

Amarula bottle tassel deal is bearing fruit for enterprising Somerset West women

WEEKEND ARGUS REPORTER

THEY'RE such a rare delicacy that herds of elephant travel vast distances to find them.

Now, marula are bearing fruit for a group of Somerset West women, who have set up their own business supplying the yellow braided-and-knotted tassels attached to all Amarula bottles.

The Handwork Hub was established in January and delivered its first consignment of the tassels in April to adorn bottles of the cream liqueur, which is sold all over the world.

The 24 women have settled into new premises in Asla Park in Somerset West, secure in the knowledge they now have a reliable income and a stake in the company's future.

Previously, they made the tassels as part of a community project and were paid for each one they produced.

It meant their working hours were flexible, but their income fluctuated too.

"All these years as a



Yellow braided tassels.

community project they had no formal payslip and it means a lot to them to know that they will be receiving one again next month, and the month after that," said Toni Rimell, partner and managing director.

The Handwork Hub is a majority black-owned, wholly woman-owned business that supplies Amarula-maker Distell, having produced inventories under contract of

almost 2.5 million units.

"The factory is beautiful and the ladies are comfortable, but more importantly than their physical comfort is their psychological well-being, and that is where I have seen the biggest difference," said Rimell.

The most significant aspect of being in partnership with the women is "being a part of something that is bigger than us", she added.

"It is a learning curve for all of us but we are excited about the road ahead, and are grateful to Distell for making it possible," said Rimell.

In addition to developing the enterprise, Distell provided R2.7m in soft loans, helped to secure a proper and safe business premises, and negotiated a long-term off-take agreement.

In the few months since the business was established, Distell has migrated 70% of the volumes of tassel purchases to the Handwork Hub.

Julia Malrasi, the Handwork Hub supervisor,

received a Women's Month boost when her application for a loan of R20 000 to extend her house was approved thanks to her more regular income.

"My life is much easier now that I get a payslip," said Malrasi.

Known colloquially as the "Elephant Tree", the marula features prominently in African folklore and is also known as the "Marriage Tree", for its shelter and reported fertility promoting properties.

For the women of the Handwork Hub, the work for Distell is a perfect match.

"Every time we see that yellow tassel that is so emblematic of the Amarula brand and resonates with our consumers, we know that there is a proud team of women, previously without proper jobs and now the shareholders of one of Distell's newest, and indeed most special, suppliers," said James Wilkinson, group general manager for business improvement at Distell.



A partnership with Distell has provided a regular income for Handwork Hub workers, who make the tassels for Amarula bottles.