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**“MASIBAMBANE” - LET’S STICK
TOGETHER’: CONTENTIONS ON THE
ROLE OF URBAN VEGETABLE GARDENS
IN THE CAPE FLATS**

DISSERTATION

Presented for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

in Social Anthropology

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



By

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30 November 2007

DIGITISED

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MASTERS' DISSERTATION

“Masibambane”- Let's Stick Together': Contentions on the role of urban vegetable gardens in the Cape Flats

FANON'S LAND

*Threadbare in the blood
bloody in the tongue
tongue-tied by the birth push,
we have washed up on a word
like an old bed sheet
wrung dry of the fight
on laundry day*

*the old world the new world
the new world the old world
(the land! the land!)
if you stared just long enough*

*love still finds me here
in the post-colonial hour
here
among the politics of viruses
and neo-liberal economic policies
here among the grand things
that have curled around us
and sprouted wings
like god's heavenly creatures
vainly trying to transport us to paradise*

*here in Fanon's no-man's land
we are beginning to learn
how to make everything
out of nothing again.*

Roshila Nair, 2004

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on three collectively managed urban vegetable farms in two of Cape Town's urban townships, Guguletu and Philippi. I entered the field through an NGO, Abalimi Bezekhaya, engaged in promoting small-scale, organic forms of urban agriculture through training and the provision of selected locally accessible services such as nurseries based in the Cape Flats, and also in 'greening' schools and other public areas. I also noted the activities of Department of Agriculture (DOA) officials in the gardens. Early on I noticed an apparent discrepancy between the stated intentions of the two institutions in terms of their expectations of what could be achieved in the urban vegetable gardens they facilitated and the motivations for participation gardeners themselves gave. While the DOA, and to a lesser extent Abalimi, claimed that urban vegetable gardens would provide participants with an important source of income in cash and kind, I found, in line with prior research on urban agriculture in Cape Town, that such incomes were negligible and often depended on participants having access to regular sources of income outside the gardens. In fact, the reasons participants gave for their ongoing participation tended to be largely social. This dissertation, therefore, explores the more convivial personal and social motivations behind participation in urban vegetable gardens for participants themselves, briefly comparing and contrasting these with the stated goals of Abalimi and the DOA. By way of contextualisation, I understand these discrepancies, where present, to be couched firmly in the structure of the 'development industry', born as it is of a global neo-liberal capitalism.

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PART ONE: BEGINNINGS

1. 'Sticking Together': An Introduction

The sprawling urban townships of the Cape Flats, a sandy, scrubby tract of land that separates the wealthy and picturesque Northern and Southern suburbs of Cape Town, are painfully representative of the impoverishing effects of Apartheid's legacy in South Africa as well of the current government's failure to find or create the means to alleviate that poverty. South African Finance Minister, Trevor Manuel's much celebrated 'fiscal discipline', 'cost recovery', and high growth rates have not tended to improve living conditions nor have they resulted in the significant redistribution of wealth, often actually further entrenching inequality (Koelble, 1998). As De Swardt et al (2005, 101) point out, 'Apartheid social engineering, spatial planning, and rural-urban migration have created urban sprawl and the expansion of racialised economic geographies that have persisted well after the transition to democracy'. Although incorporated into the urban monetary economy of which Cape Town is part, the city's urban townships¹ and their residents occupy a marginal position within it,

clinging to employment at the edges of the formal labour market, subsisting on the meagre pickings that circulate through the informal economy, and continuing to rely heavily on the networks that connect them to the rural economy (De Swardt et al, 2005:102).

Most of these area's residents are 'black'² and live in varying degrees of poverty. Poverty impacts on all aspects of their lives every day. In one of my early visits to the Cape Flats, in April 2006, walking down a street in Guguletu with a friend, I saw a young man collapse in the street ahead of us. I was

¹ 'Township' in the South African context does not refer, as it would in other places, to any suburban area, but to a very particular kind of urban or peri-urban space, characterised by low levels of service provision, high levels of unemployment and poverty, largely informal and/or council-provided housing, and relative isolation. In other parts of the world, such areas might be referred to as 'slums', 'favelas', or 'ghettos'.

² Again, in the South African context, 'black' refers to the racial category a person would have been assigned to under Apartheid. It is usually understood to include people of 'African descent'.

surprised when no-one rushed to assist him and I was urged not to get involved. My companion explained that this happened relatively frequently and that the fallen man would be fine. According to her, it was better not to get involved in case he was 'acting' and tried rob us. She described another time someone had collapsed in front of her on her way to the local grocery store nearby. Sometimes, she explained, people collapsed in the throes of epileptic seizure, other times because they had had too much to drink. Most often however, she added, with gravity, they would fall down because they had not had enough to eat.

Food insecurity is easily the most serious preventable poverty-related humanitarian problem of our time. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) defines food security thus: 'it means that food is available at all times; that all persons have access to it; that it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quantity, quality, and variety; and that it is acceptable within the given culture' (Koc et al, 1999:1). Frequently understood as a rural problem, food insecurity has increasingly become a concern of urban populations as African cities experience simultaneous rapid urban population growth and declining economies, or growing economies without attendant development as in South Africa's experience of 'jobless growth', and lessening state capacity for service provision and social welfare (Koc et al, 1999; Maxwell, 1999). According to a livelihoods survey they conducted for the School of Public Health and Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies in Khayelitsha and Nyanga in 2002, De Swardt et al (2005) indicated that as many as 80% of households in the area had too little available food to meet their needs. This is not entirely surprising considering that, according to the same study, close to 85% of these households' incomes fell well below the national poverty line of R560 per month (De Swardt et al, 2005). The South African Department of Agriculture claims that, overall, South Africa is a food-secure country (<http://www.nda.agric.za>, 29 May 2006), but, 'despite national food security, many South African households experience continued food insecurity, malnutrition, and unemployment' (<http://www.statssa.gov.za>, 29 May 2006).

As Madeley (2002:24) has demonstrated, 'people go hungry because they are either too poor to grow enough or to buy the food they need. Growing more food may not in itself reduce poverty'. Likewise, Sen (1982) has argued that hunger is related to poverty and not to production, proposing, along the lines of Hobson (1905), that production will always be able to increase to meet higher demands. His research into the incidence of famine highlights the terrifying reality that several countries, including Ethiopia and India, have continued to export grain during extreme famine, and that this is not unusual in the developing world (Sen, 1982). If these authors are correct in reporting that there are so very many people who must go hungry on a daily basis, then our work as anthropologists needs to find ways to address the problem if we are to avoid being part of the scandal that it entails. This dissertation considers one project that claims to address this situation, and reports on its successes and challenges in achieving urban, community-based food security, reflecting particularly on the motivations of participants in its projects.

Most urban areas have considerable amounts of open and underutilised land within their boundaries. Even on the Cape Flats, which is constructed extremely densely on soft, shifting white sand, one finds such sites. They could be, and some are being, used to grow vegetables. The assumption within many development agencies is that doing this can significantly reduce the food insecurity of poor urban residents, increase the self-sufficiency of cities, and improve urban environments, while simultaneously generating income. In Havana Cuba, for example, urban agriculture has been actively promoted as a solution to acute food scarcity problems. Here it was found that even though urban food gardeners tend to operate on small and marginal sites the production of food at home 'significantly increased the quantity and quality of the food available to gardeners' households and had an impact on household budgets' (Moskow, 1999:79).

Food insecurity, and the means to combat it, is increasingly acknowledged as an urgent policy issue and relevant development tool. The nongovernmental organisation (NGO), Abalimi Bezekhaya, which facilitated the research on which this work is based, is one of a number of organisations in Cape Town

engaged in promoting urban vegetable production as a partial solution to the problems of food insecurity and poverty increasingly experienced in the city. It is a non-denominational (although still closely affiliated with its parent organisation, Catholic Welfare and Development [CWD]), community-based urban agriculture and 'greening' organisation. Its objectives are clear and contained: to make greening and vegetable gardening resources readily available at low cost to members of the lowest income groups, and to support community-based tree-planting and food gardening initiatives in the city's townships.

This dissertation focuses on the activities of three collectively managed urban vegetable gardens associated with this organisation. I investigate the stated motivations for involvement of the vegetable gardeners with whom I worked during the period of research. These motivating factors are explored with brief reference to the expectations of the NGO, as well as those of other involved agents, particularly the Department of Agriculture (DOA). The comparison is attempted in order to begin to examine whether or not, and how far, the expectations of the NGO in terms of alleviating poverty and adding to food security are being achieved. The ways in which the motivations and expectations of the gardeners themselves and those of the relevant development agencies overlap, intersect, or contradict, and the implications of this, will be discussed.

The vegetable gardens in which I worked, two in Guguletu and one in Philippi, were managed primarily by women of pension-collecting age. This is crucial since I demonstrate below that the continued viability of these vegetable gardens was largely dependent on external support structures, such as those provided by the aforementioned NGO as well as by the DOA and the Department of Social Services (DOSS), which provided much of the inputs by way of compost, fencing, tools, and, particularly, on the participants' access to alternative sources of income for general livelihood. Frequently, as I aim to elucidate here, participation in these vegetable gardens is not 'for the money' – the gardens rarely break even, let alone turn a profit – or even always for the food – the supply of vegetables is often irregular and there is evidence to

suggest that surpluses are sometimes wasted (see the discussions in Part 2, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5). The continued participation of project members relies largely on access to sources of income in cash and kind from outside the gardens themselves such as government social grants and pensions and the rents, incomes, and grants of co-resident children, spouses, and tenants.

The stated motivations for participation appear to lie primarily in the realm of the social, although there are clearly some limited material benefits to participation. This is not the first time the argument for the convivial role of urban vegetable gardens in Cape Town's urban townships has been made (see R. Eberhard, 1989, or Rachel Slater, 2001, for example), but the claim bears restating and reinvigorating with new evidence in conjunction with a cursory evaluation of the practice of development agencies and the state involved in promoting and supporting such initiatives. While Abalimi clearly recognises the social aspect of communal urban vegetable gardening, there is a strong element in the stated goals of Abalimi and particularly in those of the DOA that continues to advocate the material economic 'potential' of such projects in terms of aspirations for poverty alleviation and income generation.

The dissertation begins by laying down the 'Groundwork'. This chapter trawls through the methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation used. I excavate the messy business of fieldwork and delve into the ethics of my research and the many challenges I faced in conducting meaningful ethnographic research in the context of urban agriculture in Cape Town. Also included at this point is an unearthing of some of the joys and difficulties I experienced in working with an interpreter.

Next, in the four chapters that make up Part 2 of the dissertation, I invite the reader to take a trip 'Down the Garden Path' towards an understanding of what it is that motivates long-term participation in such projects. Here I present the more descriptive aspects of my data, taking the reader with me into the gardens to meet the gardeners and get to know them. This section of the dissertation divides the ethnographic material I collected into the spatial,

institutional, material, and social dimensions of participation. Chapter 3, 'The Spatial Dimension', describes and analyses the important spatial dynamics that influence the operations of the gardens, including the layout, position, and purpose of the garden. I outline the rhythms of work in the gardens and explore some of the interpersonal dynamics I observed, particularly those that affected the distribution of labour in the gardening groups and the amount of time respective gardeners spent at 'work'. This chapter makes use of observable spatial factors and the impact of these on the ways in which participation in the gardens was variously structured in each of the three gardens.

It is in Chapters 4 and 5, the material and social dimensions respectively, that I demonstrate the very limited extent to which access to scarce resources such as cash, jobs, food, training, and the acquisition of new skills operate as a primary motivating force for engaging in urban agriculture, at least for the groups with whom I conducted my research. After having argued that it would appear not to be the money, or even always the food, that encourages and sustains participation, I move on to a detailed exploration of what it is, then, that motivates the people I worked with to take part in the kinds of urban vegetable gardens on which my research has focused. These chapters draw heavily on participants' formal statements of motivation, obtained through interviewing, and the extensive use of observations and the information gleaned from the frequent informal conversations I had with gardeners during the course of the work day. Chapter 5 explores the extent to which the reasons participants gave for their garden 'work' related to the primarily social and convivial character of that participation (see also Passes, 2000; Overing, 1989; Illich, 1973; and Goldman, 1963 on the social value of work).

Chapter 6, 'The institutional dimension', examines the interactions between the gardens and the organisations and institutions which support them. The chapter is based on the NGO's records and its written appeals for funding as well as on my observations of the two institutions' presence and activities in the three gardens during my two months (six weeks intensive and a further, more protracted two weeks) of fieldwork in mid 2006. While Abalimi explicitly

acknowledges the forerunning importance of social motivators for participants themselves, its 'Livelihood Model' continues to work within a linear 'development continuum' model. This model imagines communally managed vegetable gardens passing through 'survival', 'subsistence', and 'livelihood' levels to ultimately, with the correct training and motivation as provided by Abalimi, attain 'commercial' status. This commercial level would 'retain and enhance wider social and nature conservation benefits while at the same time realising viable profits' (Funding proposal submitted to Misereor³ in March 2006). Here, I briefly discuss the constraints on NGO and development industry practice due to the current global economic system, which expects projects to define themselves in economic terms, and the impact of this on the image individual projects aim to project.

Once the ethnographic material is clearly laid out and discussed, Part 3 of the dissertation goes on to discuss the implications of the varying expectations, intentions, and roles of both the gardeners themselves and their patrons. It is here, in the concluding comments and discussion, that I explore the potential consequences of any discrepancy between the motivations of participants and the intentions of support structures on the ways in which gardens are managed. The intention of the chapter, then, is to place in context the lives of research participants as well as the hopes, logic, and intentions of those promoting urban agriculture as one strategy for the potential alleviation of poverty in some South African urban areas. In the postscript, I make some brief general recommendations as to how the NGO in question, and, indeed, the DOA, might better serve the needs of their target populations. First, however, a reflection on the methods of data collection and analysis used, and the ethics of these, is necessary.

³ Misereor is one of Abalimi Bezekhaya's primary donors. It is a German-based Catholic international development funding agent engaged in agricultural and missionary work across the 'developing world'.

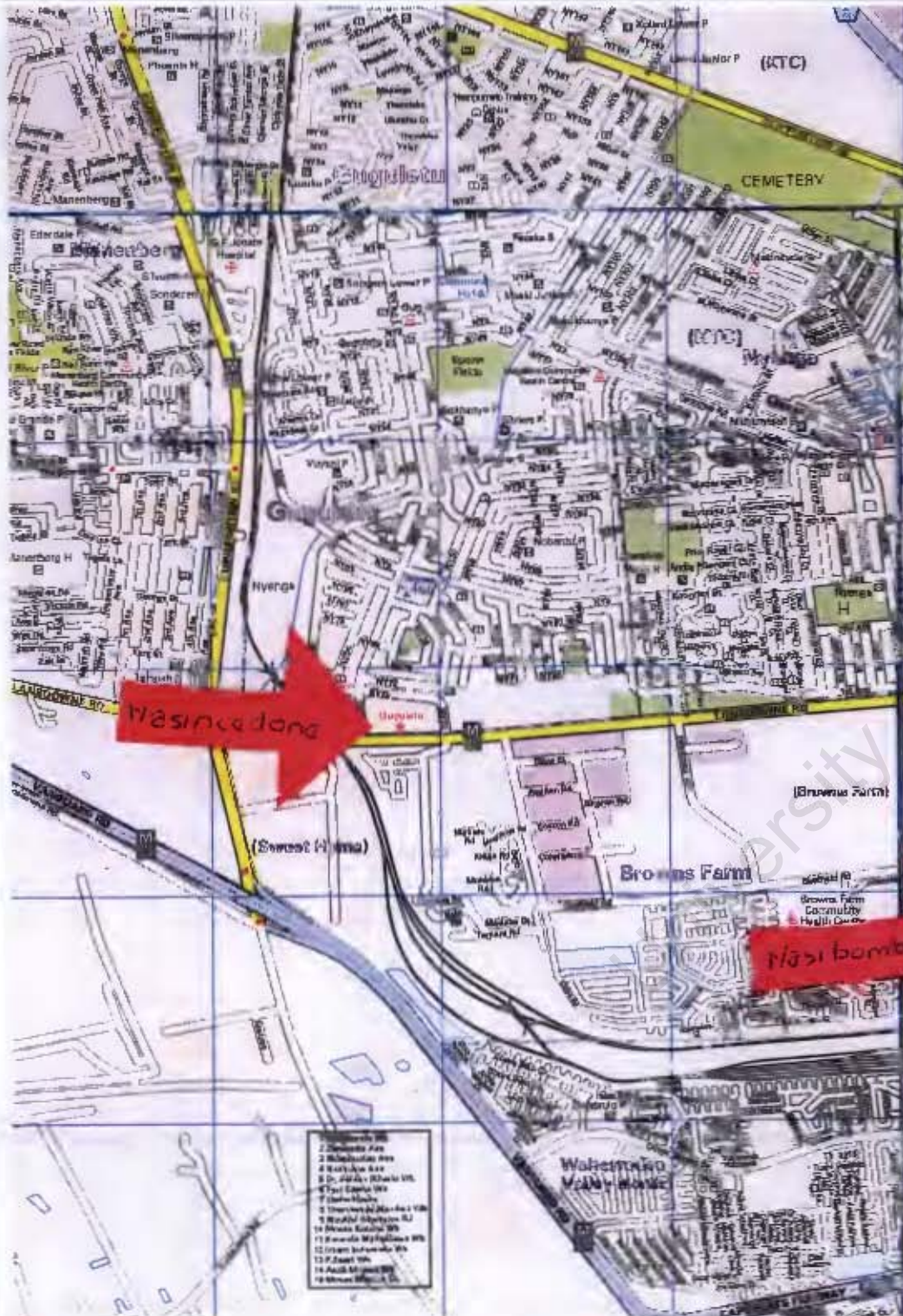
2. 'Groundwork': Finding the people. A comment on method and the dynamics of translation

One morning in April 2006, one of Abalimi's employees picked me up from home to accompany her to a weekly field team planning meeting. As we drove, I questioned her about her role in the NGO and her goals with the gardens. She works on a contract basis as the person responsible for organic accreditation. En route, we stopped at a large communal vegetable garden at a prominent Guguletu community centre. She wanted to see how the gardeners were dealing with recent problems with their water supply and irrigation system. The adjacent building from which they drew electricity for their borehole pump had been the victim of arson, leaving just a locked and abandoned shell with irrigation storage containers slowly emptying. No-one was at the securely locked garden so we walked its perimeter peering through the fence, my companion giving me a crash course in identifying vegetables by their leaves. She mentally noted a few things, among them that the garden was running short of adequate compost.

A few days later, I returned to this garden with another fieldworker, a woman from Nyanga with whom I was to work extensively over the next year. This time the cooperative's members were all present, for a planning meeting. A group of six elderly women and one old man, they sat together amongst tools and planting charts in their 'office' (a large used shipping container donated by the DOA, which I had by this point discovered were a fairly standard feature of all the vegetable gardens under the jurisdiction of the NGO). I stood dumbly by while the fieldworker introduced me in Xhosa, a language of which I regrettably have only a rudimentary understanding, and the members nodded quietly and politely but with what seemed an air of resignation, as if such formal introductions to wandering curious strangers was a necessary evil of being part of the vegetable garden project, a bearable and yet undesirable interruption, a feature of participation. This Guguletu-based cooperative,

called Masincedane (literally 'Let us Help Each Other'), ended up being the garden where I did most of my fieldwork. I also spent time with members of the Masithandane ('Let us Love Each Other') and Masibambane ('Lets us Support Each Other'/'Let us Stick Together') groups, in Guguletu and Philippi respectively. The reader is invited at this point to refer to the map overleaf, Figure 2.1, for an indication of the exact location of each garden and its position in Cape Town.

The research was conducted over the period April – December 2006, with the most intensive fieldwork taking place over six weeks in June and July 2006. I began in April with a week-long participatory pilot study from within Abalimi itself. These six days (not always consecutive), spent in the company of fieldworkers, administrative staff, and management at Abalimi, were intended to enable me to gauge the scale, scope, and internal workings of the NGO. I made initial contact telephonically and over email through its coordinator, Rob Small, whom I knew of through prior research on community building, this time in the context of Waldorf education (Bourne, 2005). I attended two of the NGO's weekly field team planning meetings, held on Monday mornings at the garden centre, or 'nursery', in Khayelitsha. Present at these meetings were the finance manager, organic accreditation person, the Khayelitsha administrator, three fieldworkers and their assistants. Attending these meetings presented me with a valuable opportunity to get an idea of the priorities of the organisation, the duties of its staff, and the kinds of issues they dealt with in the day-to-day implementation of project goals. Travelling to the meetings with a staff member, who lived in my own suburban neighbourhood, gave me an opportunity to see some of 'Abalimi's gardens', their administrative offices in Philippi, and the Nyanga garden centre, as well as to locate the residences of some garden participants. A brochure (parts of which are included as the Appendix) I had found at Abalimi's head office proved very useful as a visual aid to involve a fieldworker who travelled with us part of the way in a conversation about various vegetable gardens and greening projects. The photographs and case studies prompted other examples and detours en route to show me the places pictured, as well as elaborations about the people mentioned.



I spent one full day (and several half days after my initial pilot) looking through the records of the organisation, housed at the Khayelitsha and Philippi offices⁴, in order to learn about its operational history and its stated aims and objectives. I was able there to peruse vegetable garden project files, funding proposals, literature the organisation draws on in advocating particular methods of cultivation, and its records of the major donors. The reports also provided me with sources of data from previous volunteer researchers, such as Fleming (2003), Matschke (2001), and Wade (1986), useful for accessing what others have said was important in the field in which I was working. I also spent some time in each nursery, as well as photographing and mapping both 'nurseries' and the wider community centre complexes in which they were situated⁵.



A store of seedlings at Abalimi's garden centre in Khayelitsha

I spent one full day in each of Khayelitsha and Nyanga working alongside two different fieldworkers and their assistants. Here, I was able to observe what the fieldworkers were responsible for in the organisation and the kinds of work

⁴ There appeared to be no records kept at the garden centre in Nyanga.

⁵ Both shared premises with Nestle sponsored 'soup kitchens' and were associated with Catholic Welfare and Development, with which Abalimi is associated.

they were doing. In each instance, they took me to several operating vegetable gardens in their respective areas where I was able to chat to some gardeners. While traversing the Cape Flats with the fieldworkers, I interviewed each informally about their work, the organisation, and the gardens we visited.

I did not spend much time during the pilot-study period speaking to gardeners themselves, using the time instead to learn about Abalimi and its goals and strategies. I asked members of Abalimi's 12-strong team for comments as to any specifics that they might regard as useful but they were not particularly forthcoming in that regard and my project therefore followed a set of questions that I chose, and that developed further, and indeed arose, as the research progressed, rather than those selected by the field team.

I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork over six weeks in June and July 2006. On many fieldwork days, I conducted one or two formal interviews with members of three vegetable gardens, often accompanied by my interpreter – a local woman (from Philippi) and a relative of one of Abalimi's fieldworkers, whom I had employed part-time. The interviews were short and very structured so as to gather comparative data about the interviewees themselves, their family and home life, and their individual roles in the gardens while not interfering with their activities in the gardens. Very often those I interviewed, while Xhosa first language speakers, had a solid grasp of English and there was little need for translations, except on occasional points of clarity, but there were instances where her presence was invaluable when informants really struggled to understand me and I them. It was also very useful for me to have someone around who could listen to and participate in more informal conversations as well as group planning meetings, and fill me in on the details I had missed.

For the most part, however, I relied on informal conversations with my research participants, carried on mostly in English and 'pidgin' Afrikaans while I worked side by side with them in the gardens each day, and on observations I made during each day's work. I sometimes used these conversations and

observations consciously to elicit testimonies as to the reasons for participating in the gardens, while at other times I just participated, enjoyed, and learned by experience. I watered, planted, weeded, hoed, composted, cleaned, ate milk tart or freshly picked salad, participating in whatever was going on that day and chatting all the while. I bruised, blistered, and ached, learning to use new kinds of tools and uprooting stinging nettles with my bare hands (and later learning to cook them). On occasion, I organised groups of friends and colleagues to help with particularly onerous tasks in the gardens. One day I took several friends to Masincedane to dig out very awkwardly constructed stainless steel 'composters' provided by the DOA. These were becoming a nuisance because the relatively advanced age of the project members prevented them from being readily willing and able to climb into the composters to dig the compost out of them.

The fieldwork method I have just described is known by anthropologists as participant observation and is described by Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland (1998:260) as 'a way to collect data in a relatively unstructured manner in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities of the people being studied'. I found it a very useful technique for learning to understand my research participants and their behaviour through my actively engaging in their vegetable gardening practices in ways that gave me an 'intuitive understanding of what's going on...and allow(ed me) to speak with confidence about the meaning of data' (Bernard, 1994:141).

I also drew maps and took photographs of all the gardens to illustrate the nature of the activities at the vegetable gardens. Each time, I would have a group member walk with me while I drew the maps to have them explain the plot to me, describe what was growing in it at the time, what had been there previously, what it would be used for next, and what would become of the produce grown there. I took many photographs, often at the request of the gardeners themselves, who thoroughly enjoyed looking at the copies I made for them. A selection of these is reprinted, with permission, at key points throughout the dissertation.

In addition, I kept notes obsessively, convinced that, as Malinowski (1922:21) said, 'certain subtle peculiarities, which make an impression as long as they are novel, cease to be noticed as soon as they become familiar. Others again can only be perceived with a better knowledge of the local conditions.' What Malinowski (1922) referred to here is now known as the 'problem of reactivity' (Bernard, 1994:141); and I noticed that its effects worked both ways. The more time I spent in the gardens, the more comfortable the gardeners became with my presence, at least at Masincedane.

Being familiar with various visitors 'popping in' to have a look around, ask a few mundane questions, and take photographs, the gardeners at Masincedane often expressed puzzlement about my insistence on returning to the gardens every day, and staying all day! At first they were a little uncomfortable about my being around so much. They quietly accepted my presence at first, basically because they had no choice - I was, after all, yet another researcher in a seemingly endless stream being imposed upon them by the various organisations and government departments on which their gardening activities are partially dependent. That circumstance concerned me since I worried that they might have been adapting their normal practices because they thought I would be reporting back to Abalimi. They relaxed a little after the first week, and by the end of the six weeks, seemed much happier to have me around than had been the case at the start, and had become completely comfortable ordering me to my chores. At times they became so comfortable with putting me to work that it almost interfered with my ability to play observer. I remember clearly going to Masincedane one day very excited to participate in planting a potato bed, but being told in no uncertain terms that I would be more useful to them watering the other side of the garden while they worked on the potato bed! After a period of seeming incredulity that I kept re-appearing every day, and staying in the gardens for so long, they found a way to use me and I came to enjoy being there: I visit the ladies at Masincedane still.

Unfortunately I was unable to attain the same degree of familiarity at the other two gardens, Masithandane and Masibambane. My association with Abalimi

and the history of their engagement with the collective urban vegetable gardens in their jurisdiction, as well as my reluctance to impose myself on the garden participants and inconvenience them, restricted my ability to locate research participants through these projects and fully participate in their daily lives.

At Masithandane and Masibambane, relatively small gardens although they had large numbers of members (eleven and six members on record respectively), it proved extremely difficult to get members to commit to being in their gardens for any length of time over a period of consecutive days, even though arrangements had been made ahead of time. The group members of Masithandane tended to live in the immediate vicinity of the garden and visited it only when they had some unstructured free time, or when there was a particular job to be done (see Chapter 3). At Masithandane group members popped in for an hour or so at a time, at their leisure, did not work in the garden on Mondays (there was too much to do at home after the weekend), weekends, or Fridays (most of the members claimed to be Seventh Day Adventists, attending the same local church), and did not hold regular meetings with all group members. As a result, I was forced to rely exclusively on short, protracted, and rigidly scheduled visits - such as those these garden members were more familiar and comfortable with after long involvement with Abalimi – and on formal interviews with only four of the eleven stated members.

On the other hand, many of Masibambane's members appeared to live relatively far away from the garden and were younger (and poorer) on average than the other gardens' members, claiming that they still sought formal job opportunities wherever possible and had amplified childcare responsibilities. Most of the work in this garden appeared to be done by one group member, a retired man, Mr Sibaca, who lived across the road and popped into the garden for short periods throughout the day. Once, Mr Sibaca, clearly misunderstanding my desire to see the gardens in operation, unlocked the garden gate for me and my interpreter and left us in the garden alone, telling us to bring him the key when we were finished! Although I was

able to spend a significantly greater amount of time 'hanging out' at Masibambane than was possible at Masithandane, I again had to rely more heavily on formal interviews than was necessary at Masincedane. I was able to meet many of the group members only once during the two weeks spent there, and then only by appointment; and I spent most of this part of my fieldwork with only two of the members. I suspected at the time that these two asked others to come and be interviewed even though they were not necessarily involved in the garden. Fieldworkers from Abalimi have expressed their suspicions to me that project members put extra names on the application letters because they think they can access greater resources and more easily as a cooperative, playing the system. I was not able to conclusively confirm or deny this, although I suspect it was the case here that additional 'members' were summoned to please me, a researcher who was perceived, despite my best efforts, as being associated unequivocally with Abalimi.

Whenever I failed to find someone at Masithandane or at Masibambane, which was often, I would go to Masincedane for the day. At Masincedane, there was always someone in the garden unless the weather was really extreme and they had an agreement, which they adhered to for the most part, that all members would be in the garden from at least 10:00-16:00 (from 9:00 in summer) from Monday to Friday, and there was almost always someone there earlier and later than this. Even at Masincedane, however, my time in the field was severely restricted. Here, I was forced to spend time with members only from Monday to Friday, from roughly nine to five daily. My fieldwork was largely restricted to these, the opening hours of the garden, for the very practical reason that this is when the project members were there and since I gained very few invitations to meet with them outside of these times. Although vague invitations to visit garden members at home were extended, they were seldom made with much enthusiasm. I did spend some limited time at the homes of Mrs Esitang and Mrs Mbovu, and visited the homes of most of the other members at least once, although this was always in the afternoons after I had given them a lift home from the gardens, and never on weekends.

The overall result of the above challenges was that most of the research data presented here were gathered at Masincedane in Guguletu. The most detailed of the data presented in the following chapters derives from experiences at Masincedane. It also meant, fundamentally, that my participation, and therefore, my findings were restricted to the goings-on in the gardens themselves. I therefore have extremely limited data on the social relationships and activities of group members outside of the gardens, beyond what I learned from interviews and conversation. Any study of these same or similar processes that had more available time for research would need to go into gathering such data in order to achieve a more nuanced and better contextualised understanding of the role played by the vegetable gardens in the lives of participants than I was able to achieve in such a short time.

On most days, I was accompanied by Phyllis for a few hours. Although her presence was invaluable, working with an interpreter presented my second major fieldwork challenge. Firstly, she had to be paid and, as a graduate student, I was working on a limited budget. This meant I could only employ Phyllis for a few hours a day, after which I would have to interrupt fieldwork to take her home. Secondly, and certainly more importantly, Phyllis, not being a trained interviewer or social scientist, began, after a few sessions, to get her own ideas of what the answers should be to my questions. She would occasionally, and more frequently as time went on, interrupt interviewees or manipulate their answers in translation. I have enough of a grasp of basic Xhosa to have recognised at least some of the instances when this was happening. One clear example was when we were interviewing a Masibambane member in Philippi. The respondent spoke no English at all and only a little ragged Afrikaans. I had asked him, building up to some questions about how much fresh produce he used from the garden, what he had had for supper the night before. 'Meat and rice', he replied, plain as day. Well, actually, 'nyama ne rice'. Yet, Phyllis then liberally translated this as: 'He said that they use veggies and add with some other food, like rice, or maize meal, or porridge. But the veg is always there.' In this case, I knew for certain she had been putting words, along with the vegetables, in his mouth. I have no sense of how far this kind of 'interpretative interference' might have

gone in more complex and long-winded conversations. This reflects a common problem in any attempt to translate something from one language and frame of reference to another. It is also a common problem when interviewer and interviewee share 'similar backgrounds that include norms for conversation and interaction' (Anderson and Jack, 1991:14).

Another striking example is drawn from my attempts to find out the meaning of this man's project's name, the name also used in the title of this dissertation. Masibambane⁶ was variously translated for me, by Phyllis and others, as 'Let us help each other' (the same as the literal translation of Masincedane), 'let us stick together', 'let us hold hands with our fingers tightly interlaced', 'let us stand in a circle together holding hands', and 'let us hold hands and make something together'. While all of these convey a similar tone in that they reflect intentions of cooperation and mutual support, they are all literally somewhat different from each other.

Ethically, it was essential to ensure that those involved in the study did not feel that they were in any way jeopardised, professionally or personally, by my research into their livelihoods. As Dewalt, Dewalt, and Wayland (1998:291) have made clear, 'our responsibility is to ensure...that the people we study are not harmed by our personal involvements with them and are not negatively affected by the information we collect and write about them'. Furthermore, anthropologists often work in contexts characterised by differential access to power and resources, a clear feature of my own research project. This 'imposes upon us a grave responsibility to consider carefully the character of our research and its likely effects for those who participate in it' (Ross, 2005:1). I have, consequently, been very clear about my research prerogatives and intentions from the beginning and have made it a priority to get consent from all those involved. Each staff member in the organisation has a copy of my research proposal and each research participant was asked to give verbal consent, repeatedly, for my presence,

⁶ 'Ukubamba', the verb, is translated in Kirsch, Skorge, and Magona's (2001) Xhosa-English dictionary and phrasebook as 'to seize, grasp, apprehend, catch, hold, keep back, restrain; and its extended form, 'ukubamabana' (with the -ana reciprocal suffix which means that it is done to one another) means 'to strive, struggle, grapple, catch, take hold of one another...and to cohere'.

after a thorough explanation of the project with my interpreter and a fieldworker from Abalimi present. All participants were advised that participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could decide the extent of participation at all times, a disclaimer which, though necessary, distinctly worked against me, hence the first major challenge discussed above.

Another key ethical issue for anthropologists is often the 'preservation of confidentiality and the privacy of people involved' (Kelly, 1998:119), especially when the kinds of power differentials mentioned above might bring them harm if such confidentiality is not maintained. Since Abalimi's coordinator requested that I use his name and the name of his organisation, I have done so. Furthermore, my interactions with Abalimi during the writing process have convinced me that no harm will come to the vegetable garden participants I worked with and the gardeners themselves have expressed interest in gaining 'publicity'. Consequently, I use their real names and the names and geographic locations of each garden in the text. Specific employees of Abalimi and the DOA are, however, not referred to by name and at points I resituate them in space to protect their identities. This is necessary because some of my findings are in direct opposition to at least a portion of the public claims of the two organisations and I would not like to jeopardise the relationship between the gardens and the staff of these respective organisations. In addition, I have invented a fictional name for my interpreter to prevent any possible offence or embarrassment. Of course, she was related to one of Abalimi's fieldworkers and could be tracked down if someone really wanted to know. I do not, however, feel this would really be a problem for anyone concerned.

Of central importance in any fieldwork of this kind is the tension between building relationships and keeping analytic distance and I felt that tension constantly. As Lederman (1990:88) has argued, 'being in the field involves placing oneself deliberately in a context of commitment doubly different from the normal one... a particular relation between oneself and others, involving a difficult combination of commitment and disengagement, relationship and separation'. This dilemma arises from the necessary demands of

anthropological fieldwork that the researcher get 'involved in the setting's central activities...but without fully committing themselves to members' values and goals' (Adler and Adler, 1998:85).

Also key at this point is the need for me to acknowledge my theoretical stance that the situation of poverty observable on the Cape Flats is a direct result of a neo-liberal capitalist structure and its failure to adequately and equitably distribute wealth in South Africa. Theoretical paradigms are integral to research methodologies, 'providing a context for the process of research and grounding its logic and criteria' (Crotty, 1998:3). Drawing on post-development and neo-Marxist and anarchist anthropology, I tend to view the development industry as fundamentally compromised by its position within the current global neo-liberal capitalist system. This viewpoint influences the kinds of questions I asked of the gardens in which I worked and the institutions that support them, and has profoundly influenced my analysis of the data presented here. This philosophical stance concentrates on 'the effects on local societies of the penetration of large-scale regional, national, and international political-economic forces, such as global capitalism' (Erickson and Murphy, 1998:139). As such, I recognise a bias towards what may be called a 'political economy' perspective, but justified by a deep concern with inequality and poverty and the need to investigate the role of 'development' in offsetting, or not, these widespread ills. This bias is further managed, I believe, by an analytical focus on the social motivations for participation.

The more post-modern deconstruction of post-development 'emphasises the subjectivity of experience and, consequently, the impossibility of any one form of authoritative knowledge' (Erickson and Murphy, 1998:140). This theoretical stance builds up to a strong critique of the constraints placed by the development industry, as conceived within a capitalist system (Esteva, 1992), on both garden participants and urban agriculture agents. Although the present chapter has been about methods and ethics, the reader should recall that it began with the issue of the NGO employees' goals to move collective urban vegetable gardens towards market cultivation. The chapters following outline the four main dimensions of participation in urban vegetable gardens –

the spatial, material, social, and institutional – building up to an exploration of the tensions between and among the stated goals of the supportive organisations involved, the manifestations of these in the activities of Abalimi's and the DOA's fieldworkers, and the motivations of the gardeners themselves. I ask readers to now take a walk with me 'down the garden path', to meet the people with whom I spent most of my days in June and July 2006 and explore in detail their motivations for continued participation in collective urban vegetable cultivation.

University of Cape Town

PART TWO: Down the Garden Path

There are several dimensions to participation in the vegetable gardens that I studied, addressed here in the four chapters below. The wide variety of motivations members of the Masincedane, Masithandane, and Masibambane vegetable gardens gave for participation in their respective vegetable gardens can be broadly distilled into two central themes, the material and the social, dealt with in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. First, and before addressing the central motivating forces behind member's participation, Chapter 3, the Spatial Dimension, investigates the significant spatial factors that influence the different ways in which each garden was managed, structuring the participation of the members of each, dictating who could participate where, when, and to what extent, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes severely impinging upon the kinds of fieldwork I could attempt in each garden. This spatial dimension operated both in terms of the physical size and design of each garden and in terms of the location of the garden relative to its members' homes. I demonstrate that the banal physical aspects of layout and situation have important implications for the allocation of labour in each garden as well as for the amount of time each member spent there and the relative part the garden had to play in the social networks of members.

Secondly, Chapter 4, the Material Dimension, acknowledges that there clearly is an extent to which project members obtained material benefits from their participation. These benefits came in the form of cash and in-kind supplements to limited household incomes. Less directly, it was sometimes proposed that members benefited from training in additional skills such as crafts and business management (e.g. Abalimi's Agriplanner programme, which teaches micro-business record-keeping and marketing skills with an agricultural bent), which took the collectives formed around the gardens as a starting point for interventions in other arenas. Members also believed there would be significant health benefits to be derived from increased access to

fresh and healthily-grown vegetables. This was particularly important to women, who are increasingly recognised as the primary care-givers in poverty-stricken areas (De Swardt et al, 2005, Beall, 1997; Freeman, Pickup, and Rashid, 1997), and 'woman-headed households' formed fully half of my sample.

The material aspects of participation in urban vegetable gardens are often assumed to be the most important motivating factors for members (e.g. Drescher, 1999, Van Vuuren, 1988). As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, however, such material benefits as are derived from participation in urban vegetable gardening are frequently small and irregular, making up only a tiny fraction of household incomes for participants, each of whom draw their primary incomes from sources independent of the gardens.

Thirdly, Chapter 5, the Social Dimension, deals with the social motivations garden members claimed could best explain their long-term commitment to their vegetable gardens, often despite the aforementioned small and irregular direct material benefits they received. I argue that these social motivators were the primary force in sustaining their participation, particularly at Masincedane, the garden for which I have the most detailed data. The same appears to be true of Masithandane, although the supporting data I have is much thinner in this case, and the role of the garden itself in mobilising social networks was smaller (because members were involved in many groups and projects together the garden formed one of many nodes in their social networks rather than the single central meeting point the garden at Masincedane was)⁷. Social issues were certainly key at Masibambane as well, although, as I will show, these are qualitatively different kinds of motivations than those expressed by Masithandane and Masincedane members.

In the fourth and final chapter in this section, Chapter 6, the Institutional Dimension, I focus on the institutional hopes for urban vegetable gardening.

⁷ However, the garden here played an important symbolic role as a unifying point around which neighbours constructed community.

Both Abalimi and the DOA were actively involved in all 3 of the gardens I worked in, sending fieldworkers regularly, calling project members out to meetings and training sessions, and providing inputs and assistance of various kinds. Representatives of both institutions have articulated their intentions and hopes for the gardens in terms, at least to some extent, of job creation and income generation. These intentions and the roles played by supportive institutions are explored here.

The data presented below are drawn from interviews with fifteen project members from three gardens as well as from regular informal conversations with many of these same people and some additional others over an extended period. I also draw on my observations in the field and whatever records I could obtain on the history and performance of each garden over time, mostly from Abalimi, as well as on data derived from conversations with Abalimi and DOA fieldworkers and Abalimi's records and funding proposals. The intention of this section is to illustrate the landscape of urban vegetable gardening on the Cape Flats, drawing out the key influences that affected long-term participation in these projects. Chapter 3 investigates the implications of the physical nature of the gardens and of collectively farming a piece of land on which one does not live, while Chapters 4 and 5 delve into what it is that motivates long-term participation. Chapter 6 takes what has been learned during the course of the three earlier chapters and uses this knowledge to evaluate the stated aims of Abalimi and the DOA. The tables, Figure 2 on page 32 and Figure 3 on page 33, summarise certain details about garden group members that will be referred to throughout the following chapters.

As indicated in Figure 2, twelve of the fifteen research participants were women and, with the exception of Lungiswa and Nokwanda, who were considerably younger, the average age of the sample was about 67 years (not yet advancedly aged but still old enough to 'retire', i.e. to draw a state pension). As Figure 3 shows, eleven of the fifteen drew a state pension at the time of research. Lungiswa and Nokwanda both received child support grants and Mr Sibaca, not being old enough to qualify for a pension yet, although

retired, relied on his wife's disability grant. With the single exception of Mr Sibaca, all the participants had been involved in vegetable gardening for at least four years. Most, with three exceptions⁸, had been living permanently in Cape Town for at least 25 years, with three having been born in the city. In this regard, the sample represented here reflects the same broad pattern of migration to the Western Cape indicated by Seekings, Graaf, and Joubert (1990) and Spiegel and Mehlwana's (1997:9) research in another Cape Town settlement, Khayelitsha, in so far as "the vast majority were people who had first come to settle in, or close to, Cape Town before 1986 when influx control legislation was repealed". Most, with the same three exceptions, lived in permanent formal housing for which they owned the title deeds. Mr Moni lived alone while the other households ranged in size from two to twelve residents.

As Figure 3 indicates, the ratio of number of household residents to the numbers of dependents and income-earners in any given household varied greatly. For example, Mrs Puza lived in a very fluid household with anything between six and ten members at any one time and yet claimed to have no dependents relying on her pension. In fact, she was able to access the incomes of two of her children, who lived with her at least part of the time. Mrs Ndamane, however, supported her entire nine-person household with her state pension (although she continued to receive her late husband's private pension as well). The smaller households tended to have half the number of dependents as residents, with Mr Moni's household being the only one in the sample which claimed to support more dependents than constituted the domestic unit in Cape Town at the time of research – he continued to financially support his wife and one of their children in the Transkei. Some of the smaller households registered no dependents. For example, although one of Mrs Shiceko's adult children lived with her, he supported himself from wages. Fully half of the dependents listed here were, however, not school-age children but unemployed (seventeen) or disabled (three) adults.

⁸ The two younger women had arrived fairly recently from the Transkei, and Mr Moni was living temporarily in the city seeking treatment for asthma.

FIGURE 2: Summary of Research Participants

Name	Date of Birth	Yr Joined	Prior employment	Origin	Yr of arrival inCT	Spouse	House
Masancedane							
Mrs Puza	84yrs	1999	Nanny'	Keiskammahoek, Ciskei	1943	Deceased	Brick House
Mrs Nyepetsi	1942/05/05 (64)	1999	Domestic Work	Rustenburg, Gauteng	1963	Divorced	4 Room Brick
Mrs Mbovu	1939/07/14 (67)	1999	Cleaner in Hotel	Transkei	1960	Separated	4 Room Brick
Mr Moni	1939 (67)	1999	Miner	Transkei	1994	Married	Small shack
Mrs Witbooi	1939 (67)	1999	Domestic Work and Counselling	Ciskei	1980	Deceased	4 Room Brick
Mrs Ndamane	1935/12/12 (71)	1999	Char, various informal sector jobs	Stellenbosch	1956	Deceased	4 Room Brick
Mrs Shiceko	1944/05/05 (62)	1999	Cleaner in Hotel	Jamestown	1958	Deceased	4 Room Brick
Mrs Esitang	1930/08/26 (76)	1999	Domestic Work	Kuruman, North-West	1950	Deceased	4 Room Brick
Masibambane							
Mr Sibaca	1942/07/26 (64)	2006	Labourer for cement company	Cape Town		Married	4 Room Brick
Lungiswa	35 yrs	2003	several jobs	Transkei	1996	Married	Shack
Nokwanda	35 yrs	2003	Sweets vendor	Transkei	1996	Married	Shack
Mrs Bakeni	didn't know	didn't know	Char, and disability grant	Transkei	Didn't know	Single	4 Room Brick
Masithandane							
Mrs Madalane	1940/07/16 (66)	2003	auxillary nurse	Cape Town		Married	Brick House
Mr Madalane	1941(65)	2003		Cape Town		Married	Brick House
Mrs Snele	1949 (57)	2003	Office cleaner	Ciskei	1954	Separated	4 Room Brick

Figure 3: Summary of household income sources.

	Name of research participant	Number of incomes to participant's household	Types of income to household members	Number of residents in participant's household	Number of dependents (both within and beyond household)	Ratio of dependents to number of household incomes
Masinedane	Mrs Puza	4	State pension, 3 salaries	10	6	6:4
	Mrs Nyepetsi	3	State pension, disability grant, salary	9	6	3:3
	Mrs Mbovu	1	State pension	4	3	3:1
	Mr Moni	1	State pension	1	3	3:1
	Mrs Witbooi	3	2 State pensions, 1 regular wages	5	2	2:3
	Mrs Ndamane	2	2 State pensions	9	8	8:2
	Mrs Shiceko	2	State pension, 1 salary	2	0	0:2
	Mrs Esitang	1	State pension	3	2	2:1
Masibambane	Mr Sibaca	1	Wife's disability grant	2	1	1:1
	Lungiswa	2	1 Child support grant, husbands wages	3	2	2:2
	Nokwanda	4	2 Child support grants, husbands wages, informal trading	4	2	2:4
	Mrs Bakeni	2	State pension, 1 salary	12	10	10:2
Masithandane	Mrs Madalane	2	2 State pensions	4	2	2:2
	Mr Madalane	2	2 State pensions	4	2	2:2
	Mrs Snele	0	NA	2	NA	NA

Notes: 1. Unfortunately, as I worked exclusively with active participants in the gardens rather than with their extended households, I was unable to collect exact data as to the value of salaries and/or wages. However, de Swardt et al (2005) have shown that average monthly salaries for the employed in these areas range from a little under R1000 per month to a high end of about R2600. Weekly wages start at around R300 per week.

2. The ratios given here (in the last column) do not reflect the proportion of number of dependents to number of earners but of numbers of people (excluding the earners) dependent on the number of incomes obtained by the household. That is because some earners obtained more than one income and some earners (e.g. children bringing in child support grants) are still classed as dependents.

3. Mrs and Mr Madalane (rows 14 and 15) were both members of Masithandane and so are listed separately above. They are, however, married and co-resident, constituting the same household.

3. The spatial dimension

There are two central issues when considering space and place in relation to the urban vegetable gardens discussed here. Firstly, the layout, relative size, and purpose of each garden itself proved important for the strategies employed by garden members in working their land and particularly for the allocation of labour and the time spent in the respective gardens by individual members. Secondly, the position of members' homes relative to the gardens also proved central in this regard. These had implications for the kinds of social spaces each of the gardens became and the types interactions that took place, or didn't, in them.

All three of the gardens in which I conducted research were classified by Abalimi fieldworkers as 'market gardens'. As such, all were supposed to be operating as cooperatives growing vegetables for sale, frequently in preference to growing food explicitly and exclusively for consumption by members and their households and networks. All the gardens had originally been made up of a collection of individually worked allotments for the cultivation of vegetables for household consumption. Over time, however, both Masithandane, in Guguletu, and Masibambane, in Philippi, had come to be cultivated exclusively as 'projects' in the sense of the cultivation of vegetables for sale. Masincedane had also been pushed into becoming a cooperative 'project', but since it was by far the biggest of the three gardens its members had managed the transition to a 'market-oriented', collectively-farmed project by allotting some land to that purpose and, with the additional available space, keeping other portions of land for their individual allotments. Consequently, at the time of fieldwork, Masincedane members were cultivating their own plots, usually working them alone and for obtaining produce for household consumption. They also worked a larger 'project' section, doing that collectively and, where possible, selling the produce.



Gladys Puza working in her own allotted plot at Masincedane.

The shift to collective, market-oriented planting and cultivation was encouraged in all cases by Abalimi, and it was a move strongly supported by some members themselves. For example, Mrs Madalane of Masithandane explained that she and her peers had found the allotments expensive to maintain and so took a group decision with fellow members to change to a collectively managed project in order to pay the garden bills from sales; 'because we had some needs for the garden – we must go to workshops and meetings, we need to buy things. We don't take this money from our own pockets. We take it from petty cash' (Mrs Madalane). Such members claimed that it made sense to cover such expenses through the sale of collectively grown vegetables rather than having to pay with what they understood to be separately classified as 'their own' money.

The three gardens had, therefore, a similar overall intended orientation: vegetables were, with the single exception of Masincedane's allotments, grown collectively for sale, and those not sold were eaten or given away. Meanwhile, the money made from such sales as did occur was sometimes distributed amongst members, sometimes banked, and most often used to pay for necessary garden sundries. The material aspects of the gardens in terms of incomes derived and expenses incurred is discussed in more detail

in Chapter 4. What concerns us here, however, is each group's radically different strategy from that of the others for the management of the gardens in practice and the impact of garden layout, position, design, and purpose on participation.

The different ways in which I observed the gardens working was closely related to the site of the garden, i.e. in Guguletu or Philippi and in which part of each township, for example at a school or community centre or a more independent piece of land, and to its physical proximity to the dwellings of garden members. The actual size of the garden, its layout, and the number of people involved also profoundly influenced the kinds of decisions made regarding the distribution of labour. I discuss each garden in turn below, comparing and contrasting each with the other in order to tease out the different ways in which each garden was managed and the impact of spatial factors such as location on decisions made about labour allocation in particular as well as the kinds of social relationships and networks formed amongst members in and around the gardens. I begin with Masincedane, for which I have the most detailed data.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Masincedane's members were in the garden more regularly than any of the other projects' members – at least during the time of my fieldwork. There are a number of reasons for this, many of which can be illuminated by a thorough exploration of the relevant spatial factors. Masincedane, at 1500m², is a fairly large development as urban vegetable gardens go. It is the largest of the three gardens, and the only one in my sample to have both a 'project' section farmed for marketing as well as individual allotments for household-directed cultivation. The size of the garden alone, in conjunction with the combined effort of cultivating both a very large project as well as smaller individual plots, would suggest that the labour needs at Masincedane would be high and sustained. This was confirmed by my research which indicated many more hours spent working there than was evident in any of the other gardens (an average of six hours per member per weekday). In addition, Masincedane had, at the time of research, eight

members (this had dropped to six by the time of writing⁹), all of whom were over 60, one of whom was 84, and most of whom (seven of the eight) were women, who, although hale and strong, tended to work slowly. The only male member was Mr Moni, a thin and frail man living temporarily in Cape Town whilst seeking medical treatment for asthma. Due to his illness, Mr Moni's presence in the garden was inconsistent at best and eventually ceased altogether.

The combination of size and design of the garden and the small number and limited ability of the available labour force within the group's members, meant that Masincedane's members had to work long hours relative to members of the other groups. There was simply more work to do because individual members had simultaneously to cultivate the project, which is large in its own right, while still maintaining their own plots.

Days were typically allocated to the project and to their own plots so that all members would work together, at the same time, on project works, and then have a set time to tend to their own crops. Decisions as to necessary jobs and planting/harvesting rotations were taken collectively in the weekly group meetings, held on Thursdays at the garden. The work was extremely painstaking and labour-intensive, with much watering, and all weeding, clearing, planting, pest control, and harvesting done by hand. Work was therefore carried on all day, every weekday, in order to keep up with what needed to be done.

This meant that project members at Masincedane had to agree, upon joining, to the necessity of spending long hours in the garden each day, something enshrined in the 'constitution' of the project as an agreement amongst members to be in the garden, nine to five, Monday to Friday. Members were

⁹ By this time both Mr Moni and Mrs Witbooi had left the group. Mr Moni had been very ill with respiratory problems and had been living temporarily in Cape Town since 1994, seeking treatment. One day he had just stopped coming to the garden and the other members suspected he had returned to his family home in the Transkei. Mrs Witbooi, although a founding member, left the garden because of conflict with the other members due to her inability to commit to working in the garden for long hours every day.

expected by other members, as they were not expected elsewhere¹⁰, to adhere to these 'rules'. The extended 'working hours' at Masinedane had the result that any potential members needed time to be available to devote a large part of their day to gardening. Those who were unable to meet the demands on their labour and time, Mrs Witbooi and Mr Moni, gradually dropped out of the project. The age of the members, i.e. all over 60, and their self-defined status as 'retired', firmly positioned them as those with the available time. This severely restricted membership.

The property that constitutes Masinedane's garden is itself situated alongside a major road in Guguletu and forms part of the municipal offices at Fezeka Community Centre, which is a large municipal compound housing the Guguletu offices of Cape Town's city council, a community courthouse, a police station, a community hall, and a small clinic. None of the members' houses was directly adjacent to or overlooking the garden, nor were members each others neighbours: they lived in disparate parts of Guguletu and beyond. All walked to the garden in the mornings: for some this constituted a fifteen to twenty minute excursion. This indicates the commitment of the members, but also, and perhaps more importantly for our purposes, it represents an almost prohibitive distance between the gardens and the homes of some members. Masinedane members were thus unlikely to visit home during the day, preferring to remain in the garden all day, making the trip only once.

In Masinedane, therefore, the most important spatial issues affecting the duration and allocation of labour were the size of the garden itself (large), its dual role as both a collective market project and a series of individual allotments (high maintenance), and the proximity, or rather the lack thereof, of the members' homes to the garden. Issues around the size and proximity of the garden affected the amount of time members needed to spend in the

¹⁰ Bambanani, a garden in Khayelitsha, for example, claims in its constitution to expect members to work in the garden from 08:00 to 11:00 every morning, Monday to Saturday, but when I visited this garden with a fieldworker around 10:00 no members were present. Furthermore, we had to make an appointment requesting that at least one member be present the following day. Likewise, members of Masithandane had drawn up a constitution which committed members to attendance in the gardens between 10:00 and 16:00 daily whereas members actually decided their own work hours and rarely went to the garden more than a few hours a week.

garden in consecutive hours. Although the Fezeka compound in which the garden is located is known as a 'community centre', the actual community of members in the garden was somewhat contrived, and necessarily so. Members lived fairly far from the garden and from each other and did not engage in other activities together. As the only point of connection between them, members had to spend much more time in the garden than was the case in other gardens in order to establish and maintain their ties to one another. The character and special combination of these spatial factors played a deciding role in who participated in Masincedane – it was exclusively 'retired' people, and mostly women with few particular domestic or economic commitments (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Masithandane's and Masibambane's members tended on the whole to spend much less time in their gardens than Masincedane's members, with Masithandane opening least frequently. Since the lack of presence of gardeners in these projects was such a major methodological issue, the phenomenon is worth exploring in some detail.

I had intended at the start of fieldwork to spend two weeks at Masithandane. I actually spent just two days there, using the rest of my allotted fieldwork time at Masincedane. Masithandane's members were extremely difficult to find, even when I had made appointments, and in the end I located only three (as well as a single additional lapsed member). Those who did turn up were reluctant to spend more than an hour at a time in the garden. The garden at Masithandane was fairly small, about 350m², and the project had eleven registered members (thus not quite 32m² per member, compared with Masincedane's 188m² per member when there were eight members and 250m² per member when the membership dropped to six). This suggests, as opposed to the situation at Masincedane, a situation in which the amount of labour available exceeded by far the amount needed, from which follows the observed lack of presence in the garden. The relatively small size of the plot, the large number of registered members, and the consequently relatively low level of required labour, significantly reduced the amount of time members needed to spend in the garden.

Furthermore, Masithandane's members all lived very close to the garden. The homes of the three garden members I interviewed, and that of the lapsed member, all faced directly onto the garden, which formed a sort of central square around which their houses were built. Members could, and therefore did, visit the garden briefly from time to time. By their own admission, the members I managed to speak to would go to the garden only sporadically. Mrs Madalane claimed that she typically worked in the garden for only a few hours, maybe one day a week, and even then only if something specific really needed doing (or if she wanted something from the garden to cook). It was the same, she said, for the other members, who would tend the garden in between tending to other chores and obligations. 'We all do what we can when we got time', she said. As discussed in Chapter 5, Masithandane members were involved in many other societies and social groups together, were each others' neighbours and friends, and attended the same Seventh Day Adventist church in the area. Their garden, therefore, formed a real 'community centre' as opposed to the more contrived community centre at Fezeka. Cohen (1985) has argued that any sense of community is necessarily constructed, an exercise in the creation and maintenance of imagined boundaries. At Masithandane, more so than at Masincedane, the constructed element of the community represented by the garden required less conscious effort on the part of members. At Masithandane, a combination of small plot size, large numbers of members, high levels of interconnection between and among members, and the close proximity of members' houses to the garden led to a low need to work in the garden at regular times, or for extended periods.

Masibambane was also a small garden, only about 200 m², and it claimed to have just six regular members (33m² per member). Of the six, I was able to meet and interview just four, although I was able to spend a substantial amount of time with two of them. They were Mrs Bakeni and Mr Sibaca, who both spoke only Xhosa, necessitating the presence of my interpreter throughout my fieldwork at Masibambane. Mrs Bakeni, a founding member at Masibambane, oversaw the running of the garden, although she did little of the physical work because she was often ill. Much of the labour was carried

out, at least during the time I was around, by Mr Sibaca who had, by then, been a member for just a little over a month. Both Mrs Bakeni and Mr Sibaca lived in the road alongside the garden and would come and go throughout the day. The proximity of Mr Sibaca's and Mrs Bakeni's homes to the garden enabled them to tend to the garden part-time, an opportunity of which both took advantage. For Mr Sibaca, this was vital as he had periodically to check on his epileptic wife at home. Mrs Bakeni, for her part and in addition to her own health problems, was very involved in assisting with the care of her grandchildren in her twelve-person household.

The other two members I interviewed, Lungiswa and Nokwanda, were the youngest participants in my research (both were in their thirties). They lived in informal housing in Samora, quite far away from the garden (indicated on the map on p16)¹¹. Both had young children and one did some part-time work trading in sweets in the informal sector. Both said they were constantly looking for wage work in the formal sector. They argued that their responsibilities at home, caring for their husbands and children, and their ceaseless search for wage work limited the time they had available to work in the garden. As Lungiswa put it, 'Sometimes we come four times a week. We say that you must be here at least four times a week, but we are busy in our own homes'. During the two weeks I spent at Masibambane, these women each came to the garden just once. They further stated that they lived too far away to make the trip regularly. Since they did not cultivate their own plots, there was very little incentive for them to make the trip, unless they had been specifically asked to be there to undertake particular jobs.

Van Vuuren (1988:44) has pointed out, that 'the locality of most community gardens...is of great importance'. This has proved true in my analysis of the three urban vegetable gardens on the Cape Flats that I have focused on. In each case, the position of the garden relative to the participants' homes had a significant and measurable impact on the distribution of labour, the number of consecutive hours members spent in the gardens on a daily or weekly basis,

¹¹ They are two of the only three shack-dwelling participants in my sample (the other being Mr Moni of Masincedane who could be classified as a 'health migrant').

and the extent to which the garden formed the central connection point for members (as opposed to being one of many points of connection between them as in the case of Masithandane). The size and intended purpose of each garden further influenced the amount of labour needed and therefore dictated membership to some extent. Masincedane needed members with plenty of free time while the smaller gardens, Masibambane and Masithandane, could be much less demanding but appeared to depend on their members living very close to the gardens and therefore being able to 'pop in' regularly. Spatial factors held significant sway over the organisation of each garden. In addition, membership was influenced by material factors – both hopes for material gain and the need for access to incomes outside the gardens to enable membership – and social concerns. The next two chapters deal with each of these in turn.

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4. The material dimension

That all three of the participating gardens were classified by Abalimi as 'market gardens' suggests that at least part of what each garden was, or should have been, doing was to generate direct material benefits for members through the sale of produce. Abalimi's director, Rob Small has also referred to such gardens, in a funding proposal submitted to Misereor in March 2006, as 'Livelihood Level' gardens which, in his words, realise 'organic vegetable...micro-farming as a permanent (and profitable) activity within the lives of project members, while also allowing for, and indeed encouraging, many other activities around the garden, which can enhance income, status, the environment, health, and community well-being.' This is a common expectation of the potential role of urban agriculture in development and, as Maxwell and Zziwa (1992:5) have said, 'it is often hoped that...productive strategies, such as urban agriculture, would suggest partial solutions to the problems of urban food supply and employment'. Its protagonists have thus regarded urban agriculture as an 'important component of what has come to be referred to as household survival strategies for the urban poor in the face of worsening economic conditions' (Maxwell and Zziwa, 1992:3). The assumptions embedded in such an understanding include viewing urban agriculture as a primarily economic pursuit engaged in explicitly with the intention of combating unemployment, low wages, and high living costs in today's cities, and also thereby addressing the need to diversify household incomes for survival.

In this chapter I explore the kinds of material benefits garden members received and I evaluate their significance as motivating forces for those people's sustained participation. I then show that material gains – in cash and kind – from the three gardens, while certainly present, were limited and inconsistent at best. Furthermore, I demonstrate that all the participants drew the bulk of their household incomes from sources independent of the vegetable gardens, and I point out that this was a necessary condition for their participation. I thus conclude that gardeners' long-term motivating forces were

not the material benefits supposed by Abalimi, at least in its funding documents, and the DOA.

My argument here is structured somewhat differently from that in the chapter above. Rather than evaluating each garden in turn, I investigate material benefits in all the gardens according to the cash and in-kind supplements to household incomes derived directly from participation. In addition to their concerns about such direct material benefits, participants also listed the benefits of a regular supply of fresh vegetables as a major advantage of garden participation. Abalimi proposed that the gardens provided sites for training in additional skills that could be used in the workplace. Since the majority of my sample is 'retired', this did not emerge as a material benefit of importance to them. Rather, the categories of benefits discussed below are drawn from topics that arose frequently in conversations with urban vegetable gardeners themselves about their reasons for beginning urban agricultural pursuits.

Twelve of my fifteen interviewees gave, as one of the main reasons they had started vegetable gardening initially, that they hoped it would improve their economic situation. At least, they seemed to hope, their cultivation of vegetables for their own consumption would limit their need to buy fresh vegetables. Indeed, one of the most frequently cited reasons for engaging in the urban production of vegetables – for a full thirteen of the fifteen respondents – was the promise of supplementary food. 'And at least now you don't have to go to the shops and buy a few things like spinach and those things', said Mrs Madalane; or Mrs Shiceko, on her reasons for joining Masincedane: 'it's just because I wasn't working and I did think it better to work in the garden because you are not going to buy any veggies', items that, for her, were healthier than those available from local markets. Mrs Ndamane, when asked why she had first wanted to join the garden, looked at me with narrowed eyes, as though I had some obvious mental defect:

Because we were hungry. Now we have much more fresh food. We still have to buy maize and meat, but now we have some vegetables to go with them. Vegetables are expensive in the location, 4 carrots for R2.50, 1 cabbage for R6,

small onions for too much – each time you don't buy this you have saved your pocket.

The survey reported on by De Swardt et al (2005) found that vegetable intake was often neglected in poverty-stricken areas, revealing that a shocking 34% of households on the Cape Flats rarely ate vegetables. For the group members represented here, access to such fresh vegetables as were available through participation in the gardens was prized. Likewise, independence from the food stalls available in their neighbourhoods was highly valued because such vendors' produce was seen as over-priced and of inferior quality. As Mrs Shiceko noted, for the group at Masincedane, 'the food of the garden is healthier than to buy from the market.'

De Swardt et al (2005:110) also suggested that, 'food gardens might provide an important food source that has a positive effect on general health status and also bolsters resistance to illness and infection'. The quality of the vegetables members grew themselves was certainly valued, as shown above. In addition, some members believed that eating the vegetables would be beneficial for their health. Indeed, my interpreter, Phyllis, translated Mr Moni's claims thus:

He started the garden because he saw that it was going to be helpful to him to stop from starving and to keep busy. He was also sick and had heard about the value of fresh vegetables for good health and decided he would go and get them for himself from the garden.

One Friday afternoon I observed the women at Masincedane harvesting carrots, cabbages, and spinach. Much of this was taken from their personal allotments. In June and July, when the gardens were lush during the rainy winter, members of Masincedane were able to take produce from their individual plots almost daily. The women also took some produce from the project garden. Vegetables taken from that source were those that were getting too mature to be sold or, in the case of the spinach leaves, had been slightly damaged by pests such as snails. They were always carefully divided, absolutely equally, amongst the members present that day. Those vegetables, they told me, were taken to be cooked at their own homes over the weekend and consumed by themselves and their families. Members

regularly ate crops such as lettuce, peas, and carrots 'from the ground' as their lunch. Again, these were frequently taken from the project rather than the allotments and shared during the meal by those there that day.

Masithandane's members also used vegetables from their collective project for consumption at home. In explaining what they did with the produce they had grown, one member of Masithandane said, 'we sell it and then we share what is left of it. We haven't got our own gardens because this is a project. About once a week we will take something for ourselves'.

Masinedane's members occasionally made even more explicit use of project land for home consumption. Their annual onion crop was of central importance to members as onions, a staple seasoning vegetable, are easily stored and this single annual harvest could, I was told, keep members in onions for the whole year. A large crop of onions was grown each year in the project section of Masinedane's garden and the group had taken a collective decision to keep these for their own use, opting not to sell them to others.

Personal use of vegetables grown collectively was negotiated between members as needed or as such vegetables became available. The vegetables thus provided a small supplementary income in kind, to be added to other, quite diverse, forms of income by preventing the need to purchase these items.

In addition to the personal use of vegetables grown, 84 year old Gladys Puza, the oldest research participant, also regularly collected *imifino*, or wild leafy vegetables such as nettles, from overgrown patches of the garden that were in the process of being cleared. A practical woman, Mrs Puza claimed these wild vegetables were good food, even teaching me to cook them. But all the other research participants bluntly refused to eat them, gently laughing them off as 'weeds' (e.g. Mrs Nyepetsi) or a food of last resort when nothing else was available (Mrs Ndamane). Stent (2006) has reported on recent research conducted in Eastern Cape towns by Dutch scholar Madeleen Husselman which claims that, amongst Xhosa-speaking South Africans, *imifino* was

classified as women's food. Traditionally, in rural areas and amongst the urban populations Husselman worked with, women cooked and ate *imifino* together in an act of gendered solidarity. Stent (2006) goes on to claim that *imifino* has since slowly been losing its stigma as something eaten by rural women only and becoming a recognised ethnic delicacy. While this might be the case among an elite that is able to distance itself from the negative perception of rural people as 'backward' and therefore lacking urbanity, I did not find it to be so among the women in my sample. For them, *imifino* was typically rejected outright in favour of other vegetables. Although many of them had come from rural areas originally, they had lived for extended periods of time in and around Cape Town. They may thus have needed to differentiate themselves from recent arrivals who, as Eppel (2007) has indicated, were disdained as mere 'migrants' and regarded as very distinct from those he referred to as 'borners', those born in the city. According to Eppel (2007) the latter were regarded as having quite different attitudes and practices from those of the former, and members of my sample preferred to be seen as being like the 'borners', even if it meant that a potentially significant source of foodstuff, grown in the garden, was not acceptable to them.

Returning to the supply of such vegetable foodstuffs as were obtained by participants from the gardens: this was limited, seasonal, weather-dependent and often inconsistent, and we cannot therefore understand it to have even potentially completely replaced member's need to buy vegetables. In the two gardens identified above where vegetables were harvested regularly for home use during the period of research, such a regular supply of vegetables was not sustained (or sustainable) year round. In the summer months, when water was scarce and winds strong, levels of production were reportedly much lower than during the wetter winter months. Indeed, during my later visits to Masincedane, once my formal research period was over, the garden was much emptier and drier, with very little growing in the project section, and even less in the members' personal allotments. Rather than being able to rely on vegetables for the table on a daily basis then, seasonal fluctuations meant that group members had to turn to other sources of primarily purchased vegetables.

Such a lack of consistent productivity and supply was exacerbated at Masibambane, certainly during the time of my research. The members there had planted the whole garden in anticipation of a bulk sale at a later date and therefore had no sufficiently mature vegetables available at the time of research even to harvest some to cook for themselves. During the entire two weeks I spent in the garden, no member took any vegetables home. And, although there clearly were expectations that the garden should provide food for its members, Lungiswa and Nokwanda, two of those members, confirmed that they got little from the garden in terms of food. 'When I started, I expected to get something out because I am not working; maybe a food parcel or else things like that' (Lungiswa). Her friend, Nokwanda, concurred; 'The group is getting smaller because there is nothing we get, no food, no nothing.'

The other Masibambane members too did not appear to make use of vegetables grown collectively for household consumption, and this was the case even when such produce was available. The only 'harvest' I observed at Masibambane during my period of fieldwork was a handful of sweet potatoes that had grown from the remains of those planted the previous year and that had not been removed when a small corner of the garden had been left as fallow. They were not shared to be taken home. Nor were they sold. Rather, they were given to Phyllis, my field assistant. Members at Masibambane had clearly joined the project anticipating getting some food from the garden (as indicated by Lungiswa and Nokwanda's comments above). Despite this, and in the light of the fact that Masibambane had 'not had a harvest in over a month' (Mr Sibaca), the fact that members could still afford to give away such little produce as they had indicates that they were not reliant solely on the supply of vegetables from the gardens. Vegetables from this garden represented, as in the above gardens, what Alex de Waal (2005) has referred to as a 'bonus' resource – one that I did not see materialise at all during the period of my research.

A scene at Bambanani, one of the gardens in Khayelitsha that I visited during the pilot phase of my study, provides an additional example to support my

conclusion that food production for household consumption may not always be the primary reason for vegetable gardening. On visiting this garden with one of Abalimi's fieldworkers, I noticed an abandoned aubergine patch. The fruits on the plants were large, ripe, and in good condition, but they seemed to be being used for nothing more than feeding the compost heap. The fieldworker I was with at the time – none of the project members were actually present – said that the people around this garden did not themselves use and could not sell aubergines because they were an unfamiliar food which no local persons knew how to cook. Were food the most important reason for engaging in urban agriculture, members would surely have been unwilling to grow food they did not prefer to eat; or – in this instance – they would have found ways to prepare the foods they had produced to be able to eat them. In this case, the fieldworker told me, the seedlings had been provided by Abalimi. She also explained that the NGO's personnel had since acknowledged the inappropriateness of the vegetable for local needs, especially given the limited access the gardeners had to external markets which might have found aubergines desirable; the NGO, she added, was unlikely to suggest aubergines again.

Access to fresh vegetables was a strong motivating force for participation, particularly for joining the gardens initially. In the context of a combination of inconsistent supply and wastage of inappropriate foodstuffs, however, it could not (and certainly did not) provide the primary reasons for members' continued involvement over the long term. Such members had consistently to be able to access food in other more dependable ways because they could not rely on the gardens to provide for all their vegetables needs all year, or even all week. In addition, project members still needed to have the means to purchase staple carbohydrates, meat, fruit, eggs, and/or dairy produce.

Another reason many members gave for joining the gardens initially was the hope that the gardens would provide some supplementary cash income. The tale of how Masibambane came into being is indicative of the initial hopes of many urban vegetable gardeners in this regard. Masibambane is situated in visibly the poorest area I worked in, and its members were the least financially

stable of all the gardeners who participated in this study. Both Lungiswa and Nokwanda were unemployed at the time of my research; both lived in shacks and both relied on piecemeal informal sector jobs and the meagre income derived from tiny monthly child support grants (R170 per month per child). Both of their live-in husbands worked in formal jobs and it was their husbands' wages and the regularity of the small child support grants that formed the basis of their respective household budgets.¹²

The other two members of Masibambane had only recently moved into state-constructed formal housing, having previously lived in shacks. Mrs Bakeni claimed that she had always been sickly and so had never worked in a formal job. She had achieved relative financial security only recently, when she moved into her house and started receiving a state pension. Still, she shared her two-bedroom house, to which she had attached a lean-to shack, with 11 other people: all six of her surviving children and sundry grandchildren, a further indication of financial stress. Mrs Bakeni's state pension and the wages of one working daughter supported all twelve household members.

The most compelling reason Mrs Bakeni, the only remaining founding member of Masibambane, gave for having started the garden originally was that they 'were suffering and had no food for our homes'. In other words, they were looking for alternative ways to generate a livelihood – in what Beall (1997:40) refers to as 'the non-conventional labour force' – apart from relying on wage or other cash incomes to purchase food. Their participation in the garden thus represented, for them, one of the many diverse strategies of unemployed single women living in extreme poverty. She had hoped that the vegetables they grew in their collective garden would enable them to supply their families with some of their vegetable needs and to generate a small but regular income to purchase necessary household items such as fuel and staple foodstuffs. Most of the other founding members, finding these expectations unmet, had abandoned the garden in favour of other pursuits.

¹² Unfortunately, because I was only able to meet with Nokwanda and Lungiswa once during study, I was unable to find out exactly the extent to which their husbands' incomes contributed to their respective household budgets. An average wage for residents of the area may fall between R1200 and R2500 per month.

New members, Lungiswa and Nokwanda told me that, although they had been involved in the garden since 2003, 'The two of us, we didn't get any money from the garden, ever', thus testifying to the low levels of cash income generated by the garden. And Mr Sibaca, who had been working in the garden for a little over a month, said he had not participated in any harvests as yet, and so was unsure of the outcomes of such events in income terms.

These members' comments suggest that the sale of garden produce at Masibambane did not generate significant cash income for members. As was the case for the supply of vegetables discussed above, flows of money from the sale of produce were limited and inconsistent. Indeed, independent research into the Siyazama Community Allotment Garden Association (SCAGA), Abalimi's longest running and most 'successful' vegetable growing project, in terms of per capita production, suggests that it is an illusion that cooperative urban agriculture on this small scale could ever provide a significant and regular cash income for members (Fleming, 2003; Matschke, 2002). If this 1500 m² allotment, farmed by eleven group members, were to be producing at maximum capacity it would be possible to extract a monthly after-cost profit of R2.37 per m², roughly R3600 per month in total. This would provide a monthly income of about R320 for each member. While this would represent a significant contribution to their respective household budgets, given that only 15 per cent of households generated a monthly income greater than R600 per adult (De Swardt et al, 2005:104), it cannot replace the income derived from a formal job or even access to a state disability grant or pension (both R820 per month at the time), even when production is at its maximum. Moreover, in practice this garden runs at less than half its potential capacity (Fleming, 2003), generating about R120 a month for each member, at least in theory. It is, however, unlikely that all members sell all their produce; they most likely eat some of it and trade or give away some, reducing their cash income further. Furthermore, as discussed above, seasonal fluctuations affect harvests, preventing a regular supply of produce from being sold all year round. By way of explanation, Small (undated:2) has argued that SCAGA 'could provide between 3-4 permanent full-time jobs, but has decided instead to become a livelihood level

garden with up to 30 subsistence 'jobs', on a mixture of communal and individual plots.'

A further example of the limited capacity of urban vegetable gardens to generate regular incomes for members can be seen in Abigail's Women's Movement (AWM), a registered non-profit organisation on Abalimi's books. According to Abalimi's records, AWM claims to support some 30 adults and 60 children from a scattered network of home and community gardens. From March to November 2005, while running a soup kitchen once a week and purchasing tools for the garden, AWM's members saved R490. As at SCAGA and the three gardens in which I worked, members claimed to bank all cash incomes, distributing savings amongst members at an agreed date. Once these savings were distributed, however, they amounted to a cash income of less than R2 per adult member per month, or a potential lump sum of R18 at the end of the 9 month period, much less if the 60 child members were included in payouts.

During the entire period of my research across the three gardens, I observed only three sales of produce, all of which took place at Masincedane. In one instance, a local man bought a small bunch of parsley for R3. On another day, Phyllis, my interpreter, bought R30 worth of carrots (10 bunches, for a funeral) and a R3 bunch of spinach (to cook with potatoes for her father). I was present for only one fairly major harvest. In mid-June 2006, a stallholder from a nearby market in Philippi bought R560 worth of vegetables: carrots (101 bunches at R3 each), beetroot (36 bunches at R2 each), turnips (R22 for what was salvageable from a bed of old and damaged roots¹³), and parsley (5½ kg at R30 a kg for a total of R165). Masincedane also sold a further 57 bunches of carrots (R171) and a kilogramme of parsley (R30) to the same buyer a week later, but this appears to have been the end of their dealings with her.

¹³ By the time they were harvested many of the turnips were too old to sell and had been damaged by pests. After they had been rejected by the stall-holder, project members agreed to divide the crop amongst themselves. Each project member took 2 bunches of turnips, 4 turnips in a bunch.



Masinedane members Nancy Witbooi, Philippina Ndamane, Maggie Mbovu, Shaba Esitang, Regina Shiceko and Gladys Puza with their July harvest which they sold

These sales brought the total income at Masinedane over six weeks in June and July 2006 to R797. No money was ever distributed amongst the members at the time of the sales. Had it been, however, the gardeners would have assured themselves an income of just under R100 each over a six week period, or a weekly 'wage' of R16.50. While all my research participants agreed that they did sometimes sell produce, Mrs Nyepetsi of Masinedane had this to say, 'Well, we sell it for R2 and R3 for spinach, Amanda. We are not making money from this garden.'

Rather than distributing the cash amongst themselves, Masinedane members typically gave the money obtained from such sales straight to the group secretary, Mrs Shiceko, who deposited it in a collective bank account. Such income was used to pay for things required in the garden. Masinedane paid an annual fee of R300 to the Cape Town municipality for the use of the land, which was taken from project funds generated by the sale of produce.

They also used the money to purchase seedlings occasionally (when they could not be obtained by donation), to replace stolen tools, and to buy necessary equipment such as new fencing and, in 2006, a 100m hosepipe. Mrs Ndamane described it thus: 'We put all the money into a bank account, and we use it to buy the things we need for the garden whenever we start to run low.' Fleming (2003) found the same behaviour at SCAGA: cooperative members tended to save most if not all of the income generated in a collective bank account, and much of this cash income was used to purchase inputs that were needed for the garden.

Some garden members claimed that what was left of this income after all expenses were paid was distributed at the end of the year: 'If there is R2000 in the bank at the end of the year, we will take R1000 and share it equally. R50, R50, R50...' said Mrs Ndamane (making a total of some R125 each for the whole year). The timing of this small distribution of earnings would be planned to coincide with the end of the year, the intention being to help to relieve some of the extra expenses, often to do with travel and/or entertaining, incurred at Christmas time. Group members admitted on closer questioning, however, that they had not had anything left in the bank account at the end of 2005 or 2004. A snippet from a conversation with a Masincedane project member is telling:

Mrs Esitang: Before, we were planting for ourselves at home. Later Abalimi came and told us we must make a project. They told us that if we plant together, we are going to sell the vegetables and make some money for ourselves.

Amanda Bourne: Do you make money from the gardens?

Mrs Esitang: Yes we make something. We had a gentleman who used always to come get our vegetables. Last year he didn't come because he is sick. There is now another lady. If we have something to sell we can tell her and she will come and get it. We take all the money from this to the bank. The vegetables we can't sell we take for ourselves. We use the money from the bank for when we want to buy something for the garden, like seeds or seedlings, or manure, or fertiliser, and those sorts of things. If we have something left at the end of the year, we divide it for us.

Amanda Bourne: How much did you each get last year?

Mrs Esitang: Last year we didn't have anything left over.

Amanda Bourne: How about the year before?

Mrs Esitang: No, nothing. It was too dry.

I did not observe any harvests for sale at the other two gardens. Masithandane members told me that their harvests were consistently insubstantial, bringing in just a few Rand on some days when they sold spinach bunches, for R3 each, to neighbours. They did not grow great enough quantities to sell at a market and they harvested larger amounts for sale only when friends and neighbours had to cater for special occasions: 'We are not making too much money. A bunch of spinach is R3. We are selling maybe 1 or 2 bunches a day. Or maybe if there is a funeral they will come and buy bulk, but it's not something that is always there' (Mrs Madalane).

There is an element of choice in all of this. It is likely that group members continued to claim market production and income generation as goals because that is what motivates potential donors to continue funding them. In practice, the gardeners seemed to prefer a planting strategy that ensured smaller harvests over a longer period of time, enabling consistent but low level local sales and consumption rather than larger bulk sales for a lower price, with the possible exception of Masibambane which was planted in anticipation of a bulk harvest. As far as marketing was concerned, it appeared that at Masithandane there was little real effort to produce for a regular market. Rather, the business end of the garden depended on local people who wanted to purchase vegetables knocking on the door of any one of the members living near the garden and that member then going to the garden to harvest what was required.

Cash incomes from the sale of garden-grown produce were thus often inconsequential and certainly irregular. This finding corroborates earlier

research by Eberhard (1989:i) which demonstrated that the value of food produced by the average home gardener in Cape Town is 'economically insignificant', being less than 1% of the low-income household's monthly budget. Typically, members deposited such income as there was in a group bank account and used the money for the general maintenance of the gardens rather than for paying themselves out.

This pattern of reinvesting in the gardens rather than paying dividends to members persisted even at such times as there was a significant cash injection. During the research period, Masincedane was competing for the title of South African Annual Woman Farmer of the Year, run by the DOA which they subsequently won. Winners were awarded a R10 000 cash prize. Rather than choosing to distribute the winnings amongst themselves, the project members claimed that they would use this money to install an electricity box and repair their borehole. Having their own electricity supply would free them somewhat from an awkward dependency on distant municipal buildings for power to run their borehole pump and irrigation system. They also spoke about expanding the garden to include a seedbed or nursery, a chicken coop for eggs and meat, and a soup kitchen. Indeed, a second container on the property was stocked with kitchen equipment which had been donated to them but which they could not use since they had no permanent electricity supply. Masithandane' members, winners of the award in 2005 had done precisely this with their prize money. Rather than using it themselves, treasurer, Mrs Madalane, used it to install an electricity box in the garden itself. 'Electricity is going its own way', she said. 'We paid for the box ourselves, R5900, and that's without the man who was doing it. We paid the man who (installed) it R1700'. When the box is finished – which it was not at time of writing – the group members said that they planned to buy their own electricity for the garden from the garden's petty cash, where the remainder of the winnings were then being kept.

Long-term members of all three gardens clearly expected some material benefits from the gardens, mostly in the form of a supply of fresh and healthy vegetables which were otherwise difficult and expensive to obtain. As

demonstrated above, however, this supply of foodstuffs from the gardens was often irregular. Furthermore, members who remained involved in the gardens for long periods had learned from experience that they could not expect that growing vegetables collectively on a small scale would provide them a regular wage-like income. None of my research participants claimed that work in the vegetable garden could actually replace a formal job. Indeed, respondents clearly stated that any potential new members who expected the garden to provide them with a 'job', i.e. a regular wage-like income, were soon disappointed. As Mrs Ndamane said, 'many people left the garden quite quickly when they realised they were not going to be making money. There is no money; we're just working for ourselves. They decided to go because they need wages.'

It is evident then that, due to the irregular, though highly valued, supply of food and the lack of income generating opportunities, participation in the gardens required that members were able to support themselves by drawing on externally derived incomes. As De Swardt et al (2005) have indicated, informal economic activities such as urban agriculture depend on income that can be secured through formal sector employment and through access to social grants and credit. Those authors have also demonstrated that members of the lowest-income cohorts have the smallest chances of obtaining grants and credit, and therefore the least scope for engaging in productive informal sector activities that require an initial capital outlay, however small that may have to be (De Swardt et al, 2005). Accessing the support of NGOs and government agents is also more difficult for less organised groups. Urban agriculture of the type I have focused on for this project requires that members are able to support themselves from sources external to the gardens themselves, thus substantiating the conclusions drawn by de Swardt et al (2005).

An example: a man, I knew him only as Petros, joined Masincedane shortly after I had completed the most intensive part of my fieldwork there. He worked very hard in the garden at first but was soon disappointed by the low financial returns and left after less than a month, as soon as he had found

himself a job as a baggage attendant at Cape Town International Airport. As Mrs Nyepetsi explained, 'the young ones don't want to come because they are looking for wages and we are not working for wages here'. Unable to generate sufficient cash income to replace a formal wage-generating job, the gardens held very little appeal for youth, people of working age, and for very poor people, all of whom typically needed to search for wages. And as Abalimi's Rob Small (2005:269) has himself argued, 'successful agriculture is plain hard work... if easier options appear, many move on'.

The consequent leaking of members is common to communal vegetable gardens across the board in Abalimi. As Matschke (2002:9) has clearly demonstrated of SCAGA, 'Better educated members and ones of better health and younger age have found a paid job'. Lungiswa and Nokwanda, of Masibambane, confirmed this trend when they explained their own pattern of participation: the two do not participate in the garden when they have any other wage-generating work available.

Such a flexible arrangement seems typical of many collective work efforts. As Alan Passes (2000:110) has argued with reference to the Pa'ikwene, 'the solidary unit formed...tends to be non-coercive and unrestricting; each worker is free to come and go, to take part or withdraw their services as and when they wish. People frequently drop out when bored, tired, or discontented, or if they consider there is something more worthwhile to pursue'.

As Figure 3, on page 33, shows, three quarters of the participants in my study were pensioners, with only four of the total of fifteen being too young to qualify for a state pension at the time of research. At Masithandane and Masincedane combined, only one member I interviewed, Mrs Snele (row 15) of Masithandane, was not receiving a state pension. Moreover, members' pensions frequently formed the basis of their monthly household incomes. For example, Mrs Ndamane (row 6) supported a household of nine on her pension and the private pension of her late husband, which she continued to receive.

Two thirds of the members' households have low numbers of dependents (two or fewer). Two thirds of the sample had access to the incomes of other household members. For example, while Mrs Puza had six-ten people living in her house with her, depending on her son's contractual work as a live-in security guard, she claimed to have no dependents as three other household members earned regular incomes with which they were able to support themselves and their children without having to make demands on Mrs Puza's income. In fact, she claimed, her children often subsidised her income with theirs. Mrs Shiceko shared her home with one of her children, who was working full-time and has no children of her own. In the cases such as these, the majority demonstrated by the relatively low ratios of numbers of dependents to numbers of incomes (column 7) for twelve of the fifteen research participants, the financial pressure on incomes is much diminished.

Even in those households that exhibited some extensive financial stress, primary household incomes were derived from sources other than the gardens. As mentioned previously, Lungiswa and Nokwanda drew their incomes from a combination of their spouses' wages and state child support grants. Both worked occasionally when they could find jobs, stating that they constantly sought work, and Nokwanda had maintained a small, informal sweets-vending business for several years. Mrs Bakeni's pension and her daughter's wages formed the basis of her household's budget, rather than any incomes derived from the garden. Likewise, 'retired' Mr Sibaca, lived at the time on his wife's disability grant.

Invariably, therefore, garden project members had access to some other source/s of income, whether a state pension (most members), a spouse's disability grant (Mr Sibaca), a marginal career in the informal and part-time work sectors (Nokwanda), or at the very least a spouse's formal job (Lungiswa). Garden participants tended to receive their primary household incomes elsewhere and did not rely on the gardens to bring in wages and food. As Coetzee (2002:11) has proposed, the lifestyle choices 'available to individuals and households will depend on their access to resources or assets'. While many people in urban areas such as Guguletu and Philippi,

'eke out a living in a vital yet marginal informal economy, that informal economy is thoroughly linked to and dependent on the income that can be secured through participation in the formal job market' (De Swardt et al, 2005:111) and, I would add, access to government support structures such as social grants.

The participants in these projects are not the poorest people, at least on the scale laid out by de Swardt et al (2005). This is a common problem in development, with many programmes, even grass-roots ones, failing to reach those with the lowest incomes, living in the worst conditions. These people have to focus on survival and have other priorities than obtaining better quality vegetables by their own hands. Any approach that requires start-up capital or investment of any kind will necessarily exclude the poorest groups. De Swardt et al (2005:105) have shown that the lowest income groups have the most difficulty accessing social grants. One can imagine that they would then have equal difficulty accessing other forms of government and NGO funding or support. As Mitlin and Satterthwaite have argued in relation to development in the context of housing:

there are both internal pressures (higher-income community leaders, a desire to replicate conventional housing, the desire to take larger loans) and external pressures (local authority expectations, market-based subsidy systems that work for those able to adapt to the formal economy) that favour those who are less poor.

Even Maxwell and Zziwa (1992:42) concede, in an argument otherwise aimed at proving the ability of urban agricultural endeavours to provide valuable informal sector job opportunities, that 'outright unemployment was not a common reason for beginning to farm – presumably this takes more capital than an unemployed person can raise'. Certainly, the less poor were favoured in my sample.

The findings I have presented above are well-documented by scholars in other contexts. Slater (2001:635) has shown that 'the dynamics behind urban agriculture in Cape Town were obviously far from clear and were not being clearly understood by posing questions about income and expenditure'. This became very evident to me as I worked with the various gardeners who were

my research participants and then with the data generated from my conversations with and observations of them. Their evident lack of a regular supply of food and income from the gardens, as discussed at length above, led me to question further the reasons for their continued involvement in the gardens.

As Molema's (1996:90) research into small farming in Mamelodi has concluded, 'the people involved in urban agriculture do not practice it to make a living. It is also not seen as a supplement to their income or as gainful employment because only a small number of cultivars produce any surplus whatsoever.' Furthermore, Alex De Waal (2005:204), in a comprehensive and provocative study on famine and relief aid in Darfur, has argued that

Rural people in Darfur are used to relying on themselves: their own production and the forms of charity found in their local communities. The arrival of food aid from outside...was greeted with bafflement and surprise – and delight...Food aid was a bonus. Nobody expected it to continue.

He proposed that while people were grateful for the relief food they were offered it was regarded as a 'free bonus rather than a reliable source of food around which they could plan' (De Waal, 2005:210). Likewise, the gardeners who participated in this study were happy to obtain produce and cash from the gardens when they were available, but continued to diversify their survival strategies so as not to rely too heavily on this single, limited and unpredictable source. For these gardens' members, the material dimension of the garden has limited value and the regular incomes that formed the bases of their household budgets were obtained elsewhere. Such material benefits as were derived from the garden constituted a welcome 'bonus', in the sense De Waal (2005) describes, but were not, as I discuss in the next chapter, the primary reasons for participating.

Rob Small seems to acknowledge informally the limited economic potential of the vegetable gardens to generate much needed cash, noting that

the garden is but one of a number of livelihood strategies that will relieve some pressure on household costs and might provide some cash income but the groups have yet to graduate to a level of production where they'll be able to deal with a contract in retail or provide genuine sustainable income and job creation (personal communication, April 2006).

The next chapter explores the motivations driving long-term participation in so financially unprofitable an exercise. I propose here that sustained engagement in these vegetable gardening practices over the long term becomes more intelligible when goals and motivations other than the purely material/economic are considered. It appears that the reasons for long-term participation lie in the supportive sociability of the practice.

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5. The social dimension

Ask a Pa'ikwene person about work, and you are likely to be told that it is *mahiko*, i.e. 'hard and difficult'. This evaluation co-exists, however, with another, in which the process of work and productivity is held to be enjoyable, even joyful, and an activity as rewarding in terms of the emotions and communication as in material ones...More fundamentally, it is about the daily and very ordinary process of people speaking and working together: the interaction of, and value placed on, these twin behaviours; and how in a Pa'ikwene context, their joint practice can be said not only to generate sociality but a sociality of a particular type, namely conviviality (Passes, 2000:97)

In my own part-time work as a waitress, a tutor, and a researcher, as for Passes' (2000:98) Pa'ikwene, 'work is a group activity and, as such, a pleasurable, satisfying, and recreational one...for all the constant reference to and complaining about the unpleasantness of the physical side of the work', and the talking about it in purely utilitarian terms such as 'Well, I need the money'. In what could be described as a 'fusion of feeling and livelihood' (Netting, 1993:334), and contrary to Weber's (1905) stark analysis of alienated and isolated 'Western' work under Puritan Protestant morality – a distinction reproduced by Alverson (1978) relating to Tswana ideas about work (c.f. Comaroff and Comaroff, 1986) – and while not viewing work quite as Goldman (1979) appears to, as virtually a 'leisure activity', I do not experience my work and social life as 'always discrete and mutually exclusive modes of behaviour' (Passes, 2000:98). Neither do the vegetable gardeners with whom I worked.

Work in the gardens was typically represented as 'hard and difficult' in the extreme. Often the labour-intensive methods employed at Masincedane were reviled as inappropriately heavy work for elderly women of the kind that comprised the garden's membership. Nonetheless, participants enjoyed the physical aspects of their labour and valued highly the sociability of the practice. As Rachel Slater's (2001:642) research on urban agriculture in Cape Town uncovered, motivations for participation in urban vegetable gardens tends to transcend the purely economic:

While for some women their food gardening was a source of solace as they attempted to console themselves following outbreaks of violence in the townships, for other women food gardening was symbolic of their new found stability in Cape Town. Some women were negotiating more control over household food consumption through food gardening, while others had empowered themselves so far as to develop social networks and encourage community development.

Following Alverson (1978), Comaroff and Comaroff (1986) make use of a Tswana linguistic distinction between *tiro* – processual, non-alienating, socially valued work that strengthens sociality and reinforces interpersonal relationships – and *bereka* – alienable labour for money, measured in hours, and typically individualised – to discuss this phenomenon. For many of the women discussed here, work in the gardens appeared to take the form of *tiro*.

As Chapter 4 demonstrates, garden participants generally agreed that the gardens of which they were members had not lived up to their initial expectations in material terms; but they also said that they still carried on with it because they enjoyed it, it gave them a sense of satisfaction through enabling sociality. Lungiswa, of Masibambane, told me that 'I like to do it now', and her friend Nokwanda concurred: 'We just come because we like it'. The more indirect operations of the gardens as recreational sites and social fora, mobilising vital and highly valued social support networks around a core common activity, proved a central component of most members' expressed motivation. As shown below, the strongest data I have to support this claim is drawn from Masincedane, the Guguletu garden in which I spent most fieldwork time, although I also refer to the social motivations of Masithandane and Masibambane members where relevant and where the data to support such references are adequate.

The gardens evidently provided pleasantly supportive social and recreational spaces for project members, defined by both 'push' factors that encouraged members to get out of their houses and 'pull' factors that drew participants to the gardens. As part of the sociability and recreational value of the gardens, health-giving exercise was highly valued, as was community involvement and charity work facilitated by the gardens – important in terms of its capacity to reinforce social networks in the surrounding 'community at large'. The

gardens were understood by many members as extensions of their social networks, important for personal reasons and for the mobilisation of support structures around a central point. The gardens were also, at least at Masincedane, a place for older women who no longer worked full-time to go during the day, providing members with some routine, something outside of the house to keep them busy. This section explores these social motivations in detail.

Small (undated: 3) argued that work in the vegetable gardens his organisation supports appeared to be having 'a therapeutic effect' on participants. This position is further supported by the circumstances of one of Slater's (2001) research participants in Imizamo Yethu, an informal settlement in Hout Bay, Cape Town. Her respondent, says Slater (2001:647), found that vegetable gardening group meetings and the time spent with other women working in the gardens represented 'an opportunity to escape her worries and feel part of a group and enjoy the company of other women. At times she could discuss her personal problems and receive the sympathy of her fellow gardeners'. Indeed, this seemed, from my own work, among the most prominent reasons for garden members to continue their involvement.

For one woman, a member of Masithandane, working in the garden provided her with a supportive space for communing with other women in difficult and stressful situations similar to her own:

It is nice to go there and talk to the other women and share your problems. It goes far beyond the garden because we are able to share our problems and hear that others have problems like yours. You don't feel so alone and the burden is lightened. It is also free counselling! You don't have to go to a counsellor or pay for a psychologist or anything!

The companionship and counsel of other women was frequently sought in the gardens. At Masincedane, group members discussed matters of both practical and political importance, such as who to vote for and the implications of government-sanctioned switching from electricity to gas after the extensive mid-winter power-outs in Cape Town in 2006. They did this whilst working side by side and during lengthy 'lunch-hours' every day, which provided them a chance for the women – Mr Moni rarely joined these gossip sessions,

preferring to continue pottering in the gardens throughout break times – to sit together and talk, about their children, the garden, their old jobs, their winter aches and pains, anything, everything.



Masinedane members Joyce Nyepetsi, Shaba Esitang, Gladys Puza, and Maggie Mbovu chatting while planting seedlings in the project section of their garden.

While Masinedane members met daily in the gardens, providing the single site in which all members could be together at once as discussed in Chapter 3, Masithandane was viewed by its members as but one of a number of social and associational ties between neighbours. The founding members of Masithandane, Mr and Mrs Madalane, claimed that the garden had come about as an extension of social networks and interactions already in place in the neighbourhood. 'We were all already neighbours', explained Mrs Snele, with Mrs Madalane adding that, 'We also got another group'. Phyllis

explained that this was 'one of those location groups, like the burial societies and those *gooi-goois* I told you about'¹⁴. 'We are always together,' another project member concurred, explaining that many of the project members also attended the same local Seventh Day Adventist church. What this shows is that the vegetable garden represented one node in a complex and multi-faceted network of social relations, associations, religious and political affiliations, and neighbourhood groups, useful for its central location amid the houses. While members were not in the garden very often, it nonetheless provided a central activity to connect over while involved in any number of other activities together.

A second reason for garden members to continue their involvement in garden activities, but one that was the case primarily for Masingedane members where it was a strong motivator, was that it enabled them to get out of their houses and, indeed, in the words of one member, 'out of the location', into the comfortable, neutral space provided by the garden. Here, the fact that members did not live close to the garden may have enhanced the capacity of the garden to enable members to feel such a sense of escape, to attain some distance in both a physical and a metaphorical sense. The combination of the opportunity to leave home for a while and the chance to get some exercise was particularly valued. A series of comments by Masingedane members on the reasons they liked being in the garden and continued to participate over several years, listed below, makes this point clear:

Mrs Nyepetsi: Just to keep ourselves from staying at home all day, and to get a little bit of exercise.

Mrs Puza: Yes the exercise is good, we can stay fresh.

Mrs Esitang: I thought maybe it can be better to come and do something in the garden, working together to keep the company going, not sitting at home

¹⁴ A *gooi-gooi* can be roughly translated as a rotating credit association. See Ardener and Burman (1995) for more information on such associations. Typically, burial societies and other resource-pooling collectives do not charge membership fees, but all members contribute towards the support of one member at a time, taking turns (Narayan-Parker, 1997). For example, one month members might contribute R50 or R100 each towards buying another member a new fridge or paying for her trip to the Transkei, each taking a turn to benefit from the pooling of each individual's otherwise limited resources.

every day. The garden keeps you healthy and fit. It is good to get some exercise.

Mrs Witbooi: I just like the gardening because it is keeping me active all the time and working at the garden is better than sitting at home doing nothing.

Mrs Shiceko: It's just because I wasn't working... And then I can say that it is also good to work in the garden to get the exercise.

All the above women had worked full-time in formal and informal sector jobs for their whole lives. After reaching pension-collecting age and stopping their jobs, these women found, in the gardens, a routine, an escape from boredom at home, and a gainful outlet for their productive energies. They argued that the physical labour kept them strong and healthy as they aged. Even for Mr Moni, echoing the women's words, his interest in the garden had begun because he was living in Cape Town in order to get access to health services, was unemployed, and wanted to keep himself occupied between visits to the clinic: 'just to keep myself busy, not sitting down doing nothing'.

The household sizes of participants ranged from one person (such as Mr Moni's shack dwelling) to twelve (Mrs Bakeni's extended Philippi household) and reasons for wanting to get out of the house varied accordingly. The following cases illustrate.

CASE 1: Using the garden to escape a noisy and overcrowded home

Mrs Philippina Ndamane repeatedly expressed to me how she relished having her plot at the garden as a place to go to, away from her house. The following quote is typical of her attitude: 'I live with nine people, Amanda, in so small a house. Really, it's better to come out and look at the plants'. Mrs Ndamane had moved from Stellenbosch to Cape Town at age 20, in 1956, when she got married. Now a widow, she had had six children with her late husband, four of whom had died of AIDS-related illnesses after completing their education. The couple had fostered an additional three orphaned children, all of whom

were, by the time of my fieldwork, over eighteen years old, although none was yet working (with the implication that Mrs Ndamane could no longer collect child support grants for them but that they were still dependent on her). Mrs Ndamane lived in a four-roomed house¹⁵ in Guguletu with her 40-year-old son, crippled in an incident of domestic violence, the three orphans her family had fostered, and four young grandchildren, born to her now deceased children. Before the garden had started, Mrs Ndamane had been involved in social sewing and baking clubs at Fezeka, the community centre alongside which the vegetable garden was located. These social clubs provided her with an escape from an overcrowded, noisy, and demanding household. However, the clubs also tended to be noisy and cramped indoor meeting places.

The vegetable garden at Masincedane offered a peaceful space to which she could escape and she had jumped at the opportunity. Whilst there each day, Mrs Ndamane relied on the three adult foster children to tend to the younger children and her disabled son. As her friend, Mrs Nyepetsi, said, the garden was valued as a quiet place that they all used to 'get out of the location and away from the gossips, and to come into the garden and talk to the plants'.

What became clear therefore, and is corroborated by Slater's (2001) findings, is that it was tremendously empowering for these older women to have a place to go to that is all their own, a place, as described by Slater (2001:643), to 'be alone with your thoughts, hopes and fears.' The following case illustrates how this worked for a woman who had no daytime company in her home where, for the most part, she lived alone.

CASE 2: Using the garden to escape an empty lonely home

Mrs Regina Shiceko joined Mrs Ndamane as one of the founding members of Masincedane in 1999, although, rather than being recruited from the sewing and baking groups, she had been involved in another urban agriculture project. She had moved to Cape Town from the small Eastern Cape town of

¹⁵ 'Four-roomed' refers to a brick house with two bedrooms, a living area, and a kitchen.

Jamestown in 1958 and had remained in the city ever since, working as a 'chambermaid' at a major city hotel. Also widowed, Mrs Shiceko had six children. Her two eldest had passed away and one lived, at the time of writing, in Malmesbury, about 60km from Cape Town, another in Limpopo Province, and a third in Khayelitsha, another area on the Cape Flats. Her fourth surviving child, an adult son, lived with her in her four-roomed house but was away at work all day – he had a full-time job as a security guard. 'They are all working for themselves', she explained, meaning that none sends her money, but that she does not have to support them either: 'Even the one that lives with me, just food, just groceries because you must also eat'. Mrs Shiceko's son, she explained, was rarely at home as his wife and children lived in Philippi with his wife's family, where he visited them often¹⁶ so, effectively, she lived alone. A practical woman, no doubt the reason for her position as the group's secretary, Mrs Shiceko frequently concentrated on the material benefits of the garden in her conversations with me. However, she was the group member always likely to accept Abalimi and DOA invitations to attend workshops and meetings. She would arrive punctually at the garden every morning, and often stayed later than the others. Mrs Shiceko could reliably be found toiling away at her plot in all weather, even when the other members called off work due to rain. The garden and the work that was needed in it structured her days, giving her something to do since she had retired, her husband had died, and her children had all but moved out. She had few domestic responsibilities to occupy her time, and little company at home. The garden provided her with a way to feel useful and productive while also affording a social space for her to interact regularly with others her own age.

The above case studies illustrate the various push and pull factors that motivated their regular and sustained participation in communal vegetable

¹⁶ It is possible that Mrs Shiceko, although she never stated this outright, believed that her son's wife and children should have been staying with her, as would be fitting in a patrilocal system such as is typical of Xhosa-speaking South Africans (Van der Vliet, 1991). Her suggestion that he remained part of her household even though he was actually present there only very infrequently may reflect the above idea, rather than that he really co-resided in her household.

gardens for women of pension-collecting age (nine of fifteen research participants). As for the garden members described by Slater (2001:638) these women attached 'great importance to their food gardens even though they do not earn a significant income from their activity'. For those with large households, commonly made up, as in Mrs Ndamane's case, of a collection of disabled and unemployed family members, orphaned or abandoned grandchildren, adopted children, and tenants, the garden provided a relaxed, peaceful, and quiet place for refuge from noisy, demanding, and overcrowded domestic spaces. As in the case of Slater's (2001:643) respondents, such women found the garden gave 'solace and escape from [a] world of drudgery, struggle, and conflict'. By contrast, members with very small households, such as Mrs Shiceko, tended to find the companionship of others and a sense of purpose and pride in the gardens, a daily respite from boredom and loneliness at home.¹⁷ While the examples contained in the cases given above represent extremes of experience, they demonstrate that, in both instances, the gardens were significant social spaces. They were significant in this same sense for other members with less extreme home lives as well.

There was also a very interesting gender dynamic at play in the gardens. The few men who were involved (three of the fifteen research participants, one in each of the gardens) appeared to be motivated by very different kinds of reasoning and to employ quite different modes of engagement with the gardens. Each also differed from the other men so each will be dealt with briefly in turn. Mr Moni, the only male member at Masincedane, has been discussed in the above chapters. He was based in the Transkei but living temporarily in Cape Town while seeking medical treatment. Mr Moni rarely engaged in the social life at Masincedane so enjoyed by the women at break times and even whilst working, preferring to work consistently, and often alone, all day. The fact of his illness and advanced age may have enabled him to break the norms of cultural expectation by working in such a feminine

¹⁷ While these analytical distinctions are useful for broadly understanding the phenomenon, things are rarely so clear cut. For example, Mrs Esitang claimed to live with two grandchildren, a three-year-old and an unemployed twenty-something. Every time I visited her house, a total of four times, it was crowded with people, mostly small children, for whom her older grandchild cared during the day. Thus, even though her household size was technically relatively small, the space itself could still be understood as 'noisy, demanding, and overcrowded'.

space as the garden at Masinedane (van der Vliet, 1991). His manner of engagement with the work done, however, suggests that he imagined it as a job. It is possible that this reflects a continuation of attitudes cultivated during a long career as a migrant mineworker – while in town, he is expected, and expects himself, to earn a living. He refused to 'sit back' whilst in town, feeling obligated to engage in some form of productive work. Even though the garden did not provide him a wage, he took the work very seriously, displaying little or no interest in the social aspects of gardening. While the work of the garden was quite clearly '*tiro*' for the women, it appears to have been '*bereka*' for Mr Moni.

Mr Sibaca, the only male member of Masibambane, also, like Mr Moni, tended to work very hard, in silence, and mostly alone, representing this difference of attitude towards work in the gardens between socially motivated '*tiro*' and production oriented '*bereka*'. He had only been involved in the garden for a month at the time of research but already had taken on a lot of the responsibility for the day-to-day running of the garden. Here, Mr Sibaca may be seen as representing the typical 'man in control' (van der Vliet, 1991), at least until something better comes along.

Mr Madalane, of Masithandane, represents a different kind of male involvement in the vegetable gardens studied. He was attached to the garden purely by his wife's involvement in it. Mrs Madalane was a dynamic and tenacious woman who 'dragged' her quiet, gentle, somewhat hen-pecked husband along with her to work in the gardens. He did not have his own interview with me during the period of fieldwork – Mrs Madalane 'offered' to speak for him – and he was never to be found in the garden without his wife.

So, male members of the gardens had quite different experiences from the women. Mr Moni and Mr Sibaca have since left their respective gardens, while Mr Madalane continued to visit Masithandane with his wife. While the men tended to view the gardens as work sites, the women derived a plethora of personal and social benefits, as discussed above. This gendered dynamic would be a fascinating avenue for future research and would no doubt be

useful to those interested in promoting urban agriculture as it could inform on the significant lack of male involvement in these projects.

Several project members, again all of them women, expressed an interest in serving their communities through their involvement in the gardens. Mrs Madalane told me that, in addition to growing vegetables for sale and for home consumption, Masithandane members

also take some to the old age home. I take some to the HIV clinic in NY1. There is another lady in NY126 who has a crèche and we also take it there. When the spinach is getting off to be sold we take it to those places.

Some gardeners argued that food security could make a difference for those affected by HIV and AIDS, by aiding the basic nutrition needed to make medication effective. Members of all three projects claimed to have, at some point, donated produce to the sick and elderly in their areas. According to Mrs Esitang, Masincedane 'used to give vegetables to the old people and the sick ones...we can't do it now because we haven't got anything now. When the garden is making more food we can begin giving again'. Many members also expressed interest in starting soup kitchens. None of the gardens actually engaged in these practices at the time of research, but it was certainly an important ideal, and one that linked with the salience of gardens as a means of inserting members into social networks, not only those directly compromising members but also broader linkages that might be understood as part of a wider sense of community.

As I have shown, when asked their reasons for wanting to join the vegetable gardens initially, and for remaining committed members for several years, group members consistently cited reasons other than income generation – they were no longer working but still wanted to be busy; they wanted to get out of their houses or out of the locations and the gardens were a pleasant place to go to pass the time; they enjoyed spending time with the other project members in the gardens; they liked the exercise, feeling that the time outside working in the gardens kept them fit, strong and healthy; and they valued the albeit limited fresh produce they got from their gardens, from both a financial and a nutritional perspective. Many group members expressed interest in

outreach, and may have pursued such efforts had the gardens been more productive and lucrative, rather than opting to pay themselves a wage. Thus, what I have found has confirmed what Slater (2001:635) argued when she said that, 'In Cape Town, the contribution of urban agriculture to income generation is limited...women use urban agriculture in processes of empowerment, to establish social networks, to symbolise a sense of security, and to encourage community development'.

For many, the kinds of social networks that gardeners' involvement in gardens enabled them to develop (or to consider extending, as in the case of the soup kitchens) is known as 'social capital'¹⁸. Coetzee (2002:13) describes such 'social capital' as being created 'when a group of individuals or households organise themselves into a larger entity, whether it is a temporary or ongoing association... and coordinate actions through mechanisms of trust, norms, and reciprocity'. In this sense, Small's (undated:4) description of the 'livelihood garden' is an informative one when he says that it is

a subsistence level garden with a commercial component that serves as the anchor for a number of other social and economic activities... (possibly including) crafts and refreshments for visitors and tourists, child care and soup kitchens (part-funded by government agents) for the sick and needy, nurseries for seedlings for own use and for sale to others...multi-functional entrepreneurial and community support initiatives.

Considering the motivations cited by project members themselves, and that Abalimi recognises the diverse social rather than purely material reasons that garden members participate in garden activities, one has to wonder why Abalimi and the DOA have tended to position these multi-functional initiatives along the standard 'development continuum' towards commercial micro-farming, since their doing that seems deeply problematic. While patrons almost inevitably have certain hopes and goals which they project onto such initiatives as the urban vegetable gardens they support, the gardeners have

¹⁸ I have tremendous problems with the concept of social capital. I feel that it is too blatantly utilitarian (in the sense that social capital is frequently sought out by development practitioners as a way for 'poor people' to further themselves economically by mobilising social networks – see Narayan-Parker, 1997, for an particularly flagrant example of this) to be useful in describing the mobilising of associational networks for the more convivial reasons that I am describing here. I would therefore prefer, and will beyond this nod to convention, call what I am describing what it is, i.e. either associational activity, the mobilisation of social networks to various ends, the role of reciprocity and interdependences, etc. See also Fine (2001) and Fine (2002) for further eloquent critique of an imprecise and unscholarly term.

their own sets of agenda, defining their participation. These local-level goals, intentions, and motivations are often articulated in contradictory ways, through what Small has referred to in personal communications as a 'smoke screen', in order to continue to attract development funding, which tends to look primarily at the material. In the following chapter I explore the context in which the many voices expressed above articulate their diverse interests.

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6. The institutional dimension

We seem to have got into the habit of 'judging the value attached to work principally in terms of its products, their so-called use and exchange values, and that connected with productivity in terms of the labour and time expended and the money these are reckoned to be worth' (Passes, 2000:109). For Passes' Pa'ikwene however, as for the vegetable gardeners discussed here as demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the productive process is communicative and sociable and, although no doubt physically exacting, it is at least as 'fruitful emotionally and socially as it is materially' (Passes, 2000:109), if not more so. Nonetheless, the gardens' primary sources of support, the NGO Abalimi Bezekhaya and the South African Departments of Agriculture and of Social Services tended throughout my fieldwork to focus their attention on furthering the role of the material benefits afforded by participation. Through reference to Abalimi's position as stated in a series of official documents, mostly aimed at fund-raising, and to the positions espoused by field representatives of both the DOA and Abalimi, most of them collected through personal communications, this chapter explores the material-benefits bias present in institutional hopes for communal vegetable gardens and it briefly considers the implications of this bias for participants themselves, particularly in terms of the ways they have to learn to market themselves in order to ensure continued support..

Individual garden projects in which I worked simultaneously received technical, financial, and material support from Abalimi Bezekhaya, the DOA, the Departments of Social Services and of Health, the South African Lotto Fund, and the international donor body, the Green Trust, as well as various other less regular sources. This support was generally desired and frequently actively sought out by project members, with Abalimi's fieldworkers, and myself for a time, often being enlisted to help project members fill out forms, apply for grants, and seek out other interventions. As indicated by the extensive involvement of multiple development agencies in any one urban vegetable garden, and while group members were usually left to their own

devices in the day to day running of the gardens, projects were often and to a great extent designed, run, and monitored by outsiders.

Representatives of both the DOA and Abalimi visited the gardens periodically. In both cases the visits were typically short in duration and project oriented. On an average of every ten days (in the case of Masinedane) fieldworkers from Abalimi would come to the gardens to assist, usually by providing additional, particularly skilled labour, at planting and harvesting times. Representatives of the DOA visited less regularly, usually surveying progress and asking members what was needed for the garden. Their visits were typically significantly shorter in duration than those of Abalimi fieldworkers and they tended not to involve physical labour. At Masinedane, one such state representative visited often, facilitating the group members' entrance into the 'Female Farmer of the Year' competition. She also brought tools, seeds and seedlings around and, on one occasion, delivered cuttings of traditional herbs to be planted as windbreaks.

Abalimi and the DOA had slightly different, but arguably complementary, roles in the gardens. At the level of providing basic inputs, the DOA was more involved than Abalimi. All the gardeners claimed that the majority of their tools, fencing, and storage containers had been provided by the DOA. Much of the compost used by the gardens in which I worked was also provided by the DOA. As Mrs Madalane of Masithandane reported:

They (Abalimi) bring us compost, but I think the DOA is doing the most. They are the ones that set up this water business and tools – we also got three tools from Abalimi, one, one, one, but the rest is from agriculture. They also brought us the container¹⁹. This compost, they put this compost here. The nursery also – they gave us that shelter [a wood and shade cloth structure used for storage and for sprouting seeds and hardening off seedlings] and I made a nursery out of the leftover.

By and large, Abalimi accepted this role of government agencies in subsidising urban agriculture with the NGO's fieldworkers thus being more likely to be employed to provide training and labour as needed. On request,

¹⁹ The 'container' refers to a used shipping container supplied by the DOA to all the gardens I viewed and worked in. typically project members would use them as offices, meeting places, and storage rooms.

the NGO would also make a truck and driver available to assist with transporting seedlings to and vegetables from the gardens and with shifting large harvests. Both agents maintained a visible and consistent presence in all three gardens throughout the period of research. While they had similar ideas in general about what they hoped would be achieved in the gardens, they differed in the subtlety of their understandings of the motivations of participants.

On the one hand, the first priority for the DOA in all the gardens studied was that government-supported vegetable gardens could and should work to alleviate poverty. First and foremost, insisted the DOA representative assigned to Masibambane, the department claimed to be interested in promoting food security, and moving through increasing food security to alleviating poverty. Said representative also claimed that the department was centrally concerned with economic development in and through the vegetable gardens. This is why, she said, they are interested in teaching groups marketing skills and in locating buyers for the gardener's produce. Her expressed hope was that some gardens might be able to move towards selling their produce in bulk (rather than eating it at home in small quantities) and in that way for them to start to generate a cash income for themselves. Such sentiments were echoed in Masithandane and Masincedane as well, where DOA representatives expressed hopes that the gardens would ultimately generate incomes for their members. The fieldworkers thus understood their primary role as being to subsidise urban micro-businesses by providing the necessary initial inputs, in this case those being gardening tools, fencing, training and so on.

On the other hand, the NGO, Abalimi Bezekhaya, in business in various guises since 1982, and having conducted much research into the gardens, both internally (e.g., Fleming, 2003) and through openness to independent, 'volunteer' researchers such as myself, Karaan and Mohamed (1998), and Matschke (2005), had developed an understanding of members' motivations and of what the gardens could realistically achieve that was much more nuanced, critical, and subtle than the overtly economic aims of the DOA.

Broadly, in fact, their research appeared to have arrived at much the same conclusion as I did as to the convivial nature of participation in the collective gardens. For example, Abalimi certainly recognised that ‘the developmental movement (the vegetable gardens in this case) is driven by family values in the hands of women, rather than being a crass profit-driven movement’ (p3 of a funding proposal submitted to Misereor in March 2006). What has come to be known as ‘associative movement building’, by which was meant facilitating the development and maintenance of local networks around particular social and material goals, had apparently become a key target area for the NGO: its ‘Livelihood Level’ model, defined in Chapter 3, advocates the pursuit of ‘all around social, economic, and environmental benefits’ (Misereor proposal, 2006:6). On p2 of the same funding proposal, Abalimi claimed that its aim is the ‘provision of targeted services to organic micro-farming and gardening associations among the poor in Cape Town, to improve community project and community association sustainability.’

Abalimi has tended to represent itself as a non-profit ‘voluntary service provider’ (Misereor proposal, 2006:7), seeing its role as enabling prospective urban vegetable gardeners who want to grow vegetables by setting up nurseries, known as ‘garden centres’, that offer cheap (subsidised) and locally accessible seeds and seedlings, compost, and tools, as well as making services, advice, and training available to the general public. Cooperatives interested in pursuing urban agriculture, and which have already secured access to a plot of land for this purpose, have to approach Abalimi on their own initiative with business plans, tenure agreements, and arrangements to access water and electricity, in order to get support. Abalimi usually requires that people who want to be involved in an urban agriculture project organise themselves, sort out their own land tenure agreements and make sure for themselves that they will be able to access water and electricity as needed before approaching them for help. They are usually expected to write up a proposal for assistance, part of which is a negotiated ‘constitution’ detailing the way the garden will be run. Of course, fieldworkers may, and often do, approach a garden that has started up independently and invite them to join the NGO, as happened with each of Masincedane, Masithandane, and

Masibambane. In this way, Abalimi could be understood as providing resources and services that are in demand but scarce in the local context, in response to the needs of grassroots initiatives. As a service provider, Abalimi 'supports individual households and group projects in developing their own sustainable organic vegetable gardens' (Young, 2003:15). Constructed this way, the NGO could be seen as playing an important facilitative role for local initiatives, addressing a need by providing a service. From this angle, Abalimi could create the necessary distance from the usual claims in the industry that vegetable gardens are and should be moving towards greater 'economic success' by limiting its role to facilitating local initiatives in whatever social, associative or potentially economic form they may take.

Abalimi does not, however, take full advantage of this opportunity. Abalimi's stated core concerns with job creation, organic accreditation for a niche market, and training in additional skills demonstrate, as I discuss below, that despite recognising the social-relations building motivations of gardeners, material interests remain foremost in the statements and deeds of the NGO's personnel. Abalimi representatives frequently spoke about the gardens in terms of their income-generating potential and the social impulses and motivations that the organisation clearly recognised were repeatedly referred to in combination with long-term profit-making and employment-creating goals. Small, in his Ashoka Fellowship Motivation (2002:4), stated that he would like to see an important delivery threshold reached in the gardens: 'the establishment of permanent job creation opportunities on micro-organic community vegetable gardens'. Small (undated:1) sees the vegetable gardens supported by Abalimi as effective in alleviating poverty by assisting 'individuals, groups, and community organisations to develop their own organic vegetable gardens in order to supplement their diet, improve household food and nutrition security, and provide sustainable additional income'. Indeed, my most recent personal communication with Small (end October 2007), which in many respects corroborated my findings that the urban vegetable gardens under the Abalimi umbrella appealed mainly to older women and did not reach the very poorest by necessarily failing to result in income-generating set-ups, has continued to argue for an imagined future

when young people would want to garden and the gardens would become profitable. Where Small had previously questioned the findings presented in the preceding chapter, he here stated, following his perusal of the results of Abalimi's latest internal annual review, that 'I think we are ready to accept your research project as it stands, as a very informative window on "one moment in time" of the development continuum as it plays itself out on the ground'. As discussed in the introduction, the 'development continuum' to which Small referred imagines the vegetable gardens moving linearly and irrepressibly from 'survival' aims, through 'subsistence' and 'livelihood' levels, to an ultimately attainable and desirable 'commercial' status. The internal contradiction demonstrated by his simultaneous recognition of the primarily social value of participation in the gardens alongside the assertion that job creation and income generation goals should continue to be earnestly pursued is deeply problematic and reflects a situation in international development funding lacking the capacity to recognise non-economistic aims in these kinds of projects.

In addition, and further demonstrating this contradiction, Abalimi doggedly pursued the attainment of formal organic accreditation for the larger 'commercial' gardens with the intention, according to Small (undated:4) of 'increas(ing) the external marketability of their products'. The NGO had employed a person tasked specifically with pursuing this goal, with the belief that being able to label their produce 'organic' would afford projects access to city markets. This person explained that their hope was that the gardens could, with the appropriate organic certification, be enabled to reach a commercial level of practice through taking advantage of the growing niche market for organic produce in Cape Town. Furthermore, she argued that better marketing and planning could be used to motivate people to grow the kinds of produce that buyers of organic produce want, thus raising the potential for their businesses to grow. While organic methods certainly have a wide variety of benefits – they ultimately improve soil fertility thereby improving the quantity and quality of the yield over time and making it more consistent over time, they are more environmentally sustainable, and they can contribute to creating local stability (see Madeley, 2002, Seymour, 2003, and

Small, 2005) – pursuit of them here appeared based largely on the two assumptions that participants should want to sell their produce for profit and that organic certification would enable them to do so for a better price than they might obtain for uncertified goods²⁰.

Thirdly, Abalimi focused a large portion of its interventions on training. Training formed an element of service provision hierarchically positioned above resource supply and project delivery. Abalimi pursued various training and education initiatives with the intention of providing 'all round improvements (including jobs and money) to the existing movement' (Misereor proposal, 2006). Training, in Abalimi's thinking as expressed in funding proposals, would begin to move gardens towards a 'community-based commercial level model which retains and enhances wider social and nature conservation benefits while at the same time realising viable profit' (Misereor proposal, 2006:6). The NGO anticipated too that training could enhance material benefits that would, in turn, attract more young people and men to the gardens. One such training initiative was Agriplanner, 'a training course in agribusiness skills related to production planning, marketing, and cash management' (Summary of Activities, Apr 2005 – March 2006). Abalimi's 'Pack Shed initiative', a project developed in conjunction with the Pick n Pay Foundation, was another training initiative. This one too had explicitly market related intentions: 'the urban agriculture movement should be able to supply Pick 'n Pay stores and other market networks with a regular stream of basic organic vegetables' (Summary of Activities, Dec 2005 – Nov 2006:10). At the time of my research, Abalimi was also in the process of developing a 'special training course for the urban agriculture movement which will enable even illiterate people to progress through the development continuum, from survival level to commercial level' (Summary of Activities, Dec 2005 – Nov 2006:10).

The stated goals of Abalimi Bezekhaya's collective food gardens, therefore, were to provide one or more of the following – job creation, supplementary

²⁰ Abalimi had, however, no market outlets arranged for this supposedly more valuable product. I called a few organic fruit and vegetable suppliers in Cape Town to promote the produce of the three gardens in which I worked. None was remotely interested, especially since the produce was not packaged or processed in any way that might make it easily saleable.

income, and/or improved household nutrition. Rob Small is first to admit, in a letter to donors written in 2005, that 'the groups have yet to graduate to a level of production where they'll be able to deal with a contract in retail or provide genuine sustainable income and job creation.'²¹ Research, both from within Abalimi itself (e.g. Fleming, 2003) and independently (e.g. Slater, 2001), has clearly demonstrated that such aims are unlikely to be achieved in Cape Town. Nevertheless, this remains the stated goal, as is evident by Small going on to say in the same letter that five of the more mature urban agriculture projects have reached technical sustainability and are in the process of drawing up business plans to become 'proper' urban micro-market gardens:

Until recently, it has not been possible to build a culture of highly skilled survival and subsistence gardeners in a political and economic environment which sees the 'formal job' as the only worthwhile objective and land work as an undesirable, even stupid, alternative. This is falling apart among the unemployed who increasingly view the small but regular supplementary income from urban agriculture as an attractive option.

This conclusion is not, however, borne out by the findings of my research, presented above, which clearly indicate that unemployed persons of employable age are not getting involved in urban agriculture precisely because they cannot afford to do so (see the discussion in Chapter 4). Indeed what my work has shown is that such involvement is an option available only to those drawing state pensions or receiving income from some other source/s. After hearing fieldworkers comment over and over again that is 'only old women' that are interested in urban agriculture for any length of time, I do not doubt for a second that Abalimi's staff members are aware of the dynamics I have uncovered.

Why, then, do they continue to claim job creation and income generation in direct opposition to the evidence? In contracting ties to its national and international donors, Abalimi necessarily has to take on specific types of tasks, to focus on particular kinds of projects and engage in definite forms of activities with the money it receives, activities that preclude others and that make the organisation less able to respond directly to its beneficiaries' own

²¹ Considering that the NGO has been in operation since 1982, a solid twenty-five years, the fact that no projects have yet 'graduated' to a commercial level of production may indicate that this is unlikely to occur in the future.

felt and demonstrated needs. While arguing that associative movement building is their key goal, the NGO must still claim in reports and funding proposals, in an exercise of well-intentioned deception, that 'jobs can be created on 500m² of wasteland or less' (Misereor proposal, 2006:5)²².

As Matschke (2001:6) explained, Abalimi's donors 'do not accept periods of standstill marked by crisis...[so that] the NGO was not willing to risk losing another donor by showing him or her bare plots'. Development funding for urban agriculture is often short-term and project- rather than process-oriented. Competing for funding has thus forced the NGO to align itself with the requirements of donors, requirements which have frequently focused on efficiency and material performance and looking for measurable indicators of 'success' in the short term. The same then occurs in the gardens themselves, where the focus of gardeners is clearly on the process, but where their public orientation has to appear to be towards the measurable successes of commercial engagement – hence the somewhat arbitrary requirements (considering the limited incomes derived) that projects have formal constitutions in terms of which members elect a secretary and treasurer, they keep records of harvests, sales, and savings, and they detail plans for future expansion.

Intended beneficiaries have thus to 'fit in with a pre-existing structure in order to participate in it' (Escobar, 1991:674). For local groups to seek funding and material support for their initiatives, they have to adopt particular organisational forms and project designs, draft constitutions, and outline business plans, even where these are not the members' priorities. Abalimi is thus forced to articulate its goals in particular ways, in order to retain a level of external financial support to maintain the NGO's viability. This is then passed on to the vegetable gardeners themselves who find themselves obligated to behave as though they are running a business.

²² Again, see Chapter 4 for the discussion on the limited and irregular material benefits project member obtain from the gardens and the seriously circumscribed potential of the vegetable gardens to produce incomes equivalent to those derived from formal jobs.

Insights into the nature of the needs of beneficiaries of development projects, such as those generated by detailed ethnographic investigation of the kind presented here, can often fail to make an impact on funding bodies and development agencies, on those who define the terms of engagement for 'beneficiaries'. This is because donors and development agencies tend to "prefer clearly defined problems with simple answers" (Randel and German, 1996:79), rather than time-consuming discussions of complex and convoluted local realities which defy the possibility of a 'one-size-fits-all' solution. Such a preference limits their ability to take important local specifics into account. After all, "development projects are about delivering resources, not about anthropological analysis" (Garber and Jenden, 1993). Anthropology's interest in explanatory accounts that deal with observable events and with participants' representations of events are all too often difficult to translate into action, precisely because donors and the larger development agents, such as states and multi-national/international/ even established local agencies, tend to prefer models that offer the greatest degree of predictability, use established guidelines, and have some claim to universal applicability (Hobart, 1993).

In the case of the vegetable gardens discussed here, data informing the NGO that the gardens are not particularly productive in material terms, and are unlikely ever to be so, is not useful. Their primary expressed concern, and especially that of those who fund them, is with alleviating poverty and reducing food insecurity, rightly so based on current global inequities and widespread poverty. Information that suggests that urban vegetable gardens may be more highly valued by members for their social benefits, their capacity to create, maintain, and mobilise social networks in Cape Town townships, fails to fuel these claims. That project members tend not to be the poorest on the scale laid down by De Swardt et al (2005) and that they require resources outside of the gardens to support themselves in order to be able to afford to participate, thwarts arguments regarding job creation and income generation such as are needed to raise funds by the NGO. Meaningful and public recognition of the importance of the networks created for those involved in the gardens, in terms of both the psychological benefits and the potential for the

pooling of various kinds of resources (time, cash, labour, emotional support, etc)²³ requires a shift in the discourse and practice of donor bodies.

Frequently, too, concerns around budget are problematic in that donors tend to give money for specific projects the authors of which can claim to be able to achieve specific aims within set time frames (see, for examples relating to development in Lesotho but also more widely relevant, Ferguson, 1990, and Spiegel, Watson, and Wilkinson, 1999). As Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2004:11) have argued, 'all external funding comes with requirements and conditions'. The DOSS, for example, provides funding to Abalimi specifically for setting up vegetable gardens at clinics and hospitals, with the expressed intention of providing regular food for HIV/AIDS patients – not possible as clearly demonstrated by the examples given in Chapter 4, both from my own research and that of others. Abalimi's organic accreditation person has complained that donors, on their site inspection, want to see neat, orderly rows of spinach and cabbages, prohibiting creative engagement with garden design on the part of members themselves, who may, and sometimes do, prefer alternative strategies (see Chapter 4). Thus, while Abalimi has a private discourse that recognises the primarily social motivations for membership to the gardens, its public discourse conforms to that of the DOA and the broader conventions of development aid in general by continuing to consider and discuss the gardens in terms of the material benefits to be potentially derived from them in the undefined future.

In order for its private discourse to move into the public domain, where it can better serve members of collective vegetable gardens, issues around the narrow, economic view, characteristic of donor bodies, as to what qualifies as a valid intervention need urgently to be redefined to recognise, value, and promote the social network building aspects. This could, in turn, lead to an end to what I would describe as the 'well intentioned deception' of development agencies such as Abalimi²⁴ in perpetuating a material bias, leaving them freer to attend to the needs of their actual beneficiaries (mainly

²³ Chapter 5

²⁴ Although it could also perhaps be understood as a kind of optimistic self-delusion.

retired women who have been settled in town for many years and utilise the gardens as one conduit through which to expand on and reinforce new or existing networks of mutual support amongst themselves), and perhaps even to begin to imagine realistic ways of reaching their desired target populations (the unemployed and otherwise vulnerable, men, the youth, and new arrivals to town, i.e. those most in need of both material and social-relational assistance). The widespread encouragement of urban vegetable gardens is valuable in itself in terms of greening the urban environment, creating spaces for urban dwellers to engage with and learn about nature, making productive use of otherwise vacant land, and reducing the practical and environmental costs of transporting foodstuffs to urban areas from outlying districts, to name but a few reasons. Recognising the limited potential of such projects to create jobs and generate significant incomes (in cash or in kind) may just enable agents to consolidate the efforts of existing projects while branching out in new directions. Development funding could be better directed a) towards associative movement building, b) the further consolidation of Abalimi and the DOA as the necessary service providers for the local urban agriculture movement, and c) towards job creation/income generation initiatives that do not focus exclusively on cultivation and may have better chances of success, such as, for example, the value-adding project represented by the Pick 'n Pay Packshed initiative.

PART THREE: CONCLUDING COMMENTS

7: Conclusions

Very little past research into urban agricultural pursuits of various kinds has recognised the central importance of the social side of such activities. Urban agricultural activities such as the vegetable gardens studied here have been, and continue to be for the most part, viewed by the vast majority of researchers in terms of their economic impact. Most of those thinking around urban vegetable gardens have focused on the material benefits to be derived from membership of such projects, particularly in the form of supplementary supplies of cash and/or foodstuffs. Such thinking frequently positions urban agricultural activities conceptually within the informal sector as an entrepreneurial venture of sorts. Urban farming is thus often imagined as an informal job, with the potential to eventually become formal. For van Vuuren (1988:40), community vegetable gardens 'are essential nutritional resources'. Although he tells us that the gardeners in Keiskammahoek, where he did his research, were only able to grow potatoes, tomatoes, and cabbages, he still groundlessly insisted that this could be understood as sufficient for feeding the household. Furthermore, 'apart from feeding the household, most of them [he does not say who or how many] were able to market a surplus [he does not say how much or what it was worth], which is purchased direct from the gardeners by other community members and wholesalers, with some members having an income in excess of R40 per week' (van Vuuren, 1988:42)²⁵.

As pointed out at the beginning of Chapter 4, there are others too who see urban agriculture as 'a job'. Maxwell and Zziwa (1992:3), along with others such as Leonard (1998), have thus placed urban agriculture firmly within the informal sector economy, viewing it as 'an important component of what has

²⁵ Of course in the 1980s, R40 was worth significantly more than it is now.

come to be referred to as household survival strategies for the urban poor in the face of worsening economic conditions'. Such authors sincerely hope that urban agriculture can 'suggest partial solutions to the problems of urban food supply and employment' (Maxwell and Zziwa, 1992:5). Likewise, Drescher (1999), who studied urban agriculture in Zambia, did so with a view towards surveying land use patterns that might effectively contribute to household food security and Makgoga (1995) has argued that community food gardening projects could and should progress from subsistence levels to job and wealth creation initiatives. For Moskow (1999), whose research on urban agriculture in Havana, Cuba showed the potential for hugely successful urban agricultural projects, and for Morgan's (2006) film²⁶, urban agriculture is understood to have massive potential to generate wealth for participants. What is often not noted in this case, however, is the fact that the Cuban urban agricultural revolution was driven by members of the educated, professional middle classes with many resources at their disposal, the kinds of resources, including capital, connections, education and skills, ability to access information and so on, that poorer under- and un-employed people of South Africa could scarcely hope to mobilise at this point in the country's history. The events in Cuba, although certainly inspiring and filled with new ideas and hope, may not be replicable in the South African context for this reason²⁷. For all of the above theorists and researchers, urban agriculture is viewed as an economic pursuit designed to combat unemployment, low wages, and high living costs while fulfilling the need to diversify incomes in poorer households.

This position, that 'community gardens could well be a way in which the ever-increasing cycle of poverty could be broken' (van Vuuren, 1988:45), is certainly reflected in the aims and expectations of development agents involved in promoting urban agriculture in the Cape Flats. As discussed in Chapter 6 above, these aims and expectations have tended to focus on income generation and job creation. Although the South African Department

²⁶ Faith Morgan's (2006) film, *The Power of Community: How Cuba survived Peak Oil*, offers a visual documentation of a vibrant and economically viable and sustainable urban agriculture movement but under quite different socio-economic circumstances from those on the Cape Flats.

²⁷ From my own experience, the same can be said for urban agriculture on allotments in Western European cities and towns.

of Agriculture does not have a clearly articulated public position specifically regarding urban agriculture at present, its focus in agricultural development in general has typically been on creating employment in the sector and thereby reducing inequality. These certainly were the forerunning concerns of the DOA fieldworkers and representatives I encountered during the course of my research.

Abalimi Bezekhaya too claimed that its role was to assist 'individuals, groups, and community-based organisations to develop their own organic vegetable gardens in order to supplement their diet, improve household food and nutrition security, and provide sustainable additional income' (Small, undated:1). Abalimi thus explicitly aims its interventions towards 'a community based commercial level model which retains and enhances wider social and nature conservation benefits while at the same time realising viable profit' (Misereor proposal, 2006:6). Yet Abalimi's public expressions in this vein obscure the fact that members of the organisation are very much aware that there is another significant side to urban gardening, thus reflecting a tension that the leaders of the organisation have consistently to negotiate. In an article by Small (undated:4) on the ways in which organic certification improves the external marketability of garden produce, making the gardens more 'economically viable', comment is made about the social role of the gardens, but it tends to be more lip service than anything else: 'this social impulse, combined with relative economic success, provides the first examples in South Africa of sustainable urban community organic gardens as a new lifestyle choice'. While Abalimi's personnel say that the intention is to ensure all-around quality of life improvements, with collective organic gardening facilitating 'community-building, personal growth, and the development of self-esteem' (Young, 2003:15), they are forced at every turn to stress that this is necessarily focused on jobs and money (Misereor proposal, 2006:6).

Recent research into urban vegetable gardens in Cape Town has begun to suggest, however, that the goals of employment creation and income generation are not attainable. Fleming (2003) has demonstrated, by way of a

single detailed case study about an Abalimi project, that collective urban vegetable gardens cannot replace jobs in income terms, even when operating at maximum potential production levels. Similarly, Rachel Slater (2001), who focused on a number of gardens in an informal settlement in another part of the Cape Peninsula, also found that such gardens were not profitable enterprises. As early as the late 1980s, some researchers had already recognised the limited role of material benefits in urban vegetable gardens (see Eberhard, 1989). But it was Slater (2001:638) who began in earnest to explore the social reasons for participation, arguing that 'women attach great importance to their food gardens even though they do not earn a significant income from their activity'. Recently, Dunn (2007), a Masters' student in the Historical Studies Department at the University of Cape Town submitted a proposal to conduct research into the social benefits of participation in urban vegetable gardens. This is, indeed, the position taken here. Through my in-depth ethnographic study of three such gardens in the Cape Town townships of Guguletu and Philippi, I have been able to reveal, with much supporting evidence presented in Chapter 4, that material benefits such as supplementary cash incomes or supplies of foodstuffs from the gardens, while they did exist, were insubstantial, irregular, and inconsistent. Individual project members certainly did derive some material benefits from participation in the gardens – for example most took vegetables home to cook for themselves on a fairly regular basis and there were some large harvests for sale. But these material benefits were obtained during the winter months when water was plentiful and wind damage minimal. On the basis of evidence I have gathered during return visits to these same gardens later on in the year, it is clear that these already limited supplies of vegetables all but disappeared in the hot, dry summer months.

Furthermore, as also shown in Chapter 4, such cash incomes as were received were typically extremely small amounts, once divided amongst members, and were received at irregular times. Project members tended to prefer to save these cash incomes in collective accounts for re-investment in the gardens as needed, rather than paying themselves any sort of 'wage'. This was salient because members chose to reinvest garden-generated cash

incomes in their garden not because it provided them with much food or money but because it gave them continued access to a highly valued social and recreational space.

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, members could afford the time to participate in vegetable garden projects precisely and only because they had access to other sources of income with which they supported themselves and their dependents. In no case was the vegetable garden the primary income for members, neither in cash nor in kind. This clearly problematises developers' claims about the gardens' eventual graduation to a commercial stage. Precisely because members were typically relatively secure financially, they could afford to use the gardens for associational ends, which is why they reinvested whatever small cash incomes were generated in to their gardens rather than taking them home.

What my research has shown, then, is that potential or actual material benefits may motivate an individual to join an urban vegetable garden project only initially but that the irregular and frequently inconsequential nature of such benefits means that these material benefits are not what motivate people to remain involved in such projects over the long-term. In Chapter 5 I have shown that the garden members I worked with were motivated primarily by the social, associational, and convivial benefits to be derived from participation. Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2004:254) have demonstrated that government agents and NGOs 'have limited possibilities to change economic circumstances in ways that produce real income increases for significant sections of the urban poor' – because, for example, 'competitive' macro-economic policies have contributed to unemployment and falling incomes in real terms. Therefore, they argued, one may find, as I have, that the value of being part of projects, for their members, lies elsewhere, in savings groups that can provide members with limited 'crisis credit'; in the potential to enhance earning opportunities through supplementation, training, and networking; or even just as a result of an increased level of organisation which facilitates access to social grants and government/NGO funding and support.

For the members of the gardens in which I conducted research, membership provided several such social benefits. Members derived great satisfaction from participation in the gardens, which were understood as sociable and recreational spaces – although there definitely was a lot of hard work involved! Health-giving exercise was highly valued, as was the emotional and psychological support gained from friendship with the other members. For many, particularly those at Masincedane, the gardens provided an opportunity to escape from either noisy, over-crowded, and demanding households or quiet, empty, and lonely ones, enabling members to spend time with people their own age, engaged in a productive yet highly recreational activity. This provided members, many of whom were recently retired, with a daily routine and an enjoyable outlet for their productive energies.

There was also an important gender dimension to this which may be productively pursued in any further research on this topic. Most of the participants in the vegetable gardens I studied were women (twelve of fifteen). As discussed in Chapter 5, men participated differently in the gardens, with apparently somewhat different motivations. More so at Masincedane than elsewhere, the gardens provided a place for older women who no longer worked full-time to go to during the day, providing members with some routine, something outside of the house to keep them busy as well as with a social space for highly valued interaction with one another.

Members also valued the increased level of organisation that membership in a recognised and supported collective project afforded them. Creating, strengthening, and maintaining the associational ties between members, the gardens represented 'community centres' around which various networks and support structures could be mobilised. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, the 'community' sustained by the gardens was more organic in the case of Masithandane than in Masincedane. The former garden had come about, according to members, as an extension of social networks and associational ties already in place in the neighbourhood. The latter was somewhat more contrived since the garden had been designed and implemented by non-members and members had actively to construct the networks between

themselves through a significant investment of time. This was due primarily to unavoidable spatial factors and the impact of these on membership and participation.

The size of the various gardens, the way the land was used, and the relative distance of the gardens from members' homes also structured the ways in which the gardens were used by members as social fora. At Masithandane, and to a certain extent at Masibambane, members were each others' neighbours and they also engaged in activities together outside of the respective gardens. This, in combination with the relatively small size of both gardens and the consequent low levels of labour required to maintain them, meant that members had to spend relatively little time actually in the gardens in order to keep both the garden itself and the connections between members that it represented going. At Masincedane, however, the unique combination of being a contrived project, distance of the garden from members' homes and of members' homes from each other, and the large size of the plot meant that members had to spend a lot of time in the garden on a daily basis in order to grow and sustain the vegetables and what was the only linkage of significance between members themselves. As concluded in Chapter 3, although Masincedane was situated in what was called a Community Centre, the community of the garden's members was a somewhat contrived one, and necessarily so. In order to maintain a sense of collective, members had to spend a lot of time together in the gardens as this was the only time they had together. In contrast, the other two gardens, especially Masithandane, formed centres of communities that were constituted by their members. As one of many nodes of established networks and connections between members, these gardens required less input of time in order to fulfil their binding role as symbolic community centres.

What I have shown in this dissertation is that the urban agricultural projects these women (and they are mostly women) participate in are not the vehicles of job creation and supplementary income generation that development agencies and government departments evidently hoped that they would be. Indeed, these women participated for other reasons, primarily social and

convivial but also associational, for access to an increased level of organisation which afforded them greater ability, collectively, to obtain government and NGO funding and support for their endeavours. These motivations were highly valued by the participants and must be recognised by those involved in promoting urban vegetable gardens in order to better serve the actual needs and desires of the people concerned. Trying to live up to the NGO's notion of these three gardens as 'market gardens' forced the participants to engage in practices that required a lot of extra work: record keeping, planning, training and so on that seem to be of little value to the participants but of great importance to the NGO and the state representatives because it is evidence of these activities that keeps national and international funding agents interested in their projects.

Furthermore, and of central importance, these people participated because they could afford to do so because they had other ways of supporting themselves from pensions, disability grants, and the shared wages, rents, and grants of children and tenants. By and large they lived in formal housing which they themselves owned, they spoke English and/or Afrikaans well, and they had lived and worked in urban areas for much of their lives. This speaks volumes to the possibility that development initiatives such as the urban vegetable garden may not adequately alleviate the worst effects of extreme poverty in urban areas because they are simply not accessible to people who do not already have the means to engage in them, and perhaps especially those who are new to town.

This said, it falls to Abalimi to decide whether or not to continue with what I have referred to above as its 'well-intended deception'. I call it this because it is clear that Abalimi's personnel are aware that the primary driving forces behind the projects it supports are social. Yet they continue to make unsubstantiable claims about the potential for such projects to generate significant incomes and even to create jobs – something they do, and must do, it seems, in order to encourage donor funding. A decision to pursue the association and network-building programmes would require a shift in the discourse and especially in the understanding of donor bodies and the state –

those that at present define the terms of engagement – to acknowledge social and associational aspects of development projects as legitimate goals.

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8. Postscript: Recommendations

I have been critical of Abalimi's apparent, although understandable given the context of the development industry today and the expectations and demands of funding agents, decision not to deal openly with the tension between their recognition of the importance of the social benefits of participation in the gardens and their continued emphasis on the supposed material benefits. But since I have been able to do my work with the blessing of Abalimi, I believe it is necessary to make a few suggestions as to how Abalimi might address the problem to the benefit of its target populations.

Abalimi could perhaps do best, and most honestly on their part, to work on consolidating its role as a voluntary service provider, supporting the efforts of those, like the women discussed here, who are interested in pursuing urban agricultural activities by continuing to provide facilitate training, inputs, transport, and local subsidised plant nurseries. This would enable the social aspects of vegetable gardening to be well-supported. But the NGO would need to recognise that it would not, however, be extending assistance to the poorest, most vulnerable, and most in need of aid.

In order to reach such people, Abalimi would need to redefine its spheres of engagement in order to reach more widely into the poorer areas and populations in the Cape Flats because, as I have shown, cultivating vegetables in the context of the Cape Flats is only marginally productive in material terms and requires a certain amount of financial stability before participation becomes even a possibility. One possibility may be for Abalimi to help to extend the role of the vegetable gardens in their surrounding neighbourhoods by encouraging the impulse that present project members have expressed towards community service. Abalimi itself could then become the primary buyer of surplus produce grown by the projects its supports, perhaps using this produce to supplement soup kitchens at clinics or school feeding schemes. Extending its activities to value-adding practices such as

packaging, perhaps in conjunction with the Pick 'n Pay Pack Shed Initiative, may generate a few jobs; and incorporating small livestock, such as chickens for example, into the vegetable gardens may well increase their productivity and income-generating potential, making them more viable options for the unemployed.

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Appendix

Attached as an appendix I have included Abalimi Bezekhaya's bi-annual newsletter. I used it as a visual aid in informal interviews with Abalimi staff members. It also provides examples of the NGOs discourse regarding the urban vegetable gardens they support.

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NEWSLETTER



NO 32

APRIL 2005 - SEPT 2005



TO OUR FRIENDS

Co-ordinating Office Physical Address:
Cwango Crescent, (Cnr New Eisleben Rd and Lansdowne Rd,
behind Shoprite Centre) Philippi, 7785
NEW tel / fax: 021 371 1653

Postal Address: PO Box 44 Observatory, 7935
Khayelitsha Garden Centre tel / fax: 021 361 3497
Nyanga Garden Centre tel / fax: 021 386 3777

NEW email: info@abalimi.org.za web: www.abalimi.org.za

"Abalimi's secret of success is simple- we walk the "long road", alongside our client community. We are committed to achieving the "impossible". We repair and conserve nature as the foundation of human prosperity. We recognise obstacles as learning opportunities. We welcome help from all who understand development to be a cooperative process. To all our Friends in civil society, business and government - thank you for your support. We hope 2005 concluded well for you and that 2006 will bring healing and renewal for you, your community and your natural environment."



Siyazama Community Allotment Garden Association, SCAGA, before (1996), and after (2005)

Urban Agriculture Program - UAP



Brief Six Month Report: April 05-Sept 05
77 community gardens have been directly enabled this reporting period through project implementation, resource support, training, follow-ups and demonstrations. Six of these are new community gardens, which have just started to sprout this reporting season.

Sakeka, Nyanga

In the corner of NY1 and NY3 in Nyanga, you will find beds of lush green vegetables within the premises of the Gugulethu Health Clinic. This garden is run by the members of the HIV Support Group Sakeka, and supported by ABALIMI.

The six gardeners at Sakeka (four men and two women) all share the status of being HIV Positive. Their community garden is a safe environment where they can help each other cope with the repercussions of being HIV positive. Through gardening, the Sakeka group are empowering themselves to tackle the devastating health effects of their illness. As project member Mxolisi Nimrod Gwele said, "My health has improved by the nutritious vegetables and exercise I get from my gardening." We are inspired by the energy and spirit these individuals have shown to improve their quality of life and to fight their life-threatening illness.

Organic Certification

We are currently doing the necessary research for the Organic Certification of all ABALIMI-supported Community Garden Projects. The plan is that we will buy any surplus vegetables that the projects have and sell them to the larger vegetable distributors. The emphasis being the community takes what they need from the harvest and they will sell us the excess.

We have had a very enthusiastic response from everyone, with most community gardens wanting to be certified. As you can probably imagine collecting information from all these projects is quite time consuming and getting everyone from each project in the same place at the same time has involved a lot of planning and arrangements, but we are almost there. Once everything is correlated we can then move on to setting up our internal control systems and from there to certification! A great big thanks to Bridget for donating her time and expertise in organic horticulture to conduct this research! A big thank you to the field staff, Lisiwe, Vatiswa and Nyaniiso who have been efficient in setting up appointments for Bridget with all the projects, taking her around to visit all the projects and for translating for the groups.

One of the gardens, which will soon get Organic Certification.

The organic certification project has received a huge boost from Pick 'n' Pay Foundation, who have agreed to fund a dedicated Organic Produce Packing Shed at the agri-Business Place Phillipi. The Packing shed should be run as a collaborative Social Business between ABALIMI, YukuZenzela Urban Farmers Association (YUFA) and agri Business Place Phillipi. It will supply organic produce from the urban farming movement primarily to Pick 'n' Pay stores. Viva Pick 'n' Pay Foundation Viva!!!!



The Sakeka Support Group and Community Garden Members