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2024

13 JUNE

Unlocking Opportunities: NBI-Sappi's Impactful Partnership Through the Installation, Repair, and Maintenance (IRM) Hubs



In an era marked by escalating youth unemployment and economic disenfranchisement, it's increasingly clear that merely investing in skills is not going to be enough to tackle the immense challenge at hand.

Three years ago, the [National Business Initiative \(NBI\)](#) partnered with our member company, [Sappi](#), to forge a transformative partnership aimed at fostering local business growth, particularly in the realm of [Installation, Repair, and Maintenance \(IRM\)](#) enterprises. Sappi's commitment was not just financial; it was a pledge to nurture budding entrepreneurs and bolster existing

Sappi: A Pillar of Support

Headquartered in Johannesburg, Sappi Limited is a global powerhouse with operations spanning continents. Renowned for its production of dissolving pulp, paper pulp, graphic and packaging papers, among a range of wood fibre-based products, Sappi's positive impact extends far beyond its operations. Sappi is a key driver of the local economy and a steadfast supporter of community development in South Africa.

Housed within the Umfolozi TVET College's Mandeni Campus, close to the Sappi Tugelamill, the IRM hub, aptly named Kwenza Okusha (meaning “do a new thing”), is more than just a physical space—it symbolises a commitment to long-term change.

The programme commenced with a cohort of **nine** local small, micro, and medium enterprises (SMMEs) embarking on the journey, and recently more SMMEs have been onboarded, bringing the total of SMMEs supported through the Sappi partnership to **19** overall.

From construction to mechanical and electrical services, these enterprises span a spectrum of offerings, with recent additions including cleaning, waste management, and recycling services.

Central to the NBI- Sappi partnership is the facilitation of connections between IRM suppliers and Sappi's mills in Mandeni, iLembe Municipal District and KwaDukuza, in the KwaDukuza Municipal District.

Through meticulous vetting and strategic support, the hub propels these enterprises on a journey towards success, offering:

- Guidance on compliance with industry regulations.
- Technical skills enhancement tailored to green economy imperatives and procurement prerequisites.
- Facilitation of funding access, a vital lifeline for burgeoning businesses.

Paving the Way: Milestones and Progress



While it is still early days, the impact of the programme is palpable. Several milestones to date attest to its efficacy:

- **Two** suppliers have successfully achieved **ISO 9001, ISO 14001, and ISO 45001** certifications. These certifications have not only extended their market access but also formalised their management processes, enhanced overall performance, and ensure ongoing compliance with industry regulations.
- **Six applications** for working capital finance have been facilitated, with **2** being successfully approved. This process also resulted in the creation of a finance partner linkage to assist with meeting the businesses' financial requirements.
- SMMEs, that are not suppliers to Sappi and currently supported by the IRM hub, have the opportunity to bid more confidently for Sappi opportunities.
- Across the SMMEs supported, a total of **25** individuals, including business owners and employees, have received technical and compliance upskilling, with a total of **43** competency certificates issued to these individuals.
- **Two** of the supported businesses have created **22** workplace learning opportunities. These opportunities involve hosting unemployed youth for a **nine-month period** of workplace-based learning. These youths are part of two cohorts that received technical training through the IRM initiative and a partnership involving a college, Sappi, and the German Development Agency (GIZ). In addition to technical training, they received training in work readiness, gender equity and social inclusion, workplace readiness, and entrepreneurial mindsets.

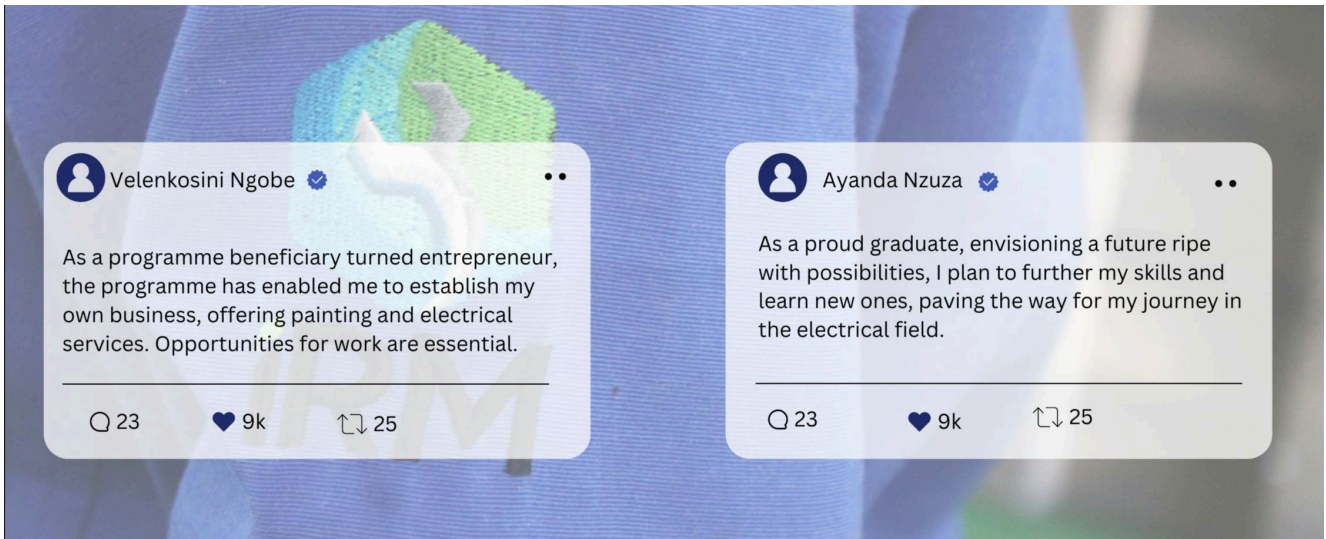
Voices of Impact: Youth Empowerment






Beyond business triumphs, the IRM initiative champions youth empowerment, and **25** individuals, equipped with newfound competencies, stand poised to make their mark. Sappi has been very intentional in the support it provides to areas around its operations.




“Sappi is committed to nurturing the potential of young talent through our Enterprise and Supplier Development initiatives. We strive to equip SMMEs, who are integral in hosting these youths, with the necessary support to unlock market opportunities that catalyse their expansion and create sustainable employment prospects. Our ambition extends beyond expanding SMMEs within our supply chain; it encompasses preparing them for broader industry challenges and enabling their access to diverse growth avenues.”




Sappi Head of Corporate Affairs- Mpho Lethoko






 Velenkosini Ngobe  

As a programme beneficiary turned entrepreneur, the programme has enabled me to establish my own business, offering painting and electrical services. Opportunities for work are essential.

 23  9k  25

 Ayanda Nzuza  

As a proud graduate, envisioning a future ripe with possibilities, I plan to further my skills and learn new ones, paving the way for my journey in the electrical field.

 23  9k  25

As the programme unfolds, valuable insights emerge:

- SMMEs do have the propensity to take in young people for structured workplace training. Structured interventions are key to bridging the gap between SMMEs and young talent as well as facilitating access to both existing and new markets.
- With the right support, SMMEs can meet local demand and thrive in competitive markets.
- Corporate partnerships, like that of Sappi and the NBI, hold immense potential for driving meaningful change.
- Young people are not just the workforce of tomorrow; they're catalysts for societal progress.
- Local intermediaries play a pivotal role in fostering supply chain linkages and youth employment opportunities.

For the NBI, this marks a groundbreaking milestone—a chance to unveil the transformative power of the IRM initiative alongside one of our esteemed member companies. Witnessing the ripple effects of our efforts is nothing short of exhilarating. It's not just about witnessing lives and communities transformed; it's about witnessing the birth of a new era where businesses and the NBI unite forces to uplift local SMMEs, creating a brighter future for all.





National Business Initiative

The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.

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