

## SA's furniture sector must adapt and innovate

As global trends in technology, sustainability, and shifting consumer behaviour continue to transform industries, South Africa's furniture sector must evolve through adaptation and innovation.



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This was emphasised by the Trade, Industry and Competition (dtic) Deputy Minister, Alexandra Abrahams in her keynote address at the annual Furniture Design Competition Awards ceremony on Friday, 27 March 2026.

Speaking at the ceremony held in Midrand, Gauteng, Abrahams said the government's vision is to build a fast-growing, profitable, inclusive and sustainable furniture industry that creates jobs, reduces poverty and contributes to economic growth.

However, she stressed that the sector must adapt and innovate to remain competitive and achieve this vision.

"Our commitment to strengthening local industry must be reflected in concrete, sustained action wherever is feasible. The furniture sector has been designated a priority sector since 2012 and remains crucial to the government's plans to boost manufacturing and industrial capacity.

"We should recognise the enabling role government can play in this industry: with the state procuring more than R2bn in furniture annually, public expenditure can be positioned in a disciplined and market-supportive manner to expand opportunities for local manufacturers, crowd in private investment, and strengthen employment across the value chain," Abrahams explained.

She noted that, if strategically positioned, this demand can anchor industrial capability, strengthen supplier networks, and ensure that government spending delivers meaningful economic returns for South African workers and industries.

“The dtic is driving a range of programmes funding initiatives that directly support these transformative efforts. The Furniture Challenge Fund has disbursed over R100 million to support nearly 20 companies, while the Furniture Export Strategy opens new markets.

“This is bolstered by [the] private sector’s own investments in raw materials and factory expansions, which will only serve to strengthen the sector in the long term. Together, these initiatives are laying the foundation to establish a sustainable and globally competitive industry in South Africa.”

Furthermore, Abrahams noted the challenges that are faced by the industry, including intensifying competition from imports and rapidly expanding e-commerce platforms, limitations in design capability and broader skills shortages, which continue to inhibit the sector’s ability to move up the value chain and compete effectively in both domestic and export markets.

She added that, in the context of a low-growth domestic market and an international market shaped by turbulent geopolitical events, the government, through the dtic and partners, are working to overcome these challenges.

“The Furniture Design Competition showcases the creativity of our students and professionals, introduces new products to the market, and elevates South African furniture on the global stage,” Abrahams said.

The ceremony was hosted by the dtic in partnership with industry stakeholders, including the South African Furniture Initiative, the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), and Proudly South African.

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