

GAUTENG BUSINESS CONSULTATIVE FORUM
SESSION: TOURISM & HOSPITALITY
DATE: 27 October 2016, GIBS, Illovo

High-level delegates from the world of tourism and hospitality gathered at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science in Illovo, Johannesburg on Thursday, 27 October 2016 for an explanatory and exploratory session of the Gauteng Business Consultative Forum (GBCF). The GBCF was launched in July 2016 to bring business and government closer together with the intention of unlocking the economic potential in the Gauteng City Region.

The broad view

Opening the session, Gauteng's MEC for Health, Qedani Mahlangu, set the tone for the engagement, noting the provincial government's high hopes for the outcomes of these strategic sessions and promising a reduction in red tape and "no more loops and hoops to go through".

Mahlangu outlined areas on government's radar for development, including medical tourism, the development of township tourism, arts and heritage, sporting and eco-tourism.

However, as the session progressed, particularly following presentations by Makhukhu Mampuru, CEO of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site and Dinokeng Projects, and CEO of the Gauteng Tourism Authority, Sphiwe Ngwenya, it became clear that the disconnect between opportunity and seizing and exploiting these prospects was being lost.

This was reinforced by both Ngwenya's comments and those made by Gillian Saunders, Deputy CEO at Grant Thornton Johannesburg and an expert in the hospitality and tourism industry. Ngwenya observed that: "We need to agree on the congruency of our messaging, of what we and the private sector are saying." He also noted: "Although tourists are coming to Gauteng, they are not spending as much as we would like, and that is where we want partnerships with the private sector."

Saunders' presentation picked out problem areas including poor record keeping; a disconnect between government and business; perceptions around safety and security; poor public transport infrastructure; Visa hassles; red tape; a focus on old markets rather than new African growth markets; a seeming reluctance to implement plans of action; and a lack of trust.

Key touchpoints

Unpacking the potential areas of dislocation during a discussion on the challenges and opportunities in the sector, facilitated by GIBS' Abdullah Verachia and Marius Oosthuizen, the assembled gathering outlined the following five points as crucial to moving forward:

- A lack of trust
- Transformation and SMME development
- A lack of (or fragmented) government coordination
- Communication, data and intelligent sharing
- The need to define roles and a shared vision.

Among the comments to come through from delegates included:

"A lot of us in the private sector are looking to move from talk to action."

"Business is about making money; because when we make money everyone benefits."

"There is a lack of trust. There seems to be this disconnect."

“As a country we can’t wait until we get to the brink. We should be talking now about the next five or 10 years.”

“[Government’s] is the antithesis of a competitive approach.”

“[The approach] is fragmented; everyone does their own thing.”

“We need to look at these nine provinces as a collective.”

“If you look at successful countries, tourism is run as a business from government level.”

“Be genuine in accepting our contribution.”

“We in the tourism industry haven’t transformed enough.”

Ultimately, it was GIBS’s Oosthuizen who summed it up best when he observed: “The private sector wants to make money, government wants transformation. We have two parties who want the same thing. These two sides need to find each other.”

The session closed with the establishment of an industry engagement task team, with the purpose of engaging meaningfully with the GBCF and carrying the issues raised in this session forward and into action.

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