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ACTING DIRECTOR- GENERAL, MS JACKY MOLISANE, CALLS FOR PRODUCTIVITY-LED GROWTH AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AT GAUTENG WORKPLACE CHALLENGE MILESTONE EVENT

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ACTING DIRECTOR-GENERAL, MS JACKY MOLISANE, CALLS FOR PRODUCTIVITY-LED GROWTH AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AT GAUTENG WORKPLACE CHALLENGE MILESTONE EVENT

The Department of Employment and Labour's Acting Director-General, Ms Jacky Molisane, delivered a powerful keynote address at the Gauteng Workplace Challenge Programme (WPC) Milestone Workshop, highlighting the critical role of productivity, enterprise competitiveness and women's economic empowerment in driving South Africa's economic recovery and long-term growth.

The event, hosted by Productivity SA, an entity of the Department of Employment and Labour at the Accolades Boutique Venue in Midrand, brought together government leaders, business representatives, labour stakeholders and participating enterprises to celebrate the achievements of companies that have successfully implemented productivity improvement initiatives through the Workplace Challenge Programme.

Towards Productivity Excellence", coincided with Women's Month commemorations and underscored the important link between gender inclusion and economic performance. The Acting Director-General emphasized that women's economic empowerment must be viewed not merely as a social objective but as a strategic economic imperative essential for sustainable development and national competitiveness.

The workshop, held under the theme "Empowered Women, Empowered Workplaces: A Journey

Empowering Women to Unlock Economic Potential



Addressing delegates, the Acting Director-General reflected on South Africa's democratic journey and the enduring legacy of the 1956 Women's March, reminding participants that the struggle for women's rights was fundamentally rooted in the fight against systemic economic and social exclusion. She stressed that the country cannot achieve meaningful economic progress while barriers continue to limit women's participation in leadership, entrepreneurship, skills development, and economic opportunities.

In her keynote address, Ms Molisane challenged stakeholders across sectors to consider practical interventions that can dismantle workplace barriers, support women entrepreneurs, expand access to advanced skills, and create pathways for women to occupy leadership and decision-making positions. According to the Acting Director-General, building an inclusive economy requires ensuring that every South African has a genuine opportunity to contribute to and benefit from economic growth.

Gauteng's Strategic Role in Economic Growth

Recognising Gauteng's position as South Africa's economic hub, the Acting Director-General noted that the province remains central to industrial activity, investment attraction and employment creation. However, Ms Molisane also acknowledged the significant economic headwinds confronting businesses and workers alike.

The Acting Director-General, Ms Molisane, cited the latest labour market statistics, which indicate a national unemployment rate of 33.6%, representing approximately 8.5 million unemployed South Africans, while total employment stood at 16.7 million during the second quarter of 2026. The

decline in employment experienced in Gauteng during the same period serves as a reminder that sustainable economic growth and job creation require deliberate interventions to improve enterprise competitiveness and productivity.

The Acting Director-General stressed that economic growth must translate into production, productive enterprises and decent work opportunities if it is to have a meaningful impact on the lives of citizens. As Gauteng pursues reindustrialisation, township enterprise development and technology-driven growth, productivity improvement remains critical to ensuring that investment delivers tangible socio-economic benefits.

Productivity as a Driver of Sustainable Development

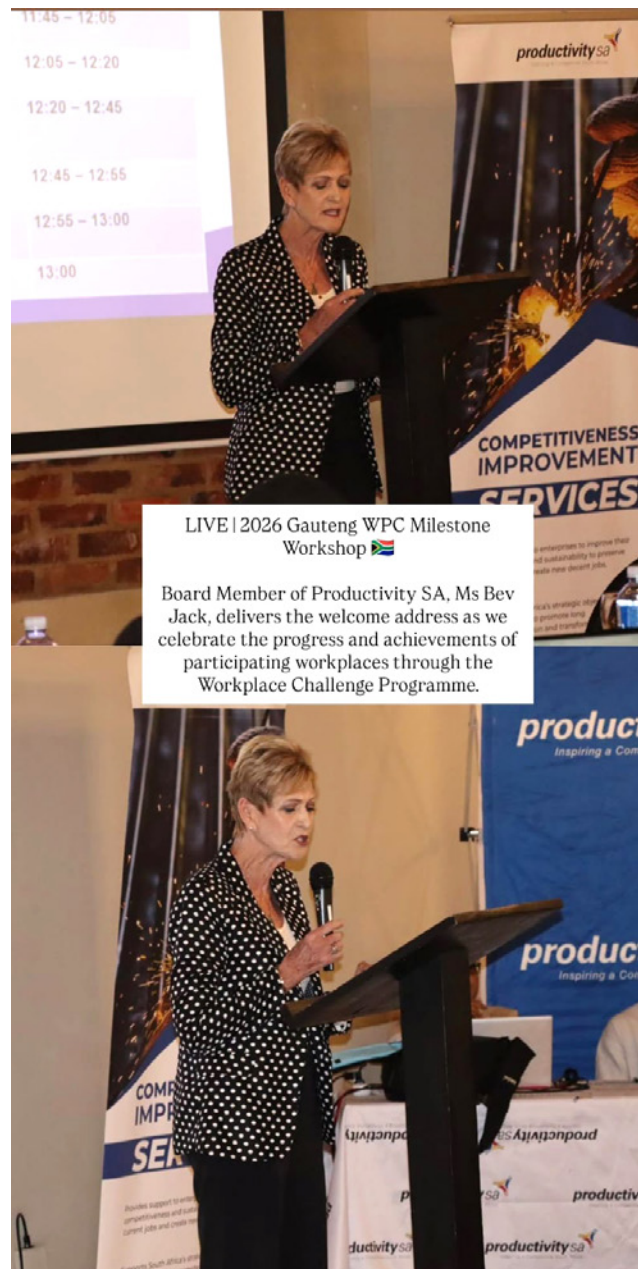
A central theme of the address was the need to redefine productivity. The Acting Director-General argued that productivity is not about increasing pressure on workers but about creating smarter and more efficient ways of working. True productivity, he said, involves reducing waste, improving quality, enhancing skills and fostering stronger collaboration between management and employees.

Ms Molisane highlighted the role of the Workplace Challenge Programme in advancing these objectives. Established in 1998 and administered by Productivity SA, with funding support from the



Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the DTIC), the programme was designed to help South African enterprises improve competitiveness, sustainability and job creation.

Over the years, the programme has evolved to meet changing economic conditions through initiatives such as the 12-month Compressed Toolkit, the six-month Kaizen intervention for distressed companies and the collaborative cluster model, which enables enterprises to share best practices and learn from one another while receiving



guidance from productivity specialists.

Delivering Measurable Results for Businesses

The Acting Director-General outlined several tangible benefits that participating companies derive from the Workplace Challenge Programme. These include improved labour-management relations through joint workplace structures, enhanced operational efficiency through Kaizen methodologies, workplace organisation using the internationally recognised 5S system, improved product quality, streamlined production lead times and strengthened workplace health and safety practices.

Several Gauteng-based enterprises showcased the practical impact of these interventions.

Sir Fruit, which participated in Productivity SA's



Digital Kaizen pilot programme, improved production line efficiency from 44.2% to 53.39% and reduced the time required to produce 2 million litres of juice from 5 months to 1 month. Unaccounted production downtime was also significantly reduced.

Out of Africa successfully applied 5S methodologies to address operational challenges, reducing customer waiting times from 45 minutes to 5 minutes, eliminating production reworks, and improving overall workplace organisation.

Breadroll Bakery, a community enterprise in Mamelodi West, leveraged productivity improvement tools to optimise operations and expand employment from 10 to 14 jobs since joining the programme in August 2025.

Special recognition was also given to Lindiwe Sanitary Pads, a 100% black women-owned enterprise employing 33 people, including 27 women, and Ambesha Africa, which is advancing sustainability through furniture restoration and circular economy practices. Other exhibitors recognised at the event included Denic Cabinets, Agata Lonia and Pioneer Plastic.

Productivity SA's Growing Impact

The Acting Director-General highlighted the broader impact of Productivity SA's interventions, noting that the entity continues to play a vital role in promoting productivity, preserving jobs and supporting enterprise development in line with the Employment Services Act.

During the 2024/25 financial year, Productivity SA achieved 85% of its planned targets. Its Competitiveness Improvement Services program supported 1 323 SMMEs, trained 2 696 entrepreneurs and workers, and developed 423 productivity champions. Through the Workplace Challenge Program alone, 102 enterprises received support, with 75% black-owned, 33% women-owned, and 19% youth-owned. Importantly, these interventions helped preserve more than 3 241 jobs.

Preparing for the Future of Work

Looking ahead, the Acting Director-General urged businesses and workers to prepare for the opportunities and challenges presented by the Fourth Industrial

Revolution, including artificial intelligence, automation, digitalisation and the green economy transition.

She stressed that women must be placed at the centre of this transformation and called on employers to create more inclusive workplaces that allow women to advance into technical and leadership roles. Financial institutions and development agencies were also encouraged to provide sustained support to women entrepreneurs beyond the start-up phase, while young women were urged to pursue opportunities in emerging sectors and remain confident in their ability to shape the country's economic future.

A Call for Continuous Improvement

Concluding her address, the Acting Director-General reaffirmed that productivity excellence is a continuous journey rather than a final destination. Ms Molisane encouraged government, business and organised labour to strengthen their partnership in support of inclusive growth, competitive enterprises and sustainable job creation.

Acting Director-General congratulated Productivity SA, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, provincial partners and participating companies for advancing 25 years of productivity excellence through the Workplace Challenge Programme. The success stories showcased during the milestone workshop, she said, demonstrate that transformation, innovation and continuous improvement are already delivering meaningful results across workplaces and communities.

The event served as a powerful reminder that empowering women, improving productivity and strengthening enterprise competitiveness are not separate objectives, but interconnected pillars of a more inclusive, resilient and prosperous South African economy.

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