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## MEDIA STATEMENT

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Issued by The Department of Women, Youth & Persons with Disabilities  
Attention Journalists and News Editors  
Pretoria, 17 November 2019

### **AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY MEANS GROWTH FOR THE COUNTRY**

As South Africa enters Week 3 (17-23 November) of Disability Rights Awareness Month the focus shifts to the economy where the call by the disability sector is that economic transformation and the creation of jobs should not ignore persons with disabilities. The week-long theme: *Persons with disabilities as equal players in building inclusive economies* is an appeal to heed President Ramaphosa's call to action to work together to build South Africa.

This theme brings to light how much more needs to be done. The *19<sup>th</sup> Annual Report from the Commission on Employment Equity* for the period 2018/19, indicates an average of 1,1% disability equity achieved by designated employers. The *2017/18 Employment Equity Report for the Public Sector* indicates that as at 31 March 2018 there were 1 233 653 employees in the Public Service of which 11 068 (0.90%) were employees with disabilities. The representation of persons with disabilities increased by 260 (0.02%) between March 2017 and March 2018.

The above figures makes for depressing reading and confirms the concerns of the disability sector that not enough is being done to ensure inclusivity in the workplace. The International Labour Organisation estimates that South Africa has an estimated 7% loss of Gross Domestic Product due to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the workplace (2009). In 2017 figures, that translates to a loss of US\$24.5 billion to the GDP.

Society in general, and the economic sector in particular, conceptualises the contribution of persons with disabilities in terms of dependency, as customers, as recipients of corporate social investment, rather than as owners of the economy. When investors therefore look for local partners, finding a local partnering company which is majority disability-owned, seldom comes to mind.

“As we unlock opportunities by removing attitudinal, physical and communication barriers, persons with disabilities are increasingly entering the world of investment. Partnering with them makes business sense, as not only does it improve BBBEE scores, but it also brings on board the unique experiences, perspectives and talents persons with disabilities offer the market,” said Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane.

The department calls on South Africa to take up the following challenges facing persons with disabilities, to ensure inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities into the economy:

- Seeing the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities as a value proposition, not a compliance matter.
- Look at youth with disabilities and opportunities for employment in your company / organisation.
- Move from learnership opportunities to full time employment. Allow the investment you make in persons with disabilities to return 10-fold by absorbing that person into the company fulltime.
- Develop opportunities to empower persons with disabilities with life skills, technical skills, and furthering of studies.
- Ensure that your procurement value chain includes doing business with companies and enterprises owned by persons with disabilities.
- Assist and support smaller companies, where the majority of the jobs are created, to be able to establish reasonable accommodation and conditions to support persons with disabilities.
- Ensure skills transfer to persons with disabilities and establish empowerment programmes aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to become future managers/supervisors, and business owners.

The department encourages South Africans to continue to share experiences and achievements relating to disability using the hashtag #DisabilityInclusiveSA.

**ENDS**

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