

Young paravet expands beyond just veterinary medicines with the help of GAP/Jobs Fund project



“My name is Mfikiseni Sikhakhane. I am from KwaVumbu, near Weenen in KwaZulu Natal. I am 28 years old and have one son and live with my family, there are 7 of us. My calling started from when I was a Community Animal Health Worker (CAHW) for the Goat Agribusiness Project (GAP) in 2019.”

GAP is a partnership between Mdukatshani and HPSA, based in KwaZulu Natal. GAP started as a project in 2015 and working to commercialise 9000 rural farmers, mainly women, and train and equip 700 CAHWs. At the time the project was working with provincial and national government departments but has since taken on a variety of other initiatives and projects like the current National Youth Development Agency and The Jobs Fund Project through which is giving opportunities to 3000 youth like Mfikiseni across 150 project sites in KwaZulu Natal (KZN).

“I was trained as a CAHW and received a vet kit which contained veterinary medicines. I never stopped replenishing it and servicing farmers. When the 5-year GAP and CAHW project with government came to an end I went back to the chair of the local diptank and said I would be prepared to continue supporting farmers with my own medicine. This was in 2021.”

In April 2022, HPSA and Mdukatshani (GAP) began working on a project called Empowering Rural Youth in Agriculture, a project better known as the “Jobs Fund Project”. It would mean employing 3000 youth to support up to 27000 rural farmers a month in increasing their livestock’s productivity. This would be done by training the youth in animal health and animal nutrition and then equipping

them with the necessary training materials, medicines and nutritional supplements. The youth were divided into groups across 150 sites and worked across the most rural areas of KZN. Each group (sometimes two groups) had a team leader to monitor daily activities and ensure paperwork was submitted on time. Mfikiseni, because of his background and knowledge of livestock was one of the lucky ones to be selected.

Mfikiseni, after several rounds of interviews, was selected to work for the Jobs Fund Project and serve as a team leader. He says the money he earned in this project really helped take his business to another level, "The stipend has really helped me top up my veterinary medicine stock and boost my business. I also had another business selling vegetables but I decided to stop that business and just focus on my animal health business because I see there is better potential. There is only one person at home who has a permanent job so I used some of my stipend to support my family and buy groceries such as maize meal. I have been trying to further my studies on animal health so a part of the stipend went for transport to get to the courses."

"With my animal health business, it has really taken off since I have started investing in it with my stipend. There is so much demand from the farmers that I have had to employ and train my brother. I sell medicines from my house so someone needs to stay there to sell. When a farmer calls with a sick animal, I send my brother to the farmer to examine the animal, he sends pictures and we decide how to treat it and with what medicine. The main medicines the farmers need right now are vaccines, external parasite controls, dewormers and dips. I charge R14 per animal for a vaccine. For antibiotics, I charge R4 per ml. Dipping is R25 for 16 litres. The main challenge I see with farmers' goats is heartwater. I can't find the vaccine, however, I learnt that if you can control ticks, it will reduce heartwater. Now I communicate with farmers and every Friday I go and dip farmers' goats".

As the Jobs Fund Project comes to a close and monthly stipends end, Mfikiseni looks towards future plans. "I am lacking a place to sell my medicine. I would like to have a proper vet shop." Mfikiseni and other youth starting small business have expressed the challenge that although it is very easy to sell from home and there are no overheads, extended family and neighbours will take products without paying for them so it is necessary to have offsite shops if you are going to make money from your endeavour.

"Even if I get a shop, I still need to remain mobile. My brother can do the farmer visits while I manage the vet shop. I found a place in Colenso but it is too expensive. I have a place to get medicine wholesale but I can't do both. Some new ideas I have are that I am advertising to clean kraals for R50. Also, most cattle farmers don't dehorn their cattle. I want to start advertising this now. What I earn through my business is enough to top up medicine, pay for transport and have a very small profit."