



SOUTH AFRICAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY CAMPAIGN

Special Edition: Food Sovereignty hubs and pathways

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Introduction to the special edition: Food Sovereignty Hubs and Pathways

By Charles Simane

“In nature's economy, the currency is not money, it is life” Vandana Shiva

The Coronavirus pandemic exposed the fragility of a market-dependent food system. More than 30 million South Africans are food stressed, 14 million are in a state of hunger. Meanwhile, the rich are lavishly throwing away tons of food, some have too much to eat while others have nothing at all. Studies show that food riots are increasing in frequency and violence, the events of July in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng may have just been a trailer for a movie none of us wants to watch. We need a new food system, thankfully that food system is being built from below as we speak. Over the past year and a half, the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) has been deepening and enriching its food sovereignty strategy. The central feature of this strategy is to promote food sovereignty pathways and hubs in villages, towns and cities. Last year we developed a draft version of this strategy and we have been continually updating it with lessons from practice.

This special edition captures those lessons from practice because rural farmers, peri-urban farmers and urban farmers have stood up to build a new democratised food system, free from the chemicalised industrial agriculture and free from market reliance. This edition captures that as part of our ongoing work to unite farmers and activists across the country and to give them tools to build food sovereignty hubs in their areas. Section 27 of our Constitution states that every South Africa has a right to access sufficient food and water, small-scale farmers across the country are making that right a lived reality. Their work is crucial if this democracy is going to survive.

All hail the subaltern!

1. The Vrygronde Agroecological Hub

By Chriszanne Janse van Vuuren

The Vrygronde agroecological hub that was launched in April 2021 is fulfilling the pivotal function of restoring dignity, strengthening social cohesion and building solidarity in the Vrygronde community and beyond. Through the hub, the relationship between the Vrygronde community and local stakeholders was strengthened and a number of local businesses already committed themselves to supporting this innovative initiative. Women have been at the centre of this endeavour and the youth developed an appreciation for the environment and an interest in environmental issues. Moreover, youth leadership was promoted, and the youth developed an understanding of the important role that they have to play in their community.



Young people removing rocks

With regard to agroecological production, the soil has been prepared with manure supplied by local small-scale producers who are in full support of the hub, and winter crops have been planted. According to Nettly Ahmed, Support Centre for Land Change (SCLC) fieldworker responsible for, inter alia, assisting the Vrygronde community in the development of the hub, preparing the soil for planting was challenging – the site was full of rocks and needed a lot of attention – but the hard work paid off.

In addition to the challenges relating to agroecological production, a number of other challenges have been encountered but, fortunately, it

was never anticipated that the process would always be smooth sailing. The primary challenge relates to the lack of community involvement. Even though a considerable number of the members of the Vrygronde community are involved in the hub, it has not been possible to achieve the objective of getting the entire community on board – some members of the community simply do not share the transformative thinking. Political interference has also played a role in diverting the community from their transformative agenda. Nettly says that they also struggle to keep the youth interested and actively involved. “The youth do not always have the patience to wait for results. A number of workshops and exchanges are in the pipeline, and we are hoping that the planned workshops and exchanges will contribute to resolving some of the challenges.” The workshops will include agroecology and markets since, in addition to the subsistence of the community, the aim is also to test local markets towards sustainability of the hub.



Materials delivered

At present, progress is measured on a weekly basis and planning for the following week is based on the immediate practical needs that are identified. Considering that we are moving out of the winter season, the community has already planned to start planting summer crops soon.

Irrespective of the challenges, the Vrygronde agroecological hub is proving to be much more than merely a production site and therefore SCLC is already supporting the establishment two additional agroecological hubs in Uniondale in the Western Cape and Rosmead in the Eastern Cape respectively. We are hoping to share similar success stories in the near future.

2. The Valley Food Gardens Initiative

Marshall Rinqest Interviewed by Charles Simane

The Valley Food Gardens is a food sovereignty initiative that was launched by the Greyton Transition Towns (GTT) in Genadendal, Bereaville, Voorstekraal, and Greyton. The initiative was started in 2020 during the harsh lockdown months when several people (almost half of the country) were going to bed hungry. The founder of the project Marshall Rinqest says that they were working with the Red Cross and the GTT to give food parcels to families who were in desperate need. The food parcels helped to alleviate the immediate problem of hunger but, they were not a sustainable solution. He says that after they had managed to raise a million Rands to supply communities with food parcels, they knew that more was needed to help empower the community. This is how the initiative was started. In their last distribution of food parcels, they gave 500 families seed vouchers. They also gave 250 seed vouchers to other families who wanted to participate in the program. In all, seed vouchers were distributed to 800 families. These vouchers contain 40 assorted vegetable seedlings. For a water-stressed country, the Valley Food Gardens initiative is fortunate to work in areas with sufficient water and weather conducive to farming. However,

many communities did not know how to farm. Marshall and his team then developed a permaculture pamphlet titled *How to Grow*. This pamphlet accompanied every seedling voucher.



Marshall Rinquest on the right

The Covid pandemic exposed the danger of market dependence and a food regime where purchasing power determines who eats and who goes to bed hungry. It showed the need for teaching people how to grow their food as well as supplying them with resources like seeds. The Valley Food Gardens has created a food Sovereignty knowledge hub. It has established centres with experts who not only distribute seeds and farming pamphlets but help people by actively assisting them to farm. These knowledge hubs serve as a reference centre where these new farmers can learn about manure, water management, and other farming techniques. This initiative is also about land transformation, teaching people to use their land other than having several desolate hectares.

The towns of the Valley Food Gardens initiative have sufficient water to run a small farm effectively but the problem according to Marshall is getting people to farm. He says that many people in the area undermine farming and others are just not committed enough to do it. They still prefer to go and buy their vegetables from the supermarket than farm it themselves. This is even worse among young people. Many of them see farming as a primitive rural exercise, not something for the millennial or the so-called 'ama2000'. Resources are also a problem as many people need essentials like farming tools. However, there are several successes. Several families are taking farming seriously to the extent that they are no longer just farming subsistently for themselves but they are selling their produce and making a profit from it. Another

great success is the skills transfer. Families have been freely trained in permaculture. They are passing this knowledge to their friends, neighbours, and relatives. The successful farms according to Marshall have motivated other people to take farming seriously and be part of the initiative. Even some young people are being drawn into farming because of the prospect of making a profit. But the biggest success is food sovereignty. Teaching people to produce their food, eat it and sell off the surplus. This brings dignity to many families who would otherwise starve.



Small seedlings growing in tires

as knowledge centres is critical in helping emerging farmers. The initiative has also learnt the importance of running farmer's markets, holding them Wednesdays and Saturdays. These are important since farmers usually struggle with access to markets and get exploited when they sell to supermarkets who purchase their produce at poverty inducing low prices. But the most important lesson is that food sovereignty pathways are the only way of breaking the chains of hunger and poverty.



After-care Garden replanted by the Valley Food Gardens

There have been important lessons for the Valley Food Gardens initiative over the past year. The first lesson is that not many people want to farm. The purchasing culture and the market dependence that underlies society runs deep. This is even more difficult for young people who sometimes want quick cash jobs and do not have the patience that is required for farming. Another important lesson is the importance of food sovereignty hubs. Having hubs that distribute seeds while also serving

3. Amandla! Collective reflects on food sovereignty in Nelson Mandela Bay

By Janet Cherry

Over the past year and a half, Amandla activists have been active on the ground – and literally, in the ground – in five townships in Nelson Mandela Bay. As part of the Food Sovereignty Campaign, we have engaged in different kinds of responses to the crisis of hunger in our communities, which was made worse by the Covid 19 pandemic and the lockdown. The activists from Amandla collective have worked in partnership with various community groups, NGOs and service providers, and with Nelson Mandela University Centre for Post School Education and Training, and Department of Development Studies. A network of food sovereignty activists has been built which, although it is not structured as a formal ‘food hub’, has promoted food sovereignty in the townships of Nelson Mandela Bay.

As the crisis hit us a year ago, we responded with a basic food distribution campaign. This was organised in KwaDwesi and involved a weekly allocation of funds to the KwaDwesi team to buy basic groceries in bulk, put these into balanced food parcels, and identify and distribute these to the households in need in the neighbourhood. Eventually the Covid grants came through and this emergency relief programme was replaced with a more long-term developmental project of food gardens.



Planting under the tree shade to conserve water

The food gardens were implemented in backyard gardens in KwaDwesi as well as in schools and open land in KwaDwesi, KwaZakhele, Zwide and Wells Estate. Spinach, green peppers, onions, garlic, lettuce and cabbage are grown, although some problems have been experienced with cabbage in the KwaDwesi garden and one KwaZakhele garden. Some of the vegetables are consumed by the

participating households, while others are sold to households in the neighbourhood. In KwaDwesi, the vegetables are distributed to households ‘on tick’ and at the end of the month, or when they receive their grant payments, the cash is collected. The money raised from sale of vegetables is then used to buy more

seeds, and grow another crop. Some seed saving has also been done successfully, in particular with green peppers and chillies, where the seeds are easy to get from the plant, store and then plant.

We have tried to use permaculture and agro-ecology methods in all our gardens, and activists and participating households have received training in these methods. In the Saltuba Cooperative in KwaZakhele, which is part of the Transition Township project, the food tunnels are linked in with a water capture system and a PV solar array to generate electricity and feed it into the municipal grid, as well as run a pump to pump the water onto the vegetable gardens. This project is situated on a gap tap between the houses, with 25 households



Potatoes and onions harvested from the garden

being members of the Saltuba Cooperative. Four households have gutters on their roofs which feeds rainwater into a tank and a storage dam, and two households have washing machines linked to another tank for grey water.

Water is one of the big challenges faced by all our gardens, as there is a severe drought in Nelson Mandela Bay. We cannot rely on capturing rainwater, as it does not always last long enough to keep the crops growing until the next rain. We haven't managed to get a good grey water system going yet, although in KwaDwesi the grey water from two washing machines is being used on the vegetables. We are hoping to get a tank or a drum to collect the grey water, but until then a black rubbish bin has served this purpose well. It should be noted that not all detergent is good for vegetables, so the houses using the washing machines are asked to use Sunlight powder, which is okay for vegetables.

Some of the houses that have backyard gardens are using municipal water from their taps, but the problem here is that if more than the 'free basic' allocation of water is used, then we have to pay for the extra, and not only has water become more expensive because of the drought, but there is a water restriction and households are only allowed to use 500 litres per day. In gardens which are on school grounds, the Department of Education pays for the water, but they are reluctant to foot the bill for vegetable gardens. Gutters and tanks are the obvious solution where there are roofs, but again this depends on there being regular rainfall. Other solutions we are exploring for open ground are setting up containers with gutters and jojo tanks for rainwater collection. The containers can then also be used for waste collection for recycling, or for community kitchens – but we have not quite got there yet!

Other challenges have been the need for capital inputs for items like fencing, water tanks and sometimes machines to dig up the very hard ground. The fencing issue has a potential solution, in using old tyres to make a ‘tyre wall’ to keep out animals. The problem here is that we need to hire a truck to collect a big number of old tyres.

Despite these challenges, there are important victories that have been won, and lessons that we have learned over the past year. The first is that young women can get together and do something practical – “We learned a lot” says activist Vuvu Made. For unemployed youth, the vegetable gardens answered the question of “what can we bring to put on the table?”.



Beetroot being harvested

The successful gardens then serve as a demonstration and an inspiration to others in the community. There has been a mushrooming of backyard gardens all over the townships. ***“It shows that women have strength and can do anything they want to do”***

4. Abanebhongo Persons with Disabilities

Profile by Nosintu Mcimeli, Written by Charles Simane

Abanebhongo Persons with Disabilities (APD) is a registered non-profit organisation based in the village of Jekezi in the small rural town of Nqamakhwe under the Amathole District Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province. The town of Nqamakhwe was established by refugees of the Mfengu clan in 1865 after the great Mfecane (period of wars, migrations, and unifications of Nguni clans from 1815 to about 1840). Today, the town of Nqamakhwe which is historically a town of immigrants is facing an exodus. Poverty, unemployment, rampant crime, and municipal incompetence have caused many to flee the area and seek greener pastures elsewhere. This is even worse for people with disabilities, pensioners, and unemployed rural women. This desolate situation motivated Nosintu Mcimeli to stand up and do something. In April of 2020, she, together with six other women established the APD to help disabled and unemployed people as well as pensioners. With the small donations they receive, they provide food parcels as immediate food relief for their community. Nosintu and co understand that food parcels are not sustainable. Thus, with the money they received from the Solidarity Fund, they started farming vegetables in a small plot of land

they had received. APD now runs a food sovereignty garden producing much-needed vegetables in the poverty-stricken village of Jekezi.



Nosintu with other women and young people at the farm

These six women are on a mission to turn Jekezi into a food sovereign rural area. They are actively encouraging backyard farming and assisting community members with the little they have. As part of the Climate Justice Charter Movement, Abanebhongo is also educating the community about the climate crisis.

The farming they are practicing and teaching to others does not use insecticides, fertilizers, or pesticides but relies on the principles of permaculture.

In Jekezi, like many other rural areas with an underdeveloped, neglected, and sometimes totally inexistent water infrastructure, people struggle to get clean water. Taps decorate the streets without a single drop of water. Vegetables demand constant watering so the lack of clean and reliable water supply is a huge challenge to the women of Abanebhongo. They often have to fetch dirty water kilometers away from dams and natural water streams to drink for themselves and water their plants. The second challenge is the lack of seeds and farming tools. They mostly use their hands and a few spades to plow. The women did not have much training in agriculture, water management, and permaculture training, they are being helped by tools from movements like SAFSC. The threat of crime is another challenge. In a poverty-stricken area, the threat of vegetables being stolen before they are harvested remains large. Another challenge is to get many young people to farm, their perception of farming remains largely negative.



Despite these challenges, there have been positive outcomes. Starting a small farm is in and of itself an achievement. It leads to self-sufficiency and breaks the chains of poverty and hunger by restoring dignity. These women have shown that it is possible. Despite overwhelming research proving that small-scale farmers feed the world, many people have the perception that large-scale industrial farms are the ultimate source of food, they are not. Nosintu and her devoted team are proving that small-scale farmers run by women feed the world.

Vegetables also used for the soup kitchen

They are successfully encouraging other community members to farm and be food sovereign. They are angels of change. They have quickly developed a working structure and are learning farming management and other skills. Through practice, they have learned that farming is not easy, but it is doable. They have learned the importance of self-reliance and starting small with the little that they have. Farmers should learn from other farmers. The Abanebhongo women have learned the importance of learning from other farmers through platforms provided by SAFSC.

5. We're no longer asking for permission — we are demanding food sovereignty in Mangaung

By Tshiamo Malatji & the UFS Food Sovereignty Campaign



Tshiamo Malatji

On 16 October 2018 (World Food Day), we founded the UFS Food Sovereignty Campaign at the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein campus). We hoped to steer the university's hunger relief programmes toward agroecological vegetable gardens, fruit trees, organic markets and community kitchens. These practical ideas were tabled before our Student Parliament and to the office of the Dean of Student Affairs. What followed was an immensely bureaucratic process where our ideas were accepted in principle, but the process to implement them dragged on. Today, the university has vegetable gardens, but they are yet to adopt agroecology practices and our remaining proposals remain to be implemented. Still, the "food environment" (as the university labels it) has progressed since 2018 and the pressure of many groups, ours included, has materialised in some considerable victories, namely:

- 1) The creation of a Food Sovereignty Task Team,
- 2) the commissioning of a report into food sovereignty,
- 3) the inclusion of food sovereignty into the university's Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP),
- 4) the opening of vegetable gardens,
- 5) the opening up of said vegetable gardens to all students (they were reserved for residences),
- 6) the inclusion of fruit trees in the planning of the university's gardens, and
- 7) the diverting of resources for community activities toward addressing hunger.

Still, much of the campaign's ideas remain to be implemented and the university's slow and ineffectual processes have limited the ability for food sovereignty to spread through the university. This has further slowed down due the Covid-19 lockdown, which has been used conveniently by the university as a reason for the lack of progress on food sovereignty initiatives.

In response to these lockdown measures, we have moved much of our activism off-campus. The majority of the university's community live off-campus. But, without access to the university's land and water, we discovered an even greater bureaucratic issue — the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. After knocking on many doors and attending multiple meetings, it became clear that there was no political will from members of our local government to use vacant municipal land for food gardens and municipal buildings for community kitchens. To make matters worse, there has been no support for informal and small-scale traders, providing more affordable food. In fact, the opposite has been the case, with the municipality cracking down on traders.

There have been elements of hope too. At the start of lockdown, we participated in an initiative which handed out food relief packages to dozens of students in need. We raised funds and purchased food for people who otherwise would have gone hungry. However, we believe so much more could be done if the people who have decision-making authority (at the university and the municipality) had the will. We realise that the journey that we, as activists, underwent has not been shared by those in power.

Our idea to campaign for food sovereignty was, after all, sparked by a presentation about the Wits Food Sovereignty Centre by Dr Vishwas Satgar in September 2018. In fact, the concept of food sovereignty revolutionised our activism at the university. Never before had it been so clear that there was a certain solution to hunger among the student community, added to addressing the loss of biodiversity, the risks of climate shocks and corporate control of the food industry. The roots of the problem were clear. The food industry was creating hunger by denying the most vulnerable access to food through centralising control over land, water and seed. At the same time, learning about this (the true cause of hunger), pathways were opened. What we had seen but not understood before was made clear and seeds of hope emerged — we could defeat this system through a co-ordinated student movement.

So, we rallied support. We visited residences and student associations. We enlisted progressive lecturers and student representatives. The campaign launched a declaration, stating:

“We, the UFS Food Sovereignty Campaign (UFS FSC) and interested stakeholders of the University of the Free State community, declare to all that this university should openly embrace food sovereignty, agroecology and a just transition to a sustainable and ecological food and agricultural system.” We knew we had entire communities behind us. This was also reflected in the declaration:

“We are not isolated in our struggle for food, dignity and sovereignty. The university community is comprised of thousands of stakeholders, who together can set a remarkable example for similar campaigns in institutions of higher learning around the world and the general global food system. Together, we can advance this collective eco-social agenda. Food! Dignity! Sovereignty!”

But many of the people we were working with have grown despondent waiting for change, showing up again and again to call for the university to address student hunger. In the wider off-campus community, it has been even more difficult to rally people to call on the municipality to initiate food sovereignty initiatives. It appears we have done so again and again, but the people in the power just have not budged.

We have come to realise that the people in power do not feel much pressure from the communities they have responsibilities to because they do not feel threatened. Ward Councillors are elected each local election without providing as much as food relief to the hungry in our communities.

So, learning from this, we decided to launch a campaign for public office this year, running on many issues, including food sovereignty. We hope to create enough pressure for our elected leaders to launch food sovereignty initiatives and in the best case scenario, run a campaign to win office so we can implement such initiatives.

Short of contesting in these upcoming elections, we believe that each community should find ways to pressure their representatives to action. These representatives are a final barrier to implementing food sovereignty initiatives in our communities. Whether it is officials at the university or officials in municipal buildings, if they are not oriented in favour of the community, we need to push them.

Here, we are doing that through a direct independent campaign for office. We hope to revive the energy and spirits of the campaign that we launched three years ago, and bring our communities together — but this time, we aren't asking for permission for food sovereignty initiatives, we are demanding it.

6. The Oude Molen Food Garden

By Kelly Mansfield

The Oude Molen Food Garden is an urban agricultural community food project which began in 2002. The programme was originally started as an educational and empowerment project for the youth and children. The site was an old hospital dumping ground and with the help from the Oude Molen community and other partners it was transformed into The Oude Molen Food Garden. To date, Kelly Mansfield manages the garden and over the years with the help of many volunteers has continued to transform the garden into a space where everyone is welcome.

People pop in over weekends just to stroll through, buy organic vegetables & home grown seedlings. They are currently setting up a nursery for public sales. The garden has about 16 allotment holders, all of which are responsible for their own gardens and all practice sustainable organic growing techniques. No

pesticides or hormones are used in the garden, only natural organic methods are allowed. All funds received in the garden go towards our two workers, William and Andrew who are in-patients at Valkenberg hospital, they are employed three mornings a week. We also have Keith and Annelien who are from The open



Planting seedlings during lockdown

Circle at Alexandra Hospital. Keith and Annelien come to the garden as part of their occupational therapy on a Tuesday and Thursday morning. They are currently sponsored by People & Gardens in the UK.

Kelly runs a kids garden program every Wednesday afternoon for the neighbouring local communities and she can get up to 27 kids per time, ranging from 5 to 16 years. Kids are the future and so she teaches them how to grow from seed to harvest and everything in between, from recycling

projects, to eco brick building. The Kids have their own gardens which gives them a sense of pride, which then carries through back into their homes and their own communities. Kelly also runs a volunteer programme every Saturday morning, where she can get overseas students and school kids who need to do community service. Keeping all this in mind, she volunteers her time and energy without taking a cent for this garden.

Covid had a full impact on the garden in that no gardeners were allowed access and so I became fully responsible for keeping everything alive, watering for up to two hours every second day. The general maintenance also fell into my hands, taps, irrigation, infrastructure etc. The kids programme stopped and that was the hardest for me personally. I took the time in a positive way to clean up the garden areas in the space that were



The soup kitchen garden

not being utilised efficiently and I created smaller gardens for planting for community members. My husband and I created a big round garden which I called “The soup kitchen garden”. It looked like a large pizza and all seedlings grown in this garden went to community members, security for the village and Valkenberg and we supplied our local soup kitchen with Veggies on request, plus numerous churches approached us for veggies, which we gladly gave. We also applied for Food & Trees for Africa for the



School children during community service

seedlings that were advertised. When the seedlings came, we planted them all in the spare ground, filled the soup kitchen garden, filled up our gardeners beds, our community took seedlings, we gave seedlings away to numerous CAN projects and people who approached us got seedlings. We definitely spread love! Some CAN members approached me for advice and we chatted about how to set up basic gardens etc.

We have continued the soup kitchen garden with the intention of feeding those who need food. Locals came and got spinach/ Kale/ lettuce/ beetroot etc.

The challenges over the past year and half have always been trying to create and grow food on a shoe-string budget or none at all. I was lucky in that I retained my job as a health care worker and was able to put money into the garden and wages when there was none.

The success has been that the lockdown really gave me a chance to see what was important to the community, how we can work together as a whole to create a sustainable system, not looking at personal gain. It connected me with like-minded people who are invested in making a positive change to their communities. Food growers initiative/ seed savers/ CAN groups and members, all making a difference. Learning from practice

What I have learnt is that one can go to a community to set up a working garden but it takes a community to keep it going. The community must be part of the set-up, be on the ground from the beginning and be invested with their time to truly reap the benefits of it.



Children from the program

7. Belz Greenz and Herbz

Belinda Ratyana Interviewed by Charles Simane

Belz Greenz and Herbz is an urban hydroponic farm based at Constitutional Hill in Johannesburg. The farm is run by its founder, a mother of five, Belinda Ratyana. She grows over 4680 plants producing some of the best basil, mint, thyme, kale, pepper, and other herbs in Johannesburg. She started her farm on the rooftops of the National School of Arts in 2017 before relocating to Constitutional Hill. For Belinda, farming is more than just producing food and growing herbs, it represents freedom and self-realisation as a source of independence and empowerment. Her hydroponic farm uses less space, grows faster and it is flexible for the rooftops of the city. Belinda understands the problems of hydroponic farming that it is not cheap to start, not easy to operate because it requires a lot of technical expertise as well as using a lot of electricity. However, she believes it should not be dismissed as a technotopian solution (the idea that technology can solve social problems) because it is important in addressing the scourge of urban hunger.



Belz Grenz and Herbs at Constitutional Hill

Her farm is also a learning centre; she trains young and aspiring urban farmers who want to produce their food.

With the coronavirus forcing the government to lock down, many restaurants Belinda used to supply with her herbs closed and others scaled down their businesses. This meant that Belinda, like other farmers, lost a valuable market. This was worse during the harsh level five lockdown. Some of the restaurants have permanently closed and those that remain are still not buying at the pre-Covid levels. The pandemic has impacted the farmer's markets. Belinda and other farmers could not organise their usual farmer's markets because of the Covid regulations and the fear of contracting the virus. Small scale farmers often have challenges directly selling to customers. Because of this, they

end up selling to large-scale supermarkets that purchase at extremely low prices driving the farmers into bankruptcy. Farmer's markets and selling directly to customers without the exploitative middle man have proven to be the most profitable business strategies for small-scale farmers. They retain their power to determine prices while developing relationships with their customer base. Therefore, being unable to participate in farmer's markets has been a huge challenge for Belinda. She had developed a good working relationship with several restaurants that were forced to close because of Covid lockdowns and the exorbitant rent of Johannesburg, especially Braamfontein. Though not unique to the past year and a half,

travel continues to be a challenge for Belinda. Her farm is in Braamfontein and she is in the townships. She has also had to deal with crime. Some of her produce was stolen during the lockdowns in 2020.



Herbs in Belinda's farm

She says that the pandemic has taught her resilience and a can-do attitude. After farming since 2017 in the National School of Arts she has now moved to a bigger space in Constitution Hill. This is due to her resolve and her positive attitude. She has also learned how to use overgrown plants as manure so that nothing gets destroyed.

Belinda says that “Farming is not an easy endeavour. It requires a lot of patience, dedication, and management. An improperly managed farm where the books are not in order will struggle because it will be difficult to see how much is being gained or lost. As a farmer, you must be dedicated even if you are not making as much as you would have wanted”. Belinda wants to see food on the rooftops of Johannesburg, she says that lack of access to land in urban areas should not be a death sentence and she believes that hydroponics can be a viable solution to the crisis of urban hunger.

8. The Phillipi Horticultural Area Food and Farming Campaign

Nazeer Soday Interviewed by Charles Simane

The Phillipi Horticultural Area comprises several farmers, using different farming methods. Nazeer Soday is of the farmers in the area. He uses the most sustainable way of farming, which is agroecological



Nazeer Soday at the farm

farming which does not rely on insecticides, pesticides, or fertilisers but instead uses ecological diversification, permaculture, input reduction, biodiversity protection, and synergy. The entire PHA area supports local food needs thus removing the food production and consumption divide. Local food production, agroecology,

living land, and a multifunctionality approach to agriculture is essential for food sovereignty. Nazeer's farm

believes and teaches these principles of regenerative agriculture that focuses on living land rather than chemicals to produce high-quality crops. Nazeer brought together unemployed farm workers and taught them these principles of agroecology, his goal is for them to go and start their farms and ultimately develop farming cooperatives with like-minded farmers who believe in the principles of living land and de-chemicalised agriculture. He also trains university students studying agriculture. This multifunctionality approach makes his farm a training centre that empowers aspiring farmers especially young people.



Work on the farm

Like in other communities, the impact of Covid-19 in Phillipi and surrounding areas was catastrophic. Most people who work in the townships are employed in the services sector in areas like human care (salons, restaurants, etc). These workers lost their jobs overnight and could not afford to buy food. Symptomatic of their country where almost half the population could not

afford to buy food, 30 million food stressed. This is the reality of a market centred food system, where purchasing power determines who eats and who goes hungry. Nazeer and co. responded by forming a food kitchen to help their community with meals, especially children. Food kitchens are not sustainable but under the circumstances, they were a lifesaver for many. The food kitchens were made possible thanks to donations from NGOs and this made it possible for them to source much of the produce from the local area. According to Nazeer, this showed just how important local food production is because being able to source local food reduced costs and other expenses. In the context of the climate crisis, local food production is essential to cutting long transportation which emits a lot of greenhouse gases.

The PHA is considered a water sovereign area because it locally sources its water from an aquifer. This makes the area very important in a semi-arid country with long droughts and erratic rainfalls. The importance of the aquifer became more evident when the city of Cape Town was on the verge of day-zero and farmers around the province were closing shop because of the drought. It provides about 200 000 tons of vegetables to the city of Cape Town and surrounding areas. Farmers in the area continue to resist the planned projects that will undermine the ability of the aquifer to recharge while destroying farming land and entire ecosystems.

Nazeer says that Covid has shown the importance of local food production and that these networks must be encouraged and strengthened through coordination between farmers and informal traders as well as farmers' markets. Small-scale farmers should not imitate the chemical agriculture which destroys soil organisms undermining soil nutrients and the quality of farm produce. Covid-19 has also highlighted the need for more coordination



Protest against the planned PHA development (capture)

between farmers because those farmers who were not connected to others suffered the most; they had no assistance and no information on how other farmers were surviving. With hunger expected to increase due to job losses, production needs to be democratised, it cannot be in the hands of a few export-oriented and market-driven large-scale farms. Rural, peri-urban, and urban farmers must rise to the occasion and realise that they are the heart of food production, failure is not an option.

9. The Molobanye Cooperative

The Molobanye Cooperative Profiled by Violet Phala written by Charles Simane

Waste collection is a huge health, financial and social problem in many townships in South Africa. It undermines people's right to dignity and to a clean environment that is not harmful to their health. In 2011, the women of Alexandra decided to do something about the waste crisis in Alex which has created dumping sites that are fertile ground for rodents, foul smells, and crime while also serving as a constant



Women clearing the dumping site

reminder of the indignity of poverty. These women started clearing a dumping site to create space for farming.

With assistance from the City of Johannesburg, cooperatives were set up to farm on this newly cleaned piece of land in the Lenin Drive Gardens as part of the city's Urban Farming Project. The Molobanye Cooperative is one of the Co-ops

that emerged. It was founded by five members and now has two active members, three full-time employees and volunteers who assist at certain times. On their farm, they produce different herbs such as mint, thyme, chilli, basil along with vegetables such as pumpkins, spinach, carrots and others through permaculture farming. Through methods such as circular herbal portioning, they eliminate the need for pesticides and insecticides by creating a balanced ecosystem and plant diversity.

Although the coronavirus is dangerous to all age groups, it has disproportionately affected older people due to physiological changes and a weakened immune system due to age and other underlying health conditions. This is why older people are in the high-risk category and are likely to need hospitalisation if infected and unvaccinated. Violet Phala is 59 years old, and the women she farms with are in her age range, they are all in the high-risk category. When the lockdown began, they were very scared of the virus and many of the women she farms with were reluctant to come to the farm. The fear was made worse by the disinformation that was spreading wildly in the townships which made them feel like getting the virus was



Herbs growing in the farm

a death sentence. Thus, for her and the other women, each day of coming to the farm felt like a dance with the jaws of death. The soldiers and police who show little regard and respect for township dwellers did not make the situation any easier. Although farmworkers were designated essential workers and were allowed to operate even under the harshest level five lockdown, however, law enforcement officials are notorious for undermining the rights of the poor. The travelling restrictions drastically reduced their customers and for some time, it was a struggle to sell their produce. What came to their aid was the department of Social Development which bought some of their produce as part of the government's failed food parcel scheme.

The emotional toll of farming during the gravest health pandemic in a century was made worse by the unreliable water supply of the City of Johannesburg. Endemic corruption, maladministration and the de-professionalisation of local government in South Africa have led to a dilapidated water infrastructure that loses 37% of freshwater due to bad water management. The women of Molobanye know the face of poverty and they tried to help their fellow community members by having volunteers at the farm which they then gave some fresh produce at days end. They also had to be generous with prices and giving whatever little they could even though the farm is their only source of income, they had to practice Ubuntu. Violet and the other women have learnt that they play a critical role in the food supply. Being easily accessible to the community, they save their community members from exorbitant transport fees. They hope that more dumping sites can be turned into farming spaces in urban areas. Space is a problem because

it limits their farming and many women who want to start cooperatives and partake in farming are not able to because of land. They also wish to see more young people taking farming seriously especially in the rampant youth unemployment in South Africa. With regards to water, the Cop-opts have learnt the importance of using Jojo tanks since the municipal water is so unreliable. The Cop-opt also wants more farmers markets to strengthen the relationship with informal traders. This will help their communities and themselves as they will be able to sell their produce at reasonable prices which are more profitable than selling to large scale supermarkets.



Dried herbs ready for sale

10. Masifundise

By Carmen Mannarino

Masifundise is a civil society organisation that has been working with small-scale fishing communities across South Africa and globally since 2001. Masifundise is based in Cape Town but we work in Western Cape, Eastern Cape Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State.

Masifundise's mission is to build the knowledge, skills, and capacity of small-scale fishing communities to enable them to become agents of change within their own communities, organisations, and social movements, with the ability to understand, engage with and, where necessary, challenge and advocate for



Women protesting against corruption in fisheries

just political and economic decision-making processes. This includes facilitating and strengthening participatory governance at all levels, enabling fishing communities to secure their social, economic, and political rights and to demand redistribution of access to natural resources and roll-back of harmful development initiatives and promoting principles of social, economic, and environmental justice.

Masifundise is a member of the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP) and through this affiliation, we are active in the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC).

Since 2001, Masifundise has been involved in the struggle for fisheries to be recognised and managed as food-related sector, not only an environmental management and commercial sector. The fisheries' legal framework and governance fails to effectively recognise the role that fishing plays in food and nutrition, and the cultural significance of fishing and the related natural resources for the tradition and customary practices of fishing communities.

Through mobilisation and litigation, Masifundise and Coastal Links- a community-based organisation which was formed with the support of Masifundise- were able to secure legal reform through the development of the Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Policy (2012- Currently under implementation), which provides a framework in line with food sovereignty and Human Rights principles. However, the implementation of the policy has been poor: while 152 SSF Cooperatives were formed and allocated fishing rights, they lack capacity to effectively realize their rights. Furthermore, many fishers were left out as the policy process failed to recognize them. In the implementation of the policy, DFFE is taking a top down approach, in which co-management of the resources is not implemented and the basket of species not matching traditional practices and availability/capacity. Overall, we see a push from government for formalization and commercial orientation (including export) in implementing the policy

At the same time, SSF Inland Fisheries still not recognized- Policy development in place but currently there is a vacuum, which leaves inland fishers in a space of informality, which in several instances resulted in criminalisation.

It is in this context that in 2018, Masifundise took a strategic decision to shift the focus of Masifundise's work from "fishing rights and human rights" towards including "human rights and food sovereignty". For Masifundise, the principles and objectives of food sovereignty look beyond the act of catching fish, and constitute a direct response to the multiple aspects and systemic causes of the crisis. Social, environmental, and economic justice are its key principles. The principles of Food Sovereignty, with emphasis on local control and democratic governance of the food system are the core of all Masifundise's activities and initiatives, which can be divided in three broad categories:

Empowerment and movement building: We co-design and facilitate local, provincial, national, and global training and learning platforms (workshops, consultative forums, Winter and Summer Schools, related to food sovereignty in small-scale fishing in South Africa, and globally as part of the WFFP. We also work to support mobilising of inland and coastal small-scale fishing communities to access and claim their fishing and wider socio-economic rights within a Food Sovereignty agenda and paradigm that promotes the strengthening and expanding of existing social movements, networks, and partnerships.

Research activities: Masifundise is currently working in several sites on the coast and inland together



Fishers' rights are human rights

with small-scale fishing communities, applying Participatory Action Research methodologies with the goals of 1) document, reflect critically and describe local histories, natural resource interactions, sacred sites, demographics, livelihood and tenure patterns, customary systems and rights, capacities and skills, talents, household incomes, services and assets, 2) document and develop a stronger understanding of both the issues impacting small-scale fishing communities

and 3) empower fishing communities to take actions to claim their rights and to lobby for access and control of natural resources. We also conduct, together with several national and international research partners research activities to deepen and expand knowledge on the context, trends, and systemic challenges relevant to Food Sovereignty and small-scale fishing communities in South Africa, and globally.

Advocacy: We seek to create platforms at all level of government to enable small-scale fishing communities and their organization to articulate their needs and opportunities to advance the realization of their human rights and propose solutions based in food sovereignty practices and solutions.

The advent of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown measures have challenged us as an organisation, as not being able to be operational and work on the ground has created major challenges in continue to support mobilization and organisation building in fishing communities, which is the very essence of our empowerment, research and advocacy activities. We had to find more creative methodologies to both communicate with and share knowledge and strategies with our network of predominantly rural fishing communities, especially in the deep rural areas in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Many of our meetings with community's had to be undertaken on virtual/online platforms, with airtime and data being provided for fishers to attend. However, this was a limitation for our work, as many of these rural communities are remote, with limited connectivity access, and infrastructure challenges.

Covid-19 negatively impacted small-scale fishing community especially during the hard lockdown in 2020, exacerbating pre-existing challenges. Many small-scale fishers were prohibited from accessing their fishing grounds. The closure of public Parks and Marine Protected Areas as part of the ***Amendment of Regulations issues in terms of Section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002***, further entrenched the food and economic crisis in these communities whose traditional fishing grounds are

located in public Nature and Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Areas. Small-scale fishers were declared an essential service during the lockdown. However, the movement required for the sale of fish was prohibited. The lockdown led to a crisis of fish markets and plummeting of fish sale. Prices dropped to less than half compared to pre-covid. The average prices of fish sales have still not returned to pre-Covid levels and fishers are still struggling.

Inland fishing communities were especially negatively affected during COVID-19. The lack of clear, national-level policy and legislation regulating the inland fisheries sector meant that inland fishers were not able to be effectively recognized as essential services. This has led to further criminalisation.

While many in fishing communities benefited from the special COVID relief grant and the grant top-ups, small-scale fisheries have not received any relief or meaningful support from government as a sector, for example when compared to the relief measures put in place for small-scale/subsistence farming.

The Covid19 and related food crisis has further showed that systemic change is necessary and that food sovereignty and its principles are more relevant then ever. In this context, much of Masifundise's work on food sovereignty has focused on ensuring that communities have access to the natural resources they depend on for their livelihoods. Masifundise has continued to conduct online and, when possible, face-to-face local and provincial and national meetings to work with communities to empower them to engage and struggle against the threats to SSFs food sovereignty and livelihoods, in particular against extractive developments (oil, gas and mineral mining, aquaculture, Marine Protected Areas) happening all over the coast and putting the very existences of local small-scale fisheries at risk.

As part the interventions related to Covid, Masifundise has partnered up with PLAAS to look at impacts of COVID-19 on the small-scale fisheries food system and value-chain in the Western Cape with a focus on the political economy of our food system and food flows, as well as the impacts of COVID-19 and the associated government responses. This research is currently ongoing.

The SSF National Strategic Forum hosted by Masifundise in April 2021 also provided another moment for representatives small-scale fishing communities to discuss their fishing rights and the important role they play as food producers during South Africa's ongoing food crisis. The National Strategic Forum assisted them in understanding their local food production system and the value of fish in terms and nutrition and economics and the role that women and the youth can play along the value chain.

Successes and challenges

- Communities have struggled to adapt to the limited physical presence of Masifundise on the ground. Many of them were also challenged at first by using online platforms such as Zoom as a means of communication and engagement.

- Poor connectivity and internet infrastructure have strained communication and the sharing of knowledge in the rural communities Masifundise works in.
- This has created challenges in strengthening the fishers' movement at this time of crisis.

Despite the restrictions of COVID-19 and all the related challenges, we continued with the work and were able to have some successes, including:

- Securing access to the dam for inland fishers in Vanderkloof Dam, Northern Cape
- The redoing of the SSF Policy verification process in the Western Cape. Masifundise and fishing communities lobbied the Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries to re-assess the verification process that led to the exclusion of bona-fide fishers. As a result, the Minister ordered for an independent audit of the verification process in the Western Cape province. In February 2021, the Minister announced that the audit concluded that the verification process was "wholly inadequate" and that the verification process will be re-done in the Western Cape. This was an important achievement, as for the first time since the roll-out of the SSF Policy the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries has admitted to the shortcomings in their policy implementation approach.
- This creates an opportunity for all small-scale fishers to have their rights recognized and resulted in renewed energy and mobilization within small-scale fishing communities, which prompted significant local-level mobilization on the occasion of South Africa's Human Rights Day, on 21st March 2021
- The SSF National Strategic Forum in April 2021 was a successful event, where using 4 locations and hybrid online/face-to-face approach, we were able to bring together more than 90 SSF representatives, together with partners and allies, to strategise on the way forward to ensure that food sovereignty becomes a reality in SSF communities. In the context of the National Strategic Forum, fishing communities were able to speak directly to Minister Creecy. As a result, the Department committed to a series of interventions aiming at improving the implementation of the Small-scale Fisheries Policy, the recognition of the subsistence fishers and the challenges to access that fishers whose traditional fishing grounds are located in Marine Protected Areas and Nature Conservation areas.

Learning from practice:

- Small-scale food producers play a very important role by providing healthy and nutritious food. However in fishing communities, too often the nutritious food leaves communities, to be sold in urban and international markets. Covid-19 has shown us the fault lines within the global South Africa's food system that has been under strain since the beginning of the pandemic. In this context, empowering SSF to locally and democratically control their natural resources empowered

and food system, in line with food sovereignty, would protect communities in moments of crisis in the future and limit the reliance on outside sources for food parcels.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fact that localised food systems and shorter value-chains are the most resilient in times of crisis. These localised food systems allow food to stay within the community, financially benefiting the broader community including women and youth who are involved in the post-harvest value-adding and trading of products, and ensuring food and nutrition security in the community. To make this a reality, building solidarity and partnership between fishing communities and other food producers will be very important, as we will continue to face the covid19 pandemic and the climate crisis.

11. West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum

By Davine Witbooi



Agroecological garden

The West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum was established in October of 2016. We are based in Lutzville, a small rural town on the West Coast of South Africa. We are part of a broader network that practices agroecology and food sovereignty nationally and internationally. We started community gardens with indigenous seeds we received from farmers through exchange visits. I also received training on food sovereignty and agroecology from manuals we received from COPAC and the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign. We also make seedlings and distribute it in the community. We established two soup kitchens. We live in an area where agriculture is dominated by the chemical way of

farming. We also face a lot of environmental damage caused by mining in the area. This leads us to a new approach to safe practices to look after our environment.

Since the beginning of the lockdown, we have seen people suffer due to a lack of food. Many lost their jobs and the promise of food parcels by the government never reached rural communities. Covid 19 was something the people never expected and also no one was prepared to face these difficulties. Food prices increased and made it more difficult for rural people to get access to healthy nutritional food. Our organisation found it difficult to move around because the lockdown restrictions did not allow us to do visits to people's houses. We could not get access to government departments because they closed their offices. The only way for us to reach others inside the community was to use social media. We depended

on the community to share their food. We also helped the migrants who had been left without jobs and food. Due to travel restrictions and a ban on international travel, they could not return home.

The impact of covid 19 was a heavy burden for most families in rural areas. Nutritious food was hard to find, creating a lot of food stress and eventually hunger. Children were begging for food to provide for their families. Due to job losses, many families depended on child social grants. We started two soup kitchens, using vegetables from our community gardens. The soup kitchen provided daily cooked meals for 500 families. We have been asking people in the community to make gardens in their backyard and plant vegetables. We realised that we cannot wait on government's empty promises. The West Coast Food Sovereignty and Solidarity Forum reached out to the Doornbay women and youth fisher folk and did advocacy on agroecology and food sovereignty. Also, we reached out to Koekenaap small scale farmers who grow indigenous herbal pants. We engaged with



Davine's Garden

the municipality and local businesses to help us to get more land to build more food hubs and in all towns in the Matzikama municipal area.

Some of the challenges we experienced during Covid include:

- lack of access to government support
- no access to healthy nutritious food due to food price increases
- lockdown regulations restricted us from visiting families
- Loss of jobs
- Job losses contributed to gender-based violence
- No access to technology (cellphones, computers) and high data prices
- Covid 19 infections and death in the families
- Lack of healthcare

Successes during Covid included:

- Establishment of community agroecology gardens to provide for community needs.
- The distribution of cultural seed and seedlings in the community

- The training on agroecology and food sovereignty that was given in the past and also the activist tool kits provided good guidance for communities to survive and combat hunger.

Lessons from the past year:

- We realised that we need to make sure that we plant our own food;
- Government is nowhere to be found when we need it, this has encouraged us to lead our own struggles;
- Getting the community involved and give training on how to build your own community gardens: We learned that each community is different because of the different climate patterns but we have one common purpose and that is to have healthy nutritious food to eat and eliminate hunger;
- Farming can take place on any size of land that is available and that community can get access to, for example backyards, parks, schools and churchyards;
- It is important to teach young children and get them involved in gardening; and
- Link your community gardens and keep a record and establish seed banks.