

BULUNGULA INCUBATOR

WILD COAST, SOUTH AFRICA

A catalyst in the creation of vibrant and sustainable rural communities





Located 33 kilometres (as the crow flies) from Nelson Mandela's birthplace, the Bulungula Incubator (BI) is on the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The area was classified a 'Black Homeland' under Apartheid. As a result, infrastructure development was neglected and communities lacked access to social services.



OUR STORY

*From crisis response to sustainable and
incremental change through the last mile*

CHALLENGES

No road infrastructure, access to healthcare, functioning schools, electricity, any kind of sanitation, or access to safe drinking water.

Only a handful of people have ever succeeded in achieving their Matric certificate. Almost all adults were illiterate.

For a livelihood, community members have been reliant on subsistence farming, government grants, and wage remittances from migrant workers.

The health of the population was compromised by the inaccessibility to health care, insufficient health knowledge, poor nutrition, poor water quality, HIV and cysticercosis.

The BI conducted a local survey in which found that 53% of households had lost at least one child to diarrhea, and 1 in 9 have lost 3 children or more, due to a lack of access to safe drinking water and any kind of sanitation

In the Mbhashe Local Municipality
where we are located...



93.7%

of the area is classified as Traditional/Rural



64%

access water from sources other than municipal-piped water - like drawing from rivers, streams, rain and ground water harvesting

(interruptions to shared municipal water municipal sources are recorded 47.5% of the time)



3.5%

of homes have piped water inside the dwelling (193 in the country out of 198 for piped water).

30%

of homes can be considered as formal dwellings (ranking sixth in the country for number of formal dwellings)



50%

of people still use wood for cooking and heating

9%

of adults over 20 years have obtained a Matric (school-completion) Certificate

60%

of the population is illiterate



HOW OUR RESPONSE BEGAN

Independent tourism as a tool for rural development

In 2004, Bulungula Lodge opened with the vision of using backpacker/independent tourism as a tool for rural development in a remote African community. The land is owned by the local community, which had also owned 40% of the Lodge since its inception. At the end of 2014, 100% ownership and management of the Lodge was transferred (for R2) to the community.

All profits are used to improve life in the village. Over the years, the community has bought a tractor and trailer, and a large funeral tent, and built a school classroom with their share of profits.

All staff are selected by our community to ensure that jobs go to those who need them the most (e.g. widows), as well as to ensure that there is a fair distribution of jobs; every clan/family benefits from the Lodge. The Lodge has created 18 permanent jobs, and supports a further 15 people through various community tourism businesses.



Once the Lodge was established, we soon realised that our community would never escape the grinding poverty trap if we focussed only on income generation through tourism. Without a school, without clean water, without access to basic health care, our community would not have the minimums needed for living happily and with dignity. This led to the establishment of the Bulungula Incubator.



A third of babies died of diarrhea due to lack of access to clean drinking water, 2004



No-Ofisi Primary School prior to collapsing, 2007

Bulungula Incubator was founded in 2007 with the mission to provide the tools necessary to develop self-reliance and independence in our community.

Poverty is more than just the circumstance of not having enough money to buy food or other material items. The effects of poverty are compounded in South Africa, where generations lived under Apartheid and colonialism, leading to an internalised sense of being inferior.

Here, poverty is also not understanding why a clear glass of water can cause a child to die of diarrhoea. Poverty is not having the confidence to challenge a teacher about their absenteeism simply because the teacher holds a position of authority, not being able to do basic arithmetic, not being able to read or write, not being able to speak an international language, and not having access to any outside information.

It means no books or internet in your home, no family members who studied further than primary school, no contacts in the corporate, government, or NGO world who could help you find a job or solve a problem.

It means you see little evidence that education is a path to success, as the most successful people in your community are not the relatively well-educated people but rather those mostly illiterate family members brave enough to work three kilometres underground in the gold or platinum mines. It means never having seen anyone start their own business besides those selling basic groceries, and not knowing that the nutrition of your mother when she is pregnant will impact your ability to learn and earn throughout your life.

It is only in experiencing quality education that its power can be appreciated, only by seeing a business succeed in your own community that a wave of entrepreneurship is set off. It is only when you have more choices and a sense of agency that a virtuous cycle can spark and create a multiplier effect to change your life.

There is no one single intervention, **no 'silver bullet'**, that can enable a path out of poverty. We focus on incremental change, implementing projects from 'Preconception to Career' in education, healthcare, nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, social cohesion and youth acceleration.



OUR APPROACH

'Preconception to Career'

It became clear that the approach to developing vibrant and sustainable rural communities has to be a holistic one. Our approach enables us to scale the depth of our work for our direct beneficiaries, who number over 10,000 people.



Education

Provide high-quality education and care for learners throughout their student-lifetime.



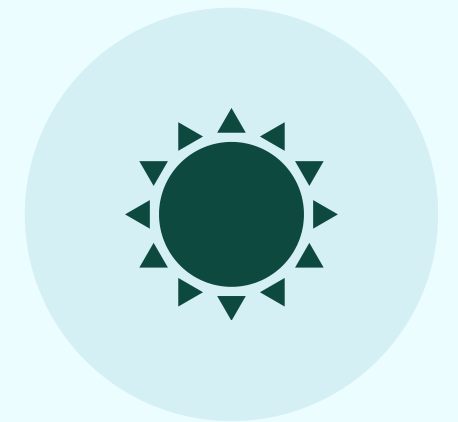
Health & Nutrition

Ensure access to primary healthcare for members of the community, and provide nutritious meals and growth monitoring for children to eradicate stunting.



Sustainable Livelihoods

Support the generation of a local economy that uses the valuable assets in the region to create jobs and opportunities.



Vibrant Villages

Promote social cohesion and youth acceleration through radio, sport, art, and cultural programmes.





OUR GOAL

Sustainably end poverty in a generation while enhancing community life and cohesiveness

Overview Video



(5 minute video)



Daily Maverick: Climbing a mountain starts
with taking the first step



Stanford Social Innovation Review:
How Radical Trust Creates Long-Term Resilience

A background image of two young girls in a library. The girl on the left is smiling and holding a large, open book. The girl on the right is looking up and to the side. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background.

OUR IMPACT

*Incremental life-cycle change by scaling
the depth of our impact*



GLOBAL IMPACT

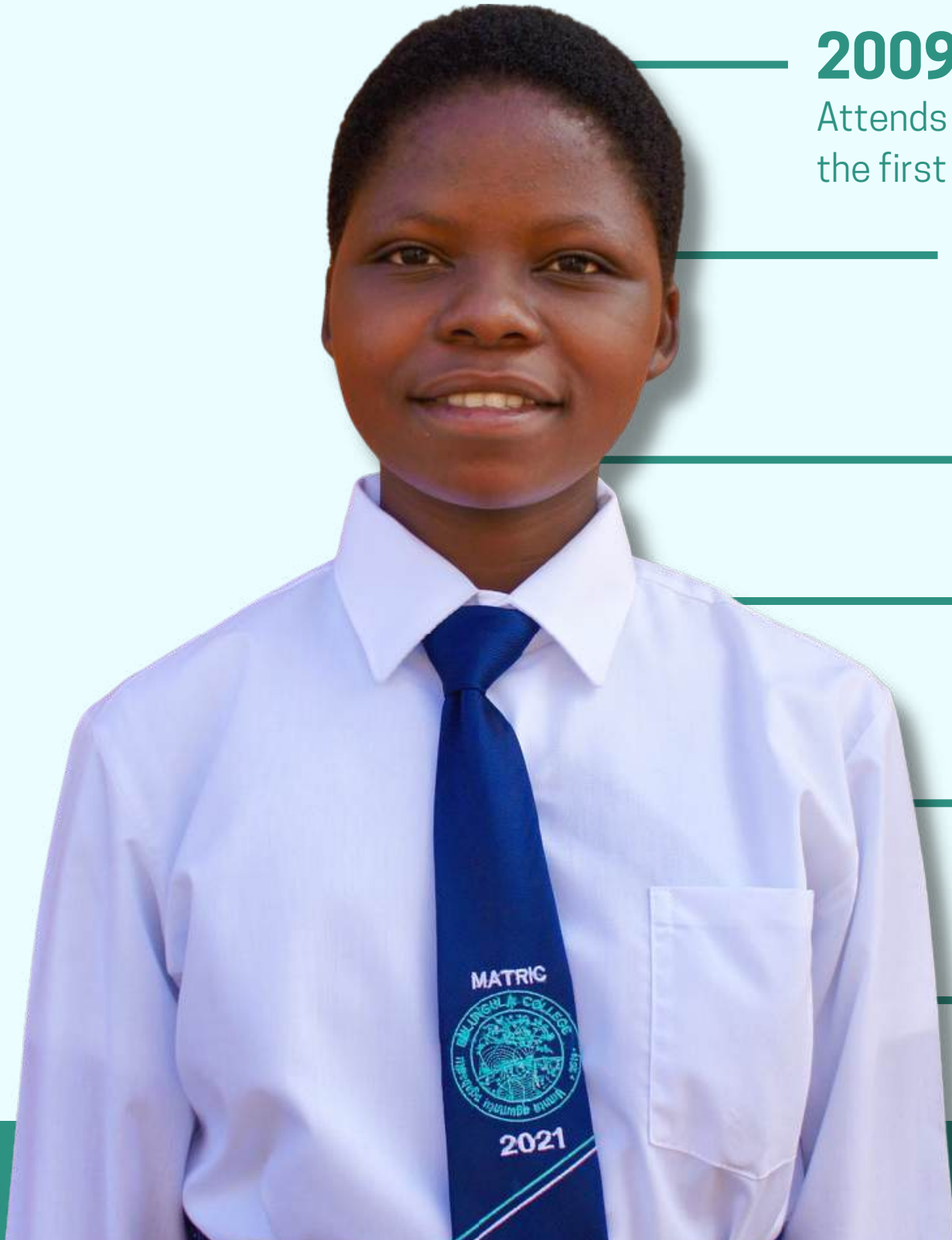
The needs facing the communities the BI works with can be summarised almost entirely by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1-11. The alignment and achievement of these SDGs means that businesses who support the BI will in turn strengthen their Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Criteria. Change *is* possible, read more [here](#).

Furthermore, BI is a Level One Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Contributor; addressing the inequalities suffered by black South African citizens as a result of the apartheid regime.



INCREMENTAL IMPACT

Siyamthanda Case Study



2009

Attends Jujurha Preschool, the inaugural class of the first ECD centre that BI built

2012

Enrols in iiTablet Tshomiz, Maths and English online learning project, and participates throughout primary school years

2019

Attends Bulungula College, inaugural class

2021

Graduates from Bulungula College, the first in her family to graduate from high school

2022

Completes an accredited Further Education and Training (FET) course and a paid internship through our Job Skills and Entrepreneurship Programme

2023

Secures a full-time, permanent job position with a BI partner organisation

Throughout her lifetime

Siyamthanda received growth and weight, deworming, vitamin A, and immunisation monitoring from our Health Programme. Her parents volunteered their time throughout her ECD years on the Parent Committee and cooking meals at the preschool, which parents could offer to participate in, in lieu of paying school fees. Her family received health services, support for farming opportunities to increase food security, job opportunities in the form of public works jobs (managed by the Bulungula Incubator) and community cohesion programmes through talent shows, sports events and Bulungula Community Radio.



INCREMENTAL IMPACT

Linewu Case Study

2004

Born into a very poor but close-knit family in Nqileni Village; showed early signs of academic brilliance despite limited resources.



2009

Attends Jujurha Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre, the first ECD centre established by the Bulungula Incubator.



2012



Selected for BI Vulindlela Scholarship Programme and attends private primary school.

2021

Enrols at Bulungula College; excels academically and matriculates in 2023 as the top of her class—the first in her family to graduate high school.



2024



Begins Nursing studies at the University of the Western Cape.





Child immunisations available locally at the Bulungula Health Point

Establishment of vocational education and skills development programme to **ensure productive careers for youth**



Capacitate and keep highly skilled entrepreneurs in the community—**growing local economy while reducing the rural to urban migration**



Two hours of extra learning in Maths & Literacy per child, per week, to over 1,350 learners grades 1-12, at government schools and the Bulungula College

First ever high school in the Xhora Mouth Administrative Area, graduating the most Matrics in the history of our area

Bulungula Health Point **provides primary healthcare to over 400 patients each month**, with the majority of patients receiving on-site treatment



Providing primary healthcare locally **improves patient outcomes, reducing the load on government hospitals** and lowering the need for expensive care.



Bulungula Community Radio **broadcasts to 100 surrounding villages** and remains the most reliable and popular form of communication in our area

100%

of Chronic medication users access prescriptions, and all prescriptions are scanned and entered into the Department of Health national register.

450 households visited per month by Nomakhayas (community health workers) to improve access to basic health

6,000 seedlings sold per month at Masilime Ngqo nursery



At our ECD sites...



our health team provides six monthly growth monitoring, development milestone assessments, deworming and vitamin A provision, and an annual vision and hearing screening

each child is fed 2 hot nutritious meals a day and a snack—**over 50,000 hot school meals every year**

OUR EMPLOYMENT IMPACT

A deeply embedded community-based organisation

Our office is located in Ngilieni Village, where our projects operate

100% of our employees work locally in the Xhora Mouth Administrative Area.

Nearly 90% of our employees are from our community, creating 125 permanent job positions— one third youth, and 60% women.

83% of our senior management team was born in or are permanent bona fide members of the community.

Equality of earnings is important to us.
The BI proudly operates with a



5:1
pay ratio

of **senior management salary** (programme managers, teachers, nurse, director/founder) **to lowest paid salary**



HOW WE SCALE IMPACT

Scaling deep, up and out

Rooted in the belief that meaningful development cannot be achieved through isolated interventions, our work embodies the principle of **scaling deep** — transforming the cultural, relational, and systemic fabric of our community through long-term partnerships, inclusive programming, and local ownership. Guided by the framework developed by the Tamarack Institute and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, we also **scale out**, as youth who have grown up within our programme ecosystem are now pursuing university studies, launching businesses, securing meaningful employment and contributing productively to their communities. At the same time, we **scale up** by engaging in research, shaping policy, and collaborating with government to align systems and direct institutional resources towards sustainable rural development.



OUR BROADER IMPACT

Bulungula Rural Sentinel Site

A sentinel site is a community from which in-depth data is gathered, and the resulting analysis is used to inform programmes and policies affecting a larger geographic area. The BI is well placed to harness our deep community embeddedness, experience and project data outcomes to innovate, unlock and share new approaches.

In 2025, we established our rural Sentinel Site in partnership with the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at the University of Cape Town, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the Presidency's Economic Services (PES), and the South African Population Research Infrastructure Network (SAPRIN). This collaboration represents an important scaling up of our work, from deep community-level impact to research and national policy engagement.



PROGRESS IS NOT LINEAR

How we respond to a tough year at Bulungula College



Bulungula College top-achieving school in our circuit for three consecutive years (with 97%, 98%, and 100% Matric pass rates)



In 2025, achieved 71% Matric pass rate

Key Challenges: High number of older learners; Behaviour and engagement challenges with male learners; Leadership transition (new principal); Crime disruption

Our Response: Early identification of risk; Intensive catch-up programme; Increased academic and psychosocial support; Collaboration with traditional leadership; 2026–2028 strategic plan and action



**Zimvo Skosana,
BC Class of 2025 Top-Achiever —**

A lesson in perseverance when the road gets tough ...

Zimvo Skosana failed Grade 11. She dropped out during COVID-19. She returned — and failed again. Then she chose to start over at Bulungula College. With determination and support, she rose to the top of her grade, passed grade 11, and finished as the top learner in the Class of 2025.

A person in a black wetsuit with yellow sleeves is surfing on a wave. The background shows a beach, a forested hill, and a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the image.

PRECONCEPTION-TO- CAREER

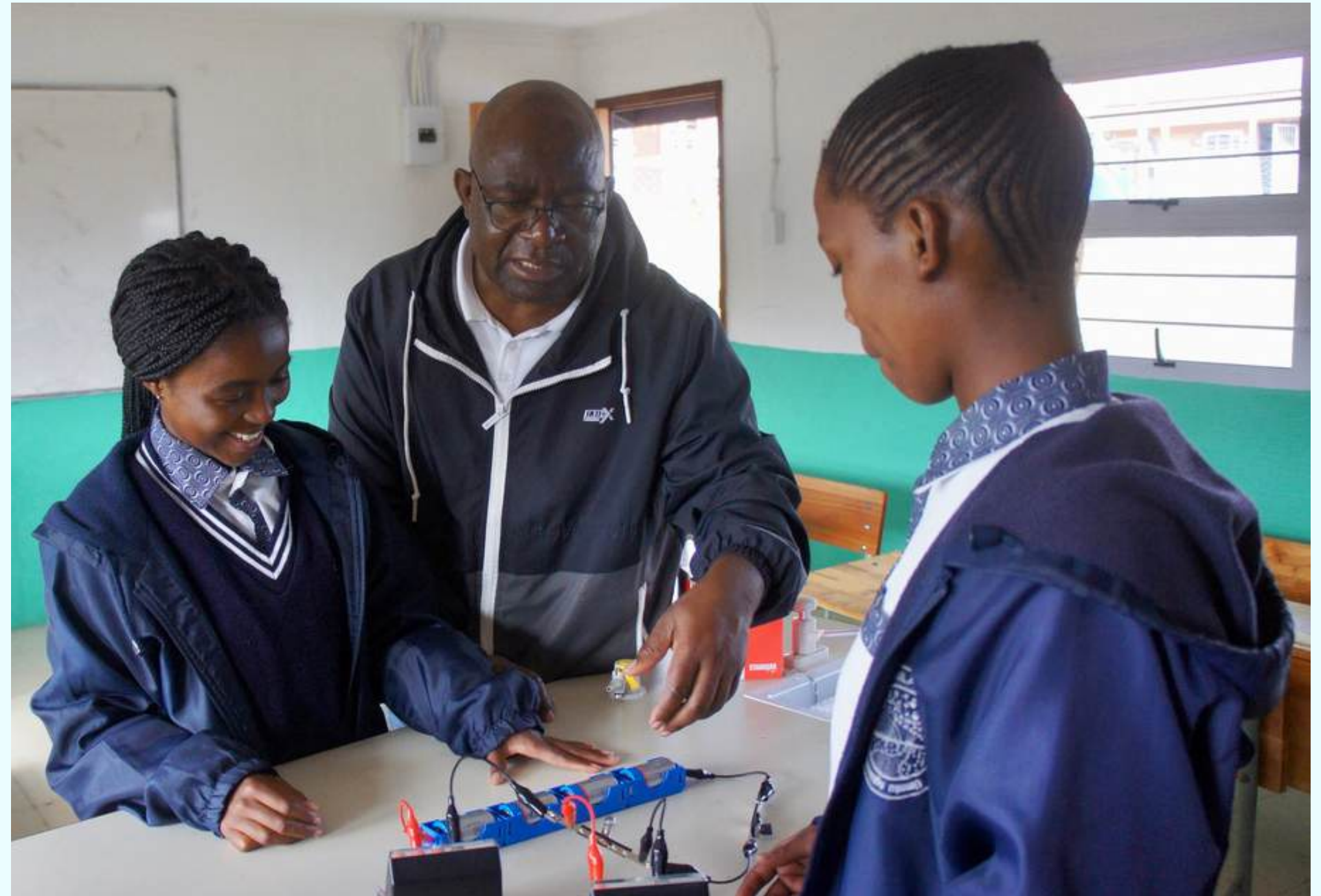
A deep-dive



Promote development through a series of programmes that support the education and care of learners throughout their student lifetime

The aim of our Education Programme is to ensure our community has and values access to quality education that will enable our people to live a happy, empowered, and productive life.

We have programmes in home-based and centre-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) from 0-6; a government school Maths and English e-learning programme for grades 1-12; an independent high school for grades 10-12, and Job Skills and Entrepreneurship for vocational education, training and internships. Furthermore, we offer quality support to further learning opportunities through scholarships and university advising.



"You have turned the light on in my child's mind"
– Parent of learner at Jujurha ECD Centre



Lessons learned and replicable models



How Bulungula College achieved a 100% pass rate within two years of opening



How our inclusive policy enables pregnant and mother learners to stay in school



Implementing a mother tongue literacy project at our government primary schools



From Bulungula to Higher Learning: The Sakha iKamva Tertiary and Career Guidance Programme



Job Skills and Entrepreneurship Programme Overview



Early Childhood Development Programme Toolkit



iiTablet Tshomiz e-learning Programme Toolkit



Bulungula Tech Centre



How to Start a Second Chance Matric Programme at Your High School





Success stories



Bulungula College Achieves a 98% Matric Pass Rate and Earns Top Performing School in Region for the 3rd Consecutive Year!



Special Visit by Minister Angie Motshekga to Showcase Our Holistic ECD Model



Strengthening ECD in Our Region: Establishing the Wild Coast ECD Community of Practice



How Bulungula College Achieved a 100% Mathematics Pass Rate: Lessons for Transforming Maths Education in Rural South Africa



Independent Education Magazine: Impacting generational change



Daily Maverick: A 100% pass after just two matric cohorts — meet the E Cape's Bulungula super-achievers



Second Chance — supporting young people to rewrite matric can unlock their economic potential



Daily Maverick: Learning mission: The Bulungula Incubator 'turns the light on' in children's eyes



Job Skills and Entrepreneurship success story







HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Ensure access to quality healthcare for members of the community, and provide nutritious meals and growth monitoring for children to eradicate stunting.



The overall aim is to improve access to quality healthcare and nutrition. The programme includes our Bulungula Health Point and mobile health outreach programme, staffed by two professional nurses and a mental health counsellor. Home-based primary healthcare is provided by a team of community health workers, "ooNomakhaya". All learners at our ECD Centres and Bulungula College receive two hot-cooked meals every day.

Lessons learned and replicable models



How to get ARVs delivered to your home in the rural Eastern Cape



Going digital: Migrating to tablet-based data collection for a streamlined approach



Zero Stunting: Our strategy in a region where 1 in 4 children are stunted



Bulungula Health Point 3.0—from mud-hut to mini-clinic



Toolkit for Persons with disabilities and caregivers



Rural areas need these health workers. So does the NHI



Success stories



Expanding Our Alcohol and Tobacco Harm Reduction Programme: Integrating Pharmacotherapy and Group Support



Nourishing minds and bodies: Why we provide daily cooked meals for all of our learners and staff



Bhekisisa op-ed: NHI lessons for deep rural South Africa



Spotlight: Walking with “nomakhayas”: How the Bulungula Incubator is creating change in Wild Coast communities

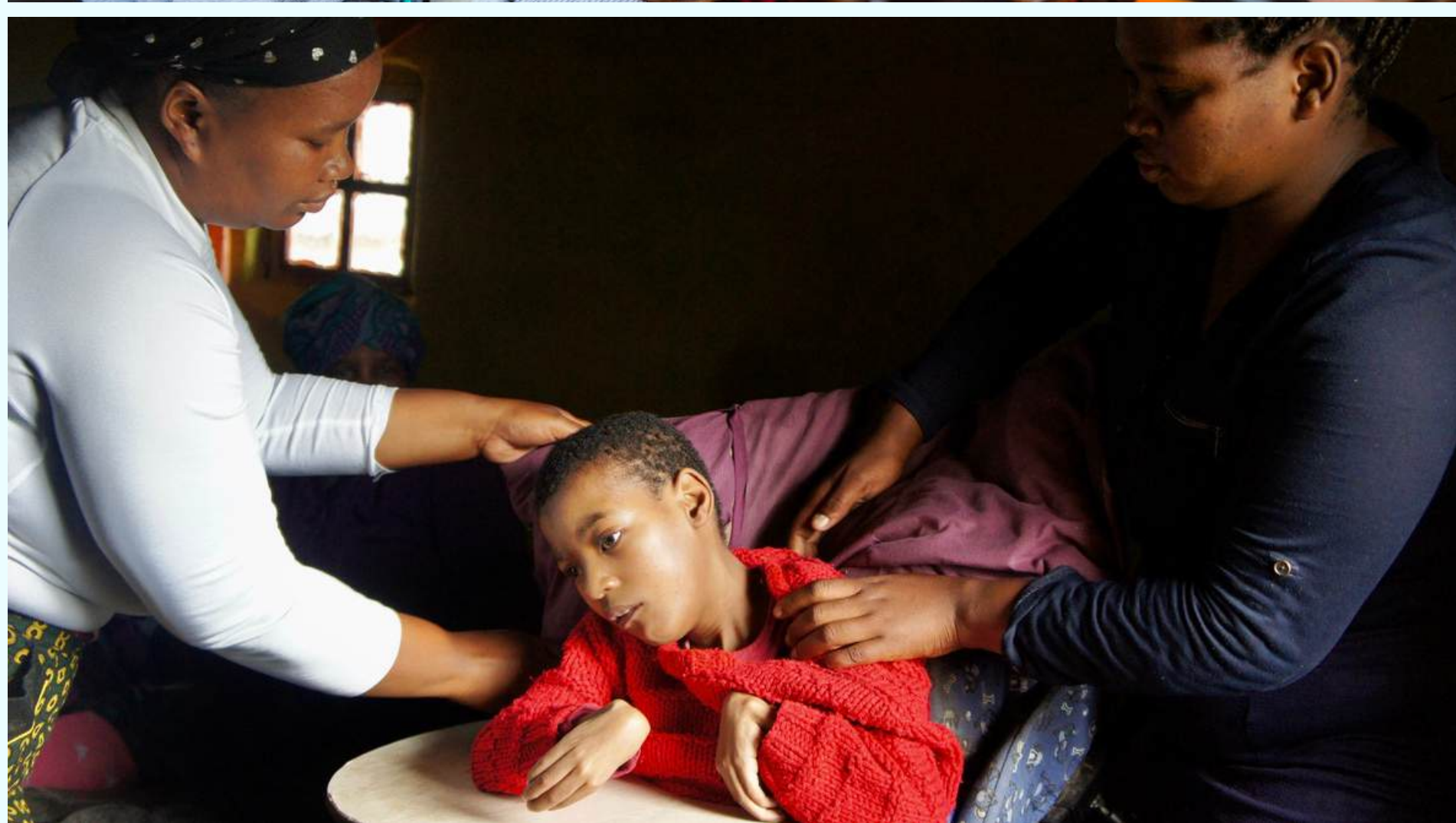
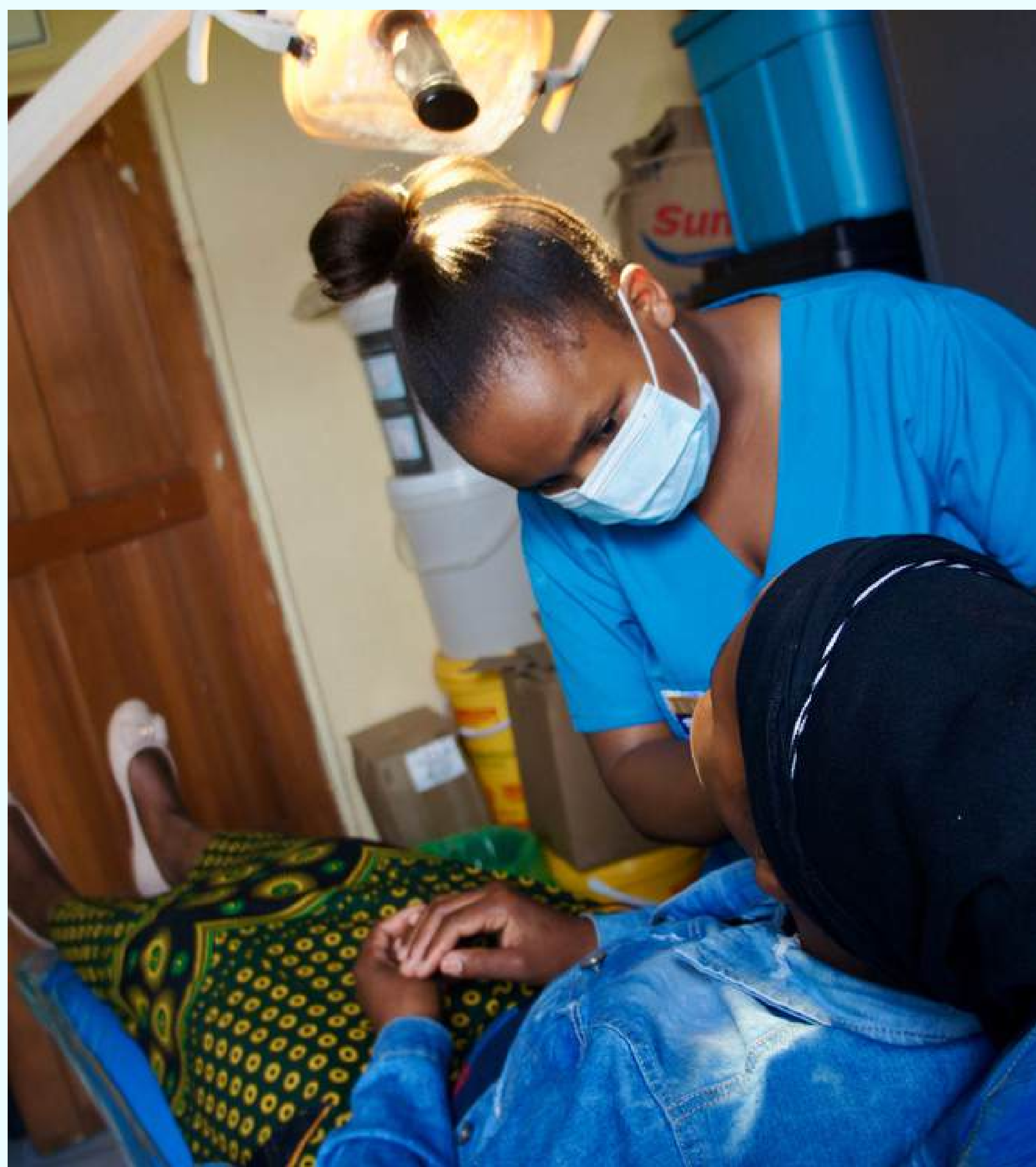


From countless deaths to achieving zero defaults— ten years of HIV/AIDS work in our rural community



Daily Maverick: isiXhosa ‘storyboards’ bring Covid vaccine campaign to life in rural Eastern Cape







SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Support the generation of a local economy that uses the valuable assets in the region to create jobs and opportunities

Through our Sustainable Livelihoods Programme, we aim to demonstrate and assist our community to use their agricultural land to improve their standards of living.

The BI's most urgent objective is to identify families who are food-insecure and who have potential and interest in gardening. These families are assisted to establish vegetable gardens from which they can eat, and potentially supply other families in their village.

Lessons learned, replicable models and success stories



Creating 1,000 Local Jobs
Through the Social Employment
Fund: A Partnership with the
Nosintu Gwebindlala Foundation



Seedling Nursery toolkit



Perfect Pump for Small
Farmers in Africa



Self-Sustained Community
Livestock Project







VIBRANT VILLAGES

*Promote social cohesion and youth acceleration
through radio, sport, art, and cultural programmes*

The Vibrant Villages programme aims to enhance social cohesion in the Xhora Mouth community so that people can enjoy creativity, self-expression, a healthy lifestyle and respect for the environment. Vibrant Villages is particularly aimed at our youth, many of whom have not completed matric and/or are unemployed.

Lessons learned, replicable models and success stories



M&G op-ed: Bulungula shows how social connectedness can improve economic opportunities for young people



How our rural way of life is a model for environmental sustainability



Providing youth fun and age-appropriate activities



Supporting Youth Mental and Emotional Health Through Surf Therapy



Reducing alcohol harms in our community



Bulungula Community Radio (BCR)





Contribute to a thriving South Africa

Our approach enables us to scale the depth of our work for our direct beneficiaries, who number over 10,000 people. **Providing our services is achieved at a cost of R2,500 per person per year.**

Investing in the Bulungula Incubator enables us to continue our work while upholding good corporate social responsibility. Your partnership makes a meaningful contribution to the collective pursuit of global development.

Get in touch

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www.bulungula.org | Bulungula/Nqileni Village, Elliotdale District | Receive our latest news and updates to your WhatsApp, email or SMS, [subscribe to our LinkTree](#) | ☀️ This document was created using solar energy!

