

WORKER SUNDAY CAMPAIGN

RECLAIMING THE DIGNITY OF INFORMAL WORKERS



WHY THE CAMPAIGN

The Worker Sunday Campaign is a church based programme aimed at building solidarity with the working poor and unemployed people. This campaign was started in the days of apartheid, when black workers were exploited and oppressed. The campaign was one of the ways the church supported the working class and poor people such as farm workers; domestic workers; mine workers; casual workers and informal traders, who were often disregarded, and pushed to the margins of the economy centre of society. Resources were produced to enable different denominations and organisations to advance Biblical and theological teachings that promote justice in the workplace.

We now have a democratic government in place. Apartheid laws have been abolished; the conditions of workers have slightly improved and worker rights are now protected by the constitution. However the current economic system in the world, often called globalization, has accelerated job losses and casualization of work. People work under poor conditions without benefits and often with lower wages. Permanent employment is quickly becoming a reserve for the few. Many have in effect become underemployed. The neo-liberal economic system did this by putting pressure on governments to develop policies that promote the interests of businesses in their pursuit of profits instead of those of the workers such as outsourcing and subcontracting of work, among others.

For many people the only source of income and means of livelihoods is found in the informal sector. The informal sector employs many 'poor' people in the world and in South Africa. Some of those employed in this sector belong to registered firms while others do not. Some are employed and others are self-employed. The sector is mostly occupied by semi-skilled and non-skilled workers.

The experience of the workers in this sector is however one of pain, struggle and suffering. The informal sector is accompanied by exploitation, insecurities, injustices and harassment. For many people working in the sector it feels like a curse. And many people who are outside the sector also look at this form of work as a curse and relate to informal workers as less than human beings and treat their work with contempt.

There are many reasons why people perceive informal work as a curse.

- This work is seen as a sign of underdevelopment and backwardness – a sign of weakness. Some have called for the wiping off of this industry as it is seen as a nuisance and an eyesore. Right now in the major cities of South Africa policies are implemented to clean the city streets of these undesirable workers.
- Policy also restricts spaces for trading and access to doing so. In the process the poor workers blame each and fight each other for better trading opportunities. Some are offered 'bribes' in the form of incentives such as access to better stalls, funding from authorities. Foreign traders are accused of stealing the jobs and spaces of locals and chased off the streets.

- The conditions of work in this sector are appalling. People work long hours with very little pay and no benefits. Their families suffer because of the long and irregular working hours. The hawkers or informal traders are harassed by police daily on the basis of apartheid era city by-laws. They are forced to move from profitable selling places. Their goods are confiscated by the police and are never returned or are left to rot away. Women – who are on the majority in this sector are often harassed sexually, and left lifelong emotional scars.
- These workers lack social protection. This involves lack of access to safe trading spaces, decent health care, insurance in cases of disaster or loss of their goods, access to skills development and education. They become vulnerable to social ills such as HIV and AIDS and crime.

This however should not be so. There is an alternative. Informal work is a means of livelihood for many people and should still be seen as such. It can become a blessing instead of a curse.

Informal work is an important feature of our economy. People who work in the sector do COUNT. The contribution informal workers make in our economy is enormous, not just to their families, nor just the economy, but to society at large. The 'formal' economy cannot stand without the informal sector – therefore the formal and the informal sectors complement one another and each depends on the other.

Where would the retail sector be, if we did not have hawkers? What would happen to the newspaper houses, if we did not have the vendors who sell the newspapers at the corners of our streets? What would happen to many of our families, if we did not have women and men, who brave the hot summer and cold winter days, to put a plate on their tables, to take children to school, and make sure they have some clothes to wear? While we cannot support the casualisation and subcontracting of work for their impact on workers, the point however is that these workers contribute a lot in our economy.

The unstable picture that has been described about the nature of informal work calls for better policies that will show respect and dignity to these workers. Informal workers can contribute in the establishment of these policies. All of us have a role in reclaiming the dignity of informal workers which is often eroded by government policies and our negative perceptions of their work.

The Worker Sunday Campaign – with a particular focus on informal workers for 2009, is therefore aimed at showing solidarity with such people, to say to them 'God cares and is concerned about their injustice'. The campaign seeks to uphold the dignity of informal workers and say 'they count'. We are all therefore called to join the many churches who will take this opportunity to be God's hands by dedicating one service during the month of May or June to informal workers.

Resources to assist in such services are available from any of the partner organisation

THE CAMPAIGN TEAM CAUGHT UP WITH AN INFORMAL TRADER, PINKY PIKOLI AT PARK STATION, JOHANNESBURG WHERE SHE IS TRADING-:

Ms Pinky Pikoli's thoughts of making a living for herself and other members of family were not deterred by the fact that she did not receive formal education. Mama Pikoli hinted that she used to get casual jobs which did not last for a long time until she resorted to becoming an informal trader.

"When I first started to sell, it was hard but I had to learn to persevere and be disciplined. Today, I can count myself lucky to be allocated a viable and secure trading site as compared to other fellow traders in the heart of the city centre. Thus, with the income that I generate from this informal work, I am able to support my family, which comprise of my daughter and a grandson. I can also manage

to pay for my rental trading site (R30), storage of my goods (R20) and the better portion of the money gets saved" says Mama Pikoli proudly, a Dube resident who peddles at Park Station in Johannesburg.

Still fostering feelings of pride, she says: "I am forever thankful to God for blessing me with the ability to sell so that I can survive and take care of my family. Some people even approach me for financial assistance and where possible I assist them. Therefore, I perceive my work as a true blessing from God". Ms Pikoli admitted that being an informal trader was a daunting experience as she was despised by some of her friends and relatives. Others discouraged her from persisting to sell on the streets of the city centre as they perceived informal trading as worthless form of employment. She says she is proud of herself for not bowing to pressure to quit the informal trading sector.

Unlike many of her fellow traders, she is happy about the environment where she works (inside Johannesburg Park

Station). She spoke kindly of storage facilities and clean toilets conditions and the fact that their business is boasted by multitudes of bus and train commuters who go pass by the Park Station to their respective destinations.

Nevertheless, like most of the informal traders, Ms Pikoli share with them the frustrations that are brought about by the street trading by-laws developed by the Johannesburg Metro Trading Council. "As traders were are vulnerable to authorities such as the Metro Trading Council, who at any given point can develop or amend street trading by-laws without consulting us as affected parties. Therefore, with the street trading by-laws being chopped and changed from time to time without us being given notice, briefed or asked to give inputs, we have valid reason to be afraid of our future within this informal trading sector. Though trading is our only source of revenue, it is clear that the traders cannot have guarantee that they will be trading for long and they remain at risk from the might of the agents such as the MTC and their by-laws," she says with distress written all over her face.

She says that she will always participate in different platforms and initiatives aimed at challenging the Metro Trading Council's unjustified by-laws and the metro police's disgraceful acts of corruption. She was quick to commend and appreciate the efforts of various organisations and individuals who have observed the challenging and harsh conditions in which many informal traders conduct their businesses. In particular, she challenged the churches and religious leaders to commit to engaging government regarding the pertinent issues that are of concern to people on the ground such as; poverty, unemployment, homelessness, basic service needs, harassment of informal traders etc.



PIKOLI AT PARK STATION, JOHANNESBURG

THE CAMPAIGN TEAM ALSO PAID A VISIT TO A YOUNG MAN AT JABULANI MALL PRECINCT IN SOWETO, WHO IS ALSO AN INFORMAL TRADER.

Sibuyile Mazwi lives in Emndeni, Soweto with his wife Amy. He is an informal trader operating from the Jabulani Mall precinct in Soweto. Before becoming a trader, Sibuyile worked as a security guard. The money he earned there was too little for him to support his family. About four years ago he decided to start his own business. This was the only option available for him as he did not have proper formal education to enable him to get a better paying job.

At first things he was doing very well. He ran a public telephone service from a trolley and had three phones at a time. He also sold other goods alongside the telephone service. Tragedy struck when the metro police confiscated his trolley. He could never claim the trolley back nor was he compensated for it. Now he only operates two phones and is always on a look out for the metro police. It is difficult. The business has been crippled.

Even with the difficulties, Sibuyile sees his work as a blessing. It is a business which gives him an opportunity to feed himself and his family in a decent way. He does not have to steal or kill anyone. He is also providing a much needed service to the community he trades in.

Though he think well of what he does, he is aware that many people think being an informal worker is a joke, they always look down on traders like him. The way government treats informal traders also make people to perceive them as criminals. Police are always after them like common criminals who break the law all the time. And yet all they are trying to do is to make a living.



SIBUYILE MAZWI HARD AT WORK

Working conditions for informal traders are bad though. Sibuyile operates from a tent. It protects him from the sun, but when it rains, he can't work. They have been moved away from the entrance of the mall and now are no longer making the money they made before. Profits have gone down. The taking of stock by the police is always a setback because he has to find money again to replace it.

The biggest challenge for him is getting space to trade. The metro police tell him every time that he is trading at the wrong spot. Nobody has been able to explain to them how the demarcations work. He just does not understand them. It is not like Sibuyile and other traders are not trying to do anything.

He is a member of Qedindlala Traders Association in Jabulani. The association has tried to engage the Local Economic Development (LED) department at Jabulani municipal offices. They were told to write to the Mayor, which they did. The Mayor referred them to the LED offices in town. They were then promised a land to trade on but they are still waiting even today. They attended another meeting at the beginning of the year with the department but

nothing has changed. While they wait, the police continue to harass them and confiscate their stock. It is frustrating. These days they no longer issue us slips. They just take the stock.

Sibuyile believes that churches can make a difference in their lives. He thinks that the church should support them by raising these issues in their meetings and being vocal, in media platforms like radios and newspapers. They should also send petitions to government on behalf of the traders.

FLORENCE MALI, A RETIRED INFORMAL TRADER AND A LADY BISHOP FROM ZONE 12 IN SEBOKENG, EXUDE WITH ENTHUSIASM WHEN SHE START TO TELL OF HER EXPERIENCE WHILE STILL AN INFORMAL TRADER-:

ESSET : How many people did you feed with an income you got as an informal trader?

Lady Bishop Mali : *My household comprised of my husband and six children, all raised from the income generated from selling in the streets. I am proud that all of them except one completed their secondary schooling.*

ESSET : Has it always been your dream to become an informal trader?

Lady Bishop Mali : *I and my husband were from humble family background and not educated as many blacks were, during the apartheid era. Finding employment was another challenge by then. I became an informal trader way back in 1980 when I used to sell small food stuffs such as, apples, eggs and sweets.*

ESSET : What would you say is the value of your work?

Lady Bishop Mali : *I have raised six children through selling and all of them have completed their secondary schooling except one. I survived and lived with the money that I got from selling. As time went by I started to expand my business and also sold live chickens as well. As people saw that I was making progress they came to me for advices on how to establish their own businesses and I ably gave them the tips. Some of them are still doing business today.*

ESSET : How would you describe the nature of your work?

Lady Bishop Mali : *The conditions were bad. I would brave rainy weather conditions to go and sell. Sometimes I would hide under the trees and cover myself with plastic because I was guaranteed that at the end of the day I would be able to put food on the table for my family. I had to withstand the police harassment and be ready for detention any day as long as I was selling. I was prepared to put my life at risk as long as there was no income in our household.*

ESSET : How did others perceived your work?

Lady Bishop Mali : *Even during my time as informal trader, people looked down upon us and our families. They called us all sorts of names and even had tendency to ask where our God was as we live in such abject poverty. I was not ashamed to continue selling even on my own street despite those squabbling.*

ESSET : Do you regard your work as a blessing from God or a curse?

Lady Bishop Mali : *Being an informal trader was in*

fulfilment of God's plan for my life. It enabled me and my family to reach out to many people by selling them basic food stuffs but also taking care of those who were destitute, I am also convinced if we take care of people, God becomes more interested in blessing the affairs of our lives. In addition, the bible says that God will not give us stone if we ask Him for fish to eat. He is always just and faith in His promises although we might not see it through human eye.

ESSET : What would you say were the challenges facing informal traders?

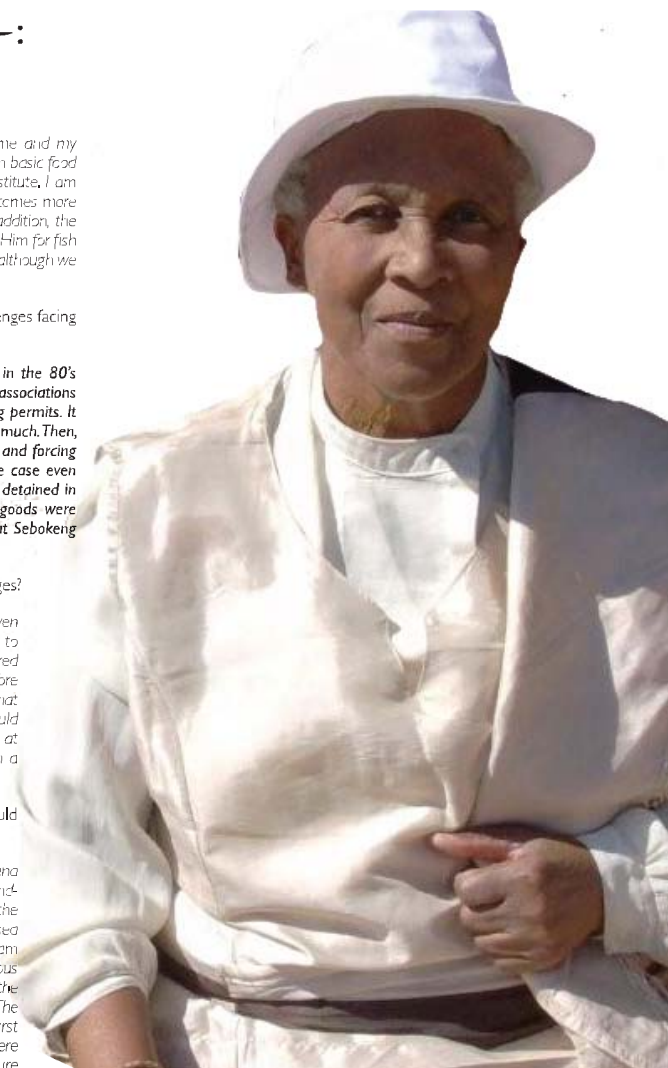
Lady Bishop Mali : *Being informal traders in the 80's was not easy at all because there were no traders associations who could advocate for us to be given the trading permits. It pains me to realise that things have not changed much. Then, the police used to harass us by taking our goods and forcing us to close our business which is what is still the case even today. I can still vividly recall the day when I was detained in a cell in 1989 together with my kids while my goods were also being impounded and I ended up sleeping at Sebokeng Police Station.*

ESSET : How did you deal with your challenges?

Lady Bishop Mali : *I persisted on selling even though I knew that police who come any time to confiscate our goods and detain me. God answered my prayers in 1989 and when I appeared before the sympathetic magistrate, he eventually ruled that I should be given the permit to sell so that I would be able to provide for my children. Thus, appearing at the magistrate court was a breakthrough though a traumatic experience at the same time.*

ESSET : How do you think churches should support you as traders?

Lady Bishop Mali : *Having had firsthand experience of poverty and struggles of making ends meet, I cannot over-emphasize the need for the churches to be active in the struggles of marginalised communities and the poorest of the poor. I am personally involved in an initiative of local religious leaders, who are geared up to help heighten the voices of the poor and local communities. The preparations are already underway for the first Pastoral meeting here at Saul Tsotetsi centre, where issues of poverty and service delivery will feature prominently. Churches and the religious leaders owe it to their communities to continually advocate for social and economic justice as well as HIV and AIDS by making submissions to government until their efforts yield positive responses.*



FLORENCE MALI, A RETIRED INFORMAL TRADER AND A LADY BISHOP

The Worker Sunday campaign is a vital instrument that the church can use to promote the biblical message of justice. The same campaign was used by the church community in the Apartheid era to fight for the rights of and support black workers who were exploited and oppressed. Today in the democratic dispensation, many informal workers still face work under exploitative, unsafe and unjust working conditions. In its work for justice, ESSET seeks to accompany the struggles of informal workers. This we do with the full conviction that informal work is not a curse, but has been blessing and a means of livelihood for many.

The traders with whom we have worked have appreciated the solidarity that churches show in their lives. This information sheet is a resource aimed at helping churches to understand the plight of informal workers through the case studies documented here. Churches and Ministers are urged to run the campaign in their congregations and organisations, through special services and prayers in the month of May.

Those interested and in need of more information and / or resources can contact ESSET on

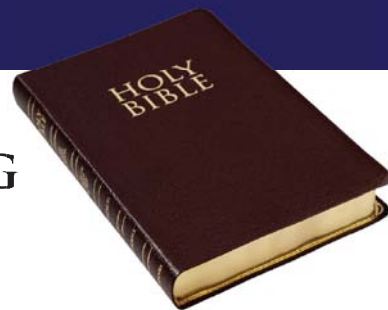
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ESSET would like to thank all that contributed to the production of this information package. We thank Thembele Njenga, Thabo Koole, Rev Desmond Lesejane, Sthembo Zwane, Dicksy Mashigoane, Brown Motsau, Sonto Magwaza and Mandla Mndebele

INFORMAL TRADE IS A BLESSING FROM GOD AND NOT A CURSE



BIBLICAL REFLECTION

And to the man he said, "Since you listen to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you are made from dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:17-19)

This passage depicts work in the Garden of Eden as painful struggle for living. Many people working in the informal sector of our economy often feel this way. Sometimes other people look at them and think that they too are under the curse of God.

Many people strive very hard to make a living in this world, they raise money to start small businesses; they work for their abusive neighbours who see them as nothing more than a pitiful bunch; they are seen as no-hopers in life because of their poor educational background; authorities see them as a nuisance on the city pavements who have to be hidden away when visitors come.

When they go to the market and their workplaces in the streets in the city to sell their products it's like working on thorns and thistles. The city by-laws are against them, law enforcement agencies harass them and criminals target them. The ground they work in is cursed. And even in our democratic state the thorns and thistles seem to be growing more and more.

In Genesis 3:17-19 God is speaking to Adam, a worker responsible for the garden. The text may give an impression that work came from God as a punishment for sin. This may be interpreted to mean that those who work in difficult conditions like the traders do, are being punished for their sins or are not blessed by God like others not in similar situations.

However work did not start in Genesis 3. It was instituted in Genesis 1 and 2 when God worked to create the earth and gave Adam the responsibility of taking care of the garden. In these two previous chapters work is good and appreciated and above all it is an effortless and noble activity. It is an activity that God shares with human beings. Work is primarily God's activity with people invited as co-workers with God. Then clearly God cannot be a source for punishment of sin or curse.

Today workers sometimes experience work as a curse and

sometimes as a blessing. Their work unlike that of God in Genesis 1, is hard and painful. They experience work as a curse when they work in unsafe conditions and unhygienic, live in hostels and travel long distances. Work is seen as a curse when they are employed as casual workers working long hours with low wages and no overtime pay, few benefits and such as annual leave, sick leave, pension and medical aid. The working conditions are like thorns and thistles when authorities who are supposed to protect them become the ones who pass laws that prevent them from working effortlessly and use the same laws to harass them and steal their livelihoods. Work may also seem like a curse for many women whose work in the home is unpaid and unacknowledged; or they are expected to work double shifts – at the office / factory floor and in the house; or are forced by circumstances to sell their bodies for a living.

Work can also be experienced as a blessing, like when workers do not have to work for a boss, earn a living wage and so forth. This remains God's expressed purpose. As it was promised to the people of Israel, God's work ongoing of transformation and salvation is creating a world where workers:

"Shall build houses and live in them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat" (Isaiah 65:21-22)

Whose sin turns work into a curse?

In this text we learn that the struggle and pain that accompanies work is a result of sin by people entrusted with authority. There was an instruction for Adam and Eve, a guideline they chose to ignore it. The curse is a direct consequence of their actions. This sounds familiar; today people take decisions in international forums like WTO, IMF and WB that have negative impact on the rest of the people in the world especially poor working class and the unemployed. These are decisions that put profits before people; decisions that favour the interests of so-called developed nations over those of developing nations. In our country these are decisions that disregard the interests of the poor and promote those of the elite.

Work is for sustenance, and the curse came only after capitalists had sinned, making the wrong choices that affected others negatively. They created thorns and thistles in the workplace. They developed economic policies which increase their profit at the expense of the poor working class. They implemented labour market flexibility in order to create a downward pressure on workers, compelling workers to be flexible depending upon the needs of production. They demand that what is produced is made

at the lowest possible cost to the employer. Workers have to compete with machines. The effect of this is slave wage, a loss of jobs and massive unemployment, an intensification of work, a lightning of time workers work and a whole range of health and safety problems, from forced early retirement to increased incidences of repetitive stress injuries.

Work before the fall was never meant to be a burden or a curse to people. It was meant to be a blessing and enjoyed by all people.

The redemption of work: from a curse to a blessing

The church today is to offer the alternative system meaning, the unconditional acceptance and authority for redemptive action found in Christ. The church should understand how the socio-economic conditions impact on workers' (Church members) spiritual well-being and proclaim the gospel that fights against thistles and thorns that threaten the livelihood of the working class. The gospel message must always liberate and empower the poor working class in terms of God's creative authority, God's redemptive concern and God's comprehensive vision.

As the church we can learn a lot from Calvin's preaching that work must not be casual or occasional, but must be methodical, disciplined, rational and uniform. Workers have to work at what they are best at, and not be forced by circumstances to do something that they are not passionate about. Workers must also be empowered to work decently and in decent conditions.

So, becoming aware of the situation of the value of work today, it is highly impossible to remain quite and inactive. Let us not say that "we cannot change anything". The reality of the impact of macroeconomic policies on the world of work demands solidarity and action by all. Our will to fight together and change the status quo already gives us hope. The solidarity, daily actions and growing awareness can help us to reinvent the world of work that is free from thorns and thistles, where there will be justice, sharing of resources and human dignity for all.

Work would then be a blessing and be seen to be so.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Deregulation: the change of policies by governments to make it easier for the business to work freely. This may include changes in the labour laws, environmental laws, tax laws, etc.

Casualisation of work: the changing of work practices so that regular workers are re-employed on casual or short-term basis

Globalisation: the process by which different countries and cultures on earth become integrated into one global village

Marginalised people: these are people who are kept away from the centre of society and economy, and those whom society and government look down upon and refuse to pay attention to

Sub-contracting and outsourcing: sub-contracting when a firm contracts the services of another to carry some of its tasks or operations. The control and ownership of the operation or process being contracted remains with the parent company. Outsourcing, which is similar to sub-contracting, happens when a company delegates a part of its internal operations to a third party or another company. The other company in this case gains full control over that operation/process. Outsourcing is therefore a greater level of handing over ownership and/or managerial control than has before been the case. Sub-contracting and outsourcing are normally done by companies to save money.

Neo-liberalism: a belief system imposed by powerful finance institutions which suggest that economic growth is the only way to ensure that everyone benefits from the world

economy. It promotes the breaking down of barriers to trade and investment to reap maximum benefits for companies. Its policies, which result in more benefits for the rich at the expense of the poor, bring more suffering to the poor

Economic growth: the increase in the amount of the goods and services produced by a country over time. Some people believe that if the economy grows, everybody will benefit. The problem lies when the resources of a country are distributed in a manner that benefits only a few at the expense of majority.

Underemployment: A situation in which a worker is employed in a position that does not fully utilise his/her skills and experience. This may also refer to a situation where a worker is not employed at full capacity in terms of compensation, and/or hours. While not technically unemployed, the underemployed are often competing for available jobs.

Decent work: a good quality job that respects the rights of workers and affords them some form of social protection

Social protection: a set of policies and programs that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social risks. These risks may result from a number of factors such as the absence or a significant reduction of income. The absence or reduction of income may be due to factors such as sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, death of a breadwinner, etc. Social protection policies and programs are therefore designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by reducing people's exposure to risks. They can also be used to enhance people's capacity to protect themselves against risks.

