

## **KwaZulu-Natal youth fight unemployment through sustainable gardening**

In the face of South Africa's youth unemployment rate of 46.3%, youth in KwaZulu-Natal have risen to the challenge of creating jobs for themselves, and subsequently partnered with Shoprite's sustainable community food garden programme.

The Hlabana Magalela Supplies food garden in Newcastle was established by a group of unemployed youth in 2012. Co-founders Mzamo Mhlongo and Bongani Mtshali continue to teach young people about farming and sustainability.

"I joined the garden in 2020 while I was still in high school to learn more about farming and now I work there fulltime, which helps me to earn an income," says Bhukumuzi Khumalo (21).

His mentors, Mhlongo and Mtshali, inspired him to start his own home garden and register his own farming business. Khumalo is now using the training offered by Shoprite to prepare himself to run a successful business that will create jobs for some of his peers in Newcastle.

"When we started the food garden in 2012 our aim was to combat youth unemployment as we were among the many young people without jobs in our community. Now we are using our experiences to transfer skills to young people like Bhukumuzi, adding to the workshops offered by Shoprite," explains Mhlongo.

Shoprite has been supporting Hlabana Magalela Supplies since late last year, providing permaculture training over a period of 18 months to ensure the long-term sustainability of the garden. "The training sessions have taught us a lot about organic gardening. It's been very helpful, and we are so appreciative of Shoprite," says Mhlongo.

They have also received gardening tools and the initial components of an irrigation system from Shoprite. "We're looking forward to receiving a water tank, because the lack of water in our area is a real challenge to our expansion," comments Mhlongo.

Another project supported by Shoprite, the Iqabunglihle Garden Project in KwaMashu near Durban, produces and sells spinach, cabbage, beetroot and green peppers to surrounding households.

Started by a group of seven unemployed matriculants, the garden registered as a co-operative in December 2017. "Our immediate aim was to feed our community, to create jobs and at the same time protect our environment," says Sabelo Mdlalose (27), a founding member of the Iqabungelihle Garden Project. "We believe that by cultivating the soil we can uplift our community."

Iqabungelihle started on a 10x20 metre plot and has since expanded to a 2.5 hectare plot located at a nearby school.

Shoprite has been supporting it through a series of monthly training workshops, equipping them with the necessary skills to plant and cultivate the soil more productively. Organic material such as kraal manure is used in the garden, instead of chemicals and synthetic fertilizers.

"With the help of Shoprite, we have acquired a red shed, water drums, bird netting and tools for soil preparation. Income from the sale of our produce has increased Iqabungelihle's bank balance and we regularly donate vegetables to households and an old age home in our community," comments Mdlalose.

The Shoprite Group has a robust programme in place to address the food security challenges faced by so many people across the continent on a daily basis. Through its support of 145 community food gardens, and 1 429 home-based gardens, the Group fosters long-term food security and generates livelihood opportunities.

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