

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON THE FREE AND OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE DAY DELIVERED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM: HONOURABLE SEAPARO SEKOATI. BOLIVIA LODGE, POLOKWANE 17<sup>TH</sup> OF MARCH 2017.**

Programme Director  
Members of the Executive Council, present  
Heads of Departments  
Managing Director of LEDA  
Provincial Government officials  
Representatives from Tirelo Bosha and the Belgian Development Agency  
Leaders of organized business and labour  
Captains of Industry  
NGOs  
Research institutions and Academia representatives  
Training institutions  
Members of our communities  
Small, micro and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs) representatives  
Youth, women and community leaders  
Media representatives  
Distinguished guests  
Good morning, Thobela, Goeie more, Ndi matsheloni, Avuxeni!

The United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that *“The Free and Open Source Software model provides interesting tools and processes with which women and men can create, exchange, share and exploit software and knowledge efficiently and effectively”*.

In 2007, the South African Government approved a policy on Free and Open Source Software use. This policy document encouraged the utilization of Open Source Software in Government.

In 2015 the Provincial EXCO approved the Free and Open Source Software Strategy for Limpopo province in order to lower the cost of ICT operations in the province.

The digital revolution is changing the structure of economic and social power globally. The digital revolution creates economic empowerment opportunities but there is a danger that these opportunities may become non-inclusive and only benefiting the already privileged communities. Several barriers exist which prevent the youth and Small and Medium Enterprises from benefiting from the digital revolution.

One of the factors discouraging small companies and individuals from entering the ICT market is the high-cost of software, and the fact that the market is dominated by established companies with access to technologies and patents, which are acquired at high cost and in-turn leads to a high-total cost of ownership for the end-user.

With the introduction of the Free and Open Source Software the rules of engagement have changed. Small companies and individuals no longer have to pay expensive license fees which mean that they are no longer excluded from new technology developments including participation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The Free and Open Source Software supports ICT investment with local companies, keeping money 'onshore' and promotes a valued local skill base. Free and Open Source Software supports local content creation and consumption. Localization is one of the areas where the Free and Open Source Software becomes a preferred option because of its open nature. Users are able to modify applications to suit the unique requirements of a particular cultural region, regardless of economic size.

The introduction of Broadband into Limpopo is one of the initiatives towards achieving a better life for all. However, the economic impact of broadband infrastructure is higher when promotion of the technology is combined with stimulus of innovative businesses that are tied to new applications. The impact of broadband is neither automatic nor homogeneous across the economic system.

The Free and Open Source Software will play a very significant role because of the following characteristics that come with the software: Any person, everywhere can use it without paying any licence cost and the software is freely available to download or access; Enterprises can pay for the support they require and negotiate their own terms; SMMEs and entrepreneurs can use the software to create small businesses e.g. online multimedia, web-design, e-commerce and many other types of businesses without paying the high cost of proprietary software; Free assistance is available to start-ups in the form of online communities and organizations. In Limpopo Province, Limpopo Connexion is entrusted with the responsibility to support and build capacity to SMMEs and communities at large to use the Free and Open Source Software.

There are a number of Free and Open Source initiatives taking place in the Province. The Limpopo Department of Education has taken up the challenge to implement the Free and Open Source Software and free content in 20 schools in the province. Today we celebrate the success of this Offline Content project.

This project, namely Tirelo Bosha was implemented through a partnership model established between DPSA, The Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism and the Department of Education with funding from the Belgian Government through the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC).

Tirelo Bosha is a grant funding facility that supports the research, development and piloting of new and innovative ways of delivering front-line public services by funding improvement initiatives in all three spheres of government.

This funded Free and Open Source Software project contributes to the following objectives; improved learning outcomes, increased exposure to technology in schools, promoting and enhancing teaching, learning and school classroom management and promoting inclusive information society initiatives. It provides access to additional teaching and learning material and content like previous exam papers and study guides and most importantly research for assignments given to learners.

Learners and teachers in remote areas without any Internet access can now use information and communication technologies to search information in the same way one normally does on the Internet. Understanding how to use these resources in an **offline environment** will in future make it easier for learners to use resources in an **online environment**.

The department of Economic Development, environment and Tourism through Limpopo Connexion has started with the implementation of several other Free and Open Source projects in partnership with other provincial departments. In the department of Agriculture a farmers' portal is being developed to assist emerging farmers to connect with fresh produce markets across the province.

In the longer term, this system should be able to combine with other open platforms like Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing (RS). These open platform systems are increasingly being used to enable and complement the reforms aimed at enhancing tenure security for farmers to leverage their assets, ensuring more efficient land use and water management.

These systems support the assessment of land capability, soil conditions, crop condition and yield, flood and drought risk, groundwater, contamination, pest infestation and most importantly access to local and global credit facilities. Satellite imagery data and GIS have also been used to enable land registration and crop inventories.

The department of Economic Development, environment and Tourism through Limpopo Connexion, has migrated the Wild Trade Permit System from proprietary software to open source platforms and implemented this system in all the 5 districts. The primary function of this system is to manage and support hunting applications operations in the entire province. Originally, the development, maintenance and support of this system was done by an experts from abroad, however due to introduction of open source technologies, the Limpopo Connexion has taken over the management, maintenance and technical support of the system without license and support fees. This system is displayed on Limpopo Connexion stall.

The department of Sports, Arts and Culture will develop a heritage portal and database to manage the provincial heritage and to make it accessible to the general public. This system will improve service delivery, improve public access to heritage information, improve management and preservation of heritage resources and improve social cohesion. Both the Agriculture farmers' portal and heritage portal projects will be developed with Free and Open Source technologies with funding from Tirelo Bosha.

Limpopo Connexion, in partnership with Department of Science and Technology, will replicate Mobile Application Laboratory Southern Africa (mLab), in the province. MLab is a start-up accelerator established in 2011, it consist of various programmes, i.e. youth vacation schools and hackatons, coding academy, SMME accelerator, demonstration laboratory and application fund.

There is a need for targeted investment in skills, education and training. Supporting individuals in basic, advanced and specialist skills will be a key priority as we foster a sustainable and more productive economy.

Many of these challenges cannot be solved by business, government, or academia alone but needs to be tackled in a collaborative way. Community members and small companies are becoming central to these initiatives. We need to build strong relationships with all parties in their ecosystem, existing vendors, banks, major corporations, public and private training intuitions, venture capitalists, donors, partners, start-ups and institutions of collaboration.

Intense collaboration across a variety of industries will generate better outcomes in terms of nurturing the technical and entrepreneurial talent present in the communities, generating opportunities for the next generation, and helping address some of these issues around skills and capability development at the community level. Possibilities in future would require individuals, communities, companies and governments to identify and implement transition pathways that achieve better outcomes.

Free and Open Source Software is indeed a game changer, with the potential to benefit the masses; however it requires a strong and vibrant community to support it. We encourage everyone to join the Open Source community and to use this important resource to your own benefit and that of the province.

===== I THANK YOU =====