
News Release
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INMED’s agricultural training empowers disabled women and youth in the Free State

South Africans with disabilities, especially women, continue to face disproportionate rates of food insecurity, unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty amid economic, political, and social exclusion. The more than 230 000 people with disabilities who live in Free State province have been especially hard-hit due to a combination of climate change-driven drought, floods, and lack of access to meaningful educational and employment opportunities.

INMED’s Adaptive Agriculture Program (AAP) has benefitted nearly 100 disabled small-scale farmers – mostly women and youth— at three co-ops in the Free State province since the beginning of this year.

Over the last two years, INMED South Africa, a registered non-profit organization affiliated to INMED Partnership for Children, has made significant progress in bolstering the capacity of people with disabilities to adapt to climate change. Funded by USAID, “the program is aimed at alleviating malnutrition and food insecurity and developing sustainable livelihoods in Free State,” says Janet Ogilvie, Operations Manager for INMED South Africa.

Ogilvie says that thanks to the continued funding from USAID, Phase II of INMED’s AAP began this year. At the beginning of March, training took place at three disabled cooperatives located in Hennenman, a small town in the Lejweleputswa District Municipality; Wesselbron, a small

maize farming town; and Kroonstad, the third largest city in the Free State. About 90 people, mostly women and youth, learnt how to plant seeds and to produce seedlings.

In addition, 1 000 disabled people in the Free State will receive online training and community-based education in small-scale farming. “The emphasis in Phase II has shifted to improving access by disabled people, especially women and youth, to new adaptive technologies and financing that will help them generate income and integrate them into the mainstream economy,” says Ogilvie.

“Our objective in Phase II is also to expand INMED’s reach to include greater numbers of beneficiaries and partners, both in the Free State and in three new provinces – Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Northern Cape, where INMED already has a footprint, and where we’ve targeted an additional 2 000 participants, again mostly women and youth with disabilities,” she says.

To this end, INMED has deepened its partnership with the Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) Free State Provincial Office and DPSA Youth, working hand-in-hand to improve the design and yields of aquaponics systems at DPSA partner sites; bolstering DPSA’s reach to its member cooperatives; sharing its business acumen and links to markets; and training and inspiring the next generation of farmers with disabilities in Free State to utilise aquaponics as a sustainable, climate-smart source of nutritious food and entrepreneurial opportunity.

“This objective means DPSA is provided with the opportunity to lead as an implementing partner in the AAP and In Phase II, DPSA Free State is well-positioned to take on additional project management responsibilities,” says Ogilvie.

The Free State is one of the worst drought-stricken regions in South Africa – it was in fact declared a “drought disaster area” in early 2019 – so water conserving adaptive agricultural technologies and techniques introduced through INMED’s AAP represent an urgently needed form of climate change adaptation.

The cornerstone of INMED’s AAP program methodology is aquaponics, an innovative, intensive food production technique combining aquaculture (fish farming) and hydroponics (soilless crop production) in a closed system that dramatically conserves water and space, and yields abundant and marketable fresh produce and fish.

“Aquaponics is particularly suited to the needs of the physically disabled, as the systems are situated at easily accessible heights, can be designed to facilitate wheelchair access, and require minimal physical effort to maintain. Through aquaponics, physically disabled farmers have the opportunity to learn new agricultural techniques in place of traditional methods that may be difficult for them to perform, opening new opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency,” concludes Ogilvie.

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Editor's notes

About INMED

INMED Partnerships for Children is a non-profit international development organisation that has worked in more than 100 countries for over 30 years to build pathways for vulnerable children, families and communities to achieve well-being and self-reliance. Through multisector partnerships and in-country affiliates, INMED builds effective systems that deliver innovative and sustainable approaches to break complex cycles of poverty for current and future generations.

Since 2006, in-country affiliate INMED South Africa has been working in collaboration with a wide range of corporate, foundation and government partners to transform the health, lives and futures of South Africa's most vulnerable children. INMED South Africa's programmes focus on food security, child and community health, and economic and social development via climate-smart agriculture and participatory education. Incorporated under Section 21, INMED South Africa is a registered non-profit organization (NPC/PBO) recognized by the Department of Social Development and the South African Revenue Service (SARS). For more information, visit: www.inmed.org.za.

About USAID

The Expanding Participation of the Disabled in Climate-Adaptive Agriculture Program is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

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