

33 Johannesburg Schools Unite for Earth Day: Planting Trees & Breathing Life Into Communities

In a city-wide activation spanning all seven regions, Seriti Institute and partners brought environmental education, 180 trees, and 105 recycling bins to schools across Johannesburg.

By Seriti Institute Communications · Breathe Cities Initiative



MEC for Environment Ewan Botha (centre) joins Seriti Institute and Breathe Cities representatives at one of the 33 Earth Day activations.

International Mother Earth Day, celebrated annually on the 22nd of April, served this year as the backdrop for an ambitious environmental campaign across Johannesburg. Seriti Institute, in partnership with Breathe Cities, the City of Johannesburg, and 33 community-based organizations (CBOs), successfully coordinated large-scale activations at 33 schools spanning Regions A through G.

The campaign forms part of the Breathe Better Together initiative, which focuses on improving air quality awareness, promoting environmental education, and encouraging communities to take practical action towards cleaner and healthier living spaces. Air pollution caused by vehicle emissions, industrial activities, waste burning, and fossil fuels continues to pose serious risks to communities, particularly vulnerable groups such as children.

Schools from Soweto, Alexandra, Diepsloot, Orange Farm, Eldorado Park, Roodepoort, and surrounding areas all participated, creating meaningful spaces for environmental learning and action.

Throughout the activations, learners were introduced to important environmental topics: air quality and pollution, the dangers of waste burning, waste separation at source, recycling, and sustainable environmental practices. Demonstrations and discussions educated learners on how their daily actions directly impact the environment and community health.

As part of the campaign, Seriti Institute purchased and distributed 180 trees and 105 waste bins across participating schools. Each CBO received five trees and three bins labeled with colour-coded recycling stickers for recyclables, non-recyclables, and organic waste.

What stood out most was the enthusiasm shown by learners across all schools. They engaged confidently in discussions, asked thoughtful questions, and participated enthusiastically in tree planting and waste management demonstrations.

33

Schools
Activated

180

Trees
Planted

105

Recycling
Bins

7

City
Regions

“ Young people are not only aware of environmental challenges , they are eager to become part of the solution. ”

— Breathe Better Together, Earth Day 2026



LEFT: Learners and community leaders participate in the tree planting ceremony. RIGHT: Students plant a tree together, each placing their hands on the sapling.

Trees play a critical role in improving air quality by absorbing harmful pollutants and acting as natural air filters. They also provide shade, reduce heat, support biodiversity, and contribute to healthier environments overall. Schools were intentionally chosen as the focus of the campaign because they are spaces where young people spend most of their time learning, growing, and developing habits that shape their future.

By planting trees in schools, the campaign invested not only in greener school environments but also in the health, well-being, and environmental consciousness of future generations. The campaign was further strengthened through collaboration between community organisations, schools, local stakeholders, and government representatives.

At one of the participating schools, the event was attended by the MEC for Environment, Ewan Botha, whose presence highlighted the importance of collective action and environmental stewardship in building cleaner, healthier, and safer communities.

Through the successful implementation of the Earth Day campaign across 33 schools, the Breathe Better Together initiative demonstrated the power of partnerships, education, and community participation in driving environmental awareness and sustainable action across Johannesburg.

The initiative continues to engage communities, schools, and local government in the shared mission of improving air quality and building a greener, healthier city for all.

