

# the dti Enterprising Women



**the dti**

Department:  
Trade and Industry  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**



# **the dti Enterprising Women**

# Contents

Introduction	3
Foreword by Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry: BM Ntuli	4
Message of Support from Director-General of Trade and Industry: T Matona	5
What <b>the dti</b> offers: Women-specific programmes	6
Other selected programmes offered by <b>the dti</b>	9
<b>the dti's</b> Enterprising women stories	12

# Introduction

The aim of the Department of Trade and Industry (**the dti**) is to lead and facilitate access to sustainable economic activity and employment for all South Africans through its understanding of the economy, its knowledge of economic opportunities and potential, and its anticipation of the future economic trends. The Department also aims to catalyse economic transformation and development by leading the delivery of economic empowerment of South African men and women. To realise this and to show its commitment, **the dti** has established the Gender and Women Empowerment (GWE) Unit to ensure that the empowerment of women forms part of the broader mandate of **the dti**.

Through the GWE, **the dti** has, on behalf of government, played a fundamental role in ensuring that women empowerment forms part of the broader mandate of **the dti**. Since its establishment, the GWE has introduced measures to eradicate direct and indirect barriers to women enterprises. The Strategic Framework on Gender and Women's Economic Empowerment, which is one of the major milestones of the GWE, has taken women empowerment to another level, by bringing more focus to **the dti**'s commitment to the gender mainstreaming approach. The Framework introduced specific interventions which range from financial support to market access.

To date, remarkable progress has been made on women empowerment and it is for this reason that **the dti** intends to display its commitment by making a publication on success stories of women entrepreneurs and women in business. This publication will profile success stories of South African women entrepreneurs and women in business who have been assisted by **the dti** through its programmes and incentive schemes to set up and grow their own businesses since 1994 to date. The objectives of the publication include the following:

- To raise awareness and promote the work of **the dti** thereby realising one of the department's key objectives that seek to promote broader participation, equity and redress in the economy.
- To recognise the success of women entrepreneurs and leaders in business, thereby creating a cadre of female role models whose achievements will inspire other women to raise their insights and reach their goals.
- To create a mechanism for applauding and celebrating women's contribution to the economy.

# Foreword by the Deputy Minister



I am deeply honoured to present this publication, titled **the dti** Enterprising Women. This publication is a sequel to the previous projects undertaken by **the dti** through the Gender and Women Empowerment Unit.

The project dates back from the dawn of democracy in 1994, when women's economic participation was practically non-existent. The first project conducted was under the theme of moving from the periphery to the economy during 1994 to 2000. During that era, women entrepreneurship was just starting but now women's representation in the economy presents a colorful tapestry in the various sectors of business. Reflecting on our achievements, I wish to express my appreciation to my predecessors for their contribution to the acceleration of women's participation and representation in the economy.

I profoundly acknowledge with thanks, the voluntary participation of women entrepreneurs featured in this publication. This group of women who you see and read about in this magazine, I trust, will serve as a cadre of female role models whose achievements will inspire other women to develop the tenacity to withstand the difficulties associated with starting, growing and sustaining an enterprise.

For us, this project supports our institutional objective of ensuring broad participation and equity through socioeconomic transformation. We are saying women's participation in the economy will continue to be a priority. As I read each storyline, I acknowledge fully that much has been done, however, as always there will be areas that we can improve on i.e. access to finance and access to market opportunities, as well as skills development. It is my sincere wish that this book will be a resource for anyone, be they in the private or public sector, to use when procuring goods and services. To you budding women entrepreneurs in particular, may this book also be a resource to network with other women owned businesses, to grow your own businesses.

In closing, I wish to share with you our approach to the women's economic empowerment agenda of **the dti** which takes two significant perspectives. The first approach is conducted through gender mainstreaming whereby we engender strategic selected programs, policy and process in the department and the second approach is through women specific programs. All of these programs have benefited these phenomenal women, may their stories inspire others to follow their examples.

***Malibongwe!***

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BM Ntuli'.

**BM Ntuli (MP)**

Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry

# Message of Support



As the Department of Trade and Industry (**the dti**), we have an important role to play through our ongoing work to bridge the economic divide and broaden economic participation. The past year saw **the dti** continue to implement key policy initiatives intended to support the economy's growth momentum of recent years, prior to the onset of the global crisis and the resultant domestic recession. Several specific interventions have been developed to address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in South Africa when starting, growing and sustaining their enterprises. The imperative is to harness the existing momentum in the economy and to overcome the challenges of unemployment and underdevelopment.

Through gender and women empowerment initiatives, **the dti** will continue to support the economic empowerment of women. These initiatives range from supporting women entrepreneurship through various business development services that we offer, providing them easy and affordable access to finance and ICT.

South African women entrepreneurs are indeed a vital pillar in the second economy, through their efforts at creating opportunities for economic participation and employment in areas where there is little else. The women-owned businesses profiled in this publication which has been appropriately labeled '**the dti** Entreprising Women' attest to this and celebrates the successes of these women. The publication profiles women entrepreneurs who have accessed both financial and non-financial support from the dti and its agencies. The support ranges from business development services, incentives for enterprise support, market research and participation in international exhibitions.

Through this publication, **the dti** hope to raise awareness and broaden the base of empowering our people by encouraging other women entrepreneurs across the country to utilise the services that the government has put in place, thus assisting them to grow their businesses and contribute towards the country's economic growth. This national publication will also serve as a marketing tool for the profiled enterprises as it will be distributed countrywide.

I therefore invite all organs of state, the private sector and all South Africans to work with us as we fast track the economic empowerment of our women. While we take heart from the great strides that have been made we must keep on working harder and smarter to create a vibrant and growing inclusive economy.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'T Matona', written over a light-colored background.

**T Matona**

Director-General of Trade and Industry

# What the dti offers

## WOMEN-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES

The Department of Trade and Industry (**the dti**) recognises the vital importance of women's economic empowerment as a main aspect towards mainstreaming women's business within the boarder South African economy. To this end, the Department under the auspices of the Enterprise and Empowerment development Division (EEDD) established the Gender and Women Empowerment Unit to promote contribute and provide the following:

- Gender – sensitive programmes for trade and industry
- Promote and provide support to the competitiveness of women-owned business/enterprisers
- Entrepreneurial support for women
- Lobbying and policy advocacy

To realise the above commitments, the Gender and Women Empowerment unit has introduced various initiatives targeted at women with ultimate goal to have growing and sustainable enterprises that contributes to the country's GDP, employment, equity and economic transformation to have equal access and control over economic resources.

The Department of Trade and Industry's women specific programmes are outlined hereunder:



### South African Women Entrepreneur's Network (SAWEN)

SAWEN is a flagship programme of **the dti** where women economic empowerment is applied in an effort to enhance their participation and contribution in the economy. SAWEN brings together women groups to address the unique challenges that faces them. The program is in direct response to our constitution in terms of contributing to gender equality and access to resources. SAWEN is also South Africa's response to the Beijing Platform Action Plan of 1995. The program's strategic objective is that of strengthening the participation of women associations in the Policy dialogue.

As an umbrella body, SAWEN aims to represent and articulate the aspiration of all women entrepreneurs in South Africa by working closely with like-minded organisations and associations from various sectors of the economy in a concerted and structured fashion. **the dti's** desire through the Association base model is to:

- Emphasise outreach through a common agenda for women's economic empowerment
- Provide a common organisational strategy for promoting women's economic empowerment
- Strengthening financial, human and intellectual resources of participating organisation.

By and large, SAWEN, under the refocused model membership will be open to various women formation such as association, non-governmental organizations( NGOs), and other women groupings.

Ongoing activities or support services under the banner of SAWEN program for all women in our country are:

- Effective networking forums;
- Training and capacity building forums for acquiring skills and experience;
- Pertinent business information and advice that leads to business opportunities;
- Organising trade missions facilitating exposure to the global economy; and
- Maintaining a reliable database of South African women entrepreneurs.



### Technology for Women in Business (TWIB)

Since 1998, Technology for Women in Business (TWIB) has helped hundreds of women apply technology to support and grow their businesses, thereby assisting in the mainstreaming of women's businesses within the broader South African economy. TWIB was introduced to accelerate women's empowerment and women-owned enterprise development through the facilitation of technology-based business applications and systems and in the process, unlock constraints to enterprise innovation and growth, as well as local and global competitiveness.



TWIB's mandate extends to programmes that encourage girls to choose careers in engineering, science and technology by facilitating access to educational information, career opportunities, academic and extramural learning programmes, and by creating successful female role models.

TWIB exists:

- To facilitate focused action by women entrepreneurs through the introduction of technology based solutions to their businesses;
- To create successful role models in business;
- To unlock solutions and progressive technological approaches to do business in a global economy;
- To explore partnerships with government, corporate, private sectors and women-focused organisations.

#### Target Beneficiaries

Targeted beneficiaries are women already in business, as well as girls and young women with an interest in science and technology career paths.

#### Techno-Girl programme

TWIB reaches out to girls by means of its annual workshop, to which learners are invited, as well as a variety of science, engineering and technology and entrepreneurship exposure projects.



#### Isivande Women's Fund (IWF)

The Isivande Women's Fund was created in response to research that confirmed that limited access to finance for women inhibits the establishment, growth, sustainability and profitability of women's enterprises. IWF is one attempt by government to improve women's access to formal finance in the absence of personal savings and gender bias in existing lending institutions. research confirms that most black women's usage of financial services is dominated by informal savings, funeral and burial schemes with little and often very expensive credit, reaching their enterprises. The Fund improves and expands access to finance to women entrepreneurs

by lending and investing in women enterprises and generating income that will improve their living standards.

#### Who we target

The IWF targets formally registered, 60% women-owned and/or managed enterprises that have been in existence for at least two years. It also focuses on professional women with feasible business ideas, high potential survivalists, micro enterprises and co-operatives on a case by case basis.

The Fund pursues deals involving start-up funding, business expansions, business rehabilitations and turnaround, franchises and bridging finance. Loans range from R30 000 to R2 million, although exceptions may be considered. The loan repayment period is a maximum of five years.

In order to be eligible, applicants must adhere to the following:

- The SME or co-operative must be 60% women-owned/controlled.
- The business must have at least a 2 year track record of business activity and a sustainable business plan.
- The staff profile must be at least 60% Women and 75% Black (including people living with disability).
- The business must be in a rural or peri-urban area.
- IWF limits loans to 60% in peri-urban and 40% in rural areas in year one (to be reviewed thereafter) and 30% towards start-ups.
- IWF assists with business support services to enhance the success of the business.
- The Old Mutual Masisizane Fund co-funds each loan on a rand-for-rand basis and also provides free financial education to IWF clients.

For more information please contact: Gender+Women Empowerment  
Office 012 394 1606





## Bavumile

The Bavumile Skills Development Initiative's primary objective is to upgrade the basic skills of women with home-based enterprises to produce quality, commercially-viable, crafts and other culturally-based products.

South African women are gifted in both designing and crafting fashionable products that reflect the country's cultures and heritage for both the local and international markets. However, one of their greatest challenges is to produce high quality products that will sell well anywhere in the world.

With the emphasis on both skills development and empowering women economically in mind, Bavumile seeks to:

- Find and recruit women who're currently involved in the creative, clothing and textile industries, with skills in embroidery, weaving, netting, sewing and beading
- Provide specialist skills training and help them to establish their own enterprises or co-operatives.
- Provide additional training in packaging, customer service, basic bookkeeping and establishing an enterprise or cooperative.

Five-day training sessions are provided for groups of a maximum of 20 people at a time. Workbooks and work kits allow trainees to learn and produce products as designed and guided, while receiving general training in how to successfully market and run a business.



# Other selected programmes offered by the dti

## **The Enterprise Organisation (TEO) Incentives**

The Enterprise Organisation (TEO)'s main function is to facilitate and stimulate the development of sustainable competitive enterprises. Here are some of its key products:

### **Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Offshoring Investment Incentive**

The BPO Incentive Programme seeks to position South Africa as a preferred location for BPO&O operations that create employment opportunities, alongside the sector skills development initiatives, a dedicated investor-friendly set up process and a programme to improve industry service standards. The incentive is offered to local and foreign investors establishing projects that aim primarily to serve offshore clients.

The Incentive comprises an Investment Grant ranging between R37 000 and R60 000 per seat and a Training Support Grant towards costs of company specific training up to a maximum of R12 000 per agent. For more information, please contact the BPO desk.

### **Film Incentive Programme**

The South African Film and Television Production and Co Production incentive aims to assist local film producers in the production of local content and must spend at least R2,5 m. The Foreign Film and Television Production incentive to attract foreign based film productions and must spend at least R12 m.

The South African Film and Television Production and Co Production Incentive provides assistance of 35% on the first R6 m of Qualifying South African Production Expenditure and 25% on amounts of more than R6 m. The maximum incentive is capped at R10 m.

The Foreign Film and Television Production incentive provides 15% of Qualifying South African Production Expenditure. The maximum incentive is capped at R10 m.

### **Black Business Supplier Development Programme (BBSDP)**

The BBSDP programme has been revised and a new improved BBSDP will be launched in the first quarter of 2010 - 2011. The main objective of the revised programme is to enable small black businesses to take advantage of procurement opportunities created by both the public and private sector.

The main features of the new programme is to enable small black businesses to implement technology in the form of tools machinery and equipment. Qualifying businesses under the new programme should have a minimum turnover of R1 m to a maximum of R35 m.

Approved businesses can qualify for an incentive of up to R1 m on a 35%/65% cost-sharing basis.

### **Capital Projects Feasibility Programme (CPFP)**

This incentive is a cost-sharing programme providing a contribution to the cost of feasibility studies that are likely to lead to projects outside South Africa that will increase local exports and stimulate the market for South African capital goods and services.

The secondary objectives include attracting higher levels of domestic and foreign investment, strengthening the international competitiveness of South African businesses, creating jobs, stimulating project development in SADC countries and supporting the NEPAD objectives.

The programme's contribution is in the form of a cost-sharing grant up to a maximum of 50% of the total feasibility study costs for projects outside Africa and 55% for project in Africa. The size of the grant falls within the range of R100 000 to R5 million. For more information, please contact the CPFP desk.

### **Critical Infrastructure Programme (CIP)**

The Critical Infrastructure Programme acts as an incentive for projects that support infrastructure necessary for the establishment of identity private sector investment projects.

The CIP is a non-refundable cash grant that is paid to the beneficiary once the infrastructure project is completed. Between 10% and 30% of the total development costs are covered. For more information please contact the CIP desk.

### **Enterprise Investment Programme (EIP) Manufacturing Investment Programme (MIP)**

The MIP is an investment incentive designed to stimulate investment growth in line with the South African government's National Industrial Policy Framework. The programme aims to encourage investment within the manufacturing industry, enhancing the sustainability of manufacturing investment projects that would otherwise not be established without the grant.

The MIP offers an investment grant of up to 30% of the value of qualifying investment costs in machinery, equipment, commercial vehicles, land and buildings, required for establishing a new production facility, expanding an existing production facility, or upgrading production capability in an existing clothing and textile production facility.

Investment projects of R5 million and below may qualify for an investment grant equal to 30% of their total qualifying investment cost, payable over a three year period. Investment projects of above R5 million may qualify for an investment grant of between 15% and 30% of their qualifying investment costs, payable over a two year period. This investment grant cannot exceed R30 m. For more information please contact the MIP desk.

### **Tourism Support Programme (TSP)**

The TSP is a targeted incentive programme to support the development of tourism enterprises that will stimulate job creation and encourage a geographic spread of tourism investment. Given the fact that tourism is highly concentrated in the metropolitan areas of Johannesburg, Cape Town and eThekweni, projects located within these metros are excluded from the programme, unless they fall within marginalised areas with higher than the national average unemployment rate.

The programme offers a grant of up to 30% towards qualifying investment costs for establishing and expanding existing operations in South Africa. It is available to local and foreign-owned enterprises and provides for qualifying investment costs of furniture, equipment, vehicles, land and buildings of up to R200 million. For more information please contact the TSP desk.

### **Sector Specific Assistance Scheme (SSAS) Sector Specific Assistance Scheme: Project Funding**

This scheme is a reimburseable 80:20 cost-sharing grant whereby financial assistance is granted to Export Councils, Joint Action Groups and Industry Associations in the following priority sectors:

- Aerospace, Rail and Marine
- Agro Processing
- Automotive
- Cultural Industries
- Electro-Technical
- Metals (including Capital Equipment and Allied Industries)
- Services (including BPO)
- Services (Electro-Technical)
- Textile, Clothing, Leather and Footwear

### **Sector Specific Assistance Scheme: Emerging Exporters**

The purpose of assistance under SSAS Project Funding for Emerging Exporters is to compensate the costs in respect of activities aimed for the development of South African emerging exporters.

### **Export Marketing and Investment Assistance Scheme (EMIA)**

The EMIA scheme assists South African manufacturers, export trading houses, commission agents and industry associations, export councils and joint action group by partially compensating them for the costs they incur in developing markets for South African products and services. Assistance is provided on the following basis: travel, daily subsistence, transport of samples, marketing materials and exhibition costs.

## EMIA Schemes

- **National Pavilions**

**the dti** helps South African products enter foreign markets by assisting South African manufacturers of goods and services to participate in suitable exhibitions abroad. EMIA bears the cost for space rental, construction and maintenance of stands, electricity and water, as well as freight costs up to a maximum of three cubic metres of two tons per exhibitor. SMME and PDI firms qualify for air ticket assistance up to R13 000 and a daily subsistence allowance which can be claimed both after the event.

- **Individual Participation**

Assistance is granted to individual exporters to exhibit abroad where EMIA does not provide for National Pavilions.

- **Individual Inward-Bound Missions**

Assistance is provided to SA entities organising an inward buying/investment mission to enable a prospective buyer/investor to make contact with them to conclude export orders or attract foreign direct investment. **the dti** provides assistance to South African entities engaging with a foreign buyer/investor to make contact and conclude export orders or attract foreign direct investment.

- **Outward-Selling Missions**

Assistance is provided to South African exporters who wish to make contact with foreign buyers with a view to concluding new export orders. The mission must be organised by a qualifying organisation, i.e. Export Councils, Provincial Trade Promotion Agencies (PTPAs) or **the dti**.

- **Inward-Buying Missions**

**the dti** assists organisers of inward-buying missions to enable prospective buyers to make contact with South African exporters to conclude export orders. The mission must be organised by a qualifying organisation, i.e. Export Councils, Provincial Trade Promotion Agencies (PTPAs) or **the dti**.

- **Outward Investment Missions**

Assistance is provided to South African entities taking part in outward investment recruitment missions, to attract foreign direct investment into South Africa. The mission must be organised by a qualifying organisation, i.e. Export Councils, Provincial Trade Promotion Agencies (PTPAs) or **the dti**.

- **Inward Investment Missions**

Assistance is provided to organisers of inward-investment missions to facilitate the flow of foreign direct investment into South Africa. The mission must be organised by a qualifying organisation, i.e. Export Councils, Provincial Trade Promotion Agencies (PTPAs) or **the dti**.

- **Primary Market Research (PMR) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)**

Assistance is provided to partially compensate exporters for cost incurred:

- in developing new export markets and/or
- in recruiting new foreign direct investment into South Africa through personal contact by visiting potential investors in foreign countries.

- **Inward Investment Research**

Assistance is provided to organisers of inward investment missions to facilitate foreign direct investment into South Africa. The mission must be organised by a qualifying organisation, Export Council, Trade and Investment South Africa or **the dti**.

For more information contact: 012 394 1259



# Beauty from ashes

## AFRICAN ART EMPORIUM



Did you sometimes feel like you wanted to give up? It's a question that every entrepreneur can relate to and if she's being honest, Lydia Dercksen, the founder and owner of African Art Emporium (Limpopo ceramics), says the answer to the question is a resounding yes. "Especially when business is slow and you have the responsibility to pay your staff and suppliers."

But an experience she once had in her Mokgophong Limpopo factory made her begin to see things differently. A frog lived in a hole in the factory floor next to the ovens, from which it would croak all day and keep Lydia company. "One day I was feeling down, thinking about a lot of things, about the business as well. As I was busy emptying the ovens, we had a power failure and I suddenly felt something on my feet."

Lydia froze, and fumbling around in the dark she discovered that she'd stood on the frog. "I sat down and cried like a baby, feeling sorry for the frog as there was nothing I could do to help."

"I thought to myself: 'That is it, I am quitting!' But when I got home I realised that wasn't an option. This is my passion I can't just walk away." After that, Lydia returned to work with renewed purpose and commitment that has helped her build her brand to one that's sought after in many countries. But how did her story begin?

In 2002, while nursing her late husband, who had a brain tumour, Lydia decided she had to find a way to earn a

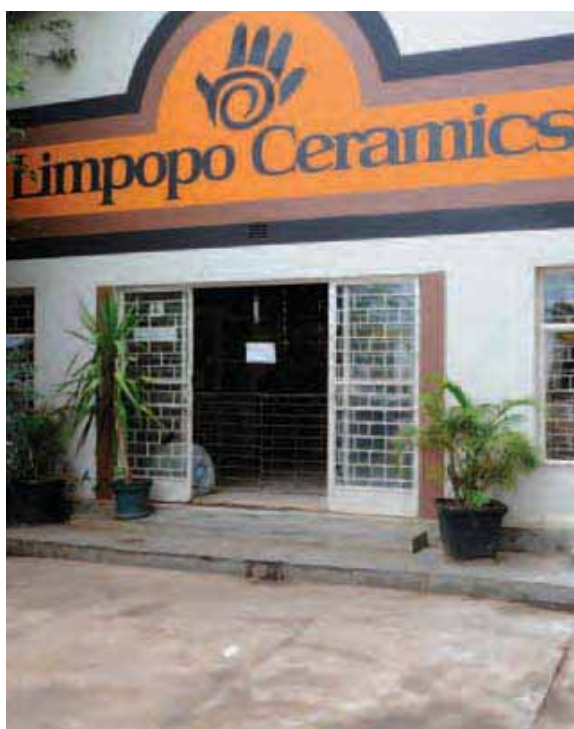
living from home where she could care for him and their two children. Inspired by women in the community who were making and selling beadwork and other cultural crafts to earn money, she turned to her lifelong passion – ceramics – to start her own business.

As a child, Lydia and her brothers would spend hours experimenting with clay. Now, instead of her siblings, it was her children who were getting involved. "In the afternoons after school and on weekends and holidays my two boys, then 16 and 9, helped me with the ceramics," she says. "My mother and father helped me with the beading and looked after my family when I had to go out for the business. And they prayed for me and cheered me up when I was on the floor!"

Also, Lydia's brothers, now all artist's in their own right, helped with ideas and finding markets in Johannesburg. "I really have the most wonderful family anyone can ask for!"

Having produced her first piece – an African mask – Lydia felt like a real artist. "And when a man came to visit my husband and bought it, I didn't sleep that night! I was over the moon!"

Inspired by her early success, Lydia set about training her first employee: a young man working on their farm who demonstrated a passion for ceramics and artistic flair. Today she employs around 15 people who produce a wide variety of products for the international market.



Thanks to support from the **dti**, Lydia's company has participated in several exhibitions in South Africa and Germany over the years including Decorex, Design Indaba and One of a Kind. The response to her products has been nothing short of phenomenal, with clients now in Germany, USA, Angola, Namibia, Kenya, Dubai, Botswana and Zimbabwe. "Our business wouldn't be the same without the dti's support."

Her business also wouldn't be the same without her trademark hand painted, beaded works that she describes as a true reflection of the Limpopo region. "Strong in colour, vibrant and charming – a true reflection of the Africa we all love and its people. I believe that one day our products will be collector's items as each piece is lovingly made by people with a passion for their work." "When you take a piece out of the oven, you feel like you're holding your passion. It's difficult to describe – all I know is I love my work and I enjoy trying out new and interesting designs."

It's a love that's kept Lydia motivated over the years, no matter the challenges she's faced, such as power failures, transport costs (of travelling to Johannesburg several times a week) and of training new staff members.

However, the care she takes in meeting her challenges, especially when it comes to up-skilling employees, has paid off handsomely as her staff members are the reason Lydia gives for the business's success.

"Their team work is incredible, they work hard and have a passion for producing beautiful works of art," she says. "Essentially, we believe in ourselves and our product and that's why, although we're working hard, our success is very satisfying."

Now that Lydia has a 'big' factory, she says she sometimes misses the old days when she and the children would work on their ceramics and homework around the kitchen table, enjoying tea and rusks and dreaming about the day they'd be able to buy a new car and go on holiday. "All I can say is that the Lord Jesus has been looking after me." And if the past few years have been anything to go by, the best is yet to come.

#### **AFRICA ART EMPORIUM**

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# Working together for a brighter tomorrow

## ASIJIKI CO-OPERATIVE



Perseverance. It's something Thembeke Nxumalo could teach lessons on, having continued to soldier on despite many challenges to her quest to build a chicken and vegetable farming business that will employ enough people to help lift their small community in Lusikisiki out of poverty.

Inspired by her role model, Nelson Mandela, she's learnt that giving up is not a choice – after all, you never know how close you are to reaching your goal. "Where would we be if Madiba had stopped believing in his dream and given up? He gave us freedom and taught us to work for ourselves and be independent."

Having tried various ways to make a living, including running a small store on her property (which was closed down due to crime), Thembeke eventually tapped into her passion for farming.

In 2006, Asijiki co-operative started farming with a few chickens and a small vegetable patch. However, the crops suffered due to alternating heavy rains and severe water shortages. Also, many of the chickens died as the coop which was built for them was not suitable, as was their feed.

"We had a lot of passion, dedication and a commitment to working hard together, but unfortunately, due to our lack of education and experience in farming, we suffered substantial losses," Thembeke recalls. "However, this changed after we approached the Department of Agriculture and they sent some people to teach us about proper chicken farming, how to feed them and take good care of them."

"The Department also taught us more about how to run a business, as well as how to do our own book-keeping,"





she says. “Aside from the key farming and business skills we learnt, we also discovered that no-one can – or should – try to go it alone. You should always ask for help where possible, be determined and have patience.”

In 2009, a welcome boost came in a form of assistance of a van and chicken feed from **the dti**, as well as a R14 000 cash injection from a retailer. “The van has made an enormous difference to our business as we use it to do collections of chickens and sawdust, as well as deliveries.” It also means that Asijiki members can earn additional income by travelling to other locations to train people in farming.

“Undoubtedly, our business would not be where it is today without **the dti**’s support which came in a form of



a van as we simply cannot function in this area without reliable transport.”

As regards the future, Thembeke and her team have big plans. Once the new chicken coop they’re building has been completed, they’re confident their farming will really take off. “In fact, soon we hope to start supplying Shoprite and some of the other stores in our community. The sky is the limit,” smiles Thembeke.

#### **ASIJIKI CORP**

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# From mulch to money

## BARK ENTERPRISES



"I love it when a plan comes together," says Lelanie Trollip, who first got the idea to make money out of something most people regard as useless in 1992. A great plan indeed: having visited one of Mpumalanga's large pine bark dumps, she decided to find a way to recycle the enormous mounds instead of simply letting them go to waste. And so Bark Enterprises was born, a company based in Brits in the North West that today employs nine people and supplies customers as far afield as the United Arab Emirates.

"We supply a wide variety and range of barks, compost, liquid fertilizers, mulch nuggets and lignitic feeds," to mention but a few. "We collect raw product from mills around the country and then start the composting process by adding water and urea. We then screen the size that is required for our various markets, load onto truck and either deliver directly to our customers or transport to our Brits site for further processing."

Impressive, for a former advertising rep. But that's not all Lelanie has learnt over the years. "To really make your business work, you need good people, so I recommend employing individuals whose track record you've checked out; people who have a history of taking their jobs seriously and being dedicated to what they do."

"Delegating to the right people, who know what they're doing and whom you can trust is crucial in any business, especially if you can't be supervising them all the time." Particularly in the face of challenges like finding the right transport provider, procuring raw material and dealing with clients from different cultures – "A greater challenge than I ever imagined," she says, referring particularly to her Middle Eastern clients.

"Especially, being a woman in a man's world is not easy. But then I've never been one to let anything like that put me off," she beams. "Believe that anything is possible, patiently persevere and you will succeed."

Which is exactly what Lelanie did when she approached the dti several years ago for support. "I received a R150 000 grant and was given the opportunity to travel to various international exhibitions," she says.

"The networking assistance and support has been fantastic." In addition to her African customers, Lelanie now has markets in Kuwait, Bahrain, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where her products were a part of preparations for the Formula 1 Grand Prix.

"It may sound easy when you hear my story, but the truth





is a lot of hard work has gone into making this business work. There's no substitute for doing your homework correctly and getting all the information you need before making any decision, "she says.

"And if there's just one thing you learn, when starting out, remember that you need to make provision for enough cash flow before the money starts coming in reliably."

Regarding future plans, Lelaine's working hard on developing her new Bed & Breakfast business in Limpopo. And, if that weren't enough, she also hopes to expand her products and markets from the horticultural sector, where her business is well-known, to agriculture. A business so successful one might be tempted to believe that money does grow on trees after all!

#### **BARK ENTERPRISES**

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# A better start for the leaders of tomorrow

## BNS DAY CARE CENTRE



Beauty Nomzakhwezi Siima is living her dream. As a young teacher, having obtained a law degree and a community developer certificate, she promised herself that in her 40s she would retire from the classroom and open her own school. This happened in 2005 in Letlhlabile, Brits in North West province when Beauty and like-minded partners sharing the same dream and passion formed a co-operative and opened BNS Day care centre. But like all real dreams, the task of running a school has sometimes had its nightmarish moments. Nevertheless, it's one Beauty and her colleagues aren't planning on waking up from for a very long time.

"Many years ago, we realised that white people start their education at an earlier stage and also saw a need to do the same in our community, so we decided to start a private school," says Beauty – the first of its kind in the vicinity, which meant that parents could keep their children local instead of sending them to schools in town. "Our vision is to teach children to read and write at an early age, especially in English. We also teach Numeracy, Literacy and Life Skills, motivating our children and

teaching them about attitudes and behaviour and knowing God." The school registers children from age groups 2 – 3 years and classes range from Grade R to Grade 6, with an extra grade added each year as children progress.

Although the school is running well now, the first few years were challenging chiefly on a practical level. "We used to struggle very much when we started, we never even had a toilet – children had to use the bushes instead and it wasn't safe for them to do that," she says. So, faced with the challenge, the co-operative approached **the dti** which gave us a grant of R300 000 in 2008. "**the dti** is a hero! Thanks to their support, we were able to get contractors to build toilets, fencing and gates for our school."

"The difference **the dti**'s assistance has made to our school goes beyond words and we're extremely grateful." Even though they're the teachers, Beauty and her team say they never stop learning. "Especially when it comes to starting a business, we've learnt that you can succeed





through hard work. Perseverance makes everything possible.”

“As a role model, we’ve also learnt the importance of encouraging and motivating other people to follow their dreams and not to be put off by anything,” she says, referring to tough departmental interviews they had to endure when applying for permission to set up the school.

“Even if you feel things are unfair, just keep trying—things have a way of working out in the end,” she says. “Sometimes it’s difficult, but it’s then that women need to stand up and work even harder, asking for help and guidance from other successful business women. Just keep your eye on the rewards.”

And what are those rewards? “certainly the motivation of people appreciating your services; happy parents praising the quality of the education their children receive and encouraging more people to register their children – there’s nothing better than that!”



As more children register, the new dream of Beauty and her partners is to expand the school to Grade 12 and eventually establish a tertiary institution suddenly seems increasingly possible. In fact, it’s just a matter of time.

#### **BNS CHILD CARE CENTRE**

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# Baking for Africa

## DINATLA BAKERY CO-OP



The warm, comforting aroma of freshly baked bread wafts down the streets of Retswelele in the Northern Cape, a better advertisement than any one could think of for the Dinatla Bakery co-op. It's here that Dimakatso Jansen and her five partners have been running the bakery since 2006, a business that's become well-known in the community for its delicious bread, scones, cupcakes, biscuits and catering services.

"We start at 4 o' clock in the morning – a true test of our passion for and commitment to this business – especially when we've been working the night shift too!" says Dimakatso. The bakery has been selling its goods as fast as it can produce them since it started."

I had wanted to start a business for some time, so after some investigating, we thought a bakery would be ideal because there aren't many in our area."

Although the business is doing well now, it hasn't always been easy, according to Dimakatso. "It can sometimes be a challenge to work with partners, especially if not everyone has the same vision for the business," she says. "But if you're determined to work hard and love what you're doing, you've already got the vital ingredients for success."

Another vital ingredient for any business is money, a

substantial injection of which came from **the dti** in 2009. "We received R226 000's worth of equipment and a bakkie that has helped transform the business. In fact, I can confidently say that we wouldn't be where we are today without this grant," beams Dimakatso.

A large retailer also gave assistance in baking training and another large foods company donated stock to start the business.

"Perseverance and patience is important too," says Dimakatso, "Especially when your business takes time to really kick in. Also, you need to remember that you're only in business because you have customers, particularly when they're sometimes difficult. The customer is always right," she smiles.

Aside from these challenges, the biggest obstacle the bakery has had to face is finding a suitable space in which to work. Dimakatso and her team started baking in her kitchen, but soon she was forced to extend her garage in order to give them enough space in which to operate. "Now we're just busy saving up to buy a house that we can convert into a proper bakery!"

Even without the larger premises, Dimakatso is already planning to buy new mixing and moulding machines and expand the business to be able to take on bigger orders





and start making birthday and wedding cakes. But for now, she and her team will take pleasure in the fact that customers love the bread they make and that it can last up to three days without losing its fresh, wholesome taste. Can't wait to taste those cakes!

#### **DINATLA BAKERY CO OP**

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# From clay to display: a Free State success story

## EMANDULO ART MANUFACTURERS



Emandulo Art Manufacturers, a co-operative business operating out of humble premises in the heart of rural Witsieshoek, Free State, has big plans. right now the pottery products that the team of seven people are making are well known in the region, but according to Emandulo's Tefo John, they have a vision to establish branches in neighbouring towns and further afield.

Meaning 'In the beginning', just as God created man out of clay, Emandulo is the means by which this close-knit group of mostly women and men are making a life for themselves.

In 2007, Tefo, along with Ms Motaung and Ms Thokozile Melliet, took the plunge and started the business with the aid of **the dti's** support, having heard about the cooperative Incentive Scheme (CIS) programme at local road show.

Prior to this, Tefo and the ladies had been working for a pottery business near Bethlehem which had recently closed down. Without any other hope of getting jobs and a love for the pottery craft, the group decided to establish their own business.

"We started in a small room with one little oven – just five people making only 20 pots a day," said Tefo. "But now, thanks to government's support, we've employed more people and can now produce up to 200 pots a day while training more women in our craft. We believe that someday our business will be just as big – if not bigger – than our previous boss's company."

Under **the dti's** CIS programme, the business was given a cash grant that enabled it to buy the machines needed to operate effectively. These included stone breaking machines, potter's wheels and ovens. "Now we can produce even more pots than ever before. Without **the dti's** support, we would never be where we are today."

Over and above the crucial support from government, Tefo also ascribes Emandulo's success to each individual's passion for pottery and commitment to development.

"We have regular meetings to discuss how to improve our business and we make sure we're up to date with the latest trends and designs so that our products remain



relevant,” he says referring to the current top-sellers: lampshades and flower pots. In addition to their love for their craft, it’s also their determination to see their dream fulfilled that keeps them going. “We started from nothing, so to see this operation as it is today is very encouraging and helps us to believe that we can grow even bigger, despite our challenges.”

These challenges include finding new markets and raising the capital needed to expand. “We have to acquire more potter’s wheels in order to be able to produce the volumes of pots required by commercial buyers,” says Tefo. “But without money, we won’t be able to expand as additional equipment requires us to hire men to operate the wheels as most women aren’t strong enough.”

Despite the challenge, the group remains confident. “If we can achieve what we have thus far, others definitely can,” says Tefo of the business that now supports seven individuals and their families. “People shouldn’t wait for someone to come along and give them jobs. Women should join hands and agree on a single vision that will form the basis of business that will unlock their future prosperity.”



“It may not always be easy, as we’ve experienced, but with a lot of hard work and patience, it most certainly be worth it!”

#### **EMANDULO ART CO-OP**

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# Wired for success

## ENZANI TECHNOLOGIES



While studying electrical engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand in the 1990s, Tlaleng Moabi and her classmates would often daydream about starting their own business. However, after they graduated, each went in separate directions, seeming to forget about their idea for the time.

But in 2004, Tlaleng, Landiwe Nene and Bheki Lembede and a few others (who never stayed for long) got together again and reminisced about the old days and their former ambition. "It had always been my desire to explore my entrepreneurial dream," says Tlaleng, "So when we started talking about it again, I knew we simply had to do it." After much discussion and planning, in 2005 Enzani Technologies, an Electrical Engineering and construction company specialising in industrial and commercial power systems, was born.

Enzani Technologies is one of the few engineering companies that is majority owned by black women. "Our timing as a start-up was perfect because it was in 2005 that the infrastructure industry was booming and government was stepping up its support of womenowned businesses." Today the company employs (20 permanent

staff with around 60 contract staff members on projects) at its factory in Ormonde, Gauteng, which also designs and manufactures low voltage electrical panels for clients.

Being a new player in a very competitive industry and women in a male dominated arena, Tlaleng and her partners have learnt to work harder than most to make their unique mark in the industry. "You have to prove that you have the know-how, which means working three times as hard as men," she says. "But once your reputation becomes established and people get to know you they begin to feel comfortable."

Another challenge, Tlaleng concedes, is working with partners. "It's not always easy, even if you have known each other for years, and that's why being united by a common vision is so important. It keeps everyone focused and steers them away from personal agendas. Also, of importance is building trust amongst each other thus appreciating that it is our dream together not just my dream."

On the subject of building and retaining business relationships, she says that having come from a technical background and not always appreciating the importance of networking, she had to learn fast the importance of communication and people's skills. "Business is about people and relationships and not systems and technology. Those who really make it are the ones who know how to manage and maintain client relationships." Tlaleng believes these are key factors in building a company brand and establishing a track record – and just as important as the quality of the products and services one delivers.

Quality – another key foundation on which the success of Enzani Technologies depends – received a boost in 2008, when as finalists in **the dti's** TWIB awards (Technology for Women in Business), the company received R80 000. The money was used to set up an ISO 9001 (2008) quality management system, and plan to get certification in this year and the rest was used for marketing and branding material.

"Obtaining the ISO accreditation will give us some competitive edge in some of the markets that we are targeting," she says.

"Also, the media exposure we received thanks to the TWIB Awards also gave us a great boost in terms of our marketing efforts."

Another secret to their success is discipline and professionalism. "We even have penalties lateness





in meetings, non-performance of tasks, etc, which goes towards our lunch kitty,” Tlaleng grins. “Of utmost importance is ensuring that we follow up on all complaints received from clients and share each other’s mistakes, so we learn from them and thus we don’t repeat them.”

It’s in exactly this way that the company learned in its inception that cash flow is king.

“If you don’t manage your cash flow you’ll manage your way right out of business! It’s the same problem for start ups and large companies, so my advice to people is to get it right from the beginning because it re-occurs at different stages of the company growth” she says, commenting that as they celebrate their first 5-years in business, they are planning to grow the business and to expand the electrical panels’ business and increase their market share in sectors such as mining, water and petrochemical sectors.

“At the end of the day, the fact that I’m building wealth for myself and also knowing that I am making a difference in other people’s lives is what motivates me.

I know I’m creating a legacy, part of which is to inspire other women and young ones from disadvantaged communities who may be have the passion but afraid of technical fields to be brave and take on the challenge with a good attitude.”

“As we plan to expand, we also need to continuously seek knowledge and enhance our skills (I personally believe in empowering people through reading), engage with other leaders in business, choosing and working with a right team with a good attitude and of course, continue to listen to what the market is looking for,” she advises other entrepreneurs. “Only the sky is our limit!”

#### **ENZANI TECHNOLOGIES**

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# Your home from home

## HAYANI GUEST HOUSE



Passion and a plan. That's what got Grace Sibara started on a road in 2003 that would see her combining her love of working with people, cooking and travel into her own business. Little did she know, while standing in her classroom teaching children, that one day she would welcome the world to her very own 3-star guest house and conferencing venue in the heart of Polokwane.

It all started with an idea that Grace had, having observed the rapidly growing capital of Limpopo. "With more and more people arriving in town on business having limited choice in terms of accommodation, I saw an opportunity to show them true African hospitality," she says.

A few years ago, most of the few Bed & Breakfast establishments that existed were owned by white people, thereby limiting visitors' choice of cultural experience when visiting these homes – one of the key reasons that people choose to stay in B&Bs rather than hotels. "Having done research into what it takes to open a B&B, I felt sure that I had what it takes, especially since I'm a people person and I love to entertain," she said. "Also, I'm not afraid of hard work!"

And so the highly successful Hayani Guest House started in Grace's family home in Polokwane. Thanks to a very welcome R600 000 injection from **the dti's** Small Medium Enterprise Programme (SMEP) in 2006, Grace was able to move her business to a plot just outside town that would allow her to expand the number of rooms – initially to 12 and now 20 – and introduce conferencing facilities.

As a member of SAWEN, she also now benefits from much of the information and advice she found when she first started her business. Additional assistance from **the dti** has taken the form of training in managing books, marketing, as well as export and import.

"The help I've received has been nothing short of phenomenal," says Grace. "And I can confidently say that my business would not be what it is today, had I not had the support."

### Lessons learnt

"Starting a business on your own can be scary, especially when you're waiting for loans to come through and you're struggling with getting the right information and assistance," says Grace.



“But it’s at these times that passion for what you do and achieving your dream helps you through.” It’s the kind of passion that saw Grace quitting her job as a teacher in 2005 in order to fully commit herself to realising her vision.

“Also, you’re going to make mistakes, so you have to decide not to lose hope when that happens and continue believing in yourself.”

And, of course, one must be open to learning from your mistakes and asking for help and advice when you need it. According to Grace: “You can’t operate in isolation. You need to network and meet people in order to learn skills and obtain finance. You also get motivated by talking to them.”

For Grace, another great source of motivation comes simply from her enjoyment of serving people with excellence – a fact that’s been recognised with two nominations for the Emerging Tourism Entrepreneur Awards. Both times she reached the semi-finals amidst stiff competition.



regarding her future plans, Grace has her sights set on expanding her business with catering and interior decorating services. “If you have an idea, you need to do whatever it takes to realise it,” she concludes. “You must listen to your heart and go for it!”

Grace has won the Technoserve Believe Begin Become competition. The prize money was R110 000 which she intends using towards securing a Business reservation Software equipment and also assist in terms of skills training and development of employees.

#### **HAYANI GUEST HOUSE, CATERERS & INTERIORS**

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# Back to Nature

## HERBAL HORSE



With a passion for horses and owning a business – one that would not only transform her life, but also those of her four-legged friends – Beryl Shuttleworth took the plunge in 2002, quit her job and started The Herbal Horse, a company that makes natural remedies for horses that are now sold all over the world.

Since then, Beryl has also started The Herbal Pet, which specialises in treatments for dogs and cats, and if her enthusiasm for treating ailments by natural means is anything to go by, The Herbal Human can't be far behind.

Indeed, she's already working on formulations. "Horses suffer from the same ailments as humans do, including arthritis and stiffness," she says, "and when it comes to treating pets with remedies for calming them down or boosting their energy, you realise we're not that different after all."

A trained biochemist, with Honours degrees in both biochemistry and zoology, Beryl spent many years in the pharmaceutical industry. "But I got to a point where I was tired of working for other people," she says. "Also, I had a lot of experience and my own ideas for treatments that I couldn't execute where I was, so quitting to start my own enterprise seemed like the only option."

Encouraged by family and friends, Beryl started out by cooking up and mixing combinations of fresh herbs



and other ingredients in her garage in Walkerville near Vereeniging, Gauteng. She never dreamed that within a few short years her products would be sought after in Africa (South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe), Europe (Greece, France, Netherlands) and in the Middle East.

"It hasn't been easy, but then nothing worth doing ever is," she says. "You certainly learn from your mistakes and I've learnt more than I ever dreamed of she says," referring to her ability to generate an invoice and import/export almost as easily as she makes her formulations.

### Challenges

Beryl's main challenge in starting her company was not knowing the basic principles of how to run a business. "crucial things like balancing the books – I went in blind – and certainly paid for it, having experienced cash flow problems."

Not knowing enough about export regulations also hampered her expansion into new markets early on, as did language barriers. "But hard work and perseverance, no matter what, are the keys to moving onwards and upwards," she says.

Also, receiving assistance from **the dti** helped her through a difficult time when the company needed to grow and in fact, gave her the boost she needed to enter new markets.





In 2006, Beryl attended the Dubai International Horse Fair, a trip that was paid for by **the dti's** Export Marketing Investment Assistance programme. "I went specifically to look for an agent for the United Arab Emirates market and by the end of the first day I had 14 agents!" she said. "Without **the dti** support, I'm not sure my company would have grown in the way it did – or even still exist – given the fact that the local market is so limited."

The Herbal Horse is also supported by the Egoli Bio Life Science Incubator which assists Beryl with much appreciated ongoing business advice and mentoring.

#### Advice

On the subject of advice to other entrepreneurs, Beryl recommends doing something you're passionate about, "Because when it gets tough, you want to give up. But if you love what you do, it helps you stay the course." She also recommends seeking the advice and guidance of people who've already done what you're trying to do. "The best thing you can do is learn from their experience," she says.

And when it comes to doing business, Beryl says "I believe in honesty and integrity in business, in every single sale, no matter the size."

As the owner of three horses – one chestnut TB off the track, one talented chestnut Arab-cross, one very cute, but very grumpy Welshie – looking back, Beryl couldn't be happier about her decision to start The Herbal Horse. "It's an exciting business and I learn something new everyday. I have done a lot of travelling, and most of all, I get to do what I love and that's spending time with animals."

#### The Herbal Horse's Achievements:

- JCCL Exporter of the Year 2007 Finalist
- JCCL Exporter of the Year 2008 Finalist
- Winner Passing the Torch Award for Women in Trade 2007
- NBIA Outstanding Incubator client runner-up 2009

#### HERBAL HORSE

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# Adorning Africa...and the World

## JABULANI JEWELLERY



Jabulani Jewellery almost never existed. What started out as a two-year stint in the US for speech therapist Paula Goosen in 1989 turned to disappointment when she was not permitted to practice. But as the old saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining. Although the Americans didn't benefit from her clinical skills, they did love Paula's authentic Zulu beadwork and that's how she got the idea to start making and selling beaded items. "However, the traditional Zulu designs were usually too ethnic for Western tastes and the quality was often not up to standard," says Paula. So when she returned to South Africa at the end of 1991, she gathered a group of Zulu women skilled in beading and together they set about designing and making more contemporary jewellery.

"Today our ladies manufacture our range of beadwork products in their homes at Ndwedwe, while our shop window is in Durban. We also regularly take part in exhibitions here in South Africa and in New York, London and Paris where our products are regarded as unique works of art."

The Jabulani Jewellery story is not just about a business making money, but about a transfer of skills to women who're able to provide for their families while taking care

of them at home, and of children who're able to go to school because of the sustained income. "Many of the same families who started out with me are still working with us – and that's really rewarding," she says. The company was also recently accorded international Fair Trade status, meaning it's acknowledged for the role it plays in building people's lives whilst making a fair profit.

However, as with any business, it has its ups and downs. "Working with artists is never easy – they walk to a different drummer," says Paula. "But once respect for deadlines and discipline is instilled, we work well together."

Another enduring challenge for the business is cash flow. "This is especially apparent when we want to fill some of our larger overseas orders and struggle to get enough money together to be able to pay for manufacture and shipping," she notes, describing how a timeous loan from the Masisiyane fund recently enabled them to fill a substantial order from Spain.

Aside from these challenges, Paula says the success of her business is down to perseverance, hard work and an emphasis on quality. "rural crafters who've not been exposed to the bright lights and big cities of Europe or



America do not all at first appreciate the importance of producing high quality products in large numbers, but with a little patience and perseverance, we get there!"

Also, the exposure the business has received abroad, thanks to **the dti**, has been invaluable in terms of opening new markets. "Thanks to the support of **the dti** over the past ten years, we've been to all the important craft and jewellery exhibitions in the glamorous cities of New York, London and Paris, enabling us to tap into new markets while being exposed to the latest trends."

"With cash flow being our main problem area, sales are paramount and the trade shows have definitely resulted in increased interest and customer sales."

How about a little advice from a seasoned entrepreneur? "Be ready for the long haul!" exclaims Paula. "Seeing a dream come to life can be the ride of your life, but no one can prepare you for how difficult it can be." But hang in there, after all, it's always darkest just before the dawn.

#### **JABULANI JEWELLERS**

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# A passion for fashion

## JIM DESIGNS



As long as she can remember, Cindy Mthembu has loved fashion and design. "It's in my blood," she says, referring to the way in which she would devour fashion magazines as a child, sketching and dreaming about the day she'd create her own line of clothing and interior design accessories.

Although Cindy's dream didn't go quite according to plan from the start – her parents steered her away from pursuing fashion as a career after school and she completed an accounting diploma instead – it never died. It even outlived a stint working at Telkom, but after three years she left her job to pursue her passion: design.

"I bought a small domestic sewing machine and started experimenting with home furnishings," she says. Without the benefit of formal training, in 2004 Cindy started designing and making toilet sets which she sold door-to-door in Kenyonhowden, Durban. Having had limited success in selling to individual customers and retailers, she took stock of her situation and decided to upgrade the standard of her products, a decision that paid off as her business began to take off.

"It's during this time that I learned the importance of patient endurance," says Cindy. "I spent a lot of time perfecting my products and building up the confidence to approach prospective customers."

She also discovered that professionalism in every aspect of her business would be crucial to its success. "People buy you first before they consider buying your product, so I learned that in order for your customers to take you seriously, you need to look professional and know how to speak to your customers and present yourself properly. You have to believe in yourself or nobody else will."

According to Cindy, this is especially true when you start out selling from door-to-door. "If people have never seen or heard of you before, your first impression becomes so much more important. You have to convince them you're not begging and that they should give you a few moments of their time – and that takes guts!"

"I needed to market my business so I approached **the dti** in 2009 for the BBSDP programme which helped me with marketing advice and to set up my website.

"I began distributing flyers and soon people started placing orders from as far afield as Johannesburg," she says. "The help I received from **the dti**, especially in terms of additional training and networking support, has been invaluable. I couldn't have done it without them."

**the dti** also came in handy when Cindy was able to exhibit at the Indaba held at the ICC with her marketing material from **the dti** program.

Cindy's advice for entrepreneurs is to prepare themselves for the challenges that will undoubtedly come. "The road is never smooth, but that doesn't mean you should lose hope and give up," she encourages. "Have a good strategy and execute your plan, no matter how long it takes because running a business is a journey, not a destination. Be positive!"

Right now Cindy and her team of four are working on launching a line of clothing in addition to the interior decorating services she offers. "I'm planning on introducing some really unique designs, ones that really express who I am and what this business is about. And I'm starting with luxury pyjamas," she says, dreaming of her bright future. How appropriate.

### J.I.M DESIGNS CC

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# Luxury has a new address

## MELAIRE LINENS



The next time you climb under crispy hotel sheets or wrap yourself in a fluffy bathrobe – check the label – you might just be revelling in one of Melaire Linens' ultra luxurious range of products. Is that an overseas brand? you wonder, quite understandably, given how difficult it is to source genuine Egyptian Cotton and Cotton Percale, the high thread count of which makes for the smoothest, softest sheets.

Imagine then your surprise at discovering that Melaire Linens is a home-grown brand that's taken the Western Cape hospitality industry by storm with its beautiful bed linen, table linen, gowns, bed covers – and basically any soft furnishings that one can think of.

Now with an impressive flagship store that opened in Woodstock, Cape Town in 2009, Melaire Linens has come a long way since owner Melanie Medell's mother Claire Medell started the business in 1994.

"Having worked for many years as a Bookkeeper, my mom started the business due to ill health," says Melanie. "So, we grew up around sewing machines and material as my mom, a single parent, made every effort to provide for us over and above her normal job."

With her creative side awakened from an early age, it was a natural progression for Melanie to study fashion design and then go on to join a knitwear company – Monviso Knitwear, a division of Seardel Group Trading – for which she worked for 14 years. "I started as a temp



pattern maker and ended up as a director!" she says, commenting on the enormous amount of experience she gained, both in the trade and in running a business.

However, as she now concedes, "Managing a company is nothing like running a small business! Here we have to manage every cent and be a Jack of all trades, without getting any of the glory for a job well done that one might receive in a company."

"But I wouldn't have it any different! The hard work is rewarding, we've learnt more than we could ever have imagined about all aspects of running a small business and we've built something up ourselves from scratch," Melanie smiles, describing how her cousin joined them in the early days, running the business from her mom's house while Melanie's salary provided funding.

"We started with my mom's old machine, a domestic one that I bought during my student days at just R400! And by producing quality work in fashionable designs, our reputation slowly grew by word of mouth."

A major boost came in the form of a financial grant from **the dti's** Black Business Supplier Development Programme (BBSDP) in 2008. "The assistance we received was amazing. Production is smoother and faster and we look so much more professional now with our pamphlets, brochures and business cards." Small, yet crucial items that have helped Melanie to market the business.





Also, in 2009, **the dti** made it possible for Melaire Linens to take part in the SAWEN exhibition at Decorex, Cape Town, an important industry showcase that succeeded in bringing in much new business.

According to Melanie, being a black woman supplying to a predominantly white industry has been one of the most difficult challenges that she has had to face. "It's not been easy, but once you build a relationship with people and gain their trust by providing innovative, quality products on time, they're far more willing to do business with you," she says.

"The keys to success are to love what you do and persevere, no matter what. Also, in pursuing your passion, it's important to know your limits and ask for help when you need it."

Also, learning should never stop, according to Melanie. "This philosophy is something my mother passed on to me," she says. "With this business she taught me to fish rather than giving me fish, something for which I'll be forever grateful."

Wise words indeed from someone who plans to open stores around the country and hopefully, one day, open a 100 room hotel with arguably the finest soft furnishings ever to be seen.

#### **MELAIRE LINENS**

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# Interior decoration for the nation

MELOKUHLE CO-OP LTD



The tiny, perfectly aligned stitches that edge the seams of the sumptuous blinds and curtains, luxurious cushions and upholstery that adorn offices and homes all over Tshwane, are evidence of the precision with which Thandi Lekhuleni and Co-op members runs an interior decorating business. Their success is no accident, and if the expert care and exquisite artistry with which they execute each and every order is anything to go by, Melokuhle Co-Operative is going to be around for a very long time.

In 2002, Thandi, the leader of the Co-op, started sewing at home in Soshanguve in an effort to make some extra money. Then, inspired by her seamstress neighbour Nelly, she registered a Co-operative with **the dti** while the two continued to work together, making all kinds of soft furnishings – from bedding, blinds and curtains to loose cushions and upholstery – all the while encouraging each other and growing in their skills and expertise.

In 2006, the burgeoning business received a powerful boost in the form of a R300 000 grant from **the dti**. The money enabled Thandi and team to acquire muchneeded machinery and pay for extra staff and operational costs. However, perhaps the most profound input from **the dti** was the financial training they received, which has enabled



them to continue to operate and grow their business where others have floundered.

“When the business started, the biggest challenge we faced was paying salaries and suppliers. But thanks to the guidance I received I learned how to use money wisely and negotiate cheaper prices with suppliers,” says Thandi.

“I believe the main reason behind our success is that we buy just enough stock and don’t overspend, which enables us to maintain a good cash flow.” Also, she says, it’s important for business owners to make sure that their books and all records and documents are always in order. “Without these fundamentals in place, it’s easy to lose control of one’s business.”

Another crucial component to running a successful business is marketing. After all, it doesn’t matter what great service you offer if no-one knows you exist. With this in mind, Thandi approached another state enterprise which stepped in to help with getting their name out there. “We were even featured in The Sowetan newspaper, which helped tremendously with creating awareness of who we are and what we do,” she said.



In addition to providing a variety of interior decorating services, Melokuhle also teaches people sewing skills, with a particular focus on providing free training for unemployed women and young people.

As most business owners will attest, running a company is not easy, but it can be incredibly rewarding. "We have learnt to stand by ourselves and fight the big challenges," says Thandi.

With an impressive list of clients – many of them from government – the business – then occupying its Pretoria CBD premises – received a personal visit from the Deputy Minister, who praised Melokuhle for a well-run business.

So, where to from here? Regarding future plans, Melokuhle hopes to expand the workshop (currently employing five people) to employ even more people. "It's also our dream to acquire an embroidery machine that will enable us to grow into making badges for school uniforms and police and army clothing," she says.

This is something which, understandably, might not happen overnight. However, as Thandi well knows and encourages other would-be business owners –



patience pays off in the long run: "Running a business is challenging, but help is available from government and people should do their best to access all the grants, training and assistance they can." A tried and tested pattern for success.

#### **MELOKUHLE CO-OP LTD**

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# Cleaning up the local soap industry

## MMATSHIDI SOAP PRODUCTION



"A woman is born a manufacturer and entrepreneur by nature," states Motlalepula Morweng, as if to explain how she, with barely more than a primary school education, has made a success of her growing business: Mmatshidi Soap Production in Gopane, North West province.

"You fall pregnant, give birth to your baby, and already you know how to care for it without anyone telling you how." Good point. If one can raise a child and manage a household, surely one can run a business.

It's this practical approach to life coupled with a positive attitude and a decision to make it no matter what that has contributed greatly to the business Motlalepula began in 2000.

Having injured her foot, she was advised to find less strenuous work, having previously worked as a cleaner, leather waxer and welder. That got her thinking and having considered all her options, she decided to start by selling mala and mogodu: cow intestine and pancreas. Soon Motlalepula started to be concerned about all the fat she was throwing away, wondering if there wasn't some way to put it to good use. "I came up with the idea to make soap out of it and called a major manufacturer to find out about soap making – who refused to help me.

I nevertheless continued to ask around until I got the information I needed and I started to make soap."

"I've learnt to live without complaining and just to start doing things for myself. If you know what you want, just go out there and get it," she says. "I believe I can say 'I am a go-getter'!"

"In fact," she continues, "it's exactly because some people seem to be intent on undermining everything that women do that I'm motivated to show them that we can do anything!"

As she continued to build her business, Motlalepula encountered a variety of challenges, including the quest to acquire an extruder – the machine that smoothes the soap mixture before turning it in to a bar soap.

"It's amazing how reluctant some people can be to help you with information," she says, describing how she sometimes felt discouraged to the point of wanting to give up. Instead, however, she decided to write to **the dti** to ask for assistance.

"I told them what people in the rural areas have ideas and plans that can be realised with a little help in the form of training, equipment and information centres."





Such help came in 2008 in the form of networking and training assistance from **the dti** that paid for Motlalepula to take part in an exhibition in Vietnam and advised her on various aspects of the growth and maintenance of her business.

“SAWEN helped me so much – I now have customers from Departments of Health and Education, as well as Polokwane Funeral Undertakers,” she says, in addition to many more individual customers.

“My community became aware of my business through **the dti** programme” – “taking **the dti** to the people” says Motlalepula “Thereafter I was the soap lady of Gopane.”

Thanks to **the dti**’s assistance, Motlalepula’s hand made products have been laboratory tested and accredited by the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS). “My soap is really unique,” she beams. “It takes away pimples, ring worms and even dark marks (Chubaba).”

In the future, Motlalepula plans to upgrade her factory

conditions, expand her business far beyond the province’s borders and hire more staff in addition to the three that Mmatshidi Soap Production already employs. And how will she do that?

In exactly the same way she advises every woman who comes to her for business advice: “Women must further their educations by attending government programmes like Tshomishano, asking people for advice and reading,” she says. “And then they must put their knowledge to good use!” We’re sure she will.

#### **MMATSHIDI SOAP PRODUCTION**

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# Where inspiration meets innovation

NELLY SQUEEJE



It's not everyone who can look at the seed pod of a Jacaranda tree and visualise it hanging off the earlobe of a New York socialite. Nelisiwe Mkhatswa can and that's why her vision has become a reality. In fact, her reputation for unique artistry with a distinctly African flair has made her clothing and accessories business, Nellysqueeje Trading, a hit at international exhibitions where her quirky earrings and cheeky designs have been well-received by fashionistas.

Nelisiwe's teacher first spotted her potential during sewing lessons at school in her hometown of Mambiso, Mpumalanga. "She encouraged me to take fashion seriously having seen my love for it." Today her growing business, started in 2005, already employs six people.

Having completed a certificate in fashion design, Nelisiwe started making up some of her designs – clothes, shoes, accessories and handbags. "I realised the people love unique clothing, especially traditional South African items," she says. And so the business was born through which Nelisiwe also teaches people how to design and sew.

However, she herself admits that she's always learning



and says that's the best way to grow her business. "communication skills are of supreme importance," she says, referring to the need to learn how to talk to customers and ensure they're happy. "The customer is always right – believe it! One should always try to learn from their advice and comments."

Nelisiwe says she's also learnt a lot about how best to present South Africa, particularly to the overseas market, and how to interact with people of other cultures. These skills have enabled her to win even more customers during exhibitions she attended abroad over the past few years.

Thanks to **the dti**, Nellysqueeje Trading was represented at One of a Kind exhibitions in Italy and the USA in 2006 and 2008, as well as at a local exhibition in Johannesburg. "The exposure helped me very much, not only in terms of giving me access to new markets, but also teaching me what others are doing in this business," she says. "There's no end to what one can learn."

Although the business has done well in a relatively short space of time, it's had to face its fair share of challenges. "We live far from Nelspruit so travelling to get materials



has always been a bit tough,” says Nelisiwe. “But to overcome this I order more material so that I don’t have to visit Nelspruit and Johannesburg too often.”

“If you have passion for what you’re doing you’ll persevere no matter what,” smiles Nelisiwe. “And then soon you’ll be rewarded and motivated by your clients who appreciate the service you provide.”

Her future plans include designing men’s and children’s clothing and opening a store in town so that she can be nearer to her customers. She’s also passionate about the idea of opening a fashion design school, although she understands this won’t be anytime soon.

“Patience is vital,” says Nelisiwe to would-be entrepreneurs. “Do something you’re passionate about, understand that any business starts slowly and be willing to learn from criticism. In every challenge lies an opportunity.” Indeed, therein lies the key to her very bright future.

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# Doing business for business

## POSTNET FRANCHISE STORES



"Enough is enough!" That's the phrase that ran repeatedly through the head of Mboya Simango, a former lecturer at the University of Limpopo and Head of Department for Giyani College of Education, in the weeks before she quit her job to pursue her destiny as the proud owner of a Postnet outlet in Polokwane.

As a single parent of two children, with a dream of being her own boss and improving her family's lifestyle, she took the plunge in 1999 and, backed by other agencies, opened her first Postnet franchise store in Mankweng, a business that provides a suite of office services. "It was very scary at first, but I knew that if I didn't try, I'd always regret it," says Mboya, describing her desire to create a better future for her children and also to help create jobs for others.

Today Mboya has over 60 employees at seven stores – six in Limpopo that are all run by women – as well as one in Sunnyside, Pretoria. Her business has become a virtual business for many SMMEs in the surrounding areas they operate in. In addition to becoming a helping hand to these SMMEs, providing everything from photocopies and the Internet to courier services, she's also fulfilled her ambition of empowering others in their own businesses.



Mboya helped set-up an owner driver scheme whereby she used all the 30 drivers under her employ and gave them cars and empowered them with contracts. She further partnered with another courier company, IT couriers, to ensure a constant flow of business for the drivers.

Innovative ideas such as this have helped set her apart from her competitors, as well as her drive to remain on the cutting edge in her field. "I have learned to be creative in my business offering, constantly finding out what my clients need and striving to offer it to them at competitive prices," she says. Also, empowering not only her drivers but also her own staff members to run the stores even when she's not there has made all the difference. "I'm able to trust my employees to manage the stores, which is a huge plus for me. I can't be in all places at the same time."

However, running her highly successful business has not been without its challenges. According to Mboya, competition is tough. "The business is not exclusive and many competitor stores are opening up, not to mention the pressure of competing against the major courier





companies. This means that we have to constantly implement new strategies in order to survive.”

“However, we find that our clients keep coming back to us because they can’t get better service anywhere else,” she says. “They enjoy spending time with us and have come to regard us as an extension of their own offices as we help take them to the next level in their own businesses.”

A boost that took Mboya’s own company to the next level was her attendance at a world summit for businesswomen in Morocco in 2002. “Thanks to SAWEN and the dti, I was exposed to what businesswomen in other countries are doing and I implemented new strategies as a result.”

When she went to the summit, Mboya had just two stores because she says she was still thinking small. “But coming back I had the courage to multiply my stores to seven, having spoken with many other women who had plenty of stores with large workforces. I thought ‘If they can do it, so can I!’ It was a real confidence booster for me.”

“A helping hand at crucial times is just what everyone in business needs,” she says. “One always needs support and advice – it’s the only thing that can really guide one as one grows from strength to strength.”

So what kind of advice would Mboya give to other entrepreneurs? “Women must figure out exactly what they want to do, become trained and knowledgeable in their chosen fields and then go for it! But, crucially,

they need to have patience,” she warns. “Wealth simply doesn’t come overnight.”

In addition to patience and perseverance, Mboya ascribes her success to discipline – especially in terms of financial management – ongoing staff training, transparency and “the passion I have for this business. There’s just no substitute for enthusiasm when it comes to inspiring others.”

Having a passion for community involvement, Mboya knows all about the need for patient endurance and the role she is able to play as an inspiration in the lives of others. Her business organises an annual cancer relay fundraiser, the proceeds of which go to cancer research and patient care.

Exactly the kind of inspiration that’s needed, especially given Mboya’s future plans to open even more Postnet outlets in Limpopo and Gauteng. There’s simply no stopping her.

Mboya has won the Postnet ‘Franchise of the Year’ award three times, the dti’s ‘Most promising Woman Entrepreneur’ award (2004), the Black Management Forum’s ‘Businesswoman of the Year’ award (2005), as well as the Polokwane Business Chamber’s ‘Business Personality of the Year’ award.

#### POSTNET

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# Going places in the wide open spaces

## REHOBOTH CO-OPERATIVE



Back in 2006, Thandi Ngcobo and ten friends decided to take their destiny into their own hands and started planting vegetables in their hometown of Wardburg, KwaZulu-Natal. "We started because we saw the need for fresh, affordable vegetables in our community and began planting sweet potatoes, green mielies, potatoes and later tomatoes."

It was tough work, with mostly women doing the ploughing, harvesting and carting of produce off to market, so much so that the 11 members soon shrank to five, who then decided to start a co-operative.

Called rehoboth, meaning 'wide space' or 'room', the members believe their business's name speaks to the opportunity that has been created for them to make a living for themselves and their families.

"This is our chance," says Thandi, "And that's why we're giving it everything we've got, even when things get tough." As they inevitably have done over the years. The work is back-breaking at times, sales at the market in Pietermaritzburg are unreliable, and the R400 spent weekly on hiring transport to take the crates to market eats into the profit the group makes.

However, things have been looking up since the dti assisted rehoboth co-operative to erect a tunnel and irrigation system for growing the most beautiful, ruby red tomatoes in the district.

"The difference it has made is incredible!" gushes Thandi. "No longer do our precious tomatoes burn in the sun,

which means our productivity has soared, and we can switch on the irrigation system as we desire for the tomatoes' much-needed water."

Disease and infestation that affect the tomatoes are still a problem, but the group remains optimistic: "With faith we survive, by the grace of God," she says. "It's not been easy, but we've learnt a lot as a group of individuals, meeting and sharing together, motivating each other when times are hard."

"We've also learnt how to handle difficult customers and stand up for ourselves by running this business," says Thandi, and that's something money can't buy.

In terms of future plans, the group is optimistic. "We know that we won't get anywhere if we don't have a plan," she says. "So, we've decided to aim high with a dream of having five tunnels after five years – one for growing seeds and the other four for vegetables. We also want to start growing mushrooms."

With well-thought out plans as seeds and hard work, patience and determination the sunshine and water, we're sure rehoboth will realise their dreams, and then some!

### REHOBOTH CO-OPERATIVE

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# Counting chickens before they hatch

SASEKISANI PRIMARY CO-OP



South Africa's rural landscape wouldn't be the same without the ubiquitous chicken. For some, the sound of chickens clucking evokes nostalgic memories, for others it's a dinner bell. In Malamulele, near Giyani in Limpopo, the cacophony of hundreds of clucking chickens has become like the music of cash registers ringing to the ears of visionary chicken farmer Violet Mabasa.

Her dream is to see Sasekisani's produce sold countrywide and the Sasekisani brand becoming a household name. And indications are, she and her partners at the Sasekisani Primary Co-op – of which she is chairperson – will reach this goal. They already supply 10 large retailers and around 20 other local supermarkets in and around Limpopo.

How did it all begin? This thriving business, which now employs 16 people, started out in 2003 with a handful of chickens. And as Violet can testify, growing a business is not unlike incubating chicken eggs. It takes patience, time and a lot of committed effort.

"A few of us started the business after learning from NCASA that people can group themselves together to form a business," says Violet of the group of 9 women, many of them single mothers and breadwinners of their families, who pooled their meagre savings to buy



chickens. "Starting a business on your own can be very difficult, but with the help of others anything is possible."

Harnessing the power of the collective, the Sasekisani Primary Co-op was born and started operating from violet's home. The Department of Agriculture also donated chickens, and thanks to a grant from the Limpopo Business Support Agency, the group was able to pay for chicken coops, much-needed electricity, fencing and a bore hole. In addition, **the dti's** grant that was used to buy a computer, a fridge and cabinets, and the Thulamele Local Municipality also got in on the act and helped build a store room.

"We always knew that we'd make our business a success and manage to grow," says violet. "But thanks to the support we received, we've grown faster and achieved more than we ever could have imagined."

## Lessons learnt

In 2006, Sasekisani Primary co-op was faced with its biggest challenge to date. The majority of a R250 000 grant from **the dti** was used to buy chickens from a local farmer who never delivered on the deal. Several years later, the group is still battling the matter out in court. "We learnt the hard way to be very careful with whom you do business," says Violet.



But despite the costly lesson, she wouldn't change a thing. "The ability to stand on your own two feet and not depend on other people for your income is the greatest reward. With hard work you can achieve anything."

Violet encourages others with a dream of owning their own businesses to go ahead and start them, having sought advice and support. "But they must not expect quick returns," she cautions. "You need patience, patience, patience and the willingness to put in a lot of effort."

Sasekisani Primary Co-op is a business with plenty of potential that will undoubtedly grow as violet and her team continue to pour their hard work, passion and perseverance into it.

"We want to grow much bigger and employ more people from our community so that they too can reap the benefits. Then hopefully, some day people from all over South Africa will be able to buy our chickens," she grins. We can't wait.

#### **SASEKASANI PRIMARY CO-OP LTD**

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# Feeding the nation, one tomato at a time

SIYAVUSELELA



Soon, if Virginia Shuku has her way, almost every time you bite into a ripe, juicy tomato it might be from Siyavuselela farm, a co-operative near East London, that produces the tastiest red jewels this side of the Limpopo. Meaning “we renew”, the business begun by Virginia in 1998, started small but thanks to her passion for farming and a vision to see the tomatoes sold countrywide, it’s been growing as steadily as the delicious fruit it produces. A fact that’s been recognised by others too: Siyavuselela was awarded Farmer of the Year in 2007 and Community Builder of the Year in 2005.

Long before Siyavuselela, Virginia held a passion for planting and growing things, but it was only after 18 years spent as a domestic worker, followed by a stint working for an NGO and a bank that she moved back home and began fulfilling her passion. “In 1998, I discovered that there was no place that grew seedlings in cala, so I started my own nursery planting seeds on the ground in a private house,” says Virginia.

The following year, once news of what she was up to spread in the area, the local government donated the land on which Cala’s old hospital was situated to Virginia’s project – a whole two hectares, about the size of between six and eight soccer fields. And that’s when

she started farming in earnest, as well as involving more people in the co-operative. Today, Siyavuselela employs more than 20 people.

## Here we grow again

In 2008, the enormous challenge of trying to farm on a relatively small piece of land was overcome when a R300 000 grant from the dti enabled Virginia and her team to purchase a 24 hectare farm, as well as pay for additional equipment and various operational costs. In addition to financial assistance, which also included grants from the Eastern Cape Development Corporation and the Department of Agriculture, the government has provided much-needed business advice and training in various aspects of running a business.

“The training we received from the dti was particularly helpful in that we’re now able to do our own financials and work on Pastel,” says Virginia.

the dti funding also saw the purchase of two hydroponics systems. These enable plants to be grown in water using mineral nutrient solutions without soil. “The use of hydroponic technology as part of our farming process has been an enormous boost to the business,”





she says. "In fact, without the assistance of **the dti** in this regard, as well as historically, I can safely say that Siyavuselela would not be where it is today."

Despite the enormous strides the business has made over the past few years, a few distinct challenges remain which are common to many businesses, including capital requirements and a need for marketing. However, it's by persevering despite these obstacles that Virginia says she has learnt most about successfully running a business.

"I've learnt to grow in strength as a person and not to view farming as a project but as a fully-fledged business."

Also, she says, she's learnt that the strength of Siyavuselela lies in the individual contribution of its passionate and dedicated members. "We are only as strong as the input of each of our members," she observes. "And that's why transparency, communication and honesty are highly-prized as values in our business."

Virginia observes that learning from others and networking with business people is also very important if one is to gain the skills and experience needed to grow. She also advises others who are starting out in business

to temper their passion with patience. "It's important to put your energy into doing all you can to run the business well," she says. "But in the end, it takes time to stabilise and eventually show growth."

Among her greatest joys in starting Siyavuselela is the confidence and sense of empowerment that it has brought her. "We started small but have now grown to a good size despite our many challenges." And on a personal level, the ability to provide for her family, having struggled for many years to make ends meet, has made it all worthwhile.

regarding the future, where Virginia would like to see the business going is being able to pack their own tomatoes and have their own delivery trucks and dedicated marketers. And having East London's tomatoes become world-famous for their rich flavour and juiciness? Well, she ponders, that wouldn't be bad either!

#### **SIYAVUSELELA CO-OP**

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# Art of Africa

## UNDONGWE HAND PAINTED CERAMICS

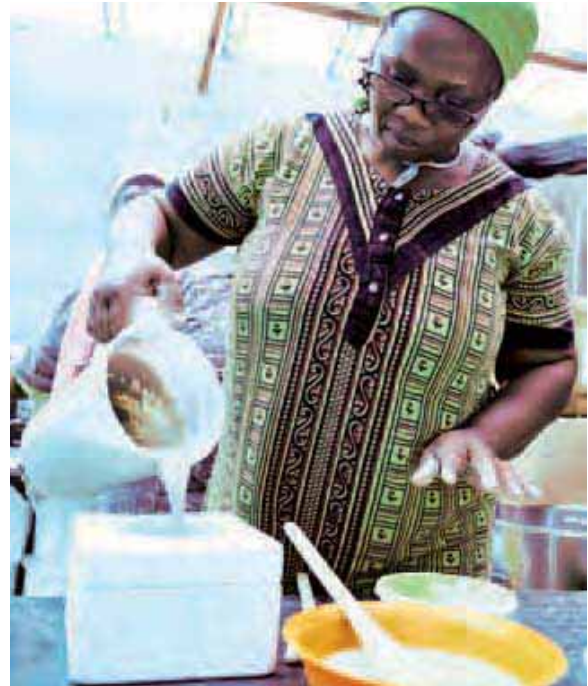


How formless, cold, grey clay becomes an object of beauty is a work of magic that Khunjuzwa Mayi and her team from Udongwe Hand Painted ceramics perform on a daily basis. It also illustrates the birth of a business that came about quite unexpectedly, a co-operative that benefits from the collected talents and efforts of each individual, who on their own might not be as bright and beautiful as they are together.

A few years ago Khunjuzwa, an artist in her own right, started teaching ceramics and painting to a few Khayelitsha residents in an effort to help them earn a living. Then, in 2007, having seen the results and the potential of starting a business, she founded Udongwe Hand Painted ceramics. The venture now employs six full time staff members, including an organiser and a market researcher, who mould clay objects of all shapes and sizes, fire them in the oven and then paint and decorate them, ready for market.

As an outlet for her passion, the business has been wonderful, but it is not without its challenges. These include power cuts – which cause art in the oven to be rejected and a shortage of space due to high rentals in the area.

“Also, it’s not easy to market. People always say it’s a free market, but it’s not. We actually pay fees,” she



smiles, referring to the transport problem the business used to face. “But now, thanks to the help from the dti, who assisted with a bakkie, we’re now able to take our products wherever we want to sell them and pick up supplies whenever we needs to.”

Also, without the boost of **the dti**’s assistance with equipment, it’s fair to say that Udongwe Hand Painted ceramics would not be where it is today.

“We would have managed to maintain the business, but without the help from **the dti** we wouldn’t have been able to grow it in the absence of reliable and affordable transport.”

Inspired by the success of the business, and with the encouragement of her businessman son, Khunjuzwa recently opened a bakery that also caters on request. “The encouragement of others is extremely important when starting any new venture,” she says. “Also, the ability to communicate effectively is vital, as is taking the time to motivate each other. No-one can have everything together all of the time, so we need each other to get through the hard times and remain focused during the good ones.”

“Never lose hope, never give up,” is the advice that Khunjuzwa has to give to anyone thinking about starting





out in business. “Rome wasn’t built in a day and neither will your business be established immediately, but the day will come when it will be a success. In the meantime, you have to continue to persevere and believe in it.”

The future looks bright for Khunjuzwa and her team. Right now they’re saving up to buy clay mixing and moulding machines and they’re also on the lookout for larger premises that will enable them to take on bigger orders. Oh, and they’re also starting to do birthday and wedding cakes. It seems that for the creative, entrepreneurial mind, icing confectionery isn’t all that different from painting ceramics, indeed, the sky certainly is the limit.

**UDONGWE HAND PAINTED CERAMICS**

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# Empowering the nation

## VOLTSING ELECTRICAL (PTY) LTD



Geeta Singh's life could have been very different. Born and raised in the town of Ladysmith, her father – the family's breadwinner – passed away when she was 13-years-old, leaving her mother with six children to care for. Unlike many others in similar circumstances, it was her attitude that made the difference.

"My mother, who is a wonderful and humble person, taught me from a young age to see every difficulty as an opportunity. It is this outlook on life that has allowed me to achieve all that I have today," says Geeta.

Shortly after her father's death, Geeta started selling fruit and vegetables at the local taxi rank every afternoon in an effort to supplement the family's meagre income. This is where she learnt the basics of entrepreneurship that she now applies in her present capacity as founder and managing director of South Africa's only 100% black woman-owned company in the electrical wholesale industry. Established in 1998, the multi-million rand voltsing Electrical boasts three branches and over 45 employees.

### But how did it all happen?

Having spent many years working in the cable manufacturing industry, in 1998 Geeta was finally given the opportunity to open an electrical wholesale branch at the Monument centre in Western Johannesburg. As a joint venture, the business was very successful, and in



2004, she acquired 100% of the company and currently services major clients including contractors, various municipalities, and Eskom – a triumph for a woman in a male dominated industry.

"I wanted to engage in a venture that women don't normally do, and even today I'm the only woman, running such a company in South Africa," she says. It is critical for women to believe that they can do anything they put their minds to."

This much is true, but proving it hasn't been without its challenges, as Geeta recalls.

"Even with our favourable BEE status, we still needed to work extra hard to build key client relationships. Geeta was so thrilled when, in 2008, as the overall winner of **the dti's** Technology for Women in Business (TWIB) award, the company received a major cash injection. The money was used for buying a new computer server, computers, a high-end photocopier for the tendering division, and a generator. "What a difference these machines have made in our lives! We don't suffer with power cuts anymore and we're now able to communicate more easily between branches."

Good communication between employees, suppliers, and customers is one of the top reasons Geeta gives for voltsing Electrical's growth. "Maintaining an open-door

policy, seeking advice, sharing expertise and meeting with managers on a regular basis has been critical to the company's success," she says. "It's the only way that employees are able to live the company's vision and be inspired."

Innovation is another key factor, according to Geeta. "Don't imitate, rather innovate your way to success," she says, describing the philosophy that both birthed and today powers the company. "As an example of our own innovation, we designed pre-wired electrical boards for townhouse complexes, in an effort to make our contracting client's businesses more cost effective and efficient"

#### Great advice

"For any business to grow into the vision one has, one needs to take calculated risks," she says. To that end, Geeta believes that, "In order to succeed as a businesswoman, you need to be in the right place at the right time in order to take any acceptable calculated business risk – and these are places you can only reach with passion and perseverance."

Steady growth is also a function of good customer relations and service. "You need to look after your business relationships. retaining current customers is far more affordable than attracting new ones, so focus on ensuring that your current client base is satisfied with your value-added services."

In addition to spending wisely, avoiding waste and saving, even when times aren't hard, Geeta believes that it is crucial to keep one's ear close to the ground. "An informed person makes decisions from a position of strength and does not fall victim to sensationalism," she says.

In conclusion, Geeta sums up her enduring success in two words: "Stay positive. It's only through being positive during difficult times that will keep you focused." regardless of what the future holds, Geeta continues in her endeavour to fulfil her vision of creating a voltsing Electrical empire throughout the country and Sub Sahara Africa.

Geeta was the winner of the Technology for Women in Business (TWIB) award 2008 • DTI ambassador for the Global Summit for Women in chile • Top Woman-Owned company for the year 2009 • Top Women Awards • Top Black Businesswoman of the Year 2009 • Metropolitan Oliver Empowerment Awards • Top Empowered company in Sustainability and Beyond for the Year 2009 • Nominated as Top Empowered company by Impumelelo Awards • Finalist in the National Business Awards and BBQ finalist for Best Established Business – Empowerment.



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# Creating a world without limits

## WOMEN ARISE AND SHINE



"One doesn't come across a lot of women in carpentry or construction," observes Nonceba Mantlana, the founder of Women Arise and Shine, a carpentry business she started in 2005, in crossroads in the Cape with the vision of empowering other women to discover and develop new and unexplored talents. "And it's not because they can't do the work, but rather that they don't think they can."

The idea of 'men-only' jobs is something Nonceba has never fully understood. "My father was a carpenter and when he was working I used to ask him questions about his work. I started making wooden trays and realised that I loved doing it," she says.

Nonceba then went for carpentry training and after completing her course she recruited a few women and men – the business now employs seven people – and they started doing wood work and upholstery.

"In 2005 I started doing wooden trays with a couple of ladies who sold them at the V&A Waterfront," she says. "It's then that I realised how far this business can go. Now we even do ceilings, wooden flooring and we also cover and repair couches and chairs."



How far her business can go, Nonceba believes, is up to her and her team. "It's down to hard work – that's the only way we'll make this business grow," she says. "And commitment. If you've started something, you have to do whatever it takes to persevere until you finish it. This motivation has to come primarily from yourself because others are not always there to give it to you. When things get tough, others don't necessarily understand."

Self-motivation, especially in the face of seemingly impossible tasks, is something Nonceba learnt as a little girl. "I grew up with only boys at home so I became accustomed to doing hard work that girls normally don't, or won't do. It's incredibly empowering to make yourself do something you think you can't do or won't enjoy, and then discover the satisfaction that lies in finishing the job – especially when things get tough."

Tough things the business has had to face include transport challenges. "We used to use taxis to help us transport our equipment – which cost us a fortune – but now, thanks to **the dti** grant, we've been able to buy a bakkie and some equipment we really needed, like power tools," she beams. "Now we can go anywhere anytime and we can do our jobs even better thanks to the





equipment. I can also now pay for my house and I have tools that I can measure square meterage and space accurately before we do any work.”

According to Nonceba, the key when things get tough is to reflect before making rash decisions. “Think before you do anything. Sometimes I just take a drive and stare at the sea – it’s important to give yourself space before deciding on something – although this is not always possible!”

Good advice, especially when it comes to working with a diverse group of people, as is the case in most businesses in South Africa. Nonceba advises to remain mindful of the fact that “We all come from different backgrounds and cultures, which means being polite, patient and understanding at all times is the best way to avoid potential conflicts,” she says.

“Having said that, it’s important as a boss to have the inner strength to ‘put one’s foot down’ when necessary. As much as it’s important to acknowledge people’s achievements, it’s equally important to help them acknowledge their mistakes so that they can learn from them.”

And in doing so, while she continues to grow her business, Nonceba hopes one day to become recognised amongst the businesswomen of Cape Town, “especially for doing a ‘man’s job!’”

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the dti, in support of women in business





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