



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## KZN YOUTH OFF TO US TO BECOME 'WEATHER AND CLIMATE CHANGE WARRIORS'

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Young people 'must learn more about environmental affairs'



*KZN agriculture and rural development MEC Thembeni Madlopha-Mthethwa and Cogta MEC Thulasizwe Buthelezi.*

**Image:** Supplied

After years of being at the receiving end of violent weather, the KwaZulu-Natal government is recruiting young people to send to the US to address climate change and environmental challenges.

This comes after devastating natural disasters, including the 2019, 2021 and 2022 floods as well as the recent tornado which hit six districts in the province last month.

"This province has borne the brunt of violent weather. We are indeed in the eye of the storm," KZN agriculture and rural development MEC Thembeni Madlopha-Mthethwa said on Tuesday.



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The address — delivered on behalf of KZN premier Thami Ntuli — was during day two of the EnergyWaterFoodClimate Nexus summit in Durban.

The summit — which brought global leaders, experts and stakeholders together to seek solutions to resource security and environmental sustainability, especially in the fields of energy, water, food and climate change — was hosted as part of a partnership between the Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) and the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU).

Ntuli said aside from hundreds of lives lost and billions of rand spent on infrastructure repairs, these events also affect other factors such as food and energy supply in the areas it hits.

“When such events occur it is not only lives and physical infrastructure that gets disrupted, but livelihoods as well. Future earnings get obliterated and a better future for communities gets derailed.”

“In Tongaat for example, farmers, mainly broiler and egg farmers, lamented that the tornado had undermined their ability to produce chickens and eggs. This means that the retailers run out of stock and may mean the price of eggs or chicken products rises.”

He added KZN was implementing climate change strategy programmes to mitigate and adapt to the affects of climate change.

They include:

- Improvement of land management through invasive alien plant management, erosion control and switching to more resilient crop and livestock production systems (climate-smart agricultural practices).
- Promotion and mainstreaming of conservation agriculture.
- Strengthening water conservation, demand and resource management.
- Diversification of KZN's water supply sources.
- Promotion of sustainable agricultural water use management, which includes diversification of crops and use of water-harvesting mechanisms.
- Support the transition to sustainable and decentralised energy generation in the province.

“Cutting across all of these are finances, research education, communication and other means of ensuring implementation.”

The provincial government, MUT and FAMU are all in agreement that young people must learn more about resource security and environmental affairs if the affect of climate change is to be managed.



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Dr Victor Ibeanusi, FAMU's dean of the School of Environment and founder of the summit, said recruiting and training students to provide solutions to environmental challenges was his intention when he started the programme in 2015.

"We are able to capture real time data of 15 parameters that support coastal marine ecosystems," he said. "We also have the ability to capture satellite data to monitor climate change. With that we can make predictive models of how to mitigate climate change affect."

He said 14 scholarships would be made available — 10 for undergraduates, two for Masters and another two for PhDs.

"You have to give these young kids that leg-up. If you give anybody a leg-up they can thrive — that's how I thrived, somebody gave me a leg-up."

"That's how they can begin to solve this problem. Once we provide scholarships we can begin to train them. Some of them will come to our university and begin to learn. We have a programme called the Nexus scholars and residence that mandates every first-year student who comes with monetary research. That's how you get trained (with) support and monetary research so you can grow your skills."

Rev Thulasizwe Buthelezi, KZN's co-operative government and traditional affairs MEC, said they send leaners from all KZN districts to the US to learn more about resource security and environmental sustainability.

"As the KZN government, we have committed to send 11 leaners from all 11 districts who are doing matric overseas to go and study towards climate change, water conservation and energy transition so they can come back to deploy those skills here," he said.

Prof Nokuthula Sibiya, MUT acting vice-chancellor, said they want to establish a "centre of excellence" at the university that will focus on energy, water, food and climate challenges.

"We want to ultimately work with our sister universities from South Africa and even abroad, to continue with research to help bring solutions to these challenges."