

PREMIER MP NDLOVU ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIGNING OF THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA (UMP), 25 February 2026, IN UMP, TFOKOMALA

Programme Director.

The Chairperson of the UMP Council, Mr S Mahlalela, and Members of Council.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mpumalanga, Prof Thenjiwe Meyiwa.

The MEC for the Department of Education and all MECs present here today;

The Director General, Ms MM Skosana and all senior officials from both the Government and UMP;

Members of the academic community;

The President of the SRC and all the students;

Our partners and all distinguished guests present here today.

Good evening.

1. Today is indeed a joyous occasion as we gather here to sign this historic Memorandum of Understanding, which seeks to address the real challenges facing our people, particularly unemployment, currently standing at 32.3%.
2. Some believe our speeches are incomplete unless we speak about those who are unemployed. Tonight, however, we turn that narrative on its head. Tonight is about creating jobs, unlocking opportunities, and celebrating an institution that has made it possible.

3. We cherish our first encounter with both the chairperson of the Council, Mr Sabelo Mahlalela and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Thenjiwe Meyiwa whose collaboration has brought us this exciting initiative that will transform lives.
4. On the 3rd of February 2026, we had the honour and privilege of hosting a delegation from UMP, led by both the Chairperson of the Council, Mr Mahlalela, and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Meyiwa. Today's gathering is a direct outcome of that important meeting and the impressive presentation delivered.
5. This gathering marks a significant milestone in the development of our province: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Mpumalanga Provincial Government and the University of Mpumalanga.
6. This is not just a formal signing ceremony; it is a public declaration of intent by two key institutions to collaborate in a structured and sustained manner to promote the social, economic, and intellectual development of Mpumalanga's people.
7. As a provincial government, we are fully aware that the complex challenges facing our province, unemployment, inequality, poverty, and skills shortages, cannot be addressed by government alone.

8. We carry the constitutional mandate to promote sustainable development, improve service delivery and foster socio-economic growth across our Province. It is these responsibilities bestowed on us that demand strong, purposeful partnerships, particularly with institutions of higher learning.
9. Universities are not ivory towers removed from society; they are engines of transformation. They are incubators of innovation and catalysts for economic growth.
10. They play a critical role in shaping society by producing skilled graduates, generating new knowledge, and supporting innovation. However, unemployed youth graduates currently stands at 26.4% while unemployed graduates is at 14.4%. This highlights the urgent need to diversify the skills our young people acquire from institutions of higher learning.
11. The University of Mpumalanga carries a distinct developmental mandate: delivering quality education, promoting the holistic development of students, and advancing socio-economic growth through research and community engagement. These objectives are fully aligned with the government's three priorities set out in our MTDP.

12. Agriculture remains a key strategic driver of economic growth in our province, and as such we aim to establish global competitiveness in primary agriculture and agro-processing, in line with the MTDP priorities, the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan, and the NDP 2030.
13. We have initiated the construction of the International Fresh Produce Market, and its completion marks a strategic milestone for the province.
14. This state-of-the-art facility will create new trade opportunities for both emerging and commercial farmers, positioning Mpumalanga to compete more effectively in local and international markets.
15. Beyond agriculture, it will stimulate growth across multiple sectors and enhance access to essential services for our communities.
16. On operationalisation 156 jobs will be created on the market floor, a total of 150 000 subsistence farmers and small scale farmers will have access to trade their produce.
17. An additional 105 000 jobs at a farm level will be created. A total of 1 600 SMME's, four per ward will be supported to start their own business that will trade their produce with the market.

18. With the signing of this Memorandum of Understanding, we will open yet another opportunity for our farmers to access international export trading through the piloting of large-scale hybrid rice production in our province.

19. This project is estimated to yield up to 10 tons per hectare. It is expected that the project will eventually create over 388,000 employment opportunities for young people and contribute approximately 40.32 billion Rand annually to the provincial economy, amongst many other benefits.

20. This is ground-breaking project targeting at least 1.2mill hectares. It is the first of its kind in the African soil, and it has landed well on the province of the rising sun. We aim to support emerging farmers and small-scale farmers to expand agro-processing opportunities that create sustainable jobs.

21. With the imminent opening of our Mpumalanga International Food Market (MIF), a great platform for aggregation of the hybrid rice produce for international trade export is already in existence.

22. We will continue to leverage private sector funding and fully implement the Agro-Fund blended finance programme, in

partnership with the Land Bank and the National Empowerment Fund (NEF).

23. This fund seeks to enhance access to capital for black farmers, promote agricultural transformation, address sector duality, boost agricultural output, and increase black farmers participation in the agri-economy.

24. In September 2025, a three-year agreement was signed with NEF for blended finance totalling R300 million: R120 million (40%) as a government grant and R180 million (60%) as a N-E-F soft loan at 2% interest.

25. To date, over R100 million has been approved for six finalized deals. This initiative is expected to sustain 640 existing jobs and create 1,950 new employment opportunities.

26. This Agro-Fund will be capacitated to provide an opportunity for financing hybrid rice production in most of our land reform farms. We are committed to demonstrating optimal utilization of all arable land and to bringing all farms into full production.

27. We have identified Tekwane Farm for the piloting the hybrid rice. This initiative maintain the 16 existing jobs but also generate additional sustainable employment opportunities.
28. AS part of this MoU we will identify farms for partnership with the university in the field of agriculture and agri-processing for student research. As the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, we commit to playing a central and enabling role in driving this partnership forward.
29. As A governance responsibility, we will establish and support a joint Steering Committee to oversee and coordinate all initiatives under this MoU. A clear implementation plan must be developed and monitored by the steering committee in a timely manner.
30. This committee will meet regularly to review progress, approve new projects, resolve challenges, and ensure alignment with our provincial objectives. Where consensus cannot be reached, I will ensure that matters are escalated to the designated senior officials for resolution.
31. The MoU clearly states the roles and responsibilities of all parties. Ladies and Gentlemen, this MoU will remain in force for five years, with the option for renewal.

32. There is a Chinese proverb that says “If you plan for one year, plant rice; if you plan for ten years, plant trees; if you plan for hundred years, educate children.”

33. We are gathered here to plant a seed of hybrid rice, which demonstrates our short term plans to respond to the pressing challenges of sluggish economic growth and high unemployment rate.

34. The MoU we are signing today will go a long way in aiding us grow our economy and reduce unemployment. We are not planning for a year but for 100 years as this MoU is signed by a center of learning, the University of Mpumalanga, the first university of our province which is charged with the responsibility of educating our children.

35. It is now my honour to invite our partners to join me as we formally sign this Memorandum of Understanding and begin this important journey together.

I thank you