



Restoring Landscapes. Empowering Communities. Building Futures.

As we conclude the first quarter of 2026, we reflect on a period of meaningful progress across our core pillars: community development, conservation, and enterprise support.

This quarter has once again demonstrated the power of partnerships. Through strong collaboration, we have expanded access to education, advanced ecological restoration efforts, and strengthened livelihoods across the Babanango region.

We remain committed to building a sustainable future where people and nature thrive together.

Q1 Newsletter 2026



Ecological Restoration Team (ERT) Update

The Ecological Restoration Team closed off 2025 on a high note, achieving the control of 730 hectares of land within Babanango Game Reserve, exceeding the annual target by 150 hectares.

Despite a challenging year marked by increased alien plant regrowth due to good rainfall, the team demonstrated resilience, strong work ethic, and unity.

A key milestone was the permanent deployment of a woodchipper which has significantly improved the management of excess biomass from felled wattle and eucalyptus trees, reducing fire risk and accelerating land rehabilitation.



Organic Farming & Entrepreneurship Programme

We kicked off the year with an exciting Organic Farming Programme in Babanango, starting with a powerful lesson: healthy soil is the foundation of life. Participants arrived eager and prepared, bringing kitchen waste and recyclable materials to begin their practical learning journey. Together, they explored composting techniques, learning how to balance green and brown materials to create nutrient-rich soil.

This hands-on programme fostered

collaboration, learning, and a deeper appreciation for sustainable farming practices. Every seed of knowledge planted will contribute to stronger food systems and community resilience.

Alongside this, our entrepreneurship training was filled with energy and creativity. Participants explored the idea that business is an art, and they are the artists. They learned about product differentiation, branding, and the importance of visual appeal in attracting

customers. One standout activity included creating unique, handcrafted beaded “Babanango B” products, designed as magnets and keychains, innovative, marketable, and proudly local.

Each participant confidently presented their business idea and even achieved real sales using their newly developed skills. This is just the beginning.

We remain committed to mentoring these entrepreneurs as they grow their businesses, build confidence, and contribute to a stronger local economy.



Where Water Meets Purpose: A Community Guardian's Story

In the community of Springfield, access to clean water is sustained not only by infrastructure, but by dedicated stewardship.

Meet Mmeli Buthelezi, the maintenance officer responsible for safeguarding the community borehole. For Mmeli, this role goes beyond employment, it's a commitment to service, pride, and community wellbeing.

This borehole is one of The Babanango Foundation's flagship water projects, developed in partnership with Babanango Game Reserve and officially handed over to Zululand District Municipality.

Each day, Mmeli ensures the system remains clean, functional, and leak-free. He conducts inspections, prevents water wastage, and educates community members, especially children, on the importance of protecting this shared resource.

Mmeli is one of six local officials formally contracted through the Municipality, marking a significant milestone for both the project and his personal journey. This opportunity provides income, dignity, and hope.



"Water is life," he says, "and it is my duty to protect it."

His story highlights a powerful truth: sustainable development depends not only on infrastructure, but on community ownership.

Career Expo: Reaching over 1,200 Learners

In partnership with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, The Babanango Foundation supported a large-scale career expo that reached over 1,200 matric learners from six schools: Mandela High School, Mpunga Mhlophe High School, Ekuthukutheni High School, Matshitsholo High School, as well as Sicelimfundo and Nhlopheni Combined Schools.

The expo provided learners with direct access to leading tertiary institutions and training providers, including:

- Durban University of Technology (DUT)
- Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT)
- University of South Africa (UNISA)
- Umgungundlovu TVET College
- Ithuba Agribusiness

Through these engagements, learners gained valuable insight into academic and vocational pathways, empowering them to make informed decisions about their futures.

This initiative forms part of our ongoing commitment to youth empowerment, education access, and career readiness in rural communities.



From Passion to Profession: Nhlakanipho's Journey

The Babanango Foundation is proud to support young people whose aspirations are grounded in opportunity and a strong connection to the natural environment.

One inspiring example is Nhlakanipho Mzwandile Sibiya, a bursary recipient currently enrolled at the Bushwise Field Guide Academy. At 34, Nhlakanipho comes from the Nhlopheni community and describes receiving the bursary as both exciting and deeply rewarding, especially given the high level of competition.

Nhlakanipho is particularly passionate about wildlife, with a strong interest in learning about the Big Five. He aspires to become a Head Guide and, in time, mentor future field guides. Beyond his personal ambitions, he hopes to inspire others in his community to explore careers in conservation—an area that was previously unfamiliar to many. The Bushwise programme is equipping him with essential skills in wildlife tracking, guiding, and practical field experience, opening pathways to employment and long-term impact.

At The Babanango Foundation, we believe that investing in individuals like Nhlakanipho is an investment in the future of both our communities and our environment. This quarter reflects the strength of our partnerships, the resilience of our communities, and the transformative impact of investing in people.

Together, we are restoring landscapes, unlocking opportunities, and building a future where both communities and ecosystems can thrive.

He reflects on his journey so far as "insightful and inspiring," praising the quality of training and mentorship offered through the programme.



Get Involved: Be Part of the Change

The impact we are creating at The Babanango Foundation is made possible through collaboration, shared vision, and the support of partners and individuals who believe in building a better future. There are many ways you can get involved and make a meaningful difference:

Partner with us to expand community development and conservation initiatives

Sponsor a programme or bursary to unlock opportunities for young people

Support our enterprise development work to help grow sustainable local businesses

Contribute resources or funding to scale our impact across the Babanango region

Every contribution, big or small, helps us restore landscapes, empower communities, and create lasting change.

If you would like to partner with us or learn more about how you can support our work, we would love to hear from you.

Together, we can build a future where people and nature thrive.



Contact

Thina Nyathi

Foundation Manager

T: +27 (0)31 100 0362

M: +27 (0)67 948 5569

E: thina.nyathi@babanango.com



www.thebabanangofoundation.com