

**OPENING ADDRESS AT THE OCCASION OF
REGIONAL LEARNING AND EXCHANGE SYMPOSIUM –
STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES OF SADC NATIONAL
STRUCTURES FOR EFFECTIVE COORDINATION AND
COMMUNICATION BY THE
MS. NTHOATENG LEBONA, PRINCIPAL SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING
3 JUNE 2023, AVANI LESOTHO**

Programme Director,
Let me pay my respects to:

HMK Letsie III
The RHPM
His Majesty's Cabinet, in particular the Honourable Minister of MoFDP,
the Host of the SADC – National Focal Point

Let me turn to the
Director Industrial Development and Trade and officials from the SADC
Secretariat
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to you.

I am honoured to be here. First, I wish to join those who spoke before me to welcome you all to Lesotho, our guests, from different SADC countries, including facilitators. Colleagues, from different Ministries and Civil society organisations in Lesotho.

I am informed that the event that this has attracted members of coordination structures from a number of Member states of SADC, Non-State organisations, as well as national SADC Media Coordinators or their representatives. We therefore believe that it is a good representation of the voice of key stakeholders and main conduits for information and feedback on matters of national and regional interests, including SADC matters. Thank you for making time to attend this symposium.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Citizens and stakeholder engagement on regional policy and program development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as information dissemination are essential ingredients for a successful regional cooperation and integration agenda. We need to build national and collective capabilities to develop new policies, products, markets, etc to deepen integration inwardly and with other regional blocs to realise faster and broad based economic development.

I am grateful it is happening here. We promised ES, when he was here in Lesotho a few months back, that we will position ourselves better to be able to meet our commitments and exploit take the opportunities available for being in the regional block.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am excited about today's event, where the objective is to "... facilitate exchange and enhancement of knowledge on the SADC Regional Integration architecture, processes as well as to gain ideas on how to operationalise RI coordination structures fully and effectively in the Member States". The importance of information sharing cannot be overemphasised!

Also, we are aware that in our Member states, or at least this is true for Lesotho, that SADC Regional Integration Agenda is not widely known. In Lesotho when you talk about SADC, the first thing that comes to people's minds are peace and security issues --- the 1998 Military

support Lesotho and recently SAMMIM. (received from SADC; the soldiers Lesotho contributed to Mozambique;

Apart from obviously observable peace and security gains, there are a lot of good socio-economic programmes and projects that our Member States are implementing under the auspices of SADC, for the betterment our people. The RISDP is as comprehensive as our national Development agenda. But the citizens are not fully informed about these developments. Traders and other service providers see procedures being improved at their border posts, and their way of doing trade being eased! They are not aware that this is a result of the SADC Co-ordinated Border Management Project! Complimented by other initiatives as well.

In Lesotho, we have been struggling to put our RI Coordination structures in place and to work effectively. Regional integration and cooperation offers enormous opportunities for enlarging markets, which can be served through cooperation arrangements in different states, there is need to cooperate in building seamless infrastructure and therefore open up opportunities for investment. We have not tapped this big potential, therefore we need to position ourselves well, such that we do not just have national platforms that are just talk shops, but yield results.

So, we hope this symposium is a good platform for exchange of ideas and learn from each other.

For the third sector/Media, this is a good opportunity to understand what SADC is about, so that you communicate, interrogate information and produce reports effectively on SADC. We need informed and good reporting! We also need to engage all the people, - communities, private sector and academia, Regional agenda should not only be the province of Government, We should all be held accountable.

Programme Director, Let me end my remarks by wishing you a very productive engagement over the next two days. I am sure we will fill empowered at the end of it all.

Please make time to drive and walk down the hill to see a bit of Maseru and the beautiful white mountains just a few kilometres away.

Program director

It now gives me great pleasure to declare this symposium officially opened!

Thank you