

FEEDBACK REPORT ON THE INAUGURAL PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT ECONOMIST FORUM CONGRESS – Submitted by Mr. Michael John Meyer (01 and 02 October 2009)

Please find a detailed report below. I have attached 5 important reports as the documents to highlight the proceedings that took place at the Provincial Government Economists Forum. The following has been attached:

- 1). An updated 2 day programme;
- 2). An invitation from KZN Treasury to attend the Inaugural Provincial Government Economist Forum;
- 3). Attendee list of all delegates present;
- 4). KZN MEC Speech given at the forum;
- 5). 3 Media releases of reports that featured in the KZN local newspapers; and
- 6). A detailed report of the minutes/ proceedings at the Inaugural Provincial Government Economist Forum

TABLE 1: DISCUSSANT POINTS OF THE AGENDA

<u>Detailed Agenda Points:</u>	<u>Descriptions of activities :</u>
Format of proceedings	Informal and Casual. Delegates were actively involved in all the discussions. Decisions were made through voting (majority rule) and support a democratic majority outcome.
Venue arranged	Whitehorse conference facility at the Golden Horse casino, Pietermaritzburg.
Date and time	01-02 October 2009, from 8:30 AM to 4 PM
Aim of the congress	To bring Provincial Government Economists out of their closets and selected stakeholders together to discuss amongst others the need for such a forum and the way forward for such a forum i.e. assisting local government with expertise and working on joint-research projects.
Delegates / participants	All provinces were present at the congress, however in a couple of cases either the relevant Treasury or DED were present. The attendance register has been forwarded to all (see list in the attached email)
Media covering	Full media briefing took place at the beginning of the congress. Both national and provincial media were present. The congress received significant media coverage from the Witness, Business Day, Maritzburg Sun, Maritzburg Bureau (see media reports in attached email)
Format of the congress	Day 1: Registration of attendees, introduction into the roles, functions and activities of provincial economists (administration issues). Day 2: Economic and related presentations by the various Provincial Departments of Treasury and Economic Development. Discussions about the connection that economists play in policy analysis, advisory role and strategic advice on socio-economic and development related issues. Building a network in a collaboration effort to share ideas, experiences, challenges, research methodologies, data & statistics, economic information used, database sources/subscriptions, future

	joint research projects and dissemination of knowledge i.e. Membership with the organisation for Economic Research of South Africa (ERSA) at UCT, School of Economics.
Bus Tour	Municipality Manager provided an in-depth analysis in the form of a presentation about the historical and cultural uniqueness and a detailed background of the city's political, economic, social, agricultural, labour, housing, infrastructure, transport, sport and cultural evolution from a past oppressed society into a modern KZN metropolitan diverse district of today i.e. main streets and important monuments were introduced, activities of nobel peace prize awards and the success stories of various local economic development initiatives from public entities as well as historical persons at important time periods were highlighted by Mr David Gengan i.e. Role models like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu's speeches were mentioned. KZN's economic performance and its success stories as lessons were highlighted. He discussed the need for government intervention programmes under the umbrella of the current challenges and market failures facing the KZN economy. He mentioned one success story that stood out i.e. The employees of a factory in the manufacturing business sector deciding to cut staff salaries to accommodate employee retention, during the crisis, instead of lay-off's of staff.
	The members responsibilities include: Coordination of the specified terms of reference, gathering the member inputs and the stakeholder comments, distribute info to forum members, discuss the objectives, roles and function of the forum, facilitate finalisation of project proposals, give input into idea generation, support the activities and facilitate the direction of the economist forum core functions
Frequency of the congress	Beginning of 1 st week in 3 rd quarter per annum
Hosting the event	Rotational basis between the provinces – voluntary basis
Proposed Duration for next meeting	3 days – DAY1 (Administration issues) - DAY2 (Economic presentations, strategic focus groups to discuss economic related problems, form government responses, act as a think tank, heavy discussions, debates and open dialogue

On the first day of the event:

The programme manager of the Forum introduced the major inclusion of a guided bus tour that was arranged by the General Manager, Mr. Clive Coetzee, of the KZN Provincial Treasury Inter-Governmental Relations unit. It was very interesting and exciting. At the end of the day, Mr. David Gengan conducted a 2 hour tour guide of the KZN Metropolitan City Region. He is the current Head of Economic Affairs at the Msunduzi Municipality and lived in Pietermaritzberg for an extremely long time period of his life. He is an experienced public official within the economic development spectrum and his knowledge covers wide geographical areas within the socio-economic environment. Some areas includes topics covering broad cross-cutting activities; such as, Local Economic Development, Poverty,

Unemployment, Rural-urban migration, Town planning, Spatial dimension, micro-enterprise development, skills development, infrastructural development., Sport development, financial management, supply chain procurement, cultural history. He was the the best person for the job.

SOME OF THE MAJOR POINTS THAT WERE DISCUSSED AT THE FORUM (SEE TABLE 2. OUTLINED BELOW):

Do we need such a Economist forum, the name, membership, purpose, etc of such a forum if needed?? The above questions were collectively agreed through a participatory approach where all inputs and decisions were included about the the above questions as follows:

TABLE 2: DISCUSSION POINTS AND DECISIONS TAKEN AT THE FORUM

<p>Do we need such a forum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, we need such a forum. There were consensus about the need and desirability of such a forum. It was seems as long overdue and the correct time to discuss the issues relevant to such a forum, etc
<p>Do we need a name?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was agreed to discuss the name of the forum once the issues related to the membership was resolved. As its stands at present the name of the forum is Provincial Government Economists Forum which not only include Treasury and Economic Development Departments but also economists in all other provincial government departments such as transport, agriculture,, health, etc. Any provincial government economists are thus a member of the forum. However the forum excludes economists from other spheres of government, organized business organizations, local economic development practitioners, economic consultants and private sector economists.
<p>Do we need membership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As indicated above there were a serious debate regarding membership to the forum and at the end it was decided that the steering committee would make some recommendations to the current members in due course. There are essentially four options to decide between: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Only provincial treasury and ded economists 2. All provincial government economists 3. All provincial and local government economists and LED practitioners, but only the major local municipalities (metro’s), maximum 4 per province (for example) 4. All provincial and local government economists as above plus selected private sector economists or organized business representatives (chambers of business ceo’s), maximum 4 per province as above.

What is the role of the Steering Committee?

- As indicated it was suggested that the steering committee take this issue forward to make suggestions and recommendations to the current members for their decision. Advantages vs Disadvantages of each??? Only once the membership issue has been resolved can a suitable name for the forum be decided upon.

Aim of the Forum?

- The following was suggested, but no decision has been taken. It was however decided to delegate the issue to the steering committee: To act as a think tank to influence public policy and service delivery

Purpose/s of the Forum?

- Same as above regarding the way forward for the forum: Demonstrating the value and impact of economists in provincial and local economic and public sector policy analysis through service delivery through the following active interventions:
 1. How to get politicians to listen to economists?
 2. How to get involved in policy formulation and analysis?
 3. Where and how to get reliable and relevant data?
 4. Continues and further training for economists?
 5. Are we getting the required and needed support for the HOD and MEC?
 6. Issue of Treasury and Economic Development duplication of work
 7. What are the mandate, role and functions still relevant?
 8. Corporation and elaboration between economists in the different spheres of government?
 9. There are appointed economist who is not being utilized?
 10. Lack of cooperation and support between provincial government economists and municipal representatives
 11. Involvement in the allocation of funds and budget processes?
 12. Closer cooperation between Stats SA and provincial government economists?
 13. Ability to produce and mine data from within provincial government departments and municipalities?
 14. Marketing the unit as a whole?
 15. Disseminating Information and Research Results and Working with the media?

SOME FURTHER MATTERS ARISING OUT OF THE FORUM THAT REQUIRE ATTENTION:

1. Skills development and training needs:

Receiving training which includes both quantitative and qualitative training.

Quantitative training includes the following (not a complete list)

- 1) CGE Model;
- 2) Gravity Model;
- 3) Statistical Economic Benchmarks;
- 4) DSP model;
- 5) Statistics South Africa;
- 6) Business and Consumer Confidence Surveys;
- 7) Economic impact analysis;
- 8) SAM and Input-Output Analysis

Qualitative training includes the following (not a complete list)

- 1) Public Policy
- 2) Economic Growth Theories
- 3) Economic Policy Formulation
- 4) Political Economics
- 5) Public Finance

THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE ECONOMIST FORUM

(i) PROPOSE A SUITABLE TRAINING SCHEDULE TO DEVELOP AN ECONOMIST PROGRAMME:

Following the compilation of this report, the role for the steering committee for the Economist Forum has become apparent. At this point, every province has been given an opportunity to respond with their comments and/or suggestions to the organizer, Mr Clive Coetzee, and once the feedback report has been accepted and distributed to all attendees then the steering committee will start its work (As explained in Table 1 above). It was decided at the congress that each department will submit their training needs to the steering committee (communication will be forwarded to request this input) as soon as possible. The steering committee will consolidate the training needs into a consolidated training demand schedule. The schedule will then be forwarded to universities, training institutions both private and public, ERSA, etc.

(ii) INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS SPHERES AND DEPARTMENTS:

There was an agreement for everyone to circulate research document and working papers amongst members, establish an Economist website so as to publish research, Peer review amongst one another, Create joint ventures wrt research, Create on line debates and discussions for focus groups, creating a joint quarterly South Africa newsletter to distribute to all Provinces.

(iii) STEERING COMMITTEE REPRESENTATION:

The programme manager requested delegates to volunteer providing one representative from each Province and where possible an assistant to give support where necessary. The representatives were identified for each Province: (1)Eastern Cape – still to be decided; (2) Tauten – Mmathep Maudi, (3) Free state – Julia Kambule , (4) Limpopo – still to be announced, (5) Mpumalanga – Lennard va Vuren, (5) North west – Susan Myburgh & Mr. J.N.T. Mohlala (6) Northern Cape - Portia Seameco (7) Western cape – Calire Horton (Michael Meyer will assist when needed) and KZN – Clive Coetzee Chair man

Next meeting: This will take place in the 1st week of October 2010. The venue is still to be announced.