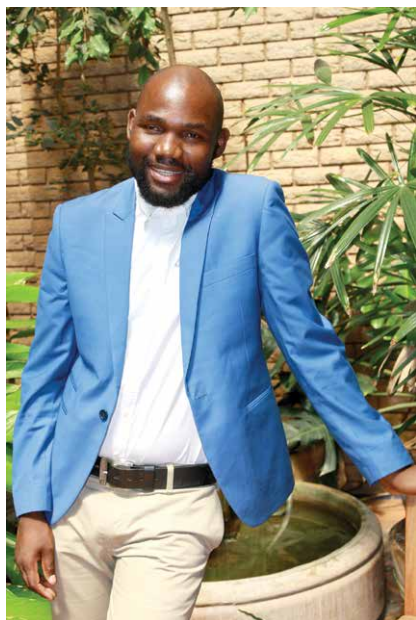


# Water personality

## Every child deserves to have hope and ambition

*Young water professional, Nakampe Modike, has not only managed to overcome difficulties in his own life to have a successful career, he is also helping to create a new generation of young people working in the water sector. Lani van Vuuren spoke to him.*



*Nakampe Modike*

Hailing from humble beginnings, 32-year-old Nakampe has achieved more than many men his age. Yet, when meeting this tall, shy, yet calmly confident young man, one could mistake him for just another young, up-and-coming water professional.

This would be grossly underestimating a man who is, through his non-profit organisation, African Hands for Youth, inspiring and leading a generation of young people who would otherwise have little to aspire to. Not only is he giving them back their hopes and dreams of an education and a career, he is turning these dreams into reality.

Young people from rural backgrounds, like himself. Nakampe grew up in Relela village, outside Tzaneen in rural Limpopo, in the house of his grandparents. Ambitious from an early age he realised that the only way to improve his circumstances was through education. "I wasn't a straight A student, but I was determined to learn wherever and whenever I could."

So much was his determination that he once attended four schools at the same time. "I would attend my local high school (Kgwe Kgwe High School) in the morning until 14h00, then join a study group from another school in the afternoons. When yet another high school offered extra classes I was there, and during the winter months I attending the winter school of a fourth high school," Nakampe explains.

But once he passed matric he didn't know where to go. Overhearing his old study friends talk about Pretoria, he decided that this was going to be his destination. His family managed to raise R500, and armed with a small bag of clothes, his matric certificate, his ID document and a 2 kg bucket of achar (a farewell gift from his mother) he boarded the bus to Pretoria – a city he had only heard of before then.

By chance, he ended up at the Tshwane University of Technology. Here he queued for days in order to obtain

financial support from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, often sleeping on the floor. He enrolled in the first course that accepted him – Water Care. To supplement his funding, he worked as a security guard in his spare time.

His first job was as an operator at a sewage treatment plant. His career took several turns from there, and today he works as an audit specialist: water treatment in the internal audit department of Rand Water, where he analyses the potential risks of Africa's largest water utility.

Is he happy that fate brought him to the water sector? "Working in the water sector is not a career it is a calling," says Nakampe. "In other sectors the goal is profit, but in the water sector the aim is so much more – adding to the quality of life of a person by providing regular access to good quality water. If you do not give your best you could be putting someone's health – even their life – in jeopardy. That is a great responsibility."

Now successful in his own life, the harrowing experience Nakampe had to undergo as a school leaver never left him. Just as they often lack access to basic services, such as water, sanitation and healthcare, South Africa's rural communities also suffer from a dearth of information, he notes. "I had no idea of the career options available to me,

and no guidance was offered in terms of applying to university or for a bursary or even what awaited me once I got onto that campus."

## African Hands for Youth

Nakampe is determined to change this situation. Even as a student he started taking university applications and course brochures home to the learners at his old high school so that they would be better informed than he was. "I didn't want them to go through the same ordeal as I had." When he was a process controller at the wastewater treatment works in Roossenekal, in Limpopo, he gave tours to local school children of the works. It was also here that his passion for career guidance started.

This eventually led to the birth of African Hands for Youth. Initially, the focus was to provide learners with access to university and bursary applications forms, but later the organisation extended its services to share information on careers, water and sanitation with learners. The organisation works mainly in the Motupa and Modjadji educational Circuits Limpopo, however, repeated requests from other rural areas will see it expanding its reach this year to provinces such as North West and KwaZulu-Natal.

Learners are not only told about the career opportunities available to them, they are also assisted in making the right subject choice. When Nakampe found out that many learners were not choosing mathematics as a subject as they lacked access to math sets and calculators, he arranged sponsorship from the Rand Water Foundation. Other organisations, such as the Water Institute of Southern Africa, have assisted in providing water bottles so the learners can stay hydrated on the long walk to school.

## Right tools for the job

Nakampe's paths first crossed with the Water Research Commission a few years ago. Since then, he has become one of the main beneficiaries of the Commission's educational materials,

including the *Water Wheel* Water Kidz edition, water cycle posters, and the *Water@Work Career Guide*.

It is the career guide that has got Nakampe especially excited. "I have seen many career guides in my time, but none so comprehensive. The WRC's career guide includes everything, from which subjects to choose to study for a certain career to detailed information about bursaries and tertiary institutions, even FET colleges!"

*"There is nothing that motivates a child like a student number."*

In 2014, it was through African Hands for Youth that the WRC launched its comic book, *The Thirsty Three*, at Morutsi Primary School, in Limpopo. Two thousand graphic novels, along with other education material, were distributed to the children that day.

Through their efforts, the organisation has reached more than 7 000 learners to date. Nakampe's organisation has been so successful that it has managed to raise not only school attendance but also the matric pass rate in the Motupa circuit from 47% to 68% in the last two years. The mathematics pass rate has increased from 21% in 2011 to 39% in 2013, while the physical sciences pass rate has increased from 29% to 46% during the same period. "There is nothing that motivates a child like a student number," says Nakampe. "Once the learners have been provided with assistance in applying for tertiary education they have something to work for."

Nakampe is particularly proud of the fact that five learners have now gone on to study various engineering and technical water degrees at university and universities of technology as a direct result of the intervention of African Hands of Youth. But the need for further support is significant. "These children are now earning the grades, and being

accepted for further study, but obtaining the necessary funding for them to further their studies is difficult, as there is just not financial support for students to go around," notes Nakampe. Much of the funding comes from his own pocket, and he has even gone so far and taking a student into his own home.

Nakampe calls on particularly the water and engineering fraternities to invest in the capacity building of South Africa's scarce skills. "Imagine if these children can become engineers and technicians and go back to their communities – what a difference they would make."

African Hands for Youth has an ambitious vision. "We want to see the youth in rural schools having the same dreams and aspirations as their counterparts in urban areas. Why must they be left behind, just because they were born in a different part of South Africa?"

**To find out more about African Hands for Youth's activities,** visit their Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/africanhands4youth?fref=ts>, their web page, <http://ah4youth.org.za> or contact Nakampe Modike at Email: [nakampe@ah4youth.org.za](mailto:nakampe@ah4youth.org.za)



*Nakampe and his organisation, African Hands for Youth have reached over 7000 rural children to date.*