

Pursuing sustainable livelihoods - these South African youths are shining examples of resilience

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It is apt that the 2022 Youth Month call to action for South African youth is to 'Forge resilience and pursue opportunities for a sustainable livelihood, today and in the future'.



Phumlani Mhlongo offers haircuts to people at his home, when he is not teaching them to keep fit!



Nonku Zirba from Winterton shows off her successful brickmaking business to Mark Barnardo, GMSappi Forests KZN

This is exactly what the Abashintshi programme – launched by Sappi Southern Africa back in 2015 – set out to teach the participants in the programme. Not only for themselves, but also for others in their communities, as they adopted the asset-based community development (ABCD) methodology, aimed at recognising and capitalising on existing assets and building on these to forge sustainable livelihoods.

Resilience has been the key for many of these youngsters, who have persevered through hardships and tough conditions, made even worse by two years of dealing with Covid-19 and the restrictions it brought to many of their small businesses. But even then, thanks to their life skills training, they got active on their social media platforms with useful information about curbing the spread of the Covid-19, and did their bit for their communities.

Now that Covid restrictions have relaxed, things are picking up for the Abashintshi and many of them have managed to put their 'can-do' attitude to work and have established or rejuvenated their small businesses, and it's good to report that some of these ventures are doing very well.

Leading the way is Ziningi Mazibuko, a Sappi-trained Umshintshi from Mphithini near Bulwer in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), who is currently studying marketing and, with advice from extension officers from the Department of Agriculture, is assisting the Mphithini Cooperative with admin duties and sourcing markets for their produce. The cooperative operates with 11 members, focusing on agriculture production specialising in sugar beans and maize production.

“Because the youth generally consider farming as being something for the older generation, they do not consider the potential there is in the agriculture field,” says Ziningi. “I want to change that mindset and show them that by being part of

these community initiatives and by becoming commercial farmers, they will secure futures for themselves.” Besides promoting the plans of the cooperative, which results in job creation and contributes to economic growth in the area, this venture supports overall food security in the area and the country at large. Ziningi also runs two very successful tuckshops in the area.



Ziningi Mazibuko showed her mettle from the start of the Abashintshi programme, when she received the Best Entrepreneur Award from Sappi CEO Alex Thiel back in 2018



Sthembiso Dlamini (front centre) stands proudly in front of one of the many houses he has built, along with the team from Sappi (fltr: Mpho Lethoko, Beryl Traore, Mhobisi Mazibuko (Umshintshi Winterton), Sthembiso Dlamini, Angel Sibisi, Zee Zeka-Ngcamu, Buke Ngcamu and Bongani Hadebe)

Sthembiso Dlamini, an Umshintshi from Umzumbe is a well-known bricklayer, with many of the houses in the Umzumbe community built by him. His skills have also taken him further afield, and this ambitious young man even had a contract for building RDP houses in the Eastern Cape for a large part of the year.

Zanokuhle Mpungose from Nkandla in Northern Zululand, is another young man with a plan. He started a store in 2019 which is doing well in the community, selling popular fast-food fare like vetkoek, potato chips, Russians and viennas. Zano is also part of a cooperative with 13 other youth members, with plans to start a community garden with land allocated to them by the chief Induna in the area.

Armed with a pair of clippers and the right mindset, Phumlani Mhlongo from Sokhulu in Zululand is making use of his natural talents. Besides offering haircuts to people at his home, he facilitates aerobics classes and boot camps for those who want to get fit – either at his home or on weekends at the soccer field.

Lucky Lugagu from Manguzi in the far north of KwaZulu-Natal saw a gap in the market and is cashing in on those with a sweet tooth: his registered bakery co-operative bakes muffins that are sold at schools every morning and on weekends, they take orders for birthday cakes.

Mfanafuthi Hlatshwayo, hails from the Ekuthuleni village on the Sappi Lothair plantation in Mpumalanga. With a tractor that he inherited from his late father, he has negotiated a contract with Sappi for the short-hauling of timber and has formalised

the relationship, steadily moving towards becoming a full-time contractor. His Abashintshi training helped him to realise his assets and to earn a living.

Phindile Dlamini, an Umshintshi from Kempstone, kaMadakwa in Mpumalanga has teamed up with two other Abashintshi from the same community – Ntombikayise Ndlela and Thandiwe Masina – and together these go-getters are running a recycling business which is also committed to helping other young business people who are making a difference in their community.

Back in KZN, Nonkululeko Zimba is a driven and hardworking Umshintshi, based in Vimbukhalo, Emmaus in Winterton. She runs a brickmaking business, which is so successful that at times she employs two other youths part-time to deliver on big orders.

It was the booming infrastructure development and the need for vital materials in her community that led Nonku to start with brickmaking and although challenged by access to funding to grow her business, this has not stopped her from continuing to apply for NYDA assistance and entering competitions aimed at uplifting youth-owned SMMEs. She is currently also receiving training from SEDA made possible by the Sappi ESD (enterprise supplier development) Unit.

“It is thanks to the ABCD teachings and learning about the ‘Leaky Bucket’ concept that I realised that we needed to stop money leaking to suppliers or vendors outside of our community. I am very thankful to Sappi for choosing me to be part of the Abashintshi programme and opening my eyes to all the possibilities around me,” she says.

Read more about the Sappi Abashintshi programme here: <https://www.sappi.com/abashintshi-project-sappi>.

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