
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Shining a Spotlight On Economic Empowerment for Women with Disabilities

FREE STATE, SOUTH AFRICA (August 2020): INMED Aquaponics® programme participant Ntswaki Anna Toolo was a featured panellist in a recent live discussion hosted by USAID to raise awareness of inclusive development objectives, including women, people living with disabilities and other marginalized populations.

Toolo is the chairperson of the Lentsweleng farming cooperative in Kroonstadt, Free State, which is participating in INMED South Africa's climate-smart adaptive agriculture program and a beneficiary of a commercial INMED Aquaponics® system. The program is funded by USAID (United States for International Development) to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to strengthen their food security and achieve sustainable livelihoods. Tolo also is chairperson of the Disabled Women of South Africa.

Living as a woman with a disability is not easy, said Tolo, citing accessibility as one of the main challenges. "Access to venues, technology and transport are major hurdles that other people don't realise."

Panelist Olwethu Sipuka, an advocate for people living with disabilities and Director of USAID's YALI Southern Africa Regional Leadership Centre, agreed, stressing it is not the person who is disabled – it is the society that disables the person because of these kind of obstacles that prevent them from becoming active economic participants in the economy.

INMED South Africa NPC

Fancourt Office Park, Block 7, Loft Right, Northumberland Avenue, North Riding 2162

Telephone: +27 11 486 1090 • Fax: +27 86 606 6890 • contact@inmed.org • <https://inmed.org.za>

Registered with the Department of Social Development, NPO 094936 • Section 21 Registration no. 2009/008197/08 • NPC (PBO) Registration

“We need a more inclusive society that appreciates people living with disabilities and their needs,” he said. “We need to take off our blinkers and ensure attitudes change because the biggest barriers to people with disabilities and their emergence, be it in business, higher education institutions and everywhere else in society, is that of ignorance, because attitude is linked to ignorance.” Tolo, concurred, saying unfortunately there is still a stigma around people living with disabilities, and this hampers their effectiveness in the community.

Developing policies addressing universal accessibility is key, said Sipuka. “If you are talking about a bank offering loans to a business, for example, make sure that these are fully inclusive so all can participate. Disabled people all over the world will tell you that they don’t want handouts.” In South Africa, the feeling is rather to do away with a disability grant and use the money to fund education and independent businesses for people with disabilities. “The disability rights struggle is not for hand out, it is purely for independence,” stressed Sipuka.

Tolo’s thriving cooperative in Kroonstad is a shining example of what can be achieved. All the members of the cooperative are living with some form of disability, and agricultural tasks are split between the members so that depending on each member’s capability. “Everyone becomes part of the process,” says Tolo. “We have never asked for a hand out but rather for opportunities to enable us to integrate into society and use our skills to be active economic citizens in the country.”

Tolo added that while government does have good policies in place and is making progress, the main challenge is to implement them. She pointed to quotas, for example, that mandate 50% of a company’s workforce should be women—but the focus is on able-bodied women only. “Any of these quotas should be inclusive to all women,” Tolo said. With women accounting for the majority of the population and the disabled community forming a sub-group of that, it is time the voice of women with disabilities is heard, she added

ENDS

PREPARED ON BEHALF OF INMED SOUTH AFRICA BY CATHY FINDLEY PR. CONTACT JACQUI MOLOI WITH ANY QUERIES ON (071 764 8233) OR EMAIL JACQUI@FINDLEYPR.CO.ZA

Editor’s notes

About INMED Partnerships for Children

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 and families 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.

INMED South Africa

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).

USAID is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity, demonstrates American generosity, and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience.