

South32 youth farming graduates boost local food security

In a significant stride toward enhancing local food security, 20 previously unemployed KZN youth celebrated their graduation from the South32 Eco-Hubs Project at a ceremony in Richards Bay. Spearheaded by mining and metals company, South32 Hillside Aluminium, and implemented by the Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA), this agricultural skills-training initiative has been instrumental in uplifting youth from unemployment and poverty.



Source: Supplied

The project, funded by South32, equipped these graduates with extensive training in sustainable farming practices and small, medium, and micro-enterprise (SMME) development. WESSA's Head of Programmes and Projects, Cindy Cloete, highlighted the significance of this training, emphasising its aim to empower these individuals to manage their farm plots independently and successfully.

"It's a privilege to witness incredible growth, change and impact among the South32 youth farming programme graduates. Seeing these young individuals blossom into skilled farmers and entrepreneurs has been incredibly moving. They are not just cultivating crops but nurturing hope and opportunity in their communities. Their dedication and newfound abilities are not just about food - they are about building a brighter, more sustainable future for everyone," said Cloete.

Vice president of operations, Calvin Mkhabela, highlighted Hillside Aluminium's commitment to combatting youth unemployment, food insecurity, and poverty within the communities around the King Cetshwayo District Municipality (KCDM). Mkhabela emphasised the importance and impact of collaborative efforts in conceptualising and executing this learnership project.



Source: Supplied

The project immersed aspiring farmers, (referred to as ambassadors), in a two-year practical training programme across four Eco-Hubs situated in the Amangwe, uMkhoma, uMhlathuze, and Madlankala communities. South32's funding facilitated the development of farming infrastructure and provided essential learning materials.

Acknowledging the ambassadors' dedication and resilience despite facing adversities such as floods and storms, WESSA Project Coordinators Raymond Ngubane and Sinxolo Sabelo praised their commitment over the past two years.

The ceremony recognised outstanding achievements with special awards presented to Simangaliso Mthembu as top student and Thandeka Myeni for presenting the best Agri-Business Plan.

Impactful youth development

An integral aspect of the training focused on equipping the ambassadors with the skills to manage their agri-businesses independently. From January 2024, these ambassadors will assume independent management of the Eco-Hubs as their farms, with WESSA providing ongoing mentoring and guidance.

Some ambassadors will transition to starting their farms closer to their homes, receiving similar support from WESSA staff.

Expressing pride in spearheading this impactful youth development initiative on behalf of South32 Hillside Aluminium,

WESSA extended gratitude to all stakeholders involved, including the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development, uMfolozi Local Municipality, Amangwe Village, uMhlathuze Valley Sugar, and private landowners who contributed portions of their land.

This collaboration marks a significant investment in cultivating a new generation of skilled and empowered farmers.

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