

Emerging contractor development in the Working for Water programme

Mr. Ndlanzi lives in Wagendrift in Kwazulu-Natal. In 1998, he heard that the *Working for Water* project was looking for people to work with. After meeting with the project manager who was looking for people to train as contractors, he attended a 10-day course and started working for the programme. Says Ndlanzi, "I learnt about starting and managing a business, personnel management, equipment, book-keeping and employment regulations amongst other things".

The principle objective of the *Working for Water* programme is to use the removal of alien plant species from stressed catchments as a way of empowering people into small business.

Before signing the contract, Ndlanzi went for a site inspection, and thereafter selected his 20 workers. "To be a successful contractor", believes Ndlanzi, " you have to be diligent with costing. Things like transport, fuel expenses, time management etc, are all critical to a good contractor. The challenge is that the contractor must teach workers about the clearing techniques and the type of alien species that must be cleared".

"As a contractor, I am the leader of the team and I must build team spirit among workers", he explains.

The *Working for Water* programme sets definite parameters for contractors in the selection of workers, requiring that they give preference to single-headed households, women, the disabled and the youth. The programme has, in partnership with NICRO and the Department of Welfare, allocated jobs to ex-offenders, endeavours to provide child-care for the children of workers, and has programmes committed to deal with issues such as reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Mkhize is another successful contractor in the Kwazulu-Natal project. "Working in the project is a wonderful opportunity for unemployed people to earn an income, however small. It is also a good chance for emerging business people to prove what they can do", he says.

Given the nature of funding cycles, and the insecurity imposed with the daily wage system, *Working for Water* recognised the need to ensure sustainability, and saw merit in introducing the contractor system. Says Mkhize, "Since I started I have managed to buy a vehicle that I use for my shop. I have invested most of my earnings, which have sustained me beyond my contractors' income".

Training and skills development provided in the *Working for Water* programme allows contract workers to tender for work in the broader forestry market with the clearing of fire-breaks, for example. Contracts could also be sought with Eskom and Telkom, with the clearing of servitudes, Spoornet for work on line verges, the National Roads Agency and agriculture.

The programme currently has some 600 contractors working throughout the country, in an effort to manage the escalating problem of alien invading plants.