

WOMEN BUILDING ONE BRICK AT A TIME IN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

The construction industry in South Africa plays a pivotal role in the economy of the country. The industry employs about 40% of the country's population according to stats presented by the South African government; however, male employment far supersedes the employment of females in this industry, as is the case in many other industries in the country. It is because of these many boundaries women face in the industry that Tfutukani Brick Making Cooperative was formed.

The women of Kwanyamazane location in Mpumalanga came together and formed the Tfutukani Brick Making Cooperative to defy the odds and prove that women have the necessary skills to advance in the construction industry not only as employees but also creators of employment.

Inspired by a passion to improve their lives as unemployed women and the desire to provide for their families, Mrs Lindiwe Msibi, the deputy chairperson of Tfutukani Brick Making Cooperative gathered 24 other women from her community and they registered the cooperative in 2008. With no funding and skills to move the cooperative forward, they got in touch with their local government and the National Development Agency (NDA) to seek assistance.

The Mbombela Local Municipality provided the cooperative with land where they could advance the cooperative and have space to grow and have large production. The NDA then grant funded Tfutukani with R970 000.00 in 2012. The NDA's funds warranted the cooperative to build the office, buy office equipment, build the storage house, buy a tipper truck, get more raw materials and install a borehole. Through the capacitating efforts of the NDA, Tfutukani also got a mentor who worked with them for 12 month to capacitate them on manufacturing different bricks and the operation of the new machinery.

Tfutukani Brick Making Cooperative currently has 31 full time employees, majority of which are women. The cooperative prides itself in being able to provide for so many families in a community that is ridden with unemployment and poverty particularly for youth and women. Part of the challenge they face is that the industry is competitive and the rate of business turnover in that area is high. They are unable sometimes to meet the demand of the industry because of inadequate machinery and other capacity issues.

Despite these challenges, one cannot deny the resilience of the founders of Tfutukani Brick Making Cooperative and the strides they continue to make. Now that women have made inroads, it is time for men to recognise these women and to work together to grow the industry and make sure cooperatives led by women in this industry also grow and develop communities. The NDA continues to work with cooperatives like Tfutukani that challenge the status quo and at the same time improve the lives of many in poor and remote communities.