

Mpumelelo Buthelezi

Portfolio of Evidence –
Presentation

Documentary Project

1. Artist Statement
2. 20 captioned images

E'Plazini: The Waste Collectors' Home

In South Africa, one of the most unequal societies on the planet, the informal sector drives the economy. It is estimated that 85 000 people make a living as waste collectors. They are called waste pickers, a phrase reminiscent of vultures, but contributing more than any other group to recycling within cities and towns, helping divert waste from overflowing landfills.

What my lens has shown me is that cities are complex and incomplete, they have the potential to be key organising units where people, jobs and ideologies are brought together— vessels through which hopes and dreams can be realised; and yet most of the time they fail us. South Africa's cities – like yours – remain exploitative, exclusionary, and classist, with little regard for those struggling in the margins that hold the centre together.

The [United Nations](#) projects that up to 68% of the world's population will live in cities by 2050, with rates increasing fastest in Africa. Every wave of urbanisation brings to the fore questions around quality of life and liveability, with jobs posing the biggest challenge.

Our notions of work in the city are skewed by capitalism. My camera has questions: what counts as work, what is 'important' work and who is dignified through that work?

The waste pickers that I have documented are mostly from the Dryhook area near Devland in Soweto. I started this project after engaging with some recyclers who would come to collect waste around my own neighbourhood. One conversation led to another, resulting in a visit to a waste collection sites, where I listened to the workers' stories.

I had a duty, then, to document the waste pickers' daily journey and communicate their stories about how they make a living through this work that is more important than it looks.

Waste pickers collect recyclable material around the city – scrap metal, plastic bottles, paper, cardboard... They sort and organise the collected material and resell what they have collected to recycling companies. Typically, they receive R3.20 for each kilogram of plastic and R2 per kilogram of cardboard, making somewhere between R40 and R60 a day. Through their recycling methods these individuals are earning a living while also contributing towards environmental sustainability.



South African's landfill in Devland, Soweto, Johannesburg are reaching full capacity and the only solution to the problem is recycling waste materials to make a living for themselves. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Gladman Mazibuko, age 25 is a young recycler who collects recyclable boxes and bottles for a living. He is one of the 26,000 mobile waste pickers in South Africa who are desperate to work. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Peter Moorsi, was born in 1985 in Orlando West Extension, Soweto. He used to study Biology Chemistry at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, He majored his studies under Mathematics, Physics and Accounting. He is now a homeless man who collects old books and recycles them. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Mashume Tasho, lives by collecting waste materials for recycling from the Townships dustbins of Soweto, Johannesburg. A landfill in Devland provides an income from recycling for many waste pickers in the area. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



The residents of Devland and Dryhook claiming the mountain to recycle materials, which they have collected during the day rummaging through plastic, sorting glass and crumpling paper. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Dk Gori a father of two daughters, is one of the hundreds living on the periphery of an Informal Settlement next to the Devland landfill in Soweto, Johannesburg. He works normally around Orlando, Diepkloof and Kliptown collecting different kinds of waste materials to sustain his family. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



A detailed furniture of a waste collectors home in one of the houses in around Devland, Soweto. The waste picker received one of these materials to decorate his home from recycling. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



A waster picker named Matha is pictured at her environmental space on a Wednesday afternoon posing for a image after a long day of running around the streets of Soweto, collecting recycling materials. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



One of the waste pickers are still using the olden days mode of cooking stove named the Prama Stove to prepare food for her family . Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Ntate Sithole(R) alongside his next door neighbour Friend and son are pictured busy perusing through the Newspapers on a Sunday Afternoon and having the best relaxed time of their lives. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Mpho Mosebo is a newly recycle collector who started collecting recyclable materials during the festive season to generate an income for himself. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Ntate Jass alongside his younger daughter named Dikano Ralebuse, assist his father to collect recyclable materials across Daveland, Soweto. The father makes a living by collecting waste materials to feed his family on a daily basis. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Mokanka Moraoetsi (34) has been collecting recyclable materials for more than five years. His work helps him to put food on his family's table and clothes on their backs. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Johnna Moyo collects recyclable materials across Soweto. He makes about R4 000 a month, but he has to work every day to get that kind of money. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthlezi



One of the waste pickers hands are pictured whilst his busy trying to sort out all the aluminium recyclable products to go recycle for money. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



A waste picker is pictured during a sunny day walking through the mud after an early morning of waking up and collecting recyclable materials to put food in the table for his family. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



A waste picker is spotted busy trying to prepare food and also busy sorting all aluminium products for recycling in the next day. Apparently if you collect aluminium waste materials they have a heavy weighted amount of income in return. Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



A waste picker lady is pictured carrying alongside her important personal belongings next to the muddy water river across Devland landfill mountain on a late afternoon . Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Ntate Thabo is one of the waste pickers living in a neighbourhood called Phororo next to the landfill called Devland in Soweto. This waste picker has been collecting and living in this area for over ten years collecting recycling materials to make a living Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi



Two of one of the waste pickers are pictured in Phororo next to Devland busy sorting and packaging their recycled materials. A landfill in Devland provides an income for many in the area Picture: Mpumelelo Buthelezi