



**Publication:** Daily Dispatch - Main  
**Title:** Hundreds of EC businesswomen attend Brics event  
**Publish date:** 26 Jul 2023  
**Page:** 6

**Reach:** 10889  
**AVE:**R 18536.86  
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## Hundreds of EC businesswomen attend Brics event

**MKHUSELI SIZANI and ZENARHE GXASHE**

About 250 businesswomen from across the province attended the Brics Women Business Alliance (WBA) in partnership with Nafcoc Eastern Cape meeting on Tuesday.

The meeting, held at the East London ICC, was in preparation for the upcoming Brics Africa WBA Trade conference, scheduled for August 20-21 in Durban, followed by the Brics Summit on August 24 at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg.

During the summit a formal collaboration agreement between the Brics Women's Business Alliance and the Nafcoc Eastern Cape Women's Chamber will be signed.

Tuesday's event was attended by Nafcoc members from Buffalo City Metro, Nelson Mandela Bay and the Joe Gqabi, OR Tambo, Chris Hani and Sarah Baartman municipalities.

Rural development and agrarian reform MEC Nonkqubela Pieters encouraged women to make their presence felt in business.

Referring to the theme of the day — "A call to action in shaping the future of Brics and African women-owned business" — she said it was spot on and inspired women.

"I have no doubt that all stakeholders who have been invited here will contribute immensely to the quality of the agreement.

"It is important that we come up with build-up programmes such as this one so that as women we prepare ourselves for those economic opportunities."

She said SA faced another opportunity in 2025 to host the G20, which brings together the 20 leading economic powers.

"The Eastern Cape attracted a total of \$1.12bn (R19.66bn) and created about 2,184 job opportunities in the province between January and April 2023," the MEC said.

Her department was also fighting hard to ensure indigenous cannabis growers were not left out because of their previous criminal records for



**SHARING IDEAS:** Cwayita Zituta and public works MEC Ntombovuyo Nkopane shake hands during the Brics Women Business Alliance meeting in East London on Tuesday. Picture: MKHUSELI SIZANI

selling dagga.

"Our province is a hub of indigenous cannabis growers in the country.

"Given our endowment compared to other provinces, the Eastern Cape is lobbying the national government to remove legislative barriers of entry for indigenous cannabis growers so they can fully participate in the cannabis industry."

Pieters said in the past financial year, 273 cannabis farmers were supported with hemp cultivation permit applications and 91 permits had been issued by the department.

A total of 44 farmers and 70 department officials were trained in good agricultural practices in the primary cultivation of hemp.

"In addition, the development of both the Magwa and Dohne cannabis

incubation centres is continuing to ensure the cannabis produced in the province is of acceptable quality for both domestic and international markets.

"The Magwa centre is the province's strategic intervention to enable indigenous cannabis growers to produce and process in a compliant medicinal cannabis facility.

"In this financial year, the cannabis programme has been allocated R10.4m to support cannabis growers and operationalise the two centres."

Brics WBA chair Lebongang Zulu said: "We're seeking to forge a partnership with Nafcoc, specifically the women's chamber, so that we can work collectively.

"For us there are specific areas about Brics 2023 strategy. We want to in-

crease trade output but we have to understand what we have in the country. How big is the Eastern Cape in agriculture, what potential and investment is needed to activate it to get to the level of Brics?"

Nafcoc provincial chair Cwayita Zituta said: "The main purpose was for us to engage and collaborate with Brics WBA and for them to present and explain exactly how we can benefit from these five Brics countries, including SA.

"We'll be looking at some empowerment projects that can assist in uplifting the standards of our women and making them economically viable.

"We want to tap into opportunities provided by Brics countries and also to get our projects funded."

