

# EcoLink is celebrating 50 years

Empowering communities, protecting nature

Mar 3, 2026 · 10 min read



## CHAMPIONING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

We're pleased to share that **EcoLink** will begin sending occasional updates to keep you informed about our activities, partnerships, and the ongoing work connected to its flagship programme **Diamonds on the Soles of our Feet**.

You are receiving this email because you have been part of the EcoLink journey - as a donor, partner school, university collaborator, student, colleague, or friend. We are grateful for your involvement and would like to keep you updated on the progress and impact of the project.

**Through these updates, we hope to stay connected with our wider network and share key milestones, stories, and developments from our work together.**

If at any point you would prefer not to receive these emails, you can manage your subscription using the link provided at the bottom of each newsletter.



**EcoLink is proud to celebrate five decades at the forefront of citizen science, environmental education and sustainable development in South Africa.** Founded in 1976 by Dr Sue Hart, Africa's first woman veterinarian and a renowned conservationist, EcoLink dedicates its work to **enhancing water and food security, alleviating poverty, and fostering resilience through holistic training programmes.** Its flagship programme, **Diamonds on the Soles of our Feet**, successfully demonstrates how learning with emotions can bring science closer to communities and inspire environmental stewardship for a more sustainable future.

As one of the longest-surviving NGOs in South Africa, EcoLink continues to expand its thriving initiatives, bridging scientific knowledge with lived experience to empower communities, ignite a passion for science, and protect ecosystems. At its core, EcoLink nurtures a deep respect and care for both people and planet.

We wholeheartedly thank our wonderful donors whose past and continued support is vital to EcoLink's success.

[Get involved, give heart & make a difference](#)



[EXPLORE OUR JOURNEY AND JOIN US IN BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE AND HOPEFUL FUTURE →](#)

### Rooted in individual effort and intentionality

EcoLink began on Dr Sue Hart's private property, Mhlanlanyoni, meaning *"the place where the bird rests"*, where the grassroots initiative grew into a pioneering Environmental Education and Training Centre.

Fondly known as the original *"Daktari"* (Swahili for healer), Dr Hart was a visionary conservationist whose generosity and commitment to learning with the heart inspired generations. The organisation proudly honours her legacy, carrying forward a mission to restore hope and dignity in communities while fostering a deep and lasting respect for nature.



*Dr Sue Hart in 1974 shortly before EcoLink was founded*

**Diamonds on the Soles of our Feet (DSF)** is EcoLink's expanding flagship programme, a global initiative that brings communities closer to nature through the power of citizen science. **By taking science out of the laboratory and into real life, DSF equips participants to engage with pressing environmental issues that directly affect their lives.** Through hands-on, creative learning experiences, DSF fosters curiosity, joy, and a deep connection to the natural world. Its "heart-beat pedagogy" combines scientific knowledge with local culture, integrating poetry, dance, storytelling, music, and art into the learning process. This approach makes learning accessible, participatory, and joyful, ensuring that education is both meaningful and impactful for every participant.

*"We believe that keeping science education in laboratories and libraries affirms what Bozalek and Zembylas (2023) call "privileged irresponsibility". We propose that citizen science and its transformative potential can be one way to redress such irresponsibility," writes Jacqueline Goldin, anthropologist and forerunner of DSF in her paper Pedagogy with a heartbeat: The transformative potential of citizen science in education.*

DSF envisions a world where individuals and communities are empowered to protect their local ecosystems and water sources. By equipping young people with the knowledge and tools to become environmental stewards, DSF creates a ripple effect that extends from local communities to the global stage.

[Get involved, give heart & make a difference](#)



**Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world**

Nelson Mandela

### Success stories of 2025: Roots of change growing globally.

What began as a small initiative in South Africa has now expanded into a global programme, working with multiple partners around the world.

The launch of **DSF Goes Global** in Narok County, Kenya, marked an exciting new chapter in 2025. Through a **vital partnership with the Mara Basin Conservation Forum (MBCF)**, **DSF reached 21 schools in just one week on World Water Day, 22 March 2025**, an impressive achievement given the long distances and challenging infrastructure marking a resounding success to build on. As one teacher reflected:

*"The roads are really bad. I was so pleased that MBCF still came to my school. DSF is already creating change in the community. It's beginning. It takes time and passion..."*

At the heart of DSF's work is the belief that schools are more than places of learning, they are collaborative ecosystems where students, teachers, parents, and local leaders grow together.



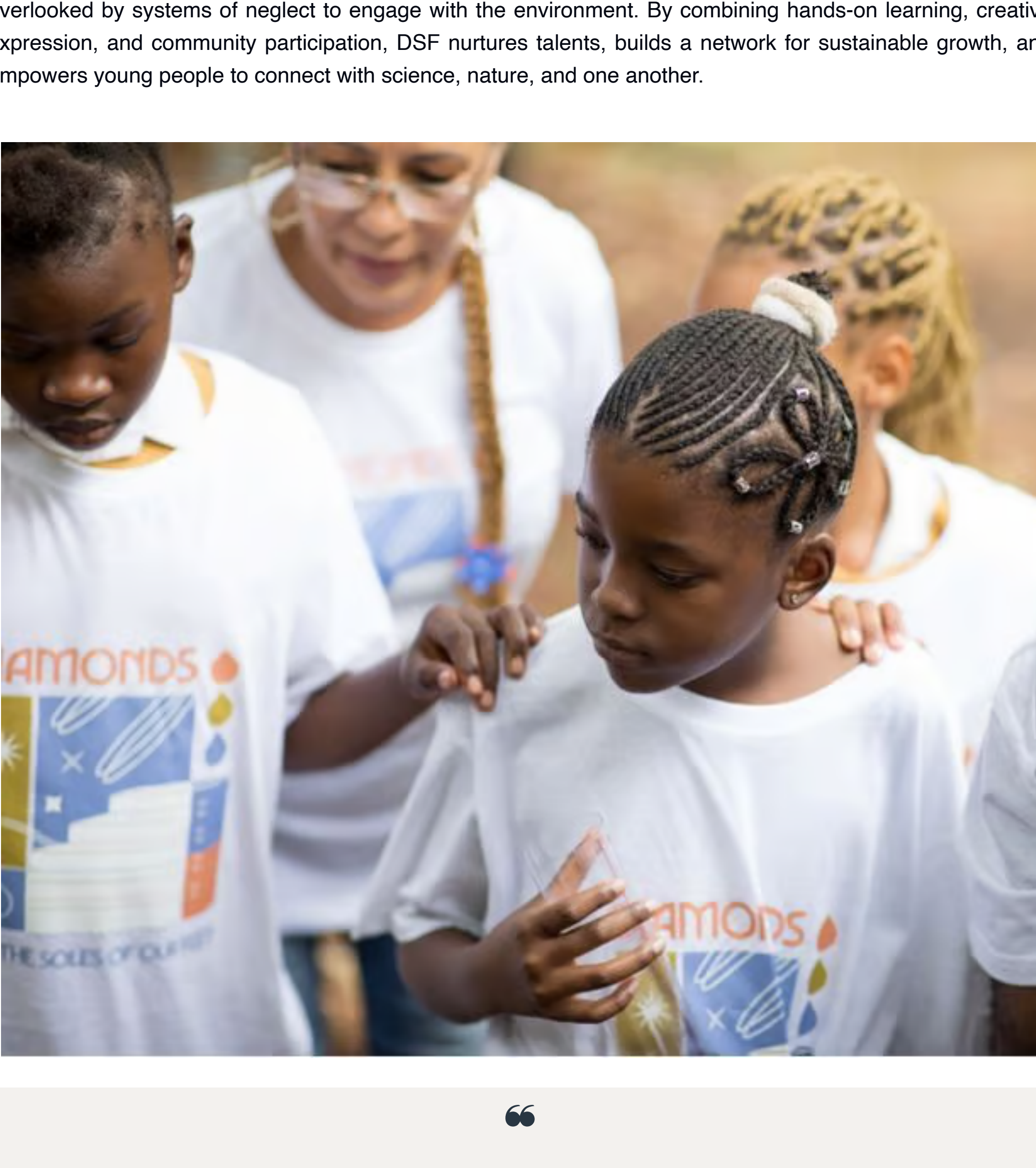
**The Mandela Day** on July 18th served as a powerful day to nurture empathy, leadership, critical thinking and civic responsibility alongside academic skills. The event included community service, educational workshops, tree planting, and student-led discussions on social justice and equality setting an emphasis on the role of education in **shaping not just minds but futures.**

The Mandela Day celebration was more than a commemorative event. It was a call to action, a reminder that investing in our children's education is investing in a better, more just world. Through collaborative learning, shared responsibility, and a spirit of ubuntu (humanity toward others), we honour Mandela's legacy not only in words, but action.

In Limpopo, where DSF began in 2019, Catherine Basson and Dora Masahela continue to inspire through the "Learning on the DSF" model. As field manager Murendeni Mavhungu observes:

*"The kids were so enthusiastic and engaged with every Diamond-related question. Teachers said students are much more excited about science. We are building scientists for the future."*

DSF takes a **holistic approach to education, addressing challenges such as low water literacy, limited infrastructure, and inequitable access to science. Using citizen science as more than a method, the programme cultivates curiosity, care, and inclusion, allowing learners and communities that are often overlooked by systems of neglect to engage with the environment.** By combining hands-on learning, creative expression, and community participation, DSF nurtures talents, builds a network for sustainable growth, and empowers young people to connect with science, nature, and one another.



**The programme allows us to pay closer attention to places and people who have been rendered invisible by systems of neglect and abstraction. CS means to cultivate care in a world that desperately needs it**

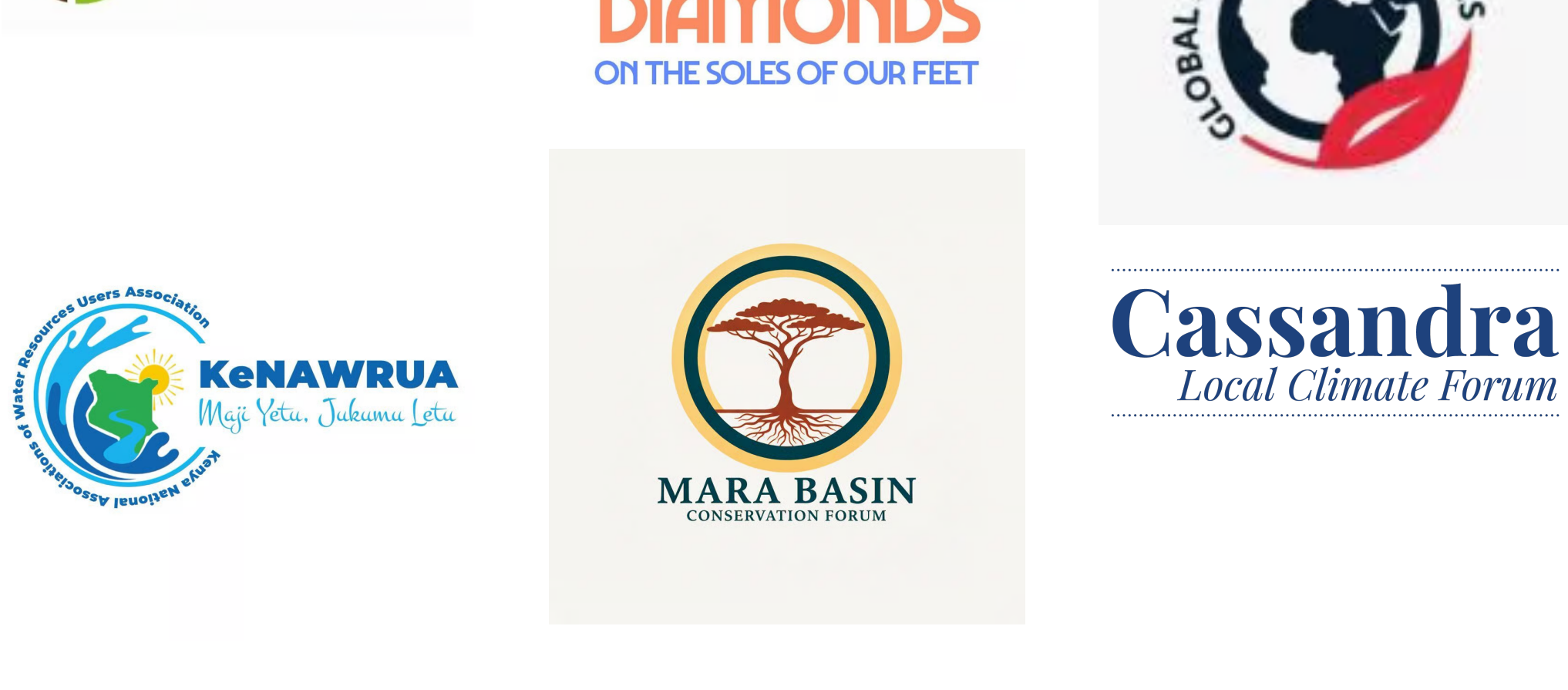
### Reflecting on 2025 and Looking Ahead.

In 2025, EcoLink took significant strides in its ongoing journey of growth and impact. The participation at the **Citizen Science Association for South Africa (CSA SA)**, along with DSF's participation at the **CSA4Water Conference** in Delft, which included a panel session and a paper on the programme, highlighted the organisation's commitment to driving continuous change through scientific approaches. It showcases the reach and influence of its citizen science initiative on a growing scale.

As we celebrate 50 years of EcoLink, we are inspired by the **transformative impact of Learning with the Heart** and excited to expand DSF globally while growing our projects to support communities holistically.

[Get Involved](#)

We wholeheartedly thank our dedicated partners, generous donors, change makers on the ground, and partner schools for your trust, support, and commitment.



[EcoLink - Today for the Future](#)

### Keep reading

