

Forum: The Citizen forum on inequalities

Theme: How to reduce inequalities at different scales?

Name of citizen: Pumza Emmanuel Gumede

Marital status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input checked="" type="radio"/> Married/in a relationship<input type="radio"/> Single<input checked="" type="radio"/> With children, if so, how many: 4	Level of education <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input checked="" type="radio"/> Primary<input type="radio"/> Secondary<input type="radio"/> University
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1. How does the theme of inequalities concern you?

My name is Pumza Emmanuel Gumede, I am a 34-year-old man, I have a wife and 4 kids, and we live in Soweto, South Africa. I maintain our household by working in the informal sector as a street vendor selling food and other goods. My days are long and fatiguing, often starting early in the mornings trying to locate the best spots in the streets. I usually come home late, exhausted after trying to get those last few sales. Despite my efforts, I and my family live hand to mouth with little to no security for the next days, as one serious medical issue could ruin my and my family's livelihood.

The informal sector is one of my only options, but we street vendors face a severe lack of labor rights. I get no access to minimum wage guarantees, and I can't ensure that I will have something to eat the next day, always living on the edge of uncertainty. I am also excluded from most, if not all, formal financial services, like owning a credit card or getting formal pay slips, which I could use to get access to loans as collateral. I get no pension and no insurance, and public health insurance makes one accident or any significant health issue an existential issue for me, as hospitals are overcrowded, under-resourced, and understaffed, with long waiting times (in months) for diagnostics and mostly limited precarious health care.

Adding to all these issues, we street vendors are often harassed by law enforcement, who confiscate our goods, making us lose profits for the day, which is something I can't afford living hand to mouth. Soweto doesn't have any safe designated trading or commerce spaces that are free, making my daily sales fluctuate and giving me and my family another layer of instability.

One of the most noticeable injustices, in my point of view, is the lack of education for future generations. As a father I want better opportunities for my children, but education is marked by high fees that heavily weigh on my already low income, in addition to the lower teaching standards compared to wealthier urban areas. The modern world is moving online, and my children are at a digital divide, as they lack reliable internet access and devices to be able to learn and be active in today's modern virtual world. I feel this is an issue that needs desperate action.

2. What do you suggest at your level?

One of the ways to address economic barriers is to extend unemployment insurance, pensions, and better healthcare access through simple registration systems, which would allow citizens that have microenterprises to become official and contributing parts of our society and economic system, eliminating the need to use untaxed income, as their economic stress would be reduced by introducing a micro pension scheme or certain already existing state-supported saving plans and making them accessible to vendors and other informal workers. Once again, giving us workers a path to a more stable and stress-free future. Included in these initiatives, we should facilitate microcredits and ease financial inclusion, allowing informal workers to be able to take out loans and allowing them to invest in their business and future.

A very important solution with great impact would be to introduce designated trading areas in several to be determined areas like Soweto for the informal sector, specifically for street vendors, providing legal recognition and protection from harassment. This would also help stabilize daily income and vending locations, giving an extra layer of stability to our already unstable way of life.

We should encourage the ILO (International Labour Organization), in cooperation with funding from the World Bank and IMF, to help us strengthen these previously mentioned frameworks and allowing us to implement them nationally creating aid programs for these micro-scale businesses which will be functioning as “social safety nets” to again further support a more stable way of life.