

Reclaiming our Farming heritage

Supporting home food growers in four villages in the Nkomazi Municipality in Mpumalanga Province

By Thelma Nkosi and Bernerd Ngomane



August 2018

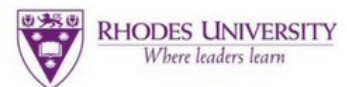
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The Mpumalanga Water Caucus is part of the South African Water Caucus.

Mpumalanga Water Caucus facebook page

[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=mpumalanga%20water%20caucus%20\(mpwc\)](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=mpumalanga%20water%20caucus%20(mpwc))

Environmental Monitoring Group

www.emg.org.za

Association of Water and Rural Development

www.award.org.za

Environmental Learning Research Centre, Rhodes University

www.ru.ac.za/elrc



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ABCD: *Asset-Based Community Development*
- AWARD: *Association for Water and Rural Development*
- BGM: *Bi-annual General Meeting*
- CMA: *Catchment Management Agency*
- CMF: *Catchment Management Forum*
- DAFF: *Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries*
- DTI: *Department of Trade and Industry*
- DWS: *Department of Water and Sanitation*
- EDE: *Ecovillage Design Education*
- EIA: *Environmental Impact Assessment*
- EMG: *Environmental Monitoring Group*
- MPWC: *Mpumalanga Water Caucus*
- NGOs: *Non-Governmental Organisations*
- SAWC: *South African Water Caucus*
- SEDA: *Small Enterprise Development Agency*
- SSNC: *Swedish Society for Nature Conservation*
- THO: *Traditional Healers Organisation*
- WSSD: *World Summit on Sustainable Development*

1.

Introduction

Our study is intended to help the communities of Skhwahlane, Madadeni, Sibange, Magudu and other communities interested in home food gardens, to provide healthy indigenous food for their families and to improve their economic means through permaculture practice. To those who are already doing home food gardens, this booklet may offer some views to improve their farming through the permaculture process. It may help them to understand the challenges faced by communities in this process and strengthen their ability to strive when faced with difficult situations in their farming practice.

Most of the information included in this booklet comes from the knowledge of the four communities mentioned above, where a social learning process was facilitated by Thelma and Bernard

“Our study is intended to help the communities of Skhwahlane, Madadeni, Sibange, Magudu and other communities interested in home food gardens, to provide healthy indigenous food for their families”

WHO ARE WE?

Thelma Thandekile Nkosi



Thelma Nkosi in one of the home food gardens in Magudu during our visits in July 2017

My name is Thelma Thandekile Nkosi. I was born in the Mpumalanga Province in the Nkomazi Municipality on a farm called Tenbosch in the Komatipoort area. I stayed there with my parents until I was 6 years old. I went to Entfonjeni Primary school in Swaziland in the Hhohho Region. My parents separated when I was 7 years old and my younger sibling and I had to go and stay with my grandmother in Swaziland where I finished my primary school. Swaziland was very expensive to continue with my secondary school. I went to South Africa to stay with my father in a location called Kamaqhekeza in the Nkomazi East Region, where I wrote my Matric at Mjwokwane High school.

I went to school in pre-1994 when South Africans, mostly students, were fighting for freedom. I lived in a community with water scarcity and we had to fetch water at the stream early in the morning and after school. This made me very angry and left me feeling hopeless. Those times motivated me to get involved in politics.

After passing my Matric in 1994, I was not able to further my studies. This was very stressful for me. I started to get involved in community work, which made me understand the lifestyle of my people. The stress of insufficient water continued, and I was seeing sick people lacking water for their basic domestic use. Sometimes we were sharing water with animals, which was very unsafe for sick people. These experiences influenced me to become an environmental activist.

In 1998 I met a man called Mr Mabunda, a traditional medicinal doctor, who saw my work in my community and asked me to volunteer for his organisation called Traditional Healers Organisation (THO). That opportunity opened doors for me, as I was able to meet with other NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) and civil society organisations. I was lucky to be sent by the organisation to represent it in some forums and gatherings. In 2000 I was invited to attend the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) where I was able to meet water activists who were talking about the very same issues I faced in my community. At that conference, I met the comrades who formed the South African Water Caucus (SAWC) through George Dor of Jubilee South Africa. My journey of being an activist evolved from there. I was invited to go to parliament to talk about my community's situation of water scarcity. Wow, that was amazing for me as from that speech in parliament small changes happened in some parts of my community. That taught me that the problems in my community can change through engagement and support from these structures. From that time on, I have never looked back but continued to fight for what I believe is right for me and my community.

In 2003 George Dor introduced me to Philip Owen of GeaSphere. In 2004 Philip invited me to do volunteer work for GeaSphere, which I accepted. I continued doing my community work and working with traditional healers as well. In 2009 I was employed by GeaSphere up until mid-2014; my duty was to coordinate and build the Mpumalanga Water Caucus (MPWC). Late in 2014 I joined Environmental Monitoring Group where I continued with my work to build and grow the Mpumalanga Water Caucus.

Water is a basic need for everyone, without water we are going to perish. Everyone must make sure that he or she is involved in protecting water for the sake of our lives and that of the next generation. Water protection is what drives me to do what I do as it is a necessity and a must for all to be involved.

Bernerd Thokozani Ngomane



My name is Bernerd Thokozani Ngomane. I was born in Mpumalanga Province in the Nkomazi Municipality in a village called Mgobodzi. I stayed there with my parents until I was 9 years old. I went to Mgobodzi Primary school for grade 1 and 2. My parents separated when I was 8 years old and my younger siblings and I had to go and stay with my grandmother and with my mother at Madadeni (Sihlangu) where I went to Sihlangu Primary school. Sihlangu was a community where water was scarce. We used to go to fetch water from the taps that were placed on the road side. I did my Matric at Dlamadoda High School. After passing my Matric in 1999, I

Bernerd Ngomane, Madadeni Marula at his house in May 2018.

was not able to further my studies. In 2001 I went to the Hendrina Power Station for piece jobs until 2004. In 2006 I moved to Johannesburg and worked for 5 years at the Gold Reef City Casino. I left the casino in 2012 and left Johannesburg in 2014.

In 2015 I met Ms Thelma Nkosi who introduced me to the Mpumalanga Water Caucus, a civil society organisation, and the Nkomati Usuthu Catchment Management Agency. That is when I realised that there are networks busy trying to push against the violation of laws and for community rights. Thelma introduced me to different networks and that boosted my ego to change. The networks opened my eyes and I understood that it is a complex, international challenge of violation of operational licences, community rights, pollution, gender equality, seed security, industrialisation, food price hikes, agricultural land et cetera. I felt that I must join the team to win the struggle. I see the networks working and must work with them..

OUR ORGANISATIONS

The Environmental Monitoring Group

The Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG) is an NGO based in Cape Town, South Africa. It has a relationship with the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) that has stretched over many years. In 2002, in the lead up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, EMG was a key initiator for the formation of the South African Water Caucus, a loose grouping of organisations interested in strengthening their capacity to engage with government around water resource management and water service delivery. Since then, EMG has been active in incubating and nurturing provincial water caucuses around the country. These provincial groupings help to facilitate local and community water issues to surface, find appropriate expression, and (ideally) a satisfactory response from authorities. In the process, many other benefits – capacity, awareness and solidarity – are built. The role of Thelma Nkosi in the organisation is to manage the Mpumalanga office and to coordinate the Mpumalanga Water Caucus.



EMG staff members with Thelma Nkosi, South African Water Caucus in 2015

The Mpumalanga Water Caucus

The Mpumalanga Water Caucus (MPWC) is the provincial wing of the South African Water Caucus (SAWC). The MPWC is a broad and diverse network of organisations involved in the water sector, with members including small-scale farmers, traditional health practitioners, anti-mining and environmental organisations. The MPWC is a useful platform to meet and discuss mutual water-related issues and provides opportunities to meet directly with the responsible government officials in the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) and participate in the water Catchment Management Forums (CMFs) in Mpumalanga. Its primary focus is to:

Raise awareness amongst its members of issues relating to water services, sanitation, water resource management, access to water, water pollution and other related issues.

Facilitate discussions amongst members about their local water concerns and liaise with government representatives in finding solutions.

Engage with national water policy issues through the National Water Caucus.



Mpumalanga Water Caucus members, Skhwahlane Tribal Authority in November 2017

OUR CHANGE PROJECT



Home food garden for Tryphina Mgambi in Madadeni Village, August 2016

Our Change Project is part of the Changing Practice course. This course is designed to help and support local water and environmental activists to support, protect and improve local communities' lives and management of local natural resources. It is a short course supported by Environmental Monitoring Group through funding by AWARD and accredited through Rhodes University. This social learning project started in June 2017 and the lead facilitator is Jane Burt.

Our Change Project is called: Reclaiming our farming heritage: food security as our right and indigenous heritage. The project focuses on 4 villages: Skhwahlane, Madadeni, Sibange and Magudu. In these villages, we wanted to understand the situation around food security as a

right and as an indigenous heritage: what is already happening, how did it go in the past, how do people relate to their rights and to indigenous practices, how can communities work towards a better life through reclaiming their farming heritage?

Firstly, we wanted to understand these communities much better in terms of their practices to create food security. To come up with a successful case around these four villages, it was important to engage with them throughout our research process, as they have lived in these communities for a long time and they understand the history of the land much better than we do.

Our research used various methods, including field visits to the villagers who are already doing home food gardens, interviews with people, research of documentation and media information, practical working in the field, following up on knowledge from the elders, engaging in the Inkomati Usuthu Lower Catchment Forum meetings, engaging with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), NGOs, and government parastatals.

We have also attended various meetings and workshops, like the water Catchment Management Forums, a permaculture workshop in Skhwahlane, the Mpumalanga Water Caucus meetings, the South African Water Caucus Bi-annual General Meeting (BGM), and AWARD Civil Society Indabas. We have used information from a community mapping exercise, from an Asset-Based Community Development course facilitated by Elamanzi community organisation from Cape Town, and an Ecovillage Design Education course conducted by Aaron Ranayeke, both funded by the Environmental Monitoring Group. We also participated in community dialogues conducted by Mupho Foundation. All of this has added to our skills and networks where we can share our case.

Being part of the change project has given us an opportunity to explore more opportunities to make sure that food gardens are sustainable. We did this by doing research on their sustainability and coming up with tangible arguments to present to responsible government departments in support of these home gardens.

THE SITUATION

Thelma and Benerd live in the villages where our Change Project took place. These villages are situated in the Mpumalanga province in the Nkomazi Municipality, next to the two neighbouring countries Mozambique (which is 30km away) and Swaziland (which is 15 km) away. The communities share one river catchment called Inkomati river catchment that

stretches through them from Swaziland down to Mozambique. These communities are classified as rural communities and they are faced with many challenges, such as high rates of unemployment, poverty and no industry for employment or empowerment opportunities. Most people who are employed travel up to 120 km to do work such as: working on farms, domestic work, working in shops or small self-owned businesses like selling vegetables, sewing clothes and repairing shoes. Most people depend on government grants like those for home-based care and some are looking for work outside the province in the mining areas. The communities are also under traditional authority.

In these communities, people are given a big stand, so they can build their shelter, grow food and have space for their livestock. Most people were not using that piece of land for anything, as they were not aware of the importance of having these assets. After our Asset-Based Community Development workshop, the 30 people who attended immediately started to have an interest in making sure that their existing resources are being put to use.

These communities are classified as rural communities and they are faced with many challenges, such as high rates of unemployment, poverty and no industry for employment or empowerment opportunities.

Community Challenges

Water for their gardens and an irrigation system to sustain the continuing of ploughing. Sand mining is a big contributor to the water problems, because the sand plays a big role in cleaning and maintaining the flow of the river. Due to the mining of the sand, the river stops its normal flow, and the water becomes contaminated as there is no more natural cleaning. This makes it difficult to irrigate with water from the rivers as the flow is not enough. The sand mining is difficult to stop as people from these local communities see it as a source of income. Sand is being used to build houses for the people, making it an important resource for the people living around the Nkomazi River. However, this resource is being abused because it is now seen as a business opportunity for some small business people. There has been some engagement with the Department of Mineral Resources through the Inkomati Usuthu Catchment forum in 2018 to try and solve this issue of sand mining. During those discussions there were no tangible solutions put on the table. They said: people who are sand mining have permits, but there was no clear explanation of how to monitor the people with the permits, and no proper consultation with the communities living next to the river or benefiting from it. So, we believe policies around sand mining are very poor, as is the monitoring from the government side. We believe that any mining activity requires some Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, plus consultations with affected parties that need to give consent before the activity can continue.

Lack of support from government will also make farming fail. However, we would like to argue that support from government should be seen as necessary until people are able to stand on their own feet. Now, many people feel they need it as they have been taught to depend on aid.

Disputes within the traditional leadership is another big challenge we are facing in these communities. Groups are formed, and if you are not in support of the group favoured by government then chances to get support from government are very slim. It is of great importance for these communities to stand firm for their sustainability.

Climate change is a big problem for the whole world and for our communities. It is affecting our plans to change the current ways of living. It is beyond our control; we all need to come together and try to solve this issue. This impacts our water, land, food and natural vegetation. We all depend on the climate for our livelihoods in all aspects of our lives. Without making sure that climate change is adequately responded to, all we are planning is in vain. Climate change could drive food scarcity with heavier or less frequent rains.

Gender and inequality affects us, as women are the ones who bear all the pain, yet they are the pillars of strength in the family and the community. Women are taught from childbirth that they are inferior. Women lack self-confidence, because of this they are afraid to initiate things. They always need to tell a man their ideas to be heard. When it comes to farming this is important as it is women who take care of the whole family (and the nation at large) in terms of providing the fundamental necessities of life. A woman needs to make sure that good food is on the table for her family for better health for them. Women are faced with many challenges of gender inequality as the man is classified as the head of the house. However, they are apparently not up to that task, as they push all the duties onto the women. It is high time that both women and men work together to improve the current situation. Both men and women are faced with these challenges of providing proper food for their families; therefore it is important for them to hold hands for a better future for their families.

Coal mining has destroyed many people's minds as they believe it can employ most of them. But that is not set in stone. We have had the Nkomazi Anthracite Mine, for over three years in three communities, Skhwahlane, Madadeni and Mangweni Tribal Authorities, but so far, little employment has been created.

OUR APPROACH

The communities need another strategy for sustainability, as poverty and hunger are growing very fast. To help with this, we have been training communities on the ABCD model (Asset-Based Community Development) in 2015 through EMG. We also hosted a training on the EDE model (Ecovillage Design Education) in 2016. This programme has also been running as a project through EMG in Ngqushwa Municipality in the Eastern Cape. Some members of the communities that attended the workshops approached us and asked us to help them implement what we have been teaching them. We visited members of our community who were part of this project to see what they are doing in their house and how much land they have.

In our interviews with some of the farmers, they were very clear that they are willing to sustain what they have started and to grow from it. However, the issue of support is paramount to most of these farmers, as dependency is still rooted in their minds. It is our observation that we cannot erase that in a minute, so we will have to move with this until they are in a state of mind that has no fear of any challenge ahead of them.economic issues.



This photo shows the young and old people in a backyard owned by Tholakele Mabaso, a young woman who took us to her garden and explained to us how much she loves her garden and wishes to sustain it in the long run. She does not wish to work for anyone in her life, she just wants to be a sustainable farmer and earn a living from it. She also believes she can attract other young people to follow what she is doing in her garden.

Tradition and culture: importance of farming

During our interviews, the elders shared with us how it was in their time. They explained that farming is a way of life; if we lose that, we could lose our identity as humans and our health benefits. We do not want to see what is happening - the hand folding and laziness of the modern world - because the history of black Africans shows us they were depending on the natural resources for their survival. This gave them freedom of choice on how to manage their diet and to be able to provide for their families. They were also able to protect their environment, as they knew that they were dependent on natural resources.

In our interview with Mr Magolide Mkhathshwa, the head man of Madadeni village, Mawewe Tribal Authority, we asked him what makes farming difficult these days. In our observation there are not many people practicing farming to earn a living. People rather work for big commercial farms. In their time, the elders tell us, it was their way of life. Mr Magolide Mkhathshwa said to us civilisation has corrupted people's minds as it taught people that they must relax and food will come from big companies. He said it was looking good at the time, but later they realised that their power to decide what to eat has been taken away from them. We asked him if it is possible to reverse the situation. He said it requires a lot of effort as people's minds are corrupted and the most important aspect - their cultural dynamics - is also being destroyed. He said farming was part of their tradition and culture and that is now gone and it needs more collaborative effort to try and change that. However, what we are doing with the home gardens is a good way to start because people will have the power to decide what to eat in their household and that might grow to the entire community and villages at large. He also told us that people were known as wealthy if they had a big piece of land to farm and had many heads of cattle. They were using systems, designed by them, to store their food, like storing seeds and maize in baskets above ground or in underground pits so they would have enough food and seeds until the next planting season came again. This means they only grew enough for themselves. If the harvest was very good, they may have bartered with other groups. They were practicing subsistence farming as they grew enough for themselves, not for selling. They had freedom to do whatever they could to feed their families with the resources around them, like hunting wild animals to feed their families. They also grew some fruit and vegetables, kept animals, like chickens, sheep, goat and cattle. Eggs, milk and meat from these animals were an important part of their diet. Grazing and farming land provided enough to live.

We gathered this information from Mr Magolide Mkhathshwa, and the elders of Matsamo Traditional Authority during our workshop on permaculture in the Skhwahlane village. We also gathered during the indigenous knowledge workshop conducted by MUPO Foundation, which showed us that the history of black Africans was a history of depending in the natural resources for their survival.

Indigenous Seeds

During our workshop on indigenous seed preserving with the MUPO Foundation in 2016, which was held in Madadeni, and the 2017 workshop on permaculture, it was clearly mentioned by the elders who attended those workshop that indigenous seeds were the most valuable assets to people. Indigenous seeds ensured that you were going to have diverse food in that season and it also showed how much power you had, because some people would

depend on you to share seeds with them for their ploughing in that season. Seeds gave people independence and a choice of what they wanted to plough. By having their own seeds, they had the power to have food sovereignty. Indigenous seeds are also organic. This helps to:

- lower the cost of providing your family with healthy, organic vegetables
- reduces the environmental impact of transporting and warehousing food
- makes your meals more personal and interesting
- connects your family to the natural cycles of weather, growth and renewal
- provides wholesome activities and lasting memories for your children.

In our Workshop held in Skhwahlane village in November 2017, some members of the Traditional Council and elders were present. They clearly appreciated the discussions we are having around seeds protection and they urged us to continue with the work we are doing. They promised to give us more information on the various ways of seed protection. The process of seeds exchange is of paramount importance as some of the seeds have disappeared in some areas, but in other areas they are still available. They advised us to start a seed bank, which will help us to store the seeds for the next generation. They indicated they would love to assist us with this.



This is a picture of indigenous maize seeds which was taken during an indigenous knowledge workshop in Mariskoep Klaseri village in 2013

Indigenous Cattle

In the workshop mentioned above, it was also said that cattle were used for important events such as cultivating and ploughing in the fields, slaughtering them at a wedding or a funeral and paying Lobola (when a husband made a payment to the wife's family, usually paid in cattle). This payment made the marriage official. Today people still pay Lobola as a sign of respect, but it is not as valuable as it was before, because now people mostly use money for an exchange of a wife.

Cattle were also used for important customs. The Mafisa System: when cattle were lent to other people for breeding purposes, but the owner could take back their cattle whenever they

wanted to. The owner could also ask for the milk from their cow. Men who had large numbers of cattle showed their power by lending cattle. The men who borrowed the cattle had to give respect to the people they borrowed cattle from.

Life was very easy and simple as cattle would bring them together as a community and the spirit of Ubuntu was restored through cattle. Materials like money came and destroyed all this wonderful practice. We do not want to see what is happening today, because it is evidence that the life people are living today is not our original life that our forefathers practiced. This change was imposed on them and transferred to the next generation. It has to end with us, as we can see that it was not a good idea to change from our origins to where we are today. Life was good before colonisation. We are now living to benefit the capitalists.



Picture of indigenous cattle taken from Mathonsi household at Magudu in August 2017

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING

There have been a number of developments that led to today's situation. We name some of the most important ones.

Colonisation

The evidence gathered from our interviews and the indigenous knowledge workshop has clearly shown us that colonisation came with many challenges for us as a people. It has destroyed all the good work and the spirit of Ubuntu that people were practising before; now people do not care about each other but follow their own self-interests. This has developed a spirit of competition, which is not building a better society. In the name of development

(capitalism), it took away land that people were proudly owning for bigger development for oneself, indigenous seeds and natural food resources. Colonisation took away people's traditions and replaced it with 'civilisation' which meant people needed to change from their traditional lifestyle to another style that was introduced to them by a foreign culture. The banking model of education system was also adopted, which tells people what to learn and gives it to them ready-made and made people to be dormant and shift away from being critical thinkers.

Forceful removal from their own land

This is another big factor that has contributed to people losing their traditional ways of farming, as they were taken from big fertile lands to a small remote place where they were not able to practice farming. This was a great loss, as people were not able to transfer the skills of farming to their children, even though they wanted to. There just was not enough land to practice it. It also contributed a lot to the loss of seeds, as they were no longer important to people and were also not storable anymore, as most of them were stored in the ground. The issue of returning land to the people is still burning in our parliament. It is very hard to resolve as some people and political parties urge that it affects the economy of our country. According to us, permaculture farming can play an important role as less can be bought and more income can come to local people.

Loss of Traditional Practice

The leadership in the past was always reminding people to practice their culture and traditions and to transfer that knowledge to the next generation. A lot of things challenged the traditional leadership like politics, infighting within the royal houses and the control of the land. The custom of giving the land to the people within the community is lost; we now have to pay for the right of occupation. In some cases, the municipality has to consult for land distribution, which also contributes to the frustration about land.

With this time of democracy people see an opportunity to return back to their tradition. At this point in time it looks impossible, as people's minds are already damaged, but there is hope that we can gain some of our traditional practice back. The damage has been introduced by a particular education system that sees people as workers in a working system that controls the people and binds them to abide to this system. Steve Biko has spoken out against this system of education in his book 'Black Consciousness' and Paulo Frère as well with his concept of education where he talks about knowledge not being an isolated phenomenon. In this view, the act of knowing involves dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from

reflection upon action to a new action. He also argues that the system has given us a banking education where someone comes and pours that knowledge into us and people are not supposed to agree or disagree with what they are told. That system of education has destroyed our way of thinking. So, we hope all of this will change with our democracy as people should be allowed to write what they like and do what they like in terms of sustainability through farming.

THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE



This photo was taken around Sudwala in March 2018. There is an amazing water fall. We took members of the Mpumalanga Water Caucus, including some small-scale farmers, to understand the importance of water in our rivers and streams.

A changed world is possible; it starts with one single step. We cannot change the world in one night but steps towards achieving our goals need to be in place. In order to be able to address the above mentioned challenges we need to come up with some tangible strategies that can be achieved by communities. Working together as families, communities and the nation can make us see the change we want to see in the world.

The big practical question that we need to address, based on what people told us at the workshops is: *How can we secure water for home food gardening and protect the gardens from domestic animals?* A second question is: *How can we protect indigenous seeds?*

These are very big and challenging questions; in order to achieve what we have started we need to be vigilant and focused. Water is a source of life and everything on the planet is dependent on water. We can achieve nothing in this world without preserving water security for all. We therefore need to understand how to protect water resources like rivers, streams,

and wetlands and also to know how to use water in our own yards. Communities need assistance to achieve this.

WHAT ARE WE DOING TO CHANGE



December Ndhlovu, member of the Mpumalanga Water Caucus in his home food garden in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga 2016

To collect information and answers to our questions, we have spoken to many people and read many documents. In our search for help for the small-scale farmers who are keen to farm, we approached the Inkomati Catchment Management to find out if they can assist us in securing water for subsistence farming and in fencing of crops to prevent domestic animals entering gardens. They have indicated that they can be able to help those farmers, but it is a process as they need to register them and they must have some documentation as a registered entity with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). The Change Project participants, under the banner of the Mpumalanga Water Caucus (MPWC), approached the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) branch Malelane. SEDA is an institution that helps people who want to register small enterprises and companies by giving them relevant information in the form of a workshop and assists them to register their companies. They were able to register the people as small-scale farmers. After the engagement with SEDA, we started the process with Inkomati Usuthu Catchment Agency through the Inkomati Usuthu

Catchment Forum in Tonga to apply for some support towards the people who are doing home food gardens. The processing of those grant applications is still going on, as it takes some time. The support that we were looking for was water tanks, pumps, fencing for the small gardens, licenses to take water from the Nkomazi River to the gardens next to that river and building water wells for those who are far away from the Nkomazi River. If we are successful with those applications, we know that we have secured water for watering the gardens.

Dikegtso Khaile and Gugu Motha, coordinators of the Inkomati Usuthu Catchment Management Agency, made it clear to us that they are not providing fences to protect the home gardens, however they have referred us to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) for assistance. We then made an appointment to meet the responsible person in DAFF who told us that they do support with fencing, but they have targets for a year. This means you need to register and be in their system to be supported. It turned out that we were late for this year, but we still have a chance to register for next year to be eligible for assistance. We are looking forward to that and we need to do some follow-up and have a meeting with the home gardeners for them to register for that assistance.

There is still a big challenge of water quality. It will not help us to use water that is not clean for our gardens as it will affect our health and no one will buy the vegetables we have produced. We always attend the CMF's meetings where there are updates on the quality of the water we are using and we engage in campaigns to clean our streams and rivers. So far, that is no tangible way to make sure that our resources are always clean, so we depend on the information given by stakeholders in the CMF's meetings.

As a society, we took it into our hands to make sure that we change the situation in the above picture by standing up and cleaning our streams and rivers to make sure that we have healthy rivers.



River Cleaning Campaign in Nkomazi with the Inkomati Usuthu Management Agency, Mpumalanga Water Caucus members and the community members of Skhwahlane, Madadeni, Sibange and Magudu 2016

LEARNING ABOUT PERMACULTURE



Girly Mathonsi, December Ndlhovu and Hazekile Mthabini in Try Give's home food gardens, Hoedspruit, June 2017

Thelma Nkosi, December Ndlhovu, Girly Mathonsi as members of the Mpumalanga Water Caucus visited the organisation Springs of Hope in Hoedspruit in June 2017. They wanted to look for further assistance and to learn how other people are making their home food gardens possible. Try Give Nxumalo, the coordinator of Springs of Hope, has been doing home food gardens in his own yard and been monitoring food gardens for the members of his community and for the schools they support for 7 years now. Today they have over 200 households with gardens that are being monitored. It was an amazing experience to see and hear what they are doing and what they have achieved so far with home gardens and schools.

The biggest question we had was to find out how they are sustaining their work with little water. He explained to us the permaculture processes, the method of farming they are using. With permaculture, there is not much water needed and there are various ways to secure water for home food gardens. He took us to his gardens and showed us how he is watering them with limited water and how he protects his crops from diseases and domestic animals. This is a process that can use wonderfully in our villages. We have asked him and his organisation to take us through the whole process in a workshop for the communities who are part of the Changing Practice Course and for the members of the Mpumalanga Water Caucus. We have also asked for an exchange visit for the people who are doing home gardens on their side and on our side, to increase the knowledge for us and our group.



Mpumalanga Water Caucus members and community members who are doing home food gardens in Skhwahlane Madaden, Sibange and Magudu during our implementation of what we have learnt from Try Give, transferring the knowledge to our members in November 2017

We organised the communities and the members of Mpumalanga Water Caucus to do the practical training on permaculture gardening as the way to learn the easy and costless method of gardening. December Ndhlovu and Thelma Nkosi conducted the training in December 2017 in Skhwahane. We were able to put what we learnt from the Spring of Hope workshop into practice. We had a theory workshop on the first day and on the second and third days we went to the field and ploughed Mama Noreen Magagula's garden. 45 People attended this workshop, including the Traditional Council of Skhwahlane. It is clear that we are on the right track with what we have started. The whole world is behind this initiative to overcome malnutrition and hunger and to restore dignity to many families who are said to be poor. People are not poor if they have their natural resources and are able to use them. That is why we talk about a voice to many, because once you depend on yourself and not on someone else, your dignity is restored.



Members of the Mpumalanga Water Caucus and home food gardens farmers at Sikhwahlane in Mama Norinah Magagula's place

CONCLUSION

We have learnt from this Change Project, through the information we have gathered from the elders, dialogues, media sources and workshops that working in a garden is also a shared experience for the family. It instils in children an understanding of the natural cycles of growth which provides lessons of lifelong value. Working with the MPWC social movement has improved our way of argument as well as given us an opportunity to share with many our knowledge and confidence. Home food gardens are for everyone, rich or poor, as everyone needs food at the end of the day. People must learn to use the little piece of land they have and it can benefit a great deal to the whole society.

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Reclaiming our Heritage.

A case developed through the *Changing Practice: Olifants project*

Written by Thelma Nkosi and Bernerd Ngobane of the Mpumalanga Water Caucus

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