

Nestlé joins 'Adopt-a-School' campaign

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Nestlé South Africa has become one of the first corporates in the country to respond to the recently launched "Adopt-a-School" campaign. The company "adopted" Mpumelelo High School, near Estcourt in KwaZulu-Natal, at a ceremony on Tuesday.

The Accord on Basic Education and Partnerships with Schools campaign, launched in October by Brand South Africa, the Department of Basic Education and the National Economic Development and Labour Council, encourages businesses to "adopt" schools and donate educational facilities to them.

Nestlé South Africa has now joined the likes of banking group Absa, financial services group Alexander Forbes and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) in becoming part of the movement with its own "Adopt-A-School" initiative.

The food and drinks maker employs 420 people at its coffee and beverages factory in Estcourt, and thus a nearby school was chosen as the first beneficiary of the initiative.

Established in 2007, Mpumelelo High School has been a tremendous success - the name in fact means "success" - and a source of pride to people in the area.

In its first year, it produced a 75 percent pass rate. The following year that figure was up to 85 percent. In 2009 and 2010 that mark was a perfect 100 percent.

Tough challenges

The success has been achieved despite the school facing some tough challenges, such as having only eight classes for 560 pupils, most of whom come from indigent families, whose parents are mostly unemployed and have no formal education.

In the mornings, the pupils have to walk to school very early, carrying water with them, because there is no water supply at the school.

Now, with Nestlé on board, that is about to change, and the school is about to be blessed with some invaluable educational aids; Nestlé will build a science laboratory, a computer lab, a school library, provide water, and also install a sports field, which the pupils have not yet been able to enjoy.

The company said its Adopt-A-School initiative was in line with Nestle's worldwide "creating shared values" business strategy, which states that for a business to be successful in the long term, it has to create value for the communities in which it operates.

'Creating meaningful partnerships'

"The key to resolving government's challenges is to create meaningful partnerships with the private sector in community development projects such as this Adopt-A-School initiative," KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Education Senzo Mchunu said at Tuesday's launch.

"Education," he said, "is everyone's business".

Addressing the pupils, parents and guests in attendance, Mchunu added: "At my age, there are not many things that inspire me, but today I am inspired by this school."

Nestlé SA managing director Sullivan O'Carroll said that Nestlé had brought in its partners, those companies it does business with, to help bring about the big contribution the company was making to Mpumelelo High School.

Education, he said, was about giving people an opportunity to compete in the world.

The first of many

Mpumelelo is the first of many schools that Nestlé will adopt and assist. The company's communications director, Ravi Pillay, explained: "The plan is that where Nestle has an operation, the model will be implemented.

"It may vary in terms of detail, but the primary objectives will be the same - to ensure skills development and enhancing quality of life. But most importantly, it is our way of contributing towards rural development."

Linda, a parent, told SAinfo afterwards that she was proud to have four children in the school. One of her children had failed grade 10 at the local high school in Estcourt, but after moving to Mpumelelo had passed with flying colours.

She paid tribute to the school's principal, WB Maphanga, and his staff for the success, saying they made all the difference.

A culture of learning

Maphanga, in his address, said the school's excellent results had come about because a culture of learning had been instilled.

A dedicated teacher, Maphanga arrives at school at a quarter-to-six every morning. Upon arriving, he checks whether any overnight rain has been caught to boost water levels. If not, he fetches water himself.

It is this kind of dedication that led Nestlé to choose to assist Mpumelelo.

More success is surely on its way, yet life as the staff, pupils and parents at the school know it is about to become a lot better, thanks to Nestlé's decision to "Play its Part" in making this happen