

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...



Ilitha Telecoms: PAGE 15

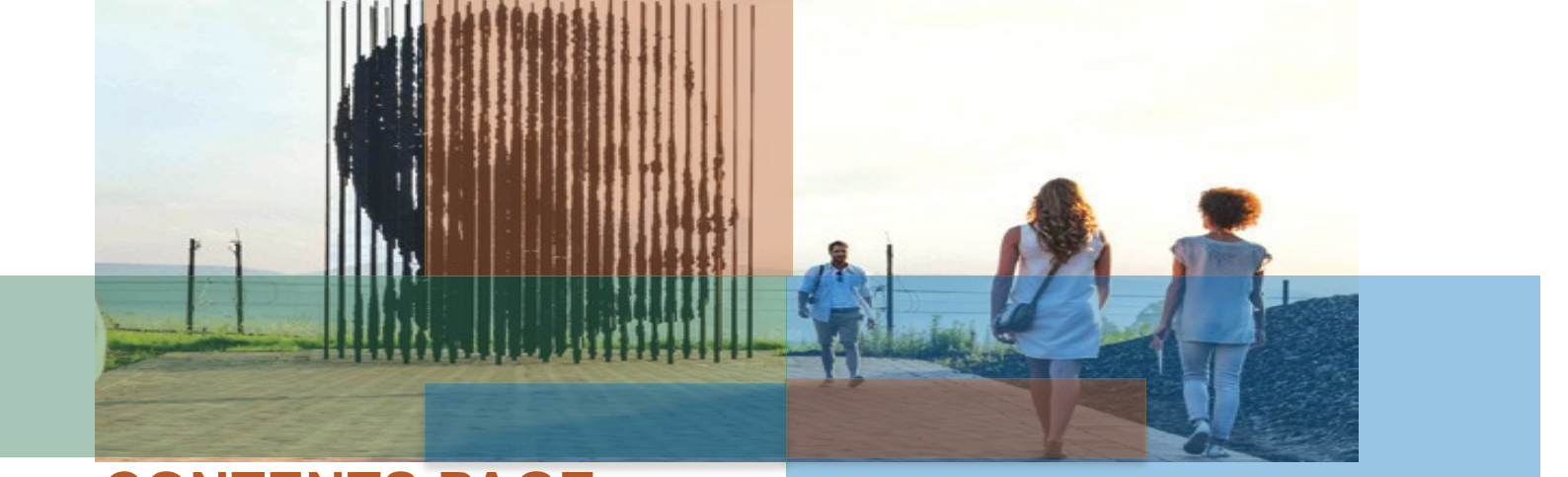


U.S. Consulate General : PAGE 21



Potential of Richmond PAGE 23

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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

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the first edition of the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) Newsletter for the 2026/27 financial year. This edition provides an opportunity to reflect on the work undertaken during the first quarter and the continued commitment of the District and its development partners towards creating an enabling environment for inclusive economic growth.

The economic development of our District requires a coordinated approach in which municipalities, government institutions, the private sector, communities and development agencies work together towards common objectives. As the District, we recognise the importance of creating conditions that enable businesses to grow, attract investment and contribute meaningfully to local economies.

During the quarter, important engagements highlighted the connection between economic development, enterprise support, tourism, investment and community participation. The continued support of small businesses and cooperatives remains particularly important, as these enterprises provide opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship and participation in local value chains.

We also recognise the importance of strengthening our tourism and investment infrastructure. Developments such as the Howick Falls Precinct and the Zulu Mpophomeni Tourism Experience demonstrate how strategic investment can improve tourism assets while creating opportunities for local businesses and communities.

As we move forward, collaboration will remain central to our efforts. I commend UMEDA, its leadership, staff and partners for their contribution during the first quarter. I encourage all stakeholders to continue working together to unlock the economic potential of our District and build a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable local economy.

I wish you an informative and productive reading of this edition.



Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Mr. Michael Newton

Welcome to the first quarterly edition of the UMEDA Newsletter for the 2026/27 financial year. The first quarter has been characterised by strategic engagements, partnerships and initiatives aimed at advancing the economic development mandate of the Agency and positioning uMgungundlovu to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

Our work continues to be guided by a clear objective: to facilitate investment, support enterprise development and advance projects that can contribute to sustainable economic growth across the District. This requires us to work beyond institutional boundaries and build meaningful partnerships with government, business, development institutions, communities and other stakeholders.

One of the key areas of progress during the quarter has been the continued development of the creative economy. The UMEDA Midlands Film Office is increasingly serving as a platform through which the District can connect local creatives, businesses and service providers with opportunities in the film industry. Our vision extends further through the proposed Creative Economic Zone, which seeks to bring together film, tourism, creative industries and investment.

The quarter also demonstrated the importance of strategic investment facilitation. Engagements with potential investors, tourism and development institutions, research organisations and international stakeholders have created platforms for identifying opportunities that can contribute to the growth of the District.

I am encouraged by the dedication demonstrated by the UMEDA team and our partners. The achievements reflected in this edition are the result of collective effort.

As we enter the next quarter, we remain focused on turning opportunities into practical interventions, strengthening partnerships and ensuring that economic development initiatives create meaningful opportunities for businesses, communities and the people of uMgungundlovu.

I invite you to explore this edition and reflect on the progress we are making together.



Chief Finance Officer (CFO)

Mr. Mpumelelo Hadebe

It is my pleasure to present the first quarterly edition of the UMEDA Newsletter for the 2026/27 financial year. The first quarter has provided an opportunity to reflect on the Agency's activities and the importance of ensuring that our programmes and projects are supported by sound financial management, accountability and responsible utilisation of resources.

Economic development initiatives require more than strong ideas. They require effective planning, appropriate resource allocation, monitoring and accountability to ensure that available resources are directed towards programmes that support the Agency's mandate and deliver value to the District.

The activities highlighted in this edition demonstrate the range of interventions being undertaken by UMEDA, from tourism infrastructure and enterprise development to investment facilitation, agriculture, the creative economy and strategic partnerships. Each initiative requires careful coordination and responsible management to ensure that resources support clearly defined development objectives.

The progress recorded during the quarter also reinforces the importance of collaboration. Partnerships with municipalities, government departments, development institutions, businesses and other stakeholders enable resources, expertise and opportunities to be brought together in support of economic development.

As we continue through the 2026/27 financial year, financial discipline, accountability and effective planning will remain important foundations of our work. These principles support the Agency's ability to implement its programmes responsibly while maintaining confidence among our stakeholders.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment of UMEDA management and staff, as well as our partners, whose collective efforts continue to support the Agency's work.

I encourage readers to engage with this edition as we reflect on the progress made during the first quarter and look ahead to the opportunities and responsibilities that lie before us.

Together, through responsible stewardship and coordinated development, we can continue contributing to sustainable economic growth across uMgungundlovu.



General Manager: Trade and Investment

Mr. Sandile Gabela

The first quarter of the 2026/27 financial year has demonstrated the importance of creating strong connections between businesses, investors, government and development institutions. As we present this edition of the UMEDA Newsletter, we reflect on a period characterised by investment facilitation, enterprise development, research and engagements aimed at unlocking economic opportunities across the uMgungundlovu District.

Our approach to trade and investment is centred on understanding the economic potential of the District and connecting that potential with suitable investors, markets and development opportunities. During the quarter, UMEDA engaged with businesses exploring expansion opportunities, including industrial enterprises, while also advancing discussions around agricultural development and specialised value chains.

The agricultural sector remains an important area of opportunity. Engagements in Richmond and Mooi River demonstrated the potential for strengthening agricultural production while creating greater participation by emerging farmers, cooperatives and local enterprises in established value chains.

We have also continued to recognise the importance of reliable information in investment facilitation. The engagement with the Moses Kotane Research Institute highlighted the role of market intelligence, research and credible economic data in understanding investment opportunities and responding effectively to the needs of potential investors.

Enterprise development remains equally important. Through partnerships and engagements with youth-owned businesses, cooperatives and SMMEs, UMEDA continues to facilitate access to information, support mechanisms and opportunities.

The progress achieved during the quarter reinforces the importance of partnerships. No single institution can unlock the District's economic potential alone. It requires collaboration, informed decision-making and continued engagement with the private sector.

As we enter the next quarter, we remain committed to strengthening investment facilitation, supporting enterprise growth and identifying opportunities that can contribute to sustainable economic participation across uMgungundlovu.



General Manager: Projects Development

Mr. James Martin

It is a privilege to welcome you to the first edition of the UMEDA Newsletter for the 2026/27 financial year. The first quarter has highlighted the importance of moving economic development priorities from planning and conceptualisation towards projects that can create tangible value for communities and businesses across the uMgungundlovu District.

Projects Development is fundamentally about identifying opportunities, developing viable interventions and working with stakeholders to create projects capable of contributing to long-term economic growth. During the quarter, this work was reflected in progress across tourism infrastructure, creative industries and other strategic development initiatives.

The continued progress at the Howick Falls Precinct demonstrates the value of sustained project implementation and monitoring. The development of the Information Centre forms part of broader efforts to strengthen the tourism offering and improve the visitor experience while creating an environment in which local enterprises can benefit.

The quarter also provided an opportunity to showcase the potential of the UMEDA Midlands Film Office and the proposed Creative Economic Zone. These initiatives demonstrate how projects can connect tourism, investment, creative industries and enterprise development, creating opportunities that extend beyond a single sector.

Effective project development requires collaboration at every stage. Engagement with municipalities, government departments, development institutions, businesses, communities and oversight structures remains essential to ensuring that projects are properly aligned with development priorities and can deliver meaningful outcomes.

As we progress through the financial year, our focus will remain on strengthening project preparation, implementation, monitoring and stakeholder coordination. We will continue working to identify opportunities that can unlock investment, improve tourism infrastructure, support local businesses and contribute to employment creation.

I commend the UMEDA team and our partners for their continued commitment and look forward to building on the progress achieved during the first quarter.

Together, we remain focused on developing projects that create lasting economic value for uMgungundlovu.

uMgungundlovu District Launches Multi-Stakeholder Anti-Crime Council



The uMgungundlovu District Municipality has launched the uMgungundlovu District Multi-Stakeholder Anti-Crime Council in Caluza, under the Msunduzi Municipality on the 9th of July 2026, marking an important step towards strengthening collaborative efforts to combat crime and create safer communities across the district.

The launch brought together a broad range of stakeholders, including government departments, traditional leaders, law enforcement agencies, the private security industry, businesses, community safety structures, civil society organisations and various departments within the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) Cluster.

Delivering the keynote address, Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Hon. Kenny Morolong, emphasised that creating safer communities is a shared responsibility that extends beyond government and law enforcement agencies. He called for the active participation of businesses, faith-based organisations, traditional leaders, civil society, community structures, young people and citizens in efforts to prevent and combat crime.

“The responsibility for creating safer communities cannot lie solely with the police or Government. It requires the active involvement of business, faith-based organisations, traditional leaders, civil society, community structures, young people, and every citizen who believes in a safer and more prosperous South Africa,” said Deputy Minister Morolong.

The Executive Mayor of uMgungundlovu District Municipality, Cllr Mzi Zuma, highlighted the important link between community safety and economic development. He noted that reducing crime is essential to creating an environment that protects existing businesses and investments while increasing investor confidence in the district.

According to the Executive Mayor, a safer uMgungundlovu will contribute towards positioning the district as a destination of choice for investment, supporting economic growth and creating opportunities for communities.

KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Transport and Human Settlements, Hon. Siboniso Duma, also called on communities to work closely with law enforcement agencies by reporting criminal activities in their neighbourhoods. He stressed that the fight against crime requires active participation from communities and stronger cooperation between residents and law enforcement.

The District also recognised the valuable contribution of Inkosi Zondi of the Mpumuza Traditional Authority, who shared insights into the role of traditional leadership in bringing communities and government together in the fight against crime.

The establishment of the Multi-Stakeholder Anti-Crime Council represents a commitment to strengthening coordination among key stakeholders and developing a collective approach to addressing crime and its underlying challenges. Through greater collaboration, information sharing and community participation, the initiative seeks to contribute towards safer communities and a more secure environment for residents, businesses and investors across the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Participates in Provincial Tourism and Audio-Visual Committee Meeting



The Provincial Tourism and Audio-Visual Committee (PTAC) convened on 10 July 2026 at the Golden Horse Hotel in Pietermaritzburg, bringing together government leaders and key stakeholders to deliberate on practical strategies to strengthen KwaZulu-Natal's tourism and audio-visual sectors and advance inclusive economic growth.

The meeting focused on creating a conducive environment for investment, strengthening tourism-related infrastructure, advancing tourism development and improving policy alignment. Discussions highlighted the importance of coordinated action, collaboration and innovation in unlocking the province's economic potential and creating sustainable opportunities for communities.

The meeting was chaired by the MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Rev. M. Zondi, who emphasised the need for stakeholders to work together to address challenges and maximise opportunities within the province's tourism and audio-visual industries.

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) was honoured to participate in these strategic engagements alongside key provincial stakeholders, including Dr Sibusiso Ndebele, Chairman of the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority.

Addressing delegates, Dr Ndebele encouraged tourism stakeholders to remain competitive by continuously adapting to the changing needs and expectations of visitors. He emphasised that innovation, responsiveness and the delivery of memorable visitor experiences are essential to maintaining KwaZulu-Natal's position as a competitive tourism destination. He further called

on the province to strive towards becoming "Viable, Vibrant and Victorious."

The importance of collaboration was also highlighted by the Executive Mayor of uMgungundlovu District Municipality, Cllr Mzi Zuma, who cautioned against stakeholders working in silos. He stressed that strong partnerships between the public and private sectors are essential for building a thriving tourism industry.

Cllr Zuma noted that meaningful partnerships can help stakeholders maximise tourism opportunities, attract investment and generate greater economic benefits for communities across the province. By bringing together government, businesses and other tourism stakeholders, the sector can strengthen its ability to respond to emerging opportunities and contribute more effectively to sustainable economic development.

The PTAC engagement provided an important platform for stakeholders to share perspectives, strengthen partnerships and identify practical interventions to support the continued growth of KwaZulu-Natal's tourism and audio-visual sectors. UMEDA's participation reinforces its commitment to collaborative initiatives that promote investment, tourism development, job creation and inclusive economic growth within the uMgungundlovu District and the broader KwaZulu-Natal economy.

UMEDA Supports Youth Empowerment and Enterprise Development in uMshwathi



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) joined government and development stakeholders at the Provincial Youth Empowerment Workshop on the Framework for the 2026 Local Government Elections, held on 16 July 2026 at Swayimani in uMshwathi Municipality. The workshop was organised by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and provided a platform to engage young people on issues affecting their participation and development within their communities.

Representing UMEDA, General Manager: Trade and Investment, Mr Sandile Gabela, highlighted the Agency's commitment to empowering young people through enterprise development, investment promotion and business support services.

UMEDA continues to work in partnership with government institutions and development stakeholders to create pathways for young entrepreneurs and innovators to participate meaningfully in the local economy. Through these partnerships, the Agency seeks to strengthen youth-owned enterprises, promote sustainable business development and contribute to inclusive economic growth across the uMgungundlovu District.

A key highlight of the workshop was the showcasing of youth-led enterprises from uMshwathi, including CBSP Growers, Reapele Africa and a local tourism enterprise. These businesses represent the potential of young entrepreneurs to contribute to local economic development when provided with the appropriate support, resources and opportunities.

The participating enterprises also stand to benefit from the Business Plan Development Programme, implemented through a partnership between the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and UMEDA. The programme is designed to support promising youth-owned businesses with the

development of professional and bankable business plans.

Access to quality business plans can strengthen the ability of emerging enterprises to approach financial institutions, access funding, attract potential investors and position themselves for sustainable growth. The programme therefore forms part of broader efforts to address some of the barriers faced by young entrepreneurs when attempting to establish and grow their businesses.

UMEDA's participation in the workshop demonstrates the Agency's continued focus on connecting young people with practical enterprise development opportunities and support mechanisms. By strengthening collaboration among government, development agencies and youth entrepreneurs, UMEDA contributes towards building an enabling environment in which young people can transform their ideas into sustainable businesses.

The engagement in uMshwathi further reinforces the importance of youth participation, enterprise development and strategic partnerships in driving inclusive economic development and creating opportunities for young people throughout the uMgungundlovu District.

EDP Committee Conducts Oversight Visit to UMEDA Strategic Projects



The Agency hosted members of the Economic Development Portfolio (EDP) Committee on an oversight visit on 22 July 2026 to assess progress on strategic tourism and economic development projects across the uMgungundlovu District.

The visit provided the Committee with an opportunity to gain first-hand insight into the progress of UMEDA-supported projects and to see how investments in tourism infrastructure are contributing to improved visitor experiences, stimulating local economic activity and creating sustainable opportunities for communities.

The oversight visit commenced at the Zulu Mpophomeni Tourism Experience, where the Committee inspected several completed infrastructure upgrades. These included the installation of a new stage roof, reconstruction of the septic tank, improved security lighting, roof patching and the provision of secure storage containers fitted with shelving for local crafters.

The improvements have enhanced the functionality, safety and overall visitor experience of the tourism precinct, while also providing better facilities to support local entrepreneurs and crafters. The investment demonstrates the importance of strengthening tourism infrastructure as a platform for local enterprise development and economic participation.

The delegation then proceeded to the Howick Falls Precinct, where members acknowledged the successful completion of Phase 1 of the project. The first phase delivered a range of infrastructure improvements, including new perimeter fencing, paving, pergola structures with seating, trader stalls, a guard house and a braai facility.

The Committee was also encouraged by the progress being made on Phase 2, which is currently ahead of the approved project programme. Construction of the new Information Centre is progressing well, with superstructure brickwork underway. The progress reflects UMEDA's commitment to implementing quality tourism infrastructure while maintaining project timelines.

The oversight visit concluded at Midmar Dam, where UMEDA Chief Executive Officer Mr Michael Newton presented the Agency's proposed Creative Economic Zone (CEZ). The presentation outlined a long-term vision to position the precinct as a catalyst for tourism growth, creative industries, investment attraction and inclusive economic development.

The proposed Creative Economic Zone seeks to unlock new opportunities for businesses, creative practitioners and communities while strengthening the district's tourism offering and attracting further investment into the region.

Following the site visits and presentation, the Economic Development Portfolio Committee commended UMEDA for the progress achieved across the strategic projects. The Committee recognised the Agency's continued efforts to implement catalytic infrastructure that enhances tourism assets, supports local businesses, attracts investment and creates employment opportunities.

The oversight visit reaffirmed the importance of collaboration between UMEDA and its oversight structures in ensuring that strategic economic development investments deliver meaningful and sustainable benefits to communities across the uMgungundlovu District.

Howick Falls Information Centre Project Gains Momentum



Progress on Phase 2 of the Howick Falls Project is gaining momentum, with construction of the new Howick Falls Information Centre advancing steadily towards completion. The development forms part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the Howick Falls tourism precinct and enhance the experience of visitors to one of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands' key tourism attractions.

As part of the continued monitoring of project implementation, a site inspection was conducted on 28 July 2026, bringing together key stakeholders from the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (EDTEA), the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) and uMngeni Local Municipality.

The inspection provided stakeholders with an opportunity to assess construction progress, review work completed to date and engage on areas requiring attention to support the successful delivery of the project. The Information Centre is increasingly taking shape, representing an important milestone in the continued development of the Howick Falls precinct.

The new facility is expected to strengthen the tourism offering at Howick Falls by providing an improved point of information and support for visitors. Its development forms part of broader investments aimed at improving tourism infrastructure, supporting local economic activity and creating an environment that can attract more visitors to the area.

Ms Ayanda Zondi, Director: Tourism and Planning at EDTEA, commended the progress achieved across the various stages of Phase 2, particularly the development of the Information Centre. She emphasised the importance of identifying and addressing challenges during project implementation to ensure that construction progresses successfully and that the project ultimately achieves its intended objectives.

The site inspection also highlighted the value of ongoing collaboration among the participating institutions. Through regular monitoring, engagement and coordinated interventions, EDTEA, UMEDA and uMngeni Local Municipality are working together to support the successful implementation of the project.

The continued development of the Howick Falls tourism precinct reflects the importance of strategic investment in tourism infrastructure as a driver of local economic development. Improved facilities can contribute to a better visitor experience while creating opportunities for local businesses, traders and other tourism-related enterprises.

As construction progresses, the project remains focused on delivering infrastructure that will enhance the functionality and attractiveness of the Howick Falls precinct. The collaboration between provincial government, UMEDA and the local municipality demonstrates a shared commitment to strengthening tourism assets and unlocking their potential to contribute to sustainable economic development in the uMgungundlovu District and the broader KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

UMEDA Welcomes 33 Young People to Tourism Safety Monitors Programme



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA), in partnership with Tourism World Academy, hosted an induction session on 29 July 2026 for 33 young people selected to participate in the National Department of Tourism's Tourism Safety Monitors Programme.

The initiative forms part of the second tranche of the programme, following the successful implementation of the first tranche, which provided opportunities to 53 young people. The programme is aimed at strengthening tourism safety while creating opportunities for young people to gain valuable skills and experience within the tourism sector.

The induction session provided the successful candidates with a comprehensive overview of the programme, including its objectives, expectations, roles and responsibilities. Participants were also introduced to the importance of tourism safety and the critical role they will play in creating a safe, welcoming and positive environment for visitors at tourism attractions across the region.

The programme officially moved into its training phase on 5 August 2026, when the 33 participants attended their first training class. This marked the beginning of a comprehensive three-month training programme designed to equip participants with the knowledge, skills and practical experience required to contribute effectively to tourism safety and improve the overall visitor experience.

Through the programme, the Tourism Safety Monitors will gain exposure to the tourism environment while supporting safety initiatives at designated tourism



attractions. Their presence will contribute towards creating a more secure environment for visitors while enabling young participants to develop practical workplace skills.

UMEDA will play an important coordination and monitoring role throughout the programme. The Agency will work closely with Community Tourism Organisations (CTOs) from the seven local municipalities within the uMgungundlovu District to identify suitable venues for training and facilitate the placement of Tourism Safety Monitors at designated tourism sites.

UMEDA will also monitor the deployment and performance of the participants throughout the programme, ensuring that the initiative remains aligned with its objectives and that young people receive meaningful opportunities to gain practical experience.

The Tourism Safety Monitors Programme represents a collaborative effort to address two important priorities: strengthening tourism safety and creating opportunities for youth development. By placing young people within the tourism environment, the programme supports skills development while contributing to a safer and more welcoming experience for visitors.

Through its partnership with Tourism World Academy and collaboration with the National Department of Tourism, CTOs and local municipalities, UMEDA continues to support initiatives that strengthen the tourism sector and promote meaningful economic opportunities for young people across the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Film Office Hosts Exclusive Screening of Spirit



The UMEDA Film Office recently hosted an exclusive staff screening of the upcoming film *Spirit*, giving employees a unique opportunity to experience the production ahead of its official public release. The screening marked another milestone in UMEDA's efforts to promote the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands as an emerging film and production destination.

The exclusive screening was attended by Mr Sydney Masina of Pambili Media, who joined UMEDA staff in celebrating the production and the growing potential of the region as a location for local and international film projects.

Directed by Tebogo Malope, an award-winning filmmaker whose accolades include recognition from the Cannes Lions, D&AD and SAFTAs, *Spirit* demonstrates the calibre of creative productions emerging from South Africa's growing film industry. Malope is renowned for his work across television commercials, music videos, feature films and television series.

The screening also provided an opportunity to highlight the role that strategic partnerships can play in developing the local film ecosystem. Through initiatives such as the UMEDA Film Office, the Agency is working to position the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands as a destination capable of attracting film productions, supporting local creative talent and generating economic opportunities within the region.

UMEDA General Manager: Projects Development, Mr James Martin, highlighted the broader significance of the initiative, stating:



"This is part of the legacy we are creating in establishing the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands as a premier film destination."

The vision extends beyond individual productions, with the development of a sustainable film ecosystem that can benefit a range of local industries. Film productions can create opportunities for local businesses, accommodation establishments, restaurants, venues, transport providers, technical service providers and creative professionals.

Speaking about the region's growing potential as a filmmaking hub, Mr Sydney Masina of Pambili Media expressed confidence in the future of film production in the Midlands, stating:

"There are a lot of movies that are going to be produced in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands with the support of the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency."

The *Spirit* screening therefore represented more than an exclusive staff viewing; it was an opportunity to celebrate the continued development of the region's creative economy and the partnerships supporting its growth.

UMEDA extends its appreciation to Pambili Media, Tebogo Malope and everyone involved in bringing *Spirit* to the screen. The Agency looks forward to supporting and welcoming more productions to the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands as the region continues to establish itself as a destination for film, television and creative industries.

UMEDA Strengthens Social Compact Through Township, Rural and Technology Initiatives



As part of its continued commitment to strengthening the Social Compact, the Agency on the 6th of August hosted a strategic engagement focused on the Township and Rural Economic Revitalisation Programme (TRERP) and the District Technology In Education Project (DTEIP).

The session brought together UMEDA representatives and key stakeholders to explore opportunities to strengthen township and rural economic development while advancing technology, innovation and community empowerment across the uMgungundlovu District.

Among the stakeholders participating in the engagement were representatives from Ilitha Telecoms, led by its Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Mr Vuyani Jarana, as well as Mr Ndlovu, CEO of SBD and Chairperson of the Social Compact Sub-Committee for Township and Rural Economy and DTEIP.

The engagement highlighted the importance of strategic partnerships in mobilising resources and implementing initiatives that respond to the economic and developmental needs of communities. Through collaboration with development partners, UMEDA continues to explore opportunities to strengthen local economies and create platforms for communities to participate meaningfully in economic development.

Ilitha Telecoms plays an important role in funding mobilisation and investment support, working closely with communities and stakeholders to identify and unlock funding opportunities for impactful development projects. Its involvement is particularly relevant to initiatives under TRERP and DTEIP, where access to

resources and strategic investment can support the implementation and sustainability of projects.

The District Technology In Education Project (DTEIP) focuses on the use of technology, innovation and learning to support educational development. UMEDA is implementing the programme in partnership with the Department of Education, with the initiative aimed at strengthening opportunities for learners and communities through technology-driven solutions.

Meanwhile, the Township and Rural Economic Revitalisation Programme (TRERP) focuses on revitalising township and rural economies by supporting local economic development and creating opportunities for communities. The programme seeks to contribute to stronger local economies by identifying opportunities for enterprise development, investment and community participation.

The strategic session reinforced the importance of ensuring that economic development, technology and community empowerment are pursued in a coordinated manner. By bringing together government, development agencies, private-sector partners and community-focused structures, UMEDA is working to strengthen the Social Compact and support initiatives that respond to the needs and opportunities within township and rural communities.

Through continued collaboration and resource mobilisation, TRERP and DTEIP have the potential to contribute to inclusive economic development, technological advancement and improved opportunities for communities across the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Showcases Tourism, Heritage and Film Investment Opportunities



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency welcomed a delegation from the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), accompanied by representatives from Trade & Investment KwaZulu-Natal (TIKZN) and the Moses Kotane Research Institute (MKRI), for a tour of cultural, heritage tourism products and film developments across the uMgungundlovu District.

The engagement formed part of UMEDA's ongoing efforts to strengthen strategic relationships with key tourism, investment and development stakeholders while exploring opportunities to co-develop tourism products that can unlock new investment and stimulate economic activity across the region.

During the engagement, UMEDA Chief Executive Officer, Mr Michael Newton, presented the Agency's vision for growing the District's creative economy. He highlighted the establishment of the UMEDA Midlands Film Office as a key platform for developing the local film industry, attracting productions to the region and creating opportunities for local businesses and creative professionals.

Mr Newton also highlighted the Agency's ongoing work towards the potential establishment of a Creative Economic Zone (CEZ). The proposed development forms part of UMEDA's broader vision to create an integrated destination that brings together film, tourism, creative industries and investment opportunities.

The proposed Creative Economic Zone has the potential to attract billions of rands in investment, create employment opportunities and position the uMgungundlovu District as a leading destination for film, tourism and creative industries. By developing an enabling environment for investment and production, the initiative could create opportunities across a range of sectors, including accommodation, hospitality,

entertainment, retail, construction, transport and creative services.

The delegation's tour provided an opportunity to showcase the District's diverse cultural and heritage assets alongside emerging film and creative economy developments. It also demonstrated the potential for these assets to be developed into commercially viable tourism products capable of attracting visitors and investment.

The engagement highlighted the importance of collaboration between public-sector institutions, investment agencies and research organisations in identifying opportunities and developing projects that can generate long-term economic value. Strategic partnerships can help unlock funding, technical expertise, market access and investment required to transform promising concepts into sustainable economic projects.

The delegation expressed its appreciation for UMEDA's forward-looking approach to identifying and developing economically viable attractions and investment opportunities. The engagement further strengthened the potential for collaboration in developing tourism and creative economy initiatives that can contribute to sustainable growth across the District.

Through initiatives such as the UMEDA Midlands Film Office and the proposed Creative Economic Zone, UMEDA continues to position the uMgungundlovu District as a destination with significant potential for investment, tourism development, film production and creative industries, while creating opportunities that can benefit local communities and businesses.



UMEDA is strengthening its efforts to attract and facilitate strategic industrial investment within the uMgungundlovu District through targeted engagements with businesses seeking opportunities for growth and expansion.

UMEDA Trade & Investment General Manager Mr Sandile Gabela recently held a strategic engagement with Mr Sizwe Makhaye, Founder and Managing Director of Braceable Manufacturing, to explore opportunities for the company's future expansion within the district.

Braceable Manufacturing is a KwaZulu-Natal-based industrial enterprise with a strong presence in both the automotive and agricultural sectors. The company plays an important role in the automotive manufacturing value chain, supplying approximately 300 components to Toyota. Its operations also extend to the agricultural sector, including the manufacturing of fertiliser and various agricultural components.

The engagement provided an opportunity to discuss how Braceable Manufacturing's future expansion ambitions could potentially align with UMEDA's plans to advance the development of the Mooi River Industrial Park. The proposed industrial development has the potential to provide a suitable platform for businesses seeking to establish or expand manufacturing operations within the district.

Through continued investment facilitation and support, UMEDA is exploring opportunities to connect established industrial enterprises with suitable development platforms that can strengthen local supply chains, increase manufacturing capacity and create opportunities for employment.

The potential expansion of Braceable Manufacturing within the district could further contribute to the development of the local industrial ecosystem by supporting supplier networks and creating opportunities for increased participation by local businesses. Such investments are also important in strengthening the manufacturing base of the uMgungundlovu District and promoting sustainable economic growth.

The engagement forms part of UMEDA's broader commitment to identifying strategic investors, supporting black industrialists and unlocking new industrial development opportunities across the district. By engaging directly with businesses and understanding their expansion requirements, UMEDA continues to position itself as a facilitator between investors and available economic development opportunities.

The proposed Mooi River Industrial Park represents one of the opportunities through which UMEDA seeks to advance industrial development, attract investment and support the creation of sustainable economic opportunities. Continued collaboration with private-sector enterprises such as Braceable Manufacturing will be important in translating investment ambitions into tangible economic activity within the district.

Through strategic partnerships, investment facilitation and targeted industrial development, UMEDA remains focused on creating an environment that supports business growth, strengthens local manufacturing and contributes to job creation and inclusive economic development across the uMgungundlovu District.

Midlands Wanderers FC Unveils New Kit Ahead of 2026/27 Season



The uMgungundlovu District Municipality, in partnership with Midlands Wanderers FC, hosted an exciting Media Evening on 17 July 2026 to officially unveil the club's new kit and introduce the players who will represent the team during the 2026/27 football season.

The event brought together football stakeholders, business leaders, community representatives and supporters to celebrate the club's journey while highlighting its ambitions to take football in the uMgungundlovu District to greater heights.

Speaking on behalf of the uMgungundlovu District, the Mayor of uMshwathi Municipality, Honourable Councillor Mandla Zondi, highlighted the District's aspiration to see Midlands Wanderers FC progress to the highest level of South African football, the Betway Premiership.

The Mayor called on stakeholders across the District to rally behind the young talent emerging from the region and contribute towards creating an environment in which the club can realise its ambitions.

"I wish the club every success in the journey ahead. The future is bright, the talent is here, and the supporters are here. Now let us ensure that the resources and partnerships are also there to take Midlands Wanderers to the next level."

The Chairman of Midlands Wanderers FC expressed his appreciation to the football fraternity for its continued support and called on the business community, organisations and individuals to partner with the club. Support through the provision of services, goods, sponsorships and strategic partnerships will be important in strengthening the club's operations and supporting its ambitions of putting the uMgungundlovu District on the national football map.

The evening also highlighted the broader economic potential of professional football within the District. Representing the uMgungundlovu Economic

Development Agency (UMEDA), General Manager: Trade & Investment Mr Sandile Gabela emphasised that the growth of Midlands Wanderers FC extends beyond the sporting field and can contribute to local economic activity.

Gabela noted that professional football has the potential to generate economic opportunities whenever matches are hosted within the uMgungundlovu District. Match-day activities can stimulate demand across a range of sectors, including hospitality, tourism, transport, retail and catering, while also creating opportunities for local businesses to benefit from increased visitor and supporter activity.

The development of Midlands Wanderers FC therefore presents an opportunity to strengthen the connection between sport and economic development, while providing a platform for local talent to gain greater exposure and opportunities within the football industry.

As the club begins its 2026/27 campaign, the Media Evening served as a reminder of the importance of collaboration between government, the private sector, the sporting fraternity and communities in supporting local talent and building sustainable sporting institutions.

With talented players, passionate supporters and growing stakeholder interest, Midlands Wanderers FC enters the new season with an ambitious vision. The call is clear: unite behind local talent, strengthen partnerships and build a football club that makes the uMgungundlovu District proud.

Tourism and Film Create New Opportunities for Economic Growth in uMgungundlovu



The growing potential of the tourism and film industries is creating new opportunities for economic development, investment, job creation and enterprise growth within the uMgungundlovu District.

As these sectors continue to evolve, strengthening collaboration among government, industry stakeholders, businesses and creative professionals remains important to ensuring that the economic opportunities presented by tourism and film translate into meaningful benefits for local communities and enterprises.

Against this backdrop, stakeholders gathered on 19 August 2026 for the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film District Stakeholder Engagement, which provided a platform for industry players to engage on key areas affecting the growth and development of the sector.

Discussions focused on a range of opportunities, including film development, production support, funding incentives, investment, destination marketing and supplier opportunities. These areas are important in creating an enabling environment for film productions while strengthening the participation of local businesses and creatives in the broader tourism and film value chains.

For uMgungundlovu District, the growth of the film industry presents an opportunity to leverage the region's diverse landscapes, cultural heritage, tourism attractions and existing creative talent. Increased film activity can generate demand for a range of local goods and services, including accommodation, catering, transport, venues, equipment, technical services and other creative and professional services.

The engagement also provided an important platform for the UMEDA Film Office to connect with industry stakeholders and explore opportunities to attract film productions to the district. By building relationships within the sector, the Film Office is working to identify

opportunities through which local businesses and creatives can participate in productions and benefit from the economic activity generated by the industry.

UMEDA's work in this space forms part of its broader vision for developing a Creative Economic Zone (CEZ) within the uMgungundlovu District. The initiative seeks to create a platform where creativity, tourism, film and investment can intersect to support economic development and unlock new opportunities for businesses and communities.

The Creative Economic Zone ambitions also reflect the potential for the film industry to complement the District's tourism offering. Film productions can showcase destinations, attractions and local experiences to wider audiences, while tourism infrastructure can provide the services and facilities required to support productions and visitors.

Through continued stakeholder engagement, investment facilitation and industry collaboration, UMEDA is working to strengthen the District's position within the tourism and film sectors. These efforts are aimed at creating an environment that encourages investment, supports local enterprise development and provides opportunities for emerging creatives to participate in growing industries.

As uMgungundlovu continues to explore its potential as a tourism and film destination, the collaboration between public institutions, industry stakeholders, businesses and creatives will remain critical. By connecting film, tourism, investment and creativity, the District can unlock new avenues for economic participation and contribute to sustainable local economic growth.

UMEDA Highlights Economic Opportunities Through Midlands Film Office



The Agency was privileged to be invited by uMgungundlovu FM to discuss the establishment of the UMEDA Midlands Film Office and the opportunities it seeks to unlock for businesses, creatives and communities across the uMgungundlovu District.

Representing UMEDA during the radio engagement, Mr Phiwokuhle Dladla highlighted that the film industry extends far beyond what audiences see on screen. Film production forms part of a broader economic ecosystem that creates demand for a wide range of goods and services, presenting opportunities for businesses and skilled individuals across different sectors.

These opportunities include technical services, accommodation, transport, catering, security, equipment hire, creative services and numerous other supporting services required before, during and after a production.

As part of establishing the Midlands Film Office, UMEDA is developing a database of local service providers, businesses, skilled individuals and creative talent across the uMgungundlovu District. The database is intended to strengthen the connection between local businesses and film production companies seeking suitable locations and services within the District.

Through this initiative, when production companies choose uMgungundlovu as a filming destination, the Film Office will be better positioned to identify and connect them with local businesses and skilled individuals who can provide the services and expertise required to support their productions.

This approach is aimed at ensuring that the economic benefits associated with attracting film productions

remain within the District wherever possible. Increased production activity can create opportunities for local enterprises to secure contracts, expand their services, gain industry exposure and build relationships within the broader film and creative economy.

The initiative also creates opportunities for local creatives and emerging talent to gain practical exposure to professional productions. By connecting skilled individuals with industry opportunities, the Film Office can contribute to skills development and help strengthen the District's growing creative sector.

The establishment of the Midlands Film Office therefore forms part of UMEDA's broader efforts to use the creative economy as a catalyst for investment, enterprise development, job creation and local economic growth. The initiative seeks to position uMgungundlovu not only as a location for film productions, but as a district with the businesses, talent and support services needed to participate meaningfully in the industry.

The vision is clear: the objective is not simply to attract film productions to the District, but to build a local film ecosystem in which communities, businesses and creatives can participate in and benefit from the economic opportunities generated by the industry.

Through continued engagement with industry stakeholders, local businesses, creatives and communities, UMEDA is working to ensure that the growth of the film industry becomes an opportunity for broader economic participation across the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Engages U.S. Consulate on Investment, Youth and Creative Economy Opportunities



On the 26th of August 2026 UMEDA welcomed Mr Douglas Mann, Public Affairs Officer at the Consulate General of the United States of America, accompanied by Mr Skhumbuzo Majola, for an engagement focused on economic development, youth empowerment and opportunities within the creative economy.

The engagement provided an opportunity for UMEDA and the U.S. representatives to explore areas of mutual interest and discuss opportunities that could contribute to economic growth, investment and the development of young people within the uMgungundlovu District.

During the engagement, Mr Mann encouraged the youth of uMgungundlovu to pursue their passions and make full use of the opportunities available to them, particularly within the creative industries. He highlighted the potential for young people to transform their talents, creativity and ideas into meaningful economic opportunities.

The creative economy presents a growing space for young people to participate in a wide range of industries, including film, media, music, design, digital content and other creative services. Supporting young creatives can therefore contribute not only to skills development but also to enterprise creation and broader economic participation.

Mr Mann further highlighted the potential of the United States private sector in KwaZulu-Natal, noting that significant opportunities have been identified within the province. This presents scope for stronger engagement, investment and collaboration between American interests and local economic development initiatives.

For UMEDA, strengthening international relationships forms part of its broader investment facilitation mandate and its efforts to identify opportunities that can contribute to sustainable economic development across the District.

UMEDA CEO Mr Michael Newton welcomed the engagement and expressed the Agency's readiness to explore opportunities for collaboration with the American side. He highlighted the importance of building relationships that can help attract investment, unlock economic opportunities and contribute to the growth of the uMgungundlovu District economy.

Newton also expressed UMEDA's interest in strengthening the relationship with the U.S. Consulate and exploring opportunities that could facilitate greater U.S. engagement and presence within the District. Such collaboration could open further avenues for investment, knowledge exchange, partnerships and support for initiatives within the creative and broader economic sectors.

The engagement also aligns with UMEDA's growing focus on the creative economy, particularly through initiatives such as the UMEDA Midlands Film Office and its ambitions around the development of a Creative Economic Zone. These initiatives seek to create platforms through which young people, businesses and creative professionals can participate in emerging economic opportunities.

The engagement between UMEDA and the U.S. Consulate therefore represents an opportunity to strengthen international linkages while exploring practical areas of collaboration that can support investment, youth development and economic growth.

As UMEDA continues to build strategic partnerships locally and internationally, the Agency remains focused on connecting investment opportunities with local economic potential, while creating pathways for young people, businesses and creatives to participate meaningfully in the growth of the uMgungundlovu District.

Cooperatives and Small Businesses Central to Local Economic Development



The critical role of cooperatives and small businesses in driving local economic development, creating employment and empowering communities was highlighted during the Youth-Owned Cooperative Indaba held in Ward 8 under the Msunduzi Local Municipality.

His Worship the Mayor of the uMgungundlovu District Municipality, Councillor Mzi Zuma, emphasised the importance of creating an enabling environment for emerging businesses and cooperatives to grow and contribute meaningfully to the local economy.

The Mayor highlighted the District Municipality's commitment to supporting small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) as important contributors to economic development. He also highlighted the recently advertised SMME Support Programme, which is aimed at providing assistance to emerging businesses and strengthening their ability to participate in the local economy.

Support for cooperatives and SMMEs is particularly important in creating opportunities for young people to become economically active and develop sustainable enterprises. By strengthening small businesses, communities can benefit from increased economic activity, employment opportunities and improved participation in local value chains.

The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) also participated in the engagement, highlighting the role it plays in supporting businesses and communities across the District. Through its facilitation role, UMEDA connects businesses and community members with relevant government departments, institutions and other stakeholders to help them access available support and opportunities.

This approach enables UMEDA to assist businesses in navigating some of the processes associated with accessing government programmes and services, while

also helping to facilitate communication between entrepreneurs and the relevant institutions.

UMEDA further highlighted its One Stop Shop (OSS) services, which provide support to emerging and existing businesses with key compliance and administrative requirements. These services include assistance with business registration, tax compliance, Central Supplier Database (CSD) registration and other essential business support services.

The One Stop Shop serves as an important platform for entrepreneurs who may require guidance in understanding the processes involved in establishing and formalising their businesses. By helping businesses meet essential compliance requirements, the service contributes to creating a stronger foundation from which enterprises can pursue funding, market opportunities and further growth.

The engagement also reinforced the importance of collaboration between government, development agencies, business support institutions and communities in creating an environment conducive to enterprise development.

For UMEDA, engagements such as the Youth-Owned Cooperative Indaba provide an opportunity to connect directly with entrepreneurs, understand their challenges and ensure that businesses are informed about available support mechanisms and economic opportunities.

As the District continues to focus on inclusive economic development, cooperatives, SMMEs and youth-owned enterprises remain important components of efforts to stimulate local economic activity. Through continued collaboration and business support, stakeholders can help create pathways for emerging enterprises to grow, participate in local markets and contribute to job creation and sustainable economic development across the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Explores Potential of Richmond as a Specialised Poultry Hub



The agricultural sector in Richmond continues to demonstrate significant potential to contribute to economic development, investment, job creation and enterprise growth within the uMgungundlovu District.

On 26 August 2026, UMEDA General Manager: Trade & Investment Mr Sandile Gabela visited Mountain View Broilers in Richmond, where he engaged with Mr Johan Hendrik Van Wyk on the farm's operations and its contribution to the poultry value chain.

Mountain View Broilers demonstrates the scale and productive capacity of Richmond's agricultural sector. The operation produces approximately 42 tonnes of poultry per day and around 342,000 chickens daily, with its products supplied to Rainbow Chicken.

The visit formed part of the work of the UMEDA Social Compact Agriculture Sub-Committee, which is exploring opportunities to identify and promote an Anchor Farms Production Model across the uMgungundlovu District.

The proposed model seeks to identify farms according to their areas of specialisation, enabling agricultural enterprises to focus on specific products or components of the value chain while strengthening linkages between producers, suppliers, processors, logistics providers and other supporting businesses.

Through this approach, UMEDA is also advocating for the promotion and onboarding of black and emerging farmers, including cooperatives, into established agricultural value chains. Creating opportunities for these enterprises to participate in sectors such as poultry can contribute to broader economic inclusion while strengthening the sustainability of the agricultural sector.

The poultry industry presents a range of opportunities extending beyond primary production. These include feed production, animal husbandry, processing, logistics, equipment and other supporting services.

Strengthening participation across these components can create opportunities for local businesses and emerging agricultural enterprises.

UMEDA is therefore exploring the potential to position Richmond as a specialised poultry hub, where farms and supporting enterprises can contribute to different components of the poultry value chain. The development of such a hub could create a more integrated ecosystem around poultry production while attracting further investment into the area.

The scale of operations demonstrated by Mountain View Broilers provides an indication of the opportunities that exist within Richmond's agricultural economy. Established agricultural enterprises can provide a foundation around which smaller businesses, emerging farmers and cooperatives can develop complementary activities and participate in established value chains.

The Anchor Farms Production Model is intended to support this type of coordinated development by identifying existing strengths and building economic opportunities around areas of agricultural specialisation. It also creates a basis for identifying gaps within value chains where new businesses and emerging farmers could potentially participate.

For UMEDA, the development of a specialised agricultural economy in Richmond could contribute to investment attraction, employment creation, enterprise development and increased participation by local communities in the agricultural value chain.

By identifying Anchor Farms and building around their areas of specialisation, UMEDA is working towards a more integrated, productive and inclusive agricultural value chain across the uMgungundlovu District, while exploring new opportunities to position Richmond as a significant centre for poultry and related agricultural activities.

UMEDA Facilitates Expansion of Mooi River Small-Scale Farm



The agricultural sector in Mooi River presents significant opportunities for enterprise development, investment, job creation and the strengthening of local agricultural value chains. UMEDA is supporting efforts to unlock this potential through the facilitation of an expansion plan for a local small-scale farming enterprise.

The Mooi River Boutique Small-Scale Farm currently operates on approximately 50 hectares and has established a diversified agricultural operation specialising in sheep farming, goat farming, fish farming and chicken farming.

The farm's diverse production activities provide a foundation for the development of a broader agricultural model that can integrate different components of the value chain. Recognising this potential, UMEDA is facilitating an expansion plan that would enable the farming operation to occupy approximately 1 000 hectares, creating the basis for a Multi-Purpose Farming Model.

The proposed expansion would significantly increase the scale of agricultural production while creating opportunities to integrate complementary activities into the farming operation. An important component under consideration is the establishment of fertiliser and animal feed production, which could support the farm's own production requirements while creating opportunities to supply other agricultural enterprises.

The integration of production, feed and fertiliser components could contribute towards developing a more connected agricultural value chain in the area. It could also reduce reliance on external inputs while creating opportunities for local enterprises and emerging farmers to participate in supporting activities associated with agricultural production.

The longer-term ambition is to develop the farm into a productive agricultural enterprise capable of supplying established markets, including major companies such

as Rainbow Chicken, as well as other large retail outlets.

The proposed market reach could extend beyond South Africa, with the farm exploring opportunities to supply markets in neighbouring countries within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The initiative also seeks to leverage relevant trade and market-access opportunities, including those associated with the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) where applicable.

For UMEDA, facilitating the expansion of agricultural enterprises such as the Mooi River farm forms part of its broader efforts to promote investment, enterprise development, agricultural production and inclusive economic growth across the uMgungundlovu District.

The Multi-Purpose Farming Model has the potential to create opportunities across several stages of the agricultural value chain, from primary production and animal husbandry to feed and fertiliser, processing, logistics, distribution and market access. This integrated approach could also provide opportunities for emerging farmers and agricultural cooperatives to participate in a growing production ecosystem.

The proposed expansion represents an opportunity to transform an existing 50-hectare diversified farming operation into a larger-scale agricultural enterprise with the potential to serve established markets locally and regionally.

Through continued facilitation and investment support, UMEDA is working with agricultural enterprises to identify opportunities that can unlock productive capacity, strengthen value chains and create sustainable economic opportunities. The development of the Mooi River Multi-Purpose Farming Model is part of this broader vision to position agriculture as an important driver of economic growth, employment and enterprise development within the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Hosts EDP Committee Meeting and Showcases Midlands Film Office



On 8 September 2026 UMED hosted the Economic Development Portfolio (EDP) Committee at its offices, bringing committee members together to review and discuss progress made during August 2026.

The meeting provided an opportunity for members to reflect on key activities undertaken during the month, assess progress against planned initiatives and strengthen coordination around programmes aimed at advancing economic development across the uMgungundlovu District.

The engagement formed part of ongoing efforts to ensure that strategic economic development initiatives are effectively coordinated and aligned with the broader development priorities of the District. Discussions also provided an opportunity to consider progress, identify areas requiring continued attention and strengthen collaboration between stakeholders.

Following the meeting, committee members were given an opportunity to tour the UMEDA Midlands Film Office, gaining insight into its purpose and the role it is expected to play in supporting the development of the local creative economy and film industry.

The visit provided an opportunity to showcase the work being undertaken to establish a platform that can connect film production opportunities with local businesses, creatives and service providers across the District. The Film Office forms part of UMEDA's broader efforts to explore the economic potential of the creative industries and attract film-related investment and activity to uMgungundlovu.

Committee members were able to gain a better understanding of how the Film Office can contribute to creating opportunities within the film value chain, while supporting the development of local creative talent and businesses.

The visit concluded with an engaging movie screening, providing a fitting opportunity for committee members to experience the work and environment of the Film Office firsthand. The screening also highlighted the connection between film production, creative talent and the broader economic opportunities associated with the industry.

The engagement demonstrated the importance of exposing economic development stakeholders to emerging initiatives that have the potential to contribute to the District's economic growth. The Midlands Film Office represents one such opportunity, linking the creative economy with investment, tourism, enterprise development and job creation.

Through continued collaboration with stakeholders and strategic economic development structures, UMEDA remains focused on advancing initiatives that can unlock new opportunities across the uMgungundlovu District.

The EDP Committee engagement and subsequent visit to the Midlands Film Office therefore provided an opportunity to combine strategic oversight, economic development coordination and practical exposure to emerging creative economy initiatives, reinforcing the importance of collaboration in driving sustainable development across the District.

UMEDA Explores Potential Hemp and Cannabis Tourism Route in Richmond



Exploring new opportunities to diversify the tourism offering within the uMgungundlovu District through the development of innovative tourism experiences linked to emerging economic sectors.

On 10 September 2026, UMEDA conducted a site visit to three locations within the Richmond Local Municipality to explore opportunities for the development of a potential hemp and cannabis tourism route.

The visit included an engagement with uNdabezitha Mkhize in Nhlazuka, where discussions focused on opportunities within the hemp and cannabis sector and areas in which UMEDA could potentially provide support. The engagement provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of existing activities and explore how these could contribute to a broader tourism and economic development initiative.

UMEDA also visited Serendipity Farm and Minova Green, two tourism accommodation establishments offering visitors a range of activities and experiences. The visits provided an opportunity to assess the existing tourism infrastructure and explore how these establishments could potentially form part of a broader tourism route.

The proposed route seeks to explore the connection between agriculture, hemp and cannabis-related activities, tourism and local enterprise development. By linking existing businesses and attractions, the initiative could create a more integrated visitor experience while providing opportunities for local enterprises to participate in the tourism value chain.

A hemp and cannabis-themed tourism route could potentially offer visitors a unique experience centred around the emerging sector, while also showcasing the natural environment, accommodation facilities and

other attractions available within Richmond. Such a route could create opportunities for businesses involved in accommodation, hospitality, transport, food services, guiding, retail and other tourism-related activities.

The initiative also provides an opportunity to explore how existing local enterprises can benefit from increased visitor activity. By connecting businesses and tourism products, UMEDA is seeking to identify opportunities that can contribute to local economic development, enterprise growth and job creation.

The site visits form part of UMEDA's broader efforts to identify innovative tourism products that can diversify the District's tourism offering and unlock new economic opportunities. The proposed route is still at an exploratory stage, with further engagement and assessment required to determine its potential development.

Through continued collaboration with local stakeholders, tourism establishments, businesses and communities, UMEDA is exploring ways to develop tourism experiences that reflect the unique economic and cultural assets of the District.

The potential development of a hemp and cannabis tourism route in Richmond represents an opportunity to connect an emerging sector with tourism and local economic development, while creating platforms through which local enterprises and communities can participate in and benefit from new tourism opportunities.

UMEDA and Moses Kotane Research Institute Strengthen Collaboration on Economic Research



The uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA) hosted the Moses Kotane Research Institute (MKRI) for a consultation session aimed at strengthening collaboration in market intelligence, economic research and data-driven investment promotion within the uMgungundlovu District.

The engagement provided an opportunity for both institutions to explore how reliable economic data and research can be used to strengthen investment promotion and support informed economic development planning across the District.

UMEDA General Manager: Trade & Investment, Mr Sandile Gabela, outlined the Agency's mandate and highlighted the importance of accurate, relevant and reliable economic information in supporting investment promotion and facilitation.

He emphasised the value of having access to quality economic data to better understand the District's economic landscape, identify investment opportunities, understand market trends and support engagements with potential investors.

The consultation explored a number of key areas, including the major economic sectors and markets within the District, as well as the data sources and research tools currently utilised by UMEDA in its economic development and investment facilitation activities.

The two institutions also discussed opportunities to strengthen data analysis and research support, recognising the important role that research can play in identifying emerging trends, understanding economic opportunities and informing strategic interventions.

Access to reliable market intelligence is particularly important in supporting investment promotion. Detailed information on sectors, markets, infrastructure, businesses and economic activity can assist development agencies in presenting evidence-based

investment opportunities and better responding to the information requirements of potential investors.

The engagement further explored opportunities for future collaboration and knowledge sharing between UMEDA and MKRI. Such collaboration could strengthen the sharing of research capabilities, economic insights and analytical expertise, while supporting the development of information that is relevant to investment and economic development within the District.

For UMEDA, strengthening its research and data capabilities forms part of its broader commitment to improving investment facilitation and identifying opportunities that can contribute to economic growth across the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

The engagement also reinforced the importance of strategic partnerships between economic development institutions and research organisations. By combining institutional knowledge, research capabilities and reliable data, stakeholders can strengthen their understanding of the regional economy and improve the evidence base supporting investment and development initiatives.

The consultation reaffirmed that research, reliable data and strategic partnerships are important tools in supporting effective investment promotion and sustainable economic development.

Through continued engagement with research institutions such as MKRI, UMEDA seeks to strengthen its market intelligence capabilities and ensure that investment promotion efforts are informed by credible economic evidence, while identifying opportunities that can contribute to investment, enterprise development, job creation and sustainable economic growth in the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Participates in uMgungundlovu Integrated Ecosystem District Dialogue



On the 18th of September The uMgungundlovu Integrated Ecosystem District Dialogue, held at the Hilton Anew Hotel, brought together a range of stakeholders to strengthen the local enterprise and innovation ecosystem.

The multi-stakeholder engagement provided a platform for stakeholders to reflect on the economic landscape of the uMgungundlovu District and explore practical, place-based interventions that can support local businesses, strengthen innovation and contribute to sustainable economic development.

UMEDA was represented by Mr Sandile Gabela, General Manager: Trade & Investment, who contributed to the session focusing on the District Ecosystem Context and Overview. His contribution considered the socio-economic landscape of the District, the current enterprise and innovation environment, as well as key challenges and opportunities that influence local economic development.

The dialogue brought together representatives from local and district government, state-owned enterprises, development finance institutions, the private sector, incubators, academia and development partners. The diverse participation created an opportunity for stakeholders to share perspectives, identify gaps and explore areas where greater coordination could strengthen support for enterprises across the District.

A key focus of the engagement was the need to create an enabling environment in which local businesses can access the resources, markets, finance, skills and partnerships required to grow and become more sustainable.

Discussions explored several areas critical to strengthening the local enterprise ecosystem, including enterprise and finance enablement, market access and local procurement, innovation and skills development, ecosystem support, and stronger partnerships and collaboration.

Access to finance and enterprise support remains important for businesses seeking to establish, expand or improve their operations. Strengthening linkages between enterprises and financial institutions, development partners and business support organisations can help businesses better understand and access available opportunities.

The dialogue also highlighted the importance of market access and local procurement in creating opportunities for local enterprises to participate in supply chains. Connecting businesses to markets can contribute to enterprise growth while supporting increased economic activity within the District.

Innovation, skills development and collaboration were also identified as important components of a stronger enterprise ecosystem. Creating connections between businesses, academia, incubators and other support institutions can help strengthen knowledge sharing, innovation and the development of skills aligned with economic opportunities.

For UMEDA, participation in the dialogue aligns with its mandate to facilitate investment, support enterprise development and contribute to sustainable economic growth across the uMgungundlovu District.

The engagement reinforced the importance of a coordinated approach to economic development, where government, the private sector, development finance institutions, academia and other stakeholders work together to address challenges and unlock opportunities.

Through continued participation in multi-stakeholder platforms such as the Integrated Ecosystem District Dialogue, UMEDA remains committed to strengthening partnerships, facilitating investment and supporting an enterprise environment that enables local businesses to grow and contribute meaningfully to the economic development of the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Empowers Local Filmmakers Ahead of 48-Hour Film Project



The UMEDA Midlands Film Office was abuzz with creative energy as filmmakers, actors and aspiring storytellers from across the uMgungundlovu District gathered for the 48-Hour Film Project: Filmmaking Preparation Workshop.

The workshop formed part of UMEDA's ongoing efforts to strengthen the local creative economy and equip emerging filmmakers with the knowledge and skills required to participate meaningfully in the film industry. It brought together dynamic representatives from various local municipalities across the District, creating an opportunity for local creatives to connect, learn and prepare for the upcoming filmmaking challenge.

The session was led by industry expert and producer Nerusha Sadapal, who shared practical insights and guidance aimed at helping participants navigate the demands of a professional film production environment.

Participants were equipped with strategic insights, creative tools and production skills to assist them in developing their ideas and successfully responding to the 48-Hour Film Project challenge. The workshop also provided an opportunity for aspiring filmmakers and industry professionals to engage with one another and build connections that could support future collaboration.

The 48-Hour Film Project Durban 2026 presents an exciting platform for local talent to showcase its creativity, storytelling ability and filmmaking skills. The fast-paced nature of the challenge requires teams to work collaboratively and transform an idea into a completed film within a limited production period.

As part of its commitment to invest, empower and sustain local film talent, UMEDA will fully fund 10 local teams from the uMgungundlovu District to participate in the 48-Hour Film Project Durban 2026.

The sponsorship is intended to reduce some of the barriers that emerging filmmakers may face when accessing industry opportunities and provide local teams with a platform to gain practical experience, build their portfolios and showcase their work.

The initiative forms part of UMEDA's broader vision for developing the creative economy within the uMgungundlovu District. Through the UMEDA Midlands Film Office, the Agency is working to create platforms that connect local creatives with opportunities within the film industry while promoting the District as a destination for film production.

Supporting local filmmakers also has the potential to generate opportunities beyond the creative process itself. Film productions require a wide range of services, including accommodation, transport, catering, security, equipment, technical services and other local suppliers, creating opportunities for businesses across the wider economy.

The preparation workshop therefore represents more than a training session; it is part of a broader effort to build the capacity, networks and confidence of local creatives while connecting them to opportunities within the growing film industry.

Through initiatives such as the 48-Hour Film Project sponsorship and the work of the Midlands Film Office, UMEDA continues to invest in local talent, empower emerging creatives and build a sustainable film ecosystem that can contribute to economic development, enterprise growth and job creation across the uMgungundlovu District.

UMEDA Empowers Local Filmmakers Ahead of 48-Hour Film Project



The UMEDA Tourism Office joined community members, local leaders and tourism stakeholders for the Tourism Month celebration held on 20 September 2026 in Appelsbosch, highlighting the area's rich religious, cultural and historical heritage and its potential to develop as a growing religious tourism destination.

The celebration provided an opportunity to honour the unique legacy of Appelsbosch while exploring ways in which its heritage assets, stories and traditions can contribute to tourism development and local economic opportunities.

The programme was led by KZN MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Rev. Musa Zondi, KZN Tourism & Film Authority Chairperson Dr Sibusiso Ndebele, and Bishop Nkosingithi Myaka. Activities included a wreath-laying ceremony at the Ntombazane Nsele Memorial and the unveiling of a plaque at the Appelsbosch Lutheran Church, recognising important elements of the community's history and heritage.

The celebration also marked the 100th anniversary of Appelsbosch Hospital, recognising the important role the institution has played in the community over the past century. The milestone celebrated a longstanding connection between Appelsbosch and Sweden, as well as the contribution of faith, education and healthcare to the development of the community.

Speaking during the celebration, uMshwathi Local Municipality Mayor Mr Mandla Zondi emphasised the importance of residents taking pride in their community and playing an active role in preserving its heritage. He highlighted the need to protect Appelsbosch's historical assets while continuing to develop new tourism attractions that can encourage more visitors to discover the area.

The Mayor's call highlighted the important relationship between heritage preservation and tourism

development. Maintaining historical sites, sharing local stories and developing visitor experiences can create opportunities for communities to participate in tourism while ensuring that important aspects of local heritage are preserved for future generations.

MEC Rev. Musa Zondi also applauded the people of Appelsbosch for their efforts to preserve and care for their surroundings. He encouraged the community to continue protecting its heritage and developing the area, noting the potential for these efforts to contribute to the growth of tourism in Appelsbosch.

For UMEDA, participation in the celebration provided an opportunity to engage with local stakeholders and gain further insight into the tourism potential of Appelsbosch. The area's combination of religious heritage, cultural significance, historical sites and its longstanding connection with Sweden provides a foundation from which distinctive tourism experiences can be developed.

The celebration also demonstrated the importance of community involvement in tourism development. Local residents are central to preserving heritage, sharing stories and creating authentic experiences that can attract visitors while contributing to local economic activity.

With its rich history and strong religious and cultural identity, Appelsbosch has the potential to position itself as a destination where visitors can experience a meaningful journey through history, faith, culture and community.

Through continued collaboration with local communities, municipalities and tourism stakeholders, UMEDA remains committed to supporting the identification and development of tourism opportunities that can strengthen the visitor economy and contribute to local economic development across the uMgungundlovu District.

MUT and Partners Explore Anchor Farm Initiative in Mooi River



A delegation from Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), led by Chief Buthelezi, son of the late Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, together with MUT Vice-Chancellor Professor Rushiella Songca and the entire MUT Council, on the 29th of September 2026 visited Mooi River to explore opportunities for collaboration towards the establishment of an Anchor Farm.

The visit brought together MUT, the uMgungundlovu Economic Development Agency (UMEDA), the Western College of Agriculture and SAMID, with discussions focusing on the potential to strengthen agricultural education, practical training and production. The initiative seeks to create a stronger link between academic learning and practical experience by providing students with an environment where they can apply their knowledge while gaining exposure to real agricultural operations.

MUT and SAMID are currently exploring the potential purchase of a farm located near the Western College of Agriculture in Mooi River. The proposed site could serve as a practical training and production facility, providing a platform for students to develop agricultural skills while supporting broader opportunities in the local agricultural economy.

UMEDA will support the initiative through a coordinating role, bringing together the relevant institutions, government stakeholders and other partners. The Agency will also work to ensure that the proposed development is aligned with the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) of Mpofana Local Municipality, thereby linking the project to local development priorities.

The proposed Mooi River initiative forms part of a wider vision to develop Anchor Farms across the uMgungundlovu District, with agricultural activities tailored to the strengths and opportunities of individual municipalities. Mpofana is being explored for an Anchor Farm in Mooi River, while Richmond has been earmarked for poultry production and uMshwathi for fresh produce.

The approach is intended to extend beyond training by creating opportunities for agricultural production, enterprise development and participation in local value chains. It could provide students and emerging agricultural practitioners with practical exposure while creating opportunities for collaboration between educational institutions, agricultural schools, government and the private sector.

The initiative builds on existing partnerships involving MUT, the Western College of Agriculture and SAMID, creating a foundation for further cooperation in agriculture and skills development. By bringing these stakeholders together, the programme seeks to strengthen the connection between education, practical skills, agricultural production and local economic development.

The proposed Anchor Farm programme represents an opportunity to use agricultural education and productive land as platforms for developing skills and unlocking economic opportunities within the District. Through coordinated partnerships and municipality-specific agricultural initiatives, the programme aims to contribute to a stronger and more integrated agricultural sector across uMgungundlovu.



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