

## **Igniting fire**

Sifiso Shandu from Umzimkhulu in KwaZulu-Natal says he has achieved many things since joining the KwaZulu-Natal Youth Environment Project, an initiative supported by the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), in 2010. For 29-year-old Shandu, supporting his family has always been a challenge, as he lives with his unemployed mother, three siblings and a cousin.

“I matriculated in 2002 and wanted to study further to become a horticulturist, but didn’t have money to do so. I had to find a way to support my family and got a part-time job at a forestry company, but it didn’t last long.

“In 2010, I joined the KwaZulu-Natal Youth Environment Project, which deals with security and fire management. The project lies close to my heart, as veld fires are disastrous if not managed. I’m involved in fire disaster awareness campaigns and burning firebreaks as a veld-fire reduction strategy.”

The monthly stipend from EPWP he receives as project manager has been very helpful. “Besides helping my family financially, I’ve been able to save money to study further. I haven’t given up on my dream completely.”

He says the project has given hope to him and many people from his neighbourhood. “My dream is for our community to have its own environmental educational centre, fully equipped to cater for our programmes to benefit the poorest of the rural masses, while providing a better life for us all.”

As part of his duties, Shandu teaches people skills to conserve their communal land, while preventing veld fires that kill people and destroy grazing land.