

KZN Business Conversations reveal the province undersells itself

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KwaZulu-Natal needs to be confident about its business offerings, rather than undersell itself as a business destination. This emerged at KZN Business Conversations, which brought together some of the country's top business minds at the Oyster Box Hotel in Umhlanga on Thursday. The first installment of KZN Business Conversations was aimed at kickstarting the dialogue around how business leaders could actively play a role in changing the narrative around KZN.



Sandile Zungu speaking at KZN Business Conversations

CEO of the Durban Chamber of Commerce and Industry Dumile Cele, one of the panellists at the breakfast meeting, said, "Perhaps we have undersold ourselves when it comes to our business and growing our economy and some of the things investors are looking for."

Fellow panellist, businessman Kim Macilwaine, agreed, saying that KwaZulu-Natalians are the worst at selling themselves and are innately modest. Guest speaker Allan Hirsch from Hirsch's believes trading in KwaZulu-Natal has distinct advantages. "The workforce in KZN is amazing and deliveries are a lot quicker and relatively inexpensive to the rest of the country."

CEO of the Kagiso Media Group Mark Harris encouraged businesses in the province. "You can establish a brand on what KZN is at the moment, or you can look ahead to what KZN aspires to be. For me if KwaZulu-Natal looks ahead it needs to look at maybe what the economy needs to look like in the future. I think it has got to do with what business is going to do with KZN into the future."



Kim Macilwaine, Nicola Tyler, Boni Mchunu, Dumile Cele and Hamish Erskine



Nick Grubb, Allan Hirsch, Boni Mchunu, Sandile Zungu, Mark Harris and Eric Apelgren

Sandile Zungu, executive chairman of Zungu Investments Company, said it was no accident that he is so heavily invested in

the region. "In KwaZulu-Natal we have very strong social partnerships and there is a culture of dialogue among these social partners." He adds that to take full advantage of the conditions in KZN, "we should move all our businesses up the innovation curve and force greater collaboration with human capital in KZN." Eric Apelgren Head of Department for International and Governance Relations within eThekweni, also urged businesses to be innovative and disruptive in their thinking.

While there was a range of suggestions on the way forward, East Coast Radio General Manager Boni Mchunu said she would like to see a movement emanating from the first KZN Business Conversations. She said, "It was amazing to get so many great business minds together in one room and it is clear that we all agree it is time to mobilise around KZN as a business destination. We now need to align the private and public sector to talk to how we can achieve this."

Mchunu has added that a core team will be identified that will work together to chart the way forward.

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