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New energy and opportunities following the inaugural Furniture Sector Forum

There is new energy in the furniture manufacturing sector following the inaugural Furniture Sector Forum event held in Fourways on Wednesday 17 July.

The Forum, which was hosted by Proudly South African, the South African Furniture Initiative, the Department of Trade and Industry (dti) Sector Desk and sponsored by PG Bison, brought together decision makers from all parts of the furniture value chain, including manufacturers, importers and exporters, buyers and the media.

The discussion was opened by our Chairman, Penwell Lunga, who delivered a state-of-the-industry talk and highlighted pertinent issues, including cheap imports – both legal and illegal, the upskilling of staff, the great potential of local government procurement and the economic pressures facing manufacturers.

Throughout the day, industry specialists unpacked different challenges in the

sector and highlighted ways for manufacturers to overcome them. This included a talk by Ncumisa Mhlauli-Mcata, Chief Director of Agri Processing and Resource Based Industries at the Department of Trade and Industry, on the various support schemes under its Agro Processing Support Scheme (APSS), its policies in support of black industrialists and its export platforms.

In another talk, Proudly South African CEO, Eustace Mashimbye, shared the wide-ranging efforts of Proudly South African to canvass government departments to buy furniture locally and also to ensure compliance through the ongoing monitoring of state tenders. Proudly South African also spoke of the benefits of its membership programme, which starts from as little as R500 a year and includes a free listing on the buy local website www.RSAMade.co.za.

Towards the end of the Forum, the veteran journalist, Iman Rappetti, hosted a panel discussion where representatives from various parts of the sector shared their views. From this discussion it became clear that manufacturers of all sizes share similar challenges. It also became evident that communication platforms such as those created by SAFI and Forums such as this one help a lot to highlight possible solutions and introduce different businesses to each other and to clients.

The Forum ended with a public commitment by attendees – such as a representative from the Department of Human Settlements – to buy only local furniture.

SAFI and Proudly South African committed to grow this commitment list and to help stimulate the furniture sector by channelling government and private furniture procurement to local suppliers. SAFI and the dti Sector Desk also committed to completing the Furniture Industry Master Plan by the end of Financial Year End March 2020.



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