

ESWATINI CANE GROWERS ASSOCIATION



ECGA

"Cane For Growth"

ECGA

News letter

3rd
Quarter



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1. CEO's note

Dr Siphon Nkambule

DR SIPHO NKAMBULE:
I am pleased to introduce the 3rd quarter Eswatini Cane Growers Association (ECGA) in-house newsletter. The ECGA Office attaches a lot of importance in effective engagement with members and other stakeholders. We have grown from relying only on physical meetings to harnessing emerging technologies in general and social media in particular. Most members and stakeholders will access this document through social media. We encourage all forms of responsible and efficient means of communication.

As we reflect on the past quarter, I extend heartfelt appreciation to all growers for their active participation in the Feedback Meetings and Annual General Meeting. The strong turnout and meaningful discussions highlight your commitment and unity as an industry, and your contributions continue to guide ECGA's representation, advocacy and support programmes.

Our sector continues to face shifts in the SACU sugar market, with growing competition and price pressures due to deep sea imports. Despite these challenges, Eswatini's growers have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability.

This period also marked an important milestone as Tambankulu Estate, Royal Eswatini

"We have grown from relying only on physical meetings to harnessing emerging technologies in general and social media in particular."

Sugar Corporation, and the Eswatini Sugar Association received their Bonsucro Certification/accreditation, demonstrating Eswatini's commitment to sustainable sugarcane production. We are encouraged that more growers are now preparing to apply for Fairtrade Certification, further strengthening our sustainability drive.

Congratulations to all small-scale grower competition winners for your outstanding performance, and especially to the women farmers whose successes continue to inspire and affirm the growing inclusivity within our industry.

We also noted with excitement the number of youth who came up to the podium on the day. ECGA remains committed to building the leadership capacity of growers, with special focus on gender balance and youth participation. Initiatives that equip growers with governance and leadership skills will ensure strong, inclusive leadership for the future of the Association.

ECGA will work with the orga-



nizing team to ensure that the 2 groups of farmers are visibly recognised and incentivised in future.

ECGA is finalizing its five-year Strategic Plan, which will define our priorities in representation, advocacy, sustainability, and grower support. Together, we will continue to build a more resilient, inclusive, and competitive sugar industry for Eswatini.



2. Grower Engagement

AUGUST was a month of high energy and meaningful engagement for the Association, with growers showing up in strong numbers for both the Feedback Meetings and the Annual General Meeting (AGM)—held just a week apart. Their commitment, even with such a packed calendar, was truly commendable. **Planter's Group (PG) Feedback Meetings**

The Feedback Meetings took place on the 19th, 18th and 20th of August 2025 and featured a special session led by representatives from the Eswatini Revenue Services (ERS). Their presentations on Tax Compliance sparked lively discussions and were met with appreciation from growers.

The sessions also prompted further research, as presenters took note of growers' insightful questions.

Annual General Meeting

Just days later, the AGM on the 27th of August 2025 drew an even larger crowd than in previous years, marking a new milestone for the Association. Among the key speakers was Ms. Andrea Mendes from Eswatini Sugar, who delivered a timely update on the sugar markets dynamics in general and Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) in particular. While the industry faces growing competition from imported sugar, there was encouraging news: increased Dollar Based Reference Price (DBRP) for imports into SACU and relatively lower export tariff (estimated at about 10%) into the USA offer some relief for growers. With strong attendance, informative sessions, and forward-looking discussions, August 2025 will be remembered as a month of progress and participation.



3. Building the next generation of leadership

BY MXOLISI HLOPHE

ECGA remains committed to developing the leadership and governance capacity within the Association. Our broader vision is to cultivate a strong pipeline of knowledgeable and responsible leaders to drive the association's future. As part of this commitment, ECGA recently sponsored six growers to attend the "Being a Director Part 1" course offered by the Institute of Directors South Africa (IoDSA), at a course fee of R5,818.60 per participant. We sat down with one of the participants of the governance training, a young woman grower from Malandelas Farm in Malkerns.

Mxolisi Hlophe (MH): Can you briefly introduce yourself and tell us about your journey as a young grower in the sugar industry?

KD: My name is Khetsiwe D. Dlamini (KD), a young grower and Assistant Farm Manager at Malandela's Farm. With a degree in Agricultural Education and a Senior Certificate in Sugarcane Production from South African Sugar ECGA-GSM, I am passionate about agriculture and community development. My journey in the sugar industry has seen me grow from fieldwork to management, focusing on productivity, sustainability, and ethical farm practices.

MH: What were some of the key lessons or takeaways you gained from the training?

KD: The training was eye-opening. I learned that effective governance goes beyond compliance, it's about building a culture of ethical leadership, accountability, and inclusivity. Most importantly, leadership is not a position, but a responsibility. It is about serving the organization and society responsibly.

MH: How did the training change your perception of leadership and governance, especially in the context of agri-



culture and grower organizations?

KD: The course completely transformed my perception of leadership. I now see it as a responsibility to serve with conscience and courage, focusing on practical, people-centered governance. It taught me that good leaders build systems that outlast them and emphasized the importance of clear roles and accountability, especially in community-based organisations.

MH: How do you plan to apply what you learned in your everyday role as a grower?

KD: I plan to apply these lessons by strengthening governance in our farming operations through better record-keeping, transparency, and ethical practices. I also aim to share this knowledge with other young growers to collectively raise governance standards in the sector.

MH: What does this opportunity mean to you personally as a young woman in the sugar industry?

KD: It's a significant opportunity. Women in agriculture face unique challenges, but this experience reaffirmed that we belong in leadership spaces. It empowered me to speak confidently, contribute meaningfully, and inspire other young women to pursue leadership — proving that gender is never a limitation.

MH: How do you feel about ECGA's continued efforts to empower youth

and women through capacity-building initiatives?

KD: ECGA's efforts are commendable and vital for the industry's sustainability. Building young, ethical leaders prevents stagnation and promotes transparency, inclusivity, and innovation among the next generation of growers.

MH: What are your aspirations moving forward, both as a grower and as a future leader in the industry?

KD: My goal is to grow as an ethical and innovative leader in agriculture, promoting sustainable, transparent farming and greater youth participation in governance, while championing environmental conservation and responsible land use.

MH: What message would you give to other young and aspiring growers—especially women—about taking up leadership opportunities when they arise?

KD: I'd tell them to take the opportunity, even if they feel unsure — growth begins outside the comfort zone. Leadership isn't about titles, but about responsibility and positive change. Lead with integrity, purpose, and heart.

MH: Thank you Khetsiwe for the time and wish you all the best in your work and governance journey

K D :
Thank you.



4. Policy, Advocacy & Industry Developments

By Mxolisi Hlophe

THE Eswatini Cane Growers Association (ECGA) continues to play a pivotal role in advocating for growers, engaging with key stakeholders, and contributing to policy discussions that shape the sugarcane industry. In the past quarter, ECGA participated in several strategic events and consultations aimed at strengthening grower support, promoting sustainability, and advancing climate-resilient and technology-driven agricultural practices.

Participation at the 97th South African Sugar Technologists Association (SASTA) Congress - August 2025

In August 2025, ECGA joined over 500 industry experts at the 97th SASTA Congress in Durban, a hub for the latest in climate-smart agriculture, digitalisation, and smallholder development. The congress provided valuable insights on pest management, farm diversification, and precision agriculture technologies. ECGA returned with a renewed focus on promoting climate adaptation measures, expanding grower training, and encouraging the adoption of renewable energy and digital tools to strengthen farm productivity and resilience.

Differential Agricultural Water Pricing Consultation - October 2025

October saw ECGA contributing to discussions on a new Differential Agricultural Water Pricing Framework. Stakeholders explored fair and sustainable pricing for irrigation water, resulting in the creation of a Multi-Stakeholder Task Team, with ECGA representing grower interests. The process will ensure small farms are protected while medium and large farms undergo targeted consultations to finalize the model, reflecting ECGA's commitment to equity and sustainability in resource management.

Standardized Electricity Connection Charges consultations - October 2025

ECGA also participated in a workshop



on standardized electricity connection charges organized by the Eswatini Energy Regulatory Authority (ESERA). The initiative aims to introduce transparency and consistency in connection costs nationwide, with further consultations scheduled in the Lubombo and Hhohho regions to ensure all stakeholders are heard.

Bonsucro Climate Action Session - August 2025

In August, ECGA engaged with Bonsucro's Climate Action Session, exploring tools to measure emissions, water use, and sustainability performance across the sugarcane value chain. The session reinforced the need for cross-sector collaboration and institutional support to implement effective climate strategies and remain globally competitive.

NDC 2.0 Stocktake Validation Workshops - July 2025

Finally, ECGA played an active role in validating the NDC 2.0 Stocktake Report, helping shape Eswatini's NDC 3.0 under the Paris Agreement. Workshops focused on advancing climate-smart agriculture, efficient irrigation, resilient land-use planning, and soil carbon improvement, while highlighting the urgent need for financing and partnerships to scale sustainable practices across the sector.

Through these initiatives, ECGA continues to champion grower interests, advocate for sound policies, and drive industry development, ensuring that Eswatini's sugarcane sector remains resilient, innovative, and prepared for the challenges of a changing global market.

5. Sustainability Matters

I. Assess and Manage Environmental, Social & Human Rights Risks

(Focus: Setting up your system and managing risk - the 'Governance' element of ES)

SUSTAINABILITY Compliance Check for the Sugar Industry By Eswatini Sugar Sustainability demands systematic, documented compliance. This checklist simplifies the core, non-negotiable Indicators to help industry members, management and field teams ensure they are sustainability compliant and demonstrating robust sustainability performance. This is the first part of this series and is designed to sensitive on the requirements of sustainability compliance.

Simplified Action Item	Notes/Explanation
Management System & Planning	
Sustainability Plan (SMP): Create and review your master plan yearly. Get Top Management to sign off on it.	This plan must include policies on Human Rights, Labour, Safety, Environment, Anti-corruption, etc.
Legal Compliance: Have a system to track and prove you follow ALL local and international laws.	You must be able to verify you are compliant.
Internal Monitoring: Do an annual internal check (audit) of your progress, fix any problems, and report the results to management.	This ensures continuous improvement.
Risk Assessment & Stakeholder Engagement	
Risk Assessment: Annually assess and record all potential risks to your operation.	This means looking at risks against the entire operation.
Stakeholder Engagement: Map all people and groups impacted (especially vulnerable groups) and update your plan on how to work with them.	Ensure your plan has clear actions and resources.
Grievance Mechanism: Ensure your system for complaints is easy to use, strictly confidential (anonymity guaranteed), and follows the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs).	It must be fair and accessible to everyone.
Supply Chain Due Diligence (Mill Focus)	
Supply Base Assessment: Start assessing social and environmental risks in 20% of your sugarcane supply base annually.	The goal is to cover all supplier growers in five years.
Improvement Plan: Create a Continuous Improvement Plan to help your growers fix the problems you find in the assessments.	This shows active support for your supply chain.

II. Respect Labour Rights & Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

(Focus: Ensuring fair treatment and a safe workplace - the 'Social' element of ESG)

Simplified Action Item	Notes/Explanation
Occupational Health & Safety (OHS)	
H&S Risk Management: Formally assess all risks (including heat stress) and manage them using a written Health & Safety Management Plan.	You must communicate hazards to workers and actively manage risks.
Worker Welfare: Provide FREE and SAFE drinking water, separate, adequate sanitation, and hand-washing facilities.	Water must be near the workstation and toilets must be available where workers are.
PPE: Provide REQUIRED Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) free of charge.	Train workers on its use and check they are using it effectively all the time.
Emergency Response: Ensure first aid supplies, trained personnel, and emergency procedures (in an accessible language) are available.	
Contracts, Wages, and Working Hours	
Employment Contracts: Ensure 100% of workers have a written contract that is clearly explained and understood.	This is critical for all workers.
Minimum Wage Guarantee: Ensure all workers (including those paid by piece-rate) are guaranteed to receive at least the legal minimum wage for their hours worked.	
Overtime: Ensure overtime is voluntary and paid at a minimum premium rate of at least 25%.	Must comply with national law.
Working Hours: Follow all national laws on working hours and ensure workers get at least one day off every seven days.	
Human Rights & Dialogue	
Zero Tolerance Policies: Implement and communicate policies against discrimination, harassment, and forced labour.	Make sure these policies are known by your members and workers
Child Labour: Enforce the legal minimum age, with 18 years as the absolute minimum age for any hazardous work.	Hazardous work covers most field/mill operations. Must comply with national law.
Social Dialogue: Respect workers' rights to form unions (freedom of association) and use collective bargaining without interference.	
Land Claims: Actively work in good faith to resolve any legitimate land- or water-related conflicts.	Must follow national law.

Next Steps: Drive Action

- Assign clear ownership for each item on this checklist. These tasks are essential for sustainability.
- Use this checklist in your next management meeting.

6. Grower Competitions & Recognition

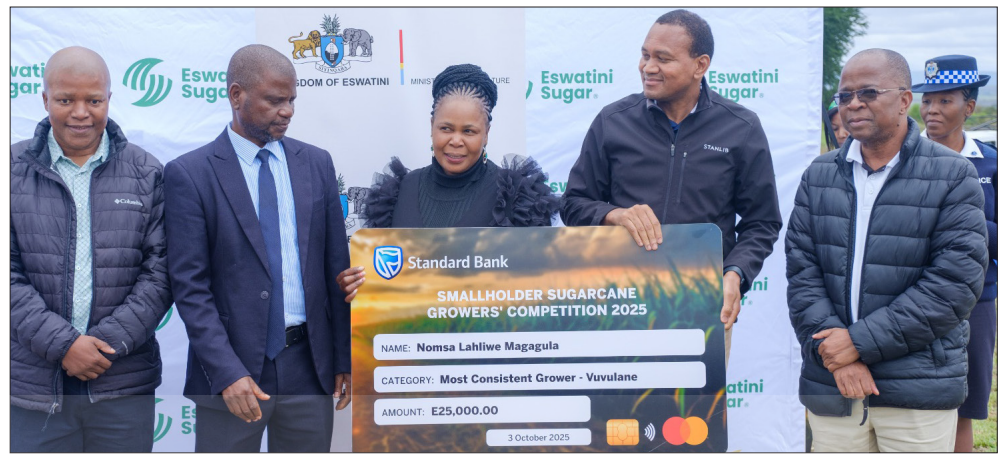
By Mxolisi Hlophe

ECGA proudly celebrated the achievements of small-scale sugarcane growers at the 2025 Small-scale Grower Competition, held on 3 October at Phumlamcashi, Siphofaneni. The event was a showcase of dedication, innovation, and excellence in cane farming, bringing together a distinguished audience that included the Minister of Agriculture, Principal Secretary of Agriculture, the Regional Administrator for the Lubombo region, Chiefs, CEOs from leading banks, Senior Government Officials and captains of industry. ECGA reaffirmed its commitment to the growth of the sector by contributing E50,000 towards the sponsorship of the competition. Our spotlight turns to one of the outstanding achievers of the day – a remarkable female grower who was honored with the prestigious “Most Consistent Grower” award. In this exclusive interview, she shares her journey as a small-scale grower, the strategies that have driven her consistent performance, the challenges she has overcome, and how ECGA’s support has played a role in her growth.

Mxolisi Hlophe: Could you please introduce yourself to our readers?

Nomsa Magagula: My name is Nomsa Magagula, and I am from Vuvulane. I am a single mother of two and a businesswoman involved in chicken and goat farming, as well as running a small grocery business. I have been engaged in sugarcane farming since October 2012.

MH: What inspired you to venture into sugarcane



farming, and how did your journey begin?

NM: After returning home from working in South Africa, following the passing of my parents, I wanted to revive our family farm. I joined the revolving fund programme offered by Government through Mhlume Sugar Mill and received over E125,000, which I used to replant my 4.8-hectare farm in 2014 and renovate the farmhouse. This support was the foundation for my journey in sugarcane farming.

MH: Can you tell us a bit about your farm — its size, location, and the community it supports?

NM: My farm is 4.8 hectares and is located in Vuvulane, Jubilee. It provides seasonal employment to 12 young people from the local community and two full-time positions, helping to support youth engagement and livelihoods in the area.

MH: You received the Most Consistent Grower Award, which included a special prize from Standard Bank Eswatini. What does this recognition mean to you?

NM: Receiving this award is very exciting and encourages me to continue working hard and striving for excellence. It is inspiring to see Standard Bank and other partners recognizing the efforts of small-scale growers. The cash prize of E25,000 is also a meaningful support that will help me further develop my farm.

MH: Consistency in farming is not easy. What key practices have helped you maintain such high standards year after year?

NM: Consistency comes from discipline and dedication. I make sure to weed on time, apply fertilizer as scheduled, and control smut diseases early. I spend time on the farm daily to ensure every activity is done properly and on time — that’s what keeps

the results steady.

MH: What challenges have you faced as a small-scale grower, and how have you managed to overcome them?

NM: One of the biggest challenges has been dealing with Yellow Sugar-

“I want to encourage women to believe in themselves and take up the challenge.”

cane Aphids (YSA). We’ve managed it through spraying and, recently, by using drone technology, which has made pest control more effective. Rising fertilizer and input costs are also a concern, but I’ve learned to plan ahead and work closely with financiers to ensure timely procurement of inputs.

MH: What message would you like to share with other women who may be hesitant to venture into commercial agriculture?

NM: It’s absolutely possible — regardless of gender. I want to encourage women to believe in themselves and take up the challenge. With dedication and focus, women can succeed in commercial farming just as much as men.

MH: What are your future goals for your sugarcane enterprise?

NM: My goal is to expand by acquiring another farm and to join sustainability initiatives such as Fairtrade. I believe this will help me grow my business responsibly while contributing to a more sustainable sugar industry.



7. Agricultural finance corner

By Mxolisi Hlophe

IN this edition of the agricultural finance corner, I look at financial inclusion, which refers to the process of ensuring that individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs.

With the aid of the above conceptual framework, which I developed for an empirical study I recently conducted on the effects of financial inclusion on income inequality in the SADC region.

I argue the importance of expanding financial inclusion to rural, agricultural communities in order to increase their income levels and reduce income inequality.

Access to rural finance as a pathway to higher incomes

Policymakers, development agencies, and financial institutions working on financial inclusion initiatives should adopt a holistic

approach that considers access, availability, and usage of financial services.

This comprehensive perspective is crucial in guiding effective financial inclusion efforts. Focusing only on expanding physical infrastructure, such as banks or ATMs, without ensuring that services are truly accessible and actively used by rural and low-income populations, will fall short of achieving meaningful financial inclusion outcomes.

In the context of our local agricultural sector, with primary activities mostly located in rural areas, financial inclusion for farming communities can be achieved through; Increasing the availability of financial institutions such as microfinance institutions and savings and credit cooperatives, and remote/mobile bank branches.

Expanding the reach and coverage of these institutions to increase their accessibility in the rural farm-

ing areas.

Most importantly, ensuring that farmers actually use the financial products/services of savings and credit for buying inputs, adopting improved irrigation systems and raising farm productivity.

Why Target the Rural and Agricultural Poor?

The conceptual framework I present acknowledges that there are many levels of income inequality, typically rural and agricultural groups are amongst the upper quantiles of inequality.

Hence targeting financial inclusion efforts to this population segments produces the greatest benefits.

When farmers gain access to affordable finance, their capacity to invest, manage climate change risks, and participate in value chains increases, contributing to shared prosperity.

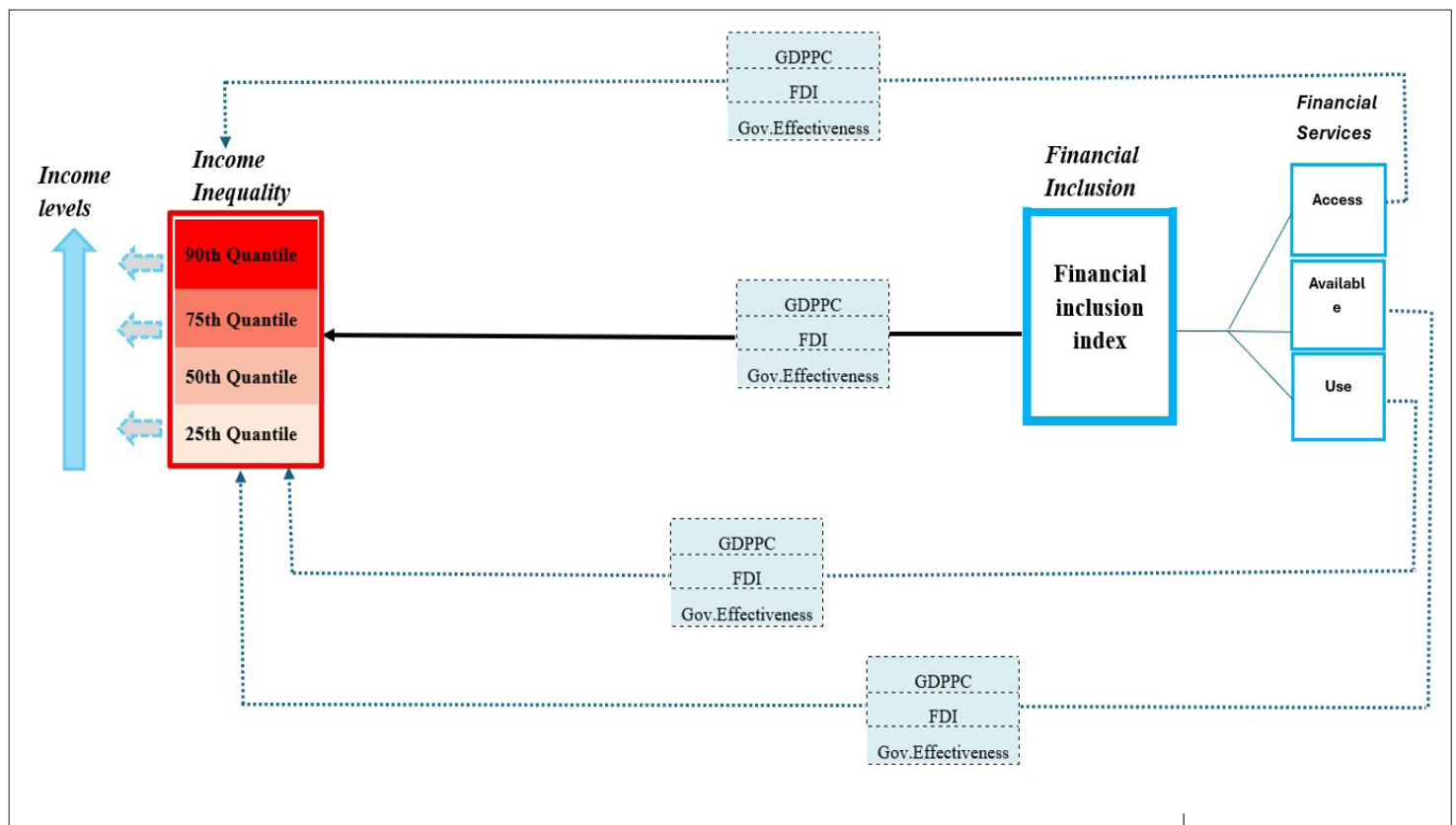


FIGURE: Conceptual framework -financial inclusion and income inequality relationship

Source: Writers own computation.

8. Celebrating Eswatini's Bonsucro Milestone

By Mxolisi Hlophe

As we close this quarter's edition of the ECGA Newsletter, we celebrate a proud moment for Eswatini's sugar industry. Tabankulu Estate, Royal Eswatini Sugar Corporation, and the Eswatini Sugar Association were officially awarded their Bonsucro certificates—a major milestone that reaffirms the industry's commitment to responsible, sustainable production.

Bonsucro is one of the world's leading standards for sustainable sugarcane, recognising operations that protect the environment, uphold fair labour practices, and use natural resources efficiently.

This achievement aligns closely with the sustainability principles highlighted in our "Sustainability Matters" section, demonstrating how strong governance, improved labour systems, and continuous improvement

drive meaningful progress.

This certification is not only a win for the recognised organisations but for the entire sugar value chain, including our growers. It shows what is possible when we work together towards shared standards and a sustainable future.

We congratulate the certified organisations and look forward to continued industry-wide progress.



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