



Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE
& TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

COGTA

Newsletter

June 2026



“Communicators should always be the first to understand what is happening in the province by being curios, proactive and be informed storytellers to build public trust. I urged you to position yourselves as strategic partners within municipalities and continuously add value to governance processes.
MEC Williams”



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EDITORIAL COMMENT

As we reflect on the past month's activities, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs has remained steadfast in advancing good governance, strengthening stakeholder collaboration, and safeguarding the wellbeing of communities across the Eastern Cape.

The Winter Initiation Season, which officially commenced on 8 June 2026, has remained a key priority. While the department continues to work closely with traditional leaders, law enforcement agencies and communities to ensure the safe conduct of this important cultural practice, the loss of initiates has deeply saddened us all. MEC Zolile Williams extended heartfelt condolences to the affected

families and reiterated government's unwavering commitment to preventing further tragedies through strengthened monitoring, enforcement against illegal initiation schools, and collective community action.

Strengthening communication and collaboration remained central to the department's work through the Communicators Forum, which provided a platform for improving coordinated government communication, while the Political MUNIMEC meeting in Gqeberha reinforced cooperative governance and strengthened partnerships between provincial and local government leadership.

In preparation for the 2026 Local Government Elections, the MEC engaged stakeholders to encourage active citizen participation ahead of the voter registration process. These engagements underscored the importance of democratic participation in shaping responsive and accountable local government.

The month concluded with a youth empowerment programme in Port Alfred, where young people were encouraged to seize opportunities for personal growth, leadership and community development.

As we move forward, we remain committed to working together with communities, traditional leaders, municipalities and all stakeholders to build a safer, more inclusive and better-governed Eastern Cape.

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This is a monthly newsletter published by the Directorate: Communication Management of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

NKOSI GWADISO DECLARED THE 2026 WINTER CUSTOMARY MALE INITIATION SEASON OPEN

By Vuyani Sibene and Anelisa Mabece

The Department of CoGTA officially launched the 2026 Winter Customary Male Initiation Season on 09 June 2026 at the Chris Hani District Municipality. The event took place at the Thobi Kula Indoor Sports Centre in Komani.

Welcoming delegates, Chris Hani District Executive Mayor, Councillor Lusanda Sizani, reaffirmed the district's commitment to ensure a safe and successful initiation season through awareness campaigns, stakeholder collaboration, and effective monitoring. "We are ready to ensure compliance and promote a safe Winter Customary Initiation Season in 2026," he said.

Addressing the gathering, CoGTA MEC Zolile Williams acknowledged the cultural significance of customary male initiation while stressing the department's concern over continued fatalities and health risks. "While it is a deeply important cultural tradition in the province, it cannot continue without careful oversight by all stakeholders including parents and guardians to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of initiates," he noted.

MEC Williams highlighted key challenges, including limited parental involvement, substance abuse, dehydration, health complications, and broader societal issues negatively affecting the journey of young initiates to manhood. He emphasized the need for coordinated interventions, extensive monitoring, and community responsibility to safeguard lives.

The MEC also underscored the importance of legislative compliance, citing Section 41(1) and (2) of the Customary Initiation Act, which mandates the Provincial Initiation Coordinating Committee (PICC) to register traditional surgeons and maintain official records. "This accountability measure ensures that only credible and recognized iingcibi and amakhankatha practice within communities," said MEC Williams.

Commending the ongoing provincial efforts, MEC Williams pointed to the strengthened monitoring systems, rescue centres, and logistical support from municipalities. He urged stakeholders to strive for zero fatalities during the season.

The Chairperson of the House of Traditional and KhoiSan Leaders, Nkosi Mpumalanga Gwadiso reflected on the extensive work undertaken by the House and its partners, including awareness campaigns, training of amakhankatha and iingcibi, and the rollout of the newly approved Z-Fold form to "enhance compliance and safety."

"I encourage traditional leaders to continue to lead with integrity and collaboration to realise a season that is free of negative incidents. No child must die in our province during the winter and summer seasons. One death is one too many," said Nkosi Gwadiso.

The Chairperson then officially declared the 2026 Winter Customary Male Initiation Season open, proclaiming: "Mabaye Bephila, Babuye Bephila. Siyazingca ngeSiko Lethu!"

Closing the programme, PICC Chairperson Nkosi Gwazinamba Matanzima highlighted the importance of rescue centres, emergency response systems, and sustained collaboration among all stakeholders to safeguard initiates throughout the season.



Deputy Chairperson of House of Traditional & KhoiSan Leaders Nkosi Gwazinamba Matanzima and Executive Mayor of Chris Hani DM Councillor Sizani



Chairperson of the House of Traditional Nkosi Gwadiso & KhoiSan Leaders handing over car keys to one of the drivers



MEC Williams handing over car keys to one of the drivers

COMMUNICATORS CHARTS PATH FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND CITIZEN TRUST

By Ziphozethu Sonjica

The Eastern Cape Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (EC COGTA) convened the first Quarter Local Government Communicators' Forum (LGCF) on 11–12 June 2026 in KuGompo City. The Forum brought together communication practitioners from municipalities across the province for a two-day engagement focused on governance communication, elections, traditional practices and digital innovation.

The forum marked a significant milestone with the attendance of MEC for CoGTA, Zolile Williams, who attended the session for the first time. Addressing the attendees, MEC Williams emphasized the indispensable role communicators play to shape public perception and strengthen the relationship between government and citizens.

“Communicators should always be the first to understand what is happening in the province by being curious, proactive and be informed storytellers to build public trust. I urged you to position yourselves as strategic partners within municipalities and continuously add value to governance processes,” said MEC Williams.

The discussions began with a presentation by Ms Nandipa Sondati-Thawa, Acting Provincial Director of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), who unpacked the findings of the latest government perception survey. Her presentation highlighted the evolving public sentiment towards government institutions and underscored the need for responsive, citizen-centred communication strategies.

With the Local Government Elections (LGE) scheduled for 04 November 2026 fast approaching, election preparedness featured prominently on the agenda. Representatives from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), including the Eastern Cape Manager Electoral Matters, Mr Siyabonga Maki and Senior Communications and Outreach Manager Mr Nodada, outlined the commission's communication campaign aimed at encouraging voter participation, combating misinformation and strengthening electoral awareness ahead of the polls.



Ms Veronica Java Communications Officer from Blue Crane Local Municipality, Mr Alulutho Kabeni and intern at Mbhashe LM and Mr Luncedo Walaza Communication Manager from Alfred Nzo District Municipality

Mr Maki said on 30 April 2026, the President of the Republic announced 04 November 2026 as date of Local Government Elections for 2026. “Announcement of date creates certainty for planning purposes and for voters to register where they will be on 04 November 2026,” explained Mr Maki

Another standout presentation came from Umzimvubu Local Municipality, which showcased innovative digital communication practices despite limited financial resources. Demonstrating a range of digital products, video editing techniques and software solutions, Mr Kwanele Nojoko and Ms Khoboso Lebenya illustrated how creativity and strategic planning can produce professional communication products even in budget-constrained environments. The presentation highlighted the growing importance of digital storytelling in modern local government communication, yet the forum also revealed persistent challenges confronting government communicators.

Communicators raised concerns about inadequate budgets, limited cooperation from some departments and leadership structures, last-minute programme announcements, and the perception that communication units are often undervalued within institutions. The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as both an opportunity and a risk, particularly the growing trend of scammers using AI generated content to imitate government branding, logos and official documents.

Mr Vuyo Stofile, Director of House Operations at the Eastern Cape House of Traditional and KhoiSan Leaders addressed delegates on the importance of the Z-Folder system used during the winter initiation season.

“This is a critical control mechanism for tracking initiates, identifying illegal traditional surgeons and ensuring compliance with safety protocols,” explained. He emphasised the important role women play to support initiation processes through awareness and vigilance, helping communities identify and report unlawful initiation schools.



Mr Nodada, Senior Communication and Outreach Officer at IEC

POLITICAL MUNIMEC MEETING REAFFIRMED GOOD GOVERNANCE

By: Sonto Malinga

Municipal leadership across the province gathered in Gqeberha from 18-19 June, for the First Quarter Political MuniMEC meeting, wherein government reaffirmed its commitment to strengthen local government, improve service delivery, enhance disaster management, and protect the Constitutional rights of communities. This strategic engagement, led by MEC for CoGTA, MPL Zolile Williams, brought together Executive Mayors, Municipal Managers, traditional leaders, Heads of Departments and other key stakeholders to assess municipal performance, address service delivery challenges, and develop practical interventions to improve the lives of citizens.

Opening the meeting, MEC Williams emphasised that the implementation of the Non-Negotiable Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and the Risk-Adjusted Strategy (RAS) as fundamental to improve municipal performance, accelerate infrastructure grant expenditure, and ensure that municipalities deliver quality services to their communities.

Drawing from provincial service delivery statistics and empirical evidence, the MEC highlighted persistent challenges affecting municipalities, including capacity constraints at senior management level, weaknesses in governance, and a widening gap between strategic planning and implementation.

"The implementation of the Non-Negotiables SOP and the RAS remain central to improve municipal performance, accelerate grant spending, and ensure that our communities receive the services they deserve," said MEC Williams.

He stressed that the Political MuniMEC meeting was not simply a platform to review municipal performance but "an opportunity for leaders to make decisive interventions that will improve governance and restore public confidence in local government."

"We must move beyond plans and ensure that our strategies translate into real impact on the ground. Communities judge us by the services they receive, not by the plans we produce," he said.

The meeting also focused on strengthening disaster preparedness through technology. The Chief Director of the Provincial Disaster Management Centre (PDMC), Chuleza Jama presented the Provincial Disaster Management Application System (PDMAS), which an integrated digital platform designed to improve disaster risk management and emergency response across the province.

Ms Jama said the system enables real-time monitoring, coordinated resource management, incident tracking, communication, compliance monitoring, and improved oversight of disaster risk, response, and recovery. Integrated with the South African Weather Service, PDMAS also supports SMS and email alerts to ensure faster and more coordinated responses during emergencies.

Welcoming the initiative, MEC Williams urged municipalities to embrace the platform as an essential governance tool. "Every municipality must take ownership of this system. Building resilient communities requires strong leadership, accountability, and the effective use of technology to improve disaster preparedness and service delivery," said MEC Williams



Khoi-San Leaders from Sarah Baartman & Nelson Mandela Bay



Ms Jama, Chief Director Provincial Disaster Management Centre

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ACCOUNTABILITY, GOVERNANCE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE FOREFRONT OF MUNIMEC DAY TWO IN GQEBERHA

By Sonto Malinga

The second day of the MuniMEC meeting placed emphasis on accountability, constitutional governance, and the protection of human rights through improved municipal service delivery. The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) presented findings from its 2024 investigations into road infrastructure, water, and sanitation, highlighting persistent service delivery shortcomings affecting communities throughout the province.

The Commission reaffirmed that access to basic services is a constitutional obligation and emphasised its oversight role to hold municipalities accountable through legislative mechanisms, including litigation where necessary, to ensure compliance with the Constitution and applicable legislation.

Reflecting on the Commission's presentation, MEC Zolile Williams reminded delegates that delivering basic services is central to restoring the dignity of communities. "Service delivery is a right, not a privilege. Every municipality has a Constitutional responsibility to provide quality basic services with dignity, fairness, accountability and urgency." Delegates also received a presentation from Dr Harsha Dayal, Director from the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) on the

implementation of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020–2030). The session highlighted the GBVF Information Management System as a "critical tool to strengthen coordination between government institutions, improve data-driven decision-making, and enhance responses to GBVF. He/she underscored the important role municipalities play to prevent GBVF through programmes, community awareness, and support the coordinated whole-of-government approach to address GBVF as one of South Africa's most pressing social challenges.

Concluding the engagement, MEC Williams called on municipalities to translate the discussions and resolutions of the MuniMEC meeting into measurable improvements in governance and service delivery.

"Our responsibility does not end when this meeting adjourns. The real measure of our success will be seen in functional municipalities, improved good governance, and better services that positively change the lives of the people. Together, we must build municipalities that are responsive, accountable and capable of meeting the needs of every community," said MEC Williams.



MEC Williams



Dr Dayal, Director from the DPME

YOUNG PEOPLE CALLED TO REGISTER AND VOTE ON 04 NOVEMBER 2026

By Zethu Sonjica

As the province prepares for the upcoming Local Government Elections (LGE) scheduled for 04 November 2026, EC Premier Oscar Mabuyane called on young people to register, vote and exercise their constitutional right to shape the future they wish to see. He was speaking during the Provincial Youth Dat Celebrations hosted in Umzimvubu Local Municipality on 16 June 2026.

"As we approach the LGE, I urge every young person to register, vote and exercise their constitutional right to shape the future they wish to see," said Premier Mabuyane. He reminded young people that government remains steadfast in its commitment to create opportunities through skills development, workplace experience, entrepreneurship support and access to funding initiatives.

"Drawing inspiration from the courageous youth of 1976, I call on young people to remain resilient, innovative and hopeful in the face of contemporary challenges," he said. As the curtain fell on the one-day commemoration, eMaXesibeni stood transformed, not merely by the celebrations, but by the dreams ignited, the opportunities unlocked and the futures envisioned.

The Provincial Youth Day Celebrations were more than an annual observance but a living testament to a province investing in its greatest asset, the youth. And as young people departed the eMaXesibeni Police Grounds, they carried with them a renewed sense of purpose. Because history is not only remembered, it is written and the youth of the Eastern Cape are writing the next chapter.

FLOOD DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY EFFORTS ONGOING

By Thando Sonjica

The Eastern Cape Province has once again been severely impacted by flooding, following disruptive rains between 06 and 09 May 2026. This disaster, classified as a national disaster in Gazette No. 54740 of 26 May 2026, caused widespread damage across municipalities, particularly in the Sarah Baartman District Municipality and Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality. Roads and critical infrastructure in Sarah Baartman were extensively damaged, leaving communities stranded and cut off. Joe Gqabi, OR Tambo, Amathole, and Alfred Nzo municipalities also reported damages to homes, roads, and electricity supply.

The South African National Defence Force and South African Police Service deployed helicopters to assist with rescue and evacuation operations. “More than 2,288 households were affected, with 1,229 left homeless. Many displaced families were temporarily accommodated in Mass Care Centres, where they received psychosocial support, health care, clean water, and other essential services. Fortunately no loss of life was reported during this disaster, said MEC Williams.

The flooding has dealt a severe blow to the province's economy, particularly in the agriculture and tourism sectors.

Farms lost crops, livestock, and arable land, undermining the province's export market. Tourism areas such as the Gamtoos River Valley experienced reduced activity due to damaged lodges and inaccessible roads. Communities in Kouga and Koukamma municipalities faced electricity outages and road destruction, delaying delivery of food, medicines, and essential goods. Restricted movement disrupted access to schools, clinics, and workplaces, while psychological stress weighed heavily on affected communities.

MEC Williams said the Provincial Disaster Management Centre, led by COGTA, activated contingency arrangements and rapid response teams immediately after receiving South African Weather Services warnings on 4 May 2026. “Joint Operations Centres were established across municipalities to coordinate relief efforts. Provincial and municipal leadership visited affected areas to support Disaster Management Centres and oversee relief operations. Relief stakeholders, including government and NGOs, provided assistance at Mass Care Centres. The Department of Human Settlements is implementing a phased resettlement strategy, including Temporary Residential Units and victim profiling measures,” said MEC.

He added that damage assessments indicate that repairs to road and stormwater infrastructure will cost approximately R599,719,820. “The Department has reprioritised R5,861,000 but requires additional disaster relief funding of R593,858,820 to restore accessibility and services. Overall, the province estimates R6,593,378,80 is required to address the disaster's impact,” explained MEC Williams.

He said the Eastern Cape Province continues to follow the national Disaster Response Standard Operating Procedures, guided by four recovery pillars: communication, coordination, continuity, and collaboration. The District Development Model ensures alignment with national protocols and strengthens partnerships with non-governmental organisations, businesses, and communities.

The Provincial Government remains committed to assisting displaced families, supporting affected farmers and businesses, and restoring essential infrastructure. The resilience of our communities and the coordinated efforts of all stakeholders will ensure recovery and rebuilding in the aftermath of this disaster.



MEC Williams got briefed on the disaster situation at Nelson Mandela Bay



Dr Sindisiwe Nyide, Mr Sithembiso Soyaya and Mr Gavin Boucher from Metro showing the MEC the flooded areas



Flooded area in Nelson Mandela Bay

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YOUTH DAY CELEBRATION IGNITES INNOVATION AND EMPOWERMENT

By Zethu Sonjica.

The Provincial government, led by the Office of the Premier (OTP), transformed the ordinarily quiet town of uMzimvubu into a vibrant hub of innovation, inspiration and possibility, a fitting tribute to the fearless generation of 1976 whose sacrifices continue to shape South Africa's democratic journey, writes

Among the many government departments present at the June 16 Youth Day was CoGTA, which proudly answered the call to support the Provincial Youth Day celebrations through a dynamic and interactive exhibition showcasing youth development programmes and opportunities available within the department.

Manning the exhibition stall were officials from the Directorates of Strategic Management and Planning and Communication Management in collaboration with Provincial House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders. This combination demonstrated Cogta's unwavering commitment to empower young people and advance sustainable youth development across the province.

From the moment the exhibition centre opened its doors, it became evident that this was far more than a commemorative event, it was a declaration that the young people are not merely beneficiaries of development, they are active partners in shaping the future.

The exhibition precinct buzzed with entrepreneurial energy, innovative ideas and boundless ambition as young people engaged directly with government officials, entrepreneurs and development practitioners. Cogta officials seized the opportunity to interact with scores of young people, sharing information on departmental youth initiatives, empowerment programmes and pathways designed to improve socio-economic participation and promote inclusive growth. The department's presence reaffirmed its developmental mandate of building capable institutions and creating an enabling environment where young people can thrive.

The atmosphere reached new heights as provincial leadership descended upon the exhibition arena. Premier Lubabalo Oscar Mabuyane, accompanied by Members of the Executive Council (MECs) and distinguished guests, undertook a walkabout through the exhibition centre, engaging exhibitors and celebrating the remarkable contributions of young entrepreneurs and innovators from across the province.

Premier Mabuyane remarked that “the future of the Eastern Cape will be shaped by the creativity, resilience and ingenuity of its youth. We remain steadfast to create opportunities that allow young people to thrive,” he said.

Cogta's exhibition also received high-level support from Deputy Minister (DM) of Cogta, Reverend Prince Zolile Burns-Ncamashe, and MEC Zolile Williams, whose attendance underscored government's collective commitment to youth empowerment.

DM Burns-Ncamashe said youth empowerment is not a slogan, rather a commitment. “We encourage young people to seize the opportunities made available through government programmes.”

MEC Williams added that “by supporting youth-owned enterprises, we unlock economic opportunities and build a province where young people lead the way.”

One of the defining moments of the celebration was the handover of tools of trade to young entrepreneurs, an initiative aimed at unlocking economic opportunities, promote self-reliance and support youth-owned enterprises. For many beneficiaries, the handover symbolised far more than equipment. It represented hope, dignity and a future reimagined.

Throughout the celebrations, young people were inspired by messages from thought leaders and youth champions, including Provincial Convener of the South African Youth Council (SAYC), Emihle Goniwe, and Morena Khomotsoana Lebenya from the Eastern Cape House of Traditional Leaders. Ms Goniwe challenged the youth to embrace leadership, preserve our heritage and become active participants in community development.”

Adding to the festive atmosphere were beloved Umhlobo Wenene FM personalities Lusanda Mbane and Amaza Ntshanga, whose infectious energy transformed the grounds into a celebration of youth excellence, culture and possibility. Yet beyond the music, exhibitions and festivities lay a deeper purpose.

Provincial leaders called on young people to cultivate healthy minds, pursue education, embrace entrepreneurship and participate meaningfully in democratic processes.



MEC for Agriculture Ms Nonceba Kontsiwe and Premier Mabuyane handing over a tractor to a young entrepreneur.



Deputy Minister for Cogta Rev Prince Burns Ncamashe, MEC Williams, Mr Zingisa Ntuni from Cogta with learners

ENGAGEMENT KEY AHEAD OF THE 2026 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

By Sabo Dlelengana

The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) successfully hosted its 6th Provincial Municipal Public Participation and Rapid Response Advisory (MPP&RRA) Forum in the OR Tambo District Municipality, this month. The gathering brought together government leaders, stakeholders, public participation practitioners, and strategic partners to strengthen citizen engagement, promote transparency, and improve government responsiveness ahead of the 04 November 2026 Local Government Elections (LGE).

The forum forms part of the department's ongoing commitment to enhance democratic governance through meaningful public participation focusing on strengthening mechanisms for citizen involvement, ensuring timely responses to community concerns and service delivery challenges, and assessing the readiness of stakeholders to support the upcoming LGE.

Addressing delegates during the opening session, OR Tambo District Municipality Speaker, Councillor Nonkoliso Ngqongwa, underscored the importance of public participation as a cornerstone of democracy. "Public participation is the foundation of democratic governance, creating space for meaningful dialogue that serves citizens across the province. As we approach the elections, we must keep communities informed, promote civic education, combat misinformation, and strengthen citizen responsiveness," said Councillor Ngqongwa.

Throughout the forum, delegates engaged in robust discussions highlighting the importance of collaboration among all spheres of government to ensure that communities remain at the centre of governance and service delivery processes.

Stakeholders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening democratic participation by intensifying civic education programmes, promoting transparency, combating misinformation, and ensuring that citizens are empowered with the knowledge and information necessary to participate actively in governance and electoral processes. Mr Siyabonga Maki, Manager Electoral Matters from the Provincial office of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) outlined the roadmap towards the 2026 LGE. His presentation emphasized the importance of voter registration and encouraged stakeholders to intensify awareness campaigns to ensure eligible citizens register and participate in the electoral process.

Adding to the discussions, Ms Welekazi Ndika from the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL) provided an overview of infrastructure investment projects and intervention strategies that will support development and service delivery in communities to restore public confidence in government.



Mr Khaya Singiswa Deputy Director from
Cogta Joe Gqabi District Support Centre



O.R Tambo District Municipality Speaker
Councillor Nonkoliso Ngqongwa



Mr Mboniswa Nodlabi, Chief Director for Municipal
Public Participation, IDP and Rapid Response

DID YOU KNOW ?

MEDIA LIAISON RESPONSIBILITIES

- The media engagement function is allocated to the Directorate of Communication Management in collaboration with the Media Liaison Officer (MLO) in the Office of the MEC. Both officials are the points of entry for any media related issues affecting the department and commentary related thereto.
- All communication with the news media including media releases, statements, interviews, news conferences and briefings, letters to the editor, opinion pieces (op eds), technical announcements and other information or material given to news media representatives, fall under the media engagement activities of the Directorate and the MLO.
- Therefore, no official of the department including in the District Support Centres (DSCs) is allowed to speak to the media without the approval of the Head of Department (HoD).

Source. Departmental Corporate Communication Policy