

All women gardening club on KZN South Coast provides more than just food security

A garden club in Umgababa on KwaZulu-Natal's South Coast has become a source of friendship, fellowship and mentorship for 11 female farmers.

Each of the ladies tend to their own dedicated space on the land, which is about 2.5 hectares in total. There they grow vegetables which they use to feed their families and sell to the local community to earn a living.

As part of Shoprite's ongoing efforts to provide hunger relief to communities in need, the retailer partnered with the ladies from the *Siyaphambili Womens Club* food garden last year.

Africa's largest retailer assisted the club with gardening resources including gardening tools, seedlings, seeds and compost. As access to water in the area is a challenge, Shoprite is also putting in a water harvesting system. The retailer's support further includes 18 months of hands-on permaculture training for the members of the *Siyaphambili Womens Club*.

"Shoprite has given us hope. If an organisation as big as them show an interest in what we are doing it proves that they believe in what we are doing. We now all have this belief that if we continue working hard, we can go far," explains Nonhlanhla Mkhize, one of the garden club's founders.

"The training has helped us to understand techniques such as intercropping and raised beds. We have learnt, for example, that planting cabbage and onions alongside each other is beneficial because the onion acts as an insect repellent, keeping the bugs away from the cabbage. It has taught us to use what nature is giving us, as well as what we have at our disposal," says Mkhize.

The ladies, who range in age from 40 to over 70 years old and are all grandmothers, learn from each other. "The garden has become part of our lives. It is more than just a source of income. The gogos of the group often give us advice and teach us about things such as herbs and natural medicine. Together we also share friendship and jokes. It is beautiful," Mkhize explains.

The members of *Siyaphambili Womens Club* have all experienced the benefits of small-scale farming first-hand. "Having a food garden provides food security for us, our families and the community. I love that I can give visiting family members something I have grown for Umphakho (a departure gift) when they leave. Growing our own vegetables is really the way to go," continues Mkhize.

Shoprite also donated 'garden in a bucket' starter kits to neighbouring community members to address food insecurity at a household level. The kits contain essential garden resources – including seedlings, garden tools, organic fertiliser and a training manual to equip community members to start their own household food gardens.

Hunger relief and food security are at the core of the Shoprite Group's corporate social investment programmes and is one of the key drivers behind its support of more than 180

community food gardens and over 3 500 home gardens, which impacts almost 53 000 beneficiaries. In the past year, more than 2 700 community members were trained in sustainable food gardening, assisting them to grow nutritious and organic food. The gardens collectively produced a harvest of more than 31 500 kg, providing almost 100 000 meals.

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