

“Living” – every second month

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Black pensioners are fighting a losing battle. Their average pension of R5 a month hardly covers the rent. In fact many can't even pay that for rentals vary from R3,40 to R6,75. And even those who can pay the rent have a maximum of R1,60 over for food for the month, and clothing.

The conditions under which the pensioners live are appalling. Obviously pensioners dependent on R5 or less, as is the case in most instances, can only exist under conditions of extreme poverty.

Mr. Dodi Buneyi of Mdantsane summed up the plight of pensioners when he said: “I have a family to look after, but I cannot do so. I am now like a tsotsi. I cannot help borrowing food and money from people on the pretext that I will repay. I realise I should be responsible at my age, but I can't be.”

He receives R10 every two months and by the end of the month in which he gets his pension he is without food and money. “We do not have to curse God for our plight, but there are times when one has to curse the day on which one was born. Life to me is one long story of suffering,” Mr. Buneyi said.

Some of the pensioners are able to survive and meet their rent and food accounts through the generosity of relatives or grandchildren who work.

Mr. K. Sigonyela is not old at 54. He is an epileptic and cannot be employed. He has a sickly wife and with their seven children they stay at his brother's house in Mdantsane. “I depend on what my brother buys. The R10 I get every two months does not carry us through. I cannot afford to clothe my family. Now and again I have to visit a rubbish dump in search of old clothes and shoes,” Mr. Sigonyela said.

Mrs. R. Temele is a widow and stays in a rent-free house with seven children. First she was supplied with a two-roomed house and has since been changed to a single-roomed house at Mdantsane. “I cannot make ends meet. My food supplies run short within one month. By the time I get my R10 every two months I

have to pay back money I borrow from sympathetic neighbours,” Mrs. Temele said.

Mr. W. Sileku pays R5,97 for rent each month. The R9 he gets every 2 months is not sufficient to cover rent for two months. He has to depend on his daughter and grandson.

In the Assembly last month the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr. M. C. Botha, disclosed that the exact average amounts paid out to black pensioners for the financial year were:

Old-age pensions — R5,38 a month;

Blind persons pension / R5,21 a month;

Grants to ex-members of military forces — R5,20 a month.

Disability grants — R5,35 a month;

In interviews with pensioners in Duncan Village and Mdantsane I discovered that their pensions vary between R8,50 and R11,50 every two months — or R4,25 to R5,75 a month.

In 1962 the monthly cost of food was calculated at R5,17 for an elderly man and R4,81 for a woman. Since 1963 the cost of living has risen and, according to economists, the rand is now worth about 45 cents.

Take the case of Mrs. Lydia Masiza, 76, of Duncan Village. She receives R11,50 every two months and she stays with four grandchildren whose ages range from three to twelve years. Her monthly shopping list is: Potatoes R1, samp R2,00, beans 60 cents, meat R1,10, coffee 60 cents, sugar 99 cents, candles 18 cents, matches 10 cents, soap 30 cents, and paraffin 25 cents. No provision is made for medical expenses or clothing. She also has to pay a monthly rental of R3,40 for her single-roomed house. She is only able to see her way through because of the assistance she gets from a married son who has his own family to support. “My daughter is unable to assist me. She

does not stay with me and the father of the four children does not support them," Mrs. Masiza said.

Mrs. Lillian Jule, 70, also rents a single-roomed municipal house in Duncan Village for R3,40 a month and stays with her 18-year-old grandson who is at school in the township. For the bare essentials to be able to live her monthly shopping list is: Samp 50 cents, beans 50 cents, coffee 20 cents, tea 20 cents, sugar 44 cents, mealie meal 20 cents, soap 40 cents, meat 50 cents, paraffin 25 cents, meal 50 cents, and tinned milk 20 cents. "How I manage to live I do not know. I depend on the generosity of my neighbours and friends," Mrs. Jule said. Her pension is R9.50 every second month.

Mrs. Esther Matiyane, 74, gets R8,50 every two months. She has to pay a monthly rental of R3,40 for her single-roomed house in Duncan Village. Her monthly shopping list is: Samp 50 cents, sugar 25 cents, tea 10 cents, paraffin 25 cents, meat 50 cents, mealie meal 25 cents, meal 50 cents, matches 10 cents, candles 18 cents, beans 15 cents, coffee 10 cents, soap 25 cents, tinned milk 13 cents. "It is difficult to survive. These food parcels do not last a month and I have to borrow from neighbours," Mrs. Matiyane said.

These are not isolated cases. Many pensioners suffer the same fate, Mrs. N. Qupe of Mdantsane said the position would improve if pensions were paid out monthly.



"Look, Makhula, no April – do we only eat again in May . . . ?"