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Rosalia Kamati

Sewing Machine Operator

Making Clothes is her Passion

Meet Rosalia Kamati. It wasn't so long ago that Rosalia could barely sew a button, let alone operate a sewing machine. However, a childhood fascination with making clothes has now developed into a bright career path for this 25-year old lady. She is a Sewing Machine Operator. This is her story.

Early Struggles

Rosalia Kamati hails from the Onelewa village outside Ongwediva in Oshana. The youngest of seven children, Rosalia attended primary and secondary school at Ongwediva. Growing up, Rosalia, like many girls of her age, enjoyed playing with her dolls. But, it was no ordinary playing. Rosalia's dolls had to look good and had to wear the latest fashions. So,

she started dressing them up with clothes she made herself from old clothes and fabric. "I got a lot of hidings from my mother and sisters, because I would always be on the lookout for old clothes that I could sew into dolls clothes", she recalls.

However, since her Grade 12 results were not good enough to apply for either university, or technikon, Rosalia found herself sitting idle at home. "After completing Grade 12, I spent one year at home, not knowing what to do with my life. I wasn't in a good space, at all. You see others furthering their studies and landing jobs, whereas I was just sitting at home, idle and unoccupied", she shares.

Changing Fortunes

Luckily, Rosalia learned about a new



intake at the Valombola Vocational Training Centre at Ongwediva and applied. “I was very fortunate. Valombola VTC accepted me as a graduate of the Namibia Training Authority’s Bridging Programme, which was aimed at preparing school leavers for absorption into the technical and vocational stream”, she explains. “This was the best news ever, because it put me in a position to enroll for training in a field I’ve always been passionate about, which is Clothing Production”, she adds.

All of a sudden, Rosalia’s fascination with fashion, which started with her childhood hobby of making clothes for her dolls out of old clothes and fabric offcuts, was taking her on a path to become a qualified Sewing Machine Operator. “I really enjoyed the practical sessions. The attendance registers will confirm that I didn’t miss a single one throughout my training at Valombola VTC. I simply couldn’t get enough. Often,

my fascination would annoy my instructors, because I would always have too many questions about why and how things are done”, she says.

Factory Work

Today, Rosalia is employed by the Dinapama Textile Manufacturing Plant in Windhoek’s Northern Industria. The company specialises in custom designing, manufacturing and branding of high quality clothing items, bags and headwear, and walked away with the Medium Manufacturer of the Year Award at the 2015 Namibia Manufacturer of the Year Awards. “I remember asking our instructor at Valombola VTC to arrange excursions to local manufacturing companies. It was during one such a visit to the Dinapama plant that we were introduced to the Managing Director, Mr. David Namalenga, who encouraged us to complete our training and to then approach him

for employment. I kept him to his promise, and shortly after graduation, I became a Dinapama employee”, Rosalia shares.

Rosalia’s work as a Sewing Machine Operator at Dinapama involves assembling garments by matching patterns and dye lots and joining sections into finished products on a production basis. The field requires physical dexterity and a close eye for detail, and patience is a virtue for any operator. “This work requires heaps of concentration. It’s not about just sewing things together. You must be able to visualise a three-dimensional garment as it takes shape from a pile of flat fabric pieces. You must also be well-organised, so pattern pieces don’t get damaged or lost”, she shares.

Value Addition

Rosalia feels very strong about local value addition and support to

local manufacturers and laments what she describes as a pre-conceived negativity towards locally-manufactured products. “As Namibians, we think quality can only come from outside our borders. You can also find good quality here at home. Look at Dinapama, manufacturing top-notch quality, but still you’ll find corporates procuring the same items from South Africa. How do we expect our economy to grow, if we don’t support our local companies? It’s simple really, if we spend our money here, we keep our money here”, she explains.

“It’s all about mindsets. The use of traditional textiles for fashion is becoming big business in Africa, and Namibia shouldn’t be the exception. We should emulate other countries

and be proud to wear our own Namibian designs. Look at my shirt. It's a Namibian product, made in Namibia, by Namibians working at a Namibian factory, Dinapama", she adds.

Passion for Fashion

Rosalia's passion for her work goes far beyond the clothes she makes. For her, it's a lifestyle, an emotional connection, and a love that goes far deeper than material, needles and thread.

"For me, fashion is what I see on the streets. I love going to the open market just observing what people are wearing, what the latest trends are and what they are buying. I also try to link up with other tailors and needleworkers. This is how I met Meme Lahya, who owns a tailoring stand at the Ongwediva Open Market. She has taught me a few things, especially about traditional needlework techniques. We remain good friends", she notes.

Circumstances are making it difficult for Rosalia to live her passion. She currently stays with her sister at the 'One Nation' settlement on the outskirts of Katutura, where there is no electricity. But, she is already applying her skills in her free time to supplement her income and

to save towards her first sewing machine. "I'm not sewing now. However, my sister introduced me to another lady who I am helping in cutting fabric, because she only has one machine. She calls me whenever she needs assistance", she explains.

Future Entrepreneur

As one of Dinapama's star employees, Rosalia continues to make the best of opportunities that come her way. But, she remains resolute in making her dream to one day managing her own outlet a reality. "I am saving up for the machinery like the straight and overlock machines just to get me off the ground. I will need to reinvest the profits into more advanced machinery and build the business gradually until I can acquire my own premises from which to operate. It's not going to be easy, I know. But watch this space!", she shares.

Rosalia's dream to one day employ herself encapsulates a key objective of technical and vocational training – To empower graduates with skills

they in turn can apply to create employment for themselves and others. "I think more technical and vocational graduates should aspire towards becoming self-employed. That is what is beautiful about technical and vocational training. You can use your skill set to become a job creator, and not a job seeker", she emphasises.

Rosalia Kamati. Young, gritty, driven, creative, humble. Her unwavering spirit encourages us to work hard, and never give up on our dreams, even when nobody else believes they can come true. Her story gives us hope that the future of Namibia can be secured with skilled young people able to build the economy and create a sustainable future for the generations to come. She is living her passion!

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