

Earth Mother urges women to dig in

DURING WOMEN'S MONTH a Cape Town woman will be spreading the food garden message to help alleviate the burden of poverty.



■ Tenjiwe Kaba feeds hundreds of people while teaching the community about the advantages of growing your own food.

Dale Hes

Tenjiwe Kaba from Cape Town is a hero. For the past 30 years, Mama Kaba has been changing the face of townships around Cape Town, turning dusty pieces of land into flourishing vegetable gardens which feed hundreds of people.

Kaba (69) grew up on a farm near Kokstad in the Eastern Cape where her parents worked as farm workers.

"From as young as 14 years old, I went into town every day to sell the farm's vegetables on the street," said Kaba.

Although she received little reward for her hard work, the experience established Kaba's knowledge and passion for vegetables.

When she moved to the township of Khayalitsha in

Cape Town in the late 1980s, she realised that she could use her knowledge to improve the terrible living conditions that many were faced with.

"There were many empty pieces of land which were not being used – this precious land was just being wasted. I knew that I could make something out of it."

With assistance from community organisations and government, Kaba and several other women began growing vegetables on a tiny plot in the township. Over the years, the community garden steadily grew, with fresh vegetables being sold at markets around the township.

"I also wanted to spread this throughout the area, and soon other community members were becoming growers of their own gardens. Today there are more than 30 gardens here,

providing the growers with an income and also feeding our communities," Kaba explained.

Kaba's original community garden, which became known as Moya we Khaya, which means spirit of home in IsiXhosa, is today a thriving one-hectare garden.

Mama Kaba has also managed to train more than 30 disadvantaged community members to become growers, and her current team comprises eight people.

The grandmother of three has won numerous awards and has been invited to give talks around the world.

But Mama Kaba said that the awards are not what is important.

"What is really important is the message that we can all do something to improve ourselves and others." ■

Silahliwe's guardian angel

Lesego Ranchu

Silahliwe, meaning abandoned, is an informal settlement located near Bethlehem in the Free State.

It is characterised by unemployment and poverty. The only beacon of hope for many is the Mapojotana Co-operative, founded by retired teacher and community builder Pontsho Mokoena in 2012.

The co-operative is a food security programme that grows vegetables and provides nutritious meals daily to about 400 residents of Silahlwe as well as neglected and frail elderly persons in the community.

Nkgono Pontsho, as she is fondly called, started the programme using her pension money after she retired in 2011. She recruited an ad-

ditional four former teachers who, in some instances, also contributed their meagre resources to the project.

"I still felt young and did not just want to sit at home. I already had a passion for food gardens and believe that no one should go hungry when there is a little bit of land to grow on," she said.

At the time, there was a call by the Department of Health for communities to assist with setting up soup kitchens.

"We decided to join the programme because we had a thriving garden by then and we were already feeding poor people. The land we are on used to be a dumpsite but with the help of the community, we have turned it into this beautiful sanctuary that welcomes everyone."

On site is a vegetable gar-

den, feeding hall, kitchen, sewing room, office and a crèche to look after the children of Silahlwe.

Mapojotana Co-operative is in the process of registering the crèche to meet all Early Childhood Development (ECD) requirements.

The three teachers have already completed the basic ECD training that was provided by the National Development Agency (NDA) in partnership with Tshepang Educare Centre.

NDA funding has also made it possible for identified local youth to receive basic computer training.

Mapojotana Co-operative currently employs 29 people and has 12 volunteer workers.

Over the years, Mapojotana has received many awards, the most recent being one from the Department of Agricul-



■ Mapojotana Co-operative received an award from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Best Community Nutrition Development Centre.

ture and Rural Development for Best Community Nutrition Development Centre 2017/18. ■