

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

MEDIA BRIEFING – EKASI BUSINESS FAIR

MKRI, DURBAN

23 FEBRUARY 2026

Icebolethu Group CEO;

Representatives from MKRI;

Representatives from IDFC;

Members of The Media;

Good Morning!

Today is not simply about announcing an event.

Today is about announcing a shift in how we activate township and rural economies in KwaZulu-Natal.

POLICY CONTEXT – TRERS

In April 2022, the KwaZulu-Natal Cabinet approved the Township and Rural Economies Revitalisation Strategy (TRERS), as a deliberate intervention to transform townships and rural areas into inclusive, diversified and sustainable economic systems.

The vision of TRERS is clear:

To move township economies from survivalist activity to structured, scalable and investment-ready ecosystems.

But we must be honest.

One of the biggest barriers to township economic growth is not the lack of talent.

It is not the lack of ambition.

But it is the disconnect between:

- Available resources
- Funding instruments
- Government programmes

And the actual entrepreneurs on the ground.

So this partnership is about bridging that gap.

MAIN ANNOUNCEMENT

It is therefore my pleasure to officially announce that:

The first Ekasi Business Fair will take place on the 6th and 7th of March 2026 at Hammarsdale Junction Mall.

This two-day intervention forms part of our broader Township and Rural Investment activation programme for the 2025/26 financial year.

WHY THIS PARTNERSHIP?

The Ekasi Business Fair is not a stand-alone exhibition, but it is a strategic implementation vehicle of the Township and Rural Economies Revitalisation Strategy.

Through this platform we will:

- Integrate the Township and Rural Investment Workshop into a practical, accessible format;
- Bring financial institutions, development agencies and private sector players directly to township entrepreneurs;
- Provide market access, mentorship and funding linkages;
- Identify high-impact enterprises that government must prioritise.

EDTEA has committed resources towards ensuring that this is not symbolic, but impactful.

This initiative allows government to:

- Take stock of what is happening on the ground;
- Identify scalable enterprises;
- Prioritise funding and support based on real data and real engagement.

WHY ICEBOLETHU?

Icebolethu Foundation has demonstrated sustained commitment to community development and enterprise upliftment.

They bring:

- Grassroots credibility;
- Organisational capacity;
- Community trust;
- Implementation experience.

This partnership reflects what economic development must look like:

Government,

Research institutions,

Development finance,

Private sector,

Working together.

WHAT THIS FAIR REPRESENTS

This Business Fair will include:

- A structured exhibition of township enterprises
- A formal conference component
- Masterclasses aligned to township investment priorities
- And engagement with financial institutions and development partners

It is designed not merely as an event, but as a pilot model that can be replicated across other townships in KwaZulu-Natal.

If successful, this becomes a scalable provincial framework.

BROADER IMPACT

Township economies present enormous untapped potential.

When properly structured, supported and integrated into value chains, they create jobs, build local supply chains, reduce poverty, and expand provincial GDP.

The Ekasi Business Fair is therefore a practical expression of inclusive economic transformation.

CALL TO ACTION

To township entrepreneurs in Hammarsdale and surrounding areas:

This platform is for you.

To financial institutions:

Engage beyond compliance. Invest meaningfully.

To the private sector:

Open procurement pipelines.

To development agencies:

Align programmes and avoid duplication.

And to the media:

Help us tell these success stories.

CONCLUSION

This is merely the beginning, not the end.

The 6th and 7th of March 2026 will mark the first step in repositioning township economies as investment-ready spaces of growth and innovation.

So, I look forward to working with Icebolethu Foundation and all partners to ensure that this initiative delivers measurable outcomes - not just speeches.

Let us move from dialogue to delivery.

Thank you.