

## **The Cycle for Gain: The Story of Local Recyclers**

By Yonela Gebengu

In today's economy recycling has evolved from a simple act of environmental safety and keeping communities safe to a necessary need for making an income. It is no longer for those who stay on the streets or those who can't make ends meet due to their financial struggles.

Recycling has become a way of making an extra income for individuals and families, where you can use the money, you received from your recycled goods to buy necessities like food and water, because nowadays basic things like water had become expensive. Eric Ngwenya (41) who is recycling around Kensington, Malvern and Jules Street said, at times he finds out he doesn't have water in his area, and he must go and buy water from the markets and re-use those same water bottles to pay for another necessity, such as an electricity bill.

Mr Ngwenya said he wakes up at 4 am to collect what he could sell to the recycling depots around Johannesburg. What makes him wake up that early is the tough competition with other recyclers in the area "If you snooze you lose", he added.

He also makes sure that the pavements in the neighbourhood are clean and by doing so, some people give him money for cleaning those pavements. One of the challenges he faces is that other people don't even notice his hard work and they don't even give him anything even though they see their pavements have been cleaned they don't bother but just continue with their lives.

In Jewel City, a group of young people lead by a 35-year-old Siphon Khumalo, formed a group of five members to collect and sell recyclables. This group collects all the recycled materials at Ithemba Properties in Jewel City, they empty all the bins that comes from the tenants in those properties every morning and they also take out all the bins collecting materials they need, it's their daily bread and this is what they do everyday to make money for themselves, said Khumalo.

A woman (39) who wished to remain anonymous, said she only collect bottles because it's easier for her to collect and carry. She said there are many shops that she works with around Pritchard Street in Johannesburg CBD, for her bottles to be kept and she only picks them up on Thursdays.

Sometimes she asks other people to assist her to push the trolley because that's what she uses to deliver her goods to the recycling depot. While Zakhe (33) from Sterkspruit, Eastern Cape, said he collects all his goods around Johannesburg supermarkets, but he struggles with transporting them, so he makes sure his collection is always near recycling depots so that he doesn't struggle with transport issues.

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