

Special Edition



Ubuntu Nexus

The spirit of collective humanity and interconnectedness

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (CEAD) DIRECTORATE

Newsletter - May 2025

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2024



**NATION BUILDING
&
SOCIAL COHESION**



**SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT**



STEM



**Food
Security,
Health, &
Safety**



Environmental Sustainability and Resilience

A note from the Editor-in-Chief



Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni
Director CEAD

As we reflect on the journey on community engagement through in 2024, it is evident that the year has been defined by remarkable momentum and a clear sense of purpose. Across all community engagement strategic focus areas, our commitment to community engagement and sustainable development has not only remained unwavering; it has grown stronger, deeper, and more impactful.

Guided by a shared vision, our work in 2024 was structured around key areas of influence, each designed to drive meaningful change. We continued to champion the transformative power of STEM education, recognising this through projects driven by the Faculty of Engineering and the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences.

MUT's strategic partners, Moses Kotane Research Institute and Azibuye Digital Solutions, empowered local communities in digital skills, computer literacy, coding, and robotics. All these efforts were proof of MUT's commitment to its critical role in building resilient, future-ready communities.

We also sowed seeds of hope by addressing food insecurity, promoting health, and ensuring safety efforts rooted in uplifting lives and restoring dignity through various projects led by the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences. With the focus on restoring our mother earth, the Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences led projects that embraced environmental sustainability and resilience to encourage responsible stewardship of our natural resources.

Our nation-building and social cohesion initiatives helped foster a shared identity and promoted inclusive growth, bringing communities together through collaboration and shared purpose. Powering change is the backbone of long-term, sustainable impact.

JOIN US FOR THE UPCOMING SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT CONFERENCE UNDER THE THEME: "BRIDGING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP IN ADVANCING THE SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT FOR MAXIMUM SOCIETAL IMPACT."

 **FULL DETAILS AVAILABLE ON PAGE 13.**

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE!

MUT's community engagement and development impacted across key focus areas in 2024

In 2024, MUT reaffirmed its role as a driving force for societal change, harnessing dynamic and strategic Community Engagement (CE) initiatives to inspire hope, unlock potential, and build resilience across diverse communities.

Through tireless efforts and purposeful interventions, MUT focused on five critical areas to address the pressing needs of its surrounding communities:

IGNITING INNOVATION: STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)



STEM robotics Education and 4IR Development Project

STEM education became the beacon of opportunity for young minds in 2024 through a STEM Robotics Education and 4IR Development Project which brought futuristic learning to two Umlazi primary schools. Fourty learners who had never encountered coding or programming just months earlier successfully built mini robots within a space of 14 weeks.

RESTORING OUR EARTH: Environmental Sustainability and Resilience

With the Earth's future under increasing threat, MUT championed green initiatives to create sustainable communities through flagship projects such as Ecosystems Rehabilitation and Restoration (ERR)

Project and the Environmental Education and Sustainability (EES) Project. The projects mobilised many community members through a series of impactful activities. These included coastal clean-ups, wetland rehabilitation efforts, and tree-planting campaigns.



The EES Project

SOWING SEEDS OF HOPE: Food Security, Health, and Safety

Addressing hunger and promoting health were front and centre in 2024. Through projects such as Food Security for Better Health (FSBH), primary school learners in Umlazi were taught to cultivate their own food gardens.



Food Security and Better Health Project

Hygiene and food safety project elevated street vendor practices in Umlazi and Isipingo, reducing public health risks. In Mariannridge, near Pinetown, the Community Development Project, led by the CEAD Directorate, empowered 50 families to grow crops in backyard gardens for sustenance and income, while the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Project uplifted livestock farmers in uMzimkhulu, southern KwaZulu-Natal, enhancing both livelihoods and nutritional standards.

UNITING FOR A GREATER GOOD: Nation Building and Social Cohesion

MUT proudly waved the banner of unity and inclusion through projects that celebrated literacy and community spirit.



MUT Schools and Community Cup

The MUT Schools and Community Cup brought together high-achieving learners from Umlazi schools in spirited netball and soccer competitions, proving that sport remains a universal language of unity. Additionally, the Funda Nathi Reading Project and the MUT Reading Project Competition ignited a love for reading among learners from local schools, promoting academic excellence and social inclusion. In addition, the Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi Museum and Documentation Centre (PMBMDC) Project progressed to preserve cultural heritage. The project is in Ulundi, northern KwaZulu-Natal.

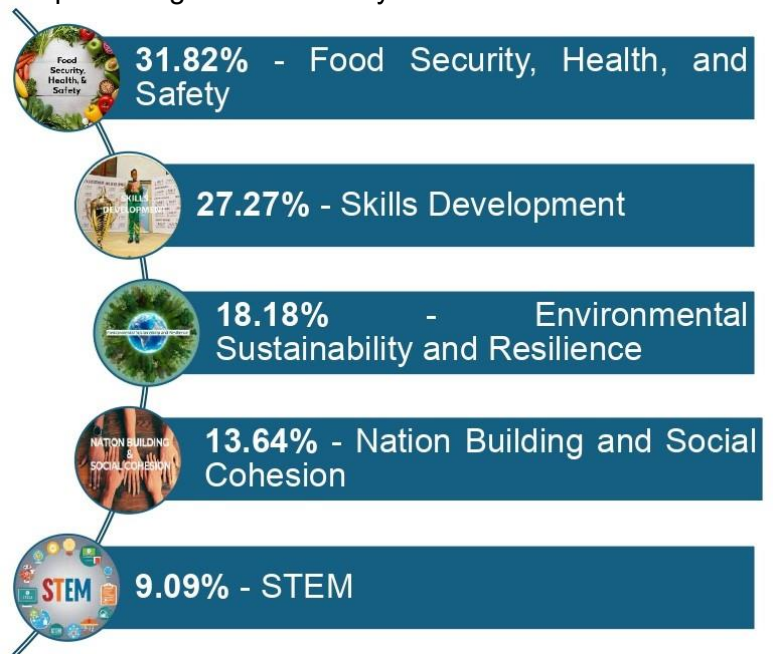
EMPOWERING DREAMS: Skills Development

Recognising that sustainable change demands skills, MUT launched initiatives such as the Sithola Ulwazi Entrepreneurial Skills Development Project, the Impilo Community Project, and the Isisekelo Campaign. These projects equipped unemployed youth in Umlazi and Dassenhoek, near Pinetown, with business acumen, life skills, and entrepreneurial mindsets.



Impilo Community Project

Out of a total of 22 projects implemented in 2024, the percentage distribution by focus area is as follows:



MUT's community engagement initiatives contributed to addressing social and developmental challenges in 2024 through enhancing access to skills, promoting inclusive participation, and strengthening local capacities.

These efforts reflect more than community outreach - they represent collaborative partnership, empowerment, and sustainable transformation. Through each project and partnership, MUT continues to advance its commitment to societal development and shared progress.

Highlighting some of our impactful projects



Food Safety Training Project



Agricultural Support Project



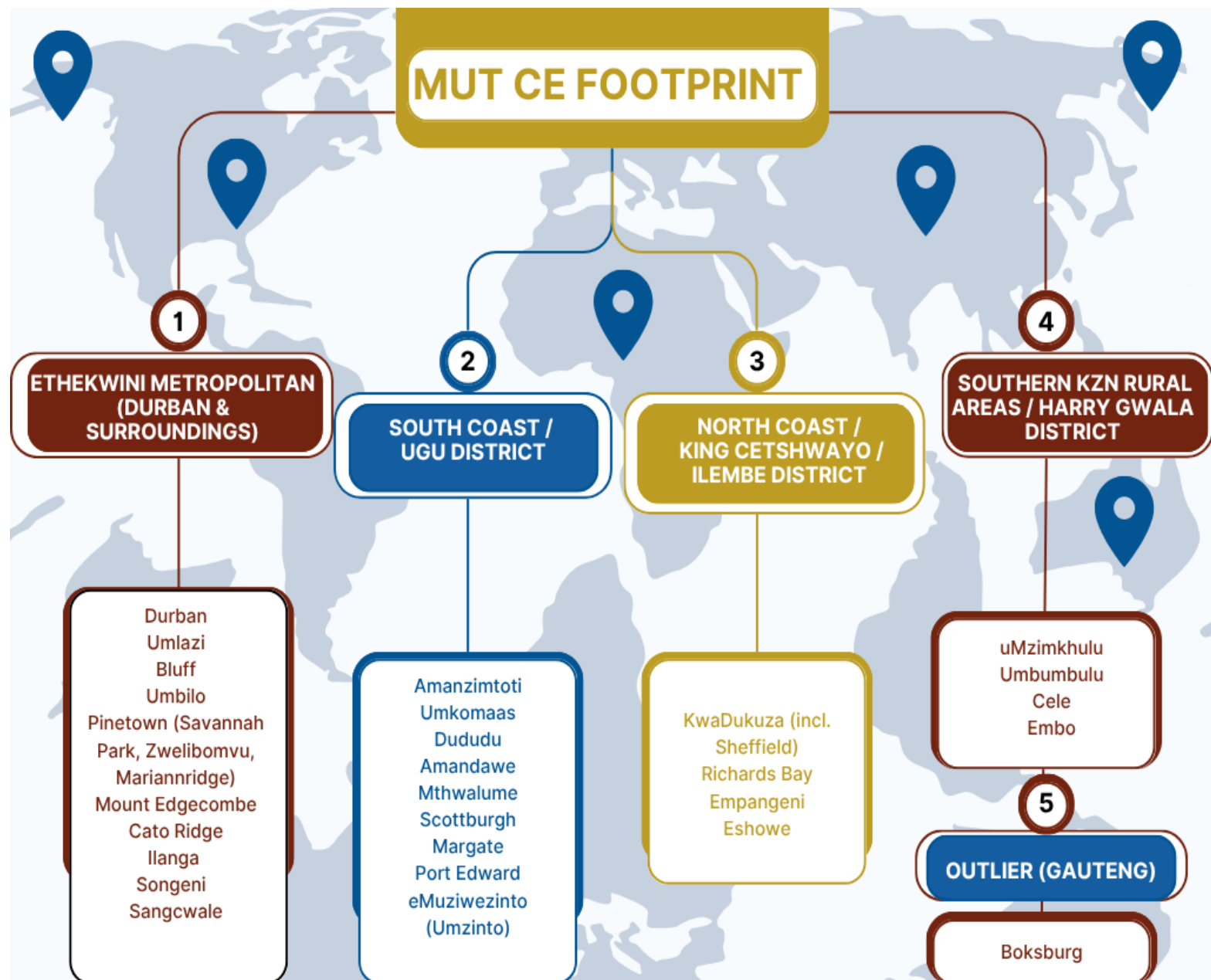
The Motor Vehicle Mechanic Repair Project



Assisted Reproductive Technology Project



Ecosystems Rehabilitation and Restoration Project



The MUT community engagement footprint across numerous communities in KwaZulu-Natal and even extending beyond the province, such as Boksburg, Gauteng, demonstrates the University's far-reaching impact and commitment to inclusive, transformative development. This broad reach is made possible through the dedication of MUT's academic staff from various departments who actively champion community engagement, as well as through strategic and dynamic partnerships with key organisations, including the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEFDA), the Moses Kotane Research Institute (MKRI), and Azibuye Digital Solutions. Through these collaborations, MUT implements a wide range of initiatives that respond directly to community needs.

These projects enhance the quality of life in urban, peri-urban, and rural communities while also nurturing civic responsibility and promoting a culture of active citizenship. MUT's model of engagement reflects a deeply rooted principle of co-creation, where knowledge is shared and solutions are developed in partnership with the people they serve, making a lasting contribution to regional development and social upliftment.



**Powering change through
partnerships: CEAD's
expanding web of
empowerment**

At the heart of every successful community initiative lies a network of like-minded partners: visionaries who share resources, expertise and passion for collective progress.

In 2024, the CEAD Directorate deepened its commitment to transformative collaboration by forging six impactful partnerships with civil society organisations and sealing an international academic alliance with a prestigious global institution.

INTRODUCING OUR 2024 PARTNERSHIP POWERHOUSES

Dexter Matu Zama (DMZ) Agricultural Academy



As an emerging leader in sustainable agriculture education, Dexter Matu Zama Agricultural Academy, brings critical training in agricultural production, agri-business, and rural empowerment through beadwork and sewing.

Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency (SEDFA)



SEDFA's involvement has been instrumental in capacitating aspiring entrepreneurs across KwaZulu-Natal. Through business development training, mentorship, and funding advice, SEDFA has helped turn ideas into viable ventures, aligning perfectly with MUT's commitment to skills development and economic empowerment.

Azibuye Digital Solutions Pty Ltd



As a tech-driven partner, Azibuye Digital Solutions has enabled CEAD to expand its digital literacy workshops to both learners and community members. This partnership has empowered participants with the tools to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution - particularly in underserved communities.

Sivusisizwe Boyz to Men Africa Initiative



Focused on positive masculinity, mentorship, and life skills, this initiative has partnered with CEAD to run transformational programmes for boys and young men across high schools and communities. Their work in addressing social issues such as gender-based violence, absenteeism, and substance abuse is aligned with CEAD's nation-building objectives.

Seed of Hope South Africa



This faith-based development organisation focuses on life skills training, psychosocial support, and food sustainability projects in vulnerable communities. Their holistic model — nurturing body, mind, and spirit, enriches community wellness approach.

University of Missouri, USA



MUT's newest international partner, the University of Missouri, brings global best practices in engagement scholarship, student exchange, and collaborative research. This transatlantic alliance enhances MUT's academic profile and opens new doors for joint publications, capacity building, and innovative pedagogical approaches that benefit both students and communities.

Building Capacity, One Skill at a Time: Equipping people. Empowering communities. Elevating potential

At the core of CEAD's strategy is the belief that empowered individuals build empowered communities. In 2024, CEAD turned this philosophy into action by delivering 12 targeted capacity-building initiatives that impacted staff, students, farmers, youth, and community partners across urban and rural KwaZulu-Natal.

EMPOWERING THROUGH LEARNING: Key 2024 Capacity Highlights

Quarterly CE forum sessions: The quarterly CE Forum sessions provided a consistent platform for MUT staff to deepen their understanding of community engagement. Topics included integrating CE into teaching and research, and models for sustainable impact. Each session promoted reflection and reinforced CE as a core part of MUT's academic mission.

Community Engagement Research and Science Communication Workshops: CEAD strengthened the research capacities of academic staff through targeted workshops on integrating research into community engagement, producing scholarly outputs, publishing, conference presentations, and science communication.



Research-related community engagement for outputs workshop 2024

Sign Language Training – Mandela Month Inclusion Drive

In July, as part of Mandela Month, Sign Language Workshops were facilitated by the community organisation Incamisile Intokozo. Attendees included various MUT divisions. The initiative promoted inclusivity by empowering participants to engage with hearing-impaired individuals—a critical step towards inclusive community engagement.



Sign language workshop 2024

Digital, Coding, and Robotics Training: Our University partners such as SEDFA, Moses Kotane Research Institute and Azibuye Digital solutions increased the footprint of MUT by capacitating communities in Umlazi and far-flung rural areas of Umlazi on business skills, coding and robotics, and computer skills.

Rural Farmer Training: In the rural farming communities of uMzimkhulu, CEAD supported workshops that introduced livestock farmers to Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), a modern method to improve herd genetics, increase yields, and secure higher market prices. The workshop was facilitated by the Department of Agriculture at MUT.

CEAD's capacity-building initiatives in 2024 planted seeds of self-efficacy, resilience, and collaboration.

Celebrating with communities — events that matter

In 2024, the CEAD Directorate hosted a series of powerful, inclusive, and transformative events—celebrating humanity, service, learning, and excellence.

Each event brought together students, staff, community members, civil society organisations, and government partners, and created spaces where ideas were exchanged, partnerships were formed, and impact was celebrated.

MOMENTS THAT DEFINED MUT'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR:

▪ MUT Schools and Community Cup

This flagship event that took place on 22 August 2024 at King Zwelithini Stadium, Umlazi, was a celebration of discipline, academic excellence, and social cohesion. The MUT Schools and Community Cup brought together eight Umlazi high schools in a thrilling soccer and netball competition. Three talented players from Skhwama High School impressed scouts and are being recruited to professional teams, a shining example of how community engagement can open doors to real opportunities.

Academic requirement for participation: Learners had to achieve 80% or above in all subjects, blending the pursuit of knowledge with physical excellence.



MUT Schools and Community Cup 2024

▪ International Mandela Month — giving back with Ubuntu

Theme: *"It is still in our hands to combat poverty and inequality."*

Throughout July 2024, MUT was transformed into a living example of Ubuntu in action. The university community - staff, students, and project leaders, stepped out of lecture halls and offices to serve society through dozens of community-based activities.



Cleaning campaign: Mandela month initiative 2024

▪ Inguyazana — Conversations that count

Named after a Zulu phrase meaning "family in-house meeting," Inguyazana is a critical dialogue introduced by CEAD to bring together MUT staff, partners, and community stakeholders to reflect on project implementation and strategise for the future.

Key themes:

- Community Engagement as a strategic pillar.
- Integrating research with community development.
- Co-creation and participatory planning; and
- Multidisciplinary collaboration.

The event took place on 17 October 2024 at the main campus.



Inguyazana 2024

Community Engagement Excellence Awards

This prestigious annual event that took place on 26 November 2024, recognised outstanding contributions to MUT’s community engagement vision. Awards were presented to seven exceptional CE projects and 11 impactful community partners.

Awarded partners included Toyota, eThekweni Municipality, Sivusisizwe Boyz 2 Men Africa Initiative, DMZ Agricultural Academy, Impilo Home, SEDFA, Azibuye Digital Solutions, Moses Kotane Research Institute, Vumengazi Traditional Authority, and Ikamva Youth. The awards had a significant impact, boosting project leaders’ morale and visibility, strengthening partner relations, and institutionalising a culture of excellence and recognition.



CE Excellence Awards 2024

16 Days of Activism

25 November – 10 December 2024

An MUT partnership with the Goodman Foundation, this initiative empowered local learners and University students to take an active stance against gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) through the Youth Unite Influencer Leadership Programme.

Public Lecture

The CEAD Directorate hosted a virtual public lecture titled ‘*Journeying Towards an Engaged University: Institutionalising Scholarship for Societal Impact*’, delivered by Professor Priscilla Daniels and Dr Cornel Hart from the University of the Western Cape.

The lecture, which took place on 1 November 2024, aimed to promote the Scholarship of Engagement (SoE) at MUT by integrating engagement into the University’s core functions, which are teaching, research, and community involvement—positioning it as a scholarly, embedded approach rather than a separate activity.

Intentional events for impact:

- The 2024 events were not simply symbolic; they were meaningful. Each gathering strengthened MUT’s bond with the communities it serves.
- Each award, handshake, or workshop reaffirmed the University’s role as a transformational force, not only through research and teaching, but through visible, lasting community impact.

At MUT, we do not host events to tick a box — we host them to change a life, challenge a mindset, and champion a cause.



Students leading the way — volunteerism in action

At MUT, the spirit of community engagement is not confined to staff offices and project boards; it lives and breathes through the students as well. In 2024, MUT students became the embodiment of Ubuntu in action, taking up the call to serve with humility, pride, and unwavering dedication. They were on the ground, in the field, sleeves rolled up, leading and learning simultaneously.

By the numbers:

- About 114 students formally registered for ongoing volunteerism through the CEAD Directorate.
- Over 500 students actively participated in Mandela Month activities across the University's outreach locations.
- Dozens more engaged throughout the year in projects that spanned literacy, health education, environment, youth mentorship, and rural support.



MUT students volunteering during Mandela Month 2024

The lessons learned during these engagements does not stop when a project ends. MUT student volunteers become ambassadors of service, carrying their values into their academic pursuits, their future careers, and their families. They learn that giving back is not seasonal — it is foundational.

Stories that travel. Voices that matter. Impact that resonates

In a world overwhelmed by noise, the voices of real people doing meaningful work must be amplified with purpose. In 2024, the CEAD Directorate did exactly that — by creating dedicated platforms to tell authentic stories, celebrate grassroots efforts, and connect MUT's work to the broader community consciousness.

- **Ubuntu Nexus Newsletter:** Launched in 2024, the Ubuntu Nexus newsletter became CEAD's flagship publication for sharing transformative community engagement updates. Drawing its name from the Zulu philosophy of interconnectedness, Ubuntu Nexus chronicled the projects, partnerships, and people that make MUT's outreach impactful.



- **MUT Radio:** While Ubuntu Nexus spoke to readers, MUT Radio spoke to the soul. With its wide reach and loyal listener base, the station became the auditory bridge between the University and its communities. In 2024, MUT Radio hosted multiple special broadcast segments featuring the voices of project leaders, students and local beneficiaries. These were not scripted presentations; they were candid conversations filled with learning, and vision.

The CEAD Directorate maintains that featuring people's stories on air or in Ubuntu Nexus fosters a sense of being heard, offering powerful validation.



Andile Mkhize
Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences
Department of Agriculture

Step Up. Stand Out. Serve.

Be Part of the Change with CEAD

 **Calling All MUT Students!**

Are you ready to make an impact beyond the classroom?
The **CEAD Directorate** invites **YOU** to get involved in community engagement initiatives that empower, uplift, and inspire.

Introducing Andile Mkhize

Andile confidently stepped up to participate in the CE Day Essay Competition and earned a spot among the top nine finalists.

His decision to seize the opportunity became a springboard for personal growth and greater visibility.

Why Get Involved?

Volunteering with CEAD isn't just about giving back — it is about growing forward. Through our initiatives, you will:

- Gain valuable experience
- Build leadership and communication skills
- Connect with purpose-driven peers
- Make a real difference in the lives of others

Imagine what **YOU** could achieve if you got involved — and stayed involved.

CEAD Offers Ongoing Opportunities Throughout the Year!

Don't just participate once — become an active agent of change.

 **Here's How You Can Join Us!**

 **Information Booths:** Look out for our vibrant booths at the university entrance at the start of each semester. Instant sign-up and info!

 **Student Organisations:** We are working hand-in-hand with student groups to bring opportunities to you.

 **Faculty and Staff:** Keep an ear out for announcements in your lectures and emails!

 **Need More Info? We are Here to Help:**

Phone: 031 819 9422 / 031 819 9413

Email: shabalalaS@mut.ac.za

Extended Call For Papers

Bridging the knowledge gap in advancing the Scholarship of Engagement for maximum societal impact

18-20 NOVEMBER 2025

 HYBRID CONFERENCE



Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) is hosting a Conference on Scholarship of Engagement (SoE) under the umbrella of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF).

Sub-Themes:

- Conceptual and Multidisciplinary Perspectives on the Scholarship of Engagement
- Practical approaches for the implementation of SoE for maximum societal impact
- Practical and Implementation Challenges of Integrating CE into Teaching, Learning and Research
- Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and their Role in Enhancing SoE
- Community engagement as vehicle towards Community Development

REGISTRATION FEES

	Early Registration	Late Registration
Presenters (non-students), Physical attendance	R4 700.00	R5 100.00
Authors (students), Physical attendance	R2 000.00	R2 500.00
Online day participants (non-students)	R3 500.00	R4 500.00
Online day participants (students)	R1 500.00	R2 000.00

IMPORTANT DATES

Abstract submission deadline	30 June 2025
Notification of abstracts/workshop proposals	31 July 2025
Submission of full paper/workshop proposals	29 August 2025
Registration deadline	15 September 2025
Conference dates	18 – 20 November 2025

N.B Rates include conference pack, teas, lunches, water and a gala dinner.

PRESENTATION OPTIONS

- Options for both oral and poster presentations are available; and
- Options of ONLINE presentations with Zoom/Teams and OFFLINE presentations with recorded voice, are also available.

All extended papers may be published in the following journals:

- African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement
- South African Journal of Higher Education

VENUE: Coastlands Hotel, Musgrave, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

FORMAT: Hybrid Conference (In-person & Virtual Participation)

FOR REGISTRATION AND ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

VISIT: <https://mut-soe.org>

Connect With CEAD!

SPREAD THE WORD!

Help us raise awareness about MUT's community engagement efforts

Share 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."

MEET THE EDITORIAL TEAM

Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni: *Editor-in-Chief*

Dr Oluwabunmi Popoola: *Writer*

Dr Ikponmwosa David Ighodaro: *Editor*

Dudu Mbhele: *Editor*

YOUR FEEDBACK MATTERS!

We value your opinion – please feel free to share your thoughts with us!

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