

Good soil and great partnerships are the key to improving lives

With ingenuity, dedication and strong partnerships, it is possible to overcome dire circumstances and transform lives – as a group of ordinary people from Alexandra, Gauteng, have proved.

In 2011, Margaret Thaba, Miriam Malunga and Lekau Nkoko were unemployed, like many thousands of women in South Africa. Without an income, they were unable to support their families. Worse still, they were unable to participate fully in their community by contributing to celebrations or commemorations.

The three friends urgently needed to find a way to feed their families. That year, they were able to secure a one-hectare tract of municipal land in their neighbourhood and began to develop a small urban farm. In 2013, they registered themselves as a co-op and soon recruited three other community members to join them. Inspired by their faith, they called their new co-op Modimo O Teng, which means 'God is here'.

However, despite the team's focus and determination, the initiative faltered. The main problem was that the soil was not rich enough to sustain intensive cultivation. Undaunted, the co-op members applied to Shoprite for support.

As Margaret says: "It's very hard when you're unemployed, but we were so happy when we got the help we needed from Shoprite. It means so much that we will be able to grow enough food to feed our families and also sell to our communities. We've even been able to contribute towards community events."

Shoprite and its implementation partner, Food & Trees for Africa, is assisting Modimo O Teng with a series of permaculture training sessions as well as tools, plant material and shade netting.

Patrick Monyepao, another member of the co-op agrees: “We only started working with them in December 2017, but we have learned so much already. One of the most important lessons they have taught us is how to make the compost that we need to enrich the soil and make the garden sustainable. As well as growing spinach, cabbage and tomatoes, we now plan to cultivate carrots and lettuce.”

With Shoprite’s continued support, the members of the Modimo O Teng Co-op and their community will be able to secure their families’ long-term food security while earning vital revenue to uplift their lives.