

Growing a sustainable response to food insecurity

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The Covid-19 pandemic is having a devastating impact, destabilising the economy and putting pressure on already fragile livelihoods and communities. Restrictions on trade have led to reduced imports and price hikes impacting both industry and consumers. Businesses have suffered further through loss of trade caused by the restrictions on movement and limits on gatherings. Rising costs and declining revenue have forced many businesses to close or scale down, leading to job losses and declining household incomes. Unsurprisingly, the fourth quarter of 2020 saw a steep increase in the unemployment rate, with the youth being the most affected.



In his televised public address on Freedom Day, 27 April 2020, President Ramaphosa acknowledged the impact of the national lockdown: “For millions, this has been a month of misery, of breadwinners not working, of families struggling to survive and of children going to bed and waking up hungry.”

At False Bay TVET College, whose campuses are located in some of the most vulnerable communities of Cape Town, it has become clear that the student population is deeply affected by the increased levels of poverty and unemployment sparked by the pandemic. As a caring institution, the college must be able to respond to the social and economic challenges faced by the vast majority of our student population. The problems of hunger and food insecurity particularly require an urgent response.

The college is developing a strategy to address these problems sustainably within a broader ecosystem and aims to support our students with nutritious meals sourced from food gardens established at our campuses.

As a first step to realising this vision to support communities and students, the college convened a webinar/online workshop with external stakeholders that were experienced in implementing food gardens. The purpose of the workshops was to begin to learn from these institutions and on-board best practice models for the delivery of our strategy.

The webinar roundtable discussion was attended by representatives of the Western Cape Education Department, the Department of Agriculture and the non-governmental organisations Neighbourhood Farm and Living Hope. The college was

represented by members of the Executive, Campus Management and student representative levels.

The main discussion topics covered in the webinar were the consultative approach to food sustainability as a college concern; the advancement of nutritional support among its student population through awareness programmes; and skills development, partnership and access to resources in the college.

Some of the thought-provoking questions discussed by participants were: How do we influence the urban mind-set when it comes to food and the ways we live and work in cities; how do we fix a broken food system; how do we build food consciousness; and, what garden model works? The common denominator throughout all the contributions of our experts was that the support and participation of the community were critical to the success of food gardens.

The adoption of a community garden project at False Bay TVET College will directly contribute to students' overall well-being, improved nutrition and health, which will conceivably result in higher programme completion/ retention rates and improved social and emotional behaviour. These outcomes therefore align well with the college's strategic focus areas of decreasing the number of student dropouts and strengthening the retention rate of students, as well as improving the throughput rates in the NC(V) and NATED programmes.

The food garden initiative will add to our already comprehensive student support offerings, which include career guidance, financial aid, personal counselling, academic support and the recently introduced mobile health and wellness clinic, the first such facility provided at a TVET college in South Africa. Thanks to a well-functioning communication environment built on regular engagement between management, the faculty, an active Student Representative Council and students across all courses and campuses, the college is able to identify and service students' needs effectively.

For more information on the food garden project, please contact Mrs Christiana Nel, Deputy Principal for Innovation and Development.

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