



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Garden Route Rebuild Initiative finalises strategy, seeks public input on project implementation**

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The Garden Route Rebuild Initiative (GRI) has finalised its strategy to 'Build Back Better' in the wake of this year's devastating fires.

The work of developing the strategy was accomplished through a massive, community-wide cooperative process that involved local residents and businesspeople, individuals with specialist expertise, representatives of a wide variety of NGOs, the municipal managers, executive mayors, officials, and political representatives of the Eden District and the Knysna and Plettenberg Bay Municipalities, and officials drawn from a large number of provincial and national government departments. The project was coordinated by the international strategic consultancy McKinsey, which provided its services on a pro bono basis.

Knysna's Municipal manager, Kam Chetty, said that the six pillars of the strategy have been defined as tourism, light manufacturing, local business, skills development, urban planning, and enhancing resilience.

"Core to all initiatives will be ensuring a sustainable supply of water, thereby enabling environmental resilience, and the sustainability of infrastructure and livelihoods," he said. "Additionally, each initiative must be supported by a plan to secure funding, and to drive implementation through a dedicated Project Management Office." (See below)

#### **BUILD BACK BETTER: THE 6 PILLARS**

The GRI's strategy presentation sets out its six pillars as follows:

**1 TOURISM:** "Strengthen the tourism sector to support year-round tourism in the Garden Route."

The local tourism industry will be strengthened by developing a unified value proposition for tourism in the Garden Route; by enhancing out-of-season offerings to support year-round tourism; and by broadening product offerings based on nature, culture, and sport and adventure (e.g., bio-domes, township business development, golf routes, etc.).

**2 LIGHT MANUFACTURING:** "Develop light manufacturing industries to support local employment."

Light manufacturing will be enhanced by creating a facilitation program for the niche manufacturing industry; by developing a platform to match needs to skills, with partnerships for artisans in the green economy; and by creating a Garden Route Green Expo to showcase and celebrate sustainable building.

**3 LOCAL BUSINESSES:** “Supporting local businesses to thrive in an enabling environment.” Ease of doing business will be enhanced by creating an investment facilitation centre and SMME mobile business lab, and by the launch of an inclusive business chamber for Knysna.

**4 SKILLS MECCA:** “Creating a ‘skills Mecca’ for skills training in the Garden Route.” Turning the Garden Route into a skills Mecca will be achieved using locally-recognised skills providers; by attracting international skills providers (e.g. a hotel school); and by piloting training programs for coding and hospitality.

**5 INCLUSIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT:**” Facilitating inclusive urban development that erodes apartheid-era spatial boundaries.” Inclusive urban development will be achieved through the development of affordable, mixed-income housing supported by adequate supporting infrastructure; improving affordable and effective last-mile and long-distance transport; and implementing citizen-centric dashboards for local municipalities to improve service delivery.

**6 ENSURING THE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND LIVELIHOODS:** “Improve fire and water resilience (catchment, harvesting and wetlands).” Resilience will be achieved through the development of waste beneficiation projects across the Eden district; by running awareness and education campaigns to promote a mindset of resilience; by offering incentives (possibly in the form of rates rebates, etc.) for householders who invest in green technologies for their homes; by providing feed-in tariffs for rate payers who sell excess solar power to their municipalities (George and Mossel Bay already have these in place); and by integrating human resilience into all GRI projects.

## **VISION FOR 2030**

“Our vision for the near future is to create integrated, cohesive, thriving communities in South Africa’s best-run municipalities that are known for the quality of their services and the well-being of their residents, and that have overcome the challenges of apartheid-era spatial segregation,” said the executive mayor of Bitou Municipality, Peter Lobese.

This initiative will create an enabling environment for an inclusive, resilient business community in which entrepreneurship, innovation, education, skills development and research will flourish - all of which will ensure a globally competitive modern economy whose potential is unlocked through efficient and effective governance.

The Garden Route will attract a diversity of visitors - including international travelers as well as South Africans from all walks of life – who are drawn to the natural beauty and the wide range of activities made possible because of its wilderness areas, mountains, and sea. Mr. Chetty said that the GRI will only succeed if its work continues in the spirit of community that emerged during the fires.

“The only sustainable way to Build Back Better is through continued partnerships between the public and private sectors, and with the help and cooperation of residents and ratepayers,” he said.

## **PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE**

The Garden Route Rebuild Initiative’s Project Management Office (PMO) has supported - and is still supporting - a number of short-term projects.

These include the slope stabilisation project, a fire risk reduction project, the identification of short-term housing solutions, and the completion of the project to restore housing damaged by the fire in Knysna’s White Location. It is also busy developing and rolling out skills courses in construction, hospitality, and business support.

“The PMO will also support longer-term projects like the creation of integrated, affordable

housing opportunities in Bitou and Knysna, the implementation of water and sanitation infrastructure projects, the removal of invasive alien vegetation, a reduction of fire risk in settlements next to wild-land vegetation, and the creation of a business hub and incubator to support local SMMEs,” said the executive mayor of Knysna, Eleanore Bouw-Spies.

“The PMO’s job is to assist municipal officials to develop, implement, monitor, and report on critical projects, and to provide project management mentoring - and where appropriate, it will appoint dedicated project managers, who will liaise with the municipalities concerned to obtain support for the implementation of those projects,” she said.

Dr. Hildegard Fast, chair of the GRRI’s steering committee, said that the strategy is based on a vision for the Garden Route as an inclusive and thriving region that supports the well-being of all who live, work and travel here.

“This is why input from local residents is absolutely crucial, and why we’re inviting members of the public to come forward with ideas about how we should implement the strategy,” she said.

Comments can be submitted via social media (@GRRebuild on Twitter; gardenroutererebuild on Facebook) or by email ([info@gardenroutererebuild.co.za](mailto:info@gardenroutererebuild.co.za)). Please visit [www.gardenroutererebuild.co.za](http://www.gardenroutererebuild.co.za) for more information.

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