

‘Groundbreaking’ research on the cards for Phikolomzi

By Nicola Spingies

Overlooking the lush courtyard of Stellenbosch University’s Natural Sciences building is Ph.D. candidate Phikolomzi Matikinca’s (Phiko) second-floor office. The office space is playing host to the final chapter of an academic career marked with success and achievement, with its last installment brimming with groundbreaking potential.

In 2014, Phiko was the first recipient of the John and Maureen Summers Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship is awarded through the [Sifunda Kunye Foundation](#), an organization that partnered with Phiko to support his studies. He is the third of six children, and the first in his immediate family to attend university. The foundation’s support has meant a great deal for Phiko over his numerous years of study as it helped him fund the “necessary essentials to keep [him] going throughout the year”, he says. As the primary caregiver of his household, Phiko says that financial aid has certainly helped him to make ends meet and care for his siblings because they do not have parents nor anyone else supporting them. "My siblings are very important to me, and I have a big responsibility to take care of them," he says.

In the academic realm, Phiko is currently busy with his doctorate on climate change and marine invasion biology. His research, the first of its kind in the South African context, explores how the predicted future climate change might affect marine biological invasions, with a particular focus on fouling organisms which are problematic for the aquaculture industry. “I hope that my research will be a stepping stone for people to respond to the challenges of climate change now and in the future,” he says. “It is something that hasn’t been done [in South Africa] before, so it has the potential to be quite groundbreaking.”

He has been interested in the ways of the world since his high school days, Phiko says. "Since [high] school, I've had a love for geography. At university, that translated into environmental sciences and an interest in climate change, policies, adaptation and mitigation," he says.

The nature of the Ph.D. project at SU fascinated Phiko. “I’ve done climate change work before but not in the marine context and how it applies in the marine environment. That, along with the number of skills I would have by the end of the program, really interested me,” he says.

Phiko previously obtained his undergraduate and honors degrees in Environmental Sciences and Geology from Rhodes University and his master's in Climate Change and Development from the University of Cape Town.

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