



**Interview with:** Nokuthula (27)  
**Interviewed by:** Nomkhosi  
**Date of interview:** 8 December 2016  
**Travel:** Ndwendwe - Durban

**Nokuthula:** I am Nokuthula. I am from Ndwendwe. I grew up and studied for my matric in the rural areas. My mother maintained us through living here at Thokoza, selling Jeyes Fluid. When I finished I had two children, which I had to look after.

**Nomkhosi:** You finished school when you already had children?

**Nokuthula:** I left matric when the second one was already in my tummy. My mother was here in the city selling Jeyes Fluid. Since I had kids I had to come to the city to be independent and look after my children. When we were all grown up, my mother had to retire and take care of our children. So when I got to the city, I had not passed matric. So I did not have money to go to school to finish my matric. I did not finish it and I started looking for jobs. I got work at Prestige which is a cleaning company. I worked for two years—2003 and 2004. In 2005, I was involved in car accident and I could no longer go back to work. I was hospitalised for three months. When I came out of the hospital, I couldn't work, so I went to the government to look for a survival strategy. I got the disability grant and this is what I use to survive.

I came to live with my sister here at Thokoza. When she passed away I ended up living on my own. I could not go back to the rural areas to live there because our yard is really bad and I could not walk on crutches there. Even when I [put away] the crutches, it was difficult for me to walk around. So I continued living here at Thokoza. I started looking for some handwork that I could do, so that I would not just rely on government money. So now I am doing this beadwork to raise my kids. One finished school in 2011. The other one is doing Grade 11 this year. The older one is able to get piece-jobs now. I have raised them with this beadwork.

The problem is that we do not have white people who will come and support us in this. We create them and sell it to foreigners [*abantu bokuhamba*]. They would take an item for R10 and sell it for R50. This means we are abused [*xhaphazeka*] in the city of Durban. The problem is that we cannot get somebody who can help us create a co-op.

So that's how we got to Thokoza. Even councillors come in and go out, but there is no one who is able to help us with our needs. As you can see there are four of us in this room ... (It's a three-bed room.) ... and it is hot. The room is small. Councillors do not want to build us RDP housing. They also do not want to build us family units.

Is there anything else I have not mentioned?

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, okay. Let me start here. You said your mother used to live here, but when came here, you came to live with your sister? Was that you big sister?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, it was my big sister. There were also two brothers and we all had piece-jobs. We agreed that our mother had to go back home so that she could take care of our children. [The more there are and the more they grow] the more the responsibilities. That is a burden. When we are old we also have to take care of our children. Mother should stay at home and we should take care of her and our children. So our mother went back home and lived with our kids and we continued working. One thing that happened is in 2003 our first-born brother took a gun and shot himself dead and his fiancée.

**Nomkhosi:** And they died?





**Nokuthula:** Yes. They left a child who was 18 months old.

**Nomkhosi:** Where did he stay?

**Nokuthula:** At Umlazi. He was renting. In 2005, my older sister—the one I came to live with—died and we buried her in the Zululand area. I had the car accident when we were coming back from her funeral. We did not have the same father, so she was buried by her father's family. That's when life just sat down and it has been sitting down ever since. I've got one brother left. He is alone although he has two kids: twins. Their mother passed away. He has another girl child who also lost her mother. We all have children. My big sister left three children. The one who shot himself left two kids and I have two kids. So the situation was bad and it has been this way ever since my sister died.

**Nomkhosi:** All these grandchildren stay with your mother?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, the pension has to help her with the grandkids.

**Nomkhosi:** How did you and your mom deal with the death of your siblings, especially happening so close together?

**Nokuthula:** The one who shot himself used to come back home from Durban where he worked. There was a telephone call from work saying he had to come to work to stand in for somebody else. And then people were telling him that his fiancée was not well behaved.

**Nomkhosi:** She was cheating?

**Nokuthula:** Yes. So when he left home, we knew he was going back to Durban. But we got a phone call saying he shot himself at Montebello. We heard that he went to work and there they told him that he had to start the following day. From there he went to Montebello where his fiancée stayed and he shot himself and her as well, leaving the 18-month-old old baby.

We just got a phone call somebody is dead. It was really not very easy for my mother to accept. It was difficult. She used to pray until she ran out of words of prayer. You could see that she looked like she was running out of faith. But because she had a relationship with God, she eventually became alright. Just when she was recovering from that, my sister died. She had been sick for a very long time. Her death was very difficult for us of all because she had been a very strong person. She used to stay here and sell peanuts and vegetables. But she was stronger at home.

So all these people are dying and leaving children behind. They are leaving home without any proper job or qualification. My remaining brother is a security guard. So life got difficult.

There are three other boys who are my mother's children. They are between 25 and 32 years. They are all not working, having failed at school. When they try to get jobs, they lose their jobs. Even piece-jobs that they get are only temporary. Life is really hard.

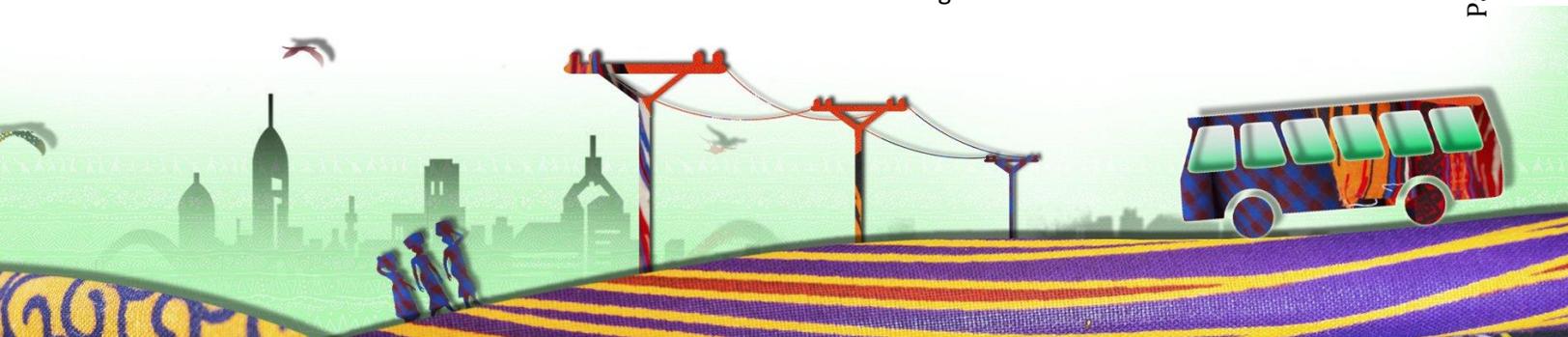
**Nomkhosi:** Where do they live?

**Nokuthula:** They live in the oldest brother's house at Lindelani. [They are trying to make things happen but not succeeding].

**Nomkhosi:** What do you think could be the way forward for your family, in order to make the situation better?

**Nokuthula:** There is nothing [we can do] because there is no employment. If they could get piece-jobs, that would make things better, but it does not happen. Now the problem is that they are also looking at my mother's R1500 [pension]. At the end of each month, she must divide it between them, but she also has to buy groceries for the grandchildren. The brother living in Lindelani also has his own problems. Life has been difficult because there was no money for them to further their education as well.

**Nomkhosi:** But were there some who were interested in furthering their studies?





**Nokuthula:** Well, I am not sure. One showed some interest. He even went to an FET College. From there he enrolled with UNISA with a NSFAS [bursary]. Unfortunately, if you fail, NSFAS does not continue to pay for you, although I heard they will take you again after a few years. He got a job, but there was an Indian person who did not like him and he eventually was fired. Now nothing comes together for him. He tries and fails. I think it must be really difficult since there is nothing at home.

**Nomkhosi:** Living apart from each, when do members of the family come together?

**Nokuthula:** Not often. If you go back home, you need to bring something that will make my mother happy. You do not have the money to go back home. Things like funerals bring us together to do traditional ceremonies. It is even difficult to call each other to ask how each is doing. If one says they are hungry, what would you say? What would you give them because you also don't have anything? *Lonke ixoxo liyazigxumela* (Every frog jumps for itself).

**Nomkhosi:** You said that you have been here for quite some time and that you feel the councillors are not doing anything to help you. What are the things that you feel could be done in order to help you and other hostel dwellers?

**Nokuthula:** Here at Thokoza you sometimes hear that people were given RDP houses. You find that you do not know how people are selected for those houses.

**Nomkhosi:** There are RDP house found here?

**Nokuthula:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** How?

**Nokuthula:** Through the councillors.

**Nomkhosi:** Where are those houses?

**Nokuthula:** In different places. They said that there is no space in the city for RDP houses. But our councillor talks to other counsellors in different areas and asks for RDP houses to be allocated to us.

**Nomkhosi:** So people are sometimes moved from Thokoza into other places?

**Nokuthula:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** What kind of places have they gone to?

**Nokuthula:** To Welbedatch, next to Chatsworth, and Moriya, closer to Veralum.

**Nomkhosi:** How do they get selected?

**Nokuthula:** That I do not know. I would like to know how they get selected. You never hear an announcement that there is RDP house available or that there are people who have got RDP housing.

**Nomkhosi:** Do you have community meetings here?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, we have them.

**Nomkhosi:** What kind of issues do they address?

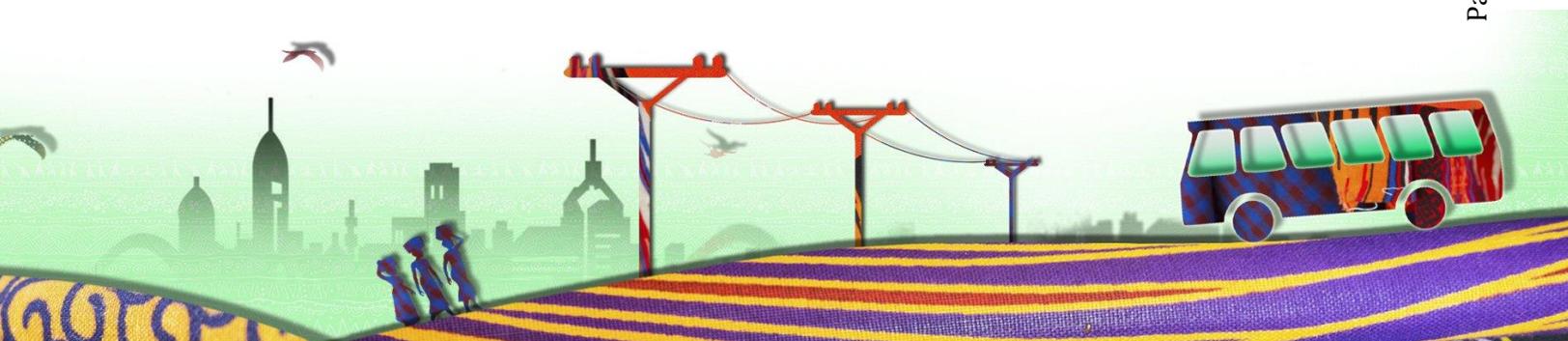
**Nokuthula:** They talk about such stuff. For example, we have been once registered for RDP housing. We were also advised to register for family units by a councillor called Themba Chonco. But we have not seen anything. He was here for five years. Maybe the RDP houses only went to people who are well connected [*omtakabani*].

**Nomkhosi:** And the family units?

**Nokuthula:** There are no family units but we registered for them and that's it.

**Nomkhosi:** What did they say about them?

**Nokuthula:** They said the municipality was going to buy us an old building in town, renovate it and turn it into family units. Thokoza would also be renovated but some people would remain here. Those are the kinds of things they tell us in community meetings, but they have not happened. We need RDP houses.





Personally, if they gave me an RDP, I would sleep there. The people who have been given RDP houses are still here.

**Nomkhosi:** Those who got RDP housing?

**Nokuthula:** Yes. Those ones are not so much in need. You are supposed to get a house because you need it and then you can leave this place.

**Nomkhosi:** Do they not accept it?

**Nokuthula:** They do. For example, there is a woman who has an RDP and she is renting it out while she continues to rent here at Thokoza.

**Nomkhosi:** Where is that RDP?

**Nokuthula:** In Welbedatch

**Nomkhosi:** Are you close to that woman?

**Nokuthula:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** Why does she not go to her own space but prefer to be cramped here with many people?

**Nokuthula:** That woman is actually really doing well. One of her sons works for the electricity [department]. One is a professional nurse at the hospital. They live in their own houses. I think her kids could even pay someone to live with the mother in the RDP and look after her.

**Nomkhosi:** Is she too old?

**Nokuthula:** She is not too old but she had a problem with her leg (following an accident). Even at Mtubatuba, in the rural areas, she has a house. She is somebody who really does not have a problem. I don't know why they gave her a house. This means that they do not do checks on a person before they give them an RDP house. Maybe they just liked her and they gave it to her.

**Nomkhosi:** Where do you kids live?

**Nokuthula:** One is still at school in the rural areas. The other one lives with me here.

**Nomkhosi:** Boys or girls?

**Nokuthula:** Both girls.

**Nomkhosi:** What is her perception of life?

**Nokuthula:** I do not know. I would not know how she perceives life.

**Nomkhosi:** Are you guys not close?

**Nokuthula:** We are really tight, but I do not know. I guess it's really that she tries and things do not come together, because she would also like to have better life. For now, we all do not have much. I just have my family house and I would leave here to go back there.

**Nomkhosi:** Does this mean you also wish that you could have your own house?

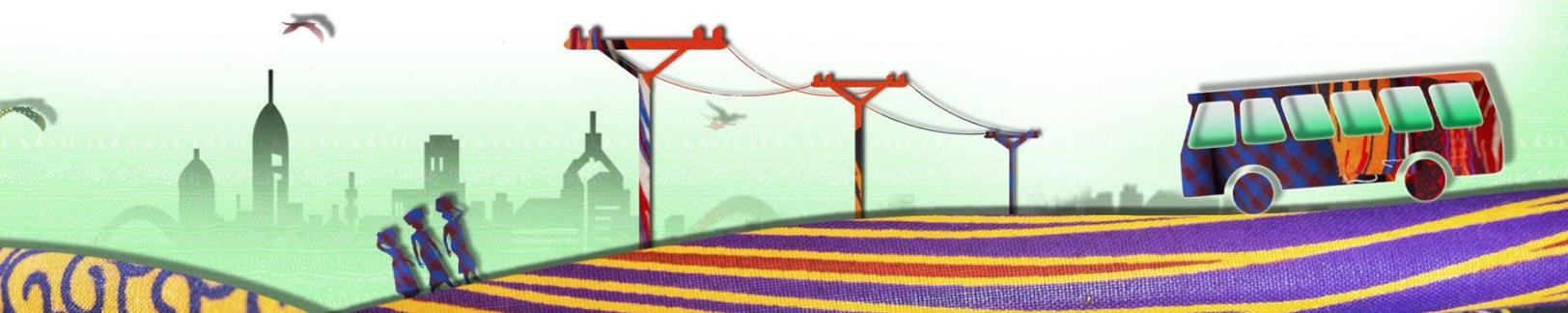
**Nokuthula:** I wish. The problem with the government grant is that you chew it while you are standing. By the time you sit down, it's gone.

**Nomkhosi:** You chew it while standing and by the time you sit down it's gone! (Laughs)

**Nokuthula:** Yes. It does not go anywhere. It's just for you to survive and nothing else. What is worse is that when you have it, you start having a lot of debt. You take debt thinking you have money with the grant. The father of my first daughter passed away. The father of the second one is alive but he does not do anything for her. So the pension helps me raise my kids, but it's not enough. It only helps us to survive. Even the people from Road Accident Fund refused to pay me. If they paid me, I would be in my own house by now.

**Nomkhosi:** Why did they not want to pay you?

**Nokuthula:** The car I was travelling in collided with wood that had fallen off a truck. It was at night and, I don't want to lie, I was sleeping. I did not see it happen. So there was a car coming from the opposite





direction and this car flashed his lights. Our driver then crashed into the logs. The RAF said they wanted to know why there were logs on the road. They wanted the number plate of the truck and they wanted to know where the truck was coming from.

**Nomkhosi:** Now where were you supposed to get that information?

**Nokuthula:** Who would ever get that information? You are driving and you meet with an accident. Is the driver supposed to try and run after the truck? Who could think of all that? It was really crazy. And that was the end of it.

**Nomkhosi:** This was so unfortunate because people really benefit from this fund. Is there any other way you could try?

**Nokuthula:** I tried and I have given up. I went to two different lawyers and they also failed. The lawyer who had my case eventually died in 2010.

**Nomkhosi:** Were you still working with him when he passed on?

**Nokuthula:** I went there but I had already given up. He had said he would call me when something happened. But one day in 2014 I just decided to go there and they told me that the lawyer passed on. He was working with another case before he died but they said there was new legislation that said the RAF wouldn't investigate accidents any more. All those in the accident would have to benefit. But by the time that legislation was passed, he died. The ones who were left behind did not check through the files. Even now my file is still there. When I went there again I was told that my case file has expired as it has been more than five years.

**Nomkhosi:** Five years since the accident?

**Nokuthula:** I don't know how it expires without you getting the money after you had an accident.

**Nomkhosi:** So how did you start your beadwork business?

**Nokuthula:** I started through the ladies who are hawkers at the beach. They taught me and they asked me to do beadwork. I eventually sold the beadwork in the place where we sell to foreigners. In turn the white people sell it on for a higher price.

**Nomkhosi:** Where do they get those white people?

**Nokuthula:** When they come to South Africa touring.

**Nomkhosi:** Why don't you also target these white people?

**Nokuthula:** Where will we get them? We need someone to organise us to do this. We need a space where we can sell these things.

**Nomkhosi:** Oh, you think that would make a difference?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, because for now there is nothing that we are doing. We are only selling this for R10. Foreigners are the ones who are making a lot of money. Otherwise there is nothing that we are getting. It's really nothing.

**Nomkhosi:** So how do you see this co-op working? Do you have people that you would like to work with?

**Nokuthula:** There are too many people who are skilled at this job. A white person can design something on paper and the person will do exactly that.

**Nomkhosi:** You are not one of those people?

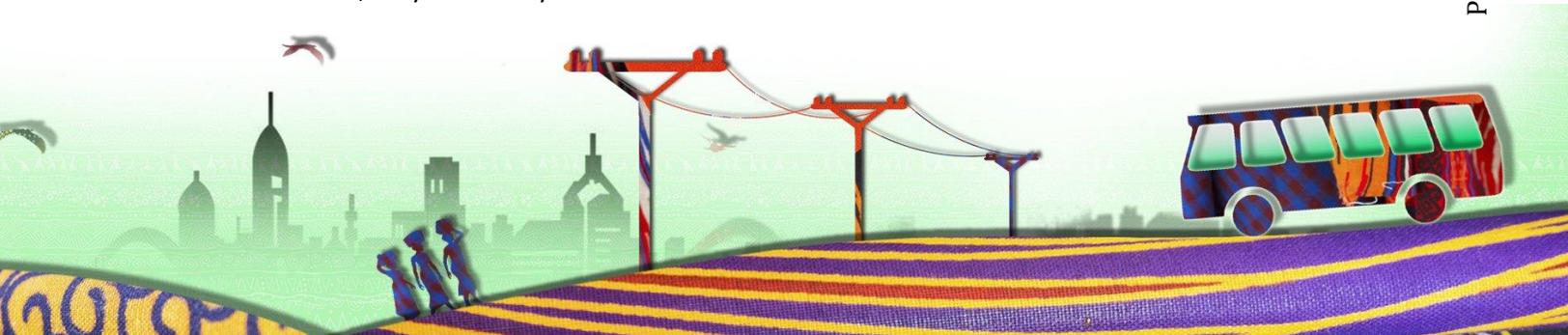
**Nokuthula:** I do not know everything, but there are people who know everything. There are people who can help us become a co-operative.

**Nomkhosi:** For how many years have you been doing this?

**Nokuthula:** It's too many years ... maybe six years.

**Nomkhosi:** Are the people who have this knowledge from South Africa?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, they are mainly from Ndwedwe.





**Nomkhosi:** Do you know how to register a co-operative?

**Nokuthula:** (quiet)

**Nomkhosi:** Or how it works?

**Nokuthula:** It will work if we can get our own place. Perhaps a councillor can see the work we do and find us a place where they can build for us. And then white people can come and buy directly from us when they are touring so that we don't have people who buy from us for little and sell on for a lot.

**Nomkhosi:** Are you sure you guys only sell this for R10 each?

**Nokuthula:** We really sell it for R10 each.

**Nomkhosi:** I normally see women selling this for R50 and more.

**Nokuthula:** Yes, but they buy it from us.

**Nomkhosi:** And they are making profit?

**Nokuthula:** As I say, we sell it for a small price. The women who sell it on buy from us. When they sell for R50, they make a profit. They get paid for sitting down and selling it. We, who sit down and make it, get nothing.

**Nomkhosi:** So can you say that the people from outside have an advantage compared to South Africans?

**Nokuthula:** No, I won't say that. It's because they got here first and were given spaces where they could sell, spaces that they are renting. White [tourists] come through to them and buy with lots of money.

**Nomkhosi:** In this hostel, is there something like an organisation for people who do beadwork, because I can see that there are many people who do beadwork?

**Nokuthula:** We do not have somebody who looks after us. Maybe it's because we do not want help.

**Nomkhosi:** Don't you think you can try to organise something? When you gather people together you get a lot of bright ideas. You can discuss some of the challenges and some people could come with solutions.

**Nokuthula:** People want to be served. You can talk about this thing and agree that it needs to happen, but you still need to go up and down, using your own bus fare to go to different departments. Where I come from, they tried to establish a crèche for us. One person who went to the department said they wanted seven people coming together who would speak the same language so that we could get what we wanted. She had to use her own money to give these people bus fare to go to these offices. So this thing was not successful. How can you afford to pay for many different people's bus fare? This person was also trying to get something that would help the others.

**Nomkhosi:** Could you not all contribute something like R2 towards a group fund?

**Nokuthula:** No, this was just for bus fare. That would not have been that difficult.

**Nomkhosi:** Yes.

(Long pause)

**Nomkhosi:** Okay, so, how long did your mother live here?

**Nokuthula:** It was about 20 years. She was here since we were very young and stayed until we were old and we finished school.

**Nomkhosi:** And her main thing was to sell Jeyes Fluid?

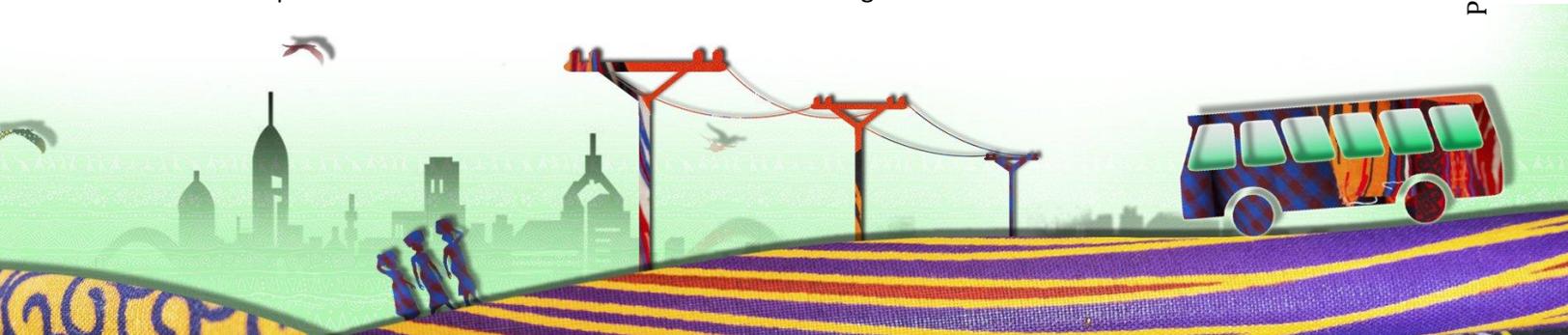
**Nokuthula:** Yes.

**Nomkhosi:** Why did you not sell it as well?

**Nokuthula:** I did not want to. It makes you walk too much.

**Nomkhosi:** How come?

**Nokuthula:** You have to walk a lot. For example, to go around selling you have to walk from here to Overport and then to Berea Centre and still down to King Edward and come back to the beach.





**Nomkhosi:** You go around doing what?

**Nokuthula:** You have to go around shouting/screaming that you are selling 'sheedeep' (*shibhoshi* the isiZulu term for Jeyes Fluid disinfectant). I never wanted to do it. It's too much. You walk through the whole township, going around screaming.

**Nomkhosi:** But you can do the same thing with beadwork as well.

**Nokuthula:** No, you can't. With beads you have to have a base where people know that they can find you.

**Nomkhosi:** But people are able to buy sheedeep whenever and wherever.

**Nokuthula:** Sheedeep is not like beadwork. You can't just go around and sell beads. But when you buy sheedeep today, you use it and next week, you will need it and buy it again. With beads, if you bought them today, you won't buy them again soon.

**Nomkhosi:** But here in Thokoza there are so many people who do beadwork. We all know that if you need beads, you need to go to the beach.

**Nokuthula:** Yes, but those people get it from us.

**Nomkhosi:** But in the townships there are no people doing or selling beads. Don't you think you can use that opportunity? You have to see how many people do what you do. Now you know that people have traditional ceremonies all the time. Even when people are dressed in modern clothes they accessorise traditionally. So we all know that there is a great demand for beadwork but it's not easily accessible. So why do you people want to remain in one place?

**Nokuthula:** The problem is that if you sell this September, there is a lot of demand in September, but next September they will not need to buy it again. Even the following September it will be there. It does not get old or tear. It remains the same. So who would you be selling to?

**Nomkhosi:** But people are so stylish. They want things in variety now.

**Nokuthula:** You can go to KwaMashu and walk through the whole township and only two items will be bought. Many people have this item already because in September they like to wear it. It's better to have a space where we could be stationed, a place where white people from abroad can buy loads of beadwork and go. They would know where to go if they want beadwork. They know that here they will find everything that they need. Remember these are not *vetkoeks* (Afrikaans word for fried donuts).

**Nomkhosi:** Do you just have one person that you always sell to?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, there is a foreigner who comes and orders for her shop.

**Nomkhosi:** So you are serious that they buy for R10?

**Nokuthula:** No, they just buy for R10. If you sell to them for R10, you know for sure that they will be selling to South Africans or tourists for R50.

**Nomkhosi:** Why don't you go straight to the people from here and tourists and sell for R50?

**Nokuthula:** Where will I get them because she has a space, a shop where she sells it?

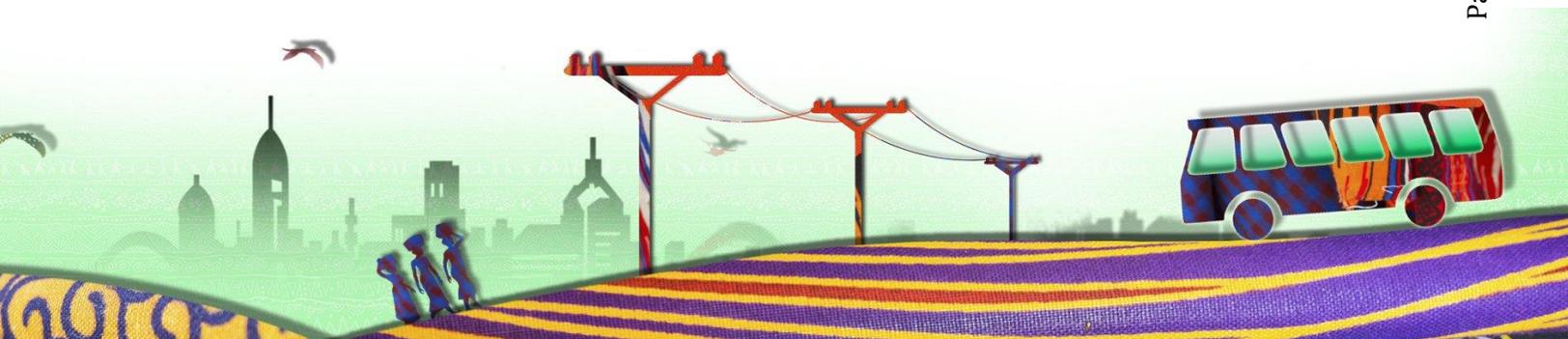
**Nomkhosi:** Why don't you have a shop?

**Nokuthula:** I don't have money to start a shop.

**Nomkhosi:** How does one get a shop?

**Nokuthula:** You have to have a space where you will have the shop. You need money to stock up on the things you will sell in your shop. Personally, I am only able to make one design. In a shop I cannot sell just one kind of thing. The shop must have items for the head and the neck and the hand. So what I would need to do is to buy from other people. So you can't start a business when you will not be able to feed into it.

**Nomkhosi:** Okay, let's go back to when you arrived here, how did you find life in the city?





(Answers the phone. She was speaking to her daughter, the one who lives with her. Her daughter was admitted to hospital because of an emergency with ongoing menstruation. They rushed her to the doctor and he recommended some tablets. These tablets just produced water. At the hospital they said that the tablets were wrong. She lost her strength through taking these tablets. They had not been back to the doctor to report this. When she came back from the hospital she would have to take the tablets back to the doctor. They said this was not the first time. People say that one day there was a girl who was not well—she was vomiting (*wayethatha isisu* – to take out her stomach). She went to that doctor and he gave her some tablets. When she took those tablets, everything came out. She got help by going to the hospital and they said the tablets were affecting her unborn baby. I don't understand how this doctor recommends wrong tablets.)

**Nokuthula:** (Looking out the window) Eh, people are buying TVs and fridges. I have been observing this trend. People have money. They have been playing (*Stokfel* – informal rotating credit schemes) for the whole year and now they have divided their investments. You see all kinds of flat-screens.

**Nomkhosi:** So do people take this place as a home? How do you see this place?

**Nokuthula:** I do not take this place as a home. Maybe it is because I am not working that I am not enjoying this place. If I were working, I would enjoy this place. All I want is an RDP house so that I can go to my house.

**Nomkhosi:** Is life not easier here than in a RDP house?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, it's easier when you are here.

**Nomkhosi:** So you say that life is easier here?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, it is easier when you are working. When you are not working, in the city everything is money. The hand must first go to the pocket [before you eat]. It's not like that in the rural areas. In the rural areas you can even go outside and pick up something from the garden [*imifino* – leafy green vegetables] and throw it in the pot. Over there as long as you have mealie meal and oil, you never go hungry. Life is difficult here.

**Nomkhosi:** For how many years have you been unemployed?

**Nokuthula:** From 2005.

**Nomkhosi:** More than ten years? You don't think that living here as families in one room is better than living alone in an RDP? I am sure you collect money here.

**Nokuthula:** Everybody must be independent. Perhaps you are working and you must buy groceries. When collecting money one would say she only as R200; another would put in more; another would say there needs to be a difference because one has a kid here whereas the one with a kid may have a better job with you ... It's better when you get hungry on your own than when you are full with others.

**Nomkhosi:** So this means that it does not benefit you too much to have a family?

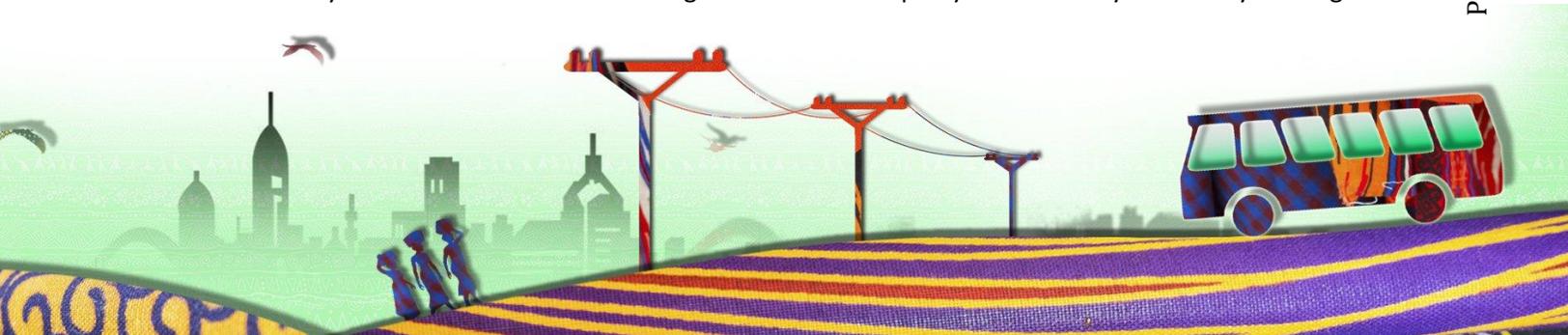
**Nokuthula:** It's good that everybody is able to stand on his or her own.

**Nomkhosi:** So if you were also working, would you also be buying all the stuff that other people are buying, and bring it here to Thokoza?

**Nokuthula:** Yes, I would. Anyway all our life is here. Even if you go home, you go on Friday and you come back on Sunday. Maybe you also go just once a month. So you basically spend a lot of time here rather than at home.

**Nomkhosi:** But this is not your home?

**Nokuthula:** It's the same because you spend most of your time here. If there's electricity, it's impossible that you won't buy TV and DSTV. So what will you do? Will you not buy those for yourself as well, whereas you are the one who is working? You must also spoil yourself with your money. A fridge is





important. If there is a special on meat at USave, you have to go around asking for people to allow you space in their fridges.

**Nomkhosi:** Okay, I hear you. Is there anything that you would like to share with me? Thank you very much, Nokuthula.

