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Media Statement

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BCMM Youth are Ready to Participate in the Economy, But Systemic Barriers Stand in Their Way – bumb'INGOMSO Study reveals

Despite significant gains in secondary school completion among young women in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM), turning educational progress into meaningful economic opportunities remains a major challenge. This is one of the critical findings emerging from the bumb'INGOMSO Endline Evaluation, which highlights the systemic and institutional barriers that continue to limit young people's participation in the economy.

The evaluation reveals that among women aged 20–24, secondary school completion in BCMM increased from 50.3% to 72.2%. However, over the same period, the proportion of women in this age group who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) also increased, from 39.6% to 53.9%.

These findings are particularly significant in the context of the Eastern Cape as one of the provinces with high unemployment rate. According to Statistics South Africa's Quarterly Labour Force Survey for the third quarter of 2026, the province's official unemployment rate stood at 44.3%, while Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality recorded an unemployment rate of 33.7%. The figures highlight the difficult economic environment in which young people are expected to transition from education into employment and economic participation.

The Endline Evaluation further shows that while young people in Buffalo City are demonstrating increased confidence and readiness to participate in the economy, systemic barriers, including policy implementation gaps, fragmented service delivery and weak institutional accountability, continue to limit their access to opportunities.

The evaluation, conducted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Health Economics and HIV and AIDS Research Division (HEARD), was presented at the bumb'INGOMSO Reflection and Learning Summit, held on 9 November 2026 at the Regent Hotel in KuGompo City.

The Summit brought together key stakeholders from government, civil society, the private sector and programme participants to reflect on eight years of implementation, engage with the evaluation findings and identify lessons to inform the programme's next phase.

Delivering the keynote address, Eastern Cape MEC for Health, Honourable Ntandokazi Capa, highlighted the National Department of Health's move towards a life-course approach to health and youth development. The approach recognises the interconnected social, economic and structural factors that shape people's well-being throughout their lives, reinforcing the importance of coordinated interventions across sectors.

Dr David Harrison, CEO of the DG Murray Trust, called for a shift in youth development approaches, emphasizing the need to give young people greater power and agency to lead change and influence the decisions that affect their lives.

A key theme emerging from the discussions was the importance of strategic partnerships in addressing the complex and interconnected challenges facing young people.

Concluding discussions reinforced an important message: preparing young people to participate in the economy cannot rest solely on individual agency, education or employability. It also requires responsive institutions, effective policy implementation, accessible services and stronger accountability from the structures mandated to support them.

As bumb'INGOMSO looks towards its next phase, the programme remains committed to building on the lessons of eight years of implementation, strengthening strategic partnerships and advancing a youth development approach that not only invests in young people's potential but also addresses the systemic barriers standing in the way of their progress.

ENDS

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