

Gogo Siphelele



At 68 years old, Gogo Siphelele is the oldest carpentry graduate in Swaziland, overcoming initial skepticism to earn the support and trust of her family and community. These are her words, about why she decided to become a carpenter, as translated by Swaziland Positive Living Project Coordinator Cebile Dlamini: "I just want to share specifically why I chose to enroll in Carpentry.

There were three reasons why: one was because HIV was destroying our own children. We had no money to buy coffins. Every weekend we were burying our own children. So there was that great need (for carpenters and for coffins).

Secondly, is because my son was a carpenter, so I chose to become a carpenter because I did not want the skill to leave the family.

Third, because I was now the one responsible for bringing food to the table. Shortly after burying my son, the following week my daughter-in-law passed on and I was left with the twins. And my responsibility was to take care of them. Mind you, they were HIV positive and I didn't know what to do.

And I was old. I did not want to disclose what was happening in my home at the time ... I did not want to share how my son had died ... I didn't know that my neighbors were also affected.... Only when I heard about Swaziland Positive Living was I able to share. The organization was busy conducting community mobilization in my community and it was targeting young women, older women and teenagers. I approached the executive director and I told her what was happening and my desire to become a carpenter.

Together we were able to mobilize 10 women to enroll for a carpentry course. In the end, we all graduated and we provide for our grandchildren. There is nothing we can't do."