

Ubuntu Nexus

The spirit of collective humanity and interconnectedness

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (CEAD) DIRECTORATE

NEWSLETTER

July – September 2024



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Editor-in-Chief's Note



Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni
Director CEAD

The University community has done it again! I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations and deepest appreciation to each one of you for the incredible work done during the third quarter of 2024. The projects you have undertaken have made a remarkable impact, addressing critical issues like food security, food safety in empowering our local communities while enriching learning and teaching.

Your efforts to capacitate local communities with entrepreneurial skills are a testament to the power of education in transforming lives.

The engagement with farmers in far flung rural areas of uMzimkhulu, particularly through Assisted Reproductive Technologies, has brought hope and opportunities to those who have often been marginalised by connecting them with the larger commercial markets. By this act you have not only supported their livelihoods, but also fostered a sense of empowerment, progressive farming, and pride in livestock farming.

Colleagues, your projects to Umlazi Township schools through Reading, Literacy, and STEM robotics projects, have helped prepare the next generation for the demands of the future world of work. I am persuaded that the knowledge and skills shared will undoubtedly open doors for our learners, inspiring them to strive for excellence in their studies and beyond.

As we celebrate the success of these projects, we must also acknowledge an important aspect of a well-rounded individual. We can gain this noble level of life through sports. While subject content is essential, the soft skills learned through sports, such as teamwork, communication, resilience, and leadership, are equally vital in preparing learners for both their professional and personal lives. Without sports, a critical element of personal development would be missing, leading to an imbalance in the holistic education we aim to contribute towards. The project on Sports has also opened opportunities for learners in the schools to be identified to play for professional football clubs.

By continuing to integrate sports into the educational framework, we ensure that learners are not only academically capable but also equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of life and work. Excellence in schools is achieved not just through academic achievements but also through fostering well-rounded individuals who can thrive in various aspects of life.

The community engagement projects that MUT community delivered in this quarter were not just showing that MUT is an “Anchor Institution” due to its proximity in communities, but it has been instrumental in creating more equitable opportunities for the communities that the University serves.

Thank you once again for your dedication, passion, and the positive changes you are making in our University community and beyond. Let us continue to push boundaries and bring hope, education, and opportunities to all those we serve.

Umlazi Schools Thrive with Food Security Initiative



Planting of seedlings at Inkonkoni Primary School

The Food Security for Better Health (FSBH) project, led by Dr Caiphaz Hlungwani has made significant strides in promoting sustainable food practices among primary schools of Umlazi Township from July to September 2024.

On 20 July 2024, the project team collected kraal manure and distributed it to Ngqayizivele, Zimisele, Sithokoziso, and Sekelani primary schools.

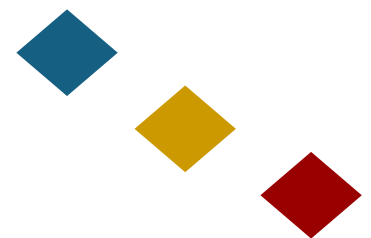
The team commenced its hands-on training sessions on 22 July 2024 at Inkonkoni Primary School, where they conducted land preparation for planting, demonstrated proper seedling handling and transplanting techniques, and applied kraal manure. Similar activities took place at Sithokoziso Primary School on 24 July and Sekelani Primary School on 30 July.

At both schools, project leaders addressed challenges such as poor soil fertility and continued to equip learners with essential agricultural skills. In August, the team expanded its efforts, starting with Zimisele Primary School on 5 August, where they repeated the process. At Ngqayizivele Primary School on 14 August, they introduced covering with dry leaves to conserve soil moisture while continuing other core gardening activities.

On 19 August, the project extended to Bavumile Primary School, where learners participated in land preparation, seedling transplanting, and manure application.

These activities have not only improved the gardens' productivity but have also instilled a sense of responsibility and sustainable farming skills in learners.

The FSBH project empowers schools with tools and knowledge for food production, effectively addressing food insecurity while fostering self-reliance in local communities. This impactful initiative demonstrates a steadfast commitment to creating a healthier and more resilient future for all its beneficiaries.



From Classroom to Chicken Coops: MUT Students Explore Poultry Farming Through Agricultural Support Project



MUT students engage in hands-on learning at a poultry farm alongside farm owners, who are beneficiaries of the ASP project

The Agricultural Support Project (ASP) continues to make an impact, bringing together education and real-world farming experiences for MUT students in the Agriculture Department. In the third quarter of 2024, Phindile Mlaba the project leader, and Lecturer in the department, conducted four monitoring visits to farmers that she trained in 2023.

These visits took place on 19 and 21 August, and 2 and 3 September. They were not only an opportunity for farmers to receive guidance, but also served as practical learning experiences for Mlaba's students.

Believing in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes

learning through experimentation, Mlaba said: "In agriculture, practicals are essential. The ASP has allowed me to take my students into the field. I have a class of 68 students. I organised the visits in smaller groups of 15-20 to ensure a more hands-on learning experience."

The farm visits provided a dual benefit: students were able to learn about poultry production while simultaneously applying their knowledge of agricultural extension in a real-world setting.

Additionally, Mlaba has assisted some farmers with improving their record-keeping, a critical element in financial management.

These enhanced records will serve as teaching materials for advanced diploma modules in the future.

The ASP does not only equip farmers with the tools they need, it also ensures that the next generation of agricultural professionals gains the practical skills required for success in the field.

MUT Students Lead Food Safety Training for Umlazi and Isipingo Informal Traders



MUT students participating in a food safety training session for informal traders

The Food Safety Training for Ready-to-Eat informal Traders, led by Dr Jugen Manyatsa, alongside Dr Thobile Poswa, Thulisile Mtshengu, and Dr Trishka Pillay, has made significant strides in promoting food hygiene and safety standards in Umlazi and Isipingo.

This impactful initiative focuses on enhancing traders' knowledge of food hygiene, identifying potential hazards, and promoting safe trading practices. It also includes the development of educational materials and the training of students to teach informal food handlers, bridging academic knowledge with community engagement.

As part of its efforts, the project trained 29 third-year MUT Environmental Health students on 23 July 2024 through the "Five Keys to Safer Food" train-the-trainer programme.

This session prepared students to lead future training sessions for informal traders, equipping them with tools and knowledge necessary to promote food safety effectively.

Between July and September 2024, 13 students participated in the research focusing on informal traders' knowledge, attitudes, practices, and infrastructure needs. This research provided a better understanding into the challenges and opportunities for improving food safety in these communities.

On 10 September 2024, the same group of 29 students received training on Regulation 638 of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants, No. 54, of 1972, which outlines the requirements for safe trading practices, with a focus on compliance and food hygiene standards.

The culmination of these efforts came on 13 September 2024, when the trained students led a workshop for 46 informal food traders from the MUT trading site, Mnyandu trading stalls, and eMshiyeni trading site.

The session emphasized practical food safety practices, aligning the traders' operations with regulatory standards, and empowering them with the knowledge to ensure safer food for their customers.

This initiative highlights the value of academia-community collaboration in addressing food safety challenges and promoting sustainable practices among informal traders.

Revolutionizing Livestock Farming: ART Workshop Empowers Communities and Inspires Learners



Helen Mapeka with a beneficiary of the ART project

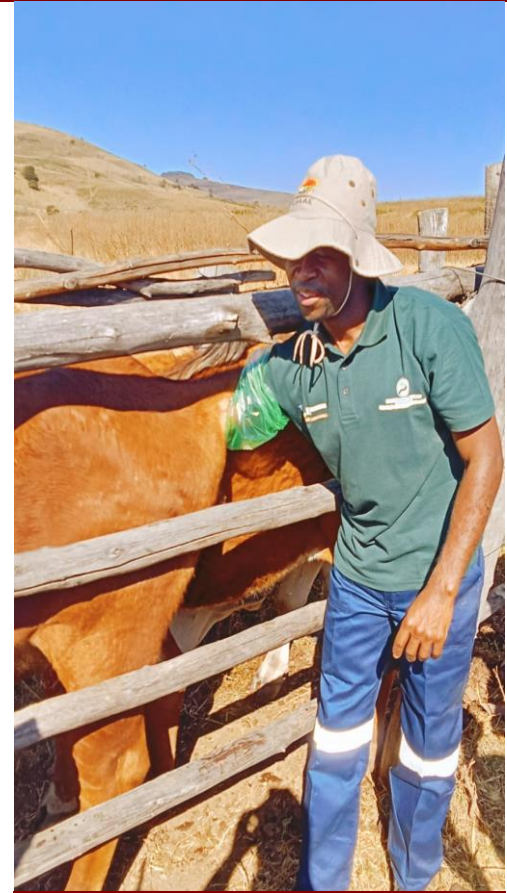
The Assisted Reproduction Technology (ART) Project, led by Helen Mapeka from the Faculty of Natural Sciences' Agriculture Department, recently concluded a transformative series of activities aimed at enhancing agricultural practices and inspiring young minds in the local schools of Riesdale, uMzimkhulu in the Eastern Cape.

From 9 to 16 August 2024, Mapeka conducted a comprehensive four-day training workshop for community members involved in the project. The workshop combined two days of theoretical learning and two days of practical sessions, covering key components such as an introduction to ART and its benefits for the beef cattle industry, breed and animal identification, ear tagging, record-keeping, pregnancy diagnosis, and oestrus detection and synchronization.

During the practical sessions, 50 cows were ear-tagged and given unique identities, while 30 cows were scanned for pregnancy, with seven cows testing positive. This hands-on training equipped livestock keepers with vital knowledge and skills to improve livestock productivity in their communities.

The project also extended its impact to learners. On 16 August 2024, a Science talk was held at local school, the Zwelinzima Senior Secondary School. Ninety Grade 11 and 12 learners were introduced to the Science of Assisted Reproductive Technologies. They were also informed about the various agricultural programmes offered by MUT. The session sparked curiosity and encouraged learners to consider agriculture as a career choice.

Further highlighting the project's influence, Mapeka was invited as a guest speaker by the Association of South African Agricultural Educators on 26 September 2024. She presented on Assisted Reproductive Technologies, sharing insights into its transformative potential for the agricultural sector.



A practical training session for cattle farmers



Learners engaging in a hands-on session on the Science of ART

Entrepreneurial Skills Development Initiative Brings Hope to Umlazi Community

The Sithola Umlazi Entrepreneurial Skills Development (SUESD) Project, led by Dr Sibonelo Mbanjwa from the Department of Nature Conservation in the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences, is making a remarkable impact by equipping unemployed youth in Umlazi with essential entrepreneurial skills. This transformative initiative aims to promote economic development and self-reliance within the community.

On 23 July 2024, the project started off with a workshop on business registration and guidelines to start a business, offering Umlazi community members essential guidance on launching and managing their business ventures. The session provided participants with the tools and knowledge necessary to take the first steps towards entrepreneurship.

The momentum continued on 9 August 2024, with an Entrepreneurship Day, where participants showcased their innovative business ventures. This event not only highlighted the community's entrepreneurial spirit but also provided a platform for potential entrepreneurs to share ideas, network, and inspire one another.

To further support these efforts, an entrepreneurial workshop was held on 16 September 2024, focusing on enhancing entrepreneurial skills and encouraging creative approaches to business. Participants were empowered with strategies to navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship and seize opportunities for growth and development.

Through the SUESD project, Dr Mbanjwa is not only promoting economic opportunities but is also nurturing a culture of innovation and resilience in the Umlazi community. This initiative reflects a commitment to community development and the creation of sustainable livelihoods for the youth.



Dr Sibonelo Mbanjwa (far right) presenting a laptop to a SUESD Project beneficiary



Dr Mfanozelwe Shoji, Deputy Director of CEAD (second from left) and Dr David Ighodaro, Researcher: Community Engagement CEAD Directorate (first from right), presenting certificates of participation to the participants

Umlazi Youth Empowered Through Mechanic Training



Beneficiaries of the Motor Vehicle Mechanic Repair Project actively participating in a hands-on training session

The Motor Vehicle Mechanic Repair Project, led by Emmanuel Mdhuli and Dr Jean Gad Mukuna from the Faculty of Engineering's Mechanical Engineering Department, is steering change in the Umlazi community with a transformative collaboration involving Toyota South Africa and Bosch Global. This initiative is dedicated towards producing skilled and competent technicians capable of thriving in the automotive industry while delivering exceptional repair and maintenance services to customers.

In the first semester of 2024, Mdhuli and Dr Mukuna conducted a comprehensive motor mechanic repair skills training programme that saw 22 community members from Umlazi receive certification for their newly acquired skill. The programme provided a hands-on experience and theoretical knowledge, equipping participants with the required tools to excel in the fast-evolving automotive sector.

Building on this success, another group of aspiring mechanics underwent training between July and September 2024, further extending the project's impact. This group, upon completing the rigorous training, also earned certificates, which indicated their readiness to contribute to the automotive industry and their local communities.

Through this project, the Faculty of Engineering is not only enhancing technical skills but is also promoting economic opportunities and self-reliance in Umlazi.

The collaboration with industry leaders like Toyota South Africa and Bosch Global underlines the project's commitment to delivering world-class training and developing the next generation of automotive technicians.

Building Tomorrow Today: STEM Robotics Training Inspires Young Minds



Participating learners fully engaged in assembling robotic kits

The STEM Robotic Education and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Development Project, led by Dr Vikash Jugoo, Head of the Department of Information Communication and Technology in the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences, Dr Richard Chidzonga and Rogerant Tshibangu, from the Faculty of Engineering's Electrical Engineering department, is a groundbreaking initiative bridges the gap between education and innovation.

The project is empowering young learners with essential skills for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. On 20 August 2024, the project held a stakeholder engagement meeting, bringing together parents, principals, and teachers from Umlazi's Sukuma and Umgijimi Primary Schools.

The meeting highlighted the project's mission to deliver accessible, high-quality STEM education, particularly in robotics and coding.

The STEM Robotics training officially launched on 31 August 2024, running for an immersive 14 weeks.

About 40 learners from Sukuma and Umgijimi Primary Schools embarked on an exciting journey of discovery, learning computer programming and robotics.

By 14 September 2024, two weeks into the programme, these young innovators showcased their first milestone achievement: an obstacle-sensing car which they assembled themselves.

This remarkable demonstration highlighted the hands-on, learner-centered approach of the training.

The programme concluded with a celebratory closing ceremony on 23 November 2024, marking the culmination of a transformative experience that not only expanded the learners' technical knowledge but also inspired their creativity and problem-solving abilities.

This initiative reflects MUT's commitment to advancing STEM education and creating opportunities for the next generation of innovators.

Management Sciences faculty Campaign Inspires Dassenhoek Youth with skills and resources needed for a brighter future



Isisekelo Campaign project team members with the participants at the training

The Isisekelo Campaign, led by dedicated staff from the Faculty of Management Sciences' Public Administration and Economics department, continues to transform lives by empowering disadvantaged youth with the skills and resources needed for a brighter future. Focusing on regeneration, education, and opportunity, the project is a beacon of hope for teenagers, youth and young adults who are striving to overcome adversity.

On 25 July 2024, the project team members conducted a training at the Dassenhoek, near Pinetown, west of Durban. The training focused on time management and equipping 31 participants with essential skills to navigate their personal and professional lives more effectively. The training was attended by 41 individuals, including staff members from Impilo Home thus highlighting the project's collaborative spirit.

Through its efforts, the Isisekelo Campaign not only nurtures human development but also guides young minds towards higher education and sustainable opportunities, fostering a future of self-reliance and success.

Reading Project Ignites Passion for Literacy in Umlazi Schools



Dr Sibonelo Mbanjwa inspiring learners to embrace reading as a key to academic success and personal growth

The Funda Nathi Reading (FNR) project, led by Dr Sibonelo Mbanjwa from the Nature Conservation department: Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences, and Dr Nobuhle Ndaba from the Department of Communication: Faculty of Management Sciences, contributes significantly in promoting literacy among learners in the Umlazi community.

The project's primary objective is to improve English as a First Additional Language (FAL) and provide macro skills among both primary and secondary school learners in the community.

On 11 July 2024, the FNR team initiated their mission with a promotion of reading and writing at various primary schools in the Umlazi community. This initiative laid the foundation for encouraging learners to embrace reading as a tool for academic growth and personal development.

Building on this success, the project reached a significant milestone on 29 August 2024, when Dr Mbanjwa and Dr Ndaba organised a reading competition for four local schools: Bavumile, eMthethweni, Sizwakele, and Nqayizivele primary schools.

The event not only highlighted the importance of reading and writing but also created a competitive and stimulating platform for the students to showcase their newfound literacy skills.

Through these engaging initiatives, the FNR project is promoting a culture of literacy and empowering learners in Umlazi to improve their language skills and academic performance, paving the way for a brighter educational future.

Literacy Takes Centre Stage at the Third MUT Reading Project Competition



The highlight of the day was the announcement of Ngilosi Primary School as the overall winner, a testament to their outstanding performance.

Trophies were awarded to category winners, while every learner received a certificate of participation. The event concluded with the Faculty Deans presenting the coveted competition trophy to Ngilosi Primary School amidst loud cheers.

The third MUT Reading Project Competition was more than just an event; it was a celebration of literacy, culture, and community spirit. It emphasized the transformative power of education and MUT's unwavering commitment to uplifting local communities. The competition brought together young learners, educators, and stakeholders in a shared mission to promote a love for reading while addressing literacy challenges in underprivileged areas.

With vibrant cultural performances, inspiring speeches, and moments of academic triumph, the event showcased the interaction between education and community engagement, demonstrating how collaborative efforts can create a brighter future for the next

A learner participating in the third reading project competition

On 17 September 2024, Bozzoli Hall at MUT campus buzzed with energy as Grade 4 learners from six schools gathered for the third round of the MUT Reading Project Competition. The event organisers welcomed new participants from Mariannridge Primary School, near Pinetown, west of Durban, alongside returning schools: Ngilosi Primary School, Sukuma Primary School, Mgijimi Primary School, Emthethweni Primary School, and eMbonini Primary School. The competition built on the success of earlier rounds held in March and June 2024.

The event featured inspiring speeches that emphasized the importance of literacy and education. CEAD's Director, Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni, highlighted MUT's dedication to community engagement and its role in promoting socio-economic development through education. Busisiwe Mahlambi, District Director of the Department of Education (DoE), expressed pride in the learners and reaffirmed DoE's commitment to promoting literacy.

The competition consisted of 30 learners, five from each school, all demonstrating their reading abilities. The material used was carefully selected from Grade four workbooks to ensure consistency. Adjudicators used rubric from the DoE and evaluated fluency, expression, volume, pronunciation, and presentation.

MUT Supports Mariannridge with Agricultural Training and Resources



MUT team members with the participants at the training

The Mariannridge Community Development Project, led by the CEAD Directorate under the guidance of Dr David Ighodaro - researcher for community engagement, is a grassroots initiative aimed at addressing the socio-economic challenges of the Marianhill community. Focused on empowering a predominantly disadvantaged and unemployed population, the project seeks to enhance food security by equipping families with the knowledge and tools to cultivate their own crops. On 8 August 2024, the CEAD Directorate, in collaboration with the Mariannridge Coordinating Committee (MCC), organised a training workshop for local vegetable garden owners. The workshop was facilitated by two experts from MUT's Department of Agriculture: Dr Tholi Cele, a specialist in crop pest and disease management, and Nathi Nxumalo, an agronomy expert.

Participants received training on urban gardening techniques such as soil preparation, planting, and crop rotation, with an emphasis on soil health for sustainability. The sessions were interactive, with attendees actively engaging. Additionally, pest and disease management strategies were shared, covering both natural and chemical methods, addressing specific challenges faced by the gardeners.

The workshop concluded with the distribution of shade nets to protect crops and enhance productivity. This initiative emphasizes MUT's commitment to empowering local families, promoting food security, and fostering sustainable practices, reflecting the CEAD Directorate's dedication to socio-economic development.

Inspiring Excellence Through Sport: MUT Schools & Community Cup 2024



Participating soccer teams in the third annual MUT Schools and Community Cup

The King Zwelithini Stadium buzzed with energy and excitement on 22 August 2024, as the third annual MUT Schools & Community Cup unfolded. This highly anticipated event, spearheaded by the collaboration between MUT Sport and Recreation Directorate and the CEAD Directorate, is more than just a tournament - it is a platform for promoting talent, healthy lifestyles, and building meaningful connections between MUT and the Umlazi community.

The event, featured spirited competition among eight teams from Umlazi high schools, chosen based on their academic performance (80% pass rate or higher) and active participation in sports. On the fields, schools battled for victory across two sport codes which are soccer and netball. Soccer teams from Umlazi Commercial, Isikhwama, and Umlazi High showcased their talent, while netball teams from Ogwini, Zwelihle, and Igagasi impressed spectators with skilful play.

To honour their efforts, all participating teams received playing kits, with additional kits for finalists and champions. Bronze, silver, and gold medals were awarded to the top three teams respectively, while winning teams proudly lifted their trophies. Individual awards for standout players in both soccer and netball highlighted exceptional talent and dedication.

Beyond competition, the MUT Schools & Community Cup reinforces MUT's commitment to nurturing the youth thus forging stronger bonds with the Umlazi community, identifying future talent, and eliminating anti-social behaviours through sport. This initiative stands as a powerful reminder of the transformative impact of education and athletics. As the tournament concluded, it left a lasting impression, with players, schools, and community members eagerly anticipating the next competition.

JOIN US

VOLUNTEER

WITH CEAD



CEAD Directorate is excited to offer MUT students the chance to make a difference!

Why Volunteer? Volunteering with CEAD is a fantastic opportunity to contribute to meaningful projects, gain valuable skills, and make a positive impact in our community.

By giving your time and energy, you can help create real change.

Watch out for the following ways to register with the CEAD Directorate:

***Information Booth:** We will have a booth at university entrance at the beginning of each semester for on-the-spot registration and more information about volunteering opportunities.

***Student Organisations:** We will be partnering with student organisations to spread the word.

***Faculty and Staff Announcements:** Faculty and staff will be sharing opportunities in class and through departmental communications.

If you have any questions or need more information, feel free to contact the CEAD office directly:

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Be a part of something bigger.

Volunteer with CEAD and help make a difference!

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SPREAD THE WORD!

Help us raise awareness about MUT's community engagement efforts by sharing our newsletter with your partners, collaborators, friends, family, and colleagues.

Together, we can amplify our message and inspire others to join us in our mission.

Your Feedback Matters!

We value your opinion - Please feel free to share your thoughts with us!

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