



WESSA
PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH

My Journey with WESSA- Rooted in volunteerism

*From a spark of passion to leading and
empowering the next generation*

WESSA NATIONAL AGM | 04 October 2025

Presented By :Siziwe Hlongwa



The Spark

- In 2019, in one of my third-year modules at UKZN, I joined a three-day soil study excursion to the Drakensberg that completely transformed me.
- First time to truly connect with nature, and it ignited a passion for the environment that I had never experienced before.

That spark led me to seek opportunities to volunteer and grow in the field.



Discovering WESSA

- In October 2019, while attending the Climate Change Protest in Durban, I came across WESSA.
- I was immediately drawn to the organization and joined in November 2019.
- Becoming a member opened doors for me to begin my volunteer journey with passionate young conservationists.



EARLY VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- My first opportunity was a guided walk at Burman Bush in March 2020, right before COVID-19
 - Networking and connecting with other nature enthusiasts , I met a Senior education guide from the Durban Botanic Gardens, Christine Sole.
 - Became an Education Volunteer guide at Durban Botanic Gardens through connecting with Christine.
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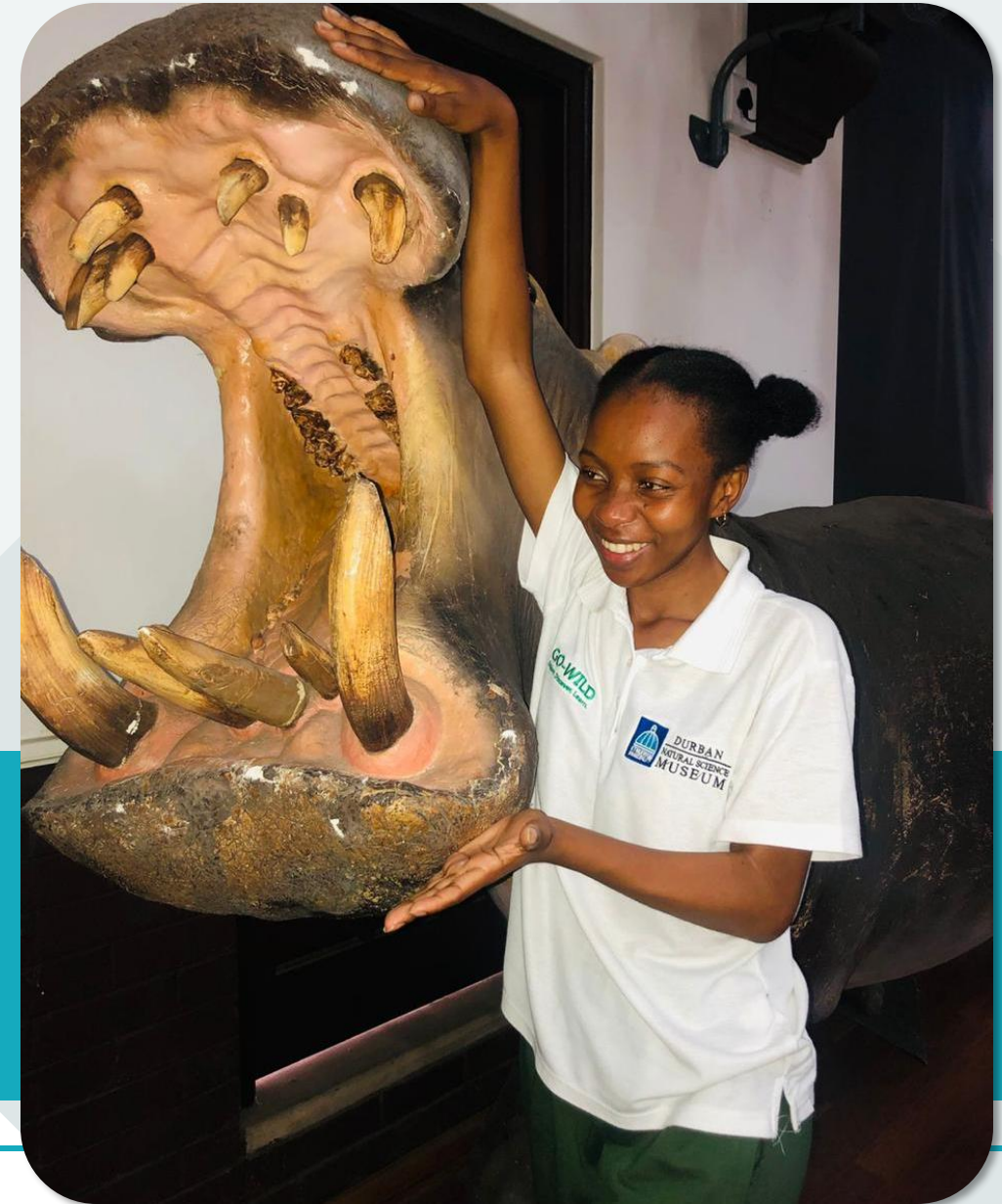
These early moments introduced me to environmental education and the importance of connecting people with nature.



DURBAN NATURAL SCIENCE MUSEUM

- In 2022, joined a one-year volunteer programme at the Durban Natural Science Museum.
- Facilitated Environmental Education programmes with learners, while also assisting with Research in the Ornithology Department.

here, I learned valuable research skills, including specimen preparation and data recording, which deepened my understanding of conservation science.



WESSA Internship & Employment



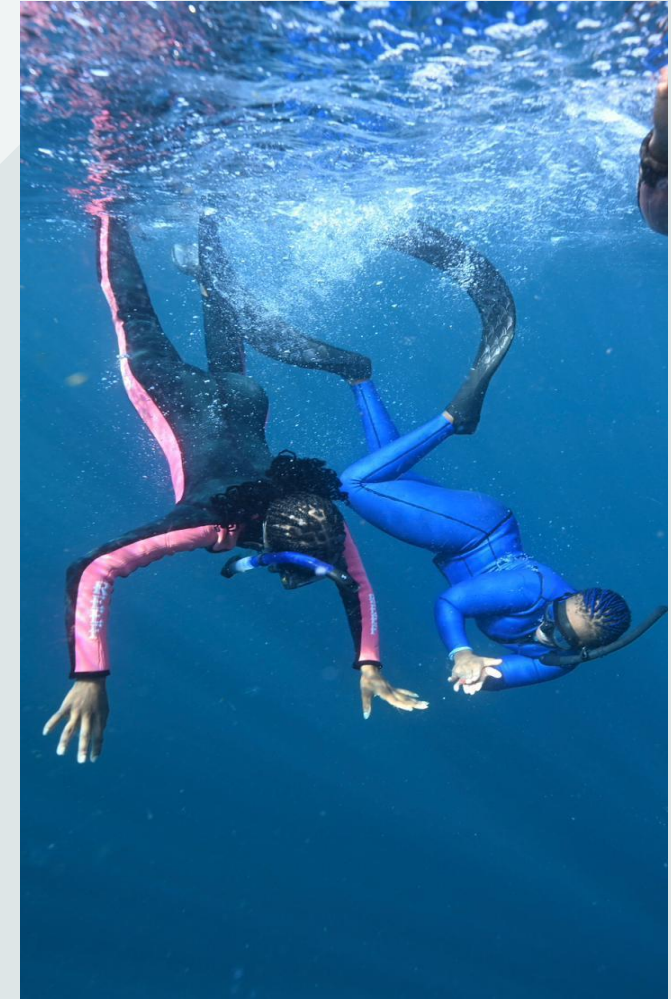
- In 2022, I started my Groen Sebenza internship with WESSA at the Umbogavango Nature Reserve.
- Concurrently, I volunteered at uShaka Sea World, which gave me marine education experience.
- In 2023, I was excited and proud to be employed by WESSA as an Environmental Educator at Umbogavango.

Highlights & Impact

- Designed and facilitated grade-appropriate education programmes, using creative approaches to connect learners with the natural world.
- One of my highlights has been seeing learners' behaviour change and their passion for the environment grow.
- **Attending the EEASA Conference in 2023 further strengthened my skills and broadened my understanding of environmental education.**



Free-Diving with Sharks Experience – July 2024



Umbogavango –Green Skills Development Programme

- At Umbogavango, with support from Margaret Burger, I designed an annual Green Skills Development Programme to extend environmental education opportunities to WESSA unemployed Environmental graduates.
- Mentoring two new volunteers, helping them gain experience and grow in confidence as environmental educators.
- Foundation for growth and purpose in the green space, creating clear career pathways.



WESSA Youth Leadership



In July 2024, I was elected Chair of the WESSA KZN Youth, and this year, I was honoured to be re-elected at the ARM.

In June 2025, through a leadership team building intervention, we united the Durban and Midlands youth branches, in line with the “One-WESSA” vision.

This helped to strengthen our youth movement

AFRICA YOUTH DIALOGUE

WORLD OCEANS DAY

2025

AT WESSA TREASURE BEACH, BLUFF

8 JUNE | 11H00 - 16H00

RSVP : TEBELLO +27 78 690 6283 | ZUZILE +27 76 777 7038

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ETHEKWINI
enviro week
#ourworldiswonderful

Black Mermaid

KZN Youth Branch Milestone

- Acknowledgement and appreciation- KZN Regional informal Youth mentorship – dating back 15 years.
- In August, our proposal for a structured WESSA Youth-led branch was approved at the 2025 KZN ARM.
- This will be the first youth-led branch under WESSA, and it marks a major milestone in giving young people a stronger voice and leadership role within WESSA



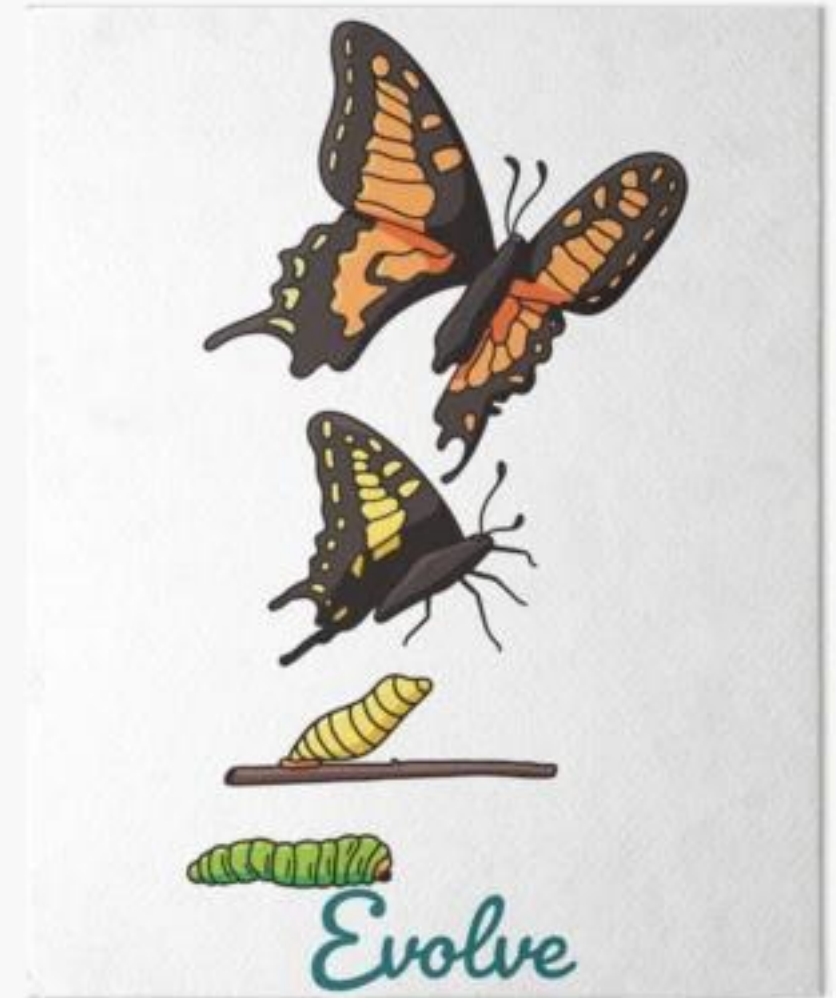
Mentorship & Growth

- My personal growth has also been shaped by additional opportunities:
- **Roving Reporters-** Introduction to Wildlife Crime reporting – strong focus in the Kruger area.
- **Ukusimama Women in Energy and Sustainability mentorship programme** – A structured national mentorship programme focusing on leadership, Energy, Climate change and Sustainability .
- One on One Mentorship with industry professionals gaining guidance on career development and technical skills, CEO fireside chats, leadership workshops, Energy, and Sustainability conferences .
- **Leaderex Conference** - clarity, purpose and direction to the next steps of my career.
- (Expanded professional networks by interacting with entrepreneurs, policy makers and sustainability experts).

Reflections & Commitment

- Looking back, I see how volunteerism has helped me build a colourful and meaningful career.
- WESSA has been the foundation of my growth, and I am committed to continuing to give back to empower youth through leading with impact, to contribute to WESSA's vision for the future and beyond its 100-year legacy.

“Climbing the Corporate ladder is not as important as building a colorful career that will be a strong foundation for where you are headed and will attract your purpose” –Zwelibanzi Sapula





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PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH



**Educate.
Advocate.
Act.**

Thank you.

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www.wessa.org.za