

Young Scientists find impressive solutions to local challenges at Eskom Expo

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This year, the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists International Science Fair has unearthed talented young scientists with bright ideas to help solve common challenges that South Africans face.

These budding scientists have been recognised and rewarded at the Eskom Expo's special awards ceremony, held on Thursday 9 October, and hosted by recording artist ProVerb.

At the awards, a book chronicling the history of the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists: "Light Comes Out of Darkness", was launched by Professor Rosemary Gray, co-founder of the Eskom Expo.

Guests were treated to a stirring talk by Mthatha-born Siyabulela Xuzza, inventor of safe and affordable rocket fuel, Eskom Expo alumni, Harvard University graduate and now inventor of groundbreaking micro-fuel cell technology.

"It is an honour and a privilege to be back here [at the Eskom Expo]; this is where it all started. My story is a product of the vision that Dr Derek Gray and the Eskom Expo team had," he said.

Xuzza encouraged all the young scientists at the Eskom Expo to pursue their dreams and not be discouraged by setbacks and failures.

"South Africans, whether black or white, male or female, are capable of global innovations. Embrace the opportunity the Eskom Expo gives you," he said.

This year, 101 special awards were awarded to some of the most outstanding participants in South Africa's largest school-level science fair. The special awards are sponsored by Eskom and several other organisations and universities. Prizes include books, laptops, iPads, cash prizes and university bursaries.

The Eskom Expo, which is endorsed by the Department of Public Enterprises, Department of Basic Education and the Department of Science and Technology, has also received recognition from the presidency.

The Eskom Expo sees learners from 31 regions across the country competing for a ticket to the prestigious Eskom Expo for Young Scientists International Science Fair (ISF). Of the more than 17 000 learners who participated at a regional level, only the top 822 were selected to represent their regions at a national level.

At the ISF, these learners presented their projects to a panel of judges that included professionals from the private sector, academics, scientists and educators in a bid to take home a medal or special prize or a prized ticket to an international science fair like the 2014 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in Los Angeles, California.

The most prestigious special awards are awarded by Eskom to the Best Female Project, Best High School Development Project, Best Primary School Development Project, Best Energy Project and Best Energy Efficiency Project. They each won a laptop, and the development winners also won a mobile science kit to upgrade the science facilities at their schools.

Eskom Group Executive of Sustainability and Eskom Expo champion, Dr Steve Lennon, said: "These learners show what can be achieved with hard work, commitment and a passion for science. South Africa faces many complex problems, but with bright young minds like you at the helm, we will be able to tackle these challenges head-on."

The Eskom Special Award winners were:

- **Eskom Award for Best Overall Project and Best Rural Development Project:** Nondumiso Mthembu, a Grade 11 learner from Newcastle High School.
- **Eskom Award for Best Energy Project:** Jonathan Baker and Thomas Eichner, Grade 10 learners from St Stithians College.
- **Eskom Award for Best Energy Efficiency Project:** Lize Raubenheimer, a Grade 9 learner from Wesvalia High School.
- **Eskom Award for Best Female:** Jana Lotz, a Grade 9 learner from Bloemhof Girls High School.
- **Eskom Award for Best Development High School:** Sebalamakgolo High School.
- **Eskom Award for Best Development Primary School:** Isiqophamithi Primary School.

In the last few years, the Eskom Expo has grown from strength to strength, and in recent years there has been a focus on drawing more female learners into the competition. This year, 477 female learners competed alongside learners from as far afield as Mexico, and from our neighbouring countries Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Parthy Chetty, Eskom Expo for Young Scientists Executive Director, said: "South Africa wants to establish itself as a hub of science research and excellence. The strength of the projects on display this year has shown me that South Africa has a bright future indeed and I believe that we will soon be seeing a cohort of strong female scientists forging a new future for South Africa."

This science fair not only exposes learners to the exciting world of science, but learners also gain several important life skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving as well as discipline, presentation skills, the importance of team work as well as learning to interact with people from a variety of backgrounds.