

National Dialogue Event: Mthatha, Eastern Cape



13 November 2025



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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About the CMA

The goal of the CMA is to help make mediation efforts throughout Africa more effective. We do so by offering academic and practical courses in mediation, researching new and current best practices, and supporting organisations and governments involved in mediation processes.

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Centre for Mediation in Africa, Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the institution of Traditional Leaders in the Eastern Cape Citizen-led Dialogue

Welcome Address

On the 13th of November 2025, the Centre for Mediation in Africa (CMA) in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria facilitated the very first citizen-led National Dialogue in the O.R. Tambo District in collaboration with traditional leaders and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Eastern Cape (COGTA-EC) with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In facilitating the dialogue, which brought together some 60 people, including women traditional leaders, representative of ten government departments at the local, district and provincial levels, and academia the CMA sought to do more than merely convene diverse groups and individuals, including traditional leaders, provincial and local government officials, civil society members, and academia. The dialogue aimed to allow these diverse groups and individuals the opportunity to engage with the key issues faced within their district, prompting them to recognise their shared vision for the district, and find ways to establish a social compact. Impactful resolutions are reached when different perspectives and outcomes are evaluated, to ensure that decision-making is responsive to the needs of the given societies.

The event formed part of the ongoing work of the CMA in the Mthatha area of the Eastern Cape through the Ukuthula: Women building peace project, supported by the Kingdom of the Embassy of the Netherlands. This project, which began in 2023, includes a community mediation process and dialogue facilitation between key stakeholders, and particularly women traditional leaders, to enhance peace, security and development in the area.

The event, which took place at the Dans Lodge in Mthatha, commenced with an opening speech delivered by Professor Cori Wielenga, the director of the Centre for Mediation in Africa, highlighting the aim of the dialogue, namely, to cultivate a collaborative environment amongst the stakeholders of the O.R. Tambo district, enabling their responsiveness to challenges hindering effective development within the context of the unfolding National Dialogue. To guarantee that the aim of the event was achieved, a reflection and evaluation on the envisioned future of the district, factors hindering progress of reaching the identified envisioned future, alongside how a responsive social compact could be achieved, were placed as guidelines for

this citizen-led dialogue. Professor Wielenga warmly invited keynote speaker Mr Vusumuzi Ntshuba, O.R. Tambo District Councillor, who extended an additional welcome, followed by an expression of appreciation and celebration for the dedication being displayed by the participants to contribute towards dialogue, striving to uplift the district. Subsequently, before the commencement of the dialogue, Mr Vusumuzi Ntshuba, O.R. Tambo Councillor, underscored the importance of “everyone being in the position to fully express themselves.” In this statement, it became evident that the people lead citizen-led dialogues; they are also put in place to strengthen democracy due to dialogue being driven by transparency and accountability.

Phase One: Panel Discussion

Part one of the dialogue was presented as a panel discussion, with CMA facilitators Professor Cori Wielenga, the director of the Centre for Mediation in Africa, and Mr Lazarus Phetla leading the proceedings. The CMA was honoured to present a distinguished panel including two women traditional leaders, Nkosi Jumba of the Jumba Traditional



Council and Nkosi Ngonyama of the Cacadu Traditional Council, Mr Bongani Kupe from the Thabo Mbeki Foundation, Mr Vusumuzi Ntshuba, O.R. Tambo District Councillor, and Mr Siyabonga Jentile, founder and President of Not in My Name.

The panel proceedings commenced with asking Nkosi Jumba to reflect on her vision for the O.R. Tambo district, and her response was marked by much optimism, highlighting that “There is nothing that the O.R. Tambo district does not have, the only problem we face is the lack of coordination amongst leaders.” In highlighting that the district does not lack, Nkosi Jumba reaffirms that resources and capabilities are abundant at the district’s disposal. Her response reflects a positive affirmation on the potential advancement of the district, especially with the consideration that it is situated in a province with a 50.2% expanded-equivalent unemployment rate.



From her response, Nkosi Jumba set a progressive, forward-looking tone for the rest of the discussion. The reflections and responses captured from this panel discussion were those representing great hope in the future of the district; they also captured that all the present participants were willing to work towards a social compact that would lead to the district reaching its full potential. Support for the participants' willingness to work together was demonstrated by Nkosi Jumba and Councillor Ntshuba, who raised concerns about how competition amongst government officials and traditional leaders must lessen for meaningful

collaboration to take place. Within the district, both traditional leaders and government officials are regarded as important stakeholders who play leading roles in community representation. Their misalignment leads to challenges of undermined respect for leaders, poor accountability, and community uncertainty about whose authority is final.

Mr Kupe, from the Thabo Mbeki Foundation, emphasised the importance of the citizen-led nature of the dialogue, noting that issues such as unemployment, poverty, exclusion, and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) are best expressed by those directly affected. He reiterated that effective problem-solving should originate at the grass-roots level, rather than through top-down approaches. Supporting Mr Kupe's point, Mr Siyabulela Jentile stated, "The youth have been left paralysed by inactivity," highlighting that young people cannot contribute meaningfully to long-term transformation when excluded from such forums. Closing the discussion, Nkosi Ngonyama emphasised the importance of inclusivity by stating, "In order for us to get what we want, we need to be reasonable, work together and understand that we are all leaders."

Phase Two: Round Table Group Discussions and Panel Feedback

The second phase of the citizen-led dialogue was divided into two segments. In the first segment, all the esteemed guests were divided into small groups, where they engaged with various themes provided by CMA facilitators. To ensure adequate collaboration and accountability, the groups were evenly sized yet intentionally diverse. Diversification within

the groups played a critical role in assuring that all contributions were considered whilst simultaneously ensuring that participants take into consideration viewpoints that go beyond their frameworks of engagement, noted in how higher education representatives from the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) contributed perspectives that were successful in stimulating discussions in their groups on realigning the educational systems to match high-demand skills. The second segment of phase two was dedicated to a feedback panel discussion, with the panel consisting of group representatives who have been assigned to unpack the key outcomes drawn from their group discussion under their assigned theme. During the dialogue participants expressed wanting to extend the time spent in the small groups as they expressed this being the first time not only that traditional leaders were able to engage with such a diversity of government departments, but also that members of government were able to speak to freely across departments. The deep value of this kind of dialogue across sectors became starkly evident.



Key Themes and Feedback From Group Representatives

Mapping Roles and Expectations

One theme that emerged was the lack of a clear demarcation in roles and responsibilities between leaders, particularly amongst traditional leaders and government officials. Tension and competition remain persistent amongst these leaders, hindering the effective execution of responsibilities. There was a shared consensus amongst the group that the first step towards building a social compact would be by eliminating factors that hinder collaboration giving rise

to the proposal of structural intervention, in the form of a roles and responsibilities framework. By clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder, collaboration becomes more effective as expectations are defined.

Mutual Commitment

Another theme that emerged was that of mutual commitment, which put into perspective the significant shift towards an appreciation for different leadership roles and responsibilities, whilst recognising the shared aspiration of reshaping the socio-economic standing of the district. The group representative further reiterating that the long-standing socio-economic challenges faced by the O.R. Tambo district were “greater than our differences.” Despite their differences, the stakeholders were able to identify overlapping priorities that included economic emancipation and skills development. Furthermore, these priorities were collectively established by the stakeholders as the O.R. Tambo district’s long-term aspirations.

Barriers and Bridges

Barriers and bridges was another theme that emerged around the constraints to successful coordination within the O.R. Tambo district. The feedback from the group representative outlined the concerns expressed by the traditional leaders and local community members, which centred on the government's negligence. According to them, the inadequacy in service delivery and withholding of state resources accounted for poor coordination within the district. In response to the concern, government officials from the local and provincial levels were able to provide clarity that resources were not deliberately withheld; instead, this was a reflection of the limited availability of resources. Consequently, they were able to account for factors such as corruption within the internal structures of government causing additional restrictions to the availability of resources. This response led to further deliberations on the value of community representatives, such as traditional leaders in governance structures.

Key Takeaway: Values and Long-term Aspirations

Inclusivity

The value of inclusivity was held in high esteem throughout the planning and processing of the dialogue, and for further dialogues to take place. Councillor Ntshuba’s outline of the dialogue as a space where participants could freely express themselves strengthened emphasis on the value of everyone’s contribution. Moreover, open dialogue amongst participants is promoted, underpinning qualities of mutual respect, inclusivity, and active listening.

Accountability and Transparency

Service delivery shortcomings in the O.R. Tambo District have eroded the community's trust in governmental institutions to fulfil their constitutional mandate. Through dialogue, stakeholders identified the importance of transparency and holding leaders accountable, underscoring the need to establish structural interventions in the form of a roles and responsibilities framework.

Economic Emancipation

Unlocking the agricultural potential of the district was identified as a strategic priority amongst the stakeholders. Government officials played an important role in advocating for funding and programming opportunities directed to crop-farming, livestock farming, and agricultural tourism. Engagements involving government officials at the provincial and national levels need to take place to further discuss implementation and execution plans.

Youth Skills Development

The importance of having an all-inclusive citizen-led National Dialogue was demonstrated in the present academia representatives, highlighting 'youth skills development' as an important long-term aspiration for the district. Stakeholders acknowledged the persisting social challenges of crime, poverty and unemployment in the district; in response to these challenges, they proposed that actively engaging the youth in vocational programmes and youth development training would be the first step to taking action against the identified challenges. A national long-term aspiration was also proposed, highlighting the need to restructure the higher education curricula to implement practical, real-world skills and phase out oversaturated programmes, in order to increase the employability of the youth.

Inclusive Local Governance

The pivotal role that traditional leaders play in advancing the interests of local communities has been underpinned by historical and legal foundations. The inactive involvement of such leaders compromises impactful development and responsiveness. Responsive solutions cannot be achieved if those who are affected are excluded from transformative dialogue. This citizen-led dialogue is the first step to advancing inclusive local governance.

Conclusion

In closing, Mr. Bongani Kupe from The Thabo Mbeki Foundation expressed the need for citizen-led dialogues, such as this one all over the country. Without participating in the dialogue, the stakeholders would not have recognised that, despite longstanding tensions and structural challenges, they all shared a collective vision: to reshape the socio-economic standing of the O.R. Tambo district. Most importantly, the stakeholders recognised that without inclusive collaboration, the likelihood of attaining their shared vision would remain minimal. To give effect to the social compact, collaboration amongst stakeholders should not end here; instead, the set values and long-term aspirations for the O.R. Tambo District should serve as the basis for collaboration.

Going forward

Collaboration between Traditional Leaders and government officials has now been made a priority, both leaders have been able to recognise the roles they play in serving and stabilising the district's communities, and they will continue doing so from here onwards. The collectively recognised values and long-term aspirations for the O.R. Tambo district will anchor the collaborative relationship between the stakeholders. As a result, a volunteer team will be appointed to ensure the continuity of dialogue.