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INMED's Plan to Feed the World

In a world where more than 2 billion people are without regular access to safe, nutritious and sufficient food, INMED has revolutionized and is scaling an ancient faming technique to not only feed millions of people living in poverty, but also to generate sustainable incomes and self-reliance in regions hard hit by climate change.

A program of INMED Partnerships for Children, INMED Aquaponics™ has benefited more than 5,000 smallholder farmers and their family members spanning diverse geographies on three continents – and has plans for reaching hundreds of thousands more in the next few years. A finalist in the food category for the 2020 Zayed Sustainability Prize, INMED's model includes an innovative aquaponics technology along with physical and virtual training, mentoring and support, and links to markets and finance—addressing the root causes of extreme poverty, including inequality, food insecurity, stigma and lack of opportunity.

A technique used as far back as the Aztecs, aquaponics combines fish farming and hydroponic (soil-less crop production) in one closed, symbiotic system. INMED Aquaponics™ is a simplified, lower cost version of aquaponics utilizing solar power and locally available materials, producing at least 10 times more high-quality crops year-round in the same space, consuming up to 75% less energy and using 80-95% less water than conventional agriculture. It also does not require pesticides or chemical fertilizers and is resilient to severe climate events.

INMED's modular design is easy to build, operate and maintain by people of all ages and abilities in nearly any location—urban or rural. With a focus on women, youth, indigenous communities and people with disabilities, INMED is using aquaponics to bring marginalized populations into the mainstream economy with marketable skills and improved access to fresh fish and produce. A single commercial-sized INMED Aquaponics system, for example, yields an average of 13.6 tons of organic fruits and vegetables, produces 1.4 tons of fish, and feeds over 600 people per year.

Through nearly a decade of front-line experience, INMED has developed best practices and program models that work, while inspiring and training the next generation of farmers and educators—connecting them to mentors and markets and helping to build business acumen across the value chain. By creating deeply rooted community capacity for generating sustainable livelihoods through aquaponics, INMED's projects have led to measurable success. For example:

- Within a year of implementing INMED Aquaponics, a struggling all-female farming cooperative on the outskirts of the Kalahari Desert increased its monthly income 120-fold, winning regional and national awards and investors. The group continues to expand its supply of fresh produce and fish for its impoverished community, as well as create jobs and skills development opportunities in a township with a history of 82% unemployment and nearly 100% government assistance.

- South Africa's Free State province has the highest percentage of people with disabilities in the nation, comprising more than 230,000 people, 59% of whom are female. INMED Aquaponics is empowering cooperatives of disabled farmers with marketable skills and business training. Within the next three years, INMED plans to reach thousands more adults, youth, and schoolchildren with disabilities through online and community-based aquaponics education in three additional provinces where INMED already has a footprint.

- INMED's Increasing Access to Climate-smart Agriculture (IACA) program in Jamaica is helping dozens of struggling smallholder farmers who have been forced out of business because of destructive climate events build climate-resilient aquaponics enterprises in the degraded watersheds of Clarendon. IACA combines technical, online and business training, access to financing, links to markets and ongoing technical support from INMED-trained agriculture extension agents—the entire value chain for success. One participant recently won $J100,000 in seed funding from an economic development competition to launch his own adaptive agri-enterprise.

- In rural indigenous communities suffering from climate-change impacts in the Peruvian Amazon, INMED Aquaponics is supplementing the nutritional value of school meals and increased dietary diversity for hundreds of schoolchildren. INMED also has facilitated new research and hands-on learning opportunities for over 300 tertiary and graduate-level students at the Intercultural University of the Amazon, who are using aquaponics systems to propagate native crops and fish.

In 2020, INMED is introducing its aquaponics program in Brazil to provide food security and skills development for impoverished populations, as well as in the U.S. to deliver vocational training to teens with special needs. There also are plans to further scale INMED Aquaponics in South Africa.

“Being a finalist for the Zayed Sustainability Prize has generated a lot of interest in our plan to scale nationally to primary and secondary schools and universities as well as vulnerable communities throughout South Africa to serve as a model for replication and scaling in other high-priority regions worldwide,” says INMED Founder and CEO Dr. Linda Pfeiffer. “Having built an impressive scope and diversity of participants and partners as well as political backing for scale, South Africa will be the natural launchpad to expand our successful model – a model that incorporates physical and virtual training and support with links to markets and finance, and hands-on experience and coaching from our Center and cadre of mentor farmers and trained . agriculture extension agents.”

“We see great potential for INMED Aquaponics to be a game changer for South Africa and the continent,” says Unathi Sihlahla, Programs Director of INMED South Africa. “With the right partnerships, we can create transformative change for the millions of struggling small-scale farmers, youth, women, and people with disabilities in South Africa and beyond who could achieve so much, if only given the opportunity.”

About INMED Partnerships for Children

INMED Partnerships for Children is a nonprofit international development organization that has worked in more than 100 countries since 1986 to build pathways for vulnerable children, families and communities to achieve well-being and self-reliance. As a direct result of INMED’s community-based interventions, diverse multi-sector partnerships, grassroots community engagement, and integrated programs addressing climate-adaptive agriculture, health and nutrition, youth development and income generation, INMED has helped some 100 million individuals in low-resource areas to break the complex cycles of poverty and find a path toward self-reliance. Learn more at https://inmed.org.

Photo caption:

INMED’s school-based aquaponics systems are providing access to fresh produce and fish, skills development and vocational education to students of all abilities on three continents.

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