

UMEDA NEWSLETTER



WELCOME TO OUR QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency is a state-owned entity for the uMgungundlovu District Municipality and it was established as a result of the mandate of the decision taken at a Kwazulu-Natal Provincial Cabinet Lekgotla in September 2012.

Mandate

Our mandate is to implement and promote the economic development policies of uMgungundlovu District Municipality in the areas of economic production, investment and trade. This includes fast-tracking the implementation of strategic and catalytic local economic development projects within the District Municipality.

Vision

To be a dynamic Agency which acts as a catalyst for inclusive economic growth and development thereby making uMgungundlovu District the investment destination of choice

Mission

To identify, facilitate and implement strategic projects which transform the District both economically and spatially. To become a self-sufficient and sustainable entities.

Values

- Transparency
- Integrity
- Innovation
- Inclusivity
- Consultative

COMING UP...



Strengthening Global Investment Ties:
PAGE 19



Howick Falls Phase 2: PAGE 23



New Opportunities for Richmond:
PAGE 28

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uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency



UMEDA Official



uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency



uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency



uMgungundlovu District Mayor

Honourable Cllr Mzi Zuma

As we conclude the 2025/2026 financial year, I reflect with gratitude on the collective efforts that continue to shape the future of the uMgungundlovu District. This has been a year of resilience, collaboration and bold decision-making as we worked together to create an environment that supports economic growth, investment and improved opportunities for our communities.

Economic development remains one of the key priorities of the District Municipality. Our commitment has been to create an enabling environment where municipalities, government departments, traditional leaders, investors and communities work together to unlock the full potential of our district. Through these partnerships, we have strengthened our ability to respond to local challenges while creating pathways for sustainable development.

I am particularly encouraged by the growing confidence shown by both local and international investors in the uMgungundlovu District. This confidence reflects the work being undertaken to position our district as a competitive destination for investment, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure development. These efforts are laying the foundation for future economic prosperity and improved livelihoods.

Our vision remains clear: to build an inclusive economy that creates opportunities for every resident, particularly young people, women and emerging entrepreneurs. This requires continued collaboration, innovation and commitment from all sectors of society.

I wish to thank the Board, management and staff of UMEDA, our local municipalities, provincial and national government departments, traditional leadership, business partners and communities for their continued support throughout the year. Together, we are building a stronger, more competitive and prosperous uMgungundlovu District.



Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Mr. Michael Newton

The completion of another financial year presents an opportunity to reflect not only on our achievements, but also on the partnerships that have enabled us to fulfil our development mandate. At UMEDA, we firmly believe that sustainable economic development is achieved through collaboration, innovation and shared responsibility.

During the past year, the Agency has continued to strengthen relationships with municipalities, government institutions, the private sector, development finance Institutions, academia and community organisations. These partnerships have enabled us to unlock opportunities that extend beyond individual projects and contribute to the long-term economic competitiveness of our district.

We have also continued to position UMEDA as a catalyst for investment facilitation, enterprise development and strategic economic planning. Whether engaging international investors, supporting local entrepreneurs or identifying catalytic projects, our objective remains the same to create an environment where businesses can grow and communities can prosper.

As an organisation, we recognise that economic development is constantly evolving. This requires us to remain responsive, forward-thinking and committed to delivering practical solutions that address the needs of our stakeholders while preparing the district for future opportunities.



Chief Finance Officer (CFO)

Mr. Mpumelelo Hadebe

Good governance and sound financial management remain fundamental to the success of any development institution. As we conclude the 2025/2026 financial year, I am pleased that UMEDA has continued to uphold the principles of accountability, transparency and responsible financial stewardship in delivering on its mandate.

Every development initiative undertaken by the Agency is supported by careful planning, effective financial management and a commitment to ensuring that public resources deliver measurable value. Our focus throughout the year has been to strengthen internal controls, improve operational efficiency and ensure that financial resources are directed towards programmes that create sustainable economic impact.

Strong financial governance not only enhances organisational credibility but also strengthens the confidence of investors, funding partners and stakeholders who choose to work alongside UMEDA. Maintaining this confidence remains one of our highest priorities as we continue to expand our development initiatives.

As we begin a new financial year, we remain committed to supporting sustainable development through prudent financial management, sound governance and responsible decision-making that will continue to benefit the people of the uMgungundlovu District.



General Manager: Trade and Investment

Mr. Sandile Gabela

Economic growth depends on creating opportunities where businesses can invest, expand and compete successfully. Throughout the 2025/2026 financial year, our focus has remained on strengthening the district's investment ecosystem while supporting enterprises to access markets, partnerships and new opportunities.

The district possesses enormous potential across agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, logistics and the creative economy. Our role has been to connect these opportunities with investors, support local enterprises to become investment-ready, and promote uMgungundlovu as a preferred destination for business development.

An equally important priority has been strengthening relationships with the private sector. Sustainable economic development requires active participation from business leaders, entrepreneurs and investors working alongside government to create employment and stimulate inclusive growth.

As we move into the next financial year, we will continue pursuing innovative approaches to investment promotion, export development, enterprise support and value-chain development. By strengthening these areas, we aim to improve competitiveness while ensuring that economic opportunities reach communities across the district.

I would like to thank our municipalities, business community, development partners and fellow colleagues whose continued collaboration has made this progress possible. Together, we are building an economy that is resilient, competitive and future-focused.



General Manager: Projects Development

Mr. James Martin

Development is measured not only by plans and strategies, but by projects that create lasting value for communities. During the 2025/2026 financial year, our Project Development portfolio continued to focus on identifying, planning and advancing catalytic initiatives that contribute to long-term economic transformation across the district.

Every successful project begins with collaboration, technical planning and a shared vision for sustainable development. Our work has centred on creating investment-ready opportunities that support tourism infrastructure, commercial development, renewable energy, property revitalisation and community-based economic initiatives.

Beyond physical infrastructure, our objective has been to develop projects that unlock future opportunities for investment, enterprise development and employment. We remain committed to ensuring that every initiative is aligned with municipal priorities while delivering tangible benefits to local communities.

As we enter the new financial year, we will continue strengthening partnerships with municipalities, consultants, investors and development agencies to accelerate implementation and expand the district's portfolio of catalytic projects.

I wish to thank our project teams, stakeholders and partners for their dedication throughout the year. Your expertise and commitment continue to transform ideas into projects that will shape the future of the uMgungundlovu District for generations to come.

Strengthening Township and Rural Economies Through Strategic Retail Partnerships



A strategic engagement was convened between the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency leadership and the SPAR Group, focusing on innovative approaches to strengthen township and rural economies through inclusive retail partnerships. The meeting brought together key development stakeholders, including UMEDA's General Manager for Trade and Investment, Mr Sandile Gabela, and the Social Compact Subcommittee Chairperson for Corporate Social Investment, Township and Rural Economy, Mr Themba Ndhlovu.

The engagement served as a platform to explore collaborative opportunities aimed at establishing a joint programme that will directly benefit spaza shop owners across the district. Central to the discussions was the concept of bulk buying solutions, designed to improve access to affordable goods, reduce operational costs, and enhance the competitiveness of small informal and emerging retail businesses.

Participants recognised the critical role that township and rural retail enterprises play in sustaining local economies, creating employment opportunities, and ensuring the circulation of economic value within communities. Strengthening these enterprises through structured support mechanisms was identified as a key priority in advancing inclusive economic development.

A major focus of the discussions was the importance of building partnerships between large retail groups and small, independent traders. The SPAR Group's participation highlighted the potential for established retail networks to contribute meaningfully to the growth and sustainability of township-based businesses through supply chain integration, pricing support, and logistical efficiency.

Mr Sandile Gabela emphasised that such partnerships are essential in unlocking scalable economic opportunities for spaza shop owners, many of whom

face challenges related to procurement costs, access to suppliers, and market competitiveness. He noted that structured collaboration with major retailers can significantly improve business sustainability and long-term growth prospects for small enterprises.

Mr Themba Ndhlovu further highlighted the role of social compact initiatives in bridging the gap between corporate sector resources and community-based economic activity. He stressed that township and rural economies require innovative interventions that are both practical and scalable in order to achieve meaningful economic transformation.

The proposed programme seeks to create a structured framework through which spaza shop owners can benefit from bulk purchasing arrangements, training support, and improved access to formal retail supply chains. This approach is expected to enhance business efficiency, reduce input costs, and ultimately improve profitability for small traders.

The engagement also underscored the broader importance of inclusive economic growth strategies that integrate formal retail sectors with informal and emerging enterprises. By fostering collaboration between large retailers and small businesses, the initiative aims to create a more resilient and interconnected local economy.

Stakeholders expressed strong commitment to advancing the initiative through further technical engagements and implementation planning sessions. These future discussions will focus on operational models, partnership structures, and mechanisms for rollout across targeted communities within the district.



The Renewable Energy Programme feedback session held at the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) offices on the 14th of April 2026 marked a significant step forward in the district's efforts to address energy challenges and accelerate the transition towards sustainable power solutions. The session was attended by key stakeholders, including representatives from InovaSure, led by Max Lourens and his team, as well as senior officials from UMEDA.

The engagement received strong endorsement from the uMgungundlovu District Municipality Mayor, Honourable Cllr Mzi Zuma, who welcomed the progress being made through collaborative energy initiatives. The session provided a platform to reflect on implementation plans, technical readiness, and the role of independent power producers in strengthening energy resilience across local municipalities.

A key highlight of the discussion was the agreement by Mpofana Local Municipality to be supplied by an independent power producer. This development represents a major milestone in the municipality's energy strategy and is expected to be implemented in the coming months. The initiative forms part of broader efforts to diversify energy sources, reduce dependency on the national grid, and improve service delivery to communities.

Mayor Zuma emphasised the importance of this development, noting that the establishment of the Energy War Room was a direct response to the ongoing energy crisis affecting municipalities across the country. He highlighted that coordinated planning, innovative partnerships, and private sector participation are essential in addressing energy constraints and ensuring long-term sustainability.

He further noted that Mpofana's decision to proceed with an independent power supply model will serve as a benchmark for other municipalities within the province. This pioneering approach is expected to provide a practical example of how local governments can work with private sector partners to implement alternative energy solutions effectively.

The Renewable Energy Programme continues to play a critical role in facilitating dialogue between municipalities, investors, and technical experts. Through structured engagements such as this feedback session, stakeholders are able to align on implementation strategies, regulatory requirements, and investment frameworks necessary to support successful project rollout.

InovaSure, represented by Max Lourens and his team, contributed valuable insights into the technical and operational aspects of independent power production. Their participation reinforced the importance of public-private partnerships in driving energy innovation and ensuring that municipalities are equipped with viable, sustainable solutions.

UMEDA senior officials also played a key role in facilitating discussions and ensuring alignment with broader economic development objectives. The Agency continues to position itself as a coordinating platform for investment facilitation, infrastructure development, and strategic partnerships aimed at unlocking economic growth within the district.

The session reaffirmed the shared commitment of all stakeholders to addressing energy challenges through practical and implementable solutions. It also highlighted the importance of collaboration in building a more resilient and sustainable energy future for the region.

As implementation progresses, the Renewable Energy Programme is expected to contribute significantly to improved energy security, reduced operational disruptions, and enhanced economic activity within participating municipalities. The success of Mpofana's initiative is anticipated to pave the way for similar projects across the province.

Celebrating 25 Years of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Excellence at Mpophomeni



The 25th Anniversary of the Zulu Mpophomeni Tourism Experience, held on 21 April 2026, marked a significant milestone in the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of community-based tourism within the uMgungundlovu District. The celebration brought together community members, tourism stakeholders, and development partners to reflect on a remarkable journey spanning over two decades of cultural preservation, storytelling, and local economic empowerment.

The event showcased the richness of Zulu traditions, highlighting authentic cultural performances, heritage exhibitions, and community narratives that have been carefully preserved and shared through the Mpophomeni Tourism Experience. These activities demonstrated the power of cultural tourism as a tool for education, identity preservation, and economic upliftment within local communities.

Over the past 25 years, the initiative has played a pivotal role in positioning Mpophomeni as a key cultural tourism destination, attracting both local and international visitors interested in experiencing authentic Zulu heritage. The programme has also contributed significantly to community development by creating employment opportunities, supporting small tourism enterprises, and promoting local entrepreneurship within the tourism value chain.

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency was honoured to participate in this milestone celebration, recognising the importance of sustained partnerships in advancing tourism-led economic development. The Agency reaffirmed its commitment to supporting initiatives that strengthen tourism growth, empower local communities, and create meaningful economic opportunities across the district.

Events such as the Mpophomeni Tourism Experience play a critical role in showcasing the district's cultural richness while contributing to its broader economic development objectives. By integrating heritage preservation with tourism development, such initiatives help to position uMgungundlovu as a vibrant and competitive tourism destination.

The celebration also highlighted the importance of collaboration between community-based tourism organisations, government institutions, and development agencies. These partnerships ensure that tourism initiatives are sustainable, inclusive, and capable of delivering long-term benefits to local communities.

As the Mpophomeni Tourism Experience celebrates 25 years of excellence, it stands as a testament to the power of community-driven development and cultural pride. Its success reflects the dedication of local custodians of heritage who have worked tirelessly to preserve and share their stories with the world.

Looking ahead, continued support and collaboration will be essential in expanding the impact of such initiatives and ensuring that they continue to contribute to economic growth, job creation, and cultural preservation within the district.

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency extends its heartfelt congratulations to the Zulu Mpophomeni Tourism Experience on this remarkable achievement and looks forward to many more years of growth, innovation, and cultural celebration.

Empowering Local Entrepreneurs Through the Richmond LED Business Workshop



The LED Business Workshop held at the Richmond Sports Complex on the 22nd of April 2026 provided a valuable platform aimed at equipping business owners and young entrepreneurs with the necessary skills, knowledge, and support systems required to start, grow, and sustain successful businesses. The engagement formed part of ongoing efforts to strengthen local economic development and promote entrepreneurship within the Richmond area.

The workshop brought together a diverse range of stakeholders committed to advancing small business growth and youth empowerment. Participants engaged in informative sessions focused on practical tools and services available to support enterprise development, with an emphasis on improving access to resources, compliance requirements, and funding opportunities.

A key highlight of the programme was the presentation by Mr Sandile Gabela from the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA), who outlined the Agency's One-Stop Shop Services designed to support aspiring and established entrepreneurs. These services include assistance with Business Registration, Central Supplier Database (CSD) registration, Tax Compliance Status applications, Tourism Grading support, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes, as well as regulatory guidance for Poultry Meat and Egg Inspections.

Mr Gabela further highlighted the progress made through UMEDA's enterprise development initiatives, noting the identification of 16 SMMEs under its social compact programmes. These enterprises represent successful examples of local business development supported through structured intervention, mentorship,

and stakeholder collaboration aimed at strengthening economic participation at grassroots level.

The workshop also featured contributions from several key development partners and government agencies, including the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDA), the KwaZulu-Natal Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (KZN EDTEA), the Aids Foundation, the Department of Agriculture, and local fire department representatives. Each stakeholder provided valuable insights into available support programmes, compliance requirements, funding opportunities, and sector-specific development initiatives.

Collectively, these contributions reinforced the importance of coordinated support systems in building a thriving small business ecosystem. The collaborative approach highlighted during the workshop demonstrated how different institutions can work together to reduce barriers to entry for entrepreneurs and improve the sustainability of emerging businesses.

The engagement served not only as a capacity-building platform but also as an inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs to take the next step in their business journeys. By exposing participants to practical tools, funding pathways, and compliance frameworks, the workshop contributed to strengthening entrepreneurial confidence and readiness.

Importantly, the session reaffirmed the role of partnerships in driving inclusive economic growth. Through continued collaboration between government agencies, development institutions, and local stakeholders, opportunities can be created to support innovation, job creation, and sustainable enterprise development.

Advancing Structured Development Through Traditional Authority and Municipal Collaboration in Mpumzu



A significant engagement was held with Inkosi Zondi of the Mpumzu Traditional Authority, marking an important step towards strengthening collaboration between traditional leadership structures and municipal planning frameworks. The meeting focused on exploring structured development opportunities within the greater Msunduzi and uMngeni areas, with the aim of unlocking land potential in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

Inkosi Zondi, whose jurisdiction extends from the vicinity of the new prison through to Hilton and surrounding areas, is widely recognised as a progressive traditional leader committed to promoting development in an organised and orderly way. His approach reflects a strong understanding of the importance of aligning traditional authority land use with formal municipal planning systems to ensure long-term sustainability and growth.

During the engagement, the Inkosi requested support in identifying suitable portions of land within his jurisdiction that can be earmarked for development. These proposed developments include housing estates, shopping centres, schools, hospitals, and other essential infrastructure that can significantly improve service delivery and economic activity within the region.

He further emphasised the importance of working closely with local municipalities, including Msunduzi and uMngeni, to ensure that all development initiatives are aligned with approved Spatial Development Frameworks and town planning schemes. This integrated approach is seen as critical in preventing uncoordinated development while ensuring that land use decisions support broader regional growth objectives.

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency has acknowledged and commended the progressive leadership demonstrated by Inkosi Zondi. His proactive engagement reflects a forward-thinking approach to development that recognises the importance of collaboration between traditional authorities, government institutions, and development agencies.

The Agency further emphasised that such partnerships are essential in unlocking the full economic potential of traditional authority areas, particularly in regions experiencing rapid urban expansion and infrastructure demand. By working together, stakeholders can ensure that development is both inclusive and strategically aligned with long-term planning priorities.

As part of the agreed next steps, a series of site visits will be conducted to all identified land parcels highlighted by the Inkosi. These assessments will provide a clearer understanding of the development potential, infrastructure requirements, and environmental considerations associated with each site.

Following the site inspections, formal engagements will be held with the town planning units of Msunduzi and uMngeni Municipalities. These discussions will focus on evaluating planning frameworks, assessing feasibility, and identifying mechanisms to unlock development opportunities in a structured and compliant manner.

This collaborative process represents an important milestone in strengthening the integration of traditional authority land governance with municipal development planning. It also reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that land is utilised effectively to support economic growth, infrastructure development, and improved quality of life for communities.

Strengthening Local Economic Development Through Strategic Municipal Collaboration in uMshwathi



The uMshwathi Municipality convened its Strategic Planning Session bringing together key stakeholders to reflect on progress, align priorities, and strengthen collaborative efforts aimed at accelerating local economic development. The session provided an important platform for reviewing ongoing initiatives and reinforcing partnerships that support sustainable growth within the municipality.

A key highlight of the session was the presentation delivered by the General Manager for Trade and Investment at the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency, Mr Sandile Gabela. His presentation showcased the impactful role played by the Agency in supporting economic development initiatives within uMshwathi Municipality and the broader district.

Mr Gabela outlined several strategic interventions that have been implemented through collaborative efforts between UMEDA, the municipality, and various development partners. These initiatives are aimed at unlocking investment opportunities, strengthening local enterprises, and enhancing the municipality's economic competitiveness.

Among the key projects highlighted was UMEDA's support for the Estate Property Development Initiative, which seeks to unlock the value of underutilised land and properties for productive economic use. This initiative is expected to stimulate investment in property development while creating opportunities for local businesses and job creation within the municipality.

Another significant intervention discussed was UMEDA's facilitation role in attracting investment for a Chinese timber processing factory. This project represents a major step toward strengthening the local manufacturing and agro-processing value chain, while also creating employment opportunities and enhancing export potential within the region.

The presentation also highlighted UMEDA's assistance in the establishment of the uMshwathi Fresh Produce Market. This initiative is designed to provide local farmers and producers with improved access to formal markets, thereby strengthening agricultural value chains, supporting food security, and enabling small-scale farmers to expand their economic participation.

In addition, Mr Gabela outlined UMEDA's role in coordinating the disbursement of funding for the uMshwathi Community Tourism Organisation (CTO). This support aims to strengthen local tourism development efforts by empowering community-based tourism initiatives, enhancing destination marketing, and promoting cultural and heritage tourism within the municipality.

The Strategic Planning Session underscored the importance of coordinated planning and strong institutional partnerships in driving sustainable development at local government level. Stakeholders acknowledged that initiatives such as these are critical in addressing unemployment, stimulating investment, and improving service delivery outcomes for communities.

The collaboration between uMshwathi Municipality and UMEDA reflects a shared commitment to building a resilient and inclusive local economy. By leveraging strategic partnerships and targeted interventions, both institutions continue to work towards unlocking economic opportunities that benefit local communities and strengthen the municipality's development trajectory.

Strengthening International Trade Relations: uMgungundlovu and China Explore New Investment Pathways



In a strategic move to enhance international trade relations and attract foreign direct investment, representatives from the Chinese government recently engaged with stakeholders in the uMgungundlovu District as part of ongoing efforts to pave the way for a high-level delegation of Chinese investors to the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

The engagement was officially welcomed by His Worship the uMgungundlovu District Municipality Mayor, Cllr Mzi Zuma, together with the Chief Executive Officer of the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA), Mr Michael Newton on the 15th of May 2026. The meeting marked an important milestone in strengthening diplomatic and economic ties between the district and China, particularly in relation to trade, investment, and industrial cooperation.

During the discussions, both parties expressed a strong commitment to deepening collaboration and unlocking new opportunities in import and export markets. With uMgungundlovu's population estimated at approximately 1.2 million and Guangdong Province in China exceeding 11 million residents, stakeholders identified significant potential for expanding trade flows, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, agro-processing, and logistics.

The engagement highlighted the strategic importance of aligning local production capacity with international demand, enabling local enterprises to access larger and more competitive markets. This approach is expected to strengthen export potential within the district while also attracting investment into key growth sectors.

As part of the outcomes of the meeting, it was agreed that a structured exchange programme will be implemented. A delegation from uMgungundlovu, including senior executives and representatives from

the local business community, will undertake a visit to China to further explore export opportunities, establish trade relationships, and engage with potential investors and industry partners.

In return, a Chinese delegation will travel to the Midlands region to assess investment opportunities on the ground and engage directly with local stakeholders on how such investments can be facilitated and supported within the district. This reciprocal arrangement is expected to strengthen mutual understanding and lay the foundation for long-term economic cooperation.

The initiative forms part of the broader BRICS economic cooperation framework, reflecting growing collaboration between emerging markets aimed at promoting inclusive global trade and investment. It also arrives at a strategically significant time, as from 1 June, trade relations between China and South Africa will benefit from a zero-tariff arrangement, further enhancing competitiveness and making bilateral trade more attractive for both regions.

Stakeholders expressed optimism that this development will unlock new avenues for economic growth, job creation, and industrial expansion within the uMgungundlovu District. The alignment of international partnerships with local development priorities is expected to position the region as a key player in global value chains.

Positioning Msunduzi as a Leading Investment Destination Through Tourism, Events and Strategic Partnerships



The Pietermaritzburg Urban Development Indaba placed strong emphasis on repositioning Msunduzi as a competitive and attractive investment destination, with a particular focus on tourism, events, and strategic partnerships. This engagement forms part of ongoing preparations towards the upcoming Msunduzi Municipality “City of Choice” Investment Conference, which seeks to strengthen investor confidence and unlock new economic opportunities within the region.

A key highlight of the programme was UMEDA’s participation in THEMATIC AREA 6, titled “Msunduzi as an Investment Hub: Unlocking Tourism, Events and Untapped Opportunities.” The session provided a platform for stakeholders to reflect on the city’s economic potential and explore practical strategies for accelerating investment-led growth.

UMEDA’s General Manager for Trade and Investment, Mr Sandile Gabela, formed part of the panel discussion, which was moderated by SALGA’s Mr Mazwi Madlala. During his contribution, Mr Gabela emphasised the critical role of investment attraction, tourism development, and collaborative partnerships in driving inclusive economic growth across Msunduzi and the broader uMgungundlovu District.

He highlighted tourism as one of the most important economic pillars with the capacity to stimulate local economic activity, create employment opportunities, and position Msunduzi as a vibrant and competitive destination for both domestic and international visitors. He further noted that leveraging tourism assets, events infrastructure, and cultural heritage can significantly contribute to strengthening the city’s investment profile.

The discussions also underscored the importance of strong partnerships between government, private sector stakeholders, and creative industry players in unlocking development opportunities. Collaborative approaches were identified as essential in packaging investment-ready projects, promoting destination marketing, and supporting sustainable economic growth initiatives.

Within this context, UMEDA acknowledged the value of strategic partnerships in advancing its development mandate. One such partnership is with Pambili Media, formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Pambili Media has established itself as a key player in the media and film industry, with involvement in internationally recognised platforms such as Netflix and other major production networks.

The company’s portfolio includes contributions to notable productions such as *Kalushi*, *Battle of Isandlwana*, *Heart of the Hunter*, and *Silverton Siege*, among others. These productions highlight the growing influence of the creative sector in telling African stories while simultaneously contributing to tourism promotion and economic development.

The collaboration between development agencies and creative industry stakeholders such as Pambili Media demonstrates the increasing importance of the film and media sector in positioning regions like Msunduzi as attractive destinations for filming, tourism, and investment. This alignment between storytelling and place branding is expected to play a significant role in strengthening the region’s economic narrative.

Strengthening Youth Empowerment Through Skills Development and Work Integrated Learning



A site visit to Zethembe Learning Academy at the Boston Training Centre marked an important milestone in ongoing youth development efforts driven by the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) in partnership with the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA). The engagement formed part of a broader programme aimed at strengthening practical collaboration between institutions to advance youth empowerment, skills development, and economic inclusion.

The visit brought together key stakeholders committed to addressing youth unemployment through targeted, implementable interventions. Led by Mr Khumbulani Shange, the engagement provided a structured platform for discussions focused on translating policy intentions and developmental discussions into practical outcomes that directly benefit young people.

The session was described as highly productive and forward-looking, with a strong emphasis placed on the urgency of moving beyond dialogue and into implementation. Stakeholders collectively acknowledged that sustainable solutions to youth unemployment require coordinated efforts, institutional partnerships, and practical training opportunities that equip young people with the skills required by the labour market.

A key area of focus during the engagement was the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Programme, which presents a critical pathway for bridging the gap between academic training and workplace readiness. Through this programme, opportunities were identified for NYDA to support students with essential job readiness interventions that enhance their employability and confidence as they transition into the labour market.



These interventions include structured training on interview preparation, job application processes, CV development, and workplace expectations. Such practical support is seen as vital in improving the success rate of young people seeking employment and ensuring that they are adequately prepared to meet industry demands.

The engagement also highlighted the importance of collaboration between training institutions and development agencies in creating a seamless ecosystem for youth development. Zethembe Learning Academy's role as a training provider positions it as a critical partner in delivering skills-based education, while NYDA and UMEDA provide complementary support through programmes that enhance employability and economic participation.

Stakeholders further emphasised the need for sustained partnership models that allow for continuous engagement, monitoring, and support of learners beyond the classroom environment. This includes strengthening linkages with potential employers, facilitating access to internships and learnerships, and ensuring that training programmes are aligned with current and emerging market needs.

The visit reaffirmed a shared commitment to empowering young people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities required to participate meaningfully in the economy. It also underscored the importance of practical collaboration between government agencies, training institutions, and development partners in addressing structural challenges related to unemployment.



A collaborative History and Filming Engagement brought together historians, geographers, researchers, filmmakers, and cultural custodians with deep knowledge of KwaZulu-Natal's rich historical landscape spanning the 1820s to the 1860s. The session formed part of an ongoing initiative to strengthen heritage-based storytelling and position the uMgungundlovu region as a key destination for historical film production and creative industry development.

The primary focus of the engagement was the proposed establishment of a specialist historical forum that will guide and support film production processes rooted in the region's complex and significant past. This forum is envisioned as a voluntary collective of experts, historians, and community knowledge holders committed to preserving, interpreting, and sharing the untold stories of uMgungundlovu and KwaZulu-Natal in a historically accurate and culturally respectful manner.

A diverse group of stakeholders and creatives contributed to the discussion, including representatives from heritage institutions, film production companies, municipal structures, and independent researchers. Their combined input highlighted the importance of collaboration between academic research, lived experience, and creative interpretation in producing authentic and meaningful historical content.

During the engagement, the General Manager, Mr Martin, outlined the strategic vision for establishing a dedicated Film Office in the Midlands. He explained that the initiative aims to position uMgungundlovu as a leading film-making destination by developing a centralised database of film-related service providers, locations, and industry stakeholders. The Film Office is also intended to serve as a "landing pad" for filmmakers seeking to produce content within the district, offering streamlined access to local resources and expertise.

Further discussions emphasised the importance of integrating historical accuracy into film production through structured collaboration with historians and cultural custodians. This approach was seen as essential in ensuring that the region's stories are represented with integrity while also unlocking opportunities for local creatives within the growing film economy.

Pambili Media expressed interest in collaborating with the Film Office, local service providers, and filmmakers to develop productions that highlight the untold stories of the region during the historical period under discussion. This partnership is expected to create new opportunities for skills development, job creation, and the growth of the local creative industry.

The engagement concluded with a shared recognition that storytelling is a powerful tool for cultural preservation and economic development. By combining historical expertise with creative production capacity, the initiative seeks to build a sustainable platform for showcasing uMgungundlovu's rich heritage to both national and international audiences.

The session marked an important step toward establishing a coordinated framework for heritage-based film production, reinforcing the commitment to preserving history while unlocking new economic opportunities through the creative sector.

Agricultural Development Through the Social Compact Agriculture Sub-Committee Engagement



As part of its ongoing commitment to inclusive rural development and youth empowerment, the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) conducted a dedicated engagement under the Social Compact Agriculture Sub-Committee with a local agricultural Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) operating in Vulindlela within the Msunduzi Municipal area. The purpose of the engagement was to assess the organisation's farming activities, identify operational challenges, and explore potential development support interventions.

The NPO is a registered entity actively involved in agricultural development and youth empowerment, having enrolled 149 young participants in its structured programme. The initiative is currently implemented in partnership with the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) through the Social Employment Fund, which has played a significant role in creating temporary work opportunities while promoting youth participation in agricultural production and food security initiatives.

During the engagement, it was noted that the organisation operates five (5) community gardens spread across Ward 40, Ward 02, and Ward 03 under the Msunduzi Local Municipality. These include the Ntokozweni Garden (0.9 hectares), Tractoville Garden (1 hectare), Okhalweni Garden in Ward 40, Khobongwaneni Garden (0.5 hectares) located in Ward 09 under Nxamalala Traditional Authority, and the Nqabeni Garden in Ward 03 also under Nxamalala Traditional Authority.

The largest of these sites, the 12-hectare Nqabeni Garden located in Nqabeni Village, has already benefited from support provided by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (KZN DARD), particularly in the form of fencing and irrigation infrastructure. Despite this progress, the remaining gardens continue to face significant infrastructure and resource constraints that limit their full productive potential.

Key challenges identified during the engagement include a shortage of potato seeds and other essential seedlings required for ongoing land preparation and planting activities. While stipends are currently provided to participating youth, the organisation highlighted that additional agricultural inputs are urgently required to ensure successful production cycles and sustainable output.

Further operational constraints include insufficient funding to support critical inputs such as personal protective equipment (PPE), farming tools, technical agricultural services, and basic safety gear, including protective footwear for participants. These gaps present challenges to both productivity and the safety of young participants engaged in daily farming activities.

In response, UMEDA acknowledged the challenges faced by the organisation and reaffirmed its commitment to exploring targeted interventions aimed at strengthening the programme's sustainability. Focus areas include improved coordination with relevant stakeholders, enhanced market access opportunities, and potential partnerships that can support input supply, technical assistance, and enterprise development.

The engagement further highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts between government, development agencies, and community-based organisations in strengthening rural economies. By addressing input shortages and operational challenges, the programme has the potential to significantly improve food production, enhance youth skills development, and create pathways for long-term agricultural entrepreneurship.

Chinese Delegation Engages uMgungundlovu on Strategic Economic Opportunities



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency, under the leadership of the uMgungundlovu District Municipality Mayor, Cllr Mzi Zuma, on the 22nd of May 2026 hosted a senior delegation of Chinese representatives from the financial and automotive industries in a strategic engagement aimed at strengthening international investment relations and unlocking high-impact economic opportunities within the district.

The high-level meeting focused on exploring investment prospects along the N2/N3 Corridor, a critical logistics and trade route with significant potential for regional economic expansion. Key discussions centred on opportunities within the logistics sector and automotive value chain, both identified as priority areas for driving industrial growth, improving export capacity, and enhancing the district's competitiveness within national and global markets.

During the engagement, both parties expressed a shared commitment to identifying suitable investment sites and exploring innovative business models that can support sustainable industrial development. The discussions also included considerations around import and export facilitation, positioning the uMgungundlovu District as a strategic hub for trade and manufacturing activity within KwaZulu-Natal.

The meeting marked an important step toward deepening economic cooperation, with stakeholders agreeing to proceed to technical-level engagements. These future sessions will focus on detailed investment structuring, incentive frameworks, potential rates rebates, and other enabling mechanisms designed to support investor confidence and project viability.

Preliminary projections indicate that the proposed investments could generate approximately 3 000 employment opportunities across the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands region. This potential job creation underscores the transformative impact that strategic foreign direct investment could have on local economic

development, skills transfer, and long-term industrial growth.

Although negotiations remain in the early stages, both parties demonstrated strong intent and urgency in advancing the discussions. There is a mutual understanding that structured collaboration and adherence to due process will be essential in ensuring that investment opportunities are successfully realised for the benefit of the district and its communities.

Beyond the formal discussions, the delegation was also treated to a showcase of the Midlands' rich tourism offering through a visit to Karkloof Safari Spa. The experience included viewing a range of wildlife such as hippopotamuses, giraffes, crocodiles, and other species, highlighting the region's strong eco-tourism appeal and its ability to complement industrial and commercial investment opportunities.

The visit further reinforced the dual strength of the uMgungundlovu District as both an investment destination and a tourism hub, offering a unique blend of economic potential and natural heritage. This combination positions the region as a competitive and attractive location for diversified investment.

Driving uMgungundlovu Forward Through Automotive Culture and Community Engagement



On the 6th of June 2026 The Phat Events Car Show, hosted at Raisethorpe Secondary School, delivered an unforgettable experience of entertainment, automotive excellence, and vibrant community spirit. The event attracted car enthusiasts, families, local businesses, and visitors from across the region, creating a dynamic platform where lifestyle, culture, and economic activity converged.

The atmosphere throughout the day was electric as participants proudly showcased their vehicles in a series of exciting competitions, including the Show n Shine, Sound Off, and Park Off categories. These displays highlighted not only technical creativity and automotive passion but also the strong sense of pride within the local motoring community.

The event provided more than entertainment; it served as a powerful platform for local economic participation. Small businesses, food vendors, and craft exhibitors were given the opportunity to trade, engage with customers, and expand their market reach. This created a meaningful economic ripple effect, demonstrating how community-driven events can directly contribute to local enterprise development.

Beyond the immediate trading opportunities, the car show reinforced the importance of events as catalysts for tourism and economic stimulation. By attracting attendees from across the district and surrounding areas, the event contributed to increased foot traffic, heightened visibility for local brands, and strengthened demand for locally produced goods and services.

The participation of the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency reflected its continued commitment to supporting initiatives that promote inclusive economic growth, youth engagement, and small business development. Events of this nature align with broader efforts to stimulate township economies, encourage entrepreneurship, and create accessible platforms for emerging enterprises.

In addition to economic benefits, the event fostered a strong sense of community cohesion. Families, youth, and stakeholders came together in a shared space that celebrated creativity, innovation, and lifestyle culture. The positive energy and engagement throughout the day highlighted the role of social events in building stronger, more connected communities.

The Phat Events Car Show also showcased uMgungundlovu as a growing destination for lifestyle and automotive culture, further strengthening its profile as a region that supports diverse economic and recreational activities. Such events contribute to shaping a vibrant regional identity that attracts both visitors and future investment opportunities.

Ultimately, the success of the event demonstrated the powerful intersection between entertainment and economic development. By creating platforms where local businesses can thrive alongside cultural and recreational activities, the district continues to move towards a more inclusive and opportunity-rich economy.

Advancing Tourism and Skills Development Through Msinsi Holdings Partnership at Albert Falls



The ongoing collaboration between the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency and Msinsi Holdings continues to unlock meaningful opportunities for tourism growth and economic development within the district. As part of this partnership, a site visit was conducted on 10 June 2026 to Msinsi Holdings' tourism facilities at Albert Falls, reinforcing the commitment to strengthening strategic assets and enhancing their long-term sustainability.

The visit forms part of the implementation process under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two entities, which aims to support the revitalisation and commercialisation of key tourism outlets managed by Msinsi Holdings. Through this collaboration, focus is placed on improving infrastructure, attracting investment, increasing visitor numbers, and ensuring that tourism assets are fully utilised to generate economic value for surrounding communities.

During the site assessment, stakeholders explored various opportunities to enhance the current tourism offering at Albert Falls. The discussions centred on developing a structured commercialisation strategy that will position the facilities as competitive tourism destinations capable of attracting both domestic and international visitors. This approach is expected to stimulate local economic activity, create employment opportunities, and support small business participation within the tourism value chain.

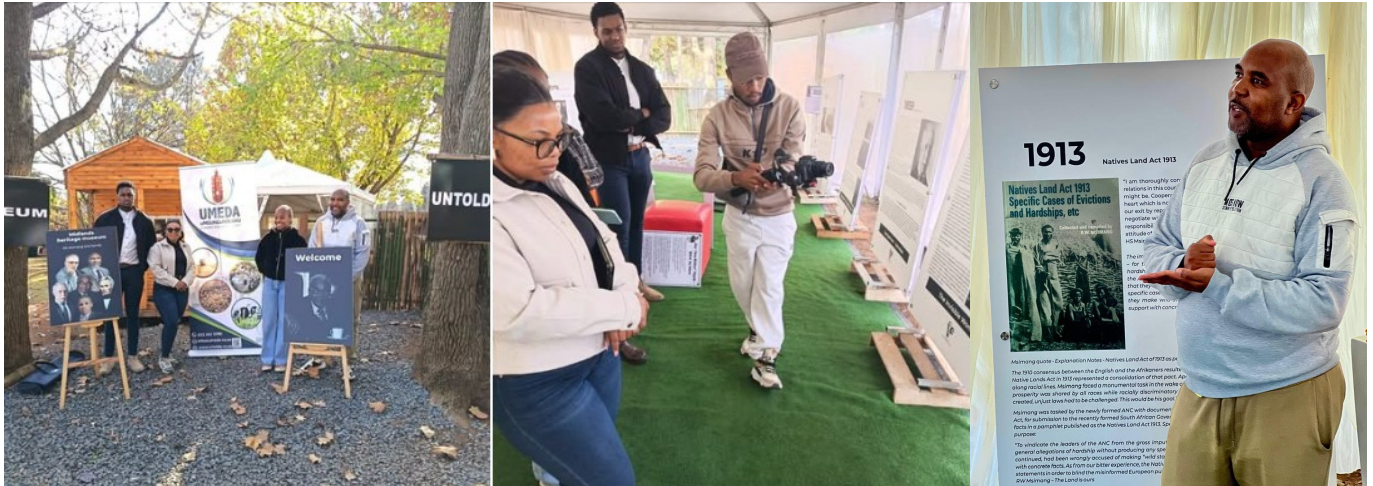
A key highlight of the visit was the identification of a significant opportunity for the development of a world-class Training and Development Facility within the Albert Falls precinct. This proposed facility is envisioned as a centre of excellence dedicated to skills development, vocational training, and innovation. It has the potential to serve as a critical enabler for youth empowerment and workforce development across the district.

The establishment of such a facility would not only complement the tourism operations but also contribute to building a skilled labour force capable of supporting various sectors of the economy. By integrating training with practical exposure to tourism and environmental management, the initiative aims to create sustainable pathways to employment and entrepreneurship.

As part of its mandate, efforts will be made to identify and engage potential investors and strategic partners who can support the development of the Training and Development Facility. These partnerships will be crucial in ensuring that the project is implemented successfully and aligned with broader district development priorities.

The revitalisation of Msinsi Holdings' tourism assets, combined with the proposed skills development centre, represents a holistic approach to economic transformation. It brings together tourism development, infrastructure investment, and human capital development in a way that maximises long-term impact for local communities.

UMEDA Film Office Strengthens Heritage Learning Through HS Msimang Museum Visit



The UMEDA Film Office continued its ongoing historical and educational engagement through a visit to the HS Msimang Museum, building on the momentum of the successful History and Filming Forum hosted on 18 May 2026. The engagement formed part of a broader programme aimed at deepening understanding of South Africa's historical landscape while exploring opportunities for heritage-based storytelling within the film and creative industries.

The purpose of the visit was to further enrich knowledge of key historical events that have shaped the nation, with particular focus on the significance of Isandlwana and the Battle of Blood River (Impi yaseNcome). These landmark events remain central to South Africa's historical narrative and continue to influence cultural memory, identity, and interpretation of the country's past.

Participants had the opportunity to take part in an informative and interactive session led by Mr Leko Msimang, who provided in-depth insights into the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and the historic Battle of Isandlwana. His presentation offered a detailed account of the events, their causes, and their lasting impact on both local and national history, enriching participants' understanding of this important period.

The engagement also served as a valuable platform for experiential learning, allowing participants to engage directly with curated historical exhibits and storytelling spaces within the museum. This hands-on exposure strengthened appreciation for heritage preservation and highlighted the importance of protecting historical sites, oral histories, and cultural artefacts for future generations.

For the Film Office, such engagements are critical in bridging the gap between history and the creative economy. By deepening knowledge of authentic historical events and contexts, the initiative supports the development of accurate, meaningful, and culturally

grounded storytelling that can be translated into film, television, and other media productions.

The visit further reinforced the role of heritage institutions in education and community development. Museums such as HS Msimang serve not only as custodians of history but also as active learning environments where dialogue, reflection, and knowledge-sharing contribute to a stronger sense of identity and cultural pride.

As part of its broader mandate, the Film Office remains committed to fostering partnerships that promote historical awareness, youth development, and creative industry growth. These engagements continue to create opportunities for learning, collaboration, and the development of content that showcases South Africa's rich and diverse heritage.

Appreciation was extended to the HS Msimang Museum and Mr Leko Msimang for their warm hospitality and for sharing their extensive knowledge of South African history. Their contribution plays an important role in ensuring that historical narratives remain accessible, relevant, and preserved for future generations.

Howick Falls Information Centre Project Advances with Key Construction Milestone



On the 11th of June 2026, a joint site visit was conducted to the Howick Falls Phase 2 Information Centre Project by the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency together with Siwa Consulting & Project Managers. The visit formed part of ongoing project oversight and monitoring processes aimed at assessing construction progress and ensuring alignment with development objectives, timelines, and quality standards.

The inspection provided a positive update on the status of the project, with construction having reached an important milestone. The team is currently undertaking the casting of the concrete slab for the new facility, a critical phase that establishes the structural foundation of the Information Centre. This stage represents significant progress toward the realisation of a modern tourism facility that will enhance service delivery and improve visitor engagement at Howick Falls.

Once completed, the Information Centre is expected to play a key role in strengthening the Howick Falls Precinct as a premier tourism destination within the uMgungundlovu District. The facility will provide visitors with essential information services, improved orientation support, and a more structured tourism experience, thereby enhancing the overall appeal of one of the region's most iconic natural attractions.

The project also contributes meaningfully to local economic development objectives by creating employment opportunities during the construction phase and supporting the broader tourism value chain. Increased visitor satisfaction and improved infrastructure are anticipated to stimulate surrounding businesses, including hospitality, craft, and informal trading sectors.

Stakeholders expressed satisfaction with the progress achieved to date, noting the strong coordination between the project implementation team and consulting partners. The successful execution of the current construction phase reflects effective planning,

technical expertise, and a shared commitment to delivering a high-quality public asset.

The revitalisation of the Howick Falls precinct forms part of a broader strategy to enhance tourism infrastructure and unlock economic opportunities linked to heritage and natural sites across the district. The new Information Centre will serve as an important gateway for tourists, offering guidance, historical context, and improved access to site-related services.

As construction continues, stakeholders remain committed to ensuring that the project progresses smoothly toward completion. Ongoing monitoring and collaboration will support timely delivery and ensure that the facility meets its intended purpose of elevating the visitor experience.

Strengthening Collaboration Through Land Disposal and Property Revitalization



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) successfully hosted a strategic Land Disposal and Property Revitalization Committee meeting, bringing together key stakeholders dedicated to unlocking the economic potential of state-owned land and properties across the district. The engagement formed part of ongoing efforts to ensure that public assets are effectively leveraged to drive inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

The meeting focused on identifying practical and actionable strategies to maximise development opportunities associated with underutilised and surplus state-owned properties. Discussions also addressed existing challenges that often hinder effective land disposal and redevelopment processes, with stakeholders collectively exploring solutions to improve efficiency, coordination, and implementation.

A key emphasis of the session was the importance of ensuring that public land and properties are not left idle, but are instead transformed into productive assets that can stimulate local economies. By repurposing and revitalising these properties, the district aims to attract investment, create employment opportunities, and enhance service delivery outcomes for surrounding communities.

The meeting was strengthened by the participation of key government and infrastructure stakeholders, including the Department of Public Works, the Department of Basic Education, the SANRAL, and the COGTA. Their contributions provided valuable insights into intergovernmental collaboration, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure planning processes that are essential for effective land and property management.

Stakeholders collectively acknowledged that successful land disposal and property revitalization requires strong coordination between all spheres of government, as well as strategic partnerships with the private sector and development agencies. The discussions highlighted the need for streamlined processes, improved data sharing, and aligned planning to accelerate development readiness of identified sites.

The committee also explored opportunities for innovative land use models that can support mixed-use developments, small business incubation, and community-driven projects. These approaches are expected to play a critical role in transforming underutilised properties into vibrant economic hubs that contribute to long-term district growth.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to strengthen collaboration and accelerate implementation efforts aimed at unlocking the full value of public assets. Through continued partnerships and coordinated planning, UMEDA and its stakeholders remain committed to driving inclusive economic transformation and ensuring that state-owned properties are effectively utilised for the benefit of communities across the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Takes Part in PMCB OTT Relay, Strengthening Collaboration and Team Cohesion



The PMCB OTT Relay, hosted on 19 June 2026 at Maritzburg College, brought together a wide range of stakeholders from the private sector, public sector, and community-based organisations in a vibrant celebration of teamwork, wellness, and collaboration. The event created a unique environment where professional engagement met recreational activity, allowing participants to connect in a more relaxed and interactive setting.

The relay featured a series of organised team-based activities designed to test endurance, coordination, and problem-solving while encouraging interaction among participants. Along the relay route, teams engaged in fun challenges and mini-games that fostered a spirit of friendly competition, mutual encouragement, and shared achievement. These activities not only promoted physical wellness but also strengthened interpersonal relationships among different organisations.

For the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA), participation in the event was aligned with its broader mandate of fostering collaboration, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive development. The relay provided an opportunity for the team to engage with various partners, including enterprises and development practitioners, while exchanging ideas in an informal but impactful setting.

Beyond external networking, the event served as a valuable internal team-building exercise for UMEDA staff. Team members collaborated across different activities, supporting one another through challenges and celebrating collective successes. This experience reinforced the importance of communication, trust, and coordination within the organization, key elements that directly contribute to effective service delivery and economic development facilitation.

The event also highlighted the role of wellness and active lifestyles in improving workplace productivity and morale. By participating in physical activities together, the team strengthened internal relationships and fostered a sense of unity that extends beyond the office environment. The experience encouraged a culture of collaboration, resilience, and shared purpose among staff members.

Importantly, the PMCB OTT Relay also served as a networking platform where UMEDA engaged with various stakeholders involved in economic development, business support, and community initiatives. These interactions opened opportunities for future collaboration and strengthened existing partnerships that are essential for driving economic growth within the uMgungundlovu District.

The day concluded with a strong sense of achievement and camaraderie among participants. For UMEDA, the relay was more than just a sporting event; it was a strategic engagement opportunity that reinforced the value of partnerships, teamwork, and community interaction in advancing inclusive economic development.

New Hanover Showcases Growing Investment and Agricultural Potential



Economic development continues to gain momentum across the uMgungundlovu District, with New Hanover in the uMshwathi Municipality emerging as a promising destination for investment, entrepreneurship, and agricultural innovation. On 22 June 2026, the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) conducted a strategic site visit to explore opportunities that have the potential to stimulate local economic growth, create employment, and strengthen black-owned enterprises.

One of the highlights of the visit was a proposed site for the development of a modern shopping centre on land owned by Mr Mkhize, where The Village Butchery currently operates. The commercial development is set to be undertaken by Thandukukhanya Mseleku Zwe-labelungu Investment under the leadership of Mr Mseleku, representing a collaborative partnership between black property developers and black landowners.

The proposed development is expected to serve as a catalyst for economic activity in New Hanover by attracting new businesses, improving access to retail services, and creating employment opportunities for local communities. It also demonstrates the growing role of black entrepreneurs in shaping the future of commercial property development within the district.

The initiative reflects a significant milestone in advancing inclusive economic transformation and showcases the capacity of local business leaders to drive meaningful investment within their communities. UMEDA views the project as an inspiring example of black excellence and innovation, with the potential to become one of the first black-led commercial property developments of its kind in the uMgungundlovu District.

Mr Mseleku is also an active member of the Vuka Darkie Group, a growing network of SMMEs, cooperatives, land developers, manufacturers, and business leaders committed to promoting sustainable economic development across the district. Through collaboration and shared expertise, the group continues to unlock new opportunities for investment, enterprise development, and community empowerment.

The visit also included CBSP Growers (Continental Berry Sapphire Produce), an emerging agricultural enterprise owned by young commercial farmer Mr Sibonginhlhla Shange. Using modern greenhouse technology, Mr Shange successfully produces premium-quality strawberries and a variety of plants, demonstrating how innovation and sustainable farming practices can contribute to food security and economic growth.

During the visit, UMEDA was impressed by Mr Shange's dedication, entrepreneurial vision, and commitment to expanding his farming enterprise. His work highlights the growing contribution of young farmers to the district's agricultural economy while showcasing the opportunities that exist within high-value crop production.

As part of its ongoing commitment to enterprise development, UMEDA will support the business by assisting with the necessary compliance requirements to improve its readiness for funding opportunities, strategic partnerships, and future expansion. This support aims to position the enterprise for long-term sustainability and increased market competitiveness.

Exploring the Rich History and Heritage of Sobantu



Understanding the history of local communities is essential in preserving cultural identity and recognising the people and events that have shaped them. On 24 June 2026, an insightful engagement was held with Mr Enzo Ntshangase, a respected lifelong resident of Sobantu, who shared his extensive knowledge of the township's remarkable history and enduring legacy.

Born and raised in Sobantu, Mr Ntshangase provided participants with a fascinating journey through the area's past, highlighting the milestones, influential figures, and cultural heritage that continue to define the community today. He described Sobantu as a place rich in history, resilience, and unity, with stories that deserve to be preserved for future generations.

One of the key historical figures discussed during the session was Bishop John William Colenso, whose contribution to the development of Sobantu remains significant. Mr Ntshangase explained that Bishop Colenso donated a large piece of land that became the foundation for the establishment and growth of the community. His generosity played a pivotal role in creating opportunities for families to settle and build lasting homes in the area.

Education has also been central to Sobantu's development. Mr Ntshangase shared that the first primary school was established in 1928, laying the foundation for generations of learners. Many of the original houses constructed during the early years of the township remain standing today, some approaching a century in age, serving as lasting reminders of the community's strength, resilience, and architectural heritage.

Today, Sobantu continues to reflect the diversity and unity of its people. The community is home to three schools, several churches, and a mosque, demonstrating a rich social and cultural fabric. Mr Ntshangase also shared the history behind some of the township's well-known streets, including Mpande Street, one of the longest roads in the area, which

intersects with Masiphula Street. He explained that Masiphula Street was named after the influential Prime Minister, Mr Masiphula. Other notable streets, including Vilakazi Street, Dube Street, Smith Drive, and Lembede Street, each carry historical significance that contributes to Sobantu's unique identity.

Among the many stories shared, one of the most moving was the account of the devastating floods of 1987, which caused widespread destruction across the township. Despite the hardship, the resilience and determination of Sobantu's residents enabled the community to rebuild and emerge stronger, reflecting the spirit that continues to define the area today.

The engagement concluded with a guided tour of Sobantu, where participants visited several historical landmarks and gained a deeper appreciation of the places that have shaped the township's identity over many decades.

Rich13 Initiative Set to Unlock New Opportunities for Richmond Youth Entrepreneurs



A new chapter of economic empowerment is unfolding in Richmond as plans advance to establish a dedicated business hub that will support youth-owned enterprises and stimulate local economic development. The initiative is being driven through a partnership between Richmond Local Municipality, the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA), Rich13, and other strategic stakeholders committed to creating sustainable opportunities for emerging entrepreneurs.

To assess the readiness of the project, stakeholders recently visited a property donated by Richmond Local Municipality for the development of the Rich13 business hub. The site inspection formed part of ongoing preparations to ensure that all operational, technical, and administrative requirements are met before the facility is officially launched.

The property offers significant potential for enterprise development. It comprises six individual business stalls that will provide workspace for entrepreneurs, two structures that can be converted into warehouses for storage and production, and ample land suitable for the installation of hydroponic tunnels to support agricultural production and agro-processing activities. The facility is expected to become a centre for innovation, collaboration, and skills development while creating employment opportunities for local residents.

Rich13 is a collective of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) operating across a range of industries that contribute to Richmond's local economy. The businesses specialise in school uniform manufacturing, water purification systems, block making, toilet paper production, coal supply, food processing, agriculture, and agro-processing. By working together, these entrepreneurs aim to strengthen their businesses, improve productivity, and expand their market reach.

As part of the partnership, UMEDA will facilitate the identification of private sector partners to provide business incubation, mentorship, skills development,

and enterprise capacitation programmes for Rich13 members. These interventions will equip entrepreneurs with the practical knowledge, technical expertise, and business support needed to build sustainable enterprises capable of competing in broader markets.

In addition, UMEDA will assist in exploring market access opportunities for Richmond-based SMMEs by connecting them with potential investors, buyers, and strategic partners. This collaborative approach seeks to unlock investment, encourage innovation, and create an enabling environment where local businesses can grow and contribute meaningfully to the district's economy.

The Rich13 initiative demonstrates the power of collaboration between government, development agencies, and the private sector in driving inclusive economic growth. Once operational, the business hub is expected to become a catalyst for entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, and long-term economic resilience, positioning Richmond as a growing centre for enterprise development within the uMgungundlovu District.

Karkloof Classic Polo Tournament Drives Tourism and Economic Growth in the Midlands



The successful hosting of the 2026 Karkloof Classic Polo Tournament from 26–28 June 2026 reaffirmed the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands as one of South Africa's premier sports tourism destinations. Hosted at the historic Karkloof Polo Club, the three-day event attracted more polo teams, hundreds of players, sponsors, and thousands of visitors from across the country, creating a significant economic boost for the region.

The tournament generated increased business for accommodation establishments, restaurants, transport operators, retailers, tourism attractions, and informal traders, demonstrating the important role that major sporting events play in stimulating local economic development. The influx of visitors also created valuable opportunities for small businesses and tourism operators to showcase their products and services to a wider audience.

Beyond the exciting polo matches, the event featured networking opportunities, social functions, and a championship awards ceremony, encouraging visitors to experience the wider Midlands tourism offering. Many guests extended their stay to explore local attractions, adventure activities, craft markets, and hospitality establishments, further strengthening the economic impact throughout the district.

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) proudly supported the tournament as part of its strategy to promote tourism-led investment and position the district as a destination of choice for major sporting and lifestyle events. Through its partnership with the uMngeni Community Tourism Organisation (CTO), UMEDA continues to strengthen destination marketing and build the capacity of local tourism structures to support events of this scale.

The success of the tournament highlighted the value of collaboration between government, tourism organisations, event organisers, and the private sector in creating sustainable economic opportunities. It also reinforced the importance of sports tourism as a

catalyst for job creation, business growth, and destination branding.

As another successful edition came to a close, the 2026 Karkloof Classic Polo Tournament once again demonstrated that world-class events can deliver lasting benefits beyond the sporting arena. By attracting visitors, showcasing the beauty of the Midlands, and stimulating local businesses, the tournament continues to strengthen the region's reputation as a vibrant hub for tourism, investment, and economic development.



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