

# Young Winterton brickmaking entrepreneur receives welcome boost from Sappi

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A young woman who embarked on a learning journey with Sappi five years ago, is now enjoying the fruits of her labour through her flourishing brickmaking business, thanks to her perseverance and diligence.





Nonkululeko Zimba from the community of Vimbukhalo, near Sappi's Winterton plantation in KwaZulu-Natal, was part of the 2018 intake of Abashintshi – a Sappi-sponsored programme aimed at enabling youth to bring about positive change to their communities.

Since joining the programme, which delivered over 90 active Abashintshi (meaning 'changers' in isiZulu), Nonkululeko has taken her learnings and has started a successful brickmaking business, which recently received a wonderful boost, when she took delivery of brand new brickmaking equipment from Sappi at a small handover ceremony held near her home.

Through her established relationship with Sappi, she was able to apply for the funding which enabled her to receive this equipment to increase the size and scope of her business.

"Helping build thriving communities is at the core of Sappi's Social Impact Strategy," comments Mpho Lethoko, Sappi Southern Africa's head of corporate affairs. "We engage and partner with our communities to deliver tangible social benefits as well as create economic empowerment, as we believe this is key to securing sustainable development."

Nonkululeko's business, Sehlukaniso (Pty) Ltd is an emerging business in the flourishing building sector currently producing bricks to build homes. Using her knowledge of the Asset Based Community Development model, which formed the basis of her training in the Abashintshi programme, Nonkululeko did an asset survey of her community and surrounds to identify a business opportunity.

"Looking around me, I could see that the need for bricks in my community was growing very fast. People are moving from mud to bricks for their homes," says Nonkululeko. With the Department of Human Settlements also starting with building RDP homes for vulnerable families, she saw this as a possible avenue giving her access to another market for future business growth.



Sappi SA believes that projects like this, that have the potential to reduce poverty, increase job opportunities in rural communities and make available key items needed by the community to live, are pivotal for addressing social challenges in

marginalised communities. The fact that the owner of the business is a young and passionate woman, who is using her knowledge gleaned from another Sappi-supported initiative, makes it even more rewarding for the company in knowing that it has played a positive role in this success story.

“Having grown to know Nonkululeko over the years, we have confidence in her ability to make a success of this venture. Supporting her by providing funding for the brickmaking equipment was based on the character and growth she has shown since joining the Abashintshi programme,” says Beryl Traoré, social impact lead for Sappi Southern Africa. “She used her ABCD training to identify the gaps in her community and to see how she could fill those gaps. We will continue to use the ABCD model to engage with our neighbours, to further improve symbiotic relationships and also to decrease dependence and reveal opportunities that are all around,” she said.

In addition to the equipment, Nonkululeko will also receive support from Sappi’s ESD (Enterprise Supplier Development) department, where she will receive further training tailored to assist SMMEs to succeed.

“I can still not believe that my dream has come true. The knowledge and skills that Sappi gave us as Abashintshi - I declare that no one can take it away from me! Now my life is changing and I have big hope that in years to come I will be part of those who are called entrepreneurs and I know that I will also change my communities. Thanks Sappi, thanks!” said an elated Nonkululeko.

Besides embarking on this ambitious project, where she and her husband are making the bricks themselves, sometimes with the help of two temporary workers, Nonkululeko is also raising a family and this year also earned an NQF 6 teaching diploma.

“As a young woman in the rural landscape Nonkululeko’s efforts are not only inspiring but serve as a valuable lesson in discipline and choosing a path that goes towards success and development at a personal level,” says Mpho Lethoko. “Besides the work our ESD department are doing in our communities, where hundreds of people are being helped to enter the economic mainstream, Sappi will be reviewing more applications from former Abashintshi to see if there are other strong candidates that have the potential to become self -sustaining economic hubs with opportunity to work and thrive. As we support the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) this ties in with our priority focus on SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and our ongoing focus on empowering the youth,” she said.

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