

MILLIONS FOR BOTSHABELO FACTORIES' RESUSCITATION

By Tselane Moiloa



New DETEA MEC Mamiki Qabathe delivered her budget vote on Monday, March 19 in Wesselsbron

WESSELSBRON – An estimated R5 million will be spent in the next two years on the resuscitation of clothing and textile industries in Botshabelo, creating an initial 400 jobs for women.

The allocation was made possible through the Sun International Thaba Nchu Botshabelo Community Action Trust which was set up to benefit the communities of Thaba Nchu and Botshabelo.

This was revealed by the MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DETEA) Mamiki Qabathe, when she tabled her department's budget on Monday, March 19 in Wesselsbron.

Most of the run-down factories in Botshabelo, which were mostly owned by the Chinese, were closed down in the late 1990s, leaving many people without jobs.

An article by the Mail&Guardian in November 2011 stated that less than a 1000 people were employed in the once-burgeoning textile industries in Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu, only 60 kilometres from the provincial capital.

According to the article, ten factories remained at the time; having decreased from an approximate 55 in earlier years.

Public Eye also reported in October 2011 that about 3000 people who had previously worked at the factories were to be retrenched.

The growth and prosperity of the industries will be implemented through the newly developed Sectoral Development Initiatives (SDI). The initiatives, according to Qabathe are to activate growth in the industry by using cooperatives and Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and focus on particular sectors.

This would also “bolster SMME development and increasing their chances of migrating into the formal economy and playing a meaningful role within the community,” she said.

In his state of the province address in February, Premier Ace Magashule advocated for the abolishment of tenders in favour of cooperatives; which would directly benefit the people of any particular area a development project is to be undertaken.

As part of this, 50 cooperatives in Botshabelo are set to be involved and benefit from the industry; while 20 SMMEs are expected to create about 5000 jobs over the next five years. Furthermore, local fashion designers will make a contribution to the flourishing of the clothing industries.

Two other flagship projects which are to be promoted under SDI are the grouping of the flower industry and the development of the Free State Venison brand.

Qabathe mentioned that although in the early stages, the project aims to start flower growing farms in the Thabo Mofutsanyana and rose farms in the Motheo district.

Whilst not enough information was given regarding how the project would proceed, the initiative is expected to start between April and May 2012; under the leadership of a yet to be known "market champion".

The development of the Free State venison brand could offer a lighter, meatier side to economic development driven by SMMEs. Qabathe said that "an interested European partner" wants to start a deer farm in the province, with the possibility of exporting other game from the province to the market.

A new breed of restaurants in Bloemfontein is set to take shape under this initiative; with game restaurants forecast to mushroom firstly in Bloemfontein, then eventually around the centre of the country.

"We will work hard to attract both local and international investors into key sectors in which we have identified competitive strengths.

Greater emphasis will be placed on destination marketing and investment opportunities will be packaged appropriately in order to attract investors," Qabathe said about SMME development.

[Source: www.publiceyenews.com]