

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL MEALS: DUT LEADS NATIONAL EFFORT TO IMPROVE FOOD ENVIRONMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

With childhood obesity and poor nutrition on the rise, a visionary team from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) is tackling the issue at its root: the school food environment. Through an award-winning project titled “Modelling the Blueprint to Improve the School Food Environment in South Africa”, DUT is leading a national initiative to revolutionise how children eat and engage with food at school.

Led by the Department of Food and Nutrition Consumer Sciences in the Faculty of Applied Sciences, the project aims to adapt and implement a policy blueprint initially developed by UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2019. This blueprint outlines a comprehensive strategy for creating healthier, more supportive school food environments (SFEs) across the country.

DUT secured R2.1 million in competitive funding to pilot the initiative in the iLembe district of KwaZulu-Natal, working with six public schools across the full socioeconomic quintile range. This funding allowed for the development of seven targeted interventions, co-designed with stakeholders and tailored to the unique challenges faced by schools and learners.

The interventions included regulating the sale of foods and beverages at tuckshops, running school campaigns to promote healthy eating and physical activity, enhancing the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) by improving meal diversity and infrastructure, and aligning school sponsorships with healthy food policies. Other actions involved banning unhealthy food advertising in and around school grounds, training stakeholders like food vendors and school leaders, and supporting informal vendors in offering nutritious options while remaining profitable.

What sets this project apart is its multi-stakeholder approach, which brought together government departments (DBE and the Department of Health),



Pictured: Prof. Nemavhola together with Prof. Ashika Naicker, Dr Imana Pal, Dr Evonne Singh, Dr Heleen Grobbelaar, Dr Nokuthula Vilakazi, Dr Onwaba Makanjana, Dr Lisebo Mothepu and Ms Anjellah Reddy at the Institutional awards receiving RIE Impact Award for the Modelling the Blueprint to Improve the School Food Environment in South Africa Project.

UNICEF, academic researchers, NSNP teams, school governing bodies, and local vendors. Rather than working in isolation, the project brought everyone to the table, from policymakers to those on the ground, like vendors and teachers. This inclusive model enabled interventions that are practical, sustainable, and nationally scalable.

Beyond its immediate success, the project has laid the foundation for national-level strategies aimed at improving food environments in all South African schools. It has also spurred a number of spin-off projects in collaboration with UNICEF, DBE, and the Department of Health, further advancing the mission to combat child malnutrition and obesity.

In recognition of their outstanding work, the DUT team comprising Prof. Ashika Naicker, Dr Imana Pal, Dr Evonne Singh, Dr Heleen Grobbelaar, Dr Nokuthula Vilakazi, Dr Onwaba Makanjana, Dr Lisebo Mothepu, and Ms. Anjellah Reddy were recently honoured with the Research Innovation and Engagement (RIE) Impact Award 2024. The award acknowledges the project's significant contribution to public health, educational equity, and policy innovation.

PHUMEZA MSONGELWA

Pictured: Mr Ebrahim Asmal, Ms Fezeka Mzimela and Vodacom representatives.
Photographer: S'bonelo Dlamini.



DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND VODACOM NXT LVL HOST CHEQUE HANDOVER CEREMONY TO SUPPORT CODE LIKE A GIRL PROJECT

The Department of Information Technology in the Faculty of Accounting and Informatics at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in collaboration with Vodacom NXT LVL held a cheque handover ceremony on Tuesday, 18 March 2025 at the Ritson campus in Durban. The event marked the presentation of a cheque valued at R20,000 to Ms Fezeka Sthandiwe Mzimela, a deserving recipient of the Code Like a Girl project, to assist in settling her outstanding tuition fees.

In attendance was the Head of Department of Information Technology at DUT, Mr Ebrahim Asmal, Marketing Specialist: Vodacom, Ms Mbali Magwaza, Luthando Cetwayo, Technician, Mrs Ugeshni Moodley, award recipient, Ms Fezeka Mzimela, influencers and DUT students.

The Code Like a Girl project is an annual initiative led by Mr Ebrahim Asmal. It is designed to empower young high school girls by equipping them with digital and coding skills. Through this initiative, the learners who participate gain hands-

“This collaboration... is a testament to our commitment as a department and faculty to empowering young women in technology. Mzimela’s dedication and hard work deserved recognition, and we are proud of her.”
– MR ASMAL

on experience in programming, problem-solving, and critical thinking, preparing them for future careers in IT and related fields.

Mr Asmal highlighted the importance of such partnerships in advancing educational opportunities and bridging the gender gap in the technology subdivision.

“This collaboration with Vodacom NXT LVL is a testament to our commitment as a department and faculty to empowering young women in technology. Mzimela’s dedication and hard work deserved recognition, and we are proud of her,” said Mr Asmal.

An emotional Mzimela expressed her heartfelt gratitude for the financial assistance. “I am incredibly thankful to Vodacom NXT LVL, my department, and lastly Mr Asmal for this generous support and for starting this initiative. This contribution not only helps ease my financial burden but it also motivates me to continue striving for excellence in the IT field,” she said.

This ceremony served as a moment of celebration and encouragement for other students who wish to enter the world of technology. It highlighted the importance of industry-academic collaborations in fostering talent and creating opportunities for young women in Science Technology Engineering Mathematics fields.

The cheque handover ceremony served as a moment of celebration and encouragement for other students aspiring to enter the world of technology. It underscored the significance of industry-academic collaborations in fostering talent and creating opportunities for young women in the Science Technology Engineering Mathematics fields.

SIPHOKAZI DLAMINI

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN DUT AND LOCAL SCHOOLS TO BOOST AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

A significant meeting took place between the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Community Engagement, the DUT Confucius Institute, and the DUT Enterprise Risk Management Office, alongside the Mahlabathini CMC and James Nxumalo Agricultural High School in Ulundi on 7 February 2025. The purpose of this meeting was to establish a mutually beneficial partnership aimed at enhancing education and promoting agricultural studies for both teachers and learners.

The collaboration will focus on improving the quality of education at James Nxumalo Agricultural High School, with a special emphasis on introducing innovative agricultural practices, such as mushroom farming and ginseng grass cultivation. These agricultural projects are expected to equip learners with valuable skills, opening doors for future careers in agriculture.

Additionally, the Confucius Institute announced its intention to offer top-performing learners from James Nxumalo Agricultural High School an opportunity to study abroad as exchange students at the University of Fujian Agricultural and Forestry, providing them with international exposure in the agricultural field.

The Enterprise Risk Management Office also extended its support to the Mahlabathini CMC, offering to assist with professional risk management strategies. The Office will conduct workshops for principals across the six circuits in the Mahlabathini area. These workshops aim



Pictured: Mr Dubazane, James Nxumalo Agricultural High School Principal.

to assist school leaders to develop risk profiles, improving the management and operation of schools and ultimately addressing some challenges that contribute to school underperformance.

Ms Xoliswa Cele the Chief Education

Specialist from the Mahlabathini CMC emphasized the importance of equipping school leaders, particularly principals, with the knowledge and tools necessary to implement effective strategic plans. She pointed out that the lack of clear answers as to why some schools fail to meet expectations often stems from insufficient risk management and strategic planning.

“We need to train school leaders to better understand how to manage risk and implement strategic goals. This is essential in improving school performance,” said Ms Cele.

The DUT team expressed their excitement about the partnership, which they hope will benefit the entire community by advancing agricultural education and enhancing leadership capabilities within local schools. Further meetings are planned to finalize the details of these promising partnerships.

PHUMEZA MSONGELWA

Pictured: DUT team with the Mahlabathini CMC team at the James Nxumalo Agricultural High School.



YOUTH EMPOWERED TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AT DUT PRE-CONFERENCE

The Durban University of Technology (DUT)'s Business School under the Faculty of Management Sciences, hosted a community engagement Climate Change Pre-Conference event on 25 February 2025 at the Durban Botanical Gardens, offering a platform for youth to voice their concerns about climate change. The event, attended by delegates from around the world and learners from Seatides Combined School and Chatsworth Secondary Schools, aimed to engage participants in discussions surrounding climate change and building a more sustainable future. The pre-conference was particularly focused on giving youth from areas recently affected by natural disasters the chance to share their experiences and propose solutions to combat climate change.

The day began with a "Toxic Tour," where participants visited Wentworth, a community impacted by oil refineries contributing to land and air pollution, as well as Tongaat, an area devastated by the 2024 tornado. These site visits highlighted the real-world implications of environmental damage and the need for urgent action.

The second session at the Botanical Gardens featured intense discussions about the effects of climate change, with Ms Phumzile Xulu, the Engagement Practitioner at DUT and the Programme Director for the day emphasised the need for collective action from youth, academics, government, and industry to tackle climate change and find sustainable solutions. "What can we do? We need to start to engage in this issue and talk about what we can do as a collective, as communities," she said.

In his welcoming remarks, Professor Pfano Mashau, Director of the DUT Business School, welcomed attendees to the pre-conference community engagement event on climate change. He emphasized that climate change is a socio-economic challenge that requires collective action from communities, businesses, and policymakers. He encouraged everyone, regardless of age or role, to take responsibility in addressing climate



Pictured: Learners and educator from Chatsworth Secondary School who attended the Climate change Pre-Conference.

change, citing real-world examples like last year's heavy snowfall affecting businesses. He stated, "Climate change has become too important to be left to one actor. We cannot put this responsibility only to our government, our municipalities, and say they should prepare us for these changes. We need to play a role." Prof Mashau highlighted the importance of turning knowledge into action and stressed that climate change must become a constant topic of conversation in all sectors. He thanked all those involved in organizing the event and urged active participation.

Keynote speaker Commissioner Makoma Lekalakala, Director of Earthlife Africa Johannesburg and Member of the Presidential SA Climate Change Commission, highlighted

the urgent need for leadership to address the climate crisis, highlighting the importance of global cooperation and local action. The focus was on the "just transition" towards renewable energy and how it must be managed to ensure fair treatment for communities and workers, particularly those affected by industries like coal. The speaker stressed that climate change is a leadership crisis, not just an environmental one, and called for everyone, including individuals, businesses, and governments, to take action in order to avoid further environmental destruction and safeguard the future.

"Leadership means taking action. And if we all take action, then we can be able to save the planet. Because this planet is that environment



Pictured: Learners and educators from Seatides Combined School who attended the Climate change Pre-Conference.

“Climate change has become too important to be left to one actor. We cannot put this responsibility only to our government, our municipalities, and say they should prepare us for these changes. We need to play a role.” – PROF PFANO MASHAU

that makes all of us. People are always saying that we need to protect nature because we are nature and nature is in us.”

Mr Livhuwani Ndou, Acting Deputy Director from the National Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, stressed the importance of collaboration among professionals, students, and stakeholders in developing solutions. Looking ahead, he proposed structured engagements where their department can present key initiatives and partnerships to combat climate change. Mr Ndou highlighted the urgency of these issues and expresses their willingness to participate in future discussions with a more comprehensive presentation.

“Climate change is a reality we can no longer ignore. As professionals and policymakers, we must collaborate, innovate, and take decisive action. Through structured engagements and partnerships, we can find sustainable solutions to mitigate its impact on our built environment and beyond.”

The event included a panel discussion with representatives from the eThekweni Municipality’s Disaster Management Unit, eThekweni Municipality Climate Change Department, South Durban Community Environmental Alliances, and learners from Seatides Combined School and Chatsworth Secondary School. The panel addressed the impact of climate change on communities and proposed ways to tackle the issue moving forward.

Dianca Govender, a matric learner from Seatides Combined School, delivered a powerful message to youth and community leaders: “You need to stop talking and take action. We need real investment in environmental-proof infrastructure, and we need to create awareness. For the youth, we are not just the future, but we are the now. We need to start doing simple things such as using public transport rather than private transport, stop littering, and increase awareness ourselves.” She stressed the importance of immediate, tangible action and the role young people can play in driving change.

Dhashan Pillay, a Grade 11 learner from Chatsworth Secondary School, praised the event as an eye-opener, commending DUT for involving schools in such an essential discussion. He believes that simple actions like keeping communities clean could be the first steps toward tackling climate change. “If all communities come together to find solutions, we can make a difference,” he said.

Adding to the voices of leadership and action, Professor Simphiwe Nojiyeza from the DUT Business School emphasized the transformative role of higher education institutions in climate response efforts.

“Universities are vital in connecting climate research with real-world action. By working with communities, NGOs and governments, they help turn policies and academic theory into practical, community-led solutions. This kind of participatory research empowers people to take ownership of climate adaptation, making responses more effective and sustainable,” he said.



Pictured: DUT staff at the Tongaat site visit.



Pictured: Learners from Chatsworth Secondary who attended the Climate Change Pre-Conference.



Pictured: Panel speakers and attendees of the Climate Change Pre-Conference.

The Climate Change Pre-Conference set the stage for the main conference, which took place on the 26–27 February 2025 at the Coastlands Hotel. The event underscored the urgency of addressing

climate change and the need for a collective effort to secure a sustainable future for all.

PHUMEZA MSONGELWA



Pictured: students who attended the training with Adv. Mohammed Vahed and DUT Ms Phumzile Xulu.

DUT HOSTED 'KEYS TO EXCELLENCE' TRAINING ON COMPETING WITH AI AND ROBOTS

The Durban University of Technology (DUT), Community Engagement, in collaboration with the Young Leaders Academy and IQRAA Trust, successfully hosted the Keys to Excel training sessions at the Urban Futures Centre (UFC), located on the Steve Biko Campus. The sessions took place on 8 and 15 March 2025 for Cohort 1 and 29 March and 5 April 2025 for Cohort 2, providing a powerful platform for personal development, leadership growth, and academic excellence.

The two-day programme brought together students from various faculties divided into two cohorts, all eager to develop skills for a future shaped by artificial intelligence, automation, and innovation. Drawing reflections and experiences from both cohort 1 and cohort 2, the training focused on self-mastery, critical thinking, teamwork, and career readiness, aiming to equip students not only for the corporate world but also for entrepreneurial opportunities in a rapidly evolving job market.

Facilitated by Advocate Mohammed Vahed, founder of the Young Leaders Academy, the sessions encouraged reflection, goal setting, and workplace awareness. "It's not just about getting a job," said Vahed. "It is about becoming adaptable, innovative, and prepared for a world that's constantly changing."

This message resonated with Khwezi Nqoko, a second-year Industrial Chemistry student, who said the training changed her outlook on AI. "I used to think AI was here to take away our jobs," she explained, "but I realised it's actually a tool to enhance our creativity and innovation." She also appreciated the practical guidance on job interviews and career expectations.

Similarly, Khethiwe Qwabe, a third-year Business Information Management student, found value in the interactive elements, especially a group challenge to build paper jets under pressure. "That moment showed me how powerful teamwork is," she said. "It really opened my eyes to how important collaboration is in any setting. The certificate ceremony at the end was a proud moment for all of us."

Nokuthula Majola, an Advanced Diploma student in Horticulture, echoed these sentiments, saying the training boosted her confidence in applying innovation and creativity within her field.

As the programme concluded with certificates awarded to all participants, gratitude continued to pour in particularly from Nothando Maphumulo, a second-year Clinical Technology student who wrote to the Community Engagement Office praising the experience as "truly transformative." Although she was not outspoken during the sessions, she noted she was "fully engaged and absorbing valuable lessons."

Maphumulo shared how the training sharpened her decision-making and helped her become more intentional about her goals and

actions. "This newfound intentionality has helped me stay focused and driven," she wrote. "I now see my path unfolding brightly, with purpose and direction. I'm excited to apply the knowledge and skills acquired to make a meaningful impact. I am honoured to have been part of this program."

The third cohort is scheduled to take place at the PMB Campuses on 7 and 14 June 2025 and will include participants from diverse academic backgrounds. This upcoming session will not only expand the program's reach across campuses but also aims to build on the momentum of previous cohorts by deepening the impact of experiential learning, peer collaboration, and leadership development.

The DUT Community Engagement Office extended its appreciation to both the IQRAA Trust for its generous sponsorship and the Young Leaders Academy for its continued commitment to student empowerment. With its blend of practical learning, reflection, and real-world application, the Keys to Excel programme continues to serve as a vital stepping stone for DUT students determined to thrive in a competitive and tech-driven world.

SIHLE NZIMA

DUT FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES DONATES WHEELCHAIRS TO KHULA NATURAL HEALTH CENTRE IN COMMUNITY SUPPORT EFFORT

The Durban University of Technology's (DUT) Faculty of Health Sciences recently made a generous donation of wheelchairs to the Khula Natural Health Centre in St Lucia. This donation follows the Faculty's achievement as a runner-up at the DUT's Engagement Showcase and Pitching Awards 2024.

The Faculty of Health Sciences Community Engagement Committee, chaired by the Deputy Dean, Professor Pavitra Pillay and representatives from all the faculty departments, contributed to this initiative. The donation

was funded using the prize money awarded to the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), a clear demonstration of inter-disciplinary collaboration for a common cause. This effort underscores DUT's commitment to community engagement and addresses the pressing need for accessible healthcare solutions in South Africa. According to a recent study, approximately 2% of the South African population over five years old rely on wheelchairs, highlighting the importance of contributions like this.

Prof Pillay, speaking about the initiative, said, "We are thrilled to have won the R10,000 at the 2024 DUT Engagement Showcase and Pitching

Awards, which we used to procure much-needed wheelchairs for the Khula Wellness Centre in St Lucia. This NGO plays a vital role in providing healthcare to over 360,000 patients, with women, children, and the elderly being the primary beneficiaries. We were pleased to deliver the two wheelchairs, knowing they will make a significant difference in the lives of those who rely on the Centre's care."

According to Prof Gugu Mchunu, the Executive Dean in the Faculty of Health Sciences, this project is one example of DUT being an

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Pictured: Faculty of Health Sciences handing over wheelchairs to the Khula Natural Health Centre.



engaged university. She expressed that the Khula Wellness Centre started working with Homeopathy Department in 2019. As part of the outreach to rural communities, in 2023 the faculty identified the need to involve all health sciences departments in this project, and the results have been amazing. “We are grateful to the centre directors, Drs Nicoline Potgieter and Manuel Steiner, for welcoming our staff and students to the centre,” she said. The donation is part of the faculties’ broader vision to support local communities, improve quality of life, and empower individuals with mobility challenges. By focusing on making healthcare more accessible, Prof Mchunu said that the faculty is working to alleviate some of the daily struggles faced by individuals who lack mobility aids.

During the handover ceremony, Mr Zamani Mayeza, Community Engagement Co-ordinator from the Faculty of Health Sciences, expressed his pride in the initiative, noting the impact on the community. “The wheelchairs were well received by the Khula Clinic and the community. The community was absolutely overjoyed to receive this much needed equipment. It was a truly successful day as we were able to bring light into their lives. They were so delighted,” said Mayeza.

The Faculty of Health Sciences is already exploring ways to expand community-based projects to other communities, considering both immediate and future needs for improving healthcare access. In alignment with SDG3, the faculty aims to offer more engagements such as these, to provide its students with similar learning opportunities, contributing to solving societal health problems. Students are able to gain a deeper understanding around the context of socio-cultural dynamics which are not usually found in traditional classrooms.

“The Khula community’s response has been incredibly positive, and we’ve seen first-hand how these small gestures can make a huge difference in the lives of those who need it most. We look forward to continuing our work with Khula and other local initiatives to bring more support where it’s most needed,” Mayeza concluded.

This successful donation reinforces the faculties’ vision of creating a lasting impact and fostering a spirit of unity and shared responsibility for the betterment of local communities. As part of its ongoing community engagement efforts and in alignment with the faculty’s research focus area: Global Health and Sustainability, FHS plans to continue to engage in additional projects where it is able to provide meaningful and impactful contributions while continuing to provide valuable support to those in need across South Africa.

PHUMEZA MSONGELWA

RISK MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP STRENGTHENS SCHOOL SAFETY AND GOVERNANCE IN MAHLABATHINI

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) Enterprise Risk Management Unit in collaboration with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZNDOE) and the Mahlabathini Circuit Management Centre (CMC), recently hosted a transformative Risk Management Workshop aimed at empowering school leadership in the Mahlabathini Circuit.

To accommodate a wider group of school leaders, the workshop was delivered in two cohorts: Cohort 1 was held on 26–27 March 2025, followed by Cohort 2 on 10–11 April 2025, both hosted at Princess Phumzile Primary School in Ulundi. This impactful initiative brought together principals from across the Mahlabathini Circuit to address and mitigate pressing risk factors affecting school environments. The sessions focused on equipping participants with practical tools to enhance governance, safety, and academic performance. Through in-depth engagement, the workshop addressed key challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited resources, and governance gaps, while introducing foundational concepts in Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) – including environmental scanning, SWOT analysis, risk appetite, and strategic planning.

The impact of the workshop was best captured through the heartfelt feedback of the participating principals. Londiwe Dube, Principal of Mazonke High School in Mhlabathini, shared a powerful testimony about the workshop. “In my point of view, the workshop was fruitful, revealing, and productive. We’ve been waiting for a very long time for such information. Now, we are fully equipped and ready to implement what we’ve learned,” said Dube. She furthermore

reflected on the impact and knowledge she gained from the workshop. “I am walking away with a clear understanding of governance, financial, academic, and safety risks, and I now understand the importance of asking: ‘What could be the problem? What can be done? For how long? Is there a need for action?’ The answer is yes. Every principal must first self-reflect and ask themselves, ‘Am I a risk factor in my school?’ This training wasn’t just for principals, it was for SMTs, SGBs, educators, and our learners. We are ready to go back and implement,” she added.

Majola Vusumuzi Abiort, Principal of Magqezulana High School from Cohort 1 also shares the same sentiments with Dube about the workshop being productive and impactful. “The workshop was wonderful, fruitful, impressive, supportive, and developmental. I personally gained strategies for managing risk factors in a school environment, said Abiort.” However, Mr Sisa Godfrey Edmond Mndunge, who attended Cohort 2, gave a candid and critical reflection. “As teachers, we are often confined to departmental policies, which limits our thinking. This workshop opened our minds to risk management and strategic planning,” said Mndunge. He furthermore touched on his personal challenges that he has faced as a principal of Masibumbane High School. “We’ve been passive, waiting for things to go wrong and then report. Now we understand the importance of proactive planning. If we were empowered like CEOs, our schools would function far better. This workshop reminded me how important it is to think independently and take ownership, even in a system that often denies us resources,” he added.

Mr Sandile Khanyile, facilitator from DUT’s Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) team, emphasized the importance of embedding risk management into school leadership, stating that Risk management is crucial and it is a key line

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– MR SISA GODFREY EDMOND MNDUNGE



Pictured: DUT Team with the KZN DOE Team, Mahlabathini CMC and School Principals from the Mahlabathini CMC who attended the Workshop.

“Every principal must first self-reflect and ask themselves, ‘Am I a risk factor in my school?’ This training wasn’t just for principals, it was for SMTs, SGBs, educators, and our learners. We are ready to go back and implement.” – LONDIWE DUBE

of defence, helping institutions make informed decisions, manage uncertainty, and foster innovation and growth. “The workshop aimed to introduce the ERM process to principals within the Mahlabathini Circuit Management Cluster (CMC), with success defined not merely by attendance but by long-term impact,” said Khanyile. He further noted that when principals are empowered to make risk-based decisions and apply these strategies in their schools can we truly call this initiative successful. “Encouragingly, the maturity of engagement and depth of discussion by the end of the sessions indicated measurable progress,” he said. Khanyile also highlighted the strategic value of the collaboration between DUT, KZNDOE, and the CMC, aligning with DUT’s 2025 ERM theme being “Deepening the Risk Culture: A Co-Journeying, Integrative DUT Posture. He stressed that school leaders must be equipped to identify risks that could hinder performance, link strategy to execution, and reflect continuously on outcomes – critical elements in the Department of Education’s drive to improve school functionality and learner achievement.

Mrs Xoliswa Cele, Chief Education Specialist from Mahlabathini CMC, praised the initiative and said that while the circuit’s 85.4% pass rate in 2024 is commendable, she believes they can do better. “Equipping principals with risk management tools will elevate school performance, DUT has supported us since 2021, from learner support in chemistry to career guidance and institutional outreach,” said Cele.

At the end of each two-day session,

participating principals received certificates of completion, recognizing their active engagement and professional development. This initiative marks a critical step toward strengthening education in the Mahlabathini Circuit. By expanding access to training through two separate cohorts, DUT and its partners ensure that more schools benefit from proactive leadership and strategic risk planning. With school principals now empowered to identify potential

risks, develop mitigation plans, and implement governance frameworks, this workshop lays the foundation for improved educational outcomes across the circuit. DUT, in collaboration with KZNDOE and Mahlabathini CMC, remains committed to creating sustainable, safe, and well-managed school environments that nurture both educators and learners for years to come.

SIHLE NZIMA



Pictured: Mahlabathini CMC Principals attending the Risk Management Workshop.

THE NONKULULEKO CATHERINE FOUNDATION: EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES AND HONOURING A LEGACY

The Nonkululeko Catherine Foundation, established in 2022, is a registered Non-Profit Organisation founded by Sinalenjabulo Joy Elizabeth Ndlovu, a third-year Human Resources Management student from the Faculty of Management Science at Durban University of Technology (DUT). The foundation is named after her late mother, Nonkululeko Catherine Ndlovu, who passed away in 2019 after battling colon cancer.

Ndlovu describes her mother as a loving and life-changing woman who touched many lives, and the foundation was created to honour her enduring legacy.

The primary mission of the foundation is to mobilise the youth, empower communities, and address pressing social issues. Through various initiatives, the organisation seeks to make a lasting impact by providing essential services, advocating for change, and improving individuals' lives. The foundation is committed to bettering communities, focusing on programmes that offer career guidance and tertiary application assistance to high school students, hosting career days, and distributing food parcels and clothing to those in need.

"We aim to make a positive impact in the community by instituting initiatives and programmes that help better individuals," said Ndlovu.

To further its reach, the foundation collaborates with a variety of stakeholders, including schools, churches, and other organisations. These partnerships are pivotal in amplifying the foundation's efforts to tackle the social issues faced by many members of the community.

The foundation's hard work and dedication recently earned recognition through the prestigious DUT Engagement Showcase and Pitching Award. Ndlovu shared her pride in receiving the honour, expressing how it validated the organisation's efforts and highlighted its impact in the community. The award has significantly raised the profile of the Nonkululeko Catherine Foundation, leading to new collaborations with



Pictured: Members of the Nonkululeko Catherine Foundation during their Road to Varsity initiative at Ezithabeni Secondary School.

Photo supplied by the Nonkululeko Catherine Foundation.

notable lecturers and academic departments, especially at DUT.

"We were overwhelmed with a sense of pride, fulfilment, and elation upon receiving the Engagement Award. It opened doors to new collaborations and has been a game-changer for us," she said.

The foundation is currently involved in several impactful projects, including its flagship programme 'Road to Varsity', which helps high school students navigate the tertiary application process. Another key initiative is 'Career Days', where major stakeholders come together to educate the community on educational opportunities. The foundation also runs 'Care Community Assistance and Relief Effort', a programme that provides food assistance to those in need, as well as 'The NCF Clothing Drive', which collects and distributes second-hand clothing to community members facing shortages.

"We are excited to collaborate with DUT on several projects this year," Ndlovu added. "We invite everyone to follow us on social media for updates on our upcoming events and initiatives."

Over the past year, the foundation has achieved significant milestones, including assisting more than 550 students with career guidance and tertiary applications, hosting a successful career day, and distributing food parcels and clothing to those in need. Furthermore, through collaborations with DUT's SWEEP Programme and sponsorships from partners like BB Bread, Durban Solid Waste, First National Bank, and the DUT Human Resources Department, the foundation has been able to expand its reach and make a more meaningful impact.

The Nonkululeko Catherine Foundation remains steadfast in its mission to make a positive difference in the community. The foundation's commitment to collaboration and service ensures that it will continue to thrive, and they look forward to growing their efforts to better the lives of many.

"We are always looking for ways to collaborate with others to achieve our goals," Ndlovu concluded.

PHUMEZAMSONGELWA



Pictured: DUT's Phumzile Xulu, Xoliswa Cele and the principals of the seven top achieving schools.

DUT CELEBRATES ACHIEVEMENTS OF SCHOOLS AT MAHLABATHINI CMC MERIT AWARDS 2025

On March 20, 2025, the Community Engagement team at Durban University of Technology (DUT) attended the Mahlabathini CMC Merit Awards 2025, a prestigious event that celebrated the remarkable achievements of schools in the region. The ceremony recognized schools for their dedication and hard work in ensuring the academic success of their learners, especially in achieving a 100% matric pass rate. DUT was proud to be part of this special occasion and to show its continued support for education and learner development in the region.

The schools honoured during the event were from various circuits within the Mahlabathini CMC. These included Magqezulana and Ekwandeni High Schools from the Ceza Circuit, Malandela and Thabani Isaac Gasa High Schools from the Makhosini Circuit, Qgokamandla and James Nxumalo Agricultural High Schools from the Ondini Circuit, and Kwabhamu High School from the Okhukho Circuit. Each of these schools achieved an impressive 100% matric pass rate, reflecting the hard work, commitment, and resilience of both learners and staff.

Ms Xoliswa Cele, the Mahlabathini Chief Education Specialist, congratulated the district on the significant improvement in the 2024 NSC results. She expressed gratitude to DUT for its contribution to the Physical Science stream, stating, "We have seen a great improvement in the Physical Science results, and we could not have done it without the assistance of DUT." Cele also commended all top-achieving schools and

expressed hope for even greater success in the coming year.

Ms Phumzile Xulu, the Engagement Practitioner at DUT, recognised and congratulated the seven schools that achieved a 100% pass rate. "We are very proud of what the schools have achieved in 2024. May you continue to rise, excel, and inspire others. The future is bright, and it belongs to all who make it," She said.

DUT has been actively supporting these schools through initiatives such as science experiments and career guidance under the Mahlabathini Schools Programme. These efforts aim to enhance learners' learning experiences and provide valuable resources to help shape their future aspirations. At the event, DUT presented certificates and congratulatory gifts to the honoured schools as a token of appreciation and recognition for their outstanding achievements.

Additionally, Masibumbane High School was recognised as a top DUT Feeder School for its continued support and partnership with the

university. This award highlighted the school's role in fostering strong educational foundations for its learners and its contributions to the local academic community.

The 2024 top achiever from the Mahlabathini Circuit, Zamokuhle Kwanele Biyela from Mnyamana High School, who is now a DUT Information and Communication Technology (ICT) student, expressed his gratitude to DUT for their contribution to the education system. "I was really happy to be the top achiever because I put a lot of work into my studies. I also thank DUT for affording us a chance to put theory into practice."

By celebrating these accomplishments, DUT reaffirms its commitment to supporting education in the Mahlabathini region and empowering students to achieve their academic and career goals. The Merit Awards event served as an inspiring reminder of the power of education to transform communities and improve lives.

PHUMEZA MSONGELWA



Pictured: Siyakhula Msinga Empowerment.

EMPOWERING RURAL DREAMS: SIYAKHULA MSINGA CHANGING LIVES ACROSS KWAZULU-NATAL

In the heart of Msinga, a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal often overshadowed by limited resources and systemic barriers, a youth-led movement is rewriting the narrative. Siyakhula Msinga Empowerment, a registered non-profit company, is driving change from the ground up one learner, one application, and one dream at a time.

Founded in October 2022 by Simphiwe Mnyandu, a third-year Nursing student at Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Chairperson of the Insika Men's Network, Siyakhula has grown from a grassroots support group into a structured NPC powered by a team of dedicated university student volunteers.

Their mission? To dismantle the barriers to education, entrepreneurship, and personal development that continue to sideline rural youth – not only in Msinga but across the broader KwaZulu-Natal region.

The heart of Siyakhula's work lies in making higher education accessible to those who've long been excluded. "Many of us come from these communities. We know what it feels like to struggle with university applications without internet, guidance, or even a proper uniform," says Mnyandu.

Since its inception, the organization has assisted more than 8,000 students with university and bursary applications. Their dedicated team offers one-on-one support for CAO forms, NSFAS funding, motivational letters, and documentation – all delivered by university students who've walked the same path.

Despite limited resources, Siyakhula continues to evolve through annual strategic planning workshops. These sessions not only define roles

within the team but also open doors to new sponsorships and partnerships. The organization has collaborated with DUT's Faculty of Health Sciences and is in talks with Management Sciences and DUT Innobiz to bolster their entrepreneurial efforts.

"We've hosted two career expos and have big plans for our third one in June 2025," says Mnyandu. "We also run tutorial programmes during university breaks and support schools with motivation sessions and application workshops."

Siyakhula's impact extends to entrepreneurship. The team offers mentorship, assists with business registrations, and connects aspiring entrepreneurs to seed funding opportunities.

Looking ahead, the organization is working to establish a digital hub in Msinga, featuring an internet café and media production space. These facilities will serve as both a learning centre and a revenue generator – bridging the digital divide for rural youth and giving them tools to tell their own stories.

As Chairperson of Insika Men's Network at DUT, Mnyandu brings a compassionate lens to the organization's work with vulnerable youth, particularly young men facing issues like mental health struggles and gender-based violence. "We're creating spaces where male victims can seek support without fear of stigma. But there's

still a long way to go."

The proof of Siyakhula's impact lies in the success stories it cultivates. Hundreds of learners from isolated villages with no internet access are now enrolled at institutions like DUT, UKZN, MUT, UNIZULU, NWU, and UNISA.

"Seeing students who once had no hope now thriving at university or running their own small businesses – that's our reward," says Mnyandu.

Earlier this year, Siyakhula gained significant exposure through an Ikhwezi FM interview and was named among the Top 10 finalists in DUT's Engagement Competition Awards. The organization's growing recognition reflects the strength of its mission and the urgency of its work.

At its core, Siyakhula Msinga Empowerment is more than just a non-profit – it's a movement by rural youth, for rural youth.

"We may lack funding," Mnyandu says, "but we make up for it with passion, authenticity, and a deep-rooted commitment to seeing our communities rise."

With dreams of expanding into a fully-fledged rural development centre, Siyakhula Msinga Empowerment is proving that when given the chance, rural youth don't just survive – they lead.

SIHLE NZIMA

DUT INSPIRES FUTURE FILMMAKERS

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) welcomed 40 enthusiastic Grade 9 learners from Mhawu and Nwabi High Schools for an immersive experience in the world of film and television on 7 March 2025. This visit was hosted by the Video Technology Department, under the Faculty of Arts and Design, providing learners with valuable exposure to potential careers in media production.

The day commenced with a warm welcome from Mr Samuel Ntsanwisi, a dedicated lecturer from the Video Technology Department. In his opening address, he encouraged the learners to embrace curiosity and ambition in their educational journeys. “You need to shine bright and don’t allow anyone to dim your light,” he advised, emphasising the importance of standing out and striving for excellence in every endeavour.

Mr Michael Haton, a Video Technology lecturer, introduced the learners to the intricacies of film and television production. He explained the essential roles involved in bringing a show to life, from directors and scriptwriters to cinematographers, editors, sound engineers, and boom operators. Mr Haton highlighted the importance of teamwork and dedication, stating, “Respecting your craft means giving every task your best effort. Whether you are behind the camera or in front of it, every role contributes to the final masterpiece.”

Ms Arushnie Govender, a Video Technology lecturer, provided insight into the opportunities that await students after completing a Video Technology degree. She emphasised that the programme is highly practical, requiring students to be hands-on in learning how to shoot, edit, and

produce content. She also elaborated on career paths available in the industry, whether in front of the camera as presenters and actors or behind the scenes as producers, editors, and technical specialists. “Film and television serve multiple purposes – they entertain, educate, inform, and inspire. This industry has the power to create social impact, promote empathy and unite people through storytelling,” she shared.

Talking on career choices and the importance of early preparation, Ms Phumzile Xulu the Engagement Practitioner at DUT, provided career guidance, equipping the learners with information brochures detailing DUT’s diverse course offerings and entry requirements. She stressed the importance of making informed career choices early, stating, “Your career journey starts now. Knowing your interests, skills, and talents will help

you choose the right path and perform well in your matric year to qualify for your dream course.”

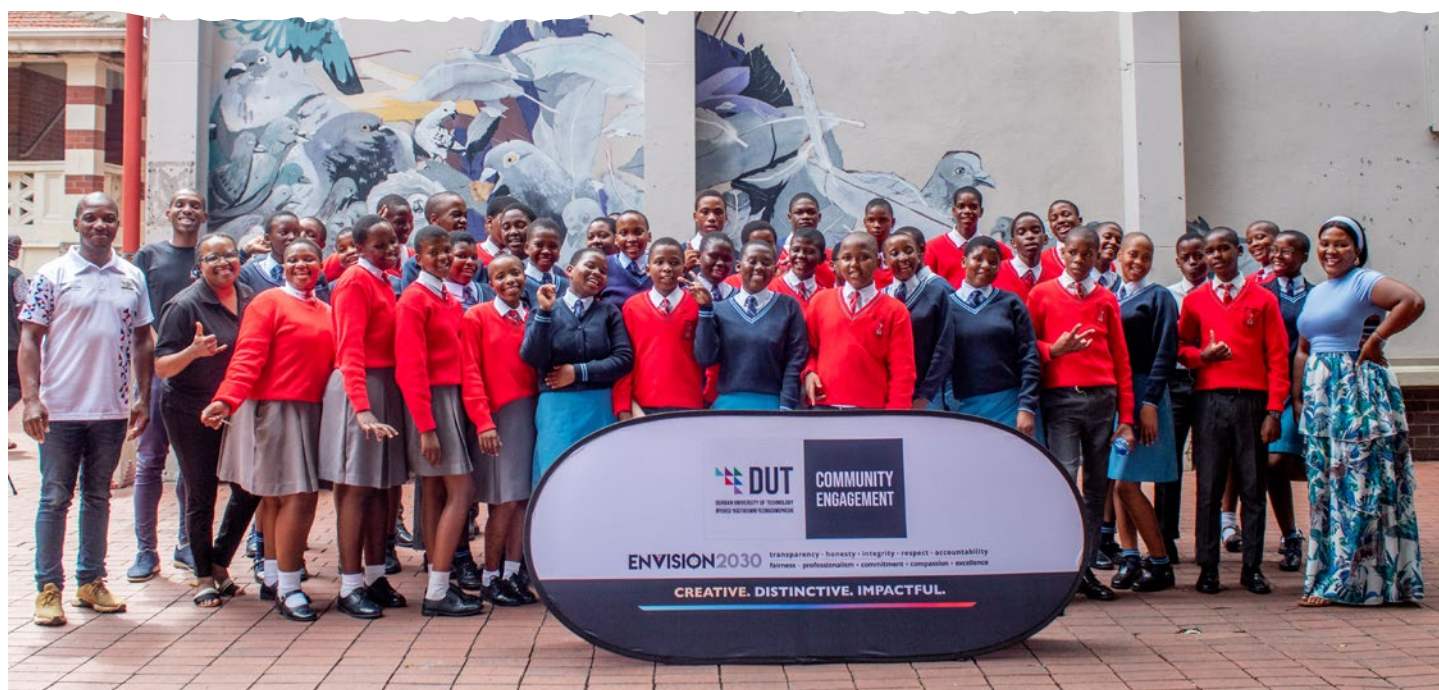
The learners were taken on a practical session where they toured lecture rooms and studios used by Video Technology and Journalism students. They were given the opportunity to operate cameras, learn about TV control devices, sound engineering, and even experience being in front of the camera. This campus visit not only provided valuable insights into the media industry but also ignited a sense of possibility and ambition among the young learners.

A teacher from Mhawu High School, Ms Njapha, expressed her gratitude for the initiative, noting how it would inspire the learners to aim higher. As a DUT alumna herself, she reflected on the importance of early exposure to university life. “Being here today reminds me of my own journey. Seeing these young minds engage with their potential futures is truly rewarding. It’s crucial that they understand what awaits them beyond high school so they can start preparing now,” she said.

DUT’s commitment to community engagement and education continues to inspire the next generation of storytellers and media professionals.

SIHLE NZIMA

“Film and television... entertain, educate, inform and inspire. This industry has the power to create social impact, promote empathy and unite people through storytelling.”
– MS ARUSHNI GOVENDER



Pictured: Learners from Mhawu and Nwabi High School with their Educators and the DUT Team.



Pictured: Learners from Mhawu and Nwabi High School during the Video Technology Campus Visit.

Engagement at DUT is the portfolio under the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research Innovation and Engagement (DVC-RIE), Durban University of Technology (DUT). The Engagement Office champions initiatives, efforts and activities that focus on establishing the University as a responsible, relevant and active partner of the community in addressing the needs of society. Through engagement, the University facilitates collaboration among DUT staff, students, alumni and the community for meaningful university-community engagements. This newsletter seeks to capture and showcase community engagement projects that have been initiated by staff and students as part of service learning, community-based research, scholarly service and community outreach or volunteering efforts. Showcasing these projects recognises staff, students and social partners for their exceptional commitment to community engagement in line with the DUT strategy, ENVISION2030.

The DUT Community Engagement invites you to report on community engagement activities by submitting articles for publication in the following newsletter (Quarter 2 2025) via the following link: <https://forms.office.com/r/YQVbujeQLd>

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