

Shoprite fosters food security through support for KZN food gardens

When Nombuso Hlophe's mother started a vegetable garden in 2010, she knew she had to help, but she wasn't sure how profitable it would be and whether they would be able to support others in their community. Now, with Shoprite on board as a partner, Nombuso is learning how to turn their food garden into a thriving business.

Nombusa (34) and her mother, Mellie Blose (57), live in rural KwaZulu-Natal near the town of Harding, and together with four women established the Nqabeni Project, which is involved in poultry, flower and vegetable farming.

"I was making enough [money from selling poultry], so when my mother needed assistance with the garden I wanted to make sure we could make some money and help our neighbours too," explains Nombuso.

They grew vegetables on a small patch of land behind their house while Nombuso used the front yard to grow flowers. Today they are farming on 2-hectares of land. "We sell curry leaves, spinach, onions, flowers and cabbage to people in our area and are also donating to the old-age home," says Nombuso.

The high unemployment in the area means many community members started their own gardens to sustain themselves and their families. Last year the Nqabeni Project together with other home gardens in the area started receiving gardening tools, educational material, seedlings and compost from Shoprite.

The retailer is on a mission to fight hunger across South Africa and has since 2015 partnered with more than 100 community gardens as well as 347 home gardens, benefitting more than 23 000 people.

Ongoing training workshops form part of this extensive support: "Every month, the trainers come to teach us how to farm. They taught us how to make beds, how to use mulch and they are also teaching us how to save water," says Nombuso.

Some twenty minutes away another community is benefitting from Shoprite's investment in food gardens. Thenjiwe Mkani (47) and four other women from her village have been sustaining their garden since 2012.

"We started with nothing and now we have a garden that we all benefit from. We also give vegetables to those who can't afford to buy from us or from the shops," says Thenjiwe, who started the Mkani food garden.

She and her small team have done a good job over the years, but with assistance from Shoprite they were able to expand their food garden as the retailer provided them with proper water infrastructure, fencing, gardening equipment, seedlings, compost and mulch.

Through ongoing training over a period of 18 months, they were also introduced to gardening techniques that include mulching, companion planting and how to use vegetable waste as compost.

“We are very happy to learn new things and increase our farming knowledge. We are teaching these new methods to other people in the community as there are a few who want to start their own gardens,” says Thenjiwe.

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CAPTION: The Nqabeni Project farms on two hectares of land near Harding in KwaZulu-Natal, and produces vegetables, flowers and poultry, which they sell.

CAPTION: Volunteers from the Mkani Project have been harvesting fresh produce from their garden since 2012.