

“Cross over the river and when you come to the bottom of one of the two steep mountains coming towards Eshowe you will see a Vodacom tuck shop on your left. Turn onto the dirt road, keep going straight and you will find my farm.” Those directions by Moses Gumede to his farm 160 hectare sugar cane farm ‘Entembeni’, are typical of a rural farmer who identifies with his surroundings and uses landmarks instead of road maps.

After getting lost on a few dirt roads I finally find the farm and am greeted by Moses in his trademark cowboy hat, surrounded by his cattle – one of his many passions in addition to being a sugar cane farmer. As we talk it is clear that Moses is not easily put off by adversity. He saw an advertisement in the newspaper offering a farm for sale. He applied and was successfully interviewed only to find that a land claim had been lodged on the farm. In hindsight this was probably to his advantage. The government began negotiating with the claimants, the Nzuza Tribal Community and it was agreed that the farmers should be part of the Nzuza clan. As Moses is from the Nzuza clan he automatically became one of the claimants.

Trials and Tribulations

Whilst the claim remains unresolved, Moses has been farming Entembeni for the past seven years and has managed to increase his operation and has recently been asked by the Nzuza community to take over a further 128 ha. In total, Moses will be cutting 13 300 tons cane this season. Not a small tonnage for a man who still sees himself as a ‘small scale grower’ from the days when he used to have a 2ha plot. The process has not been easy. Originally the government suggested that the Nzuza clan should lease the whole area (2 185 ha) and then sub lease this to their people. Some of the lessess failed dismally and at the end of the lease period those leases were not renewed and new people from the clan took over the farms. The idea behind this was to rehabilitate those farms with people who had farming background so that the same mistakes would not be repeated. “Now we have experienced farmers who are part of the Nzuza community but cane farming elsewhere coming back to this area due to land claims on their farms. Things are looking good for our community and cane growing in this region.”

As Moses relates some of the stories of failure it is clear that he is on top of the game in terms of his financial knowledge and technical farming skills. He attributes this to his 21 years of experience as an extension officer coupled with financial management training through CANEGROWERS funded by PAETA. In addition, he makes use of the One Stop Accounting and VAT service offered by Canefarms, a division of CANEGROWERS. He has also benefited from a special relationship with cane growers Jonathan Chennells and Gavin Wiseman who have been excellent mentors. Where he can he assists others with financial advice “my intention is to lift people up. Only problem is that when people make mistakes they keep quiet. If I have a problem I will speak up immediately and ask for help before it gets out of hand.” Moses does not like to see others fail as he believes the strength of the community depends on successful farmers.

An initial problem with cane haulage was soon sorted out by this astute businessman and he managed to secure good contracting rates with Peter Klusener which enabled him to soon purchase his own tractors and in turn become a contractor for others in the area. Moses now has four tractors and continues to provide a contracting service to his fellow cane growers as well as helping with fire breaks.

Sense of Community

As we drive around the area and view his cane farming operation, Moses’ self awareness and empathy for his community is evident. He is genuine in his ability to influence and capacitate his community

without compromising his values and at the same time achieving his goals. During our drive we come across Mrs B Nxumalo, principal of Mvutshini Primary School. After the traditional greeting and asking after the family I asked Mrs Nxumalo about Moses the community man. “Haaibo”, she says wide eyed, “he is our municipality. He fixes up all our roads and our children can go to school without getting wet, all our roads are well graded thanks to Moses. He also helps us financially when we have a death in the community.”

As I wind my way back down the dirt road to the bottom of the mountain and over the river onto the tar road I reflect on my visit with Moses and find myself inspired by his positive attitude and the way in which he is taking responsibility for his own destiny and that of his community. Ubuntu at work.

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