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ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE: Gideon Machete is one of SANRAL's civil engineering bursary graduates now gaining hands-on experience at the SANRAL Centre of Excellence design academy in Port Elizabeth.

SANRAL Centre of Excellence changing lives and giving opportunities to youth

A BURSARY from the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL) has meant the realisation of a dream for young engineer Gideon Machete. Now that he has graduated, his months spent gaining invaluable hands-on experience at SANRAL's Centre of Excellence in Port Elizabeth will boost his career on a safe journey ahead.

Machete is one of 11 at SANRAL's Centre of Excellence design academy this year, the second since its inception in January 2014. SANRAL bursary graduates from around the country benefit from the centre's formal in-house programme, which was established to facilitate and advance their careers by providing experience on real projects. Next year SANRAL plans for an intake of 27 candidates, based on the number of its expected graduating bursary holders.



SANRAL Southern Region (SR) Regional Manager Mbulelo Peterson said the structured training programme added substantial value to the parastatal's commitment to the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), to which SANRAL is an accredited commissioning and undertaking provider. ECSA's primary role is the regulation of the engineering profession and registration of qualifying professionals.

Graduates at the Centre of Excellence have successfully attained BSc Civil Engineering degrees with the complete support of SANRAL's bursary scheme. It is a four-year course, but that is not where it ends for these hard working graduates. SANRAL's programme facilitates work that will build up the experiences, competencies and proficiencies they need in order to qualify for ECSA's stringent professional standards.

"ECSA's registration process requires young engineers to have undertaken design work and projects of a complex nature. SANRAL's programme is outcomes driven. We have four external mentors that nurture the graduates in their development, all professional engineers with many years of experience," explained Tom Kelly, who heads the programme.

Graduates remain at the design academy, which is housed in SANRAL SR's offices in Newton Park, for 12 to 18 months, depending on their previous field experience. After completing the programme, they proceed to construction sites or to gain further experience in SANRAL projects around the country.

"Ideally, they should complete four years' training after their studies. They need to be able to prove that they can operate in the field as professional engineers," said Kelly. "The first gate then is ECSA registration and doors will then open for them, depending on employment opportunities available at SANRAL at the time. Our programme is aimed at getting their responsibilities and competencies right."

SANRAL is responsible for the on-going maintenance, development and expansion of the South Africa national road network. This network currently consists of 21 403km, of which 3 120 km is toll roads. The balance – 18 283 km – are non toll roads. Qualified engineers fulfil roles related to this responsibility in fields such as structural engineering, traffic and transport engineering, road engineering, geotechnical engineering, project management, environmental engineering, hydrology and storm water engineering, hydraulic and water engineering.

"SANRAL is passionate and committed to developing these skills, thereby ensuring not only our own resources but also contributing the country's skills pool. The Centre of Excellence in Port Elizabeth not only provides intensive post-graduate training, mentorship and coaching, but also guarantees much-needed exposure to a broad variety of disciplines," said Kelly.



Originally from Moleketla Village in Tzaneen, Machete is a SANRAL head office bursary recipient. He studied at the University of Pretoria.

“I matriculated in 2005 but could not afford to pay for my studies. I spent most part of 2006 working as a painter in Tzaneen to earn a living, so I am very grateful to SANRAL for making this possible. Education is important to me because it opens doors and opportunities. With an education one is able to do what you love most and be able to contribute towards creating a better world,” the young engineer said.

The training at SANRAL includes geometric design, traffic analysis and capacity, materials investigation and utilisation, pavement evaluations and more. Some of the hands-on engineering projects Machete is currently working on are the upgrade of the R75 road from Jansenville to Graaff-Reinet, which is being designed by the academy, and the maintenance of provincial gravel roads in the Eastern Cape.

“Engineering is a critical skill in South Africa and roads play an integral role in connecting people to opportunities and improving their lives. I hope to form part of the organisation that is mandated to manage and provide safe roads for our country,” said Machete.

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