

Community gardens breathe life into townships

The Farm and Garden National Trust is helping South Africa's poor communities blossom with self-sustaining micro farms

The road to Gugulethu, one of South Africa's largest townships and situated just outside Cape Town, is for the most part windswept fields, abandoned cars marked 'for sale' and interminable traffic circles. The Masicendane Community Allotment Garden is a veritable oasis amid the corrugated iron shacks and power lines.

One of hundreds of such projects supported by NGO Abalimi Bezekhaya and adopted by the Farm and Garden National Trust, the community garden literally radiates a healthy breath of life and sustenance into the surrounding community through the fresh produce given away by the grandmother-farmers to the sick and poor in their area and sold to neighbours. Trust founder Rob Small recalls: "Before the gardens existed, there was only an overgrown bare patch of land surrounded by shacks. Now there is an abundant pantry of healthy fresh food available to all."



Farmer Shaba Esithang, 79, explains that she gives spinach and cabbage to sickly neighbours, while others ask her "What are you bringing today?" And there is plenty to harvest, as sleek rows from pumpkin to green beans to the more income-generating salad and herb materials - all neatly labelled - attest.

Local non-profit distributor Harvest for Hope (a project of Abalimi Bezekhaya) places orders with the farmers to fill baskets that are sold through schools and universities, and, soon, a major organic produce supplier.

Through the Farm and Garden National Trust, organic micro-farmers (anyone running a home garden, community garden or a small farm) in poor communities can get ongoing help, including training, start-up kits, on-going assessment and networking assistance. Established in 2007, the Trust is supporting Abalimi Bezekhaya as a leading food security



model, with the intention to replicate this type of activity country-wide in order to fight poverty and to develop a national micro-farming movement.

The benefits to those involved are clear to see: the gardeners are sprightly, happy and engaged making business decisions such as what to plant and negotiating prices and delivery of organic fertiliser. Philipina Ndamane, 74, jokes, "We don't need a walking stick like the other [non-gardening] people. This is our form of gym!"

And the garden reminds her of home: "In the Transkei we plant to have food. We don't have to buy vegetables any more. Even my former husband was happy for me to work here. And I enjoy the companionship very much."

Small sums it up: "Ever since I could think, I have objected to the notion that there will always be those who must live in utter poverty or who must go hungry on a daily basis where there are easily-established and sustainable solutions through micro-farming." And, if Masicendane is anything to go by, communities can look forward to many more oases of abundance spreading wealth into their respective communities.

GET INVOLVED

You can support the Trust through one of two ways:

- Making a donation
- Making a bequest

Donations and bequests are fully tax deductible.

People are welcome to visit one of the Trust's working gardens and operation centres.

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