

Life changer

Thirty-nine-year-old Sophie Ntsomela from Limpopo was a well-known vegetable vendor in her community. She never liked her job, but had to do it because she had to make ends meet.

Ntsomela has two kids in school, one in Grade 10 and the other in Grade Two. Although she herself never finished school, their education is important to her. "I was never a bright person in school and dropped out, but I know that education is important and I want to empower my kids."

After realising she couldn't pass Matric and faced with the reality of how difficult it is to find a job, she decided to become a vendor to feed her family. She struggled at times, but she couldn't give up. For five years, she relied on tomatoes to support her children.

"In 2009, a friend told me about an Expanded Public Works Programme project and I wasted no time in becoming part of it. The project saved me from poverty. I joined the Tivoneleni Bakery Project, which changed my life. I was paid a monthly stipend and the money helped me a lot. I bought a television set for my children with my first stipend."

Once she became used to having a regular income, she decided to save money to renovate her house. "I managed to save enough money to buy a fridge, finish building our house and put up a fence around the yard."

Ntsomela says she is grateful that an opportunity like this came along and changed her life. Although the project has ended, its benefits will last forever.

"I was really struggling before I joined the project and it changed my life. I'm sad that it has ended, as it made a huge difference in my life."