

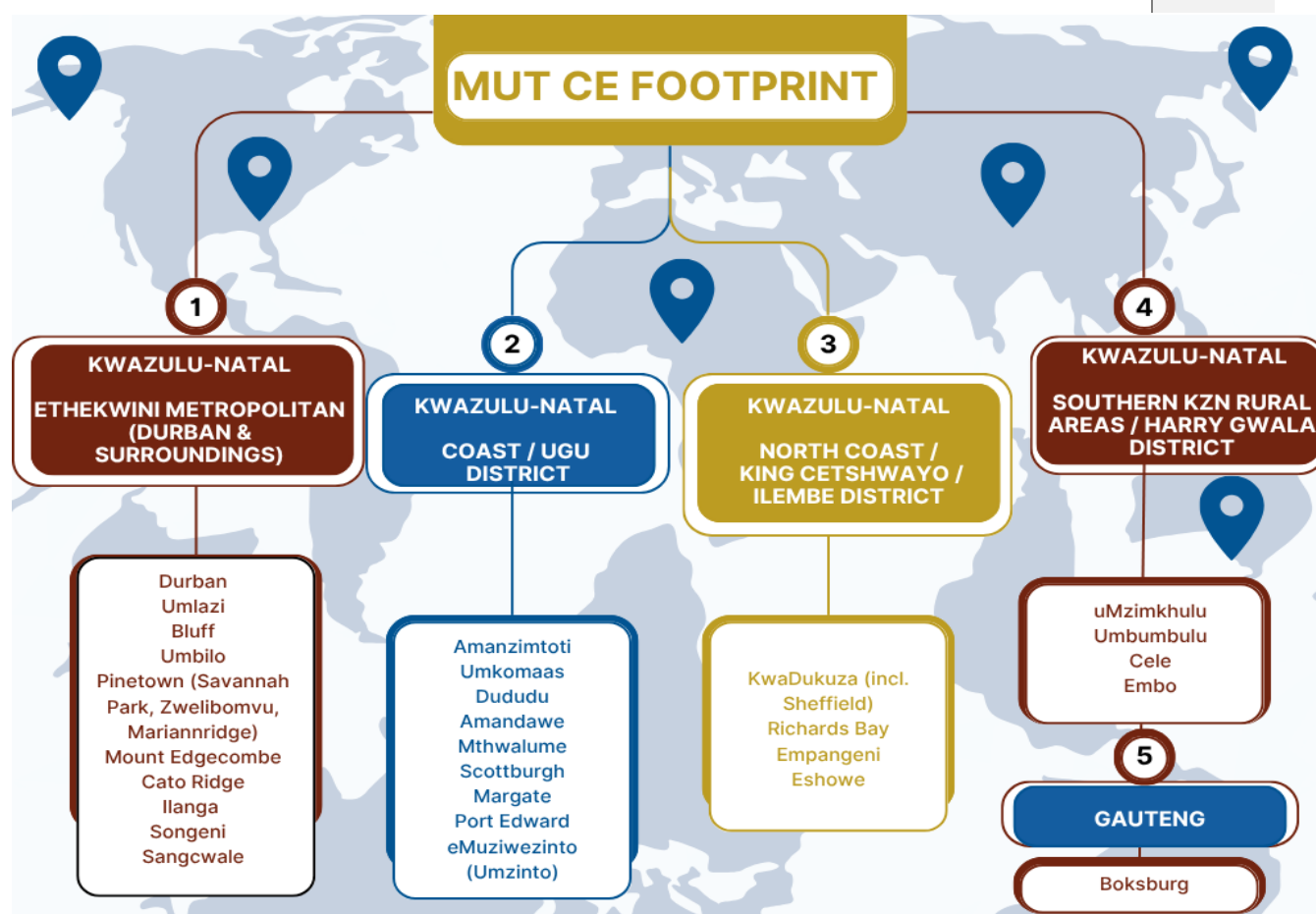
Community Engagement Day 2026

Knowledge. Inclusion. Transformation. In Community Partnership.



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Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni
Director: CEAD

The second quarter of 2026 has been a period of purposeful engagement, innovation, and collaboration for the Community Engagement and Development Directorate (CEAD). The stories featured in this edition demonstrate how Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) continues to advance its mission of engaged scholarship by partnering with communities to address societal challenges through teaching, learning, research, and innovation. At the heart of every initiative is the recognition that sustainable development is achieved through partnership.

Message from the Editor-in-Chief

Building Communities Through Knowledge, Partnership and Innovation

Communities are not simply beneficiaries of university programmes but valued partners whose knowledge, experiences, and aspirations inform the co-creation of practical and sustainable solutions. This philosophy continues to guide the University's approach to community engagement, ensuring that academic knowledge remains relevant, responsive, and transformative.

The articles in this edition showcase the diversity and impact of community engagement at MUT. From introducing young learners to coding and robotics, strengthening literacy through the MUT Reading Project, advancing livestock production through Assisted Reproductive Technologies, promoting climate-smart agriculture, and mobilising communities against substance abuse, each initiative demonstrates how the University is responding to local needs while contributing to national development priorities.

A significant highlight of the quarter was the annual Community Engagement Day, held under the theme "*Knowledge, Inclusion, Transformation: MUT in Community Partnership.*" The event provided a platform to celebrate the University's growing portfolio of community-engaged initiatives while reaffirming the importance of reciprocal partnerships, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the integration of community engagement into teaching, research, and innovation.

This edition also highlights the invaluable contribution of students, who continue to play an active role in community-engaged projects. Through volunteerism, experiential learning, community-based research, and service-learning, students are making meaningful contributions while developing leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, and a lifelong commitment to active citizenship.

Their participation demonstrates that community engagement enriches both student learning and community development, preparing graduates who are academically competent, socially responsive, and committed to serving society.

These achievements would not be possible without the commitment of our academic and support staff, students, community partners, government departments, schools, municipalities, industry, civil society organisations, and funding partners. Their collective efforts demonstrate that addressing complex societal challenges requires shared responsibility, mutual learning, and enduring partnerships.

The initiatives showcased in this edition reaffirm that community engagement is not an isolated activity but a strategic pillar of Mangosuthu University of Technology's mission. By integrating teaching, learning, research, and innovation with the needs and aspirations of communities, the University continues to create knowledge that is relevant, impactful, and transformative.

As CEAD continues to institutionalise community engagement across the University, we remain committed to strengthening reciprocal partnerships, advancing engaged scholarship, and creating opportunities that empower communities while enriching teaching, research, and student learning. Together, we are building a university that not only generates knowledge but also transforms lives through meaningful collaboration.

We extend our sincere appreciation to everyone who has contributed to the successes featured in this edition. We trust that these stories will inspire continued innovation, stronger partnerships, and an even greater commitment to community engagement. Together, we will continue building healthy, resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities while advancing MUT's vision of being a socially responsive university that makes a lasting contribution to society.



Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni with Dr Thulile Mofokeng of the Durban University of Technology, who delivered the keynote address at MUT's flagship Community Engagement Day



Leading community engagement with purpose: Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni's vision for MUT



Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni during a podcast session at MUT Radio

"Community engagement is in my blood. I love it." These heartfelt words from Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni, Director of CEAD, captures her unwavering commitment to improving lives through higher education. Speaking during a recent interview on MUT Radio on 15 April 2026, Professor Nkonki-Mandleni shared her vision of a university that works hand in hand with communities to address real societal challenges and create lasting change.

At the centre of her leadership philosophy is the belief that community engagement is far more than an outreach activity. It is a scholarly practice that must be integrated within learning, teaching, and research. Guided by the MUT Strategic Plan 2026–2030, CEAD works to ensure that academic programmes are informed by the realities and challenges faced by communities. Rather than developing solutions in isolation, the Directorate encourages academics and students to engage directly with communities, ensuring that research and teaching remain relevant, responsive and transformative.

As Professor Nkonki-Mandleni aptly noted, "We do not have all the answers. Some of the answers come directly from the communities." This approach has enabled CEAD to cultivate strategic partnerships with government departments, municipalities, non-governmental organisations, industry and international institutions. These collaborations allow the university to leverage resources and expertise in ways that create meaningful opportunities for both students and community members. One notable example is the Digital Centre at the MUT premises established in partnership with the Moses Kotane Research Institute, where local community members come and receive computer literacy training while students have access to facilities that assist them in developing important career-readiness skills such as preparing professional curricula vitae. Similar partnerships have also introduced coding and robotics programmes for primary school learners, exposing young people to digital technologies and broadening their future career aspirations.

Professor Nkonki-Mandleni emphasised that successful community engagement begins with listening. Before academics and students undertake community-based projects, they are equipped with the necessary understanding of community engagement principles and protocols. Rather than entering communities with predetermined solutions, they are encouraged to engage respectfully, listen carefully and work collaboratively with community members to co-create knowledge. This participatory approach ensures that projects are sustainable and genuinely address community needs while

Drawing on her academic background in Environmental Management and Climate Change, Professor Nkonki-Mandleni has also been instrumental in promoting climate-smart agriculture through collaborative projects involving schools across KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and Mpumalanga. These initiatives encourage learners to establish school food gardens while introducing them to sustainable agricultural practices. Significantly, the projects also recognise the value of indigenous knowledge by involving community elders and retired educators who share traditional farming methods and indigenous crops that have sustained communities for generations. The impact extends far beyond school boundaries, as learners are encouraged to replicate these food gardens at their homes, promoting food security within their families and communities.

Among the many initiatives currently underway, Professor Nkonki-Mandleni regards the fight against substance abuse as one of the most pressing and personally meaningful. Working alongside schools, churches, non-profit organisations and community leaders, CEAD is coordinating awareness campaigns and capacity-building initiatives that equip community organisations with the knowledge and skills needed to support individuals and families affected by substance abuse. Through these partnerships, the university is helping to mobilise communities to confront one of society's most complex social challenges with compassion, collaboration and practical action.

The Directorate also places considerable emphasis on student volunteerism as an essential component of holistic student development. Students are encouraged to participate in structured volunteer programmes within communities, gaining invaluable leadership, communication and civic responsibility skills while making meaningful contributions to society.

Whether serving in organisations that support vulnerable communities or assisting local development initiatives, students are provided with opportunities to apply their academic learning in practical community environments, preparing them to become socially responsible graduates who understand the importance of giving back to society.

Looking to the future, Professor Nkonki-Mandleni envisions community engagement becoming even more deeply integrated within the university's academic culture. Through collaborations with universities across South Africa and internationally, including participation in a UNESCO-supported initiative on Community-Based Participatory Research, she is championing a model where research originates from community-identified needs and communities remain active partners throughout the research process. From identifying research questions to sharing findings and implementing solutions, communities are recognised as equal partners in knowledge creation rather than passive beneficiaries.

Professor Nkonki-Mandleni's vision reflects a profound belief that universities have a responsibility to serve society by working alongside the people they seek to value. Under her leadership, CEAD continues to demonstrate that meaningful community engagement is not simply about delivering services, but about building partnerships, fostering mutual learning and creating sustainable solutions that improve lives. Through her passion, strategic leadership and unwavering commitment to collaboration, she is helping position Mangosuthu University of Technology as an institution where knowledge is created with communities, for communities, and where higher education becomes a powerful force for positive societal transformation.

 *For more on the podcast, please visit:*
<https://iono.fm/e/1666640>



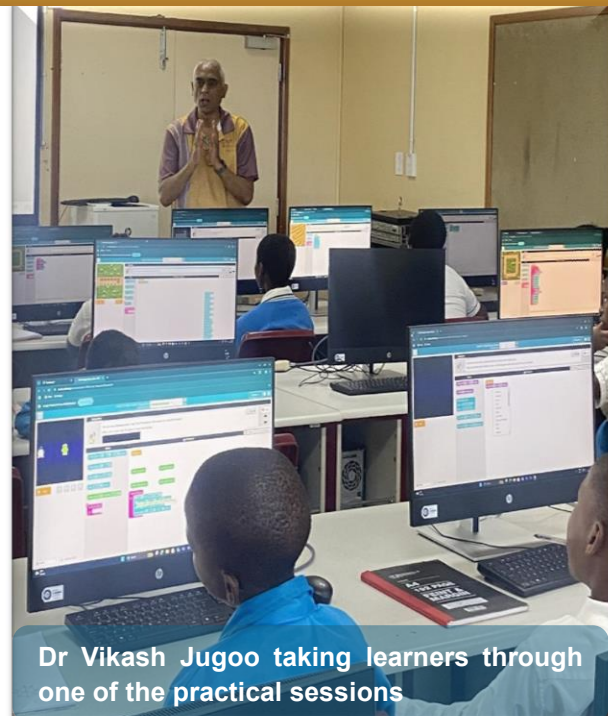
STEM project participants, educators, the STEM Project Coordinator Dr Vikash Jugoo (second from left, back row), and MUT student tutors during a project session

Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) is investing in the future of young learners by equipping them with the digital skills and confidence needed to thrive in an increasingly technology-driven world. Through its STEM Programme, the University's Department of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), under Dr Jugoo and the Faculty of Engineering under Dr Chidzonga, are introducing primary school learners to the exciting fields of coding and robotics, laying a strong foundation for future careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

During Quarter 2 of 2026, the first seven-week cycle of the STEM Programme engaged Grade 6 and Grade 7 learners from two local primary schools in Umlazi, providing them with hands-on learning experiences in coding and robotics. Mzwilili Primary School participated in the Coding Programme, while Sizwakele Primarv School took part in the Robotics Programme.

Delivered through weekly interactive sessions, the programme provided learners with practical, hands-on experiences under the guidance of MUT academic staff and dedicated student tutors.

Designed to develop digital literacy, computational thinking and problem-solving skills, the initiative encourages learners to move beyond simply using technology to understanding how it works. Through coding activities, learners developed logical reasoning and foundational programming skills, while those participating in robotics gained practical engineering experience by assembling and programming robotic vehicles. These activities challenged learners to think creatively, work collaboratively and apply critical thinking to solve real-world problems. Learners displayed remarkable enthusiasm and growing confidence in using desktop computers and digital technologies.



Dr Vikash Jugoo taking learners through one of the practical sessions



Learners participating in hands-on practical sessions

A distinctive feature of the programme is its rotational approach. Following the completion of the first seven-week cycle, the participating schools exchange learning streams, allowing learners from Mzwili Primary School to experience robotics while those from Sizwakele Primary School begin coding. This approach ensures that every participant benefits from exposure to both disciplines, broadening their understanding of technology and enhancing their digital capabilities.

This initiative has been made possible through strong collaboration between MUT, the participating schools and dedicated educators who have worked together to create meaningful learning opportunities. School management teams played an important role in coordinating learner participation, while Drs Jugoo and Chidzonga oversaw programme delivery to ensure a high-quality educational experience.

MUT students from the two faculties played a central role in the initiative, serving as mentors and facilitators throughout the programme. They guided learners during practical sessions, demonstrated coding software and robotics equipment, provided individual support where needed, and encouraged teamwork and creative problem-solving. Their involvement provided them with valuable opportunities to strengthen their knowledge they receive from the classroom setting, leadership, communication and mentoring skills through community engagement.

The programme reflects MUT's commitment to extending learning beyond the university campus and contributing meaningfully to community development through education. MUT is helping to bridge the digital divide while inspiring future generations to consider careers in Information and Communication Technology, engineering and other STEM-related disciplines.

As the STEM Programme continues into its next phase, it promises to further strengthen learners' confidence, curiosity and technological skills. Significantly, it demonstrates how partnerships between higher education institutions and local schools can create lasting opportunities that empower young people, nurture innovation and contribute towards building a digitally skilled South Africa.



SCIENCE • TECHNOLOGY • ENGINEERING • MATHEMATICS



Dr Helen Mapeka leading a practical demonstration on Assisted Reproductive Technologies for community farmers

MUT continues to demonstrate the transformative role of higher education in addressing community challenges through innovative research and community engagement. During an interview on MUT Radio on 6 May 2026, Dr Helen Mapeka, Lecturer in the Department of Agriculture and project leader of the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) Project, together with Master's candidate Sabelo Khanyile and Agriculture students Brian Zibula and Nhlanzeko Ndokweni, shared how the University is using scientific innovation to improve livestock production while empowering emerging farmers in the iXopo community.

The discussion highlighted how Assisted Reproductive Technologies are creating new opportunities for livestock farmers by improving animal reproduction, increasing productivity and strengthening food security. Although ART is often associated with human medicine, Dr Mapeka explained that these technologies play an equally important role in animal production, where techniques such as pregnancy diagnosis, oestrus synchronisation and artificial insemination are used to improve breeding efficiency in cattle, goats, sheep, pigs and poultry. These technologies enable farmers to better manage breeding seasons and improve herd genetics, contributing significantly to sustainable livestock production. The community engagement project, implemented in partnership with livestock farmers in iXopo, has already produced encouraging results. Building on previous work with cattle farmers, the project achieved an impressive calving rate of over 80 per cent, with several twin births recorded during the programme. These outcomes have strengthened farmers' confidence in modern reproductive technologies and demonstrated the potential of science to improve agricultural productivity within rural communities. Despite the project's successes, the outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease disrupted activities by restricting access to livestock. In response, the research team introduced interventions to improve livestock nutrition and prepare farmers for future breeding seasons.

With co ordination by the Community Engagement and Development Directorate (CEAD), the project expanded to include the establishment of cultivated pastures. Farmers are being trained to grow high-quality forage that will improve animal nutrition and body condition following the devastating effects of the disease. This holistic approach not only strengthens livestock health but also improves the effectiveness of future reproductive programmes. The project has also highlighted the importance of record keeping in livestock farming. Dr Mapeka emphasised that maintaining accurate breeding and production records enables farmers to make informed management decisions and improves their ability to participate in formal livestock markets. Through regular workshops and ongoing support, the project team continues to equip farmers with practical skills that extend beyond reproductive technologies to include sustainable livestock management practices.

A key feature of the initiative is its strong emphasis on experiential learning. Agriculture students work alongside academics and farmers, applying the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to real-world agricultural environments. From assisting with artificial insemination procedures to establishing cultivated pastures and engaging directly with farming communities, students gain valuable practical experience while contributing to meaningful community development. The project also provides opportunities for postgraduate research, further strengthening the integration of teaching, research and community engagement. Working directly with farmers has allowed students to develop practical agricultural skills, strengthen their communication and problem-solving abilities, and gain a deeper appreciation of the role that science can play in improving rural livelihoods. Their involvement reflects MUT's commitment to producing graduates who are not only academically prepared but also socially responsive and equipped to contribute meaningfully to community development.



Dr Helen Mapeka with her students and community farmers during practical session

 For more on the podcast, please visit:
<https://iono.fm/e/1673490>

MUT student volunteers celebrate unsung heroes through 'Kindness@MUT'



Standing, Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni Director (fifth from the right) and Dr Mfanozelwe Shoji Deputy Director (eight from the right), with student volunteers and members of the University's cleaning staff at the Kindness@MUT appreciation event



Centre: Delani Jeza, recipient of the Employee of the Month recognition

MUT Student Volunteerism Programme continues to inspire students to become active, compassionate citizens who make a meaningful difference within their communities. Building on the values and skills developed through the programme, a group of student volunteers from the 2025 intake established **Kindness@MUT**, a student-led initiative dedicated to promoting appreciation, kindness and community spirit across the university. Demonstrating remarkable leadership and initiative, the students independently planned and hosted a special appreciation event on 08 May 2026 to honour MUT's cleaning staff.

The celebration recognised the invaluable contribution of the University's cleaning personnel, whose dedication often goes unnoticed despite the essential role they play in creating a safe, clean and welcoming learning environment. During the event, the cleaning staff members were celebrated through a series of light-hearted yet meaningful award categories, including **Social Butterfly**, **Cleaner of the Month**, and **Longest Serving Member**. The event was met with heartfelt appreciation. Many recipients expressed their gratitude, sharing that it was the first time they had been formally recognised for their commitment and years of service to the University.

The initiative reflected the transformative impact of the Student Volunteerism Programme and demonstrated how students are developing into socially responsible leaders who not only identify opportunities to serve others but also take the initiative to create positive change. Through Kindness@MUT, these student volunteers have shown that acts of appreciation and compassion can strengthen relationships, foster a culture of respect, and enhance the sense of belonging within the MUT community.

MUT celebrates partnerships at annual Community Engagement Day



From right (standing): Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni, Dr Thulile Mofokeng, and other participants at the CE Day 2026 event.

MUT reaffirmed its commitment to transforming lives through meaningful community partnerships during its annual Community Engagement Day, held on 21 May 2026 at the University's North Campus under the theme, "Knowledge, Inclusion, Transformation: MUT in Community Partnership." The flagship event brought together academics, students, community partners, government representatives and other stakeholders to celebrate the University's growing culture of engaged scholarship and its collective efforts to address societal challenges through collaboration.

The event highlighted how community engagement has become an integral part of MUT's learning, teaching, and research mission. Opening the proceedings on behalf of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Innovation and Engagement, Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni, Director of CEAD, welcomed delegates and emphasised that meaningful knowledge is created through collaboration with communities.

She reaffirmed the University's commitment to strengthening partnerships that contribute to sustainable development while aligning community engagement initiatives with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union's Agenda 2063 and South Africa's National Development Plan 2030.

Representatives from the University's three faculties showcased a diverse range of projects that are making a tangible difference within communities. The Faculty of Engineering presented initiatives focusing on sustainable technologies, including waste-to-gas production, motor vehicle repair skills, water education and STEM education. The Faculty of Management Sciences highlighted projects addressing literacy, water harvesting, entrepreneurship development, financial literacy for small businesses and career guidance for school learners. The Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences demonstrated its commitment to

environmental sustainability, food security and STEM outreach through projects designed to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers.

A keynote address by Dr Thulile Mofokeng of the Durban University of Technology challenged universities to rethink community engagement as more than an act of service. She encouraged higher education institutions to view communities as equal partners in knowledge creation and emphasised the importance of integrating community engagement into learning, teaching and assessment. Drawing on practical examples from her own work, Dr Mofokeng illustrated how universities can produce socially responsible graduates by integrating real community challenges into academic programmes. She also advocated for greater recognition of indigenous knowledge systems, reminding delegates that communities possess valuable knowledge that should be respected and incorporated into research and innovation.

The programme also celebrated indigenous knowledge through a cultural segment. A thought-provoking poem entitled *Walking the Truth*, presented by Phumzile Xulu of the Durban University of Technology, encouraged universities to move beyond symbolic commitments to transformation and embrace indigenous knowledge holders as intellectual partners. This message was reinforced by Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Keeper Cynthia Mpati, who shared fascinating insights into the cultural significance of local bird species and demonstrated how indigenous ecological knowledge has guided African communities for generations. Her presentation highlighted the importance of preserving and valuing traditional knowledge alongside scientific research. One of the highlights of the day was the "Show and Tell" exhibition, where approximately 18 community engagement projects were showcased alongside community collaborators and external partners.

The exhibition featured initiatives such as the MUT's Nqayizivele Student Volunteerism Project, Food Security for Better Health, Assisted Reproductive Technologies, Motor Vehicle Repair Skills, Ecosystem Rehabilitation and Restoration, the Green Initiative for Climate Change, Substance Abuse Awareness, the MUT Schools and Community Cup, as well as contributions from the MUT Library, Clinic and Radio. External organisations, including the Moses Kotane Research Institute, Heartlines, the Dexter and Matu Zama Agricultural Academy, the Centre for Community Development South Africa and other valued partners, also participated, demonstrating the strength of MUT's collaborative approach to community development.

Equally inspiring was the active participation of students, academics and community partners throughout the event. Their involvement reflected MUT's commitment to creating reciprocal partnerships where knowledge is shared, solutions are co-created, and learning extends beyond the classroom. The event also provided an opportunity to celebrate the University's expanding network of partnerships that continue to support community development across a range of sectors.

Community Engagement Day 2026 reinforced the University's vision of becoming a people-centred institution where learning and teaching, research and community engagement work together to create sustainable social impact. The engagements throughout the day emphasised the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, indigenous knowledge, student involvement and partnerships in addressing complex societal challenges.

The event reaffirmed MUT's commitment to building lasting partnerships that empower communities, inspire innovation and promote inclusive development. Through engaged scholarship and meaningful collaboration, the University continues to make a lasting difference in the lives of the communities it serves.

Photo Gallery





Turning the page on literacy: MUT Reading Project inspires young readers



Educators and learners from Sukuma Primary School, one of the participating schools from the Umlazi District

MUT, through its CEAD Directorate, continues to make a meaningful contribution to improving literacy among young learners through the MUT Reading Project. During May 2026, the University hosted its first two district-level reading competitions of the academic year, bringing together Grade 4, 5 and 6 learners from primary schools across the Umlazi and Pinetown Districts. Held at Sukuma Primary School on 22 May 2026 and Nonophya Senior Primary School on 29 May 2026, the competitions celebrated reading excellence while reinforcing the importance of literacy as the foundation for lifelong learning.

Since its establishment in 2022, the MUT Reading Project has grown from just three participating schools in Umlazi into a thriving community engagement initiative that continues to expand its reach and impact. Beyond the annual competitions, the project supports literacy development through classroom-based learner activities, teacher capacity-building workshops, school monitoring visits and ongoing collaboration with participating schools. The initiative reflects MUT's commitment to addressing literacy challenges through sustainable partnerships that empower both learners and educators.

The competitions provided learners with an opportunity to demonstrate their reading fluency, comprehension and summarisation skills in a supportive yet competitive environment. Grade 4 learners were assessed on reading fluency, while Grade 5 learners were assessed on both fluency and comprehension. For the first time, the competition included Grade 6 learners, who were evaluated on advanced reading fluency, comprehension and summarisation, marking an important milestone in the continued growth of the project.

The standard of performance across both districts was outstanding. Judges praised the learners for their confidence, enthusiasm and reading fluency, particularly among the Grade 4 participants. All learners received certificates in recognition of their participation, while top performers were awarded medals, certificates and special prize packs. A highlight of this year's competitions was the generous contribution made by the Environment and Language Education Trust (ELET), which donated IsiZulu books to every participating learner. Additional prizes, including dictionaries and other educational resources, were presented to the top achievers in each grade. These donations reinforce the importance of promoting literacy in learners' home languages while strengthening English reading proficiency, enabling children to continue developing their reading skills beyond the classroom. An equally important outcome of the competitions was the constructive feedback provided by the judging panels. Educators received practical recommendations to strengthen reading instruction, including encouraging expressive reading, improving voice projection, developing summarisation skills and placing greater emphasis on comprehension rather than memorisation.

The competitions were made possible through partnerships between MUT, the Department of Education, eThekweni Municipal Libraries, ELET and participating primary schools. Representatives from each organisation reaffirmed their shared commitment to improving literacy outcomes and highlighted the critical role that reading plays in academic success, personal development and future opportunities. School management teams, educators and School Governing Bodies also played an invaluable role in ensuring the smooth running of both events. The MUT Reading Project reflects the University's ongoing commitment to investing in the future of education by nurturing confident, capable readers who are equipped to succeed both in the classroom and beyond.



Dr Mfanozelwe Shoji, Deputy Director of CEAD, and Saloshini Pillay, Senior Education Specialist from the Umlazi District (DoE), alongside a stakeholder, presenting a certificate of participation and a prize to a learner



Are you ready to make an impact beyond the classroom?

The Community Engagement and Development Directorate (CEAD) invites YOU to get involved in community engagement initiatives that empower, uplift, and inspire.

Volunteering with the CEAD Directorate is about growing! 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

Step Up. Stand Out. Serve. Be Part of the Change with CEAD!

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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

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YOUR FEEDBACK MATTERS!

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

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