SQF NEWS

SiyaQhubeka
Forestry for Life

Stakeholder Newsletter for SiyaQhubeka Forests 2022

Readers make leaders!

The Sitholinhlanhla Primary School library launch



SiyaQhubeka Forests recently opened a state-of-the-art library at Sitholinhlanhla Primary School in KwaMbonambi. The library has been newly renovated and equipped with 1940 books, with the aim of fostering a love of reading and learning.

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Umlayezo Womphathi Omkhulu

Njengoba sibheka emuva kulo nyaka ka-2022, sibheka imikhakha ebalulekile kithi njenge nkampani okubalwa kukho ezempilo, ezokuphepha, ezemvelo, ukuxhumana nemiphakathi nababamba iqhaza nokusimama nenqubekela phambili yenkampani.

Impilo yabasebenzi bethu nabasebenzi abasebenza ngaphansi kosonkontileka ibalulekile empumelelweni nasekusimameni kweSiyaQhubeka Forests. Impilo nenhlalakahle emahlathini kuyahambisana esimweni somzimba somuntu. Emhlabeni esiphila kuwona namuhla kugxilwe kakhulu ekubhekeleleni isimo sengqondo. Ngakhoke umsebenzi wethu wezempilo ugxile ekuphatheni kahle abasebenzi bethu. Abasebenzi bethu basekelwa kahle ukuze bakwazi ukubhekana nezimo zempilo ngohlelo lwe-Careways. Usizo esihlenzeka ngalo lufinyeleleka kalula kulabo esisike sibasiza futhi luyimfihlo, ngokulandela imigomo yezempilo.

Ukulahlwa kwemfucuza okungekho emthethweni emahlathini ethu kuyinto ekhathazayo, ikakhulukazi eduze nemiphakathi engomakhelwane nasemigwaqweni yezifunda enqamula emahlathini ethu. Imfucuza elahlwayo iyahluka kusukela kudoti wasekhaya kuye kowezimboni. Imfucuza egqame kakhulu amabhodlela afayo. Imfucuza engalungiswa kabusha, amathayi amadala kanye nendle engahlanziwe kuphakathi kwemfucuza eyibhizinisi elihamba phambili ladoti olahliwe. Ukugcinwa kwemithetho nezinqubo kubonakale kunzima ngoba abenzi bobubi basebenza ebusuku. Kuke kwaba nezimo lapho abezokuphepha bethu bebambe khona izigilamkhuba.

Sekube nemikhankaso eyahlukene yokukhuculula ukuzama ukulungisa udaba lokulahlwa kwemfucuza ngokungemthetho. Le mikhankaso kuhloswe ngayo ukuqwashisa amalungu omphakathi kanye nokusetshenziswa kwemigwaqo yasemahlathin. UMnyango obhekelele ukulawulwa kwemfucuza eMhlathuze nawo ubambe iqhaza kule mikhankaso. Ngesikhathi somkhankaso wokuhlanza endaweni yaseMandlanzini izikhwama zikadoti eziyikhulu namashumi amahlanu zazigcwele imfucuza! Kuneminye imikhankaso ehlelelwe unyaka ozayo ezohlanganisa nokuthi izikole zendawo zibambe iqhaza.

Ukuthola isitifiketi se-NOSA 5 Star kwaba impumelelo enkulu enhlanganweni. Umcwaningi mabhuku wangaphandle uhlabeke umxhwele kakhulu umoya wenhlangano kanye nazo zonke izinhlelo ezisetshenziswayo ukuqinisekisa ukuthi inhlangano isebenza ngendlela efanele. ISiyaQhubeka Forests iphinde yathola isitifiketi se-Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) kanye nesitifiketi se-ISO14001. Zonke lezi zitifiketi zibalulekile ekusimameni kwenhlangano kanye nokumaketheka kwenani lemikhiqizo yayo yezingodo.



uLinda Vilakazi, uMphathi-Jikelele we-SQF

Lesi sikhathi sibe nenselelo uma kukhulunywa ngezindaba ezithinta umphakathi. Ngeshwa kwaba nesinye isigameko lapho ukusebenza kwamiswa khona ngobudlova, futhi abasebenzi bebesaba ukusebenza. Kodwa sisazimisele ukusebenzisana nemiphakathi, abaholi bendabuko kanye noMbutho wamaphoyisa wakuleli ukuze sizuze ukuzwana futhi sibambe iqhaza ekuchumeni kwemiphakathi yethu.

Iminikelo yethu nge-Corporate Social Investment ibe nomphumela ezinhlelweni eziningi zomphakathi ezihlanganisa izinhlelo zokuthuthukisa amakhono eziqondiswe entsheni kanye nasekuhlomuliseni isikole samabanga aphansi iSitholinhlanhla ngomtapo wolwazi osebenza ngokugcwele. Ngonyaka ozayo sihlose ukuzuza imphumelelo efanayo ngezinhlelo zethu.

Njengoba unyaka usondela esikhathini samaholidi kaKhisimusi, sithanda ukukhuthaza bonke abasebenzi bethu nosonkontileka ukuthi baqinisekise ukuthi bathatha isikhathi sokuphumula futhi babe nemindeni yabo. Sonke singaziqhenya ngesikwazile ukukuzuza kulo nyaka kuzo zonke izinhlaka zebhizinisi. Besingeke sikwenze ngaphandle kwethimba lethu, osonkontileka, ozakwethu kanye nababambiqhaza. Sikubheke ngabomvu ukuya ku-2023 kanye nawo wonke amathuba asilindele.

> ***Sonke singaziqhenya ngesikwazile ukukuzuza kulo nyaka kuzo zonke izinhlaka zebhizinisi. Besingeke sikwenze ngaphandle kwethimba lethu, osonkontileka, ozakwethu kanye nababambiqhaza. – uLinda Vilakazi, uMphathi-Jikelele we-SQF***

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Readers make leaders!

The Sitholinhlanhla Primary School library launch

The project was funded by SQF and Ringomode (an SQF harvesting contractor) and implemented by The LEARN Project, an NGO that specializes in uplifting the level of South African education through books and literacy. The LEARN project, which is endorsed by the Department of Education, was responsible for the design and layout of the library, training of staff and selection of titles/books.

SQF Manager, Linda Vilakazi had some inspiring words to share at the opening event: "Kids need access to books to open their imaginations, to take them to another world, to promote an inquisitive mindset" he said.

Linda explained that the nearest proper library is in Richards Bay, but learners don't have the funds to travel to town to go to the library.

"If we bring the library to them, the impact is huge," he went on. "It promotes a culture of reading, it promotes a culture of learning and it also promotes a culture of responsibility – this now is the community's library, that they need to maintain and protect. The onus is on them to take care of the infrastructure and the books."



Reading is critical to early childhood and cognitive development.





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>
> ***– SQF Manager, Linda Vilakazi***





Mr Gwala, Principal of Sitholinhlahla Primary School in the newly established school library during the official opening of the Library Project.



SQF Manager, Linda Vilakazi shared inspirational words about the importance of reading at the launch of the new Sitholinhlanhla Primary School library in KwaMbonambi.

Before this upgrade, Sitholinhlanhla Primary School had a total of 50 books for its 1300 learners.

The role of school libraries is increasingly being recognized as an essential part of education as they provide information and ideas that are fundamental to the educational needs of the students, as well as creating an environment that encourages reading.

Reading has been identified as one of the major challenges in schools, with a majority of learners not reading at the appropriate grade level. This affects their comprehension and academic performance.

“As much as we are doing our best to equip our learners with skills and knowledge – a library is of utmost importance,” commented the Deputy Principal, Mr MS Phungula.

Mr Phungula went on to say that most learners between grade four and seven could read but could not comprehend what they were reading.

“Now we are going to have library lessons dedicated to reading and research,” he continued. “This is going to improve reading skills, which are the foundation of learning. We believe that the learners lives will be changed.”

Mr Phungula explained that the project was initiated at the beginning of the year, when the School Governing Body came across the SQF newsletter and learned about the various CSI projects assisting schools in the region. The School Fundraising Committee then put together a proposal, which was brought to SQF via the local Induna at one of the liaison forums.

“We work together with the traditional authorities, local communities and the SGBs,” commented Linda. “The liaison forums give traditional leaders the platform to tell us what’s lacking in the communities.”

Education is one of the core focus areas of CSI programmes at SQF. The low pass rate in the majority of the schools within the SQF footprint is linked to learners not being well equipped at foundation phase. This fully-resourced and functional school library aims to nurture a culture of reading and improve academic performance.

Grade seven learner and School Head Boy, Handel Nyokanhete, shared some wise words beyond his years: “A person who reads a book gains knowledge. The knowledge that they gain makes them a leader, and a leader builds a nation,” he said. “Personally, I like reading adventure books – books with great stories and heroes.”

Linda’s closing words inspired a positive vision of the future: “We hope that these kids will look back on this day and be able to say: ‘This is where our interest in books began’ – I think that will be a great success story.”

The launch event was attended by SQF staff, Ringomode staff, The LEARN Project CEO Ross Toerien, representatives from the Department of Education and the Local Municipality, the KwaMbonambi Traditional Council, SGB, educators and learners.





Now we are going to have library lessons dedicated to reading and research. This is going to improve reading skills, which are the foundation of learning. We believe that the learners lives will be changed.

– Deputy Principal, Mr MS Pungula

SQF aids local households devastasted by floods

In April 2022, days of heavy rain across KwaZulu-Natal led to devastating and widespread floods. The Durban area was particularly hard-hit, but the torrential rain also caused significant damage to communities in the SQF footprint.

At least 435 people died across the province, with an unknown number of people missing. Several thousand homes were damaged or destroyed. Critical infrastructure, including major roads, transportation, communication, and electrical systems, were also impacted by the flooding. The floods have caused more than R17 billion in infrastructure damage and the storm has been identified as one of the deadliest natural disasters in the country in the 21st century.

Port Durnford, which lies in the south of the SQF operational area, was the worst hit in the Zululand region. Further torrential rain in May exacerbated the already dire circumstances.

As part of the Masidle Food Parcel Relief Project, SQF came to the aid of affected communities with much-needed support in this time of disaster. In a partnership with Gift of the Givers Foundation, SQF donated food parcels to affected households in the region – extending the aid to the affected households under Mkhwanazi Traditional Council.

The recipient households were identified by the Traditional Council through local Izinduna, who helped locate the families that were in most need of assistance.

Representatives from each of the households attended a hand-over ceremony at the community hall in Port Durnford in May. The event was also attended by SQF employees and members of the Mkhwanazi Traditional Council.



SQF Manager, Linda Vilakazi, offers words of hope to victims of the devastating floods in the Port Durnford area.



The handover ceremony was attended by SQF staff and presided over by the Mkhwanazi Traditional Council.





Food parcels that include maize, rice, tinned food and cleaning products will go a long way to alleviating the suffering of those displaced by the floods.

Linda Vilakazi offered some words of hope, highlighting that SQF values the well-being of its neighbouring communities. "I cannot comprehend the suffering that this flood has caused," he told *SQF News*.

The food parcels were sponsored by SQF and delivered to Port Durnford by the Gift of the Givers Foundation, an organisation that specialises in disaster response. Each parcel contained a variety of essentials; – including maize, rice, tinned food, soap, cleaning products, milk, tea, sugar, cooking oil and more.

The floods are expected to put the greater community under immense pressure, with many displaced families having to move in with neighbours, and issues of food security and unemployment heightened.

"All the water poured into my house," explains Nonjabulo Khuzwayo from Esikhalenisenkosi. "I had to evacuate my children and myself. I am too afraid to move back into my house because of the damage – the structure could collapse at any time. My garden is like a dam! We are now staying with our neighbour, there are six of us living under one roof."

Nonjabulo said that the food donation will help her and her family, as well as her neighbour.

Mr Mboniseni Mjadu had a similar experience.

"All I can say is – thank you very much SQF," commented Mboniseni. "I am a widower – my wife died some time ago. I am looking after four children at home – on the night of the flood, a wall collapsed and nearly killed my 15-year-old child. Everything was upside down. We are still living in the house, trying to fix all the damage."

Induna Bheki Mkhwanazi represented Inkosi Mkhwanazi, who was unable to attend the event. "These donations will make a big difference to our people's lives," he said. "The extent of the damage goes beyond just the structural damage of the homes – people's furniture and appliances were destroyed as well as gardens and land, which is often used for subsistence farming.



But we must give thanks that there were no deaths in our area. In that way, God was great to us. We are deeply grateful to SQF for responding to our call for assistance."

The flood relief project is a continuation of the Masidle Food Parcel Relief project, which was launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. SQF in partnership with Gift of the Givers has distributed 647 food parcels to SQF communities as part of the COVID-19 Relief Programme to support vulnerable households that continue to be impacted by the pandemic, both socially and economically.

Careers Expo shines bright in Mfekayi

SQF and Mondi share the story of forestry with Mtubatuba youth



A total of 560 learners from 14 schools attended the inaugural Mtubatuba Municipality Careers Expo.

On a cold and windy day in August, SQF and Mondi staff packed up gazebos, banners, newsletters and flyers and headed up to Mfekayi in northern Zululand for the inaugural Inkosi Mtubatuba Municipality Careers Expo. Despite the freezing weather, spirits were high, music filled the air and hundreds of local learners gathered in the community hall to listen to inspirational words of encouragement and guidance from the municipality, private sector, SAPS, local government and iSimangaliso Wetland Park to name a few.

A total of 560 learners from 14 High Schools in the area attended the careers expo. The Municipality provided transport for the learners and SQF's silviculture contractor, Njojo Construction and the Municipality sponsored meal packs.

"We decided to focus on career guidance because local youth are not aware of the many career opportunities out there," explained event organiser Goodman Mkhwanazi, Youth Affairs Manager for Mtubatuba Municipality. "There is a lack of information about higher education and skills that are in high demand. Jobs are evolving – careers need to be aligned with the 4th Industrial Revolution and the local economy."

Knowledge is Power

The day's presentations aimed at generating a sense of hope and direction for youth in the area.

"Unemployment and crime are major challenges in Mfekayi," continued Goodman. "Another challenge is the lack of higher education institutions in this area, which further limits access to education, so it is very important that we guide our youth with knowledge and resources that can put them on the right path. We identified local stakeholders that offer employment, bursaries and career opportunities because it is vital to match skills with real opportunities in the market."

Community Development Manager, Zakithi Mngomezulu, took the stage on behalf of SQF and addressed the crowd of excited learners. She began by giving an overview of the forestry business in the area and briefly explained the relationship between SQF, Mondi and local communities. She went on to describe the nature of forestry as a career – that a love of the outdoors and strength in Maths, Science and English are crucial when pursuing a career in forestry.

"We offer bursary opportunities to learners like you, who have grown up in the communities that neighbour our plantations," she explained. "You can apply for these bursaries online, and if you're successful you will get the chance to study at Nelson Mandela University, the country's premier forestry college in the southern Cape."













Zakithi went on to say that there are many other careers in the forestry value chain – ranging from finance to transport and logistics, health and safety, community development and the environment.

A powerful speech was given by Sifiso Sibeko, Mtubatuba Municipality Research and Policy Analyst, who spoke on the professions that are currently 'trending' or in the highest demand in the local and global economies. Sifiso highlighted careers connected to the 4th Industrial Revolution – including information technology, programming and industrial design, while adding that our country is always in need of more 'traditional' professionals in commerce, accounting, law, health sciences and engineering.

"But MOST importantly, do what you love – follow the passion of your intellect," emphasized Sifiso. "Find your passion and follow that path – there is a career out there that suits you. That is the way to success."

Another fascinating presentation was that given by the South African Police Service (SAPS). Captain Mkhize revealed that there are 96 different careers within the SAPS, ranging from pilot to vet surgeon, search and rescue personal, radio technology and corporate communications.

Captain Mpungose added some valuable guidance: "Have a plan. Right now – you are the master of your future destination. Nobody else is truly responsible for your future – not your parents, educators or us. It's up to YOU."

Cllr Mlambo spoke on behalf of the mayor Cllr M Mthethwa, who was unable to attend. He encouraged learners to choose a career wisely with the aim of finding employment or starting a business. He also shared information about the best institutions in the province and careers that are in high demand.

After the presentations, learners flocked to the various stands and displays to gather more information and network with potential employers.

"I was impressed with all the questions that the learners were asking," commented Land Manager, Nosipo Zulu. "They really wanted to understand what forestry is all about. There are so many career opportunities in the forestry industry, so it was great to bring more awareness about what it is that we do."

Joining forces to empower local youth

SQF and Mondi join a host of local partners in support of the inaugural Inkosi MM Mkhwanazi Career and Skills Expo, held on 14 June, 2022

This flagship event was held at the Vulindlela Sports Ground in KwaDlangewza, bringing together 700 youth from the 15 KwaMkhwanazi communities in the greater Port Durnford area. The event was planned and sponsored by the Inkosi Phalane Community Trust, owner of 3 830 ha of forested land in Port Durnford, which is leased to SQF.

The aim of the expo was to empower youth in the region by exposing them to opportunities and career paths that exist in their immediate area. The Trust invited a host of local businesses, organizations and education institutions to share information and showcase their various sectors.

SQF and Mondi seized the opportunity to be involved in the initiative to help capacitate local youth. “We take it for granted that our neighbouring communities know about forestry and the opportunities that exist in the sector, but it’s not always the case,” explained Zakithi Mngomezulu, SQF Community Development Manager. “Many youths do not have access to information, the internet, career guidance and so forth. So, this is a great opportunity to share our story, build relationships with our stakeholder communities and explain the many benefits of forestry.”

Zakithi gave an overview of the business to the large and excited gathering on the main stage as part of the day’s formal proceedings. She also introduced Talente Dube, a young Mondi forester who hails from the Matholenjeni community in Port Durnford. In 2015 Talente was awarded a Mondi bursary to study his National Diploma in Forestry at Saasveld, Nelson Mandela University in George, where he excelled in the academic and practical components of his studies. Today he is forging a successful career as a silviculture forester based at Mondi Nseleni, uMfolozi. His story inspired youth with a real and relatable experience that showed how opportunities do exist within the various industries that operate in the Zululand region.

“My favourite thing about being a forester is working with people from all walks of life,” reflected Talente. “You learn something new every day, so you’re always evolving as a person.”

Other organisations to present on the day included Yethu Scholars, Richards Bay Industrial Zone, Richards Bay Minerals, Umhlathuze Water and the Richards Bay Technical Training & Assessment Centre. The Mkhwanazi Traditional Council was present to oversee proceedings and offer their moral support to the youth in their community.



Talente Dube, Silviculture Forester at Mondi sharing his experience as Forestry Bursary recipient and his career journey with Mondi and SQF.

Inkosi Mandla M Mkhwanazi concluded the event with a motivational speech, which outlined what the Inkosi Phalane Community Trust is doing for local youth currently and what is planned for the near future.

Inkosi Mkhwanazi explained that 30 local youth are being funded towards completing a three-year artisan programme in plumbing and carpentry. The skills programme kicked off in August 2022 and will be concluded with the all-important trade test on completion of the theoretical and practical components of the course. The learners received extra support in the form of stipends and transport fare throughout the training.

Inkosi Mkhwanazi went on to present the Trust’s plan to open a Techno Hub and Info Centre at the Forest Inn facility situated in Port Durnford. This technology hub and skills centre will offer an array of services to the local community, including 40 desktop computers with internet access, board rooms and support staff to assist youth and entrepreneurs with IT skills, drafting of CVs and job applications.

The renovation of an existing building to house the Techno Hub is under way, with plans to open in 2023.

“These are not dreams or promises. These are tangible projects to uplift and empower local youth,” said Inkosi Mkhwanazi. “Go with passion into your careers, or don’t go at all. Success is not achieved over night. It takes hard work, collaboration and time.”

Inkosi took the opportunity to promote clean living and good life choices among local youth. He warned of the dangers that drugs and alcohol pose to youth, who may lose their way



iNkosi Mandla Mkhwanazi visited the Mondi and SQF stands to give thanks for the ongoing cooperation with the iNkhosi Phalane Community Trust.

or become disheartened when faced with many challenges. Inkosi inspired hope and encouraged all present to invest in skills development. “We need skills that are aligned with local industries,” he said in closing.

Sanele Mhlongo, the former General Manager of the Phalane Trust was instrumental in making the Career Expo a success. “We utilized local businesses to provide all the services today,” he explained. “About 45 taxis were hired to transport youth from all the Mkhwanazi communities to the event. We want to offer equal opportunities wherever possible.”

Sanele further explained the function of the Techno Hub. “The aim is to support small businesses and entrepreneurs with resources that will help launch their businesses,” he said. “We also plan to run computer literacy programmes for youth – once we have the facility, we will be able to make great progress in skills development.”

Sanele added that the Techno Hub is a pilot project, and the hope is to establish more of these centres in the region. There are further plans to establish a Career Centre, to help guide learners at a school level in preparing and planning their tertiary education and career paths.

“The real value for us is to bring our message directly to the people,” commented SQF General Manager Linda Vilakazi, as he handed out SQF Newsletters to local youth and offered career advice. “This type of event is interpersonal – it connects us with our neighbouring communities. People can ask us questions and get ‘real-time’ answers, which is hugely valuable in a place where youth lack access to information and resources.”

SiyaQhubeka Forests views BBBEE as a vital component of economic and broader transformation and is fully committed to the objectives enshrined in the Forest Sector Transformation Charter. SQF aims to ensure that its business strategy and procurement processes are developed to achieve measurable progress towards genuine black and local economic empowerment. This commitment is realized by 70% of the total value of contracts being allocated to local community entrepreneurs.



An estimated 700 local youth from 15 communities attended the Career and Skills Expo.



Festivities and entertainment in the lead-up to the presentations were led by the charismatic MC Bhebhe.



SQF Manager Linda Vilakazi offers valuable career advice and discusses the many benefits of forestry.

SQF Skills Development Programme

Skills development empowers local youth and tackles unemployment

The 2022 SQF Skills Development Programme has reached an incredible 113 beneficiaries from stakeholder communities. The beneficiaries were selected through the community liaison forums and youth committees, ensuring community participation and ownership of the project. The liaison forums as well as youth committees were also consulted on which skills would be focussed on for the year. It was decided that Machine Operator Courses – Front-End Loader Training and Excavator Training – as well as Code 10 and Code 14 Driver's Licences would most benefit youth in their search for valuable employment.



Khanysile Ellen Mfeka of Masiphephe Driving School says that getting driver's licences will help change the lives of unemployed youth from the Port Durnfod area.

These skills are linked to employment opportunities that have been identified in the mining industry across the King Cetshwayo District (KCD).

The goal of this programme is to develop and empower young people through practical training and experiential learning interventions to help them access employment opportunities.

South Africa has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, for both youth and adults. The national unemployment rate is increasing annually and the rate in the district is above the national average.

"Every year there are more youth from the communities neighbouring our plantations requesting assistance with skills training opportunities," explains Zakithi Mngomezulu of SQF, who is managing the project. "It is crucial that we contribute to the sustainable social and economic development of communities that neighbour our forestry operations. The health and well-being of the communities is important to our business."

The programme has the added benefit of supporting local businesses and service providers in the skills development space. The training service providers involved with the 2022 programme are:

- Tholulwazi Advanced Training Centre
- Bhekwell Training Academy
- Magwaza Driving School
- Masiphephe Driving School

Khanysile Ellen Mfeka of Masiphephe Driving School received the contract to train 18 youth from the KwaDlangezwa area (of the Mkhwanazi Traditional Council) towards getting their Code 10 Driver's Licences. This phase of the project is still under way, with driving tests scheduled for the end of 2022.

"These licences will help the youth get jobs," commented Ellen. "Some of them are orphans and are trying to take care of siblings. This will help them feed their families."

Ellen went on to say that she hopes to repeat the programme again next year.

Mpume Simela from Magwaza's Driving School said that not only do driver's licences improve employment opportunities,



Mpume Simela and Sibongile Magwaza pictured with some of the SQF Skills Development participants from the KwaMbonambi community.

but they also help ensure that our roads are safe. “We are making sure that our learners get more than enough lessons before they continue with their driver’s test,” explained Mpume. “We are starting them all with code 8, so that they get used to the vehicle, and then moving up to code 10 and 14.”

Magwaza Driving School is responsible for training 30 youth from the KwaMbonambi community.

Thobeka Cindi (22), one of the participants from KwaMbonambi, explained that getting her code 10 licence is crucial to her career. “I studied electrical engineering, but when I applied for the job, I was told that I needed a driver’s licence. I’m so grateful to SQF for this opportunity and I’m excited to move forward with my career now.”

SQF monitors the progress of participants during the course of the training programmes and reports back to the liaison forums. The participants will be monitored for 12 months after completing the training to determine their success in finding employment in the formal sector.

“The majority of the participants that attended the excavator training at KwaMbonambi in 2021 received employment opportunities in the mining sector, which shows that the programme is really making an impact,” reports Zakithi.

The Skills Development Programme helps strengthen SQF’s relationships with neighbouring communities through consultation, dialogue and community participation. The training and development of young people addresses the increasing pressure from local youth for job and skills training opportunities as well as the National Skills Development Strategy, which calls for outreach programmes that tackle unemployment.

> ***The majority of the participants that attended the excavator training at KwaMbonambi in 2021 received employment opportunities in the mining sector, which shows that the programme is really making an impact.***
> ***– Zakithi Mngomezulu, SQF***

SQF bursary students fly high

SQF is currently sponsoring eight students from stakeholder communities at a tertiary level. In order to provide these students with the support they need to succeed both academically and on a personal level, SQF partners with the Rural Access to Education Programme (REAP), an NGO that provides holistic support to university students from day one all the way through to graduation.



This partnership is part of a broader effort to contribute to and to invest in the upliftment of communities in the SQF footprint.

Seven students currently on the programme are attending the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban. These are: Bongumusa Mabaso (3rd Year, BSc Applied Chemistry), Jabulile Jobe (2nd Year, Bachelor of Medical Science in Anatomy), Asanda Mthembu (1st Year, BSS Psychology), Sanele Ndabana (3rd Year, Bachelor of Social Science), Lindokuhle Sikhakhane (2nd Year, Bachelor of Pharmacy), Menziwokuhle Zakwe (1st Year, BSc Agriculture – Animal Science) and Mandisi Zungu (1st Year, BSc Civil Engineering).

The eighth student is Siyanda Mathaba, who is currently in his first year of N.Dip Forestry at Nelson Mandela University in George.

These students represent the four areas within the SiyaQhubeka operational footprint – namely Port Durnford, KwaMbonambi, Dukuduku and Nyalazi.







Bongumusa Mabaso – the rocky road to success

One student on the brink of graduating is Bongumusa Mabaso, who is in his third and final year of his BSc Degree in Chemistry and Cellular Biology.



Bongumusa says that the biggest challenge has been the step up in level of academics from school to university level.

"Eish, it's chemistry, so there are a lot of challenges – it's been hard!" He reveals. "But I have managed to push through with support from REAP, SiyaQhubeka and Mondi. Any time I've had challenges, I'll talk to them and they will help solve them."

When he's not buried in his books, Bongumusa enjoys playing chess on campus. Being able to experience campus life has been a positive thing for many students who were previously studying remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Our students had to show great resilience during the pandemic, to successfully pass their academic years regardless of the challenges they faced studying from home," comments Nombuso from REAP.

REAP had to make huge adjustments in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic – setting up online webinars and ensuring that students had access to laptops and data to study remotely. Now, students are adjusting again, with the return to physical exams and other traditional forms of tertiary education.

SQF Community Development Manager, Zakithi Mngomezulu praised the bursary students for how far they have come over the years.

"We've really seen growth in terms of their personal development," she observes. "They started off very shy and unsure of how they were going to navigate the move from a rural area to a big city. They face many challenges while adjusting to being independent. But in their final year, we can see that they have developed more confidence – they are more engaged and bright eyed – looking to the future."

Zakithi went on to say that Bongumusa has been achieving excellent results: "He comes from a humble background and has shown real determination to get where he is today. We wish him well in his career. My advice would be to just keep working hard. I believe that his spirit of determination will take him far in life."

Bongumuso attributes much of his success to the SQF/ REAP bursary programme.

"I can say that this programme, and the support that I've had, has changed my life, because without it I don't think that I would have made it," he admits. "All I can say is – thank you for everything."

SQF and REAP work together in the recruitment process, identifying students that are from schools in the SQF footprint and that are not being supported through any other bursary programme.

“Our main vision is to see students successfully graduating,” says Nombuso Dimba Ndaleni, university team leader from REAP. “In order to help them do this, we offer psycho-social, academic and financial support.”

The REAP student development programme focuses on four pillars: the Self, Academics, Career and Community Service.

“We have specific topics that we cover to help students at different levels,” continues Nombuso. “For instance, with first year students, we are helping with the transition between high school and university, from the rural context to the city – whereas with our third year students we are preparing them for the world of work or post-graduate studies.”

Further developments for REAP

Nombuso reveals that REAP has been extending its reach to the high school and TVET level and that the future plan is to expand that programme further.

“The greatest challenge in our schooling is the lack of career guidance – so now we are starting with grade nines in order to assist them with career guidance, tertiary applications and funding opportunities. We are also setting up computer labs in different high schools to help rural students bridge the technological divide,” says Nombuso in closing.









Siyanda Mathaba – A bright future in forestry

A Q&A with SQF’s ambitious forestry student, currently completing his first year at Nelson Mandela University



SQF News: When did you first become interested in forestry?

Siyanda: I grew up in Port Dunford, so forestry was something I saw every day, since there are plantations near my home. Through curiosity, I wanted to know more about forestry, how the forestry businesses operate, and that’s how I gained interest in it.

SQF News: How did you receive the SQF bursary?

Siyanda: The bursary was presented to me by my high school teacher Mrs Nduli. I always expressed my interest in forestry to her, so she guided me through the application process. I was selected for an interview and everything went well – so I got the bursary! Mrs Nduli heard about the bursary from Zakithi Mngomezulu, SQF Community Development Manager.

SQF News: How has it been living in George so far from home? Good or tough? What do you miss about home?

Siyanda: Living in George has been a nice experience for someone like me, since I grew up in KZN and I didn’t have that much exposure when it comes to different provinces. George is a very amazing place to live in. It was a bit challenging of course, as the place is far away from home, but as time went by, I adapted. What I miss about my home is spending time with my family.

SQF News: What’s been the best part of your first year studying forestry?

Siyanda: The best thing about my first year studying forestry has been the exposure to the forestry industry, and also being around a community of foresters that share the same ideas is very heart warming and fulfilling.

SQF News: What are you looking forward to in your studies next year?

Siyanda: I am looking forward to getting more exposure to the industry, developing myself personally and enjoying the best moments of my life through a career in forestry.

Usuku lukaMandela 2022 - ukudla komphefumulo



Ithimba le-SQF kanye nabeKhayalethemba Child and Youth Care Workers namavolontiya omphakathi ngesikhathi somcimbi obeyimpumelelo wokugubha uSuku lukaMandela.

Abasebenzi base-SQF bahlanganyele neKhayalethemba kanye namalungu omphakathi ukusungula ingadi ukuhlonipha umgubho wamazwe ngamazwe woSuku lukaMandela lwalo nyaka.

Njengoba bonke abantu bakuleli bazi, uSuku lukaMandela lungolunye lwezinsuku ezibaluleke kakhulu ekhalendeni... usuku olulodwa lonyaka olubekelwe ukusiza abanye ukuze kukhunjulwe impilo kaMandela nakho konke ayekumele.

Izimiso ezibalulekile zomkhankaso woSuku lukaMandela ukulwa nobubha, ukugqugquzela ukuthula, ukubuyisana kuqedwe ukwehlukana okungadalwa ukwehlukahlukana ngokobuzwe nangokwamasiko nokwenkolo. Ingqikithi yalo nyaka ibithi: “Yenza ongakhona ukukwenza, ngalokho onakho, lapho ukhona.”

“Sikhethe ukunikezela ngosuku lwethu lukaMandela ekusizeni Ikhayalethemba, okuyinhlangano egxile ekuthuthukiseni impilo yezingane eziyizintandane, izingane ezibuthaka, abadala kanye nentsha nabangasebenzi,” kusho uMphathi-Jikelele we-SQF uLinda Vilakazi ngesikhathi eyingxenye yethimba elisebenza ngokuzikhandla kulo mkhakha KwaMbonambi.

“Lo mphakathi ubhekene nezinkinga eziningi,” kuqhuba uVilakazi. “Abesifazane nezingane yibona abasengozini enkulu yezinkinga zomphakathi ezifana nokuntuleka kwemisebenzi, izifo kanye nodlame. Ikhayalethemba linikeza usizo olubalulekile kulaba bantu abasengozini.” kusho tena.

Ikhayalethemba selineminyaka engu-16 lisebenzela umphakathi waKwaMbonambi. I-SQF isanda kusiza le nhlangano ngokwakha inkulisa entsha yezingane ezingu-60 ezinakekelwa nsuku zonke.

Enye yezinsiza ezibalulekile ezihlinzekwa yilesi sikhungo uhlelo lokuphakela izingane ezingu-60 ukudla kabili ngosuku. Ezinye izingane zesikole ezingu-50 ezivela endaweni ezungezile

> ***Izimiso ezibalulekile zomkhankaso woSuku lukaMandela ukulwa nobubha, ukugqugquzela ukuthula, ukubuyisana kuqedwe ukwehlukana okungadalwa ukwehlukahlukana ngokobuzwe nangokwamasiko nokwenkolo. Ingqikithi yalo nyaka ibithi: “Yenza ongakhona ukukwenza, ngalokho onakho, lapho ukhona.”***



zivakashela lesi sikhungo nsuku zonke ukuze zizothola ukudla kwasekuseni nokwasemini. Imikhiqizo evela engadini izokwengeza lolu hlelo futhi izosiza ekuqinisekiseni ikuthi abantu ababulawa indlala.

“Ukuntuleka kwemisebenzi inkinga ehamba phambili emphakathini wakithi, futhi lokho kuhambisana nendlala,”



kusho uNkk Zungu onguSihlalo weKhayalethemba ngesikhathi ephumule emthunzini wesihlahla sikalamula ebuka ingadi. “Kubaluleke kakhulu ukuthi izingane zethu zithole ukudla okunempilo nsuku zonke,” eqhuba.

“Uma sebesuthi, bangaqhubeka nokufunda nokudlala – le ngadi izosisiza kakhulu. I-SQF ibi-lokhu iseseka kakhulu eminyakeni edlule. Sibonga kakhulu.”

IKhayalethemba elisekelwa uMnyango wezokuThuthukiswa koMphakathi nalo linohlelo lokuxhuma-na nabantu ukuze kubhekwane nezinye izingqinamba umphakathi obhekene nazo. Miningi imindeni ephethwe yizingane endaweni ngenxa yokushona kwabantu abadala ngenxa yezifo ezihlobene ne-HIV/AIDS. Lesi simo sabuye sabhebhethekiswa ubhubhane lwe-COVID-19. Lezi zingane zibhekana nezinselelo ezinkulu ukuze ziphile impilo yansuku zonke nokuthi zinakekele izingane zakubo ezincane.

Ikhayalethemba linethimba labasebenzi abahlanu abanakekela izingane nentsha kanye nabanakekeli bomphakathi abayishumi abangena emphakathini nsuku zonke ukuze banikeze usizo oluyisisekelo nokwelulekwa.





Yidla imifino yakho!

Umfundi wezolimo we-SQF uSiyabonga Ngema kanye noMphathi wezokuThuthukiswa koMphakathi we-SQF uZakithi Mngomezulu basebenze kanzima ukuze balungise konke ngaphambi komcimbi woSuku lukaMandela. Lo mhlaba onguhhafu wehektha ulinywe i-Amahlathi Ethu, engusonkontileka we-SQF. I-SQF ihlinzeke ngezithombo, umanyolo namathuluzi – kodwa okubaluleke kakhulu abasebenzi kanye namalungu omphakathi abenza



umsebenzi onzima ngosuku bemamatheka.“Namhlanje sitshala isipinashi, u-anyanisi, upelepele oluhlaza kanye neklabishi,” kuchaza uSiyabonga Ngema.

“Inhloso enkulu ukweseka uhlelo lokuphakela abantwana ukudla, kodwa akhona amathuba okudayisa nakwimakethe yendawo. Kukhona izimakethe ezinhle zesipinashi neklabishi eduze.” USiyabonga uzoqapha ingadi masonto onke futhi uthe izitshalo zizobe sezilungele ukuvunwa ezinyangeni ezimbili kuya kwezintathu ezizayo.

“Kuyajabulisa ukubona umphakathi uphumela obala ngokweseka lo msebenzi,” kusho uLinda. “Bathatha ubunikazi balolu hlelo futhi ngaleyo ndlela lolu hlelo luzoya phambili.”

Kwenziwe inqwaba yeminye imisebenzi ngalolu suku ukuqinisekisa ukuthi izingane nazo zithola ithuba lokugubha usuku lokuzalwa lukaMadiba.

Intsha inikwe amaphasela okudla, izinto zokudlela ama-jumping castle, imidwebo nokunye. Phela intsha yiyona enamandla okuguqula ikusasa lalo mphakathi.

> ***Kuyajabulisa ukubona umphakathi uphumela obala ngokweseka lo msebenzi. “Bathatha ubunikazi balolu hlelo futhi ngaleyo ndlela lolu hlelo luzoya phambili.***
> ***– uLinda Vilakazi, uMphathi-Jikelele we-SQF***





SQF Clean-Up Day

Striving for healthy environments, communities and businesses



SQF staff were joined by representatives from WOF, Zululand FPA, RBM and Umhlathuzi Local Municipality in collecting 150 plastic bags of trash at the first ever SQF Clean-Up Day.

On the 1st of July 2022, SQF brought together a number of partners for the inaugural SQF Clean-Up Day, a brand-new initiative that strives to spread awareness about the negative impact that illegal dumping has on the environment, people and animals in the areas where the plantations intersect with neighbouring communities.

Beyond just a 'clean-up day', the event aimed to coordinate waste management efforts between different stakeholders in the KwaMbonambi and Mandlanzini areas and conscientize the public about issues relating to waste.

On the day, SQF staff were joined by representatives from Working on Fire (WOF), the Zululand team from the Zululand Fire Protection Association, Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) and uMhlathuze Local Municipality, who all showed their support by putting in the hard work required to tackle the problem.

Linda Vilakazi, SQF General Manager, briefed everybody about the aim of the day and thanked all present for joining in the effort to combat illegal dumping.

"We are trying to create awareness, rather than trying to clean up the whole of Mandlazini and KwaMbonambi in one day," explained Linda. "We've seen the dumping of tyres, sewerage, rubble, and more in our plantations. This is extremely illegal AND dangerous. Let's use today as a platform for more partners to join us and to spread the message that illegal dumping is not the way to go. We can never do this on our own, hence the importance of collaboration. Thank you for all your support."

The attendees were split into three teams, each led by an SQF forester, and deployed to different areas where Mandlazini and KwaMbonambi border the plantations. On the winding dirt road towards our starting point, SQF Forester Lwandile Mbono updated *SQF News* about the progress in community relations.

"Overall, our relationship with the community here has improved over the years," he said. "There's a lot of understanding between us. Whenever we do have issues, we are able to put our heads together with the KwaMbonambi Liaison Forum – they've been very helpful in finding solutions. We are always able to find a way forward together."

The community benefits from the plantations in a number of ways. Lwandile discussed some of the resources and opportunities that the forests and forestry businesses offer neighbouring communities.

"The community has access to our plantations – they graze their cattle and we issue permits for the collection of firewood and honey. We also play a role in uplifting the community through various CSI initiatives. Job creation is another benefit, as the majority of our labour comes from neighbouring communities," said Lwandile.

By mid-morning the various teams were sweeping the plantation road and filling bag upon bag with all sorts of garbage. Within three hours, approximately 150 plastic bags were piled high at the central meeting point, where Community Development



Manager, Zakithi Mngomezulu was leading the clean-up team. Security was stationed on the road to hand out flyers to pedestrians and cars passing by. Despite the huge effort by all, the sheer volume of trash hidden in every corner of the plantations and open areas was shocking.



In the shade of a big gum tree, Mondi Environmental Specialist, Miranda Sikhakhane, offered her thoughts on the issue.

“Let’s stop illegal dumping by educating people about the negative effects on the community and environment,” she said. “For a start, the garbage is a danger to livestock because waste goes into the watercourses and rivers. It attracts rats and can be a health hazard. Children play in open areas – they can get sick or hurt as a result of the garbage.

“SQF plantations are convenient, easy places to dump – so awareness is of utmost importance,” she went on. “We need to change mentalities. Let’s start helping people see value in waste. Let’s promote recycling and composting. It’s great working with all the stakeholders – this combined effort makes all the difference and we invite other stakeholders from the area AND the communities to join the campaign.”

Fisuxolo Mnguni (City of uMhlathuze team leader for Waste Management, Admin and Compliance) lead a team of 15 CWP (community work programme) staff and uMhlathuze officials who came to show their support for the Clean-Up Day. Fisuxolo offered some valuable perspectives on the problem.

“The municipality provides skips along the road in Mandlazini, which are collected twice a week, but still the dumping continues,” he said. “The community has raised the point that people (individuals and even garden services) come from



urban areas to dump here, because it is seen as being remote or unregulated. They also say that new residents who are not originally from here are inclined to dump, because they do not value the place as their own home."

Rynie Kearns, Ward 4 Councillor for Birdswood and Mandlazini, paid a visit to show her support for the initiative. She said that the municipality encourages people to report illegal dumping so that it can be tackled by the authorities. She added that there are a number of new municipal projects that offer incentives for the collection of garbage, in the form of food tokens and even a 'cash-per-bag' clean-up event that had been well supported.

"It is heart-warming to see the community joining these initiatives and making positive change," she said. "There is currently a competition for the cleanest ward in uMhlathuze. It will be a big challenge to win, but we are going for it!"

Mbuso Khambule was one of five representatives from RBM who joined the day's activities. He summed up the achievements of the day.

"Today fits in with our plan to help ensure that our communities join in the shared responsibility of managing the environment. It's important that we remove all the waste in our areas in order to protect our plants, animals and water sources. It's also important to collaborate with key stakeholders, like SQF, for the sustainability of community and environmental projects."





Nkosingiphile Nhlabathi – for the love of forestry

Nkosingiphile Nhlabathi, or 'Mphile' for short, is the newest addition to the SQF team, having joined the ranks in August 2022. Mphile has had an interesting journey thus far and brings vital experience and plenty of passion to her position as Silviculture Forester for the Dukuduku area.



Mphile grew up on a farm surrounded by forestry plantations in the Piet Retief area. Most of her family were employed at the nearby Mondi plantation (Reinstoff farm) – her mother and grandmother were general workers, while other relatives worked as foremen and long-haul drivers, thus forestry has been an integral part of her life for as long as she can remember.

Looking to break the mould and forge her own path, Mphile decided to pursue a career in electrical engineering after she finished school in 2011.

"As much I grew up with forestry, I didn't see myself working in the plantations," she explains. "So I studied Electrical Engineering at Gert Sibande Colllege in 2012/2013."

However, when it came to finding a business for her practicals, Mphile struggled and became despondent.

That's when she attended a Sappi field day and forestry came back into her life.

"I discovered that there was much more to forestry than I thought, a flame of interest was ignited and I applied for a bursary through Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries," she remembers.

Mphile was successful in her application and before she knew it she was off to Nelson Mandela University in George to study her National Diploma in Forestry. Her journey had now really begun.

"NMU was a great time for me," she reflects. "I discovered my own potential and I excelled at my studies, graduating cum laude in 2018, the top student of the year. It was a proud moment for me!"

Mphile says that she had discovered a career that was more than a job, it was something that she loved. She went on to do her practical at a forestry company in Zululand followed by a Forester-In-Training, and finally landing a permanent position at Sappi in 2019, where she managed two plantations (Braemar and Rosslea) in the Umkomaas area – handling both silviculture and harvesting.

This experience placed her in an excellent position to take on the role of SQF silviculture forester in Dukuduku when the opportunity presented itself.

"SQF is unique and there is a lot for me to learn! But I am enjoying it," she says with a smile. "I have experience in all elements of forestry – from planting and harvesting, to fire protection and also working with communities."

Mphile adds that working in a protected area with wildlife is high risk. "You have to bear in mind that just about any day you can come across an elephant or a buffalo, which adds a new and interesting dimension to safety."

Mphile is particularly keen to gain experience at a mechanized operation, as this has been her ambition since she started her career in forestry.

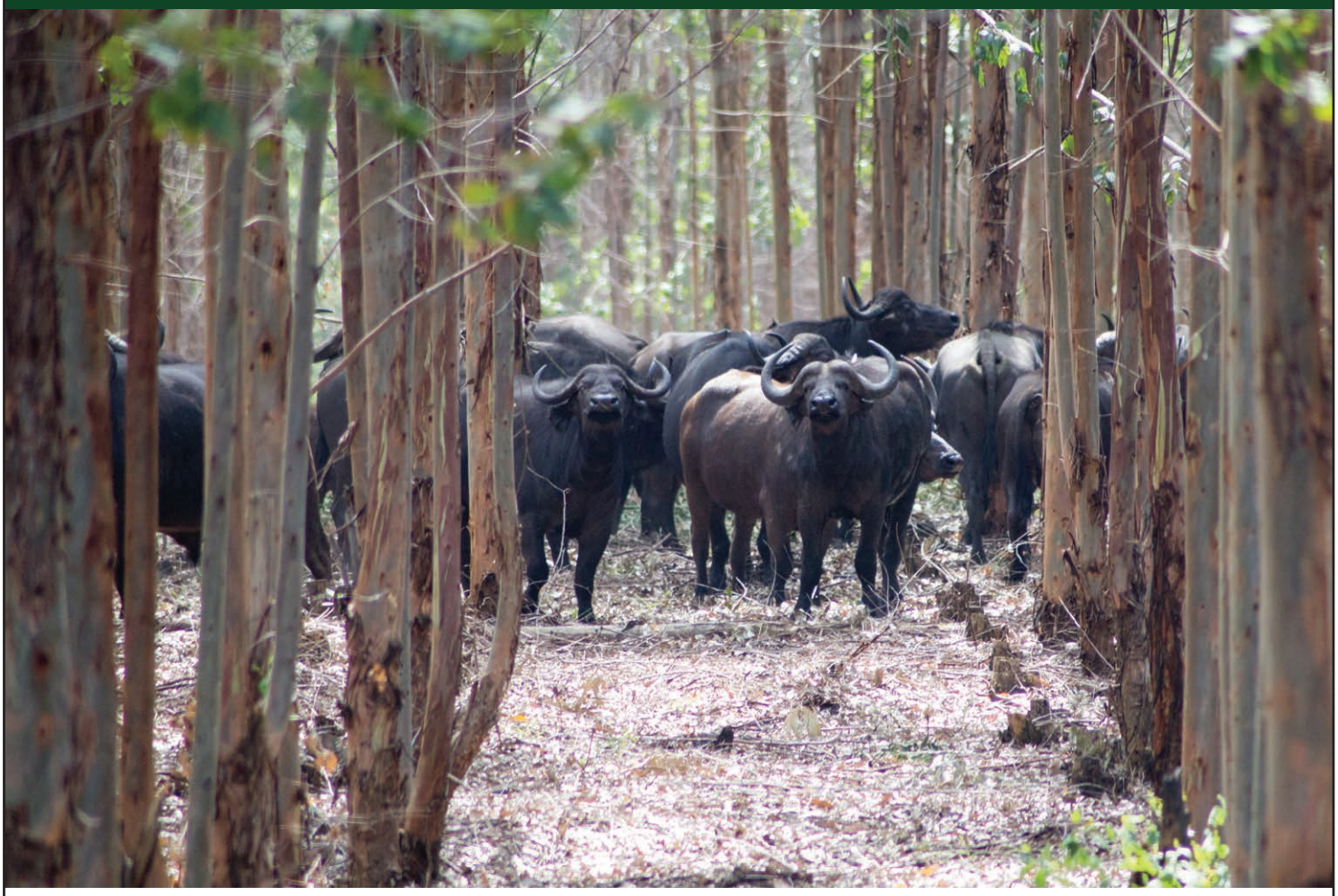
When asked what she loves most about her job, Mphile has a whole list of answers: "I love being outdoors and working with people. I am also proud to be a woman in forestry – to be one of the women who are striving to do great things in the industry."

Mphile goes on to say that fires are definitely the most challenging element of her job. "You can't predict when fires will happen, and when they do your daily planning is compromised. All we can do is to be prepared, ensure that the equipment is on point and that the firefighting team remains safe and calm in the case of a fire."

Mphile takes great pride in her work, as well as her personal development. She has put her Bachelor of Technology studies on hold while she adjusts to the new position, but she will be pursuing her studies again in the near future. "I am new here – I need to focus and adapt!" She explains.

"I am a focused and caring individual," she goes on to say. "Striving for excellence and acting with integrity is at the core of who I am. I am also a woman who believes strongly in prayer – I pray about everything. I am looking forward to a good working relationship with the SQF team, support staff and contractors."

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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.









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