

Entrepreneur turns her small business into a food garden

After getting married in 1996, Esther Masekoameng (60) moved from Phalaborwa to Mathibaskraal in Limpopo, but she was shocked by the level of poverty in her new hometown.

“It wasn’t like Phalaborwa. People are very poor here and the children at the school were learning under the trees,” says Esther. Most of the learners didn’t bring lunch to school and because the school is near her house, Esther began to make soup for them and she also started to sell *vetkoek* (fat cakes). “The children who could afford to buy lunch paid 10c for a *vetkoek* and the others, who were too poor got free vegetable soup.”

The unemployment and poverty in Mathibaskraal worsened over the years, and in 2006, Esther decided to approach the school principal to expand her garden to cater for more learners. “I knew that if I had a little help, I would be able to grow more vegetables and make more soup for those in need, so when the principal agreed, I asked some of the older ladies in the community to help and that’s how we started. We also give vegetables and seedlings to the crèche in our area.”

Esther used the funds from the sale of *vetkoek* to buy a variety of seedlings for the We Can Women’s Cooperative, which was formally established in 2018. She also bought chili seedlings and started to sell chilies to the grocery shop in town.

The Shoprite Group has been supporting community food gardens for a number of years. Its implementation partner, Food & Trees for Africa (FTFA), assess existing gardens to better understand their requirements and Shoprite then assists with the necessary tools, training, infrastructure and seedlings.

Shoprite is enabling the We Can Women’s Cooperative to grow its community food garden by providing proper water infrastructure. “Water is a big problem in our area, even at the school because the taps run dry there all the time and the learners come to my house for water and to use the toilet.”

Shoprite’s support also enabled Esther to erect a fence around the garden and for the team of nine women to receive extensive gardening training.

“When we don’t have access to water, our crops suffer. This year, we weren’t able to sell chilies for two months because we didn’t have water. We are looking forward to having a proper water supply and we’re also excited to learn new gardening skills like companion planting and composting to make our garden more successful.”

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CAPTION: Women from the We Can Women’s Cooperative with the produce from their food garden.