

Women in the timber industry prioritised in education and skills development drive

Over 100 adult learners, mostly women, were awarded with their Abet certificates in Levels 1 to 3 in literacy in the Eastern Cape and southern KwaZulu-Natal last week. This was a result of the 2006 Abet intervention introduced by the Forest Industries Education and Training Authority (Fieta) Seta in 2006 to tackle the scarce and critical skills identified in the forest sector.

"Not only does this day make a difference in the lives of these graduates, but also their families and the province," said Simangalisso Mkhwanazi, chief executive officer of Fieta who encouraged the learners to become entrepreneurs and continue acquiring skills. "Discipline is critical for quality performance," added Mkhwanazi who further encouraged learners to continue with their studies as the drop-out rate of students in the province is regarded as a challenge to be addressed.

Supported by Fieta Seta, in 2007 HM Timber implemented a multi-media Abet programme primarily focusing on women in the first year.

"Forestry has traditionally been one of the most male dominated rural activities, so in an effort to provide opportunities for rural women and contribute towards gender balance, it was important to us that women were prioritised for Abet development. This is a launch pad for other learning," explained Kirsten Hurwicz, HM Timber's Kokstad complex human resources manager.



Simangalisso Mkhwanazi, chief executive office of Fieta, left

With a reported 78% of the forestry industry workforce defined as either semi or unskilled there is a critical shortage of crafted or skilled workers, technicians and professional managers.

About Fieta Seta

The Forest Industries Education and Training Authority (Fieta) Seta serves the South African forest industries, which is a world leader in plantation forests. To maintain this world leadership position, Fieta is committed to producing skills that are world class in quality.

Fieta encourages industries in the four chambers to transcend their current fragmented strategies and to create an integrated national strategy to meet the standards of international quality control and the challenges of global competitiveness. Fieta encourages domestic and foreign consumption of tree related products and domestic and foreign direct investments in the forest Industries of South Africa.

As the green heritage, Seta will manage the national skills revolution within the forest industries with ecological responsibility.

About HM Timber

Hans Merensky Holdings (Pty) Limited is the holding company for one of South Africa's largest sawmilling groups. HM Timber is a fully integrated forests products company, and represents a major force in the country's sawmilling industry with the geographical spread of our mills ideally located to serve both local and international markets.

The timber division consists of a number of companies engaged in forestry, sawmilling, veneering, manufacturing, nurseries, marketing, research, development and production of high quality timber for furniture, panelling, joinery, laminating and construction.

HMH has been involved in the upliftment and development of the Eastern Cape and southern KwaZulu-Natal since the early 1970s when Singisi Forest Products was formed with other stakeholders to establish a forestry and sawmilling enterprise of the highest standards in that region.