

SISONKHE

A PUBLICATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS IN ESWATINI January - June 2025

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SISONKHE (We Are Together) is published by the United Nations in the Kingdom of Eswatini under the technical leadership of the UN Communications Group (UNCG), which comprises communications focal points from all UN agencies in Eswatini, together with the Editorial Team of the Resident Coordinator's Office.

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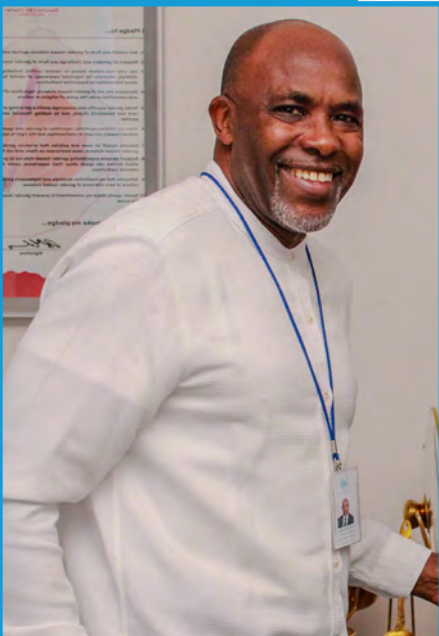


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Foreword by the United Nations Resident Coordinator



George Wachira
United Nations
Resident Coordinator

An Unwavering Commitment to Partnership and Progress

The first half of 2025 has underscored the enduring value of unity, resilience, and partnership in advancing Eswatini's development aspirations. Guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2021–2025), the UN Country Team has remained committed to delivering impactful results, expanding access to essential services, supporting governance, and fostering inclusive growth.

As we look ahead, we are actively shaping the next Cooperation Framework for 2026–2030. Informed by a robust Common Country Analysis and wide-ranging consultations with the Government, civil society, the private sector, and development partners, the new Framework will focus on two strategic outcomes: Inclusive Social Wellbeing and Shared, Sustainable Prosperity. Our collaboration with key

partners, through platforms like the Eswatini International Development Partners Platform and advocacy efforts such as the MTN Bushfire Festival, has amplified national priorities and strengthened public engagement, particularly with youth.

I would also like to thank the UN Communications Group, under the leadership of Dr. Susan Tembo, for their outstanding work in putting this newsletter together and in amplifying the work of the UN in Eswatini.

I extend my sincere gratitude to His Majesty's Government, our partners, and the people of Eswatini. Your continued trust and collaboration remain the cornerstone of our shared progress. Together, we are laying the foundation for a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future.

Message from the United Nations Communications Group Chairperson



Dr. Susan Tembo
United Nations
Communications
Group Chairperson

It gives me great pleasure to reflect on the continued relevance and impact of the United Nations Communications Group (UNCG) in 2025. As one of the cross-cutting coordination structures of the UN Country Team (UNCT), the UNCG plays a vital role in promoting awareness of the values and work of the United Nations in Eswatini, while strengthening public engagement and joint visibility for the UN system.

The UNCG brings together communications' focal points from all UN entities operating in Eswatini. Our shared mandate is to foster coherent communications, drive strategic advocacy efforts, and amplify the results of UN programming in alignment with the Eswatini United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and other joint strategies.

This year, we have made important strides. Working under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. George Wachira, the UNCG has helped position communications as a central enabler of development results. We continue to advise the UNCT on strategic media engagement, generate content that communicates impact, and explore creative approaches to storytelling. Our communications strategy remains focused on clarity, coordination, and connection - with people at the centre of our messaging.

One of the highlights of the first half of 2025 was our successful collaboration with the MTN Bushfire Festival, where we reached over 20,000 participants with messages on climate action, human rights, youth empowerment, health, and inclusive development. This was not just a communications milestone, but a powerful demonstration of what partnerships can achieve when rooted in shared values. We also proudly supported the launch of the UN Esgcumeni Podcast, a new platform that brings the voices of EmaSwati into conversations on the UN's work, further expanding our outreach and engagement.

On behalf of the UNCG, I would like to sincerely thank all UN Heads of Agencies who have continued to demonstrate their commitment by allocating both financial and human resources to support joint communications. Your contributions have made possible the many achievements outlined in this edition.

I also warmly acknowledge our communications officers, whose dedication and creativity continue to strengthen the visibility and credibility of the UN's work in Eswatini.

I invite you to explore this issue, which captures the energy, progress, and partnerships that have defined the first half of 2025. Thank you for your readership - and we look forward to bringing you the next edition in December.

SECTION I.
NEWS
ROUND-UP

.....

PM Leads Dialogue on New UN Development Cooperation Framework (2026–2030)



UNEP Africa Director Visits Eswatini



Financing Sustainable Development



UN Resident Coordinators meet UN Deputy Secretary-General



NEWS ROUND-UP

Secretary-General's Special Envoy and UNECA Deputy Executive Secretary Come Calling



The UNCT received and held discussions with the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety Jean Todt and the Deputy Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa and, together, supported the Ministry of Public Works and Transport in the successful hosting of the Kofi Annan Road Safety Awards.

UNCT Deepens Internal Capacity for Strategic Policy



The UNCT continued its tradition of thought-provoking and action-oriented bimonthly strategic policy dialogue series, with three insightful sessions hosted by UNDP, RCO and UNFPA, respectively. In February, the UNDP Resident Representative Henrik Franklin and senior staff Mangaliso Mohammed presented on "The Imperatives of Digital Transformation." In April, visiting Eritrea RCO Economist Dr. Jack Zulu teamed up with Eswatini RCO Economist Mphucuko Mamba to lead a discussion on "Urban Transition and Service Delivery in Eswatini: Getting Ready for the Future." And, in June, Margaret Thwala-Tembe and Rachel Shongwe-Masuku from UNFPA presented on "The Emerging Global Demographic Trends and their Implications for Eswatini's Sustainable Development." These presentations have been developed into Policy Briefs.

Surveys on Adolescent Health and School Policies



WHO, UNESCO, and the Eswatini Ministries of Health and Education successfully conducted the Global School-based Student Health Survey and School Health Policies Survey to strengthen data on adolescent health and school policies.

NEWS ROUND-UP

UNCT Engages Stakeholders in the Design of the Cooperation Framework for 2026-2030



As part of the consultative development of the new CF for 2030, the UNCT caucused with the private sector led by the umbrella Business Eswatini; and with civil society led by the umbrella Coordination Assembly of NGOs (CANGO).

Eswatini Launches USD 821,000 FAO Projects



The Minister of Agriculture Hon. Mandla Tshawuka launched five FAO technical cooperation projects, valued at USD 821,000 which focuses on catalyzing investment in agriculture and agriculture value chains from tick-borne diseases, agrifood systems transformation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation.

IOM's Brian Mohammed Wins 2025 Global Recognition Award for Migration Leadership



International Organization for Migration (IOM) is proud to announce that Brian Mohammed has received the 2025 Global Recognition Award for his leadership in advancing migration governance, innovation, and community empowerment.

Eswatini, UNICEF Reaffirm Commitment to Children's Rights



On the Day of the African Child 2025 presided by the Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Eswatini Senator Thulisile Dladla, the Government of Eswatini and UNICEF reaffirmed their commitment to the prioritization of children's rights in planning and budgeting as a smart investment in Eswatini's future.

NEWS ROUND-UP

WFP, UNESWA Launch Youth Debates



WFP Eswatini and the University of Eswatini launched a policy debate series to engage youth in shaping future food systems and addressing policy gaps in food security, nutrition, and social protection.

Eswatini, Mozambique, and South Africa Sign USD 71M Deal



The Governments of Eswatini, Mozambique, and South Africa, together with UNDP, have signed a USD 71 000 000 agreement to strengthen integrated trans-boundary management of the Incomati and Maputo River Basins.

WFP, NDMA Partner for 2025 Lean Season Food Assistance



WFP Eswatini and NDMA signed an MoU to enhance collaboration on the 2025 Lean Season Response, ensuring timely humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations and refugees.



SECTION II.

IMPROVING THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Business at the Heart of Development

Written by: UNRCO



E. Nathi Dlamini, Chief Executive Officer, Eswatini Business.



Participants engage during the Private Sector-UN consultation on the upcoming Cooperation Framework (2026-2030).

It does not matter how ambitious you are, you can never be more ambitious than the law, no matter how smart or creative you are!" These words by Zinhle C. Matsebula, at a dialogue session between private sector leaders and the Eswatini United Nations Country Team (UNCT), summarized the sentiment about the need for a facilitative policy and regulatory environment to enable the expansion of Eswatini's economy.

In turn, Jay Jay Worral of Vukani BoMake argued that the country would be better off "not by raising taxation, but by creating jobs so that people can spend more." As one of the younger voices in the room, Worral highlighted the need for greater mentorship, urging senior industry leaders to nurture the younger generation of entrepreneurs and managers. "Allow them to network, allow them to thrive," he emphasized, stressing the importance of intergenerational collaboration to ensure the long-term impact of current initiatives.

Business Federation of Eswatini President, Thulie Dladla, highlighted critical challenges facing the private sector, noting that "External finance development has been declining since COVID-19." She drew attention to the gender gap in economic opportunities, particularly for young girls, and pointed out that the private sector is struggling to absorb the available youth workforce, signalling a disconnect between education and market needs.

Matsebula, Worral and Dladla were a part of the consultation



The challenges we face today are too large for any one actor to tackle alone,” he noted. “The private sector is more than just an engine of economic growth; it is a catalyst for transformation.



co-hosted by the umbrella body, Business Eswatini and the UNCT, aimed at shaping the strategic direction of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2026-2030. Over 70 participants actively contributed to conversations about innovation, job creation, gender equity, transformative policy environment and sustainable business practices. The dialogue sought to frame solutions for the identified key development challenges including unemployment, a high rate of poverty, unequal education outcomes, climate crisis risks, governance and service delivery, among others.

The dialogue was one in a series of consultations aimed at ensuring the alignment of the new UN Cooperation Framework with Eswatini's development priorities. It follows a similar dialogue with senior government officials and ministers, led by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister, held in January.

Discussing the Cooperation Framework's strategic priorities, participants underscored the importance of fostering innovation but also pointed out that barriers to innovation in Eswatini must be addressed. “Let's tailor something that is designed to meet the specific needs of Eswatini,” Zinhle C. Matsebula suggested. She also stressed the importance of compliance to access international platforms, suggesting that regulations and laws must adapt to the changing needs of businesses while ensuring that local solutions

are at the core of Eswatini's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Nathi Dlamini, CEO of Business Eswatini, and Mvuselelo Fakudze, President of Business Eswatini, talked about the importance of collaboration among all sectors, reinforcing the role of the private sector in driving sustainable development. “Our success as businesses is deeply intertwined with the well-being of the communities we serve,” Mvuselelo Fakudze said, affirming that aligning business strategies with the UN's vision could yield solutions to Eswatini's most pressing challenges.

As co-convener of the event, UN Resident Coordinator, George Wachira emphasized the interconnected nature of global crises, which demand collaborative solutions. “The

challenges we face today are too large for any one actor to tackle alone,” he noted. “The private sector is more than just an engine of economic growth; it is a catalyst for transformation. You drive innovation, deploy cutting-edge technologies, build skills, continuously improve efficiency, lift people out of poverty, and make money out of it!” The continued collaboration between the UN, Business Eswatini, and the private sector marks yet another significant step toward building a multi-stakeholder partnership for the Cooperation Framework for 2026-2030. As Eswatini advances on its path to sustainable development, the shared commitment of all stakeholders to innovation, inclusivity, and resilience will be pivotal in driving transformative change for a prosperous future.



Mvuselelo Fakudze, Standard Bank CEO and President of Business Eswatini, pictured with UN Resident Coordinator George Wachira.



Alexio Musindo, ILO Director for the Pretoria office, presents the report alongside Minister of Labour and Social Security, Hon. Phila Buthelezi.

Eswatini has made significant progress in strengthening its labour market information system with the launch of the 2023 Labour Force Survey (LFS) and a dedicated youth labour market report. The International Labour Organization (ILO) praised the government and partners for successfully conducting the survey, analyzing the data, and producing high-quality, policy-relevant findings.

The survey, conducted following international statistical standards from the 19th and 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), offers detailed insights into employment, unemployment,

underemployment, and labour underutilization. It reveals that unemployment remains a major challenge, rising slightly from 33% in 2021 to 35.4% in 2023, with over half of the unemployed out of work for a year or more—youth being the most affected. The survey also found that 11% of employed persons are underemployed, working less than 35 hours weekly but available for more work.

New data sheds light on self-employment and work relationships, highlighting vulnerable groups like those running unincorporated enterprises. It also shows low worker organization membership, with 66% of

employees unaffiliated. The youth report provides a focused analysis on barriers young people face, especially those outside the labour force, and calls for policymakers to review regional employment strategies.

The ILO reiterated its support for Eswatini's continued efforts, including thematic reports on informality and persons with disabilities. These developments position Eswatini as a regional leader in labour market data.

"This is more than data - it's a foundation for action," said ILO DWT/CO Director Alexio Musindo. "We are proud to support Eswatini in turning evidence into impact."

Ending Silence, Building Safety at Work

Written by: ILO

With technical support from the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and the Gender, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) Branch, Business Eswatini has launched a pioneering training programme to prevent and address violence and harassment in the workplace.

In November 2024, Business Eswatini joined other Employer and Membership-Based Organizations (EMBOs) from East and Southern Africa for a Training of Trainers (ToT) organized by ILO ACT/EMP in Johannesburg. This two-day session equipped participants with the necessary knowledge and tools to effectively tackle

workplace violence and harassment. Business Eswatini became the first EMBO among the seven participating countries to implement this enterprise training for its members.

From February 18 to 20, 2025, twenty-three representatives from sixteen enterprises across ten sectors—including forestry,



Business Eswatini CEO and ILO representatives during the Training of Trainers session at Nkonyeni Lodge and Golf Estate.

energy, petroleum, construction, banking, local government, civil aviation, agriculture, insurance, and tourism—participated in the training. Their involvement highlights a strong regional commitment to fostering safe and respectful workplaces.

The programme covered key topics such as the nature of workplace violence and harassment, relevant legal

frameworks, risk assessments, and the development of enterprise policies. Emphasis was placed on the business case for safe workplaces, highlighting that respect and inclusion contribute both to worker well-being and enterprise success.

E. Nathi Dlamini, CEO of Business Eswatini, welcomed the initiative, saying, "We are honoured to lead this important effort in Eswatini.

By equipping our members with the skills and knowledge to prevent and address violence and harassment at work, we will foster a culture of respect and dignity that benefits both employees and enterprises alike." This training initiative demonstrates ILO's ongoing commitment to supporting member organizations in promoting healthier, safer, and more inclusive workplaces across the region.

A Regional Milestone for Workplace Wellness and Inclusion

Written by: ILO



Phazi Zwane from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security speaks at the launch of the National Workplace Wellness Policy.

On the occasion of the 2025 World Day for Safety and Health at Work, the Kingdom of Eswatini launched its first-ever National Workplace Wellness Policy - a comprehensive, rights-based framework that integrates health promotion, violence prevention, disability inclusion, and social dialogue into the world of work. This milestone aligns with the broader goals of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and sets a strong example for neighbouring countries in the region.

Developed through a tripartite-plus consultation involving government, employers, workers' organizations, and civil society, the policy provides a unified structure for enterprises to support the health and wellbeing of workers and their families. It also serves as a

practical guide for designing and implementing workplace wellness programmes across all sectors - formal and informal.

The policy draws on international labour standards, including ILO Recommendation No. 200 on HIV and AIDS, Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment, Convention No. 111 on discrimination, and Convention No. 155 on occupational safety and health. It mandates non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities, and inclusive wellness services that extend to job seekers, interns, volunteers, suspended staff, and immediate family members - ensuring no one in the world of work is left behind.

Recognizing health as a multidimensional concept, the policy outlines eight

pillars of wellness: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, vocational, financial, and environmental. It calls on employers to embed these pillars into daily operations and employee support services. In response to Eswatini's dual burden of HIV and rising noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), the policy promotes integrated prevention, testing, treatment, and counseling services, supported by education and referral systems.

A dedicated section on violence and harassment requires enterprises to establish anonymous reporting mechanisms, maintain incident records, and provide survivor support, in line with ILO Convention No. 190. The policy also strengthens occupational safety and health by requiring hazard identification, provision



Simphiwe Mbhele, HIV and TB Technical Support, representing the ILO at the National Workplace Wellness Policy launch.

of personal protective equipment, and training in first aid and infection control.

Implementation responsibilities are clearly defined. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security will regulate, monitor, and review the policy, while employers must integrate wellness into HR strategies and protect medical confidentiality. Workers and their organizations are expected to promote participation, reduce stigma, and collaborate on health and safety initiatives. Enterprises are encouraged to appoint a “wellness champion,” form joint committees, conduct needs assessments and develop

action plans with dedicated budgets and communication strategies.

A gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation framework will track participation, satisfaction, and business outcomes. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are supported with simplified tools to measure impact.

The policy’s anticipated benefits are far-reaching. For workers, it promises safer, more inclusive workplaces where health issues are addressed early, violence is not tolerated, and confidential support is accessible. For employers and the economy,

it offers the potential for reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, and lower long-term healthcare costs - outcomes already observed in countries that prioritize workplace wellness.

With a review scheduled every three years and a resource mobilization clause inviting support from government and international partners, Eswatini’s National Workplace Wellness Policy provides a future-proof platform for advancing decent work, gender equality, and disability inclusion - not only within its borders but as a model for the wider SADC region.



IOM Officer assisting Migrants.

Safe, Dignified Migration Pathways

Written by: IOM

Migration, when well-managed, can be a force for opportunity, safety, and human dignity. In Eswatini, IOM is working closely with the Government and communities to ensure that migrants are supported—whether they are returning home, seeking protection, or navigating complex systems of movement.

Earlier this year, IOM Eswatini assisted a Rwandan mother and her 9-year-old son who had arrived in the country under false promises. Believed to be victims of trafficking, they were found staying at the Malindza Refugee Reception Center with limited options and growing uncertainty. Through the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, IOM helped the family return safely to Rwanda, offering travel support, pocket money, and reintegration assistance. Their story underscores the importance of having systems in place that

protect vulnerable migrants and ensure they can return home with dignity. But support doesn't stop at the individual level. Recognizing the need for stronger frameworks to manage migration effectively, IOM—through the IOM Development Fund—has been working with the Ministry of Home Affairs to strengthen national migration governance. A key milestone has been the development and launch of Eswatini's first Migration Profile, a data-driven report that captures key migration trends and informs policy direction.

This work has fed directly into the finalization of Eswatini's National Migration Policy, now pending Cabinet endorsement, and the ongoing update of the Immigration Bill to better reflect current realities and international standards. These efforts are complemented by the establishment of a National Migration Data Hub Project,

which began with an inception meeting to design a centralized system for collecting, analyzing, and sharing migration data across institutions.

To ensure that migration governance is coordinated and inclusive, IOM and the Ministry of Home Affairs also facilitated the creation of the Migration Management Task Force (MMTF). This new inter-agency platform is tasked with overseeing migration efforts across sectors. With clear Terms of Reference and an action plan now in place, the MMTF will help ensure that Eswatini's approach to migration is not only comprehensive, but also aligned with regional and international frameworks.

From supporting vulnerable migrants to strengthening systems and institutions, IOM's work in Eswatini is rooted in the belief that migration should be safe, informed, and beneficial for all.



Nuha Ceesay, UNAIDS Country Director, and Khanya Mabuza, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health.

Support for People-Centered HIV Response

Written by: UNAIDS

In the wake of recent U.S. policy shifts that have disrupted health funding in Eswatini and other countries, a UNAIDS media and communication team visited the country to assess the unfolding situation on the ground. The visit came at a critical time for a country that has long relied on sustained external support for its ambitious and life-saving HIV response programmes.

Communication plays a key role in the global AIDS response, from informing communities to supporting behavioural change to end the pandemic.

The team met with several key stakeholders in the HIV response. Among these were 29-year-old Nompilo Mdluli and 26-year-old Simphiwe Matsebula, who expressed concern that the PEPFAR pause on HIV services in Eswatini could negatively affect people living with HIV - particularly access

to antiretroviral treatment that helps keep the virus under control. The delegation also met with Mr. Khanya Mabuza, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Health, who spoke candidly about the scale of PEPFAR's support now at risk.

"The U.S. government has been an essential partner in our HIV response," he said. "They supported the procurement of second- and third-line antiretroviral treatments, paediatric ARVs, testing kits, and laboratory commodities beyond just the daily pills. That kind of support saved lives—not hypothetically, but literally. Children living with HIV today are thriving because of those interventions."

Eswatini has made global headlines for its progress toward the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets - 95% of people living with HIV knowing their status, 95% of those diagnosed on

sustained treatment, and 95% of those on treatment achieving viral suppression. That progress is now under threat.

To echo the PS's words, the UNAIDS Country Director stated: "Eswatini's HIV response has been a success story, transforming a crisis into a model of resilience. But the recent U.S. funding cuts—representing about half the national HIV response budget—have left the country unprepared. People living with and affected by HIV are in despair, and frontline workers are in shock. There is real concern that infections and deaths will rise, reversing years of progress."

As the Global Communications team wrapped up their visit, the reality of the policy shift was clear: it is not just about funding lines and strategy meetings—it is about lives. Lives like Simphiwe's and Nompilo's, and the lives of children whose futures now hang in the balance.

A group of young people, mostly Black, are seated in a room with a rustic, industrial feel. Some are raising their hands, suggesting an interactive session or a Q&A period. The room has wooden beams and various objects hanging on the walls. The text 'SECTION III.' is overlaid in green, and 'SCALING UP SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT' is overlaid in large white letters.

SECTION III.

SCALING UP SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



A portion of the IT equipment handed over to the National Geo-Observatory Lab by the FAO.

Geo-Lab Boosts Urban Resilience

Written by: FAO

In Manzini, a new chapter is beginning for Eswatini's urban spaces. On February 11, 2025, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) officially handed over furniture and cutting-edge IT equipment to the National Geo-Observatory Lab (NGOL) at the Eswatini Local Government Association (ELGA) offices.

Eswatini, a lower middle-income country, is vulnerable to climate impacts such as droughts and floods affecting both rural and urban populations. Although predominantly rural, about 25 percent of residents live in urban areas where rapid urbanization strains natural resources and biodiversity. This pressure threatens quality of life and food security, making innovative urban solutions essential.

In response, FAO has initiated a two-year project titled "Preparing for public and private investment in sustainable green infrastructure, green open spaces and urban agriculture for adaptation and mitigation to climate change in urban and peri-urban communities in Eswatini." It aims to transform Eswatini's urban and peri-urban areas into more resilient, sustainable spaces better equipped to adapt to climate shocks.

Key stakeholders including FAO's Subregional Coordinator for Southern Africa and Representative to Eswatini, Patrice Talla, the Honorable Minister for Housing and Urban Development Apollo Maphalala, ELGA President, and local government representatives gathered to witness the handover and discuss the lab's purpose.

Patrice Talla highlighted the project's importance: "Following a comprehensive capacity needs assessment conducted in July 2024, FAO procured vital office equipment and resources to strengthen ELGA's Secretariat. This support has already begun to yield results, as demonstrated by the successful work planning session held in January 2025, which outlined ELGA's coordination and implementation strategy for the year ahead. Through these efforts, we are laying the groundwork for structured, evidence-based urban policies that prioritize climate resilience and sustainable development."

The Geo-Observatory Lab is equipped with modern Geographic Information Systems (GIS), drones, and digital tools to collect, analyze, and share data across municipalities. This information supports informed decisions on spatial planning, land use,

zoning, Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), and environmental assessments. Minister Apollo Maphalala emphasized the lab's role: "In an era where data-driven decision-making is paramount, the role of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and digital technology cannot be overstated."

The ability to collect, analyze, and utilize data effectively is a game-changer for urban planning and governance. With the establishment of this Geo-Observatory Lab, we now have a central platform to monitor and evaluate key indicators related to climate change adaptation and mitigation. This will allow us to develop evidence-based policies that drive sustainable urban growth."

Local government leaders, including Chief Executive Officers, Mayors, and Councillors, recognized the project as a pioneering effort in Southern Africa to strengthen governance and promote climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Moving forward, FAO will continue supporting ELGA and municipal authorities by developing proposals for future interventions to sustain and expand Eswatini's green urban development journey.



Panel discussion led by UNESCO during the launch of the report titled Creating for the Future.

There was music in the air and purpose in the room. What began as the launch of a UNESCO study quickly became a regional rallying cry to rethink how we see - and support - arts and culture in Southern Africa. Titled “Creating for the Future: Harnessing Southern Africa’s Arts and Cultural Festivals for Sustainable Development,” the new report explores the power of festivals not just as celebrations, but as engines of transformation across economies, communities, and the climate.

Held in Eswatini, the launch event brought together government leaders, festival organisers, UN partners, and artists in a collective call to action: culture is not a luxury. It is infrastructure. It is identity. It is development.

In her opening remarks, Ms. Lwandle Simelane, Secretary-General of the Eswatini National Commission for UNESCO, set the stage: “This report is not just a resource it is a catalyst. It highlights how arts and culture festivals are quietly but powerfully advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. From promoting education and decent work to empowering communities and preserving heritage, this is the creative economy in action.”

With Eswatini having recently launched its own Arts and Culture Policy in collaboration with UNESCO, the moment was especially timely. The study,

which draws insights from ten festivals across the region, shows how creativity contributes to education, decent work, gender equality, climate action, and community cohesion.

Representing the United Nations in Eswatini, Resident Coordinator George Wachira emphasized that the time for abstract appreciation of culture is over. “Festivals are not merely entertainment. They are platforms of power of expression, of employment, of education, and of environment. They generate income, ignite collaboration, and reinforce identity. Let us not just celebrate culture, but invest in it”

His message was clear: culture is a development sector in its own right, and this report offers a roadmap for governments, donors, and communities to move from celebration to strategy.

Ms. Elena Constantinou, Head of Culture at UNESCO, called for regional commitment: “This report offers a roadmap - what we now need is movement.” She encouraged stakeholders to use the study as a launching pad for cross-border collaboration, policy reform, and smarter investment in the festival economy.

Her vision was one where data drives decision-making, culture is embedded in budgets and planning, and festivals become climate-conscious, inclusive, and sustainable spaces for all.



Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs, Hon. Bongani Nzima, seated with UN representatives and members of the diplomatic corps.

The numbers spoke for themselves. In 2024 alone, the ten festivals profiled in the report generated nearly 3,000 jobs and over USD11.7 million in spending. Over 60% of attendees traveled from outside host cities, showing the enormous potential of cultural tourism.

Eswatini's Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs called the report a turning point: "In 2024 alone, the ten festivals studied generated close to 3,000 jobs and USD11.7 million in expenditures. More than 60% of participants travelled from outside host cities, proving the value of cultural tourism. These festivals are not a luxury they are an economic imperative."

By aligning the findings with Eswatini's National Development Plan, the Minister reinforced the government's commitment to supporting the arts—not as an afterthought, but as a driver of inclusive growth.

The launch of *Creating the Future* wasn't just an unveiling—it was a shift in mindset. It sent a strong message that culture is development, and that Southern Africa is ready to lead by example. As the drums and dialogue faded, what remained was a shared vision: a region where festivals are not just moments, but movements—nurturing identity, jobs, education, and joy. Because when we invest in culture, we're not just preserving the past—we're creating the future.

As the festival roared to life, so did the efforts of these passionate advocates. Nestled within the vibrant atmosphere was the "Bring Your Fire Zone," a hub of activity and enlightenment.

Here, amidst the beating heart of the festival, conversations flourished on topics ranging from human rights and food security to gender-based violence and youth empowerment. It was a space alive with ideas, where voices from all corners of society converged in dialogue and determination.

But it wasn't just words that filled the air; it was action. At the broadcasting corner, the voices of change echoed far and wide, reaching ears hungry for inspiration. Esteemed guests graced the stage, including the Honourable Prime Minister Russell Dlamini and UN Resident Coordinator Mr. George Wachira, their presence a testament to the significance of the cause.

Amidst the buzz of conversation and the beat of drums, the festival-goers were treated to exclusive performances from both local talents and international artists. Yet, it was the fashion show that stole the spotlight, a dazzling display of creativity and conscience. As models strutted down the runway, adorned in garments crafted from eco-friendly recycled materials, the audience was mesmerized. Each piece was not just a work of art but a statement—a testament to the possibility of fashion that harmonizes with the planet.

In this moment, beneath the canopy of stars and the glow of festival lights, a story unfolded. It was a story of collaboration and commitment, of music and meaning. It was a story of hope, woven into the fabric of each conversation, each performance, and each recycled thread. And as the last note faded into the night, it left behind a promise—a promise of a future where passion and purpose ignite change, one festival at a time.

Veggies That Weather Change

Written by: FAO

From March 4 to 7, 2025, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in partnership with the National Agricultural Marketing Board (NAMBOARD) and the Ministry of Agriculture, held a successful baby vegetable production training workshop at Esibayeni Lodge, Matsapha, Eswatini. Twelve smallholder farmers, mainly youth groups, participated in the workshop as part of the One Country One Priority Product (OCOP) initiative, aimed at promoting climate-smart agriculture and improving livelihoods.

The project supports farmers through the installation of 0.2 hectares of shade nets to protect crops from climate-related risks under the “Green Development of Baby Vegetables to Facilitate Export and Promote Decent Youth Employment in Eswatini” initiative. The training equipped participants with practical skills in baby vegetable production, pest management, and value chain integration, led by experts

from the Ministry of Agriculture’s Horticulture Department and NAMBOARD. This aligns with FAO’s Technical Cooperation Programme and Strategic Framework 2021–31, focusing on sustainable agrifood systems, climate resilience, and inclusive rural development.

Central to this initiative is FAO’s commitment to the “4 Betters”: Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment, and a Better Life, ensuring no one is left behind. By strengthening the technical and entrepreneurial capacities of youth farmers, including groups like Manga Manga Cooperative and Khanyakudze Youth Group, the project promotes sustainable techniques that reduce chemical use, food loss, and waste, while boosting productivity and income.

Agriculture Officer Vusi Mavuso highlighted the government’s support through capacity building and climate-smart practices, noting that protected

agriculture infrastructure shields farmers from climate shocks and enhances productivity. He also emphasized NAMBOARD’s role in providing subsidies and market integration assistance to farmers.

The OCOP initiative, part of FAO’s Global Action on Green Development of Special Agricultural Products (2021–25), targets unique agricultural products like baby vegetables to transform agrifood systems towards efficiency, inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability. Through a participatory approach, OCOP develops value chains that prioritize environmental sustainability and improved market access.

Looking ahead, FAO and its partners will continue supporting Eswatini’s smallholder farmers with training, technical assistance, and infrastructure like shade nets, reinforcing FAO’s dedication to youth empowerment and sustainable development.



Smallholder farmers attending the baby vegetable production training workshop at Esibayeni Lodge, Matsapha.



Turning Passions into Livelihoods

Written by: UNDP

At just nine years old, Banele Nkomonye (24) from Ndunayithini in the Shiselweni Region had already shown a keen interest in electronics. He spent his childhood tinkering with items like radios; often getting it wrong, but occasionally succeeding, which only deepened his curiosity. He dreamt of becoming an electronics technician. However, lack of funds stood in the way, and he could not enroll for training after graduating from high school. To survive, Banele worked various jobs, including as a security guard.

Banele's turning point came when his constituency headman, under Sigwe Inkhundla, informed him about the Eswatini Youth Empowerment Programme (EYEP) – a government initiative funded by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development

(MEPD) and supported by UNDP. EYEP equips unemployed young people with at least a Grade 7 Certificate and no tertiary qualification with artisanal and entrepreneurship skills to enhance their livelihoods. In addition, EYEP supports youth graduates with internships to gain skills and experience thus improving their employability.

The programme was calling for applications for cellphone repair and culinary training courses, targeting unemployed, non-graduate youth. Seeing a new path opening, Banele applied and was selected as one of 15 trainees – 11 males and four females – for the eight-week cellphone repair course at CIT College in Mbabane.

"I can't wait to return to my community to establish a small workshop to fix cellphones because these services are limited where I come from," said

Banele. "Now I'll be using real skills and knowledge." He has already earmarked a spot near a school and police station to start his business.

Breaking Barriers: Judith's Story

Judith Nkambule (26), from Sivule under Shiselweni I Inkhundla, shares a similar story. She aspired to become an electrical engineer and began her studies at a college in South Africa. Unfortunately, her family ran out of funds, and she had to return home, her dreams temporarily crushed.

When she learned about EYEP, Judith jumped at the opportunity and was accepted into the cellphone repair programme.

"I grew up fixing things. When I see a cable, I want to fix it," she said. "I've never seen a woman fixing cellphones – that inspires

me rather than scares me. I love what I do, and I believe my business will succeed."

Judith plans to start her business in Nhlangano town, where she sees a niche to trade her recently acquired skills. Cellphone repairs instructor, Banele Maseko, sees great potential in the participants establishing their own small enterprises through the training, which combines both theory and practical work.

"The trainees gain skills to repair both the software and hardware components of cellphones. "Common cellphone hardware faults include broken screens, while software issues often involve non-responsive applications," said Maseko.

Cooking Up Careers: Culinary Dreams Come to Life

While some youths are fixing phones, others are in the kitchen – literally. At the same college, 20 trainees – 5 males and 15 females – are enrolled in culinary arts training under the guidance of instructor Simile Simelane. Among them are Mkhululi Magagula (25) from Mhlume and Thembeke Nhlabatsi (33) from Lubulini. Magagula always loved cooking – even if he was teased

for it as a man. He now dreams of starting a mobile kitchen and baking business.

"People used to laugh at me, but I know what I want. This training is helping me pursue my passion," he said.

Nhlabatsi shares the same entrepreneurial spirit. Her goal is to serve affordable, healthy meals to her community in Nsoko.

"What I like about this course is that it also teaches us business skills like costing for catering, customer care, and how to understand our target market," she said.

Recently, the trainees welcomed a technical team from UNDP, MEPD, and the Eswatini National Youth Council (ENYC), accompanied by UNDP Student Ambassadors. Ms Siphwe Dlamini, Principal Planning Officer at MEPD, congratulated the youth for taking the initiative.

"We're here to encourage you to use this opportunity to help the government address unemployment. And don't stop with yourselves; teach others the skills you've learned," said Dlamini.

ENYC CEO Mr. Lwazi Mamba also commended the EYEP initiative for tackling the country's 58% youth unemployment rate.

"What I like about the artisan skills training is that these young people have the potential to create jobs – not just for themselves, but for others too."

ENYC is collaborating with UNDP in implementing the programme. UNDP Sustainable Development Specialist, Mangaliso Mohammed, said he was delighted to see a spark in the trainees' faces that shows hope has been restored. "I'm also happy the youth realised they could redirect their lives through EYEP," said Mohammed. He thanked MEPD and ENYC for the partnership, and CIT College for providing quality training so participants could gain skills to thrive.

Under EYEP, another 90 young people from the Shiselweni and Lubombo regions are currently receiving training in sewing, upholstery, and metalwork at the International Youth Fellowship. The programme is opening doors, igniting passions, and building skills – one young person at a time.



Unemployed youth participate in a culinary course as part of the Eswatini Youth Empowerment program.

From Opportunity to Impact – Youth Take the Lead

Written by: UNDP



UNDP Student Ambassadors meet Sandile Mavuso, founder of Sibongile Beverages.

What started as a simple call for applications in 2017 has grown into a national success story. Two young visionaries, Sandile Mavuso and Duncan Dlamini, responded to a youth entrepreneurship initiative and, today, they stand as two of Eswatini's most inspiring young business owners.

Their transformation was made possible through a strategic partnership between the Royal Science and Technology Park (RSTP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has supported 29 youth-led start-ups across the country.

The Programme Behind the Success

The initiative combines RSTP's incubation services with seed funding from UNDP's Funding Windows – a flexible, multi-donor funding mechanism. This support structure is designed to tackle pressing challenges like youth unemployment, which

affects 58% of young people aged 15 – 35 in Eswatini. By fostering innovation, building capacity, and offering financial backing, the programme has enabled young entrepreneurs to scale their ideas into sustainable businesses.

Sibongile Beverages: Brewing Success in Matsapha

Mavuso, founder of Sibongile Beverages, started with kombucha brewed in his kitchen. He now runs a fully operational factory in the Matsapha Industrial Site, Manzini Region, employing seven people. "One of my biggest highlights was getting my product onto the shelf at OK Foods," says Mavuso. "I asked to place it there myself – it was an unforgettable experience."

With E135,000 (USD 7 500) in seed funding, Mavuso purchased essential equipment and raw materials. Over the years, his product line has expanded to include:

1. Six kombucha flavours
2. Three iced tea flavours
3. Three water kefir flavours
4. Three vitamin water flavours
5. Protein shake is in the pipeline, earmarked to be released at the end of June 2025.

He also secured a E100,000 (USD 5 560) loan from the Youth Enterprise Revolving Fund, under the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs, to support further growth.

Looking Beyond Borders

Mavuso exhibited his products at the 2024 Taipei International Food Show, through support from Eswatini Investment Promotions Authority (EIPA) where he attracted interest from potential international partners. He is hopeful that being among 20 initial small enterprises benefiting from the Ingelo Local Certification Scheme, supported by UNDP and implemented by the Eswatini Standards Authority, will open mainstream markets, both locally and internationally.



Henrik Franklin, UNDP Resident Representative, joins a diplomatic delegation in visiting a pork production site.

DJD Investments: Powering the Pork Industry

At Matsetsa, in the Lubombo Region, Duncan Dlamini is revolutionising pork production through his company, DJD Investments. He used his E270,000 (USD 15 000) seed grant to establish a waste management system and increase his furrowing crates from 10 to 28.

Today, Dlamini:

1. Employs 18 full-time and 6 part-time staff from his community
2. Supplies major retailers including OK Foods and Boxer
3. Operates a successful business that still can't keep up with demand because more supermarkets are interested in his pork but he does not produce enough.

"The RSTP/UNDP business model was a game changer for me," says Dlamini. "It propelled me to greater heights."

To scale even further, he secured

a E2.86 million (USD 159 000) loan from Eswatini Bank, which also helped fund a borehole and perimeter fencing among other facilities.

A Visit from Global Partners

On May 23, both entrepreneurs welcomed an esteemed delegation including:

1. Mr Henrik Franklin, UNDP Resident Representative
2. Ms Caitlin Piper, Chargé d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy in Eswatini
3. Ms Liesel Töpfer, German Embassy Liaison Officer
4. Ms Nomvula Gulwako, Acting CEO of RSTP
5. UNDP Student Ambassadors

This visit highlighted the power of public-private partnerships and international support for youth innovation.

Mr Henrik Franklin, UNDP Resident Representative "It was really encouraging to see two young entrepreneurs supported by UNDP creating employment for others, especially women and youth, and contributing to

the economy. The significant core funding to UNDP from both the United States and Germany is instrumental in enabling us to improve the lives of emaSwati."

Ms Caitlin Piper, U.S. Embassy "The United States is proud to be a longstanding contributor to UNDP. These entrepreneurs are proof that with the right support, the private sector can be a powerful engine for economic growth and job creation in Eswatini."

Ms Liesel Töpfer, German Liaison Officer "Germany supports innovative youth entrepreneurship in Eswatini through the European Union. Seed capital is important - it gives a head start."

The journeys of Mavuso and Dlamini reflect a broader vision: when young people are given the tools, mentorship, and capital to succeed, they create jobs, solve local challenges, and boost the national economy. This initiative by RSTP and UNDP is more than a business incubator – it's a launchpad for Eswatini's future innovators.

Poultry Business Transforms Community

Written by: WFP



WFP officers meet Winile Ceko, a small poultry business owner supported by the Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework initiative.

In the rural area of Mashobeni, a remarkable story of perseverance and empowerment is unfolding. Winile Ceko, a mother living with a disability, is successfully running a small poultry business that has transformed her livelihood, thanks to support received through a joint initiative funded by the Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) from UNAIDS, implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) in collaboration with the local community-based organisation, Membatsise Home-Based Care.

In September 2024, Winile received start-up support that included poultry equipment and 100-day-old chicks. The support package was part of a broader effort to promote sustainable, income-generating activities for vulnerable individuals, particularly those living with disabilities or affected by HIV. With this assistance, Winile launched her broiler production business and is now tending to her fourth batch.

In September 2024, Winile received start-up support that included poultry equipment and 100-day-old chicks. The support package was part of a broader effort to promote sustainable, income-generating activities for vulnerable individuals,

particularly those living with disabilities or affected by HIV. With this assistance, Winile launched her broiler production business and is now tending to her fourth batch.

Despite a recent setback caused by a disease outbreak that led to the loss of 21 chicks, Winile remains committed to her enterprise. She continues to apply the knowledge and skills she has acquired and views such challenges as opportunities for growth and learning.

Winile's poultry business has enabled her to cover critical household expenses. With profits from previous cycles, she successfully paid her child's school fees and saved USD 93, 00 toward constructing a dedicated poultry shed. Currently operating from a small residential space, she is working towards building a proper structure to expand production and improve animal welfare.

Winile Ceko's experience is a compelling example of how targeted support and inclusive economic opportunities can transform lives. Her journey demonstrates that with the right tools and partnerships, individuals can overcome barriers, support their families, and actively contribute to their communities.

Öld Zakhele NCP Resilience Sustains a Community

Written by: WFP



Volunteer knitting at the Old Zakhele Neighborhood Care Point.

Old Zakhele Neighbourhood Care Point (NCP), nestled in the Manzini region, is one of the 864 NCPs supported by the World Food Programme (WFP) across the country. These care points are vital community-based safety nets providing orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) with at least one warm, nutritious meal per day. Beyond food, NCPs also offer a space for children to learn, play, and grow in safety.

At Old Zakhele NCP, the daily preparation of meals is led by a dedicated caregiver, Gogo Thulisile Kunene who volunteers her time and energy to serve the children who depend on the care point for their basic nutrition. Recognising her commitment and the challenges she faces, a group of local youth, particularly young boys, have stepped in to assist.

Their contribution includes helping with cooking and serving meals. Their support not only eases the caregiver's workload but reflects a growing sense of community responsibility and solidarity. Despite the support received, there are often gaps in the availability of cooking essentials such as condiments and fresh vegetables. To bridge this, Gogo Thulisile has taken up crocheting. In her spare time, she crochets and sells handmade

clothing items, using the proceeds to purchase ingredients that enhance the meals she prepares such as salt and vegetables. Her initiative ensures that the meals served are not only filling, but also varied and nourishing.

The World Food Programme plays a crucial role in supporting Old Zakhele and hundreds of other NCPs in Eswatini. Through the regular provision of food commodities such as maize meal, rice, pulses, vegetable oil and fortified blends, WFP helps ensure that each child receives at least one warm and nutritious meal per day. This support is instrumental in improving the food security and nutrition of vulnerable children.

What is unfolding at Old Zakhele NCP is more than just daily feeding it is a story of commitment, dignity, and community-led impact. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of a compassionate caregiver, proactive community youth, and WFP's steadfast support, the NCP continues to provide a lifeline to Eswatini's most vulnerable children.

Together, they are demonstrating that even in the face of limited resources, meaningful change is possible when communities are empowered and supported.

HUMAN
RIGHTS

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LET'S ADVANCE ON
THE PROMISE OF
FREEDOM, EQUALITY
AND JUSTICE

SECTION IV.

IT'S ALL
ABOUT
RIGHTS

UNIVERSAL
DECLARATION
HUMAN
RIGHTS



Children enjoying the play area at the Malindza Refugee Reception Centre.

From Displacement to Healing

Written by: UNICEF

At the heart of the Malindza Refugee Reception Center in Eswatini, the laughter of children now rings out from a newly revamped play area, an oasis of joy in a space that shelters over 900 displaced individuals. Among them are 100 children aged between 3 and 7 years, many of whom have already experienced trauma far beyond their years.

The center has welcomed people fleeing conflict from countries including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Somalia. During the peak of the unrest in Mozambique, the camp also hosted many refugee families from that country, most of whom have since returned home. The multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of the community presents ongoing communication challenges for both residents and service providers. Yet, with support from UNICEF, meaningful strides are being made to support the wellbeing of children and families at the camp.

“UNICEF has played a critical role in strengthening services at Malindza”, said Ms Bong

Mamba, the Camp Manager. “The deployment of two social workers, improvements to the children’s play area and the installation of floodlights for enhanced safety at night have all made significant difference.” For many children at the center, the pre-school offers more than early learning, it provides a sense of normalcy and security. Sixty-six children (46 girls and 20 boys) are currently enrolled.

The pre-school is also a space for healing. Many of the children arrive at the camp withdrawn or visibly distressed. Six year-old Blessing Nyawdi softly shared, “I miss the place we used to live with Mum and Dad”. Behind the scenes, the social workers, Temalangen Dlamini and Mbali Mabuza are a vital lifeline for families. They provide psychosocial support, assist with issues such as school fees and food security and respond to child protection concerns.

“We work with people who are deeply distressed,” said Ms Dlamini. “Many of the issues we encounter include neglect, trauma and a need for basic services. We are grateful to UNICEF for enabling us to be

here and to offer this support”. One pressing concern is the lack of privacy with the camp’s one-room shelters. Children exposed to adult behaviours and vulnerable to mimicry and even abuse.

“This living arrangement puts children at risk,” Ms Dlamini warned. There is a danger they may misinterpret harmful actions as normal, particularly if they are sexually abused. Education is critical” In response, the social workers are planning to hold sensitization sessions with parents on maintaining privacy and boundaries.

There is also a call for age-appropriate learning materials to help children understand the concepts of good and bad touches and to raise awareness about sexual abuse. Thanks to ongoing support from UNICEF, the Malindza Refugee Reception Center is gradually becoming a safer, more nurturing space for children. While the journey ahead is long, the seeds of hope have already been planted, one play session, one supportive conversation and one smile at a time.

Rights in Every Voice

Written by: OHCHR

In a landmark move toward inclusive governance, 48 community leaders, civil society actors, and local government representatives converged in Simunye for two ground breaking Training of Trainers (ToT) workshops. Hosted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the World Bank, the sessions aimed to amplify the voices of Eswatini's rural communities in development processes.

The training, held in March and May 2025, strengthened participants' capacity to promote citizen engagement and foster implementation of the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) in local development planning. "Development often arrives with decisions already made," said Zandile Mkhathshwa, Bucopho (Community Representative) from Lukhetseni. "Now, I know it is my duty to ensure my community is consulted, not just informed."

The programme aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Outcome 3: Accountable Governance, Justice and Human Rights. It emphasized that the right to participate in public affairs is not only a democratic principle but also a legal right enshrined in Eswatini's Constitution and international human rights obligations.

Participants explored a wide range of content using a newly developed training manual. They delved into civic participation



Participants engage in Training of Trainers on Human Rights-Based Approach to local development planning.

mechanisms embedded in national and international frameworks, learned about gender mainstreaming and the inclusion of marginalized groups, and were introduced to the World Bank's Environmental and Social Standards (ESSs). The sessions also covered practical tools for community engagement and accountability, and strategies for creating local multipliers for human rights.

Designed to create a ripple effect, the training empowered participants - from civil society workers to elected officials - to integrate a HRBA in their

daily work. Many pledged to conduct outreach sessions and actively involve marginalized communities in governance and service delivery. "Human rights are not foreign," shared Mangaliso Sambo from Luvatsi. "They are about dignity, fairness and respect—values we already hold dear in our culture."

Participants emphasized the urgent need for similar training to be provided to duty-bearers, including newly elected Bucopho and Tindvuna Tenkhundla (Constituency Headmen). Many traditional leaders admitted they had never received formal

Human rights must not only be taught—they must be practiced. Let every community in Eswatini know their rights, claim them, and take part in shaping a fairer, more just future.



Doo Aphane, Human Rights Consultant,

training on citizen engagement post-election and welcomed the opportunity to better understand their responsibilities. “We need to move beyond consultation,” said Mduduzi Mndzebele, Indvuna YeNkhundla from Mafutseni. “True participation means listening, adjusting, and partnering with the people we serve.”

This initiative is part of broader UN support to Eswatini’s governance reform under the UNSDCF 2021–2025. It contributes directly to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

The next phase of the programme will focus on

supporting trained participants in rolling out sessions at community level, translating and distributing HRBA materials in local languages, mobilizing resources for rights-based, community-led initiatives, and advocating for institutional training of public officials on HRBA.

As the participants departed Simunye, one message echoed powerfully: “Real development begins when every voice is heard and every right is respected.”

This training marks a powerful step toward inclusive development. But for lasting change, it must be scaled up and sustained.

Human Rights-Based Approach

(HRBA) training should be integrated into national governance systems - reaching elected leaders, traditional authorities, schools, and communities. Real development happens when people are informed, engaged, and empowered to shape their futures. We urge institutions and partners to invest in expanding these trainings, translating materials, and supporting grassroots implementation.

Human rights must not only be taught - they must be practiced. Let every community in Eswatini know their rights, claim them, and take part in shaping a fairer, more just future.

Planting Change Through Inclusion

Written by: UNESCO



Senator - Princes Ntfombiyenkhosi with Mbongeni Matimela from the Department of Forestry

In the rolling hills of Boyane and Mbekweleni, something powerful took root this year, not just trees, but a movement. In a world increasingly shaped by the effects of climate change, Eswatini is showing that resilience must be rooted in inclusion. The country's first-ever Disability-Inclusive Tree Planting Initiative, launched in 2025, is doing more than greening the landscape - it's reshaping who gets to lead the climate conversation.

For years, climate change has disproportionately affected people with disabilities, often sidelining them from disaster preparedness, policy discussions, and recovery efforts. But this time, they weren't just included—they led.

Organized by the Eswatini National Commission for UNESCO, in collaboration with the Deputy Prime Minister's Office and multiple disability

rights organizations, the initiative brought together traditional leaders, youth, government officials, and people with disabilities for a shared purpose: to plant not only trees but a future that leaves no one behind.

Prince Gija, Manzini Regional Administrator, summed up the spirit of the event:

"Inclusion isn't a checkbox - it's the foundation of progress. Today, as we plant trees, we're also planting the values of dignity, equality, and justice."

These weren't just ceremonial saplings. The tree-planting sites at Boyane High School and Mbekweleni became living classrooms—spaces where environmental action met human rights, and where accessibility and climate justice walked hand in hand.

Participants in the initiative weren't there to be seen; they were there to be heard. Mr. Methula, Director of the Eswatini Comprehensive Disability Mainstreaming Initiative, reminded the crowd, "Persons with disabilities are integral to our communities and economy. Their ideas and leadership are crucial to building a climate-resilient future."

The initiative builds on a growing momentum. Between March and April 2025, more than 260 government officials and organization members took part in capacity-building workshops on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Eswatini's National Disability Action Plan. These sessions, jointly organized by UNESCO, UNICEF, and UNFPA, provided concrete tools to turn inclusive climate policies into everyday realities.

The goal? To align Eswatini's development path with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—especially those focused on gender equality (SDG 5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and inclusive societies (SDG 16).

Dr. Ngcebo Mbuli, Chairperson of the National Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities, reinforced the need to implement the National Disability Action Plan, stressing that real change must go beyond policies on paper and become a living practice.

It's a message echoed by Hon. Sifiso Shabalala, Chairperson of the Climate Change Portfolio Committee, who pledged to carry the voices of persons with disabilities into the heart of national policymaking.

In Eswatini, the trees now growing in schoolyards are more than environmental offsets. They're reminders that real climate action doesn't just happen in conference rooms or policy briefs—it happens when everyone has a stake, a voice, and a shovel in hand.

As the climate crisis continues, Eswatini offers a powerful model: one where climate justice and disability rights are not parallel goals, but shared ones.

Because when inclusion becomes the norm - not the exception - we don't just build greener futures. We build fairer ones.

The tree-planting sites at Boyane High School and Mbekweleni became living classrooms—spaces where environmental action met human rights, and where accessibility and climate justice walked hand in hand.



Boyane and Mbekweleni residents planting trees on Disability-Inclusive Tree Planting Day.

SECTION V.
**HEALTH AND
WELL-BEING**

Bridging SRHR Access

Written by: UNFPA

In Lomahasha, where the roads hum with the movement of people crossing between Eswatini and Mozambique, there is a story that transcends borders. At this crossroads in the Lubombo region, 31-year-old mother of two, Nomcebo Sifundza, is redefining access and agency in family planning.

Nomcebo recalls visiting the Lomahasha clinic, hoping to access her preferred family planning method, only to find it was out of stock. Faced with limited options, she didn't give up. "I simply crossed the border to check if my preferred commodity was available at the nearby Namaacha clinic," she said with a smile.

"I have two children, 10 and 3 years old. Spacing my births has been crucial to me because I know the importance of family planning. I do not have much, so planning allows me to look after my children as they grow," she explained.

She works at a local restaurant in one of the busiest crossroad areas in Lomahasha, where citizens of both Eswatini and Mozambique converge. It was here that she recently attended a Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) session facilitated by the Family Life Association of Eswatini (FLAS), with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The session formed part of the "SRHR-HIV Knows No Borders" campaign led by the International Organization for



Women from Lomahasha accessing SRHR services at a mobile clinic.

Migration (IOM), in partnership with UNFPA and supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

To Nomcebo, the campaign is more than a message: "The partnership is a breath of fresh air for Lomahasha," she said. The region is home to a highly mobile population, facing high HIV risk and limited SRHR education. But the arrival of mobile clinics has been a game changer. "They provide us with the freedom to discuss sensitive health issues openly," she added.

"Money is no longer a barrier. These mobile clinics provide high-quality services," said Nomcebo. The presence of young, friendly nurses creates a relaxed environment, encouraging clients to ask questions that might otherwise go unspoken. "Running my business keeps my days full. One clinic visit takes up an entire day

due to long queues and multiple consultations," she shared. "I just sometimes wish I could have a quick Depo jab!" she joked. The mobile clinics are starting to offer that convenience.

"If I don't find what I need in Eswatini, I go over to Mozambique. The language barrier is no longer an issue because there are interpreters," she explained. The warmth and care Nomcebo receives across the border are no different from what she finds at home. "Mozambicans come to Eswatini for HIV and SRH services, and we are treated just the same," she smiled. In a world where borders often divide, Lomahasha is becoming a symbol of connection, of shared community, dignity, and care. In this small but powerful corner of the region, better health is reaching across borders, touching lives, one woman at a time.

Money is no longer a barrier These mobile clinics provide high-quality services...



Young person using the social accountability feedback platform.

Youth-Led Accountability Transforms Health Services in Eswatini

Written by: UNICEF

The high incidence of HIV among adolescents and youth, particularly girls, in Eswatini highlights the urgent need for continuous monitoring and improvement of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. These services must be accessible, stigma-free, and of high quality. However, only 48% of health facilities in Eswatini offer youth-friendly SRH services, restricting young people's access to critical information and care.

In response, UNICEF Eswatini is supporting the implementation of a social accountability feedback platform that empowers young people to directly influence the enhancement of youth-friendly health services, particularly regarding their sexual and reproductive health rights. The platform provides real-time reporting via a mobile application, enabling clients to share their experiences and suggest improvements. The system analyzes feedback data

and channels recommendations to service providers for quality assurance and service improvement. When young people visit health facilities, they are guided to youth-friendly corners where they are introduced to the app and encouraged to provide feedback on their care experience.

"The platform has the potential to be scaled up to all health facilities in Eswatini. It's already showing positive results in improving the quality of healthcare services and ensuring equitable access for young people. Most importantly, youth are leading the process—telling us what needs to change for them to feel comfortable using these services," said Dr. Thuli Mdluli, UNICEF HIV Specialist. The feedback collected has provided the Ministry of Health and its partners with credible, youth-driven insights for strengthening health systems and empowering youth-led initiatives.

One example includes young people's concerns about the discreet provision of condoms. In response, the Ministry of Health began packaging condoms in medication bags, enhancing privacy and making it easier for youth to carry them confidently. "I saw how powerful the platform was and knew I had to help others use it too," said 22-year-old Celucolo Simelane.

Celucolo first encountered the social accountability platform in 2022 when he was just 19. Impressed by its impact, he became a dedicated youth champion. Today, he along with 49 volunteers, support the initiative by guiding young people at health facilities on how to use the platform and encouraging them to speak up about their experiences.

In addition to addressing issues such as medication stock-outs, the feedback platform has contributed to:

- Improved quality of youth-friendly health services
- Enhanced privacy and confidentiality
- Better clinic flow and service delivery
- Positive shifts in health worker attitudes toward young clients

In 2024 alone, 1,744 young clients submitted 2,875 recommendations through the platform.

With a resolution rate of 55% of recommendations acted upon by the Ministry of Health to improve the quality of services, the initiative demonstrates significant progress in promoting evidence-based decision-making at the local level and strengthening accountability to affected populations under UNICEF-supported programmes.

Health System Heroes in Action

Written by: UNFPA



Margaret Thwala-Tembe, UNFPA Head of Office, and Rejoice Nkambule, Deputy Director of Health Services – Public Health and recent parents, at the 2025 International Day of the Midwife commemoration.

At some point, I called my relatives and friends to say goodbye,” shared Ms. Soko.

Hlophe couldn’t believe that what started as a normal pregnancy would land her in the operating theatre. She was especially shocked, having had a smooth, complication-free pregnancy before.

Ms. Hlophe lives in Fairview, on the outskirts of Manzini city, the vibrant hub of Eswatini. During pregnancy, labour and delivery, she experienced several complications, including pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, breech presentation, and foetal distress due to meconium aspiration. As a result, she had to undergo an emergency caesarean section to save her life.

“I thank God for the midwives who supported me throughout my pregnancy and delivery. My journey with midwives started during early antenatal care,

when they identified problems with my pregnancy, to the final day when I had the caesarean section,” she joyfully shared, holding one of the twins.

“Had I faced such a traumatic experience in my first pregnancy nine years ago, I think I would never have had any more children. But I am here today, with my two healthy, beautiful boys,” she added with a smile. “I appreciate all the support I received from the midwives at Raleigh Fitkin Memorial Hospital, as they ensured the safe arrival of my children.”

Hlophe felt that effective communication helped her understand her labour complications and the procedures undertaken.

“Midwives were kind and caring,” she said. “They explained everything from the beginning and kept my husband and me informed, which allowed him to offer every bit of support he could.”

Her husband, Mr. Soko, a refrigeration specialist, couldn’t stop praising the midwives, whom he described as miracle workers. Despite his fears of losing either his wife or the children, he appreciated their sound judgement, which helped avert a worst-case scenario.

“The information the midwives shared helped me stay positive,” he said. “I remained hopeful and kept her in my prayers. I cannot express the joy I felt when I received her call, informing me that she was awake.”

“Attending antenatal care is critical,” Mr. Soko advised other couples. “To my fellow men, let us support our partners during pregnancy and encourage them to visit health facilities for early identification of potential complications,” he concluded.

The Soko family shared their story during the commemoration of the International Day of the Midwife 2025, held on 16 May in Manzini.

The event was organized by the Ministry of Health’s Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme in collaboration with UNFPA under the theme “Midwives: Critical in Every Crisis.”

Approximately 200 midwives from all four regions of Eswatini attended the celebration, which shone a spotlight on the remarkable and often life-saving work of midwives across the country, particularly during critical situations like the one faced by Nomkhosi.

Strengthening Cervical Cancer Defense

Written by: WHO



Young girls having received HPV vaccinations.



Young schoolgirls with consent forms preparing to receive the HPV vaccine.

The Kingdom of Eswatini is making notable strides in its fight against cervical cancer through the successful implementation of a nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination program. Launched in June 2023, the initiative targets girls aged 9 to 14 years, aiming to reduce the incidence of cervical cancer, a leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women in the country.

HPV is a virus that causes cancers, mainly of the reproductive system, including cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the leading cancer among women ages 15–49 years in Eswatini, fuelled by the high numbers of HIV cases. Eswatini records approximately 360 cases of cervical cancer each year and 27% of these cases result in death. Currently, a total of 2129 women are living with cancer in the Kingdom. In the last five years, 771 women have died due to cancer related illness.

The introduction of the HPV vaccination received tremendous support from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) through WHO, UNICEF and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI). The partnership with GAVI was instrumental in supporting the rollout of the HPV vaccination program. The support from GAVI encompasses capacity building within the healthcare system, ensuring that health workers are adequately trained to administer vaccines and engage with communities. This collaborative effort has resulted in improved healthcare infrastructure, which is essential for the sustainability of vaccination efforts.

There is need for continuous sensitization and addressing misconceptions in order to increase uptake of the services...

"The initial funding and logistical support facilitated by GAVI enabled the country to target high vaccination coverage effectively," said the WHO Representative Dr Susan Tembo when interviewed about the program. A coverage of 51% was attained upon introduction of the vaccine in 2023. A second round of an integrated school-based campaign was conducted in June 2024, where an increase in coverage was noted, reaching 69.7%. Coverage had reached approximately 73% of the eligible population by end of 2024. To date, coverage has reached 79%, which is a significant achievement in the fight against cervical cancer.

To foster a successful HPV vaccination program, the Kingdom of Eswatini engaged in a series of well-coordinated and targeted activities. The program mainly focuses on health education and sensitization as well as social mobilization. Through partnerships with non-governmental organizations and community leaders, the Ministry of Health and partners

organized educational sessions to inform parents, guardians, and young girls about the benefits of vaccination, the dangers of cervical cancer, and the significance of early prevention.

The programme also utilized other strategies including vaccination campaigns and integrating HPV vaccination into public health services to ensure sustainability and continuity. Health centers across the country are now equipped to provide the HPV vaccine alongside other routine immunizations, thereby normalizing the vaccination process and reducing barriers to access. In November 2024, the program also expanded vaccination to immunocompromised girls. Health workers continue to conduct school-based vaccination campaigns, making it easy for girls to access the vaccine in a familiar environment. This approach not only enhances access to this life-saving vaccine but also encourages higher uptake rates among the target demographic.

Partners have observed that the vaccination programme has been well accepted by the people of Eswatini. Dr Pido Bongomin, the Deputy Director of Georgetown University noted that parents generally accepted the HPV vaccination, which has resulted in an impressive uptake of the vaccine. "There is need for continuous sensitization and addressing misconceptions in order to increase uptake of the services," he said.

The implementation of the HPV vaccination program in Eswatini marks a noteworthy advancement in public health efforts to combat cervical cancer in the country. Eswatini's proactive approach serves as a model for other nations grappling with high cervical cancer rates, demonstrating the impact of coordinated vaccination campaigns and international collaboration in disease prevention. EPI Program Manager Ms. Xolisiwe Dlamini addressing the Bhadlane community while young girls who received the HPV vaccine at the launch look on. (you may blur the breasts).



HPV vaccination at St. Marks High School.



Elders at the community vaccination station.

Vaccination Week Drives Vaccine Progress

Written by: WHO



Dr. Susan Tembo, WHO Representative, speaking at African Vaccination Week.

To cultivate a healthy and productive population, the Kingdom of Eswatini successfully conducted a nationwide vaccination catch-up campaign as part of the 2025 African Vaccination Week (AVW) commemoration.

The campaign, conducted from 5-9 May 2025, reached 5,181 children with essential vaccines, a major milestone in the country's ongoing efforts to close immunization gaps and protect against preventable diseases. Led by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with WHO, UNICEF, and other partners, the nationwide campaign expanded beyond the usual target group of children under five years to include girls aged 9–20 for the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. This marked a groundbreaking step for Eswatini, making it the

first country in the African region to vaccinate girls up to age 20 against HPV, while many others are only beginning to extend eligibility to 18. A total of 238 girls received the HPV vaccine during the 5-day campaign.

Nosimilo Dlamini, a mother of three children under five expressed her appreciation to the Ministry of Health for the outreach services.

"All my children were vaccinated at this site and all three are now up to date. I make sure that they stay protected from diseases by taking advantage of free vaccination services. As a result, they are rarely sick and do not miss school because of sickness," she said during the launch of the AVW at Bhadlane under Lubulini Inkhundla.

The campaign offered a wide

range of critical vaccines, reinforcing Eswatini's routine immunization programme. Children received BCG for tuberculosis, bOPV and IPV for polio, DT and DTP for diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis, HepB-Hib for Hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenzae type b, MR for measles and rubella, and PCV 1 for pneumonia.

The Rotarix vaccine protected against rotavirus, a common cause of severe diarrhea, and TD boosters were given where needed. Vitamin A supplements and Albendazole were also administered to strengthen immunity and support deworming.

The success of the campaign lied on the strong community engagement, especially through traditional leaders, who proved vital in building trust and

Mobile outreach teams delivered vaccines directly to hard-to-reach communities, while health facilities offered catch-up services.

encouraging participation. Proactive outreach before the campaign using mobile platforms such as Whatsapp and community outreach helped to raise awareness and ensured smooth logistical operations. Health talks and education initiatives supported vaccine acceptance and addressed hesitancy. Further, early planning and detailed microplanning at local levels enhanced coordination and outreach.

Efforts were particularly focused on reaching zero-dose and under-immunized children in remote areas. Mobile outreach teams delivered vaccines directly to hard-to-reach communities, while health facilities offered catch-up services.

Reflecting on the campaign, Ms. Rejoice Nkambule, the Deputy Director of Health Services- Public Health said: "This campaign is more than numbers. It is about restoring trust in immunization, reaching

under-served communities, and giving every child a fair shot at a healthy life."

"Eswatini has shown strong leadership and community-driven action. Vaccination remains one of the most powerful tools we have to prevent disease, and this campaign clearly demonstrates how coordinated efforts can yield meaningful public health outcomes," added Susan Tembo, WHO Representative to Eswatini.

Dr Tembo further pledged WHO and the entire UN's commitment to support the government of Eswatini to identify and reach all children that have never received vaccinations (zero-dose children) so that every child benefits from the life-saving power of vaccines.

"We are working towards strengthening routine immunization, integrating services into primary health care, and roll out new vaccines to broaden disease prevention," she said.



Rejoice Nkambule, Deputy Director of Health Services – Public Health, at African Vaccination Week.

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