

Written for and presented by Productivity SA's Chairman,  
at the opening of National Productivity Month 2009:

*A journey of 40 years begins with a single month*

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to welcome you here today to celebrate the start of Productivity Month.

Officially installed on our annual calendar by government seven years ago, Productivity Month is now an established and effective vehicle designed to deliver widespread focus – across management and workers, SMMEs and students, so called first and second economies – of the importance of productivity in the daily and immediate lives of *all* South Africans. We have another milestone to flag here today, however: this year, Productivity SA commemorates its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Productivity SA started its incredibly challenging yet undeniably rewarding journey in another era; another millennium; another mindset. In the same year that man was taking his first steps on the moon and irrevocably changing forever his footprint on the universe, our embryonic organisation was reaching out its arms and taking its first wobbly steps towards an inclusive, efficient, and productive economy. The year was 1969 and the National Productivity Institute, as it was christened, could never have predicted such a meteoric rise and shining future.

Baby steps turned into great strides which became giant leaps, and over a span of four decades we have constructed and crafted a heritage of which we are immensely proud, and which has played a direct and impactful role in South Africa's economy, both locally and internationally. The road we have paved through previously untraversed terrain has been signposted with a great many milestones that mark our sometimes winding and uphill route. Let me highlight just a few:

- In 1969, the first productivity measurement study in SA was under-taken, in the men and boy's clothing industry.
- In 1973 we developed the Resource Allocation Strategist - REALST - productivity measurement model, which is still used worldwide today.
- In 1976 we established offices in Durban, and soon after in Cape Town.
- In 1979 we presented the first National Productivity Awards for exceptional achievements in the field of productivity improvement.
- In 1983, our management structure underwent a significant broadening with the appointment of seven directors, and staff had more than doubled in two years.
- In 1988, certain of our staff members served as advisors to the Economic Committee of the President's Council during a comprehensive investigation of factors affecting productivity in South Africa.

- In 1992, the first Pan African Productivity Assembly was held, leading to the formation of the Pan African Productivity Association, with one of the National Productivity Institute's managers elected as the first President.
- In 1996 we hosted a World Productivity Assembly, attended by delegates from 25 countries around the world.
- Between 1998 and 1999 a new tripartite Productivity Advisory Council was appointed, and later renamed the Social Plan and Productivity Advisory Council.
- In 2004 we launched the Product Capacity Building programmes for SMMEs.
- In 2005 we launched the partnership programme with Asia Productivity Organisation.
- Between 2006 and 2007 we rebranded ourselves from the National Productivity Institute to Productivity SA, as we are known today.
- And last year, we were the proud hosts of the World Productivity Congress, held in Africa for the very first time.

Along the way we have never lost sight of why productivity is so absolutely vital to the South African economy. To quote The Global Competitiveness Report of 2003/04, "A nation's standard of living is determined by the productivity of its economy". Therefore, in order to improve our nation's standard of living - not simply that of the wealthy, or the decision-makers, or the formally employed, but the entire nation - we must continue to address the fundamentals: efficiency and productivity in all that we do; at every level at which we do it; by whomever does it.

Traditionally, the concept of productivity and competitiveness centred on the efficiency ratio between input (recourses) and output (goods and services). This has now correctly evolved to include the all-important human element - productive capacity building of people. This very neatly closes the productivity circle: getting the most out of people so that they can get the most out of their lives.

Our mandate at Productivity SA is to steer all businesses, operating at all levels, towards this ultimate goal. Throughout the years we have developed and honed our skills and expertise, and I can stand here today, 40 years young, and confidently say that we are *the* leading voice on productivity in South Africa, and on the African continent. Not only that, we are also a voice of authority on the international productivity stage.

However, Productivity SA could not have undertaken such a journey nor achieved such prominence alone, and I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our various partners. As with any true alliance, at times we have hitchhiked with our partners, piggy-backing on their advanced knowledge and proven systems; at others, we have willingly given lifts to those who saw value and assistance in using our mapped route, complete with highways, T-junctions - and the odd cul-de-sac.

One such partner, the Asian Productivity Organisation (APO), with whom we've enjoyed a fruitful affiliation since 2005, is jointly hosting the course and the presentation of certificates to our successful delegates later today. This partnership was established to fast track the productivity movement within South Africa and on the African continent and, as a result, the APO has shared technical expertise with Productivity SA in order to build staff capacity within the productivity field.

Another invaluable affiliation is with the Pan African Productivity Association (PAPA). PAPA's core focus is to facilitate and advocate for the establishment of national productivity organisations on the African continent, and to provide support to existing NPOs to become effective in promoting productivity awareness and contribute towards the socio economic development of the country and the region in which they operate. Productivity SA is the Secretariat of PAPA, strengthening this alliance ever further.

These and additional partnerships assist us in accelerating the government's Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition and Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa projects, by making enterprises more competitive, and by helping to develop skills for the country's unemployed.

By working together we can share proven programmes and craft tailor-made products that will create a suite of systems conducive to addressing Africa's unique social challenges head on, and so lift ourselves up to greater economic security. A goal aspired to by all, regardless of circumstances.

But one of our most important partners is you - each individual South African - which is why Productivity Month is central to our continued success. By turning the spotlight on productivity and all its associated features for an entire month each year, we have the opportunity to bring it to the attention of 48 million people. Increased productivity will undoubtedly mean different things to different people: working harder; reduced absenteeism; recycling; improved communication; less wastage. Whatever your approach, your participation makes a difference.

We look forward to a highly productive month - and the next 40 years!

Thank you.