



## PWK Waste Management and Recycling

**ENTREPRENEUR:** Susan Kone

**ESTABLISHED:** 2015

**TEAM:** 6 full time

**LOCATION:** Thohoyandou, Limpopo, South Africa

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“I want to see more people getting involved in recycling and waste collection. We need to reduce the load for the government. There is a lot of money that is being wasted maintaining our landfill sites.”

PWK Waste Management is a woman-led organization that collects, prepares and resells various waste streams for recycling, repurposing and reuse. The company advocates for separation at source and responsible recycling to reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfill. They believe that ‘there is no such thing as waste’ and that community engagement is key to protecting our environment.

# ABOUT THE BUSINESS

When Susan gave up her corporate job to start a business in waste, people around her were perplexed. “Even my family didn’t understand me,” she says. “Going from this clean woman to working in the dirt, it didn’t make sense to them.” But Susan saw the need, took the plunge, despite having little knowledge of recycling and waste management, she started PWK Waste Management. Now, 7 years on, the business employs 6 full time employees and collects an average of 4,5 tons of waste per week for recycling. And through her business, Susan is spreading the message of environmental responsibility and the ideals of circular economy throughout her community.

“Wherever there is a human being, there is waste, it’s something we have to live with,” Susan says. “Our work is to make sure that we live in a clean environment,” she adds. To do this, her business takes care of clients’ various waste streams, collecting used materials like glass, cardboard and

plastic. They then identify what is recyclable and resell these materials for reuse or recycling. “We’re trying to manage as much waste as possible and divert it from landfill sites,” she reflects.

“*Let’s not wait for people to do things for us, we must be creative. The answers are all around us, we have land, we have waste. We must think outside the box.*”

But waste management is not just a line of work for Susan, it’s her mission. “Our motto is that we are protecting Gaia, our mother earth,” she says. “We need to start changing people’s behaviour, to start being accountable and responsible for all the waste we produce,” she adds. In alignment with her mission, Susan has become active in community outreach. Alongside her advocacy work with the government, which has seen her addressing schools and waste pickers about responsible and effective waste management, Susan has run campaigns like ‘Keep Thohoyandou Clean’ since its inception 3 years ago.

And Susan has noticed a difference. The number of waste pickers in her community has been steadily

increasing, people even seek her advice about waste, “now they see me as a book of knowledge,” she says. “People are learning. I get so happy when I see people waste picking. You come into town now and everyone has a trolley with boxes,” she says with a smile.

“We have to be creative and realise that there is no such thing as waste,” Susan says, adding, “but we can’t do it

alone, we need everybody on board.” Susan recognizes that her vision for a waste-free world is about more than keeping pollution out of rivers and off our streets, she sees its value for our economies. “We are creating jobs, we are stimulating the economy, we are increasing our GDP,” she says. Susan wants to show people that there is money in waste. And of course, as she says, “your trash is my treasure”.

## VISION FOR THE FUTURE

“I want to grow my brand and get more people on board. I want to achieve the goal of ‘Keep Thohoyandou Clean’, which is to clean up our town’s environment, by year 5 of the campaign. In the long term I want to produce either school desks or other products from recycled plastic because plastic pollution is a problem for the universe.”



ADVICE ON CIRCULARITY FOR ENTREPRENEURS

“There is a lot we can do in the circular economy space, there is a gap. However, you need passion.

Don’t think you’ll make money overnight, or you won’t do it right, it’s a learning process. Knowledge is power. Give yourself time. Start learning. Read. Attend seminars, get knowledge. Then you will be able to conquer.”

