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Sibongile Makhanya Trading in Traditional Medicines

By Caroline Skinner

Impact: Before the Warwick Junction Project, which gave street vendors in Durban an infrastructure providing shelter and basic amenities, Sibongile Makhanya traded in the streets in conditions which exposed her to high personal and professional risks. Now Sibongile has moved her business to a kiosk which gives her more security, income, and income potential. The devastating reality of AIDS in Africa has had a direct impact on Sibongile's family life, as it has for so many of her fellow traders, making her income essential to the survival of several children now in her care.

Sibongile is a 64 year old traditional medicine trader who lives about 40 kilometres away from the city and travels to work each day in a taxi. She has known Warwick since 1982 and began trading in the years of severe harassment when she would have to run from the police and watch her goods being confiscated. It would take months to build up the stock she had lost. As restrictions slowly lifted she worked along an exposed street where there was a constant risk of her goods being damaged or stolen. At the time the city provided no basic amenities for street vendors.

In 1998 Sibongile moved into the muthi (traditional medicine) market where she finally had shelter, water, and toilets. More recently she moved her business to a kiosk on Brook Street



photo: Mary Beth Graves

that has water, lighting, and a roll-up metal door that she can lock at night. This kiosk is close to her friends in the muthi market. She feels this is important as she and other traders have built up high levels of trust and support for one another.

The kiosk has made a great difference to Sibongile's business. She now has more trading space and, with lock up facilities, she can carry more stock. Both of these factors have significantly improved her income. She estimates that the stock that she can now lock away in the kiosk is worth R30 000 (US\$ 4 000) and that on a good week she can expect a turnover of up to R7 000 (US\$ 930).

The Inclusive Cities Project is working to take the lessons of the Warwick Junction Project (where street traders had a voice in the infrastructure provided to them by the city) and extend this success across South Africa and then globally to ensure better working conditions and livelihoods for street traders like Sibongile.

Inclusive Cities project: Inclusive Cities focuses on support and capacity building for membership-based organisations (MBOs) of the working poor in the urban informal economy. Through organising, advocacy, and policy analysis, informal workers are making their needs heard within urban planning processes. Partners in the Inclusive Cities project include MBOs of the working poor, international alliances of MBOs, and support organisations committed to improving the situation of the working poor. For more information, and to access research and publications on inclusive urban planning and capacity building tools for MBOs, visit: www.InclusiveCities.org