



INTERNET ARTICLE

Mpumalanga to represent South Africa at Youth Water Prize competition in Sweden

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Mpumalanga has made history after a Grade 11 learner from Sintintile Secondary School was crowned the 2026 national winner of the South African Youth Water Prize (SAYWP), a competition hosted by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS). This achievement marks a significant milestone for the province, as it is the first time Mpumalanga has secured the prestigious national title.

The 27th SAYWP national finals took place on 29 May 2026 at the Protea Hotel OR Tambo in Kempton Park, Johannesburg, where Sinenhlanhla Sikhulile Nkosi, from Kanyamazane in Mbombela, Mpumalanga, was announced as the overall winner, securing the competition's top honours.

The SAYWP is an educational initiative led by DWS, aimed at learners in Grades 9 to 11. The competition allows learners to compete individually or in pairs, with a strong focus on innovation, awareness, and a commitment to water and environmental issues. Most importantly, learners are required to identify water-related challenges within their schools or communities and respond by conducting a comprehensive research, developing practical solutions, and creating models or inventions to address these challenges.

Sinenhlanhla impressed the judging panel with his project titled "*The Sentinel Barrier*". The project presents an engineered silicone-based elastomeric coating applied to the internal surface of Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) plastic bottles, designed to prevent microplastic release and chemical leaching into water.

As the national winner, Sinenhlanhla will represent South Africa at the international Stockholm Junior Water Prize in Sweden this August, where he will compete against 30 learners from various countries. His achievement marks a significant breakthrough in youth participation in science-driven solutions to environmental challenges.

Speaking proudly and with gratitude, Sinenhlanhla said, "Winning still feels hard to believe. More than a personal achievement, I am excited to share my invention with the world. Stockholm is where leading water experts come together, and taking my solution from Kanyamazane in Mpumalanga to that global platform means a great deal to me. It demonstrates that innovation does not always require extensive resources or large institutions, only a problem to solve and the determination to address it."

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After completing his matric, Sinenhlanhla stated, “I want to study Mechanical Engineering. My invention addresses a materials-based problem, and a Mechanical Engineering degree will equip me with the knowledge to improve it further and develop scalable solutions for wider use”.

Sinenhlanhla added, “Mechanical engineers play a vital role in designing systems for water treatment and ensuring water quality. Since microplastic contamination is a growing concern, I aim to contribute to solving this challenge through my future work as a mechanical engineer.”

To motivate fellow learners, Sinenhlanhla encouraged those who did not win, saying that competition results do not define the quality of an idea. He emphasised that every project contributes to learning and improvement, helping to strengthen future work. He further advised learners not to compare their progress with others, but to focus on their own growth and development.

Department officials praised the young innovator while also recognising the crucial contribution of educators and mentors in developing and unlocking the potential of young South Africans. The Department further reiterated its commitment to strengthening collaboration with the Department of Basic Education to enhance water education and broaden opportunities for meaningful youth participation in the water sector.

Nhlamulo Makhubele

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