

Singita  
**LOWVELD  
TRUST**

Holistic Early Childhood  
Development (ECD)



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The Singita Lowveld Trust is a non-profit organisation committed to the preservation and restoration of wilderness areas in South Africa, collaborating with communities to build healthy eco-systems in which people and nature can thrive.

## SINGITA LOWVELD TRUST

# Overview

Singita Lowveld Trust is Singita's conservation partner in South Africa. Formerly known as the Singita Community Development Trust, the not-for-profit Singita Lowveld Trust has been the committed custodian of the Greater Kruger Park region since 2006.

Singita Lowveld Trust places significant focus on building long-term, meaningful community partnerships in the region. Singita Lowveld Trust community partnerships have three main objectives:



### Education

Supporting quality education and professional skills development.



### Enterprise Development

Developing rural entrepreneurs and small enterprises.



### Environmental Awareness

Promoting environmental awareness and sustainable natural resource management.

These partnerships provide socio-economic opportunities and support resilient livelihoods to enhance diversified income streams for the deeply impoverished rural communities in villages near Singita Sabi Sand and Singita Kruger National Park. It supports a spectrum of partnerships spanning all stages of life, from early childhood development and formal schooling to income-earning opportunities for school-leavers and the many unemployed youth in this region.

Singita Lowveld Trust also supports the safeguarding and monitoring of the many species of conservation concern in this region (rhinos, leopards, vultures and large raptors, lions and wild dogs), as well as the effective conservation management of reserves.

COLLABORATION | RESTORATION | RESILIENCE



# Purpose

Recognising the crucial role of Early Childhood Development (ECD) as the foundation in shaping a child's future success, the Singita Lowveld Trust has significantly focused on this area as part of its community initiatives.

Research has found that 85% of brain development occurs in the first five years of a child's life, including executive functions (self-control, working memory, and cognitive flexibility), all of which contribute to school readiness. During this critical window, the foundations for physical and mental development are established, unlocking the full potential of formal learning capabilities.

Children who are exposed to quality ECD programmes:

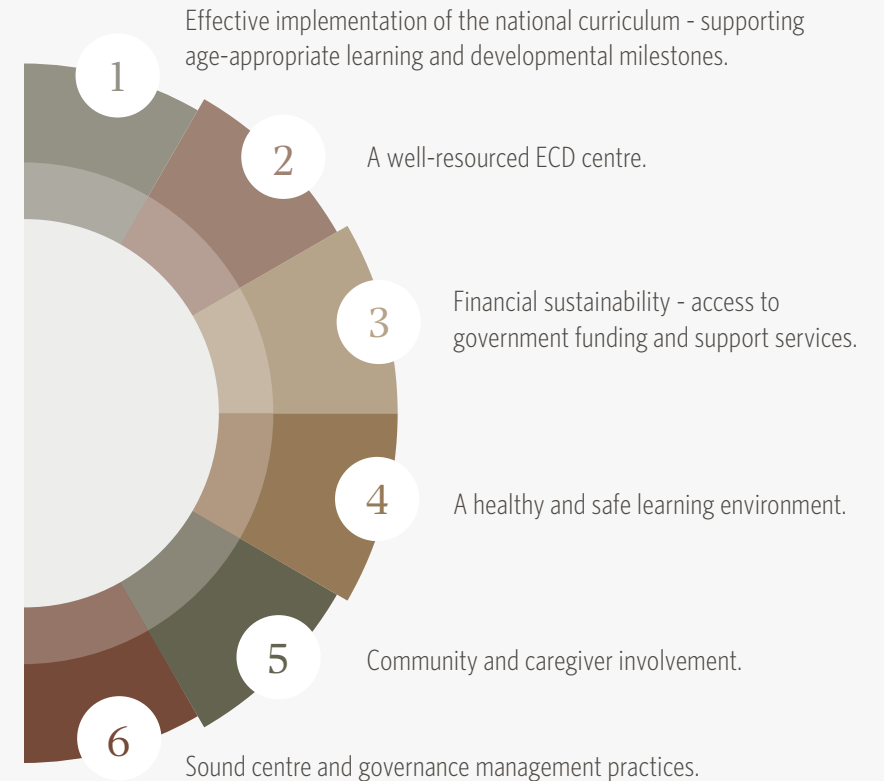
- Perform better at formal school.
- Are more likely to be employed.
- Are less likely to need costly remedial education.

Despite its significance, historically, the ECD sector in South Africa has been under-resourced and poorly regulated and supported, especially in rural areas.

# History

After 10 years of supporting Grade R classes (i.e. the five-to-six-year-old age group) and practitioners (teachers), Singita Lowveld Trust redeveloped its ECD programme to align with the new policies and guidelines and to focus on fostering good-practice models across the region. Over the past five years, the Singita Lowveld Trust has implemented a comprehensive Holistic ECD Support Programme that encompasses the physical (nutritional, health and safety) and age-appropriate developmental needs of children aged 0 to five years old. Through a structured four-year support cycle, ECD centres receive assistance and guidance from the Singita Lowveld Trust. By the end of this cycle, the centres will emerge as Good Practice centres. At this point, a new group of schools will be accepted into the programme, continuing the Singita Lowveld Trust's commitment to nurturing quality early childhood education.

**A holistic support programme aims to offer support on the following six competency areas that form a basis of a good-practice ECD model:**



## Core components of the ECD programme



### Phased ECD centre support:

A phased onsite programme is offered. School leadership, governance and administration skills are developed in ECD centre managers. ECD practitioners are trained to establish a stimulating and innovative learning programme, and parents learn about the crucial role they play in their children's development.

Support is intensive in the first two to three years. These “good practice centres” will then inspire and mentor the next group of ECD centres to the programme, thereby continuing the virtuous circle.



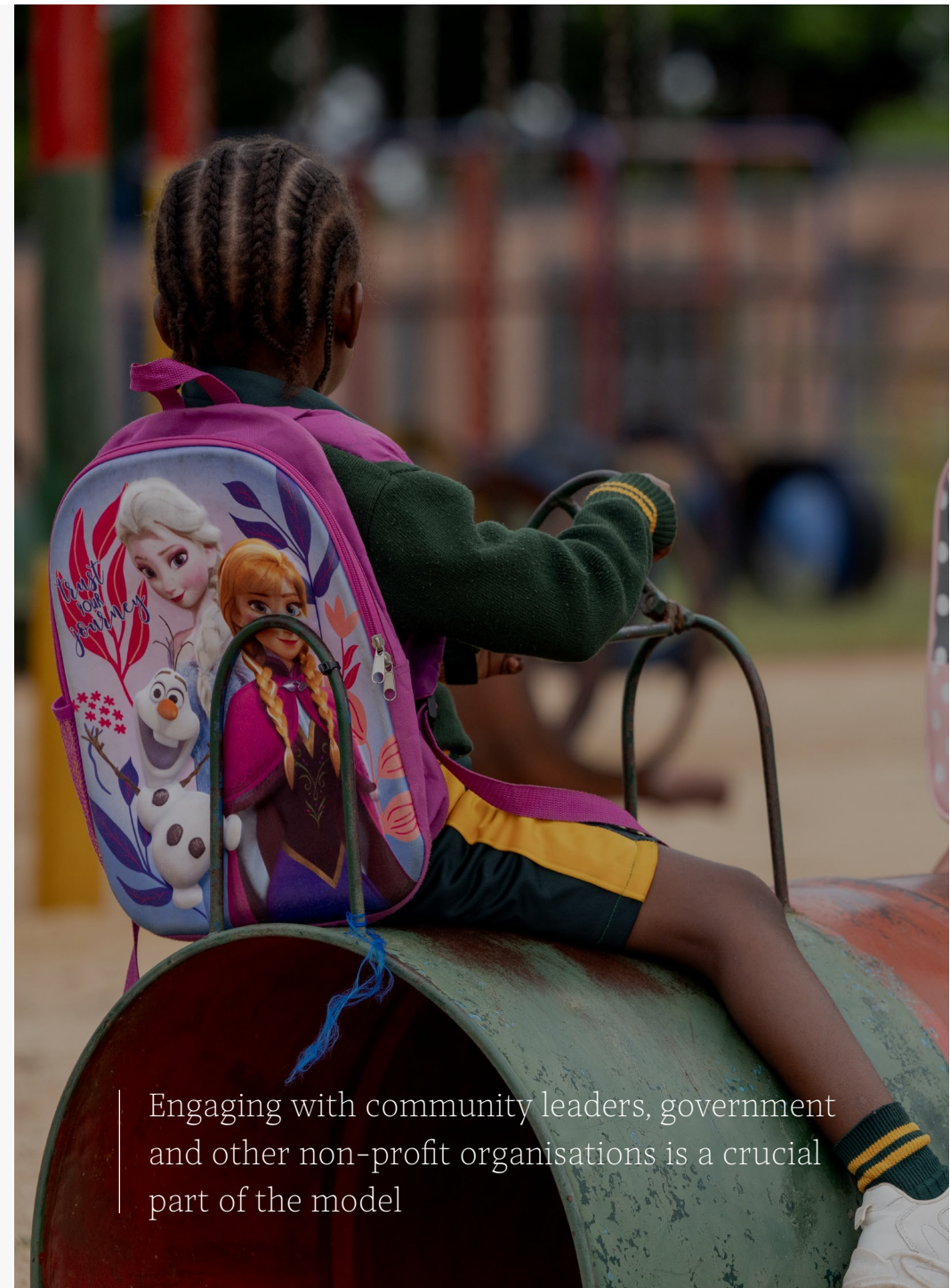
### An ECD resource drive

ECD centres in South Africa simply cannot afford the educational equipment and resources they need to stimulate young minds during this crucial period of their cognitive, language, physical and psycho-social development. Singita Lowveld Trust purchases and distributes quality educational toys, learning materials and equipment to a specific age group each year. This annual resource drive is generously supported by Singita guests and donors. An overview of resource materials is provided on **page 8**.



### Continuous stakeholder engagement

This partnership programme will not succeed working in isolation; engaging with community leaders, government, and other non-profit organisations is crucial to the model. For example, the Singita Lowveld Trust works with government partners to ensure centres are registered to access relevant grants and that children are well-nourished and in good health. Together with local community leaders, the Singita Lowveld Trust is building an awareness of the importance of the early years for future life prospects.



Engaging with community leaders, government and other non-profit organisations is a crucial part of the model

# ECD support programme

Singita Lowveld Trust currently supports:

17 ECD centres across 9 villages.

A fluctuating annual enrolment of between 1700 and 2000 preschoolers each year.

67 classrooms across 17 ECD centres were equipped with educational learning materials, playground and music equipment, educational toys, games and classroom furniture between 2019 and 2022.





A full-time ECD trainer provides weekly training to centre managers and practitioners.



## DEFINITION OF A GOOD PRACTICE CENTRE

A best-practice monitoring, evaluation and learning system is in place to continuously evaluate and identify good practice centres.

Annually, centres are assessed against the below characteristics:

-  Stimulating learning programme.
-  Well-resourced classrooms.
-  Access to government funding and support services.
-  Healthy, safe and secure learning environment.
-  Engaged caregiver and community support.
-  Functional management systems.

## PROGRESS AGAINST EACH FOCUS AREA AND DEGREE OF COMPETENCY REACHED

### ● Achieved

(90% + completed across all centres)



#### Stimulating Learning Programme

- The programme supports 80 centre managers and practitioners and just over 1700 children.
- At least 90% of practitioners excel in five key areas of ECD practice, including their daily programme, classroom layout, teaching practice, group activities and use of classroom resources.
- An impressive 80% of Singita Lowveld Trust practitioners will have received the minimum NQF Level 4 training by the end of 2023.
- A full-time ECD trainer provides weekly training to centre managers and practitioners.



#### Well resourced

- 80 classes across 17 ECD Centres were equipped with educational learning materials, playground and music equipment, educational toys, games and classroom furniture between 2019 and 2022.

### ● Partially achieved

(70 - 80% achieved across all centres)



#### Healthy and Safe Learning Environment

- 70% of ECD centres have a staff member with a current first aid qualification.
- Other criteria for centres to improve on their health and safety competency include restocking first aid kits, implementing a healthy menu (a function of budgetary constraints) and improving record-keeping of incidents.



#### Government Funding and Support

- 88% of ECD centres receive government subsidies, contributing to staff salaries, food for children and operational costs.
- The relationships that a centre has with government departments are crucial to this competency area, as this is how support and services are accessed. Despite the funding received, support is not offered to all centres, is sporadic, and centres are only sometimes clear about what support they can expect.
- Singita Lowveld Trust will engage with the various governmental departments to map their ECD services.

### ● Not yet achieved

(<60% ongoing support)



#### Caregiver and Community Involvement

(parent/caregiver focus training and involvement)

- 100% of ECD centres hold parent body meetings (to orient new parents, verify income for subsidy purposes, plan for graduation and/or discuss trips); however, attendance is low.
- Singita Lowveld Trust will identify resources and offer support as appropriate for centres to achieve these competencies.



#### Functional Management

(support for transition to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) - implementation and understanding of policies, procedures, record-keeping, strong governing body, and department support.

- 82% have an established school governing body with a constitution, and regular minutes of the meetings are recorded and kept.
- Singita Lowveld Trust will engage with DBE on key areas that require support; accessibility of policy templates, provincial finance training, school governing body orientation, employee contracts, and learner reports).

# Annual resource drive

Rural pre-schools often lack the most basic safety equipment, educational toys and furniture. The Singita Lowveld Trust has successfully provided essential resources for all age groups, including 0-18 months, 19-36 months, 37-48 months, and 49-60 months.

- The resource inventory developed by an ECD specialist includes **over 500** age-appropriate and durable items **per school**.
- Deliveries occur once a year and are celebrated community-wide; they are distributed equitably to all **17 centres**.
- Practitioners are trained to use resources to provide a **stimulating, age-appropriate learning environment**.

## Resources include:



**Safety equipment:** first aid kits and fire extinguishers.



**Furniture:** tables, chairs, storage, cots and changing tables for babies, carpets, sleeping mats



**Reading Corners:** libraries of 430 local Xitsonga/Shangaan books.



**Educational toys:** blocks, puzzles, bean bags, memory and counting games, cars, pull-along toys.



**Fantasy corners:** rag dolls with baby care accessories, play kitchens, housekeeping toys, dress-up costumes.



**Kitchen equipment:** dishes and utensils.



**Arts and crafts supplies.**



**Outdoor play equipment:** balance beam, sand play toys, skipping ropes, stilts, push wheels.



**Musical instruments:** tambourines, drums, bells, castanets, shakers, cymbals, triangles, claves.





## Meet Frank Makwakwa, ECD Specialist Trainer

The success of delivering well-resourced, well-trained ECD centres rests largely on the passion and knowledge of key individuals like Frank Makwakwa, providing daily training support and encouragement for the centre managers and their staff. The passion and dedication of individuals like Frank bring this model alive and make daily progress and impact possible.

Onsite, regular face-to-face training and engagement with the centre staff are central to this support – the practitioners are the interface between the children and the educational resources provided and give the curriculum life through term plans, weekly themes and daily planned activities. Frank oversees the training of all teachers/practitioners across all 17 ECD centres, who received training on the National Curriculum Framework and are now supported by Frank to implement this in their classrooms.

A day in the life of Frank's training ranges from demonstrating the correct usage of classroom learning materials and toys to supporting practitioners in learning the proper teaching techniques.

All are aimed at helping children develop gross motor skills, reasoning and problem-solving, numerical and verbal literacy and creativity, as well as social development and emotional skills and conflict resolution.

The Singita Lowveld Trust's recent annual Monitoring and Evaluation Survey has highlighted the value and appreciation of Frank's specialist knowledge and trainer role as the critical success factor for this programme.

All practitioners and centre managers indicated hands-on input from Frank was how they feel such significant progress has been made in such a short time. He is very proud of the progress and impact he is making daily.

"The progress is heartening and tangible. When you look at the children and see how they have matured in quite a short time once they enter the ECD programme, the progress is remarkable. Children are wonderful, they learn so quickly."  
– Frank Makwakwa



## How can I get involved?

Singita Lowveld Trust programmes are supported by donors, sponsors and guests, allowing the scaling of our reach and impact and developing meaningful long-term community partnerships. The need is far greater than our current reach, and any additional funding support will enable the Singita Lowveld Trust to expand its critical support to additional ECD centres not yet supported.

Become part of this ongoing success story that changes lives by equipping young minds for the future. Donate to support the Singita Lowveld Trust annual ECD resource drive or the training of the next cohort of ECD centres.

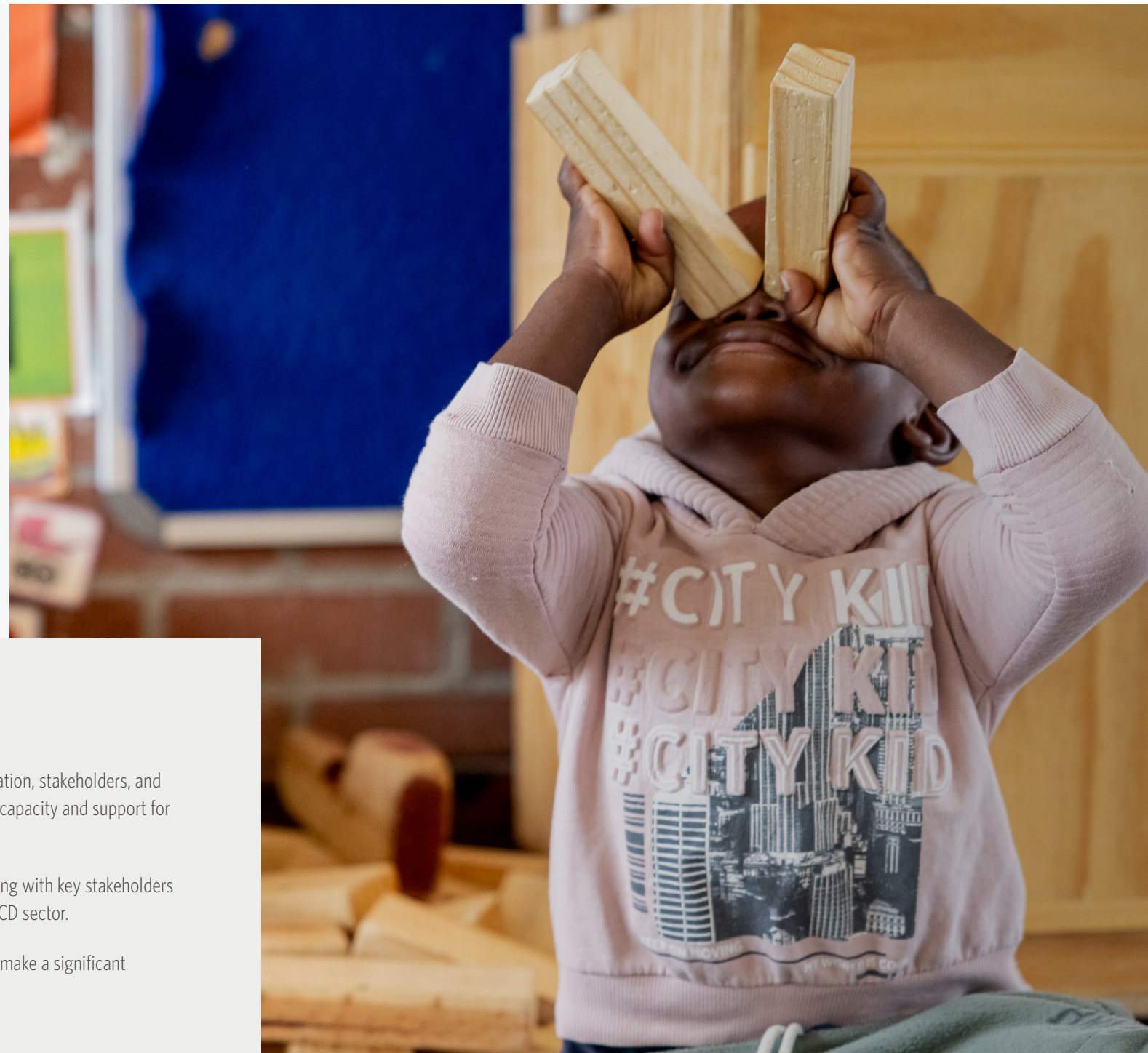
*Donate directly to the Singita Lowveld Trust, Holistic ECD programme.*

## Building brighter futures

Singita Lowveld Trust will collaborate closely with the Department of Basic Education, stakeholders, and other NGOs in the ECD sector to share insights and lessons learned and enhance capacity and support for numerous ECD centres still in urgent need of resources and assistance.

The Singita Lowveld Trust team is working on a "train-the-trainer" model partnering with key stakeholders and the Department of Basic Education to enhance capacity and support in the ECD sector.

Singita Lowveld Trust aims to expand the reach and impact of the programme to make a significant contribution to the transformation of the ECD sector in the region.





SINGITA LOWVELD TRUST

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# Singita Lowveld Trust

## Who we are (purpose statement)

Singita Lowveld Trust is a non-profit organisation committed to the preservation and restoration of wilderness areas in South Africa, collaborating with communities to build healthy ecosystems in which people and nature can thrive.

## What we do

We work with surrounding communities to support livelihoods and collaborate with partners to ensure healthy river catchments and surrounding landscapes, whilst managing and preserving biodiversity and wildlife on the land we occupy.

## How we do it

- Supporting projects on Singita's properties and in local communities through an expert team of conservation and community development specialists.
- Maintaining healthy ecosystems and safeguarding wilderness and wildlife through research and effective antipoaching methods.
- Actively engaging with communities, supporting education and enterprise development programmes to enable these communities to thrive.
- Collaborating with communities further afield to ensure effective resource management, securing the future of water catchments and surrounding landscapes through alien plant clearing, communal livestock management, climate-smart farming, and access to clean water and energy.