



Province of the
EASTERN CAPE

COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE
& TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

COGTA

Newsletter

DECEMBER 2025



Global Disaster Response Delegates from International and National
Disaster Management and Rescue Teams

EDITORIAL COMMENT



Editor: Ms Thando Sonjica

Welcome to final issue of our monthly newsletter for the calendar year. In this edition, we highlight a wide range of programmes the Department has undertaken, from local initiatives to major international events hosted in the Province.

One of the key highlights is the Eastern Cape's latest Municipal Capital Review Session, held in East London which marked a decisive shift on how the Province addresses long-standing challenges in infrastructure delivery. For years, municipalities have grappled with under-spending, stalled projects, and the return of unspent funds to the National Treasury to the detriment of service delivery intended to uplift communities.

CoGTA MEC Zolile Williams delivered a clear message that the era of underperformance is over thus calling for accountability, reinforced by the Risk-Adjusted Strategy (RAS), signals a growing recognition that infrastructure delivery requires discipline, professionalization, and measurable action, not goodwill alone. Read more about this story on page 3.

Another major event featured in this issue is the Africa, Europe and Middle East (AEME)

Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE), recently concluded at Nelson Mandela University. Hosted on African soil for the first time, this large-scale simulation brought together search and rescue specialists, humanitarian organizations, disaster management officials, and academic partners from across the AEME region. The week-long exercise strengthened preparedness, improved coordination, and test operational readiness for major disasters particularly large-scale earthquakes and their cascading impacts. Read more about this global exercise on page 6.

Throughout the year, the Department continued to host community-focused events to raise awareness, educate, and encourage dialogue on critical issues such as the Customary Male Initiation, along with other programmes that directly affect our communities. These stories and more can be found throughout this issue.

We encourage you to take the time to explore all the features in this edition. To everyone travelling during the festive season, we wish you a safe journey, please obey the rules of the road.

Wishing you a joyful and restful festive season.

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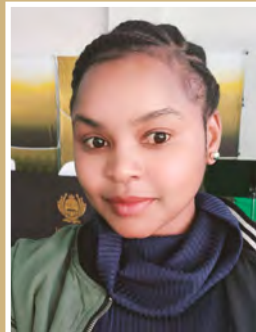
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RAS GEARED FOR MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE EFFICIENCY

By: Ms Sonto Malinga

The Eastern Cape Department of CoGTA continues to lead efforts to strengthen municipal performance and accelerate infrastructure delivery. Last month, the Department hosted the Eastern Cape Municipal Capital Review Session in East London. This is a high-level engagement session that brought together Municipal Managers (MMs), Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), and Technical Directors from all municipalities across the province, alongside strategic partners such as the Department of Water and Sanitation, MISA, the Department of Electricity, and the Provincial Treasury. The session served as a collaborative platform to reflect on the expenditure of municipal capital grants, particularly the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG). It also explored practical ways to enhance planning, coordination, and accountability in infrastructure development.

In his keynote address, CoGTA MEC Zolile Williams underscored the urgent need to end the cycle of grant underspending across municipalities. “No municipality will be allowed to underperform under my leadership,” he stated firmly, calling for a culture of accountability and performance-driven governance.

MEC Williams further highlighted the Risk-Adjusted Strategy (RAS) as a transformative instrument to fast-track municipal spending and professionalize the infrastructure development sector. “The RAS is not just a document, it is a performance compass that ensures municipalities stay on course in delivering infrastructure projects on time and within budget,” he explained.

The PMIG–RAS Policy Framework, approved in June 2023 and endorsed by the Provincial Executive Council, was developed to address what the MEC described as a “perennial tragedy” of conditional grant under-spending, where billions meant to address infrastructure backlogs are returned to the National Revenue Fund. The strategy has since been incorporated into municipal implementation protocols signed by Municipal Managers, ensuring accountability at every level of government.

According to the framework, “RAS introduces the non-negotiables as an instrument to do those simple things which, when done, have major impact and do not require new budget.”

“These non-negotiables focus on practical, high-impact actions that improve service delivery and strengthen oversight. MMs are positioned as Chief Implementers, while Mayors serve as Chief Oversight Managers, with regular reporting to CoGTA and municipal councils to track performance,” said MEC Williams.

To ensure consistent delivery, the framework sets monthly expenditure thresholds, requiring municipalities to spend at least 30% of their annual allocation by September and 60% by December, with construction work planned on a strict 12-month turnaround cycle.

In addition, CoGTA has established Provincial and District Infrastructure Support Centers (PISC and DISCs) staffed with engineers, planners, and financial specialists to assist municipalities with project planning, design, procurement, and monitoring. The institutionalization of RAS within municipalities is supported through internal “RAS War-Rooms” dedicated monitoring and support structures chaired by District Technical Directors in collaboration with CoGTA.

The framework also emphasizes the professionalization of infrastructure management through the Road to Registration (R2R) mentorship programme and the development of web-based Programme and Project Management Information Systems (MIS) to enhance transparency and data-driven decision-making.

Summing up the department's commitment, MEC Williams reiterated that CoGTA's focus is on sustainable delivery, not compliance for its own sake.

“We can no longer afford delays and excuses, and every rand must translate into tangible improvements in the lives of our people. Our goal is to build capable municipalities that plan better, spend better, and deliver better,” he said.

The review session concluded with a shared commitment among all stakeholders to strengthen planning, reporting, and accountability mechanisms that will ensure the RAS drives measurable improvements in infrastructure performance across the province.



Attendees of the EC Municipal Capital Review Session



MEC Williams

PDMC LAUNCHES CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMME FOR FIRE FIGHTING VOLUNTEERS

By Vuyani Sibene

The Provincial Disaster Management Centre (PDMC), in Cogta, in partnership with Santam, initiated a three-day capacity-building programme to strengthen disaster preparedness in vulnerable municipalities in the Amathole District, with a special focus on Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality.

Hosted in Hogsback last month, the training equipped volunteers on firefighting capabilities, essential knowledge and practical skills to prevent, respond to, and manage veld fires and related disasters. This pioneering programme places young people at the forefront, fostering expertise in firefighting and laying the foundation for safer, more resilient communities.

The objective is to provide volunteers with practical tools, coordinated strategies, and community-driven support. By doing so, the initiative seeks to minimize environmental and economic damage, safeguard lives and livelihoods, and create a proactive frontline against the growing threat of wildfires.

Ms Andiswa Tyulu, an Assistant Director for Fire Services at the PDMC officially opened the programme for the twenty volunteers, emphasizing that, “Fires pose serious threats to livelihoods especially in Raymond Mhlaba LM, where dense vegetation makes the area highly fire prone. Volunteers must pay close attention to every detail shared by facilitators. The Municipality must ensure the equipment is kept safe, properly accounted for during audits, and registered in its asset register. Volunteers must return equipment safely after responding to incidents,” said Ms Tyulu

Mr. Molefi Lethoba the Chief Fire Officer at Raymond Mhlaba LM highlighted the broader vision of the training that it was developing and capacitating a dedicated corps of trained volunteers to enhance early warning systems, rapid response capacity, and community resilience.

“This involves not only training and equipment provision, but also creating a sustainable volunteer management system, clear operating procedures, and integration with local and provincial disaster management structures. By formalizing and strengthening the role of volunteers, this initiative supports provincial goals of disaster risk reduction, climate resilience, and sustainable development. We thank Cogta and Santam for including this municipality and assisting in capacitating the youth,” said Mr Molefe.



Officials from Provincial Disaster Management Centre, Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality and the trained volunteers

TRAINING OF AMAKHANKATHA AND IINGCIBI CONTINUES IN EARNEST TO CURB INITIATION DEATHS AND INJURIES

By Vuyani Sibene

In a proactive effort to enhance the safety and integrity of customary male initiation practices, the Department of COGTA, led by MEC Zolile Williams, in collaboration with the Eastern Cape House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders, continued with the Advocacy Training Session for Traditional Surgeons (Iingcibi) and nurses (Amakhankatha) in Amathole and Buffalo City Municipalities from 13 November 2025 in Buffalo City Metro.

This initiative forms part of the government's broader programme to capacitate customary male initiation practitioners ahead of the 2025 summer initiation season. The main objective is to ensure that all practitioners are properly trained and equipped to handle challenges associated with the initiation process, particularly those that have in the past led to injuries or deaths of initiates.

During the sessions, emphasis was placed on promoting hygiene standards, proper management of initiates, and enhancing knowledge of legislation governing customary male initiation practices. Participants were also encouraged to work closely with traditional leaders, health professionals, and government structures to ensure that initiation schools operate safely and in compliance with legal and cultural requirements.

Driving the programme, Mr Thembelani Rumbu who is the Health Coordinator in Amathole District Municipality (DM), emphasised

the importance of following proper procedures and taking all necessary precautionary measures. He urged practitioners to work closely with health authorities and traditional leaders to prevent unnecessary incidents.

“Pre-screening three months before initiation is important to young initiates. History is important for the medical condition of the young initiates. Let us allow medication in the traditional initiation schools,” said Mr Rumbu.

Advocate Vuyo Xalisa from the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) said they attended the session to educate, raise awareness to the amaKhankatha, Iingcibi to know they will be liable if they do not exercise the legal rights of the initiates. She added that they were working together with South African Police Services (SAPS). “The success of our initiation seasons depends on the commitment and competence of every practitioner. This training is about saving lives and honouring our culture the right way,” she said.

The training was well received by participants, who expressed appreciation for the government's continued support in improving customary initiation practices. Families must be responsible, also avoid alcohol,” said Nkosi Xhanti Sigcawu, Chairperson of the Local House of Amathole DM.



Dr Loyiso Nqevu, Nkosi Bovulengwe Mtirara, Nkosi Mpumalanga Gwadiso, MEC of Cogta Zolile Williams, Dr Mthembeni Tebelele and Amathole Executive Mayor Anele Ntsangani

SOUTH AFRICA CONCLUDES EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE EXERCISE IN NELSON MANDELA BAY

By Sonto Malinga

South Africa has once again positioned itself as a leader in international disaster preparedness as the Africa, Europe and Middle East (AEME) Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE) was concluded at Nelson Mandela University. Hosted on the African continent for the first time, the large-scale simulation brought together search and rescue specialists, humanitarian organizations, disaster management officials, and academic partners from across the AEME region.

The week-long exercise was conducted under the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) framework, designed to improve preparedness, strengthen coordination, and test operational readiness for major disasters, especially large-scale earthquakes and their cascading impacts.

Opening the exercise earlier in the week, the Director-General (DG) of the Department of Cooperative Governance, Mr Mbulelo Tshangana, emphasized that disasters recognize no borders and require collective global action. He noted that the AEME-ERE represents a strategic investment in resilience and marks a significant moment for South Africa, especially following the country's recent hosting of the G20 Summit. At the G20, the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group adopted a landmark declaration that reinforces the principle that disaster preparedness is everyone's responsibility.

DG Tshangana highlighted the increasing frequency and complexity of disasters, driven by climate change, infrastructure vulnerabilities, and rapid urbanization. He said that strong planning, coordination, and multisectoral collaboration are essential to saving lives, particularly in high-risk municipalities such as Nelson Mandela Bay, which has experienced severe flooding in recent years.

The exercise drew a diverse group of international participants from across Russia, the United Arab Emirates, Iceland, Estonia, Poland, Kenya, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom. Their presence demonstrated the global commitment to sharing expertise, strengthening international partnerships, and improving collective readiness. DG Tshangana also expressed appreciation to Mr Martijn Viersma, INSARAG Global Lead, for his attendance and support.

From 01-05 December 2025, the simulation replicated the aftermath of a major earthquake, complete with collapsed buildings, trapped survivors, and complex rescue scenarios. Teams engaged in joint briefings, drone-assisted reconnaissance missions, live-field operations, and intensive coordination through the On-Site Operations Coordination Centre and EXCON structures. The exercise provided an opportunity to assess systems interoperability, refine communication protocols, and strengthen the use of INSARAG-standard documentation and reporting tools.

The Exercise Control Chief noted that having international teams on the ground allowed agencies to test how different operational approaches integrate during high-pressure emergencies, providing vital learning for future response efforts.

DG Tshangana cited the country's progress in improving governance frameworks, revitalizing fire services, and professionalizing emergency response mechanisms. He emphasized the importance of using platforms like AEME-ERE to deepen skills, strengthen readiness, and cultivate long-term resilience.

The final phase marked the official demobilization and final debriefing session which allowed participants to reflect on the week's activities, consolidate key lessons, and identify improvements to enhance South Africa's capacity to respond to large-scale disasters.

The debrief highlighted the importance of strong multi-sectoral coordination, efficient communication systems, and continuous refinement of operational protocols. Participants shared technical insights, reviewed response strategies, and discussed opportunities to strengthen readiness, particularly in the early hours of a disaster when rapid, coordinated action is most critical.

As the AEME Earthquake Response Exercise concludes, it leaves behind strengthened partnerships, enhanced operational capability, and renewed determination across the region to safeguard lives and protect livelihoods in the face of future disasters.

Deputy Minister Prince Zolile Burns-Ncamashe expressed heartfelt appreciation for the dedication shown by all teams, noting that the exercise demonstrated a collective commitment to building safer, more resilient communities. "I commend the national and international participants for their professionalism, cooperation, and willingness to share expertise."



Eastern Cape Provincial Disaster Management Team

IMBIZO YAMADODA HELD FOR BCM AND AMATHOLE MUNICIPALITIES

By Anelisa Mabece and Vuyani Sibene

An initiative which is a collaborative effort between the Cogta, ECHTKL, Department of Health (DoH), South African Police Service (SAPS), and National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), specifically convened for Ingcibi and namaKhankatha, was held in East London for the Buffalo City Metro and Amathole District municipalities to address critical matters related to the customary male initiation practice towards a zero 2025 season.

The Imbizo was an inclusive platform for men and boys to engage on issues affecting them, including mental health, gender-based violence, healthy expressions of masculinity, and health protocols. AmaKhankatha and liNgcibi engaged with the MEC Zolile Williams, Dr Mthembeni Tebelele, Dr Loyiso Nqevu, and Nkosi Mpumalanga Gwadiso who is the Chairperson of the ECHTKL.

The engagement included discussions on the issues such as the role of parents and community members in Customary Male Initiation, credible practitioners, integration of medical intervention and the role of traditional leaders.

“We are often mocked by women that they carry these young men in their bellies for nine months and we then we kill them in a month, why? Let us be responsible,” said MEC of Cogta, Zolile Williams.

Dr Loyiso Nqevu said, “It affects us all whether you have a young boy or a young girl because they live in the same society with us. Let us look in the baboon family they take care of their young one and they have rules, laws and culture, why don't we.”

Phase 2 of the event featured the official Launch of the Summer Initiation Season 2025, which was also graced by the presence of

the MEC of Health, Ntandokazi Capa, who said Ulwaluko was an important phase for young men in the Eastern Cape province.

“We are committing ourselves to achieving zero deaths in the summer initiation season. No family should be burying their children, and I hope our health practitioners will come in handy in safeguarding the health and wellbeing of initiates,” she said.

She further announced that the DoH committed R58.3 million for customary male initiation season of the 2025/2026 financial Year.

“This includes the deployment of 49 vehicles that will be availed for the summer season across all 8 districts, 89 designated medical officers and 52 contracted nurses to strengthen medical oversight over the period mentions. Our commitment is to ensure support is timeous to attend to any complications that may arise,” said MEC Capa.

Nkosi Gwadiso, officially declared the 2025 Summer Initiation Season opened and emphasized that, prior to the launch, amakhankatha and Ingcibi had undergone training in the Alfred Nzo, O.R. Tambo, Amathole and BCM municipalities.

“This day serves as a continued call to parents and incoming initiates to ensure that all proper protocols are followed. This includes boys being medically screened at their nearest hospital and all approval forms being duly completed and signed. By following these measures, we can determine whether the initiate is in good condition to undertake this important journey or whether medical attention is required beforehand. Our aim is simple “Abantwana bethu mabaye bephila, babuye bephila,” said Nkosi Gwadiso.



L-R: Mr Ayanda Mxekezo, Sarah Baartman district Health coordinator and MEC Ntandokazi Capa.

COGTA JOIN HANDS WITH DR AB XUMA MUNICIPALITY TO LAUNCH 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

By Sabo Dlelengana

The Department of CoGTA joined the community of Dr AB Xuma Local Municipality in eNgcobo last month for the official launch of the 16 Days of Activism of No-Violence Against Women and Children.

The event, led by Eastern Cape Premier Oscar Mabuyane, marked the beginning of the annual national campaign that calls for intensified action against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF).

Held against the backdrop of continued reports of violence and killings affecting women and children across the province, the launch served as both a call to action and a reaffirmation of government's determination to strengthen its response to the crisis. Community members, traditional leaders, government representatives and law-enforcement officials gathered in solidarity, underscoring the collective responsibility required to build safer communities.

Delivering the keynote address Premier Mabuyane emphasised the urgency to confront GBVF through united and sustained efforts.

“Violence against women and children remains one of the gravest threats to our nation's well-being. We remain resolute to strengthen our partnerships with communities, traditional leaders, and law enforcement agencies to build safer, more dignified spaces for all. We will collaborate towards a plan that prioritises the needs of the

most vulnerable and guarantees the inclusion of everyone in our joint endeavours to eradicate GBVF,” he said.

In his message of support Nkosi Mpumalanga Gwadiso, Chairperson of the ECHTKL, reinforced the role of traditional leadership in the fight against GBVF. He noted the alarming increase in drug abuse among young people, highlighting it as one of the major contributing factors to violence in communities. He reaffirmed the House's ongoing collaboration with the SAPS through various crime-prevention programmes focused on protecting vulnerable groups.

Department of Cogta strengthened the outreach efforts by deploying its Services on Wheels initiative through exhibition. Through this mobile platform, residents received important information on Customary Male Initiation, Rights and Responsibilities, and the Customary Initiation Act. The service ensured that even community members in remote areas could access essential support and guidance.

The launch set a powerful tone for the 2025 campaign, one rooted in unity, awareness, and accountability. As the 16 Days of Activism unfolded across the province, the message from eNgcobo was clear: ending violence against women and children requires a sustained, collective commitment, and every stakeholder has a vital role to play.



Mr Vuyani Sibene, Assistant Director Communication interacting with the Chairperson of the HTKL Nkosi Mpumalanga Gwadiso



Ms Sabo Dlelengana -Principal Communication officer sharing information with MEC of Social Development Ms Bukiwe Fanta

