

## Media statement: Unlocking demand for skills and jobs in the township economy in iLembe

Mandeni, 30 September 2024

On Friday, 27 September 2024, 30 iLembe Dual Trade Assistant Learners graduated under the Short Skills Programme at the Mandeni IRM Hub. After completing three months of theory and simulation training at the college and nine months of work-related experience, these graduates are now more employable in both the public and private sectors. After gaining three years of work experience, they will have the opportunity to qualify as artisans in mechanical or electrical fields through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process. In addition, on Thursday, 26 September 2023, 15 plumbing assistants graduated at the Esikhawini campus. The programme has also assisted 10 local youth to qualify as trade artisans, with another 10 expected to qualify by the end of 2024.

Graduates are also encouraged to start their own businesses, with the option to join the Hub's incubation programme. Other students can go on to study towards obtaining their trade test in a relevant field.

How do we unlock demand for skills and jobs in the township economy? The answer lies in expanding opportunities for job retention and growth within Installation, Repair, and Maintenance (IRM) enterprises across various sectors of the South African economy. This is the driving purpose behind the IRM Enterprise and Skills Hub, located on the Mandeni Campus of Umfolozu TVET College, which was officially opened on 6 October 2021.

This initiative, funded by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and Sappi Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd, in partnership with the National Business Initiative (NBI) and Umfolozu TVET College.

The IRM Hub, situated in a renovated building on the Mandeni Campus, is the first of its kind under the IRM initiative. Inaugurated on 6 October 2021 by Dr. Nicolas Brühl, Ambassador of Switzerland to South Africa, and Mayor Thabani Mdlalose of Mandeni Municipality, the hub offers a comprehensive facility including a training room, maker space, office space, boardroom, kitchen, eating area, and ablutions. These resources are available for use by local businesses, fostering entrepreneurial development.

The Hub, aptly named "Kwenzakusha," meaning "we are building," has to date supported 19 local IRM businesses. These enterprises receive entrepreneurial support, including market access, capacity building in areas such as marketing, finance, and compliance, as well as skills development, personal coaching, and mentoring.

IRM roles account for approximately 2 million jobs, or 12% of total employment in South Africa, with 736,000 of these roles occupied by young people. Two-thirds of these jobs are within Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Recognizing that youth unemployment cannot be solved solely through formal sector labour absorption, the IRM initiative focuses on supporting township youth, who face significant barriers in accessing and sustaining employment. By developing and growing township enterprises, we can stimulate economic activity and unlock employment opportunities.

Just a few hundred meters from the hub is the college's training centre, where local township youth complete three months of accredited IRM skills training, followed by six to nine months of workplace learning with local businesses. To date, 44 iLembe township youth have graduated as general handypersons, equipped with the skills needed to enter the job market or start their own businesses.

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IRM roles account for around 2 million jobs (12% of all employment) in the South African economy, of which 736,000 are occupied by young people<sup>1</sup>. Two-thirds of these jobs are in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. This IRM Initiative recognises that youth unemployment will not be solved through labour absorption in the formal sector alone, and that township youth in particular face significant barriers in accessing and sustaining employment opportunities. Therefore, it is critical to support and develop township enterprises to grow economic activity and unlock employment.

The name of the hub is 'Kwenz' Okusha' which means, 'we are building'. To date, the hub has been building 19 local IRM businesses, through the provision of entrepreneurial support including access to market, capacity building such as marketing, finance, and compliance, skills development, personal coaching and mentoring.

A few hundred meters from the hub is the college's training centre. It is here that local township youth complete their 3-months training in an accredited IRM skills programme, followed by 6-9 months' workplace learning at local businesses. To date, 44 iLembe township youth have graduated as general handypersons.

Looking ahead, Umfolozzi TVET College is excited to announce a significant development in the iLembe district: a 2000m<sup>2</sup> extension of the existing IRM Hub. This expansion will include additional training facilities, incubation rooms, hot desks, meeting rooms, production workshops for four trades, as well as the maker space and retail facilities. This investment, supported by KfW (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau), a German Development Bank, is part of a broader initiative to establish five hubs across South Africa in partnership with TVET colleges.

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<sup>1</sup> StatsSA QLFS data, Q4 2018; Harambee analysis



...at the future be known



Kwenza Okusha is eager to see the hub’s continued growth, including its geographic reach, the range of in-demand skills offered, the number of SMMEs and youth developed, and the partnerships forged to implement IRM projects.

**If your company is interested in supporting this innovative, demand-driven programme by hosting our youth for workplace experience or by working with us to build your supply chains, please contact the Mandeni IRM Hub at: [irmhub@umfولوzi.edu.za](mailto:irmhub@umfولوzi.edu.za)**

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