



Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE
& TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

COGTA *Newsletter*

AUGUST 2026

SPECIAL WOMEN'S MONTH EDITION



f @ Cogta Eastern Cape



X Ecogta



🎵 @eccogta



@EasternCapeCOGTA

Editorial Team



Mr Mamnkeli Ngam



Ms Anelisa Mabece



Mr Vuyani Sibene



Ms Sabo Dlelengana



Ms Zethu Sonjica

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Empowerment Must Move Beyond the Podium

The COGTA Eastern Cape Women's Day Celebration at Kaysers Beach delivered a message that deserves to resonate long after the event itself. While the programme celebrated the achievements, resilience and contributions of women, it also challenged the Department and its employees to confront a more important question: what does real empowerment look like in practice?

The answer heard throughout the day was clear. Empowerment cannot be reduced to annual commemorations, carefully crafted speeches or photographs taken at the end of a successful event. True empowerment is reflected in everyday workplace experiences. It is found in how opportunities are distributed, how grievances are addressed, how leaders exercise authority and how colleagues treat one another when no one is watching.

The discussions revealed that women are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for fair treatment. They are asking for safe workplaces free from harassment and intimidation. They are asking for access to training, mentorship and professional development opportunities that prepare them for leadership positions. They are asking to be heard, respected and supported.

Equally important was the call for accountability. Participants made it clear that recurring conversations about empowerment must lead to visible action. Too often, important concerns are raised during commemorative programmes only to disappear from institutional consciousness once the event concludes. If empowerment initiatives are to remain meaningful, they must be accompanied by measurable interventions and continuous monitoring. Their success cannot be measured only by attendance figures, but by tangible improvements in workplace culture, leadership development and employee wellbeing.

One of the most significant themes to emerge from the session was the responsibility women have towards one another. Empowerment is not only about advancing individually; it is about creating pathways for others to succeed. Women who occupy leadership positions today have an opportunity, and indeed a responsibility, to mentor, guide and support those who follow behind them. Leadership should never be about closing doors that were difficult to open. It should be about ensuring that others have a fair opportunity to walk through them.

The event also served as a reminder that empowerment requires the involvement of men. Gender equality cannot be viewed as a women's issue alone. Men remain influential participants in workplace culture, and their commitment to respect, fairness and dignity is essential in creating environments where women can thrive.

Perhaps the most powerful lesson from the celebration was that workplaces flourish when people are valued as human beings, not merely as employees. Conversations on mental health, professional growth, mentorship and support reinforced the understanding that organisational success is inseparable from employee wellbeing.

As COGTA moves forward, the challenge is not to remember the speeches, but to implement the lessons. The real measure of empowerment will not be what was said at Kaysers Beach. It will be what changes because of it.

The strongest institutions are not those that merely celebrate empowerment. They are those that practise it daily. They develop people, protect dignity, encourage growth and create opportunities for others to rise.

The challenge has been issued. The conversation has taken place. The next step is action.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- +27 (0) 79 508 7571
- thando.sonjica@eccogta.gov.za
- www.eccogta.gov.za
- Tyamzashe Building, Phalo Avenue, Bhisho
- 5605, Eastern Cape, Republic of South Africa
- Private Bag X0035, Bhisho, 5605



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

COGTA REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND EMPOWERING WORKPLACES FOR WOMEN

By Ziphozethu Sonjica

Delivering one of the programme's central messages at the Womens Empowerment session at Kaysers beach, MEC for the department of Cogta, Zolile Williams, said sexual harassment, coercion and the expectation that women should provide sexual favours in exchange for employment opportunities, access or assistance have no place in a professional working environment.

"I will not tolerate women being subjected to sexual favours by men to work or get something done that they need. If anything like that happens, tell me and I will deal with it," he said.

He condemned the abuse of power and called for women to report incidents of misconduct rather than suffer in silence. The department's leadership has a role to maintain a working environment where women can perform their duties safely and with dignity.

"But empowerment cannot end with protection. Women must also be prepared for the spaces they intend to occupy," he said.

MEC Williams encouraged women to continue to upgrade their qualifications, develop professionally and position themselves for leadership opportunities. "Take up the space," he said.

He said the boardroom should not be viewed as a destination reserved for a selected few hence women must prepare themselves to occupy senior management positions, executive offices and decision-making structures, not as symbolic representatives, but as competent professionals with the capacity to lead.

"Women, require support in the workplace just as men do and their concerns should be heard, their grievances receive attention, and their professional development taken seriously," said MEC Williams.

MEC Williams said gender equality cannot be the sole responsibility of women. "Men remain colleagues, supervisors, managers, executives and decision-makers in institutions across the country. Their conduct contributes directly to the culture women experience in the workplace. Respect must therefore not depend on a woman's position. A woman should not need to be a manager before her voice is heard. Women do not need to be senior before boundaries are respected. They do not need to prove their competence repeatedly before being taken seriously. Professional relationships must be built on mutual respect," he added.

Men were called upon to listen to women, support their advancement and challenge behaviour that undermines their dignity.

"There is a difference between leadership and intimidation. There is a difference between professional engagement and harassment, and there is a difference between exercising authority and abusing power. Institutions committed to transformation must understand these distinctions," said MEC Williams.



MEC Williams



Cogta women dancing



L-R: Misses Siphokazi Tywakadi and Sive Ponono



L-R: Misses Athini Mfafa, Sabo Dlelengana and Anelisa Mabece

COGTA RECOGNISES THE VITAL ROLE OF CDW WORKERS IN BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

By Sabo Dlelengana



L-R: CDW women singing, Speaker of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro-Councillor Eugene Johnson handing over certificate to Ms Ntombxolo Makwethu, Ms Zukisa Qumbisa from GCIS and Mercy Thinyane of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro

Women CDWs at the celebration of Womens day

In recognition of the invaluable contribution of women in government and community development, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), in partnership with the Department of Employment and Labour, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) and the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), hosted a special programme to celebrate and empower women Community Development Workers (CDWs). This memorable event was held in Gqeberha on 21 and 22 August 2026

Guided by the theme, “Empowered Women Empower the Nation Through Community Development,” the two-day programme acknowledged the vital role played by women CDWs in improving the lives of community members and strengthening the relationship between government and the communities it serves.

CDWs occupy a critical position at the interface between government and communities. Through their daily interaction with residents, they help facilitate access to government services, provide important information, identify community needs and ensure that challenges experienced at grassroots level are brought to the attention of relevant government institutions.

Opening the event, acting Executive Mayor of NMBM, Councillor Babalwa Mafaya, paid tribute to the contribution of women who continue to serve and transform communities through their leadership and commitment. “Women continue to lead, serve and transform our communities through their strength and commitment,” said Councillor Mafaya.

She further emphasised the importance of moving beyond short-term interventions and creating sustainable opportunities that promote economic empowerment and wealth creation for women. Her message highlighted the need to invest in women not only as beneficiaries of development programmes, but also as active contributors to economic growth and community transformation.

Building on this message, COGTA Head of Department, Mr Vuyo Mlokothe, outlined the purpose of the programme and its focus on recognising and empowering women CDWs. “This programme recognises and empowers women CDWs while creating opportunities for economic development and greater community impact,” he said.

Mr Mlokothe further highlighted the importance of improving CDWs' access to information, services and opportunities that can support their personal, professional and economic development. “By equipping women CDWs with greater access to resources and opportunities, government seeks to strengthen their ability to continue making a meaningful impact in the communities they serve,” added HOD.

The programme therefore provided more than an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of women. It created a platform for engagement around empowerment, economic opportunities and the continued development of women who play an important role in advancing community development across the province.

The celebration concluded on a high note as women CDWs were awarded certificates of recognition and appreciation for their dedication, commitment and invaluable contribution to their communities.

The certificates recognised the tireless work of CDWs in strengthening the connection between government and communities, facilitating access to essential services and ensuring that the needs and concerns of residents are brought to the attention of government.

As the country continues to observe Women's Month, the recognition of women CDW serves as a powerful reminder that their impact extends far beyond their daily responsibilities. Through their dedication, compassion and professionalism, women CDWs continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and communities across the province.

The programme stands as a celebration of the resilience, leadership and contribution of women in community development, while also recognising the importance of creating opportunities that enable them to grow personally, professionally and economically.

Congratulations to all the women Community Development Workers who received this well-deserved recognition. Your work matters, your contribution is valued, and your continued commitment to serving communities remains an important part of building empowered communities and a stronger nation.

When Women Lead Women: A Difficult but Necessary Conversation on Workplace Empowerment

By Ziphazethu Sonjica



L-R: HOD Mlokothe, Misses Akhona Fani, Thabisa Matshisa, Pholisa Guzana, Sinoyolo Rode and Nobuhle Mahlanyana

What began as a Women's Day celebration at Kaysers Beach became a wider institutional conversation about leadership, workplace dignity, professional conduct and the responsibility carried by women and men in building an organisation where people can contribute without fear.

Against the backdrop of the Eastern Cape coastline, employees across the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) gathered for a programme that moved beyond celebration. There was laughter, conversation and reflection, but beneath the programme's atmosphere was a serious message: women must continue to take their place, invest in themselves and lead in ways that make space for those who follow.

Officially opening the programme Head of Department (HoD), Mr Vuyo Mlokothe, expressed appreciation for the attendance and support shown towards the initiative. He also addressed the importance of accountability in the utilisation of public resources and cautioned against fruitless and wasteful expenditure, particularly where commitments to attend government programmes are not matched by actual participation.

"The issue here, is not merely about empty seats, it is about responsibility. In a public institution, an RSVP is not simply a social courtesy. Planning, procurement, catering and logistical arrangements are informed by anticipated attendance. Where resources are allocated based on confirmed participation, accountability must follow,". The matter, he said, would receive the necessary attention.

Mr Mlokothe also reflected on the role of Community Development Workers (CDWs) and the importance of ensuring that their contribution continues to hold value beyond their years of formal service.

He spoke of plans to explore opportunities that could position CDWs as visible community resources, including the possibility of preparing them to become community tour guides

following retirement. The broader objective, he indicated, is to ensure that their institutional knowledge, understanding of local communities and experience do not simply disappear when their formal employment comes to an end. The idea formed part of a wider conversation about sustainability, skills development and recognising the value of people beyond their immediate job descriptions, but it was his remarks about relationships between women in the workplace that would introduce one of the day's most difficult conversations.

Mr Mlokothe spoke candidly about complaints he had received from employees concerning the treatment of women by other women, particularly within management structures.

"People have come to me complaining in many instances about being mishandled and abused by their managers. It is not males. It is females who complain about their bosses who are females," said Mr Mlokothe

He described instances of ill-treatment and insults that had left him questioning why such conduct continued to exist within an institution committed to empowerment and transformation.

Mr Mlokothe added that in some cases women in management are being emotionally brutalised by senior female colleagues. Others had reportedly been transferred after experiencing continued mistreatment from female managers.

"I have Directors who are emotionally brutalised by their female Chief Directors whilst others have been transferred because of being mishandled by their female bosses," he said.

Mr Mlokothe said organisational harmony, relationships and emotional intelligence require serious attention. "When we want to deal with harmony, relationships and emotional intelligence, we must deal with the women-women interface in the organisation because it is a big problem and it does frustrate the efforts of the organisation."

WOMEN URGED TO PRIORITISE MENTAL HEALTH, INTEGRITY AND MUTUAL SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

By Ziphozethu Sonjica

Women's empowerment cannot be confined to annual commemorations or symbolic gestures. It must be reflected in the daily experiences of women, in the opportunities they receive, the respect they command, the support they offer one another and the environments in which they work. These were among the key themes that emerged during the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) Women's Empowerment Session, a platform created to encourage honest conversations about leadership, personal growth, workplace culture and gender equality.

Providing context on the purpose and objectives of the session, Acting Deputy Director-General for Local Governance, Ms Charity Sihunu, reminded employees that the initiative was not designed simply as a Women's Month gathering. "It was designed as an opportunity for reflection, engagement and accountability," she said. "Women must hold one another accountable. The responsibility to empower women cannot rest solely with management, government policy or annual commemorative programmes. It must also exist in the everyday relationships women build with one another."

Ms Sihunu stressed that empowerment should be visible through mentorship, professional courtesy, the sharing of knowledge and the creation of environments where junior employees feel comfortable asking questions without fear of humiliation. She challenged the Department to consider how its commitment to women's empowerment could become more evident in the daily experiences of women across Cogta.

While discussions on empowerment addressed the position of women within institutions, psychiatrist Dr Nolwazi Ludidi shifted the focus to the people behind the positions. Her presentation explored the importance of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, arguing that mental health should not be treated separately from physical health.

She reminded the audience that employees do not leave their personal circumstances at the office door. "Sometimes we are at work, but emotionally at home, and vice versa," she said.

Dr Ludidi encouraged leaders and managers to recognise that employees have families, relationships, responsibilities and personal challenges that may affect their wellbeing and performance. This understanding, she explained, does not undermine professionalism but rather encourages institutions to respond appropriately when support is needed.

She cautioned against leadership approaches that normalise excessive workloads and prolonged stress without considering their impact on employees. A productive workforce, she noted, cannot be sustained by exhausting the very people expected to deliver results. "If Cogta employees are not treated well at work, they will not be able to work," she said.

Dr Ludidi also reflected on changing work environments, including remote and flexible working arrangements, and the importance of creating conditions that enable employees to perform effectively.

Her message concluded with a simple but powerful reminder that seeking help should never be viewed as a weakness. "If you are not coping, there are mental health professionals who are willing to help. Go and seek help."

Amatole Water Chief Executive Officer Ms Lindokuhle Nzoyi addressed empowerment from a different perspective, focusing on personal discipline, integrity and professional conduct.

Drawing on her own experiences, she reminded women that opinions, criticism and speculation are inevitable in life and in the workplace. "You cannot do anything about what people say about you. Allow them to believe what they want," she told the audience.

Instead, she encouraged women to focus on maintaining their integrity, explaining that reputation is built not by job titles but through consistency, conduct and the way people treat others. She urged women to remain focused, humble and confident while pursuing opportunities and taking calculated risks.

One of the most impactful parts of her address centred on the relationships women build with one another in professional spaces. While workplaces are often influenced by hierarchy and competition, Ms Nzoyi challenged women to consider how they exercise influence and authority. "Stop giving attitude as women at work and be willing to assist people," she said.

The message resonated strongly with participants. Through a combination of humour and wisdom, Ms Nzoyi emphasised the importance of managing emotions professionally and ensuring that positions of authority are not used to intimidate or exclude others. "As women, we must support each other," she said.

Her call was particularly directed at women in leadership positions. She encouraged those who have successfully navigated their way into management and executive roles to open doors for others rather than close them. Leadership, she argued, must include mentorship, knowledge sharing and the development of junior employees. "Leaders are seen by how their weakest employees commit themselves."

“If COGTA employees are not treated well at work, they will not be able to work,
Dr Ludidi”



Dr Ludidi



Ms Sheila Skiti



Ms Sihunu



Ms Luleka Siganeke, Pamela Nkonki and Phumeza Mboso



L-R: Misses Ntombozuko Mazantsana and Nompumelelo Kondile



Ms Chuleza Jama



Ms Nombulelo Maliza, Ms Nosimphiwe Nochwanya, MEC Williams and Ms Phumeza Sineke



Ms Nompinda Mazwi, MEC Williams and Ms Ntomboxolo Mtalana



Misses Tandokazi Soga, Cathyrine Mwanza and Chwayita Nkayi



Misses Siphe Duba, Zikhona Bota and Kwakhona Tolbard



Ms Nzoyi

Photo credit to Mr Vuyani Sibene

RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERED THROUGH GOVERNMENT SERVICE AND COOPERATIVE DIALOGUE IN COFIMVABA

By Sandiso Stuurman and Zukile Nqabisa

Women from rural communities across Cofimvaba gathered at Ndungwana Traditional Council in Banzi Administrative Area on 26 August 2026 for a Women Empowerment and Cooperative Dialogue aimed at bringing government services closer to those who need them most.

Hosted by the Chris Hani District Support Centre of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) in partnership with the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), the event formed part of Women's Month celebrations under the national theme, "Empowered Women, Empower Nations."

The dialogue sought to create awareness about socio-economic opportunities available to women while providing direct access to government services, health information, safety initiatives, legal support and enterprise development opportunities.

Addressing participants, Deputy Director for Traditional Rural Development Facilitation at COGTA, Ms Nosintu Quma, said the department recognises the vital role women play in sustaining rural communities through activities such as agriculture, sewing and other community-based initiatives.

"Women are at the centre of development in many rural communities. However, many still face challenges to access information, resources, government services and opportunities that can help them grow their initiatives and improve their livelihoods," said Ms Quma.

She explained that the Women's Day programme provides an important platform for government and its partners to bring services, information and development opportunities directly to women through traditional councils.

"The programme enables women to access information on available government support programmes, enterprise development opportunities, skills development initiatives and other services without having to travel long distances to obtain such assistance," she said.

Ms Quma added that the initiative sought to empower women to participate meaningfully in socio-economic development, strengthen their livelihoods and make effective use of available resources and opportunities.

The Executive Mayor of Chris Hani District Municipality, Councillor Lusanda Sizani reaffirmed the municipality's commitment to advance the empowerment and upliftment of women in traditional communities.

A wide range of government departments and entities offered information, guidance and on-site services to community members including the departments of Economic Development, Health, Agriculture, Education, Employment and Labour, Social Development, Transport, Land Reform and Rural Development and Public Works and Infrastructure. Other participating stakeholders included the Thuthuzela Care Centre, South African Police Service (SAPS), Chris Hani Development Agency, Chris Hani Cooperative Development Centre, Road Accident Fund, Eskom, Walter Sisulu University and several women-led cooperatives.

The collaborative initiative demonstrated government's continued commitment to ensuring that rural women have access to information, support services and opportunities that promote economic participation, self-reliance and sustainable community development.



Community of Banzi Administrative area listening to speakers

EMPOWERMENT BEYOND CELEBRATION: KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE COGTA WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION

By Ziphozethu Sonjica

The COGTA Women's Day Celebration at Kaysers Beach served as more than a commemorative event and provided a platform for meaningful discussions on women's empowerment, workplace dignity, leadership, mental wellness and institutional accountability,

During the open discussion session, participants called for greater investment in training and development programmes for women, increased opportunities for young professionals to contribute meaningfully and systems to ensure that concerns raised during empowerment programmes are translated into action.

Participants emphasised that the success of empowerment initiatives should be measured by tangible improvements in workplace culture, access to opportunities, grievance management and professional development. The discussion also highlighted the need for inclusive planning of departmental programmes, considering the geographical realities and accessibility challenges faced by employees across the province.

A central message emerged throughout the day: empowerment is not about occupying positions alone, but about how those positions are used to uplift others. Women were encouraged to develop their skills, maintain their integrity and create pathways for future leaders. Men were called upon to actively support gender equality and contribute to workplaces founded on respect and dignity.

Ultimately, the celebration reinforced that meaningful empowerment requires more than policy or annual events. It requires continuous action, accountability, mentorship, respect and a shared commitment to creating workplaces where all employees can thrive. The strongest workplaces, participants concluded, are those where capable people are developed, dignity is protected and leadership is measured not only by individual success, but by the number of others empowered to succeed.

As the gathering concluded, the celebration carried forward a challenge that extended beyond Kaysers Beach: Rise. Prepare. Lead. Support. Seek help when needed. Protect your integrity. Respect others. And never use the position you hold today to make another person's journey unnecessarily difficult tomorrow, because the strongest workplace is not one where everyone competes to be seen. It is one where capable people are developed, dignity is protected and leadership is measured not only by how high we rise, but by how many people we allow to rise with us.



L-R: Misses Primrose Boya, Nowethu Goniwe and Bulelwa Boya



Misses Noluyolo Mabokela and Nosintu Quma



Misses Linda Kewana and Yonela Mabaso



L-R: Misses Noxolo Tom, Aphiwe Ngcofe, Thabisile Madolo



Misses Litha Nkwatheni and Nomvuyiso Xabadiya

WHEN WOMEN RISE, NATIONS MOVE: PROVINCIAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATED

By Ziphozethu Sonjica

There are moments in history that refuse to fade. There are names, footsteps and voices that continue to echo across generations reminding us that freedom was not handed to South Africa; it was fought for, carried and defended by ordinary people who dared to challenge an unjust system.

On 09 August 2026, the Province once again turned its gaze towards women who helped shape the democratic South Africa we know today, as government, communities and stakeholders gathered at the Ernest Swanepoel Hall in Despatch to commemorate Women's Day under the theme, "Empowered Women, Empower Nations."

The day was more than a commemoration, it was a moment of reflection, celebration and renewed commitment to ensure that the sacrifices of the women of 1956 continue to translate into meaningful change in the lives of women today. At the heart of the gathering were the women "Imbokodo" whose resilience has carried families through hardship, whose hands-built communities and whose courage continues to challenge barriers that seek to limit their potential.

The Gender and Diversity Unit (SPU) in Cogta, was part of the exhibitors, bringing government closer to communities and creating a platform where women and families could engage with available public services and opportunities.

The presence of Deputy Minister of COGTA, Reverend Prince Zolile Burns-Ncamashe, added weight to a day centred on recognising the contribution of women to the social and economic development of the province.

The Executive Mayor of Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality, Councillor Babalwa Lobishe welcomed attendees, setting the tone for a celebration grounded in the lived realities and aspirations of women.

The Provincial Manager for the Commission for Gender Equality, Mr Nceba Mrwebi spoke to the imperative of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, while Nelson Mandela University Vice-Chancellor Professor Sibongile Muthwa and representative of South African Local Government Association (SALGA) Women's Commission Chairperson delivered messages of support that reinforced the collective responsibility to create an environment where women can thrive.

Yet it was the words of Eastern Cape Premier Oscar Mabuyane that brought the significance of the day into sharp focus.

Reflecting on the legacy of the women of 1956, the Premier challenged society and government to move beyond ceremonial remembrance and measure progress through real impact.

"Xa sikhumbula ezimini zibaluleke ka ngaka, sirhalela umzila. Sirhalele i-impact. When we remember days of such profound importance, he emphasised, we must look for the footprints they have left behind. We must ask what impact they have made."

Premier Mabuyane called for a transformation that can be felt in the everyday lives of women not merely spoken about in policy documents or commemorative programmes.

"Transformation must change the material conditions of women's lives wherein they become meaningful participants in the economy and beneficiaries of the opportunities created through development. Government must condemn the sexual harassment of women who are forced to endure exploitation in exchange for opportunities or services to which they are entitled. That sentiment has no space in our governance," Premier Mabuyane asserted.

The commemoration also brought government services closer to the people through Services on Wheels, providing communities with access to a range of services including health, employment and labour support, Home Affairs-related enquiries, transport, social development, agriculture, human settlements, education and voter education. In this way, the celebration became more than an occasion to remember the past. It became an opportunity to address the present and imagine a different future.



Speaker of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro Councillor Eugene Johnson and Professor Andre Keet



Attendees of the Provincial Women's Day Commemoration



Premier Mabuyane, Mayor of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro Councillor Lobishe, Ms Thando Sonjica and Zethu Sonjica.



Attendees of the Provincial Women's Day Commemoration