

# Dreams can come true

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*Thandeka Mashinini (26) dreamt big. She always wanted to be a beauty therapist and own her own beauty salon. Today her dream has become a reality and she credits the Social Employment Fund (SEF) for being the stepping stone to changing her life and future.*

Mashinini joined the SEF project in August 2022, as a timekeeper, with civil society organisation, Solidaridad, one of the 35 Social Implementing Partners (SIPs). During her time on the project, she never lost sight of the bigger picture or her goal of becoming a beauty salon owner. It was during her time with Solidaridad, that she gained leadership and interpersonal skills that helped support her journey.

Using savings from her earned stipend on the SEF project as seed capital, Mashinini took advantage of an opportunity to run a beauty salon at the Khayalami Hotel in Nelspruit. She has since qualified as a beauty therapist and offers massage, manicures and other beauty services at her spa.

Mashinini says she lives by the Oprah Winfrey quote: *"I have a lot of things to prove to myself. One is that I can live my life fearlessly"*. And she is doing this day by day. *"This was the first step on my journey to being fearless and I had to grab the opportunity that came my way,"* she says. *"However, there are a lot of things I still want to achieve."*



## *What is SEF?*

As part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), SEF provides temporary work for previously unemployed people, during which time they learn valuable skills and earn a stipend. Unlike financial assistance in the form of a social grant, a stipend is paid in exchange for work participation, contributing to specific programmes while acquiring skills.

By providing basic employment, a temporary work contract, a reporting structure, a team to call your own – participants gain confidence and belief in their own abilities, both of which are foundations for a better future. They are also taught basic work readiness skills such as teamwork, conflict resolution and self-awareness, supplemented by more technical and practical skills.

To date, at least 65,000 work opportunities have been created by the SEF across the country. These participants are largely youth (32 being the average age) with the workforce being 70% female. The 35 SIPs carefully design work programmes which match community needs with those of individuals, to learn valuable skills as a pathway to finding ways out of unemployment.

## *The impact of unemployment*

South Africa has had devastating levels of unemployment of over 25% for over 25 years, with unemployment currently around 40%. The consequences are cumulative, not only on the individuals directly affected but on households, communities, and the economy.

Unemployment is recognised as the single biggest cause of poverty in South Africa, with numerous negative implications

this has for a multi-dimensional range of social challenges. These include lack of adequate nutrition, poor health and education outcomes and lack of access to decent living conditions.

### *Social employment*

Social employment initiatives are crucial as a start to tackling some of our country's unemployment issues by promoting inclusivity, poverty alleviation, skills development and social impact. When people are employed – even temporarily – the material difference the income makes has a ripple effect. The money earned is spent on local businesses, stimulating the local economy and uplifting the community. An added benefit is that the skills acquired stay in the community.

### *Stepping stone*

Mashinini says she received so much more than she expected from the SEF programme. 'Working with different people from different backgrounds and learning how to lead them was an invaluable experience, it was my stepping stone to fulfilling my dream,' she says. 'And although my SEF experience was in production and farming, something which I really enjoyed and might pursue in the future, the lessons I learned were more about my own abilities.'

"It helped me hone my leadership skills, gave me the confidence to believe in myself which led to taking up the opportunity to open and run a beauty salon. My focus is now on building and growing this business."

The SEF is currently in its second phase of implementation. The programme's uniqueness lies in its dual role of creating employment and generating social impact - addressing unemployment by harnessing the power of civil society. This programme is funded through our national budget until March 2024, after which its funding is uncertain.

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### **The Social Employment Fund**



The Social Employment Fund is providing 55,000 temporary jobs in areas like health, education, nutrition and food security. These jobs skill marginalised individuals in workplace preparation and foster entrepreneurship.

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