



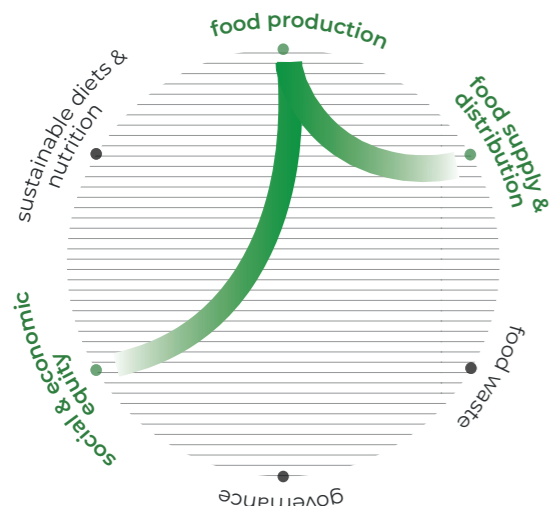
JOHANNESBURG SOUTH AFRICA

Title of Practice

FOOD EMPOWERMENT ZONES IN JOHANNESBURG'S FARMS

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Category
FOOD PRODUCTION

Main impacts on other
MUFPP categories



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Context

In the city of Johannesburg, the Gini coefficient – a measure of income **inequality** – is one of the highest in the world. This inequality is mirrored in the high level of food insecurity, which reaches an average 27 percent citywide and 41 percent in the poorest neighbourhoods. Such a high level of food insecurity is the result of both the inability to access food and the lack of income to afford food. Looking at food distribution and food access systems in Johannesburg, it becomes clear that food insecurity, though it tracks citywide with income deprivation, is geographically concentrated in the southern urban fringe. In this area, the price, quality and availability of food are all challenges that keep citizens in a condition of **food poverty**. In order to provide a solution to this issue, the Municipality designed an intervention that not only addresses the issue of food security, but also provides food resilience for the City's more vulnerable inhabitants. To this end, the City's priority is to address challenges of food security and food resilience, as well as related challenges such as creating entrepreneurial opportunities, skill building, and nutritional/health concerns.

Overview of the food practice

In 2013, the Municipality of Johannesburg and the Department of Social Development created the **Food Resilience Unit**. Its mandate stretches throughout the entire food cycle and food chain with the aim of providing a sustainable model for **empowering communities to grow their own food**, stimulating local economic development and **facilitating access to markets**. The programme, launched by the Unit in 2013, promotes **urban agriculture** as a means to alleviate food insecurity among the urban poor. It started with subsistence homestead/backyard farming at the community level and evolved into the creation of "food empowerment zones" in less than four years. **Food empowerment zones** consist of large farms, established via a competitive proposal call with private sector partners. Each farm has plots of a minimum of one to two hectares, allocated to emerging farmers via the Agri-Resource Centres. The zones also contain a hub-and-spoke site, a **people's restaurant**, a subsidised **market** and a **food-for-waste exchange site**. At present, there are four food empowerment zones in Johannesburg. The biggest one is Eikenhof Farm, which hosts 32 cooperatives, working 270 hectares of land.

Results and lessons learned

Urban agriculture has been recognised as having a potentially important role to play in improving food security in urban areas and providing a basic **safety net** for urban populations. The main results observed in Johannesburg are:

- those who grow and sell their own food experience an immediate move from a food insecure state to one of **food resilience**, and its accompanying self-reliance;
- urban farmers are also **sharing their new skills** with siblings, children, and grandchildren, creating awareness of and interest in the farming lifestyle;
- quality produce is sold at local informal **markets**. The regions host market days, where farmers sell their products to community members. People are now aware of the origin of their vegetables and can choose to visit the gardens as well. At the same time, formal markets in the form of retail outlets and agro-processing businesses are serviced.
- individuals are engaging in **economic activity** and raising their incomes. For urban farmers, this is an opportunity for them to start their own micro-farming business and become economically active; and
- additional health benefits of access to nutritional food, beyond avoiding hunger, include increased **nutritional uptake** as well as increased **physical activity** out in the field.

The project presents an innovative approach in reducing food insecurity through **community empowerment**. After a first analysis of needs and challenges, the Food Resilience Unit mobilised target communities, engaging with residents on possible solutions. This has been complemented by **strong political will** within the City as well as from the provincial government, enabling departments to commit to the success of this project. A third key element has been the creation of **collaborative partnerships**, which provided ongoing technical and financial support. Endorsement and buy-in from sister government departments have been crucial to this process, as has the commitment to empowering micro-farmers in their growth to success. In order to accomplish this the project established an agriculture **support structure** to sustain the programme. Agri-resource Centres provide ongoing support and training in both agriculture and entrepreneurship. The programme is run along the lines of an incubation programme that encompasses technical and business training for farmers in order to build their skills to exit the programme. The farmers will leave the programme with certified skills enabling them to manage their own businesses in the private sector, transitioning out of food insecurity and poverty.



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- **City of Johannesburg**. (n.d.). Summarised version of 2013/2016 Integrated Development Plan (IDP). Johannesburg, South Africa.
- **City of Johannesburg**. (n.d.). Integrated food security and nutrition programme (IFSNP). Johannesburg, South Africa.
- www.joburg.org.za