

# Competition inspires learners to study civil engineering

The South African National Roads Agency (Sanral), the Unity in Africa Foundation and Labco recently hosted learners at the seventh annual bridge-building competition in Struandale in Gqeberha. Grade 11 and 12 learners who participated in the bridge-building competition have as a result been inspired to pursue careers in civil engineering.



Source: Supplied | The winning team, from left, Lunar Dakada, a grade 11 learner at Lawson Brown High School, Asemahle Beyi, a grade 11 learner at Sanctor High School and Lonwabo Xalanga, a grade 12 learner at Marymount High School – who all form part of the iGEMS education-to-employment programme – were crowned the winners of the annual iGEMS bridge-building competition hosted at the SANRAL Lab in Struandale, Gqeberha.

The learners all form part of the Unity in Africa Foundation's Incubating Great Engineering Minds (iGEMS) programme.

"Sanral remains passionate and committed to the development of the learners' education," said Mbulelo Peterson, Sanral southern regional manager.

The competition is based on the format and rules of the South African Institute of Civil Engineering's bridge-building competition. The learners had to design and then build model bridges using only wooden sticks, glue, sewing pins and rope in two hours and forty-five minutes, following functional specifications and construction methods.

## Graduates in engineering and IT

The key objective of the iGEMS programme is to increase the number of technical and engineering graduates from disadvantaged communities in Nelson Mandela Bay and then to place them in permanent employment.

"Our students are selected from the ongoing relationships we have built with various schools over the years. Working together with industry partners, students are placed in industry to do a learnership year before entering their chosen field of study," explained Berenice Rose, director of the Unity in Africa Foundation.

"We start with roadshows at various schools in and around Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) focused on grade 10 students who take core maths and physical science as school subjects with a strong interest in the engineering and IT spaces."

Lunar Dakada, 16 years old, who is in Grade 11 at Lawson Brown High School, said: "I am extremely happy. I wanted to study mechatronics engineering or civil engineering. After today's competition I am inspired to study civil engineering."

Lonwabo Xalanga, 17 years old, who is in Grade 12 at Marymount High School, said: "I am thrilled that we won because I did not expect this. I am inspired to study civil engineering or mechatronic engineering."

Asemahle Beyi, a Grade 11 learner at Sancto High School, said the exposure to civil engineering was inspiring. "Now that I have helped build a bridge, I want to add civil engineering to my list of potential careers to pursue. I am excited that we won."

The bridges were judged on aesthetics, weight and structural strength. Strength testing was done using suspended weights that stretched the bridges to breaking point in an ultimate showdown between the four teams.

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