

A person wearing a dark jacket and light-colored pants is watering a field of green plants with a green watering can. The scene is outdoors, and the plants are lush and green. The text "stories of change" is overlaid in white, lowercase letters.

stories of change



Seeds of Change:
Food Systems Dialogue 2025

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

Across Nelson Mandela Bay, community-led food gardens and local food initiatives are sowing the seeds of a more sustainable, connected, and nourished future. **The Seeds of Change Food Systems Dialogue**, hosted by the Coega Development Corporation's Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programme, in partnership with the Nelson Mandela University's Hubs of Convergence (HoC), celebrates and connects those driving positive change in their communities.

This booklet honours their stories – the people and organisations who are transforming local food systems through collaboration, creativity, and care. From tackling food insecurity and unemployment to restoring dignity and hope, these initiatives show what is possible when communities and institutions work together toward shared goals.

The stories that follow represent just a few examples of a growing movement of food champions across the metro. As you read, we hope these stories inspire reflection, spark collaboration, and serve as a tool for action toward more just and sustainable food futures.

STORY 01

Missionvale Care Centre

MISSIONVALE

Missionvale Care Centre

by Nzuki Mpofu

Communications and Fundraising Coordinator

1. How did your garden or community food project begin?

Our centre was founded in 1988 by the legendary Sr Ethel, she saw the huge need for basic nutrition. She began with providing food parcels and medication but was concerned about the sustainability of the approach. She started a communal vegetable garden so people could learn to provide for themselves.

2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced at the start – and how did you overcome them / how are you currently overcoming them?

There is a saltpan nearby and the salinity of the groundwater is extremely high, at the time they used municipal water to irrigate but of course this comes at a great cost for the centre. We are grateful to now have an extensive rain water harvesting system including our own reservoir.

3. Have you noticed improvements in access to healthy food, income generation, or community growth?

Yes we have noted improvements. Some people have started home gardens, even creches have started gardening. Only recently we have begun selling our vegetables and we hope to grow this in the future.

4. What kind of support or knowledge sharing has made the biggest difference?

Having a dedicated person who ensures continuity, you can't teach people a skill and let them be as it is an ongoing and never-ending process.

5. What are your hopes or goals for the future of your garden or project?

We want to see more home gardens and start selling more so that we can provide an income for the centre and the individuals.

6. What do you think is needed to make food systems in your community more sustainable?

Access to water, access to other resources such as ingredients to make organic fertiliser and constant opportunity for learning.

7. If you could send one message to others starting similar initiatives, what would it be?

Start by assessing the community's interest, willingness and capacity.



A photograph of three people, two women and one man, standing outdoors in a field. They are all smiling and holding large bunches of fresh beets with green leaves. The person on the left is a woman with short dark hair, wearing a light blue polo shirt. The person in the middle is a man with short dark hair, wearing an orange t-shirt. The person on the right is a woman wearing a black t-shirt and a black headwrap. The background is a bright, slightly hazy outdoor setting. The entire image has a green tint.

STORY 02

Association for the Physically Disabled

MOTHERWELL

APD Nelson Mandela Bay

by Brett Marshall

Resource Development Manager

1. How did your garden or community food project begin?

The APD Motherwell Disability Hub was launched in July 2024 at a plot of land in NU 29, Motherwell township. Initially, a group of persons with disabilities interested in the Gardening and Food Security project were trained to prepare and educate them for when the project was set to commence.

2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced at the start – and how did you overcome them / how are you currently overcoming them?

The biggest challenge we faced at the start was the insecure nature of the NU 29 plot. With no fencing enclosing the land, and a cost of R300k to install the required security measures (which was money we did not have), we had serious safety concerns that could affect the viability of the project moving forward. Then, in May 2025, an MOU was signed between APD and Coselelani Secondary School in NU 9, with the APD Motherwell Disability Hub relocating to the school's grounds. This partnership was a win-win for both parties as the school provided the necessary fenced-in land to start the Gardening and Food Security project, and APD leveraging its established good relations with the school and the residents in the area.

3. Have you noticed improvements in access to healthy food, income generation, or community growth?

Yes! Currently, 20 persons with disabilities are participating in the Gardening and Food Security project. They are being equipped with the skills to grow a wide variety of vegetables using sustainable farming methods. Each of the 20 participants have their own raised vegetable bed which they are responsible for tending to for the duration of the skills training programme. After just one month, the first bumper crop was ready for harvest, including spinach, cauliflower, beetroot, carrots, tomatoes, beans, and more.

4. What kind of support or knowledge sharing has made the biggest difference?

The successful launch of the APD Motherwell Disability Hub's pilot Gardening and Food Security skills training programme would not have been possible without the close working partnership with Coselelani Secondary School and its passionate principal, Mr. Langa Tshangana. Additionally, we are partnering with corporate sponsors, government departments, and skills training providers in various capacities to strengthen the long-term sustainability prospects and growth of the project.

5. What are your hopes or goals for the future of your garden or project?

For next year, our goal is to ensure that every person with a disability who completes the gardening training programme in 2025 has the required resources to set up a food garden at their own house. To do so, funding is being sought to provide each participant in the training programme with a full support kit (including gardening drums, hand forks, spades, soil, seeds and seedlings, etc.) upon completion of their training at the end of 2025.

In addition, we are currently moving ahead with Phase 1 of our building plans, incorporating 2 containers to develop training and packing rooms, storage facilities, as well as a seed treatment area. Phase 2 of the building plans will see an additional 2 containers installed and a roof installed over the now 4 containers to form a community hall for local residents and participants to use as a meeting venue. The additional containers will expand the facilities offered by the APD Motherwell Disability Hub, including a recycling office, workshop areas, and additional storage space.

6. What do you think is needed to make food systems in your community more sustainable?

In 2026, we will be expanding the scale of the gardening project with the introduction of growing tunnels. Participants who complete the Gardening and Food Security skills programme will be provided with further training and support in year 2, assisting them with basic financial and business literacy skills, as well as assistance in forming their own SMMEs to grow vegetables on a much larger scale in their own growing tunnels. To ensure the project's long-term sustainability, APD will manage its own growing tunnels where seedlings will be grown and then sold onto the SMMEs, ensuring that the project moves away from a sponsorship/donor model, to one of true, long-term self-sustainability.

7. If you could send one message to others starting similar initiatives, what would it be?

Just start and go for it! Most importantly, just remember that you don't have to embark on this journey alone. Partner with as many like-minded, passionate individuals and organisations as you can.

**“Together, we can do so much more to
transform lives in disadvantaged,
vulnerable communities in South Africa
through inclusive, sustainable farming.”**

- Brett Marshall, APD Nelson Mandela Bay

STORY 03

Vulumzi Senior SS school

MOTHERWELL

Vulumzi Senior Secondary school

by Ntombekhaya Tose

Educator at Vulumzi

1. How did your garden or community food project begin?

It started as practical project for Agricultural Sciences Learners.

2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced at the start – and how did you overcome them / how are you currently overcoming them?

Pest infestation, irrigation system, scorching of plants, stoney soil. A greenhouse is being installed to control the environment, use of organic compost, use of sawdust for mulching to keep moisture longer period, bicarbonate of soda, eggshells and garlic were used to control pests.

3. Have you noticed improvements in access to healthy food, income generation, or community growth?

Yes, this is possible through Agriculture in schools and community gardens.

4. What kind of support or knowledge sharing has made the biggest difference?

Support of equipment and seedlings from Coega CSI department.

5. What are your hopes or goals for the future of your garden or project?

To improve learner skills, produce more vegetables for school kitchen and sales to raise funds for school.

6. What do you think is needed to make food systems in your community more sustainable?

Training and workshops on sustainable food production.

7. If you could send one message to others starting similar initiatives, what would it be?

Dedication and hard work can make what seems impossible possible.



STORY 04

GreenTEC

MISSIONVALE

GreenTEC

by Zama Gege

Treasurer

1. How did your garden or community food project begin?

Our project began after conducting research on community challenges, where we identified food insecurity and climate change as key issues. We decided to start producing and selling vegetable seedlings to contribute positively and support local farmers and communities.

2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced at the start – and how did you overcome them / how are you currently overcoming them?

We initially faced challenges such as limited capital and establishing market presence. To overcome these, we sought partnerships with organisations and attended networking sessions to increase our exposure and reach more potential customers. We continue to leverage these strategies to grow our business and build stronger connections within the community.

3. Have you noticed improvements in access to healthy food, income generation, or community growth?

Yes, we have noticed improvements in access to healthy food and income generation. By providing affordable vegetable seedlings, we've enabled small-scale farmers and community members to grow their own nutritious food, thereby improving food security. Additionally, our project has created income-generating opportunities for ourselves.

4. What kind of support or knowledge sharing has made the biggest difference?

Partnering with organisations like Inmad South Africa has made a significant difference. They've provided us with agricultural training, donated planting inputs, and offered guidance on best practices, which has greatly contributed to our project's success.

5. What are your hopes or goals for the future of your garden or project?

Our goal is to expand our production and reach more communities, increasing food security and income-generating opportunities for small-scale farmers and community members. We also aim to establish sustainable and replicable models that can benefit other communities in the region.

6. What do you think is needed to make food systems in your community more sustainable?

More support for small-scale farmers, increased access to markets, and training on sustainable agricultural practices would help. Additionally, community-led initiatives and partnerships with organisations that provide resources and expertise would also contribute to making food systems more sustainable.

7. If you could send one message to others starting similar initiatives, what would it be?

Start with what you have, be consistent, and build relationships within your community. Attend events, introduce yourself, and be active in making your presence known. Don't rely too heavily on external help; instead, focus on growing your initiative with your own efforts, and others will likely join and support you.

STORY 05

Hlumani Nande Environmental Ambassadors

MOTHERWELL

Hlumani Nande Environmental Ambassadors

by Melikaya Blani

Chairperson

1. How did your garden or community food project begin?

I attended a workshop on food systems which was conducted by Earthlife Africa Jhb which is the Environmental Justice Organisation that's when the interest started and I told myself that I will establish one for my community.

2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced at the start – and how did you overcome them / how are you currently overcoming them?

We had some challenges with seedlings as well as water however we've expanded our greenhouse, and we are growing our own seedlings and the partnership we had with the Municipality they are providing us with ten thousand litres as the Environmental Hub I.

3. Have you noticed improvements in access to healthy food, income generation, or community growth?

Yes we've noticed access to healthy food because people are eating from their own grown vegetables and are able to sell as well and the community is showing interest of being part of the food garden.

4. What kind of support or knowledge sharing has made the biggest difference?

Its initiative such as Gardner's assembly where urban vegetables growing is being facilitated and discussed.

5. What are your hopes or goals for the future of your garden or project?

Our goal is to supply the big markets within our area as well as supplying for government institution such as your correctional center.

6. What do you think is needed to make food systems in your community more sustainable?

There should be an emphasis that each household must have a food garden and government provide seedlings and make sure that people are equipped with skills that can be sustainable.

7. If you could send one message to others starting similar initiatives, what would it be?

I would tell them that they should understand that food availability is the result of systems of land ownership access to water seeds skills and knowledge.



A photograph of two people, a man and a woman, working in a garden. They are both bent over, planting large-leafed cabbages into the soil. The man is on the left, wearing a white t-shirt and dark shorts. The woman is on the right, wearing a blue and white striped shirt and light-colored pants. The garden is filled with rows of cabbages and freshly tilled earth. The background shows a brick wall and some greenery. The entire image has a greenish-yellow tint.

STORY 06

Door of Hope Home Garden

SYDENHAM

Door of Hope Home Garden

by Likhanya Ndamase

Resident and Team Leader of the Garden

1. How did your garden or community food project begin?

The garden was established with the Coega Development Corporation for the Nelson Mandela Day 2023. This project was part of a broader contribution made by Coega to Door of Hope.

2. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced at the start – and how did you overcome them / how are you currently overcoming them?

We initially struggled to work as a team. However, we have been able to address this by working in pairs as this keeps us accountable. We don't have a gate for the garden, and our dog "Max" helps himself to our veggies. We are currently using a table to keep him out.

3. Have you noticed improvements in access to healthy food, income generation, or community growth?

We don't have a very big garden, but we have been able to have a few harvests from our garden and this has assisted in the kitchen for the home.

4. What kind of support or knowledge sharing has made the biggest difference?

We have gained a lot of information on how to plant, main and harvest crops. We also like the mentorship from Coega staff members.

5. What are your hopes or goals for the future of your garden or project?

We would like to increase our harvest so that we can share with those in need.

6. If you could send one message to others starting similar initiatives, what would it be?

Taking care of a garden has a lot of responsibility- like a baby you need to feed and clean it. Looking after a garden also needs team work, if you are working as a team an communication is key.





Coega Development Corporation
Coega SEZ Business Centre
Corner Alcyon Road & Zibuko Street

www.coega.co.za

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

www.hoc.mandela.ac.za
[@mandelauniversity_hoc](https://twitter.com/mandelauniversity_hoc)