

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

**ASSOCIATION OF TECHNICAL UNIVERSITIES AND POLYTECHNICS IN
AFRICA (ATUPA) CONFERENCE GALA DINNER**

**"Building Africa's Future: The Confluence of TVET, Tourism, and Economic
Transformation"**

27 AUGUST 2025

THE CAPITAL HOTEL, ZIMBALI

Programme Directors, Ms. Adrine Kilemi & Prof. Dikeledi Mahlo;

Secretary General for ATUPA, Dr. Tafadzwa Mudondo;

Vice-Principal: Institutional Development at Unisa, Prof. Ramagwai Magano;

Acting Executive Dean – Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute (Unisa), Prof.
Edith Phaswana;

Honoured Guests;

Esteemed Delegates from across our great continent;

Respected Academics;

Visionary Industry leaders;

And most importantly, the brilliant young minds of Africa who have gathered here to
shape our collective destiny.

Good evening!

It is a profound privilege to welcome you to KwaZulu-Natal.

The theme of this conference – "***Empowering Africa through: Driving Sustainable Development, Youth Empowerment, and Economic Integration in the Era of Industry 4.0***" - is the essential blueprint for our continent's prosperity.

Tonight, I want to explore a powerful synergy: the connection between the transformative work you do in education and the dynamic energy of our tourism economy, which is increasingly being driven by our most valuable asset - our youth.

Often, we think of tourism as families on our beaches or travellers on safari. But there is a more powerful engine: Business Tourism, known as MICE - Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions.

This is *knowledge tourism*; a critical driver of investment, skills development, and inclusive economic growth. Hosting a prestigious event like ATUPA is a strategic investment in exactly that, an effort led by our dedicated KwaZulu-Natal Convention Bureau.

The question is, why?

The answer lies not just in immediate economic benefits, but in the lasting legacy we build together.

First, for the Immediate Economic Impact. Conferences inject vitality into our economy. Delegates support hotels, restaurants, transport, and countless SMMEs - from tech start-ups to local artisans. This event is a vital part of that stimulus, contributing to a sector that has generated over R1.8 billion for KZN in recent years, sustaining thousands of jobs.

Second, for the Enduring Legacy of Knowledge. The ideas shared here on harmonising TVET standards and digital transformation will seed innovation in our own institutions. The professional networks you build are the true dividend, creating a pan-African community of practice that can compete globally.

However, the most exciting part of this legacy, and the focus I wish to emphasise tonight, is the transformative role of our young people.

We are not just building a tourism economy for our youth; we are building it with them. They are not merely beneficiaries; they are the architects, the innovators, and the energizing force.

This vision is actively driven by our provincial vehicle, the KwaZulu-Natal Tourism and Film Authority (KZNTAFA), which provides the strategic framework for the Convention Bureau and, crucially, directs specific support and development programmes for youth in tourism and film.

Across our province, young graduates are not waiting for opportunities; they are creating them. They are the developers behind digital platforms that offer virtual tours of our heritage sites. They are the social media strategists crafting compelling campaigns that sell an experience. They are the entrepreneurs establishing sustainable tourism ventures.

We see this spirit in action through initiatives supported by KZNTAFA. In film, we have vibrant youth-owned production houses emerging from the Durban International Film Festival and the Durban FilmMart, telling authentic African stories that captivate global audiences.

Young filmmakers are producing documentaries on our biodiversity for streaming platforms and creating content for international channels, all skills honed through practical training initiatives.

In tourism, we see young people from rural communities in the Valley of a Thousand Hills who have leveraged training to launch successful cultural tourism ventures, offering immersive experiences that preserve and celebrate our Zulu heritage. We see graduates from our coastal colleges running marine ecotourism businesses, from ocean safaris to sustainable fishing tours, becoming stewards of our natural environment while creating employment.

This conference itself is a testament to that spirit. The "Innovate, Lead, and Thrive" Youth Forum is not a side event; it is the heart of the matter. The young leaders here are engaging with the core challenges of our time: sustainability, digitalization, and economic integration. The concrete action plans and pitches developed here are not academic exercises; they are the blueprints for tomorrow's enterprises.

This is where TVET and tourism merge into a powerful engine for advancement. The practical skills championed by ATUPA-digital literacy, entrepreneurial thinking, logistical management - are the very same skills that power a modern, resilient tourism and creative economy.

A young person trained in digital marketing can attract a conference delegate. A graduate with event management skills can ensure their experience is flawless. An entrepreneur with a sustainable vision can ensure that the benefits are felt widely and preserved for future generations.

Your discussions on Industry 4.0 are the foundation. The connections you have made are the framework. But the energy, passion, and innovation of our youth, supported by a focused strategy, are the tools that will build a brighter tomorrow.

Your presence here is a powerful vote of confidence. Let us leave here committed to supporting this generation of innovators. Let us ensure that the skills we champion in these halls are the ones that build a more resilient, integrated, and prosperous Africa,

where young people lead the charge in showcasing our continent's beauty and potential to the world.

You have spent this week innovating, leading, and planning to thrive.

On behalf of the people of KwaZulu-Natal, I thank you for choosing to do it here.

Enjoy the rest of your evening, and may your time in KZN be both productive and unforgettable.

I thank you.