

News Release

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African Bank and INMED South Africa launch Seeds for Life Stokvel

African Bank and local NGO INMED South Africa are launching an exciting collaborative Seeds for Life pilot project this month to benefit food insecure communities in Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape.

According to Dr Sandra Pretorius, Programme Manager for INMED's Health in Action programme, food security begins in the backyard. "Home and community gardens are a simple solution to improve access to nutritious food," she says. "Our team has nearly two decades of experience helping individuals, schools and communities implement adaptive agriculture projects to strengthen food security and build sustainable livelihoods in all types of environments."

Pretorius explains that the story in this impoverished area really began with a local resident, Koos Gradwell, who lives in Kroonvale in Graaff-Reinet. He is an enthusiastic gardener, but he faced with many challenges, such as water scarcity, not being able to afford seeds, compost and other inputs. He approached the INMED South Africa team for assistance after learning about their aquaponics projects at two local schools and INMED's Seeds for Life project in Port Elizabeth.

Seeds for Life is a project of INMED South Africa's Health in Action programme, a partnership with the Mondelēz International Foundation that provides nutrition and healthy lifestyles education, gardens and fitness activities to low-resourced schools in Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. Seeds for Life provides free seeds, compost, gardening guidebooks and hands-on training to help vulnerable families establish home gardens, regardless of the location or geographic conditions.

"We first visited his house towards the end of 2020 to discuss his food gardening needs and together we identified the best spot for his vegetable garden," recalls Pretorius. "We also gave him basic vegetable gardening advice, training, compost and seeds."

When African Bank learned of the need to expand Seeds for Life to Graaff-Reinet, its CSI and Environmental Sustainability Units saw a good fit for support. Teams from both of these Units are working with INMED South Africa to help extend the Seeds for Life programme by identifying beneficiaries in low-resource communities in Graaff-Reinet, who could benefit from this kind of programme.

“We are delighted to be working with INMED in Graaff-Reinet,” says African Bank Head of Corporate Social Investment, Kennedy Dembetembe. “Our commitment to advancing lives goes beyond just providing competitive financial solutions, but also includes our commitment to investing in empowering our communities and making a meaningful impact on the very environment we live in.”

African Bank Sustainability Specialist, Siphilile Shange, adds, “The partnership with INMED is an opportunity to not only address social challenges, such as food security experienced in vulnerable communities, but also to enable us to support developing skills that support the green economy by creating innovative green agro-entrepreneurship opportunities and providing lifelong value to the very generation that holds the power to transition us into a more environmentally responsible nation.”

Pretorius says the beauty of the programme is that it is sustainable and can really change lives. The INMED South Africa team will facilitate learning during the change process by monitoring progress, giving feedback to project participants and creating a forum for ongoing learning and sharing experiences and challenges among the participants.

“Together with African Bank, we have set out some specific criteria for anyone participating on the programme,” notes Pretorius. “They must reside in a low-resource community in Graaff-Reinet and be nominated by other stakeholders, such as a school, church, community centres or other community members.” Candidates should be unemployed and at risk for household food insecurity; have an interest in establishing a household garden and provide a commitment to maintaining a vegetable garden; agree to attend training sessions by INMED South

Africa and other continuous learning opportunities and finally be willing to share resources amongst other group and community members.

Project participants of the project in Graaff-Reinet will also establish a Seeds for Life Stokvel, which will promote and encourage gardening, especially edible gardening, by providing a unique opportunity for any prospective food gardener to receive seasonal seeds, seedling trays, grow medium, training and training material--with the added benefits of social support and interactions.

“Our training courses are highly beneficial to struggling community members,” says Pretorius. “Our adaptive agricultural methods use recyclables in different ways in a vegetable garden, incorporating grey water and vermiculture to enrich the soil in a natural way.”

The pilot phase of the Seeds for Life project in Graaff-Reinet will extend until November 2021.

Ends

CAPTION 1: A shallow trench 15 cm wide and 10 cm deep is dug in the garden and the grow bag is placed into the trench which is then filled in level with the top of the grow bag. No additional fertilization is required and the healthy root structure in the vermicompost will continue to develop into poor quality soil below it. The hessian grow bag is biodegradable and the cocoons will hatch 3 - 5 worms per cocoon which will migrate into the soil and increase nutrient and beneficial microbe content.

CAPTION 2: Tomato plants in Hessian grow bags

CAPTION 3: Using vermiculture in household garden

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