



MINISTRY

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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MINISTER STEELA TEMBISA NDABENI'S SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE 28TH DURBAN BUSINESS FAIR

Dates: 30 April 2026

Venues: Durban Exhibition Centre & Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre

- Programme Director, Ms Nothando Mbanda
- The Mayor of eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, Cllr Cyril Xaba.
- The Chairperson of the Economic Development Committee in eThekweni, Cllr Thembo Ntuli.
- Members of the Mayoral Committee present.
- Councillors of eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality.
- Captains of industry, sponsors and partners of the Durban Business Fair.
- Distinguished exhibitors — the entrepreneurs and small business owners who are the reason we are gathered here today.
- Members of the media;
- Ladies and gentlemen,

Sanibonani. Good morning. Molweni.

It is an enormous honour for me to stand before you this morning at the Durban Exhibition Centre, in this beautiful coastal city, to officially open the 28th Durban Business Fair Exhibition.

I must say, as I greet you in terms of the DDM I greet you all as a DDM Champion for eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. In that way I am also part of this City. I am a champion for the Development of the City.

For nearly three decades, this Fair has created a space where entrepreneurs are able to showcase their products, access markets, and build meaningful business linkages.

Its impact thousands of businesses supported, jobs created, and opportunities unlocked reflects the critical role municipalities play in advancing local economic development.

This resonates with our recently held Local Economic Development summit, where we said Municipalities must be the anchors of economic development.

We meet as we close the month of April, the Freedom Month - our country celebrates 32 years of democracy.

To us this is a moment of reflection on how far we have travelled as a nation, but it is also a moment to remind ourselves what freedom must mean in practical, lived terms.

It must translate into the change of lives of the ordinary South Africans; entrepreneurship must drive that change for true economic freedom

For us, as the Department of Small Business Development, freedom is incomplete until every South African can exercise the rights guaranteed to them in our Constitution. Among those rights is Section 22 — the right to choose one's trade, occupation or profession freely.

Section 22 of the Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to choose their trade, occupation, or profession freely. However, this right must be made real in practice. It is not enough to enshrine it in law, we must actively create the conditions that enable people to exercise it meaningfully through enterprise, work, and participation in the economy.

South Africa is a nation filled with creativity, resilience and entrepreneurial spirit. Across our towns, villages and cities, small businesses are working hard every day manufacturing goods, providing services, creating opportunities, solving problems, and keeping our communities alive.

From the spaza shop on the corner, to local farmers, artisans and tech start-ups, small businesses are the backbone of our economy.

Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises play a crucial role in addressing some of our country's biggest challenges, including unemployment and inequality.

MSMEs employ millions of South Africans with most credible estimates suggesting that as many as 60% of employed persons in this country derive their livelihoods from this sector.

They create pathways for young people entering the workforce. They empower women entrepreneurs.

They prop up local economies across the length and breadth of South Africa. And they give innovative ideas the chance to grow into commercially thriving enterprises.

But these MSMEs can only succeed when the entire ecosystem around them government, finance, big business, and consumers chooses to back them.

This city has, for centuries, has been one of the great trading hubs of the African continent. It is home to Africa's busiest container port.

It is a city whose identity has been shaped by the movement of goods, people and ideas across the Indian Ocean. The DNA of Durban is the DNA of trade, of enterprise, of commerce.

So when eThekweni hosts the **28th Durban Business Fair** a platform that has run consistently for 28 years it is not a small thing.

It is the longest-standing municipal-led business fair of its kind in the country, and it stands as living proof of what is possible when a metropolitan government decides, year after year, to put MSMEs at the centre of its economic agenda.

To the Mayor and to the Council, I say congratulations on 28 years of unbroken commitment.

A fair like this opens many doors for our MSMEs. It opens doors to new markets. It opens doors to retailers, buyers and corporate procurement officers who would otherwise never see these products.

It opens doors to mentorship, to peer learning, and to deal-making. It opens doors to government services brought under one roof.

And, critically, it opens doors to dignity because every entrepreneur who exhibits here is being told by their city, in the most public way possible: we see you, we believe in you, and we are investing in your success

Programme Director,

We meet at a time when the global economic environment remains uncertain. Geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions continue to increase the cost of doing business, particularly for small enterprises.

Rising input costs, logistics constraints, and market volatility are realities that entrepreneurs face daily. These conditions make it even more urgent to build a resilient domestic economy that is less dependent on external shocks.

It is in this context that, just last month, we participated in the Proudly South African Summit under the theme of localisation as a critical imperative for the economy. The message was clear: localisation is not optional; it is a strategic necessity.

Strengthening local production and building regional value chains allows us to reduce import dependence, support domestic industries, and create sustainable employment within our own economy.

This is further reinforced by our broader investment drive, including the South Africa Investment Conference, where government continues to mobilise investment and implement structural reforms to improve the investment climate.

Reforms in energy, logistics, and economic governance are essential to ensuring that small businesses operate in an environment that is stable, predictable, and enabling.

At the centre of this transformation is the Department of Small Business Development, which is focused on building an enabling ecosystem for MSMEs and cooperatives.

Programme Director,

This year's fair carries an important and well-chosen theme: **“Enabling SMME Growth through Funding, Compliance, Market Access and Strategic Partnerships.”**

We must increase access to funding for MSMEs, and we must directly confront the existing barriers that small businesses face in accessing finance.

To that end, the Department finalised the **MSME Funding Policy in 2024**, and we are currently in the implementation phase. That policy makes three commitments which I want to highlight today, because each of them speaks directly to the entrepreneurs in this hall.

- **First, we committed to improving funding instruments for start-up capital.** In response, we have been deliberately innovative. Through Sedfa and now the department, we have rolled out the **Asset Assist Programme**, which is helping new entrepreneurs acquire the productive assets and equipment they need to begin trading. The early uptake has been encouraging.
- **Second, we committed to de-risking MSME finance through credit guarantees.** Through the Khula Credit Guarantee platform, we are mobilising finance from commercial banks and private sector partners by sharing the risk of lending to small businesses. This is changing the conversation between the bank and the entrepreneur and the latest figures from Sedfa show meaningful progress on the value of guarantees issued.
- **Third, we committed to implementing a movable asset collateral register and to recognising alternative credit-rating systems.** This is the work that will allow an entrepreneur whose primary asset is, for example, a bakkie or a piece of machinery, to use that asset to unlock finance. We are finalising this work in close partnership with National Treasury.

Taken together, these three interventions are designed to do one thing: to make sure that a brilliant business idea is never killed by a closed door at a bank.

The question can say: what have we, as the Portfolio, brought to the table for the entrepreneurs of this metro?

Through the **Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency Sedfa** — between the 2023/24 and 2025/26 financial years, **R412.8 million has been disbursed in eThekweni alone**. That is **42.8 per cent of the entire provincial Sedfa disbursement** of nearly R965 million. That investment has financed **792 SMMEs in this metro and helped facilitate over 11 800 jobs**. Behind every one of those numbers is a family, a wage, a child going to school, a future being built.

Through the:

- **Informal and Micro Enterprise Development Programme (IMEDP) — 468 micro-entrepreneurs in eThekweni** supported with equipment and tools, backed by an investment of **R8.19 million**.
- **Asset Assist Programme** — In the 2025/26 financial year, **27 eThekweni-based MSMEs** have already been approved for funding totalling **R5.59 million** helping them acquire the machinery, equipment, working capital and raw materials they need to scale.
- **Township and Rural Entrepreneurship Programme (TREP) —** Across, **R66.6 million has been disbursed to 451 SMMEs** over the past five financial years, with the townships of eThekweni — KwaMashu, Umlazi, Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaDabeka, Lamontville and others — representing a substantial share of that footprint.
- **Spaza Shop Support Fund** — Launched in April 2025 as a R500 million joint initiative between my Department and the dtic, this is the very programme that introduced me to the team who organise this Business Fair. Of the 2 809 applications received nationally, KwaZulu-Natal alone submitted 940 — the highest in the country — with 314 valid licences verified from this province, accounting for 55 per cent of all valid applications nationally. eThekweni was central to that response.
- **Cooperatives Development Support Programme (CDSP) —** In the 2024/25 financial year, **R16.77 million was approved for 22 cooperatives in KwaZulu-Natal** — the third-highest provincial allocation in the country — supporting our co-operative movement to grow, modernise their production, and scale their operations.

And on the infrastructure side, through the **Shared Economic Infrastructure Facility (SEIF)**, my Department, together with eThekweni Municipality and Sedfa, completed and launched the **Intloko Meat Sellers Facility at KwaMashu Train Station** in February 2024 — a R6.17 million facility that gave our informal meat traders dignified, regulated and safer trading premises. That is what shared infrastructure looks like in practice: government meeting traders where they already trade, and lifting the conditions under which they earn a living.

Programme Director,

This fair is centred on localisation and the competitiveness of our MSMEs. And here I want to speak very plainly.

We have the talent. We have the quality. And yet, as a nation, we still seem enamoured with global brands. This is where a Business Fair of this stature plays such an important role, and I want to encourage everyone in this hall government communicators, the media, retail buyers, and citizens to **pick up the promotional and advocacy work to profile our local brands**.

Because when we **buy local**, we do far more than purchase a product. We support jobs. We strengthen families. We invest in the future of South Africa.

Every rand spent at a local business helps circulate money within our economy, enabling businesses to grow, employ more people, and build communities. When you choose a locally produced product, you are helping a small business owner pay wages, expand operations, and reinvest in the community.

That single purchase might help someone hire a new employee, train an apprentice, or open another store.

Conclusion

To the Mayor, Cllr Cyril Xaba, and to Cllr Thembo Ntuli and the entire eThekweni team — our department views you as a strategic partner as the Municipality in driving local economic development.

To the exhibitors: the next 3 days, until the 2nd of May, are yours. Use them. Network aggressively. Close deals. Exchange business cards. Sign memoranda. Build the supplier relationships that will sustain you long after the lights of this exhibition centre go down.

To the citizens of eThekweni and visitors from elsewhere: come through these doors, walk these aisles, and spend your money where it matters, with the entrepreneurs of your own city.

Programme Director,

Platforms such as the Durban Business Fair are therefore critical. They translate constitutional rights, policy, and strategy into lived economic opportunity. They connect entrepreneurs to markets, buyers, and support institutions, ensuring that small businesses are not only supported, but are able to grow and participate meaningfully in the economy.

I encourage all stakeholders to continue working together to strengthen this ecosystem, support local enterprises, and ensure that the opportunities created here translate into sustainable growth and job creation.

Programme Director, in the spirit of Freedom Month, in the spirit of Section 22 of our Constitution, and in the spirit of the partnership between national government and the City of eThekweni—

It is now my distinct honour and privilege to **declare the 28th Durban Business Fair Exhibition officially open.**

May the next five days bring deals, opportunity, and growth to every exhibitor in this hall.

I thank you.