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Government Component:
Centre for Public Service Innovation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Minister's Speech on Occasion of the 15th Public Sector Innovation Conference

THEME: *Leveraging Innovation to Enhance the District Development Model*

DATE: *24 August 2021*

Programme Director: Thank you so much for the warm welcome back home.

May I begin by extending my greetings to the:

Directors-General and HODs,

CPSI EXCO led by Ms Lydia Sebokedi and to all the CPSI Staff,

To our distinguished international guests, a very South African Sanibonani,

To the Senior managers and public officials from the three spheres of government,
our private sector partners,

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning to you all.

An organisation that can bring pertinent, modern knowledge to bear upon the challenges of the day enjoys huge advantages over a government that still uses yesterday's solutions to fix today's problems. We have little to no choice but to strive towards a public sector that inspires, incubates, and adopts innovation because if we do not, the consequences can be dire for any government and its people.

If a private sector organisation fails to keep up with innovation, its products become dull and undesirable; this leads to a drop in sales, decreased profitability and eventually bankruptcy or business closure. They only survive if they innovate and diversify.

On the other hand, if a public sector organisation such as a government department or SOE fails to keep up with innovation, then basic service delivery to the people

breaks down, frustrated and desperate the people come out to the streets to revolt against an ineffective government, violent protests could result in loss of life and property. In the case of an SOE clients or users take their business elsewhere.

I must apologise for the dystopian way that I begin this morning, but I only speak this way to introduce to you the mother of invention, and her name is Necessity.

As newly appointed Minister to the Portfolio of Public Service and Administration, I am aware of how much of a necessity innovation is to the very critical work of government departments. However, I am also fully cognizant of the slow pace of adoption of new and innovative technologies by departments. That is why platforms such as the Public Sector Innovation Conference become an indispensable part of efforts to engender a culture of innovation and promote the adoption of innovative technologies in the Public Sector. Technology and innovation are not the future; they are the now. They exist today and will improve tomorrow and well into the future.

The Centre for Public Service Innovation has been hosting this key public sector event, not as a nice-to-have, but as a necessity, as a way to highlight the need for innovation to improve service delivery and to improve the lives of the most vulnerable in society.

Yes, this is a time to celebrate, to look back at how far we have come, but it is also a moment for honest reflection. It is a moment to take stock, to marshall our forces and redouble our energies towards finding the necessary solutions to improve the way we deliver public services to all citizens.

When we gather as we do today, it is not only for niceties nor for platitudes; it is not so we can give flowery speeches laced with high sounding phrases that do nothing to improve the lives of citizens who have to wait for medical attention for 6 hours while the hospital looks for a patients file.

Private sector organisations are much more willing and able to be early adopters of innovative solutions, but the stakes are profits and losses. But, on the other hand, we in the public sector, where the stakes are quite literally a matter of life and death, are very slow to adopt new technologies, this is completely unacceptable, and we must do

everything possible to make sure that every public sector organisation properly and adequately utilises the necessary innovative technologies that are available to it.

To those who will want to stand in the way of innovation in the Public Sector, *Sithi Sukani Endleleni*.

I am happy to see that this conference has grown in stature, both here and beyond our borders. This shows that there is a silent majority who are working hard to inculcate a culture of innovation in our public sector, and conferences such as these are a premium platform for robust dialogues, the sharing and exchanging of valuable lessons and experiences on how we can leverage innovation to drive change in government and by Necessity to improve the lives of all citizens. We are therefore also appreciative of our international speakers and participants joining us today and tomorrow.

Our public sector needs to learn from international best practices, and our international guests can assist us greatly in keeping pace with international trends to serve our citizens much more efficiently. Whilst doing that, we also need to look to pockets of excellence in the field of technology and innovation that exist throughout the public sector.

It is *necessary* for our public sector to rid itself of rigid bureaucratic shackles and 'silos' if we are to make any meaningful inroads against the many challenges afflicting our beautiful country.

A public sector that is responsive to changing and more complex expectations and demands of our citizenry is *necessary*. Moreover, if appropriately leveraged, we know that innovation is a proven enabler or missing piece of the puzzle for a public sector that delivers a better life for me, for you and everyone else. Therefore, we must urgently demand a public sector that is adaptive, agile, and innovative enough to meet the ever-evolving set of challenges of modern statehood.

And therein lies the true value of this conference; if there is anything to take away from what I have to say today, then it is these two words: *Necessity* and *Urgency*. An

innovative public sector that is able to deploy new technologies to deliver improved public services to more of our people is both *necessary* and *urgent*.

Let this conference stimulate the kind of dialogues which and ideas can mobilise us to *urgently* leverage innovation as a key catalyst for a transformed public sector that is efficient, reliable, ethical and corruption-free, professional, and empowered to deliver on our developmental agenda for our people.

In Brazil, they are mining data from police case records in order to understand better the scourge of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF); data mining is being used there to inform public policy development and to deploy much more effective prevention mechanisms that are innovative and are able to better detect and prevent instances of GBVF. This kind of innovation is what we should adopt could greatly sp as to assist us here in South Africa, where the levels of GBVF are now at crisis proportions.

We need innovative ideas such as these which have practical, real-world application.

Distinguished guests and fellow attendees,

We should bear in mind that other than being part of the CPSI's mandate to promote innovation in the public sector, this conference is also an important contributor towards building an effective development-oriented public sector and an empowered and inclusive citizenry as envisaged in the National Development Plan (NDP).

The theme for the 2021 Public Sector Innovation Conference is: Leveraging Innovation to Enhance the District Development Model.

Right from the onset, our government entered into a social compact with its citizens to deal with inequality, poverty and unemployment that have historically been the defining feature of our country. These interdependent socio-economic phenomena rightly labelled the 'triple challenge' cut across many areas of life – They form the apex of our developmental agenda, which we must *aggressively* tackle as a developmental state.

In its response, the government has put measures in place to ensure equal access to services by all citizens across the length and breadth of our country. The current pandemic has made this task even more difficult, putting strain on the already constrained fiscus, including the achievement of our developmental agenda. However, we should find opportunities in crisis and think more strategically and act with urgent and compassion.

COVID-19, as disruptive and undesired as it is, has presented an opportunity that we cannot afford not to leverage. It has made it more necessary and has put even more urgency for us to innovate, particularly in a world where technology tools have become the centre of social interaction and business processes. With the need to continue seamless delivery while maintaining distance, it means we must innovate delivery models. Herein lies the opportunity presented by *Necessity* called COVID, an opportunity not to be squandered.

Owing to this new-normal, it is now a time to think about virtual-based services, automated and remote delivery. This is no longer a luxury of the future, but it is the reality and *Necessity* of today. Not only will this optimise how we function as government and interact with citizens, but it will also reduce transaction costs and increase the efficiency with which we deliver basic services at the local level.

As we have learnt from the previous speakers, one of these key objectives of the District Development Model (DDM) is to enhance inter-governmental coordination. It is to foster practical intergovernmental relation mechanisms to plan, budget and implement jointly in order to maximise impact and align plans and resources. It also seeks to promote the creation of viable opportunities for co-designing of innovative solutions at the district level, where the proximity between government and citizens is much closer.

Therefore, the conference theme demands that we collectively explore innovative ideas on how we can contribute to the successful implementation of the District Development Model to enhance service delivery and improve the lives of our people.

I hope and trust that this conference will drive a sense of *urgency* in all of us to adopt and implement innovative solutions in the public sector.

We Dare Not Fail!

For our country to emerge and rise above its formidable challenges, we require sheer determination and a shared vision. So we must all put shoulder to wheel and push forward towards a better life for you, me, and future generations.

For the public sector, the goal is to find ways of maximising the impact of innovation to ensure sustained delivery of services across the country's length and breadth and renew the confidence in government's ability to improve the lives of South African as we emerge out of this pandemic.

Again, We Dare Not Fail!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak here today,

Thank you to the CPSI for bringing us together, and a special thanks to all of you for attending and a special thanks to Mr Rabothata and Mr Moshologu who delivered the informative presentations before me.

Please remember that Covid-19 is still with us, sanitise your hands, wear your masks, maintain social distancing and stay safe.

Thank You!