

DRIVING AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC FUTURE THROUGH DIGITAL INNOVATION AT THE 8TH ANNUAL TOWNSHIP ECONOMY SUMMIT

South Africa cannot build an inclusive economic future while leaving the township economy behind. An estimated 22 million people live in South Africa's townships, communities that are home to millions of workers, entrepreneurs and consumers who drive economic activity every day. Yet, for far too long, conversations about the future of the township economy have taken place in corporate boardrooms and conference centres, far removed from the very communities they seek to transform. The township economy is not on the margins of South Africa's economy. It is central to it. This is why we bring the 8th Annual Township Economy Summit to the heart of Tembisa, where the people are. To bring decision-makers closer to grassroots businesses, turn conversations into real economic opportunities and ensure that township entrepreneurs are not merely discussed but are part of shaping South Africa's economic future.

"We cannot continue to speak about the township economy as though it is a market waiting to be discovered. Our entrepreneurs are already building businesses, employing people and serving communities every single day. What is needed now is intentional access to markets, finance, technology and procurement opportunities. The Township Economy Summit exists to bring the people who can open these doors into one space with the entrepreneurs who are ready to grow. We need to move from conversations about potential to visible economic progress."

Bulelani Balabala, Founder and CEO, TEA

According to the FinScope MSME South Africa 2024 Survey, South Africa's townships are home to an estimated 1.3 million micro, small and medium enterprises, with the township economy contributing an estimated R2.4 trillion in economic activity. These figures demonstrate why township entrepreneurship deserves intentional investment, access to markets and a central place in South Africa's economic development agenda.

The impact of the 2025 Summit

The scale of this year's Summit builds on results reported in 2025, when the gathering welcomed 3,841 attendees, hosted 134 exhibitors including 110 small businesses and supported 68 small business suppliers. It brought 38 speakers to the stage across the two Summit days and reported 278 jobs created during the engagement. Beyond the venue, 18,234 people watched the livestream from 11 countries, while combined social media impressions and website hits exceeded 18 million. These figures reflect the 2025 Summit, not projected 2026 results.

What the 2026 Township Economy Summit seeks to achieve

The 8th Annual Township Economy Summit returns to Tembisa, Ekurhuleni on Thursday 19 and Friday 20 November 2026. The national gathering is opening more than 150 exhibition spaces and aims to bring together over 2500 township entrepreneurs alongside business leaders, government departments, corporate decision-makers and organisations working to grow the township economy.

Under the theme **“An Inclusive Economic Future: The Digital Edition”**, the 2026 Summit will focus on the practical steps needed to move township businesses from survival to sustainable growth. It will provide space for business owners to learn directly from industry leaders, discuss barriers to growth, meet prospective customers and partners and better understand opportunities in established and emerging industries.

This year’s programme is built around four growth areas: **Kasi Tech and Digital Transformation**, which looks at the tools and digital payments that help businesses scale; **Manufacturing eKasi**, which examines the use of technology to improve production and access supply chains; **Mobility and Logistics eKasi**, which explores smarter delivery and transport models; and **Retail and Wholesale eKasi**, which focuses on digital trade, payments and distribution. Through keynote discussions, panels and practical sessions, the Summit aims to connect policy and investment conversations to the everyday needs of entrepreneurs.

With South Africa’s local government elections scheduled for 4 November 2026, the Summit will also offer a timely space to discuss the role of municipalities, government departments and corporate South Africa in expanding local procurement, enabling trading and improving the conditions in which township enterprises operate.

Kasi Business Exhibition: over 150 opportunities to access new markets

At the centre of the two-day programme is the Kasi Business Exhibition, a working marketplace where township businesses can display and sell their products, demonstrate their services and meet people who can become customers, distributors, buyers or business partners. More than 150 exhibition opportunities are being made available. Township business stalls are available and separate customised packages are available for corporate organisations and government departments wishing to exhibit.

Kasi Pitching Challenge Grand Finale: a share of R150 000.00

The Kasi Pitching Challenge Grand Finale will also take place within the Summit, giving selected township entrepreneurs the chance to present their businesses to a wider audience and compete for a share of R150 000.00 in prize funding. The national challenge was launched in Daveyton in 2022 and has since attracted more than 5,000 entries, created pitching opportunities for over 380 entrepreneurs and distributed more than R2.9 million in cash and business support, according to TEA’s latest programme reporting.

Entrepreneurs cannot submit a standalone public application for the 2026 Grand Finale. They must first register to attend the Township Economy Summit. An invitation with the application process will then be sent to registered attendees. Businesses will still be required to meet the programme’s eligibility and selection criteria and registration does not guarantee a place in the finals.

The Township Economy Awards conclude the three-day programme

On Saturday 21 November 2026, the 3rd Annual Township Economy Awards will bring the wider programme to a close with a separate ticketed ceremony recognising township business excellence, innovation and community impact across South Africa. The Awards form the final day of the three-day platform, while the Summit and Kasi Business Exhibition take place on 19 and 20 November.

How to register, exhibit or become a partner

Corporate organisations and government departments seeking exhibition or partnership packages may contact the TEA team on 011 572 1033 or at info@JoinUsForTEA.co.za. General information is available at www.TownshipEconomySummit.co.za

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About TEA

TEA is a leading South African township entrepreneurship ecosystem and national implementation partner connecting township and rural businesses with corporate, government and mainstream markets. TEA has a footprint across all nine provinces and has directly impacted over 100 000 township entrepreneurs through practical business development and access to opportunity.

Working with public and private sector partners, TEA delivers enterprise and supplier development programmes, township market research and insights, community engagement, township marketing, brand activations and specialist project implementation. Its field-based insights help organisations understand township consumers, identify credible opportunities and turn enterprise investment into practical programmes with measurable outcomes.

TEA has facilitated grants, equipment and technical support for more than 500 micro and small businesses. TEA connects entrepreneurs to markets, technology, funding opportunities and national business conversations. Led by founder Bulelani Balabala, TEA contributes practical insights to public discussions on township economic development and small-business growth.

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