



WITS SIYAKHANA INITIATIVE



BACKGROUND

The Wits Siyakhana Initiative is a syndicate within Wits University. It is linked to several academic units at Wits. Our goal is to develop integrated programmes to promote public and social health through improved food security and nutrition, entrepreneurial and sustainable development and livelihoods, and healthier environments. Siyakhana began ten years ago when it transformed an unused dumpsite into a 1-hectare food garden in Johannesburg's Bezuidenhout Park that has supplied a wide range of fresh fruits, vegetables, maize, and herbs to local early childhood development centres and NGOs that provide home-based care to HIV+/AIDS patients and their dependents. The garden has continued its mission of providing foods to children, youth and adults in need while simultaneously expanding to become a city-, region-, and nation-wide demonstration site, training and research hub.

In October 2011, the Siyakhana Initiative's Permaculture Food Garden was awarded "**Best Innovation Project**" and "**Overall Community Project Winner**" at the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's 2011 Awards. In 2012 Siyakhana was awarded 3rd prize for Land Conservation by National Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. These prestigious awards recognise Siyakhana as an important urban agriculture project in Gauteng and in the country. The awards acknowledge and highlight initiatives in Gauteng which seek to promote sustainable use of natural resources; encourage communities in their duty to care for the natural resource base; promote income generation activities using resources appropriately; encourage community initiatives and innovations on best management practices; and share technologies and experiences based on relevant research and practical application.

The Siyakhana Food Garden is regarded as a successful urban food garden in the wider Johannesburg metropole, as well as a hallmark of intersectoral collaboration. This is largely because of its mission to make far-reaching impacts at local, provincial, national and regional levels.

Although the garden is very important in its own right it also serves as a platform for other activities that address the following six key objectives:

- Improving availability of a wide variety of good and nutritious food at various community school sites;
- Conducting relevant and appropriate action-research that has had an impact on policy and strategies at local provincial national and regional levels;
- Offering training to develop capacity among emerging small scale farmers/gardeners and leaders in the area of food gardens and sustainable livelihoods. This objective will be strengthened by the Siyakhana/Wits European Union grant to offer courses in Food Security and Sustainable Development
- Engaging in advocacy and networking activities; and
- Achieving financial sustainability through a social, small business and entrepreneurship models.

Some examples of our diverse work include:

- Design and consultancy on an urban regeneration project in Mamelodi, Gauteng (Siyakhana's urban design work);
- Training emerging farmers, youth interns from Gauteng Dept of Agriculture and emerging leaders in permaculture principles and sustainable livelihoods;

- Advising civil society organisations, public health professionals, NGOs, and members of local and provincial government on food security and urban agriculture strategies;
- Undertaking robust research projects that provide crucial background and rationale for the development of policies addressing food security and environmental health issues.
- Setting up other gardens including roof gardens and building capacity in several sites including schools, local government buildings and institutions for the disabled
- Community outreach and engagement ensuring participation and involvement in the our projects

WHO IS BENEFITTING

The numerous beneficiaries of Siyakhana's work include vulnerable people who are not adequately served by traditional commercial and social service channels, including food gardeners at Siyakhana and other projects, NGOs providing home-based care to HIV/AIDS patients and their dependents, and early childhood development centres. Other beneficiaries are development practitioners and change makers, including directors, officials and MECs in local and provincial government, policy makers, researchers, academics, and students.

Improving food availability can be achieved through capacitating small-scale farmers and gardeners and influencing city and settlement design to give people greater access to arable land, equipment and infrastructural resources, and food retail outlets. This social development approach benefits disadvantaged people who are undernourished and do not have adequate access to supermarkets and shops in which to buy the food needed to make up a healthy diet. This population includes food insecure children and youth and people living with AIDS, for whom food insecurity is a paramount problem. By advising civil society organisations, NGOs, and government on food security and urban agriculture strategies we are improving the appropriateness of government and civil society initiatives on a local, provincial, national, and regional level.

The research and training conducted by Siyakhana has great benefits for development practitioners, students, researchers, government, and civil society. Siyakhana's action-research approach not only produces new knowledge, but also results in tangible outcomes and benefits for future leaders in the area of sustainable livelihoods.

Our base at highly regarded Wits University enables us to mobilize the intellectual capital of a diversity of experts. At the same time, our success in conducting effective on-the-ground work provides us with the credentials and expertise required to influence policy makers and facilitate linkages among a range of governmental departments including Agriculture and Rural Development, Economic Development, Education and Health and Social Development. These partnerships allow us to advocate effectively for changes that will have a national impact.

OUR VISION FOR GROWTH

In the eleven years we have made excellent progress in terms of establishing Siyakhana as a living model for growing food, research, and practical engagement with health and sustainable development. Currently, food and hunger are attracting great local, national, and international attention, as are employment and agriculture, the urgent need to increase the sustainability of human settlements, and the effects of a changing climate.

Given this context, there is enormous potential for the Siyakhana Initiative to increase its local and national impact by consolidating and enhancing its current work and simultaneously facilitating, establishing and supporting othersimilar hubs.

Through this, Siyakhana and other such resource centres could make a significant impact in capacitating people to develop sustainable livelihoods. In turn, this could improve health and contribute to a better environment in South Africa.

In order to achieve our objectives we need to consolidate and strengthen the activities ofthe existing Siyakhana Initiative and develop the staffing and infrastructure to serve a far greater number of people and institutions. It is essential to continue and enhance our flagship food garden. In addition, the unit would house management, programmatic and administrative staff who would respond effectively to requests for assistance, help establish additional resource centres, undertake research on food security and health issues, and develop partnershipsand strategies for long-term sustainability. Additional resource centres would be capacitated to respond to the needs of their own local communities.

The Siyakhana Initiative has attracted very talented, highly qualified, and capable personnelwho are effectively engaged in leading the development of these model initiatives across South Africa. By creating resource hubs and demonstration sites based on the Siyakhana model and widely sharing our experience and lessons learned, government, institutions, NGOs, and the wider public can get the hands-on experience with food production and sustainable livelihoods they need to positively affect their communities.

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE

- To consolidate and enhance Siyakhana garden
- To establish a financially sustainable Siyakhana garden enterprise;
- To improve productivity of the gardens ;
- To rollout organic food waste collections from the households & restaurants in the neighbouring communities;
- To produce compost and vermicompost from food waste and garden refuse
- To establish a health awareness & marketing outreach programme in the households in neighbouring communities;
- To offer a range of training courses (with SETA accreditation)
- To foster enterprises e.g. food stall, restaurant, box scheme and agro-ecological training
- To increase production to at least 2-3 hectares. Additional land has been approved by Joburg Property Company ;
- To extend our model and experiences to other sites
- Enhance and improve the mushroom project, which we started several years ago.

SIYAKHANA'S ACHIEVEMENTS and SUCCESSES

- Prof Michael Rudolph with co-author Florian Kroll won best oral presentation for the 6th Annual Gauteng Agricultural Research Symposium, June 2013
- Awarded European Union contract, with Siyakhana Initiative/Wits as the lead institution in collaboration with two European and two African higher education institutions which will mentor and train future leaders in the fields of food security and social development, 2013

- Multi- and inter-disciplinary research and teaching with several schools and departments at Wits 2006 until present
- African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) member - Collaboration with ten other universities in southern Africa since 2008
- Research partners with international universities: New York, Emory (Atlanta), Queens (Canada) University College London, London South Bank since 2006
- Pioneering research in food security, informal food trade, food flows, food gardens and health promotion and nutrition.
- Very high standard of reports and publications some of which are referred to as benchmark reports
- Michael Rudolph has been invited to be guest speaker at several international conferences
- Working with national provincial and local government sectors including health, agriculture, education and economic development
- Ruth Singer, a Wits honors student, won the best student award for her research conducted at the Siyakhana sites under the supervision of Siyakhana staff, 2012
- New York University students won the prize for best project in the Global Public Health department for their research project at Siyakhana, 2009
- Siyakhana Project has been featured on numerous TV programmes and in the media
- Developed an innovative school programme to teach both learners and educators about nutrition and to equip them with the skills to grow and prepare healthy food
- Siyakhana is now a recognised 'brand' and a hallmark of one of the most successful and sustainable urban food gardens in the wider Johannesburg metropole
- Out of the fertile soil of this garden, the Siyakhana team has promoted community and ecological health, improved food security and built capacity in order to cultivate leadership, create jobs and enhance environments
- Siyakhana has generated and will continue to generate income through consultancy, research and courses

Recent developments

WSI has several key areas of work including the Siyakhana garden as a model demonstration of urban agriculture which encompasses training and research, social cohesion including social development, capital and entrepreneurship and advocacy

- **MOU with National Development Agency (NDA).** Wits and the NDA have signed a MOU. Following on numerous meetings between WSI and representatives of the NDA we have been asked to carry out an assessment of food security in ECD centres in Gauteng as the first of several projects over the next two years in which the NDA want to involve us. We are currently developing this proposal which will include establishing pilot food gardens in some of the ECD centres
- **City of Johannesburg (COJ) Food resilience programme.** A proposal to carry out an evaluation of this programme which was started a few years ago has been approved. We have started this very important project which is a mayoral priority
- **COJ roof garden.** The Dept of Social Development has asked us to implement a roof garden at one of their buildings viz 3 Kotze street in Braamfontein/Hillbrow. The proposal has been approved and we will be implementing this high profile project in the next few weeks using innovative technology and methods
- **COJ Mushroom project.** Siyakhana has been identified as one of the sites for the COJ projects which is due to start in March 2016.

- **Memo of Collaboration (MOC) with Gauteng Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development GDARD.** We have enjoyed a very good relationship with GDARD over the past several years. GDARD has given us research grants and we have offered training for youth in agriculture. In order to further strengthen this relationship a MOC has been generated and will be signed and finalized in the next week resulting in several course offerings and research
- **Gauteng City Regional Observatory (GCRO).** This unit at Wits requested WSI to do two papers on food security in Gauteng. We have submitted both papers
- **Training courses for small scale and community farmers.** We have, for several years, offered many such courses and have learned invaluable lessons from our research and feedback from courses. WSI has so been very involved in training future trainers from an organization called Ekukhanyeni Relief Project (ERP). We are also working with Ubuntu Business Solutions (UBS). Both these organisations have SETA accredited courses which are highly relevant for government at national, provincial and local level where offering such courses to small scale and community farmers is a high priority.
- **European Union grant** Two important components of this project include a) an **Online food Security course.** We are developing the first online course in food security for university students and government officials. This will be offered in 2016 and b) a work package exploring **gender and food security in southern Africa.** This later component has already evoked a lot of interest. see attached brochure
- **Siyakhana garden** We have ongoing visitors and volunteers from communities schools and individuals. Currently we have nine university students from TUT doing the internship at Siyakhana. This impressive new intake is the result of the successful experience of Refilwe Moatshe is from Tshwane University and Lebogang Malinga is from UNISA. We are encouraged that these students have chosen Siyakhana as their site of choice to gain invaluable experience.
- **Business**
 - 1st Rand Foundation Food Security and Agriculture Livelihood Programme. Our comprehensive study of 19 projects sponsored by 1st Rand / Wesbank yielded very important findings and further commitment from the foundation to fund 12 projects for next 15 years We have been retained as consultants for this new programme
 - 1st Rand Foundation national Entrepreneurship study. Our application to carry out this study has been approved. We will be implementing this important study in the next couple of weeks
 - Dis-Chem Foundation small farm This is a good example of establishing a food garden at corporate head offices
 - Siyakhana incubator/ training site and formal link to the Gauteng Townships & Rural Development Institute including a major Oasis project in Soweto

CONCLUSION

Siyakhana is recognized as a hallmark for urban/periurban food gardening, research and training, as well as for its contributions to policy and advocacy. Our proposed expansion would enable the consolidation of our activities and allow us to extend our influence and share our experience and expertise with other areas of the country resulting in improved food security, sustainability, health, and community self-reliance across South Africa.