

One-and-only launched by Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network!

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THE LAUNCH of Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network's state-of-the-art Agri-Processing Hub, on 31st August 2021, will further empower marginalised women and communities being assisted in agricultural and food security activities

Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network will launch its new state-of-the-art Agri-Processing Hub during Women's Month on 31 August 2021 in Athlone, Cape Town. The launch event at the Mhani Gingi Centre of Social Entrepreneurial Excellence will celebrate both the Hub and the formidable achievements of women in urban agriculture. Ms. Bongiswa Matoti, Director: Agricultural Economic Services, Western Cape Department of Agriculture, will officially unveil the Hub.

The fully-equipped, repurposed agri-processing container has been refurbished in stainless steel by Hope Africa Collective of Phillipi, Cape Town. The National Department of Environmental Affairs, through the Extended Public Works Programme, funded the acquisition of the 3m x 12m, second-hand steel container and its refurbishment. "We are extremely thankful to the department and the officials who facilitated the whole process," said Lillian Masebenza, Founding Director of Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Network. The Western Cape Department of Agriculture will further train Mhani Gingi staff and its beneficiary communities in the packaging and processing of foodstuffs and hygiene and food safety practices.

Mhani Gingi's operations in the Agri-Processing Hub will enable the non-profit organisation to add value to agricultural produce from its community gardens and extend the range of products and quality of services provided to retail customers. The Hub will also enable the women urban farmers and vulnerable communities that Mhani Gingi assists in the Western Cape to make sustainable livelihoods through urban agriculture.

Lillian Masebenza, Founding Director of Mhani Gingi, said: "The value of the Agri-Processing Hub is that we will be providing a better service to our customers, the restaurant chefs, who will save time chopping and preparing vegetables by receiving better quality, pre-cut, shredded, and packaged produce from Mhani Gingi's gardens. This will also benefit our other targeted retail customers and those who buy our produce at markets. Moreover, it will assist the soup kitchens of the Mhani Gingi Satellite Community Food Station, where we prepare meals for the hungry every week.

"Another benefit is that we will be providing further employment and skills to the women and persons with physical disabilities whom we support. They will be able to make additional income

from processing and packaging the harvests from their community and domestic gardens," Masebenza said.

"The Hub also allows us to provide jams, juices, chutneys, preserves and dried herbs from our vegetables and herbs. They can be packaged to give them added value and extended shelf life in dried and powdered forms," Masebenza said. "Mhani Gingi is excited to add more value to our activities in urban agriculture and providing food for the hungry, especially after COVID increased the demand."

Unique, innovative and inclusive

Mhani Gingi's recycled agri-processing container is unique in many respects. "This Hub of ours is unique in two ways. It is innovative in that it is an adapted recycled container, and it is also inclusive as it makes provision for accommodating people in wheelchairs," Masebenza said.

"Hope Africa Collective has given the container new life. Everything inside is stainless steel. It is equipped with compliant fire protection devices. It is environmentally friendly, and it is attractive to the eye. The design includes an energy-efficient cold store, hot water on-demand unit and simple yet effective water recycling capability. As a repurposed transporter of goods, our Hub is also portable as we can take our activities with us anywhere," she added.

The container's interior is lined with stainless steel for better cleaning and hygiene, a stove with gas operated plates and an electric operated oven, air conditioning, and cold storage. There are two deep sinks for cleaning vegetables, cupboards and work surfaces. This set-up will enable Mhani Gingi to cut, pare, process, bottle, bake and cook the organic produce grown at the Mhani Gingi Organic Herb and Vegetable Seedling Nursery and the 10 community gardens supervised by the nursery.

Access for wheelchair users

Crucially, the Agri-Processing Hub has been fitted with a ramp to allow wheelchair access and work surfaces accessible to people in wheelchairs. This will ensure maximum accessibility and usability of the Hub by the persons with physical disabilities supported by Mhani Gingi.

Energy efficient, state-of-the-art community upliftment resource

"Hope Africa Collective was pleased to partner with Mhani Gingi in developing their new Agri-Processing Unit," said Kent Bowen, Economic Development Mentor at the organisation. "This project, completed by our AfriCube Box Solutions team, re-purposed a previously-owned shipping container destined for the scrap yard into an energy efficient, state-of-the-art community upliftment resource.

"This outcome aligned perfectly with Hope Africa Collective's values and also provided an opportunity for advanced training of our prior students, making it a true win-win project for both of the NPOs as well as their direct beneficiaries.

"We are grateful for Mhani Gingi entrusting us with this important project and look forward to bringing our shipping container conversion expertise to bear on future collaborations," Bowen said.

Mhani Gingi inclusive empowerment projects

Mhani Gingi is committed to empowering women and vulnerable groups (including people with disabilities, survivors of abuse, youth at risk and the elderly) to make sustainable livings through social enterprise and urban gardening. The community gardens supervised by Mhani Gingi are situated in disadvantaged communities and at shelters for women and youth in the Cape Town area.

Mhani Gingi predominantly focuses on women-led initiatives in food security and provides associated skills training, projects linked to women-led Early Learning Centres, centres for people with disabilities and abused women. Mhani Gingi also serves as an implementation partner, providing infrastructure and resources to grow mainly women-led start-ups and micro-businesses involved in urban agriculture, social responsibility outreach programmes, arts and crafts, tourism and B&Bs.

Importance of collaborative relationships

Mhani Gingi is based at the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children in Athlone, with whom they collaborate. The clients at the Centre have their own section of garden where Mhani Gingi teaches them how to propagate the vegetables and herbs as well as how to market that produce. Mhani Gingi has also facilitated the collaboration with National Development Agency (NDA) to make an opportunity for 20 clients, including those from Victory Outreach Christian Recovery Home (VOCRH), to receive African Grower compact food-growing systems, which are supplied by Fresh Life Produce, when they have completed the training. The collaboration with the Ackerman Pick n Pay Family Foundation also makes it possible for 16 beneficiaries from Blouville School for Learners with Special Needs, in Retreat, people with physical disabilities (PWDs) supported at Uitsig Community Centre, Ravensmead, and by LEAP Maths and Science School, in Langa, to also receive the African Grower kits after completing the training.

The initiatives afford these beneficiaries to have income-generating opportunity. Mhani Gingi also collaborates with Ladles of Love who donate food twice weekly for Mhani Gingi community soup kitchens. The Western Cape Department of Agriculture provides technical support services for the gardens and for agri-processing, while the Department of Social Development makes EPWP services available to those working at the community gardens linked to Mhani Gingi. "We are extremely thankful to ALL our collaborating partners for their support which enables us to carry on the very needed sustainable empowerment of vulnerable groups in our communities, for them to improve their livelihoods," said Masebenza.

Remembering the achievements of South African women

The Agri-Processing Hub launch planned for 31 August coincides with Women's Month in South Africa and will be a celebration of the continued successes of the Saartjie Baartman Centre towards enriching the lives of marginalised women.

"We remember and acknowledge especially during August the women who went before us and conquered and overcame greater challenges than we face today. It is from those women who marched on 9 August in 1956 and came together from diverse denominations and backgrounds to improve their situation that we have learned our strategies of collaboration and partnering that sustain us and bring us success in our current efforts," said Masebenza.

Stepping-stone to sustainability

The launch will also kick-start the journey into improving the supply chain offering to Mhani Gingi's target markets. The launch will be a COVID-protocol limited event with various stakeholders who have generously contributed to our cause. Ravi Naidu, owner of Simply Asia in Heritage Square, Cape Town CBD, has sponsored the catering.

"Along with representatives from across government and private entities, the event will provide a stepping-stone to the sustainability of these organisations and further empowerment to the communities they serve," said Dr Earl Starr, Mhani Gingi Trustee.

Hope Africa Collective

Hope Africa Collective aims to bring sustainable solutions to developing potential, transforming communities, and overcoming poverty. The collective believes in holistically investing in the youth of Philippi and surrounding communities to build and to restore dignity, worth, and employment and entrepreneurial skills. The NPO's social enterprises – AfriCube Box Solutions (the engine behind this project) and The Printery – help provide the support needed to sustain these critical community development programmes.

For further information please visit www.mhanigingi.co.za. Or contact Lillian Masebenza, Founding Director of Mhani Gingi Social Entrepreneurial Director, on mobile number 082 465 4687.

Captions 1-2: The interior of the state-of-the-art Agri-Processing Hub container after refurbishment and refitting by Hope Africa Collective.

Captions 3-5: Examples of pre-cut, shredded and packaged produce from Mhani Gingi's food gardens.







