



Province of the  
**EASTERN CAPE**  
 COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE  
 & TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

# COGTA

## *Newsletter*

MARCH 2026



“We encourage traditional leaders to work collaboratively with us while remaining actively engaged in the development of their communities particularly to advance food security, education and social justice,”  
 Premier Mabuza



# EDITORIAL COMMENT



Editor: Ms Thando Sonjica

In this issue we highlight significant government programmes and events including the annual official opening of the House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders, workshop on the White Paper on Local Government, the Summit for Traditional and Khoisan Leadership, Eastern Seaboard Development initiative etc. Each of these programmes reflect a broader vision, one that seeks to stabilize governance, deepen inclusion, and unlock economic potential.

The tabling of the 2026/27 Budget and Policy Speech by MEC Williams is more than a fiscal milestone; it is a reminder that democracy is lived not in chambers but in the streets, homes, and communities of South Africa. His words “Local government is where dignity is affirmed or denied” capture the essence of governance at its most immediate level.

When taps run dry, when refuse remains uncollected, when roads crumble, democracy itself falters in the eyes of citizens. That is why the MEC's emphasis on performance as the bedrock of democracy is both urgent and necessary. Municipalities are not abstract institutions, they are the conduits through which communities experience democracy in tangible forms, reliable services, responsive leadership, and accountable governance.

Equally important is the recognition of traditional leadership as a partner in governance and rural development including remain custodians of social cohesion and cultural continuity. By embedding them into the development agenda, the department acknowledges that governance cannot be imposed from above, it must be co-created with communities.

The reform trajectory outlined “focused, stabilised, and outcome-driven” sets a clear direction. Yet, the true test lies in execution, says MEC Williams. Strengthening municipalities, supporting governance institutions, and accelerating service delivery require political will, administrative competence, and fiscal discipline. Citizens will judge this budget not by its promises but by its impact, water flowing from taps, electricity powering homes, and dignity restored in everyday life.

MEC Williams has set the tone, now the department must deliver. As he puts it, democracy, after all, is affirmed not in speeches but in the lived realities of citizens. Enjoy the reading.

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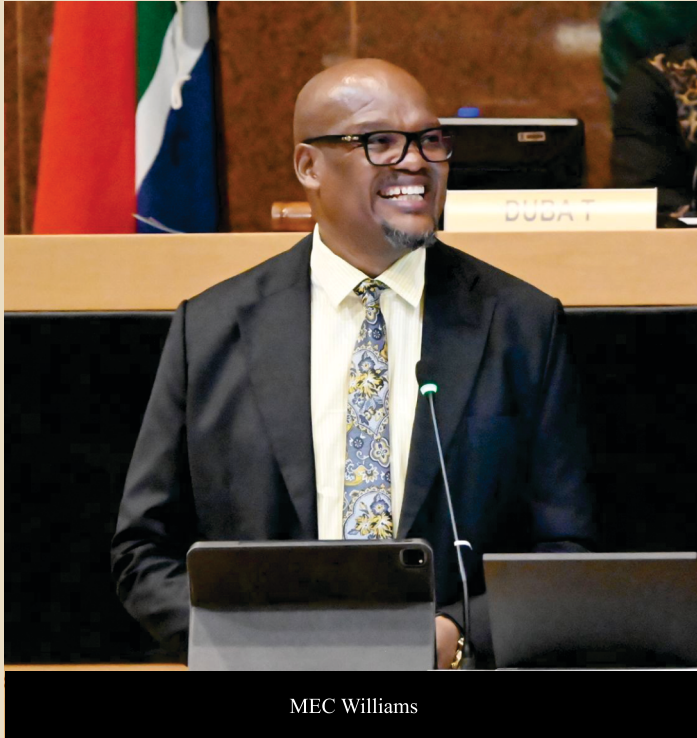
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# MEC WILLIAMS DECLARES COGTA IS ON A REFORM TRAJECTORY AND OUTCOME DRIVEN

By: Sonto Malinga



MEC Williams

On 25 March 2026, the MEC for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), Zolile Williams, tabled the 2026/2027 Policy Speech at the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, setting out a focused and reform-driven plan to strengthen local government and accelerate service delivery across the province. Central to the speech was the recognition of municipalities as the frontline of governance, where the impact of government is felt most directly. Emphasising this, the MEC said “local government is where dignity is affirmed or denied,” underscoring the importance of responsive, accountable, and effective municipal systems to improve the lives of citizens and deepen democracy.

The policy speech further highlighted the link between municipal performance and public trust, noting that communities experience the true meaning of democracy through reliable delivery of services, ethical leadership, and transparent institutions. Another key feature of the policy direction is to strengthen partnerships with traditional leadership, particularly in rural areas, where cooperative governance plays a critical role in development.

“Governance and development are effective when municipalities and traditional leaders work together to promote social cohesion, community participation, and inclusive decision-making,” he said.

In terms of resource allocation, MEC Williams said it is strategically directed to stabilise municipalities, support governance institutions, enhance collaboration with traditional leadership, accelerate service delivery, improve financial management, and build institutional capacity.

He added that key highlights include targeted municipal support and intervention programmes, initiatives to improve audit outcomes and strengthen internal controls, and ongoing investment in training and skills development for municipal officials and Councillors.

“Notably, the department has allocated R24 million towards the development of an Infrastructure Project Monitoring System (IPMS), to enhance oversight, accountability, and the efficient delivery of infrastructure projects. Additional focus areas include accelerating access to basic services such as water, sanitation, and electricity, particularly in underserved communities, as well as continued support for traditional leadership institutions,” he said.

MEC Williams expressed confidence in the department's progress, stating that it is “on a firm reform trajectory focused, stabilised, and outcome driven,” signaling a renewed commitment to ethical governance and measurable results. Overall, the 2026/27 Budget Vote reflects a decisive step towards building a capable, inclusive, and people centered local government system that restores dignity, strengthens communities, and delivers tangible improvements in the everyday lives of the people of the Eastern Cape

## Policy Speech FOCAL AREAS

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**“Local Government is where dignity is affirmed or denied.”**

**LOOKING AHEAD**  
**2026/27**

- ✓ Strengthening municipalities & Traditional Institutions
- ✓ Enhancing Service delivery
- ✓ Deepening Cooperative Governance

**PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST**

- ✓ Launch - Provincial Election Task team
- ✓ Mainstream Designated Groups and Inclusive Procurement
- ✓ Customary Male Initiation Practice (R9 326 950)

#ServiceDelivery #DignityFirst #EasternCape

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**DELIVERING BASIC SERVICES**

- ✓ Free basic services & infrastructure services
- ✓ Risk Adjusted Strategy
- ✓ Infrastructure Project Monitoring Systems (R24M)
- ✓ Local Economic Development (R3 291M)

- ✓ Disaster and Fire Rescue Services
- ✓ Support to distressed municipalities

Water | Sanitation | Fire

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**CLEAN GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY**

- Full compliance on financial disclosures
- Anti-corruption strategies strengthened
- Clean audit outcomes maintained

**TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP EMPOWERMENT**

- 140 Traditional Councils supported with financial reporting
- Infrastructure upgrades across Traditional Institutions
- Strengthened partnership for rural development

Building a Government that is Ethical, Transparent and Accountable

# EASTERN SEABOARD DEVELOPMENT GAINS MOMENTUM THROUGH MINISTER-KING ENGAGEMENT

By Thando Sonjica

Last month, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta), Velenkosini Hlabisa, led a high-level engagement with Kings, senior traditional leaders and senior government officials from Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal to advance the Eastern Seaboard Development (ESD) initiative.

Among the attendees were The Majesties King Ndlovuyezwe Ndamase, Acting King Dumelani Daluxolo Sigcau, King Misuzulu Zwelithini, and Nkosi Minenkulu Joyi, representing the National House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders.

The meeting formed part of government's efforts to strengthen collaboration with traditional leaders to unlock economic opportunities and improve livelihoods in rural communities along the eastern seaboard coastline.

“The Eastern Seaboard represents one of the most important strategic infrastructure investments connecting rural communities along the coastline. It also serves as a unifier between the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, strengthening social, cultural and economic ties between our people,” said MEC for Agriculture, Ms Nonceba Kontsiwe, speaking on behalf of Premier Oscar Mabuyane.

She cautioned against challenges such as informal structures built along road reserves and unplanned land occupation, saying, “These challenges, if not addressed early, may undermine the long-term development opportunities that this corridor is intended to unlock.”

Minister Hlabisa outlined a transformative vision for the corridor, emphasising inclusive economic growth rooted in partnership with traditional leaders as custodians of communal land.

“Development must be driven in partnership with traditional leadership. Kingships should be active participants and beneficiaries in initiatives that directly impact their communities,” he said.

He highlighted agriculture, tourism, infrastructure, and the ocean economy as key sectors for job creation and cultural preservation, stressing the need to move decisively from planning to implementation.

“We must see visible progress within the next five years through coordinated action across all spheres of government under the District Development Model (DDM),” the Minister added.

MEC for CoGTA in KwaZulu-Natal, Reverend Thulasizwe Buthelezi, described the engagement as a critical platform for alignment.

“Meaningful development depends on secure land access, community participation, and the wisdom of traditional leadership.”

Traditional leaders echoed the call for people-centred development. His Majesty Kumkani Sigcau said the development process needed humility and consultation and must be rooted in service and continuous dialogue with our communities.

His Majesty King Ndamase said there was a need to address basic service challenges.

“We must prioritise water, roads, health and housing through proper planning and expert support. Communities are eager to see the project commence rather than endless meetings,” said King Ndamase.



L-R: King Daluxolo Sigcau, King Misuzulu Zwelithini, King Ndlovuyezwe Ndamase and Minister Hlabisa

# A NEW CHAPTER BEGINS FOR TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP: TO DRIVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

By: Anelisa Mabece and Vuyani Sibene



L-R: Premier Oscar Mabuyane



L-R: Nkosi Gwadiso: Chairperson, Premier Mabuyane, Ms Pamela Ndudane and Mr Vuyo Stofile Directors of Administration and Operations Support at the Provincial House

On 19 March 2026, the Eastern Cape House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders (ECHTKL) convened its much-anticipated Annual Opening in Bhisho, marking the commencement of the 5th session of the 6th Term.

This year's opening took place during the 30th anniversary of the ECHTKL.

This august occasion was graced by the presence of Royalty namely Kumkani Vululwandle Sandile of AmaRharhabe, Kumkani Ndamase of AmaMpondo aseNyandeni as well as the Acting Kumkani of AmaMpondo aseQaukeni Kumkani Dumelani Sigcau. The event was also attended by various MECs including Zolile Williams, Health Ntandokazi Capa, Sport, Recreation, Arts, and Culture, Sibulele Ngongo and the Chairpersons of Local Houses, and traditional leaders from across the province.

Officially opening the House, Premier Lubabalo Oscar Mabuyane, reaffirmed government's commitment to improve infrastructure, particularly road networks, and highlighted a vision for economic growth in areas such as Ntabankulu. He underscored the indispensable role of traditional leaders to advance rural development.

"We are aware of the challenges confronting traditional leaders, including unresolved claims and matters of recognition and non-recognition. These cross-cutting issues remain a key priority and are receiving focused attention. The institution of traditional leadership occupies a unique and constitutionally recognised space within the governance system," he added.

Premier Mabuyane encouraged traditional leaders to work collaboratively with government while remaining actively engaged in the development of their communities particularly to advance food security, education and social justice.

About the kuGompo City incident involving the alleged coronation of the Nigerian King he said confirmed that investigations were underway.

"Reports of the so-called "coronation" of a Nigerian King, not recognised within the framework of our indigenous systems of traditional leadership, are a direct affront to the institution of traditional leadership, the customs of our people, and the constitutional order of the Republic of South Africa. Traditional leaders are not self-appointed, they are rooted in lineage, legitimacy and recognition within the framework of our laws and customs." Said Premier Mabuyane.

He added that his office, along with that of the MEC for EC CoGTA, are working to resolve the common challenges traditional leaders face. This will afford them the opportunity to delve deeper into issues of Traditional and Khoisan leadership governance and mutual cooperation to address development issues.

In his closing remarks, the Chairperson of the House Nkosi Mpumalanga Gwadiso expressed appreciation to all attendees, especially the Kings. He emphasised the importance of the Chairperson of the Local Houses, to strengthen the institution.

Nkosi Gwadiso further called for strengthened law enforcement to ensure compliance with immigration laws.

"Where there are violations, there must be consequences. We are equally concerned about illegal economic activities, including counterfeit goods, which undermine township and rural economies and threaten public safety. We are not against law-abiding foreign nationals, however, lawlessness and disrespect for our institutions will not be tolerated," he said.

He extended gratitude to the administrative staff of the department for their dedication for their support to the functioning of the House.

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# USE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES TAKE CENTRE STAGE AT LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS FORUM

By: Sonto Malinga



Mr Sigonyela added that the use of indigenous languages “is not only a matter of compliance, but a critical tool for promoting inclusivity, strengthen public participation, and ensure that citizens are fully informed about government programmes and services.”

“We urge you to prioritise language accessibility in your daily work to bridge communication gaps and improve community engagement with communities,” said Mr Sogonyela.

Beyond the language focus, the forum covered several key areas aimed at enhancing the functionality of government communication services. Insights were presented into the communication approach for the upcoming Local Government Elections (LGE), equipping communicators with strategies to ensure clear, accurate, and timely information that reaches communities.

The importance of inclusive and accessible communication took centre stage at the 4th Quarter Local Government Communicators Forum (LGCF) meeting, at the SALGA Offices in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality recently. On the day municipal communicators from across the Eastern Cape gathered to strengthen coordination and align messaging on key government priorities.

The LGCF is spearheaded by Cogta) in partnership with Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) and South African Local Government Association (SALGA) as a platform that brings together municipal communication professionals to strengthen the local government communication system, share best practices, and coordinate messaging across municipalities.

Proceedings were led by a presentation from the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), delivered by Mr Lukhanyo Sigonyela, who advocated for the increased use of indigenous languages in government communication messages. Mr Sigonyela said communication in indigenous languages should be viewed as a service delivery enabler in the quest to serve communities better.

“Government communication must speak the language of the people. It is essential that service delivery information is communicated in languages that communities understand best, which is their mother tongue, (first language if you like),” he stressed.

The forum also reflected on the outcomes of the Language Compliance Survey, providing a status update on how municipalities are performing to implement the multilingual communication practices. This was complemented by updates on the Integrated Local Government Plan, offering communicators a broader understanding of government priorities and programmes that require strategic communication support.

In addition, Ms Marge Peters from the Provincial Disaster Management Centre (PDMC) presented the Provincial Disaster Management Applications System (PDMAS), highlighting how technology can be leveraged to improve information dissemination during emergencies and disaster situations to enhance coordination across municipalities.

The Local Government Communicators Forum continues to serve as a vital platform for collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and alignment across the province. By bringing together communicators from different municipalities and other key stakeholders, the forum strengthens the collective ability of government to communicate effectively, enhance compliance, and ultimately improve service delivery messaging.

As the province prepares for key milestones, including upcoming elections and ongoing service delivery programmes, the emphasis on clear, inclusive, and people centred communication particularly using indigenous languages remains critical so that that no community is left behind.



# STRENGTHENING TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

By Sabo Dlelengana



L-R: MEC Williams and King Vululwandle Sandile of Rharhabe Kingdom

On 11-12 March, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) hosted a two-day Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Summit in Buffalo City Metro. The summit, led by MEC for CoGTA Zolile Williams, brought together traditional leaders, government representatives and key stakeholders to reflect on the role of traditional institutions in strengthening communities.

Addressing delegates, MEC Williams said the summit was intended to confront the challenges facing traditional leadership institutions and to assess the support they have received since the advent of democracy in South Africa. He noted that the summit aimed to identify barriers that prevent these institutions from fulfilling both their constitutional and customary responsibilities.

“The summit aims to explore solutions and roles, thus define the Traditional Leadership’s role in the three spheres of government and find solutions to bridge the gap between traditional leadership and government to improve the lives of traditional communities.” said MEC Williams.

Providing a provincial perspective, Premier Lubabalo Oscar Mabuyane called for solutions to long-standing challenges affecting traditional leaders. He raised concerns about access to medical aid, pension support and delays in benefits, stressing that these issues require urgent attention to safeguard the dignity and stability of those serving traditional communities. Premier Mabuyane also reaffirmed the importance of strengthening cooperation between government and traditional authorities to improve service delivery and development in rural areas.



Nkosi Xhanti Sigcawu: Chairperson of Amathole Local House

The Premier further said there was a need to unlock the agricultural potential of the Eastern Cape, noting that the productive use of arable land could help combat hunger, stimulate rural economic growth and create opportunities for emerging farmers and cooperatives. Delivering the keynote address virtually, Deputy President Paul Mashatile reflected on both the opportunities and challenges confronting traditional and Khoi-San leaders. He said the summit would contribute to address infrastructure needs, socio-economic development and policy finalization, while promoting nation-building.

“I therefore urge traditional leaders to take a leading role to confront Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) and guide young people toward discipline, opportunity and community development” said Deputy President Mashatile. The programme included plenary discussions and commission sessions focusing on the resourcing of traditional leadership institutions, advancing development-oriented traditional governance models, the role of traditional leaders as judicial officers and the review of relevant policies. Discussions also highlighted the importance of stronger collaboration between government and traditional leadership to advance development in rural communities.

The summit concluded with plenary reports and the adoption of key resolutions aimed at strengthening future collaboration between government and traditional leadership structures. In his closing remarks, MEC Williams thanked traditional leaders, stakeholders and delegates for their active participation. He said the summit had created an important platform for constructive dialogue, partnership and collective problem-solving, reinforcing the critical role that traditional and Khoi-San leaders play in community development, governance and social cohesion.

MEC Williams likewise encouraged the development of strategic plans within traditional councils to attract funding and investment in partnership with municipalities. He urged traditional leaders to act as catalysts for change and ensure that development programmes remain people-centred.

In addition, MEC encouraged traditional leaders to take advantage of departmental bursary schemes and other opportunities for further education and leadership development.



Representatives from the Khoi-San leadership and community

# MEC WILLIAMS HOSTS CONSULTATIVE WORKSHOP ON THE WHITE PAPER ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

By: Sonto Malinga



MEC Williams

The Eastern Cape Provincial Consultative Workshop on the Revised Draft White Paper on Local Government, held on 17 March 2026 Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, marked a milestone in the ongoing efforts to reimagine and strengthen the local government system. The engagement brought together a diverse assembly of stakeholders, united by a shared commitment to build a more responsive, accountable, and developmental sphere of government.

The session was led by the MEC for (CoGTA), Zolile Williams, who emphasised the value of inclusive governance. The MEC the evolution of local government is informed by the voices and experiences of all stakeholders.

“This consultative process is critical to ensure that the future of local government is shaped by the voices of all stakeholders.



Cllr Gary Van Niekerk: Deputy Executive Mayor of Nelson Mandela Metro

We must build a system that is responsive, accountable, and truly developmental (in nature),” remarked MEC Williams.

Proceedings commenced with a technical presentation outlining the objectives and structure of the workshop, laying the foundation for meaningful engagement. This was followed by a comprehensive exposition of the Revised Draft White Paper on Local Government, which detailed a series of progressive policy proposals aimed at enhancing municipal performance, reinforce governance systems, and accelerate the delivery of services to communities.

Deliberations throughout the workshop were characterised by thoughtful engagement and constructive comments , with particular focus on addressing systemic challenges within municipalities, strengthening institutional capacity, and promoting ethical and effective leadership.

The revised policy framework was widely recognised as a critical instrument to reposition local government as a catalyst for sustainable development and improved quality of life.

Reinforcing the collective responsibility of all stakeholders, MEC Williams further added that : “Through active engagement and honest reflection, we can collectively shape a local government system that delivers tangible results and restores public confidence.”

The consultative workshop formed part of a broader national process aimed at reviewing and strengthening the local government framework.so that municipalities are equipped to fulfil their developmental mandate, deliver essential services efficiently, and uphold the principles of good governance. In its entirety, the workshop represented a decisive and forward-looking step towards the realisation of a capable, inclusive, and people-centred local government system, one that is firmly aligned with the aspirations and needs of the people of the Eastern Cape.



Mr Vuyo Mlokothi: Head of Department for Cogta

