**Tiyiselani Interview notes**

**INTERVIEW INFORMATION**

Date: 23 January – present

Location: Orlando Soweto

Place of operation: Makabeni Street, Orlando, Soweto

Interviewer: Makhanana Malungane

1. **PERSONAL INFORMATIONS**

Name/pseudonym: Tiyiselani

Age: 50

Sex: Female

Highest Level of Education: Grade 10

Role in agro-food system: Trader

Do you have other occupations? Shebeen owner

How long have you been involved in the business? Since 2008

**TRADER**

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| What do you sell? | | Cabbage, potatoes, onions, butternut, spinach, tomatoes, carrots, Hubbard squash, pumpkin (ginger and garlic earlier on but it got very expensive) | |
| Is this the only thing you sell? If not where else? | | No. I also sell alcohol at Shebeen down the road | |
| Have long had you sold here? | | 12 to 13 years | |
| Have did you get to use this place? | | Yes | |
| Have you sold elsewhere before? If so where | | No | |
| How did you start? How did you hear and learn about this business? | | My grandmother, mom and her sisters are entrepreneurs. I learnt how to run a business from them. | |
| Where do you source the produce? | | Joburg Market | |
| How often do you source the different produce (make a trip, or receive a delivery) | | Every Monday or Tuesday | |
| Why source in these places? How did you start sourcing there or hear about this supplier? | | I become familiar with the market when I use to come to buy fruit and vegetables for the local stokvel and family events. | |
| Do you employ any people and if so, how many? And are they temporary, casual full-time and permanent? | | No. It is just me. My family helps out when I need to run errands. Otherwise, I will open the store when I come back | |
| Who do you sell to (probe wholesale/retail ratios)? What kinds of arrangements do you have with them? | | To the households of Sky City | |
| Are you part of any association or organisations? | | No | |
| Do you have any other collaborations with others | | No | |
| Since this time last year, has there been any changes, and if so what changes and when and if there was a change what caused the changes, in | |  | |
| 1. *What do you sell?*   Yes. I have stopped selling luxury fresh produce like lettuce, cauliflower, celery, broccoli and robot peppers. I only sell the basics   1. The prices you sell for.   No. But I reduced the size of my pre-pack. I also started selling single tomatoes and onions   1. In your cost of doing business.   Yes. It has become more expensive to stock especially fruit and vegetables. The prices change too often   1. Frequency of purchasing inputs.   No. My customers buy from me because of quality and freshness. I cannot compromise on that. Yes, I buy less stock, but I still go to the market every week   1. People you collaborate with   No   1. The number of people you work with.   No   1. The organisation of the market   Yes. I used to buy from a black female market agent at eGoli, but the company went through some problems and she stopped working. So, I had to find a new market agent. The market has also changed quite things aren’t like it us to be   1. The government regulations or taxes or other government interventions?   I have to follow Covid regulations, especially in the beginning when the army did random checks all over Soweto. I have a sanitiser at the entrance of the shop and by the counter   1. Space where you sell?   No   1. How you travel to get your inputs and the transport used?   No. I still use a taxi to collect buy stock   1. What has been the biggest impact of Covid-19 on your business? Do you think this is a short-term impact or long-term?   My customers are the community where the shop is located. Most of the people here lost their jobs even those with really good jobs in Sandton. Every other day there is some furniture store coming to collect furniture, beds, computers and so on because of non-payment. It is tough. I think this will impact my business for a while.  Currently, the biggest problem is figuring out how to get rid of the stock I know cannot afford   1. What were the impacts of the lockdown on your business? Have you recovered from this?   My business suffered a lot. The first three weeks of the lockdown were tough. I could not operate because of lockdown regulation. I lost a lot of money during that time. My business was showing signs of recovery at the end of last year but the second stopped any progress made   1. Have there been any other impacts in your life from Covid-19 and lockdown?   No, not really. I know a couple of people who had Covid but recovered | |
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**H. COVID-19 and COVID measures**

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| 103) | What do you know about government responses to Covid? | The government wants to help big business and forgot about us the little guys on the street. They are trying to stop the virus, but they don’t consider how the people they are trying to help live.  Like social distancing and wearing a mask. Those things aren’t possible here in the Kasi. Some people cannot afford to even consider doing those things. |
| 104) | How did you hear about Covid and the government responses to it? | On the radio. I always have it on in the shop. It keeps me company |
| 105) | How have these responses affected you? | I tried to follow the regulations in the beginning, but it made me lose a lot of customers. People didn’t want to wear masks and were not interested in sanitizing either. Even my loyal customer stopped coming to buy from because people thought I was looking down on them, thinking their dirty and the likes. They even started shopping at the Pakistani shop. Now I let them do as they please and protect myself instead I always sanitise and wear a mask when I serve my customers. |
| 106) | How have Covid and Covid measures affected your household and reproductive work? Any effects on economic activities | No. My children are teenagers they can take of themselves and my partner died last year so there are no real chores I need to do at home. My sister sorts the other people I am responsible for |
| 107) | How have you responded to the changes brought by Covid? | I always wear a mask when I am in a taxi. When I go to the mall and when I serve my customers and I visit my children’s grandmother who I also take care of |
| 108) | Have you benefitted from any Covid related government or non-government support? If so, what support was received? | No |
| 109) | How have you responded to the changes imposed by the government? | 1. What did they do in response (probe any innovations, changes in equipment or technology)?   No   1. Participation in any associations? Has the role of that association changed?   No   1. Have you been part of or had any discussion with any government officials or leaders? If so with who/which level of government? Did you get any benefit or see any change from that discussion?   No |
| 110) | Has there been any change since Covid in what you and your family eat? | Yes. We steam every day. |

**23 January 2021**

Orlando Soweto | 12 – 4 pm

Tiyiselani owners a spaza shop in Orlando, not far from the famous Vilakazi Street in Soweto. She runs her spaza shop from the building with two stores hers and the Pakistan shop next door. The front of Tiyiselani’s shop is beautifully painted in bright blue with “eThekwini General Dealer” neatly painted at the top of the entrance.

The shop is clean, everything is meticulously packed and has its place; from the drinks on the left to stacked up empty 1.25L coke bottle crates to the side, name brand soups and spices at the back and fresh orange Arum lilies on the counter where she trades with her customer through burglar bars. In front, she has her packaged carrots, beetroot, potatoes, onions and tomatoes neatly layout on a black iron shelve so her customers can pick which products they want. Next to the shelf, there is a plastic display with pre-cut cabbage and pumpkin and lose butternut.

When I arrive, she was busy packaging produce for the shop. She stops immediately to greet me and then attends to a customer then offers me a camping chair to sit on near the entrance of her shop. Dressed in a pair of short and a t-shirt, Tiyiselani does not look 50 at all. She sits in a camping chair right across.

Tiyiselani started selling tea, coffee, powder milk and sugar in 2008. Over time the business grew into “eThekwini General Dealer” and started to stock more household items and fresh produce. Tiyiselani brought fresh produce from the Joburg market once a week either on a Monday or Tuesday. Although she owns a car, Tiyiselani takes a taxi to the market at 4 am and hire a bakkie to transport her stock. She comes back home around 13h00 and opens the shop at 13h30. Tiyiselani works alone but sometimes a family member helps when she has run an errand. “But not always” she insists as she hits her chest “This is my baby. I am responsible for my two children and close relatives so I cannot mess this up”.

The business was booming before Covid, Tiyiselani had many customers and even offered credit to her regulars. But when COVID started Tiyiselani had to suspend some of the operations of the store and sold essential items such as bread, milk and cool drink which are delivered by truck, from the spaza shop. She operated for a limited time and opened every second day.

Tiyiselani needed a permit from her local municipality to open fully. She went to the local municipality every day for three weeks but was unable to get a permit because there was no clear understanding of how or who should get the permit. Tiyiselani says she just moved in circles. One day she was told to get the permit from her ward counsellor, then no go to the main municipal office, when she gets there, she would be told to go back to the ward councillor. This continued for weeks on end until the market agent she regularly stocked from called to tell her that she could be issued a permit from Joburg Market. Tiyiselani used this permit to fully open eThekwini General Dealers.

In the beginning, people were happy to have the shop open because of the long queues at the Shoprite up the road from eThekwini General Dealers. Sales increased for a while but stabilized after the normal grant pay-outs outs for May 2020. Then business picked up when the Covid-19 grant came out and people’s retrenchment pay-out cleared, sales increased a lot I even had people coming to buy from me from neighbouring blocks and started to offer credit to people that I knew could pay me back. The business tanked in December 2020 because of the second wave. The impact on the business was worse than the first wave. A lot of people died in the area, especially the elderly. But business seems to have improved since mid-January 2021.

I bumped into Tiyiselani 3 months later at the market on 30 April 2021. She was standing in front of a market agent stand looking to strike a deal. She did not look as well as she did when I last saw her at her “general dealer”. The first thing she says to me is “business is tough, it has just been going downhill, I just cannot afford to buy stock anymore. I have even stopped buying luxury items like lettuce and cauliflower. People just cannot afford”. Tiyiselani goes on to explain how she cannot sell pre-packaged items any longer because people cannot afford the prices she charges. After all, most of her buyer's grants had expired and needed to be renewed and others grant re-application were not approved.