

# Burying social ills to create a brighter future



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Food security is something that is dear to Melun Jephtha's heart. As a professional natural scientist in Hawston in the Western Cape, Jephtha is the owner of Ohana Environmental Consultants and Projects. Her mission is to protect the environment for future generations to come. She noticed two empty plots of land that were being used as dumping grounds and decided to do something about it.

*What did she do?*

She pitched the idea of turning it into food gardens. The community fell in love the idea and got involved to help clear the vacant plots and prepare the beds for planting.



Melun Jephtha, managing director of Ohana Environmental Consultants and Projects

The first garden, the Overstrand Care Centre Garden is on the premises of a hospice and the vegetables will be used to provide nutritious meals to the hospice patients.

Her second project, The Franklin Ohana Sustainability Garden, has received a small grant from the Table Mountain Fund to assist members of the community, primarily women, who will learn how to make their own compost, how to plant and grow their own food.

What's incredible about this initiative is that these gardens will produce more than just vegetables; they will create employment for locals. Those working on the land will become certified and this will help them find jobs in the urban farming sector.

Jeptha hopes that the abundance of produce will create a need for a farmer's market in Hawston. These are vital projects, especially for an impoverished community with a high unemployment rate and where drug use among the youth is common. The food gardens will go a long way towards alleviating these social ills and the impact will be felt by generations to come.

Melun, a graduate of the SAB Foundation Tholoana Enterprise Programme, shares more about Ohana Environmental Consultants and Projects.

#### ***Can you tell us a bit about Ohana Environmental Consultants?***

Ohana Environmental Consultants is a progressive environmental consultancy using its informed skill set and service offering to guide development planning. We conduct and undertake specialist studies such as Environmental Impact Assessment from the inception stage of housing or mining developments, water use licence application to ensure the social, economic and environmental viability of the project.

### ■ ***When, how and why did you get started?***

The company was born out of a love and passion for the environment and the desire to play a critical role in the manner which development takes place and to find a balance between how development takes place and to consider people and the environment as part of the process.

Our key objective is to utilise our experience and knowledge to provide guidance and advice on development proposals to ensure that our natural resources, rivers, wetlands, mountain and seascapes are conserved.

### ■ ***What services do you provide?***

As a proud BBEE level 1 company and 100% female owned, we offer comprehensive and precision driven environmental services that include:

- Environmental Impact Assessment for developers, engineers, local or provincial government that proposes new developments in sensitive environments based on the various sets of legislation.
- Environmental control for engineering companies or developers to ensure that environmental compliance and monitoring takes place during the construction or operational phase of the development.
- Freshwater Impact Study, Rehabilitation planning, for rehabilitation of wetlands and for developments near rivers, wetlands, marshes or areas consisting of peat soil.
- Maintenance management planning for work undertaken in rivers or wetland that are for maintenance purposes and in accordance with an approved Maintenance Management Plan.

Our core function is to ensure that our environmental studies delivers results and becomes an integral part of development practices.

### ■ ***What are some of the obstacles you've had to overcome since starting out?***

I believe it takes time underpinned by daily effort to ensure that the business is built in a sustainable manner. By understanding the vision of my business, applying patience, consistency and perseverance during the initial stages of starting my business have assisted me greatly.

### ■ ***Covid-19 and the national lockdown has impacted many businesses. What impact did it have on Ohana Environmental Consultants?***

In the nature of our work we are required to conduct site visits and site audits. During the lockdown we were unable to do any site visits and audits which had an impact on the progress of our current projects.

Due to the lockdown public participation process were extended according to the lockdown period and this caused some delays in determination on the outcome of environmental impact assessments.

### ■ ***How did you prepare for the lockdown?***

In preparation of lockdown I looked at what our main focus areas would be. I made sure that our team had all the necessary resources in order to work during the lockdown. We made use of online platforms to communicate on a daily basis including Facebook for business and Zoom/Microsoft teams.

We focused on the work that we could do during the lockdown. During the lockdown we built a database of new clients and started to engage and build relationships with other specialists in our field of work. During the lockdown we

continued to work on the vision to build a productive and sustainable food garden with the key objectives to address food security, provide accredited skills training and create sustainable work opportunities.

**▣ *What's the biggest challenge you are facing during this pandemic?***

We are presently working on securing new work opportunities and focussing on the establishment of the food garden.

**▣ *What sort of assistance will you need going forward?***

The current needs of the business entail assistance and exposure to be eligible for new work opportunities. For the food garden we require assistance with irrigation and security.

**▣ *With South Africa on Lockdown Level 3, if you are able to operate, what steps are you taking to continue operating?***

We ensure that we wear our masks at all times, carry and make use of alcohol-based sanitizer when working in the field and adhere to social distancing. We also make sure to avoid crowded areas.

### ▣ ***What measures have you put in place for your employees?***

We maintain a safe working environment for our employees. They are equipped with masks and sanitizers.

In the food garden we wear masks at all times and only allow a limited amount of volunteers and role players in the garden.

### ▣ ***Are you communicating with your customers? If so, how?***

Ensuring we communicate with our clients is an integral part of our work at Ohana Environmental. Yes, definitely, we believe in maintaining regular communication with our clients. We engage with our clients via telephone, Zoom and Microsoft teams.

### ▣ ***Now is the time to innovate and experiment. What is Ohana Environmental Consultants and Projects doing?***

Our company would like to have a positive social impact in our local community and the vision was born to build a sustainable food garden. Prior to the lockdown we started with the planning and preparation for the establishment of a community food garden in Hawston.

Due to the lockdown we could not proceed with the ground-breaking of the food garden. When the lockdown was lifted in May 2020 we started with the establishment of a overgrown and neglected piece of land with the vision to transform it into a vibrant and sustainable food garden. We believe that food gardens have the ability to enable community members to grow their own vegetables and also it has the unique ability to strengthen food security in the long run.

### ▣ ***What do you predict the next 6 months will be like?***

I believe that this will be a period where a great turn around and shift will occur in terms of work opportunities and that the company will employ methods to enhance and improve on its current service offering.

### ▣ ***What has been your biggest lesson from all this?***

Always ensure that your business is prepared for unexpected occurrences by having a strategy in place that can assist and guide during challenging times. Communicate and reach out to other specialists in your industry with the aim to build solid relationships.

Ohana Environmental Consultants has the discipline and the determination to rise above our current and future challenges and we believe that by building good relationships with our current clients and by continuing to be results orientated we can overcome anything and come out better than before.

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