

Working Class Struggle to Make A Living In Johannesburg CBD

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As the rate of unemployment rises in South Africa, many talented, passionate and ambitious working class individuals, young and old are making means to make a living with their small businesses. In the City of Johannesburg, they often start operating in the early hours of the morning. Even in cold extreme weather their businesses continue to operate so they can earn some money, no matter how small.

Johannesburg CBD, also known as the City of Gold, has the largest number of street vendors/hawkers who are increasing and strengthening food security for surrounding communities as they sell nutritious, fresh fruits and vegetables at a very low price. These street vendors are found at almost every corner in the Johannesburg CBD.

Blessing Alex, originally from Malawi, is 22 years of age and started his fruit business last year after migrating to South Africa as his way to help provide and support his family of 5 back home. His family also gets help from his 20-year-old brother who has stall in Johannesburg CBD. Alex and his brother sell avocados, apples, naartjies, peaches and pears which start from R1.

Alex said he always wanted to be an entrepreneur but he's also forced to by his home situation as he comes from a poor family and no one is providing for them. With the little profit he makes he sends a small amount of money back home to Malawi for his mother. It helps him pay rent, buy food and buy affordable clothes for himself and little brother.

Alex also spoke to *Karibu!* about the high crime rate in Johannesburg. He identified the Metro Police and government officials as the biggest thieves rather than the robbers who come and take all their money because the Metro Police often confiscate their goods and trolleys and the vendors have to pay big amounts of fines to get their trolleys back. Alex had to pay R2000 to get his trolleys of fruits he bought which is much more than what he makes.

"I have to run as fast as I can and hide with my trolley whenever I see the Metro Police or hear their sirens from a distant because I know they are going to take my trolley and starting from scratch will mean using rent money to stock again", said Alex.

Besides street vendors who sell fruits and vegetable, there are many talented and devoted women who use their own hands to make products that will bring in money as their children and other relatives depend on them to put bread on table and take their children to school.

Lindiwe Sithole is a 45-year-old woman who sells pillows that she makes from scratch using sponge and fabric. She cuts the sponge into small pieces and fabric into suitable sizes for pillows and sews the fabric by hand, without any use of machine. Sithole recently moved to Johannesburg as they were starving back home in KwaZulu Natal. She had to leave her family as the wood she used to sell in KwaZulu Natal couldn't sustain her family anymore.

Bongekile Dudu Mkhwanazi is a 61-year-old woman who used to work at Farm Wise in City Deep for 10 years "earning peanuts". But she couldn't work anymore due to medical

issues. Mkhwanazi said she also used to knit and make African/traditional beads accessories when she got back from work and then sell to her colleagues. That's when she started making bigger amounts of profit that helped her build her house in KwaZulu Natal and take her children to school.

Mkhwanazi continues today with this business of making beautiful and colourful beads accessories and sells them at an affordable price. It's still the reason she never goes to bed on an empty stomach.

Like Alex, Sithole and Mkhwanazi, people are being pushed by the poverty, starvation, unstable social grants, corruption, and other socio-economic issues, to try start and set up businesses and many share the desire to become independent, and provide for their families with the little amount of profits they make.

These are just three people of the many who are trying by all means to make a living because the government continues to fail to deliver services and create job opportunities. The same government takes from the working class by confiscating their products and goods and then expects them to pay big fines that are more than the profits they make.

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