



Hope *floats*

Liz Zambonini started enterprise development company The Hope Factory in her garage 10 years ago, with an ambition to grow grassroots SMEs run by women. Her wide-ranging success was cemented last year with a turnover exceeding R15 million

"The Hope Factory selects entrepreneurs who receive assistance through a bouquet of services underpinned by ongoing mentoring and business development. They also have access to networking opportunities, workshops, seed capital investments, support in accessing markets and further business training. Through the provision of office space and equipment-sharing, The Hope Hub incubator provides selected entrepreneurs with resources to grow their businesses.

"The biggest ingredient for success in a small start-up are the entrepreneurs themselves. They need the knowledge and skills to run the business, as well as determination, bravery and the passion to push through the hard times, carve new pathways and inspire others.

"The small business, Essence of Africa, makes me proud. After graduating from The Hope Factory, two of our

entrepreneurs – Sipiwo Sume and Unathi Godlo – started their own clothing business with the brand name Aluta Continua ('the struggle continues'). In addition to making urban and ethnic clothing, Sume and Godlo make banners for schools and prints for businesses and churches. They've already made contacts overseas, with the ultimate aim of exporting.

"As part of government's initiative to promote small businesses and create jobs, Enterprise Development is one of the pillars of the broad-based black economic empowerment scorecard. Many companies are looking for credible vehicles to invest in. Through partnering with such companies, they're able to attain their ED points. This also enables The Hope Factory to grow and establish small businesses, so it's a mutually beneficial relationship."

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

What were the challenges involved in setting up a funding model for The Hope Factory? The Hope Factory started in a garage with no start-up capital. I spoke at a Women's Day conference, got volunteers to assist and took the first R3 000 of costs off my credit card. We used the "bootstrap" method, basically spending what we had before we had it, which is the opposite of how you should ideally operate! We also had staff members who were fantastic in the pioneering garage days of The Hope Factory, but once the organisation began to take on a more corporate structure, some of them were unable to adapt to the changes. Our success from an income growth point of view has been from our stakeholder relationship management and retaining funders, in that they fund us annually, as well as a focus on growing our funder base so that our risk's spread.

In this way, we avoid dependency on one large company.

For further information, visit: www.thehopefactory.co.za