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Department:
Economic Development, Environment,
Conservation and Tourism
North West Provincial Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



NWDC Building, Cnr. University
& provident Street, Mmabatho
Private Bag X15
MMABATHO, 2735

COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Enquiries: Tiro Appolos
Tel: 018 388 1697
Email: matlhokot@nwpg.gov.za

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MEC LENKOPANE CALLS ON CHINESE BUSINESSES TO COMPLY WITH THE LAW AND DRIVE LOCAL ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

The MEC for Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism, Bitsa Lenkopane, says Chinese businesses operating in the North West must comply with the law while strengthening their contribution to local manufacturing, production, investment and sustainable employment for young people.

The call comes as the Department engages Chinese business owners and entrepreneurs on regulatory compliance and opportunities for greater economic participation in the province.

Addressing approximately 60 Chinese business owners and entrepreneurs at a Safety and Compliance Briefing and Exchange Workshop at the Mmabatho Convention Centre today, MEC Lenkopane said compliance must be accompanied by a tangible contribution to the province's economic development.

"Compliance should not merely be a box-checking exercise. We must move away from malicious compliance towards meaningful integration into the local economy," she said.

Highlighting that businesses operating in the North West have an important role to play in expanding manufacturing and production, creating sustainable employment and opening opportunities for young people.

"Let us build the province where we comply, exchange economic development programmes, and our youth find sustainable jobs," said MEC Lenkopane.

She added that government welcomes legitimate investment and economic participation, but businesses must operate within the law and contribute to the communities and economy in which they operate.

“We would not be able to build a sustainable economy if there is no compliance,” she said.

This places a dual responsibility on government to assist businesses to understand and meet their regulatory obligations, while ensuring that those obligations are properly enforced.

“We have the responsibility as government to assist businesses to comply with the business legislative prescripts, including those of our regulators. We need to ensure that they operate lawfully. We must not find businesses saying that they are creating jobs whilst they are not complying,” said MEC Lenkopane.

Officials responsible for compliance were also urged not to become fatigued in assisting businesses to navigate the regulatory environment, particularly where entrepreneurs encounter legitimate challenges.

“Let us assist them and empower them so that they are able to comply. Where there are challenges, let us elevate them so that we can engage with the Embassy and the relevant authorities to resolve them,” she said.

At the same time, the MEC cautioned businesses against treating compliance as an administrative hurdle to be bypassed through intermediaries or improper channels.

Chinese businesses were urged to follow legitimate processes when applying for licences, permits and other regulatory approvals, with a warning that individuals promising connections or expedited services could expose businesses to fraud and further compliance risks.

“We know that some of you have already been scammed and we do not want these fraudulent practices. Let us work legitimately and transparently so that you can be assisted through the proper procedures,” she said.

The engagement also highlighted instances where investment projects had proceeded without the required environmental approvals, including developments affecting wetlands and areas where protected species occur.

Such challenges, the MEC noted, could be avoided if businesses engaged the relevant authorities and obtained the necessary approvals before commencing development.

“Some of you have already built investment projects that can boost the economy of the province and create jobs for our people, but they are non-compliant because the correct processes were not followed from the beginning,” said MEC Lenkopane.

She highlighted that the engagement was not intended to discourage investment, but rather to create a clearer pathway for businesses to operate lawfully while contributing to the province’s economic objectives.

The province also sees opportunities to strengthen economic exchanges with China, including exploring ways of supporting locally produced goods to access export markets.

The engagement brought together key regulatory institutions, including the South African Revenue Service (SARS), National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS), Department of Home Affairs, Department of Employment and Labour, Department of Agriculture and municipal compliance structures.

The workshop forms part of the department’s broader efforts to strengthen business compliance while ensuring that investment and economic activity translate into meaningful opportunities for local communities, particularly young people.

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For inquiries, contact:

Mr. Jeremiah Matebesi

072 333 0325

Email: JeremiahMatebesi@nwpg.gov.za

Twitter: [@nwpg_deduct](https://twitter.com/nwpg_deduct) / Facebook: [@nwdedect](https://www.facebook.com/nwdedect)