

RECORD-BREAKING ABSA ESD EXPO BOOSTS SMMES – GENERATING R24 MILLION IN BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

This year's 14th annual Absa Enterprise & Supplier Development (ESD) Expo, held alongside the 19th annual Smart Procurement World Indaba, wrapped up with record-breaking attendance and over R24 million in business opportunities generated for South African small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

The two-day event, hosted in Johannesburg by Smart Procurement and sponsored by Absa, drew 476 SMMEs, 31 corporate procurement teams and nearly 1 700 visitors. "This year's enormous success cements the Absa ESD Expo's reputation as South Africa's leading enterprise and supplier development event. The expo recorded 6 451 total engagements - it's highest in 14 years," the organisers report.

With SMMEs responsible for a conservatively estimated 60% of employment in South Africa and contributing significantly to GDP, this increasingly important gathering aims to create real opportunities for small businesses to participate in corporate supply chains. As unemployment and economic inequality remain key national challenges, strategic supplier development is a crucial lever for inclusive growth, states Smart Procurement ESD project manager Nyasha Mate.

"This year's expo was not just about exhibitions; it was about tangible results and sustainable, long-term transformation," comments Kgaleitso Tlhoale, Enterprise Development head at Absa. "We're proud to support a platform where SMMEs gain direct access to buyers, capital, knowledge and long-term procurement pipelines."

Structured matchmaking sessions connected SMMEs with procurement professionals from major organisations. The event resulted in 654 qualified leads with an estimated value of R17 million, and 145 confirmed onsite deals worth R7.6 million.

In addition to deal-making, SMMEs took part in capacity-building sessions focused on funding readiness, tendering processes, compliance and digital transformation. These sessions were delivered through the Knowledge Hub and Smart Supplier Conference, with many entrepreneurs noting the practical value of the content.

Buyers attending the Supplier MatchUp sessions cited a strong interest in discovering agile, innovative suppliers aligned with enterprise and supplier development (ESD) targets. Many reported that the event not only provided new sourcing opportunities but also fostered insight into the barriers facing small businesses.

Small business owners also had high praise for this year's expo. "The conversations and networking sessions gave us practical insights into supply chain readiness, access to

finance, and building sustainable enterprise partnerships - areas that are crucial for scaling businesses like ours," said Zanda Isaacs of Ting Tang Tea, one of the participating SMMEs.

For many entrepreneurs, the expo served as a critical stepping stone.

"It was an eye-opening experience, especially for me as an emerging entrepreneur," said Nonsikelelo Mhlongo of Mhlongo Omhle Enterprise. "The importance of networking and being visible in the right rooms really came through."

"It was one of the best experiences I have had in showcasing my business," commented Hendrick Thabo Mofokeng from Slovalala Locksmith.

According to Bella Chirwa from Siphile Consulting, the event "made one think bigger".

"As South Africa seeks pathways to economic resilience and job creation, platforms like the Absa ESD Expo are becoming increasingly vital," Mate asserts. "By bridging the gap between large buyers and high-potential small suppliers, events like this not only unlock business opportunities but also support the broader national goal of inclusive economic participation."

In addition to the main sponsor Absa, this event was made possible with the support of the following ESD-focused host organisations:

Adapt IT, Afrimat, AfriSam, Alex Forbes, Aurik, BP, Barloworld, GEMS, IBM, Komatsu, KZN EDTA, Discovery, Pepsico, PPECB, SAAB, NCP, Rainprop, Telkom, Maskew Miller Learning, SEDFA, Sasol, TDMA

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ABOUT SMART PROCUREMENT WORLD:

Smart Procurement World (SPW) is the largest professional development event for procurement and inbound supply chain, supported and endorsed by industry professional bodies. SPW also achieves professional development for procurement and supply chain professionals while achieving economic development objectives in each region through enterprise, supplier development linking small business to supply chain.

Contact info@smartprocurementworld.com for event inquiries.

