

GERT SIBANDE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

SODA

31 MAY 2012

Speech by: Acting Executive Mayor: Cllr T.A. MNISI

Madam Speaker, It is tempting to read a State of the District Address through rosy coloured spectacles, - to be optimistic rather than realistic - but, as you can all see, my glasses are clear. My aim, therefore, is to give you an accurate and factual description of where our district – not just our district municipality but this region of southern Mpumalanga – stands, as we enter the 2012/13 financial year.

Our large region faces all the challenges that our country does, we have strengths and weaknesses, but above all my message today is: WE HAVE HOPE. Hope that, just as our new building rose up from barren ground, and close to one of the main legacies of apartheid -- a township with poor housing and services -- so too our district municipality, by practicing good governance, by working with and for communities, by forging links with the business sector, and by aligning itself with national and provincial plans, will raise the quality of life of all the one million people who call Gert Sibande home. That, and nothing less, is our mandate.

Madam Speaker, allow me to speak plainly: this building and the people who work, and make decisions in it, symbolize hope. We have shown that it is indeed possible to achieve a clean audit. We have shown that it is possible to operate efficiently, and to deliver, and still only spend 20% of our Operating Budget on salaries – most Municipalities spend 30% or more on salaries.

Our Capital Budget amounts to 80% of our total budget, and that is much higher than most municipalities, and we are therefore able to deliver improved water, sanitation, roads and electricity, and to allocate some R108 million directly to the seven local municipalities which make up this region. Madam Speaker,

these are facts we can justifiably be proud of, but much remains to be done. It is not enough to simply deliver basic services, and eliminate backlogs in both of urban and rural areas. It is unacceptable that alongside gigantic power stations such as Thutuka Power Station, women still have to collect firewood.

Increasingly we have to focus on unemployment, poverty and inequality. In response to President Jacob Zuma’s State of the Nation Address, our district has created a Job Creation Fund, and we encourage our local municipalities and the private sector to submit project applications.

It would be remiss of me not to state, that we strongly condemn the recent insult to the office of the President, as well as the shameful attack on his personal dignity. We have to stimulate the creation of decent jobs, and a much more inclusive regional economy, and to achieve that we have to work closely with the business community – we cannot do it on our own. We have taken the first steps in that direction, by meeting with both big and small business people in our region. That meeting is already bearing fruit, with businesses and Rotary donating food, blankets and caps to those in need.

We need to diversify our economy, and in so doing revive the productivity of our agricultural sector, to create employment and increase food security. Madam Speaker, our region should be able to feed itself, and also to process agricultural products for export. Again, we have taken the first step, by establishing an agricultural unit, and we are compiling a comprehensive, integrated rural development initiative. Our district will benefit from national government’s infrastructure-led development programme, with the proposed railway link from Lothair through Swaziland, to the ports of Maputo

and Richards Bay, opening up a new corridor.

Another important development is the construction of a railway line, from Ermelo to the Majuba Power Station, as this will result in fewer coal trucks on our roads. We need to spark the revival of our towns, by uncovering what each has to offer. For example, in our 2012/13 budget we have allocated funds to two exciting tourism developments.

In and around Chrissiemeeer, we will kick start a tourism plan drawn-up by all stakeholders. This town and lake district is a gem, with architectural character, history, and more than 200 – yes more than 200 – natural lakes and pans, which attract many birds. In September and November 2013, we have budgeted to commemorate the centenary of the protest actions – in fact the first strike and mass action in the history of our country – led by Mahatma Gandhi, as he led thousands of protesters against racial discrimination, on a march from Newcastle, through Volksrust, Perderkop, Platrand, Standerton, Val and Balfour.

This march inspired the ANC, the Indian Independence Movement and the American Civil Rights Campaign. In the words of Nelson Mandela, “Our struggles harkened back to the 1913 passive resistance campaign in which Mahatma Gandhi led a tumultuous procession of Indians crossing illegally into the Transvaal. It become a model for the type of protest that we in the Youth League were calling for.”

We believe that commemorating this internationally important event, will attract thousands of visitors – not just in 2013 but every year, and that it will create opportunities for the local manufacture of clothing, and other authentic memorabilia. Walking, running and riding events along the route of the march – the R23 – will breathe new life into those towns. These two tourism projects will see investment in four



IN CHARGE: Gert Sibande District Leadership

of our seven local municipal areas, in the coming year, and we will look forward to working hand – in – hand with all authorities and role-players - again, we cannot do it alone, and, of course, together we can do more. Madam Speaker, our move to Ermelo was strategic, for Ermelo lies in the centre of our region, with five main roads intersecting in this busy town.

**Put simply: in our region all roads lead to Ermelo.**

Our country’s economy is focused in nine large cities, and a number of secondary cities, with the rest of the country lagging behind. We therefore have budgeted to investigate the feasibility of a regional airport, convention centre and fresh produce market. Put another way: how do we grow Ermelo into a city, so that its growth benefits our entire region by attracting investment which might otherwise be attracted to the existing cities outside of our region? Madam Speaker, this address would be superficial, if I did not refer to our biggest challenge, and that, in my view is this: how to increase the capacity of the district municipality as well as each of the seven local municipalities in our region.

We currently lack the capacity to fully expend the grant funding available to us, and we simply cannot afford to continue to do so. Our communities deserve and demand nothing less. During the 2010/11 year our seven local municipalities were unable to spend R98 million, of their Municipal Infrastructure Grant funding. This past year that figure will be R146 million, and next year we have an allocation of R366 million.

So how do we increase our collective capacity to identify, design and manage the implementation of capital projects? How do we become a family of municipalities which can

collectively deliver R410 million worth of infrastructure and services in 2014/15? The answer surely lies in pooling our human resources – together we can do more, also applies to our municipalities.

We believe a step in the right direction, will be the establishment of a Centralized Project Management Unit (CPMU), which ensures that all MIG projects are completed on time and within a budget – that is the only practical way not to lose any of our current grants. Imagine what we could deliver with R410 million. Madam Speaker, it is not a case of the district wanting to play big brother - or Madam Speaker, should I say big sister. Rather the aim of the CPMU is to achieve full expenditure throughout our region. It is clearly a WIN / WIN proposal for all eight municipalities.

**IZANDLA ZIYAGEZANA!!**

Madam Speaker, Ermelo has other symbolic buildings, but the old railway station speaks of the past and stands empty, and the towering silos lack architectural appeal and stamped the town as only an agricultural centre, while the fine sculpture of a Boer horseman recalls conflict. Now, as a result of the promising and praiseworthy achievements by both staff and Councilors, who work in this striking building, Ermelo has a new symbol, which like the sun, rises every morning over this region of Mpumalanga, and, it is indeed a symbol of hope.

**PHAMBILI GERT SIBANDE REGION PHAMBILI**

Madam Speaker, with your permission, the chairperson of the Finance Portfolio Committee will now present an overview of our 2012/2013 Budget, thereafter, I will move recommendations which are on pages 51 – 53 of the Agenda.



ATTENTIVE: Delegates came to hear for themselves