

From a rubbish dump to a thriving community garden

Due to the care and dedication of a group of local women, what was once a rubbish dump behind Sediba-Thuto Primary School in Mapetla, Soweto has been transformed into a thriving vegetable garden the size of a soccer field.

Established in 2012, Boikanyo Foundation garden has helped create a healthier community by bolstering Sediba-Thuto Primary School's feeding scheme and providing fresh, reasonably-priced vegetables to locals.

"There was no community garden here. So, we asked the principal of the primary school if we could make a garden on the property behind the school, because we love agriculture," explains Mapabala Rachane, one of the women who has been instrumental in keeping the garden going. "We also knew that by making a garden, we would get healthy food, be able to make money and help other people in our community."

Prior to this, Mapetla community members had to travel long distances and spend money on transport just to stock up on food for their homes. Thanks to the garden, many families are now able to save more than R100 a month.

"The community supports us very well and come to the garden regularly to buy fresh vegetables," says Rachane.

They currently produce a range of vegetables, including cabbage, Chinese spinach, brinjals, green peppers and chillies; and also have 18 well-maintained fruit trees in the garden.

Along with its implementation partner, Food and Trees for Africa, the Shoprite Group has provided support to Boikanyo Foundation Garden through permaculture training over a period of 18 months. The retailer also provided them with a shade tunnel, new tools, boots and planting materials, such as seedlings.

While the community certainly benefits from the garden's presence, it has also improved the wellbeing of the volunteer gardeners themselves. Since starting the project, the women who tend the vegetables and work the soil on a daily basis have reported an increase in their physical and mental health. This, in turn, has increased their passion and enthusiasm for the project.

As one of the gardens supported by Shoprite, Boikanyo participated in Market Day at Checkers Glenvista on 4 April 2019 for the first time. This gave them the opportunity to sell their vegetables to a customer base beyond its immediate community.

"It went very well – we sold a lot of vegetables and had an amazing time," says Rachane.

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CAPTIONS: Mapabala Rachane with some of the vegetables grown in the Boikanyo Foundation garden in Mapetla, Soweto.

Mapabala Rachane (left) and fellow gardener Sarina Motseoane recently sold their vegetables at Checkers Glenvista as part of the retailer's nationwide Market Day initiative.