

PublicSector

MANAGER

Public Service Month

Inkosi Mzamo Buthelezi
on progress towards
a capable state

Deaf Awareness Month

Making inclusion
a reality

Sho't left

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Heritage Month

Celebrating our shared heritage



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September 2026

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**government
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Building a capable, ethical

and development-oriented future is everyone's responsibility

Last year, during Public Service Month, I called on the public service to recommit itself to professionalism, integrity, and the Batho Pele principles of service excellence. I did so with a clear understanding that our people have grown impatient with empty promises. They want to see a state that works, responds to their needs and delivers services efficiently and with dignity.

Building a capable, ethical, and developmental state remains one of the priorities of this administration. This requires us to recruit and develop public servants who are not only skilled and citizen-centred, but who can also be trusted to execute their responsibilities with integrity and professionalism.

A year on, Public Service Month provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made,

the challenges that remain, and the work that lies ahead. More importantly, it is an opportunity for every public servant to consider the role they must play in building a state that serves its people.

Professionalising the Public Service

The signing into law by President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Public Service Amendment Act and the Public Administration Management Amendment Act marked an important step in strengthening the professionalisation of the public service.

The Amendment Acts reinforce ethical conduct and provide greater clarity on



the roles and responsibilities of executive authorities and heads of departments. They also seek to address wage disparities, promote fiscal sustainability in conditions of service, and give effect to Constitutional Court findings concerning provisions of the Public Service Act. These legislative reforms are complemented by the Professionalisation Framework, which continues to guide recruitment and ensure that suitably qualified and competent candidates are appointed to positions within the public service.

Professionalisation, however, cannot end with recruitment. It must be supported by continuous learning, skills development, and a culture of excellence. The National School of Government remains central to this effort. More than 600 000 people have enrolled in its programmes since its inception, while the Nyukela Senior Management Service programme continues to expand compulsory training in areas such as financial management and digital skills.

The establishment of the 12-member Ministerial Advisory Committee, chaired by former Deputy President Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, will further strengthen this work by providing strategic guidance on the curriculum of the Na-



DPSA Minister Inkosi Mzamo Buthelezi led the African Peer Review Mechanism's 2027 Africa Governance Report Round One Consultations in Durban, KZN.

tional School of Government. Its contribution will be important in ensuring that public servants are equipped to respond to the increasingly complex demands of a modern, capable, and developmental state.

An Ethical and Accountable Public Service

Competence without ethics is not enough.

A professional public service must be ethical, accountable, reliable and worthy of public trust. It must embody the Batho Pele principles not merely as a policy framework, but as a standard of conduct in every interaction with citizens. For this reason, we have intensified lifestyle audits and consequence management as part of our efforts to prevent cor-

ruption, protect public resources and rebuild confidence in government. In 2026, we achieved a 93% compliance rate in lifestyle audits. This is encouraging progress, but it is not the destination. We are working with key stakeholders, including COGTA and SALGA, to develop regulations that will extend lifestyle audits to the local government sphere.

Accountability must also mean that misconduct has consequences. We will therefore intensify the monitoring of disciplinary case backlogs across national and provincial departments, in line with the objectives of the Discipline Management Strategy. The aim is to strengthen discipline management through clear norms and standards while building the

institutional capacity required to deal with misconduct effectively and without unnecessary delay.

The Central Register for disciplinary cases will be operational across all three spheres of government from the beginning of the next financial year. This will strengthen accountability by preventing dismissed employees from simply moving between government institutions to evade the consequences of misconduct.

The Public Service Commission Bill, which is now before the President for assent, represents another important step towards strengthening the Public Service Commission and reinforcing its impartiality and independence.

These measures send a clear message: public service is a position of responsibility,

not entitlement. Where public resources and public trust are placed in our hands, accountability must follow.

Improving Service Delivery

Ultimately, the success of government is not measured by the number of policies adopted or strategies developed. It is measured by the experience of the citizen. A capable state is one that turns policy into tangible improvements in people's lives.

Innovations incubated through the Centre for Public Service Innovation are already demonstrating what is possible when government combines public-sector expertise with innovation and technology. The award-winning Broselow Emergency Reference Tape, for example, helps reduce paediatric emergency errors and save lives in healthcare facilities across the Western Cape, Gauteng and the City of Tshwane. The Smart Agriculture Box is supporting Correctional Services and rural communities, while shared e-recruitment and citizen portal systems are helping government improve the way it interacts with citizens.

Government has also approved the Roadmap on Digital Transformation of Government, establishing a focused frame-

work for modernising public services through investment in digital public infrastructure.

At the Department of Public Service and Administration, we have further embraced this digital transformation through the launch of the Batho Pele AI Chatbot. The tool provides public servants with instant access to public service policy updates, circulars, legislation and other critical information.

The initiative is the brainchild of a public-private partnership between the DPSA, Meta and Juicetel. It demonstrates how responsible innovation and strategic partnerships can help government improve access to information, strengthen institutional knowledge and support more responsive public administration.

Technology, however, is not a substitute for public servants.

The Public Service Commission Bill, which is now before the President for assent, represents another important step towards strengthening the Public Service Commission and reinforcing its impartiality and independence.

It is an enabler. The ultimate responsibility for service delivery remains with the people entrusted with serving the public.

Restoring Confidence in Government

The work of building a capable, ethical and development-oriented state is ultimately about one thing: restoring confidence in government. Citizens must be able to believe that when they approach a public institution, they will be treated with dignity; that when government commits, it will act on it; and that when public servants fail in their responsibilities, there will be consequences.

This is not the responsibility of one department, one minister or one sphere of government. It is a collective responsibility. Every public servant has a role to play

— from the frontline official assisting a citizen, to the manager making decisions, to the senior executive providing strategic leadership. Public Service Month must therefore be more than an annual commemoration. It must be a moment of recommitment.

We must recommit ourselves to professionalism over complacency, integrity over personal interest, accountability over impunity, and service over self.

A capable state is built by capable people. An ethical state is built by ethical people. And a developmental state is built by public servants who understand that their authority exists not for themselves, but to serve the people of South Africa.

The responsibility is ours. And the work must continue. ♦



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Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
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Tourism growth reflects confidence in South Africa

September is a significant month in South Africa, marked by commemorations that celebrate our identity, heritage, service and national development. This edition highlights Tourism Month, Heritage Month, Public Service Month and Deaf Awareness Month, each of which

reminds us of the diversity, resilience and spirit of our nation.

Tourism Month offers an opportunity to celebrate South Africa's rich cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes and diverse tourism experiences, while reflecting on the sector's contribution to economic growth, job creation and nation-building.

Tourism remains one of South Africa's key economic sectors, supporting businesses and livelihoods across the country. From accommodation establishments and tour operators to restaurants, transport providers, artists, crafters and community-owned enterprises, the sector creates opportunities for millions of people. It also

contributes to local economic development in urban centres, rural areas, townships and small towns, helping to ensure that the ben-

efits of economic growth reach communities across the country.

As we celebrate Tourism Month, we have good reason to be encouraged by the sector's performance. According to Statistics South Africa's International Tourism, June 2026 release and the Department of Tourism's analysis of the data, South Africa welcomed more than 5.58 million international tourists between January and June 2026, representing a 12.3% increase compared with the same period last year. This growth was underpinned by a 14.3% increase in arrivals from the rest of Africa, while overseas arrivals grew by 5.6%, reaffirming South Africa's appeal across both regional and international markets.

In June 2026 alone, the country recorded 823 365 international tourist arrivals, a 9.8% increase compared with June 2025. Significantly, tourist arrivals for June 2026 exceeded pre-pandemic June 2019 levels by 12.1%.

These achievements are particularly noteworthy given the challenging domestic and global environment in which tourism destinations compete for visitors, investment and market share. Economic pressures, geopolitical uncertainty and changing travel patterns continue to shape the global tourism landscape. Yet South Africa continues to attract visitors from across the world, reaffirming confidence in our country's cultural diversity, natural beauty, world-class attractions and renowned hospitality.

This positive performance has not happened by chance. It is supported by deliberate efforts to create an environment that encourages travel, investment and economic activity. Government remains committed to creating the conditions necessary for tourism to thrive. This was recently reinforced through a strategic partnership between the departments of Tourism and Public Works and Infrastructure aimed at accelerating invest-



Nomonde Mnukwa,
GCIS Acting Director-General.



ment in tourism infrastructure, strengthening project preparation and unlocking greater private-sector investment.

This commitment is further reflected in government's efforts to improve ease of access for travellers. The recently launched Electronic Travel Authorisation system is designed to make travel to South Africa easier, faster and more predictable, while strengthening border security. The system enables eligible travellers to apply online from anywhere in the world without having to visit a South African mission or visa processing centre.

Over time, the system is expected to expand beyond visitor authorisations to include work, study and other visa categories.

The encouraging performance of the tourism sector demonstrates what can be achieved when government, business and communities work together towards a common goal. It also highlights the importance of a capable, professional and re-

sponsive public service. Behind every positive visitor experience is the work of public servants who help create an environment in which tourism can thrive.

From facilitating travel through ports of entry and maintaining public infrastructure to preserving heritage sites, protecting natural resources and delivering essential services, public servants contribute directly to the sector's success.

The coincidence of Tourism Month and Public Service Month provides an opportunity to acknowledge the many public servants whose work contributes, often behind the scenes, to tourism growth and national development. The professionalism, responsiveness and commitment to service demonstrated by public servants help shape the experiences of both citizens and visitors. Every effort to improve service delivery and strengthen accountability contributes to building confidence in South Africa as a country in which people choose to visit,

invest and do business.

While government has an important role to play in creating the conditions for tourism growth, promoting South Africa is a shared responsibility. Every interaction with a visitor, every positive story shared about a community and every effort to showcase the country's strengths contributes to shaping perceptions of South Africa.

As public servants, we should be among the country's foremost ambassadors. Through professionalism, responsiveness and a commitment to excellence, we strengthen confidence in our country and help ensure that South Africa remains a destination of choice for tourists, investors and business travellers alike.

As citizens, we should also take the opportunity to experience the beauty and diversity of our own country. Domestic tourism remains an important pillar of the sector, supporting local businesses and sustaining jobs throughout the year. In line with

the call by Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille for South Africans to travel locally and support the sector, I encourage public servants, their families and all citizens to take advantage of Tourism Month initiatives, visit local destinations and become ambassadors for our country by sharing positive stories and experiences that showcase the best of South Africa.

As we mark Tourism Month and Public Service Month, let us recognise that a thriving tourism sector and a capable public service go hand in hand. Tourism creates opportunities for growth, investment and employment, while an effective public service creates the environment in which those opportunities can flourish.

Together, let us continue to showcase South Africa to the world, strengthen confidence in our country and build a future of growth, opportunity and shared prosperity for all. ♦

Driving tourism and job creation through environmental stewardship

Every South African should have the opportunity to visit the Cradle of Humankind UNESCO World Heritage site. As one of the world's most significant palaeoanthropological sites, it offers visitors a unique opportunity to explore humanity's shared origins and gain a deeper understanding of humankind's journey.

That is all I could think about as I sat across from Gauteng MEC for Environment, Ewan Botha, during an interview for *PSM* magazine at Maropeng Boutique Hotel.

Ahead of Tourism Month, which coincides with Heritage

Month in September, Botha spoke about the importance of environmental stewardship, the role of heritage and natural assets in promoting tourism and the opportunities these sectors create for economic growth and job creation.

"If you have not been to a space of human origin, Maropeng is certainly a place to visit. While you discover our history and evolution as human beings to what we are now, it is worth visiting other places that the province has to offer, including hiking trails in Mogale City. Gauteng is a special place to explore nature and the coun-



Gauteng MEC for Environment Ewan Botha.

try's economic hub," he said.

Maropeng is the official visitor centre, a UNESCO World Heritage Site located about 50 kilometres north-west of Johannesburg. It is one of South Africa's eight UNESCO World Heritage sites and the only one in Gauteng. The site contains one of the world's richest concentrations of hominin fossils, some dating back as far as 3.5 million years.

More tourism offers

However, that is not all that Gauteng has to offer. Besides palaeo-tourism, Gauteng is a hub of fashion, food, sport, popular culture, media, game viewing and commerce, making it a bucket-list destination for both leisure and business tourists.

Botha is confident that tourists can spend two to three weeks exploring the wide range of attractions the province has to offer.

Among Gauteng's hidden gems, he highlighted the Cullinan Diamond Mine in the quaint village of Cullinan, about a 30-minute drive east of Pretoria. The village is a historic mining settlement best known for the discovery of the world's largest diamond, the 3 106-carat Cullinan Diamond, in 1905.

There are also several parks



and green spaces, including the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden in Roodepoort, Rietvlei Nature Reserve near Pretoria, the Dinokeng Game Reserve north of Pretoria and Gold Reef City Theme Park.

Protecting natural heritage

However, if residents do not keep the environment clean, the beauty of the province could fade and the number of tourists visiting Gauteng could decline.

Botha's department is responsible for protecting the environment and conserving nature in the province. Its responsibilities include monitoring air quality

and ensuring compliance with licence conditions, including atmospheric emission and waste management licences.

The department also issues environmental authorisations for activities that may affect or disturb the environment.

"We are also big in climate change, looking at nature-based solutions, adaptation and mitigation strategies. We are really looking to reform the environment as a whole," he explained.

As far as Botha is concerned, environmental issues have not always been communicated effectively. Caring for the environment is often portrayed as a burden when, in fact, it presents

opportunities to create jobs, improve livelihoods and boost municipal revenues through the green economy.

For instance, in the waste management sector, residents can generate income by collecting and separating recyclable waste and selling it to buy-back centres. The waste is then processed and reintroduced into the economy, contributing to a circular economy that reduces waste and creates economic opportunities.

Instead of sending waste directly to landfill sites, integrated waste management facilities sort, recycle and process different waste streams to recover



valuable materials, produce compost or generate renewable energy.

"There is so much you can do in the green jobs sector, including air quality, climate change and green innovation," he explained.

Growing the green economy

Several years ago, waste-to-energy (WtE) was virtually unheard of. Today, innovation has transformed it into a growing industry that offers a range of career opportunities. The sector combines environmental sustainability with energy production, creating jobs in engineering, plant operations, regulatory compliance and business development.

To support workers and entrepreneurs, particularly in the waste management sector, the department partners with producer responsibility organi-

sations (PROs). These organisations collect fees from producers and use the funds to support waste collection, sorting and recycling initiatives.

Producers of cans, paper and glass contribute to PROs, enabling small businesses to collect and reclaim waste, develop their expertise and access markets for recyclable materials.

Leading beyond borders

The Gauteng Provincial Government, represented by Botha, was recently elected to the position of Vice President for Africa of Regions4, a global network of regional governments driving action on climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development.

In this role, the province will help strengthen African regional participation within the network and contribute to discussions on

climate action, sustainable development and climate finance.

"This is one of the biggest achievements. It means that Gauteng has a big voice globally through Regions4, because we are the subnational government that is most powerful in Africa. We have an opportunity to advocate for important issues around climate change and biodiversity in the country and the continent," explained the MEC.

This is a governance role within Regions4 that supports coordination among African countries, facilitates knowledge exchange and ensures that regional perspectives from across the continent are reflected in the network's global engagements.

The position will contribute to advancing innovative financing approaches, including blended finance and carbon markets, while ensuring that subnational governments are recognised as

credible implementing partners with direct access to global funding mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund and Global Environment Facility. A key focus will also be supporting the development of investment-ready projects and strengthening collaboration between subnational governments and development partners.

The provincial government aims to elevate the voice of African regions in global climate negotiations, including United Nations Climate Change Conference processes and international financing discussions. This will help ensure that subnational governments are recognised as active architects of solutions rather than passive implementers.

Among Botha's priorities is the implementation of the Kaalspruit Catchment Resilience Plan, a multi-municipal and provincial initiative launched to address severe water pollution, urban flooding and ecological degradation along the Kaalspruit River. The river flows from Ekurhuleni through the City of Johannesburg into the Hennops River in Tshwane, making cross-boundary cooperation critical to its restoration. ♦

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Leadership measured in every drop

Years of public service have shaped Lindokuhle Nzoyi's belief that strong institutions are built through ethical leadership, capable people and a commitment to service delivery. These principles now guide her work as Chief Executive Officer of Amatola Water, where she is focused on improving operational performance, strengthening governance and ensuring reliable water services for communities.

The appointment carries significant responsibility. Amatola Water plays a critical role in supporting water security, public health and economic development in the Eastern Cape. For Nzoyi, leading the water board is therefore less about personal achievement and more about ensuring that the institution continues to deliver, grow and adapt to future challenges.



Photo: Supplied

"I view the appointment not only as a personal milestone, but as a mandate to serve an institution that plays a critical role in water security and socio-economic development in the Eastern Cape," Nzoyi reflected.

Having already led the organisation in an acting capacity, she assumed the permanent position with detailed knowledge of its operations, challenges and relationships. She said the experience allowed her to understand Amatola Water's strengths and stakeholder environment, while the permanent appointment offers continuity and space for longer-term planning.

"The appointment affirms many years of public service, continuous learning and commitment to institutional development," she explained.

Her appointment followed another career milestone – being named Leader of the Year at the 2026 Africa Career Summit Gala and Awards. Nzoyi describes both honours as humbling, but is clear that recognition must translate into results.

"The Leader of the Year Award recognised my leadership journey, while my appointment as Chief Executive placed an even greater responsibility on me to translate leadership into measurable and sustainable institutional



Amatola Water Board CEO Lindokuhle Nzoyi at the WISA 2026 Biennial Conference.

Photo: Amatola Water Board/Facebook

performance," she said.

Measurable leadership

That emphasis on measurable leadership is central to how Nzoyi approaches the role. Amatola Water provides bulk water services, works as a technical partner to municipalities and implements strategic water infrastructure projects. The organisation, therefore, operates where engineering, public finance and the everyday needs of communities meet.

"Water is fundamental to human dignity, public health, economic development and the sustainability of communities," she said. "My responsibility is to ensure that the organisation continues fulfilling this mandate while contributing meaning-

fully to the development of the Eastern Cape."

The task is complicated by financial pressure, municipal debt and ageing infrastructure. Deteriorating assets contribute to breakdowns, service interruptions, higher maintenance costs and water losses, while unpaid municipal accounts place pressure on cash flow and limit the pace of rehabilitation and replacement.

Laying out her vision, she said Amatola Water is strengthening revenue collection, entering into payment arrangements, containing costs and improving debtor and creditor management. Critical maintenance is being prioritised, while the utility engages government and funding institutions about sustainable infrastructure financing and

pursues additional business to diversify revenue.

One of the clearest tests will be reducing water losses. Parliament recently expressed concern that losses accounted for about 19% of the utility's treated water, while the utility's target is to keep losses below 9%.

"Water losses represent both the loss of a scarce natural resource and revenue that could be reinvested in infrastructure and service delivery," Nzoyi added.

Addressing the challenges

The utility is using monthly water-balance monitoring, meter installation and calibration, pipeline inspections, leak detection and repairs and the replacement of deteriorated infrastructure. It

is also strengthening monitoring through supervisory control and data acquisition and telemetry systems.

Preventative maintenance forms another part of the response. At the same time, the utility is working with municipalities, communities and law enforcement agencies to address illegal connections, vandalism and infrastructure theft.

Nzoyi also wants municipalities and communities to experience a more responsive institution. Planned improvements include regular operational meetings with customers, clearer escalation channels and better reporting on maintenance, interruptions and restoration times.

"Customer and stakeholder experience is a measurable operational priority at Amatola Water," she said, adding that emergency response and communication protocols are being reviewed to provide accurate and timely information, while feedback and satisfaction assessments will help identify recurring problems.

Restoring confidence also requires sound governance, with the CEO explaining that the entity was assessing historical non-compliance cases to determine their nature, whether value was received, whether any financial

loss occurred and whether officials or service providers bear responsibility.

The CEO added that where wrongdoing, negligence or loss is established, disciplinary, recovery and consequence-management processes will follow. Supply chain management, contract administration, expenditure controls, delegations, compliance monitoring and record keeping are also being strengthened, with audit findings incorporated into monitored action plans.

Future plans

Over the next three to five years, Nzoyi intends to improve financial stability, operational reliability and audit outcomes while accelerating essential maintenance and rehabilitation. A newly approved organisational structure prioritises critical technical positions to strengthen project delivery and the response to water challenges.

The utility is also working towards Blue Drop and Green Drop standards while maintaining the international accreditation standards of its laboratory. Nzoyi said these programmes support drinking water quality, wastewater management, scientific credibility and public confidence.

Her vision is to build Amatola



Cleaning of the Laing Water System in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality.

Photo: Amatola Water Board/Facebook

Water into a financially sustainable, technically capable and future-focused utility. While organisational performance is currently above 80%, she aims to sustain it above 95% during her tenure.

Empowering young professionals

Yet her vision of institutional strength extends beyond performance targets. It also includes developing the next generation of leaders. Transformation, she said, has been a consistent passion throughout her career, including during her time at the Eastern Cape Provincial Treasury and the Office of the Premier.

That commitment is reflected in the utility's investment in young professionals. At the time of the interview, Amatola Water had about 20 interns and learners in technical fields, most

of them women. They are given meaningful assignments, technical exposure, decision-making responsibilities, mentorship and opportunities to work on complex projects.

Her desired legacy is both operational and human: dependable infrastructure, ethical administration, reliable water services and a new generation of capable leaders equipped to continue the work.

Nzoyi said she wanted her legacy to be defined by the institution's sustainable performance, the reliable delivery of water services and the development of people who would continue to lead and serve beyond her tenure. She added that she hoped her leadership journey would show that women can lead complex infrastructure institutions with courage, discipline, compassion and integrity. ♦



ECONOMIC CLUSTER

Growing the economy and
creating jobs

SOUTH AFRICA TRADES STRONGER

South Africa recorded a R20.1 billion trade surplus in July 2026, driven by growing exports of vehicles, coal and manganese. Exports reached R194 billion, strengthening economic activity, supporting jobs and boosting confidence in the country's productive sectors.



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Developing innovative ways to advance STEM education for children

Recognition as South Africa's Young Leader in Education at the 2025 40 Under 40 Awards is the latest milestone in Dr Moleboheng Mokhele's growing influence in the education sector.

A senior lecturer in Natural Sciences Education at North-West University (NWU), she is helping to advance science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education through her teaching, research and commitment to



developing future talent.

The award honours young professionals under the age of 40 who are making a significant impact in their respective fields, and reflects Mokhele's contribution to strengthening education in South Africa.

The award recognises Mokhele's groundbreaking contribution to early STEM education, particularly her research on innovative teaching approaches that integrate environmental and digital learning in early childhood development.

According to Mokhele, STEM education equips children with problem-solving, analytical and critical-thinking skills, helping them make sense of the world around them.

"For me, STEM education is also a matter of equity. Every child, regardless of their socio-economic background, deserves access to quality STEM learning opportunities that allow them to thrive and imagine new possibilities for their future. This ensures that no child is left behind," she said.

Learning through play

Her work focuses on reimagining how young children are introduced to STEM, particularly in South Africa and the Global South. Central to her approach is

the belief that science education should be meaningful, engaging and connected to children's everyday experiences.

One of the initiatives that contributed to her national recognition is the Renewable Rangers carpet game, a learning tool designed for children aged four to six years.

Drawing on storytelling, culture, play and adventure, the game introduces concepts such as renewable energy, environmental stewardship, sustainability and problem-solving in an age-appropriate and engaging way.

Through the character of Dr Mummy Ranger, children embark on a journey across South Africa's provinces, solving challenges and learning how communities use renewable energy.

Through guided play, they are introduced to the basics of solar,

wind and hydroelectric energy, making complex scientific concepts easier to understand through practical experiences and imaginative exploration.

"As they play, children also develop important cognitive and social skills, including collaboration, communication and decision-making. The intention is not simply to transmit scientific facts, but to create opportunities for meaningful learning that supports deeper understanding and connection," she said.

Integrating culture into STEM learning

What sets Renewable Rangers apart is its integration of STEM education with indigenous knowledge systems and culturally responsive storytelling.

This approach helps children see themselves reflected in the learning experience, while

affirming the value of their cultures, languages and lived experiences in understanding scientific concepts.

As they journey across South Africa's nine provinces, children encounter scientists, engineers, farmers and community members from diverse backgrounds. Along the way, they are introduced to local traditions, languages and indigenous environmental knowledge, demonstrating how science is embedded in communities and everyday life.

Her goal is to develop innovative, home-grown approaches to introducing science concepts in early childhood education, ensuring that learning is culturally relevant and celebrates African identity, knowledge and pride, rather than relying on imported models.

Mokhele said her work was

“For me, STEM education is also a matter of equity. Every child, regardless of their socio-economic background, deserves access to quality STEM learning opportunities that allow them to thrive and imagine new possibilities for their future.



deeply personal. Trained as a microbiologist, she developed an interest in early childhood STEM education through her experience of using play-based learning and educational games to support children with speech and language delays.

"Through this, I saw how quickly children learn when they are engaged, supported and free to explore. I also saw their natural curiosity grow, especially in science and problem-solving," she added.

A personal journey

Mokhele's work expanded during her time in the United Arab Emirates, where she served as

a STEM Ambassador for the Ministry of Education. The experience deepened her appreciation for the role of culture and identity in education.

Receiving South Africa's Young Leader in Education Award was a humbling moment in her career. She dedicates the accolade to her two sons, who continue to inspire her work and remain her greatest source of motivation.

She says the award reflects years of studying, teaching, conducting research, securing funding and mentoring students.

"This recognition reminds me that meaningful work is built slowly, through persistence, re-

silience and purpose," she said.

Building on the success of Renewable Rangers, there is growing interest in scaling the initiative through engagement with key stakeholders, including the Department of Basic Education.

Mokhele hopes to explore its integration into early childhood science curricula as a tool for introducing foundational STEM concepts in an accessible and developmentally appropriate way.

In another significant milestone, Renewable Rangers was nominated for the 2025 NSTF-South32 Emerging Researcher Award. Mokhele views the

nomination as recognition of the importance of early childhood STEM education, sustainability education and culturally responsive learning.

Academic journey

Mokhele holds a PhD in Natural Sciences Education, with research focused on the role of visual literacy in science learning and how visual approaches can help young learners understand complex scientific concepts.

Since joining NWU in July 2024, she has combined teaching, research and postgraduate supervision with contributions to national and international research collaborations. ♦



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MEDIA PROGRAMME

2026 Africa Green Hydrogen Summit

PRE-SUMMIT BUILD-UP VISIT TO SPOTLIGHT GREEN HYDROGEN RESEARCH

Venue: Eskom RT&D Centre, Rosherville, Johannesburg

Date: Wednesday, 02 September 2026

Time: 09:00 – 12:00

- **Research Overview:** Insight into how Eskom bridges the gap between applied research and large-scale industrial deployment.
- **Media Doorstop:** Briefing with Minister Dr. Kgosientsho Ramokgopa, Eskom Board Chair Mr. Mteto Nyathi, and Eskom GCE Mr. Dan Marokane regarding the strategic importance of these technologies to South Africa's energy landscape.

SUMMIT PROGRAMME

Venue: Century City, Cape Town

14 SEP 2026 (DAY 0)

Women in Green Hydrogen Luncheon

15 SEP 2026 (DAY 1)

09:00 – 12:30: Opening Plenary
(Keynote address and announcements
and Ministerial High-Level Panel discussion)

14:00 – 17:00: Breakaway Sessions

17:00 – 20:00: Networking Session

16 SEP 2026 (DAY 2)

09:30 – 15:00: Breakaway Sessions

15:00 – 15:45: Closing Session

MEDIA ACCREDITATION

Media accreditation for the Summit is mandatory. Please note the following requirements:

Application form to be requested from Jeanette.Madlala@dee.gov.za

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 07 SEPTEMBER 2026

ACCREDITATION DATE: 14 SEPTEMBER 2026

TIMES: 08H00 TO 18H00

VENUE: CENTURY CITY CLUBHOUSE



electricity & energy

Department:
Electricity and Energy
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Documenting indigenous medicinal knowledge and plant use for childhood diseases

Dr Tshepiso Ndhlovu views South Africa's heritage as one of the country's greatest assets, with its rich cultural diversity, flora and fauna, languages, traditions and indigenous knowledge systems that reflect centuries of accumulated wisdom that continue to shape the nation's identity.

In a recent interview with *PSM* magazine ahead of Heritage Month, Ndhlovu said his work aims to document and preserve indigenous medicinal knowledge, and to evaluate plant species used by rural communities to manage human

ailments, particularly childhood diseases.

He is a lecturer and researcher in the School of Biology and Environmental Sciences at the University of Mpumalanga. He is also the principal investigator for NRF-funded projects under the Thuthuka Post-PhD Track Programme.

The projects also support postgraduate student training and mentorship. Students actively participate in fieldwork, data collection, scientific writing and community engagement. His research focuses on ethnobotany, medicinal plants,

indigenous knowledge systems, ethnopharmacology, biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

"I investigate the use, conservation and value addition of medicinal plants and indigenous crops, particularly their roles in healthcare, food security and community wellbeing," he explained.



Preserving traditional knowledge

Ndhlovu completed his doctoral studies at North-West University in 2023, where he investigated medicinal plants used to treat childhood diseases and their associated economic potential in the North West. He chose this area of research because childhood diseases remain a significant public health concern, particularly in rural communities, where access to formal healthcare services may be limited.

Throughout his academic journey, he discovered that many families across South Africa continue to rely on traditional medicine as either a primary or complementary healthcare option. Despite its widespread use, much of this knowledge remains undocumented or has not been scientifically evaluated.

His research findings demonstrated a rich diversity of indigenous medicinal plant species used by traditional health practitioners, highlighting the importance of preserving this knowledge while promoting sustainable utilisation.

He strongly believes that indigenous knowledge of medicinal plants, sustainable harvesting practices, food

systems and environmental stewardship provides practical solutions for healthcare, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. Many rural communities continue to rely on indigenous medicinal plants for primary healthcare, making this knowledge socially and economically significant.

"Documenting, preserving and promoting this knowledge ensures that future generations appreciate their cultural heritage while creating opportunities for scientific innovation, sustainable livelihoods and economic development," he explained.

This commitment is reinforced by the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Act of 2019, which provides a legislative framework for the recognition, protection, development,

promotion and sustainable use of indigenous knowledge.

The Act recognises indigenous knowledge as a valuable national asset. It seeks to ensure that knowledge holders are recognised, their intellectual property is protected and they benefit equitably from the use of their knowledge.

Partnering with communities

As the principal investigator for NRF-funded projects under the Thuthuka Post-PhD Track Programme, he focuses primarily on medicinal plants used to treat childhood diseases in Mpumalanga. His research integrates indigenous knowledge and scientific methodologies to support conservation, healthcare innovation and sustainable development.

"Our current research focuses primarily on childhood diseases that commonly affect children in rural communities, particularly respiratory illnesses, gastrointestinal disorders, skin conditions and other frequently reported childhood ailments that are traditionally treated using medicinal plants," he explained.

He is encouraged that communities continue to possess extensive indigenous knowledge that has been carefully preserved across generations. This presents an important opportunity to document and scientifically investigate valuable medicinal plant resources before this knowledge is lost.

However, Ndhlovu is concerned that some medicinal plant species are becoming increasingly scarce because



Documenting, preserving and promoting this knowledge ensures that future generations appreciate their cultural heritage while creating opportunities for scientific innovation, sustainable livelihoods and economic development.





Aloe ferox has been used for healing and skincare for centuries.

of unsustainable harvesting, habitat destruction and environmental change. His research is grounded in the principle that indigenous knowledge holders are not merely participants in research, but valued partners and co-creators of knowledge.

Throughout the research process, he encourages active participation, allowing communities to share their priorities, experiences and expectations. Importantly, he believes that research should not end with data collection.

He shares research findings with participating communities through feedback sessions, community engagements and educational activities so that the knowledge generated can

contribute to local development and biodiversity conservation. Equally important, he says, is ensuring that research acknowledges and protects indigenous intellectual property rights while promoting equitable benefit-sharing.

A deeper understanding of nature

Ndhlovu says many medicinal plants have always been used to treat common ailments. Scientific investigation can validate these traditional uses, identify bioactive compounds and potentially contribute to the development of new medicines.

Documenting the use of medicinal plants also helps iden-

tify species that may be under harvesting pressure. This information can inform conservation measures such as cultivation programmes, community awareness initiatives and sustainable harvesting guidelines to protect vulnerable species.

“For example, some medicinal plant species used in South Africa have experienced population declines due to overharvesting and habitat loss. Research enables us to recommend conservation priorities and to promote cultivation as an alternative to harvesting from the wild,” he said.

Through his research, Ndhlovu is advancing the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems in mainstream science. At the

same time, he is helping to build research capacity while promoting sustainable conservation and community development.

He has received several awards for research excellence and academic leadership. These include the University of Mpumalanga's Faculty Emerging Researcher of the Year Award in 2024, the Best Post-PhD Oral Presentation Award at the South African Annual Young Scientist Conference in 2024, and a Poster Award at the 73rd International Society for Medicinal Plant and Natural Product Research Conference in Naples, Italy, in 2025. ♦



cooperative
governance

Department:
Cooperative Governance
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



NDMC ISSUES EL NIÑO IMPACT ADVISORY FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT STAKEHOLDERS

The National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) has issued an advisory warning disaster management stakeholders about the potential impacts of El Niño conditions in South Africa and calling for heightened preparedness measures. The advisory is intended to strengthen early warning systems, contingency planning, risk reduction measures and coordinated responses across all spheres of government.

WHAT IS EL NIÑO?

El Niño is a climate phenomenon characterised by unusually warm ocean temperatures in the Pacific Ocean, which influence weather patterns across the world. In South Africa, El Niño conditions are often associated with reduced rainfall, higher temperatures and increased drought risk.

SOUTH AFRICA'S CURRENT STATUS



National alert level: **AMBER – Heightened Preparedness.**

Risk outlook

July–August 2026	Low risk
September 2026	Moderate risk
October–December 2026	High risk
January–March 2027	High risk

POTENTIAL IMPACTS



Drought



Heatwaves



Water shortages



Wildfires



Crop failure



Livestock stress



Rising food prices



Public health concerns

Communities



Children



Older persons



Persons with disabilities



Low-income households



Small-scale farmers



Informal settlement residents

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Sectors



Water services



Agriculture



Health care



Education



Local government

FIVE ACTIONS BEING UNDERTAKEN



Monitor weather and climate forecasts.



Review drought contingency plans.



Promote water conservation measures.



Strengthen cooperation across sectors.



Raise public awareness.

@NationalCOGTA

Theme: "Every Municipality must work"

Transforming our energy system to ensure reliable and affordable electricity for all



Photo: GCIS

President Cyril Ramaphosa at the commencement of commercial operations at Umbila Emoyeni Wind Energy Facility in Bethal, Mpumalanga.

A reliable electricity supply is the backbone of our economy. It is essential for development and growth.

Not long ago, South Africans planned their lives around load shedding. Businesses and households that could afford to had to buy generators and diesel to keep operating. Factories lost production. Small businesses struggled to survive. Hospitals, schools and households had to cope with hours without power.

The electricity crisis, with severe load shedding almost every day, undermined investment and disrupted daily life. As we saw, an unreliable electricity supply has a devastating impact

across society. So too does the high cost of electricity.

As a result of the Energy Action Plan and the steps we took to improve Eskom's performance, we have made significant progress in restoring a reliable supply of electricity.

This is an important achievement which we should recognise and acknowledge. But overcoming load shedding was never the end of our work.

We must now confront another challenge that affects millions of South Africans: the rising cost of electricity. The cost of electricity has gone up significantly over the past two decades. For families trying

to make ends meet, having to contend with the cost of food, transport and other necessities, high electricity costs cause real hardship.

For businesses, high electricity costs make it more expensive to produce goods and provide services. They make South African companies less competitive and discourage investment in industries that can create jobs.

Our task, therefore, is not simply to produce enough electricity. We need electricity that is reliable, affordable and increasingly clean.

For more than a century, Eskom has been at the centre of South Africa's electricity system, responsible for generat-



ing, transmitting and supplying most of the country's electricity. This model served South Africa for many decades. But the electricity crisis demonstrated the danger of relying overwhelmingly on a single company to meet the energy needs of an entire economy. This model is no longer sustainable if we want reliable and cheap electricity.

When Eskom's performance deteriorated, the country had few alternatives.

That is why we are focused on modernising and transforming our energy system to ensure energy security, provide cheap, clean power for all South Africans and reduce the high cost of living.

The enormous cost overruns associated with projects such as the Medupi and Kusile power stations also contributed to Eskom's financial difficulties and ultimately to higher costs for consumers and taxpayers. We have learned from this experience.

Today, thanks to the hard work of Eskom's management and

workers, its performance has turned around. Eskom's latest results show important signs of stabilisation and improvement. But we cannot become complacent. Now is the time to complete the reform process that we began in response to load shedding to ensure that we never experience the same crisis again.

We need an electricity system in which Eskom is strong, but in which it does not have to carry the entire burden of investing in and supplying the country's electricity while it continues to carry a huge debt.

That is why we are fundamentally transforming the structure of our electricity sector.

Over the past few weeks, we have made important progress.

A new Electricity Pricing Policy has been published to ensure transparent electricity tariffs, prevent inefficiencies from being passed on to consumers, expand access to electricity for the poor, and enable competition in electricity generation.

The energy regulator, NERSA,

is finalising a range of new regulations that will form the architecture for a competitive wholesale electricity market. This will enable multiple generators – both public and private – to compete to supply electricity.

This competition can drive greater efficiency, encourage investment and put downward pressure on the cost of electricity.

It will also enable South Africa to take advantage of some of our greatest natural resources. We have some of the best solar and wind resources in the world. With the right infrastructure, regulation and investment, we have the potential to become one of the world's most competitive producers of clean electricity.

Over time, cheaper, greener and more reliable electricity will lift our economy's competitiveness and help industries to grow and create jobs.

Cheap and abundant electricity could become a source of competitive advantage for South Africa. It could support the expansion of industry, enable

new industries such as green hydrogen and electric vehicle production, support small businesses and create hundreds of thousands of jobs.

But for competition to work, every electricity producer must be able to access the national grid on fair and equal terms. That is why one of the most important parts of our electricity reform is the establishment of an independent, state-owned transmission system operator (TSO).

The TSO will manage the national electricity grid and electricity market independently and impartially. The TSO will ensure that Eskom and other electricity producers compete on a level playing field. It will act as a referee amongst all producers. It will also help mobilise the enormous investment required to expand our transmission network so that new generation projects can be connected to the grid.

We have seen how the restructuring of the electricity architecture in other countries has ensured energy security and has in some countries brought

prices down.

The Eskom Restructuring Task Team that I appointed at the beginning of the year is focused on implementing this important reform. The task team includes the Presidency, National Treasury, Department of Electricity and Energy, Eskom and the National Transmission Company South Africa.

There are several principles that will guide this process.

First, Eskom will remain state-owned and must get into the renewable energy market to compete effectively with new power generators.

Second, the TSO will be state-owned. The national transmission grid is a strategic national asset and will continue to be held in the public interest.

Third, the TSO must be genuinely independent. It must

be able to operate the grid and electricity market impartially, without favouring one electricity producer over another.

Fourth, the reform must strengthen rather than weaken Eskom. The transfer of transmission assets will therefore be undertaken in a way that protects Eskom's financial position, ensures the financial sustainability of the new operator and respects the legitimate interests of Eskom's lenders.

Fifth, workers will not carry the cost of reform. Government is committed to ensuring that no jobs are lost as a direct result of establishing the TSO and that organised labour is properly consulted throughout the process.

This is why I have recently engaged both the Chairperson of the Eskom Board and the

National Office Bearers of the National Union of Mineworkers, one of the unions that represents workers at Eskom.

In my engagement with the Chairperson representing the Eskom Board, I reaffirmed government's commitment to the electricity reform programme and emphasised that it will be implemented carefully and responsibly. The Eskom Board confirmed its support for the policy direction determined by government and its commitment to working with the shareholder to implement these reforms.

In my discussions with the National Union of Mineworkers, I emphasised that Eskom and the Transmission System Operator will remain state-owned and that the interests of workers will be protected throughout the restructuring process. These engagements are important because a transformation of this scale can only succeed if it is undertaken transparently and in consultation with those who will be affected by it. Government will hold engagements with key stakeholders who are part of the Eskom ecosystem.

We have seen before in South Africa how opening a sector to competition and investment can transform an entire industry and make a significant contribution

to the development and growth of the economy.

There was a time when telecommunications in South Africa was dominated by a single fixed-line operator. A telephone connection was expensive, access was limited and millions of South Africans, particularly in poorer and rural communities, were effectively excluded.

The opening of the telecommunications sector to new operators fundamentally changed this picture. Competition brought massive new investment. New technologies were introduced. Mobile networks expanded across the country. The cost of communicating fell dramatically and services that were once available only to a relatively small number of people became accessible to millions.

Today, South Africans can choose between different networks and service providers. These companies compete on price, coverage, technology and quality of service. At the same time, government continues to regulate the sector and the infrastructure on which our communications depend remains subject to strong public oversight.

There is an important lesson in this experience for the transformation of our electricity



Photo: Magnific.com

sector. Electricity is not the same as telecommunications. It is an essential public service with its own particular requirements, and the national electricity grid is a strategic national asset that must remain firmly under public control.

But the principle is similar.

We do not need to choose between a strong Eskom and other competitors. We can have both. We can have a strong, state-owned Eskom producing electricity alongside independent producers. We intend to have a state-owned transmission system that provides fair access to the grid, while different generators compete to supply electricity at the lowest possible cost.

Just as the transformation of telecommunications unleashed investment and expanded access to services, reform of the electricity sector can unlock billions of rands of investment in new generation and transmission infrastructure. The transformation in the telecommunications sector gave ordinary consumers choice. They continue to choose the operator who offers the best service at the lowest price. And quite often a number of people use more than one operator.

The purpose of the electricity reform is therefore not to priva-

 "We intend to have a state-owned transmission system that provides fair access to the grid, while different generators compete to supply electricity at the lowest possible cost."

tise Eskom. It is to build a better electricity system. It is to move from a system in which one company has to carry almost the entire responsibility for generating electricity to one in which many producers can invest, innovate and compete – while the State continues to safeguard the public interest through regulation and full ownership of transmission.

The ultimate beneficiary must be the South African consumer. A household should benefit from more affordable electricity. A small business should be able to operate without the burden of excessive energy costs. A factory should be able to expand production knowing that it has access to reliable and competi-

tively priced power.

That is the transformation we are seeking.

There will inevitably be different views about how our electricity system should be structured. But there should be no disagreement about what South Africans need.

They need electricity when they switch on the lights. They need electricity they can afford. Businesses need electricity that enables them to invest, expand and employ more people. And our country needs an electricity system capable of powering economic growth for generations to come.

We have already shown what determined reform can achieve. A few years ago, many believed that load shedding would be with us indefinitely. Through decisive action, investment and the hard work of thousands of people across the electricity sector, we have changed that trajectory. We must now complete the work we started.

The next phase of our energy transformation must ensure that South Africa never again faces an electricity crisis of the scale we experienced, while progressively reducing the cost of power and ensuring that every household has access to electricity.

Our objective is straightforward. We want an electricity system that provides abundant, affordable and reliable power to every South African.

We want an electricity system that supports industrialisation, attracts investment and creates jobs. And we want an electricity system that uses the abundant sun and wind with which our country is blessed to build a cleaner and more prosperous economy.

That is the energy future we are building. And we will not slow down until it is achieved.❖

**This message was first published on 31 August 2026.*

Three years of South African Sign Language: Making inclusion a reality

This year marks three years since the officialisation of South African Sign Language (SASL), a great achievement in our constitutional democracy and a milestone worthy of recognition and celebration. However, as we acknowledge this historic milestone, we must also take stock of what has been done across different sectors to give practical effect to the officialisation of SASL. The real measure of its impact will be an improvement in the lived reality of the Deaf community, with meaningful access to quality information and services.

We must ask a fundamental question of what it means for a language to be official in the country. Can a member of the Deaf community go to their local clinic or police station and be assisted in SASL? Can they access banking services, engage with government departments or access critical information in their own language? These are not luxuries but fundamental aspects of everyday life essential to every citizen in our constitu-

tional democracy.

Many hearing people take for granted the ability to switch on the television in the morning and watch the news. We listen to the radio on our way to work, hear traffic reports and adjust our routes accordingly. We receive emergency alerts, follow public announcements and engage with information as it unfolds around us.

Are you doing your part?

For the Deaf community, access to information relies on the intentional measures society puts in place to ensure they have access to quality interpreters, information and services. Their access to quality information is contingent on the availability of qualified SASL interpreters, appropriately accessible content and communication platforms that recognise the needs of Deaf people.

Often, institutions fall short of making provision for these requirements, leading to many

challenges for the Deaf community. When these systems fail, the consequences are significant. A lack of access to timely and accurate information can affect a person's ability to make informed decisions about their health, safety, education and meaningful participation in society.

Through our work, we encounter stories that remind us that language access must begin long before a child enters a classroom. Consider a Deaf child born to hearing parents; in many such cases, no one in the family knows SASL. The child may only encounter the language when they start school, where they can learn a way to communicate and feel heard and understood. The experiences of Deaf children during the Covid-19 lockdown brought this reality into sharp focus. Many Deaf learners experienced isolation and exclusion

because their homes did not provide the same linguistic environment and sense of belonging they experienced at school. For some, school was not merely a place of learning; it was a place where they could communicate freely and be heard.



Supporting Deaf people and their families

This highlighted the critical gap that exists in the support provided to parents and families. When a Deaf child is born to hearing parents, families should not simply be sent home without the knowledge, resources and support they need to communicate with their child. Early language acquisition is essential to a child's cognitive and social development. Families should therefore have access to the SASL training and appropriate guidance from the earliest possible stage. The goal should be to ensure that a Deaf child does not have to wait until school to first encounter the language.

Equally important is recognising the needs of Deaf parents raising hearing children. In many cases, hearing children become informal interpreters for their Deaf parents from a young age. They may be expected to interpret conversations with government officials, teachers and doc-

tors, which can place children in situations that are inappropriate for their age and expose them to adult conversations that should never be their responsibility.

Parents should be able to communicate independently and privately without relying on their children as interpreters. This requires all sectors of society to collectively take responsibility for providing appropriate, high-quality interpreting services.

From recognition to implementation

The officialisation of SASL was a powerful statement of intention about equality, dignity and inclusion. But recognition is only the beginning; the next phase must be about implementation. Government, civil society,

business, the media, educational institutions and other sectors of society all have a role to play in ensuring that SASL is not merely an official language on paper, but a language through which Deaf people can fully participate in society. This means strengthening the availability of qualified interpreters, expanding accessible public information, improving digital and broadcast accessibility, equipping frontline public servants with basic SASL skills, and ensuring that essential services are designed with Deaf people in mind. This also means listening to Deaf people themselves. Policies and programmes intended to serve the Deaf community must be developed with their meaningful participation and informed by their lived ex-

periences. As we observe Deaf Awareness Month and reflect on three years of SASL as an official language, our message to government, civil society and every sector of society is clear: the work cannot stop at recognition. The President has recently signed the proclamation initiating practical measures to use and develop SASL. Three years on, we have every reason to celebrate how far we have come. But we must also reflect on how far we still have to go to achieve meaningful inclusion for the Deaf community. Our collective responsibility now is to ensure that Deaf people can experience the full meaning of that official status in every sphere of their lives. ❖



THEME: "DECLARING DEAF PEOPLE'S HUMAN RIGHTS"

“This also means listening to Deaf people themselves. Policies and programmes intended to serve the Deaf community must be developed with their meaningful participation and informed by their lived experiences.”

South Africa

rediscovered: one screen scroll at a time

Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille wants South Africans exploring their own backyard this September, and she is betting AI and social media will get them there.

That is how Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille framed the shift now reshaping how South Africans travel, speaking at the launch of Tourism Month in Durban recently.

A destination spotted on TikTok. A travel creator's video that turns an unfamiliar town into a must-visit. "This is the tourism environment in which we now operate," De Lille said, point-

ing to how fundamentally the way people discover travel has changed.

This September, that shift is being put to work for domestic tourism, one of the foundations, de Lille argued, of a resilient tourism economy. Sho't Left Travel Week runs from 7 to 13 September, offering exclusive discounts and packages to make travel more affordable. It is

joined by South African National Parks Week, giving domestic day visitors free entry and various provincial Mahala Weeks aimed at widening access further.

"You do not always need to cross an ocean to discover something extraordinary," De Lille said. "Sometimes you need to cross a provincial border.

Sometimes you need to

leave the highway and turn into that small town you normally drive past. And sometimes there is an extraordinary tourism experience just a few kilometres from your own home that you have never visited."

Tourism Month builds toward World Tourism Day on 27 September, marked globally under the theme, "Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to Re-design Tourism." South Africa has localised it as "Growing South Africa's Tourism Sector in the Digital Era," a theme the Department of Tourism says

Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille joins singer Sho Madjozi on stage during the launch of Tourism Month.



reflects work already underway: using digital tools and AI to sharpen visitor experience, destination management and operational efficiency, while making tourism more sustainable and inclusive.

Embracing new technology

Two initiatives already show what that looks like in practice. The OR Tambo International Airport Smart Visitor Information Centre gives travellers seamless digital access to tourism information, while the Tourism Complaints Office lets tourists lodge and track complaints entirely online.

The Department will also launch a tourism hackathon during the month, inviting young innovators to build technology-driven solutions for the sector.

"AI is already influencing how travellers search for destinations, develop itineraries, compare experiences, translate information and make travel decisions," said the Minister.

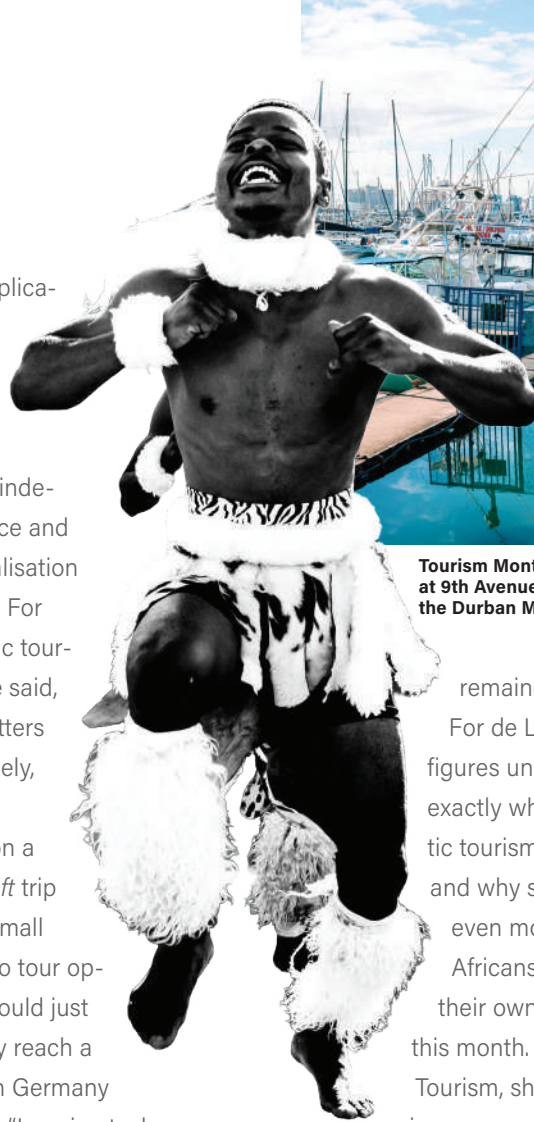
That transformation, she added, is a shared responsibility, one South Africa needs to harness deliberately to strengthen its tourism economy and open up opportunity.

"Data and insights tell us that travellers are increasingly open to technologies such as AI-pow-

ered applications that enable greater independence and personalisation of trips." For domestic tourism, she said, that matters immensely, a video filmed on a *Sho't Left* trip with a small Limpopo tour operator could just as easily reach a family in Germany or India. "Imagine technology helping a traveller build an itinerary that takes them beyond our traditional attractions and introduces them to smaller communities and emerging destinations," she said. "That is when technology becomes more than an innovation. It becomes economic inclusion."

Growing numbers

The numbers back the momentum. From January to June 2026, South Africans took 21.2 million overnight trips, up 4% on the same period last year. Holiday trips specifically rose 36%, to 5.2 million, even as overall spend

A man in traditional Zulu attire, including a white feathered collar and a beaded skirt, is captured in a dynamic dance pose. He is smiling and has his arms raised. The background shows the Durban Marina with numerous sailboats docked at a pier. A small building is visible on the right side of the pier.

Tourism Month was launched at 9th Avenue Waterside at the Durban Marina.

remained down. For de Lille, those figures underline exactly why domestic tourism matters and why she wants even more South Africans exploring their own country this month.

Tourism, she said, gives communities a way to draw real

economic value from their culture, heritage, natural assets, food, creativity and hospitality, connecting different parts of the economy in a way few other sectors can. "Our journey can therefore support many livelihoods. Importantly, we must ensure that tourism creates opportunities for more young people, women, entrepreneurs and SMMEs." She was clear that digital transformation cannot just serve the biggest players. Technology should lower barriers to entry, not raise new ones.

Tourism may begin at home,

but it does not end there. At its core, it is about people, those who travel, those who welcome them and the communities that share their stories, culture and experiences. "Even as we embrace technology, AI and a rapidly changing digital landscape," De Lille said, "there is something we must never lose sight of. Tourism remains a human business."

More than travel

Tourism Month runs as a national campaign across all nine provinces, each showcasing its own attractions. This year, Limpopo takes the spotlight as the province of focus. Beyond travel itself, the month is about creating jobs, backing entrepreneurs, preserving heritage, strengthening communities, and building national pride.

Every journey adds up to something bigger. Take a *Sho't Left* this month and find the hidden gems closer to home than you think. ♦



PhD study

develops AI to detect misinformation in South African languages

When false information spreads online in English, artificial intelligence (AI) can often help identify it. But when the same misinformation appears in isiZulu, Sepedi or many other South African languages, the tools are limited.

A North-West University (NWU) PhD study by Dr Seani Rananga is addressing that gap by developing multilingual AI that can detect misinformation across English, isiZulu and Sepedi, laying the groundwork for safer digital spaces in South Africa.

The research demonstrates that multilingual AI can identify misleading information across the three languages while highlighting the importance of improving machine translation for low-resource African languages. The study provides a

framework that can be adapted to combat misinformation during elections, public emergencies and other events where false information can have serious consequences.

Rananga, a lecturer at the University of Pretoria, says the research was driven by the need to ensure that speakers of South Africa's indigenous languages are not left behind as AI becomes increasingly important in identifying misinformation.

"South Africa is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, yet most AI systems for detecting misinformation are developed primarily for English.

This leaves speakers of indigenous languages at a disadvantage when it comes to identifying false or misleading information online," she said.

Building trustworthy technologies

Her PhD research used misinformation surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic as a pilot case study to test the multilingual framework.

The pandemic illustrated how quickly false information can spread and the consequences it can have for people's lives, according to Dr Rananga. While the initial research focused on health misinformation, the methods were designed to be applied across multiple sectors where misinformation presents a public risk.

The study found that multilingual AI can effectively detect misinformation in English, isiZulu and Sepedi while showing that the quality of machine translation plays a significant role in improving AI performance for low-resource languages.

"The framework provides a foundation for building more inclusive and trustworthy AI technologies for South African languages," said Rananga.

She added that the findings could support government departments, fact-checking organisations, social media platforms and communities by enabling earlier detection of misleading information, improving access to credible information and helping

people make informed decisions.

Standing proud on the world stage

The study has attracted international recognition. Rananga received the Google PhD Fellowship, one of the world's leading awards supporting doctoral research in AI.

Her work also received the Best Poster Award at the 2025 Deep Learning IndabaX South Africa, earning her funding to present the research at the 2026 Deep Learning Indaba at Pan-Atlantic University in Lagos.

"Receiving the Google PhD Fellowship was a tremendous honour and a strong validation of the importance of conducting

AI research for African languages. It reinforced my commitment to developing technologies that address challenges faced by multilingual and low-resource communities while also creating opportunities to collaborate with leading researchers around the world," she said.

Looking ahead, Rananga plans to expand the research to include more South African languages. Future work will focus on misinformation shared on social media during elections, public emergencies and other high-impact events.

She also intends to extend the research to address emerging challenges such as AI-generated deepfakes, hate speech and

other forms of harmful online content.

Beyond detection, Rananga aims to develop trustworthy multilingual AI systems, including large language models, retrieval-augmented generation systems and knowledge graphs that can support sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, governance and public services.

"My long-term vision is to ensure that African languages are fully represented in the next generation of AI technologies while contributing to safer and more reliable digital spaces for everyone." ❖



SADC strengthens regional cooperation through new legal instruments



The 46th Ordinary Summit of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has advanced a range of legal instruments aimed at strengthening regional governance, financing development, facilitating tourism and movement and tackling cross-border crime.

The instruments signed at the conclusion of the Summit in eThekweni in August form part of a broader effort to turn SADC's regional integration agenda into practical programmes that can improve economic cooperation

and the lives of citizens across Southern Africa.

Among the instruments was the Agreement Amending Article 33 of the SADC Treaty, which seeks to strengthen the Community's sanction regime by providing for the Summit to approve the suspension of Member States that stay in arrears for four years or more.

The agreement was signed by Eswatini, represented by King Mswati III; Mozambique, represented by President Daniel Chapo; Zimbabwe, represented

by President Emmerson Mnangagwa and Lesotho, represented by Prime Minister Sam Matekane.

The amendment is significant for the functioning of SADC as it seeks to strengthen compliance with obligations arising from membership while providing the regional body with a clearer mechanism for dealing with prolonged arrears.

The Summit also advanced the Agreement on the Operationalisation of the SADC Regional Development Fund (RDF),

signed by Namibian President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah.

The Fund is intended to provide a regional financing mechanism for economic development and sustainable growth, addressing one of the longstanding challenges confronting regional integration: the ability to finance major programmes and projects.

The operationalisation of the Fund has been a recurring priority on the SADC agenda. In March 2026, the SADC Council of Ministers identified its operationalisation among the

key matters requiring progress, while the SADC 2026/27 Annual Corporate Plan lists it as a priority under efforts to establish sustainable financing for regional integration.

Development financing

More recently, SADC and the African Development Bank reaffirmed their commitment to development financing, with the two institutions highlighting the importance of the RDF in financing regional programmes and projects. Discussions also emphasised infrastructure development, industrialisation, private-sector participation and innovative financing.

The Fund is therefore expected to become an important

instrument as SADC moves from developing regional strategies to financing their implementation.

Tourism and easier movement

Zimbabwe also signed the Draft Agreement Establishing the SADC Tourism UNIVISA, which is intended to establish procedures and conditions for issuing a single regional tourism visa for transit or tourism stays across participating Member States.

The concept is aimed at making it easier for tourists to travel across multiple SADC destinations, supporting multi-destination tourism and increasing the economic benefits of tourism for the region.

Earlier this year, SADC reported that participating countries were being encouraged

to accelerate visa harmonisation, finalise revenue-sharing arrangements and complete technical preparations for a pilot phase.

The instrument is particularly relevant to SADC's wider objective of making borders facilitators of economic activity rather than obstacles to it.

This also complements the region's work on tourism-friendly border posts. In July 2026, SADC convened a workshop involving border officials from Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe to address challenges experienced by tourists at border posts and improve customer service.

Strengthening the regional response to trafficking

President Duma Boko of Botswana signed the SADC

Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, providing a framework for cooperation among Member States to combat trafficking in persons and other cross-border crimes.

The Protocol recognises that trafficking networks operate across national boundaries and therefore require coordinated regional responses involving law enforcement, immigration and other authorities.

The instrument adds to SADC's broader work to strengthen border management while facilitating legitimate movement.

Protecting people with albinism

Zimbabwe also reaffirmed its commitment through the SADC Declaration on the Protection of People with Albinism, originally adopted in 2019.



The SADC family. The summit brought regional leaders together to strengthen cooperation, advance development and shape a shared future for Southern Africa.



The Declaration calls on Member States to take measures to protect persons with albinism and strengthen their safety and rights.

Zimbabwe further signed the SADC Declaration on Accelerating Action to End AIDS as a Public Health Threat in the SADC Region by 2030.

From agreements to implementation

The legal instruments adopted at the Summit come at a time when SADC is placing increasing emphasis on implementation.

In his closing statement, President Cyril Ramaphosa, who also chairs SADC, said the Summit had reviewed progress in implementing the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan and advancing SADC Vision 2050,

while making progress on trade, infrastructure, energy, industrialisation and regional value chains.

He cautioned, however, that the success of regional integration would ultimately be judged by its impact on ordinary people.

“But our citizens will ultimately judge us not by the number of resolutions we adopt, but by the difference those resolutions make in their daily lives,” he said.

The President said the next phase of SADC’s development should be defined by implementation, with progress measured in practical outcomes.

“We must measure our progress not only in meetings held and agreements signed, but in kilometres of railway rehabilitated, megawatts of electricity generated and transmitted, border-crossing times reduced, factories established, intra-re-

gional trade expanded and jobs created,” President Ramaphosa said.

This implementation focus places the instruments signed at the Summit within a wider push to make SADC’s longstanding commitments more tangible.

The Summit was held under a theme centred on accelerating industrialisation, reflecting the region’s intention to move beyond cooperation at policy level towards stronger productive capacity, regional value chains, infrastructure connectivity and economic growth.

The SADC Annual Corporate Plan for 2026/27 identifies deeper regional market integration, increased intra-SADC trade, greater investment and sustainable financing of the regional integration agenda as key outcomes.

For South Africa, which has assumed the SADC Chairship, the challenge is now to help translate these agreements and commitments into implementation across the region.

As President Ramaphosa put it, the region has already developed strategies, established institutions and identified the infrastructure required.

“We must now accelerate implementation,” he said.

The Summit’s legal instruments thus provide another building block for a SADC that is seeking to strengthen its institutions, finance its development ambitions, facilitate movement and trade and ensure that regional integration produces measurable benefits for its people. ♦

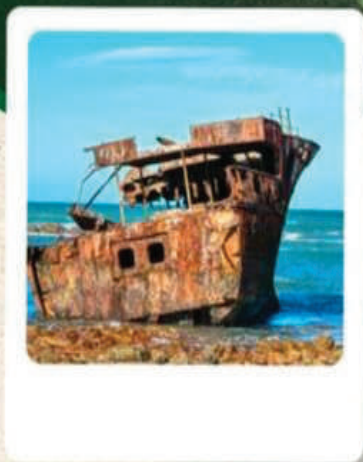
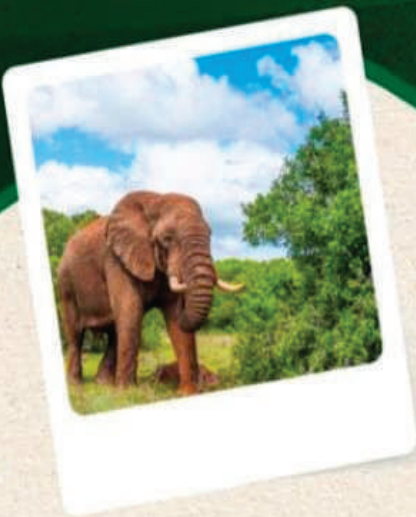


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Compulsory training to strengthen public service



Training public servants to do their jobs effectively and serve the people efficiently is critical. Law now directs that some training programmes should be compulsory to achieve this goal, writes Dino Poonsamy.

Recent amendments to the Public Administration Management Act now require that the National School of Government (NSG) design and deliver compulsory education and training across national, provincial and local government. This means

public servants across the three spheres of government are now legally required to complete specific training before they are appointed and, during their employment, to continue in their roles.

This is not a technical requirement but rather one of the

more consequential public sector reforms in recent years, and it is worth understanding what it means and why it matters.

The NSG falls within the portfolio of institutions reporting to the Minister for the Public Service and Administration,

responsible for the education, training and development of public servants across the three spheres of government.

Why compulsory, and why now?

For three decades, training in the public service was mostly encouraged rather than required. Officials could attend courses if they chose to, if their manager approved it, or if a department prioritised it. The outcomes were uneven: some officials took advantage of the training being offered, whilst others did not. In many instances, we could relate this lack of standardised training to audit outcomes and institutional performance but ultimately it is the citizens who receive varying degrees of service based on the skills and competence of the official serving them.

Our government tried to close this gap before. A two-day induction course became compulsory for new officials in 2008. By 2012, completing it became a requirement for confirming a new employee's job and for a pay increase. In 2020, the government directed that senior managers should complete a pre-entry qualification, known as Nyukela, before they could even be appointed. Each of these steps helped, but

none of them, on its own, can permanently change the culture of the public sector. The current reforms are the latest and most far-reaching attempt to fix that.

What this means for public servants

If you work in the public sector, this is what is changing in practical terms. Certain courses, such as ethics, anti-corruption, supply chain management, and induction, are no longer optional. There are currently 10 compulsory courses being delivered by the NSG, and Cabinet has now directed an expansion of the courses, with a further 10 to be offered. Completing them can determine whether your appointment is confirmed or whether you are eligible for a salary increase. To be a senior manager, you face an even higher bar: you must complete a pre-entry certificate before

appointment and are required to spend a minimum number of days in training every few years, for as long as you hold a senior role.

This is a real shift in what a public sector career looks like. Development is becoming built into the job itself, not something you choose to pursue in your own time if you are motivated to do so. The NSG is also linking compulsory short courses to structured learning pathways that enable public servants to progressively build their knowledge, skills and professional competence over time. Rather than ending with a standalone certificate, learning will increasingly form part of an articulated development journey, creating clearer routes into occupational qualifications, professional learning programmes and higher qualifications.

What this means for the citizen

For members of the public, the delivery of compulsory training to public servants means that when making decisions that affect people's lives, they should increasingly be officials who have actually been trained and tested on how to do that job properly, not simply appointed and left to learn on their own. There is early evidence that this is working where it has been tried properly. In one municipality in Limpopo, officials who completed compulsory supply chain management training showed measurable improvements in the care with which public money was managed afterwards, with better compliance and stronger audit outcomes. That is the kind of change, multiplied across thousands of officials and hundreds of public institutions, that



compulsory training is meant to produce.

The gap is still to be closed

Not everyone is covered yet. At the local government level in particular, ongoing training for municipal employees generally still depends on management approval rather than compulsory training being a standing requirement. This matters because local government is where most citizens interact with the state most directly, and where serious governance failures have occurred. Even SALGA itself has argued that leadership training in local government should not be optional.

The true test of these reforms will be whether, over the next several years, the public actually experiences improved public services as a result of compulsory training.

Dino is the chief director for strategy and systems at the National School of Government

“There are currently 10 compulsory courses being delivered by the NSG, and Cabinet has now directed an expansion of the courses, with a further 10 to be offered.”

Partnerships for progress:

Strengthening public service to accelerate development



Lawrence Ngoveni

September is Public Service Month – an important opportunity to reflect on the role of the Public Service in improving the lives of citizens. It reminds us that the project of building a capable, ethical and developmental state requires active collaboration between public servants, citizens, academia, civil society organisations, research institutions and the private sector. Strong institutions are built through partnerships, shared accountability and a collective commitment to improving developmental outcomes.

This message is particularly relevant as South Africa advances the implementation of the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024 – 2029. The MTDP seeks to drive inclusive growth and job creation, reduce

poverty and the high cost of living, and build a capable, ethical and developmental state. The successful realisation of these goals will require more than sound policies and adequate resources. It will call for partnerships that enable government and society to work together in pursuit of common developmental objectives.

Collaboration

One of the central principles of Public Service Month is that public servants are custodians of the public good. They are entrusted with the responsibility of delivering services efficiently, upholding ethical standards and ensuring that government interventions improve the daily lives of citizens. However, the increasingly complex nature of

development challenges means that the Public Service cannot operate in isolation. Effective governance requires collaboration, learning and the sharing of expertise across sectors.

The MTDP itself recognises that development is a whole-of-society endeavour that depends on collaboration, capacity building and continuous learning.

It highlights the importance of strengthening institutional capability and building partnerships that contribute to improved governance and developmental outcomes. Public Service Month, therefore, provides an opportunity to showcase how collaboration can strengthen the capacity of the State to plan better, implement more effectively and respond more quickly to the needs of citizens.

Evidence-based solutions

One of the most important partnerships in modern governance is the relationship between government and academic and research institutions. As policy challenges become more sophisticated, public servants require access to credible evidence, innovative thinking and specialised expertise.

Universities and research organisations play a critical role in generating knowledge that supports evidence-based planning, monitoring and evaluation. Their work enables government to better understand the challenges facing communities and identify practical solutions that improve service delivery.

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evalua-

tion (DPME) has increasingly embraced this collaborative approach by placing research, evaluation and data at the centre of decision-making. In this way, the department is able to draw on these partnerships with academic institutions and knowledge-generating organisations to strengthen the generation, accessibility and utilisation of evidence and in the process improve public sector performance and developmental outcomes.

Some of the most prominent departmentally led partnerships include collaborations with institutions such as the University of Pretoria and the University of Venda, as well as partnerships with organisations focused on evaluation, evidence generation and knowledge exchange. These partnerships support research, innovation and policy development while helping government strengthen its capacity to address complex developmental challenges.

National Evaluation Policy Framework

This approach finds resonance in the recently adopted National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) 2025, which promotes collaborative arrangements and partnerships as an essential aspect of effective evaluation and adaptive governance.

The framework recognises that complex societal challenges require diverse expertise and

stronger networks across government, academia, civil society and the private sector.

As government prepares for important processes such as the Mid-term Review of the MTDP, the value of these partnerships becomes even more evident.

Effective reviews require diverse sources of evidence, including official statistics, research reports, surveys and independent analysis. Partnerships enhance the quality, objectivity and credibility of this evidence, ultimately supporting better decision-making and more responsive governance.

The benefits of collaboration extend beyond evidence generation. Partnerships have already supported evaluation capacity development, knowledge sharing, data innovation and the development of tools that improve government decision-making.

They have also contributed to the development of future generations of researchers, evaluators and public-sector professionals

who will play a critical role in strengthening state capability in the years ahead.

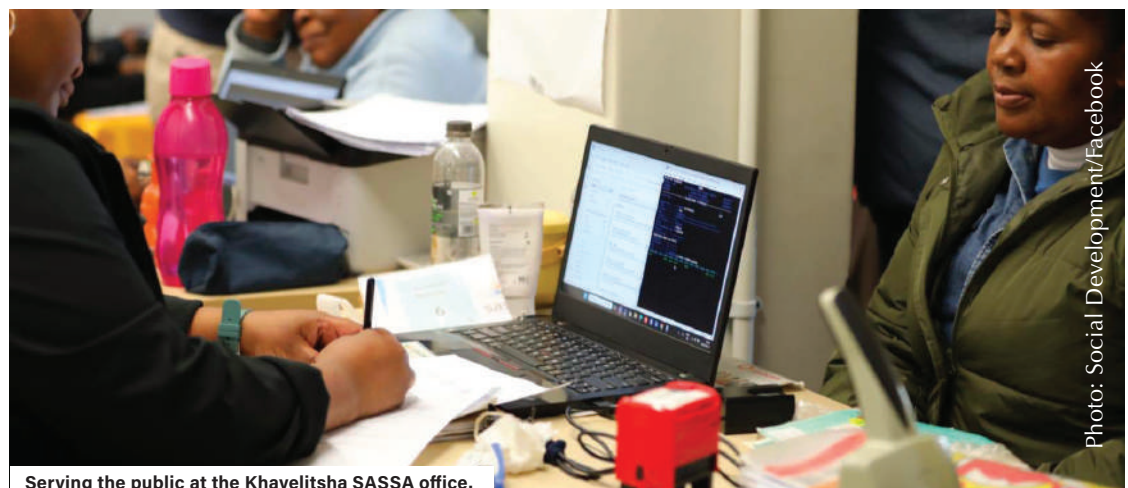
At a broader level, partnerships strengthen skills, encourage innovation, improve accountability and promote a culture of continuous improvement. They help bridge the gap between policy development and implementation by ensuring that decisions are informed by the best available evidence and grounded in the realities experienced by citizens.

For public servants, it means embracing professionalism, integrity and evidence-based decision-making.

For academic and research institutions, it means producing knowledge that helps solve real societal challenges. For civil society, it means contributing insights and advocating for improved outcomes. For business, it means partnering with government to accelerate implementation and create economic opportunities.

Ultimately, the success of South Africa's development agenda depends on collective efforts by various stakeholders. The challenges of poverty, unemployment, inequality and weak service delivery cannot be solved by any single institution acting alone. They require coordinated action, shared responsibility and strong partnerships.

Public Service Month reminds us that building a capable state is an ongoing national project. By strengthening collaboration between government, academia, research institutions, business, civil society and communities, we can improve governance, enhance service delivery and accelerate progress towards the inclusive, ethical and developmental society that is envisioned in the MTDP and the National Development Plan. The strongest public institutions are those that learn continuously, work collaboratively and remain firmly focused on serving the people of South Africa. ♦



Serving the public at the Khayelitsha SASSA office.

Photo: Social Development/Facebook

Celebrate Heritage Month

with Indoni Fashion House

Heritage Month provides an opportunity for South Africans to celebrate the country's rich cultural diversity and traditions. Throughout the month, communities across the country showcase their heritage through language, food, music, dance and fashion.

In this edition, we feature the work of acclaimed fashion designer

Kwenzekile Nkomo, founder and Chief Designer of Indoni Fashion House.

Based in Durban, Nkomo leads one of South Africa's well-known fashion brands, recognised for promoting African culture through contemporary and traditional designs. Her creations celebrate the beauty of South Africa's heritage while embracing modern fashion trends.

A multi-award-winning designer, Nkomo is also a fashion stylist who has built a reputation for producing unique and elegant garments that reflect African identity and pride.

As South Africans mark Heritage Month, wearing locally designed attire is one way to honour and showcase the country's diverse cultural heritage.



Indoni orange *shweshwe* beaded set: **R4 500**



Brown multi *shweshwe* dress: **R3 500**



KK multi-colour short-sleeve dress: **R2 500**

About the brand

Since its debut at the Durban Fashion Fair in 2014, Indoni Fashion House has consistently showcased new collections, establishing itself as a leading name in South African fashion.

The brand has earned widespread recognition for its excellence and innovation, winning several prestigious awards. These include the Durban Fashion Fair Best Ladieswear Designer Award for four consecutive years, from 2019 to 2022. Indoni Fashion House was also named Durban Fashion Fair Designer of the Year in 2022 and 2023 and received the Fashion Business of the Year Award in both years.

The success of the brand has opened doors to local and international platforms, where it has showcased its distinctive African-inspired designs. International highlights include appearances at Pure London in 2018 and 2019 and Ethiopia Fashion Week in 2019.



Navy blue shweshwe Safari Dress: **R4 800**

Locally, Indoni Fashion House has featured at prominent events such as African Fashion International and Joburg Fashion Week. The brand has also represented South African fashion on global stages, including the CANEX Expo in Côte d'Ivoire.

** Prices correct at the time of publishing.*

Sweet hospitality this Tourism Month

Tourism Month offers an opportunity to showcase South African hospitality at its best. Whether you are hosting friends from abroad or welcoming visitors into your home, food can be a powerful way to create memorable experiences and meaningful connections.

While local flavours often take centre stage, there is also value in serving dishes that feel familiar to international guests. A well-chosen dessert can bring people together around the table, blending comfort, culture and conversation.

For those looking to add a touch of Mediterranean flair to their menu, Executive Group Chef Victor Johnson of Club Como Modern Mediterranean recommends a refreshing Limoncello Tiramisu. Light, flavourful and elegant, the dessert is a crowd-pleaser that pairs well with South Africa's warm hospitality and vibrant food culture.



Limoncello Tiramisu

Ingredients

Limoncello syrup:

- ⦿ ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- ⦿ ¾ cup sugar
- ⦿ ¼ cup limoncello
- ⦿ Zest of one medium lemon

Tiramisu cream:

- ⦿ 165 ml cream
- ⦿ 110 g mascarpone cheese
- ⦿ ¼ cup sugar
- ⦿ 1 teaspoon vanilla essence

Limoncello gel:

- ⦿ 150 ml limoncello
- ⦿ 60 ml water

- ⦿ 50 g sugar
- ⦿ 1 ¼ teaspoon Agar-agar powder

Method

Limoncello syrup:

- ⦿ Combine all the ingredients in a saucepan
- ⦿ Bring to the boil and cook over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes until thick and syrupy

Tiramisu cream:

- ⦿ Whip the cream until thick

- ⦿ Add the sugar and reduce the mixer speed
- ⦿ Add the mascarpone cheese and vanilla essence
- ⦿ Whisk until smooth and well combined

Limoncello gel:

- ⦿ Combine the limoncello, water, sugar and agar-agar powder in a saucepan
- ⦿ Whisk the ingredients together and bring the mixture to a gentle boil

- ⦿ Simmer for two minutes, whisking continuously to activate the agar-agar
- ⦿ Pour the mixture into a shallow tray and allow it to cool until it sets into a firm jelly
- ⦿ Roughly chop the jelly and transfer it to a blender
- ⦿ Blend until smooth and glossy, with no lumps

Tip: Make vanilla sponge cake and cut into 1 cm x 1 cm cubes.



A heritage journey to humanity's origins

What begins as a short drive to the Cradle of Humankind soon becomes a journey through millions of years of history, revealing the discoveries that continue to shape our understanding of humanity.

Few places on Earth offer a window into humanity's distant past quite like South Africa's Cradle of Humankind UNESCO World Heritage Site. Recognised by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – a specialised United Nations agency that promotes world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture in 1999, this remarkable landscape ranks among the world's most significant palaeoanthropological treasures.

Stretching across 47 000 hectares of rolling grasslands and rocky outcrops northwest of Johannesburg, the site conceals an extraordinary network of limestone caves beneath its surface. These ancient caves have

yielded some of the world's oldest hominid fossils, helping scientists piece together the story of our earliest ancestors.

Over the years, researchers have uncovered more than 1 000 hominid fossils and identified several hominid species at the site. Hominids are a family that includes humans and their direct ancestors, and the Cradle of Humankind is the richest treasure trove of early hominid fossils on Earth.

In August, I visited Maropeng, the official visitor centre of the Cradle of Humankind, for a two-day exploration of this remarkable heritage destination.

The drive from Hatfield in Pretoria took just over an hour, making it an



easy day trip for visitors from both Pretoria and Johannesburg.

As I approached Maropeng, the urban landscape gradually gave way to open grasslands and rolling countryside. It was hard to imagine that beneath this tranquil setting lies a record of human history stretching back millions of years.

As visitors draw closer to Maropeng, a striking structure rises from the landscape. Designed to resemble a tumulus, an ancient burial mound, the building appears to emerge naturally from the surrounding grasslands, blending architecture, history and nature in a single bold statement.

After checking into the four-star Maropeng Boutique Hotel, I took a moment to soak in the tranquillity of the setting. Framed by rolling hills and expansive views, the hotel offers a peaceful retreat from the fast pace of city life. The warm welcome from staff and the inviting atmosphere set the tone for the experience that lay ahead.

An hour later, refreshed and eager to learn more about the region's extraordinary past, I made my way to the iconic tumulus. There, I met Lindiwe Mahlangu, Maropeng's award-winning heritage interpreter and public programmes specialist,

who would guide me through a journey spanning millions of years of human history.

A journey through time

The atmosphere felt calm and almost spiritual. I imagine many visitors experience the same sense of reflection when they arrive. Standing there, surrounded by a landscape that holds the story of our origins, it was difficult not to feel connected to something much larger than oneself.

From the moment the experience begins, visitors are taken on a journey through time, tracing the history of the universe from its beginnings some 14 billion years ago to the present day and beyond.

Prior to entering the tumulus, visitors pass through a welcome centre with cafés, food outlets and craft shops. Nearby, a wall bears the names of the people who were present when the landmark building was opened.

Before entering the main exhibition area, I boarded a boat that glided through a man-made underground waterway. The ride serves as an introduction to the Maropeng experience, taking visitors through key moments in the formation of the Earth and the evolution of life. It was

both entertaining and thought-provoking, setting the tone for what lay ahead.

Inside, interactive exhibits, multimedia displays and fascinating artefacts bring the story of human evolution to life. Visitors can spend hours exploring the exhibitions, which not only reveal humanity's origins but also encourage reflection on its future.

As Mahlangu guided me through the displays, interpreting the fossils, artefacts and visual narratives before us, I felt as though I was travelling through millions of years of history. Each stop revealed another chapter in the remarkable story of human evolution and the discoveries that continue to

shape our understanding of life on Earth.

All visitors are welcome

Whether you are a curious traveller, a student eager to learn, a family seeking an educational outing or a history enthusiast, Maropeng offers an opportunity to engage with one of humanity's most fascinating stories.

The Cradle of Humankind is home to more than a dozen major fossil sites. Because many of these sites are not open to the public, the Maropeng Visitor Centre was created to introduce visitors to the area's global significance and to tell the story of human evolution in an accessible and engaging way.

The Cradle of Humankind UNESCO World Heritage Site



Mahlangu explained that Maropeng became the official visitor centre of the Cradle of Humankind in 2005. Since then, it has welcomed visitors from around the world and continues to play an important role in preserving and sharing South Africa's rich human heritage.

A short drive from the tumulus, Mahlangu showed me one of the venue's outdoor event spaces, set against the backdrop of the surrounding landscape. The site hosts a range of gatherings, including heritage celebrations, retreats, year-end functions and other outdoor activities. It can accommodate up to 700 guests. Nearby is an amphitheatre with capacity for more than 30 000 people, providing a dramatic setting for large-scale events and performances.

Learning comes to life

Maropeng also plays an important role in education. Learners and students can visit the centre on day trips or participate in longer educational programmes that extend over several days.

Mahlangu said between 70 000 and 90 000 learners and students visit Maropeng each year. They come from schools and tertiary institutions across South Africa and other parts of the world, drawn by the opportunity to experience one of the world's most significant heritage

and research sites firsthand.

This complements subjects such as Life Sciences, Tourism, Hospitality Studies, History and Geography. It also gives learners an opportunity to experience concepts from the classroom in



Interactive exhibits bring the story of humanity to life.



More than 1 000 hominid fossils have been found on site.

a real-world setting.

Learners often visit Maropeng as part of organised educational tours. While some groups spend only a day at the centre, others stay for several days, either to explore more of Gauteng or to participate in extended learning programmes linked to their

curriculum.

To support these programmes, Maropeng has dedicated educational facilities that include a lecture hall, a marking centre, conference venues, a restaurant and dining areas. Learners stay in dormitory-style accommodation, while teachers are housed

in a separate six-room lodge-style facility.

The centre can accommodate up to 120 learners at a time. Larger groups can also be hosted through additional overflow facilities. The broader Cradle of Humankind area offers about 2 500 beds across a range of accommodation establishments, making it possible for visitors to extend their stay and explore the region at a leisurely pace.

Maropeng's contribution to heritage tourism has earned it international recognition, including the 2025 Excellence in Tourism Award at the Global Tourism Excellence Awards.

As the afternoon sun settled over the grasslands and the pace of the day began to slow, it was easy to understand why the Cradle of Humankind continues to captivate visitors from around the world. What begins as a journey into humanity's distant past becomes an opportunity to reflect on who we are, where we come from and the legacy we will leave for future generations.

