



FIRST PERSON Melon Trials Provide Opportunity

Itumeleng Ncube is finally practicing her trade – working as agricultural technician and farm manager



Photo: Southern Africa Trade Hub

I am so happy to have this job and to finally be able to give my children a little bit extra. It was hard when we had to do everything with only my husband's salary.

—Itumeleng Ncube, Agricultural Technician on the farm of Olebile Gaborone, where trial melons and watermelons have been grown since September 2005

Cynthia Ncube, shows off a new school uniform to her girlfriends at boarding school in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Finally, Itumeleng Ncube does not have to worry, term after term, about how she will be able to afford the ever-increasing school fees for her two older children. This was not the case last year.

Thanks to a collaborative effort between the USAID Trade Hub, the Botswana Horticulture Council (BHC), Ministry of Agriculture, and local farmers to explore the feasibility of commercial melon farming in the area around the country's capital city, Gaborone, Itumeleng Ncube is earning a regular income for the first time in 12 years.

A trained agricultural technician, Itumeleng followed her husband to Botswana in 1993 after he was recruited as a secondary school teacher. That was more than a decade ago.

Today Itumeleng is not only an employee, but also an employer herself. Since starting work full-time, she hired a young Motswana girl to look after her youngest daughter, 3-year old Muzingaye at home.

Itumeleng, whose name means 'to give thanks' in Setswana, the tongue of her paternal grandparents, ascribes her newfound economic freedom entirely to the efforts of the USAID Trade Hub, the BHC, the Ministry, and the farmers to carry out the melon trials. During the winter season, specialty melons are not produced elsewhere in the region. Fruit processors in South Africa, who export extensively to the EU market, have indicated their satisfaction with the quality of melons delivered thus far as part of the trial.

Much like the trial melons, Itumeleng feels she is also under scrutiny after spending the past 12 years caring for her family. She looks forward to continuing working as a farm manager when commercial production starts. She would also like to share the specialized expertise gained from the trials with others and further expand her own skills.