

RANDFONTEIN – BREATHING LIFE INTO DISUSED FACILITIES

Instead of waiting for government to provide facilities, the participants of Randfontein are using the resources provided by the Community Work Programme to transform neglected buildings and unused land for the benefit of the community.

Randfontein is a CWP umbrella site, with a number of sub-sites, including the Jabulani informal settlement and Mohlakeng township. Many of the people living in Jabulani used to live and work on a neighbouring farm. Unfortunately, they often clashed with the farm owner and were chased out as a result of this conflict. They had to leave the land that they had stayed on for a long time and were moved to a piece of municipal land that was once used as a power station.

Relocating from an area you have known for most of your life is extremely emotional, and it takes a long time to recover from being uprooted. People's dreams of rebuilding were also dashed by failed attempts to get their own initiatives and projects off the ground. Because of poor planning, implementation of government and NGO projects saw people in the area not succeeding in virtually everything they tried – despite dedicating long hours into their work. They had lost hope of a better future and were convinced that they would not make anything meaningful out of their lives. So it is not surprising that the community was a little sceptical when CWP was first introduced.

However, through the efforts of CWP participants from Jabulani, the community has managed to revitalise a community early child development centre, which had been plagued by financial difficulties for years. The centre, which is next to the settlement, was established through funding from various local and international organisations, but struggled to survive because of a lack of institutional support as well as community members not being able to afford the monthly fees. The facility has four containers, which have space big enough to use as teaching rooms and accommodate 58 children. Ten participants, who are also parents of some of the kids at the centre, now take care of the children.

There is a communal garden at the same site, also revived by the CWP, that is now producing nutritious

vegetables – mainly spinach and cabbages. A portion of the land that had never been used before has proved to be extremely fertile.

The garden has been extended from an area of 400 square metres to about 1.5 hectares and this has increased productivity. Because of the high production of vegetables, the piece of land where the gardens are now thriving is now referred to as “a nutritional mine”.

Participants use the vegetables to supplement food parcels, provided by Carry You Ministry and Randfontein Fruit and Veg City, which supplies R20 000 of produce a week, as well as selling some for money to get more seedlings. This has empowered the community of Randfontein, particularly the women in the area.

Other food gardens in schools – which were established by CWP – are also supporting many vulnerable families. Corporations such as Novo Nordisk have supported CWP by a donation in the form of garden tools, which included picks, spades and rakes. These have gone a long way in helping with the gardening projects.

“I am thankful that community members eventually embraced the Community Work Programme,” says Killion Hlomla, a respected community leader in the area. “Things are now different. Our lives have turned around in such a way that many of us cannot believe the difficult phases that we have gone through. We have started seeing a steady improvement in our living conditions.

“I am definitely convinced that the life of the people in the area is now better as most of them now have something to look forward to everyday. I believe the CWP has uplifted their living conditions since they can now use their earnings to support other initiatives that they embark on.”





Through the efforts of a community committee, made up of CWP managers and co-ordinators, local NGOs, community leaders and the local church, the CWP has also been active in setting up a sports coaching programme to help school children develop talents that they may possess in various sporting codes.

This initiative also sees the use of the sports field in the area so that it does not become dilapidated. "We do not allow children to roam around during school holidays," said Motlatsi Sebolao, a site manager at Randfontein, pointing at children who were happily hopping around the nearby field.

Another positive development that has come out of the CWP is the restoration of an effective disability centre, known as the Itireleng Disability Centre in the Mhlakeng township, also a CWP site. This centre has now become a "home" to a sizeable number of disabled members of the community.

Oupa Mabelane, a disabled participant who also acts a supervisor, walks with a limp, but this does not hold him back in his work. He is confident when instructing the participants about what is needed for the garden beds.

"You have to make sure that you prepare soil properly," shouts Oupa in a commanding voice. He has been working as a supervisor at the centre for many years without any form of stipend. He also echoed what others had said about failed projects "People had lost all hope in the projects that were implemented prior to the CWP, all of which did not see the light of day. However, things are now different as disabled people in the community are now able to supplement their disability grant. We are very happy for what the CWP has done for us," he says between checking to see if participants are still doing what they have been instructed to do. While the centre had always been there, it was disused mainly because of a lack of running costs. The CWP has been involved with the centre for a year, and things are much better. What is particularly

special about the centre is that disabled members of the community are the ones running the facility through resources provided by the CWP.

About 122 people with disabilities come to the centre and are both participants and helpers when it comes to caring for the disabled, cleaning and preparing of food. Disabled CWP participants embark mainly on gardening and packaging of shoe laces which are then sold for 73 cents a packet and the money used for the maintenance and running of the centre.

The vegetables that are harvested from the garden are used in the centre's kitchen. Some are then sold and the money is used to assist in activities associated with the garden. "The good thing is that we work for ourselves and we benefit from the work that we do," says Boitumelo, a participant at the centre.

'Disability is not inability'

Jeremiah Monyai (above right) may be wheelchair bound, but he is living proof that "disability is not necessarily inability".

Jeremiah is a CWP participant at the Itireleng Disability Centre. Since he joined the CWP in October 2010, after being recruited by a co-ordinator, he says he has learnt to fend for himself through the life-empowering skills he has been taught.

His main interest is the agricultural activities, which means he is always occupied and interacts with other people. He is proud that he knows how to plant and separate seedlings in the garden.

"I stay alone and have one only son, the other one passed on," said Jeremiah, who used to help with cleaning duties at a local police station before he was involved in an accident at work. "I am grateful to the CWP because through the project, I can now do things for myself as I cannot afford to depend on anyone, as you can see I am just about to fix my own wheelchair with this hammer."

This profile is part of a series that looks at local innovation in the South African government's Community Work Programme (CWP). It was produced by Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) for the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). For more information about the CWP go to www.cogta.gov.za/cwp.