

Entrepreneurship initiative empowering SA's vital emerging farmers

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While pervasive drought and hardship have driven a sharp decline in the number of emerging farmers across South Africa (SA), a hands-on agricultural entrepreneurship programme has provided an important lifeline to thousands of struggling small-scale farmers in the Western Cape and other provinces.

The AgriPlanner Programme is a joint initiative between the SA Institute for Entrepreneurship (SAIE) and Coronation Fund Managers, which this year celebrates a 16-year track record of having assisted more than 5 000 emerging farmers, of whom 65% are women. The programme falls under Coronation's Growing Entrepreneurs initiative, which assists and upskills emerging farmers.

The AgriPlanner suite of programmes provide unique practical training and mentorship support for emerging farmers. The programme addresses issues such as farm enterprise planning, money management, co-operative management and good governance, dealing with markets, record-keeping, crop management, as well as business and sustainable practices.

Alarmingly, Statistics SA reports that the number of subsistence farming households in SA dropped from 2.9 million in 2011 to 2.3 million in 2016, largely on the back of severe droughts in 2014 and 2015. Around 55% of these farmers are women who work to support their families.

Of the 5 295 farmers that have received support from the AgriPlanner programme since 2004, a total of 4,859 farmers and 201 cooperatives directly benefited from the support provided through the Coronation Growing Entrepreneurs programme, while others received additional support from other donors. In 2019 alone, a total of 128 farmers (103 new and 25 existing farmers) representing 12 cooperatives benefited from AgriPlanner capacity building and training.

The Coronation Growing Entrepreneurs programme is designed to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030) and South Africa's National Development Plan in addressing food security, inequality, poverty and environmental sustainability.

Coronation CEO Anton Pillay says the importance of emerging farmers in South Africa is undeniable.

"Farmers play a vital role in local communities: creating jobs, adding to food security and benefiting the local economy. Climate change, lack of training and business support are just some of the challenges they face, and the reality is that these issues are likely to increase.

"This is why we will continue to offer local food growers practical training and entrepreneurial support through the Growing Entrepreneurs programme, which produces a tangible result and has a very real impact," he comments.

As the country's emerging farmers await the launch of the highly anticipated public-private Agricultural Development Agency on 18 February, which is intended to boost the emerging farming sector, the private sector once again emerges as an essential ally of the country's emerging farmers. "Coronation recognised in 2004 that our emerging farmers need private-sector support and has remained committed to the cause," says SAIE chief operating officer Ernest Boateng.

Boateng says the programme beneficiaries are all too familiar with the harsh realities faced by small-scale farmers from emerging economies in the rest of Africa and around the world. Women farmers across Africa, in particular, are bearing the brunt of climate change, poverty and food security issues caused by forces beyond their control.

“Most of the farmers in the programme can attest to the extent to which climate change and the economic challenges it creates, has affected their lives, and what a powerful lifeline it is to be taught sustainable farming practices that help them deal with these issues,” he says.

The Siyazama Community Food Garden

In Cape Town, beneficiaries of Coronation’s Growing Entrepreneurs programme are spread across the city, with many working the land in townships such as Philippi and Khayelitsha. These farmers were given access to small patches of under-utilised land on school, community or municipal properties, and have turned these into small, sustainable farms.

In Khayelitsha, four women and two men farmers who came through the programme are today running the successful Siyazama Community Food Garden, a fully organic, 10,000 m² garden supported by the local community and organisations such as Coronation, SAIE and local NGOs.

The garden was started in 1997 by 30 unemployed women. Currently, the farmers sell their produce to hotels, restaurants, retailers, and families in the city through a vegetable box ordering programme. Each farmer has transitioned from subsistence to livelihood-level farming and now has an average income of between R8,000 and R12,000 a month.

Nokwanda Nkqayi, 64, who has been farming in the garden since 2004, says Coronation’s support through the AgriPlanner training programme changed her life. “I like to be in a green environment, and since working here, I am much healthier from eating these organic vegetables and getting exercise every day. It has also empowered me because I was previously unemployed and now I have a variety of skills and a steady income. I was able to send my kids to school. I also take veggies to the poor, sick and elderly in the community, and five schools each have a patch of land here that the children farm on with our help. It’s very rewarding work.”

Nkqayi and her colleagues are originally from rural farming backgrounds. They were unemployed and new to the city when they were introduced to the programme. “We were lucky, the municipality gave us this land to farm and then we received the AgriPlanner training. Now we grow peppers, kale, cabbage, leeks, rocket, herbs, lots of things. About 30 other gardens in Khayelitsha and many tertiary students have come to learn from us.”

Nkqayi has also seen climate change taking effect before her eyes. “We have boreholes now, but we are still recovering from the drought. Every year we can see the effects of climate change getting worse. Organic farms like ours, which are very water-efficient and do not use harmful chemicals, are a part of the answer.”



Representatives of Coronation, the SAIE and Siyazama Community Farm Project

Growing the change

Boateng adds that the programme's proven discovery learning methodology is applicable and relevant in rural and urban, as well as literate or illiterate settings. What makes it unique is that it is highly practical and simulation based.

"Through Coronation's support, AgriPlanner provides comprehensive business development and entrepreneurship training and enables them to take the first steps from basic subsistence for personal food security to income-generation and participation in the formal economy. We are very proud of the impact that our programme is making on the ground to tackle these issues."

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