

NEWS RELEASE

Moja Gabedi: From waste to a thriving community engagement hub



The gardens at Moja Gabedi.

PRETORIA - Once an unofficial rubbish dump and a hotspot for illegal activity, [Moja Gabedi](#) at 384 Festival Street in Hatfield has been transformed into a thriving community engagement hub thanks to the University of Pretoria's (UP) [Unit for Community Engagement](#). What was once an eyesore is now a lush urban garden, a centre for student learning and a safe, green haven for the local community.

A remarkable transformation

The rehabilitation of Moja Gabedi began in 2019 with a clean-up operation involving the removal of 3 000 tons of waste and the introduction of 3 000 tons of topsoil and 200 tons of compost. Trees were planted, gardens cultivated, and temporary structures erected to serve as therapy centres and community meeting spaces. Managed by [Dr Eugene Machimana](#), Head: Curricular Community Engagement in UP's [Department for Education Innovation](#), and Site Managers [Innocent Chauke](#) and [Pontsho Masele](#), the project continues to grow, attracting students and community members alike.

Student-driven community engagement

In 2024 alone, 183 students from various disciplines – including the [Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences](#) (NAS), [Faculty of Health Sciences](#), and the [Faculty of Education](#) – actively contributed to Moja Gabedi. Their work ranged from food production research and environmental rehabilitation to occupational therapy sessions for vulnerable members of the community.

“It is through collaborative community engagement initiatives that the University and community can transform other degenerative spaces and make them places of meaningful engagement,” Chauke says. “Students pursuing degrees in agriculture conduct their research on food production in the garden, while occupational therapy students conduct life-changing sessions with community members, helping them realise their full potential.”

The [Mastercard Foundation Scholars Programme](#) has also played a key role, with students using the space for entrepreneurial projects that, in turn, provide financial support for Moja Gabedi. A Dutch non-profit organisation, The Breadhouse, has also launched a ‘Baketainer’ project on-site, converting shipping containers into a bakery that provides affordable bread to the local community.

Positive ripple effect

The transformation of Moja Gabedi extends beyond its physical landscape. The project has become a symbol of urban regeneration, drawing in over 622 community members in 2024 alone. The community members now have access to fresh produce, students have a unique hands-on learning environment, and the area has seen a significant reduction in crime.

“The Hatfield precinct is now a cleaner and safer space,” Masele says. “We’ve seen a notable decrease in criminal activity, and the homeless individuals who once occupied the site have been relocated to a nearby shelter.”

Beyond Moja Gabedi, UP students continue to engage in various community projects across the city, reinforcing the University’s commitment to social responsibility and sustainable development.

Looking ahead

With its existing achievements, Moja Gabedi is far from complete. Plans are in place to further develop the site as a hub for educational tours, workshops and small business initiatives.

“Our vision is to make Moja Gabedi a model for regenerating neglected urban spaces,” Chauke says. “With continued collaboration between the University and community, we can transform even more forgotten spaces into places of meaningful engagement.”

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za