

PublicSector

MANAGER

Transport Month

Affordable
reliable and safe
transport for all

Yanga Mputa

ready to take the Office
of the Tax Ombud to
greater heights

***NDA new strategy
focuses more on the
poor and vulnerable
communities***



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Publishers:

Government Communication and
Information System (GCIS)
Enquiries: +27 012 473 0010
Switchboard: +27 012 473 0000
Tshedimosetso House:
1035 Francis Baard Street
(corner Festival Street), Hatfield, Pretoria,
Private Bag X745, Pretoria,
South Africa, 0001
www.gcis.gov.za

Acting Director-General
Nomonde Mrukwa

Acting Deputy Director-General:
Corporate Services

Terry Vandayar
Deputy Director-General:
**Intergovernmental Coordination
& Stakeholder Management**

Michael Currin

Deputy Director-General:
**Content Processing &
Dissemination**
Regomoditswe Mavimbela



**Head of Editorial
and Production**
Zanele Mngadi
Zanelemngadi@gcis.gov.za

Managing Editor
Tshepo Nkosi
tshapon@gcis.gov.za

News Editor
Miriam Mokoena
miriam@gcis.gov.za
GCIS Photographic Unit

Elmond Jiyane
Ntswe Mokoena
Siyabulela Duda
Kopano Tlape
Busisiwe Malungwane

Production Assistant
Jauhara Khan

Graphic Designer
Tendai Gonese

**government
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Celebrating achievements in the transport sector



Transport Minister
Sindisiwe Chikunga.

October marks Transport Month in South Africa. The October Transport Month (OTM) Campaign is about showcasing service delivery and reminding the nation of the centrality of transport in our daily lives – both in our social settings and in enabling economic activity.

As part of the OTM, we will be showcasing our achievements

across all modes of transport. We will be telling the good story of progress in delivering road infrastructure and tackling potholes; rehabilitating and modernising our rail network in the aftermath of COVID-19; of manufacturing state-of-the-art trains for the continent; of growing an aviation sector that continues to be a model for the

world with our splendid safety record and developing airports not only at home but across the continent. We will tell the good story of massive investments in public transport with the ever growing footprint of our integrated public transport network in our cities across provinces.

While we acknowledge that challenges in the transport sec-

tor loom large, our approach to this year's OTM is an expression of our confidence on the positive impact of our interventions on the lives of ordinary South Africans.

This confidence is aptly expressed in this year's OTM Campaign theme; "SIYAKHA: We are Building Better Transport Infrastructure to Grow South Africa Together".

The campaign comes at a time when we celebrate anniversaries of six of our entities. The Air traffic Navigation Service (ATNS) and the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) mark their 30-year anniversaries, while the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency (C-BRTA), the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL), the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) and the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) are celebrating 25 years since their establishment.

These entities have touched the lives of ordinary South Africans. ACSA has evolved and thrived, achieving significant milestones and successes that have not only reshaped the aviation landscape in our country, but have also earned global recognition. The company's first decade was dedicated to establishing a solid institutional foundation.

The second ACSA decade was

a period of immense growth and development. The company emerged as a true global player, earning accolades and international recognition for its commitment to excellence. ACSA airports played a crucial role in the successful hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, showcasing our nation's capabilities on the world stage.

During this time, the company embarked on an ambitious expansion programme, expanding its footprint and services to as far as Brazil and India.

Moreover, ACSA's advisory ser-

vices began to take flight, as we shared our best practices with airports worldwide, cementing our reputation as a leader in the industry.

The third decade brought forth a mixed bag of challenges and opportunities for ACSA, with the COVID-19 pandemic being the most formidable adversary. The pandemic forced us to run a tight ship and take decisive measures to ensure the company's sustainability.

ACSA has, however, emerged from this challenging period stronger and more resilient than

ever, solidifying its position as a world-class airports management company.

Intra-African air transport services

The ATNS's responsibility goes way beyond our borders. The African Union identified the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) as one of the fifteen key Agenda 2063 flagship projects to transform Africa into a future global powerhouse.

SAATM seeks to create one single air transport market in Africa through full liberalisation >>





of intra-African air transport services regarding market access and traffic rights for scheduled and freight air services by eligible airlines, thereby improving air services connectivity and air carrier efficiencies.

Remote digital towers are growing in their deployment around the world and ATNS is currently finalising a project to deploy this technology in the medium term.

The company commenced with the space-based Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) service operational trials in 2022, to evaluate the deployment viability of the technology to support the current

surveillance environment within our area of responsibility.

It intends to introduce comprehensive situational awareness across our entire area of responsibility (over 6% of the world's airspace) by introducing this service into our existing technology portfolio.

One of ATNS's proudest works is a ground-breaking partnership with Aireon, enabling it to improve its satellite technology tracking capability.

Aireon provides the global air traffic surveillance system using a space-based ADS-B network, making it possible to extend the visibility of aircraft across the planet in real-time. The system

has been operational in South Africa since June 2023.

The Aviation Training Academy is a premium provider of air traffic service and aviation training – not only in South Africa but on a continental scale. Being an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Regional Training Centre of Excellence, our training products are world-class, stretching beyond just air traffic control (ATC) training but many other disciplines across the aviation value chain.

The specialist nature of ATC training and the current gap within the academic space in providing training for aspiring ATCs means that we are primary

providers of such training in the country. Consequently, ATNS serves as a primary employer of ATCs. We are addressing the human capital development challenges by moving the ATC training model into the academic space through appropriate Department of Higher Education and Training registration and Council on Higher Education accreditation.

The SACAA is also celebrating 25 years of existence. This could not have come at a better place, with the entity having received a 10th successive clean audit.

The SACAA continues to punch above its weight in ensuring safe aviation operations in

the country. In the recent ICAO audit, South Africa surpassed the 90% mark in ICAO's safety audit, becoming the first in Africa to achieve this milestone. We are currently ranked number one in Africa in terms of ICAO rankings.

In addition, the South African cargo security system continues to be recognised by the United States' (US) Transport Security Administration and by the European Union (EU) in terms of their Third Country Airport programme, meaning that the country's cargo operators can conduct business in both the US and EU without the need to undergo individual assessments by both these counterparts.

SANRAL is one of the key drivers of the country's economic recovery through its infrastructure build programme. Its procurement policy requires that 30% of main upgrade projects is ring-fenced for Small, Medium and Micro enterprises (SMMEs), notably youth and women-owned businesses, many of whom receive their first experience in the construction and engineering sectors by working on SANRAL projects. This 30% sub-contracting policy will go a long way in mainstreaming previously disadvantaged groups into the road construction sector and other sectors in which SANRAL is active.

As a further demonstration of how SANRAL is assisting in the recovery of the country's economy, in 2022/23, it awarded 320 tenders to the value of R51 billion, up from the R22 billion awarded in the preceding year.

SANRAL also offers an extensive training and capacity-building campaign that targets more than 40 000 SMMEs over a three-year period, and which will, among others, effectively teach them to submit compliant, competitive and profitable tenders.

The agency's skills development programme encapsulates its scholarship and bursary programme for both high school and tertiary students. It also includes an in-house training academy that prepares engineering graduates towards their professional registration, thus ensuring that SANRAL grows its pool while also training engineers for the rest of the country.

The university faculty chairs that are sponsored by SANRAL ensure that South Africa remains at the cutting edge of tertiary training.

Another entity celebrating 25 years is the Cross-Border Road Transport Agency (the C-BRTA). The agency supports the South African economy by facilitating the seamless movement of goods and passengers across various borders.

Through the reduction of operational constraints, regulating market access and issuing permits, the C-BRTA plays a vital role in the socio-economic development of South Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

To achieve ease of cross-border road transportation the C-BRTA has developed an Integrated Cross-Border Man-

agement System to enhance the required harmonisation programme efforts in the SADC. This is achievable by providing a common technology platform for the issuing and management of cross-border permits. It will also facilitate seamless cross-border road transport movements and trade flows across border posts and corridors connecting the participating pilot countries. ○



Creating an inclusive society for everyone to thrive

This month, as we mark our nation's commitment to caring for the most vulnerable in society, we also celebrate a milestone towards this commitment – the recognition of the South African Sign Language (SASL) as the 12th official language.

Last month South Africa joined the rest of the world in commemorating International Month for Deaf People to promote awareness of the rights of deaf persons around the world. Locally, the commemorations were held under the befitting theme of; "Celebrating the officialisation of South African Sign Language for an inclusive and linguistically diverse nation".

The commemorations came a few months after President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law the SASL Bill, making South Africa the 41st country in the world and the fourth in Africa to recognise sign language as an official language.

The historic moment marked an important step towards the realisation of the rights of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. This milestone also highlights government's commitment to promote inclusivity



Nomonde Mnkwa,
Acting GCIS
Director-General.

and substantive equality. It will prevent unfair discrimination on the grounds of disability, as enshrined in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996.

Government strives to continuously improve the lives of South Africans and create equality among citizens. There are various achievements we have made since 1994 to ensure that the deaf community's rights are realised. In 2007, for instance, South Africa signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in 2013, Cabinet adopted the country's first report

to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In 2012, the Department of Basic Education commissioned a team to compile a sign language curriculum and just over two years later offered a standardised SASL curriculum to deaf learners up to matric level. In addition, in 2022 South Africa developed the first bilingual SASL *Dictionary*, which is available as an app on smartphones to provide a standardised SASL lexical terminology.

The signing into law of the SASL as an official language will also have a positive impact on the social and economic devel-

opment of the deaf community, as well as on their access to information and services. It will not only promote and protect their rights but will facilitate the provision of sign language interpreters and education in sign language.

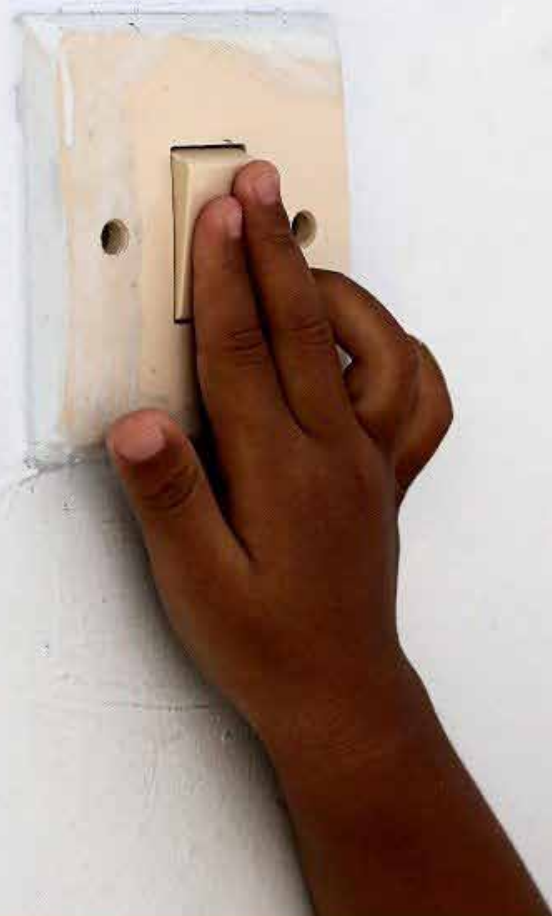
While the language has long been part of curriculum in our schools, preparations are underway to ensure it is available as a second additional language. This will mean that learning and taking the language as an additional language is not restricted for learners with special needs.

As decision-makers in the public sector, we need to review our language policies to include the SASL as is the case with other official languages. Government departments and public institutions should make provisions for SASL interpreters. Public servants, particularly front-line workers should be taught basic SASL.

Let us all lead by example and learn our new 12th official language. By doing so, we can create an inclusive society that creates space for everyone to thrive and enjoy the gains of our democracy. ○

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Transport sector

is the heartbeat of economic development



Minister Chikunga at the official launch of the KwaMashu to Durban rail service.

The transport sector in the country is making strides in recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and is making progress in addressing challenges that it faces.

Transport Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga recently launched the 2023 October Transport Month

Campaign under the theme; “Si-yakha: We are building a better transport infrastructure to grow South Africa together”.

She reflected on the transport sector as the heartbeat that fosters social and economic development.

“The sector significantly aided

job creation and enforced inclusive economic participation in the country,” said the Minister.

The Department of Transport is responsible for regulation and coordination of transportation in South Africa, including road, rail, civil aviation and maritime.

She highlighted government’s

achievements, challenges and the contribution that the transport sector is making towards the country’s economic recovery agenda.

Recovering from effects of COVID-19

“The sector is still recovering

from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the restrictions on movement impacted negatively on transport operations across the different modes," she said.

To mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on the economy, government developed and continues to implement the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan since October 2020, prioritising infrastructure spending as a critical enabler to speeding up economic growth.

National Treasury, the Infrastructure Fund and Infrastructure South Africa came up with initiatives to improve the scale, speed and efficiency of infrastructure spending by creating a pipeline of priority projects, doing project appraisal and attracting private sector participation and financing.

"The first 62 priority infrastructure projects were gazetted in 2020 and more than R340 billion of funding had been committed from the private sector. An additional 51 top priority infrastructure projects, which were declared strategically important with a value of around R595 billion and with a funding gap of around R441 billion were unveiled in 2021," said the Minister.

She added that some of the projects have been identified with an investment value of R84.5 billion in the transport sector, telecommunications, as well as water and sanitation. Government departments have



also collaborated with other institutions such as Infrastructure South Africa and the Development Bank of Southern Africa to ensure the delivery of these projects.

Furthermore, a number of entities under the Department of Transport continue to show commitment to respond to the clarion call on job creation and easing the costs of travel, while also developing industries in the area of infrastructure development.

- **Transport sector highlights Aviation sector:**

The South African airport network consists of 135 licensed airports, 19 military airports, and up to 1 300 unlicensed aerodromes. Nine of the major airports are managed and operated by the Airports Company South Africa (ACSA). According to Minister the air transport sector makes a major contribution to the

South African economy, supporting about 472 000 jobs and contributing around R154 billion to the country's gross domestic product.

- **Maritime:** South Africa derives its maritime interests from its trade and geo-economic structure, its geo-political aspirations and the obligations arising from being a regional power located at the southern tip of Africa. Minister Chikunga said the sector continues to develop and has potential to contribute substantially to the economy and support the National Development Plan. "The Ports Regulator of South Africa through the tariff application process has allowed Transnet National Ports Authority to raise funding of R14 billion in the 2023/24 financial year. It is through this

tariff methodology that the authority must create jobs, improve existing and build new infrastructure to address port inefficiencies," the Minister said.

- **Passenger rail:** Over the past year, Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) has gained ground in its efforts to recover the passenger rail network, rebuild passenger rail corridors and move commuters on the new blue modern trains, Isitimela Sabantu.

"To date, 18 corridors have been recovered out of the 40 corridors operated by PRASA in Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, with a total of 230 stations refurbished to basic functionality. Trains are running in major cities such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria and Ekurhuleni. By the end of this financial year, PRASA will have recovered 80% >>



Hammarisdale Interchange on the N3 between Durban and Pietermaritzberg.

of the passenger rail corridors and lines, while bringing to our people a modernised passenger train experience,” added the Minister.

Since the recovery of the services, more than 16 million people have been connected to economic hubs and opportunities of employment. To date, PRASA has invested R3.667 billion in rail recovery, including the refurbishment of the stations.

This has led to the creation of 6 040 jobs, of which 856 are women and over 4 000 employment opportunities were created for young people. A total of 211 small businesses have also benefited from PRASA's recovery projects, boosting local economies and their wellbeing.

- **Road transport:** The primary road infrastructure is fairly in good condition, but the secondary provincial road network

is in a generally poor condition compared to the international benchmarks. To address this, government has invested R26 billion in the upgrade and general maintenance on the N3. “The sections currently being upgraded are the 19-kilometre (km) stretch from Cato Ridge to Dardanelles, commonly known as Umlaas Road; the 26.6-km section from the Dardanelles Interchange to Lynnfield Park; and the 30-km stretch from Lynnfield Park to the Ashburton Interchange.

“Apart from resolving chronic traffic by creating greater mobility through the construction of additional traffic lanes, the upgrading of the N3 will result in increased safety,” the Minister explained.

With regard to the Integrated Public Transport Networks

(IPTN), seven cities were already operational by mid-2022. These include MyCiTi in Cape Town, Rea Vaya in Johannesburg, A Re Yeng in Pretoria, Go George in George, Harambee in Ekurhuleni, Libhongoletu in Nelson Mandela Bay, and Leeto la Polokwane in Polokwane.

The Minister said the IPTN is central to the functioning of hubs of economic activity as they provide sustainable, affordable and functional transport solutions to urban commuters.

Job creation and economic development

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), the transport, storage, and communication sectors reported a growth of 8.6% and contributed 0.6 percentage points to the gross GDP in 2022. The sectors contributed an added value of approximately R362.5 billion to

the country's GDP in the same year.

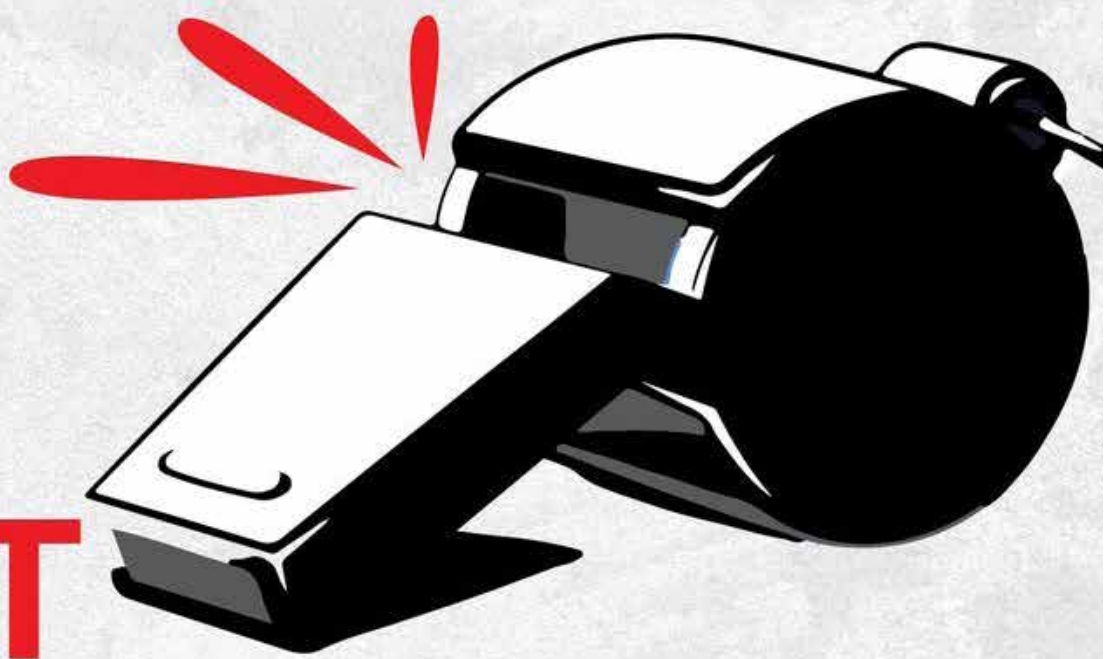
The latest GDP results for the first quarter of 2023 show these sectors increase by 1.1%, contributing 0.1 of a percentage points to GDP growth.

“This is due to the rise in rail freight and rail passenger transport. Land transport, air transport, and transport support services also reported positive growth in economic activities,” added the Minister.

Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey reported an increase in employment of 258 000 in the first quarter of 2023, following an increase of 169 000 in the fourth quarter of 2022. The number of people employed in the transport sector increased by 992 000 in the first quarter of 2023 as compared to 982 000 in the fourth quarter of 2022.

The Minister revealed that the largest producers dominating the provincial economic growth performance are Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape.

Although the Department of Transport and its entities have made strides in various sectors, the Minister acknowledged that public sector capacity to implement projects and meet the growing infrastructure need is currently inadequate, thus compelling government to collaborate with the private sector to provide efficient and sustainable transport infrastructure. ○



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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



First female tax ombud hits ground running

South Africa's tax regime is considered one of the best in the world, and the Office of the Tax Ombud (OTO) has the supreme task of ensuring that the grievances of taxpayers against the South African Revenue Service (SARS) are addressed and that everyone gets their due refund.

Yanga Mputa, who was recently appointed Tax Ombud, is at the coalface of this daunting task. Her tenure is for five years.

The OTO reviews and addresses any complaints by taxpayers against SARS to ensure fairness in the tax collection.

In July 2023, Mputa became the first woman appointed to the position. She succeeded retired former Gauteng Judge President Bernard Ngoepe. Established in 2013, the OTO has been around for 10 years.

From 2014 until her recent appointment, she worked as Chief Director: Legal Tax Design

at National Treasury. Before that she was a Tax Specialist at SARS from 2009.

Mputa is equipped with extensive tax technical skills and experience, encompassing personal income tax for high-net-worth individuals and expatriates, employment tax issues, retirement tax matters. She also has expertise in business tax aspects, exemptions and incentives, international tax affairs, exchange control issues related to tax, and financial sector taxation topics.

She holds Baccalaureus Procuratoris (BProc) and Bachelor of Laws degrees from the Walter Sisulu University (formerly the

University of Transkei), a Master of Laws Degree from the University of the Witwatersrand, Master in Commerce Degree in

International Tax from North-West University, and a Post-graduate Diploma in Tax Law from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Barely three months into her five-year tenure, Mputa, an admitted attorney of the high court, has set herself lofty goals.

She is full of praise for Judge Ngoepe, her predecessor, for steering the office in the "right direction" and leaving the OTO



in “good standing”.

As former Judge President of the North and South Gauteng High Courts, Ngoepe heard and decided seminal cases, including business and tax matters. He was also responsible for assigning judges to Tax Courts.

“The nice thing is that all the senior managers who started the office with him are still here. I have a good relationship with the Chief Executive Officer, Professor Thabo Legwaila because at some stage we were both directors at [National]

Treasury reporting to one chief director. We have known each from 2006. I have interacted with the staff when I was still at SARS, more so when they were doing changes to the Tax Administration Act, [2011 (Act 28 of 2011)] (TAA) in 2016,” Mputa says.

She foresees no challenges with taking the OTO to greater heights. “South Africa follows a system of voluntary tax compliance – we do self-assessment – when you do self-assessment you must be aware of your rights so that people can pay what is due,” she reiterates.

This, she emphasises, means that SARS’s tax revenue collection efforts are not impeded. For this reason, Mputa is ready to lean on her policy

and administrative experience to get things done in her new role. “I come from the policy side. I know what is required from [National] Treasury side in terms of tax policy and I know what is required from the SARS side in terms of tax administration. The experience of both policy and administration will assist taxpayers,” she says.

She is satisfied with the independence of her office from SARS and other state institutions. “Our decisions against

“When the office intervenes in paying back the refunds, it implies that jobs have been saved, houses have been saved and children are still able to go to school.”

taxpayers are final; we don’t request SARS’ input when we make our decisions, and we don’t even request input from the Minister of Finance.”

However, the OTO is still structurally dependent on SARS for human resources (HR), information technology (IT), and procurement processes. “I was still at [National] Treasury when the OTO started. In 2017, we made changes to the Tax Administration Act, [2011 (Act 28 of 2011)] for the budget of the OTO to be ring-fenced from the budget of

SARS,” she says.

“The budget of the OTO was [disbursed] directly by the Minister of Finance, but SARS is just the accounting officer. So, there is independence even there. The employees of the OTO are employed by the OTO but using the SARS Act [of 1997].”

This, she said, was the most cost-effective approach. Any other method would have required that the OTO have its own Chief Financial Officer, among other functionalities.

“We are an office of 40 people. Currently, our budget in terms of the division of revenue is R52 million. So, if we have our own procurement, IT and HR, that can balloon our budget to about R120 million. When [National] Treasury looked at this, [they thought] of a way to do this in a cost-effective manner,” she says.

The functional independence of the OTO cannot be questioned, she maintains. “We have been able to assist taxpayers. When the office intervenes in paying back the refunds, it

implies that jobs have been saved, houses have been saved and children are still able to go to school.”

During the 2021/22 financial year, the OTO resolved 1 561 accepted complaints. Over this period, the office received 17 249 contacts. These consisted of 13 284 queries and 3 965 complaints. The collective value of the top 10 refunds paid to taxpayers amounted to R215 million.

Mputa says reach and footprint remain a challenge. “Most people do not know about the office. If we drive awareness to try and serve the underserved communities, more people will come [forward],” she adds.

A bulk of the complaints are from Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

If SARS does not resolve OTO’s complaints, what are the sanctions can the office bring to bear on SARS? “Currently, there are none,” she admits.

“We are not like the Pension Fund Adjudicator whereby we can take someone to court. We depend on a good relationship with SARS. So far, SARS has resolved about 98% of our complaints. Maybe the issue is how long it takes to resolve complaints.” ○

Young engineer soars in freight rail world

It is often said that curiosity is the engine of achievement.

This notion rings true for Colani Mnisi, a junior engineer in train design technologies and practising railway engineering at Transnet Freight Rail (TFR).

In late August, the 29-year-old walked away with the Best Paper Award at the 2023 International Heavy Haul Association (IHHA) Conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for his paper titled; *312 Wagon ECPB WDP Longest Train Service*. He authored the paper with fellow TFR engineer, Nonkululeko Cele (25), and it came out tops among the 500 submissions.

At TFR, his roles include the development of new train services, yard evaluations, derailment investigation, in-service testing, simulations, commissioning tests, and evaluation of train configurations. He has been at the parastatal since 2018.

In an interview with *Public Service Manager* magazine, Mnisi, who hails from Mooiplaas, Mpumalanga, said the paper was about the development and implementation of a longer and more efficient train configuration for rail operations.

The paper discusses the benefits of longer trains, and the challenges associated with designing and implementing them. The paper also includes data analysis and graphs to illustrate the performance of the 312-wagon train and its impact on rail operations.

"Overall, the paper aims to explore the tactics used to maximise



resource utilisation in rail operations and to highlight the importance of intelligent design in optimising rail transport," Mnisi explained.

The paper also brings several theoretical benefits, including improving efficiency and flexibility by freeing up an additional slot after every second train, either for additional traffic or track access. "It also outlines the increases in the number of wagons running from 3 200 wagons to 3 744 wagons per day, allowing for loaded trains to run in the freed-up slots created," he said.

While the IHHA recognition was humbling for Mnisi, it took him by surprise. "There were so many talented and experienced professionals presenting their work at the conference, and I felt honoured that our paper was recognised in this way. It was a testament to the hard work and dedication of our project team," he conceded.

He also credited innovation, clear communication, practical relevance, and a collaborative approach for the paper's success at the IHHA Conference.

The recognition has also boosted his confidence as a young professional, encouraging him to dream of even more ambitious projects and collaborations in the future. "Age and



experience are not always barriers to recognition and success in the engineering field," he said.

The attraction to engineering

His venture into the complex world of engineering was deliberate.

"At home, we were a family of 11 children, raised by both our parents and our grandmother. Having such a big family instilled in me a strong work ethic and a love for the outdoors because there were too many of us at home," he recalled.

He reminisced how as a child exploring the nearby woods and streams ignited his passion for innovation and conservation.

After matriculating from Highveld Secondary School, Mnisi obtained a Bachelor of

Engineering in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Johannesburg in 2018.

The following year he was recruited into the TFR's technology management unit in Pretoria on a two-year programme as an engineer-in-training, where he was involved in technologies for the operation side of the organisation's rolling stock, which includes various types of wagons and locomotives.

"I have always enjoyed dismantling toys and devices to understand their inner mechanisms," he said. "Mechanical engineering stood out because of its broad applicability. It touches on almost every aspect of our lives, from the machines we use daily to the development of cutting-edge technologies. I was captivated by the idea that

I could contribute to designing and building solutions that have a real impact on society."

The dynamic nature of railways, he added, means that there is always something new to learn and explore.

"The field of railways is at the intersection of technology, mathematics, and domain-specific knowledge, making it a rich and multidisciplinary area for continuous growth. This constant evolution keeps me excited about my work," Mnisi said.

While his career aspirations have evolved over the years, his central mission in life is to make a positive impact in society and leave a lasting legacy. "I aspire to make a meaningful difference in my field, whether through my contributions to groundbreaking research, innovative technologies, or transformative projects. I want to leave behind a legacy of excellence and innovation that inspires others long after I have retired," he envisions.

Additionally, Mnisi values ethics in his field. "I hope to be remembered for my commitment to ethical and responsible practices. Conducting myself with integrity, fairness, and empathy has always been a priority for me," he concluded. ○



NDA maps out new strategy of fighting poverty

The new Chairperson of the National Development Agency (NDA) Board Nozabelo Ruth Bhengu believes that public servants can contribute to poverty eradication by firstly getting knowledge about why cooperatives and community development initiatives are important.

"If public servants could empower themselves with this knowledge, they will be able

to establish systems in government that are designed to enable communities to provide for themselves," Bhengu says.

"Currently, many public servants are more knowledgeable about the tender system and service delivery system, but know little about enabling communities to sustain themselves."

Additionally, she believes that various key government depart-

ments need to collaborate with the NDA so they could jointly fight poverty in the country.

Bhengu recently spoke to *Public Sector Manager* magazine about the new turnaround strategy of the NDA in line with the Social Development Month commemoration. Social Development Month is commemorated annually in October to mark South Africa's commitment to caring for the most vulnerable in society.

"It is important for everybody in the country to commemorate Social Development Month in order to remember that the social ills are the responsibility of us all," she says.

Bhengu assumed her position at the NDA in January 2023. The NDA falls under the ambit of the Department of Social Development (DSD) and its mission is to eradicate poverty in the country.

"The department has two entities – the NDA and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). SASSA is the right arm of the department and it responds to social and economic issues. The NDA is the left arm responsible for eradicating poverty and developing sustainable

families and communities that can provide for themselves," she says.

A seasoned community developer

Bhengu has more than 37 years' work experience, having begun her career journey in the early 1980s through the Ubuntu Development Institute of Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre under the Self-help

Political Economy from University of Western Cape.

"Welgespruit trained me in community economic development and the concept of cooperatives. Community economic development comprises programmes that speak to poverty eradication and building sustainable communities," she says.

Her experience also includes being a founding member of the Imbali Rehabilitation

She has served as a Member of Parliament for 17 years and chaired various portfolio committees, including Sport and Recreation; Provincial and Local Government; Transport; Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development; and Small Business Development. She has also served as the Deputy Mayor of Ugu District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal.

NDA's new turnaround strategy

When she became chairperson of the NDA Board, the previous strategy was coming to an end. She attended two workshops in which she and members of the board were taken through the strategy. She picked up that the entity was trying to eradicate poverty through capacitating the civil society organisations (CSOs) in the hope that they would get families and communities out of poverty.

Bhengu says the new turnaround strategy seeks to focus more on the affected person, who is poor, and the affected community, which is underdeveloped. She adds that the DSD and SASSA need to understand the strategy because the beneficiaries of their programmes are »

“Various key government departments need to collaborate with the NDA so they could jointly fight poverty in the country.”

Associates Development Economics Programme.

Over the years, she has obtained a number of qualifications, including certificates in Community Development and Facilitation from the Ubuntu Development Institute, Co-operatives Development and Change Management from the Coady International Institution of St. Francis Xavier University in Canada, and Development Economics and

Programme, the Coordinator of the Programme for Survivors of Violence, founding member of SANCO Development Institute, member of the United Nations Study led by Mrs Graça Machel on the Impact of political violence on children, member of Peace and Justice Committee of the PMB SACC, and developer of the Cooperatives Based Community Economic Development Model.



the same people that the NDA wants to lift out of poverty.

"A child who was born in an RDP house is the same child that the NDA wants to prevent from queuing for the RDP house when they are older or expect government to provide for them. The NDA aims to empower them so they can provide for themselves," she says.

"The NDA cannot achieve this goal on its own. It has to work with other government departments that are also mandated to address social and economic ills, including the departments of Human Settlement, Higher Education and Training, Basic Education,

Public Works and Infrastructure, and Small Business Development, among others."

Bhengu says the role of the NDA is to identify the skills or the kind of empowerment the beneficiaries need, and the relevant department should then fund the suitable project facilitated by the NDA.

She says the new strategy includes the role that the private sector needs to play in poverty eradication. "The NDA will start implementing the new turn-around strategy in the 2024/25 financial year. We cannot give a timeframe on how long it will take to implement at the moment," she explains.

She says the new turn-around strategy will inform a new five-year strategic plan that the NDA will develop for 2024 – 2029. This time the strategic plan will not focus solely on building the capacity of the CSOs or mobilising them.

"The approach is to identify problems that need to be addressed and figure out what needs to be done to address those problems, and when and how they are going to be addressed. After identifying the problems, the NDA would invite the CSOs that have capacity to present ways in which they will tackle the problems," she says.

Bhengu is of the point that that temporary jobs or social grants cannot eradicate poverty. Rather, more meaningful work is required to get poor citizens out of poverty.

Achievements

In the 2022/23, the NDA was able to achieve its service delivery targets and raised resources from partnerships to the tune of R100 million (R35 million was the target), which resulted in the creation of 3 175 work opportunities, training 3 124 the organisations and grant funding CSOs to the value of R16 million to further development programmes in poor communities. ○

CENSUS 2022 Results



www.statssa.gov.za

South Africa's Population
on 2 February 2022

62,027,503

South Africa's
population
increased by 19,8%
from 2011 to 2022



government
communications

Department:
Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



We are forging practical partnerships for growth and jobs

While we have made significant progress in recovering from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, most South Africans are feeling the pressure of rising prices and a slow economy.

The economy is now larger than it was before the pandemic and the two million jobs that were lost have largely been recovered. Yet the combination of global economic instability and the effects of our electricity crisis have meant that our economy continues to grow too slowly and is unable to create jobs at the pace we need.

While government has done much to implement the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, which we launched in October 2020, we have always maintained that the success of our efforts would depend on greater partnership across society.



Recently, together with several Cabinet colleagues, I held a meeting with business leaders organised under the umbrella of Business for South Africa.

Last month, I met with the leadership of the country's four labour federations, where we

agreed to work more closely to address the immediate challenges that confront South Africa's economy. We will be meeting again soon to discuss the areas where we can deepen cooperation.

These efforts are important

because an economy that is growing slowly cannot create enough jobs. It can also not generate enough revenue for government to fully implement the programmes needed to improve people's lives. The fact that the country's debt service costs are the fastest growing budget item means that spending on education, health, social protection and infrastructure come under even greater pressure.

We have therefore given the pursuit of inclusive economic growth the greatest priority. We are acting with increased focus and effort to remove the most immediate constraints on growth – and doing so together with our social partners.

Our collaboration with business, for example, has moved far beyond discussions. Since June this year, government has been working closely with Business for South Africa on

critical actions to address the key challenges of energy, logistics, and crime and corruption.

The recent meeting confirmed that good traction has been achieved in these areas, most notably in the work being done by the National Energy Crisis to end load shedding and achieve energy security.

A good example of the work being done is the mobilisation by business of additional capacity and skills to support the recovery of Eskom's power plants. This includes the deployment of technical support teams to five power stations, Kendal, Kriel, Majuba, Matla and Tutuka, and experts to help speed up the repair of units at Kusile power station that were damaged in November last year. In the last weekend of September, Kusile Unit 3 was returned to service two months earlier than planned.

Full implementation of the plan to improve the performance of Eskom's existing power stations, add new generation capacity and reform the energy sector is expected to result in over 12 000 megawatts of generation capacity being recovered or added to the system by the end of 2024.

Work is underway to improve the operational performance



of the bulk freight rail network and port system through the National Logistics Crisis Committee. Corridor recovery teams have been established for five strategic rail corridors, comprising Transnet executives, industry representatives and independent experts. They are working to urgently increase the volume of freight traffic on our rail lines.

Through this collaboration, business is working with government to build capacity within the National Prosecuting Authority and the Hawks, along with the modernisation of the 10111 emergency response centre and collaboration between

industry and the South African Police Service to address crimes targeting infrastructure.

This work is being made possible by the willingness and determination of all social partners to collaborate on practical actions that make a measurable difference in the performance of our economy. While these partnerships may take different forms and may be at different stages of advancement, both business and labour have shown their commitment to work with government to address these challenges.

It is this kind of cooperation in action, even more so than

negotiated agreements, that gives meaning to the concept of a social compact that is based on achievable outcomes.

Yet, while we have together identified key milestones and timeframes, the success of all these efforts will ultimately be measured by their impact on the lives of the South African people.

From the progress that has been made to date, I am certain that this is a task at which we will together succeed. ○

From the desk of The President was published on 2 October 2023.

Breast cancer screening can save lives

With the incidence of breast cancer among South African women being on the increase, the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) urges women to go for annual health check-ups and screening to detect cancer early. Apart from non-melanoma skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women in South Africa with a lifetime risk of one in 27, according to the 2019 National Cancer Registry. There is growing concern that most women present with late-stage cancers, which makes for a difficult prognosis.

Lorraine Govender, CANSA's

National Manager: Health Promotion, said her organisation plays an important role in creating awareness and educating women about breast cancer.

"Research has shown that a regular breast self-examination (BSE), plays an important role in discovering breast cancer, compared to finding a breast lump by chance. While not all breast lumps indicate cancer, they should be investigated. It is vital to educate yourself and get to know the warning signs and symptoms," explained Govender.

"CANSA offers clinical breast examinations at its care centres

to detect any irregularities.

Patients can claim from their medical aids once they have paid for the screening. Women are entitled to an annual clinical breast examination when visiting primary health care centres (according to the National Department of Health's Breast Cancer Control Policy)," Govender continued.

A mammogram (a special x-ray to detect lumps in the breast) does not prevent breast cancer but can save lives by finding the disease as early as possible. Women from the age of 40 should go for an an-



nual mammogram, for purposes of non-symptomatic breast screening. Women 55 years and older, should have a mammogram every two years – or if they choose, continue with



an annual mammogram. Some people have gene mutations that make them more likely to develop breast cancer. The most common gene mutations are found in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 that normally produce proteins that protect one from cancer. BRCA1 and BRCA2 are genes that produce proteins that help repair damaged DNA. Women with one of the defects have more chances of getting breast cancer and need to be referred for an annual mammogram.

Screening can be done at public hospital's breast imaging units. Patients can also visit the the Radiological Society of SA website – <https://www.rssa.co.za/radiology-practices-in-sa/> – to see practices that offer breast imaging services. A doctor's referral letter is not usually required for screening services. The Radiological Society of South Africa also offers booking services for screening with private practices. The service can also be booked via email, admin@rssa.co.za.

Male breast cancer

Male breast cancer is rare, accounting for 1% of all breast cancers. Symptoms may include a painless lump under the nipple or areola, an inverted nipple (turned inward), swelling of the breast tissue, a rash around the

nipple, discharge or bleeding from the nipple, and a swelling or lump in the armpit.

"We also encourage women and men to familiarise themselves with the risk factors and symptoms of breast cancer so that they may be aware.

"Let us adopt lifestyle behaviours that can help lower risks for breast cancer by being physically active, maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding alcohol and tobacco and eating balanced meals. And also avoid exposure to known cancer causing agents," added Govender.

Get support

CANSA offers alternate support group options, online support resources, and free tele counselling services in seven languages to cancer patients, caregivers and loved ones. You can make an appointment by calling 0800 22 66 22 or sending an email to counselling@cansa.org.za.

"Stay informed by subscribing to our CANSA e-newsletter featuring health campaigns and share this important information with the women in your life to help lower cancer risk and enable early detection of cancer," added Govender.

If you need help or support, please visit www.cansa.org.za or contact the nearest CANSA Care Centre, 0800 22 66 22 or email: info@cansa.org.za. In addition to



online resources and Facebook support groups, CANSA offers multi-lingual support on WhatsApp: 072 197 9305 for English and Afrikaans and 071 867 3530 for isiXhosa, isiZulu, siSwati, Sesotho and Setswana and free tele counselling per appointment on 0800 22 66 22 in English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, siSwati, Sesotho and Setswana. Follow CANSA on Facebook: CANSA The Cancer Association of South Africa, Twitter: @CANSA (<http://www.twitter.com/CANSA>), Instagram @cancerassociationofsouthafrica, LinkedIn, TikTok (@cancerassociationza) and Pinterest.

Visit <https://cansa.org.za/steps-how-to-do-a-breast-self-examination-bse/> for a self

examination video and radio spots that challenge women to get educated and learn how to do BSE.

You can help to raise funds to support CANSA's Women's Health Educational Campaign and help keep screening affordable by supporting various events and campaigns this month. Purchase a Doek with a Difference or a pair of earrings or wrap a tree as part of the Pink Trees for Pauline campaign – available at local CANSA care centres. You can host or attend a Cuppa For CANSA event or donate via CANSA's secure online platforms. ○

***For more info, visit the CANSA website: www.cansa.org.za**



Listening to the voices of learners

Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga believes it is high time that the department incorporates the voice of learners in any programmes meant to benefit them.

She spoke to *Public Sector Manager* magazine on the sidelines of the 2023 Representative Council of Learners (RCLs) Conference recently held in Pretoria under the theme; "Advancing

Learner Participation and Functionality of Learner Leaders in South African Schools."

The conference sought to address challenges that hinder the functionality of RCLs in schools and to improve learner agency, assess progress, identify neglected needs, and improve the way this statutory body operates.

It followed a recommendation

that was made during the inaugural RLC conference in 2022 to hold an annual physical RCL conference with provincial and district RCL representatives and Teacher Liaison Officers.

"Learners are what we are about. The sooner we get used to hearing them out and factoring their voices, speaking with them and not to them, understanding where they come from

and making them understand where we come from when we do certain things will help us a long way," Minister Motshekga said.

The core business of the department is to ensure that teaching and learning takes place in schools, and the RCLs are the voice of learners, she said.

"The structure is needed to improve the quality of teaching

[and] learning in schools. They play a significant role in school governance and paving a way for the academic and personal development of all learners in the school," she explained.

This is done by enforcing discipline and order among learners and ensuring that their voices are represented in schools so that the learning environment can be conducive for both teachers and learners.

"The pupils have elected RCLs so they can represent them and their ideas. We want democracy to be exercised in our schools and also ensure that there is full development of our learners in order to collectively take responsibility of their education, safety and their wellbeing.

"We also want to be sensitised about issues that affect them. Many schools that allow the participation of learners in decision-making do very well, and I know this from when I was still the MEC of Education in Gauteng," she explained.

The Minister told RCL representatives that learner leadership was not merely a badge of honour but a responsibility to lead by example and to inspire others to live a life of service to humanity.

She encouraged the youth to play a critical role in shaping the country's future. "As the generation that will inherit and lead the nation, youth have the potential



to drive positive change, overcome societal challenges, and build a more inclusive and prosperous South Africa," she said.

Minister Motshekga said youth could actively contribute by advocating for equitable access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities. They could harness the power of technology and innovation to bridge the digital divide and promote digital literacy, enabling equal opportunities for all.

She encouraged more learners to be eager to take up leader-

ship positions in schools. "This is time to show learners that it is also 'cool' to be well-behaved, orderly, responsible and hard-working, especially while you are still in school," she said.

According to the DBE, poorly developed capacity-building programmes and lack of support to RCLs by provinces are the main reasons for ineffective representative councils.

It further said some schools seemed to have very little appreciation of the role the youth could play in creating a healthy

learning environment for themselves. Schools, in this case, could mistakenly deny learners the right to contribute meaningfully to their own academic development and well-being.

"The improvement of the functionality of RCLs will go a long way towards improving learner outcomes in schools," noted the DBE in a concept document, adding that stakeholders should work together to guide the sector in improving the functionality of RCLs in schools. ○

Energy Bounce Back Loan Guarantee Scheme

National Treasury has launched the Energy Bounce Back Loan Guarantee Scheme (EBB) – an initiative aimed at alleviating the impact of continuing difficulties resulting from unreliable power supply for small businesses and households.

The EBB aims to generate 1 000 MW in additional generation capacity as well as facilitate resilience to load shedding for micro and informal businesses. Resilience measures include power storage assets without generating capacity, like batteries and inverters. The EBB is a complementary intervention to the tax measures announced in the 2023 Budget Speech. Applicants may, therefore, apply for both tax and EBB measures.

Measures

To facilitate investments, government will, through a guarantee administered by the South African Reserve Bank, assume the initial losses (20%) with finance providers assuming the risk for remaining losses for small and medium

enterprises (SMEs) and households' rooftop photovoltaic solar investments (rooftop solar). The EBB will operate through three mechanisms.

Mechanism 1 is a loan guarantee for rooftop solar for SMEs and households' investment.

This will facilitate loans to SMEs and households for investments related to rooftop solar generated energy, including solar panels, batteries, inverters and other installation related costs.

Mechanism 2 is a loan guarantee for rooftop solar for energy service companies (ESCOs). This will facilitate loans to ESCOs that provide leasing, instalment sale, and power purchase contracts to SMEs and households. It will allow businesses and households to switch to ESCO service providers for more reliable and cleaner energy without the need for loans to finance the full upfront costs of rooftop solar equipment themselves.

Support from the EBB, which will be provided to the ESCOs to



enable them to scale up and expand leasing services to households and small businesses, will require ESCOs to assess the individual need of households or businesses, the implementation of a suitable solution, and the conclusion of a leasing, instalment sale, and power purchase contract between the ESCO and applicant.

Mechanism 3 is working capital loans for businesses in rooftop solar supply chain. This will facilitate working capital loans for businesses that supply rooftop solar to meet increased demand. This mechanism will increase the supply of rooftop solar solutions, allowing businesses to source rooftop solar equipment with minimum delays.

An additional mechanism will be concluded with the Industrial Development Corporation to facilitate new ESCO entrants, as well as scale up existing ESCOs through a mezzanine finance instrument.

Participation in the EBB will be facilitated through commercial banks on an opt-in basis. Non-bank finance providers, including wholesale retailers that provide lending products to SMEs for EBB eligible related loans, can access the scheme through participating

commercial banks. Participation through commercial banks will be subject to basic requirements, such as tax compliance and adherence to other legal and regulatory requirements.

Any business borrowing under the EBB will be expected to meet the participating bank's specific requirements,

institutions (DFIs) and non-bank lenders that include wholesale retailers offering credit products servicing informal traders can also access the scheme through a commercial bank up to a maximum of R300 million per entity. The maximum amount a business can borrow is R10 million.

of rooftop solar, will be R300 000 per household. For the leasing mechanism, prospective customers would also need to comply with the requirements set out by participating banks and the ESCO providing the leasing service.

Businesses in the rooftop solar supply chain, those importing batteries, investors and panels will be able to borrow up to R100 million for working capital to ensure that wait times are reduced. Installers can borrow a maximum of R100 million.

Any business borrowing under the EBB will be expected to meet the participating bank's specific requirements, be registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission or be registered for Value Added Tax with the South African Revenue Service.

be registered with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission or be registered for Value Added Tax with the South African Revenue Service.

Eligibility

Eligible businesses must have a maximum turnover of R300 million. Development finance

Businesses can also borrow a maximum of R30 000 through the scheme, for resilience measures – to enable access for micro, informal businesses that may require portable batteries or similar equipment to these assets.

For households, a maximum loan amount, for the purchasing

Cost

Pricing of the loans will be capped at the repo rate (at the commencement of the loan) plus a maximum of 6%. Households and SMEs will have the option of approaching any participating bank. Participating banks, DFIs and non-bank SME finance providers will compete subject to the product terms, conditions and pricing cap.

The launch follows commitments made by President Cyril Ramaphosa during his State of the Nation Address in the February 2023, to “adjust the bounce-back loan scheme (BBS) to enable small businesses to invest in solar equipment”.

Knowledge management:

an organisational imperative for operational efficiency



Knowledge Management South Africa describes knowledge management as the process of creating, retaining, sharing, and better utilising the knowledge and information assets of an organisation to achieve its objectives.

Knowledge is about management of information assets and comprises four phases namely: acquisition, storage, dissemination and application of knowledge integrated into business procedures for sound decision-making.

Different types of businesses will use various types of knowl-

edge management systems such as enterprise-wide knowledge management systems, knowledge work systems or intelligent techniques to discover patterns and apply knowledge to discrete decisions and knowledge domains.

According to the Public Service Commission report on the status of the Public Service, the vacancy rate of senior managers (levels 13 – 16) is in excess of the standard norm of 10%, and current staff turnover and natural attrition across organisations, specifically in the Public Service can have a detrimental effect if there are no knowledge management system in place to ensure information and knowledge are collected, used, shared and stored.

The National Strategy Framework advocates for the implementation and customisation of the framework across the public sector to enable the preservation and storage of in-

formation. An important factor underpinning this framework is document management, a framework for the creation, editing, production, storage and indexing of documentation. The practices and intellectual capital in a department is part of the institutional and Public Service memory that entails both documented and undocumented information.

Governments worldwide are facing challenges to embark on a paperless environment driven by cost reduction and preservation of the environment. Knowledge Management is about organisations seeking to acquire and create potentially useful knowledge about themselves and make it available to current and potential new staff, including researchers and academics who conducts studies on the status of organisations.

An effective knowledge management system, whether centralised or decentralised, paper driven or paperless system

driven by technological innovation has the ability to reduce reliance on consultants to avoid past mistakes, and improve systems and processes.

Knowledge collaboration and connection enables the interactive exchange of information that empowers employees and exposes an organisation to new perspectives, while uncovering hidden resources in the workplace network. It connects and binds the collective intelligence of teams, departments, and organisational groups to create active, high-quality relationships, networks, and social capital while solving genuine business problems. ○

****Dr Barclay is the Head of Department at the Gauteng Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs and is also an independent researcher. You can email him at darion.barclay@gauteng.gov.za***

Click here for Dr Barclay's full paper on Knowledge Management.



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South African Sign Language gives a voice to the voiceless



President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law the South African Sign Language (SASL) Bill during a ceremony held at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 19 July 2023. Eventually, the SASL became South Africa's 12th official language. This is a victory for South Africa. Government has removed the barriers of language once and for all. It has restored dignity to the people living with hearing problems. This is what we call "ubuntu" in Nguni languages and literally translated to English, it simply means showing humanity to others.

People who are deaf deserve something real and meaningful. They are human beings who have rights and are also protected by the *Constitution of the Republic of South African, 1996*.

Those who do not understand the SASL Bill, unfortunately, are on the losing side. There is no more turning back and forward

we are going because the future looks bright for people who are deaf and all South Africans.

What is in a language?

Language is part of every nation's heritage and culture. Therefore, the SASL is crucial because it contains cultural heritage, identity and traditional values of all people who are deaf and those who have the hearing problems. The main connection between human beings is language. All species have their own way of communicating and human beings have cognitive language communication. Also, language allows us to share ideas, feelings, and thoughts and also build the nation.

The SASL has the potential to enhance communication for everyone – but only if we do not frame it as a language

for the people who are deaf or have hearing problems. The 12th official language in South Africa must be respected and that is why in May 2023, the National Assembly approved that Section 6 of the Constitution be amended to include the SASL as an official language to promote the rights of people who are deaf and those who have hearing problems.

In my view, if thousands or millions of South Africans can learn sign language, the better. It seems like a missed opportunity if some negligent people do not see the contributions which deaf people – the primary users and owners of sign language – can offer in this democratic country. To recognise sign language as an official language is a point of human rights, let us grab it and move on.

Some of us still remember the drama which happened

during the memorial service of the world icon former President Nelson Mandela in 2013. It is hard for us to forget or even forgive. The sign language interpreter at the memorial service was described by the South African Deaf Association as "fake" and absolute circus. The gestures of the sign language interpreter at the memorial service made deaf people around the world angry. This is a painful history.

As the 12th official language in South Africa, the SASL truly gives a voice to the voiceless deaf people of South Africa. Let us take the crown, then go on and promote the language. After all, it depends on all South Africans to make sign language a success. ○

***Malema is the Regional Communications Coordinator at the GCIS North West Office.**

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Distress to zen:

mastering workplace stress and sidestepping burnout



For professionals in South African workplaces today, stress and burnout are not just mere buzzwords; they are an omnipresent shadow. With relentless deadlines, mounting workloads, office politics, and desperate attempts to maintain work-life balance, today's workforce is flirting dangerously with burnout. Yet, while stress seems like an inescapable reality, surrender is not the solution.

"Many people flirt with the idea of throwing caution to the wind and just giving up – let the chips fall where they may, so to

speak," says labour expert Dr Linda Meyer, Managing Director at the Independent Institute of Education's Rosebank College.

"However, in South Africa, that is not a viable option for the majority of people, given our high unemployment rate, competitive jobs marketplace and the rising cost of living. So instead of stepping out and away from the source of the distress, most people muddle through daily, hoping for some relief or resolution in future.

"But instead of waiting for things to change for the better in some distant future, it is possible to make a few changes that can ease the daily emotional load of work and embark on a path that will lead to greater job satisfaction and personal fulfilment," she added.

Understanding workplace stress

"Workplace stress is more than just fleeting moments of anxiety. It is a continuous strain that can debilitate our productivity, creativity, and well-being," explained Meyer.

Signs to look out for include:

- overloaded work plates without a clear roadmap,
- the dissonance of expectations versus reality,
- the isolation of remote work or the cacophony of crowded workspaces and
- the looming spectre of job instability in a fluctuating economy.

Meyer noted that at its core, the primary root of workplace stress is the perceived lack of control coupled with mounting and seemingly insurmountable responsibilities.

"Left unchecked, stress evolves into burnout. That is when exhaustion replaces enthusiasm, cynicism overshadows commitment, and efficacy dwindles to incapacity. This is not just about a bad day at the office, burnout is the culmination of prolonged stress, leading to mental and physical health ramifications.

"Burnout is a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion, often accompanied by cynicism and feelings of detachment or ineffectiveness. It results from prolonged, continuous stress without adequate coping mechanisms or breaks," Meyer explained.

Manifestations of burnout

According to Meyer, the following signs are indicative of burnout:

- Physical exhaustion and frequent illnesses due to a weakened immune system; difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, or a decreased ability to problem-solve and make decisions;
- feelings of detachment, depression, anxiety and a reduced sense of accomplishment;
- feeling trapped and defeated, coupled with a loss of motivation;

- feeling more negative or cynical towards colleagues, clients, or the job; and
- reduced work performance.

In addition to signs at work, there will also be signs at home, including sleep disruption, physical symptoms such as chest pains, heart palpitations, gastrointestinal problems, decreased life satisfaction, lack of self-care, pessimism and difficulty connecting with loved ones.

"If you suspect you are suffering from burnout, it will be helpful to seek professional support and also to speak to your manager to see how the problem might be addressed. However, there are a few steps that you can take to start turning the ship around immediately," said Meyer.

"It is important to start cultivating mindfulness by embracing practices like meditation and deep breathing to enable you to ground yourself in the present, creating an oasis of calm amidst the storm."

Approach

- Get organised: a cluttered desk or an overflowing inbox can amplify stress. Organise

tasks, set achievable goals and celebrate small victories.

- Set boundaries: in an age of digital tethering, learn the art of disconnecting. Preserve personal time, avoiding the email rabbit hole post-work hours.
- Nurture connections: seek mentors, join peer groups and foster relationships beyond work talk.
- Embrace continuous learning: equip yourself with skills that boost confidence. Attend workshops, seek feedback, and view challenges as opportunities to grow.
- Get moving: the mind-body connection is paramount.

Regular exercise, a balanced diet, and sufficient rest are the trinity to combat stress.

"Navigating the tempestuous seas of workplace stress is an essential skill to develop to avoid the burnout that has a devastating effect beyond the workplace. It is about shifting our narrative from mere survival to empowered thriving. By recognising the signs and implementing mechanisms to address them pre-emptively, we can turn the tables on stress, ensuring it does not have the final say in our personal and professional life trajectories," concluded Meyer. ◻



Young women urged to be resilient in the face of cyberbullying



Women face many challenges in the workplace than their male counterparts, including sexism, harassment and unfair discrimination.

This is according to Boikutso Tsikane, Project Manager: Print and Digital at the Media Development and Development Agency (MDDA).

She recently addressed the 4th Annual Women in Media

and Communication Panel Discussion held by Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), in partnership with the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) at the Prestige Auditorium, Pretoria Campus.

Held under the theme; "Navigating Social Media Spaces Safely", the panel discussion focused on cyberbullying of female journalists, gender sensi-

tive writing and reporting, as well as gender discrimination in newsrooms and glass ceiling in the media and communication sector. The panellists examined the emotional toll these practices had on women in the media and offered advice on how to overcome these challenges.

Tsikane said when she prepared for the discussion, her goal was finding a key mes-

sage to give young women who would soon enter the media world.

Employment equity

The South African Employment Equity Act, 1998 (Act 55 of 1998) prohibits unfair discrimination at the workplace.

It states that no person may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee

NO TO BULLYING

Boikutso Tsikane, Project Manager: Print and Digital at the Media Development and Development Agency



in any employment policy or practice, on one or more grounds, including race, gender, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibility, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, HIV-status, conscience, belief, political opinion, culture, language or birth.

"Do we focus on ageism – that she is too young to lead – and what does it take to lead older colleagues? Do we focus on the gender discrimination wage gap? We do the same amount of work and have the same skills but the wage gap is so wide," she said.

Tsikane added that this was one of the reasons why women struggled to break through the glass ceiling despite the improvements in the market. Women often get assigned more unpromotable work and they volunteer more than their male counterparts.

She encouraged women to

exercise boundaries in the workplace and know that always agreeing to take on more work than their male counterparts will only put them at a disadvantage in the end. "When you always say yes, you are sometimes saying no to work that actually matters," she said.

She also encouraged students to advance their skills in order to secure a bright future for themselves.

"You are entering a space that is evolving. The country is moving towards a skills economy. Advance your skills because you do not know what awaits you. We studied similar courses as panel members in front of you but we come from different backgrounds. You need to find out what really moves you," she said.

Fray College Chief Executive Officer Mamoponya Motsai and a reporter from eNCA Slidelo Masikane were part of the panel discussion. They shared similar

experiences regarding cyberbullying.

Motsai related a story of when negative comments were posted on social media and her credibility questioned after she wrote about a Student Representative Council leader. "I was violated verbally. I was really scared because I thought he was also going to hit me. I went back to the newsroom and cried. I thought it was the end of it but the whole thing moved online. I was now getting insults each time I posted my work online and my credibility was questioned. This created so much trauma to a point where I deactivated my Twitter account," she said.

She had to take control of her emotions and remember why she had decided to follow her career path.

Masikane said she also had her share of cyberbullying. She had covered a student protest at Braamfontein and faced the bullies head-on. Like Motsai,

she thought the matter had ended. However, the intimidation migrated to social media where the group of bullies continued to smear her name.

"I put up a tweet stating that I had the right to report on these student protests and I should not be intimidated. High-ranking officials of a certain political party condoned the harassment and defendant on Twitter, which led to more bullying," she said.

"It is really hard to explain the pain this harassment does to you, but you need to find a way to focus on your work and block out the noise. You must remind yourself why you joined [the media] industry in the first place."

To deal with cyberbullying, you firstly need not to respond immediately, take a screenshot of the comment as the bully is likely to delete it after sometime, report the perpetrator to the site and block them. ○

PRASA's sustainable turnaround on track

The turnaround of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) has revitalised one of the most important State-Owned Entities (SOEs). Over the past eighteen months, PRASA has recovered the bulk of its corridors, reopened rail lines, refurbished stations and delivered a markedly improved performance across most of its parameters.

Commuter satisfaction has shot up, with many commuters going onto social media to share their positive experiences on PRASA's new trains. On platforms such as X, commuters regularly post photos of their trips, capturing the scenic nature of many of the routes along the PRASA network.

"The magic of rail has always been what I most look forward to when I get up. I always to take the train to work and when I was a student living in KwaMashu, I travelled by train" says Mayo Ndlovu, who recently relocated to Cape Town, where he takes the train as much as possible. He is not alone, citizens who travel by train are warmly



beginning to experience a new PRASA. Ray Mahlaka, a Cape Town-based journalist writes, "back on the glorious train in Cape Town. Still R9 to commute from the deep South to Cape

Town CBD, a more than 30-km journey. The train is clean, safe and reliable (ish). When SOEs work and are service-orientated, they can improve quality of life". Mthembukazi retorts, "do you

ride past St James station? That's the most glorious ride... from Muizenburg to Simons-town. It's best enjoyed with ice cream from those coffee shops on Kalk Bay Main Rd."

Thiathu Manenzhe observes, "one cannot underestimate the power of public transportation systems done right. They're the heartbeat of the city and make the city work".

These testimonials capture the extent to which PRASA's service meets and in many ways exceeds the expectations of those who ride the trains.

It is clear that a thriving PRASA means our people can reach their destinations quickly, affordably and safely. PRASA is mindful of the impact of high fuel prices on the pockets of South Africans and it takes seriously its role to give commuters a mode of transport that helps them travel safely and affordably. Social media platforms provide a snapshot of the positive impact that a healthy PRASA is making on the daily lives of those who use its passenger train services.

The satisfaction is not limited to those who are on social media, but is captured amongst riders who share their experiences with PRASA staff when a new line is formally launched. Customer service surveys also reveal a high level of customer satisfaction. The upside of this recovery is that commuters who prefer to travel by train save at least 50% compared to what they would pay for other modes of transport.

The most economically vulnerable are able to travel safely and affordably on PRASA's trains.

PRASA Group Chief Executive Officer Hishaam Emeran says he is pleased with the progress of the turnaround.

"We are running PRASA's modern new trains on most of our critical corridors, and passengers have returned in their numbers. We have also bolstered capacity across all aspects of our service. In the last financial year, we achieved 59% of our performance target, a significant increase from the previous year's 19%. In a historical first for us, we achieved our CAPEX [capital expenditure] spend, ensuring that we execute our capital programme and stimulate the rail industry and its support sectors," says Emeran.

"When I was appointed GCEO, I knew that the ex-

pectations of our stakeholders were high. We owe it to ourselves and the people of South Africa to build a PRASA that we can be truly proud of – an institution that embod-

"When I was appointed GCEO, I knew that the expectations of our stakeholders were high. We owe it to ourselves and the people of South Africa to build a PRASA that we can be truly proud of"

ies our values and represents the best of who we are as a people," says Emeran.

The agency has detailed plans to further improve the service by fixing signalling, modernising ticketing, upgrading more stations and bolstering an already much improved security plan. Performance indicators in the current financial year show that PRASA is building on the successes of the past year, with its performance already indicating that the agency will meet and even exceed most of its agreed targets.

This is good news for travellers and citizens who want a passenger rail service that is efficient, modern, and safe. By

the end of 2022/23, PRASA had recovered 18 rail lines. During the same period 58 stations were revitalised, 57 new train sets were delivered and 197 existing train sets were config-

ured. These solid achievements show that PRASA is hard at work. The number of lines back in operation is expected to increase substantially at the end of 2023/24.

Recovering critical corridors

Critical corridors have been recovered in PRASA's areas of operation in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. They include parts of the Central Line in Cape Town, Umlazi to Durban, Saulsville to Pretoria, Mabopane to Pretoria, Naledi to Johannesburg and Leralla to Germiston. Reopening these essential and historic lines has revived passenger rail in vital

metropolitan areas. Corridor recovery is a complex undertaking that involves recovery of the infrastructure, including the perway, installation of the overhead traction equipment, (OHE) fixing of substations and a host of other elements that enable the safe and efficient running of PRASA's modern trains. The work is done by PRASA's highly skilled internal teams as well as experienced contractors.

Work is underway to recover and, where necessary, reinstall the signalling system and to fully reinstate the central nerve center. A fully functional signalling system will ensure that PRASA runs trains at the frequency required to move high passenger numbers safely.

Job creation

Job creation has been one of the highlights of this successful recovery programme by PRASA. Nearly 9 000 direct jobs and job opportunities have been created through rolling stock, infrastructure and operational projects. A further 12 689 indirect jobs have been created through these programmes. Jobs were also created through the establishment of cooperatives focused on cleaning, horticulture and maintenance of stations. »



Commitment to safety

PRASA's much vaunted safety campaign – Asiphephe, aligns with the conditions of the agency's safety permit. But it goes beyond compliance issues to reflect PRASA's commitment to lower safety incidents and improve personal safety on its trains and at its stations. Walling and fencing projects as well as community awareness programmes, have led to a reduction in the number of safety incidents. But more needs to be done to improve safety. This is no easy task given South Africa has over 2 230 km of passenger rail track, excluding the intercity main railway lines owned by Transnet.

PRASA's investment in safety practices includes on-board ambassadors who promote safety. Their presence on board the trains contributes to physical safety, especially for vulnerable groups, including women and young people. Onboard security personnel, including the South African Police Service, CCTV cameras and onboard driver-managed communication bring an added sense of security. These measures have significantly reduced safety and security-related incidents on our new trains.

The protection services have achieved a remarkable turnaround in the security of both assets and people. We have implemented a security strategy

that combines technology and skills to significantly reduce the number of security incidents.

PRASA's new rolling stock programme reflects the achievable ambition of the agency to modernise its assets, upgrade its infrastructure and bring travellers the train of the future. A total of 165 of PRASA's new trains have been built and delivered for use in Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. These state-of-the-art electric multiple unit trains are built on the East Rand at the Gibela factory.

PRASA's turnaround is also accelerating the building of new depots and upgrading existing ones to ensure that the new fleet is staged and maintained in appropriate facilities. These

depots have state-of-the-art fencing and walling to ensure the safety and security of these national assets. The turnaround of PRASA's bus service, Auto-pax, remains an essential focus for the organisation. Autopax is a vital cog in the integrated transport matrix as it transports millions of bus passengers.

"Mobility is more than just trains and buses. It is about enabling people to connect, to pursue their dreams, and to create a better future for themselves and their loved ones. Our turnaround is firmly on track, and I am confident that we have what it takes to ensure that rail becomes the backbone of the public transport system," concludes Emeran. ○

CENSUS 2022 Results



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61,2%
of South Africa's
population is
under 35
years old.



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Government Communication and Information System
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



How to take care of your skin in spring

Spring is a season of rejuvenation and revival, yet it can also bring skin problems for many.

Somatologist Palesa Lobisi says this is because of the shifting weather conditions, increased exposure to the sun and allergens that can result in various skin problems.

In this edition, Lobisi reminds us about the impor-

tance of maintaining a healthy skin and doing away with the heaviness brought by winter. She also touches briefly on some of the challenges your skin may experience and how you can address them.

"With the much warmer weather conditions that comes with spring and summer, it is of utmost importance to hydrate and nourish the skin. The skin-care routine that I am going to share works for all genders and is easy to maintain," explained Lobisi.

She said during the spring months, several types of skin problems tend to become more prevalent, including:

Allergies

Spring is notorious for its allergy season, and during this time, skin reactions like hives, rashes, and eczema can be triggered by allergens such as pollen, dust, and mold-associated skin rash.

"The best approach to managing skin allergies is to avoid these allergens. When pollen levels are high, it is advisable to keep windows and doors closed, use air purifiers, and stay indoors. Over-the-counter antihistamines can also help alleviate itching and redness," explained Lobisi.

Ultraviolet (UV) damage

As temperatures rise, people tend to spend more time outdoors, increasing their risk of UV damage. Excessive exposure to UV radiation from the sun can lead to sun spots, dry and dehydrated skin, as well as the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.

"During spring, UV damage



R69.95 at Dischem

can catch people off guard, as temperatures have not peaked yet, and the sun may not feel excessively warm, but the damage occurs regardless.

Go for a sun protection formula of 50 or above (SPF50+) for the best protection," Lobisi advised.

Acne

Acne is a common skin condition that can occur at any time of the year. However, the increased sweat and humidity during spring can worsen it. Sweat and skin oils can clog pores, leading to acne flare-ups.

"The best way to prevent acne is to keep the skin dry and clean, avoid touching the affected areas, and cleanse twice daily

* Prices correct at the time of publishing.



R345 at Dischem



R192.95



R50 and R149 at Fundamentals

with a mild cleanser. Over-the-counter products containing salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide can also help treat acne,” said Lobisi.

Eczema

Eczema is a persistent skin condition that results in dry, sensitive, itchy, and irritated skin. During spring, irritants like pollen and dust can worsen eczema symptoms.

“Properly hydrating the skin



is the most effective way to manage eczema. Avoid harsh cleansers and detergents, and moisturise twice daily with fragrance-free moisturisers,” she said.

Rosacea

Rosacea is a chronic skin condition characterised by redness and inflammation on the face. Lobisi said spring can exacerbate rosacea symptoms due to increased sun exposure and allergens.

Lobisi offered the following tips to take care of your skin in spring:

- **Cleansing:** depending on the condition of your skin, you will need a cleanser that will address the needs of your skin. If you are a normal to combination skin type, you may use gentle exfoliation to remove dead skin cells and promote a fresh complexion. This should be done twice a week to ensure a smooth texture of the skin, even product absorption and a smooth base for make-up application.
- ▶ If you have sensitive skin, you can use the Cetaphil

Extra Gentle Daily Scrub.

- ▶ If you have an oily acne prone skin, the Eucerin Dermo-purifyer Face Scrub is one of the best as it has active ingredients to combat the acne, the oiliness and the rough skin texture that comes with an oily skin.
- ▶ If you have a normal to combination skin, the Garnier Skin Active Even and Matte Instant Radiance Scrub can get the job up to here.
- **Vitamin C:** incorporate Vitamin C serums for a bright and even skin tone. The Fundamentals 15% Vitamin C serum is the best for combating sun and environmental triggers that create free radicals, which are damaging to skin. Anti-oxidants minimise the harmful effects of free radicals. Vitamin C is the strongest anti-oxidant and best ingredient for this job
- ▶ Hydration: Keep your skin hydrated with lightweight, water-based moisturisers. Lobisi's best bet is the Neutrogena Hydro Boost Water Gel. It is lightweight

and has Hyaluronic Acid and Amino acids to keep the skin plump and nourished.

- ▶ Sunscreen: Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen to protect your skin from UV rays. Opt for an SPF 50+, but go for a lightweight product such as the La Roche-Posay Anthlios Invisible Fluid SPF50+.



“Lobisi is a qualified and internationally accredited Somatologist with over 10 years’ experience, including working on cruise ships as a beauty therapist and skin specialist. She holds a Bachelor of Technology in Somatology from the Central University of Technology and is accredited to work internationally by CIDESCO International. She runs a mobile nails and massage business in Bloemfontein while furthering her studies in Educational Management. For bookings, you can WhatsApp her on 078 133 7610.

* Prices correct at the time of publishing.

Serving culture and memories on a plate

Just as artists stare through spaces and see masterpieces and inspiration, when Chef Nkosi Ngubane looks at ingredients, the childhood fond memories of his mother's brilliant cooking and the smell of food come flooding back.

Originally from Greytown in KwaZulu-Natal – a town with an underrated culture of sharing flavourful food, Chef Nkosi says his first encounter with a professional kitchen was Italian cooking.

"Italians pass on their recipes all the way from Italy to the rest of the world. This is what I would call the legacy of impeccable taste. And their culture of sharing food knits right close to ours; this is probably why I relate to it because it is always paying homage," says the Chef.

Risotto Funghi (Mushroom Risotto)

Ingredients:

- 200g Arborio Rice.
- 1 litre vegetable stock.
- 30g Parmesan cheese.
- 5g Parmesan shavings.
- 5g Fresh Basil.
- 20g Mushroom Velvet Pro-pane.
- 20g Mushroom Alba Clam-shell.
- 10 ml Olive oil.
- 20g Butter.

Instructions:

- Heat 20g of butter and olive oil in a pan over medium-high heat.
- Sprinkle a generous pinch of salt and some freshly ground black pepper, and stir to mix.
- Add the rice and coat with all that fat, stirring well.

Photo: Yabantse Limbu on Unsplash



Photo: Sean Stone on Unsplash

Toast the rice for three more minutes, until the edges turn translucent.

- Add 1 cup of the simmering stock and stir gently.
- When the stock has evaporated, add half a cup more of the stock, stir, and repeat this process for 12 minutes.
- Check the rice at the 12 minute mark. It should be just about done, depending on your rice, and the heat. If it is not done, add 1/4 cup stock, and stir. When that stock has been absorbed, check again.
- Tip in about 3/4 of the mushrooms, and stir thoroughly to fold the mushrooms in, and heat through for about 30 seconds. Keep the rest aside for topping.
- Take off the heat. Stir in the butter, cream, two tablespoons of the truffle oil and the parmesan and

stir it all in thoroughly and vigorously for 30 seconds.

- Cover and leave to rest for two minutes.
- Serve up your risotto, topping each one with a few of the sautéed mushrooms and a few drops more of the truffle oil.

Slow cooked beef short ribs

Ingredients:

- Olive oil, for frying.
- 5 kg thick-cut meaty beef short ribs.
- 2 large heads of garlic, cut in half horizontally.
- 5 heaped tablespoons tomato purée.
- 3 litres beef stock.
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.
- 3 white onions sliced or chopped.
- 1 bunch of fresh celery.
- 500g fresh carrots sliced or chopped.
- 500 ml Worcester sauce.

- 1 litre coke.
- 1 liter BBQ sauce.
- Braai spice mix for seasoning.

Instructions:

- Preheat the oven to 170 °C.
- Heat a deep-sided roasting tray on the hob and add a glug of olive oil. Season the short ribs thoroughly, then fry for 10 to 15 minutes to brown well on all sides.
- Add the halved garlic head, cut side down, pushing it to the bottom of the pan. Add the tomato purée and heat for a minute or two to cook it out. Pour in the coke to deglaze the pan, scraping up the bits at the bottom. Bring to boil and cook for 10 to 15 minutes until the liquid is reduced by half, then add stock to nearly cover the ribs (you will need less stock if your roasting tray is not very large). Bring to the boil again, basting the ribs

with the juices.

- Cover the roasting tray with foil and cook in the preheated oven for three to four hours, basting now and then until the meat is tender and falling away from the bone.
- When the short ribs are ready, remove from the oven and transfer to a serving dish. Squeeze the garlic cloves out of their skins and pass through a sieve. Spoon off any excess fat from the beef cooking liquid, then blend it with a hand blender to breakdown the vegetable chucks in the sauce and mix with the garlic and BBQ sauce and reduce the cooking liquid by heating for 10 to 15 minutes.
- Serve the short ribs topped with the hot sauce and garnish with flat leaf rosemary.

** You can follow Chef Nkosi's work on his Instagram @nkosithechef.*

De Hoop offers the complete outdoor experience

© De Hoop Collection

Not too far from Cape Town in the Overberg region of South Africa, near the southernmost tip of Africa, lies a protected haven of sand dunes, long white beaches, beautiful mountains and 70 km of spectacular, pristine coastline. Here, a marine reserve stretches 5 km into the ocean, where dolphins surface and whales breach and play. De Hoop Nature Reserve is a world apart from the bright city lights.

Inland, away from the coast, this stunning 34 000-hectare reserve is a UNESCO Ramsar World Heritage Site, rich in biodiversity, home to an array of unique and rare wildlife, and a favourite destination for hikers, cyclists, bird watchers, and whale watchers.

Once upon a time

Thousands of years ago, Stone Age people hunted wildlife in

what is now De Hoop Nature Reserve, followed by Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers who lived off the land and coastal resources. Before the arrival of Europeans, the nomadic Khoisan or Khoekhoen roamed the inland plains. (Today, carefully preserved artefacts from this era are displayed at the tourist information centre at the main entrance.) On guided walks, one can even visit the middens, where the indigenous inhabitants of the southern coast, known as Strandlopers, combed the beaches and consumed shellfish for hundreds of years. The Overberg region was colonised in the early 18th century, and over the next 100 years, it became known for sheep farming, horse and cattle breeding, and grain farming.

Initially, the reserve served as a wildlife farm, where rare and

endangered species, such as bontebok and Cape mountain zebra, were bred for restocking. Since the early 1970s, though, the objective of De Hoop has been the conservation of this unique coastal region, and in 1986 a Marine Protected Area was proclaimed off its coast, contributing to the conservation of the region's coastal marine resources.

Wildlife and conservation success in De Hoop

De Hoop's varied habitat supports a diversity of wildlife. The reserve hosts 86 mammal species, including the rare bontebok and Cape mountain zebra, eland, grey rhebok, baboons, yellow mongoose and caracals. Lucky visitors may even spot the occasional Cape leopard. And there are many ways for visitors

to De Hoop to get out and enjoy this local wildlife - whether through traditional game drives in a vehicle, guided mountain bike rides or hikes. Cycling past the plentiful herds of eland and bontebok and walking among the zebras is an experience not to be missed.

This experience is all the more precious as De Hoop (along with a neighbouring conservancy) is now home to a slowly growing population of endangered Cape mountain zebra. This achievement is no small feat considering their near extinction at the beginning of the 20th century, after hunting and habitat loss reduced the population to less than 60 individuals. But conservation efforts by local reserves, national parks and landowners helped bolster numbers, and their story is now one of South Africa's most suc-



successful conservation stories. The population established at De Hoop in the 1960s contributed to their survival, and today their numbers in South Africa have grown from under 100 in the 1950s to 1 200 animals by 2000.

A healthy population of Cape mountain zebras call De Hoop home

The bontebok in the reserve share a similar history. The bontebok, a sub-species of blesbok, was once so endangered due to excess hunting, agricultural encroachment and competition with domestic stock for forage and water that only 17 individuals remained by the 1800s. Drastic intervention to save them from extinction in 1931 led to the establishment of the nearby Bontebok National Park (near

Swellendam). By 1969, the bontebok population numbered 800 strong, and today the population hovers between 2 500 and 3 000. While not abundant, the bontebok's future is considered secure. A current headcount of 308 of these antelope roams De Hoop – more than just a glimmer of hope for a species that was once nearly wiped out.

Plant kingdom

De Hoop forms part of the Cape Floral Kingdom – the world's smallest and most threatened plant kingdom. Fynbos, confined mainly to nutrient-poor soils in the winter rainfall areas of the Western Cape, dominates this kingdom. De Hoop is important for conserving lowland fynbos, as this is the largest area

conserving this rare vegetation type. Of all the approximately 1 500 fynbos species found here, 108 are rare or threatened, 34 are endemic and found nowhere else in the world, and incredibly, 14 species are so newly discovered that they have yet to be scientifically examined and described.

Taking a hike on one of the inland trails, visitors find themselves knee-high in fynbos, bathed in fragrance, and surrounded by shades of yellow, coral, pink, purple and green – including heath-like ericas, wiry reed-like restios, and geophytes that store moisture in their fleshy underground bulbs.

Winged wonders

The De Hoop wetlands are

internationally recognised as Birdlife International Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, and over 260 species of resident and migratory birds are found here, including flamingos, African black oystercatchers, great white pelicans, migrant wading birds, African fish eagles, endemic southern boubous and colourful malachite sunbirds.

The reserve is also home to a newly established colony of endangered African penguins – another conservation success story. After BirdLife South Africa partnered with CapeNature and SANCCOB to create a new breeding colony for African penguins by constructing a predator-proof fence in 2018 and introducing 148 juvenile penguins to the colony site, more penguins started spontaneously arriving at the site in mid-2022. In late 2022, the first pair of chicks was recorded at the colony – a promising prospect for the future success of the colony.

Not too far from the colony, on the cliffs of Potberg Mountain, avid birders can view the



Western Cape's last remaining breeding colony of Cape vultures. A short but steep hike up De Hoop's Klipspringer Trail leads to a lookout platform over the colony, home to around 150 Cape vultures. The hike is worth the climb, and the views are spectacular, with vultures soaring overhead, diving and circling in the sky.

De Hoop's marine reserve

The De Hoop Marine Protected Area extends 5 km out to sea from the coastline of the nature reserve. This is one of Africa's largest marine protected areas, providing a sanctuary for a fascinating array of marine life. Adventurers can explore the coastal rock pools, fossilised dunes, sandy beaches and rocky shores, where marine life of all shapes and sizes can be seen – from bright orange starfish to purple sea urchins, limpets, barnacles, octopus, and some of the

many sea birds that call these shores home. Snorkelling in the large, clear rock pools is one of the best ways to experience this magical marine world.

The protected waters are a haven for endangered southern right whales, and 40% of the world's population of these gentle giants return from feeding in the far Southern Ocean close to Antarctica in the summer months to the waters off De Hoop annually, to mate, give birth and rear their calves. The marine protected area is an important destination for these magnificent mammals, as it guarantees a safe nursery, and during the season, around 120 whales call De Hoop home.

At the peak periods of the season (June and December), as many as fifty can be spotted in a day, making the reserve one of the best spots for land-based whale watching in the world. The whales come so close to shore that visitors can simply sit

on the dunes and watch them as they breach, blow and belly-flop. Aside from whales, visitors are likely to spot diving dolphins and frolicking seals, and the waters here are home to at least 250 species of fish.

For the keen hiker, De Hoop has one of the best hiking trails in South Africa: the five-day, 55 km Whale Trail, which features well-equipped accommodation along the route. The 'slack-packing' route offers coastal and mountain walking, with spectacular views and plenty of opportunities for whale watching. Do note that hiking the Whale Trail requires booking well in advance.

Visiting De Hoop between August and November, during whale watching time, is particularly rewarding, but the reserve has something to offer explorers throughout the year.

Various accommodation options are available, from luxury lodges with panoramic views

over the Indian Ocean to self-catering cottages and campsites.

Final thoughts

As the sun goes down on another crisp Cape coast day, and the sky lights up crimson, orange and yellow, there's nothing better than to sit, gin and tonic in hand, and look out over the endless ocean. Silhouetted against the sky, a southern right whale and her calf make for a sensational sunset spectacle.

De Hoop offers the complete outdoor experience: sea, unspoiled beaches, dunes, wetlands, rare plants, diverse animals, incredible bird life and hiking trails. From adventure, peace and tranquillity to luxury and wilderness, De Hoop has it all. ○

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