The Lack of Public Toilets in Tembisa
By Lungile Sojini
21 October 2020
Release Date: 26 October 2020

There is a concerning lack of public toilets in Tembisa, a township in the East of Johannesburg. Shoppers are hit with a strong, foul smell as they visit Tembi Mall; the mall is located in the Rabasotho section of Tembisa. The cause is people urinating just outside the mall's main gates.

Thembi Mall has popular shops like Pick n' Pay, KFC, Mr Price and Debonairs. It also has a banks and automated teller machines (ATM). The place is probably the busiest in Tembisa. Not only does it have retail outlets, but there are also municipal offices, the court and the police are also there. Just outside, there are spaza and kota shops with street vendors selling everything from face masks to tomatoes.

Despite there being public toilets in the mall, the one problem is that some cleaners charge shoppers to use the toilets. Which is a deterrent to those who think toilets should be free. As a result, people prefer urinating in the open.

This problem is not unique to malls alone. Go to train stations. Tembisa Station has public toilets too, for example, but they are as good as non-existent because the toilets are always locked.

All over the world, the problem persists. In France, for example, they installed 'uritrottoirs' (open-air urinals). These are public urinals authorities have put in the open for people to use, just like how they use bus stops. One of the goals is to stem out the foul smells with these 'smart' urinals.

While putting these smart urinals in Tembisa might help in decreasing the cases of people urinating next to public buildings. Every solution has its challenges. But I think implementing smart urinals, is to realise that the lack of public toilets in Tembisa is a problem.