

Breaking the cycle of poverty by empowering vulnerable women with food-cultivation and life skills

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On Monday, 27 September, the University of Pretoria (UP) Community Oriented Primary Care (COPC) Informal Settlement Health project, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Future Africa, hosted the launch of its project 'Breaking the Cycle of Poverty' on the premises of the Living Word Church in Pretoria East. The aim of the project was to promote female urban farming (food production) and transfer critical health and social skills for health and livelihood to the urban residents of the Cemetery View informal settlement. To advocate and create a supportive environment for vulnerable women, this research project made use of an action research framework to develop and test food production (farming and animal protein), and an educational kit that included entrepreneurship, food production skills, (cultivation and preparation, and maternal and childcare).

The objectives of the project included the exploration of the knowledge, attitudes and needs of mothers, caregivers and community health workers with a view to establishing food gardens and egg production (laying hens) in the Cemetery View informal settlement, and developing and testing information, educational and communication material for use in primary care and vulnerable communities. Their efforts were facilitated by inputs from experts on health, nutrition, and urban farming.



The principal project investigator, Dr Ellenore Meyer from the Family Medicine and COPC Research Unit in the Faculty of Health Sciences, was among the few speakers who touched upon the topic of empowering women through the development of agricultural and money management skills. She highlighted the importance of not only teaching women how to farm, but also how to conduct business. Other speakers included Dr Sunette Laurie, who spoke on farming with vegetables and Marion Beeforth who, in collaboration with the final-year dietetics students, discussed the importance of locally grown food and healthy eating habits. Ms Rebaone Molebatsi emphasised the importance of life skills for a healthy family and business, and Prof Este van Marle-Koster spoke about keeping laying hens to provide families with eggs as a source of animal protein.