



public works

Department:
Public Works
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

Expanded Public Works Programme contribute to food security and employment creation in North West

The North West Food Security and Empowerment Cooperation is one of the many successful Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) Social Sector projects implemented nationwide. Its main aim is to address the issue of food security and create work opportunities for the people of North West in Ramatlabama village (Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality).

The project started in 2013 when a group of young men and women were given agricultural land by the Province's Department of Agriculture.

It is now a mass vegetable production project which is receiving assistance from the EPWP for fighting poverty and unemployment in the North West Province.

"We believe that no one must go to bed hungry, that is why we are working harder every day to assist poor families, orphanages, clinics, schools and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) with food parcels and helping them to set up their own sustainable food gardens. We believe that if each poor household and the aforementioned institutions have food gardens, no one will go to bed hungry in the province," said Mr Oupa Ishmael Mbele, a founder and chairman of the North West Food Security and Empowerment Cooperative (Limited) Ltd.

"When we started the project we were 18 and as time went on others left the programme to seek greener pastures. By the time we registered a cooperative in 2014 we were 13 and at this point only 10 of us are left in the project," Mr Mbele said.

Mr Mbele explained that they produced for both commercial and community consumption. "We do not only sell our produce to the market for profit, but we also donate the food to the poor and vulnerable people and to institutions that care for children in the area," he said.

The project is producing a variety of vegetables for the province's food security purposes. The vegetables produced include spinach, cabbage, onions, carrots, beetroot, pumpkin and potatoes. During summer, the project also plants lettuce, watermelons and green beans.

The project uses the organic way of production. "We do not use fertilisers and pesticides. Instead we use the original soil and we also do crop rotation. So our produce is 100 percent organic. This not only locks in all the nutrients in the food itself but it also ensures that the food has a longer shelf life," Mr Mbele explained.

Mr Mbele pointed out that currently, the project was selling its produce to businesses as well as to the hawkers in Mahikeng and Zeerust. "Any surplus is then donated to charity for public good," he added.

"We have received a lot of assistance from the EPWP including the monthly stipend and the training since 2014. The type of training includes tender processes, pricing strategies and bookkeeping. The EPWP training that we have received has assisted us a lot in moving our project forward. We will forever remain appreciative of what the EPWP has done for our project," Mbele said.

He added that the EPWP training they have received will assist the cooperation with its vision to become a fully-fledged agricultural production company.

"We do not want to receive a stipend forever, which is why we are already working on our exit strategy from the EPWP. We are using the EPWP training to create a fully-fledged and sustainable business. We want to give other people an opportunity to receive the assistance that we have received from the EPWP," he added.

The project is a shining example of the good that can be achieved when various government departments and the community work together to address social issues.

"The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development assisted us with the land, the National Department of Public Works through the EPWP is providing us with a monthly stipend and financial training, while the Provincial Department of Health has also ensured that we have first aid kits," Mr Mbele stated.

He added that the contribution of the project to the community of Mahikeng was massive. "We have assisted a local clinic with a vegetable garden. The food that is produced by the clinic's food garden benefits the patients who have chronic conditions. We also encourage members of the public to set up their own vegetable garden at their homes," he said.

Mbele explained that once they were given the land, they contributed R10 each to buy a tin of spinach to plant.

"We started the project with R198, but today we are an organisation that is making a monthly profit of thousands of rands. We had to sweat to get the project where it is today," he smiled.

Ms Alina Khalane said that she was humbled by the experience she has received working in the project.

"The project has afforded me opportunity to not only learn about food production but also to contribute in the improvement of the lives of the vulnerable and needy in our neighbourhood. We are able to also support our local centre that cares for people with disabilities. Being part of this project has been a life changing experience," Ms Khalane said.

She pointed out that at a personal level, "working in this garden has brought joy into my life."

"There's something joyful and fulfilling about working in a vegetable garden. Working in an office would give me lots of stress but working out here (she points around the garden) fills my heart with joy," she stated.

She added that the monthly stipend has given her dignity in her community. "I have done a lot with the stipend including caring for my parents and sending my children to school. I have also managed to save a bit of money for myself to survive the rainy days. I have also acquired financial management skills as I have to prioritise my needs," Ms Khalane added.

Another EPWP participant, Mr Pule Tlahale thanked EPWP for assisting the project, "I am today able to look after my family and contribute towards their well-being with the stipend I receive from EPWP. The Programme has changed my life for the better," he concluded.

This project won the 2015 Kamoso awards as the Best Social sector project. Kamoso awards were introduced in 2007 with an aim to reward excellence in EPWP implementation.

