

## **MEC QABATHE CALLING FOR ACTION**

One of the biggest challenges and frustrations in government is the inclination among some public servants to use the law and policies as a disabler and not an enabler. Addressing senior managers and board members of the entities during the strategic planning recently, the MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs in the Free State, MEC Mamiki Qabathe lashed at the delegates for what she calls 'winging and moaning about laws and policies that hinders service delivery'.

MEC Qabathe advised management to think way beyond what they believe the mandate of the department and the entities is. She says the people's expectations are much broader than the mandate given to respective government departments. The politicians' thinking and vision is often shaped by what comes from door-to-door campaigns where ordinary people express their misgivings about what government is doing or not doing.

Managers were challenged to come up with creative and innovative ways to make things happen. Officials will always, the MEC warns, be challenged with difficult issues for which they are always expected to deliver on. She emphasised that whilst managers are, in their course of duty, expected to shape policies and develop programmes, it should be accepted that the ruling party and its public representatives will regularly brings things that challenges the status quo.

Through engagement with stakeholders, the government knows that the communities have not forgotten the manifesto and what the people were promised. What should, among other things, preoccupy the government and this department in particular is the commitment of the transformation of the economy. Today, more than eighteen years after democracy, majority of the people of this country are still not in control of the means of democracy. That, according to the MEC, is what the poor masses of this province want to be addressed.

The Free State communities want the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs to champion economic transformation and job creation. "To what extend do we prepare communities to understand why things are done for them and with them and what challenges are there along the way", asked MEC Qabathe.

One of the shortcomings identified by the MEC is lack of business intelligence. Knowledge of what needs to be done or sectors that drive the economy are the fundamentals of the turnaround needed in the Free State. Synergies and collaboration between different sections of the department and cooperation between the department and other departments cannot be over emphasised. There should always be correlation between what is being done and what is being achieved.

The Free State Tourism Authority, should plan together with the Tourism Development Directorate as well as the Environmental Management section with its Resorts and Reserves if any significant impact is to be made in promoting tourism and marketing the Free State as a tourist destination. The Free State, it is believes, continues to short change itself in the tourism front even though it is endowed with so much natural resources of unmatched beauty.

Similarly, the Free State Gambling and Liquor Authority should have constant engagement with the Free State Tourism Authority on issuing of licences because they have a direct bearing on attracting travellers and revellers alike. The Free State, according to the MEC, can easily take the lead in tourism initiatives like, Kasie Tourism, Stockvel tourism and agri tourism which are Greenfield tourism programmes. Management was called upon to come up with bold plans and refuse the temptation to see budget is a limiting factor.

On the economic development front, lack of vision and dependence on state tenders, by Free State entrepreneurs, is seen as some of limiting factors. The Free State Development Corporation will have to reinvent itself even if it means amendment of the Act to ensure that it becomes what the people of the Free State expect it to be. Working with the Economic Development Branch, the FDC will have to restructure its balance sheet and recapitalize itself because the Executive Council has resolved that the funding to this public entity will be reduced drastically until it is stopped. The FDC has the ability to raise funds in the open market through viable mega projects.

The new FDC Board has suggested exciting proposal to see the FDC addressing some of the concerns raised by the MEC and the Legislature. These include the establishment of the Private Equity Fund, Property Fund and SMME Fund which will be a total departure from the way the FDC currently operates where every effort is towards enterprise development.

The Cooperatives is the new concept that needs the department's support. Properly packaged and sustainable markets identified, this can change the face of SMME development in the Free State. This process will be driven through Sectoral Development Initiative (SDI) model aimed at ensuring that Coops and SMMEs are given an ongoing business livewire meant to ensure sustainable and ongoing business opportunities.

The Model provides for the appointment of the Financial Manager for the sustainability of the Cooperatives. It further allows the appointment of a market Champion who will scout business opportunities and provide them to the Coops and SMMEs. This Market Champion also ensures that there are sound business management practices observed at all times eg Mentoring, Training, Marketing, Bookkeeping and Financial Management.

MEC Qabathe called on everybody, board members, management and staff to help her turn the situation around and build confidence with the EXCO, the Legislature and the public by ensuring that plans are indeed achievable.

In his support to the MEC and urging everybody to put hands on deck, the Head of the Department, Mr Ikhraam Osman said, "If the "WHY" is compelling enough, the "HOW" can never be an obstacle!". The real work starts now!!!

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