SQF NEWS

SiyaQhubeka Forestry for Life

Stakeholder Newsletter for SiyaQhubeka Forests 2024

AMANZI – umthombo wempilo yomphakathi



Amalunga omphakathi kanye nabasebenzi bakwa-SQF, amalunga kahulumeni kanye nabaholi bendabuko bebungaza ukuvulwa kwe-borehole entsha eMfekayi.

I-borehole yaseMfekayi enikelwe ngabakwa-SQF, ezoletha amanzi ahambayo ahlanzekile emphakathini owadingayo, yavulwa ngokusemthethweni ngoLwesi-hlanu mhlaka-27 kuSepthemba...

IMfekayi indawo yasemakhaya engaphansi kukaMasipala uMtubatuba. Ebantwini abangu-17 700 abahlala khona, bangu-1 699 kuphela abanamanzi ahamba ngamapayipi ezindlini zabo. Lokhu kusho ukuthi abahlali abangaphezu kuka-15 930 baphoqeleka ukuba bafune amanzi ezindaweni ezahlukene – okuyinselelo yansuku zonke futhi kuyingozi yezempilo.

Yize le ndawo ingayesweli imvula, isomiso sesivame kakhulu kanti lokhu kudala isimo esibucayi sokuntuleka kwamanzi, ikakhulukazi kubantu asebekhulile kanye nalabo abangakwazi ukuzihambela.

Iyaqhubeka kwikhasi 4



UMnuz Hezrom Kunene esika iribhini ngosuku lokuvulwa kwe-borehole. Esithombeni kukhona noMnuz Israel Nyawo we-Footprint Holdings, Induna uMfekayi kanye neNduna uMdluli.


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Area Manager's Message

Every morning, as I start the workday, I think of our people...

For us to be successful as a business, our people must come first – our staff, our contractors and neighbouring community members. They are the foundation of this business. As a manager, you have to understand the people and the team – their strengths and weaknesses in order to bring out the best in them.

A big part of people management is trust. We have entrusted our people to operate very expensive machines, we must trust our people to take care of the environment and the plantations, and to work hard to meet the expectations that we set.



Hezrom Kunene, SQF Area Manager

That is why we must take utmost care of our people – their health, their safety and their overall wellbeing. In turn, our staff, contractors and communities will take care of SiyaQhubeka Forests, and the business will continue to thrive.

The year started off on a tough footing, we were struggling with deliverables because of intermittent mill breakdowns. But we clawed our way back, making up for all the volumes that we had lost.

In terms of safety, we have achieved a fantastic safety record. Throughout the year, we recorded just one Lost Time Injury (LTI). There were four vehicle-related incidents to be noted, but fortunately none of these resulted in injuries.

We responded positively with a Safe Travel Campaign to build awareness around this. We also initiated the MoRo (Moving Objects and Rotating Objects) Campaign to heighten awareness, in addition to the monthly First Party Audits and daily toolbox talks, which are all part of our quest to ensure the safety of all employees and contractors.

Our mobile clinic tirelessly travelled all regions in which we operate, doing health checks and offering free services to the neighbouring communities and our teams on the ground. Those that are on chronic medication are given special attention and assisted with access to their medication without hassles. The mobile clinic is an initiative we pride ourselves in.

On the environmental side, we have managed to strike the balance between maintaining a productive business and protecting the environment. We have had a number of environmental field days and campaigns to promote biodiversity and sustainability. This is in addition to the constant management of our conservation areas by our foresters and contractors.

I am proud to say that we have achieved 99% in our AIP (Alien Invasive Plant) results, which is the best in the business.

The uniqueness of SQF is that we work alongside protected wild animals. This is a privilege and a responsibility, and we strive to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our workforce and our wildlife. There were no incidents relating to our wildlife, and I commend everyone on this success.

We also have the honour of being the guardians of the rare and threatened white Kniphophia, a plant that is endemic to our Langepan Wetland, meaning it is the only place it occurs in the world. We are seeing this plant flourish, and we will continue to protect and monitor its progress going forward.

This year we faced some extreme weather conditions – experiencing frost damage for the first time in history! We also recorded some of the dryest conditions in the past 10 years. This, coupled with high wind speeds, caused a number of fires. We intensified our fire awareness campaigns in schools, and firefighting crews embarked on fitness training and weekly drills. Working together with our local authorities also helps to minimise fire-related loses.

In terms of our stakeholder engagement and social upliftment projects, we have made huge strides in our communities. This is a collaborative effort – by engaging with our traditional authorities we can identify the direst needs in our neighbouring communities. We can then implement meaningful projects in collaboration with our contractors, creating local jobs and improving the quality of life in our communities. Healthy communities are vital to the success of the business.

Our CSI engagement focusses on the pillars of education, youth skills development and infrastructure.

A flagship project that I would like to highlight is the Borehole Project in Mfekayi. We have provided the infrastructure to deliver clean running water to the community, which will vastly improve their quality of life.

A project that has really surprised me is the Intercropping Project – where community members are growing food crops in the rows between our trees, addressing both food security and job creation. SQF supplies seedlings, access to land and 'a watchful eye' over the crops. I can see this project growing from strength to strength as we get more prepared to support our community farmers next year.

As we prepare for the festive season, I urge all my staff and contractors to stay focussed, stay calm and most importantly... STAY SAFE. I wish you all happy and peaceful holiday.

Ukuthuthukisa Impumelelo: Kunikelwe ngezibali (Calculators) ze-Casio ezingu-100 eNtongande High School

Njengoba unyaka usuyophela, abakwaSiyaQhubeka Forests baphendule isicelo esiphuthumayo esivela eNtongande High School KwaMbonambi, isikole ebesibhekene nenkinga yokuswela izibali zesayensi ngesikhathi esibucayi sokulungiselela izivivinyo.

Abakwa-SQF balekelela ngokunikela ngezibali zohlobo lwe-Casio, okuzonika abafundi ithuba elihle lokwenza kahle kwizivivinyo zabo ze-maths nesayensi. Lolu sizo olunyusa ukuzethemba yilona obeludingwa yilesi sikole ukuze sifinyelele kwinjongo yaso yokuphumelela kwabafundi ngo-90% kulo nyaka ka-2024.

INtongande High School inabafundi abangu-1209, abangu-95 babo bafunda i-Pure Mathematics neSayensi emabangeni 11 no-12.

Abazali abaningi abanawo amandla okuthenga izibali zesayensi ngenxa yokubheda kwesimo somnotho emphakathini. Ngaphambi kwalo mnikelo, laba bafundi be-maths nesayensi babesebenzisa izibali zesayensi ezingu-20 kuphela bebonke.

“Abantu abaqondi ukuthi kufanele sibolekane futhi silindane ukuze sisebenzise isibali,” kuchaza umfundi ohamba phambili ebangeni leshuminambili uNompilo Mbuyazi. “Lezi zibali ezintsha zohlobo lwe-Casio zizosisiza kakhulu ngesikhathi sezivivinyo. Zizosisiza sifunde futhi sikwazi ukuthola izimpendulo ze-maths nesayensi, obekungeke kwenzeke ngaphandle kwalo mnikelo.”

U-Nompilo ufake isicelo sokwenza izifundo zobudokotela e-Walter Sisulu University esifundazweni sase-Eastern Cape.

Ngaphezu komnikelo wezibali, abakwa-SQF baphinde banikela ngamaphepha ohlobo lwe-Rotatrim kanye namaphepha okuzilungiselela izivivinyo ukuze beseke baphinde balungiselele abafundi izivivinyo zabo zokugcina zonyaka. Le minikelo kuhloswe ngayo ukuhlinzeka abafundi ngamathuluzi abawadingayo ukuze benze kahle ezifundweni zabo. Izibali zingamathuluzi ayigugu okuxazulula izibalo ezinzima nokubala ngendlela okuyiyona, kuthi amaphepha okufunda wona asiza abafundi bazilungiselele futhi babone ukuthi izivivinyo zingama kanjani.

“Ngiziqhenya kakhulu ngabafundi bami. Bakhombisile ukuthi bangcono kunezimo zabo,” kusho uthishanhloko uNkk Nokulunga Mtambo. “Baphokophelele ikusasa futhi banecebo.”

UNkk Mtambo uveze ukuthi wafunda eNtongande High School ngeminyaka ka-1988 kuya ku-1989 ngaphambi kokuthola umfundaze wokuyofunda Ohlange High School eNanda. Wabuyela kulesi sikole esenguthisha ngo-2007, waba wuthishanhloko ngo-2021.

“Umbono wami wakusasa ngalesi sikole ukubona umphakathi wonkana uthuthuka ngemfundo,” kusho yena mayelana namathemba akhe ngekusasa. “Siyisibani kulo mphakathi – sesikhiqize odokotela nonjiniyela yize sinezingqinamba.”



AbakwaSiyaQhubeka Forests banikele ngezibali ezingu-100, amaphepha okufundela izivivinyo kanye namaphepha ohlobo lwe-Rotatrim eNtongande High School, ukubanika usizo abaludingayo ngaphambi kwezivivinyo zokugcina.



Umfundi ohamba phambili ebangeni leshuminanye uNompilo Mbuyazi (kwesokunxele), ungomunye wabafundi abathembisayo kwabangu-95 abafunda i-Pure Maths neSayensi.



Uthishanhloko onentshisekelo uNokulunga Mtambo (kwesokudla) uyabethemba kakhulu abafundi bakhe njengoba belungiselela izivivinyo zabo zokugcina.

UNkk Mtambo uchaze wathi ingqalasizinda yesikole iyona nkinga enkulu kunazo zonke ababhekene nazo njengamanje, njengoba amagumbi okufundela nempahla kugugile.

Yize kunje, isikole silokhu sithuthuka kusukela athatha izintambo njengothishanhloko, basuka ekuphumeleleni kwabafundi abangu-56% ngonyaka ngo-2021 baya ku-79% ngo-2022, bafinyelela ku-82% ngo-2023.

“Ngezimpelasonto namaholidi, sinezifundo ezengeziwe,” kusho yena ekhuluma ngokwenza kahle kwesikole. “Lemizamo eyengeziwe ikhombisa lokhu okungazuzwa ngokubekezela nokusebenza kanzima.”

Umphathi wakwa-SQF uMnuz Hezrom Kunene uqaphele ukuthi lo mnikelo uhambisana nenjongo yakwa-SQF yokuthuthukisa imiphakathi ngezinhlelo zentuthuko eziqhubekayo kanye nokwakhela iNingizimu Afrika ikusasa elingcono.

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AMANZI – umthombo wempilo yomphakathi

AbakwaSiyaQhubeka Forests basabele kule nkinga ngokwakha i-borehole kanokusho kanye nethange lamanzi elingamalitha angu-5000 ku-Ward 19 eMfekayi. Le borehole izohlinzeka ngamanzi ahambayo kumakhulu abantu iphinde ithuthukise izinga lempilo.

Umphathi wakwa-SQF, u-Hezrom Kunene uvule ngokusemthethweni le borehole emcimbini obuthanyelwe abaholi bendawo okuhlanganisa Induna uMnuz S Mfekayi neNduna uMnuz Bheki Mdluli, Ikhansela le-Ward uMnuz Mandla Ndlela, uMnuz Israel Nyawo we-Footprints Holdings, amalunga omphakathi kanye nabasebenzi bakwa-SQF.

Izalukazi zendawo azichithanga sikhathi, kube ukuvulwa nje kweborehole, zaphuthuma zagcwalisa amabhakede azo ngamanzi ahlanzekile. Uhleko nokumamatheka kwabo kukhombise ukuthi lomsebenzi ube yimpumelelo kakhulu.

Ikhansela uNdlela ube ngowokuqala ukuphuza lamanzi, ekhombisa ukulethemba izinga lawo.

Ilunga lomphakathi uFakazile Mkhwanazi uveze injabulo yakhe ngesikhathi egcwalisa ibhakede lakhe elingamalitha angu-20. “Siyajabula kakhulu!” kusho yena. “Ngangilanda amanzi esiphethwini noma ngihambe ibanga elide ngiyowakha emapayipini angaphansi, kodwa sasingekho isiqiniseko sokuthi ngizowathola. Siyabonga kakhulu SiyaQhubeka ngalokhu. Asikwazi nokuchaza ukuthi kuzishintshe kangakanani izimpilo zethu.”

Ukwakhiwa kwale borehole kukhokhelwe ngabakwa-SQF behlangene ne-Footprints Holdings, inkampani yokuthutha izingodo esebenzela uSiyaQhubeka.

“Amanzi anika abantu isithunzi,” kuphawula umqondisi we-Footprints, uMnuz Israel Nyawo. “Sinenkinga yokutholakala kwamanzi kuzwelonke. Ngakho-ke le borehole iyisinyathelo esisodwa esincane ekulungiseni le nkinga. Ngigqugquzela umphakathi ukuba uyithathe njengeyawo, uyivikele futhi uyiphathe kahle. Ngokufanayo, umphakathi kufanele usize ukuvikela izihlahla zethu ngoba amahlathi awumthombo obalulekile wemisebenzi nokuziphilisa.

Lo msebenzi wenzeke ngenxa yokubambisana, kusho uNyawo. “Siyabonga kwabakwaSiyaQhubeka ngokuqala lo msebenzi.”

Ubungozi bokumba iziphethu

“Abantu bakulendawo sekuneminyaka bezimbela iziphethu,” kuchaza uMphathi wakwa-SQF uMnuz Hezrom Kunene, ngesikhathi elula izinyawo nekhehla lasendaweni, uMnuz Mbuyazi, ukuyobona lapho umphakathi ubuzimbela khona befuna amanzi. UMnuz Mbuyazi uchaze wathi ukuze umphakathi uthole amanzi ahlanzekile, bebedinga ukukhipha isihlabathi, izinsalela kanye nodoti emigodini ejulile, ibanga elingangamamitha angu-50 ubude nenkulisa yesendaweni. “Amanzi esiphethu awabi khona njalo kanti ngezinye izikhathi kufanele kumbiwe phakathi kwamabili ebusuku ukuze kuzosa amanzi esekhona,” kuveza uMnuz Mbuyazi.

Lokhu kungumsebenzi omkhulu futhi othatha isikhathi eside, kanti namanzi lawa angaba sengcupheni yokuba namagciwane aphuma kwindle yabantu noma yezilwane, futhi angaphinde abe yingozi ezinganeni ezincane uma zingawela kuso lesi siphethu esisuke sesimbiwe.



UFakazile Mkhwanazi ube ngowokuqala ukugcwalisa ibhakede lakhe ngamanzi e-borehole entsha.



uMnuz Israel Nyawo we Footprints Holdings, ekhuluma nomphakathi ngokubaluleka kokunakekela nokuvikela i borehole.

“Le borehole ifike kubantu abafanele ngesikhathi esifanele,” kusho uMnuz Kunene. “Umphakathi ubungenayo enye indlela yokuthola amanzi ngaphandle kwalezi ziphethu.”

Indawo efanele le borehole

Induna uMfekayi uchaze wathi lezi ziphethu bezisetshenziswa abantu abahlala ibanga elingamakhilomitha angu-10 kude nazo.



Kusukela wesokunxele, uMnuz Goodman Mkhwanazi woMtubatuba local Municipality, uMnuz Hezrom Kunene we SQF, induna yesigodi uMnuz Mfekayi, uMnuz Israel Nyawo we Footprints Holdings kanye nenduna uMnuz Mdluli.

Kunamadamu lapho kuphuza khona imfuyo kodwa amanzi edamu awakufanele ukuphuza noma ukupheka.

Le borehole entsha isendaweni lapho izokwazi khona ukuhlinzeka izikhungo zomphakathi ezintathu ngamanzi ahlanzekile – inkulisa Ntulufakazi Creche, ihholo lomphakathi iMfekayi Community Hall kanye nesikole samabanga aphansi Ntulufakazi Primary School, zonke lezi zikhungo ziyibanga elingangamamitha angu-100 ukusuka kwi-borehole entsha.

Ukhansela uNdlela ubalule ukuthi umasipala uhlela ukuwahlola amanzi, yize umphakathi ususebenzise iziphethu iminyaka emningi, ngakho-ke ukholwa ukuthi la manzi aphuma emhlabeni asezingeni eliphezulu.

Ngokombiko kahulumeni, ukutholakala kwamanzi ahlanzekile naphuzekayo eMfekayi sekube yinkathazo enkulu. Le ndawo ithola amanzi eMtubatuba Water Treatment Works, yona ewathola kumfula uMfolozi. Yize kunjalo, le ndawo isibhekane nezingqinamba ngenxa yezimo zesomiso, okuholele ekuncipheni kwamanzi emfuleni.

Imizamo yokulungisa lezi zinkinga iyaqhubeka, okuhlanganisa ukuthuthukiswa kwengqalasizinda yokuhlinzeka ngamanzi ukuze amanzi atholakale kangcono. Nakuba ikhona le mizamo, kunezinhlelo zokukala amanzi abantu abawatholayo, okusho ukuthi izindawo ezahlukene zithola amanzi ngezikhathi ezahlukene.

Le borehole entsha izohlinzeka ngamanzi angakaliwe, ahlanzekile futhi ahambayo, okuzovala lesi sikhala esikhona ekulethweni kosizo.

Abase-KwaMbo Drilling bafake le borehole entsha kanye nengqalazisinda ehlangene nayo. “Sifake isitende esingamamitha angu-1.5, ithange elingamalitha angu-5000, isifutho kanye nempompi yethusi,” kuchaza uNkululeko Xaba weKwaMbo Drilling.



uMnuz Hezrom Kunene kanye nelunga lomphakathi uMnuz Mbuyazi bebuka umgodi wesiphethu la umphakathi obuthola khona amanzi.

Lo msebenzi udale amathuba omsebenzi amane kule ndawo futhi wathatha amasonto amathathu ukuba uphele.

“Wumsebenzi osezingeni elikhulu kakhulu futhi uzosiza umphakathi iminyaka eminingi ezayo,” esho ngokuzethemba.

Celebrating Mtubatuba's Top 10 matrics

The Inkosi uMtubatuba Mayoral Excellence Awards were held on 16 February 2024 at the Inkosi Mzondeni Civic Centre, with the aim of recognising the area's top academic achievers for matric 2023 and promoting career development in partnership with local stakeholders from the private sector.



Linda Vilakazi gave an overview of SQF and the forestry sector as well as congratulating the award-winning students, schools and educators.

Forestry was identified as one of the key local industries that can assist with youth development, and so SQF was invited to partner with the Municipality and other stakeholders in making the event a success.

The event was attended by the award-winning learners, their families and respective schools, traditional leaders including Inkosi N Mkhwanazi, sponsors, The Department of Education and senior members of the Municipality.

The highlight of the event was the 'Awards for the Top 10' achievers within the municipal jurisdiction. Each of the Top 10 students was awarded a laptop, tablet, trophy, and certificate – to honour their hard work and motivate future generations to strive for excellence in their academic endeavours.

The Top 10 students were as follows: Thabile Gumede (7 Dis), Nkosinamandla Ngcamu (7 Dis), Nokwanda Dube (7 Dis), Masimbonge Mathaba (7 Dis), Siphamandla Ntombela (7 Dis), Alwande Gumede (7 Dis), Andiswa Thabede (7 Dis), Bouchrat Mohamed (7 Dis), Anele Zungu (7 Dis), Sfundo Manqele (6 Dis).

SiyaQhubeka Forests contributed three laptops and refreshments for the academic awards ceremony.

Nokwanda Dube, currently studying Actuarial Science at WITS, expressed her thanks to SQF for the donation: "We are really grateful," she said on receiving the laptop. "Most parents from Mtuba cannot afford laptops, and at university - nearly all the work is done online. I have been using a computer at the university LAN, which can be very challenging. This laptop is



The top achievers in Matric 2023, for the Mtubatuba municipal jurisdiction.



Linda Vilakazi, Thembinkosi Khumalo (Mayor of uMhlabuyalingana Local Municipality) and Mxolisi Mthethwa (Mayor of iNkosi Mtubatuba Local Municipality) with three top students who received brand new laptops from SQF.

going to make the world of difference, for accessing learning resources and submitting assignments on time."

"It is a major disadvantage not having a laptop," added Bouchrat Mohamed, who is studying Psychology at UKZN. "You cannot download all the digital learning material to your phone. Some lectures are only online, so I do not think we would be able to complete our degrees without this assistance."

Other categories to receive awards of recognition included: Best Circuit, Best Educators, and Schools that obtained 100% Pass Rate.

Mondi Forest Operations Manager, Linda Vilakazi, took the podium to address the large gathering on behalf of the company. Linda gave an overview of the forestry sector and explained how SQF is uniquely positioned as a partnership between Mondi, its black economic empowerment partners, the government, and local communities. "We are passionate about education and youth development," said Vilakazi, "and we are committed to working with our neighbouring communities. We would like to congratulate the successful students, schools and educators. These laptops will enhance your learning and help pave the way to success."

Vilakazi urged the learners to strive for top results at their respective universities. He went on to describe some of the community projects that SQF had recently invested in and outline the various opportunities that forestry offers - from



A high school choir graced the event with choral music.

bursaries to SMME development (through Mondi Zimele) and contractor opportunities throughout the forestry value chain.

Words of encouragement and guidance were also shared by the Mayor Cllr Mxolisi Mthethwa and representatives from each of the sponsors, namely MTN, Tendele Coal Mining, African Health Research Institute, Umfolozi Sugar Mill and Smart Build.

Municipal Manager, Mr T Xulu noted that investing in education is the key to fighting poverty and he highlighted the importance of public-private partnerships in this effort. Overall, the Mayoral Excellence Awards was a testament to this spirit of collaboration.

Ukuvuselela ukufunda nokubhala:
Umtapo wolwazi omusha eNsiwa Primary School

AbakwaSiyaQhubeka Forests bavule umtapo wolwazi olungiswe kabusha, kanokusho, esikoleni samabanga aphansi iNsiwa Primary School eMatholonjeni, e-Port Durnford. uSQF ushintshe igumbi elaliyindawo enezincwajana kulesiskole walenza iLibrary eyisizinda esigqamile esivuselelekile, esizovuselela uthando lokufunda kubafundi bayo yonke iminyaka.

Umcimbi wokuvula lomtapo wolwazi wenziwa ngenyanga kaNhlaba kulo nyaka, wawuthanyelwe abasebenzi bakwa-SQF, abasebenzi basesikoleni, isigungu esilawula isikole, abaholi bendabuko, kanye nabavela kuMnyango WezeMfundo.

Uthishanhloko wesikole uMnuz Themba Tshabalala, ekhuluma ngosuku lomcimbi wokuvulwa komtapo wolwazi, usho amagama anohlonze ngamandla okufunda: “Ngiyindoda esihambele amazwe amaningi. Sengike ngaya e-Paris, eNgilandi kanye nase-New York… yize ngingakaze ngiye khona ngokwami! Incwadi inamandla okukuthatha ikuyise ezindaweni ezikude ozazela emaphusheni akho kuphela.”

UMnuz uTshabalala uqhubeke wagqugquzela othisha nabazali ukuba bakhulise usiko lokufunda ezikoleni. Ugcizelele ukubaluleka kokufunda ngokuqonda, ekhuluma ngokukhathazeka kwakhe ngokuthi abafundi abayisikhombisa kwabayishumi abafunda ibanga lesine abakwazi kahle ukufunda.

“Sizoyiphatha kahle le mpahla,” kusho yena evala. “Siyabonga kwabakwaSiyaQhubeka futhi siyabonga kumkhandlu wabaholi bendabuko ngokusifakela isicelo sethu somtapo wolwazi.”

Ukwakheka kwamathuba omsebenzi nokunikelwa kwezicathulo zesikole

Ukulungiswa komtapo wolwazi kwenziwa usomabhizinisi wasendaweni, uMnuz Musa Dindi weDindimusa’s Construction.

Ukulungiswa komtapo wolwazi kuhlanganise ukupendwa kwezindonga, ukufakwa kwamashalofu ezincwadi, ukufakwa kukakhaphethi, amabhodi ophahla lwangaphakathi, amakhethini, i-air-conditioning, ifenisha entsha (izihlalo namatafula), amakhushini kanye namathoyizi abafundi ahlukile enziwe ngezandla.

“Ngazalwa ngakhulela khona la eMatholonjeni,” kusho uDindi. “Kube yintokozo kakhulu ukusebenza kulesi sikole ngoba singesinye sezikole ezindala kakhulu kulo mphakathi.”

Ngesikhathi ematasa nalo msebenzi, uMnuz Dindi waqaphela ukuthi abafundi abaningi babegqoke izicathulo ezigugile. Lokhu kwamgqugquzela ukuba anikele ngezicathulo zesikole eziyishumi ezintsha sha zohlobo lwe-Toughies.



Umphathi we SQF uHezrom Kunene kanye nothishomkhulu weskole uThemba Tshabalala, besika iribhini, okukhomba ukuvulwa ngokusemthethweni koMtapo wolwazi.



Izithombe phezulu nangezansi: Abafundi bezitika ngezincwadi ezintsha sha ezingu 2000 abaxhaswe ngazo uSiyaQhubeka Forests.





Abafundi base Nsiwa Primary becula umculo wenjabulo nentokozo kubungaza ukuvulwa kwe Library.

IDindimusa's Construction iqashe abantu abane ngokugcwele kanye nabayishuminanye abangamatoho, okuyigalelo elikhulu ekwakheni amathuba omsebenzi emphakathini.

Amazwi okukhuthaza

Umsebenzi wokulungiswa komtapo wolwazi eNsiwa wahlelwa ngu-Community Development Facilitator wakwa-SQF, uNkz Similo Magwaza. UNkz Magwaza wathatha ithuba wancoma umsebenzi kaMnuz uDindi. "Wenze umsebenzi omuhle kakhulu," kusho yena. "Kuyajabulisa ukubona usomabhizinisi wasendaweni esebenza ngokuziqhenya okungaka."

UNkz Magwaza uqhubeke wachaza ukuthi ukulungiswa komtapo wolwazi kwenziwa ngokuhlanganyela ne-Family Literacy Project, inhlangano egxile ekuxhaseni ezokufunda nokubhala ezindaweni zasemakhaya. I-Family Literacy Project yabamba umhlangano wokuqeqesha abasebenzi basesikoleni iNsiwa baphinde bakhetha izincwadi ezingu-2000 ezizonikelwa ngabakwa-SQF.

UNkz Corné Peters, oyi-Social Programme Coordinator kwaMondi, wethula inkulumo evusa ugqozi ngokubaluleka kokutshala imali kwezemfundo.

"Silungiselela isizukulwane esizayo," kusho yena. "Sivule umtapo wolwazi ongadalela lezi zingane amathuba. Uma uthanda ukufunda, uzofunda ukuthanda ulwazi. Uzothuthukisa ukucabanga kwakho, ufunde ubuholi futhi ube ngumenzi wezinqumo.

"Njenge-SQF sijabule kakhulu ngalo mtapo wolwazi," kusho yena, "ngoba ikusasa lebhizinisi lethu lihambisana nempumelelo yesizukulwane esilandelayo."

UNkz Peters uqhubeke wagcizelela ukuthi ukulungiswa komtapo wolwazi yisinyathelo sokuqala esibalulekile emizamweni yokubhekana nezinkinga zokufunda nokubhala, kodwa impumelelo nokuqhubeka kwalo msebenzi kubaluleke kakhulu.

"Umtapo wolwazi udinga ukuba yingxenye yokufunda esikoleni," kusho yena.

Uthisha wesiNgisi, uSnenhlanhla Zibani, wayejabule kakhulu ngalo mtapo wolwazi omusha. Ubalule ukuthi ukubeka phambili ukufunda esikoleni kuzosiza ukuthuthukisa ukuqonda kwabafundi ezifundweni zabo zonke. Ukufunda kusemqoka esigabeni se foundation phase," kusho yena. "Izindatshana ziphinde zikhulule imicabango yakho. Lezi zincwadi ziyisipho sangunaphakade."

UNkk Khubisa, uthishanhloko wesikole samabanga aphansi iPhalane Primary School, ukhulumele uMnyango WezeMfundo. Uphakamise amaphuzu abalulekile ngezinzuzo eziningi zokufunda, okuhlanganisa ukuhlonza, ukuzifundela, ukubhala kanye nokuziphatha ngendlela eqotho. Unxenxe isikole ukuba simeme umphakathi wonkana ukuba uzovakashela umtapo wolwazi, basebenzise izinsiza futhi bazivikele.

Umphathi wakwa-SQF, uMnuz Hezrom Kunene, ukhulume ngezinhlelo zakwa-SQF eziqhubekayo zokutshala imali kwezemfundo, ukuze baxhase futhi bathuthukise imiphakathi eyakhelene namahlathi abo. "Lomtapo wolwazi mawube umthombo wokukhanya nolwazi emphakathini," kusho yena.



Ingaphakathi le library entsha yase Nsiwa Primary School.



uMondi Social Programme Coordinator, Corné Peters, udlulise umyalezo obalulekile ngamandla okufunda nokuthola ulwazi.

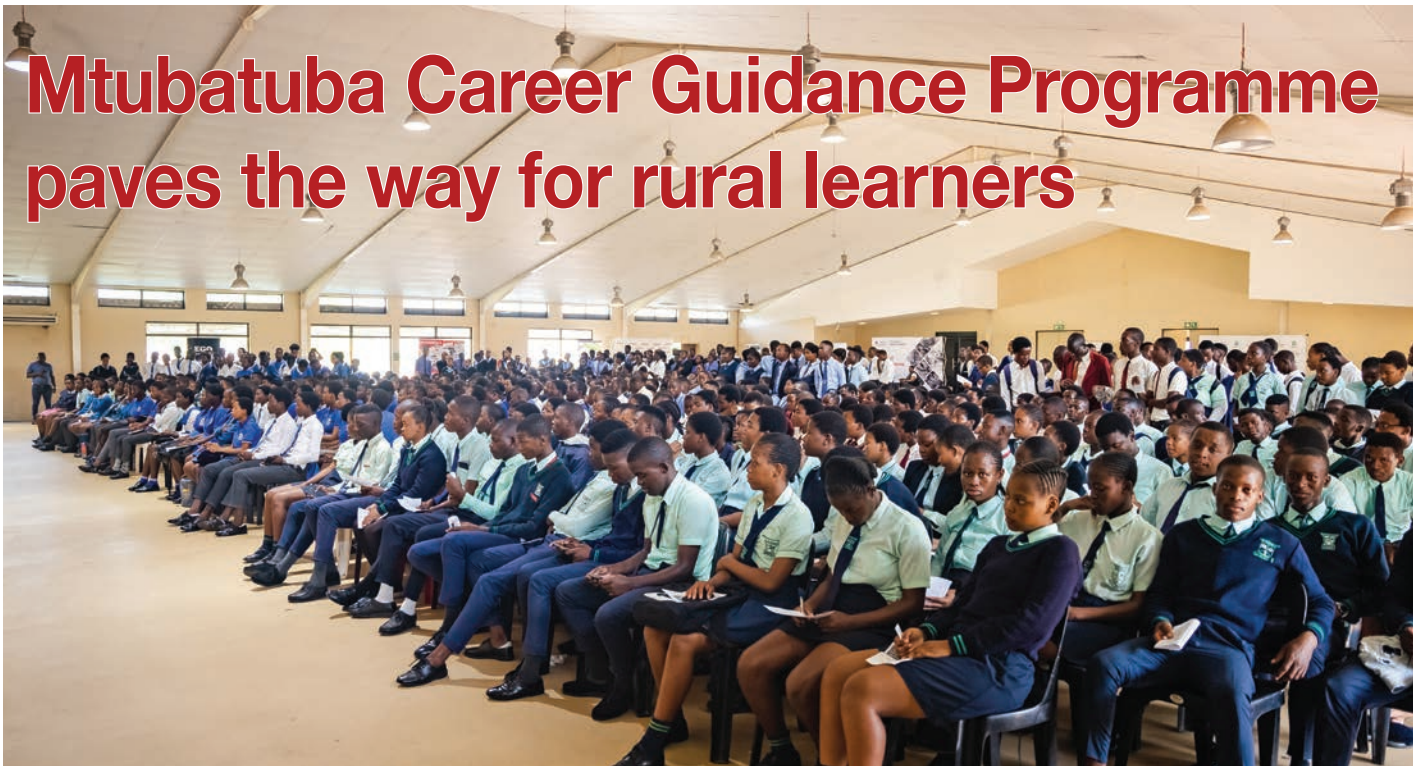


uThishomkhulu weskole iNsiwa kanye namalunga omkhandlu wakwa Mkhwanazi.

"Izincwadi zibalulekile emasikweni; ziqukethe ulwazi lwesikhathi esedlule nesamanje futhi zizoqhubeka nokubaluleka esikhathini esizayo. Wunakekeleni lo mtapo wolwazi, sebenzisanani ukuze niphathe kahle le nsiza nenzele izizukulwane ezizayo."

Isicelo sokuqala sokuthuthukiswa komtapo wolwazi sethulwa yinduna yendawo, uMnuz Mpanza, kwabakwa-SQF. Ukhombise injabulo enkulu ekuboneni isicelo siba impumelelo. "Mina ngizithandela izinkomo, ngakho-ke ngithanda izindatshana ezikhuluma ngabelusi nezikhathi zakudala," esho emamatheka. "Izindatshana ziyingxenye ebalulekile yosiko lakwaZulu. Kulezi zinsuku, ngizifundela iphephandaba isikhathi esiningi. Nginezingane zabafana ezincane kanti ngiyazigqugquzela ukuba zifunde iphephandaba nazo. Ngaleyo ndlela bangafunda ngezepolitiki, ezemidlalo kanye nakho konke okunye okwenzeka emhlabeni."

Mtubatuba Career Guidance Programme paves the way for rural learners



The iNkosi Mzondeni Hall in Mtubatuba packed to capacity with eager learners.

Career days play a crucial role in shaping the futures of South African youth, especially those in rural areas who often lack access to information about various career paths and study opportunities. The Mtubatuba Career Guidance Programme was held at the iNkosi Mzondeni Hall in Mtubatuba on 19 April 2024. The event was organized by the Mtubatuba Local Municipality, and it was attended by learners and educators from eight high schools, all eager to learn about the different career paths available to them.

Staff from SiyaQhubeka Forests (SQF) attended the career day to represent the company to the learners and community members in attendance. SQF Community Development Facilitator, Smilo Magwaza spoke on the importance of career expos in rural areas:

“Career expos are so important because many of the students in these rural areas are not exposed to different career options, and they are not aware of the different companies that operate in the area. Understanding the local industries is an important part of choosing a career path,” she said.

“Yes, the learners see the forests every day, but they don’t know who owns them or how the forestry industry works.”

Through platforms like career days, students are informed about the various career opportunities available in forestry and other industries, as well as how to apply for bursaries and educational opportunities. SQF, along with Mondi, offers a bursary programme to top-performing rural students in their operational area, further promoting education and economic empowerment in the communities that neighbour their plantations.



The career guidance expo was attended by learners from eight high schools in the region.

Bongiwe Manqele, a teacher from Kufezekile High School, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be part of the career day expo, highlighting the importance of students receiving firsthand information about potential career paths. “Our school is in a deep rural area, so it takes longer for information to reach us,” explained Manqele. “Even if you try to give career guidance as a teacher, it is still very important that they come to career days like this to get the information for themselves, so they know what they need to do before and after they finish matric.”

Manqele’s comments revealed that the career day helped bridge the information gap, enabling students to make informed decisions about their futures.

Goodman Mkhwanazi, the Youth Manager at iNkosi uMtubatuba Municipality, reiterated the significance of hosting such sessions to inform learners about their career choices. “It’s important to host events where we inform learners about their career choices. Some of the students don’t know what they want to do or what they need to do to get into higher education institutions. Some have said ‘I want to be a doctor’ but they don’t know where they can study Medicine or what subjects they need to qualify.”

Mkhwanazi went on to praise the support received from SQF, highlighting the positive impact of their assistance in achieving the municipality’s goals.

A learner’s perspective

Zama Gumbi from Vezobala High School shared her personal experience at the career day, discussing how it influenced her future plans.

“This has been a very important day for me,” she expressed. “I am doing grade 12 and I have discovered the subject requirements and career path for the course I want to study after matric, which is Agricultural Science.”

Gumbi emphasized the importance of independence and self-motivation, saying that she aimed to be a self-sufficient individual in the future. “In five years’ time, I see myself as an independent woman,” she said with growing confidence.

The Mtubatuba Career Guidance Programme proved to be a valuable platform for students to explore and understand the myriad of career opportunities available to them. It was also a vital opportunity for SQF to share information about the wide variety of careers in forestry – ranging from research to operations, health and safety, accounting, community development and the environment. The event also strengthened the partnership between SQF, its neighbouring communities and local government.

By empowering students with knowledge and resources, career days contribute to the overall development and success of individuals in rural communities, paving the way for a brighter and more promising future.



“Understanding the local industries is an important part of choosing a career path.” Similo Magwaza shares pearls of wisdom with the learners of Mtubatuba.



Looking smart for a bright future!



A hub of activity at the SQF stand.

> ***The Mtubatuba Career Guidance Programme proved to be a valuable platform for students to explore and understand the myriad of career opportunities available to them.***



Community Revival

SQF transforms Swelihle Creche on Mandela Day

Song and dance at the Mandela Day opening of the re-furbished Swelihle Creche.



The newly painted and renovated ablution block.

The significant date - 18 July - has become a vital day on the South African calendar. It is of course, former president Nelson Mandela's birthday, and it has become a moment to reflect on our history, to remember the iconic leader, and to revive all that he stood for as a freedom fighter and humanitarian.

This year's International Nelson Mandela Day was given the theme: "It's still in our hands to combat poverty and inequity".

Madiba said: "Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings." These inspirational words are a stark reminder that we must do more to fight poverty and inequality.

For this year's Mandela Day, SiyaQhubeka Forests turned their attention to Swelihle Creche in Mapheleni, Mtubatuba district. The creche provides daily meals and ECD services to 120 children from the local community and employs several local women. Over the years, the facilities have become run-down, and the school was facing challenges with shortages of school desks, chairs and water, making it extremely difficult to accommodate the growing number of children.

"We admitted 120 children this year, so we are very much at our capacity," explained school principal Fanele Nyawo. "When we are reading or doing any learning activities in the classrooms, the kids must sit on the floor. There were not enough desks

> ***Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.***
> ***– Nelson Mandela***



SQF staff handed over school furniture, gardening implements and seedlings to the creche.

– so drawing and learning becomes very challenging," she explained.

SQF responded to Fanele's call for help with a multifaceted project that breathed new life into the creche. The school buildings were painted, the ablution block was renovated, and 60 chairs and 16 tables were donated. SQF also filled up the Jojo tanks with water to help the creche see out the dry winter months.

"They just needed a little help," explained Induna Gumede, who was at the launch to represent the traditional leadership. "This creche is a cornerstone of the community, so it is important that we give them the support they need to continue offering their services."

Induna Gumede gave a vote of thanks on behalf of the broader community and the traditional leaders.

Swelihle also has a shortage of learning materials and SQF plans to link them with a partner organization called Cotlands, which provides educational toys to rural schools to help develop creativity, communication, critical thinking, language and mathematical concepts.

SQF staff roll up their sleeves!

For the Mandela Day activation, SQF staff joined forces with teachers and parents to establish a huge vegetable garden on the school grounds. SQF donated seedlings and gardening implements to the school and provided guidance on the maintenance of the garden going forward.

The staff toiled under the hot Zululand sun, achieving wonderful results on the day.

The vegetables planted included cabbage, spinach, beetroot, lettuce, onions and green peppers. The garden is intended to supplement the creche's feeding scheme, boosting the daily meals with fresh, nutritious produce.

"It was a great day. I'd like to express my profound gratitude to all the staff, for the hard work they put into the vegetable garden today," commented SQF Manager, Hezrom Kunene. "It's always good to give back to our people, especially the youngsters. Everything starts here – this creche is the grassroots of the community. It was great to see how happy the youngsters were to see their newly transformed school and vegetable garden."

Mondi Forest Operations Manager, Linda Vilakazi was hard at work in the veggie garden alongside his SQF colleagues. The manual labour brought back memories of the many decades that SQF has been investing in this community.

"We built this creche many years ago," he revealed. "So, it is quite eye-opening to be back here. There is much more to be done, but we have a limited budget - we cannot reach everybody and do everything ourselves. We must work together with partners and contractors to make a difference in our communities. It is also important that the communities take ownership of these projects and invest in their existing facilities as well. Together, step-by-step, we will make progress."



Mondi Land Manager, Nosipo Zulu encourages the girl scouts to get involved.



Swilihle kitchen, full of activity! The new vegetable garden will supplement the creche's nutrition programme.

Job creation

The painting and renovations were completed by a local contractor called Umhambi Pty Ltd. "We hired three local guys to work on this project," explained Umhambi Director Thabiso Mjadu. "The school was not in a good state, so I am very proud to see how bright and beautiful it is looking. I am a young man, and I am honoured to do this work for SQF. I am growing as a person, and Umhambi is growing as a company. We are a new business, and we already have 15 staff."

The freshly painted creche was officially handed over among joyful celebrations, songs and dance. The local girl scouts offered a fantastic performance to inspire the youth of Swelihle. Not to be outdone, the tiny creche learners also put on a brilliant performance of their own, reviving some of Madiba's most important teachings.

"This help is amazing – the garden will give us veggies for mealtime, and I now have enough chairs and tables for my kids," said principal Fanele Nyawo. "Thank you very much to SiyaQhubeka. I am short of words to express how I am feeling."

Empowering bright futures:

Benzokuhle Sports Day celebrates resilient learners

The Benzokuhle Remedial School Sports Day was held on 12 April in the Zwenelisha area, Dukuduku. SiyaQhubeka Forests was invited to the sports day, which served both as a fundraiser and an opportunity for the community to gather in support of the small private school.





SQF rose to the occasion, making a number of critical donations to the school, including a flashy soccer kit, soccer and volley balls, 30 foam mattresses and 30 blankets for the boarding house. SQF staff joined the teachers and parents in cheering the bright young learners along as they participated in a variety of fun events and races.

The Benzokuhle Remedial Centre was founded in 2015 by local educator Gugu Shandu. Shandu recognised the need for such a facility in the remote rural area when she became aware of the number of children living with physical and mental disabilities, and other barriers to learning.

The school currently has 52 learners and offers a primary school curriculum. There is no public school for physically and mentally challenged children in the immediate area.

“We have qualified teachers who give these learners the special care and attention they need to find success in life,” said Shandu, who is a Learner Support Educator with The Department of Education by profession. The Benzokuhle Centre is her passion project.



Benzokuhle learners and SQF staff celebrate the donation of blankets and mattresses that will see the kids through the cold winter months.

"Our teachers focus on the development of each child, taking into consideration their unique challenges," she continued. "Our goal is to help them transition to mainstream schools, or more established special needs schools in urban centres like Empangeni and Richards Bay."

Shandu explained that many learners travel from distant villages like Qakwini and Hlabisa to attend the special school. There are boarding facilities on the premises for these learners. Boarders receive daily meals while the day students are required to bring their own packed lunch.

Benzokuhle Remedial Centre is in the process of registering with The Department of Education but is currently receiving no support from the public or private sector. Hence SiyaQhubeka headed the call for support, which came via the local Induna Mr Dube at the area's quarterly liaison forum. The liaison forum is the platform that SQF uses to engage with communities on CSI projects, grazing rights, and other areas where forestry and community intersect.

The event was attended by Induna AM Sithole, who commented on behalf of the local traditional leadership. Mr Sithole expressed his gratitude to SQF and said that the school was at the top of the agenda because it offered a unique and valued service to the community. "We cannot do without this school," he urged. "It is in great need of support; we are looking for funding for a jungle gym and specialized equipment that will help both the teachers and learners achieve a better quality of life."

SQF Manager, Hezrom Kunene, addressed the school community, explaining the nature of the forestry business and the importance of helping to build strong, healthy communities in the areas that neighbour the forestry plantations.

"To see the way the kids have participated today has been a heartwarming experience," said Kunene. "They have wonderful energy and enthusiasm. We wish them all the best on their life journeys."

Kunene went on to say that it is the first time that SQF has had the opportunity to support a unique school like this. He said that it would be beneficial to check in with the school leadership regularly and explore opportunities for channeling more support through SQF's networks and its partner organisations.

> ***To see the way the kids have participated today has been a heartwarming experience. They have wonderful energy and enthusiasm. We wish them all the best on their life journeys.***
> ***– Hezrom Kunene***



Hezrom Kunene spoke on behalf of SiyaQhubeka Forests and congratulated all the sports day participants.


SQF staff Nqobile Khoza and Patience Magwenyana delivering the very much needed foam mattresses.


The flashy new kit, balls and kit bags will boost the Benzokuhle players to perform at their best.



SQF staff keep an eye on the action.



SQF staff pictured with Makhosana staff, Mpukunyoni Traditional Council members and building contractors.

New ablution block uplifts Makhosana Creche

In a far off and remote corner of Qakwini, Zululand, the humble but bright and colourful Makhosana Creche is a 'home away from home' for 30 of the community's youngest inhabitants, aged between six months and five years old. The creche is run by three local women and was established in 2001 by the late Grace Mlungwana. After many years of serving the community, the creche facilities were in dire need of various upgrades and SiyQhubeka Forests responded by sponsoring the construction of a new ablution block.



Makhosana Principal Baby Nsele expressed her gratitude for the investment in the creche facilities.

Construction was completed in December 2023 and the new facility was officially handed over and opened on a sunny morning in February 2024. The opening ceremony was a joyful occasion attended by members of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Council, the School Governing Body, local Ward Councillors, SQF staff, community members, teachers and learners.

Operations Manager, Linda Vilakazi spoke on behalf of the company, giving a background to the forestry business and expressing his gratitude to the women that dedicate their lives to rearing the children of the community.

> ***"The creche's principal, Baby Nsele also expressed her deep gratitude to SQF and the izinduna that backed her request for support. Nsele has been headmistress at the creche for 12 years, and seeing the upgrade is a dream come true."***



Linda Vilakazi handed out books and giftpacks to the young learners of Makhosana Creche.



Izinduna from the Mpukunyoni Traditional Council, happy with the new renovations.

"Many of our contractor employees are from this area, so it is vital that we invest in the creche to help ensure that their children are taken care of, and the facilities are up to standard," said Vilakazi. "When you are a parent at work – you need to know that your children are safe, they are fed, and they are learning."

Linda went on to highlight the importance of early childhood development, emphasizing the need to build a culture of learning in the communities that neighbour SQF plantations.

With this goal in mind, SQF linked the creche with Cotlands, an organization that offers early childhood development programmes that provide care, support and learning material to vulnerable young children and their families.

Cotlands provides children with effective, high impact health, psychosocial and play-based development to help them thrive.

Induna P. Nsibande gave a vote of thanks on behalf of the Mpukunyoni Traditional Council. Mr Nsibande was responsible for bringing the initial request to SQF via the local liaison forum – which is the platform for the community to engage with the forestry company.

The creche's principal, Baby Nsele also expressed her deep gratitude to SQF and the izinduna that backed her request for support. Nsele has been headmistress at the creche for 12 years, and seeing the upgrade is a dream come true.

"The new facilities will improve our quality of life," she revealed. "Thank you SiyaQhubeka for lifting us up and taking us forward. *Phambili Makhosana Creche, phambili*!"

The keys for the new facility were handed over to the overjoyed principal, as the local izinduna and SQF staff inspected the ablution block. Linda Vilakazi also handed out gift packs to the children of the creche to round-off the programme.

Principal Nsele noted that Ithuba National Lottery had also made an investment in the creche, constructing a new building



The community came out in numbers to support the event.

in 2021. The main building was decorated with fun, animated murals to uplift the children's daily experience. This shows that through partnership and collaboration – great progress can be achieved in developing rural communities.

Creating jobs through development

A further benefit of the creche upgrade was the empowerment of a local building contractor, Umhambi Pty. Ltd, which was awarded the contract to build the new ablution block. Umhambi is a locally owned construction, maintenance, industrial cleaning, plant hire, and skilled labour supply business based at Dukuduku.

The building project took three weeks to complete and created eight jobs for local bricklayers and labourers.

"The building plans were supplied by Mondi," explained Umhambi Director Thabiso Mjadu. "We built long-drop toilets and a soak pit with air vents. Water is very scarce here, so the design is well-suited to local conditions. This was our first contract with SQF. We are very excited to work with such an influential business and are hoping there will be more opportunities in the future!"



20 Years of Care: The Port Durnford OVC Story

The PD OVS has a thriving vegetable garden. SQF built the original greenhouses and supplies the centre with seedlings and technical support.

The Port Dunford Centre for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) is a cornerstone of the local community. The centre recently celebrated 20 years of operation in the village, which is also home to extensive SiyaQhubeka Forests plantations. SQF has been supporting the NGO in various ways for 13 years and was invited to take part in the significant milestone event.

"The children of our community are facing much neglect," explains Busisiwe Mathaba, the Centre Manager, as she sits under the shady casuarina trees outside the centre. "The children face hardship due to a number of factors in the community and homes," she goes on. "These include poverty, drug abuse, alcoholism and even the lack of a parent in the home."

The centre looks after 117 children and youth from the nearby community with daily meals, extra mural activities, homework and academic support, gardening skills and psycho-social support.

"It's about community development, but with a focus on children," explains Mathaba, who has been with the centre for 14 years.

The support extends to youth, young adults and even parents, she continues. Unemployed youth are given career guidance, assistance with applying to tertiary institutions through the CAO, computer skills training and help with compiling their CVs. The



SQF handed over sports kit, bags and balls to the children to celebrate the big occasion.



The boys showed off their Zulu dancing skills.



Centre Manager, Busisiwe Mathaba is passionate about community development, especially supporting the youth of Port Durnford.

Parenting Programme aims at capacitating parents to take better care and responsibility for their children through expert advice from professional social workers.

The centre employs five permanent staff and four volunteers.

SQF has been providing the centre with ongoing financial support, which helps to ensure that stipends and running costs are paid, there is food for the daily nutritional programme and the infrastructure is maintained. SQF donated three greenhouses for the vegetable garden project some years ago, as well as making regular donation of seedlings along with support from the agricultural interns. Every Christmas SQF donates gift bags to make the children feel extra special over the festive season.

20 Year Celebration

The '20 Year Celebration' event was full of exceptional performances, speeches and success stories that told of how the Port Durnford OVC Centre has been a beacon of hope in the community.

One such story was that of Thulasizwe Gumede, who was brought up by his grandmother. Conditions were tough at home and he began visiting the PD OVC at a very young age, to seek both consistent meals and guardianship. This continued throughout primary and high school. After matriculating, Gumede was able to learn basic computer skills at the centre, which was crucial in enabling him to enrol at Mangosuthu University of Technology in Durban. He went on to complete his Diploma in Civil Engineering. "I could not have achieved this without the love and support from my family at the Port Durnford OVC. They have been here for me throughout my life," said Gumede.

Other guest speakers included Dr Bongeka Nkwanyana, Assistant Director of Communications and Information Systems with local government and Linda Xulu, Clinical Manager from Pumelele.

Linda Xulu gave an extremely informative presentation focussing on the theme of women's health. He discussed in detail the symptoms of cervical cancer, breast cancer and menopause and gave valuable advice about all the signs, symptoms and treatments. Mr Xulu encouraged women to lead a healthy lifestyle, which is the best preventative measure for serious illnesses. He advised frequent exercise, following a healthy diet, and avoiding alcohol and cigarettes.

SQF sponsored a number of corporate gifts, which were handed out during Mr Xulu's presentation as awards for those community members that were able to answer his health-related quiz.

SQF staff also shared information about the forestry business - explaining the valuable products that are made from wood, the contributions that the business makes to employment and the local economy as well as the variety of CSI projects that are under way. SQF commended the OVC staff for their important contributions to bettering the lives of local children, youth and community members.

SQF staff then handed over brand new sports kits, bags and balls to the volleyball and soccer teams.

A highlight of the event was the variety of passionate performances given by the young stars of the OVC Centre throughout the day. These included traditional dancing, beautiful singing, a fashion show and even spoken word praise poetry.

"All I can say is thank you so much SQF, for everything you do and have done for the centre over the years," said Busi Mathaba in closing. "With your help we are giving our children the chance for a better life."

Honouring Outstanding Contributions: The SQF Excellence Awards



Linda Vilakazi with the staff that were recognised for their excellent contributions to different facets of the business.

The annual SQF Excellence Awards was a wonderful occasion for the team to come together and recognise those people that bring a special quality to their work, perform well, or inspire those around them. The awards were broken down into seven categories: Forester of the Year, Contractor of the year, Support Person of the Year, Excellence in People Development, Excellence in Self-Development, Best in Customer Service, and the General Manager's Award.

Operations Manager, Linda Vilakazi, opened proceedings with a reflection on the excellent performance of the business in 2023 – both in terms of safety and KPIs. "The business is in a great position going into the new year," he said looking forward. "We are showing intent to purchase farms in our area and we are in reach of our goal of delivering 750 000 tons per annum to the mill."

Linda welcomed new staff and contractors to the business and went on to say that the awards were an opportunity for the staff to get together in a relaxed environment, to nurture a culture of open communication and to spend time getting to know one another on a personal level.

Vilakazi and Ntokozo Ngubo (SQF Cost Controller) handed out the awards and shared some positive testimonials about the exceptional staff and contractors.

> ***Muzothule Gcaleka** is passionate about coaching and developing young foresters. He has also assisted new team members to have an easier transition into the SQF team.*
>
> ***Similo Magwaza** is a passionate advocate for community development and is currently pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma in Development Studies through UKZN, showing dedication to furthering her knowledge in the field.*
>
> ***Hein Ferreira** introduced Project Amehlo, which has significantly reduced seedling and timber theft.*



Excellence in People Development: Muzothule Gcaleka

SQF Silviculture Forester, KwaMbonambi

Mzo is an experienced and senior member of the SQF silviculture team. He is calm and diplomatic, which are good virtues when working under pressure.

Mzo is passionate about coaching and developing young foresters. He has also assisted new team members to have an easier transition into the SQF team.

Mzo continuously shares information to ensure the growth and success of junior foresters. He is a unifying member of the SQF silviculture team and lives the Mondi value of 'Caring'.

Excellence in Self-Development: Similo Magwaza

SQF Community Development Facilitator



"Similo joined the company about a year ago," said Vilakazi. "Everything was upside down and she had big shoes to fill, but she has risen to the occasion and done an amazing job. Furthermore, she is always developing herself in order to better develop the community at large."

Throughout her career, Similo has sought opportunities for self-improvement and has completed numerous career advancement programmes such as a BA Degree in Community Development 2022 and a B-Tech Agricultural Management in 2023 via the University of South Africa (UNISA).

In 2023 she completed a short course in Business Writing through the Mondi Learning Management System and is currently registered for a Human Rights course.

Similo is a passionate advocate for community development and is currently pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma in Development Studies through UKZN, showing dedication to furthering her knowledge in the field.

These critical skills are enhancing her leadership abilities and contributing to the success of the SQF team.



Support Person of the Year: Hein Ferreira

Asset Protection Officer

Heine has consistently displayed a high level of dedication in his area of expertise. He is a valuable member of the SQF team with a wealth of experience.

The Dukuduku, Nyalazi and KwaMbonambi areas experienced several crime-related incidents during the year, ranging from armed robbery to diesel and seedling theft.

Heine's investigations have led to multiple arrests, dismissals and resignations of implicated parties. Heine introduced Project Amehlo, which has significantly reduced seedling and timber theft. This initiative also reduced establishment costs, improved uniformity, and yield.

"Heine has an eye for CI projects," said Linda Vilakazi. "He is an integral part of our team, forever strategizing and innovating on better ways to protect our valuable assets."

Best in Customer Service: Bobby Esterhuyse

Specialist: Tactical Planning Snr

Senior SQF Forester Hezrom Kunene, describes Bobby as “Dependable, efficient, punctual and knowledgeable... the type of local hero that sometimes goes unnoticed!”

Bobby Esterhuyse is renowned for his attention to detail. After a storm destroyed 3 000 ha of standing timber, Bobby went in-field, collected and analysed the data and made informed decisions to recover fibre and minimise impact on the business.

He is skilled at dispute resolution, successfully resolving tree size disputes between foresters and contractors.

“We appreciate the work he does,” said Vilakazi. “He always works to resolve difficult situations; he has a cheerful attitude and a firm handshake!”



SQF Forester of the Year:
Nkosingiphile Nhlabathi

Silviculture Forester, Nyalazi/Dukuduku

“As a forester, Nkosingiphile’s performance is the benchmark in our business,” said Linda Vilakazi. “She loves her work and is passionate about results. She is competitive, but in a subtle way.”

Some KPI highlights include: a plant survival at 101% vs a target of 95%; planting 623 ha vs a budget of 529 ha; and achieving plant uniformity at 79% vs a threshold of 75%.

Nkosingiphile also pioneered a number cost-saving initiatives, namely the I-Neon Sprayer utilized by Njojo Construction, and a coppice management project that achieved huge savings through stump treatment.

Nkosingiphile is diligent in her work and always has a smile on her face. She is an asset to the organisation.

SQF Contractor of the Year:
Njojo Construction

Silviculture Contractor, Nyalazi/Dukuduku

“Njojo have exceeded all their targets – from cost saving to safety and innovation,” commented Linda Vilakazi. Njojo Construction achieved the following stats for 2023:

Uniformity - 77%
Survival vs planted - 98%
Survival vs 1333 - 101%

Njojo implemented a cost-saving initiative which involved the use of the boom tractor (I-Neon Sprayer) for the application of selective herbicide on post-planting and TUP compartments.

Njojo also actioned several CI projects, including the in-field water cooler, new coppice management and stump treatment projects that created financial savings. Njojo achieved a 5 Star Rating on their NOSA audit.





SQF General Manager's Award

SQF Harvesting Team

Linda Vilakazi selected the Harvesting Team for their effort on The Salvage Project for his GM's Award.

"In October 2023, the Nyalazi and Dukuduku areas were hit by a severe windstorm, which destroyed nearly 3 000 ha of standing timber and 250 houses in the Mtubatuba community," explained Vilakazi.

"We launched The Salvage Project to address the disaster as quickly, efficiently, and safely as possible. When the timber breaks and falls due to such a natural disaster, we only have a small window of opportunity to salvage it before it becomes too dry for the mill.

"So we put a team together comprised of all our harvesting specialists – Hezrom Kunene, Donny Mahlalela, Siyawisa Hlathi and Ringomode – as well as Trusty Nkosi and the safety team.

"One of our main concerns was safety because we were working under unusual and dangerous conditions. We started felling in November and successfully salvaged the timber without any injuries or close calls. The team worked with utmost commitment and diligence, and I would like to personally thank them for their effort."

***Bobby Esterhuyse** is skilled at dispute resolution, successfully resolving tree size disputes between foresters and contractors.*

***Nkosingiphile Nhlabathi** is diligent in her work and always has a smile on her face. She is an asset to the organisation.*

***Njojo Construction** implemented a cost-saving initiative which involved the use of the boom tractor (I-Neon Sprayer) for the application of selective herbicide on post-planting and TUP compartments.*

The inspiring journey of Mbhekiseni Nsele – from Bursary Student to Contractor



Mbhekiseni Services invested in two powerful Hitachi Excavators fitted with Ponsse harvesting heads to enable the company to meet the target of 12 000 tonnes of harvested timber per month.

From a boy making mischief in the plantations to a major player in the forestry industry! Mbhekiseni Nsele's story is a mix of determination, learning, and seizing the right opportunities...

2024 is a historic year for the SQF Bursary Programme. Mbhekiseni Nsele, the company's first ever bursary recipient back in 2003 was recently awarded a major harvesting contract with the business – over 20 years later. The entrepreneur has travelled 'full circle' - from growing up alongside the plantations of Port Durnford to starting out as a young forester for SQF and eventually starting his own business and winning a 5-year harvesting contract with SQF.

"I grew up in Matholonjeni and spent most of my days making mischief in the plantations," remembers Mbhekiseni, as he drives along the dusty road to his harvesting operation. Two giant Hitachi machines are felling the mature eucalyptus trees, which have been nurtured for nine long years by the dedicated foresters of this area.

"We were always among the trees," he goes on. "We used to herd cattle in the open areas around the plantations or go honey hunting and looking for birds in the forests. But we never knew what it



Mbhekiseni Nsele, the first ever recipient of an SQF study bursary (back in 2003) has been awarded a major harvesting contract for the KwaMbonambi area.

> ***In 2019 Mbhekiseni joined SQF harvesting contractor Amahlathi Ethu, to better understand the contracting business. This gave him the knowledge and confidence to kick off his own contracting business when the opportunity arose.***

was to be a forester. We only knew the forest guards, because we were always running away from them!"

Mbhekiseni matriculated from Qhakaza High School in 2001 and spent two tough years looking for work. "There was no money to send me to varsity," he reflects. "My dad also passed away, so it was a hard time for the family."

But then, one day his sister came home and told him of the advertisement she had seen, inviting local youth to apply for a bursary to pursue a career in forestry. At the time Mbhekiseni had hopes of being an Electrical Engineer, but he decided to give the SQF Bursary his best shot.

"I didn't even have a phone that worked properly so I almost missed my interview!" He remembers with a laugh. "Luckily I was able to reschedule, and everything went well."

After making his application and going through two rounds of interviews, he got the call that he'd been successful. "I was ecstatic!" he admits. "I had been unemployed for two years, so that was my big break."



With extensive experience as a forester, Mbhekiseni is well equipped to manage his team of 22 employees.



A close-up look at the timber, which has been cut-to-length and debarked.

The path to success

From that point on, the young man from Matholonjeni grew from strength to strength. He studied his N.Dip Forestry at NMU Saasveld in George and then began his working career at SQF as an assistant harvesting forester in 2007. From there he got promoted and worked in various senior harvesting and silviculture roles at both Mondi and SQF, in the Midlands and Zululand regions. He spent one year at DAFF as Director of Planning and Audits in 2013 before returning to Mondi as the Senior Silviculture Forester for the Umfolozi Area, where he served for five years.

"I have never been able to keep the same job, I'm always moving," he admits about his career . "My process has always been to get good people and setup good systems. I train my people to work efficiently, which frees up my time to look for new challenges. One day a friend said to me: 'Maybe you're an entrepreneur? You should look into that!' So that's exactly what I did..."

In 2019 Mbhekiseni joined SQF Silviculture contractor Amahlathi Ethu, to better understand the contracting business. This gave him the knowledge and confidence to kick off his own contracting business when the opportunity arose.

That opportunity came in May 2023 when SQF advertised for a new development contractor. Mbhekiseni had already registered his business, Mbhekiseni Services, and he submitted his proposal and dived into the rigorous process of chasing the contract. "There was lots of competition," he reveals. "I had to do psychometric and entrepreneurialism tests. But I made it, and we won the contract! It was a huge moment."

Cindy Mji at Mondi Zimele was instrumental in securing start-up funding and Mbhekiseni Services entered the forests in July 2024. The business has 22 employees and four big machines working on the contract – two Hatachi Excavators fitted with Ponsse harvesting heads, a Bell forwarder and a Hitachi loader. Mbhekiseni is contracted to harvest 140 000 tonnes per annum for five years.

"I feel proud," says Mbekiseni as he inspects the timber stacks and watches another giant gum tree crash to the ground. "When I first set my sights on contracting, I made it known that this was my goal – and that helped to realize my dream. I want to grow the business, to take on more tonnage, and employ and train local youth. I love to share knowledge and to see others learn and grow."

EMPLOYEE FOCUS

INTRODUCING

Nduduzo Ngcobo

SQF's new Harvesting & Transport Forester



Nduduzo Ngcobo is the newest member of the SQF team, since joining the company in November 2024. Nduduzo transferred from Mondi, Dumbe, where he had been serving as a silviculture forester for four years.

It is a continuation of the family legacy for the passionate young forester, whose father Simon Ngcobo was a Mondi forester for 35 years. Nduduzo says that he always knew he was going to follow in his father's footsteps...

"My dad used to take me out into the plantations on the weekends," he says about his younger days growing up in Vryheid. "I fell in love with forestry way back then. It was the flexibility that excited me. The ever-changing environment, seeing how foresters needed to find innovative solutions to problems, adapt to the changing weather, the shifting economy," he says philosophically.

These early impressions of the industry set the course for the rest of his life journey. Nduduzo matriculated from Vryheid High School in 2015. His fondest memories of school are playing rugby and winning a bursary from TWK for his excellent academic performance. This bursary enabled him to pursue a career in forestry. For his tertiary studies, he attended Nelson Mandela University in George, where he completed his National Diploma in Forestry in 2018.

"Varsity was interesting," he reflects. "Because I was able to make sense of everything I'd seen as a kid growing up around forestry. It was a new chapter in my life."

From there, Nduduzo had his first taste of the working world as a Forester in Training with Sappi, in Barberton, followed by a contract with NCT as an Estate Forester back in his hometown of Vryheid.

In 2020 Nduduzo grabbed the chance to join Mondi as a Silviculture Forester in Dumbe, Paulpietersburg, where he has been working for the past four years.

"This year, I saw the opportunity to join SQF and to experience harvesting," he said about the recent move. "It's a new challenge, a 'hot' operation and an exciting time to learn new things."

Nduduzo will be working with senior foresters and contractors in both harvesting and transport. He noted that the Zululand operation is 'hot' in the sense that the job calls for high efficiency and turnaround. Since there are no depots that hold timber, the logs must be moved immediately to the Richards Bay Mill to ensure that the area is profitable and meeting targets.

"I look forward to understanding the overall operation and the new elements that make SQF a unique forestry business – working alongside the wildlife in the plantations, the community stakeholders, and the different climatic conditions here.

"In five years, I see myself as a senior member of the team," he goes on. "I would like to be in a position where I can teach, mentor and share knowledge with the young foresters coming up in the industry."

In his spare time, Nduduzo enjoys fishing with his friends, spending time with family, watching the rugby and travelling.

SiyaQhubeka Forests extends a warm welcome to Nduduzo - may your time in Zululand bring growth and prosperity!

Shifting landscapes through intercropping

SQF's Intercropping project strengthens communities, improves soil health and produces greater yield on available land.

When travelling the N2 across Zululand, the sea of eucalyptus trees stretches as far as the eye can see. But if you take a closer look, something else is growing among the commercial plantations...

Beans, groundnuts and squashes are filling the gaps between the rows of eucalyptus, making use of resources and ecological processes that would otherwise not be utilized by a single crop. These small-scale intercropping projects are providing food and a source of livelihood to communities that neighbour the plantations.

Mondi Food Security Programme

The intercropping project falls under the broader Mondi Food Security Programme, which includes intercropping, honey collecting, community vegetable gardens and household vegetable gardens. These are non-commercial operations, primarily for subsistence, although many of the small-scale farmers are selling their surplus to local markets and their communities.

In 2024 Mondi and SQF made 126 hectares of land available to the community farmers, as well as providing seedlings and technical assistance where needed.

There are currently 578 farmers registered for the Intercropping Project. Crops being grown include groundnuts, dry beans, jugo beans and a variety of squashes. The project aims at helping to address food security in the under-developed region, where unemployment is dire, and opportunities are scarce.

"The primary aim of this project is to make sure there is food at home," says Nosipo Zulu, Mondi Land Manager for Zululand. "We want the farmers to eat first and then sell the surplus to nearby markets." Incredibly, the small incomes being generated by these rural farmers are playing a vital role in meeting basic needs – covering things like school fees, building costs and food staples.

The symbiotic relationship

SQF News visited Port Durnford, where a new intercropping project has recently begun in the SiyaQhubeka Forests plantations. There are two groups registered for the project in the area – the Nkonjane Community with 17 members and the Matolenjeni Community with 45 members. A total of 65 hectares have been planted thus far and the project moves strategically between newly planted forestry compartments, because as soon as the canopy closes, the crops cannot grow.

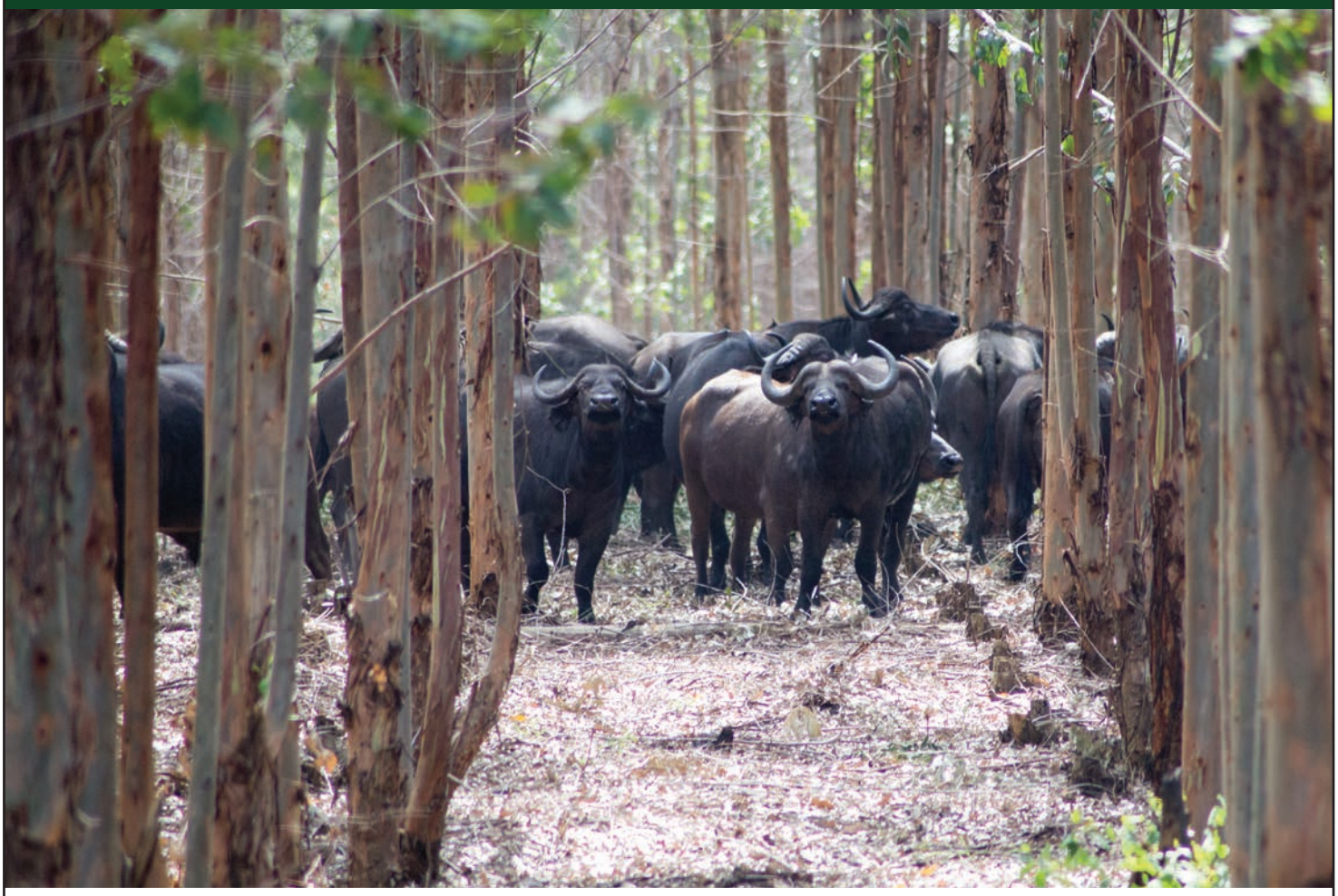
Farming for the future

This project seamlessly blends community-led agriculture with commercial forestry, as the hard edges of production give way to something more symbiotic and co-beneficial. Sharing the land and resources fosters good community relations and helps to strengthen the communities that surround the plantations. Intercropping also means that the communities have a vested interest in protecting crops (and trees) from cattle and criminals. Lastly, the ecological benefits result in healthier soil for future generations.



The symbiotic intercropping project has a myriad of benefits for local people, the forestry business, AND the environment.

NEW GENERATION
PLANTATION



SIYAQHUBEKA FORESTS is a partnership between Mondi, its black economic empowerment (BEE) partners, government and local communities. The plantations are designed to grow timber efficiently and sustainably, providing benefits for stakeholders, while minimising environmental impacts and supporting conservation.









www.siyaqhubeka.co.za

SIYAQHUBEKA
Forestry for Life