

CANEGROWERS, on behalf of the National Development Agency, handed over five new laptops to five small scale grower co-operatives on 30 June 2011. The handover was followed by a cultural dance performed by Amahlubuka Cultural Group.

The donation of the computers came to bear following the highly successful workplace challenge clustering initiative, 'Phakamisa' which has as its objective to improve the sustainability and competitiveness of land reform beneficiaries and small scale growers in the sugar value chain.

Since 2008 CANEGROWERS has partnered with the National Development Agency, the South African Sugar Association and Productivity SA, in implementing Phakamisa. In December 2009 the first land reform beneficiary cluster was formed. In March 2009, the first small scale grower cluster was formed. All participants have completed orientation phase and are now in the formalization phase which included basic computer training and specialized training in a farm management programme.

Some of the challenges throughout the programme included how to collect and store data, record keeping, illiteracy and understanding the importance of collecting and keeping baseline data. Umlalazi Mayor, Councillor TB Zulu commented on the handover and said: "We live in a world where technology plays a large part of our lives. Cane growing plays a major role in the economy of our municipality. This investment will go a long way in improving administrative, productive as well as research related activities for the beneficiaries."

Speaking on behalf of the National Development Agency, Mr Nkhensani Mthembu, National Grants Manager, said: "We do not see ourselves as just funders of this project. We see capacity building as a critical aspect of ensuring sustainability of this initiative. It is important that the beneficiaries see themselves as involved in an enterprise which is creating employment and not just another small project. "

A quote from the late Mrs Vilakazi, a Phakamisa participant from Amatikulu, concurred with the thoughts expressed by the NDA when she said "Small scale growers are no longer ignorant. We now know that we are entrepreneurs bringing economic growth into the area."

Back row from left: Productivity SA senior manager Justice Tshifularo; SA Sugar Association chairman Bongani Linda, Umlalazi Mayor Councillor TB Zulu, National Development Agency national grants manager Nkhensani Mthembu; ProductivitySA KZN regional manager Yolisa Ndima and CANEGROWERS' director of economic services and chairperson of Phakamisa Project's steering committee, Olivia Finnemore.

Front row from left Co-operative beneficiaries : Busisiwe Ncanana (Obanjeni), Phillamon Ngidi (Ukuthuthuka), Bonginkosi Ngidi (Thuthuka), Chwepheshe Mkhize (Khoza) and Zamo Myeza (Ubambiswano).