

# Women working for their families



Emily Mrabalalo

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October 2021

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Emily Mrabalalo and other reclaimers put a mixture of clay and calamine lotion on their faces and firearms to protect their skins from the harsh sunlight they are exposed to all day on this site. But Emily says there are other working conditions at the Northern Landfill Site in Mangaung that are also difficult, especially for women. There are no toilets. Women and men have to relieve themselves in the bushes around the site. She is afraid of being attacked in the bushes.

There is also no water at the face of the landfill and reclaimers carry water for washing their materials and for drinking from the facilities at the office.

Reclaimers change from their day clothes into working gear on the landfill site. They store work clothes in bags or bins close to their own clusters of bulging sorting bags. As she changes out of her denim mini skirt and fitted jacket into the many layers of her work clothes – three layers of socks, leggings a large over-shirt, and replaces her short bob styled wig with a curly wilder style that flows from under her cap, she talks of working in a cooperative. ‘The cooperative is good,’ she says. ‘I like working with other ladies’. Emily makes an average of R300 each day. The initials tattooed across Emily’s chest – M S S S T - denote her surname and the names of the four children. Her proudest achievement is having paid for her daughter’s schooling. Her daughter is currently studying law at the University of the Free State.