ADDRESS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA AT THE ETHEKWINI LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (LED) SUMMIT, 28 OCTOBER 2025, DURBAN ICC

- Programme Director Mr Bongumusa Zondo
- Amakhosi aphakathi kwethu
- Chairperson of the Economic Development and Planning Committee: Cllr Thembo Ntuli
- Deputy Chairperson of the Economic Development and Planning Committee: Cllr Phili Ndlovu
- CEO of SALGA Mr Mbanga Sithole
- Executive Director of Economic Development and Planning: Mr Lihle Phewa
- Executive Directors from all clusters
- Panellists
- Senior government officials from provincial and national government
- Business sector representatives
- Leaders from academia and civil society
- Members of the media
- Distinguished guests

Good Morning

It is both an honour and a privilege for me to be part of this crucial gathering- the eThekwini Local Economic Development (LED) Summit 2025.

Let me thank the Chairperson of the economic development and his team for the sterling work they have done to organise this summit.

You will agree with me that this is gathering speaks directly to our core mandate of rebuilding sustainable local economy, renew business confidence, and strengthen the foundations of inclusive, people-centred development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, despite the progress we have made in transforming our communities socially, we must acknowledge that many of our people remain excluded from the mainstream economy. According to the recent statistics by Stats SA, unemployment remains stubbornly high, with 33.2% of our people out of work in the second quarter of 2025.

Furthermore, informal enterprises struggle to access markets, and far too many young people remain without meaningful economic opportunities. These statistics remind us that while Durban is a city of potential and resilience, the benefits of economic growth still excludes the majority of our people. Therefore, we are confident that this summit will help us share insights on how we can build an economy that leaves no one behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen, eThekwini remains a critical driver of South Africa's economy, contributing close to 10% to the national GDP and 60 % to the economy of the province. With a population exceeding 4.4 million residents, our metro continues to anchor provincial trade, logistics, tourism, and manufacturing activities.

However, we must now move beyond statistics. The true progress in local economic development means ensuring that every resident of eThekwini benefit from our city's development efforts. Whether you live in Umlazi, KwaMashu, Clermont, Verulam and Umgababa, your voice and participation matter in shaping this city's future.

Therefore, this Summit marks a renewed commitment to positioning LED as a central pillar of developmental local That is why we are here today – to put service delivery, infrastructure renewal, business growth, skills development, job creation, and community engagement firmly at the centre of our LED agenda. It is about aligning our efforts – across government and industry – to drive inclusive growth, stimulate investment, support SMMEs, and foster enterprise development.

We are here to engage in open dialogue, encourage active participation, solve problems collaboratively, and secure real commitments – commitments that lead to tangible, measurable outcomes for our communities and local businesses.

As part of this shared agenda, the municipality must take the lead in driving LED by:

- Aligning local strategies such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and spatial planning with national and provincial frameworks.
- Creating an enabling environment for business by reducing red tape, improving core services, maintaining infrastructure, and ensuring regulatory efficiency.

- Actively supporting SMMEs, cooperatives, and local enterprises by improving access to markets, finance, procurement opportunities, and skills development.
- Facilitating investment, job creation and skills development with a focus on youth, women, and under-represented groups.
- Addressing spatial and rural inequalities by revitalising townships, informal settlements, and rural nodes to ensure no community is left behind.
- Building strong partnerships with government, the private sector, academia, and communities. We know government cannot do this alone. Our growth agenda depends on collaboration.

We must rebuild a culture of trust and cooperation where the private sector is seen not as a bystander, but as a core partner in development. Where traditional leaders and communities are engaged in planning and decision-making. Where every stakeholder understands that growing the local economy benefits every household.

One example of this partnership is our vision to position Durban as Africa's smart port city by connecting people, products, and innovation with the rest of the world. This includes digital skills training, entrepreneurship

programmes, and targeted job creation efforts – all geared towards building a more inclusive economy.

Having recently returned from Hangzhou, China where our vision of becoming a digital trade hub took a leap forward, I am proud to share that Alibaba has chosen eThekwini as the base for its African operations. This is a vote of confidence, and a powerful signal of what is possible when we create the right conditions for investment. It also demonstrates that Durban is open for business. With the significant investment that government is making in revitalising our rail infrastructure and improving the efficiency of our port, we expect Durban to remain a premier destination of choice for investment.

As the city, we also continue to allocate budget to improve bulk infrastructure for catalytic projects. This investment has seen private developers investing billions of rands in new developments in the north of Durban. A few days ago, we unveiled the R3.6 billion Beachwood Estate Development which is going to create over 2000 sustainable jobs.

Colleagues, LED is not just an economic programme. It is a political and social imperative.

When we support SMMEs, cooperatives, and township or village enterprises we build resilience and restore dignity. When we prioritise women and youth in employment and enterprise, we build equity and inclusion. When we attract investment, infrastructure and jobs closer to our communities, we build stability and hope.

This Summit must not be a talk shop. It is a platform for partnership and action. So, I challenge each of you, by the end of the summit, to commit to at least one partnership, one project, or one measurable outcome.

- To government and municipal teams: continue streamlining approvals, improving service delivery, aligning programmes, and embedding LED into every municipal function. Monitor outcomes and drive implementation.
- To the business community: engage in local procurement, invest in skills development, mentor SMMEs, and partner with the municipality to revitalise key economic nodes.

- To SMMEs and cooperatives: seize every opportunity, including those presented at this Summit. Bring your innovation. Be ready to collaborate. Ensure the growth we generate is locally rooted.
- To civil society, academia, and community groups: bring your voice, your research, and your insights. Help us better include historically disadvantaged areas, the informal sector, youth and women in our growth story.

Over the next two days, use the networking and discussion spaces not only to exchange ideas, but to challenge assumptions and develop real, actionable solutions.

Let us leave this Summit with a renewed determination to stimulate our local economies, rebuild safer and healthier communities, and sustain livelihoods.

Together, let us make eThekwini a model of what responsive, people-centred, and economically vibrant local government can achieve.

Thank you.