

# Connecting the dots .....

## Stories of change: Young Women in Local Economic Development

### New outlets for Nobuhle's okra

#### *Summary*

Nobuhle Maseko, business woman, Lavumisa, Eswatini

Project involvement: Young Women in Local Economic Development network and mentoring

*Badly affected by covid-19 and water shortages, Nobuhle Maseko, was not able to maintain her customers and sales of fruit and vegetables. With the help of her Connecting the Dots mentor she has adapted her business to sell produce that will store better, learned how to calculate costs to ensure she focuses on what is profitable, and found new outlets through social media.*

#### *Background*

Nobuhle Maseko runs a fruit and vegetable production business in Lavumisa where she helps people who grow vegetables in their gardens.

Covid-19 had a big impact on her business. Things in general were not going well, and people were not able to buy her produce. Selling from home was not very profitable as few people wanted to visit her to buy her goods due to the health restrictions. One profitable part of her business were the corn chips she liked to sell, with schoolchildren a big part of her market. But with children not able to go to school during Covid restrictions, this avenue for sales completely dried up.

#### *Aims*

A keen entrepreneur wanting to keep up her business interests, when Nobuhle joined the Connecting the Dots project, she was looking for ways to overcome her difficulties as a result of the impact of both Covid and the water shortages.

As her business requires regular stocking up of fruit and vegetables, if her stock is not sold quickly it ends up getting ruined. With fruits that store better, such as apples and pears, other sellers would also be competing to sell the same type of fruits. With fruit such as bananas the short shelf life meant that sometimes Nobuhle would find a whole box completely ruined because they have been stored for too long.

With vegetables, there was a further complication: the shortage of water in Lavumisa made it very difficult to grow them well, so Nobuhle gave up selling vegetables. Even with fruits, water was a problem as people would ask for water to wash them when they bought them.

“There is a lot we cannot do as entrepreneurs because we do not have water. Water that we have is not enough, we only have enough to drink. It sometimes happens that we go for a week without water,” explains Nobuhle.

#### *How the CtD project has helped*

Nobuhle discussed these difficulties with her mentor to try to come up with some solutions to keep her business going despite the impact of Covid-19.

One of the solutions they looked at was alternative produce and markets. Nobuhle was looking at whether she could collect some ochre and go to Nhlanguano to sell it. Her mentor talked her through the process of adding her costs such as the bus fare and calculating the resulting profits. As a result she decided to buy more corn chips to take to sell at the same time and look for new markets for these as she could no longer sell to scholars.

“My mentor helped me on all this, guiding me on what I should do during the pandemic and how to keep records for my business.,” said Nobuhle.

“For instance, when I sell the ochre, if I have three bags and each one make E100, this makes me a total of E300. To be able to pay for my bus fare, I should add more things to sell, instead of focusing just on the ochre. Even though I do not make a lot of cash, I do thank the mentors for their advice.”

Nobuhle also learned about advertising and social media after attending the workshop in Pigg’s Peak.

“Going to attend the workshop in Pigg’s Peak helped me a lot, because now I know that you can advertise your business in networks like Facebook, no matter what you sell,” she explained

“Our mentors taught us that a customer is always right.”

#### *Impact*

By using social networks Nobuhle has been able to further expand her business. She still works with people growing vegetables in their gardens as she has found that people who need vegetables and don’t have access to a garden can now order from her by post or online. She can then fulfil the order, taking it with her when she goes to sell her okra.

