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WHAT'S INSIDE

CARMEN SHABANGU
10 years of turning moments into memories and The Art of Experience.

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EXCLUSIVE
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THE SOUL TRAIN
How Mbabane Born & Bred Powerhouse DJ & Producer is Making Waves Across Mzansi & Beyond!

A RETURN TO THE AFRICAN FUTURE

EAT. SWAY. LOVE: Discover the Nguni Foodways culinary storytelling, fashion inspired by Kwasukasukela and a Pan-Africa musical experience at Standard Bank Luju Food & Lifestyle Festival.

A RETURN TO THE AFRICAN FUTURE

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FROM THE TEAM DESK

Ready, Set... SPRING!

Forget about the climate change and possibilities of having to endure four seasons in a day...the dawn of a new season is blossoming! The ladies have begun pulling out their floral dresses and the gents are looking superb in their shorts, caps and shades....Spring is here, so let the fun begin!...not that winter stopped us anyway....

Meanwhile, I've been sitting in my little cocoon excitedly observing how Eswatini is fast growing into one of the regions burgeoning entertainment hubs with so many arts and cultural events lined up with block-buster entertainers each month – this is definitely a great time to be a Swati citizen.

As you page through Issue 5 of #Kulture, you'll notice a special editorial focus on the upcoming 8th Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival, set against the picturesque backdrop of Malandela's lawns at House on Fire in Malkerns. This year's edition promises to be one of the festival's biggest and most memorable yet.

In this issue, we give you a taste of what to expect with exclusive interviews featuring the acclaimed "Son of the Soil," Bholoja, soulful R&B songstress Mandisa Mamba, and the inimitable Umntfwana weLive, Sancheziey. The artists open up about their musical journeys, what inspires their craft, and what audiences can expect from their performances at this year's festival. Dive in and enjoy the read.

Of course, the festival programme is second to none, bringing the vibrant spirit of Africa to life through an exciting mix of live music, fashion showcases, culinary demonstrations, art, wellness experiences, and immersive activations. In this issue, we unpack what to expect across Luju's signature #EatSwayLove pillars, giving you a preview of the standout performances and experiences set to take centre stage.

And because no Luju experience is complete without the perfect outfit, we've also included our Luju Fashion Overview. Whether you're putting the finishing touches on your look or still searching for inspiration, this style guide has everything you need to curate a festival-ready ensemble for the Festival ahead.(And,because I'm quite sure that the fits are already lying in bed ready for the weekend...Well done!)

Beyond our Luju Festival coverage, we've also profiled one of Eswatini's musical success stories. Meet Sabelo "DJ Sabz" Kunene, whose inspiring journey has taken him to the heart of South Africa's dance music scene, where he now works with some of its biggest players.

With the improvement that the local entertainment scene has added to its portfolio, we set down with recently appointed Chairperson of the Eswatini Music Association; Lindelwa Mafa, "The General". She shares with us her vision, her plans and the wisdom she will certainly introduce to the local music industry.

The #Kulture team also has your relationships at heart. In this issue, we explore the realities of Umjolo, offering practical insights into building healthy, meaningful connections. As we all navigate the ups and downs of love, we hope this feature encourages greater understanding, respect and kindness—because healthy relationships are key to ending the vicious cycle of gender-based violence and creating a culture of love and compassion.

I definitely do not intend to spoil the read. Page through each article with a fine eye as you might find something relevant to you.

Eat. Sway. Love

Enjoy!

- Sli



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MANDISI DYANTYIS NASTY C
LIQUIDEEP BHOLOJA MALEH
SHWI MANTOMBAZANE NEYMA
THE MASEKELA BAND TMAN XPRESS
THANDO ZIDE WANDILE MBAMBENI BATHINI
KYLE SHEPHERD TRIO JUDAH SOUL WONDERBOOM
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CHEF PRINCE SIVALO MAHLANGU (MAGRIZA MADE ME COOK)
CHEF SIVE BHEMBE

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A RETURN TO THE AFRICAN FUTURE

LUJU RETURNS
WITH ITS BIGGEST CELEBRATION YET

By: Ayanda Dlamini | **Pics:** Standard Bank Luju Festival

The stage is set for the biggest Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival yet as the event returns to the iconic House On Fire in the Malkerns Valley on 1–2 August 2026. Now expanded into a vibrant full two-day celebration, the festival promises to boost tourism, strengthen the creative economy and unlock new opportunities for entrepreneurs, artists and local businesses across Eswatini and the region.

Now in its eighth edition, the internationally acclaimed festival is expected to welcome more than 10,000 visitors from over 26 countries under the theme "A Return to the African Future." Bringing together African gastronomy, fashion, music, art and entrepreneurship, Luju continues to position itself as more than a cultural event, it is increasingly recognised as an important platform for economic growth, regional collaboration and investment in the Kingdom's creative industries.



Launching the festival, the Prime Minister Russell Dlamini through representation by the Minister of Sport, Culture and Youth Affairs, Bongani Nzima, described Luju as a reflection of Eswatini's cultural and economic momentum, saying the country's heritage should be viewed as a valuable economic asset.

"Our food, our fashion and our culture are not on the margins of our economy; they are part of its very foundation."

He said festivals such as Luju demonstrate that preserving African identity and building competitive businesses can go hand in hand.

"What the Luju Festival reminds us, intentionally, is that modern enterprise and cultural authenticity are not mutually exclusive. They are deeply intertwined."

The Minister further highlighted the importance of the country's MSME sector, noting that Eswatini has approximately 70,000 small and medium enterprises employing more than 90,000 people, supported through Government initiatives including the SME Revolving Fund, entrepreneurship programmes and the National MSME Policy 2025–2029.

He said Luju provides an important commercial platform where local entrepreneurs can showcase products to regional and international markets.

"When our chefs draw from this year's Culinary Theme, Nguni Foodways, and when our designers source from this year's Fashion Theme, Kwasukasukela, they are not only celebrating heritage. They are building distinctive, competitive brands with real market value."

This year's programme embraces African storytelling through the fashion theme Kwasukasukela (Once Upon a Time), inviting designers and festivalgoers alike to reinterpret African folklore through contemporary fashion.

Meanwhile, the culinary programme celebrates Nguni Foodways, highlighting indigenous ingredients, traditional recipes and innovative African cuisine through chef demonstrations and curated dining experiences.

The festival's expansion into a full two-day event is expected to increase visitor spending while extending stays across accommodation establishments, restaurants and tourism operators.









The Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Jane Mkhonta-Simelane also shared the Prime Minister's sentiments in welcoming the extended, full two-day festival milestone, with the Prime Minister having said, "We welcome this incredible milestone that will extend visitor stays, increase trading opportunities for our SMEs, and deepen the event's economic footprint across the Kingdom and the Southern African region at large."

He added that the quality of creativity showcased at Luju reflects an industry that is increasingly gaining international recognition.

"What we have seen unveiled this evening reflects an industry that is professionalising on its own terms and drawing from the depths of our African heritage to produce something genuinely world-class. This is a powerful signal to investors, tourists and traders alike."

With expanded programming, stronger regional promotion and Standard Bank Eswatini's continued investment in the festival, the 2026 edition is expected to reinforce Luju's growing reputation as one of Southern Africa's premier lifestyle events while showcasing Eswatini's cultural excellence to the continent and beyond.

LUJU'S HIVES & STAGES ENHANCE THE FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE

Beyond its acclaimed food, fashion and music, the 2026 Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival will feature a collection of themed Hives and vibrant entertainment stages, offering visitors an immersive celebration of African creativity, cuisine and entrepreneurship.

The Premium Lounge delivers an exclusive hospitality experience overlooking the main stage, while the Heritage Food Garden showcases authentic African cuisine and indigenous flavours. The Fashion Café, curated by Dala Spaces, spotlights premium fashion, beauty products and handcrafted designs by local and regional creatives, while the Sweet Spot offers artisan desserts, chocolates, pastries and specialty beverages.

Visitors can also enjoy wine tastings at The Grapevine Wine Saloon, interactive brand experiences at the Corporate Bazaar, and family-friendly activities at The Beehive, home to the popular Luju Junior Cook-Off Competition.

Adding youthful energy to the weekend is The Buzz, a dynamic stage featuring DJs, live performances and entertainment throughout the festival.

Together, the Hives and stages create an engaging festival environment where culture, commerce and creativity come together, while providing valuable exposure for Eswatini's entrepreneurs and creative industries.



...the 2026 edition is expected to reinforce Luju's growing reputation as one of Southern Africa's premier lifestyle events while showcasing Eswatini's cultural excellence to the continent and beyond...











PHOKOPHELA Sinawe

at Standard Bank Luju Food & Lifestyle Festival

By: Slindelo Nkosi | **Pics:** Standard Bank Luju Festival

The 8th edition of the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival promises to present a rich and dynamically curated two-day entertainment cocktail of the finest Fashion, Food and Music menu.



Raising the execution bar this year, the Festival's Director Jiggs Thorne put emphasis on the "Call-to-Action" for all Africans to start reclaiming their identity.

"The Festival is intentionally underpinned with a conscious tagline; **A Return to The African Future** - simply seeking to bring together heritage and innovation while exploring and reclaiming our African identity. Redefining our identity in a world where narratives being pushed aren't our own is particularly important so that we may find our ground and the Festival seeks to do exactly that - to profile Africa's unique identity"

Bringing in a financial commitment towards profiling local and the rest of Africa's rich talents is Standard Bank Eswatini through its latest brand campaign, "Phokophela Sinawe" which according to the bank's Manager Intergrated Marketing and Communications Lethukuthula Ndwandwe is a campaign focused on encouraging all its customers and those planning to join the bank in the future towards achieving their lifelong dreams.

"This campaign aligns well with the Festival's theme because we seek to prove to the nation,and especially our clients that we are more than just a bank. We are not about simple finanancial transactions but seeing our clients achieving and securing more for their future emanating from the bank's purpose - being with our clients all the way."

He empahsised that the campaign is aimed at supporting people at different stages of their personal and business journeys. "Whether it is an entrepreneur starting a business, an artist sharing their talent with the world, a family building a future or someone trying to build a career, our message is that they do not have to walk that journey alone."













...the campaign is aimed at supporting people at different stages of their personal and business journeys. "Whether it is an entrepreneur starting a business, an artist sharing their talent with the world...our message is that they do not have to walk that journey alone."

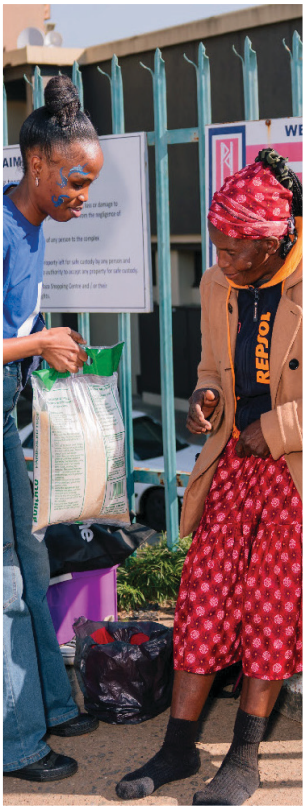
With Standard Bank's strategic partnership with the festival, more local brands and SMEs are expected to gain greater visibility and access to meaningful support through the festival's various programmes.

The Festival Director, said the festival has evolved into an important platform for entrepreneurs, artists and small businesses to showcase their products and services while connecting with new markets.

"There are programmes, trading environments and talk shops that are offered at the festival. It is through these spaces where we are able to show support to the growth and development of local brands and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)."

Thorne added that the festival's long-standing partnership with Standard Bank has been instrumental in strengthening the creative economy by providing opportunities that extend beyond the event itself.

"The creation of a platform that actively supports the arts is critical which is generally a shared mandate between House on Fire and Standard Bank. The promotion of a broader eco-system through the various programs offered during the Festival is vital because it stimulates growth of the arts industry. At the same time, it grows the bank's portfolio in keeping with its slogan - Africa is our home, we drive her growth."





EAT@ LUJU 2026

A RETURN TO THE AFRICAN FUTURE

By: Ayanda Dlamini | **Photo Cred:** Supplied

Serving Up Nguni Foodways

as a Celebration of Heritage, Innovation& Africa's Culinary Future



The Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival is inviting festivalgoers to rediscover Africa's culinary heritage through a fresh, sophisticated lens as it unveils Nguni Foodways as the official culinary theme for its 2026 edition.

More than showcasing exceptional cuisine, Luju 2026 promises an immersive exploration of the traditions, techniques and stories that have shaped Nguni communities across Southern Africa for centuries. The festival will celebrate how indigenous food knowledge continues to inspire contemporary gastronomy while creating opportunities for sustainability, entrepreneurship and cultural preservation.

A Living Culinary Heritage

According to Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival Culinary Creative Director Sasha Thorne, this year's culinary focus goes far beyond nostalgia.

"Nguni Foodways is not about looking backwards with sentimentality. It is about recognising that the culinary knowledge passed down through generations remains deeply relevant today. Our indigenous food traditions hold remarkable lessons in sustainability, resilience, biodiversity and innovation. At Luju, we want to celebrate these traditions while

creating new conversations around how they can shape the future of African cuisine."
She explained that food has always served as one of the strongest expressions of identity within Nguni societies.
"Every ingredient, every preparation method and every shared meal tells a story about who we are, where we come from and how communities have adapted over generations. We are inviting people to experience those stories through taste, conversation and creativity."
For Luju, Nguni Foodways represents a living culinary ecosystem that stretches across Eswatini, South Africa, Zimbabwe and neighbouring regions. It reflects centuries of migration, trade and cultural exchange while remaining firmly rooted in indigenous knowledge systems.
Festivalgoers can look forward to an exceptional culinary programme featuring celebrated chefs from across Southern Africa. Highlights include Chef Mmabatho Molefe, presenting a refined Nguni fine dining experience inspired by her Zulu heritage; Coco and J, showcasing vibrant Afro Fusion soul food rooted in Xhosa traditions; Chef Prince Sivalo Mahlangu (Magriza Made Me Cook), leading fermentation and ancestral foraging experiences influenced by Zimbabwean Ndebele culture; and Eswatini's own Chef Sive Bhembe, unveiling an innovative Nguni-inspired dessert. The programme will also feature traditional beer brewing and nose-to-tail cooking demonstrations celebrating Africa's rich culinary heritage.

Ancient Techniques Meet Contemporary Gastronomy

Visitors can expect to encounter ancient culinary techniques such as fermentation, smoking, drying, wood-fire cooking and traditional preservation methods—practices that have sustained communities for generations and are increasingly finding renewed appreciation within modern fine dining.
Thorne believes these age-old techniques have become increasingly relevant as the global hospitality industry seeks more sustainable approaches to food production.
"What many people now describe as innovation has existed within African communities for generations. Long before sustainability became an international trend, our ancestors were already practising regenerative agriculture, seasonal eating, zero-waste cooking and natural food preservation. Luju provides an opportunity to reposition that knowledge as world-class culinary excellence," said Thorne.







Representing Eswatini, Sive Bhembe


Chef Mmabatho Molefe


Coco & J


Chef Prince Sivalo Mahlangu

An Immersive Feast for the Senses

This year's culinary programme has been carefully curated to transform the festival grounds into an interactive celebration of indigenous gastronomy. Festivalgoers will enjoy live cooking demonstrations, immersive sonic food experiences, botanical workshops, Nguni-inspired fine dining showcases and curated tasting experiences designed to stimulate every sense. Brewing masterclasses and sommelier-led tastings will explore Africa's rich fermentation traditions, while livestock exhibitions will highlight the cultural and economic importance of indigenous breeds within Nguni communities.

Farm-to-Fork Returns

One of the festival's signature attractions, the Farm-to-Fork Cook-Off, also returns with a renewed emphasis on indigenous ingredients and regenerative farming. Teams of chefs and local producers will collaborate to create contemporary dishes rooted in traditional flavours, demonstrating how African ingredients can compete confidently on the global culinary stage.

The Food Indaba Sparks Important Conversations

Equally significant is the return of the Food Indaba, which will once again bring together chefs, academics, farmers, entrepreneurs and cultural custodians for thought-provoking discussions around the future of African food systems.
The conversations will examine how indigenous knowledge can strengthen food security, promote biodiversity, preserve culinary heritage and unlock new economic opportunities within Africa's growing food economy.
For Thorne, these discussions are as important as the meals themselves.
"Food is one of the most powerful ways to connect people. Around every table there is knowledge, memory and community. Through the Food Indaba, we want to encourage collaboration between researchers, chefs, farmers and entrepreneurs so that traditional food knowledge continues to evolve and create meaningful opportunities for future generations."

Building Africa's Culinary Future

Beyond the festival weekend, Luju's commitment extends to developing Africa's hospitality industry through professional capacity-building initiatives. Workshops for chefs, food vendors and hospitality practitioners will focus on culinary skills, innovation and entrepreneurship, ensuring that indigenous food traditions continue to inspire both cultural pride and economic growth.
The approach aligns with Luju's broader vision of positioning African creativity as a driver of sustainable development while celebrating excellence across food, fashion, music and the creative industries.



COSPE & LUJU FESTIVAL

Strengthen Partnership to Advance Sustainable Food Systems

The collaboration between COSPE Southern Africa and the Standard Bank Luju Food & Lifestyle Festival (Luju Festival) is recognised as a platform for reimagining food systems in Eswatini. What began as a strategic engagement to showcase indigenous food is evolving into a dynamic partnership that connects farmers, chefs, consumers, and cultural practitioners around a shared vision: restoring the value of indigenous seeds, promoting agroecology, and building sustainable, locally rooted economies.

The Luju Festival, widely recognized as one of Eswatini's premier cultural and culinary events, provides a unique space where food, music, fashion, and storytelling intersect. Its emphasis on African identity and heritage aligns closely with COSPE's work across the Transfrontier Conservation Area in the Lubombo region, particularly in advancing Traditional African Vegetables (TAVs), indigenous seed systems, and farmer-led value chains. This alignment has made the festival an ideal platform for COSPE to amplify its mission while creating meaningful opportunities for local communities.

Initially participating through product showcases, COSPE is using the festival as a space to introduce audiences to the richness and potential of indigenous foods with the previous festival engagement focusing on raising awareness through the display of modern-traditional dishes, sharing knowledge on agroecological practices, and promoting Lubombo Eco Products (LEP) developed by local cooperatives.

A key milestone in this journey has been the sponsorship and development of the Farm-to-Fork Cook-Off, an initiative that bridges the gap between smallholder farmers and the culinary industry. By supplying indigenous ingredients directly to chefs and competitors, COSPE has helped demonstrate how traditional crops can be transformed into innovative, market-ready dishes. This initiative has not only elevated indigenous ingredients within contemporary cuisine but has also created a tangible link between production and consumption.

The 2025 Luju Festival marked a significant moment in this evolving collaboration. Under the theme "The Forgotten Seeds," COSPE's presence was both strategic and impactful. Through a combination of sponsorship, immersive stall design, and curated food experiences, the organization showcased the full value chain of indigenous food systems which guided festival goers through seed preservation to product integration.

At the heart of COSPE's 2025 participation was its collaboration with women farmers and processors in the Lubombo region. These women, often the custodians of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity, were brought to the forefront as key actors in sustainable food systems. Their products, stories, and expertise were integrated into every aspect of COSPE's presence, from the Farm-to-Fork Cook-Off to the tasting menus offered at the exhibition stall.

The stall itself became more than just a display; it was an interactive learning and tasting space. Designed as an indigenous pantry, it invited festival-goers to engage with seeds, explore traditional ingredients, and experience modern interpretations of local dishes. Menu items such as okra pizza, amaranth wraps, and African eggplant dishes challenged perceptions of indigenous food as outdated or limited, instead presenting it as innovative, nutritious, and commercially viable.

Beyond visibility, COSPE's participation generated real economic opportunities. LEP products were sold directly to consumers, creating income streams for community groups while also testing market demand. At the same time, participating cooperatives gained valuable exposure, training, and experience in operating within a high-profile commercial environment.

Looking ahead to the 2026 Luju Festival, COSPE is poised to build on these experiences with a more strategic and expansive approach. The vision for 2026 goes beyond participation. It is about consolidation, scale, and deeper impact.

Standard Bank
LUJU
FOOD & LIFESTYLE FESTIVAL













One key expectation is the strengthening of market access pathways for farmer groups. Rather than a single point of engagement during the festival, COSPE aims to create sustained linkages between producers and buyers, ensuring that the visibility gained translates into long-term economic opportunities. This includes refining product offerings, improving packaging and branding, and supporting cooperatives to meet market standards consistently.

Strategic collaborations will take centre stage in this initiative. Partnerships with organizations such as the International Trade Centre (ITC) and PELUM Eswatini will ensure that agroecological principles and farmer-led perspectives remain at the core of all activities. PELUM Eswatini continues to play a critical role in ensuring visibility of and advocating for the preservation of indigenous food systems and the promotion of agroecology, while ITC will enhance market access and storytelling. Their contribution includes investing in a dedicated trade market stall for farmers during the festival and supporting the production of high-quality multimedia content that captures farmers' journeys, the transformation of ingredients, and the cultural significance of indigenous foods.

These stories will not only enrich the festival experience but will also serve as powerful tools for advocacy, fundraising, and knowledge sharing. Through co-branded initiatives and joint programming, these partnerships will further strengthen the visibility, reach, and impact of this networked approach, building on the success of the previous year.

Importantly, COSPE is also expected to expand its role in shaping the festival's food narrative. By introducing new engagement formats such as pre-Luju festival live demonstrations with the women farmers and processors, facilitated by Chef Sive Bhembe (Farm to fork Cook-off winner 2025), dialogues at the food indaba, and trader training sessions for the women farmers with the House on Fire team. The organization can further position indigenous food systems as an important aspect of the Luju festival.

Ultimately, the COSPE-LUJU collaboration represents more than an event partnership. It is a growing movement that seeks to reclaim indigenous knowledge, celebrate local innovation, and build resilient food systems rooted in culture and community. As the 2026 Luju festival approaches, the focus is clear: to move from showcasing possibilities to scaling impact, ensuring that the seeds planted through this collaboration continue to grow into lasting change.

Telling Africa's Story One Plate at a Time...

For many people, food is simply something to eat. For Prince Sivalo Mahlangu, every meal carries a story.

By: Fezile Mkhatshwa | Pics: Magriza Made Me Cook

It tells of migration, family, identity and generations of knowledge passed from one kitchen to another. It speaks of forgotten ingredients, cultural rituals and the wisdom of elders who understood the land long before recipes were ever written down. It is this belief that has shaped the work of the Zimbabwean chef, filmmaker and cultural researcher behind the growing platform, ***"Magriza Made Me Cook"***

This year, Mahlangu brings that philosophy to the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival, where he joins the culinary programme under the festival's overarching theme, A Return to the African Future, with a culinary focus on Nguni Foodways. Rather than concentrating solely on flavours and presentation, his demonstrations invite audiences to explore the deeper story behind the food, examining its origins, cultural significance, and what it reveals about African identity, heritage, and the enduring connection between people, place, and tradition.

A Grandmother's Legacy

The name Magriza Made Me Cook is a tribute to the woman who first introduced Mahlangu to the kitchen.

"She would call us when she was cooking and tell us all these recipes, and explained the meanings behind them because another thing that is lacking is that we know the recipes, but we don't understand the naming and where these ingredients come from."

'Magriza' (slang for Gogo) was the affectionate name he and those around him used for his maternal grandmother, who raised him from the age of 12. Although she never received formal education, she became his greatest teacher.

For Mahlangu, learning to cook was never just about preparing food. His grandmother taught him that every ingredient has a history, every dish belongs to a community and every recipe reflects a way of life.



MAGRIZA
MADE ME COOK



Even after her passing two years ago, her lessons continue to shape his work.

More Than a Cooking Show

Although many first discover Magriza Made Me Cook through its recipes, the platform quickly reveals itself to be much more than a cooking program.

Each episode explores the relationship between food, culture, language, traditional medicine and indigenous knowledge. Mahlangu combines his skills as a filmmaker and storyteller to document customs that are slowly disappearing, creating an archive that celebrates African heritage through everyday life.

"I don't believe food exists on its own, it actually is an important cultural expression."

His documentaries frequently feature elderly women, rural communities and traditional knowledge holders whose voices are rarely heard in mainstream media. Through their stories, viewers learn not only how food is prepared but why it matters.

Learning Beyond the Classroom

Interestingly, Mahlangu's professional journey did not begin in culinary school.

He holds a degree in Business Management and later completed postgraduate studies in Corporate Finance. Yet his passion eventually led him in a very different direction.

"I did not go to chef school for the cooking that I'm doing now, I also did not go to film school for the documentaries that I'm doing."

Instead, he credits his grandmother and the communities he has visited across Africa for becoming his teachers.

"I don't believe in being self-taught, there always is people who came before you and sacrificed for you to be where you are today."

That philosophy has influenced the way he approaches every new destination. Wherever he travels, he arrives as a student first.

One lesson from his grandmother has stayed with him throughout his career is to see himself in another.

"She told me, 'Go out and learn how other people cook. Learn their language and you also learn their culture. Then come back and see the similarities we have as African people.'"

Discovering Africa Through Food

Over the past several years, Mahlangu has travelled widely across the continent documenting indigenous cuisines and cultural traditions.

One journey that left a lasting impression was his visit to the country during last year's Umhlanga Reed Dance.

"Magriza had roots in Eswatini and often spoke about Umhlanga, inspiring me to experience it for myself. When I finally visited, I was fortunate to meet a well-informed gentleman, Simendzelwe Vilane, who spent time with me throughout my stay and gave me a refreshing local perspective on Eswatini, its culture, and its cuisine."

While documenting local food traditions, he was struck by how familiar many of the dishes were.

"Everything was almost one hundred percent what we have back home, what differs are the names or maybe slightly the cooking methods. For instance, we also have 'lipalishi, chuchuza

The similarities reinforced his belief that African communities share far more than many people realise.

His travels have also taken him to Botswana, where he explored traditional ceremonies and the preparation of seswaa, a slow-cooked meat dish that reflects the shared roles of men and women in food preparation.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia introduced him to a completely different relationship with food.

"There is no one who speaks badly about injera," he laughs. "They live their food. They talk about it everywhere."

For Mahlangu, these journeys are not about comparing cultures but recognising the threads that connect them.

Preserving Knowledge Before It Disappears

The idea behind Magriza Made Me Cook gained momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While considering further studies, Mahlangu spent time in rural communities where elderly women gathered to weave traditional mats while exchanging stories about plants, recipes and everyday life.

Listening to them changed his perspective.

"Society says these people are not educated," he says. "But I was amazed by the amount of information that existed within that space."

Using nothing more than an iPhone 7, he began documenting those conversations.

"I learnt that the best camera is the one that you have," he says.

What mattered most was never expensive equipment but preserving stories before they disappeared.

That decision has since grown into one of southern Africa's most distinctive food storytelling platforms.

Bringing That Story to the Luju Festival

When Luju's organisers approached Mahlangu earlier this year, the invitation felt almost unexpected.

After attending the Umhlanga Reed Dance, he learned about the Luju Festival through a local photographer who urged him to return to the Kingdom and experience it firsthand.

Months later, an Instagram message from the Luju Festival culinary team arrived.

At first, he thought it was some kind of joke.Only after receiving an official email did he realise the invitation was genuine.

The festival's theme immediately resonated with the work he has already spent years doing.

"When I saw the theme, A Return to the African Future, it embodied exactly what we've been doing through Magriza Made Me Cook."

Without revealing too much, Mahlangu says his demonstration will explore indigenous grains, foraged ingredients, migration, Nguni food traditions and the role women have played in preserving African food knowledge.

He also hopes audiences leave with a new appreciation for ingredients that are often dismissed as old-fashioned or "poverty food."

"I want people to remember that our food is beautiful," he says. "Food embodies our culture. Food embodies our heritage."

For him, the future of African cuisine does not depend on replacing traditional food with modern trends. Instead, it lies in rediscovering the ingredients, recipes and stories that have always belonged to the continent.





The Sweet Taste of Impact

How The Luju Festival is Transforming Livelihoods

By: Ayanda Dlamini | Photo Cred: Supplied

A strategic partnership between the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival and World Vision Eswatini is helping transform beekeeping into a viable commercial enterprise for rural communities, empowering smallholder farmers with sustainable livelihoods while contributing to the growth of the agricultural sector.

Implemented between July 2025 and June 2026, the community beekeeping and honey production project has empowered four farming communities in Malkerns, Ngwenyameni, Lobamba Lomdzala and Tubungu with modern beekeeping skills, equipment, technical support and improved market access.

The programme has supported the four beekeeping groups comprising 50 members, including young people, by enabling them to develop sustainable income-generating skills and diversify into value-added products such as scented candles and beeswax oils. During the reporting period, the groups collectively harvested more than 260 litres of honey, contributing to a 17 per cent increase in overall production while creating additional revenue streams beyond raw honey sales.

The initiative demonstrates how partnerships between the private sector, development organisations and local communities can create sustainable livelihoods while supporting biodiversity, food security and climate-smart agriculture.

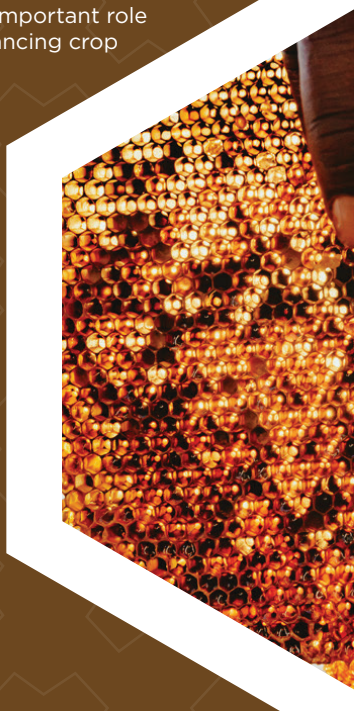
Backed by an initial investment of E250,000, comprising E148,490 from the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival and E101,510 from World Vision Eswatini, the project equipped participating farmers with 125 Langstroth beehives, 10 trap boxes and essential beekeeping equipment, including smokers, hive tools, protective clothing and harvesting accessories.

Beyond providing equipment, the project prioritised skills development through practical training in hive management, honey harvesting, processing, packaging and quality standards. Ongoing mentorship has also helped prepare farmers to access formal markets and improve production efficiency.

While some groups continue to face challenges related to hive population, environmental conditions and technical experience, the project has shown strong potential for long-term growth.

One of its most notable successes has been the partnership between local beekeepers and commercial macadamia farmers. The placement of beehives in macadamia orchards has improved pollination, benefiting both honey production and agricultural yields. Emerald Farm, for example, reported an increase in macadamia harvests from 8,900 kilograms in the 2024/25 season to 41,000 kilograms in 2025/26, highlighting the important role bees play in enhancing crop productivity.

To ensure the project's long-term sustainability, World Vision Eswatini has partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture's Honey Support Unit and the National Honey Association to provide continued technical support,





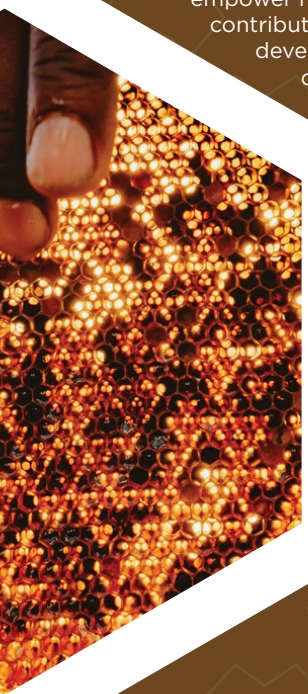
> "Luju provides more than a festival experience; it creates a platform where emerging businesses can connect directly with consumers, retailers, chefs and industry stakeholders."



mentorship and coaching. This ongoing collaboration is expected to strengthen hive management, improve production efficiency and product quality, and help participating farmers build thriving, commercially viable beekeeping enterprises.

Speaking on the importance of the initiative, Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival Communications Manager Phiwo Dhlamini said the festival remains committed to creating meaningful opportunities that extend beyond the two-day celebration of food, fashion and culture.

"The Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival has always been about celebrating African excellence while creating meaningful opportunities that uplift communities. Our partnership with World Vision Eswatini demonstrates how collaboration can unlock economic potential, empower rural entrepreneurs and contribute to sustainable development. We are delighted to see local beekeepers growing in confidence, increasing production and developing products that are ready for the market."



Dhlamini said the initiative reflects the festival's broader vision of supporting local enterprise while promoting products proudly made in Eswatini.

"The Luju Festival provides more than a festival experience; it creates a platform where emerging businesses can connect directly with consumers, retailers, chefs and industry stakeholders. We are proud that these beekeepers will have the opportunity to showcase their honey and value-added products to thousands of visitors, giving them exposure that could translate into long-term commercial opportunities. Supporting initiatives such as this allows us to celebrate authentic Eswatini products while strengthening local value chains."

World Vision Eswatini noted that the project has also strengthened relationships between producers and markets by creating opportunities for farmers to produce honey that meets commercial standards. Participants have received practical training in extracting honey from honeycombs, processing it hygienically and packaging it for sale, enabling them to compete in formal retail and hospitality markets.

The festival recently presented World Vision Eswatini with a cheque for E52,990 to support a community beekeeping project in the Lobamba Lomdzala Inkhundla, the very community that hosts the celebrated cultural and lifestyle event.

The donation forms part of the festival's commitment to sustainable community development, with E10 from every ticket sold dedicated to the initiative. The funding will further strengthen the four operational beekeeping groups, helping to increase honey production while promoting sustainable livelihoods, environmental conservation and local economic development in the Lobamba Lomdzala Inkhundla.

The programme will also introduce structured business development training covering branding, packaging, pricing strategies, bookkeeping, inventory management and cooperative governance. Farmers will be supported to develop bankable business plans and cash-flow forecasts while being linked to financing opportunities such as the Youth Enterprise Fund.

In addition, the project will formalise supply agreements with buyers, improve market linkages through strategic partners such as Emlembe Beverages and continue using the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival as a platform to connect producers with retailers, chefs, agribusinesses and consumers.



SWAY

Africa's Rhythm Comes Alive at Luju 2026

By: Fezile Mkhatshwa | **Pics:** Standard Bank Luju Festival // Supplied

Every year, music gives the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival its heartbeat. It brings people together across cultures, generations and borders, turning every performance into a shared celebration of African creativity. Under the festival's signature Eat, Sway, Love experience, the Sway pillar returns first weekend of August 2026 with a line-up that reflects this year's theme.



Zola 7

'Return to the African Future'

The festival's music programme celebrates both where African music comes from and where it is heading. It brings together legendary performers, established stars and exciting contemporary artists whose work reflects the diversity of the continent's sound.

This programme blends heritage with innovation, reminding audiences that Africa's future is being shaped by artists who continue to draw inspiration from their roots while creating music that speaks to the world.

A journey across the continent

This year's line-up takes festivalgoers on a musical journey through Southern Africa and beyond.

South African kwaito pioneer **Zola 7** headlines a programme that celebrates artists whose music has shaped generations. His performance brings one of South Africa's most influential music movements to the Luju stage, celebrating a catalogue that continues to resonate decades after its release.

Joining him is acclaimed trumpeter, composer and vocalist **Mandisi Dyantyis**, whose celebrated work Intlambululo: Ukuhlambulula combines jazz, orchestral arrangements and African storytelling into a deeply moving musical experience.

Hip hop also takes centre stage with **Nasty C**, whose international success has made him one of Africa's biggest rap exports. His appearance reflects Luju's commitment to showcasing artists who continue to influence the global music conversation while remaining connected to their African identity.

Representing the ever-growing Amapiano movement is **TMan Xpress**, bringing one of the continent's most popular dance sounds to festival audiences, affectionately not for his banger hit 'ebhasini' and many others.

Honouring musical heritage

While contemporary music features strongly, the programme also celebrates artists whose work continues to preserve African musical traditions.

Maskandi icon **Shwi Mantombazane**, formerly associated with the seperated duo 'Shwi Nomtekhala', will honour generations of Zulu storytelling through traditional music that has remained relevant across decades.

Award-winning duo Liquideep returns with the soulful electronic sound that has earned them a loyal following across Southern Africa, while singer-songwriter Wandile Mbambeni brings his distinctive blend of folk and country storytelling to the festival.



sound that has earned them a loyal following across Southern Africa, while singer-songwriter Wandile Mbambeni brings his distinctive blend of folk and country storytelling to the festival.

Tribute

Festivalgoers will also experience the genre-crossing atmosphere alongside the soulful fusion of jazz, African soul and contemporary RnB.

One of the festival's most significant performances will come from **The Masekela Band**, the touring ensemble drawn from the final years of Hugh Masekela's career. Their appearance serves as a celebration of one of Africa's greatest musical pioneers while introducing his legacy to new audiences.

Adding another layer to the jazz offering, the **Kyle Shepherd Trio** will perform a tribute to celebrated South African composer and pianist Abdullah Ibrahim.

Meanwhile, alternative rock finds its place through **WONDERboom**, while Johannesburg DJ duo Circles & Squarespromise an energetic blend of house, disco, broken beat and bossa nova.

The programme also celebrates regional diversity through performances by Mozambique's Marrabenta star **Neyma**, the Eswatini-Mozambique ensemble **ka-Tembe Connexion**, and Lesotho's Afro-soul singer **Maleh**.

A platform for Eswatini's talent

As always, local artists remain central to the Luju experience.

The 2026 edition showcases some of Eswatini's most recognised performers, demonstrating the depth of talent within the country's music industry.

Festival favourites **Cece & Rina** will reunite for a special collaborative performance, while Afro-pop artist **Sancheziey** continues to champion his signature Umgidvo sound.

Swazi soul pioneer **Bholoja** returns with his contemporary African folk music, while award-winning vocalist **Mandisa Mamba** brings her soulful sound to this year's programme.



Neyma



Judah Soul

Afro-soul artist **Judah Soul** continues to represent Eswatini's growing contemporary music scene, while Afro-pop trio **Emagagu** celebrates indigenous rhythms and storytelling.

Completing the local line-up is **Oriiginelle**, who will perform music from her latest album. The powerhouse also breaks into the program after so much traction locally and beyond having also recently launched her own distribution company, the Oriigins with the main aim of opening up the space for the next generation of creatives.

Together, these performances demonstrate Luju's continued commitment to providing a platform where local artists share the stage alongside internationally recognised names.

More than entertainment

The Sway pillar has always been more than a series of concerts. It represents one of the ways Luju tells Africa's story through music.

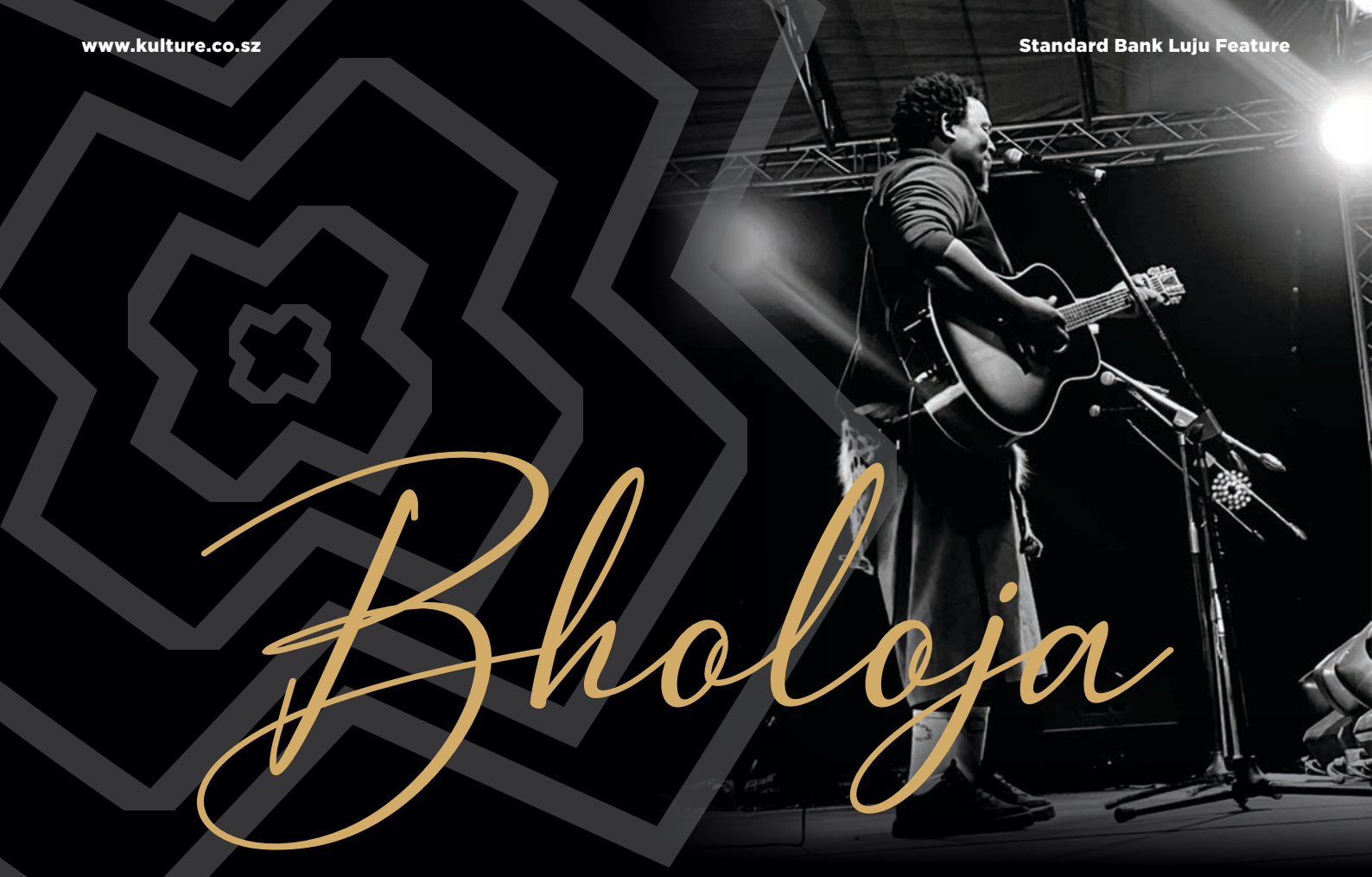
This year's programme mirrors the festival theme by showing that Africa's future is built on the strength of its past. Traditional storytelling exists comfortably alongside hip hop, jazz shares space with Amapiano, and long-established legends perform alongside artists shaping the next generation of African music.

It is a reminder that African music continues to evolve without losing sight of the cultures and communities that inspire it.

Truly ***"A Return to the African Future"***



Oriiginelle



Bholoja

READY TO REMIND LUJU FESTIVAL-GOERS ABOUT THEIR AFRICANISM

By: Slindelo Nkosi | **Pics:** Supplied

Eswatini's very own multi-talented musician, Bholoja born Mbongiseni Ngubane is scheduled for a performance at the upcoming Standard Bank Eswatini Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival billed for the 1st & 2nd of August 2026 at the House on Fire lawn.

Describing his much-anticipated performance, all he could say was "Prepare yourselves for nostalgic moments that will take each of us back to our true African roots!"



Aligning himself with the festival's theme "Going back to the African Future" curved around the ***#EatSwayLove*** phenomena, Bholoja explained how the theme perfectly resonates with his craft which will enable him to be at his best on stage subsequently giving festival-attendees the best times of their lives!

While acknowledging that the world is evolving with technology introducing and replacing some African-based practises, the 47-year-old artist is passionate about the importance of Africans not losing their identities; "The Festival's theme is basically reminding us about our identity, whom we have evolved into must not affect our African being. We must remain rooted to our culture and traditions so that we are not easily influenced by external traditions. Our core identities as Africans is about buntfu (humility), morals, culture, tradition and unity."

Using multiple African-inspired musical instruments including Sitolotolo, Mbira and Traditional Drumming styles, Bholoja easily attracts one's attention even before the sound of his African-crisped voice hits the mic on stage. He has always told his stories through art and play with some stories being personal while others inspired by the general day-to-day business governing people around him.

With an infectious sense of humour in his lyrics, Bholoja has remained one of Eswatini's greatest spirit-filled artists who expresses the true art of professionalism in the entertainment scene while delivering exceptionally unforgettable live performances each time he is on stage.

Speaking of exceptional performances, the 8th edition of the festival promises to be a stellar two-day event with a glorious line-up marking it as one of the most anticipated home-brewed festivals that will attract attendees from Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana & Namibia.

MANDISA MAMBA

Set to Captivate Luju as a New Era of Music and Meaning Unfolds

By: Ayanda Dlamini | **Pics:** Mandisa Mamba



Sultry R&B songstress Mandisa Mamba is preparing for one of the defining moments of her career as she gets ready to make her debut at the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival, a stage celebrated for showcasing some of the regions finest musical talent, fashion, cuisine and creative expression.

For the acclaimed singer-songwriter, the Luju Festival stage represents far more than another performance. It marks a milestone in a journey that has been shaped by resilience, reinvention and an unwavering commitment to creating music that speaks to the heart.

Known for her velvety vocals and emotionally rich songwriting, Mandisa has steadily carved out a distinctive place within Eswatini's contemporary music landscape since releasing her debut music in 2017. While audiences have come to know her through her captivating performances and soulful sound, the woman behind the microphone embodies many different roles.

Beyond music, she is a wife, mother, entrepreneur, actress and youth advocate who believes creativity has the power to transform lives.

"Everything I do is rooted in creating meaningful experiences," she says. "Whether it's through music, acting, youth initiatives or building my luxury handbag brand, Regal, I want my work to inspire, heal and bring people together."

That philosophy has become the foundation of an artistic career built not only on talent but also on authenticity.

Mandisa explains that music first became her outlet because it allowed her to communicate emotions that ordinary conversations often could not.

"My journey into music began from a genuine love for singing and writing," she says. "Over time, I realised music was the language that allowed me to express emotions I couldn't always put into conversation."

Finding Strength Through Growth

Nearly a decade into her recording career, she reflects on a path filled with memorable achievements, including prestigious award recognition, international nominations and performances on major stages. Yet she believes her greatest lessons came during the quieter moments.

Becoming a mother, stepping away from the spotlight for a season and navigating life's uncertainties fundamentally changed the way she approaches her craft.

Those experiences taught her that success is not measured solely by accolades but by personal growth and remaining true to oneself.

"Earlier in my career I focused on making good songs," she explains. "Today, I'm more intentional about making people feel something. My goal isn't simply to entertain. It's to create music that people can find themselves in."

That emotional honesty has become the defining characteristic of her evolving artistry.

A Luju Debut Worth Waiting For...

Her debut appearance at Luju festival feels especially fitting because the festival celebrates far more than live performances. It is a cultural showcase where music intersects with fashion, storytelling, food and African identity, values that closely mirror her own creative philosophy.

"Performing at Luju is incredibly special because it's one of the most respected lifestyle festivals on the continent," she says. "To be part of a platform that celebrates African excellence feels like an honour."

For Mandisa, the invitation represents both a personal triumph and a professional opportunity.

"Personally, it represents another answered prayer and a reminder that growth often comes one opportunity at a time. Professionally, it's an opportunity to introduce my music to new audiences while standing alongside artists whose work I admire."

She believes music should never exist in isolation.

Instead, it should complement fashion, visual art, culture and human connection to create unforgettable experiences.

"I love creating experiences that feel intentional, from the music itself to the visuals, the styling and the emotions people walk away with. Luju celebrates exactly that kind of creative expression."

SANCHEZIEY

The Sound of Heritage, Reimagined.

By: Fezile Mkhatshwa | **Pics:** Supplied

As the vibrant rhythms of the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival once again prepare to echo through the Malkerns Valley, festivalgoers can look forward to more than just world-class entertainment. Under this year's theme, "A Return to the African Future," the festival celebrates the rich traditions, stories, and cultural influences that continue to inspire and shape our evolving creative landscape.

Among the artists bringing this vision to life is SANCHEZIEY, born Mkhuleko Mangwe, whose music has become synonymous with Eswatini's distinctive Umgidvo sound. Through his authentic style and deep connection to local culture, Sancheziey embodies the festival's celebration of heritage while showcasing the future of Swati music.

Over the years, Sancheziey has built a reputation by doing something many artists find difficult; Staying rooted in tradition while creating music that resonates with younger listeners. His songs carry the pulse of Swazi culture, woven together with contemporary production and melodies that allow indigenous music to feel as relevant today as ever.

For the artist, preserving culture has never meant standing still - "I believe tradition is the foundation of everything I create. The Umgidvo sound represents who we are as emaSwati, and I want to preserve that identity."

That commitment has become the foundation of his career. Yet he is equally aware that music must continue to evolve if it is to speak to new generations.

"I understand that younger audiences enjoy music that feels current, so I blend traditional rhythms and storytelling with modern production and fresh melodies. It's about respecting our roots while allowing the music to grow with each generation."

This approach reflects a continental shift taking place across African music. More artists are choosing to celebrate local languages, indigenous sounds and cultural identity instead of chasing global trends. For Sancheziey, that movement represents an exciting future for African creativity.

"Local music is one of the strongest ways we tell our stories, carrying our languages, traditions and values into the future."

He believes Africa's greatest creative strength lies in its authenticity.

"Our creative identity will become even stronger when artists embrace their own cultures instead of trying to imitate others. Our unique sounds are what make us stand out, and they deserve to be heard on the biggest stages in the world."

That philosophy is evident in the direction his own music continues to take.

Having established himself as one of the country's leading voices in indigenous contemporary music, Sancheziey says he is entering a new chapter defined by purpose rather than popularity.

While listeners can expect fresh musical ideas, they should not expect him to abandon the sound that introduced him to audiences.

“I'm exploring new musical ideas while staying true to the Umgidvo sound that people know me for."

Every artist has a career defining moment, and for Sancheziey, that breakthrough came with the release of 'Siyabonga Gogo'. The song introduced his music to a much wider audience and proved that indigenous music could achieve mainstream success. Its impact is reflected in its growing digital reach, with the original track surpassing 114,000 YouTube views, while the 'Siyabonga Gogo' Remix featuring Lodanda, Young Zesh, and the Limkokwing Choir has attracted nearly 200,000 views on the platform.

"That song opened many doors for me, introduced my music to a wider audience and gave me the confidence to believe that indigenous music could reach people across different generations."

Since then, he has witnessed a noticeable change in how audiences respond to his music.

"I think people are much prouder of their culture today than they were a few years ago. Audiences are looking for music that feels authentic and represents who they are."

That growing appreciation makes the Luju Festival a fitting stage for an artist whose work is deeply connected to cultural identity.

When festivalgoers gather to watch his performance, Sancheziey hopes they will take away more than memories of energetic songs and vibrant performances and an increased love for Swati culture and music.

"I hope they leave feeling proud of who they are and where they come from. I want them to remember the energy, the joy and the cultural richness of the performance. More than anything, I want people to see that our traditions are alive, relevant and something we should continue celebrating."

Beyond the Luju Festival, fans can look forward to new music that continues to showcase Sancheziey's evolving artistry while staying rooted in tradition. Among the projects on the horizon is his upcoming album, teased by the release of "Utawuva Ngengoma," a collaboration with Lodanda that offers a glimpse of what's to come.



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LOVE

LUJU 2026 ***Weaves*** African Heritage Into A Bold New ***Fashion*** Narrative

By : Ayanda Dlamini | **Photo Cred:** Standard Bank Luju Festival // Will Brown // Supplied

The Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival is once again redefining the intersection of fashion, culture and commerce, unveiling a sophisticated fashion programme that celebrates African heritage while showcasing the future of the continent's creative industry.

Set to take place in a few weeks at House on Fire in the Malkerns Valley, the eighth edition of the festival is expected to attract more than 10,000 visitors from over 26 countries. Guided by its founding philosophy, "A Return to the African Future," this year's festival introduces Kwasukasukela (Once Upon a Time) as its fashion theme, inviting designers and festivalgoers to draw inspiration from African storytelling traditions and indigenous knowledge systems.

Festival organisers, Phiwo Dhlamini, Communications Manager for the Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival to be precise, says this year's programme goes beyond showcasing beautiful garments, instead using fashion as a medium to preserve culture, celebrate identity and inspire innovation.

"The Luju Fashion Programme has become one of the festival's defining pillars because it demonstrates that African fashion is much more than aesthetics. It is culture, entrepreneurship, identity and storytelling," said Dhlamini.

"Through Kwasukasukela, we wanted to create a platform where designers could draw inspiration from the wisdom of our ancestors while confidently presenting a vision of Africa's future. Every collection becomes a conversation between heritage and innovation."

Fashion Rooted In Storytelling

The siSwati expression Kwasukasukela, traditionally used to begin folktales, serves as the creative heartbeat of this year's fashion programme. The concept encourages designers to transform oral traditions into visual narratives through fabric, texture, colour and silhouette.

Instead of simply creating fashionable collections, designers have been challenged to produce garments that carry stories inspired by legendary figures, nature, ancestral wisdom and the traditions that have shaped African communities for generations. Organisers believe the theme reflects Luju's commitment to ensuring Africa's past remains a source of inspiration for its future.



Luju Fashion Runway headliner **Mzukisi Mbane**

The concept also extends to festivalgoers, who are encouraged to embrace the storytelling spirit by creating fashion looks that reflect the richness of African heritage throughout the two-day celebration.

International excellence meets local creativity as Mzukisi Mbane headlines

One of the highlights of this year's programme will be the Luju Fashion Runway, headlined by acclaimed South African designer Mzukisi Mbane, founder and creative director of Imprint South Africa.

Recognised internationally for his Afro-futuristic aesthetic, Mbane recently won Africa Fashion Up 2026 and was named South Africa's Best Heritage and Cultural Designer. His collections have gained recognition for blending indigenous African identity with contemporary luxury fashion, making him a fitting ambassador for this year's theme.

Alongside Mbane, eleven of Eswatini's most exciting designers will unveil original collections inspired by Kwasukasukela. Their work is expected to showcase the diversity of the country's growing fashion industry while demonstrating how local designers continue to redefine African design through innovation and craftsmanship.

Participating designers include Adonis Threads by Calvin DuPont, Blackdegree by Kwenzie Zwane, Flow Wearz by Zikode Zwane, Philz Creations by Philile Nkwanyana, Rose Peti by Nothando Dlamini, Tash Creations by Thando Ndlangamandla, Uniq_uity by Sinakekelwe Mhlanga, Zerushi by Zen Shiba, Karo Textile by Nomfundo Simelane, Batfobile Edit by Batfobile Dlamini and Wels Craft by Welile Dlamini.

Together, their collections will present a powerful celebration of Eswatini's evolving fashion identity.

Creating opportunities beyond the catwalk

While the runway remains one of Luju's biggest attractions, organisers say the festival's vision extends far beyond a single showcase.

"One of our greatest priorities is creating genuine economic opportunities for Eswatini's creative sector," Dhlamini said.

"The runway offers visibility, but our goal extends far beyond the catwalk. We want designers to build sustainable businesses, establish commercial relationships and access new markets. Luju exists to celebrate creativity while strengthening the entire fashion value chain."

That commitment is reflected in Luju's continued partnership with Far East Textiles, which returns for a second consecutive year to support participating designers.

Through the collaboration, each designer received fabrics of their choice to create their runway collections while also participating in a factory visit and engagement session hosted by Far East Textiles Managing Director Tokky Hou. Organisers say the partnership equips designers with practical industry knowledge while strengthening links between fashion design and textile manufacturing.

Beyond the runway itself, Luju has integrated fashion into its wider festival economy through initiatives such as the Fashion Café and curated MSME activations. These platforms provide designers and artisans with valuable opportunities to showcase their products, connect with customers and build lasting commercial relationships.

By creating spaces where creativity meets business, Luju continues to position fashion as an important contributor to Eswatini's growing creative economy.

Conversations shaping the future of African fashion

Knowledge sharing will once again form a central part of the festival through the return of the Fashion Indaba.

The platform will bring together designers, retailers, stylists, manufacturers, fabric producers and industry organisations to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing Africa's fashion industry.

This year's discussions will focus on building stronger fashion ecosystems across the continent, developing successful fashion businesses beyond creativity alone and exploring how indigenous knowledge and sustainability can shape the future of African fashion.

Organisers believe these conversations are essential in ensuring that African fashion is recognised not only for its artistic value but also for its economic significance.

Everyone has a role to play

Fashion at Luju extends beyond professional designers, inviting every festivalgoer to become part of the experience.

Visitors are encouraged to embrace this year's theme by wearing two distinctive outfits over the festival weekend, each inspired by African storytelling through colour, natural materials and symbolic design. The popular Best Dressed Competition is expected to once again become one of the festival's most anticipated attractions.

The Luju Photo Booth will also return, allowing guests to capture memorable images while celebrating individuality, creativity and personal style.

"Every year we encourage festivalgoers to participate rather than simply observe," Dhlamini said.

"Fashion at Luju is not reserved for designers alone, it belongs to every guest who embraces the theme and contributes their own interpretation. That collective creativity is what makes Luju unlike any other festival."

A celebration of Africa's past and future

With additional fashion announcements still to come before the festival opens, Luju 2026 is shaping up to deliver one of its most ambitious and culturally significant fashion programmes yet.

Far more than a runway spectacle, this year's programme demonstrates how fashion can preserve heritage, empower entrepreneurs and celebrate African identity while inspiring future generations.

As thousands prepare to descend on House on Fire next month, Luju's message is clear: every stitch tells a story, every garment preserves a legacy, and every designer contributes to a future that remains proudly and unmistakably African.



Kwasukasukela... What's your story?

Photographer: Will Brown @willl.brown | Styling: Hlanhla Lukhele & Vanessa Gwebu @sasa_lu_eswatini @vanessag-webu | Art Direction: Noentla Khumalo @makhosinoentla | Production: Philippa Thorne @philithorne

The Kwasukasukela Storybook:

A Style Guide to Once Upon a Time

By: Philippa Thorne | **Photography:** Will Brown

Each chapter explores a different way to interpret Kwasukasukela (Once Upon a Time) through contemporary African fashion. Drawing on memory, storytelling, craftsmanship and imagination, these editorials celebrate fashion as a living narrative.

From folklore and oral histories to heritage, symbolism and the landscapes that shape us, expect captivating interpretations brought to life through contemporary African style. Whether inspired by an African hero, heroine, legend or iconic character, past, present or imagined, this is your opportunity to tell a story through fashion.



Khatima Adorn

Fashion Inspiration: Accessories that Speak - Using jewellery and ochre to standout

Accessories are never just accessories. Throughout Africa, adornment has expressed identity, celebration, craftsmanship and belonging. Let your jewellery, headpiece, belt, handbag or handcrafted details become part of your story. Think sculptural earrings, stacked beads, woven bags, embellished hats and contemporary interpretations of ceremonial adornment.

Designer: Flow Wearz Model: Geoffrey Candwong @gxoffr.xy **Accessories:** Jaber Na, Azuri Brass



Cabangisisa Reflect

Fashion Inspiration: Once Upon a Time

Every great story begins with a character. Draw inspiration from an African or Swazi hero, heroine, legend, animal, landscape or folktale - not as costume, but as creative interpretation. Capture the essence of your chosen story through colour, silhouette, craftsmanship or symbolism.

Don't recreate the story. Reimagine it.

Designer: Karo Textiles,Batfobile Edit, House of Dandy, @lin_del_wa Chloe Thorne **Model:** Thubelihle Masina @thubinarrative, Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s **Accessories:** Benanial, Lupondvo Design



Bumba Mould

Fashion Inspiration: The African Future - Traditional Reimagined and Renewed through Contemporary Fashion

Kwasukasukela doesn't end in the past - it imagines the future. What would tomorrow's storyteller wear? Think sculptural silhouettes, unexpected tailoring, reinterpret heritage rather than wearing traditional dress literally.

Designer: Uniq_uity **Accessories:** Gone Rural @gonerural, Lupondvo Design



Khula | Grow

Fashion Inspiration: Stories That Shaped You

The first stories we wear are often our own. A school uniform. Sunday best. A grandmother's dress. A scout scarf. A childhood jersey. Explore how memories of growing up can inspire contemporary fashion. Familiar collars, pleats, blazers, badges and uniforms become elevated silhouettes that celebrate where your story began.

Designer: Adonis Threads **Model:** Thubelihle Masina @thubinarrative

Khumbula | Remember

Fashion Inspiration: Using Craft to Reimagine our Heritage

Rather than recreating tradition, reinterpret it. Look to the craftsmanship, materials and cultural references that have shaped generations and imagine them anew. A lihiya-inspired wrap becomes an evening cape. Traditional beadwork transforms into contemporary jewellery. A woven basket inspires the silhouette of a handbag. Heritage becomes inspiration, not imitation.

Designer: Tash Creations **Model:** Katleho Sojane, @Katleho
Accessories: Azuri brass





Umhlaba | Belonging

Fashion Inspiration: Landscape

Every landscape holds a memory. Explore the deep connection between people, place, and identity through designs inspired by rolling hills, winding rivers, vast skies, and the textures of the natural world. Transform the colours, contours, and rhythms of the land into contemporary fashion that reflects a sense of home, heritage, and belonging. Celebrate the enduring relationship between nature and community, where every garment becomes a reflection of the places that shape us and the stories that connect us.

Designer: Adonis Threads, Blackdegree, Zerushi
Models: Geoffrey Candwong, Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s
Accessories: Bag; Sine Leather, Head Khokho, Bracelets Azuri

Phupha | Dream

Fashion Inspiration: Looking to Tomorrow

Step beyond the boundaries of the ordinary and into a world shaped by imagination. Explore fantasy, aspiration, and possibility through fashion, drawing from ethereal forms, unexpected colour palettes, and dreamlike narratives. Create collections that blur the line between reality and imagination, celebrating creativity without limits. Let garments become vessels for vision, hope, and self-expression, where every look tells the story of a dream brought to life.

Designer: Rose Peti **Model:**Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s
Accessories: Maverikz



Designers Create with LOVE

Step into the vibrant world of African fashion as emerging designers unveil collections that celebrate innovation, craftsmanship and contemporary storytelling. Showcased at the Fashion Café during the 2026 **Standard Bank Luju Food and Lifestyle Festival**, these pop-up runway presentations shine a spotlight on bold creativity, cultural expression and the next generation of design talent. Discover standout clothing and accessories that blend heritage with modern style, offering a glimpse into the exciting future of African fashion.



Designer: Tash Creations @tashcreations_thando **Model:** Katleho Sojane, @Katleho **Accessories:** Azuri Brass @azuri_brass



Designer: Wels Craft @wels.crafts
Model: Thubelihle Masina @thubinarrative
Earings: Lupondvo Design @lupondvodesign
Baskets: Gone Rural @gonerural



Designer: Flow Wearz @flow_wearz_clothing
Model: GeoffreyCandwong @gxoffr.xy
Accessories: Head piece - Jaber Na @jaber.na.jewellery, Bracelet - Azuri Brass @azuri_brass



Designer: Uniq_uity @uniq_uity2024
Model: Thubelihle Masina @thubinarrative
Accessories: Head piece - Gone Rural @gonerural, Jewellery - Lupondvo Design @lupondvodesign



Designer: Rose Peti @rosepeti_ Model:Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s **Accessories:** Ring - Jaber Na @jaber.na.jewellery, Earring - Tandla Tami @tandla_tami



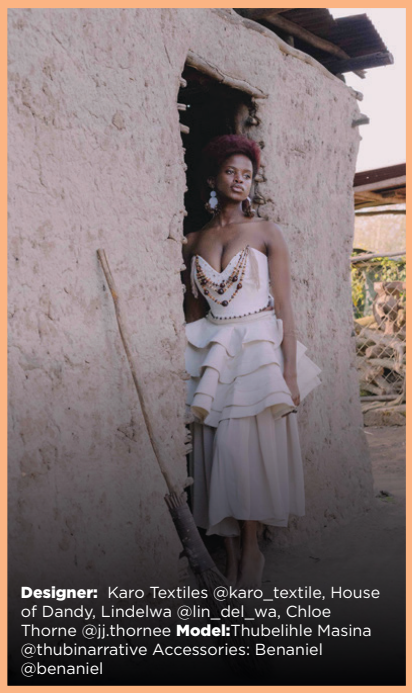
Designer: Blackdegree @blackdegree_pbd
Model: Geoffrey Candwong @gxoffr.xy
Accessories: Bag - Sine Leather @sine_leather_eswatini , head piece - Khokho @khokho_collection



Designer: Zerushi @zerushi_studio
Model: Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s
Accessories: Azuri Brass @azuri_brass



Designer: Philz Creations @philzcreations
Model: Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s
Accessories: Benaniel @benaniel



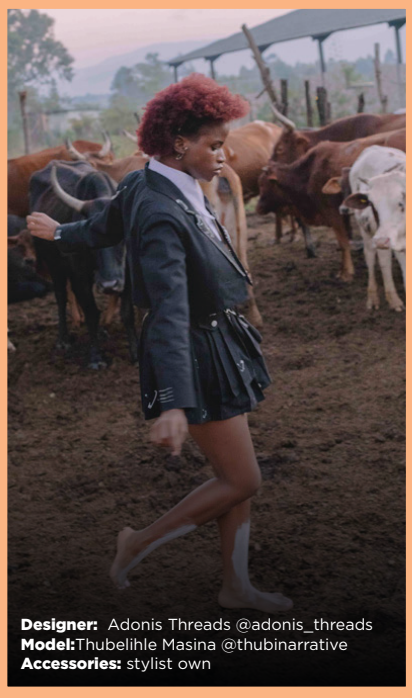
Designer: Karo Textiles @karo_textile, House of Dandy, Lindelwa @lin_del_wa, Chloe Thorne @jj.thornee **Model:**Thubelihle Masina @thubinarrative Accessories: Benaniel @benaniel



Designer: Batfobile Edit @batfobile.edit, House of Dandy @the_house_of_dandy, Lin @lin_del_wa, Chloe Thorne @jj.thornee
Model: Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s
Accessories: Lupondvo Design @lupondvodesign



Designer: Flow Wearz @flow_wearz_clothing
Model: Katleho Sojane @_katleho_s



Designer: Adonis Threads @adonis_threads
Model: Thubelihle Masina @thubinarrative
Accessories: stylist own

Credits for Fashion Concept Shoot LUJU 2026

Photographer: Will Brown @willl.brown
Styling: Hlanhla Lukhele & Vanessa Gwebu @sasa_lu_eswatini @vanessagwebu
Art Direction: Noentla Khumalo @makhosinoentla
Production: Philippa Thorne @philithorne
Research & Creative Direction Assistant: Chloe Thorne @jj.thornee
Fashion Assistant: Ella Login McGinn @ella_mcginn11
Styling Assistant: Makha Nxumalo
Accessories Supported By: Dala Spaces @dala.spaces



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PHOKOPHELA Sinawe