

---

## SAPPI PROTEC SUCCESS STORY IN PROJECT GOCELL

# Grit, determination and support take a trainee to superintendent

When Sibongile “Bongi” Gama joined Sappi Ngodwana Mill in 1995 as a process trainee, she never would have guessed the direction her career would take her. Some 20 years later, Bongi still appreciates PROTEC’s role in her career success and is grateful to Sappi for their investment in her.

While her willingness to work hard from a young age has given her the edge, Bongi’s participation in the Programme for Technological Careers (PROTEC) – of which Sappi is a key sponsor – played a major role in her professional development. Bongi joined PROTEC (Kwaguqa branch in Witbank) during her Grade 10 to 12 years.

Sappi was invited to the PROTEC Witbank branch to interview potential students for their apprenticeship and process trainee programmes – and that’s how Bongi’s path crossed that of her future employer.

Bongi shares, “There are many ways in which Sappi has groomed me to be who I am today. They paid for my studies, provided team leader development, offered succession planning and gave me ample opportunities to act in senior positions.”

But it certainly was not one hop and a jump that got her to where she is today. Bongi first progressed from trainee to Outside Operator after obtaining her N3 Pulp and Paper qualification following which she was appointed as Process Controller. Upon completion of her N6 National Diploma in Engineering, Bongi was promoted to Shift Superintendent. She also obtained a National Diploma in Operations Management through UNISA.

Bongi’s hard work and dedication paid off when was appointed to a senior position on Project GoCell at the start of the upgrade: production superintendent on Fibreline #3.



She also credits the career exhibitions and site visits during her PROTEC years as part of her decision to pursue a technological career. “Our exposure to different manufacturing processes and business functions helped us to understand the ‘bigger picture’.”

As a means of inspiring others and paying it forward, Bongi seeks to influence other women at the mill, and in the community.” She is a member of the South African Council for Business Women (SACBW) and BWASA (Businesswomen’s Association of South Africa), and was a national corporate finalist in SACBW’s Business Woman of the Year competition in 2012. She is also actively involved in community charity work in the Nelspruit area. ■

---

### ABOUT PROTEC:

PROTEC was established in the 1980s by a group of engineers to help address South Africa’s skills shortage in the technological field. The programme focuses on promoting educational excellence and technological career development among SA’s previously disadvantaged communities particularly in the areas of Science, Maths and English.

Sappi became a strong supporter of the PROTEC programme in the mid-1990s by sponsoring branches close to its operations in KwaZulu-Natal, and in 2000, joined the Department of Education to establish a PROTEC branch in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga.