



Dorah Mabe

# Safe conditions in a ‘day job’ at the cooperative recycling facility

Dorah Mabe

October 2021

Text: Tanya Zack, Kirsten Harrison, Melanie Samson

Photographs: Mark Lewis

Design: Willemijn Schellekens

## The Vaal Park Recycling Centre

The Vaal Park Recycling Centre is a large, neat yard with the business of waste picking happening along the perimeter of the parking and offloading courtyard. In the early morning it seems quite inactive. There are neat stacks of recycler bags, tyres, metal, cardboards and different types of plastic at the rear. There is a container office and next to it is a prefabricated building. And there is a truck emblazoned with ‘Vaal Park Household Recycling’, that is currently out of service. Alongside it are several cages that house different materials.

But come closer. See that around the prefabricated building, which is the women’s change room, there is a thriving vegetable garden and a shady seating area. Dorah Mabe is sitting there.

## The work- offloading, sorting and packing

‘I sort here’, says Dorah Mabe, ‘People bring things in trucks and cars and we take those things off their vehicles and sort them into the cages – different cages for PET, HD, etc.’. Dorah grew up and went to school in the Sasolburg area. She currently lives in Zamdela. She’s 29 years old.

This is at least a job I can do. I have one child. It’s good to be here. The work is not difficult. It’s clean work. I would not do this in the street or at the landfill site where the work is dirty.

And here I can keep good hours – 8.30 to 4. It is steady work.

People sometimes laugh at me and say ‘You pick bottles’. They don’t understand that there is money in those bottles” Dorah says it’s much safer on this site for women than it would be pulling trolleys in the street.

## Working collectively and democratically

She talks about working in a cooperative ‘we work together, we women sort together. The men do the heavier work and we sort material into the cages. Every month we take the stuff to the scrapyards or recycling centre. Some buy back centres come and collect the materials. Every month the office tells us what we have collected and we divide the money’.



## Looking forward

Reclaiming was Dorah’s first job. She’s been involved here since 2016. She had left school in grade 11 when she became pregnant. She hoped to be a security guard but wasn’t able to find work in that sector. This job enables her to feed her child and to do small maintenance tasks on her RDP house. ‘I will be a security guard one day,’ she says, ‘My life won’t end here.’