

Relief for siblings

After spending a year at home without an income, 27-year-old Michael Sibuya joined an Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) project in Mpumalanga in 2010. The project was focused on trenching and food gardens.

Sibuya says it was difficult at home, especially as he comes from a family of seven and is one of the eldest. Together with his older brother, they battled to feed so many mouths. Sibuya joined the project after his dreams of working in Johannesburg were shattered in 2008.

“I used to work for Woolworths in Johannesburg. My contract expired without being renewed, which was painful. I felt like my world came to a standstill at the time. I panicked and became depressed, because I knew the situation at home. My mother died in 2005, while I was still at school.”

He explains that he was relieved when he joined the EPWP project, as the stress was starting to take its toll. “I was at a stage where I was desperate and I really needed the money, because my family was suffering.”

He was paid R660 a month on the project, which was enough to make a difference. “I managed to help my brother take care of the family. It was a fulfilling experience, because I was able to look forward to the end of the month, knowing I was getting an income.”

The project changed Sibuyas’s life in a positive way, and he says he cannot wait until another one begins. “It was great while it lasted, and most people here cannot wait to see a longer project coming to our community.”

The EPWP project, he says, taught him that not everything is based in Johannesburg, as many people believe. “I went to Johannesburg thinking my life would be better there, and it was for a while. But a project based back here in Mpumalanga eventually saved me, when my family needed me the most.”