

isisele

NEWSLETTER



Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
SPORT, RECREATION,
ARTS & CULTURE

A publication of the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts & Culture

Celebrating

150



*Years of the
Birth of SEK Mqhayi*



**In
This
Issue**



**Languages
of Unity:
Driving Social
Cohesion
Through
Multilingual
Initiatives**



**Digitising
the Past and
Unlocking
the Future**



Qhawe Mbongwe is currently reading towards his doctoral degree in Historical Studies at Nelson Mandela University (NMU), focusing on the life and times of King Hintsa Ka Khawuta. He holds an MA in History (cum laude). He has worked as a researcher at NMU's Research Support and Management office and at the Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education and Transformation as a research assistant. He is currently a freelance researcher at the Jinhntsu Normal University in China, where he has worked on a workbook on South African Economic History which is still under review. His research interests include 19th century South African history, historiography and Black Radical Thinking

By Qhawe Mbongwe

2025 marks 150 years since his birth of Samuel Edward Krune (SEK) Mqhayi at Gqumashe in Dikeni on 01 December 1875, and also 80 years since his passing on at Ntabozuko on 29 July 1945. DSRAC MEC Sibulele Ngongo announced in her policy speech that the Department will continue in transforming heritage resources for socio-economic benefits for the people of the province and this will be done in context of Provincial Liberation Heritage Route and national days. The Department has since through the Eastern Cape Provincial Heritage Resources Authority (ECPHRA) refurbished SEK Mqhayi's burial site at Ntabozuko in collaboration with Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. This site augments the memorial (monument) that the Department built in town in Ntabozuko five years ago.

Heritage Month in September 2025 will be dedicated to the rich life and legacy of SEK Mqhayi. Heritage Day will thus be hosted in Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality on 24 September 2025. The Department's Language and Literature Services Directorate has unleashed Literature Festival (LitFest) auditions in the eight districts of the province where local poets (imbongi) will compete and render iconic poems that have been written and institutionalized by SEK Mqhayi. The most impressive and winning poet will apart from receiving a prize from the Department, also showcase his/ her talents at the Heritage Day celebrations on 24 September 2025.

Growing up in Tyume, Mqhayi began school at

the age of seven and demonstrated significant intellectual talent. In Centane where his family later relocated, Mqhayi spent his time sitting around the fire and listening to elders narrating amabali about the past. During his stay there with his great uncle, Chief Nanzana as his guardian, Mqhayi acquired a great deal of knowledge about the life of amaXhosa, their customs and culture. It is here that the young Mqhayi began to grasp and master the isiXhosa language, a trait that would forever place him in Xhosa - and South African - folklore. Mqhayi would later have a distinguished career as a teacher, preacher, councillor, social activist, journalist, author, linguist, dramatist, essayist, critic, novelist, biographer, translator, imbongi and a historian.

Mqhayi is often described as "one of the most prolific Black South African intellectuals of the early twentieth century". Born in 1875, four years before the end of a century of Xhosa colonial wars and dying in 1945, the last year of World War 2 and three years before the National Party institutionalised apartheid in 1948, Mqhayi is a product of a period that was characterised by radical change in the political terrain of South Africa and the world. It was in this context that Mqhayi emerged as an eloquent recorder of key global and local events, as was evident in the collection of his poetic work under the title Iziganeko Zesizwe: Occasional Poems. As an imbongi, Mqhayi's reputation has its roots amongst the amaRharhabe in the Eastern Cape but he later rose to prominence as an acclaimed national poet (imbongi yesizwe jikelele).

150 Years of SEK Mqhayi - an appraisal to a cultural genius

The role of Mqhayi as an imbongi was primarily focused on his community, simultaneously praising and criticising the power structures of his time. He was primarily focused on promoting the welfare and morality of every citizen. Renowned Xhosa historian Jeff Pieres holds that Mqhayi is generally acknowledged as the most outstanding figure in Xhosa literary history.

Mqhayi played a key role in pioneering isiXhosa as a language, both written and spoken. As a linguist and intellectual, Mqhayi took upon himself the enormous task of standardising isiXhosa, in both its spoken and written forms. Mqhayi also cemented himself as a powerful storyteller and eloquent journalist. The key to Mqhayi's work was his ability to explore the complex nature of history, morality, justice, truth and love, and his work explored various themes that spoke to his immediate surrounding and global affairs. S.E.K. Mqhayi was the son of Ziwani, who was a scholar of all Bantu languages and a qualified teacher and the great-grandson of Chief Mqhayi, who was the chief of AmaCirha.

Mqhayi was to meet the writers who shaped and influenced his writing when he began school where he met renowned Xhosa literary figures such as Reverend Pambani Jeremiah Mzimba, Reverend Elijah Makiwane and the prolific John Tengo Jabavu. Between 1891 and 1895, Mqhayi was enrolled at Lovedale for a teacher's training course, where his literary career began, after receiving encouragement from towering literary figures such as Walter Benson Rubusana, Allan Kirkland Soga and Gwayi Tyamazshe. After publishing a small collection of praise poetry in the newspaper, Izwi labaNtu (The Voice of the People), Mqhayi worked at this newspaper from 1897 until 1900, when he accepted a teaching position in Centane where he taught from 1900 until 1906. Mqhayi also translated the works of

other authors into isiXhosa, the most notable of these being E.S Smith's (1935) *Aggrey of Africa (U-Aggrey um-Afrika)*. Other translations included the Afrikaans novel by G.C and S.B Hobson, *Mees van die Kalahari (Mees of the Kalahari Desert)* and U-Adonis Wase Ntlango (*Adonis of the Desert*).

Mqhayi was a devoted historian who sought to educate his people about their past and viewed history as a source of national pride. In his writings, Mqhayi draws links that weave together education, personal identity and cultural pride. Mqhayi's historical accounts surpass the simplicity of narrating the past to effectively use history to evoke a sense of pride amongst indigenous people. Mqhayi was explicitly critical of settler colonialism and its inherent injustices and his works served as a psychological shield against the dehumanising effects of colonialism and imperialism.

The emergence of the print industry was crucial to the development of isiXhosa literature. 1897 saw the launch of the newspaper, *Izwi Labantu*, which was in direct competition with John Tengo Jabavu's *Imvo Zabantsundu*. The central disagreement with Jabavu was primarily based on the language issue. Mqhayi argued for the prioritisation of isiXhosa, whereas Jabavu was adamant that English was important in positioning his publication within the realm of modernity. After this fallout with Jabavu, Mqhayi was dedicated to promoting African languages, not only for literary expression but also as an important vehicle of resistance and political consciousness that vehemently opposed coloniality.

Mqhayi continually expressed that the survival of African languages in the face of colonialism and modernity was instrumental in the dismembering of European hegemony

in the form of the English language. Mqhayi's extensive work that included his paper, *Izwi Labantu*, was crucial to the development of isiXhosa literature because of its provocative writing about language and culture. Together with Mqhayi's voluminous writings, *Izwi Labantu* became a vehicle for political and cultural resistance against British colonialism. In collaboration with intellectuals such as Tiyo Soga, Tengo Jabavu and Walter Rubusana, who played a critical role in laying the foundation for the intellectualisation of isiXhosa, Mqhayi quickly carved a niche for himself as a poet, intellectual and historian.

Mqhayi was an eloquent and extensive writer and historian whose work has had—and continues to have—a significant impact across multiple disciplines, including African languages, Sociology and literary studies.

Although Mqhayi's writings were never assembled coherently thematically, it is important to draw them out as historiography so that they can be understood as elements of South African history. His poetry is sometimes difficult to analyse as history because it cuts across various themes and eras and deals with diverse topics, from education and colonialism to citizenship and Christianity. Because of colonialism and epistemic injustices brought about by the conquest of indigenous people, indigenous scholarship has often been neglected in mainstream academia, including historiography. Mqhayi was not only an eloquent praise poet but also a historian who was influenced by the conditions of his time and became a vocal mouthpiece dedicated to narrating, writing and preserving the history of amaXhosa.

Digitising the Past and Unlocking the Future



Assistant Director at Gqeberha repository, Nobomi Ncandana (left) giving a tour of the repository to officials

By Siziphiwe Balintulo

The Eastern Cape Provincial Archives and Records Management has embarked on a transformative journey of digitisation to safeguard records and improve accessibility. Digitisation in archives and records management involves converting physical records such as paper documents, photographs, and audio-visual materials—into digital formats like TIFF, PDFs, JPEGs, and MP3s. This process not only helps preserve records by creating a digital copy, reducing the risk of physical deterioration, but also enhances access by making them available online for researchers, staff, and the public.

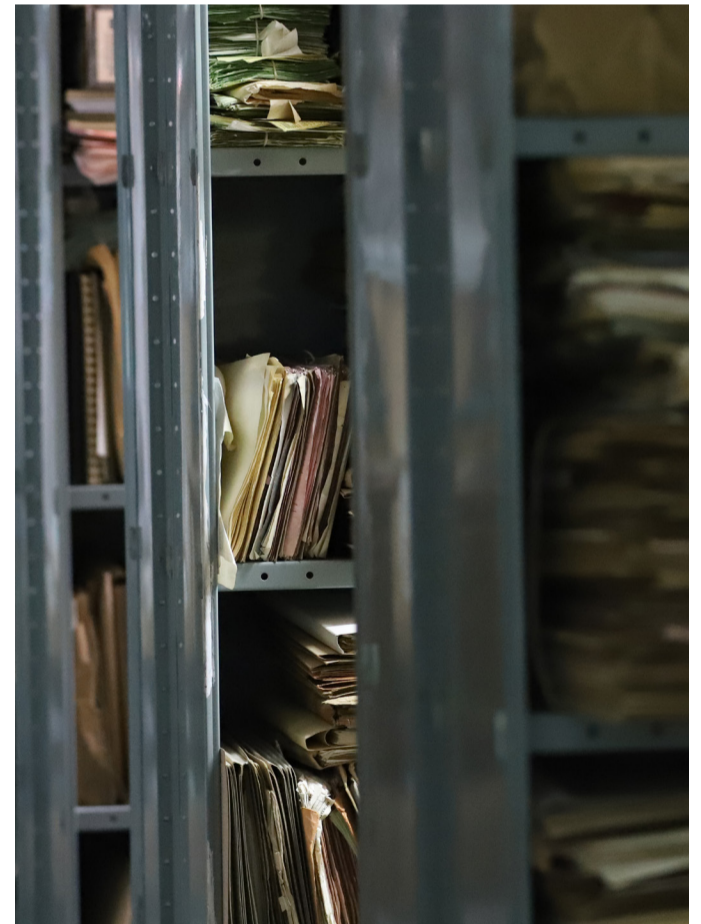
The digitisation process began in 2024 with the scanning of estate files, a move aimed at protecting fragile and deteriorating records. It contributes to records management in several key ways: it provides a backup in case of physical disasters, allows for easier management, and promotes efficiency by reducing the need for physical storage and handling. Moreover, digitisation addresses the challenge of space limitations and helps mitigate risks related to the physical loss of records.

Though the project is still in its early stages, the Eastern Cape Archives anticipates positive outcomes such as improved preservation, enhanced access for research and education, and cost savings through reduced physical storage and handling needs.

Looking forward, the department plans to integrate artificial intelligence and machine learning to automate the digitisation process, improve metadata creation, and further enhance the discoverability of records.

Additionally, the digitisation efforts aim to support community engagement, raise awareness about cultural heritage, and integrate records with other digital systems.

The project aligns with global efforts to digitise archival records, with less than 2% of the world's archival records currently digitised. As the total amount of digital data worldwide is set to soar, the Eastern Cape Archives is positioning itself as a key player in preserving cultural heritage while ensuring the ongoing accessibility and usability of its digitised materials.



Archival records and documents at the Eastern Cape provincial archives



Isisele Newsletter is a service delivery publication, produced by the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts & Culture

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TURNING PAGES:

How Literature Programmes Inspire Lifelong Learning in the Eastern Cape



A learner carefully selects a book during the Alex Matikinca Reading Competition—one of the department's key literacy initiatives aimed at nurturing a love for reading.



A passionate young reader takes the stage at the Alex Matikinca Reading Competition, showcasing talent and a love for storytelling.

By Mhlahi Dlova

One of the strategic objectives of the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts, and Culture (DSRAC) is to encourage a culture of reading and lifelong learning. In order to maintain literacy as a top priority in the province, the department actively promotes a love of books and lifelong learning in the Eastern Cape through a variety of literature programmes.

Through the South African Library Week (SALW), a yearly literary programme that has been celebrated across the country since 2002, the department is set to guarantee this goal. SALW supports the department's objective to foster a reading culture under the direction of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA). The festivities this year were held from the 17–19 March 2025, in Burgersdorp, Joe Gqabi District. In the program were thoughtfully created activities to inspire a lasting appreciation for literature and reading, both fundamental for nurturing a lifelong learning mindset.

From spelling bees, storytelling, literary workshops to book reviews in isiXhosa, English, Afrikaans, and SeSotho, SALW engages participants of all ages, reinforcing reading as an inclusive experience. Positioned as both a literary programme and a platform for promoting libraries, this initiative underscores the department's commitment to improving literacy in the province. While celebrations of SALW are held in different parts of the province each year, another impactful literary programme, the Alex Matikinca Reading Competition is a fixed event in Gqeberha, this distinction demonstrates the varied, yet complimentary approaches taken to promoting a reading culture in the Eastern Cape.

Marking its 10th anniversary this year, the Alex Matikinca Reading Competition is named after the late education advocate Alex Matikinca from Motherwell, and serves as a source of encouragement and inspiration for young learners. Since 2018, the department has supported

this initiative through its Library Services directorate, aligning it with one of the department's objectives of promoting a culture of reading and lifelong learning.

Focused on schools in Motherwell, this year, the competition saw 21 schools participate, each represented by two learners- one from Grade 3 reading in isiXhosa and another from Grade 6 reading in English. By making reading engaging and rewarding for young children, the competition nurtures a lifelong passion for learning, positioning literacy as a gateway to greater knowledge and opportunities.

At the 10th annual celebration MEC Sibulele Ngongo emphasised the competition's transformative role stating, **"The Alex Matikinca Competition is more than just a competition; it is a commitment by the department to breaking the cycle of illiteracy and celebrating every child's right to learn. The aim here is to empower young minds and reinforce education as a fundamental right capable of transforming our future as this province of the Eastern Cape."**

Both SALW and the Alex Matikinca Reading Competition highlight the role of collaboration in sustaining these initiatives. Partnerships with schools, community organisations, and municipal stakeholders ensure the longevity and impact of these programmes. Through collective efforts, the department creates lasting learning opportunities that go beyond the events, bringing the benefits of reading to even the most remote areas of the province. Through these initiatives, the department reaffirms its commitment to literacy and effective service delivery by turning the pages of possibilities for communities across the Eastern Cape.

Libraries as Lifelines: Expanding Access to Knowledge Across Rural Areas



A learner enjoys a book at the new Zingcuka Public Library.

By Mhlahli Dlova

The South African Constitution emphasises education and the fight against illiteracy as essential pillars of human dignity, and upholds access to information as a fundamental human right. As custodians of knowledge, libraries are essential to upholding this right, particularly in rural areas where access to a variety of resources is still limited. The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts, and Culture has worked hard to close the gap between opportunity and access as part of its mission to increase knowledge access in Eastern Cape rural areas.

In the past six years, the department has dedicated resources towards the building and refurbishment of several libraries in rural areas, including the Linda Dweba Library in Ngqeleni (2019), Mphathisi Nonkobongo Library in Libode (2019), Makhenkesi Stofile Library in Dikeni (2021), Welcome Baskiti Library in Cookhouse (2024) and the Zingcuka Modular Library in Tsolo (2024). These libraries have been established to support marginalised communities by guaranteeing that knowledge, digital resources, and educational opportunities are available even in the most remote locations.

Due to its extensive rural landscape, the Eastern Cape presents significant literacy and educational challenges, which are made more severe by limited access to information. Many communities still struggle with limited educational material and digital resources, putting learners and adults at a disadvantage. These libraries become essential knowledge centres that provide books, online resources, digital learning resources, and opportunities for community engagement. In an increasingly digital world, these resources play a crucial role in closing the digital divide, ensuring that rural communities stay connected.

General Manager for Cultural Affairs Nomathamsanqa Gobozi-Nibe, who spoke at the opening of the Zingcuka Modular Library in Tsolo, reiterated the department's dedication to providing equitable services,

“We have diligently focused our efforts on ensuring service delivery in all areas of the province, particularly rural areas, within our allocated budget and in line with our mandate. By opening this modular library, we aim to ensure that everyone has access to educational materials, information, and digital resources, irrespective of background or ability. Our expectation then as the department is that this community treasures and uses this facility to its greatest potential.”

With every library opening, the department has continued to advocate to its serving communities that libraries are more than buildings filled with books and encourage people to view them as inclusive spaces for education, social support, and lifelong learning. By offering free and low-cost resources, these libraries help overcome barriers related to poverty, language, and historical exclusion thereby ushering a new era for these communities. Furthermore, they provide accessible spaces for individuals with disabilities and other marginalised groups, ensuring equitable access to knowledge and opportunities for personal and communal growth.

Beyond providing books and digital resources,



Each new rural library is equipped with books, a computer lab, and spaces that spark learning and community connection.

adults, after-school activities for children, and reading clubs encourage a culture of learning at all ages. These facilities are equipped with computer facilities, internet connectivity and a dedicated children's corner featuring educational toys and board games, creating interactive learning environments that offer support and equip individuals with valuable skills to improve their quality of life.

The dedication to transforming formerly marginalised communities is unwavering as the new financial year commences and the 7th administration's strategic goals take shape. In order to assist rural communities throughout the province, the department has additional plans to build and renovate more libraries.

The department is actively developing plans to build and renovate additional libraries in order to further this objective and guarantee that rural communities in the Eastern Cape have better access to educational materials. By expanding and enhancing library services, the department is not only improving access to knowledge but also enabling these communities to benefit from technological advancements that support lifelong learning and development.

BUILDING A SPORTING FUTURE THROUGH EMPOWERING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES IN THE EASTERN CAPE



Athletes competing in a 100m race during the National Schools Athletics Championships

By Ayabonga Madlebe

The development of sport and promotion of mass participation are central pillars in the work of the Eastern Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (DSRAC). Through targeted initiatives, the department is creating pathways for young talent to rise from rural communities to national and even international platforms.

For years, sport development in the Eastern Cape has faced major challenges, particularly in under-resourced schools and communities. A lack of infrastructure and limited access to structured programmes has hindered the growth of local talent, curbing opportunities for youth to thrive through sport. In response, DSRAC has launched several strategic programmes aimed at bridging this gap and ensuring inclusive access to sport across the province.

One of the department's flagship initiatives is the School Sport Programme, a joint venture with the Department of Education. This collaboration enables schools to participate in structured leagues and tournaments at district, provincial, and national levels. In

addition to facilitating competitions, the programme invests in the training of educators and volunteers to serve as coaches, technical officials, and administrators ensuring sustainability and quality within school sport systems.

However, support for sport development extends beyond school grounds. The Club Development Programme is designed to strengthen community-based sport structures. These local clubs serve as critical incubators of talent and provide platforms for participation in community leagues and larger tournaments. The department has allocated R7.4 million to support this programme, supplying clubs with essential equipment and attire.

In parallel, the Recreation Programme plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion and healthy lifestyles through inclusive community engagement. The programme funds recreational campaigns such as the Big Walk and Indigenous Games, hosted at district and provincial levels. These events not only promote wellness but also provide safe spaces for social interaction and cultural celebration.

Altogether, the department has committed over R31 million to advancing the School Sport Programme, affirming its dedication to growing sport from the grassroots up. These investments are transforming the sporting landscape of the province, creating momentum for future champions and vibrant communities alike.

Looking ahead, DSRAC remains committed to expanding these programmes and forging new partnerships. The goal is clear: to cultivate a thriving sport culture in the Eastern Cape—one that breaks barriers, nurtures talent, and elevates the province onto the national and global stage through mass participation.

Reclaiming Our Roots and Transforming the Heritage Landscape in the Eastern Cape



Members of the newly appointed ECPGNC committee at their induction workshop

By Awethu Fatyela and Azola Mkosana

The Eastern Cape is home to some of South Africa's most powerful stories of resistance, resilience, and cultural richness. From the battlefields of the Frontier Wars to the birthplace of world-renowned leaders like Nelson Mandela and Steve Biko, the province's landscape is steeped in history. But this rich heritage does not preserve itself. Behind the scenes, a dedicated group of institutions led by the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (DSRAC) and its institutions, the Eastern Cape Provincial Geographical Names Committee (ECPGNC) and the Eastern Cape Provincial Heritage Resources Authority (ECPHRA), is transforming how heritage is preserved, remembered, and honoured. Established under the National Heritage Resources Act, ECPHRA is tasked with identifying, conserving, protecting, and promoting heritage resources throughout the province. These include everything from historic graves and battlefield landmarks to buildings, archaeological sites, and monuments. ECPHRA operates under the guidance of a council appointed by the MEC of DSRAC, ensuring that the province's heritage is in capable hands.

One of the authority's key responsibilities is evaluating sites for their cultural significance and determining how they should be preserved.

This involves site visits, heritage impact assessments, and in some cases, declaring sites as Provincial Heritage Sites. ECPHRA also plays a critical role in advising the public on how to manage these valuable resources and has led efforts in constructing memorials, monuments, and statues to ensure history is not forgotten.

Few provinces in South Africa can claim a heritage as vibrant and varied as the Eastern Cape's. It is the land of legendary warriors and kings such as Hintsa, Maqoma, Sandile, and Phato, who fiercely resisted colonial land dispossession. The birthplace of globally recognised leaders like Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, Robert Sobukwe and Chris Hani whose lives shaped the course of South African history.

The province also boasts a proud legacy of black excellence in sports and the arts. Despite apartheid-era segregation, athletes and artists from the Eastern Cape broke barriers, including boxing legends like Mlungwana Mgxaji and visual artist George Pemba. Institutions like the University of Fort Hare, Lovedale College, and Healdtown produced some of Africa's most influential thinkers and leaders. From the ancient fossils of Graaff-Reinet to the sand dunes of Alexandria and the liberation

sites of Mqhekezweni and Fort Hare (now UNESCO-listed), the landscape of the Eastern Cape is a living museum of South Africa's past and present.

Parallel to this physical preservation of heritage is a symbolic yet equally powerful transformation: the renaming of geographical locations. This responsibility lies with the Eastern Cape Provincial Geographical Names Committee (ECPGNC). The renaming of places is not simply about replacing old names with new ones. It is about redressing historical injustices and restoring cultural identity. Under colonial and apartheid rule, many towns and landmarks were given names that erased indigenous history and imposed foreign narratives. The ECPGNC, working with the South African Geographical Names Council, has helped return the names of places to their rightful historical and cultural meanings.

From Port Elizabeth to Gqeberha, King William's Town to Qonce, and Grahamstown to Makhanda, these changes signal more than just a shift in signage; they represent a reclaiming of space, memory, and dignity. Today, ECPHRA is focused on ensuring that heritage preservation contributes meaningfully to social and economic development. In line with MEC Sibulele Ngongo's guidance, there



is a strong focus on involving women and youth in heritage-related projects. By partnering with local municipalities and DSRAC district offices, the authority aims to strengthen its footprint across all corners of the province. Heritage preservation also presents real opportunities for tourism development and job creation. Through the construction and maintenance of heritage sites, ECPHRA is not only protecting cultural treasures but also opening doors for economic participation, particularly for youth in rural communities.

Despite these efforts, heritage sites are increasingly at risk due to vandalism, neglect, and lack of awareness. ECPHRA is responding with integrated stakeholder campaigns and community outreach to raise awareness and promote responsible stewardship of heritage assets.

Another important area of work is the repatriation and respectful reburial of human remains of South Africans who died in exile during the liberation struggle. In partnership with national departments, such as the Department of Military Veterans, DSRAC, and local authorities, ECPHRA facilitates ceremonies and constructs monuments in honour of these individuals, ensuring their sacrifices are not forgotten. The transformation of the heritage landscape in the Eastern Cape is a story of resilience, resistance, and rebirth. It is a journey toward healing the wounds of the past, reclaiming identity, and building pride in the stories that define us. Thanks to the tireless work of DSRAC, ECPHRA, and ECPGNC, heritage in the Eastern Cape is no longer locked away in the past, it is alive, evolving, and at the heart of the province's future. In doing so, the Eastern Cape continues to live up to its proud title: The Home of Legends.



from top to bottom:
St Mathew's Mission in Qoboqobo, founded by Bishop John Armstrong in 1855, is situated on 600 hectares of land donated to the Anglican Church by Chief Socishe.

The gravesite of liberation struggle hero, Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe

Road signage with the new names for Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown) and Qonce (formerly King William's Town)



FESTIVALS: Platforms to Promote Culture & Creative Industries

By Sivuyile Ngaba

Have you ever wondered why the department participates and hosts festivals in the province? It's because they play a vital role in celebrating our cultural heritage and providing platforms for the expression and preservation of diverse traditions, including music, dance, art, and cuisine. They reflect the province's multicultural identity and promote social cohesion, community engagement, and cultural exchange among various ethnic groups.

The National Arts Festival (NAF) that is held in Makhanda is one of the annual activities that provides artists with a platform to showcase their craft. For the past 22 years, the Eastern Cape government has been steadfast in its support of the NAF, providing a platform for local artists to shine on both national and international stages.

Award winning jazz musician, Dumza Maswana is one of the many artists that have been assisted by the department and featured at the NAF, and he continues to grow and perform in international platforms.

The NAF has been a launching pad for the Music Excellence Acceleration Programme for Eastern Cape Artists (MEAPEC). A programme designed to advance excellence in the music sector by supporting Eastern Cape artists through existing provincial Record Labels. The programme empowers musicians by accelerating their growth through partnerships with established music companies that receives up to R1.8 million grant for platinum (established company) and gold (developing company) categories.

Artists that have benefited from the MEAPEC programme includes Bethusile Mcinga, Yolanda Vuthela, Ikhona Zide, Khethabahle, Zoliswa Sontshi, and Siyasanga.

Isingqisethu is another festival that serves as a platform not only for arts development and promotion but also as a tool to showcase the province cultural diversity. Various artforms showcased at the event include fashion, dance, music, craft, poetry, visual arts, exhibition and arts and culture. The programme is held annually in Port St Johns.

Maskhandi Music Festival is a flagship event of the department that showcases traditional music that is deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of our communities serves as a testament to our rich heritage and artistic diversity and many artists have benefited from the programme including Ihashe elimhlope that has developed many local artists.

MEC Sibulele Ngongo highlighted in her policy speech that the department will focus this financial year on the development of indigenous music as part of heritage in the province and announced that the Maskhandi Festival will be renamed.

“It has been 10 years since Maskandi stalwart, Saba Mbixane, passed on, and in recognition of his sterling work in the development of this genre, the annual Maskandi event will be named after him.”

These festivals not only provide a platform for artists to showcase their talent but also preserve traditions and boost the economy as many people would flock to the different towns that host these annual programmes.



The Eastern Cape Ensemble Cultural group performs at the official opening of National Arts Festival in Makhanda.



From left to right: Local cultural groups perform at Isingqisethu Festival in Port St Johns.



The Mhlaleshushu group performing at the Maskhandi Music Festival in Kwabhaca



Languages Driving Social Cohesion Multilingual Initiative

By Siziphiwe Balintulo

In a culturally rich province such as the Eastern Cape, language is more than just a tool for communication; it is a symbol of identity, dignity, and unity. The Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (DSRAC), through its Language Services Unit, continues to lead transformative work in promoting multilingualism as a cornerstone of social cohesion and inclusive governance. This mission is deeply rooted in the department's mandate to protect, promote, and preserve indigenous languages.

The department recognises the power of collaboration in maintaining its strategic partnerships. Working alongside the Pan South African Languages Board (PanSALB) and various government departments through platforms such as the Intergovernmental Language Forum, the department facilitates workshops and training in translation, editing, and language policy compliance. These platforms ensure that language policies are fully implemented, aiding in solidifying the use of isiXhosa, Sesotho, Afrikaans, English, Sign Language, Khoi and San languages. The Language Services Directorate within the department has charted the course towards inclusivity by promoting compliance, and ensuring that the right to communicate in one's preferred language is not only protected, but actively promoted.

The department has also made major strides in embracing South African Sign Language two years after it was officially recognised as one of the country's official languages. This recognition marked a historic shift toward inclusivity and accessibility, affirming the right of citizens with hearing impairments to participate fully in society. In the past year alone, DSRAC has, in partnership with DEAFSA, trained frontline workers, including those in the police service, healthcare, and social work

in basic Sign Language. These efforts ensure that communication barriers are minimised and that public services are accessible to all. The department has committed to making Sign Language interpreters present at all major government events, setting an example for other departments to follow. On the 19th of July 2025, the province will commemorate the recognition of Sign Language, an occasion that symbolises democratic progress and a celebration of the dignity of the deaf community.

In the literary space, the Provincial Book Fair has become a vital platform to celebrate and elevate indigenous languages that continue to lag behind English in visibility and use. This initiative not only offers a platform for engagement and dialogue around language development, but also serves as a space for writers, emerging and established alike, to find community and share their work. The Fair places special focus on celebrated literary figures such as Professor Ncedile Saule, whose work has significantly advanced isiXhosa literature across multiple genres. Their legacy forms the bedrock on which the department's literary programmes are built, inspiring a new generation of storytellers to use indigenous languages as tools of expression, and pride.

DSRAC is further encouraged by the recent recognition of Buffalo City Metro as part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Creative Cities Network. This international acknowledgement puts the Metro in a unique position to drive literacy and cultural development, which aligns with the department's broader mission of strengthening the literacy landscape in the province. Through this global platform, the Eastern Cape gains an opportunity to link its initiatives to broader networks of creativity, culture, and language promotion.

At the heart of all these efforts lies a clear commitment: **to ensure that the official languages of the Eastern Cape—isiXhosa, Sesotho, Afrikaans, English, Sign Language, and the Khoi and San languages are not only recognised but actively used and celebrated. Promoting multilingualism is not just about preserving languages; it is about affirming identities, restoring dignity, and building a province where linguistic diversity is embraced. The department remains steadfast in reinforcing the pillars of the Use of Official Languages Act and advancing the objectives of the Provincial Social Cohesion Strategy, in which multilingualism is central to forging unity in diversity.**

Language plays a critical role in education, governance, and the social fabric of our communities. As such, the department commits to continue promoting and developing indigenous languages, encouraging writing and publishing in African languages, and rebuilding a strong indigenous publishing network in the province. Through the efforts of Language Services and the unwavering support of its partners and communities, commitment to linguistic justice and inclusivity is reaffirmed.

Opposite page:
Praise poet delivering an emotional poem during the Eastern Cape Literature Festival

Sihle-isipho Nontshokweni leading storytime at the Eastern Cape Book Fair

Published author, Ezekiel Jewell, reading from his book titled 'A Collection of Short Stories'

of Unity: ession Through tives







**Hon MEC
SIBULELE NGONGO**
Dept of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture



Policy Speech 2025/26 HIGHLIGHTS

**Raymond Mhlaba Chamber,
Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, Bhisho**

 **08th April 2025** Starting @ 14h30 

Investec Art Fare:

The department is partnering with Limani art gallery as an implementing agent at the Investec art fare. We will increase the number of top provincial visual artists from **8 to 12**, drawn from various districts to get an opportunity of showcasing their works among international galleries in this art fare.

Rand Easter:

8 Crafters drawn from various districts will be selected to participate at this prestigious festival, displaying the best of what the province has to offer.

Last year, **two of our Crafters** got an opportunity to supply David Tlale's Sandton Store (one of the country's top designers) with products.

National Arts Festival

The department will inject **R13.368 million** of into this festival, marking **23 years** of ongoing financial support.

The funding will specifically bolster the Eastern Cape Showcase, a vital platform for local creatives across genres and programmes such as Dakawa Jazz, Lit-Fest, Albany Museum art exhibitions etc.

Existing Funding Support for libraries

In partnership with the **South African Library for the Blind (SALB)**, the department continues to provide inclusive library services.

In the 2025/26 financial year, the department has allocated **R2 million** for the maintenance of existing mini libraries and for further establishment of three more.

R98.6 million has been set aside for this purpose of installing routers ensuring connectivity to libraries connected to broadband.

School Sport

In the 2025/26 financial year schools will be supported with Equipment and Attire with a budget of **R6 960 million**.

Club Development and support to Sport Federations

A total budget of R7 456 million has been set aside for the club development programme.

in NUMBERS

Construction of the following projects is currently ongoing with the milestones listed next to each:

Ntabankulu Library – R6 million (80% complete)

Ngquza Hill / Lusikisiki Library – R1.5 million (50% complete)

Dutywa Library – R500 000 (planning and design complete)

Renovations and maintenance in Progress:

Ugie Library – R1.5 million (planning and design; 10% construction)

Pearston Library – R885 000 (planning and design)

Fingo Library – R3.7 million (60% construction)

Sterkstroom Museum – R2.4 million (planning and design; 30% construction)

KwaNojoli (Somerset East) Museum -

R3.3 million (planning and design; 50% construction)

Summit for Creatives:

Following the recent Parliament for Creatives and in line with departmental plans, we will collaborate with EC CCIFSA and existing civil society structures to host a **Creative Summit** to craft our strategic direction for the next MTSF.

Employee resourcing strategy:

Groups appointed	Number of appointments	% of appointments
Youth	14	37%
Adults	24	63%
Females	22	58%
Males	16	42%
Disability	1	2.6%

Forty-four (44) for conditional grant contract posts and thirty-nine (39) permanent posts have been advertised

2025/26 Budget	Medium-term estimates (R thousand)"		
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
1. Administration	351 228	357 184	373 493
2. Cultural Affairs	259 207	262 481	274 293
3. Library & Archives Services	298 538	320 111	334 560
4. Sport and Recreation	170 795	180 776	189 074
Total	1 079 768	1 120 552	1 171 420



Province of the
EASTERN CAPE

SPORT, RECREATION,
ARTS & CULTURE



HOW TO ACCESS OUR SERVICES

Visit or phone the department using:

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Bhisho, 5605
Qonce, 5600

Postal Address

Private Bag X0020,
Bhisho, 5605

Office of the HOD

Tel: 043 492 0231/1412
Fax: 043 642 5309

Office of the MEC

Tel: 043 492 1413/5
Fax: 043 642 6759

COMMUNICATIONS

Tel: 043 492 0236/1023

CUSTOMER CARE

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087 287 8635
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ELCO Building | East London, 5200

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CHRIS HANI:

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Komani Office Park,
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Komani, 5319

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Maletswai, 9750

NELSON MANDELA METRO:

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66B Ring Road | Greenacres,
Gqeberha 6001

OR TAMBO:

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5th & 6th Floor | Botha Sigcawu Bldg,
Mthatha, 5100

SARAH BAARTMAN:

Tel: 046 4920200 Fax: 046 6227410
Corner Miner & African Street,
Makhanda, 6139



CHECK OUT our social media platforms

-  DSRAC EC
-  DSRAC_EC
-  @Department of Sport,
Recreation, Arts and Culture
-  DSRAC EC

**'A United, Active and Winning Province Through Sport,
Recreation, Arts, Culture & Heritage'**

