

GROWING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE

Buhle Farmers' Academy provides essential practical training to budding farmers

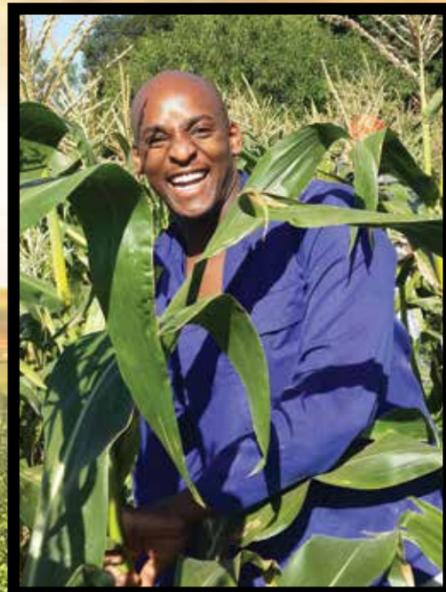
Karabo Mofokeng (28) had long held a desire to become an entrepreneur within the agricultural sector. Facing uncertain employment prospects, he was determined to realise his passion for farming and set about exploring opportunities in the sector that would support his dream. He came across Buhle Farmers' Academy, a non-profit organisation that trains and mentors aspiring farmers using a holistic approach covering all the farming and management skills new farmers need. After enrolling in the Academy and completing courses in livestock and crop production, Karabo set up KRE Agri Holdings, a 100% black-owned poultry farming operation with fellow Buhle Academy graduates Rebecca Mabasa and Elsie Joao.

With the business being in operation for just over a year, their conviction in promoting entrepreneurship through agricultural practices for youth has led to Karabo winning the City of Ekurhuleni's Youth Entrepreneurship Boot Camp prize, a huge boost that will allow KRE Agri Holdings to benefit from R200 000's worth of procurement.

Karabo's is an all too rare success story of youth excelling in the agricultural sector, one which should be replicated many times over. The reality, however, is that previously marginalised groups like the youth still face a number of challenges in accessing these opportunities due to factors such as

insufficient education and skills, a lack of access to arable land, securing capital, and training and support, amongst others.

As the primary economic activity in rural areas, the National Development Plan (NDP) identifies the agricultural sector as having the potential to create nearly one million new jobs by 2030. With the sector recovering from the worst drought in a century, registering consecutive periods of positive growth that have helped to lift the economy out of a technical recession, there can be no doubt about the potential agriculture holds in creating opportunities for youth involvement across its value chain.



While policy makers and sector players have long recognised this potential, its translation into significant benefits for previously marginalised groups, like the youth, has been slow. The implementation of activities that will encourage and support more youth entering the agricultural sector hinges on the ability of these players to fully understand the challenges and how best to respond to them.

LAND BANK AND IDC JOIN FORCES TO SUPPORT THE ACADEMY

The Land and Agricultural Development Bank of South Africa (Land Bank) together with the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) are two such sector players that have been charged with facilitating transformation in the economy and society in a manner that is more inclusive and equitable. With a specific development finance mandate, both organisations have been working to find unique solutions to the unique challenges that exist in transforming the economy, with the objective of facilitating the participation of youth, women and other previously disadvantaged groups in the economy in a sustainable way.

On hearing about the innovative training being conducted at Buhle Farmers' Academy and how this was being practically implemented towards successes such as that of Karabo's, Land Bank and the IDC formalised a partnership to provide support to the Academy as part of their respective Corporate Social Investment (CSI) strategies.

"We realised that in order to begin to address the problem of a lack of access to meaningful opportunities for youth in the agricultural sector, and to address the high and growing youth unemployment rate and scarce skills in certain sectors of our economy greater collaboration is needed," says Tebogo Molefe, Head of Corporate Social Investment at the IDC.

The partnership serves to complement both Land Bank and IDC's existing development and transformation efforts by bridging the gap between these institutions and the communities they are meant to develop.

According to Lion Phasha, Engagement and CSI Manager at Land Bank, this level of connectivity to the community is essential to understanding their challenges and effectively responding to them. "From research Land Bank has recently concluded, we are seeing that young people's perceptions of the agricultural sector are largely influenced by a lack of information and exposure to the industry. In many instances, our young people associate agriculture with subsistence farming, hard



work and being poor. We have a responsibility to change this perception and expose our youth to the many opportunities that exist in the sector. Our support for Buhle Farmers' Academy gives us an opportunity to showcase what is possible in agriculture."

For current students like Sphiwe Mnisi, this collaboration is helping to realise a dream. Sphiwe (31) is looking to follow in Karabo's footsteps when she graduates by setting up a small poultry business and expanding into a fully viable commercial enterprise with experience and time. Her training at Buhle Farmers' Academy is enabling her to gain all the necessary practical skills to be able to make her business a success. While both Sphiwe and Karabo will agree that farming requires sacrifice and hard work, to see one's vision become a reality in spite of the sacrifice is much greater reward.

The opportunities created through the partnership between Land Bank, the IDC and Buhle Farmer's Academy have a compounding effect, creating further opportunities for participation by many more in the sector through job creation. With over 4000 graduates already passing through the Academy's doors, half of them women and 65% of them youth, the programme is on track to empower many more young farmers into the future.

MORE ABOUT BUHLE FARMERS' ACADEMY

The Academy has been training and developing entrepreneurial skills for the agricultural sector for 16 years already, growing from strength-to-strength. Trainees come from all over the country to learn at its two campuses, one of which is near Delmas, Mpumalanga, and the second at Mkhondo (Piet Retief), in KwaZulu-Natal. The Academy offers holistic and practical training courses covering vegetable, crops, poultry and livestock production, as well as mixed farming. The Academy has helped to create over 8000 jobs in the agricultural sector to date, and is looking to do even more by partnering with organisations like the IDC and Land Bank. For more information go to www.buhle.org.za or call 012 492 1383.



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