

## **KZN garden project bears much fruit**

“We believe that by cultivating the soil we can uplift our community.”

So says Sabelo Mdlalosi, a founding member of the Iqabungelihle garden project in Kwamashu near Durban.

Iqabungelihle was started by a group of seven unemployed matriculants and registered as a cooperative in December 2017. The co-op produces and sells spinach, cabbage, beetroot and green peppers to surrounding households. “Our immediate aim was to feed our community, to create jobs and at the same time protect our environment,” says Sabelo.

The food garden was moved from a 10x20 metre plot to 2.5 hectares on the premises of the Zeph Dhlomo High School. With the move from the small to the bigger plot it took some time for the small team of relatively inexperienced gardeners to plant enough vegetables to occupy the entire 2.5 hectares. The principal saw the planting of the garden as an opportunity to introduce the subject of agriculture at the school and learners use the plot to put into practice what they have learnt in the classroom.

Through its implementation partner Fruit & Trees for Africa (FTFA), the Shoprite Group offers mentorship and training through monthly workshops so now the members of Iqabungelihle are equipped with the know-how to plant and cultivate the soil more productively. They use only organic materials, such as kraal manure, which they procure from a local farmer instead of chemicals and synthetic fertilizers.

The co-op has grown from strength to strength since the retailer became involved in 2018. “The Shoprite Group’s involvement has been most opportune. With their help we have acquired a red shed, water drums, bird netting and tools for soil preparation, amongst others. Income from the sale of our produce has increased Iqabungehlile’s bank balance and we regularly donate vegetables to households and an old age home in our community.”

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