

Mondi Zimele spurs local economic recovery with 122 emerging farmers

Despite the negative impacts of Covid-19 on food security and access, there's a positive outcome: Mondi's Zimele programme has successfully nurtured the development of 122 emerging farmers. This group includes 17 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs), comprising 11 cooperatives and six individual farmers.



Source: Supplied

More than 1,098 households have benefitted, with some 320 permanent and seasonal jobs created, and approximately R2m in revenue has been generated since the programme's launch.

General manager, Nelly Ndlovu explains that Mondi Zimele is the business development arm of Mondi South Africa. Its Agriculture SMME programme is part of a broader initiative that provides technical and business support to emerging farmers. The programme focuses on communities where Mondi and SiyaQhubeka Forests (SQF) operate in Zululand, northern KwaZulu-Natal, and there are plans to expand to other close-by communities.

"Mondi sees agriculture as a vehicle for economic freedom," says Ndlovu. "To this end, Mondi Zimele supplies farmers with technical farming support, including seedlings in the early stages of the programme, business support and financial management training."



Source: Supplied

Bongile Bho of Bongile Bho Trading and Projects says Mondi Zimele helped her "with knowledge to be the independent farmer" she is today. Bho began by selling her produce at the local bus stations; now she supplies Spar and Food Lovers Market.

Dokodweni Farming's Sifiso Nkwanyana said that Mondi Zimele helped him install a borehole for his farm, which now supplies fresh produce to Spar and Pick 'n Pay.

"This facilitation of formal markets, with exceptional support from local retailers, fresh produce markets and a vision of formalising supply partnerships with food manufacturers has been a critical success factor," Ndlovu notes. "All the farmers have grown exponentially and are given equal opportunity to supply some of the biggest retailers in South Africa."

They are also assisted with formal business training. "Mondi Zimele has provided us with business, sales, financial and farming support," says Eva Biyela of Imahlobo Co-operative in Nzalabantu Reserve. "They have been instrumental in teaching us the financial and business side of farming; to record everything that is coming in and what's spent on business needs like chemicals and seeds, so we know how much profit we make individually."



Another beneficiary, Mtubatuba-based Lizwi Dube of Ezemvelo Fresh Produce, says: "The training sharpened us more than I can express, especially in communicating with retailers and selecting the best produce to send to market. We are supposed to control the market by supplying the best quality in and out of season. Mondi Zimele provides us with the technical know-how."

The Fakude family, which owns and runs Mtolo Farming and Produce in KwaMthethwa echoes: "Before we started this business, we didn't have any networking programmes or training. Mondi Zimele helped us when we wanted to expand and obtain necessary information and knowledge to help maintain our business, and ensure it supplies what customers need."

"Emerging Zululand farmers who want to join can send their proposals, with pictures of their current operations, to their local traditional authority, which sits on the Mondi Liaising Forum," notes Ndlovu.

"After a comprehensive assessment, the chiefs submit them to Mondi's Land Department to determine if they are at the subsistence or semi-commercial phase. If all criteria are met, Mondi Zimele will get on board and support them accordingly."

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