

Teachers at Qhayiya Say They Fear Poisoning

By Sinalo Peyi

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Qhayiya Primary School, located in Bathurst, Eastern Cape, has banned informal food vendors from selling their food in school premises.

On 19 January 2025 the school received a letter from the Department of Education, the letter warned parents and learners about the dangers of buying food from spaza shops and from street vendors. In the Ndlambe Municipality area, there were a number of allegedly food poisoning incidents, children getting sick and others ultimately dying, allegedly after purchasing food from the local Spaza Shops and street Vendors.

The Principal of Qhayiya Primary School, Nontombi Funde told the parents that they must check anything the children eat to see if it's not expired or contaminated, this is to prevent them from getting sick or even dying. The principal who is also a resident in Bathurst, called the street vendors that operates at Qhayiya Primary School and explained to them that the school will not allow them to sell their food at school anymore. She said, this is because their goods are suspected to be the reason behind learners getting sick and sometimes dying.

A businesswoman Nombeko Mwanda (55) who sells chocolates, sweets and many snacks that children enjoy says, she sells these things to children because she is working with the community to meet their needs and they are affordable. "The announcement made by the principal felt unfair especially to us street vendors, as we are trying to make a living and we are also feeding our children," says Mwanda. She concluded that she does not have any idea on what to do as she feels that her bread is taken away. The food vendors say, she is getting old and employment opportunities for her are slim, almost nonexistent and she hopes that the principal and school will reconsider their decision of not allowing them to make a living.

Lulama Mafumana, a community member and a parent to a seven-year-old says, she fears for her child, she says she would always give her child money to carry to school together with a lunch box.

It's sad that the government isn't doing enough to keep food safe and because of this, many people are losing their livelihoods. The community needs to find ways to ensure food safety so that everyone is protected, even big supermarkets need to be monitored. The women who sell food at schools have been selling for years, it's truly unfair that they're being blamed and punished for these recent food poison incidents. The government should investigate the problem and bring back food inspectors to keep everyone in the communities safe.

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