

Rural reinvention: Inspiring stories of innovation by entrepreneurs in Mpumalanga

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In the heart of South Africa's predominantly rural province of Mpumalanga, a transformative spirit of entrepreneurship is breathing new life into the province.



Robert Mbuyazi of Mabhodla Construction and Lesetja Thupana of Molathu and Partners | image supplied

In a region where subsistence farming has long been a way of life, innovative and tenacious individuals are pioneering change, bolstering economic growth, and inspiring future generations.

These narratives exemplify the remarkable power of innovation and determination in propelling this province toward progress and transformation.

Here, we unveil the stories of three Mpumalanga entrepreneurs who have harnessed innovation to fuel their dreams, proving that innovation is imperative for the progress of the community and province.

Ayanda Ntuli, owner and founder of Cordifield

Ayanda Ntuli, the driving force behind Cordifield, a logistics and transport company in Delmas, Mpumalanga, is defined by her strong work ethic and a mission to enhance her employees' lives.

Seven years ago, Ntuli identified a pressing need for transporting mineworkers in an area with over 20 mines. Starting with her trusty Toyota Avanza, she initiated daily trips to and from the mines. Today, Cordifield operates three trucks dedicated to coal transportation.

The long hours and hard work have paid off for Ntuli. Running her own business has granted her financial freedom and a higher quality of life. She treasures the flexibility to spend weekends with her family while ensuring her children's well-being.

As the sole woman-owned logistics business in Delmas, Ntuli acknowledges the unique challenges she's faced, including a longer path to success compared to her male counterparts. Her advice to aspiring entrepreneurs is to start small and embrace failure as a stepping stone to success.

Robert Mbuyazi, owner and founder of Mabhodla Electrical Constructors

When Robert Mbuyazi left his lucrative full-time job in the mining industry to pursue his electrical services side hustle in early 2021, he didn't expect the journey to be so challenging.

Mabhodla Electrical Constructors is an electrical and instrument maintenance company operating in Secunda. Mbuyazi's entrepreneurial story demonstrates how a side hustle can become a successful business.

Reflecting on his journey, Mbuyazi recalls months of slow business and occasional cash flow issues. Through it all, he was determined to not give up.

Today, Robert's days are spent managing a team of six full-time staff who shuttle between responding to emergency requests from the local Department of Public Works to maintenance services to Secunda Mall.

Since starting the business just over two years ago, Mabhodla Electrical Constructors team has moved into their own office space. The site has several other units that are being rented out to provide an additional source of income. Mbuyazi strongly encourages creating multiple sources of income to supplement business profits.

Mbuyazi's vision for the future is to grow the business and employ over 300 people across the country.

Lesetja Thupana and Kholofelo Molapo, co-founders of Molathu and Partners

Amid rising job losses, the prospect of entrepreneurship gains traction, especially for two young artisans who emphasise agility and adaptability as their key to success.

Molathu and Partners, based in Mpumalanga and owned by Lesetja Thupana and Kholofelo Molapo, initially focused on manufacturing wooden pallets for industrial packaging. Realising the limitations in this high-volume, low-margin market, they sought alternative revenue streams.

Thupana explains, "We looked at simple, profitable business models and started manufacturing diesel-powered mobile rig lights, which we also use in-house and rent out. The profits from the pallet venture served as seed capital, helping us establish a solid financial and credit record to explore other business ventures."

Established in 2021, their business operates from an industrial workshop in Emalahleni, with pallet assembly indoors and the lights' manufacturing on-site as needed.

Thupana mentions their primary pallet business has an anchor client with international exports. While they have industry competitors, the pursuit continues to solidify their position as the primary suppliers.

The business thrives on agility, rapid response times, and a commitment to quality workmanship.

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