

REMARKS BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, REV MUSA ZONDI

Launch of MKRI Mkuze Digital Skills Centre & uMkhanyakude District One Stop
Shop

1 July 2025

Mkuze Airport Precinct

Programme Director; TIKZN CEO Sihle Ngcamu

Honourable Mayors and Councillors;

Traditional Leadership;

Moses Kotane Research Institute (MKRI) CEO, Dr Thandeka Ellenson;

MKRI and TIKZN Board members, and the Executive members present;

Leaders and representatives from the Umhlosinga Development Agency;

Partners from Accenture South Africa and the Mentec Foundation;

Officials from all spheres of government;

Members of the community;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning

It gives me great pleasure to stand before you on this significant occasion, the launch of the uMkhanyakude District One Stop Shop and the Mkuze Digital Skills Centre. The launch of these services at uMkhanyakude District bears testimony to our resolve that government services should not only be located in the urban centres, but should also be available to outlying Districts of the province to drive economic development in all corners.

Today marks a key milestone in our journey toward bridging the digital divide in rural KwaZulu-Natal. The opening of a Digital Skills Centre here in Mkuze is not only a

response to the needs of our people, it is a bold step toward digital transformation and economic inclusion.

This initiative, spearheaded by the Moses Kotane Research Institute in partnership with Umhlosinga Development Agency, Accenture SA, and the Mentec Foundation, is a model for collaborative development.

This Centre will play a transformative role in the lives of young people, aspiring entrepreneurs, innovators, and small businesses in this district.

It brings with it a suite of services that will empower our people to not just survive, but to thrive in the digital economy, including:

- Digital skills training to equip our youth with 21st-century capabilities;
- Business development services and accelerator programmes to boost local entrepreneurship;
- Workshops, seminars and mentorship networks to support innovators from idea to execution;
- Enterprise development training and access to internet, office space, and innovation tools;
- And support for IP registration and commercialisation to help innovators take their ideas to market.

Through centres like this, we are bringing world-class ICT infrastructure to the doorsteps of rural and township communities.

These centres are not just about technology, but they are about people.

They are about unlocking potential, stimulating innovation, and restoring dignity through access, skills, and opportunity.

MKRI's commitment to inclusive socio-economic development is evident here today.

This Centre embodies the principle of leaving no one behind.

This launch aligns strongly with the provincial government's vision for:

- Expanding the digital economy
- Driving job creation through innovation
- Enhancing our province's competitiveness, both locally and globally

With this investment, we are planting seeds of transformation in a district that has for too long been left behind.

UMkhanyakude District One Stop Shop

The commitment to the economic development of this District is further cemented by the opening of a One Stop Shop, facilitated by Trade & Investment KwaZulu-Natal. It is here to assist investors cut through the red tape when bringing investment projects, as well as supporting local businesses to access markets and finance.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that the number of applications processed by the provincial One Stop Shop office over the last five years has increased from 989 during the 2020/2021 financial year to 51 43 in the last financial year of 2024/2025. This increase in applications demonstrates the relevance of these services and the convenience of having them under one roof.

The uMkhanyakude District One Stop Shop, will assist investors and local businesses with the following services;

- Registering their companies with CIPC;
- Registering and obtaining tax clearance certificates through SARS;
- Grading of properties into a tourism product through the Tourism Grading Council;
- Lodging of applications for environment impact assessment through EDTEA;
- Applying for business loans from Ithala Development Finance Corporation
- Applying for government grants and incentives through the DTIC.

Mkhuze Airport

It is especially significant that these services are located here at Mkhuze Airport, which we believe is a very strategic asset, that will catalyse development in this District. The Department has plans to invest and upgrade it into a category 5 regional airport in the medium term, which eventually should allow the landing of scheduled flights over and above chartered flights. This creates synergy with other services such as VISA applications and Tourism Grading services.

The location of the airport near the Golela border gate leading to eSwatini and its close proximity to the Kosi Bay border gate leading to Mozambique, creates a unique investment opportunity in warehousing and distribution and for import and export.

Catalytic Projects

As EDTEA, we are delighted to indicate that TIKZN, uMhloosinga Development Agency and the uMkhanyakude District One Stop Shop are already involved in the facilitation of catalytic projects including mixed-use and human settlement developments, airport redevelopment, tourism and the Jozini Hydro Plant. The catalytic projects being facilitated so far have a combined investment value of R7,2 billion and with the potential to create 3110 job opportunities.

Conclusion

Our message ladies and gentlemen, is therefore a simple one, uMkhanyakude District is open for business.

To the people of uMkhanyakude: These facilities belong to you. Own them, use them, grow your business with them. I urge especially the youth, to grab these opportunities with both hands to secure your future. Prosperity is not out there somewhere, it is right here in your District.

I would like to thank our partners and funders. Let us continue to walk this journey together to scale this model across the province.

As we unveil this uMkhanyakude District One Stop Shop and the Mkuze Digital Centre today, we are not only launching infrastructure, but we are also igniting hope. We are launching dreams, opportunities, and a future in which every young person in this district can rise. Let these facilities be a beacon of what is possible when government, development agencies, industry, and communities come together with a shared vision.

I now officially declare the MKRI Mkuze Digital Skills Centre and the uMkhanyakude One Stop Shop officially launched.

Thank you.