

Paving the way for SMME success

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The COVID-19 pandemic has demanded a great deal of resilience from South Africans, and many small- to medium-sized businesses have borne the brunt of the uncertainty the pandemic has brought.

With this in mind, Anglo American responded with a wide-reaching approach to help local businesses in its host communities through its enterprise and supplier development programme, Zimele.

The plan featured four main focus areas: interest-free payment holidays on SMME loans, supporting businesses and helping them to gain access to COVID-19 relief fund, increasing supply chain collaboration, and providing online mentorship to the SMMEs and young entrepreneurs who form part of the Zimele development programme.

Through Zimele, Anglo American aims to create sustainability in business for entrepreneurs in its host communities, and by extension, build livelihoods that will extend beyond the life of its mines, and the pandemic that has tested the resilience of businesses across the globe.

Financial support

From April to June 2020, in collaboration with its banking partner, ABSA, Zimele did not charge interest on outstanding loan balances for qualifying SMMEs that applied for this option and lifted the payment obligations on instalments during this period.

It also encouraged participants on its programme to use the various services available to them to mitigate the impact of the virus on their enterprises. These included relief plans developed by other South African major banks for their customers.

In addition, Zimele helped SMMEs on the programme by alerting them of relief options available through government, and by assisting businesses to apply for the various COVID-19 relief initiatives.

Procurement

There was a drive for advance collaboration between Anglo American's business units and SMMEs on Zimele's development programme, to ensure support on SMMEs' contracts, as well as inclusive procurement practices.

Training and mentorship

Finally, Zimele continued to provide training and mentorship to entrepreneurs on its development programme, shifting to a mostly online approach, and ensuring that barriers to access – such as the high cost of mobile data – were removed.

Zimele teams successfully identified a myriad of new ways to provide knowledge and support through various virtual platforms, and shared successes between the programme's various hubs. The training was adapted to prioritise topics relevant to surviving in the current reality, such as business forecasting, cash preservation and diversification. The frequency of mentorship meetings increased substantially, as business owners had an amplified need for guidance and, in some instances, needed daily check-in calls.

Training and successful two-way engagement have continued, using whatever communication tools are available to various target groups. In some remote villages, connectivity is a problem, and only voice calls can be used, so the hub teams distributed small bundles of airtime and data to beneficiaries of our youth development programme who couldn't afford to buy their own.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hastened the arrival of a fast-paced, digital economic environment. Helping our communities to access digital platforms means that current and future entrepreneurs will continue to have greater access to effective communication and innovation and will not be left behind.

To find out more about Zimele visit <https://www.angloamerican.co.za/our-difference/zimele>

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