



AGRIPIPER

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Rising from being a recruitment specialist to a successful young emerging farmer

From a banker to a successful farm businesswoman

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THE AGRIPRENEUR QUARTERLY: A PUBLICATION BY THE SMALLHOLDER UNIT OF THE NAMC

This is the fifteenth edition of the Agripreneur publication from the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC). Through this publication, the NAMC seeks to create a platform where farmers, particularly smallholders, share their knowledge and skills, challenges, experiences and insights with one another. It is believed that this publication will assist smallholders to learn from one another, develop strategies, adopt models, and become part of the value chain through marketing commodities that meet quality standards and are safe for consumption.

Presented in Agripreneur 15 are the following topics:

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AGRIPRENEUR

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Picture captured at 2018 Women AgriBiz Training workshop.

Women remain resolute in their food production efforts amidst challenges they face

Written by:
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In Africa, women farmers play a major role in the production and processing of household food. They are also providers of the bulk of labour in the production of cash crops within the smallholder farming setting. Collectively, women contribute more than 50% of agricultural labour in sub-Saharan Africa in varying levels, depending on the specific enterprise (crop or livestock). Despite their contribution to food production and other household economic activities, women's economic roles remain largely invisible and unrecognised.

Additionally, they are often excluded from decision-making structures of farmer-based institutions. They encounter greater limitations in accessing means of production as compared with their male counterparts, due to social, cultural, legal and economic obstacles. Thus, most women producers are generally relegated to servicing un-lucrative markets, as they are not able to meet the requirements of more remunerative markets, locally or internationally. Consequently, women, especially those in rural areas, bear a considerable burden of poverty and they tend to be a symbol of poverty.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) also alluded to the fact that development strategies can be equitable only when they consider and address the different needs, constraints, opportunities and priorities of both men and women. Thus, requirements for comprehensive strategies in formulating agricultural policies and programmes cannot be overemphasised.

Despite all these challenges, most women are breaking these barriers and are making tremendous progress and contribution to the sector through championing innovations and technologies that are making a difference in the sector and through determination.

This issue illustrates the reasons why women make a significant contribution to both food production and food security. The women sampled here comprise pacesetters and they are breaking new grounds in as far as farming is concerned in Africa. They are bringing back the glory of farming in Africa and making it attractive. They are changing the image of agriculture and are role models to other women, as well as girls.

Mbali Nwoko: rising from being a recruitment specialist to a successful young emerging farmer in the space of 2 years



By: Brian Makhele,
Emmanuel Mafokoane,
Bongani Radebe &
Kayalethu Sotsha

Mbali Nwoko is a 30-years old female farmer, born in Soweto and then raised in the East Rand, Gauteng. She leases a 14-hectare farm (Green Terrace) where she plants green peppers, baby marrows, green beans and spinach on a 7-hectares open field, supported by 10 tunnels and 11 shade net structures. She currently supplies 2 formal retailers, 5 processing companies, and the Johannesburg, Springs and Tshwane Fresh Produce Markets, as well as 20 hawkers. In 2019, she will be exporting some of her green beans to foreign markets. Mbali has recently been presented with a New Entrant into Commercial Farming (Northern Region) Award by the Agricultural Writers of South Africa, a professional association that promotes the image and standards of agricultural journalism in South Africa. Amazingly, Mbali has achieved all of this in the space of just over two years, without an agriculture background and government support. However, her journey has not been easy as it may seem – she has been tested by the dynamic and unpredictable nature of the agriculture business and has braved it through. Let's see how her journey as a farmer began.

In 2015 December, when the company took a knock, the clients froze some positions and the business was growing slowly. Fortunately, Mbali met Mr Eric Mauwane and Mr Ntsako Mabnunda at a Shanduka Black Umbrellas networking event. They were two of many people she had met on different platforms that are doing farming. At the time, farming was a different industry to her, but she had conversations with these people and she started to become curious about farming. These men, Eric and Ntsako, were both Engineers and did not have an agricultural background. This is what inspired her to venture into farming.

She decided to quit the recruitment business and went into farming, which she started with the assistance from her husband, but they had to get the land first, and this was a real struggle. She finally got a piece of land from a farmer who was not fully utilising the land. She started by leasing 2 hectares, planting spinach in July 2016. In September of the same year, the landlord decided to give her an additional piece of land, including vegetables that had been planted (spinach in the tunnels and cabbages in the open space). Although this seemed like a blessing, it brought a challenge to Mbali because the vegetables were getting ready to be sold and she did not have a market – this was another test of character.

“Farming is not sexy, one has just got to view it as an income-generating source and be determined to make it work
-Mbali Nwoko

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Mbali completed her Bachelor of Commerce Degree in Industrial Psychology with the University of Johannesburg 2011. She then worked in the recruitment industry for two years. However, she had always known that she needed to run her own business. She then started her own recruitment company in 2013, co-owning it with her friend. The business ran successfully for four years.



She went around negotiating with the nearest supermarkets, such as Food Lovers Markets, Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market, and so forth. One could describe her as a determined woman with a die-hard spirit, as she had managed to get the land, and plant and acquire the market in the space of about a year and a half, bearing in mind that she did not have an agriculture background and financial support. This, to her, was an overwhelming experience, where she had to manage the relationship with the new clients (markets) and manage the farming activities, including the farm workers. She had also expanded her venture from two workers to eight workers after the landlord had decided to lease an additional piece of land to her.

When she thought everything was falling into place, she was surprised by a hail storm in November of 2016 that wiped out all the vegetables that were planted in the open space. This required her and her husband to inject more money into the business to run things as they were.

In 2017, she started researching about which crops she should plant, based on supply and demand. As a result, she ended up settling with green peppers, baby marrows, green beans and spinach. She also expanded into the informal market (hawkers), from which she generates revenue of R20 000 a month, on average. During this year, she learnt much about how dynamic the markets could be and how challenging it is for farmers to maintain their share, particularly in the formal markets. She also learnt about the supply and demand trends and how they influence the prices and volumes supplied into the markets. She also learnt about spraying programmes for diseases and pests control.

Around May of 2017, she secured an off-take agreement with Pick n Pay, but she did not have a pack house facility. She struggled to secure funding since she was leasing the land and only had a ten-year lease agreement. She had to dig into her pocket again to get a mobile pack house to secure the market share with Pick n Pay.

Omnia also played a crucial role in Mbali's success. The company gave her a contract for purchasing inputs, where she had the use of a credit facility to get inputs for planting and only needed to pay the money back after harvesting. This eased the burden of capital injection a bit and enabled her to expand the area of land planted.

She has built relations with other farmers and sometimes goes to visit them to learn how and what they are doing. In addition to the networks she built with other farmers, she considers Masedi Mohale and Andile Siphesihle Ngcobo as her mentors. Between July and September 2018, she de-bushed another strip of land on the farm to expand her operation further. This also included an investment of about R200 000, 00 on irrigation infrastructure.

Currently, she has seven full-time males and hires between 10 and 20 females, mainly for harvesting and packaging. She has even gone to the extent of hosting her clients and stakeholders (Fresh Produce Markets, Omnia and some seed companies) as a way of showing her appreciation for their support and also to showcase the new farm.

Asked what she can tell young aspiring farmers out there, Mbali said, "farming is not sexy, one has just got to view it as an income-generating source and be determined to make it work". She highlighted the challenges she has faced along the way and noted that another person could have easily given up, particularly without having an agricultural background and not being sure how things in certain situations are likely to turn out. But, she had that enthusiasm and motivation that there is no better place she would rather be; therefore, she has got to make it work. Planning is one of the key things she highlighted. In addition to her self-determination, she emphasises the support she got from her husband, her clients and the network of farmers she has built.

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From a banker to a successful farm businesswoman: The story of Mwamy Mlangwa

By: Benito Eliasi

The Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Union (SACAU) is making deliberate efforts to profile these women and publicise what they are achieving to the public. Mwamy Mlangwa is a female farmer from Tanzania



Mwamy at her hydroponic facility

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Mwamy, from Tanzania, owns an urban farm named Mwamy Green Vegies. Mwamy is a banker by profession and she left her banking career to pursue farming on a full-time basis. The decision to quit her banking job was made after she realised the possibility and potential of venturing into urban farming. She set herself on supplying fresh vegetables to urban consumers through supplying retailers, hotels and restaurants.

What motivated her was the realisation that through advanced technology, the scarcity of land and space need not hinder her from realising her dreams. She decided to start growing lettuce, using hydroponic technology where she can grow crops without the use of soil as a growth medium. This technology also assists her to be precise in the use of water and other inputs, such as crop nutrients, allowing the lettuce seedlings to grow within 15 days to maturity.

Mwamy encourages women to explore the possibilities of going into hydroponics farming because it has advantages that include absence of soil-borne pathogens in the vegetables produced, safe alternative to soil disinfection, high yield of good-quality crops, precision application of nutrients, no soil tillage and preparation, high total yield, and environmental safety and sustainability.



However, she cautioned that although the technology is handy for urban farming, adopting it should take into consideration the high initial cost of setting up the greenhouse and the other supporting equipment, the high requirements of technical skills, and a clean and adequate supply of water.

Lastly, Mwamy tips women on some of her secrets for running a successful business. "For an entrepreneur to succeed in a business such as hydroponics, one needs to be proactive in the management, keep proper records of all activities and dedicate time to closely monitor the plants and equipment; have proper production plans; proper pest control mechanisms, manpower management and use of efficient machines and strong leadership," said Mwamy.



About NAMC

The NAMC was established in terms of the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act No. 47 of 1996, as amended by Act No 59 of 1997 and Act No. 52 of 2001. We are a statutory body reporting to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Our mandate is captured in our four core divisions namely;



**Agribusiness
Development**



Agricultural Trusts



Statutory Measures



**Markets and
Economic Research
Centre (MERC)**



Our Vision

Strategic positioning of agriculture in a dynamic global market.



Our Mission

To provide marketing advisory services to key stakeholders in support of a vibrant agricultural marketing system in South Africa.

The work of the NAMC is aligned to the four strategic objectives as set out in Section 2 of the MAP Act, 1996 namely;

Increasing market access
to all market participants



More efficient marketing of
agricultural products



Increased export earnings
from agricultural products



Enhanced viability of the
agricultural sector



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Ngabaghila Chatata

growing her business worth from US\$50 000 to US\$500 000 within five years

By: Benito Eliasi



Ngabaghila Chatata

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Mrs Ngabaghila Chatata is the managing director of Thanthwe Enterprises in Malawi. Despite her background as a graduate in social science and working with various organisations at managerial level positions for several years, she decided to gradually go into farming. Through her determination and pursuance of a clear vision, she has managed to grow her business worth from US\$50 000 to US\$500 000 within a period of five years.

Thanthwe Enterprises practises an inclusive business model, which combines horticulture, agritourism, community outreach, livestock farming, and consulting. The integration helps in ensuring the supply of high-quality vegetables and consistent production throughout the year. Her farm uses smart climate technologies including 1 800 square metre greenhouse production facilities with a drip irrigation system. Through their community outreach/out-grower scheme, they seek to maximise profit and create employment and markets for the socio-economic empowerment of the peri-urban poor and the most vulnerable households surrounding their farm.

Speaking to the author, Mrs Chatata stated that they regularly introduce new knowledge, technologies and innovative research ideas to enhance solutions for the needs of consumers. “We have a committed, passionate and devoted team of 15 employees that possess the technical expertise needed to undertake the business operations. All this ensures that we can guarantee our clients added value,” said Mrs Chatata.

She is also the chairperson of the Horticulture Association in Malawi. Meanwhile, her company trains and provides mentorship to other upcoming farmers. Asked for her advice to other women farmers, she stated that successful entrepreneurs should carry others with them (alone, you run fast, but with others, you reach far). They should also mentor others to help them to grow as well. She also said that farmers need to have a clear vision for their businesses and that they should not be dissuaded from that vision. Women farmers should learn to develop plans and execute those plans religiously, said Mrs Chatata. Moreover, she believes that an entrepreneur should be ambitious and should try to take advantage of every opportunity coming their way. “As women, we should not be apologetic when it comes to taking advantage of the opportunities presented to us as entrepreneurs,” concluded Mrs Chatata.



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A top entrepreneur export markets award winner 2018:

Noluthando Mbilase

There are success stories in the midst of challenges (and associated failures) facing new entrants to commercial agriculture. The story, or rather reality, of the successful performance of the farming operations of Mrs Noluthando Mbilase is one that deserves to be celebrated.

By:
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Bonani **Nyhodo**,
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Melton **Mulaudzi**

Mrs Noluthando Mbilase is one of the successful black farmers (and more encouraging is the fact that she is a woman) in agriculture. She is a citrus producer, specialising in citrus production for the export market. It is important to note that she did financial management course with the University of Pretoria in 2015, and then attended the first aid course, followed by a risk assessment and management course. She started farming in 1997 after she took over the management of the Crenforn Farm, which was one of the farms of Ulimocor (a parastatal), after its liquidation in the same year. She was previously employed as a Field Officer in the same company in 1989. Thereafter, the farm was named as Greenwood Citrus Farm.

The Greenwood Citrus Farm is approximately 62 hectares in extent, of which 26 hectares are under citrus production. When the new beneficiaries took over the farm, the trees were dry and non-productive. It is commendable that the new owner managed to make the farm productive. Currently, the farm has different varieties of citrus cultivars, which include Cambria Navel Late maturity on 10 hectares, Lemon Eureka on 3 hectares, Satsuma Miyowase on 3 hectares, Satsuma Owari on 2 hectares, Nadorcott Mandarin on 4 hectares, Lane late Navel on 2 hectares, and Nova Mandarin on 2 hectares.

The farm exports approximately 75% of its quality fruits to Russia, Japan, the Middle East, and Europe and sells 25% to the local market. The farm is assisted by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) to ensure compliance with the export market requirements. It, therefore, complies with EU standards and is accredited with SAGap and SIZA. The compliance of the business with the legal requirements and corporate governance standards is a sign of sound business ethics. Regarding employment opportunities, Greenwood Citrus Farm has eleven (11) permanent employees, of which nine (9) are young people and two (2) are women. During the peak season, the farm can employ approximately sixty (60) seasonal workers. The workers are provided with protective clothing for safety management. They also receive training in their respective farm duties.





From left to right: Rosina Semenya (Portfolio Committee Chairperson), Hon Sifiso Buthelezi (Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries), Noluthando Mbilase (Best Women Exporter of a Year) and Dr Vuyo Mhlati (AFASA President)

The Product Export Control Board (PCECB) also assisted the workers with training on tractor driving and maintenance, provided through the Mpofu Training Centre (MTC). Furthermore, the Citrus Growers Association (CGA) also facilitates skills transfer to workers through a leadership course at MTC. The manager provides training on irrigation and fertiliser application.



The farm is also Climate Smart Agriculture-orientated and it emphasises natural resources management, adaptation to and mitigation of climate change challenges. The sustainable use of natural resources is ensured because no harmful chemicals are used, which means that there is no soil degradation. The threat of soil erosion is avoided by cutting grass and not destroying the vegetation in-between the trees. The competition for nutrients in-between trees is controlled by clearing the weeds so that they do not compete with the citrus trees for nutrients and water.

The farm is also advancing in adopting technology. The workers use a clocking machine when coming in and out of the workplace – they no longer sign an attendance register. The pickers also use a scanning machine. For irrigation purposes, they no longer use augers to check for the humidity of the soil, but rather use a neutron probe. In the past, a flood-irrigation system was used, but now electric pumps with microjet feeder sprays are used on the farm. These pumps and spraying machines are programmed to automatically change from one orchard to another when finished irrigating.

Mrs Mbilase is representing South Africa in Germany and Holland, and she encourages women in South Africa to become citrus exporters. Recently, she received an award from DAFF for being the best woman exporter of the year. This is a reflection of the true definition of women empowerment and transformation of gender in agricultural exports markets. Noluthando is a role model for all South African women in agriculture, and not only in the citrus industry.

Mrs Mbilase has other farming enterprises, such as vegetables and chicken. The vegetables are supplied to the surrounding local schools, crèches and churches. As part of community development, she donated a school uniforms to the Picardy Primary School and provided soccer kits to the local football club in "Seymour". She is also taking care of orphans around Balfour schools. Noluthando is evidence that, if women are fully transformed and supported, they can excel in agriculture, thus contributing to the eradication of poverty and food insecurity.

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