

Nqobile Lushozi is as articulate in his speech as he is vivid in his ideas. Born, raised and schooled in the township of KwaNdengezi, Marianhill, KwaZulu-Natal, he went on to complete his undergraduate studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and is currently doing his Masters at the University of Stellenbosch.

The realisation that rainfall data is needed drove Lushozi to get up and put together an idea to get this job done.

“My idea is about developing a rainfall network in South Africa using a citizen science approach,” says Nqobile. “This involves using schools as point of measurement for rainfall data collection, because of their wide distribution in the country. Most of the schools are working with farming groups and ordinary citizens since there are already a number of people collecting rainfall data in their homes,” he adds.



*Nqobile Lushozi, Stellenbosch University*

Nqobile isn't just on a mission to collect data whichever way possible; rather, he intends working with ordinary people, particularly the young, as data collectors. He believes this will raise environmental consciousness of the people.

“Ordinary citizens have a role to play in our environment and the best time to begin to nurture this way of thinking is at a young age, hence my drive for working with schools,” explains Nqobile.

He believes that understanding the rainfall patterns is critical-

ly important, particularly if we are to survive our challenges of water scarcity. “Understanding patterns of rainfall is key in that this is one way we can begin to gauge water availability and understand how this is changing,” he says. He further argues, “A number of environmental problems (extending beyond water) are a result of a lack of awareness in our communities.”

But of course, as often said, “The bigger the ambition, the bigger the challenge.” Nqobile is no exception to the problems experienced by young entrepreneurs as he faces a number of challenges in his efforts. “As a young entrepreneur with an interest in environmental issues, the challenge for me is ensuring that my entrepreneurial ideas are in-line with the development agenda of my country,” he says.

For emerging young entrepreneurs like himself, Nqobile believes that building strong partnerships with larger institutions and NGOs within the citizen science space is one way for his projects to reach the desired destination.

Nqobile was amongst the privileged few young entrepreneurs selected to partake in the Imvelisi Bootcamp, an experience which he enthusiastically describes as “very inspiring”. “For me it was very helpful and inspiring because I went into the programme with just one idea in mind but I exited the bootcamp being aware of so many ideas around the environmental space.”

The bootcamp, he continued, “offered the opportunity to interact with many experienced people in the environmental and business start-up space and also other amazing fellows known as enviropreneurs.”

In five years' time, Nqobile sees the emergence of ‘Geographers for Change’, his company, being the go-to place for environmental monitoring data, monitoring more than just rainfall but also other important environmental variables. He excitedly points out: “I also see the data monitoring platform having a significant impact in our natural sciences learning space by offering learners a practical learning experience about environmental changes.”



*Nqobile in a group discussion*

Nqobile encourages other young South Africans to stand up and do something. "I would say that let us learn to start where we are and with what we have. Sometimes we hold back on ideas because we are afraid of the unknown, and, really, we don't have to figure out everything before we start, sometimes the best things lay in the journey ahead and unless we start, we will never know," he concludes.

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