

Checkers helps rural co-op close in on commercial ambitions

A decade ago Fikile Khiva and four of his peers established a trading entity with the aim of creating jobs, alleviating poverty and having the Eastern Cape village of Nkangeni Park serve as a model for a self-sustained rural community.

Today the Varhoyi and Mgodleni Co-op has grown to over 40 members and, with the support of Checkers, the co-op is running a thriving food garden. The project derives its name from two chiefs (Varhoyi and Mgodleni) who led the two separate villages that would eventually become Nkangeni Park.

“The co-op does not have its own land, so we use the land owned by the community to farm and grow produce. We then have a compensation methodology - a share scheme of the produce with the option to sell back to the project every harvesting time,” says Fikile.

“Every 10% of the yield goes to the owner of the plot or garden as “rental” and the owner can then either consume or sell the stock back to the project. In this way every stakeholder benefits. In addition, all the people working and earning stipends as a result of the project are from the community,” Fikile goes on to explain.

They started off with 1 hectare of land and have grown their garden to more than 30 hectares. Initially the land was overgrown and unfenced, so a lot of work was put into clearing and preparing it for planting.

Seeing the potential for growth, Fikile approached Checkers for assistance: “I wanted to formalise the garden.”

Food and Trees for Africa, the supermarket chain’s implementation partner, assisted by offering workshops covering gardening methods as well as modules in business administration over an 18-month period. Fikile says infrastructure developments like the pack shed, mini-truck, tractor and implements were a game-changer for the co-op, which recently participated in one of the successful Market Days hosted at selected Checkers stores nationwide.

Support from Checkers has developed hope, pride, and self-belief in the community. “It creates the impression that people can do things for themselves. It has been exemplary in inspiring many other communities in the surrounding areas,” concludes Fikile.

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