



WESSA
PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH

Times

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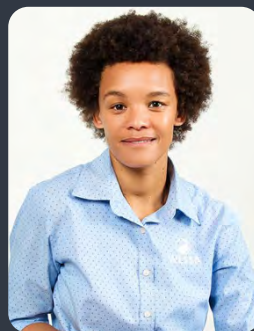
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Planting Change

One Tree, One Learner, One
Community at a Time

#WeAreOneWESSA

WESSA TIMES 2.



Rooted in Action: Local Voices, Lasting Impact

Dear WESSA Community,

As we open the first edition of WESSA Times for 2025, I am reminded once again that the heart of WESSA has always been its people.

From schoolyards in Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal, to coastal communities in the Western Cape, to rural innovators in Cala, this quarter has been a celebration of **local action with national and global impact**.

The stories in this edition speak for themselves. **Over 350 Eco-Schools recognised** for their sustainability leadership. **Wind Industry Internship Programme (WIIP) interns** stepping confidently into green careers. **Youth-led water advocacy** transforming classrooms into citizen science labs. **Members walking the Hawaan Forest**, keeping WESSA's rich volunteer legacy alive. And hospitality leaders like **The Westin Cape Town** joining our Green Key movement, proving that business and sustainability can go hand in hand.

Our theme, **Rooted in Action: Local Voices, Lasting Impact**, is not just a headline. It's a reflection of who we are and how we work, **focused, fearless, and fuelled by you**.

In this issue, **I've also shared our strategic focus for WESSA's next chapter**, a path guided by what we call the **Leopard Scenario**. It's a commitment to move with purpose, focusing on where WESSA can have the **greatest impact: climate action, biodiversity integrity, and pollution reduction**. I encourage you to read this reflection and join us in shaping what comes next.

You'll also read about changemakers like **Lindelani Maraganedzha**, whose tree-planting mission is transforming communities. And **Louisa Stroebe**, whose Eco-Club legacy shows that small, consistent actions in a classroom can ripple out to change a community.

As WESSA prepares to mark nearly a century of environmental stewardship, our focus remains clear: **Educate. Advocate. Act.**

Thank you for continuing to be part of this movement. Whether you're a teacher, a volunteer, a partner, or a supporter, **you are part of the legacy we are building together**.

Let's keep moving forward, **one learner, one member, one partner, one action at a time**.

With gratitude,

Cindy-Lee Cloete
CEO of WESSA



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WESSA's Next Chapter: Focused, Fearless and Fuelled by You

By **Cindy-Lee Cloete, WESSA CEO**

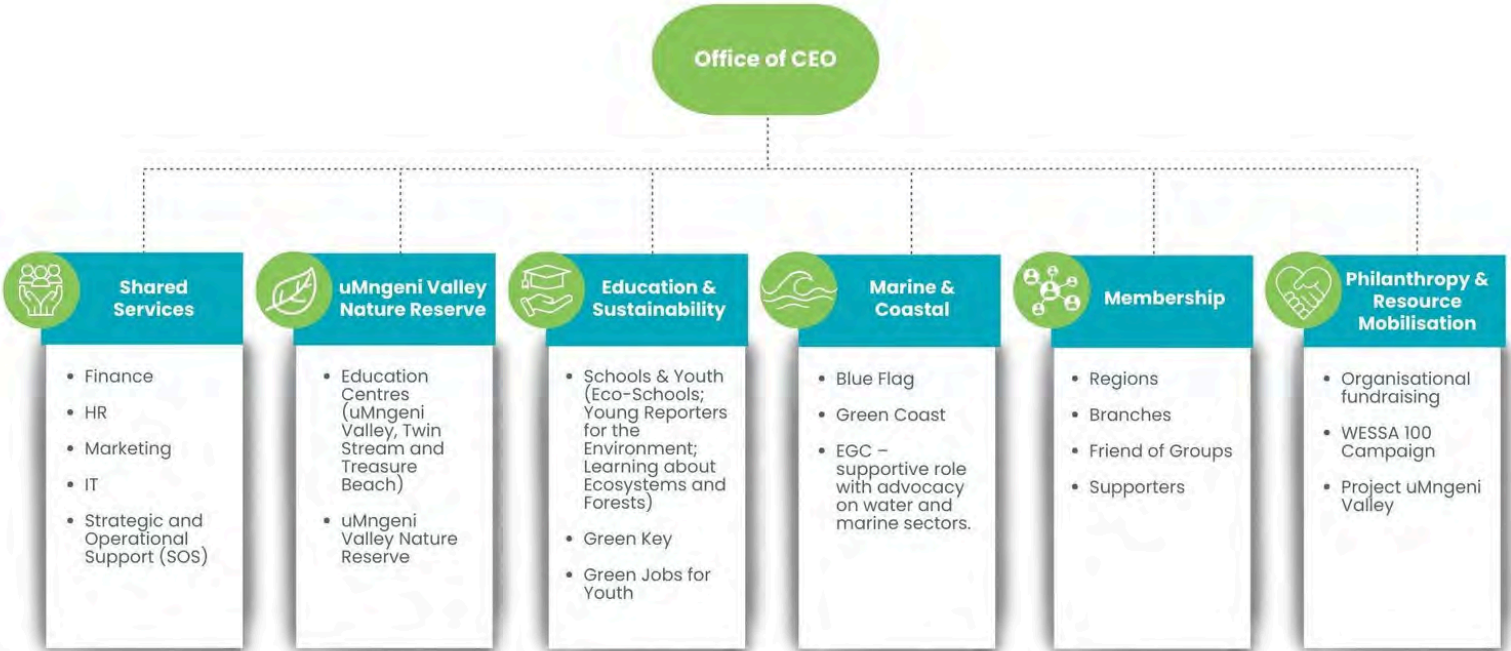
There is a quiet power in standing at the crossroads of change. As I reflect on WESSA's journey – our century of grit and the road ahead – I am excited by our next chapter as a movement of people caring for our Earth.

You'll remember the three strategic future scenarios that emerged from our 2022 Strategic Review:

- **The Elephant Scenario** – a WESSA that sticks to conventional ways of doing things
- **The Octopus Scenario** – a WESSA spread thin, reaching across too many opportunities across a wide range of environmental and development issues
- **The Leopard Scenario** – a WESSA that is lean, deliberate, focused and patient.

For our next chapter, we are choosing the Leopard.

This scenario is more than a strategy, it's our compass. It guides us toward strategic action, deep partnerships, and long-term environmental impact, especially in the areas of climate action, biodiversity, and habitat integrity, and reducing pollution.



WESSA's refreshed organisational structure reflects a leaner, more focused approach—sharpening efforts across education, advocacy, citizen action, and resource mobilisation. This is the "Leopard in motion": strategic, streamlined, and rooted in impact.



To me, it's best captured in this phrase: "The leopard doesn't chase every scent. It moves with purpose." That's the spirit guiding us now, and it says that WESSA is evolving. This new direction doesn't mean forgetting our roots, it means sharpening our focus. We're not trying to do more with less, we're choosing to do what matters most, with everything we've got. We're stepping away from the noise to focus on three areas where WESSA can leave deep, lasting leopard prints.

It's why we've made tough but necessary calls: like transitioning the Pangolin Programme to trusted partners including EWT, Pangolin.Africa, and Kalahari Wildlife Project, and pressing pause on the WESSA Academy, with custom training offered only until a full relaunch becomes viable. These decisions are grounded in sustainability and guided by a simple principle: to protect and grow what works with the resources currently available to us. We will reinvest in areas where WESSA can lead with the most impact, enabling citizen action for environmental stewardship.

This renewed focus is anchored by our enduring pillars: **Educate. Advocate. Act.**

Let me paint the picture: Imagine a coastal community using Blue Flag and Green Coast data to hold polluters accountable. A teacher in Durban weaving Eco-Schools lessons into her classroom, watching young people become water justice champions. A WESSA member in the Eastern Cape rallying neighbours to restore a degraded wetland. This is Educate-Advocate-Act in motion — not as bullet points on a slide, but as living, breathing change.

Our three-pillar focus:

- **Educate:** Our youth programmes reconnect young people with their natural heritage and link sustainability with employment. A vital opportunity for South Africa's youth. This is not just environmental awareness — this is education for agency and opportunity.
- **Advocate:** We're stepping into a louder, clearer voice, particularly in marine and water conversation space. Blue Flag and Green Coast will become megaphones for "Source to Sea – Sea to Source" advocacy, supported by WESSA's Environmental Governance Committee. This is about influencing policy, driving community engagement, and standing up for ecosystems under threat.
- **Act:** We're reawakening the power of citizen action through You. A dedicated One-WESSA Coordinator will soon be appointed to integrate efforts across teams, members, and volunteers — bringing the "One WESSA" vision to life from the ground up.

Behind the scenes, we're building resilience by strengthening our foundations. From a streamlined governance model and clearer portfolio responsibilities to a revamped Philanthropy and Resource Mobilisation team, we're becoming more agile and effective. A new Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning tool will help us track and communicate our impact — not just what we do, but what difference it makes.

Here's where I need you:

We're determined to remain financially sustainable to fuel our mission, ensure staff wellness matches expressed passion, and make membership a powerhouse movement of more *'People caring for our Earth.'* Will it be easy? No. Is it possible? Absolutely. Because history has shown us that when this WESSA family locks arms, small ripples can turn into tidal waves.

This journey isn't mine alone. It belongs to you — our staff, members, supporters, affiliates, funders, partners, and friends. WESSA has always been about people: passionate, committed individuals who care deeply about the future of our planet.

I invite you to build a legacy with us. Whether you're donating R50, sharing our posts, or getting blisters at a beach cleanup, you're the muscle behind the mission.

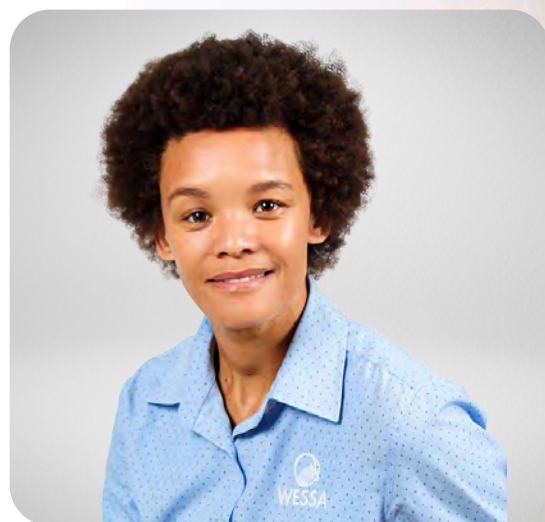
So, tell me:

Why did you become a WESSA member?
Where should we dig deeper?

Email me, call me, or corner me at the next region/branch meeting. I'm listening.

Remember: The leopard moves when the time is just right. Ours is now.

With gratitude,
Cindy



Planting Change: One Tree, One Learner, One Community at a Time

In a world where climate news can feel overwhelming, it's the stories of quiet, committed changemakers that remind us of the power of planting seeds — both literally and figuratively. The 2024 WESSA Individual and Teacher of the Year Award recipients, Lindelani Maraganedzha and Louisa Stroebel, are two such leaders, working from opposite ends of the environmental spectrum yet grounded in the same philosophy: sustainable impact begins with people.

From soil to solution: Lindelani's green legacy



Lindelani Maraganedzha receiving his award certificate.

"My environmental science background from the University of Venda showed me how tree planting can help fight climate change. When we started Universal Greening Organisation (UGO) in 2014, our goal was to advocate for the environment by engaging with schools and communities. I believe children are like wet cement — whatever falls on them leaves a lasting impression. That's why I chose to focus on shaping young minds through environmental education."

Operating in rural communities across all provinces of South Africa, Lindelani has dedicated himself to environmental stewardship through practical, low-cost action. His approach blends agroecology, climate awareness, and skills training, helping schools and families understand the power of indigenous trees and sustainable food systems.

His award-winning work includes the establishment of tree-planting campaigns at schools and churches, training sessions on composting and seed-saving, and mentoring youth on eco-literacy and land care.

One of Lindelani's most powerful philosophies is the idea that "one tree" can be more than symbolic — it can produce fruit, shade, cleaner air, and a sense of ownership for the person who planted it. In communities grappling with environmental degradation and limited access to resources, that's no small feat.

"One of the proudest moments was seeing students from our UGO Fellowship Programme grow into environmental leaders. Some had never even left their local community before. Now they are presenting internationally, starting their own projects, and inspiring others. It reminds me that small actions, like planting a tree or running a workshop, can change lives far beyond what we imagine."

In the classroom: Where eco-leadership begins

Further south, in the corridors of a well-worn school building, Louisa Stroebel is shaping South Africa's next generation of climate leaders, one Eco-Club meeting at a time.

"More than anything, Eco-Schools has been a platform for personal growth. It's not just about connecting to environmental issues, but about developing leadership, building community spirit, and encouraging our learners to care for their environment, their school, and each other."

A Life Sciences teacher at Hoërskool Zwartkop with more than a decade of commitment to the WESSA Eco-Schools Programme, Louisa has helped embed sustainability into the school's culture. Her learners aren't just planting indigenous gardens, they're running environmental audits, presenting at regional events, and speaking confidently about water conservation, waste reduction, and biodiversity.

"Two projects stand out for me. First, our Tree Race, where learners identified and tagged 151 trees on our school grounds, turning it into an interactive learning game. Second, our birding e-booklet, created by learners to celebrate the species living in our school and community. Both projects gave learners ownership and pride in their environment – and that's where real change begins."

One of her school's most successful projects involved transforming a barren corner of the schoolyard into a biodiversity garden. With before-and-after photos that speak volumes, this once-neglected space now hosts medicinal plants, indigenous trees, and a living classroom for science learners.



Hoërskool Zwartkop learners Tree race competition.

This story is not just about trees or awards, it's about vision. Louisa's consistent mentorship has shown that giving learners agency over their environment is one of the most powerful teaching tools we have.

When roots run deep: The bigger picture

Both Lindelani and Louisa represent a broader shift, one that values hands-on environmental education and real-world sustainability at the local level. Their work reflects a deeper truth – when communities take ownership of their environment, long-term resilience follows.

Whether it's a seedling gifted to a Grade 3 learner, or a teenager presenting their composting research at a regional forum, these moments are shaping South Africa's environmental future in practical and profound ways.

Through their leadership, the WESSA Eco-Schools Programme, and everyday grassroots action, these changemakers are demonstrating how one tree, one learner, and one community can create ripples of change across the country.

Image: Louisa and Hoërskool Zwartkop learners receiving their Eco-Schools Flag.



Water Month: Youth drive real-world impact in national resilience project

UNICEF Youth Leading in Water Resilience



2025



During Water Month in March 2025, WESSA marked the conclusion of one of its most ambitious environmental education initiatives: **the Youth Leading in Water Resilience Project, delivered in partnership with UNICEF South Africa.**

Spanning nine months (July 2024 to March 2025) and four provinces, the initiative enabled more than 35,000 learners, unemployed youth, and community members via 110 training sessions, to tackle water challenges through science, education, and advocacy. Using over 437 distributed water testing kits, young people were trained to monitor water quality, collect and upload real-time data, and spark vital conversations about water safety in their communities.

Across the country, learner-led eco-committees transformed schools into hubs of citizen science. In KwaZulu-Natal, wetlands were restored and data shared through the WaterCAN Map My Water platform. In Gauteng, school assemblies during National Water Week turned into powerful spaces for learner-led pledges and water quality demonstrations. In the Free State, ECD centres brought water literacy to life through sensory play. In the Northern Cape, testing JoJo tanks and household water sources helped surface local environmental champions, including Phillip Kwe Kwe, who began as a participant and is now leading training sessions in his community.

Despite infrastructure constraints, the project succeeded by embedding low-tech, curriculum-linked activities into schools and using a multiplier model to ensure long-term reach. WhatsApp-based support groups created peer mentoring networks that allowed even the most remote schools to participate meaningfully.

This initiative didn't just raise awareness, it built capacity, shifted mindsets, and inspired young South Africans to become guardians of water. With youth now confidently testing, teaching, and advocating in their communities, the ripple effect of this project will continue long after its formal close. As one learner put it: "We are not just learning about water — we are protecting it."



Green Key

Officially Certified

THE WESTIN HOTEL EARNs GREEN KEY CERTIFICATION

Leading by Example: The Westin Cape Town joins the Green Key movement

WESSA is proud to welcome The Westin Cape Town to the growing community of Green Key-certified establishments across South Africa. As the first hotel in Marriott International's South African portfolio to achieve this internationally recognised eco-label, The Westin Cape Town has set a powerful benchmark for sustainability in the local hospitality sector.

From energy-efficient lighting and low-flow water systems to local sourcing, biodiversity support and guest awareness campaigns, The Westin Cape Town has embedded sustainability into every layer of its operations.

In the past year alone, the hotel has saved over 1.4 million litres of water, reduced emissions by 170,000 kg CO₂e, and preserved the equivalent of 910 trees.

"This certification is more than an award, it's a commitment to responsible travel and continuous improvement," says Johann Nortje, General Manager of The Westin Cape Town. Backed by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) and managed locally by WESSA, Green Key is fast becoming a trusted symbol of excellence for eco-conscious travellers and industry leaders alike.

Ready to take your establishment green?

Whether you manage a hotel, guesthouse, lodge, or conference venue, the Green Key certification is your gateway to becoming part of a global movement that values accountability, innovation, and impact.

Join WESSA in raising the standard for sustainable hospitality. **Our goal is to certify 20 hotels in South Africa in 2025!**

Find out more here: www.wessa.org.za/greenkey or reach out to Tevya Visser, our Senior Sustainable Programme Manager via greenkey@wessa.co.za.

Image from left to right: Maria Jansen Van Rensburg (Director of Rooms); Mandy Mushaniga (Director of Finance); Johann Nortje (General Manager) and Nico Botha (Executive Chef)





Shore to Shore: Connecting, conserving, inspiring along South Africa's coasts

South Africa's coastline is not just a place of beauty, it is a powerful engine for tourism, community development, and environmental stewardship. This year, WESSA's Coastal Programmes team, powered by Ford Wildlife Foundation, embarked on a two-oceans road trip to visit new sites, meet stakeholders, and explore fresh ideas for coastal conservation.

Stretching across 2,500 kilometres of rocky shores, sandy beaches, and estuaries, South Africa's coastline represents one of the richest and most diverse natural assets in the world. Safeguarding it is no small task, which is why WESSA's eco-label programmes, [Blue Flag](#) and [Green Coast](#), are so vital to ensuring these spaces remain celebrated, protected, and world-class.

"As someone deeply connected to our coastline, I see every day how vital our coastal and marine resources are – not just for nature, but for the people whose lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing depend on them. Leading WESSA's Coastal Programme is an exciting responsibility where we strive for the protection of these precious ecosystems for all of us today, and the generations to come," says Mike Denison, WESSA Coastal Programme manager.

Balancing tourism and conservation with Green Coast

Along South Africa's quieter shores, the Green Coast Award shines a spotlight on places rich in biodiversity and cultural heritage. Designed to support low-impact tourism, the programme helps protect sensitive habitats and species while giving local communities a voice in conservation. Crucially, Green Coast sites are co-managed with municipalities, communities, and civil society partners, ensuring that local custodians play an active role in site stewardship.

Citizen science initiatives are central to the programme, giving local voices a platform to influence conservation decisions.

Every year, a National Jury reviews site applications, ensuring that selection remains transparent and focused on true conservation value. Green Coast is about more than just recognition; it is about giving quieter coastal gems a chance to thrive through nature-based tourism while safeguarding them for generations to come.

A global mark of excellence

For decades, WESSA's Blue Flag programme has been synonymous with high standards of coastal quality. This internationally recognised eco-label is awarded to beaches, marinas, and boats that meet stringent criteria for water quality, environmental management, safety, and education.

Annual assessments ensure that Blue Flag status remains a badge of excellence. It signals to visitors, both local and international, that these destinations are not only safe and clean, but also committed to sustainable environmental practices. In a world where responsible travel is becoming the norm, Blue Flag sites stand out as shining examples of how coastal tourism can support conservation.

Driving coastal impact forward

From estuary walks with citizen scientists to meetings with coastal managers and tourism operators, WESSA's recent journey up the west coast and down the east coast reaffirmed the power of partnerships. Through programmes like Green Coast and Blue Flag, WESSA continues to connect communities, inspire action, and conserve the unique coastal heritage that belongs to all South Africans.





How WIIP interns are growing green careers at WESSA

As the world races toward cleaner energy and climate resilience, the spotlight is turning to a new generation of professionals rising through the green economy. Among them are Sithabile Majavu and Malixole Buthlezi, two young South Africans currently placed at WESSA through the Wind Industry Internship Programme (WIIP), a flagship initiative supported by the South African Wind Energy Association (SAWEA).

Launched in March 2025, WIIP is designed to build green career pathways by placing graduates in renewable energy and sustainability roles. Supported by WESSA as an implementation partner, the programme gives interns practical exposure

to the challenges and possibilities of South Africa’s clean energy transition.

So, what exactly are green careers?

They are roles focused on preserving, restoring, or improving the natural environment from waste reduction and conservation to policy-making, education, sustainable design, and clean energy generation. As this space grows, programmes like WIIP are critical in bridging the gap between academic theory and industry practice.

We spoke to Sithabile and Malixole about their journey, what they’ve learned, and what message they have for fellow youth with dreams of working in sustainability.

Q&A

Q: What motivated you to apply for the WESSA Wind Industry Internship Programme, and what does the opportunity mean to you?

- Sithabile: I applied because of my passion for sustainability and renewable energy. This opportunity bridges my academic journey with real-world impact. I’m learning from industry leaders while contributing to environmental awareness.
- Malixole: I was motivated to gain hands-on experience in nature conservation and align my career with a meaningful industry. WESSA’s credibility and focus on environmental impact made it the perfect place to grow.



Intern: Malixole Buthlezi





Intern: Sithabille Majavu

Q: Can you describe your day-to-day work and the skills you're developing during the internship?

- Malixole: I'm an environmental educator intern in Durban. I teach young learners about conservation, and work with communities. No two days are the same. I'm building skills in planning, communication, teamwork and adaptability.
- Sithabille Majavu: It's a dynamic environment. We do a lot of community interaction, lesson planning, and even project logistics. I've developed time and project management skills, and I'm also gaining confidence in writing and admin work.

Q: Has your perception of green careers or the environmental sector changed since joining WESSA?

- Sithabille: Absolutely. I didn't realise how people-centred this work is. Environmental education is about empathy, engagement, and long-term impact. Programmes like WESSA's Eco-Schools and Blue Flag have shown me how broad the field is.
- Malixole: Before, I thought it was all about conservation. Now I see the range, from policy and research to education and advocacy. It's been eye-opening.

Q: What challenges have you faced during the internship, and what are your future aspirations?

- Sithabille: Travelling long distances to project locations in Pietermaritzburg traffic is tough, but we've adapted. In terms of what's next, to the moon and back, I'm open to project management roles and dream of doing impactful work, locally or internationally.
- Malixole: Managing stakeholders and juggling responsibilities has been challenging, but I've grown from it. As for what's next, my passport is ready and I'm ready to take on any opportunity where I can make a difference.

Q: What message would you like to share with other young South Africans considering a career in sustainability or renewable energy?

- Sithabille: Dream big and aim high. Your background doesn't define your future.
- Malixole: Go for it. This field is full of opportunities for youth with fresh ideas. Make the world your oyster.

As WESSA continues to champion environmental education, the stories of interns like Sithabille and Malixole prove just how impactful youth-led action can be. Their experiences show that green careers aren't just jobs, they are commitments to shaping a more sustainable world.

By nurturing young professionals through WIIP, WESSA is not only investing in skills development but also planting seeds of leadership that will shape South Africa's future. And as these interns step into the world, their voices, rooted in action and full of purpose, carry the message that change is not only possible, it's already underway.





Rooted in Legacy: WESSA members walk the Hawaan Forest



Bernard Chatikobo, current custodian of the WESSA Trail, leading participants through the Hawaan Forest during the guided walk.

In October 2024, a special gathering at uMhlanga's Hawaan Forest celebrated not just the beauty of one of South Africa's last remaining climax coastal forests, but also the enduring legacy of WESSA's volunteer community.

Hosted by the Botanical Society's Coastal Branch, the walk was guided by renowned ecologist Professor Eugene Moll, whose research on the Hawaan Forest spans decades. His original study, [An Investigation of the Plant Ecology of the Hawaan Forest \(1969\)](#), remains a cornerstone reference for conservation efforts in the area. [Returning more than 50 years later](#), Prof. Moll shared new insights into the forest's evolution and its resilience in the face of urban expansion.

The event drew a vibrant mix of environmental champions, including several WESSA KZN members. Many have longstanding ties with both WESSA and the Botanical Society, reflecting a rich history of collaboration between the two organisations.

The walk offered a moment of reflection on how grassroots activism has helped shape conservation outcomes in the region.

The Hawaan Forest, covering approximately 80 hectares, remains a crucial ecological asset bordered by urban development. Thanks to the efforts of WESSA uMhlanga Branch and other environmentalists in previous decades, parts of this ancient forest were preserved following intense public advocacy. Today, conservation work continues through the Hawaan Homeowners Association (HHOA) and the Hawaan Trust, with ongoing support from WESSA KZN through funding from the JB Law Trust.

Although not present on the day, WESSA's Phoebe Carnegie, along with the late Allistair Carnegie, Bill Duthie, Richard Boon, and Dave Henry, were warmly acknowledged for their steadfast contributions to the protection of the forest over the years.

Led by Bernard Chatikobo, current custodian of the WESSA Trail within Hawaan Forest, the group explored paths that stand as a tribute to WESSA's lasting environmental footprint. Highlights included reflections on the changing biodiversity of the area, and renewed calls for community-based stewardship in safeguarding this unique natural heritage.

The day captured the spirit of "People caring for the Earth", a principle that has defined WESSA for nearly a century. It also offered a powerful reminder that conservation success is rooted not only in policies and protests, but in the passion, commitment, and collaboration of volunteers across generations.

WESSA members Lungelo Mbili, Bongani Chisale, and Paddy Norman reflecting on the forest's role in local biodiversity.



Long-time WESSA supporters Dave Henry and Paddy Norman reconnecting with nature along the Hawaan Trail.



Hawaan Forest Trails route map.



Celebrating South Africa's Eco-Schools champions

Across the country, classrooms and schoolyards are transforming into powerful spaces for environmental learning and action. As part of WESSA's Annual Eco-Schools Programme, more than 350 schools were honoured in 2024 through provincial award ceremonies that took place January – April 2025, recognising their achievements in embedding sustainability into school life.

The Eco-Schools Programme was launched in South Africa in 2003 by WESSA. Over the past two decades, it has grown into the country's largest and most impactful environmental education programme, reaching thousands of schools and empowering millions of learners. Through its structured 7-step framework, Eco-Schools supports schools to integrate environmental learning across the curriculum while encouraging learners to take real action for sustainability in their communities.

From community-driven vegetable gardens to citizen science projects, learners, teachers, and school leaders have shown that youth-led environmental action is not just possible, it's thriving.

Each province brought its own flavour of excellence. **In the Western Cape**, 35 schools were celebrated, with standout honours going to schools like Newberry House Montessori Primary School, Sir Lowry's Pass Primary and Beaumont Primary for long-standing impact.

In KwaZulu-Natal, the Strelitzia Award recognised two decades of dedication at The Birches and Epworth School, while young eco-activist Romario Valentine delivered an inspiring keynote at the ceremony.

The Free State led in scale, recognising 120 schools, among them Zamaleka Primary, recipient of the prestigious Diamond Award. Gauteng celebrated 76 schools, including ADVTECH Group and Sun International participants, while YERA youth leader Khonaye Gcaza shared her journey from Eco-Club founder to Kudu Award winner.

In the Eastern Cape, schools like Kabega Primary and Seyisi Primary were applauded for ongoing excellence, while **Mpumalanga** celebrated new participants and platinum achievers through a vital partnership with Glencore.

Each award represents more than a milestone, it is a symbol of sustained commitment to the planet, rooted in action and led by local voices.

As the Eco-Schools movement continues to grow, it's clear that these school communities are shaping a greener, more resilient South Africa, one learner at a time.





Honouring Changemakers: Celebrating the 2024 WESSA Annual Awards

Each year, the WESSA Annual Awards honour South Africa's most passionate and dedicated environmental leaders — individuals, educators, organisations, and youth whose work inspires change and uplifts communities through meaningful action. The 2024 WESSA Awards celebrated a powerful mix of grassroots commitment and national influence, showcasing that true environmental leadership comes in many forms — from schools restoring biodiversity to young activists mobilising marine protection.



Lindelani Maraganedzha receives award from CEO of WESSA, Cindy-Lee Cloete.

Individual Award

Lindelani Maraganedzha: Recognised for his passion for environmental stewardship and leadership of the Universal Greening Organisation, Lindelani's work spans tree-planting, sustainable farming, and community-driven waste management. His approach brings together environmental impact and social upliftment, making him a standout example of grassroots action in motion.



Nature Connect received their award during the Western Cape Eco-Schools awards ceremony.

Corporate Award

Nature Connect: Honoured for its outstanding commitment to environmental education, biodiversity management, environmental rehabilitation and management and invasive species control, Nature Connect has become a force for nature-positive change across the Western Cape and beyond. Their scalable, high-impact programmes reflect the importance of long-term corporate commitment to sustainability, that involves and benefits local communities.



Louisa Stroebe receives the Teacher Award for her long-standing commitment to learner-led environmental action through school Eco-Clubs.

Teacher Award

Louisa Stroebe: Celebrated for her legacy of nurturing eco-leaders at school level, Louisa has mentored dozens of learners through her vibrant Eco-Club at Hoërskool Zwartkop, integrating environmental learning into everyday classroom experiences; as well as her efforts in promoting green living within her broader community.



Winner: Romario Valentine receiving his award from Morgan Griffiths, WESSA.

Youth Award

Winner: Romario Valentine: At just 13 years of age, Romario continues to capture hearts and headlines with his tireless environmental advocacy on marine pollution, reforestation and marine bird conservation. From global speaking platforms to local beach cleanups, he proves that age is no barrier to leadership.



Runner-up: Lianae Petzer, acknowledged for her exceptional contributions to environmental awareness and youth engagement at her **Kabega Primary School**.



Winner: Teachers at Kabega Primary School receiving certificate from Nomfundo Ndlovu, WESSA.

Group Award

Winner: Kabega Primary School recognised for its consistent and innovative environmental projects, Kabega Primary's efforts in conservation, recycling, and community outreach continue to inspire other schools.



Runner-up: Youth 4 MPAs – a collective that champions the expansion of South Africa's marine protected areas network and youth advocacy for ocean biodiversity conservation.

Together, these award recipients remind us that sustainable change is built from the ground up, with young people, educators, local leaders, and communities all playing a part. As WESSA celebrates nearly a century of environmental action, these 2024 honourees offer hope, momentum, and proof that South Africa's environmental future is in good hands.

The Eco-Schools Programme has reached

1 200 350
learners

4 500
schools

45 500
teachers

Register your school today!

Schools may register any time throughout the year, and submit a portfolio of evidence for an award within 8 to 12 months of registration. Provincial awards ceremonies take place annually in March.

Voices for the Earth: Mzuvele High School's Youth Lead the Way in Environmental Advocacy

In the vibrant township of KwaMashu, north of Durban, a group of determined learners are rewriting the narrative of what it means to be a young environmental leader. At Mzuvele High School, environmental advocacy has become more than just a school project; it's a movement, rooted in action and led by the voices of the youth.

Since joining the Youth Environmental Reporters and Advocates (YERA) programme in early 2024, over 1,500 learners have taken part in a growing series of initiatives that combine climate awareness, citizen science, and youth storytelling. The YERA programme is a collaboration between WESSA, UNICEF South Africa, and the Department of Basic Education, with a shared vision, "to give young people the tools and platforms to report on and respond to environmental issues affecting their communities".



For Mzuvele High, that vision has come to life.

Through workshops grounded in WESSA's Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) methodology, learners have gained hands-on experience in environmental journalism, advocacy, and scientific observation. A standout project saw students conducting water quality assessments in nearby rivers, applying real citizen science tools and raising awareness around water pollution and its impact on local communities.

But the action didn't stop there. In March 2024, learners launched a school vegetable garden, aimed at promoting food security, greening the school environment, and supporting families in need. Surplus produce is sold to staff members to fund garden expansion, while gardening tutorials link practical life skills with science learning. The garden was renewed and expanded on National Garden Day in April 2025, when learners composted old soil, installed new signage, and replanted fresh crops, reinforcing a long-term commitment to sustainable food systems.

These activities often coincide with international environmental observances, fostering a sense of global citizenship and unity among learners. On Arbor Day, tree-planting initiatives promote urban biodiversity and greener school environments. On Mandela Day invasive species were removed from school grounds transforming outdoor learning spaces and contributing to ecological restoration. On International Coastal Cleanup Day, learners took collective action for ocean health by removing over 50 kilograms of litter from a nearby beach, a meaningful demonstration of environmental stewardship. At the centre of this momentum is Mr. Msizi Mbali, a Life Sciences teacher and the school's Environmental Project Coordinator. "Seeing our learners take ownership of these projects has been the most rewarding part," says Mr. Mbali. "They're not just learning theory here, they're applying real-world skills and becoming change agents in their community."

With support from local NGOs, community partners, and dedicated educators, Mzuvele High School is showing what's possible when youth are trusted with the tools of change.

Their journey is a living example of our theme in this month's issue, "Rooted in Action: Local Voices, Lasting Impact."

Because when the youth speak for the Earth, the world listens.

Growing Hope: How a rural co-operative is transforming Cala's environment



WESSA is proud to welcome its newest affiliated group, the Sakhisizwe Eco-Designers Environmental Co-operative, to the Eastern Cape Region. Formed by eight passionate and determined individuals, Sakhisizwe Eco-Designers is a registered Primary Co-operative based in the rural town of Cala. United by a vision for a cleaner, greener future, the group is tackling environmental challenges head-on, focusing on waste management, land rehabilitation, and community greening initiatives.

Their activities are already making a visible impact. The Co-operative has embarked on projects including town clean-ups, the clearing of alien invasive plants, the rehabilitation of erosion dongas, and the greening of urban spaces through the planting of indigenous trees. In addition to these practical interventions, they are organising environmental awareness events and establishing income streams through recycling initiatives, demonstrating how environmental action can drive social and economic benefits.

Speaking on behalf of the Co-operative, Chairperson Mr Lindile Gono expressed the group's hope that their actions will not only improve the local environment but also boost Cala's appeal as a destination. "We hope to attract visitors to Cala, creating tourism and job opportunities for local youth," he said.

At a time when many rural communities are seeking ways to balance development with sustainability, Sakhisizwe Eco-Designers stands as a shining example of grassroots action in motion. Their efforts embody the spirit of WESSA's mission: Enabling people to care for the Earth.



Board of Directors, Sakhisizwe Eco-Designers Environmental Co-operative: Back row (left to right): Lindile Gono (Chairperson), Nkosinathi Njila (Treasurer). Front row (left to right): Nkululeko Pala (Board Member), Zikhona Ngesi Ncapayi (Secretary), Fezeka Ndletyana (Board Member), Andile Ntwana (Deputy Chairperson), and Ntombekhaya Mzwasantu (Deputy Secretary). *Not in the pictures is Simon Ralph Toti.

Cala Pass, Eastern Cape



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