

Francelina Lekeno



A roof over her head



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Mentoring

When Francelina came from the Eastern Cape to Bloemfontein in 2004 she hoped to make a living by dressmaking. But payments were slow and unreliable, and she wasn't earning enough to survive. In 2006 she went to the southern landfill site in Mangaung. There she met a man

who taught her how to collect recyclables, but as importantly, he taught her how to save and encouraged her to keep her focus on earning and saving for a goal. She took that advice seriously and years later, as an organiser amongst reclaimers, she passes the lessons on.

Cooperative

In 2009 Francelina started working at the Northern Landfill Site in Mangaung. She later joined a cooperative here. She was trained in cooperative organising and has been in leadership positions in two cooperatives on the site. She has held many organising roles and negotiating roles with the municipality and with buyers. As secretary of her cooperative she developed a business plan for the sale of materials for a recent venture with a private buy back business. But she is sceptical of working in a group and of these ventures. She says the cooperative was treated badly and deprived of income by the buy back business – who she calls 'tsotsis'. She also says she can make more money if she works alone.

A hard daily routine

Francelina lives in Heidedal. That is a 1.5 hour walk from the landfill site. She makes that journey to and from the site every weekday. She leaves home at 6am and works 9 to 10 hours each day. She has worked at the landfill site for 15 years. In that time, she has saved consistently. Over the last few years she has invested most of her earnings in her RDP house.

Saving and building

'I started extending my RDP house in 2013,' says Francelina. She says she could begin to save for her house once two of her children had left school. 'I am a single parent, I did all of this alone' she says of her achievements in educating and housing her children.

Her savings pattern is to save R100 in a stokvel every day. There are five women members of the stokvel. Every 5 weeks she gets R2500 from the stokvel. She then deposits R2000 in another stokvel and when she receives her earning of R12000 from that savings club she uses the money for building materials. When she had completed the walls of her home, she took an interest free loan of R25 000 from her savings society to build the roof. She is currently paying off the last R4000 of the loan. The society requires all loan payments to be made by the first week of December. In this way she has built on 5 extra rooms and has

built 4 outside rooms to rent out. Her house is painted red. It boasts several entrances, tiled flooring in several rooms, an entrance porch, a fitted kitchen and decorative ceilings – with silver geometric patterns and moulded cornices. Some of the materials – including floor tiles – that she used in the extension of her house – were found at the landfill site. She lists the sorts of things she regularly finds at the landfill site, 'soap, toothpaste, roll on... these things are dumped by shops because their packaging is damaged. But they are in good condition'. She's also found carpets, beds and sofas for her home at the landfill site.

But her hard work and consistent savings from a modest income are not always rewarded. Francelina is 60 and qualifies for a state grant. But she has struggled to access her rightful grant because her bank account looks too flush. She tries to explain how she saves a lump sum over a long time and then uses it for her house, but officials are only looking at the current balance.

Amelia

One of her daughters is training at Universitas Hospital, one has recently matriculated, and another – Amelia – is working on the landfill site with Francelina. Amelia and Francelina work 6 days a week, from 8am to 4pm. Amelia says, 'My mom taught me this work. It's not difficult and you can make your own power and success here. I get, food, clothes and everything I need, and I put my child through school from this place. Amelia works independently. She doesn't want to work in a cooperative as she prefers to be in control of her own work and earnings. She lives in a shack in a settlement that is earmarked for housing. She doesn't know when the RDP houses will be built, but she will wait and not upgrade her shack in the meantime, because, she says, she has not been given title deeds yet.

Dreams

Francelina's dream is to expand her work into a business. 'There is money in compacting' she says. If she could get access to baling and compacting equipment, she would employ people and build a business. She would teach people and help grow their incomes.

Of being a woman on the landfill site, she says, 'we work well. Men can work harder, carrying bigger loads and can jump over us to get more materials. But many of the men are using their money every day, drinking. They are not saving for their homes.'