

The little shop of Makhumalo

She shares R15.5m with Zuma's other wives, but prefers making R300 a day selling groceries

BONGANI MTHETHWA

FIRST Lady Sizakele Khumalo, who gets a share of a R15.5-million president's spousal support budget from taxpayers, is happier making R300 a day from her rural spaza.

Makhumalo, 72, sells everything from loose cigarettes and paraffin to sorghum malt for making traditional beer. She became a trader after dropping out of school in Grade 6.

Her poky rustic store, which also allows pensioners to buy on credit, caters to about 8 500 villagers in KwaNkxamalala in Nkandla, northern KwaZulu-Natal.

The shop probably has the best security in the region: two security cameras and a team of security guards occupy a house at the entrance to Zuma's newly

Most people buy sorghum from Makhumalo because it's much cheaper than other shops'

renovated homestead.

This week, the guards denied the Sunday Times permission to interview Makhumalo about her spaza shop, saying arrangements had to be made with her personal assistant or her husband's office.

The soft-spoken woman, who married President Jacob Zuma in 1973 and until recently sold vegetables at pension pay points, apparently hates the fuss made by the security personnel. According to relatives and villagers, Makhumalo treasures the freedom of working in her garden and tending to her customers.

Inside the little store, customers trickled in to buy small household items to supplement their groceries bought in Esheya, less than 60km away.

Sheives in the spaza shop contained 6kg packets of sorghum malt priced at R70 each, 750ml bottles of cooking oil on offer for R15 each and blocks of 250g Rama margarine for R12.

Other basic items included 200g packets of instant soup for R12 and a litre of long-life milk, also for R12.

A fridge was stocked with cans of cooldrink, which cost R7 each,



DAUGHTER OF THE SOIL: Makhumalo, above, President Zuma's homestead, below left, and the tuckshop, below right

Pictures: MHLABA MEMELA and THEMINKOSI DWAYISA



a price that compares reasonably with suburban cafes.

Shop assistant Lungile Khumalo said bread, eggs, mealie-meal and rice had run out and would be restocked soon. She

referred all other questions to Makhumalo's personal assistant

Tizeya Mbanjo, 60, a regular customer, said most locals were allowed to buy basic necessities on credit. "Most people buy

sorghum from Makhumalo because it's much cheaper than other shops," she said.

Fustwe Mkhize, 58, who regularly buys Sunlight washing powder for R10 at the store, said

the builders who renovated Zuma's homestead had bought bricks and cookstoves.

The spaza shop, as well as the guardhouse, were recently upgraded at a cost of R596 467 as

part of a R206-million security upgrade of the president's homestead, according to a November 2010 progress report by the Department of Public Works.

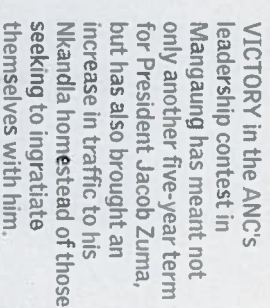
Relatives said that, on average, Makhumalo's business netted R300 a day, a pittance compared with the R15.5-million taxpayers pay annually for the Zuma's spousal support budget.

The budget covers, among other things, personal support staff — namely a secretary and researcher — for Zuma's four wives, their cellphone bills, air travel, accommodation and daily allowances for official visits approved by the president.

Relatives said Makhumalo, who accompanied Zuma on state visits to Botswana and Mozambique last year, also spent a lot of her time managing the Mashobane Foundation, an organisation aimed at community upliftment.

Road back into favour leads to Nkandla

SIBONGAKONKE SHOBA



SEEKING PARDON: But former minister Thoko Didiza denies meeting Zuma

VICTORY in the ANC's leadership contest in Mangaung has meant not only another five-year term for President Jacob Zuma, but has also brought an increase in traffic to his Nkandla homestead of those seeking to ingratiate themselves with him.

Functions in Nkandla, such as an annual Christmas party for children and the elderly, have become must-do events for politicians and those in business.

Among those who have turned up at Zuma's doorstep in Nkandla — his private residence that was controversially upgraded at an estimated cost to the taxpayer of R206-million — are loyalists of former president Thabo Mbeki.

They have joined a list of men and women who are said to have visited Zuma to apologise for not supporting him in his political battles.

Sources told the Sunday Times that the former minister of public works, Thoko Didiza, went to see Zuma to seek forgiveness for her part in his battle with Mbeki almost six years ago.

Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, a former cabinet minister, also met Zuma, although it is not clear whether this was at Nkandla.

The two were key members of Mbeki's campaign team in his failed attempt to hold on to the ANC presidency in 2007.

The SABC's controversial former acting chief operating officer, Hlaudi Motsoeneng, is known to brag about being a regular visitor to Nkandla.

Other visitors include former ANC Youth League deputy president Ronald Lamola, who drove there in December last year to apologise for his role in the unsuccessful campaign to have the party's deputy president, Kgalema Motlanthe, oust Zuma in Mangaung.

For all his efforts to return to grace, however, Lamola still faced the axe when the youth league's national executive committee was disbanded last month.

Didiza, however, made it to the 86-member national executive committee elected by the ANC in Mangaung.

It is understood that she had asked for a meeting with Zuma when she met him at the Social Cohesion

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Summit, held in Kliptown last year.

Didiza, however, denied meeting Zuma when the Sunday Times contacted her: "I don't know what are you're talking about."

Instead, she said, she had attended the summit "like any member of the public".

She later called back to inquire how this "false" information had reached the Sunday Times.

Fraser-Moleketi said she had met Zuma, but that the encounter had to do with her work at the United Nations and nothing else.