

Khwenxurha's Rebirth: How a Youth-Elder Partnership is Forging a Sustainable Rural Future

{This article has been inspired by research conducted by the author as part of his PhD studies. A journal article based on this research can be found [here](#). This article is a hypothetical social media post, written in the year 2034 by and involving fictional characters living in the Khwenxurha communal land area.}

KHWENXURHA'S REBIRTH: HOW A YOUTH-ELDER PARTNERSHIP IS FORGING A SUSTAINABLE RURAL FUTURE



Ronald Eglin, PhD
Specialist: Sustainable Settlements



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When I packed my bags for the sprawling city a few years ago, I was convinced that Khwenxurha offered no opportunities for employment for its youth, forcing its best and brightest to migrate. Now, in 2034, as I return for my new role at the local clinic, the truth is startlingly different. The visible reality of a profound rural regeneration is immediate.

Crucially, the transformation has strengthened the essential rural-village character; the homesteads remain surrounded by allotment gardens and grazing lands, but the relentless, uncontrolled settlement development that once threatened it has stopped.”

“I’ve been told by local family members and friends that the transformative process began quietly but decisively around 2026. What sparked this shift was not a central government directive but a local crisis point: a highly publicised application to develop a new township in the area that would have irreversibly destroyed the traditional rural-village landscape.

This attempt by an external developer to override local planning galvanised the community. Seeing their village character genuinely threatened, a small, determined coalition of local leaders, respected elders, and a handful of recently retired professionals joined forces with a dedicated group of youth activists.

The shared threat and the desperate need to stem the out-migration of young people provided the necessary focus for change, allowing them to turn a threat into a powerful, unified community strategy.”

This unification of generations led directly to the formation of the youth-elder partnership. The elders, possessing deep institutional memory, knowledge of land rights, and political networks, realised that their wisdom was irrelevant if there was no young generation to inherit the land.

Simultaneously, the youth, concerned about their future and lacking the political leverage to halt unwanted development, recognised they urgently needed the elders' authority and experience.

The partnership was formally structured within the overarching Khwenxurha Development Council (KDC).

This institutional arrangement mandates that the formal Youth Network, comprising the youth committee, the young adult society, and similar groups, must hold a minimum number of voting seats on the KDC.

This ensured that the youth's participation was structural and strategic, not merely advisory, giving them a direct and active role in the strategy planning and management of the area's entire development.

This powerful combination of the older generation and the youth drove the most energising social transformation.

Working together, they tackled the threat of out-migration, an ageing population, and a flagging local economy. They did this by both promoting the area as a retirement destination and placing youth development and job creation at the heart of the community's development strategy.



The local municipality played a crucial enabling role in this regeneration. The first key intervention was the provision of critical infrastructure to support the community's vision.

They secured the initial funding for the greatly expanded multi-purpose resource centre and, crucially, ensured that it was equipped with a free, high-speed Wi-Fi hotspot.

Furthermore, the municipality actively supported the rural character through zoning policies that restricted uncontrolled growth and by helping to setup the allotment gardens purchasing and marketing cooperative.

The cooperative structure is essential in helping small-scale farmers and households pool resources and ensure the collective marketing of produce.

“I spent my first few days back in Khwenxurha at that bustling multi-purpose resource centre. It functions simultaneously as a resource library, a free Wi-Fi hotspot, and a venue for numerous training activities and youth-led events. This centre is often the crucial first stop for young entrepreneurs needing technological links to the outside world”. Sipho, a young web developer running his business from the centre, explained the impact.

"Before the free Wi-Fi and the business incubator came, I had to travel hours just to upload a portfolio. Now, I'm building apps for clients worldwide from right here in Khwenxurha. This resource centre isn't just a building; it's our connection to the global economy," he told me.

“The creation of new employment is tangible and diversified. A cornerstone has been the brilliant success of the retirement destination strategy and programme. This successfully leveraged Khwenxurha's well-managed rural setting to attract a steady flow of retirees. Many are successful former residents returning home. This influx has anchored a vibrant service economy, creating numerous stable positions for young people in the health and care sectors.”

“Jobs have been generated for the youth as home-based care providers, nurses, and cleaners. This ensures the elderly residents receive quality care locally. The new expanded clinic, where I am starting my new job, is a direct outcome of this growing demand. Noxolo, a caregiver, summed up the economic impact: "My mother used to worry about me having to leave for the city. Now, I have stable, professional job here at home, caring for my own community. The retirement programme didn't just bring back our elders; it brought back our youth.”

Agriculture, once a sign of economic desperation, is undergoing a revival based on cooperative principles. Employment has also been created by the environmentally and culturally significant woodland cemetery.

This long-term cultural and conservation project involves the planting of indigenous hardwood trees and encourages the community to think about the area's eventual appearance 50 to 100 years from now. It generates long-term, stable employment for arborists, conservationists, maintenance workers, and even funeral parlours.

Construction employment is also being generated by the development of the rural-village estate, a project which the municipality helped fast-track by providing necessary planning approvals under the new, community-focused zoning scheme. The estate provides an opportunity for people who want to experience the rural-village lifestyle, while still owning their own plot, to buy into an estate that mimics the homestead, allotment gardens and grazing land landscape found in the area.



To ensure the new positions in these local development initiatives are filled by capable locals, the community implemented extensive apprenticeship and mentorship programmes. This initiative, planned jointly by the Youth Network and the Society for Retirees and the Aged, intentionally links the younger and older generations. Mrs Zola Mfene, a retired teacher and mentor, shared her perspective: "We aren't just giving our kids employment; we're giving them a vocation and a future. That's the power of the youth-elder partnership." This platform enables successful elder community members to act as role models, transferring valuable skills and experience directly to the youth.

The community's transformation hasn't stopped at economics; it has breathed new life into the social and cultural fabric of Khwenxurha.

The Youth Network has been instrumental in creating two major annual festivals, turning the communal land area into a regional destination. First, the annual Winter Sporting Festival has been a spectacular success, running for more than six years now.

This event focuses on youth participation and competition, bringing together children from the winners of various sub-regional competitions to compete in regional finals.

The festival includes soccer, rugby, netball, and other events, all aimed at promoting health, teamwork, and regional collaboration. In an exciting new development, the community is gearing up for the expanded Big Bash Summer Festival, set for the upcoming summer holidays.

This festival is specifically timed to coincide with the period when youngsters and family members return to the region for the holidays. It will be a vibrant showcase of local talent and enterprise, involving musical entertainment, local crafts, small business markets, and more.

Mandla Ndamase, a local business owner who will be a vendor at the Big Bash, expressed the excitement: "These festivals are bringing the region's heart back to our community; it's a reminder that Khwenxurha is the place to be, not just for work, but for life and celebration".

Looking ahead, the commitment to youth enterprise is only deepening. The municipality is actively involved here too, partnering with the Youth Network to secure external funding for a comprehensive business support programme.

This includes decentralised business incubators, mobile business support facilities, and electronic-enabled business and economic training and support programmes. These will bring the most advanced technological features and tailored business resources directly to young entrepreneurs.

A key piece of the development puzzle for the broader community is the upcoming network of specialised training centres, a regional network that the local and district municipalities are helping to establish across neighbouring rural areas.

The real innovation is that this is a deliberate effort to ensure that at least each sub-region has some form of tertiary education service, helping to anchor their local economies and minimise skilled youth from leaving the wider region.

The first pilot centre, planned for next year in Khwenxurha will have a strong focus on health care, including primary health care and care for the aged. When operational, this will provide a steady, professional supply of qualified young workers to sustain the retirement economy and help address the health needs in the broader community.

Other tertiary centres that are in the planning stage include centres for tourism, agriculture, the digital economy and services, community development and more.

Finally, the municipality is exploring how to build on this local economic development success by focusing on advanced models like circular economies and interlinked local value chains.

This holistic approach, where waste from certain activities can be used as resources in other activities while maximising local efficiency and sustainability, is considered critical.



A powerful example being developed is a closed-loop system: organic waste generated by the retirement community and the expanded clinic will be processed by a youth-led composting enterprise into high-quality fertiliser.

This fertiliser will then be purchased by the local allotment gardens cooperative to grow fresh produce, which is in turn sold directly back to the retirement homes and health facilities, ensuring that value is continually re-circulated within the community.

Liyema Qaba, a member of the Youth Network, explained the shift in local politics that this development has fostered: "The old way was waiting for the municipality to tell us what to do. Now, through our formal structure, we are actively setting the agenda."

The profound regeneration that greeted me upon my return to Khwenxurha is no longer just a hopeful first impression; it is a demonstrable reality.

The community's success rests on its deliberate choice to turn its primary challenges, an ageing population and chronic youth out-migration, into its strength.

By fostering the enduring Youth-Elder partnership and working collaboratively with the municipality since 2026, Khwenxurha has not just asked for a future; it has actively planned and built one, rooted deeply in its rural identity.

With the upcoming pilot specialised health training centre and the forward-thinking plans for circular economies and integrated business support, the community is preparing for a second, sustained wave of prosperity.

For me, coming home was about a position at the clinic.

For the generation coming of age here, the promise is far grander: Khwenxurha has done more than just halt the migration to the city; it has ensured that its youth can pursue a vocation, a profession, and a full, prosperous life, right here, in this familiar, vibrant community.

{This article forms part of the #WriteYourFutureSA series where people are encouraged to write article from the perspective of someone living in or time travelling to a future date.

Contact info@afesis.org.za if you would like to write and submit a # write your future article.}



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Contact Us

Afesis NPC
57A Western Avenue
Vincent
5247

www.afesis.org.za
info@afesis.org.za
[@Afesis](#)

