

Government Terminates Community Workers aged 55 years and older

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The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) has dismissed workers aged 55 years and older in the Community Work Programmes (CWP).

This decision has angered many community workers, who view this dismissal as an intentional attack on poor people in society. The CWP, was established in 2008 by the president at that time to provide regular jobs to unemployed and low-skilled people in South Africa. This programme includes home-based care, road maintenance, maintaining food gardens at schools and communities, as well as fixing classrooms.

The Botshabelo Unemployed Movement, in Free State has condemned this decision, saying the government is ignoring the economic struggles of ordinary South Africans, who rely heavily on these jobs to make ends meet.

Mrs Mantwa, whose worked in CWP for a number years, recounted the day she received the devastating news of her dismissal. "I was informed about my dismissal on the day we returned at work [January 2025] ...I couldn't hold back my tears; it was the saddest day for me." She says as a single mother, her dismissal has left her and her unemployed children in a state of uncertainty and fear. "We don't know what's going to happen to us, this is very stressful, as I can already imagine the poverty we'll face in my household," Mantwa explained.

Matshidiso Tshaka (58) who was among those dismissed, expressed her distress and disappointment at the sudden termination of her contract. "We received a letter in December stating that our contracts had ended, and we were not expected to return to work in January. No notice period was given, and we were not provided with any support during the dismissal process", said Tshaka.

The government says reason behind terminating these contracts are budget cuts from the National Treasury. These budget cuts, puts financial goals above the needs of workers, and in a country battling with inequality, it is always black working-class people in the receiving end.

After a huge outcry from the public, Cogta decided to extend the CWP contracts for two months, saying they are finding a permanent solution to this matter.

The Botshabelo Unemployed Movement and other unions found the two-month extension offered by COGTA insufficient. They say the decision to end the contracts will make poverty and unemployment worse in the country and it will leave workers with no income, deepening hunger and hopelessness in our communities." This extension doesn't make any difference because we will still be without any sources of income; this dismissal will bring nothing but poverty to our households," added Tshaka.

As the struggle continues, the dismissed workers remain determined to have their voices heard and to fight for their right to a dignified life. The government must end discriminatory practices, including ageism in employment policies and they must prioritise the well-being of workers. The Botshabelo Unemployed Movement will continue to fight for justice and equality, demanding that the government reverses this cruel decision and prioritises the needs of the people.

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