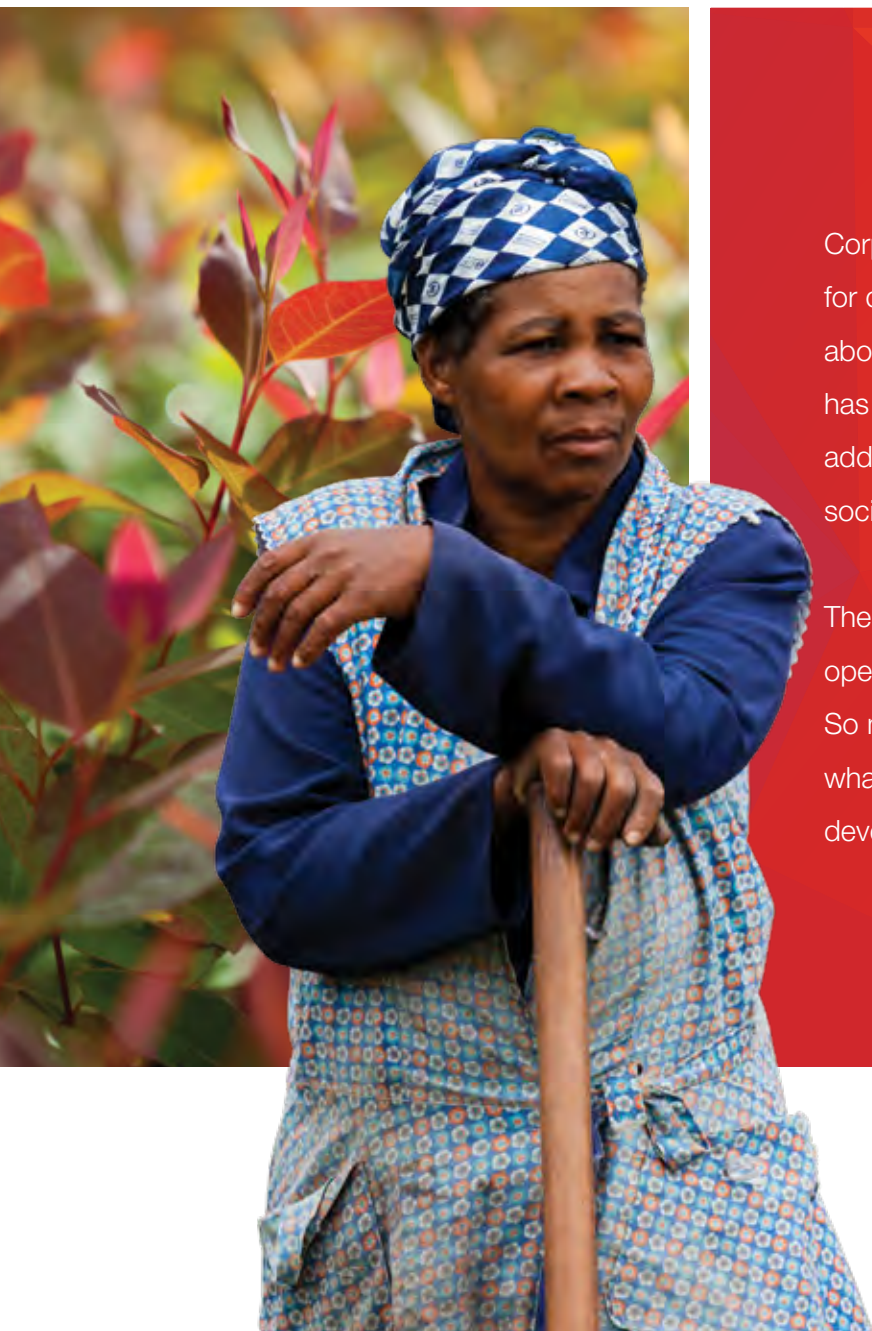


# The Story of **Project Grow**



**sappi**  
Inspired by life





Corporate Social Investment has become an imperative for doing “better business” in South Africa. Over and above government mandates driving transformation, it has become the way in which corporates in our country address black economic empowerment and fulfill their social responsibility.

The idea of benefiting the communities in which it operates has long resonated with the Sappi philosophy. So much so that, as far back as 1983, Sappi launched what has become a flagship CSI and enterprise development project: **Project Grow.**



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# benefiting

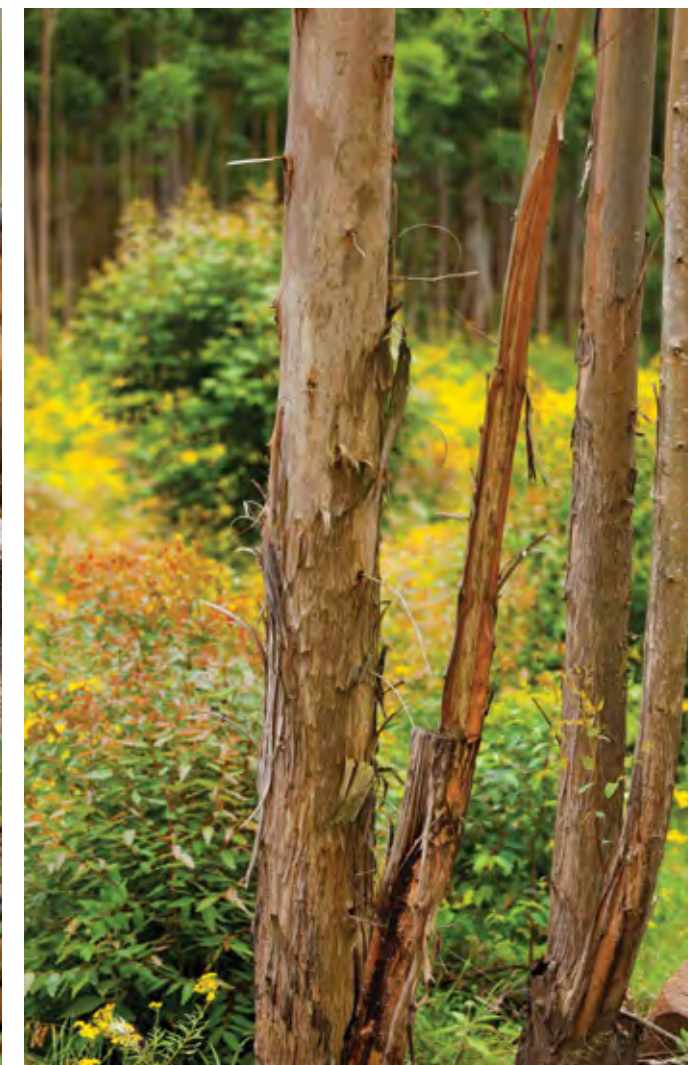




The tree-planting scheme which first started in 1983 with only three farmers in northern KwaZulu-Natal, was a way for Sappi to support small-scale rural farmers who had access to between 1ha and 20ha of land suitable for planting trees.

Project Grow started as a CSI project, a tree-farming scheme for subsistence farmers. The project really took off in 1990 when the first timber was harvested and people could see the benefits.

The project spread north to KwaMbonambi and Maputaland in KwaZulu-Natal, and south to the Ixopo/Umzimkulu area, and in more recent years as far as Lusikisiki in the Eastern Cape.



Project Grow started as a CSI project, a tree-farming scheme for subsistence farmers.

# enterprise





## How does Project Grow work?

After communities or individuals have selected land for growing eucalyptus trees, site assessments are conducted to ensure that plantings do not take place in environmentally sensitive areas and that planted areas are economically sustainable. Sappi then provides the growers with sponsored seedlings, grown by Sappi nurseries to ensure only the best available quality genetic material suitable for the growing conditions. Qualified extension officers are employed by Sappi, who provide technical advice to growers, regarding preparing, fertilising and planting, as well as weed control and the preparation of fire breaks. Certain entrepreneurial skills such as negotiating with contractors and handling money matters are also offered to assist growers. At harvesting time Sappi buys the timber from the growers and pays them a market related price.

Project Grow helps small farmers overcome the entry barriers associated with tree farming. These include the significant expense of purchasing seedlings and fertiliser and harvesting and transport. Some of these barriers are overcome by ensuring that growers have access to an interest-free loan to cover farming input costs and annual maintenance, and by providing advances for work carried out throughout the eight to ten year growing cycle.



Sappi provides the growers with sponsored seedlings, grown by Sappi nurseries to ensure only the best available quality genetic material suitable for the growing conditions.

# upliftment



When you plant a tree seedling, you don't just grow a tree, you grow an enterprise... a community... and you grow people. Since 1983, almost 10,000 farmers have benefited from Project Grow and over 100 small and medium businesses have been established by community members, generating more than 1,100 jobs. To date, more than R800million has been paid to the growers for the more than 2million tons of timber they have delivered to Sappi. Presently, these growers provide Sappi with about 11% of our annual hardwood intake (by volume).

Sappi's Project Grow – helping people help themselves and making a lasting difference in the lives of people and communities in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

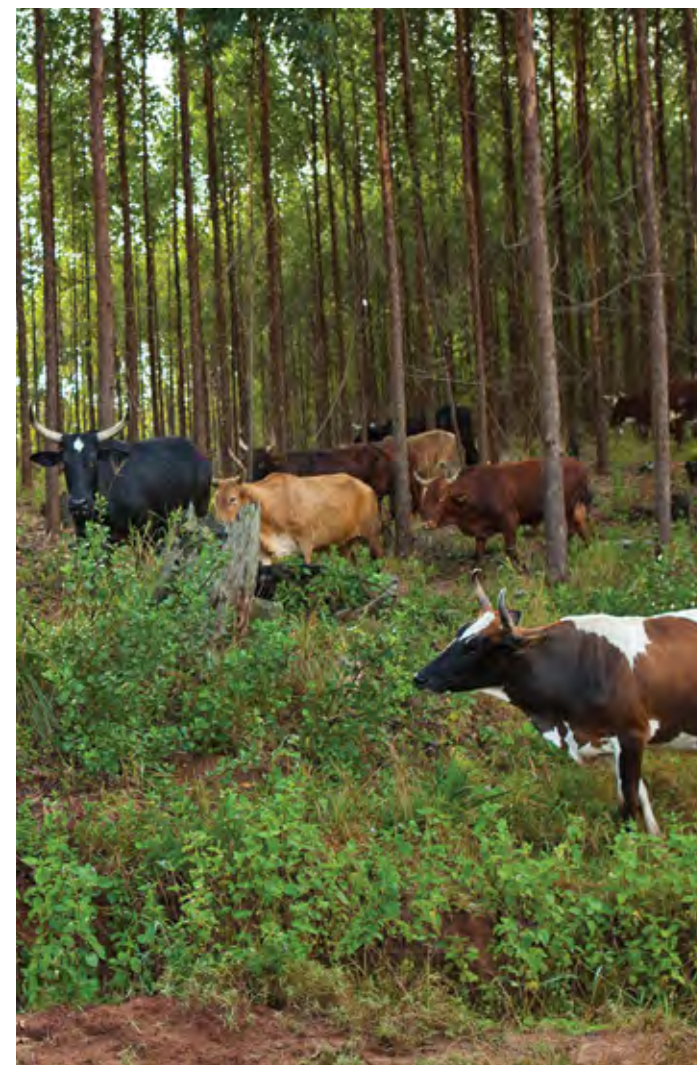


“I have seen the change in the lives of people who joined before me. I have seen the way Sappi has built them up.” – Project Grow timber grower





Project Grow makes a meaningful difference in rural subsistence farmers' lives and the wellbeing of the communities in which they live.

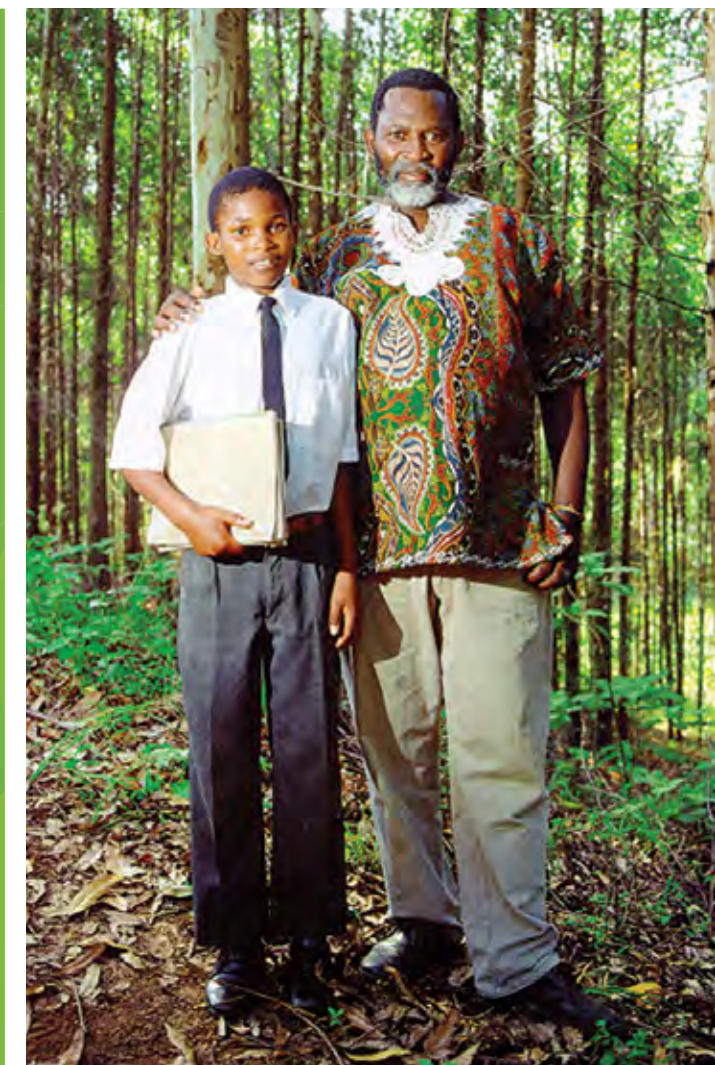


## How do growers and communities benefit?

Project Grow makes a meaningful difference in rural subsistence farmers' and their communities' lives, by delivering participation in an industry from which growers would otherwise be excluded because of high cost-of-entry barriers.

Sappi provides growers with a guaranteed market at prevailing market prices and provide growers with positive cash flow in the form of ongoing payments for work done on the land as well as annual advances on the timber crop.

Project Grow provides an integrated development service to rural communities, with emphasis on appropriate systems and training to empower individuals and community based institutions to manage their own development initiatives and maximise their potential. It is not only the growers that benefit, but also the people they employ to work on and assist in managing their plantations, as well as the many contractors they employ to do their harvesting and to transport their timber.



# development



The social benefits of a programme that features many women is that most of the proceeds are spent on education and housing and improving the social and economic status of the community as a whole.



## Women leading the way

Though Project Grow is open to anyone who has a piece of land and whose acreage falls within the Project Grow areas of operation, the initiative does focus a great deal of its time and effort on developing women growers.

In fact, 80% of Project Grow participants are women. Although this was not necessarily the strategy when it started out as a CSI programme, it has evolved this way. Forestry allows women to perform traditional social and economic roles while supplementing their household income in a situation where many of the men are employed elsewhere as migrant workers.

Migrant labour (as well as other factors, such as the death of a spouse) often leaves a large number of rural women to fend for themselves. And, due to the low rate of literacy, these women are often not able to find employment in their areas. Growing trees, often gives these rural women their only real opportunity to participate in the economy.” Sappi, however, considers it a decided strength of the programme that women make up the majority of Project Grow growers.



# empowered



*“Everything changed  
after that first harvest,”  
she says.*



## Plucking the fruits of success

Anna Msweli (77), is one of the Project Grow women whose life and that of her family and community was changed by the project. She is a widow, mother and grandmother. Msweli works and lives in the Sokhulu area, near KwaMbonambi on the KwaZulu Natal North Coast. As a single mother and grandmother, she was not able to meet the financial needs of her family but, since her participation in Project Grow, she has been able to swap her singleroomed mud hut for a larger house for herself and her family.

*“Everything changed after that first harvest,” she says. “I built the beautiful brick and mortar house that I now live in. I even sleep in a proper bed now. I also fenced the property to provide us with security. When my daughter got married in a big tent in the garden, it was the proceeds from Project Grow that funded it.”*



# enterprise





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