



Photos by Chris Mabuya

Hawking is for all who share the idea of "vukuzenzele"

"Vukuzenzele!"

Hawking is hard work but there are some success stories. Chris Mabuya talked to four hawkers in Ciskei who believe the sky is the limit

They own cars, they send their kids to schools and universities. "They" are a group of hawkers at the Mdantsane Highway terminus, in the Ciskei.

These informal sellers have turned their backs on formal sector jobs and taken to the streets - one of them for more than 30 years - selling their goods to the public.

The results have been worthwhile. As one of the hawkers, Ladylock Skeyi explained: "Hawking has been seen as a job for uneducated people but I'm sitting here with my matric certificate."

Skeyi started hawking in 1960. She has not done any other work and did not listen to her husband when he tried to make her look for "better jobs".

Her first selling stand was three empty cupboard containers turned upside-down for the fruit and "vetkoek" she sold to school children. She now has a real stand with a shelter.

"Those were trying times," she said.

She would often sit outside the whole day without getting any business.

"People sometimes just ignored me and I began suspecting others of having bewitched my business. At other times we had to run away from the police or have our stuff confiscated."

But she says "vukuzenzele" (the will to wake up and do something for yourself) kept her on her feet.

In 1964 she decided the biggest bus and taxi station in the Ciskei, the Mdantsane Highway Terminus, was a good place for hawking.

She sold chicken and was nicknamed "Masekeseke" - after the name she gave to the chicken she sold. Business boomed and she was joined by her husband, after persuading him to leave his job at a company where he earned very little.

She carried on hawking after her husband died in 1981.

The decision paid off. Skeyi, now the President of the Ciskei Hawkers' Association, owns a car and a van and has managed to send all her eight children to school.

They have all passed matric, except one who is now in standard nine. One is doing first-year at the University of Cape Town.



Ladylock Skeyi wouldn't change her job for anything

She is also part of an organisation involved with "street kids". She says this is why she encourages other hawkers not to take their children away from school.

Another hawker at the terminus, Hilda Nqayi, joined this "informal business" in 1970. Like Skeyi, her beginnings were very small

- at first she had to display her wares on empty samp bags.

A former factory worker, Nqayi did not like her job so she took to the streets, at first selling cow shins and later vegetables and live chickens.

An organiser of the Ciskei Hawkers' Association, Nqayi also speaks of success.

She has managed to send her three children to school. One of them has passed matric, and the other two went as far as their junior certificates.

She bought herself a van which she now uses for shopping at the East London's Municipal Market.



Hilda Nqayi: "The sky is the limit"

"We are going forward and the sky is the limit!", she said.

But hawking does not involve selling only vegetables and chickens. The trade is for all who share the idea of "vukuzenzele".

Priscilla Mamati, who left Cape Town in 1972 to work as a nurse at Mdantsane's Cecilia Makiwane Hospital, resigned in 1986 after discovering she had a talent for sewing.

Like other beginners to the hawking trade, she had no experience in business.

At first she tried to sell vegetables. Then she decided to concentrate on using her sewing skills.

"Now I am in business and I'm willing to stretch out my hand and lift up other people"

This was so successful she could afford school fees for her son, who is now studying part-time for a university degree.

"Now I am in business and I'm willing to stretch out my hand and lift up other people."

Mamati also drives her own car and is involved in the Ciskei Hawkers' Association.

The Border area has a very high number of unemployed people due to retrenchments. Many of these unemployed people have also found their place in this "underground economy".

Fuzile Dunywa is new to the hawking business. He has been out of work since 1987.

"I am one of the victims of unfair dismissals and retrenchments in our region", he said.

Since he was laid off work, he has been preparing to set up 10 tuck shops at the terminus. Dunywa says he will choose unemployed people to manage the shops. In this way he hopes to create more jobs for other victims of unemployment. ◉

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