



Sewing for survival

Owners of clothing micro-enterprises need training in advanced sewing and pattern design.

Dr Mariette Strydom is a lecturer in clothing production, apparel product development and sustainable apparel entrepreneurship at UNISA.

Strydom, M. and Kempen, E.L. (2019). "Fashion, frugal futures: how informal micro businesses design and develop apparel". Proceedings of the 8th International DEFSa Conference, 9-11 September 2019, Cape Town, South Africa.

<https://www.defsa.org.za/sites/default/files/downloads/DEFSa%202019%20Proceedings%20LowRes.pdf>



Informal fashion micro-enterprises can create several jobs.

According to the International Finance Corporation, small enterprises and microenterprises are the only realistic employment opportunity for millions of poor people throughout the world.

Changes in the South African clothing and textile industry have led to an increase in informal small enterprises and microenterprises. As clothing manufacturing is

labour-intensive, informal clothing manufacturing microenterprises (CMMEs) play an important role in poverty alleviation and have the potential to create several jobs.

The informal CMME's small size means that the owner is responsible for all design, product development and business management activities, hindering its effectiveness. Research at UNISA has examined operations

at thirteen CMMEs to gain a better understanding of how these clothing manufacturing businesses operate.

"The informal CMME owner has found creative ways to design and develop custom-made apparel with limited resources for the financially constrained customer," says Dr Mariette Strydom. "They are adequately skilled to produce custom-made apparel, but lack the confidence to master unusual styles and challenging fabrics."

However, a lack of knowledge and skills to manage the intricacies of running a business contributes to the high failure rate of these businesses.

"Their informal nature also limits access to the support needed to ensure business survival."

The owners need advanced sewing skills training, specifically pattern design. Confidence in their own ability may improve the sustainability of their businesses. This would increase the potential of these businesses to address poverty in South Africa.

"When addressing poverty and job creation in this country, the importance of the informal CMME cannot be overlooked."



THEART OF RESEARCH