

The Clothing Bank marks a decade of empowering the unemployed

Founded in 2010 by Tracey Gilmore and Tracey Chambers, The Clothing Bank (TCB) has for the past decade provided more than 3,000 women in South Africa with the opportunity to achieve financial independence through reselling clothes.



The Clothing Bank 10-year celebration

What started as a small project in Pickwick Street in Salt River, Cape Town, has grown into an internationally recognised organisation offering income-generating opportunities that build the bridge to financial inclusion for unemployed South Africans.

To date, R600,000,000 worth of product has been donated to TCB by SA retailers to support female entrepreneurs.

Turning waste into opportunity

Using retail 'waste' in a positive and empowering way, the TCB programme equips women to run their own retail trading micro-enterprises with clothes donated to the organisation by various national retailers. The programme currently supports more than 800 mothers across its five branches in Cape Town, Paarl, East London, Durban and Johannesburg.

Last year alone, retailers donated more than 1.8 million units, worth an estimated R131 million at cost.

"We are extremely proud of how far we have come over the past 10 years and grateful to all our power partners for their invaluable support from day one. They have allowed us to continuously develop our ecosystem and build on our various

projects in order to provide poverty eradication and economic opportunities for every member of the family,” says Tracey Gilmore, chief executive officer at TCB.

Over the past decade, the organisation has experienced many hardships, one as recent as last year when a devastating fire broke out at its Cape Town branch resulting in a R10 million loss in stock. However, with the generous support of retailers, the programme was able to achieve record sales in 2019, reaching its target of supporting over 900 women to run sustainable small businesses, which collectively earned in excess of R38 million in profits.

Skills development

TCB recruits five intakes annually in each of their five branches having the capacity to support 1,000 women a year nationally. These women are enrolled in a two-year business, finance, computer and life-skills programme, which equips them with the skills they need to establish, manage and sustain their micro-enterprises.

In 2019, a record number of TCB graduates successfully completed the programme’s Informal Small Business Practice Learnership, achieving a 91% success rate. A key indicator of the success of TCB enterprise development programme is that women continue to trade sustainably after they graduate

According to recent data released by Stats SA, black African women are the most vulnerable with an unemployment rate of over 30% in South Africa.

“We believe that self-employment is a solution to our current unemployment crisis and that the informal sector is the perfect platform from which to tackle the rising tide of inequality. Focusing our efforts on building sustainable micro-enterprises encourages individual agency and creates financial security,” says Gilmore.

“As a social enterprise, we believe in restoring dignity by teaching women and men to create wealth for themselves. Any programme that aims to move the poor from dependence to entrepreneurship must have a deep understanding of its complexity, especially that of the poverty mindset. It is deeply entrenched in the psyche and if you don’t acknowledge or understand that, your attempt to make a difference will fail.”



How The Appliance Bank is helping support the unemployed through entrepreneurship

15 Aug 2019



Celebrating successful women

As part of its 10-year anniversary celebrations, TCB hosted an event on 20 February 2020 with partners and beneficiaries, and acknowledged some of the women who have been part of the programme over the years.

Awards were issued in the following categories:

- Most successful business women - Justine Francis and Thabisa Mathandabuzo
- Business that has the most community impact - Lorraine Zantsi and Besly Malumane
- Most inspiring story - Valerie Grootboom, Lerato Noluli and Zama Khwela

“In order to achieve systemic change, collaboration is key, and we are deeply thankful to all our partners, donors and supporters for their contribution, as well as to all our hard-working and determined beneficiaries who have and continue to graduate from our programme. The power to make a real and sustainable impact lies in collective action and we are excited to see what opportunities the next decade will bring,” concludes Gilmore.

Other projects that form part of TCB include [The Appliance Bank](#) (TAB) which skills and supports unemployed fathers to repair and sell donated appliances. Using a social-franchise-scaling model, the GROW Educare Centres project empowers women in disadvantaged communities to run high-quality early learning centres that are financially sustainable. As the organisation's latest project launched in 2019, Trade Up Youth recruits young people between the ages of 19 and 25 to become self-employed traders, using the backbone of TCB and TAB models.

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