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Sewing project helps women put bread on table

A group of women from Pomeroy in KwaZulu-Natal have found a way to make ends meet after being given a helping hand by the government.

The six women were part of an Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) offered by the Umzinyathi district municipality in 2020/2021.

Ex-EPWP workers now supply uniforms to rural schools

They were employed on a temporary basis through the programme and received sewing training as part of it.

The EPWP is an initiative of the national department of public works and infrastructure aimed at providing income relief and skills training through temporary work.

The initiative is implemented by all spheres of government across the country. Upon the expiry of their six-month contracts, the women returned to their community.

With Pomeroy located in the deep rural part of Msinga, where locals spend over R50 to get to a nearby town, the women realised that there would be a market for locally made uniforms.

One of the women, Bongive Gabela, 50, says the programme was life-changing as they are now able to provide for their families and have created casual jobs for others.

Already, they have hired five people to assist in their container workshop.

They supply uniforms to three local schools and are in the process of registering a cooperative so that they might qualify for government support.

They hope that if they can get more equipment and a bigger space in which to operate,

they will be able to secure more customers.

Gabela says that before the training, she could sew, but not well enough to produce an entire uniform range, including tracksuits.

"Our container is a one-stop shop for uniforms and we will add stationery next year," she says.

"In June, we took part in a fashion show in Dundee and since then, we have been getting more customers for graduation gowns and church uniforms.

"We also design for special occasions, such as weddings

and the Dundee July," says Phumelele Kunene, 48, who is also part of the group.

According to the retail clothing, textile, footwear and leather master plan, the clothing and textile industry is one of the key sectors for job creation, accounting for 15% of employment in the country.

It says government aims to grow employment across the sector's value chain by over 300,000, by transforming the sector to make it more inclusive.

■ This article first appeared in GCIS's VukUzenzele



Women from rural part of KwaZulu-Natal have perfected their sewing skills through the EPWP training. / VUKUZENZELE

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