KZN Provincial Government @kzngov kzngov



Hon. Thamsanqa Ntuli
PREMIER OF KWAZULU-NATAL

STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS #SOPA2026

27 FEB 2026

WOODBURN
RUGBY STADIUM • PMB
@09H00 AM

BY THE HONOURABLE
THAMSANQA NTULI
PREMIER OF KWAZULU-NATAL

KWAZULU-NATAL
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

2030 NDP

Inspiring New Hope

THE THIRD STATE OF THE PROVINCE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY KWAZULU-NATAL PREMIER, HONOURABLE THAMSANQA NTULI,

27 February 2026, Woodburn Rugby Stadium, Pietermaritzburg

LuHlanga loMhlabathi;
Madam Speaker;
Deputy Speaker;
Members of the Executive Council;
Deputy Chairperson of NCOP Hon. L. Govender;
Honourable Members of the Legislature;
Members of National Parliament present;
Former President Mr JG Zuma;
Judge President, Poyo-Dlwati;
AMakhosi aseNdlunkulu and iZinduna zaMakhosi;
oMama be Silo abakhona phakathi kwethu;
oNdlunkulu beSilo;
Royal Family Members;
Provincial Commissioner Lt-Gen. Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi;
Mayor and Councillors;
Former Premiers;
Business Leaders present;
Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Acting DG Mr S.G. Ngubane;
Heads of Department;
Chairpersons and CEOs of Provincial Entities;
Religious Leaders;
Government Officials;
Mrs Ntuli umaSibisi and my Family;
Members of the Media; and
Residents of KwaZulu-Natal.

Madam Speaker;

Today, on behalf of the 7th Administration, I present the Third State of the Province Address. I do so conscious of the weight of responsibility entrusted on the 7th Administration, and mindful that this address is not a ceremonial exercise, however, a solemn moment of engagement between government and the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

This address is an opportunity to measure our actions against the commitments we made, and to assess whether our policies and programmes are translating into tangible improvements in the lives of our citizens.

We recognise that progress must be felt on the ground—in schools, clinics, communities, and places of work. For this reason, our assessment is guided by policy milestones, additionally by the real impact of government action on everyday life in KwaZulu-Natal.

I am presenting government that on its inception traversed all districts in KwaZulu Natal to engage citizens on matters of service delivery and social issues.

GEOPOLITICS AND GEOECONOMICS

Madam Speaker;

KwaZulu-Natal, like many provinces and nations across the world, exists within an interconnected global family of nations. Developments beyond our borders increasingly shape our economic prospects, social stability, and developmental trajectory. In this context, our province is neither isolated nor immune from global geopolitics.

Global geo-political shifts—whether driven by economic realignments, conflicts, climate change, or technological advancement - have a direct and indirect impact on our people. These dynamics influence trade flows, investment patterns, energy security, food prices, and the overall cost of living, reaching even the most remote communities of our province.

Yet geopolitics is not only a source of risk; it also presents opportunities. Shifting global markets open new avenues for trade, cultural heritage tourism, and investment. KwaZulu-Natal's strategic location, world-class ports, and productive sectors position us well to benefit from new partnerships and emerging global value chains.

Economic shocks and international crises tend to affect the most vulnerable first and hardest. As a caring government, we remain resolute in protecting the poor, expanding social support, and ensuring inclusive growth that leaves no one behind.

Working with national government, the private sector, labour, civil society, and our international partners, we are strengthening our economic diplomacy and positioning the province as a reliable destination for investment, trade, and tourism, even amid global volatility.

Our task, as a provincial government, is to mitigate the risks, seize the opportunities, and ensure that KwaZulu-Natal advances with confidence, unity, and purpose within the global family of nations.

Madam Speaker,

Our journey began with a sober and collective interpretation of the voice of the people of KwaZulu-Natal. That voice was expressed clearly and decisively through the ballot. It was a voice that spoke not in favour of dominance by any single party, however, in favour of cooperation, balance, and shared responsibility.

The electorate of this province delivered a historic mandate: that for the next five years, no single political party should govern alone. This outcome was neither accidental nor ambiguous. It was a deliberate call by our people for a new way of governing—one rooted in unity of purpose and mutual accountability.
Madam Speaker

For the five-year term entrusted to us, the 7th Administration reached a clear and deliberate consensus on the strategic priorities that would guide our work. These focus areas were not selected for their appeal, pointedly for their relevance to the lived realities of the people of KwaZulu-Natal and the long-term sustainability of our province.

EIGHT FOCUS AREAS

We agreed on Eight Focus Areas, namely: rebuilding the economy; strengthening local government and governance; advancing sustainable dialogue; improving healthcare and education; delivering better human settlements; improving community safety; mitigating the impact of climate change; and building a capable, ethical, and developmental state.

These focus areas serve as the organising framework of our programme of action. They reflect an honest assessment of where the province is most vulnerable, where intervention is most urgent, and where coordinated effort across government and society can yield the greatest impact.

Rebuilding the economy remains central to all our efforts. Without economic growth that is inclusive and sustainable, our ability to address poverty, unemployment, and inequality is severely constrained. Our focus has therefore been on stabilising key sectors, unlocking investment, supporting small and emerging enterprises, and protecting jobs.

Strengthening local government and governance has been equally critical. Functional municipalities are the frontline of service delivery and the most immediate point of contact between citizens and the state.

Sustainable dialogue continues to guide our approach to consensus building and social cohesion. We have prioritised continuous engagement with social partners, including traditional leaders, labour, business, civil society, and communities. Through sustainable dialogue, we build shared understanding, align interests, and forge consensus on difficult choices that shape our collective future. It is through talking, listening, and negotiating in good faith that trust in public institutions is strengthened.

Improving healthcare and education has remained a non-negotiable priority. These sectors are the backbone of human development and social mobility. Our focus has been on strengthening public healthcare services and improving learning outcomes, while addressing systemic weaknesses exposed over time.

Delivering better human settlements and improving community safety speak directly to dignity and quality of life. Safe communities and adequate housing are foundational to social stability and economic participation.

Mitigating the effects of climate change has become an urgent necessity rather than a future concern. KwaZulu-Natal has experienced first-hand the devastating effects of climate-related disasters. Our focus has therefore included strengthening disaster preparedness, building climate-resilient infrastructure, and supported adaptation measures.

Madam Speaker, building a capable, ethical, and developmental state underpins all other focus areas. Without a professional public service, ethical leadership, and effective institutions, no programme can succeed.

ON REBUILDING THE ECONOMY

KwaZulu-Natal emerged from profound disruption caused by the July 2021 unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic—two shocks that tested the resilience of our economy, our institutions, and our people. These events resulted in the loss of lives, the destruction of infrastructure, the closure of businesses, and the erosion of investor confidence.

Yet, out of this period of hardship, we made a deliberate choice as a government: not merely to rebuild what was lost, however, to reimagine and reconstruct our provincial economy on a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable foundation.

Guided by this resolve, the Provincial Government embarked on a coordinated programme of economic recovery and reconstruction, anchored in restoring stability, strengthening governance, and rebuilding trust with social partners. We prioritised the protection of strategic economic infrastructure, improved intergovernmental coordination, and reinforced partnerships with the private sector, labour, and traditional leadership. These interventions were essential in signalling that KwaZulu-Natal remains open for business and committed to policy certainty, institutional integrity, and long-term growth.

Honourable Members, these efforts are beginning to yield positive results.

The economy of KwaZulu-Natal under Government of Provincial Unity is showing encouraging signs of steady recovery. In 2025, our provincial economy grew by 1.8% — a moderate, however, but encouraging improvement from the subdued growth rates that characterised the post-COVID-19 period.

Importantly, this performance was slightly above the national average growth expectation, reflecting the resilience of our provincial economy.

The growth forecast for 2026 points to a further expansion to 2.1%. This projected increase reflects continued economic stabilisation, underpinned by improvements in energy supply and gradual recovery in key infrastructure systems, particularly in rail and port operations. These improvements are critical to restoring investor confidence and unlocking the full productive capacity of our province.

In the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, KwaZulu-Natal’s economy experienced a prolonged low-growth trend, compounded by structural constraints. However, in late 2025, the province surpassed R100 billion in investment pledges from both domestic and international investors.

These projects are expected to generate more than 100 000 of jobs and significantly strengthen economic activity across multiple sectors.

Tourism, one of our key economic pillars, recorded strong performance in 2025. The festive season alone contributed an estimated R13 billion to the provincial Gross Domestic Product, driven by high domestic and international visitor numbers.

Furthermore, between the mid-2025 quarters, KwaZulu-Natal recorded a net gain of approximately 54 000 new jobs — a development that supported household income, boosted consumer spending, and reinforced broader economic growth.

Nevertheless, Honourable Members, we remain cognisant of the structural constraints that continue to limit higher growth potential. These include historical electricity disruptions, freight inefficiencies, and rail and port bottlenecks. In addition, the broader national macroeconomic environment — characterised by slow growth — continues to exert pressure on provincial performance.

Investor confidence is steadily recovering, reflected in renewed engagements with domestic and international investors, increased project pipelines, and growing interest in key sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, energy, agriculture, and tourism.

KwaZulu-Natal requires about 461 000 additional jobs to reduce unemployment from 30.8% to 20% as a policy target, representing a 15.7% increase in current employment levels. Therefore, it is estimated that R168 billion is required to create the additional 461 000 jobs, emphasizing the need for coordinated public-private investment and district-focused industrial development strategies.

The GDP growth rate of 5% or higher is required to significantly reduce the unemployment rate. This leads to employment elasticity of growth, which is relatively low, a 1% increase in GDP would lead to only a 0.5% or lower increase in employment. With KwaZulu-Natal's growth peaking at 2.1%, the economy would likely absorb even the new entrants into the labor market, let alone clear the backlog of 461 000 people needed to drop the unemployment rate to 20%.

At a policy level, we shall have an informal sector development that should be upscaled through enhanced cross-border trade and smart infrastructure in the form of public WiFi and improved amenities to support township and rural economies. The King Shaka International Public Link Solution will be revived to improve connectivity between Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Richards Bay, and Margate.

KwaZulu-Natal has engaged with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition to secure an industrial stimulus package for upgrading industrial parks and Special Economic Zones.

The KwaZulu-Natal economic growth needed to be infrastructure-led and industry-led from a strategy perspective underpinning the KwaZulu-Natal Inclusive Growth Strategy. The Trade & Investment KwaZulu-Natal is mandated to facilitate Small Micro Medium Enterprises participation in cross-border trade, leveraging opportunities under the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The prioritization of sectors for economic growth is focused on agriculture comprising of cash crops namely macadamia, hemp, cotton, avocado, food security, livestock, horticulture and tourism that covers resorts development, heritage, biodiversity and gastronomy. On manufacturing and industrial development, this will cover clothing and textile, automotive, metal fabrication, exports, agro-processing, and pharmaceuticals. This includes infrastructure investment that would include ports, roads, rail, water and energy.

The spatial priority sectors would include the township and rural economies which would embed interconnectedness of high priority sectors to spatial priority areas. This means as a province we need to prioritise sectoral development that drives spatial patterns and spatial planning that enables sectoral growth, and planning that causes connectivity, corridor and nodal development.

While the journey towards full recovery is continuing, the direction is clear: KwaZulu-Natal is reclaiming its position as a strategic channel to the rest of the African economy, driven by a capable state, active social partnerships, and a shared commitment to inclusive economic renewal.

INVESTMENT CONFERENCE

Since the inception of the Government of Provincial Unity in 2024, the KwaZulu-Natal Investment Conference has emerged as a central barometer of investor confidence in our province and a key instrument in our economic renewal strategy. It has provided a credible platform through which government, business, labour, and social partners engage in a shared effort to rebuild the provincial economy and restore KwaZulu-Natal’s standing as a preferred investment destination.

Our focus is on presenting bankable projects, ensuring policy certainty, and demonstrating a capable and responsive state that understands the needs and expectations of investors, while remaining firmly committed to inclusive growth.

The outcomes of the 2024 segment of the KwaZulu-Natal Investment Conference marked a turning point in our recovery journey. The province received investment pledges totalling about more than R80 billion, with commitments spanning critical sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, green energy, and tourism.

These pledges signalled a renewed belief in the province’s economic fundamentals and its long-term growth prospects.

Building on this momentum, the 2025 segment of the KwaZulu-Natal Investment Conference further consolidated investor confidence in the province. As a strong vote of confidence in our economic recovery programme, the Conference secured pledges exceeding R100 billion for projects across strategic sectors in mining, logistics, automotive manufacturing, and agriculture.

These investments are expected to significantly expand productive capacity, enhance the competitiveness of our economy, and deepen industrialisation across value chains. They also reaffirm KwaZulu-Natal’s strategic advantages—our ports, logistics corridors, agricultural potential, and skilled workforce—which continue to position the province as a gateway to regional and continental markets.

The highlights of successive Investment Conferences reflect the effectiveness of our approach to rebuilding trust between government and the private sector including other social partners.

Equally important was our emphasis on implementation and follow-through. We have strengthened mechanisms to track investment pledges, unblock regulatory and infrastructure constraints, and ensure that commitments translate into projects on the ground. This focus on delivery is essential to sustaining investor confidence and maximising the developmental impact of investment.

The KwaZulu-Natal Investment Conference has therefore become more than an annual event; it is now an integral part of our economic governance framework. It anchors our recovery strategy, aligns public and private resources, and provides measurable evidence of progress in rebuilding the provincial economy.

DIALOGUE WITH BUSINESS

Madam Speaker, I lead a learning government—one that listens attentively to its stakeholders and is prepared to adapt in order to serve the people of KwaZulu-Natal more effectively.

Central to our approach to economic recovery is an understanding that sustainable growth can only be achieved through continuous engagement, honest reflection, and decisive action informed by those who are directly involved in economic activity.

During a series of structured and strategic engagements with the business sector, a consistent message emerged. Business leaders and investors raised concerns about systemic bottlenecks affecting the implementation of catalytic projects, including regulatory delays, fragmented decision-making, and administrative red tape. These challenges, if left unaddressed, had the potential to undermine investor confidence and delay much-needed investment.

We took these concerns seriously. As a government that is committed to partnership and responsiveness, we recognised that the absence of a central coordinating mechanism for investment facilitation was contributing to inefficiencies and uncertainty. It became clear that decisive institutional reform was required to unlock investment and accelerate economic recovery.

It was against this backdrop, and in direct response to engagements with the business community, that I established the Investment Office within the Office of the Premier. This intervention reflects our commitment to provide political leadership, strategic oversight, and administrative coordination at the highest level of provincial government.

A critical focus of the Investment Office is the streamlining of investment-related processes. This includes identifying and resolving regulatory blockages, reducing unnecessary red tape, and accelerating decision-making on priority and catalytic projects. These measures are essential to improving the ease of doing business and enhancing the competitiveness of KwaZulu-Natal as an investment destination.

OCEAN ECONOMY

As the 7th Administration, we have made a clear and deliberate declaration that the ocean economy is a central pillar of KwaZulu-Natal's long-term economic growth and industrialisation strategy. This is informed by our unique geographic advantage, our extensive coastline, and our historic role as a maritime gateway to the African continent.

In July last year, the Provincial Government entered a strategic partnership with Navigo International, a globally recognised Italian yachting cluster, to advance the development of KwaZulu-Natal's ocean economy.

This partnership is designed to position the province as a competitive player in the global superyacht value chain. It focuses on the establishment of local superyacht manufacturing capabilities, supported by skills development in shipbuilding, marine engineering, and related maritime trades.

A key component of this initiative is human capital development. Through collaboration with local institutions such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Durban University of Technology, the partnership is already shaping specialised training programmes aimed at producing a skilled maritime workforce. These interventions are expected to create thousands of jobs in shipbuilding, engineering, and associated industries over time.

In parallel, we are advancing plans for port infrastructure development to support this emerging industry. The ports of Durban and Richards Bay are being positioned as specialised superyacht repair, maintenance, and refit centres, enhancing their value proposition and expanding their role beyond traditional cargo handling.

These developments will significantly strengthen the province's maritime industrial base while creating opportunities for local suppliers and service providers. Small and medium enterprises will be integrated into the value chain, ensuring that growth in the ocean economy is broad-based and inclusive.

The partnership with Navigo International, will unlock R100 Billion maritime sector investment and global exposure. This global visibility is critical in attracting further investment, forging new partnerships, and opening export markets for locally manufactured marine products. It reinforces our objective of embedding KwaZulu-Natal within global value chains while retaining economic value within the province.

Most importantly, our ocean economy strategy is firmly anchored in the principle of inclusive growth. The benefits of this initiative will extend beyond large firms to include SMMEs, coastal communities, and tourism operators, creating new livelihoods and strengthening local economies along the coastline.

In this way, Madam Speaker, we are honouring our commitments and demonstrating that the ocean economy is not a future promise, however, a present and growing contributor to jobs, industrialisation, and shared prosperity in KwaZulu-Natal.

As part of our broader human resource development strategy, we have made deliberate investments in maritime studies and the ocean economy, recognising that

the success of this sector depends fundamentally on skills, knowledge, and institutional capacity. Our objective is to build a sustainable pipeline of maritime skills that supports industrialisation, job creation, and long-term competitiveness.

In this regard, engagements with the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics Standing Committee (STEAM) of the Human Resource Development Council have yielded important progress. These engagements have led to the finalisation of specifications for the acquisition of a dedicated training ship, which will serve as a national and provincial asset for seafarer training and a wide range of maritime studies.

This strategic project is being implemented through a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach, led by the Department of Transport and the Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism. It reflects our commitment to interdepartmental collaboration in addressing complex skills and infrastructure requirements within the maritime sector.

Further engagements with the STEAM Standing Committee have identified several countries with strong and mature maritime economies as benchmarks for this initiative. These international best practices are informing the design, governance, and utilisation of the training ship to ensure that it meets global standards and responds effectively to the needs of the provincial economy.

At the institutional level, the Durban University of Technology is upgrading its maritime studies and training programmes to better align with the current and future needs of the maritime and ocean economy. This ensures that graduates are equipped with relevant, industry-aligned competencies that enhance employability and support sectoral growth.

We are equally clear that maritime skills development cannot begin only at tertiary level. Early exposure is essential. In response, the Provincial Department of Education has established a dedicated maritime school in Durban, creating a pathway for learners to develop maritime-related skills from an early age.

This intervention provides assurance of continuity in education and training, enabling young people to make informed career choices aligned with the maritime and ocean economy. The geographic positioning of KwaZulu-Natal, with its extensive coastline and port infrastructure, places our learners, industry, and academic institutions in a strong position to pursue maritime studies and innovation.

In complementing these initiatives, government and industry are strengthening partnerships to expand investment in maritime infrastructure. The proposal to develop a small harbour in Hibberdene is one such intervention that will support skills development, enterprise growth, and increased participation in maritime economic activities along the south coast.

At the technical and vocational level, the Coastal TVET College has developed and quality-assured a Boat and Yacht Building training programme in direct response to the needs of the maritime economy. This programme covers not only manufacturing, but also repair and maintenance, expanding opportunities across the value chain.

We recognise that skills development must extend beyond degrees and diplomas. Technical and practical skills, apprenticeships, and targeted skills programmes are equally critical, particularly for those who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Through these initiatives, we are widening access and creating multiple entry points into the maritime economy.

Finally, through the maritime and ocean economy, government is creating platforms to better harness the economic and social benefits of natural phenomena such as the annual sardine run.

This seasonal event supports livelihoods, stimulates Small Micro Medium Enterprises, and significantly boosts tourism, as visitors are drawn to our coastline to witness this global natural spectacle.

To maximise these benefits, we are prioritising skills development for SMMEs operating within the ocean economy. In doing so, we are ensuring that natural endowments, human capital, and economic opportunity are integrated in a manner that delivers inclusive growth and shared prosperity for the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

DEVELOPMENT OF AVIATION WORKFORCE

Another critical skill area that we are deliberately prioritising, particularly for young people, is aviation. As technology reshapes industries and creates new forms of work, aviation-related skills—both traditional and emerging—are becoming increasingly important to economic growth, innovation, and public safety.

In this regard, the Office of the Premier is coordinating a range of aviation skills development initiatives in partnership with accredited institutions, including aviation schools within the province. These initiatives are designed to expand access to specialised training opportunities that were previously beyond the reach of many young people.

The programmes under this initiative include studies towards fixed-wing pilot licences, as well as Remote Pilot Licence qualifications for drone operations. Together, these skills respond to current and future labour market demands while opening pathways into high-value and technology-driven sectors.

A significant milestone in this programme was the signing of a Cooperation Agreement between the Office of the Premier and the Richards Bay Aviation School on 5 August 2025. This agreement is aimed at empowering young people in KwaZulu-Natal who have the potential and aspiration to pursue careers as fixed-wing pilots and certified drone operators.

Honourable Members, drone training is a strategic intervention. It aligns directly with the skills required for smart agriculture, security services, disaster management, and firefighting—sectors that are increasingly shaped by technological innovation and artificial intelligence. These skills are no longer optional; they are essential to modern service delivery and economic competitiveness.

In its first phase, the programme will support 15 fixed-wing pilot cadets and 25 drone pilot cadets. This approach allows us to balance ambition with fiscal responsibility, while still making meaningful progress in building critical aviation skills.

About 13 of the fixed-wing pilot cadets have already been recruited.

Similarly, the 25 drone pilot candidates have been recruited through standard bursary processes.

The practical value of drone skills is already evident across multiple sectors. In the security industry, drones have proven to be an effective tool in crime prevention and surveillance. In agriculture, they enable farmers to overcome topographical challenges, improve productivity, and manage resources more efficiently.

Internationally, drones are increasingly being used in firefighting and disaster response, significantly reducing the risk of injury or loss of life among emergency personnel. These applications underscore the relevance and urgency of equipping our youth with these skills.

Through this aviation skills initiative, we are responding directly to industry needs while creating opportunities for young people to enter future-oriented careers. In doing so, we are investing in innovation, safety, and human capital—ensuring that the youth of KwaZulu-Natal are equipped to participate meaningfully in a modern, technology-driven economy.

RURAL ECONOMY

Agriculture continues to play a pivotal role in the economic and social fabric of KwaZulu-Natal. Beyond its contribution to GDP, the sector underpins the rural political economy by creating livelihoods, sustaining communities, and promoting inclusive economic growth. The interlinkages between agriculture, rural development, and food security are clear.

In the past year, our administration committed to prioritising the identification and revitalisation of all government-owned farms that have remained fallow. This initiative is guided by a carefully developed concept, and we are in the final stages of formulating a detailed implementation plan.

As part of this effort, a trial project will be launched at the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development farm in the Amajuba District. This pilot will serve as a model for scaling up interventions across the province, ensuring that idle land is put to productive use.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is actively supporting production on land reform farms throughout KwaZulu-Natal. In Ugu District, for example, kwaNodumo and Njoli farms, which were previously underutilised, have each received R1.9 million in support. These interventions include critical inputs, infrastructure development, and technical assistance, enabling farmers to generate sustainable yields and strengthen local food systems. Similarly, in the uThukela District, Amafu Farming and Mpembe Consulting have each received R2 million for infrastructure improvements and the provision of breeding stock.

These investments are designed to enhance farm productivity, promote agribusiness development, and create employment opportunities in rural communities. By strengthening these farms, we are not only boosting agricultural output but also stimulating the broader rural economy.

In the Zululand District, Amandla Power has been supported to establish 50 saw units, with the farm now fully operational. This initiative highlights the potential of agriculture to create value-added industries, diversify rural livelihoods, and foster economic resilience.

The Jozini Small-holder Farmer Programme was launched in April 2025, supporting about 100 smallholder farmers with training, mechanisation and infrastructure in the form of drying tunnels with a focus on herbs and spices, building skills and access to markets. The programme emphasises youth and women participation.

Thousands of subsistence and smallholder farmers were supported in planting and mechanisation; this is in the form of back-yard gardens and food security initiatives.

Last year the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development bought new 24 tractors to service our communities, and added another 24 tractors this year in order to increase the hectares producing food in the province. We have also employed artisans to be based in districts to maintain our tractors.

Youth in Agriculture programmes are active — with funding allocated to train and upskill young farmers and expand agricultural participation. This includes bursaries, learnerships, and practical farm experience to position youth for long-term agricultural success.

It is vital that we continue to implement skills development and market access programmes to support employment growth in rural areas. The public-private partnerships will be supported to promote formal market access for smallholder produce, which lifts incomes and reduces rural poverty.

As the province, we are contending with Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD), which is a threat to our livestock sector. While the department reports an extended vaccination rollout and continuous efforts to contain the disease. KwaZulu-Natal has received 200 000 doses out of the one million batch, which is the largest share of what has been received nationally, and we are expecting same or more quantities every week until our herd population is covered. We are working with farmers, both commercial and communal to mitigate the risk of FMD.

ROLE OF SOE’S AND STRATEGIC ENTITIES

Honourable Speaker

State-owned and strategic entities remain strategic instruments in our mission to drive inclusive economic growth, deepen transformation, and expand employment opportunities in KwaZulu-Natal.

In my Second State of the Province Address in 2025, I outlined the strategic repositioning of the Ithala Development Finance Corporation (IDFC), an institution deeply rooted in the historiography and socio-economic development of KwaZulu-Natal. For more than six decades, IDFC has been an integral part of the province's development landscape, supporting enterprise development, financial inclusion, and community upliftment, particularly in rural and historically marginalised areas.

This strategic repositioning recognises IDFC as a key development finance institution in advancing our provincial economic growth agenda. It reflects our commitment to building strong, development-oriented institutions capable of driving economic transformation, empowerment, and inclusive growth in a changing economic environment.

The renewed mandate of IDFC is firmly aligned with our priorities of job creation, enterprise development, and infrastructure-led growth. Through its repositioning, IDFC is poised to contribute directly to the creation of at least 2 000 jobs, primarily through targeted small business financing and support for catalytic infrastructure development.

Central to this effort is IDFC's focus on supporting SMMEs and cooperatives. To this end, an amount of R200 million was committed towards funding SMMEs and cooperatives, with a deliberate emphasis on enterprises located in rural areas and townships, where access to finance and development support remains most constrained.

The IDFC has made investments in infrastructure development in energy, communications, water and transport infrastructure, and focus on underserviced areas. The capital expenditure on property portfolio was at R217.5 million, additionally R102 million capital expenditure on properties and created 150 jobs.

The development finance institution rebuild site 184 Isithebe, Sundumbili Shopping Centre including the rebuild of Eshowe Shopping Centre and Flamingo Industrial Park. This targeted investment responds to the structural realities of our provincial economy and reinforces our commitment to spatial and economic inclusion.

It ensures that growth opportunities reach communities that have historically been excluded from mainstream economic activity.

In addition to financial support, IDFC has aligned its developmental interventions with the National Skills Development Plan and our provincial growth and employment priorities. This alignment recognises that sustainable economic transformation requires not only capital, but also skills, capacity, and institutional support.

It is within this context that the entity has established the IDFC Academy, an institution accredited by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. The Academy represents a strategic investment in human capital and skills development, aimed at strengthening the capacity of entrepreneurs, workers, and emerging enterprises.

The IDFC Academy is already delivering demand-led training programmes that respond directly to the needs of the economy. These programmes place particular emphasis on SMME development, entrepreneurship, and the provision of workplace-ready skills that improve employability and productivity.

Building on this solid foundation, the Provincial Government is proud to announce that IDFC will serve as the central implementing agency for a coordinated provincial skills development and work-placement programme. This programme will be implemented in close partnership with Sector Education and Training Authorities, provincial departments, public entities, and municipalities.

Through formal Memoranda of Understanding, this initiative will unlock structured learnerships, internships, and work-integrated learning opportunities across the public sector. It will ensure that young people are able to gain meaningful workplace exposure while contributing to improved service delivery and institutional capacity.

This coordinated programme is expected to place at least 1 000 young people per year into work-readiness and experiential learning opportunities. Participants will be drawn from TVET colleges and universities, ensuring a strong linkage between education, training, and the world of work.

Importantly, participants in the programme will receive a stipend, providing immediate income support while they acquire practical experience. This intervention will help to alleviate poverty, reduce barriers to participation, and build the skills, confidence, and experience required for productive participation in the economy.

Through these interventions, we are investing in skills and restoring dignity, hope, and opportunity to the youth of KwaZulu-Natal. We are responding directly to the aspirations of young people who seek meaningful work, skills, and a fair chance to contribute to society.

In this way, the strategic repositioning of IDFC reflects our broader vision of a capable state, a resilient and inclusive economy, and a future in which growth is shared and opportunity is expanded. This is how we build a KwaZulu-Natal that works for all—today and for generations to come.

LIQUOR AND GAMBLING INDUSTRIES

The KwaZulu-Natal Economic Regulatory Authority (KZNERA) plays a critical role in regulating the liquor and gambling industries—not merely as a compliance body, but as an economic catalyst aligned to our provincial growth agenda.

In the 2025/26 financial year, KZNERA delivered tangible results. A total of 4273 sustainable jobs were created across the value chain, contributing meaningfully to reducing unemployment disparities in our province.

About 35 Black-owned SMMEs accessed high-value supply chains, unlocking procurement opportunities worth R16 million, while three Black-owned agricultural producers were successfully integrated into the formal economy through supply agreements with major industry stakeholders. In advancing inclusive licensing, 146 liquor licences and 96 gambling licences were issued to historically disadvantaged individuals and enterprises, deepening participation in these regulated sectors.

At the same time, regulatory integrity was strengthened. Through 45 on-site inspections, the confiscation of 52 illegal gambling machines, and the seizure of 830 litres of illicit alcohol, we protected both public safety and the credibility of the industry.

These efforts contributed to the collection of R730 million in tax revenue, including R30 million from liquor activities—resources that sustain essential public services and community development initiatives across KwaZulu-Natal.

Looking ahead to 2026/27, we are building on this foundation with a sharpened focus on inclusive growth and rural and township economic revival. We will facilitate 5,846 new job opportunities, prioritising youth, women, and historically disadvantaged communities.

Notably, rural horseracing has been repositioned from a recreational activity into a regulated rural value-chain economy—integrating agriculture, tourism, skills development, youth employment, and township enterprise support—creating 85 labour-intensive jobs across operating districts.

Through the expansion of the Transformation Fund, we will increase access to finance for township and rural SMMEs, particularly youth-owned, women-owned, and disability-owned enterprises seeking entry into licensed supply chains. This intervention is expected to generate at least 120 direct jobs within 12 to 24 months, while enabling micro-enterprises to evolve into sustainable small and medium businesses.

In parallel, strengthened tax administration across the liquor, gambling, and betting industries will increase compliance and reduce revenue leakage. Revenue is projected to reach R765 million in 2026/27, rising to R773 million in 2027/28, and contributing approximately R2.3 billion to the Provincial Fiscus over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework.

We will further deepen localisation and supplier development by enforcing licence conditions that direct over R150 million in industry procurement towards township and rural Black-owned SMMEs—supporting more than 1,500. A new digital portal will streamline liquor licence applications and renewals, reduce administrative bottlenecks and enable entrepreneurs to participate efficiently in the sector.

The expanded unannounced, risk-based inspections will target high-risk operators, while intensified operations against illegal gambling and illicit alcohol will protect communities and legitimate businesses alike.

Importantly, as we grow these industries, we remain vigilant about their social impact. We are advocating for the introduction of a Social Responsibility Levy to ensure that a portion of industry revenue is dedicated to mitigating the social harms associated with gambling and alcohol abuse.

Our interventions will include awareness programmes in secondary schools and tertiary institutions, strengthened enforcement against illegal operations, and the use of digital platforms, radio, and local television to promote responsible gambling and safe alcohol consumption.

In this way, KZNERA demonstrates that regulation, when strategically aligned, can be a powerful lever for transformation—driving revenue, creating jobs, empowering SMMEs, and safeguarding the social fabric of our province.

The entity managed to develop a full-scale digitisation with 50 faster licensing of facilities. The KZNERA collected about R730 million in tax and R30 million in liquor license fees in favour of the provincial revenue.

The regulator was able to leverage R 856 million to unlock economic opportunities for SMMEs in the value chain. This meant that 35 high potential township/rural SMMEs into formal supply chains. This translated into the sustained employment of 4 100 individuals within licensed operations

The illicit trade and illegal gambling hubs were dealt with, wherein KZNERA reached 8 652 community members on harm mitigation and reduced 30 illegal operations.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RIBDZ) continues to play a catalytic role in the province's economy. Two of RIBDZ key catalytic projects have started to materialise. Starting with the full commissioning of Wimar Processing South Africa valued at R2.2 billion. The second one is the multi-billion anchor project Nyanza Light Metals' Titanium Manufacturing Plant.

Nyanza Light is building 80 000 tons per annum of Titanium Pigment with the initial investment of phase of R200 million that created 286 construction jobs and phase 2 that had reached the financial close of R14 billion, and the construction of the main plant will start in the first quarter of this year.

In total the RBIDZ has an investment pipeline of over R242.7 billion, which is attributed to energy-related initiatives. This gives the RIBDZ a bespoke energy programme attraction in investment terms and broader sector facilitation as a key driver of industrialization within the zone. We anticipate creating 3000 construction jobs, and an additional 850 operational jobs.

As an addition to our maritime economy, the Sharks Board have prevented shark attacks and created a safe environment for water users and that had supported directly and indirectly an approximate R10 billion tourism economy, employing 200 000 people. Furthermore, with reference to the past festive season, the Sharks Board secured our beaches with a net result of 13 million visitors at eThekwini alone.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Honourable Members;

As the Government of Provincial Unity of KwaZulu-Natal, we are conscious of the fact that any economic gains will remain at risk if we don't take care of our vulnerable segment of our communities.

KwaZulu-Natal has historically had the highest number of social grant beneficiaries among all South African provinces, with over 4 million recipients, accounting for about 22% of all national grant beneficiaries, this across grant types including child support and old age grants. This large beneficiary base reflects KZN's population size and high levels of poverty and unemployment, particularly in rural areas.

Most of the provincial social protection spending flows through national grant payments rather than being funded by the provincial government itself. Grants are a national expenditure item; however, many beneficiaries reside in KZN.

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Social Development is crucial in addressing the risk of social instability. The department has tabled a budget of about R3.613 billion for the 2025/26 financial year, aimed at supporting vulnerable populations, enhancing child protection services, youth empowerment and strengthening community development programmes.

A substantial portion of the provincial budget goes to children's welfare and family support programmes, especially those aligned with national early childhood development and child protection goals.

Skills development, training placements, and youth support initiatives are key parts of the provincial social development strategy, aimed at reducing youth dependency on social assistance over time.

There is increased funding that is allocated to community-based services, including support for victims of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, disability support services, and programmes for vulnerable families.

Without a doubt, social grant values increased to help cushion vulnerable households against rising costs of living, including above-inflation increases for key grants like Older Persons, Disability and Care Dependency Grants.

The Social Relief of Distress Grant remains an important safety net, especially for unemployed youth and working-age adults. We have had continuous efforts to improve efficiency and fraud prevention in grant delivery, including biometric verification systems, which is aimed at improving accountability and target support more accurately.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Local government will be the face of our success when it comes to inclusive economic growth and infrastructure development. It is at municipal level where policies are translated into services, where infrastructure unlocks economic activity, and where citizens experience the state in their daily lives.

I wish to start by congratulating following municipalities for obtaining clean audit during 2024/2025: uMhlathuze Municipality, Richmond Municipality, Mlalazi Municipality and King Cetshwayo District Municipality. I further wish to congratulate eThekwini Metro for being ranked number 14 in the world as a tourist destination. This ranking means KwaZulu-Natal is also ranked on the 14 spot as tourist destination.

Over the past year, I have made a call to COGTA to support municipalities to strengthen planning, financial management, and project execution, ensuring that local government becomes a capable and reliable partner in development.

On a one-on-one session with the MEC for COGTA it was confirmed that about 19 municipalities are found to be stable and required normal monitoring. About 28 municipalities are categorised as at risk and required close monitoring and Section 154 support. About 7 municipalities were categorised as in distress and required high priority and hands-on targeted intervention. This called for an effective municipal support plan.

The Municipal Support and Intervention Plans (MSIPs) were developed using information and the intended support interventions that were required by the municipalities identified to be in distress. There was significant improvement in municipalities that have been categorised as distressed based on the close support on the implementation of MSIPs and packages of support that had been advanced by the department to these municipalities.

As part of our local economic development agenda, we are aligning municipal infrastructure investment with growth corridors, industrial nodes, and township and rural economies. Municipalities are being positioned as active enablers of investment, job creation, and enterprise development, particularly for small businesses, youth, and women.

SECONDARY CITIES

Local economic development remains central to our vision of an inclusive, resilient, and growing KwaZulu-Natal. It is at the local level where economic participation is widened, where small and medium enterprises take root, and where jobs are created closest to our people.

For our economy to grow sustainably, we must deliberately unlock the productive potential of all regions of our province, supported by targeted infrastructure investment, skills development, and strong partnerships with the private sector.

To this end, in the first quarter of 2026, we will officially launch the KwaZulu-Natal Secondary Cities Programme**.** This is a bold, long-term intervention spanning 30 years, from 2026 to 2056, aimed at transforming nine secondary cities into globally competitive, digitally connected, and economically vibrant centres of innovation and inclusive prosperity.

Guided by the vision of ***One Province, Many Engines of Growth****,* the Programme directly confronts the structural challenge of economic concentration, where more than 60% of provincial GDP is generated within the Durban metropolitan area.

The Programme will focus on Newcastle, Richards Bay (uMhlathuze), Pietermaritzburg (Msunduzi), Ladysmith, Port Shepstone, Kokstad, Eshowe, Vryheid, and Pongola. Each of these cities possesses distinct economic strengths—ranging from logistics, manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, to the green and digital economies—which, with coordinated planning, catalytic investment, and policy certainty, can become powerful drivers of regional growth and employment.

The KwaZulu-Natal Secondary Cities Programme represents a transformative opportunity to reshape our provincial economy, spread prosperity beyond the metropolitan core, and build resilient local economies that attract investment and create sustainable livelihoods. Through this initiative, KwaZulu-Natal will position itself as a leading African example of balanced regional development—one province, united in purpose, powered by many engines of growth.

TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS

In KwaZulu-Natal, our partnership with traditional leaders is not ceremonial — it is strategic. We recognise Amakhosi and traditional leadership as vital agents of social cohesion, rural development, and ethical governance. Under the 7th Administration, we took a decisive step to professionalise this institution by approving a full-time Executive Committee of the Provincial House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders, led by Chairperson Inkosi R.S. Shinga. This structural reform strengthens accountability, enhances institutional capacity, and ensures that the voices of our communities are represented with focus and consistency.

We have also deepened cooperative governance at local level. In line with Section 81 of the Municipal Structures Act, municipalities were directed to appoint participating Amakhosi to their Executive Committees.
I wish to report that 51 out of 52 municipalities — a 98% compliance rate — have implemented this directive. This integration ensures that traditional leadership perspectives shape municipal planning, service delivery, and development priorities, strengthening unity between constitutional and customary systems of governance.

Equally transformative, is our investment in knowledge and empowerment. Through a landmark partnership with the University of KwaZulu-Natal, we sustained the Amakhosi Empowerment Programme — a structured, accredited initiative designed to train 50 Amakhosi annually over five years.

The programme equips traditional leaders with expertise in governance, rural economic development, land administration, natural resource management, and constitutional frameworks.

In addition, we have introduced dedicated bursary funding for Amakhosi to pursue tertiary studies, particularly in critical fields such as Law

Through the Department of Community Safety and Liaison we have empowered Amakhosi to be the Commissioners of Oaths, thus bringing closer to the rural communities the services of certifying documents.

IMPROVE EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE

Madam Speaker

One of the eight strategic priorities of this Administration is the improvement of education and healthcare — because no economy can grow, and no society can thrive, without a healthy and educated population.

Over the past year, the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health has continued to strengthen service delivery despite ongoing fiscal constraints. Guided by the *Batho Pele* principle of putting people first, our approach has prioritised health literacy, disease prevention, improved access to services, treatment adherence, and the long-term resilience of the health system.

In January 2026, the Department reached a historic milestone by formally employing more than 4 000 Community Health Workers — oNompilo — on a full-time basis for the first time. This decision restores dignity, job security, and stability to these frontline workers, while significantly strengthening community-based healthcare.

Through the Ikhemisi Eduze Nawe programme, over 1.1 million active patients now collect their chronic medication closer to home. This has reduced transport costs for families, eased congestion at health facilities, and improved continuity of care. We will continue expanding pick-up points and strengthening partnerships to reach even more communities.

We have intensified the Healthy Lifestyle Programme, promoting physical activity, healthier diets, and reduced tobacco, alcohol, and substance use. Through community outreach initiatives such as Isibhedlela Kubantu, wellness activations, and school engagements, we are strengthening prevention efforts against communicable diseases such as HIV, TB and sexually transmitted infections, as well as non-communicable diseases including hypertension, obesity, heart disease and diabetes. This marks a deliberate shift from a curative to a preventive healthcare model — a shift that is both necessary and sustainable.

KwaZulu-Natal has recorded sustained improvements in HIV prevention and treatment outcomes. Currently, more than 1.57 million people across the province are on antiretroviral treatment. Through the #CloseTheGap campaign, over 210 000 patients who had defaulted were successfully traced and returned to care. As a result, KwaZulu-Natal is no longer the leading contributor to new HIV infections nationally — a milestone that signals meaningful progress in epidemic control.

Infrastructure renewal remains central to improving patient experience and service delivery. Over the past two financial years, numerous clinics have been renovated and upgraded. Projects such as Cwaka Replacement Clinic, Newtown Clinic, and Sokhela Clinic are strengthening our primary healthcare platform.

Maintenance initiatives — including generator installations, boreholes, improved lightning, perimeter fencing, sewer upgrades, and roof replacements — are enhancing safety and reliability across facilities.

Construction continues at Mpaphala Medium Clinic, Nyavini Clinic, and Mpolweni Small Clinic, while designs for uMtubatuba Community Health Centre and the Vryheid Mortuary are being finalised. Despite budget pressures, we remain committed to modernising facilities, improving patient flow, and expanding capacity in high-demand areas.

Emergency Medical Services have been reinforced through the addition of 44 new ambulances and we are planning to buy another more than 60 new ambulances in 2026.

During the past financial year, we have appointed more than 240 nurses and more than 238 doctors. Our recruitment strategy remains focused on critical clinical posts to stabilise facilities and reduce workload pressures.

Through Operation Sukuma Sakhe and the District Development Model, we continue to strengthen household-level outreach, linking vulnerable families to healthcare and social services. These platforms will be leveraged further to expand community screening, improve chronic patient follow-up, and ensure early identification of health and social risks.

Honourable Members,

Improving healthcare is not only about infrastructure and staffing — it is about restoring public confidence. Through focused interventions on queue management, staff accountability, and patient engagement, we are improving the experience of care.
Monitoring of service standards will be intensified, complaints resolution strengthened, and a culture of compassion, professionalism, and excellence promoted across all facilities.

Working with traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, industry partners, and communities, we will continue advancing collaborative healthcare delivery. Innovation in medicine distribution, preventive health strategies, and integrated planning will ensure that KwaZulu-Natal builds a responsive, resilient health system that truly leaves no one behind.

Residents of KwaZulu-Natal;

The 2025 class of matric historic pass rate of 90.6% is the evidence of stable and progressive education system in our government. It is now on record that KwaZulu-Natal in 2025 became number one in the whole country in the National Senior Certificate Examinations.

We thank our teachers from grade R to grade 12 for their commitment. We also thank learners who worked hard and the parents who supported the children. To MEC Hlomuka, portfolio chairperson Hon Princess Phumzile Buthelezi and all members of the education portfolio committee, congratulations.

We also congratulate the Head of Department Mr Ngcobo and entire department officials for the job well done. Finaly, I wish to also thank the teacher unions for the role well played to keep our education system strong.

The Government of Provincial Unity puts front and centre education, the remuneration of Grade R teachers and early childhood development. The KwaZulu-Natal Fiscal Framework is anchored on provincial equitable share, wherein education to receive R29.764 million, R59.528 million and R101.640 million over the medium-term expenditure framework for the progressive equalisation of the remuneration of Grade R teachers. The allocation is made as Grade R is now part of the compulsory phase of basic education.

We are grateful that education would receive R70.068 million in 2026/27 from the Presidential Employment Stimulus for the Teacher Assistants Programme.

Regarding conditional grants, the first allocation is R270.510 million, followed by R915.263 million and R932.934 million over the medium-term expenditure framework from the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme.

Early Childhood Development is allocated R133,3 million, while Education Infrastructure Grant has allocated of R55,8 million. These allocations will assist in fulfilling our commitment in delivering service in education. We are putting early childhood development at the centre of laying a strong foundation for quality education.

CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSE

KwaZulu-Natal continues to face increasing extreme weather events — including heavy rains, floods, heatwaves, thunderstorms and fire danger — as part of climate change effects. These events have caused loss of life, displacement and damage to infrastructure.

Our geography with coastal lowlands and rural river systems makes it particularly vulnerable to flooding, which is being worsened by inadequate stormwater infrastructure and outdated urban planning.

Infrastructure such as stormwater systems, bridges and drainage is generally not designed for the increasing frequency or intensity of extreme rainfall. Inadequate land-use planning — especially homes built in flood-prone areas — remains a major vulnerability highlighted by both authorities and public commentators.

The national government allocated significant disaster funds in 2025, with about R1.44 billion disbursed to provinces including KwaZulu-Natal for recovery and infrastructure repair following floods and other extreme weather phenomena. Within this, KwaZulu-Natal received hundreds of millions in dedicated funds for municipal reconstruction, restoring roads, water and electricity services, and support for affected communities.

In ensuring greater coordination, we have established a Climate Change and Sustainable Council. The Council has submitted the KwaZulu-Natal Climate Change Strategy, which is being implemented by respective departments, municipalities and other social partners.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

KwaZulu-Natal is a province under construction. We have allocated R216 million to address the province's potholes, starting with the backlog of 3.12 million square meters of potholes. In achieving this, we have secured 55 trucks with over 100 roadworker aids and supervisors appointed with the main objective of eradicating potholes across the provincial road network.

This effort is to reduce the impact of potholes on vehicle leading to punctures and wheel damage, traffic congestion and delays. This would assist in reducing the risk of accidents, including fatalities, improve mobility, and economic activity in the province.

Honourable Speaker

The issue of bulk services supply shall be addressed to strengthen the one stop shop to unlock bottlenecks in the approval processes of statutory requirements, with specific reference to Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act, Water Use Licence, Funding, so that we unlock delayed projects.

This would provide directive to private sector and municipalities to incentivise them to fund infrastructure demands, so that business should know about rates rebate, discount holiday for the period of the investment into the infrastructure

The land agreements needed to be strengthened through relations with Ingonyama Trust Board to unlock bottlenecks in the approval process.

The public sector-led infrastructure investment programme would be at R4,11 billion for the upcoming financial year. The Sanral projects spend on SMMEs is R3,6 billion with a total jobs to be created of 6842 to date.

The infrastructure projects in the districts are progressing well,

- **In uMgungundlovu** with 12 projects at R24 billion in the agriculture, infrastructure development and manufacturing sectors.
- **uThukela** with 6 projects at R38 billion in the infrastructure development, manufacturing and mining sectors;

- **UMzinyathi** with 7 projects with R1,6 billion in the agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure development sectors.
- **Amajuba** with 15 projects at R1 billion in agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure development sectors;
- **Zululand** with 7 projects at R1,7 billion in the manufacturing, and infrastructure development;
- **In uMkhanyakude** with 25 projects at R5 billion in the agriculture and infrastructure development.
- **In King Cetshwayo** with 8 projects at R44 billion in the agriculture, infrastructure development and manufacturing, and ;
- **In Ugu,** there are 17 projects at R13,2 billion in the manufacturing, and infrastructure development.

Honourable Members

The transformation of the build economy is not optional; it is imperative. For far too long, the construction and infrastructure sector has been male dominated, limiting the full participation of women in one of the most critical drivers of economic growth. If we are to build a capable, ethical and inclusive state, we must ensure that women are not only beneficiaries of development, but leaders, entrepreneurs and decision-makers within the infrastructure value chain. The inclusion of women in the build economy is therefore central to our agenda of inclusive growth, job creation and poverty reduction.

In this regard, the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is leading decisively in expanding women's participation in infrastructure delivery. In the third quarter of 2025 alone, women-owned companies benefitted from projects to the value of R35 552 709, contributing to a cumulative R62 million spent across 98 projects awarded to 84 women contractors.

This translates to 35.3% women empowerment achieved, demonstrating measurable progress in advancing gender transformation within the sector.

We have further accelerated infrastructure delivery, completing 70 out of 100 planned capital projects, with approximately 5 000 jobs created in the process. Through the EPWP, a total of 128 906 work opportunities were created. Of these, 96 698 opportunities went to women, 39 330 to youth, and 734 to persons with disabilities.

These figures affirm our commitment to ensuring that public infrastructure investment translates into broad-based social and economic inclusion. Equally important is the strengthening of capacity among emerging contractors. Out of 71 contractors trained during the period under review, 49 were women.

In uMzinyathi District, 38 women participated in a Bricklaying Workshop which was conducted in partnership with Corobrik. In Amajuba District, 11 women attended the Emerging Contractor Training Programme. These interventions are not symbolic; they are deliberate steps towards building a new generation of skilled women contractors who will shape the infrastructure landscape of our province for decades to come.

Our infrastructure programme is not merely about bricks and mortar; it is about restoring dignity, strengthening public services, and stimulating local economies.

Across our districts, the Province is on the move — building schools, modernising hospitals, upgrading clinics, and investing in critical administrative and agricultural infrastructure. These projects signal a government that is focused on delivery, responsive to community needs, and committed to long-term development.

Among the key infrastructure projects currently underway and anticipated for completion during the 2025/26 financial year are several catalytic investments led by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure.

In the education sector, the Mahlabathini Primary School in Zululand District is undergoing a comprehensive upgrade and expansion valued at R78 million.

In health infrastructure, the Cwaka Clinic in uMzinyathi District is being developed at a cost of R87 million, while the Mosvold Hospital in uMkhanyakude District is receiving a major upgrade and expansion valued at R200 million.

The King Dinizulu Hospital is progressing with the development of a new Tuberculosis Complex, further strengthening our specialised health services. In King Cetshwayo District, the Ngwelezane Hospital is being upgraded and expanded at a cost of R63 million.

We are equally investing in governance and economic infrastructure. The construction of the new Nongoma RTI Offices in Zululand District, valued at R98 million, will enhance road safety enforcement and service delivery capacity. In the same district, the new Paulpietersburg Agricultural Offices, valued at R42 million, will strengthen agricultural support services, directly contributing to rural economic development and food security.
These investments demonstrate a balanced approach — integrating social infrastructure with economic enablers to unlock growth across the province.

Collectively, these infrastructure projects are anticipated to generate over 1 000 job opportunities during implementation. Beyond the immediate employment impact, they create opportunities for local contractors, small enterprises, women-owned businesses and youth in the construction value chain. This is what a province on the rise looks like — infrastructure development that drives inclusive growth, expands opportunity, and lays a solid foundation for a prosperous and resilient KwaZulu-Natal.

ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Road infrastructure remains a critical pillar of connectivity, linking people to opportunities, markets, and services, while reinforcing social and economic integration across our province. Just as digital connectivity connects communities to the modern economy, physical connectivity through reliable road networks enables mobility, trade, and access to essential services.

In KwaZulu-Natal, we understand that sustainable development depends on the seamless integration of these two forms of connectivity.

We acknowledge the steady progress made on key freeway and arterial routes that anchor our provincial economy and support the movement of goods and people. These strategic corridors strengthen logistics, tourism, and industrial development, while reinforcing KwaZulu-Natal's position as a gateway to regional and global markets.

Progress on these routes reflects our commitment to maintaining the backbone of the provincial transport network.

At the same time, we are equally clear that inclusive growth cannot be achieved if development is confined to major highways alone. Inland and rural road infrastructure is vital to unlocking the economic and cultural potential of our hinterland communities. These roads connect agricultural areas to markets, link rural enterprises to supply chains, and provide access to cultural and heritage tourism nodes that are central to community-based economic development.

Significant progress is being recorded across several inland corridors. The P304 from KwaMiya to the Drakensberg has reached a 25% milestone with an investment of R177.8 million, while the P31 between Marburg and Port Shepstone is progressing at 13% with a budget of R775 million. These projects are essential in improving access between rural settlements and economic centres.

We are also advancing roads that directly support tourism and heritage development. The P372 Heritage Tourism Roads project has reached 90% site establishment, supported by an allocation of R426.7 million.

Similarly, the P7-4 route between Bulwer and Underberg, with a budget of R1.09 billion, and the P230 Umlalazi Drift Rehabilitation project, now at 35% progress with R552.1 million invested, are critical in strengthening inland tourism corridors and local economies.

In northern KwaZulu-Natal, the P47/3 Melmoth project has achieved 65% progress, with over 66 000 square metres completed at a cost of R159.1 million, while the P90 in Nkandla stands at 55% completion, with 36 000 square metres delivered through an investment of R423.4 million. These projects improve accessibility in historically underserved areas and directly support agricultural activity, small businesses, and cultural tourism initiatives.

Beyond road construction, our commitment to rural connectivity is reinforced through routine maintenance and bridge infrastructure. Under the Vukayibambe programme, routine maintenance has already created 3120 jobs towards a target of 3350. In addition, the construction of Welisizwe Bailey Bridges across multiple districts—including Besterspruit, now 100% complete, Ngcengeni at 80%, and Excelsior at 75%—has significantly improved rural mobility.

Each bridge project engages 40 Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) participants, ensuring that infrastructure delivery also generates immediate local economic benefits.

Through these integrated investments, we are connecting communities, strengthening rural economies, and ensuring that no part of KwaZulu-Natal is left behind. With the Provincial Road Maintenance Grant, we will be able to sustain the maintenance of our roads with an allocation of R269 million, R969 million and R1 billion over the medium-term framework.

CONNECTIVITY IN RURAL AREAS

Connectivity is the lifeblood of modern rural development. It determines whether a learner can access digital classrooms, whether a clinic can consult a specialist in real time, whether an emerging farmer can reach markets, and whether small enterprises in our villages can participate meaningfully in the provincial economy.

In KwaZulu-Natal, we are clear that rural development is no longer only about roads, water, and electricity; it is also about digital inclusion. To connect our rural communities is to unlock their economic potential and restore their full dignity in a rapidly changing world.

In the Second State of the Province Address, I reported on our connectivity initiatives, including the installation of Wi-Fi connectivity and CCTV cameras for 15 Amakhosi.

Today, I am pleased to report tangible progress in translating that commitment into practical outcomes that are beginning to change daily life in our rural areas. We have increased the number of Amakhosi receiving Wi-Fi connectivity and CCTV, from 15 last year to 30 this year.

Working in close collaboration with Vodacom, the Ingonyama Trust Board, KwaZulu-Natal South African Local Government Association (SALGA), and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, and the Office of the Premier, we have successfully streamlined processes for the installation of cell towers in rural areas. This cooperative approach demonstrates what is possible when we align our efforts around a shared developmental objective.

Once fully implemented, this partnership will deliver 130 new connectivity sites in underserved rural communities across the province. This represents a significant expansion of network coverage and directly supports our provincial strategy to close persistent gaps in education, healthcare access, and entrepreneurship. It is a concrete step towards ensuring that where a person lives no longer determines their access to opportunities.

To date, over 1 300 public Wi-Fi hotspot sites have been installed across all eleven districts of the province. These hotspots are deliberately located in high-impact community spaces such as schools, clinics, libraries, traditional authority offices, and community halls, ensuring that connectivity reaches those who needs it most.

In doing so, we are lowering the cost of access to information, expanding digital literacy, and opening new pathways for learners, job seekers, small businesses, and community organisations to participate in the digital economy.

We view these Wi-Fi hotspots not merely as infrastructure, but as powerful enablers of inclusive growth and social development. They support access to online government services, facilitate skills development and innovation, and strengthen local economic activity, particularly in rural and township areas. As we expand and sustain this network, our focus remains on using connectivity as a catalyst for opportunity—bridging the digital divide and ensuring that every community in KwaZulu-Natal is empowered to contribute to, and benefit from, our shared economic future.

SPORT ARTS, CULTURE AND SOCIAL COHESION

Honourable Members

As a province emerging from a history marked by conflict, segregation, and deep social fractures, KwaZulu-Natal understands the unifying power of sport.

Our programmes are deliberately designed to bridge social, ethnic, and economic divides by connecting different groups in positive and mutually reinforcing ways.

In advancing social cohesion through sport and heritage, KwaZulu-Natal has increasingly become the venue of choice for major provincial, national, and international sporting events.

In the last quarter of 2025, the Department hosted the Provincial Indigenous Games Festival in Margate, in the southern part of our province.

A total of 1320 participants from across KwaZulu-Natal took part in the festival, bringing with them remarkable enthusiasm, discipline, and sportsmanship. Their participation infused the event with energy and authenticity, and marked a significant step forward in the revival, preservation, and appreciation of indigenous games as an integral part of our social and cultural landscape.

In partnership with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), we also hosted the 2025 SALGA KZN Department of Sports, Arts and Culture Games in uMgungundlovu District. These games attracted approximately 5,000 participants and demonstrated the power of sport in strengthening cooperation between municipalities and communities.

As part of our strategy to promote sport tourism, KwaZulu-Natal continues to attract prestigious national and international events. The province hosted the South African National Dance Sport Championships, followed by the 2025 International Canoe Federation Ocean Racing World Championships along the Durban coastline.

The latter drew paddlers from 31 countries, showcasing our world-class facilities and natural assets. Our provincial athletes distinguished themselves on the global stage, with Saskia Hockly winning gold in the Mixed Doubles alongside Mathew Fenn, and Hamish Lovemore and Jenna Nisbet securing bronze—underscoring how hosting major events also nurtures local excellence and pride.

Our contribution to the South African Junior Springboks team that won the U20 Rugby World Cup in Italy in July 2025 is a powerful illustration of success.

KwaZulu-Natal produced eight representatives in that victorious squad, all of whom play their rugby for the Hollywoodbets Sharks and were part of a development pipeline supported by the provincial department. Notably, five players—Jaco Williams, Allie Bester, Vusi Moyo, Bathobile Hlekani, and Simphiwe Ngobese—started the final, with Matt Ramao and Ceano Everson making impactful contributions off the bench. KwaZulu-Natal recorded the highest representation of all provinces in this historic achievement.

Equally inspiring is the story of our son from rural Hluhluwe, Mbekezeli “TLB” Mbokazi. Rising through the ranks, he has become a vice-captain, lifted the MTN8 trophy, and secured a move to Major League Soccer side Chicago Fire in the United States of America. His journey from a rural community to the global stage captures the essence of our vision—that in KwaZulu-Natal, talent can emerge from anywhere, and through a normalised, inclusive sporting ecosystem, it can be developed to compete with the best in the world.

Community horse racing remains a powerful expression of how sport, culture, and the local economy can be deliberately aligned for inclusive development. Events such as the Dundee July, the Nkandla May, and the King Cetshwayo Horse Racing Festival stand as compelling evidence that sport, when rooted in community traditions, can be transformed into a catalyst for economic activity, social cohesion, and cultural pride.

The Dundee July, in particular, has grown into a regional attraction of significant scale. Participants travel from neighbouring provinces and from neighbouring countries, including Lesotho and Botswana, underscoring the cross-border appeal and cultural significance of this event. This regional footprint elevates the profile of our rural towns and positions them as vibrant cultural and sporting destinations.

In supporting and growing these events, we affirm that rural economies matter, rural culture matters, and that sport remains a powerful vehicle for shared prosperity in KwaZulu-Natal.

IMPROVING COMMUNITY SAFETY

Regarding community safety and liaison, our approach is holistic**,** grounded in the understanding that building safer communities requires far more than traditional law enforcement interventions.

We are deliberate in promoting a model that places communities at the centre of safety creation where safety is not merely the absence of crime, but the presence of social cohesion, trust, and shared responsibility. This approach compels us to address the root causes of insecurity, rather than merely reacting to its symptoms.

Working closely with the South African Police Service, under the capable leadership of Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi**,** together with communities across the length and breadth of our province, have once again affirmed a profound truth — that the challenge of crime cannot be resolved by government alone.

I wish to take this moment and thank SAPS members in our province for their fight against crime. Crime is decreasing in the province, though it is still high. The recent revelations that crime has decreased by 13% in KwaZulu-Natal is a testimony to the good leadership provided by the Provincial Commissioner Lt-Gen Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi.

I do not regret bringing the Department of Community Safety and Liaison under the Executive Authority of the Premier.

The complexity and persistence of crime demand a collaborative and multi-dimensional approach, one that brings together the full spectrum of state and non-state actors —including civil society, traditional leadership, faith-based organisations, the private sector, and, most importantly, ordinary citizens. Each of these partners play a crucial role in strengthening community resilience, fostering trust, and ensuring that our collective response to crime is sustainable and rooted in shared responsibility.

The reports about our sons who were taken to Russia to join wars between countries devasted not only their parents but the entire nation. I wish to thank His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa for intervention which resulted in our sons being brought back to home.

We fully appreciate that the effectiveness of our community safety initiatives depends not only on enthusiasm and volunteerism, but also on structured training, coordination, and sustained support for those who stand on the frontlines of crime prevention.

It is for this reason that we have prioritised capacity-building programmes targeting a range of voluntary community structures, including the Community Policing Forums (CPFs), Youth Crime Prevention Desks, the KwaZulu-Natal Community Crime Prevention Association (KZNCCPA), the Spiritual Crime Prevention Movement, and various Neighbourhood Watch formations across the province.

These efforts reflect our broader belief that community safety is a shared professional endeavour, requiring both skill and strategy. By investing in the development of these structures, we are not only building safer communities, however, we are also deepening social partnerships and ensuring that community participation in safety governance is both credible and sustainable.

As part of our integrated approach to community safety, we are equally mindful that sustainable safety must be underpinned by economic opportunity—particularly for young people.

Currently, 186 Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) activists have been placed in 99 identified hotspot police stations across KwaZulu-Natal. Of these, 103 are qualified and registered Social Workers, 30 are graduates in Social Sciences, 42 hold law degrees, and 53 are matriculants.

These young professionals and activists have become force multipliers in our broader crime prevention strategy — working alongside the police to improve the quality of victim support, conduct legal research, monitor cases, and provide guidance to survivors of violence.

In 2026, through the EPWP, the Department of Community Safety and Liaison will create 1,000 work opportunities for unemployed graduates and matriculants across the province. These placements will focus on roles directly linked to community safety, including data collection, community patrolling, crime prevention support, and Gender-Based Violence and Femicide activism.

Participants will receive structured, on-the-job training and practical experience in crime prevention initiatives and public safety administration. Through this programme, we aim to deliver immediate employment relief while simultaneously building long-term provincial capacity in crime prevention, community engagement, and safety governance. In doing so, we affirm a simple but powerful principle: when we invest in our young people, we strengthen the very communities we seek to protect.

The Department of Community Safety and Liaison has successfully implemented a range of Social Crime Prevention Programmes across all ten districts of KwaZulu-Natal, in direct response to the evolving nature and escalation of crime in our province. These programmes are central to our integrated approach to crime prevention and include:

- Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) Prevention Initiatives**;**
- Cross-Border Crime Prevention Interventions**;**
- Rural Safety Programmes;
- Safety in Learning Institutions **—** covering both schools and campuses;
- Sports Against Crime Initiatives; and
- Safety in Urban and Semi-Urban Spaces.

Each of these interventions is designed to address the unique social and geographic dynamics of crime within our communities, while promoting proactive partnerships between government, civil society, and local stakeholders.

With regard to the School Safety Programme, we took a deliberate and targeted approach in the past year, focusing on 58 schools located in identified crime hotspot areas across the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. This programme was officially launched in August 2025, when a Memorandum of Understanding was signed bringing together the Department of Community Safety and Liaison, the Department of Education, and the South African Police Service. This partnership reflects our firm commitment to a coordinated, whole-of-government response to safeguarding our learners and educators.

As part of this intervention, twenty-two of the fifty-eight schools have already been equipped with modern, solar-powered Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) camera systems.

Beyond infrastructure, we have also prioritised values-based prevention. In collaboration with Indonsa, the Department commenced the resuscitation of the Scouts Programme in the targeted schools. This initiative has included the capacitation of identified teaching personnel and the hosting of a structured weekend camp for selected learners—creating platforms for mentorship, leadership development, and positive peer engagement.

In the year ahead, we will intensify the School Safety Programme by expanding its reach to more schools across the province. At the same time, we will further strengthen the Scouts Programme as a vehicle to restore a culture of discipline, respect, patriotism and social responsibility among our young people.

Safe schools are not only about infrastructure and security measures; they are about building character, fostering belonging, and nurturing a generation that understands its role in building a peaceful and prosperous KwaZulu-Natal.

BUILDING A CAPABLE STATE

Building a capable, ethical and developmental state remains at the centre of our seventh administration. We have made measurable progress in implementing the Framework for the Professionalisation of the Public Service. In October 2025, our Province convened a historic Convention on the Professionalisation of the Public Service, bringing together government leaders, professional bodies, academia and organised labour to forge a common vision of a modern and merit-based public service.

The Convention adopted a clear Road Map to accelerate implementation, strengthened cooperation with professional councils to close regulatory gaps, and reinforced consequence management as a non-negotiable pillar of accountability. We are determined to build institutions that are staffed by competent, ethical and service-oriented public servants.

In the year ahead, we will intensify the professionalisation of front-line services — because the true measure of a capable state is felt at the point of service delivery. Every department will implement the Service Delivery Charter and approved Service Delivery Improvement Plans, while the amended Consequence Management Framework will be fully enforced.

These instruments are not compliance exercises; they are practical tools to ensure responsiveness, restore public trust, and embed a culture of performance and accountability across government.

The fight against fraud and corruption remains resolute. The Forensic Investigations Unit in the Office of the Premier is currently investigating 51 matters reported by whistle-blowers across provincial departments, municipalities and public entities. We also referred some cases to SIU. These investigations address allegations of fraud, procurement irregularities, financial misconduct and non-compliance with legislation.

Importantly, they quantify irregular expenditure, identify financial losses, and recommend disciplinary, civil or criminal action where warranted. Through strengthened internal controls and the work of the Anti-Corruption Management Committee, we are coordinating prevention measures, sharing data transparently, and ensuring that wrongdoing is met with firm and decisive action.

We are encouraged by improvements in financial governance. KwaZulu-Natal continues to record a 100% submission rate of financial disclosures by all Senior Management Service members — a clear statement that ethical leadership begins at the top. For the 2024/25 financial year, seven departments achieved unqualified audit opinions, with five attaining clean audits.

Among public entities, despite structural mergers reducing their number from seventeen to fifteen, nine achieved clean audits, three received unqualified opinions with findings, and only one was qualified, with two audits outstanding. These outcomes signal steady progress toward sound financial management and institutional stability.

As the 7th Administration, we are fully cognisant of the fact that addressing the deep-seated legacy challenges facing our province requires a renewed and uncompromising commitment to financial prudence. The scale of our developmental mandate demands that we manage public resources with discipline, foresight, and integrity, recognising that every rand must work harder to improve the lives of our people.

At both Executive and administrative levels, there is a shared understanding that for KwaZulu-Natal to succeed, financial prudence must be a collective responsibility and a non-negotiable prerequisite for sustainable growth.

Fiscal responsibility, therefore, is not merely a technical or accounting exercise; it is a moral obligation to the people of this province. It is against this backdrop that, through the Provincial Treasury, we launched the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Financial Recovery Plan on 30 November 2025. This decisive intervention reflects our resolve to confront fiscal vulnerabilities head-on, stabilise the provincial financial position, and restore confidence in the state’s ability to manage public funds responsibly.

The Recovery Plan is anchored on six strategic workstreams: targeted departmental and municipal interventions; strengthened fiscal governance; revenue optimisation; expenditure reduction and prioritisation; real-time financial monitoring; and strategic communication.

Together, these pillars provide a coherent and disciplined framework to restore financial sustainability, reinforce accountability, and enhance transparency across the province. Through this Plan, we are creating the fiscal space required to support economic recovery, accelerate infrastructure investment, and protect frontline service delivery—particularly in areas that directly affect the poor and most vulnerable.

At the same time, we are sending a clear and consistent message that inefficiency, wasteful expenditure, and poor financial controls will not be tolerated.

Madam Speaker, financial prudence is the bedrock upon which our developmental ambitions must stand. By entrenching a culture of discipline, accountability, and value for money, the Seventh Administration is laying a firm foundation for inclusive growth, long-term stability, and a capable, ethical, and developmental state in KwaZulu-Natal.

Fraud and corruption within government represent some of the gravest threats to good governance and public trust. When public officials abuse their positions for personal gain, whether through misappropriation of funds, procurement irregularities, or bribery, it undermines the integrity of institutions and erodes citizens' confidence in the state.

Such unethical practices divert resources meant for essential services, compromise transparency, and create an environment where accountability is weakened, allowing wrongdoing to persist unchecked. If left unaddressed, fraud and corruption have a direct and tangible impact on service delivery. Resources intended for healthcare, education, infrastructure, and social welfare programs are depleted or mismanaged, delaying or reducing the quality of services provided to communities.

Vulnerable populations, who depend most on government support, bear the greatest burden, widening inequality and fuelling public dissatisfaction. Ultimately, corruption not only hinders developmental progress but also erodes the social contract between the state and its citizens, making it imperative that governments implement strong measures to detect, prevent, and punish such misconduct.

Honourable Members,

A capable state must be an informed state. In KwaZulu-Natal, we are deliberately building a research-driven government — one where policy choices are guided not by assumption, but by evidence; not by rhetoric, but by data; not by short-term reaction, but by long-term strategic insight.

It is for this reason that we established the Moses Kotane Research Institute as a dedicated public research and policy advisory entity of the Province. The Institute was created to serve as our intellectual engine — conducting socio-economic research that informs provincial planning, producing baseline data and diagnostic reports, and guiding policy interventions in key sectors of our economy.

The Institute has already partnered in the establishment of the Durban University of Technology Smart Robotics Lab, creating a platform where young people are inspired to design technology-based solutions to real-life challenges. This initiative is about more than robotics; it is about cultivating problem-solvers, innovators, and future industrialists drawn from our own communities.

In the coming period, the Institute will launch the Mpofana Digital Centre, convene the KwaZulu-Natal Innovation Forum, and release a comprehensive Baseline Report on the Rural and Township Economy. These initiatives will ensure that our budgeting processes, industrial strategy, digital transformation agenda, and youth development programmes are firmly anchored in credible research and measurable outcomes.

Honourable Members, the Moses Kotane Research Institute is evolving into a critical intellectual and innovation infrastructure asset for our province. If fully integrated into our economic reform agenda, it will become the nerve centre of provincial transformation — the intellectual backbone of township and rural industrialisation, and a catalyst for technology-driven, inclusive growth. Through this work, we affirm that building a capable state begins with building a thinking state.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMES

As we reflect on the path of our province's growth, it is critical to recognise that sustainable development cannot be achieved without the full participation of women and youth. These groups represent not only the majority of our population but also the most dynamic drivers of innovation, creativity, and resilience in our economy. Yet, historical inequalities continue to limit their access to economic opportunities, ownership, and decision-making spaces. Addressing this imbalance is not simply a matter of equity—it is an economic imperative.

In my second State of the Province Address last year, I announced two important interventions: the Youth Empowerment Fund and the Women Advancement Fund. With the Youth Empowerment Fund now implemented, our focus turns firmly to the Women Fund. We do so with humility and wisdom gained from experience.

The rollout of the Youth Empowerment Fund has provided valuable lessons in governance, due diligence, monitoring, and post-investment support. These lessons have sharpened our systems, strengthened our oversight mechanisms, and refined our partnership model. They will guide us to ensure that the Women Advancement Fund is not only impactful, but sustainable, transparent, and responsive to the real needs of women across our province.

With both initiatives I issued a clear instruction to the administration that applications must reflect the full geographic diversity of KwaZulu-Natal. This intervention was never intended to benefit a select few in urban centres alone.

I emphasised that particular attention must be given to township and rural women - those who are often excluded from mainstream financial systems and formal markets. I am encouraged to report that, according to our records, youth and women from across the length and breadth of the province responded to this call, affirming both the need for and the credibility of this initiative.

The geographic spread of applicants sends a powerful message: entrepreneurial potential exists in every district, every municipality, and every community. From deep rural villages to township enterprises and emerging urban innovators, youth and women have stepped forward with ideas, ambition, and determination.

Our responsibility as government is to ensure that this potential is not stifled by lack of support, information, or structured guidance. Inclusive development requires deliberate reach and intentional design.

During the funding phase, structured mentorship, governance support, and performance monitoring must be embedded. Post-funding, sustained enterprise development, market linkage facilitation, and accountability mechanisms are necessary to guarantee long-term sustainability.

Our approach was therefore not merely to provide funding, but to respond holistically to the ecosystem challenges facing youth-owned enterprises. Following the adjudication process and the awarding of support to qualifying young beneficiaries, allegations of irregularities surfaced on social media platforms. Although no formal complaint was submitted to my Office or to the relevant Department, I took the view that public perception matters. In a democratic and transparent government, even allegations made in the public domain must be treated with seriousness and integrity.

In July 2025, I therefore directed that an independent investigation be instituted. We further issued a public call inviting any individual or organisation with information to come forward and formally present evidence.

Despite this open invitation, no formal complaint or substantiated evidence was received. Nevertheless, I instructed that the investigation proceed to its logical conclusion. This was not only about compliance — it was about reinforcing the principle of social accountability.

The investigation process was comprehensive, examining governance procedures, adjudication mechanisms, compliance with applicable policies, and potential conflicts of interest. Where weaknesses were identified, corrective measures were recommended to strengthen internal controls, improve transparency, and enhance oversight. This exercise has ultimately contributed to improving the governance framework of the Fund and restoring public confidence in its administration.

Today I am proud to announce that all deserving applications have been paid. In the interest of transparency, the list of successful applicants is posted on our website.

I know that some of the beneficiaries are with us today.

Honourable Members, we must build a state that empowers the youth while remaining accountable to the people. The KwaZulu-Natal Youth Empowerment Fund remains a critical instrument in unlocking economic participation for young people. At the same time, we reaffirm that no programme — no matter how noble its intention — is above scrutiny. Accountability strengthens, rather than weakens, our developmental agenda.

Madam Speaker;

The Women Advancement Fund (WAF) was launched in response to the critical funding gap faced by women entrepreneurs in KZN. The first intake received 2736 applications from all districts, underscoring strong demand for coordinated support.

Women represent 37% of formal business owners in South Africa, but access only 22% of business finance. In KZN, women-owned businesses face failure rates 1.5 times higher than the norm due to capital and infrastructure gaps.

In the past year, the Women Empowerment Fund has moved from concept to tangible impact, becoming a cornerstone of our provincial strategy to unlock the potential of women entrepreneurs and community leaders.

The KwaZulu-Natal Women's Advancement Fund is not a once-off intervention. It is a structured, developmental journey — one that recognises that women entrepreneurs are not all at the same level of readiness, access, or opportunity. It is designed to meet women where they are, and to walk with them toward sustainability, growth, and economic independence.

First, grant funding. We will begin by providing targeted grant funding to women who require that critical nudge of support — women who are building enterprises under difficult conditions, women who are trying, innovating, and carrying families and communities at the same time. This is not a loan. It is a discretionary grant, supported through our partnership with ABSA, offered in good faith and without repayment obligations. It comes with one expectation only: that it be applied where it will have the greatest catalytic impact on the business. For some women, that single intervention can mean the difference between survival and growth.

Second, hybrid funding — a blend of grant and loan instruments. From the broader application pool, we will identify women who are positioned to scale, but who require structured financial support that does not set them up for failure. Through a combination of grant support and responsible lending, we are ensuring that growth is enabled, while financial risk is managed. This process is already underway, guided by proper verification, affordability assessments, and strict governance guardrails.

Each beneficiary under this model will be assessed on sustainability, repayment capacity where applicable, and the long-term viability of the enterprise. Disbursement will not be the end of our responsibility. It will be followed by structured monitoring, evaluation, mentorship, and technical support — because empowerment without accompaniment is abandonment. We are building success, not statistics.

Third, incubation and readiness support, coupled with cooperative clustering. We recognise that some women are not yet funding-ready — but they are potential-rich. For them, we are establishing a structured incubation pathway so that "not yet" does not become "never." Through mentorship, compliance support, business development training, and market access facilitation, we will prepare them to enter the funding pipeline with confidence.

In addition, we will promote cooperative clustering — particularly in strategic sectors such as agro-processing and local manufacturing — where women-owned enterprises can combine capabilities to build district-based production hubs. Backed by offtake agreements and supported through blended finance instruments, these clusters can evolve into bankable, sustainable projects that transform local economies.

Honourable Members, this Fund is not charity. It is an economic strategy. It recognises that women are not peripheral to growth — they are central to it. When women-owned enterprises thrive, households stabilise, communities strengthen, and our provincial economy expands. Through this structured approach, we are not merely funding businesses; we are building a generation of women industrialists, producers, and job creators across KwaZulu-Natal.

SOCIAL CAMPAIGNS

Madam Speaker;

The issue of undocumented foreign nationals remains a serious concern and an ongoing outcry within communities across KwaZulu-Natal. While migration is not a crime, undocumented migration creates vulnerabilities that are often exploited by criminal elements.

These include the circulation of illicit goods, drug trafficking, unlicensed firearms, cross-border crime, stock theft, and the unlawful employment of undocumented individuals. These activities undermine the rule of law, distort local economic activity, and place additional strain on already stretched public services.

In response, we have launched the campaign *#EngangeniNgesangoIyafohla*—a decisive, community-centred intervention aimed at enforcing compliance and restoring order.
Through this campaign, multidisciplinary teams have conducted operations in businesses—both large and small—while also engaging directly with communities. Hundreds of undocumented foreign nationals have been apprehended, and action has been taken against employers found to be in violation of labour and immigration laws. I am calling upon our police to arrest all employers who are employing illegal foreign nationals in our province.

Some of our citizens give accommodation or rent shops to the undocumented foreign nationals and I believe we need to test the laws of our country on whether our police cannot also arrest them. If citizens can stop accommodating or renting shops to undocumented foreign nationals they will leave our province.

Let me be clear: this campaign is not driven by hostility, but by our constitutional responsibility to uphold the law, safeguard community safety, and protect local economic development.

Our engagements have further revealed that the challenge is compounded by weaknesses in border management and porous entry points. It is therefore imperative that enforcement within communities is matched by strengthened border security. To this end, we are working closely with the Border Management Authority to enhance coordination, intelligence sharing, and operational visibility at key border gates—beginning with uMhlabuyalingana.

In advancing this partnership, the Province will support the Border Management Authority with additional technological capacity, including the deployment of a second drone to monitor illegal activities along vulnerable border corridors, particularly between KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho. The use of technology is no longer optional; it is essential in combating sophisticated cross-border criminal networks. Through strengthened border management, smart enforcement, and community partnership, we are building a safer, lawful, and economically resilient KwaZulu-Natal.

The Gender-Based Violence and Femicide is not, and must never become, an ideological matter. It cannot be reduced to party positions, political rhetoric, or momentary campaigns. This is a human crisis - one that cuts across geography, class, culture, and politics—and it demands from all of us a response rooted in our shared responsibility to protect the vulnerable and uphold the dignity of every person.

As the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, we wholeheartedly welcome and support the characterisation by His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa in defining GBVF as a national crisis.

This framing is not merely symbolic; it is a necessary acknowledgment that the scale and brutality of this violence require extraordinary mobilisation, extraordinary coordination, and extraordinary moral leadership across all spheres of government. When the President calls this a national crisis, he affirms what communities have long known—that this is an emergency that must command the full attention of the state and entire society.

In this spirit, I call upon all political parties represented in this Legislature- and beyond - to rise above partisan considerations and treat GBVF as a unifying cause. The fight to end violence against women and children should become part of our collective ethos, an essential pillar of our political culture, and a reflection of the values we claim to uphold. On this matter, we must stand together, speak with one voice, and act with the conviction that our unity can save lives.

My mentor the late Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, uMntwana wakwaPhindangene, called on men to protect women. Inkosi Mangosuthu Buthelezi also said women are special referring to them as diligent creatures. We therefore have no choice but to protect our wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters and daughters.

In strengthening our provincial posture, we have launched a dedicated KwaZulu-Natal campaign under the banner *#SilwaneChilo: KwaZulu-Natal Fighting the Shame of GBVF*.

This is not merely a slogan—it is a yearlong mobilisation effort aimed at rallying society, empowering communities, and most importantly, isolating and exposing perpetrators who continue to terrorise our women and children.

#SilwaneChilo signals a bold shift in our public consciousness: from silent tolerance to active resistance, from victim-blaming to perpetrator accountability, from episodic campaigns to sustained societal action. Through this campaign, KwaZulu-Natal commits itself to changing attitudes, strengthening social solidarity, and building a culture where violence is rejected, reported, confronted, and ultimately eradicated.

The campaign will highlight an area that demands far greater attention and urgency: the intersection of Gender-Based Violence and disability. Beginning with our 2025 campaign and continuing into the coming years, this province will place a heightened focus on addressing the disproportionate vulnerability faced by women and girls with disabilities.

There is broad consensus- supported by local and international evidence—that women and girls living with disabilities are at significantly higher risk of violence. Their heightened vulnerability stems from multiple factors, including dependency on caregivers, social isolation, communication barriers, and limited access to reporting or protective services. The forms of abuse they experience are diverse and often more severe: physical assault, sexual exploitation, psychological manipulation, financial control, and neglect.

To contribute meaningfully to the solution, the Office of the Premier-working collaboratively with departments, municipalities and civil society—will champion policies and programmes that are intentionally inclusive of women with disabilities. This includes ensuring that all support services, from reporting mechanisms to justice processes and healthcare facilities, are fully accessible. We are strengthening coordination between disability services, health, justice, education, and social development so that our interventions are comprehensive, seamless, and responsive to the lived realities of survivors.

Furthermore, in partnership with research institutions and organisations representing persons with disabilities, the Office of the Premier together with the Department of Social Development will invest in dedicated research and data collection. This work will help government better understand the specific risks, barriers and needs faced by women and girls with disabilities. It will also ensure that our future interventions are evidence-based, informed by lived experience, and capable of driving systemic transformation.

Our intention is clear: to build a province where no woman is left behind, and where disability is never a reason for vulnerability, but a catalyst for stronger, more inclusive governance.

Honourable Members, the second pillar of our *#SilwaneChilo: KwaZulu-Natal Fighting the Shame of GBVF* campaign will focus on a province-wide, year-long citizen education activation. Throughout the year, we will undertake extensive public education initiatives—using mass and native marketing, social media platforms, community-based engagements and sustained dialogues—to shape attitudes, challenge harmful norms, and deepen public understanding of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

What distinguishes this approach is our deliberate inclusion of children as active participants in GBVF prevention. International experience, from UNICEF programmes to studies by the World Health Organisation, consistently shows that early education is one of the most powerful tools for breaking cycles of violence. When children are taught, from an early age, about respect, consent, empathy, equality and non-violence, societies build resilient generations less likely to perpetrate or tolerate abuse.

Madam Speaker*, #SilwaneChilo* is more than a campaign-it is a cultural shift. It is an investment in our present, and a safeguard for our future. KwaZulu-Natal is ready to lead this transformation with courage, conviction and the full participation of its people, from our youngest learners to our most senior leaders.

The third pillar of our *#SilwaneChilo:KwaZulu-Natal Fighting the Shame of GBVF* campaign harnesses the transformative power of sports, arts, and culture in our fight against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

Arts and culture provide equally powerful platforms for change. Theatre productions, music, poetry, visual arts, and storytelling have a unique capacity to challenge societal norms, provoke reflection, and ignite conversations that might otherwise remain unspoken.

Through collaborations with artists, cultural leaders, and youth groups, we will ensure that the messages of no violence against women and children permeate our daily lives—on stages, in public spaces, and across digital platforms.

Madam Speaker, the fourth pillar of our campaign recognises the critical role that the taxi industry, religious institutions, and traditional leadership structures play in shaping behaviour, reinforcing values, and mobilising communities against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

The taxi industry, as the lifeblood of mobility for millions of our people, is more than a transport network—it is a space where every day social norms are formed and reinforced. Through partnerships with taxi associations and drivers, we will integrate GBVF awareness messaging into this highly visible, daily arena. In partnership with taxi associations, drivers and conductors will be trained as ambassadors for the campaign, creating opportunities to engage passengers in discussions that challenge attitudes, confront abuse, and foster safe spaces for women and children on our roads.

Religious institutions have long served as moral compasses in our communities. By working closely with churches, mosques, temples, and other faith-based structures, we aim to embed GBVF awareness into sermons, study groups, youth programmes, and community outreach. Religious leaders carry moral authority, and their endorsement of messages condemning violence amplifies our campaign and reinforces the ethical imperative to protect women and children.

Similarly, traditional leaders and institutions remain central to social cohesion in KwaZulu-Natal. Amakhosi, iZinduna, and community elders possess deep influence in shaping norms and resolving conflicts. Engaging traditional structures ensures that GBVF messaging is locally relevant, culturally sensitive, and reaches communities where formal channels of communication may be limited. Traditional leaders and institutions will be equipped to promote zero tolerance for violence, encourage reporting, and actively support survivors within their jurisdictions.

Madam Speaker, by leveraging the reach and influence of the taxi industry, religious, and traditional institutions, this pillar strengthens *#SilwaneChilo* by taking our campaign directly into the daily lives of citizens. It ensures that the call to end GBVF is heard everywhere—on our roads, in our places of worship, and within the heart of our communities.

Together with the other pillars, this approach deepens societal ownership of the fight against violence, reinforces collective accountability, and underscores that ending GBVF is a shared responsibility across every sphere of KwaZulu-Natal life.

Madam Speaker, lastly, the *#SilwaneChilo: KwaZulu-Natal Fighting the Shame of GBVF* campaign recognises that leadership is critical in shaping societal norms and driving sustained change.

For this reason, the final pillar of our campaign will focus on *leaders of society* - policy makers, councillors, traditional authorities, political formations, and members of the media—inviting them to partner actively with the provincial government in confronting Gender-Based Violence and Femicide.

We will begin with members of this Legislature, who bear both moral and constitutional responsibility to champion laws, oversight, and programmes that protect women and children. Beyond the House, councillors and political formations at local government level are critical in translating policy into action, ensuring that interventions reach the most vulnerable communities, and holding perpetrators accountable.

The media, as the fourth estate, holds the power to shape narratives, influence public opinion, and amplify the voices of survivors. By partnering with media houses, journalists, and digital platforms, the campaign will ensure that accurate, responsible, and consistent messaging reaches every corner of our province, challenging harmful stereotypes and promoting a culture of zero tolerance for violence.

Madam Speaker, #SilwaneChilo is now a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, year-long campaign. From children to community leaders, from the taxi industry to traditional authorities, from sport and arts to policymakers and media-the fight against GBVF in KwaZulu-Natal demands all of us to stand together, speak with one voice, and act decisively. Let us lead by example and ensure that this province becomes a beacon of safety, dignity, and justice for all.

Let today be more than a presentation of a report. Let it be a renewed collective pledge-by government, civil society, traditional leaders, communities, and families-to rebuild the moral fabric of our society.

KwaZulu-Natal can, and must, be the province where women and children live free from fear. Our actions from this day forward must make that vision a reality.

The current period in our history presents a binary — *kubili*: a choice between unity and chaos; between stability and regression; between disciplined governance and destructive opportunism.

The first path is the path of unity. It is the path we chose nineteen months ago when we placed the interests of our people above narrow political considerations. Through the GPU, we have secured political stability in this province. Stability has allowed departments to function without paralysis, enabled long-term planning, and reassured investors that KwaZulu-Natal is governed with maturity and predictability. Confidence, once shaken, is being steadily restored.

That confidence is not abstract. It is reflected in renewed engagements with business leaders, in infrastructure projects gaining momentum, and in partnerships forming across sectors. Investors do not invest where there is uncertainty; they invest where there is policy coherence and political stability.

The GPU has sent a powerful message: KwaZulu-Natal is open for business, governed by collective responsibility, and committed to economic growth that includes women, youth, and emerging entrepreneurs.

The second path is the path of chaos — a return to instability, fragmented governance, and short-term political manoeuvring. We have seen before what instability costs this province: lost jobs, shuttered businesses, shaken communities, and diminished investor trust. Destruction is easy; rebuilding is hard. Disorder may produce headlines, but it does not produce employment. Noise does not build infrastructure. Division does not deliver water, electricity, or housing.

Our people must therefore understand that the choice before us is not merely political; it is economic and social. Unity strengthens institutions. Unity protects livelihoods. Unity creates an environment where service delivery can improve and where government can focus on the real issues facing our communities — poverty, inequality, unemployment, and infrastructure backlogs. Chaos, by contrast, diverts energy away from development and towards crisis management.

GOVERNMENT OF PROVINCIAL UNITY

The people have entrusted us with a rare opportunity to redefine governance in KwaZulu-Natal. They have asked us to demonstrate that cooperation across political lines is not a weakness, but a strength—one that can unlock progress and restore confidence in public institutions.

We, therefore, entered the current term with humility, aware of the weight of the mandate before us, and with determination to honour it fully. The Government of Provincial Unity will be measured not by its intentions, but by its outcomes—by jobs created, services delivered, and communities made safer and more prosperous.

Madam Speaker,

From the very outset, this government, made a conscious decision to be honest with the people of KwaZulu-Natal. We did not seek to obscure the reality we inherited, nor did we attempt to soften the truth for political comfort. We chose candour, because only honesty can form the foundation of genuine renewal.

We were clear about the depth and complexity of the challenges before us.

These included severe fiscal constraints, weakened and at times fractured social cohesion, struggling municipalities, persistent shortcomings in service delivery, and a growing distrust between the electorate and government. These realities demanded more than rhetoric; they demanded resolve.

Faced with this inheritance, we were presented with a clear choice. We could have spent our time blaming previous administrations, assigning fault, and revisiting old battles. Such an approach may have offered short-term political comfort, but it would not have delivered progress to our people.

CHARACTER OF GOVERNMENT OF PROVINCIAL UNITY

Instead, we chose the more difficult, however, more responsible path: collective accountability. We accepted that the people did not elect us to explain problems, but to solve them. We, therefore, assumed full responsibility for confronting these challenges, regardless of their origin.

This choice required a fundamental shift in how we govern. We committed ourselves to building an agile government—one that is responsive, adaptable, and fit for purpose in a rapidly changing environment.

In forming such a government, we were guided by the understanding that the mandate given to us by the people extends beyond the confines of a single five-year term. Our task is not only to stabilise KwaZulu-Natal today, but to lay a firm foundation for generations to come.

Our responsibility, therefore, is twofold. First, to rebuild within the five years entrusted to us—restoring functionality to institutions, improving service delivery, and rebuilding trust. Second, to plan decisively and thoughtfully for the KwaZulu-Natal of the future.

Planning for the future means investing in strong institutions, sustainable public finances, cohesive communities, and capable local government. It means ensuring that our policies are not reactive, but strategic; not short-term, but enduring.

Honesty has guided our approach because we believe that the people of this province are not afraid of the truth. What they demand is sincerity, leadership, and evidence of progress. By being open about our challenges, we have invited our citizens to walk this journey of renewal with us.

In choosing collective responsibility and agile governance, this administration has set its course. We will be judged not by where we started, but by how faithfully and effectively we responded. With humility, discipline, and unity of purpose, we commit ourselves to building a stronger, more resilient KwaZulu-Natal for today and for the future.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank His Majesty the King for continuous guidance.

To the Royal Family and aMakhosi aseNdlunkulu we appreciate the unwavering support you offer to our work.

Madam Speaker and Deputy Speaker, thank you for leading this august House with courage.

I also thank the Members of the Executive Council for hitting the ground running and thank the Honourable Members for affording me an opportunity to account on behalf of the 7th Administration.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank all the government employees for their commitment to the work of our nation.

I thank the people of KwaZulu-Natal for walking the journey with us.

To my wife and my family, thank you so much for being my source of strength.

I thank you.

SOPA

KZN Provincial Government @kzngov kzngov

Private Bag X9037, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Moses Mabhida Building, 300 Langalibalele Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3200
Tel: +27 (0) 33 341 3470 / **Fax:** +27 (0) 33 345 8490
Website: www.kznpremier.gov.za

KWAZULU-NATAL
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

2030 NDP

Inspiring New Hope

#KZNSOPA2026
#KZNInspiringNewHope

KZN Provincial Communications