

Sustainability is key

Since losing her husband 10 years ago, 56-year-old Ntombi Dlamini from Umzimkhulu has battled to make ends meet. She says after her husband's death, her life became challenging.

"It's difficult when you're used to being supported and suddenly you have to work. When my husband died, I had to find a way to make a living to support my five children."

Her plan was simple; selling vegetables and doing laundry for her neighbours and people in the community. Although she made very little money, she survived for more than six years. "I was everyone's helper. I didn't have a choice – it was either that or go hungry."

She explains that her situation was made worse by her lack of formal education, as she left school in Grade Four. "Without any qualification or skills, I struggled to get a decent job."

Dlamini finally caught a break when she joined an Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) project involving cemetery cleaning and food gardening.

"Since joining this project, my life is good and I've been able to take care of my family. We are no longer worried every day, wondering where our next meal will come from. The stipend that I received helped me to paint my house and I also used some of the money to buy school uniforms for my children."

Dlamini adds that working for the food-gardening project had other benefits, too, as she could take home vegetables from the garden to feed her children. "The project saved my family from poverty and I'm so grateful for that. I hope more projects can come our way, so my older children can also get jobs."

The mother of five believes that people must equip themselves with enough skills to allow them to support themselves. She says that the EPWP project came to her when she had nothing and has taught her valuable skills like growing her own food, which will sustain her family.