

VICE CHANCELLOR'S DISTINGUISHED AWARD  
*FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT*

**2016**

**Joint Award**

**Group 1**

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*Water Research Commission Amanzi for Food Research Programme*

In recent years, Community Engagement has seen an enormous surge in high quality work with the result that in 2016 it was impossible to make a distinction between two groups for the award. The first group of recipients are the Water Research Commission Amanzi for Food Research Programme.

Household food security in South Africa remains a national challenge with an estimated 59% of 13.7 million households being food insecure and often suffering hunger and chronic malnutrition as a result. Agriculture makes a significant contribution to the livelihoods of an estimated 4.5 million people who have access to small portions of agricultural land. Yet, utilisation of available land water resources for smallholders, both in home-gardens and fields remains low.

An analysis done by the project group showed that agricultural colleges (in the Eastern Cape and elsewhere) continue to focus on larger scale farming and mainstream irrigation technologies, even though water is increasingly scarce, and that the agricultural sector is the largest water user in South Africa. Currently all South Africa's water is allocated, and there is little 'new' water for developing the smallholder farming sector, especially in the face of climate change.

The Amanzi for Food Research Programme takes an action-oriented, expansive learning approach to knowledge co-creation, dissemination and training for skills development around water use in homestead food gardening and rainwater harvesting for cropland food production in the Amathole District in the Eastern Cape. The programme was developed in response to a

request from the Water Research Commission that saw the need for the kind of action-oriented approach at the heart of the project.

Over a three year period the project has developed a learning network approach that crosses borders between universities, colleges, municipality, extension services, and farmers' associations in the rural Eastern Cape. Participants in the Amanzi for Food Programme include smallholder farmers, extension officers, local economic development facilitators, research technicians from a research station, and students and academics from Agricultural Training Institutes and universities.

The learning network was named '*Imvotho Bubomi*' (meaning 'Water is Life') and was located in the Raymond Mhlaba municipal area.

The programme has been structured around the four components of:

- Knowledge dissemination and mediation with curriculum development in both colleges and universities.
- Knowledge dissemination and mediation amongst government extension organisations.
- The development of materials which complement those already produced by the Water Research Commission including a website, and a blog.
- Knowledge dissemination and mediation using public media (especially radio and local newspapers).

A key focus of the programme was activity involving the development of productive demonstration sites in community and college settings. Three different sites were set up using a collaborative model: one in a college, one on a communal plot (involving elderly women farmers) and one on a successful farming site. These three demonstration sites were chosen by the network for their learning potential, and for their capacity to impact on actual food production practices in the community.

Several methodologies were then used to enhance learning around these sites. Key to these methodologies was space for engagement by all stakeholders with matters of concern and the recognition and appreciation of indigenous knowledge of harvesting and conserving rainwater. The project also used several change-based workshops to bring diverse groups together into

conversations focused on finding solutions to the local water problems being experienced by farmers in the area.

Many projects involving tertiary institutions and local communities use 'Research-Develop-Disseminate- Adopt' strategies which involve academics producing the knowledge and communities using it with no consideration for what they already know and practice.

The Amanzi for Food programme differed in using a change practices course which then activated a learning network in order to blend scientific with other ways of knowing to create new knowledge. The project has also allowed for considerable student capacity building as students involved have worked on their own postgraduate journeys. As a result, the project has produced one PhD and three master's graduates. Three of these student researchers were awarded the 2016 Community Engagement Student Researcher of the year award for their work.

The quality of the project has been such that it has received both international and national recognition for its innovative approach grounded in learning which is truly 'social'.

