

"My business will never be the same again," says Duduza spaza shop owner

The shelves of some spaza shops in Ekurhuleni's Tsakane and Duduza townships are almost empty and owners say they are barely making ends meet. Many of them reopened their stores a few weeks after the lockdown when it was announced that they could operate. But the shop owners we spoke to say they are living from hand-to-mouth as business has been dwindling.



Justice Rapapule serving a client at his spaza shop in Tsakane. Photo: Kimberly Mutandiro

"My business will never be the same again," says Justice Rapapule, a spaza shop owner from Tsakane. He fears that he may never have enough money to replenish his stock.

He used to make most of his money by selling bottled beer. Rapapule sold his last stock of beer the day before lockdown. He might not have money to restock when sales are allowed under level 3 next week. He says his family had no other option but to eat most of the food inside his shop. At first the police would come and force him to close the shop but he persisted until they eventually stopped troubling him.

Rapapule, who has been a spaza shop owner for ten years, says he has never faced such hardship before in his life. He lost his job at a factory in Brakpan 20 years ago and struggled to find another job. But he eventually was able to open his shop. It is his family's only source of income.

He says he has been to government offices in the area to access the relief funding for small business owners but to no avail. He recently started selling magwinya (vetkoek) to help increase his customer base.

“When you have a shop people in the township think we are rich, yet I am also struggling. Government should remember us spaza shop owners and help us save our businesses. They should send people to us here in the townships and register us for relief funding,” he said.



R140 for a packet of cigarettes in Soweto

Mbsa Damane 18 May 2020



In Duduza, spaza shop owners say police have been forcing them to close shops at 6pm. Shop owner, Muzi Twala, said, “Business is very low because people do not have money due to the lockdown. Sometimes opening longer helps because people always come to buy small things.”

Twala said he used to allow some customers to buy items on credit but could no longer afford to do this because people were no longer able to pay him back.

“Life has become difficult for us spaza shop owners. Some have even closed shops. It’s as if we are invisible. We need funding now more than ever because soon we will be as good as any other unemployed person in the township,” he said.

Angeline Mthiyane is a widow and relies on her spaza shop to survive. She said, “My customers are broke. I used to sell stock to pensioners and other people who paid me at the end of the month. Now many owe me money and are unable to pay back.”

“Our small businesses are in trouble, things may never be the same again after the lockdown,” she said.

Duduza Ward 87 Councillor Simon Bongani Hlope said there were various relief funding options available for all small businesses. “The problem is that most spaza shop owners are not registered and therefore do not qualify to apply for funding. None of them have come to us for information on how they can receive assistance,” he said.

Information about relief funding can be collected at Municipal Customer Care Centres. Hlope urged affected small business owners in Duduza to apply for relief funding.

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