

Born and bred in a province that experiences some of the most frustratingly slow development progress, Mandilive Matiwane seems an undeterred young entrepreneur who is set on making her mark in the agricultural space. Mandilive hails from the village of Lenye, Keiskammahoek, in the Eastern Cape, where she, together with her peers, came together around a common cause to do their bit to ensure that the people of Lenye experience a flourishing agricultural sector.



Mandilive Matiwane with Shanna Nienaber

Mandilive is currently enrolled as a student under the Amanzi for Food Research Project at the Environmental Learning Research Centre at Rhodes University.

Together with her Lenye group members, she established a water conservation-based vegetable nursery which doubles as a demonstration site and knowledge-sharing and motivation platform around water harvesting and conservation in agriculture. This idea emanated from a pressing need, which Mandilive defines as a real struggle.

“Earlier this year we were struggling to transplant our seedlings and there was a great demand and interest from members of the community who asked to purchase our seedlings,” she says. “Seasoned and young farmers flagged the need for a nursery and the challenges they face with in this regard,” Mandilive explains.

Mandilive confidently says, “Our nursery will be our way of collectively playing our part through practising water harvest-

ing and conservation. It will also be a platform for knowledge sharing and awareness for water issues and we hope to showcase how water is utilised in an communal agriculture space.”

Mandilive points out that, passionate as she is about her work, some situations can sometimes be very tough. “We are building our own organisational culture from scratch and it’s been very challenging,” she says. “And the lack of financial and technological resources in particular make our work very difficult.”

About Lenye Youth Group

Mandilive’s Lenye Youth Group is composed of seven young people from Lenye village who started working together towards the end of 2016. They pushed themselves to work on different interests for the sake of realising employment, development and community upliftment.



Mandilive with Lenye group members

Mandilive says, “We have a range of interests in different sectors such as the performing arts, arts and crafts, sewing and designing, sports, agriculture, etc.” We decided to focus mostly on the agricultural sector, with our interest also ranging from livestock to poultry to crops, etc.”

The group realised that a gardening project was a possibility in people’s backyards. “Given that we have no financial resources, we figured gardening or vegetable farming would be the easiest and quickest way to build capital.”

Members of the community offered to borrow us plots of land to plant in and to support our vision. We have verbally been granted 10 plots of land but we have managed to secure a written consent for two and have planted on one," she explains.



Member of the League Youth Group

We are harvesting potatoes but our other vegetables (beet-root, cabbages, butternut, and pumpkin) failed because we were not consistently working in the garden.

"Since we started, there has been a lack of human resources, as a small group continues with the project. In some cases we have misunderstandings and commit mistakes on our part," notes Mandilive.

"We decided to give preference to those who are not working at all and this leads to only a few participating. In addition to that, we believe we planted a bit late and that affected our yield. Lastly, we didn't have pest control measures due to lack of funding and knowledge."

"We have now gained knowledge of organic, cost-effective ways of doing pest control and will make use of these in the next attempt at planting. We are planting again in August. Hopefully, we can plant more than two plots but definitely we will plant on a minimum of two plots before the end of the year."

"Even though we officially have seven people as part of the project, the circle is getting bigger since we've cleared up the misunderstandings on who should be part of the project," says Mandilive.

We will now have a mix of both employed and unemployed youth working together in the project. Employed youth being those who have some sort of income from elsewhere and are less likely to be as readily available because of work-related time constraints. We will need to figure out the structure and culture of the organisation as time progresses.

Experience from Imvelisi Bootcamp

Commenting about the Imvelisi Bootcamp that she recently attended at the WRC offices, Mandilive says, "Imvelisi was amazing! I learned a lot and appreciate the fact that it was highly interactive and action-oriented. Meeting other young and emerging entrepreneurs was an eye-opener and I was impressed by the knowledge shared through the 'Hero Journeys' presentations."



WRC CEO Dhesigen Naidoo addressing the Imvelisi youth

In five years' time Mandilive sees herself being part of a well-oiled network of different stakeholders participating in the growth and development of Qoboqobo village in the Eastern Cape.

One can only learn from Mandilive's words of wisdom, "Have a vision, know that it starts there. Work your way up. We started with just a piece of land in a backyard but now we have smallholder farmer land borrowed to us by community members where we are looking to grow our nursery. There's definitely something you can do. Don't undermine that small idea that passes through your mind. Get up and do it."

Contact: Mandilive Matiwane,
email: mlmatiwane28@gmail.com