



## Case study

# Blackburn Village iThuba Programme

Our development operations are dedicated to making an impact on the shared value created from effective land development in KwaZulu-Natal. Blackburn Village (BBV), an informal settlement within Cornubia phase 2B, is an example of that commitment in action. Through partnership with the community, government and other organisations, we are unlocking opportunities for education, skills transfer and economic participation.

BBV is home to about 4 500 residents, over 90% of whom are under the age of 40 years. This community is relatively highly literate as almost 100% have an education of Grade 9 and above, yet only 36% are employed in the Greater uMhlanga economic node, which creates more jobs than work seekers at BBV.

Settlement of indigent people in the proximity of opportunity does not guarantee economic participation and social cohesion, unless deliberate interventions are implemented to capacitate self-leadership and development which enables economic participation.

To address some of the challenges identified in the initial research, mapping and ongoing engagements with the BBV community, the iThuba (meaning “opportunity”) programme was launched to coordinate and facilitate upskilling and linkages between local demand and supply of labour. The programme is a partnership between eThekweni Municipality, Tongaat Hulett and the Blackburn community. Walk-in iThuba centres, managed by the communities, have been established in Blackburn Village, Cornubia Phase 1 and Waterloo, all feeding the iThuba Training Centre at Blackburn Village SSIP Hub.

The training centre is a catalyst for skills and enterprise development that enables economic participation and improves quality of life. Focus is on dominant economic sectors in the uMhlanga region like construction, retail, hospitality and property services. The training centre, piloted with the opening of the Construction Skills programme towards the end of 2016, coordinates job opportunities and work-seekers, assessing skills gaps and through the training programmes, upskilling and linking people to opportunities. The initial programme was funded by Tongaat Hulett and work is underway to encourage other sources to contribute towards this initiative.

The centre’s training facilitators are mostly retired artisans from the construction industry and some contractors and business owners active on projects in the area. The quality of training is of such a high standard that over 70% of training centre graduates are placed in jobs within the Greater uMhlanga area. Community members already employed on local construction projects frequently return to the training centre to upgrade their existing skill sets.

The centre is a hive of activity from Monday to Friday with classes underway in a network of buildings 15 minutes’ walk from Blackburn village. Uniformed trainees create brick and cement structures, chase walls for wiring conduits, run pipes, install toilets and read plans. All under the watchful eye of facilitators who pass on knowledge gained from a lifetime of quality workmanship. Graduation takes place every Friday.

The extensive population demographic surveys ascertained that there are nearly 1 000 children under the age of 6, living in BBV with only 80 or so of these attending Early Childhood Development centres (ECDs). As part of Tongaat Hulett’s education training placement programme an ECD was prioritised. The Blackburn ECD Centre was renovated by three BBV construction companies in 2017 and relaunched in January 2018. To the surprise and admiration of the community, these companies could employ 37 newly skilled graduates from the iThuba training centre, all residing in BBV. The iThuba ECD is run by two community caregivers, overseen by a temporary mentor, Nonhlanhla Sithole, a qualified schoolteacher, and The Domino Foundation. It has also received support from Angel Projects, The Unlimited Child and NELRU. The centre accommodates children from birth to the age of six.

Being a holistic environment, all the children who attend the ECD, which is open on weekdays from 5.30am to 6pm, are fed a nutritious porridge supplied by JAM SA, as well as a lunchtime soup supplied by the Grace Container Ministry, supplemented by the established vegetable garden onsite. The success of the BBV iThuba Community Centre led to the City of Durban including BBV in the Urban Safety Governance Master Class 2018 for informal settlements, with them presenting the BBV iThuba case study at the World Urban Forum in Malaysia in May 2018.

The case of Blackburn as an integral part of the Greater uMhlanga region, proves that when planned properly, neighbourhoods of different socio-economic status can co-exist sustainably. When communities stand up and develop their neighbourhoods, nothing is impossible.