

# UNIZULU partners with SANSA to launch Natural Resource Management Programme

NALEDI HLEFANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU) – in partnership with the South African National Space Agency (Sansa) – recently launched the Natural Resource Management Programme (NRMP) at the start of World Space Week.

This historic event was held at UNIZULU's King Bhekuzulu Hall. It was attended by more than 500 high school learners from the King Cetshwayo District Municipality together with representatives of City of uMhlatuze Municipality, the Mkhwanazi Tribal Authority, and the departments of Basic Education and Human Settlements, among many others.

World Space Week was initiated by the United Nations in 1999 to celebrate the crucial role space science and technology play in benefitting humanity. The annual global celebrations, which usually take the form of outreach and education events, take place from October 4 to 10. During this week, Sansa, an entity of the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), embarks on various national events.

As part of its activities for this year's space week, Sansa launched the NRMP in the King Cetshwayo District. The programme will continue to be demonstrated at municipalities across South Africa to enable improved planning using spatial data.

The NRMP seeks to harness the power of remote sensing and geospatial technologies to produce actionable insights on the state and condition of South Africa's natural resources.

According to Sansa, South Africa, like many other nations, experiences great challenges from climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, pollution and inadequate waste management. These issues catalyse the risk of great and possibly permanent environmental changes that pose a danger to humanity and ecosystems.

Through the launch of the NRMP, Professor Abel Ramoelo, Executive Director: Earth Observation at Sansa, said the national space agency sought to demonstrate how essential space science and technology are to day-to-day human life.

"In simple words, the NRMP turns satellite data into daily decisions. It helps a farmer know when to plant. It helps a municipality find leaks and save precious water. It helps us to see where to restore wetlands and how to protect our coasts. It helps disaster teams plan for floods and landslides. This is space for service delivery," Fikiswa Majola enthused.

Majola, who is the acting director of space science and tech at DSTI, delivered the keynote address at the launch.

She shared that the NRMP was aligned to the department's mantra of placing science and technology at the centre of government, industry, education and society. Furthermore, the programme fits well within the G20 Presidency theme: solidarity, equality and sustainability.

"This programme, the NRMP, is a living example of all three. We have solidarity with communities at risk, equality through open and decision-ready

data for everyone, and sustainability in how we care for water, land and our biodiversity," Majola said.

On behalf of UNIZULU, Professor Nokuthula Kunene, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation, expressed her gratitude to Sansa for the university being chosen as a conduit for communicating about the NRMP. She affirmed that the partnership was indicative of the institution's commitment to research and innovation that is relevant, impactful and African-centred. This, she added, resonates with the university's strategy.

She described the launch as an invitation to dream bigger, expand our horizons and recognise how science, technology and innovation, when applied thoughtfully, can transform societies and protect our shared planet.

"World Space Week reminds us that space is not distant or abstract. It is a living laboratory that gives us the tool to improve life here on Earth – from predicting weather patterns and managing agriculture to monitoring water resources and even responding to climate change. So, by connecting space exploration with natural resource management, Sansa and DSTI are showing us that the sky is not the limit; it is a bridge to a more sustainable and resilient future," she said.

Prof Kunene reminded the learners of the important fact that they were not mere witnesses to the NRMP launch, but future custodians of this knowledge – as some of them would become the world's next astrophysicists or satellite engineers.



| Xolani Ncube

## UNIZULU leads conversation on decolonising academic spaces

NTOMBEZINHLE ZWANE

THE University of Zululand (UNIZULU), through the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Engagements and Transformation, hosted a hybrid student seminar this month aimed at engaging students in the discussion about decolonising the university.

Professor Sipho Seepe, a higher education advisor, and Professor Josiah Lebakeng from the Thabo Mbeki African School of Public and International Affairs (TMASPIA) at the University of South Africa (Unisa) were among the attendees. They led the discourse; unpacking the concept of decolonising and transforming academic spaces while also sharing insights on leveraging African languages, indigenous knowledge and symbolism to decolonise such environments.

This event was a continuation of the university's regular webinars geared towards advancing the decolonial



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agenda and promoting African thought. However, this marked the first time students had a direct involvement.

In his welcoming address, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Engagements and

Transformation, Professor Byron Brown began by explaining what the university's posture as a node for African thought relates to.

"Being a node as a university is to

function as a central place, an anchoring point, a hub of convergence for something – and in this case, a hub of convergence for African ideas, for African thought, for the African way of thinking," he said.

Furthermore, he declared that the university intends to be the anchoring point for the development and dissemination of ideas rooted in African histories, languages and worldviews.

Professor Seepe emphasised that the decolonisation of higher education is an act of reclaiming the right to be African without apology. He explained that a decolonised curriculum should centre African people and their development; ensuring that education reflects their lived experiences and aspirations.

He further highlighted that colonisation had not been only about taking land, but also about destroying culture and diminishing people's sense of self-worth. He noted that this historical

process left many Africans doubting themselves and their value. Therefore, the call for decolonisation, he stressed, is a call to reverse that psychological and cultural destruction and to restore pride and confidence in African identity and knowledge systems.

Prof Lebakeng commended UNIZULU for its continued commitment to the discourse on decolonisation, noting that few institutions have engaged as consistently. He added that through its series of seminars, UNIZULU has taken the conversation to a higher and more impactful level.

The significance of reconsidering higher education from an African viewpoint was reinforced at the seminar. Participants were reminded by the insightful remarks of speakers that decolonisation is about more than just changing the curriculum; it is also about regaining pride and self-assurance in African identity.

## 49TH SASE ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE



| James Thwala

The Faculty of Education at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) recently hosted the 49th instalment of the Southern African Society for Education (SASE) Annual International Conference to deliberate on how African wisdom can be employed to make global impact and build sustainable education for the 21st Century. The engagements took place at the Premier Hotel, Richards Bay. More than 100 scholars representing various higher education institutions across the southern African region, including Namibia and Mozambique, descended on Richards Bay to contribute to the intellectual discourse of this year's gathering.

## 16th Humanities and Social Sciences International Conference



| Samkele Sokhela

The Humanities and Social Sciences International Conference (HASSIC) is a cornerstone event for the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Its primary objective is to foster knowledge sharing and collaboration among a diverse academic audience. The 16th conference held recently at the uMfolozi Casino in Empangeni featured engaging panel discussions and dynamic breakaway sessions, where students confidently presented their research. This prestigious gathering brought together esteemed researchers, policymakers, intellectuals, faculty members and distinguished guest speakers. Held under the theme: "Freedom to Think, Freedom to Create: Liberating Humanities and Social Sciences in Higher Education in the Context of African Thoughts", the conference aimed to liberate minds and shape the future of academic discourse.

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