

# Building thriving communities through developing enterprises

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Economic growth in communities stems from more people having access to decent work, able to earn a living through using their talents and skills. This growth leads to stronger, more resilient and successful communities - which in turn, helps us thrive as a company.



Lerato Tau of Shatadi Toil (Pty) Ltd



The Shatadi Toil team



The Mhlekezi Forestry team



Nhlamla Phoswa Mhlekezi of Mhlekezi Forestry

This desire to help our communities flourish was one of the main reasons that Sappi's dedicated Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) unit was established in 2018 – tasked with helping to incorporate small and medium enterprises (SMEs) into the mainstream economy.

This community support and supplier development has been further bolstered by the creation of a dedicated multidisciplinary team comprised of ESD, Human Resources and Corporate Communications members, in a forum known as the Community Management Committee (CMC) at its business units. The purpose of the CMC is to identify shared value opportunities that help identify and support local entrepreneurs as well as to promote the sourcing of goods and services from local suppliers where possible.

Our goal? Firstly, to build thriving local economies in the areas where we operate – through the provision of capacity building programmes for SMEs focused on accessing markets, acquiring business and technical skills to ensure business sustainability and growth. With many SMEs lacking the technical and business experience needed to thrive in a competitive business environment, Sappi has stepped in to fill that gap.

Secondly, to provide procurement opportunities from our mill and forestry operations, which are sustainable. This will enable SMEs to become partners in our supply base.

### **Celebrating small thriving businesses**

As we support the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and have prioritised SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) it is fitting that as we celebrate Micro-, Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSME) Day on 27 June, that we salute two of the small businesses established with the help of Sappi.

**Shatadi Toil (Pty) Ltd** was established in 2019 after Sappi enlisted the services of an environmental consultant to train and mentor 51 unemployed youths in the effective management of alien invasive species at our mills. Shatadi Toil services the Sappi Ngodwana mill in Mpumalanga, under the able leadership of Lerato Tau, a BSc Environmental Management Honours graduate, who emerged from the ESD programme as the new business owner.

Fast-tracked on a development programme focused on business principles of safety, productivity and quality, they have been able to maintain service levels and grow their business in terms of turnover and their employee numbers from 12 to 21, providing much needed employment in the poverty-stricken local communities.

Lerato is geared to achieve her dream of becoming a dynamic and major player in the environmental management space. Through dedication and hard work, she intends to address some of the socio-economic challenges through job creation and skills transfer. Sappi's ESD programme continues to provide business support to reinforce management systems and further enable business expansion through networking with other corporates.

"The Sappi ESD programme has had a major impact on my business and my development and I am thankful," says Lerato.

Another example where entrepreneurial drive meets passion is Nhlanhla Phoswa Mhlekezi affectionately known as Mhlekezi by his peers, who began his career as a forestry labour carrier driver in 1985, and seeing the opportunities offered by the forestry value chain, decided to start his own contracting company, **Mhlekezi Forestry**, in 2013. Today, he is one of the biggest silviculture contractors in the KZN South district, with a five-year contract with Sappi, responsible for silviculture operations in the Richmond area, having grown from 50 to 80 employees.

"The Sappi team has played a crucial role in our growth and development, and have been instrumental in opening doors for our business, providing business support, guidance and encouragement. We truly value the support from Sappi" says Mhlekezi.

Safety is an integral part of Mhlekezi Forestry, and Mhlekezi believes this has played a pivotal role in his business longevity. "Many of our peers that started with us have not sustained their business because they neglected safety in their operations. We prioritise and value safety in our business," he says.

Mhlekezi has a strong vision for his company and has started working closely with his children, Siphesihle, a forester by profession. He wants his daughter to follow in his footsteps as well. The future indeed looks bright for Mhlekezi Forestry.

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