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School uniforms to be consolidated



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THURSDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2010 05:48

Clusters could improve lives of seamstresses

A new initiative by the government is set to improve the livelihoods of a group of women based in Tlokweng who make a living out of sewing.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry has embarked on the development of clusters in the garment industry to solve the problem of sole proprietorship established through the defunct Financial Assistance Policy (FAP).

According to a study commissioned by the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), "Development of clusters in the garment industry: Study of the economic and regulatory environment in Botswana", and authored by Shorn Molokwane and John Mothibi, the clusters barely survive owing to, amongst others, lack of capital for materials, inability to market products, poor quality workmanship, and unfit operating conditions.

According to the PPADB some departments order their uniform outside the country because local companies cannot meet stringent quality conditions and security procurement requirement, the report says.

The Ministry hopes that once in full production the clusters would significantly increase market share in the various portfolios, "owing to the fact that there is currently a large unmet market needs on issues of production capacity and quality of workmanship."

The turnover per cluster is expected to grow from P67 744 per month to P142 800 within three years, while the turnover for sales companies is expected to grow from P279 000 per month to P987 600 also in three years.

The report notes that individually the sole proprietors suffered from economies of scale, thus remaining unsustainable.

For the first six months of production the clusters will concentrate on school uniforms and general goods such as fashion and traditional wear. A pilot project will see school uniforms being consolidated into four colours.

A group of seven women in Tlokweng have already formed a consortium and are pooling their resources. One, Tsholofelo Semauswane, said they were in the process of registering a company and hoped that eventually they would produce goods in bulk, hopefully get more returns compared to when they operated as individuals. "We have a lot of machinery too that is unused and could therefore create more employment," she said.

Semauswane said before the quality of their garments was low and this saw a lot of customers turning to chain stores for school uniforms; with the cluster programme they hope to buy better quality fabric in bulk to reduce costs. "We hope to consolidate our efforts by 2011," she said.

In the current set up, material costs are extremely high due to small quantity purchases in the local market.

MTI advocates for the establishment of Make and Trim companies that will be the current garment sector Small Micro Medium Enterprises (SMMEs), clustered by region or locality and feeding into a Sales and Marketing Company.

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Last Updated on Thursday, 18 February 2010 09:14

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