



MDUKATSHANI
RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Annual Report 2021





Let's start with the good news. A group of community animal health workers (CAHWs) celebrate their graduation at Jozini.

CONTENTS	
Goats for the Gods	4
Another grave on another hill	6
Raiding the hives of bees	7
Graduation Celebrations	8
Golden Jubilee for the Crafters	11
Goat Agribusiness Pilot Close-Out Report	12
The Problem of Buying and Selling Goats	13
The Vaccination Challenge	15
A Late-night Phone Call	17
A trip to the Eastern Cape	18
The Children	19
Feeding Experiments	20
A wet summer	22
Snippets	23
Obituaries	24
	25

Trustees:

Deborah Ewing, GG Alcock, Trevor Dugmore, Kusakusa Mbokazi, Mkhosi Mchunu, Khonzokwake Mvelase

Staff:

Rauri Alcock, Gugu Mbatha, Sindi Ngubane, Thokozane Xulu, Gosi Mntambo, Zamani Madonsela, Zanyiwe Ziqubu, Busisiwe Mtungwa, Senzegile Mntungwa, Mthembeni Mbatha, Thobisile Ndlela

Contact us

Postal address:

Mdukatshani Rural Development Trust
P.O. Box 795
Hilton
3245

Mdukatshani Rural Development Trust No.
IT757/2010/PMB
Public Benefit Organisation (PBO number 930001183)
Website: www.mdukatshani.com
E mail: khonya@yebo.co.za
Phone Cell: 0828569861
Phone Landline: 0333431905

Physical address:

Mdukatshani
Lorraine Farm
Weenen
3325

Mdukatshani's Vision

To find and promote options for farmers in Msinga, KwaZulu-Natal, that improve their lives, their livelihoods, and their productivity, while using locally available resources wisely for long-term sustainability.

Mdukatshani's Projects

Increasing women and youth involvement in livestock and value-adding activities through prioritizing women-owned livestock and income-generating activities in order to create wealth for the poorest. Improving livestock productivity of farmers in Msinga by intervening in livestock health systems supporting local youth in enhancing value chains leading to commercialisation of local herds. Promoting animal health and knowledge transfer between parents and school children through school clubs. Using beads, metal wire and grass to create jewellery and art for the local and international market.



The Goat Agribusiness Project (GAP)

When Mdukatshani started working with goats 45 years ago there was little to guide the project. A few far-sighted scientists in the Eastern Cape were looking at the benefits of goats in mixed farming systems in bushveld, but goats were not on anyone's agenda. Only at Msinga were goats hard to ignore. More than 70% of households owned goats, which were fluid capital, and a lifeline for local families. Despite a growing international interest in goats, there had been little change on the ground when the Goat Agribusiness Project (GAP) came into being in 2016. A collaborative effort between Mdukatshani, Heifer Project South Africa (HPSA), the National Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DLRD) and the KwaZulu Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), GAP aims to improve food security and rural livelihoods through the commercialization of indigenous goat herds. Initially launched as a five-year programme between the four partners, GAP targeted 9000 farmers in five district municipalities in KZN, creating a pilot which has put indigenous goats and small-scale livestock farmers on the national stage. With GAP's experience and ideas now embedded in state thinking, a Goat Master Plan has been included in the National Agricultural and Agri Processing Master Plan, which sets livestock policy for the next ten years.



Traditional male circumcision is still widely practised in South Africa, a sacred rite of passage from boyhood to manhood marked by sacrifice to the family spirits. About 70 000 youths were officially registered for circumcision in the Eastern Cape for the 2021 summer season. (Photograph of Xhosa initiates by *walking distance*).

THE GOAT AGRIBUSINESS PROJECT



African Goat, a bronze sculpture by the late Ezrom Legae, one of a series of 7 cast in 1990 and sold for a record R1,7 million at a Strauss and Co. auction in November 2019.

GOATS FOR THE GODS

The Markets Are in The Cities Among The Growing Middle Class

Live goats for sacrifice are the biggest market for goats in South Africa - an invisible market worth R 4 billion that absorbs an estimated 3 900 000 goats a year. Although most of the goats are reared in the rural areas, they are destined to be sold in the country's cities and townships to meet a cultural need for home ceremonies which honour the family spirits. The unique nature of this market makes estimates difficult. The Muslim community needs goats for Eid al -Adha, the Feast of Sacrifice, while the Nguni population sacrifice throughout the year for births, deaths, marriages, cleansing, thanksgiving and much more. But just how many goats are sold for sacrifice annually, and what has been the impact of Covid on sales?? When the GAP team sat down to answer these questions they began with a list of births, deaths and marriages in KZN. If about 81% of the population were Zulu, how many goats would be needed for the standard rituals in an average year? The answer was 2 185 000 goats. Add in Covid deaths and " excess deaths" since March last year... There are different ways of doing the calculations, but roughly, in a time of Covid, KZN needs 205 000 sacrifice goats a month which is much more than the market can supply.



The markets are in cities like Durban, the surrounding townships and peri-urban areas.



A Zionist worshipper seeks the purity of the sea among holidaymakers on the Durban beachfront.



Cattle and goats have right of way on busy Soweto streets.



Basotho's selling goats on the roadside in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg.



Goats on the streets of Ulundi, Zululand.



These goats have travelled more than 300 km from Lesotho to be sold to city customers.

Even in good years the KZN herd can only supply 800 000 animals a year. The remainder are imported from Namibia or other provinces, something that has been impossible in the last two years with lockdown restrictions, borders closed, an outbreak of foot-and-mouth-disease, as well as July's civil unrest which saw goat sales points looted and burned. The result has been soaring prices - over 60% at the last count - with speculators driving 1000-kilometre round trips trying to source goats. Following growing international interest in the potential of goats to survive climate change, GAP was asked to make the following presentations.

Las Cabras Los Dioses (Goats and the Gods), by Rauri Alcock and Marisia Geraci, *Tierras Caprinas* (Land of Goats) August 2021 Journal number 34. Goat Commercialization through Increasing Productivity of Homestead Herds in South Africa, Rauri Alcock and Marisa Geraci.

International Congress on Breeding of Sheep and Goats, Bonn, Germany October 2020

Goats for the Gods - Or When Covid and the Gods Clash, Rauri Alcock and Marisia Geraci, *Goats of the World and World of Goats -Emerging from the Shadow of Covid 19*, International Goat Association, Virtual Conference, Budapest, Hungary, November 2021



Goats free range in peri-urban areas like Sweetwaters, Pietermaritzburg.



Goats are sold at shopping centres and taxi ranks all over KZN's urban areas.



ANOTHER GRAVE ON ANOTHER HILL

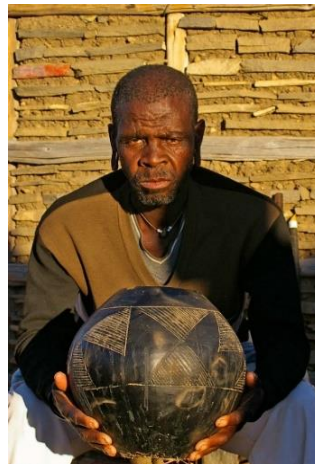


AND ANOTHER FUNERAL PROCESSION

There was not a face mask in sight among the crowds at Tugela Ferry on Christmas Eve. It was homecoming season, time for parties and celebrations, and restrictions on gatherings were just ignored. Reality hit when Covid deaths started in the new year, one after the other, so that no community was immune. Msinga was shocked when the Amabomvu *Nkosi*, P.J. Ngubane, and the Mabaso *Nkosi*, T. Mntungwa, died a day apart, leaving both tribes leaderless. As the deaths multiplied some families tried to hide the cause by rushing to bury their dead. But there was no hiding a confirmed Covid death as government sent a TLB to dig the grave. Mdukatshani would grieve especially for long-time crafter, Fikisile Duma (57) a widow with 8 children, Zodwa Bhengu (38), a GAP administrative assistant who died leaving a husband and two children, and Khebe Mtshali, a veteran fencer who left a wife and three children.



Zodwa Bhengu



Khebe Mtshali



Fikisile Duma



GAP lost records and training equipment when looters stripped and burnt this container park.

An armoured vehicle on patrol in Estcourt, the town where Jacob Zuma was imprisoned.

Invisible to passers-by, three new fridges, still in their wrappings, hidden in Colenso bush.

RAIDING THE HIVES OF BEES

There have been many attempts to describe the unrest that overwhelmed KZN in July, but the Zulu use of the word *ukuthapa* does it best. It's a word that covers almost everything: *To extract honey from a hive, ore from a mountain. To demolish, pull down. To gather foodstuffs for immediate use. To take freely.* President Cyril Ramaphosa called the unrest a "failed insurrection" but for people on the ground it was a period they would remember as raiding the hives of bees. The trouble began soon after former President Jacob Zuma was jailed for defying an order from the Constitutional Court, and by the time it was over only eight days later, 342 people had died, and KZN presented an eerie landscape of charred buildings and looted shops. Big cities, small towns - nowhere was exempt. Doctors' rooms were looted and set alight, pharmacies, clinics, the Blood Bank More than 158 schools were damaged.

More than R 120 million was stolen from 1227 ATM's, and 310 banks were vandalized or destroyed Post offices were a target, water treatment plants, fuel supply lines. Black and white farmers had livestock looted, while crops and plantation were burnt to the ground. By the time 10 000 soldiers were deployed to patrol the unrest areas, SASRIA, the state-owned insurance company, estimated the damage at R 50 billion, a figure that is still rising. Much of what happened didn't make sense, and is now the subject of two enquiries, one by a select committee, the other by the Human Rights Commission. Although Mdukatshani was unaffected by the violence, parts of Tugela Ferry were damaged, and SASSA grants had to be suspended for two months, which meant many families ran out of food. To help fill the gap we distributed quantities of vegetables bought from local growers, giving them their only sales when all outlets were blocked.

At Hyper Goats, Umlazi township, near Durban more than 2000 goats were looted and walked off the premises, while 50 cattle (including a breeding bull worth R70 000) were butchered and eaten on site. Leftover meat was carried home.

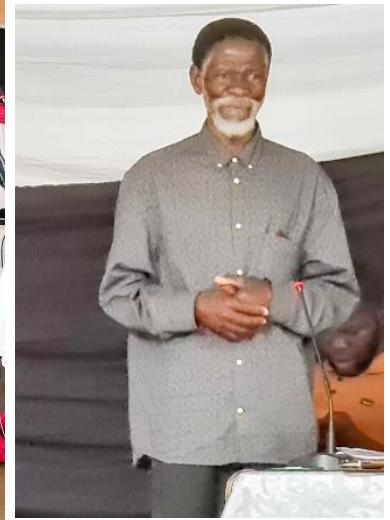




Alfred Buthelezi of the Hlabisa Livestock Association.



GAP's two project managers, Nhlanhla Mthembu (left) and Gugu Mbatha (right) congratulate a beaming Sanele Simelane of Nongoma



Umtwana Joseph Mchunu, an Mdukatshani Trustee, addresses the Weenen ceremony.

GRADUATION CELEBRATIONS

It was party time! Six halls decked out in drapes. Red carpets, flowers on the tables, everyone in their best. For the 362 Community Animal Health Workers who attended it was a joyful end to a difficult year repeatedly interrupted by Covid lockdowns. Their graduation took place in a lull, providing a moment set apart from their days, walking dusty footpaths up in the hills, offering basic animal health care to farmers. It's often lonely work being a CAHW and GAP wanted to celebrate their achievements. They had passed both written and practical tests, and after being issued with veterinary kits worked on their own with farming groups, fully fledged paravets doing vaccinations, training, and census work, while facilitating sales and auctions.

For the GAP staff the ceremonies were also a celebration of the challenging process that had made the project unique. When it started as a pilot five years before there was no model to follow. This was new ground, involving trial and error, and tested against experience along the way. There were no training materials, for a start. GAP had to design modules approved by SETA (the Sector Education and Training Authority). This was followed up by sending staff and CAHWs for additional training at the MSD Malelane Learning Academy, the only place in the country to offer courses in basic animal health care. GAP also developed handbooks on indigenous goat and chicken production which were available free, and widely used for reference and training.



Rauri Alcock addresses the Nongoma ceremony.



Nonkululeko Magwaza on the red carpet at Nkandhla.



At the Tugela Ferry ceremony Project Director Gugu Mbatha welcomes Mr. M. Thusi, chairman of the Msinga Livestock Association, Mthembu Nkosi, Siphamandla Mvelase, Umtwana Joseph Mchunu and Bomvu Chief Induna, Kusakusa Mbokazi (both Mdukatshani Trustees).



At the Weenen ceremony, from the left: Gugu Mbatha, Simiso Mathonsi (DRDLR), Umtwana Mchunu, Mr. Zuma of the Nkosilangalibalele Livestock Association. B Buthelezi, Mchunu Induna, Nonhlanhla Msibi (DRDLR), and Philiswe Mkhulose (Agri Vet)

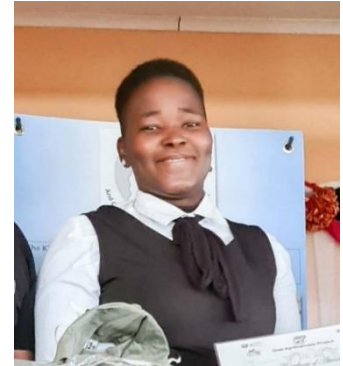
Because CAHWs were working in five different districts in KZN, separate ceremonies were arranged in Tugela Ferry, Weenen, Nongoma, Hlabisa, Jozini and Nkandla, all well attended by local government officials and members of the Livestock Associations. Each CAHW was awarded a certificate of achievement, in addition to a branded GAP jacket, cap and mask, while the top three in every district received a goat and a supply of veterinary medicines in recognition of outstanding performance. As the ceremonies marked the end of this phase of the project, the Department of Land Affairs and Rural Development suggested a five-day workshop to get feedback on the experiences of the CAHWS. This would enable the lessons of the pilot to benefit future programmes, while leading to a possible handover of CAHWs to government. As a result, a five-person team was elected at each ceremony, but despite numerous follow-ups, the proposed meeting has not taken place.



Mthobisi Ngcobo and Mboniseni Xaba, Hlabisa



Gciniso Masondo of Hlabisa won a goat for his outstanding performance



Kwazikwakhe Mkwana, Nongoma



Nelisiwe Mathenjwa, Nongoma Fezile Zulu, Nongoma



Siphelele Sibiya, Nongoma



From the left: Gugulethu Myeni, Mbuso Sibiya, Thokazaphi Mbatha, Nokubonga Mdletshe, all from Hlabisa.



Zandile Mhlongo, Secretary of the Jozini Livestock Association, dances on stage. Top from the left: Mkhohliseni Dladla, Weenen, Mandla Nhleko, Jozini, Gugu Mchunu, Nongoma Bottom from the left: Ndumiso Nxumalo, Lindeni Mchunu, Zamamba Mkhize, all from Weenen.



From the left: Lindelani Gumede, Umhlabuyalingana, and Philisiwe Macu, Gcinile Sokhela, Sheshile Ngobese and Vimbile Nzuza, all from Weenen.



Because of Covid restrictions, the event was held out of doors at Mdukatshani, with crafters sitting in groups under the trees.

A GOLDEN JUBILEE PARTY FOR THE CRAFTERS

It's a passing fad, said the donor. Beads wouldn't last, so our appeal had been rejected. They couldn't waste funds on a passing fad. But 50 years later the fad was still going strong, and we started making plans for a jubilee event for the crafters. Because of Covid it would have to be delayed, and delayed again, but when it eventually took place at Mdukatshani in November the celebration was one of joy. Although staff had spent time planning decor for the Learning Centre (drapes on the walls, covers for the chairs) the size of the crowd made social distancing impossible, so the event was transferred to the shade of the thorn trees outside. Many of the veterans now leaned on sticks, but nothing could mute the happy sounds of greeting as past and present crafters caught sight of each other, many meeting for the first time in years.



Rauri Alcock shows the T shirt with logo presented to every crafter together with a book on the history of their project.



Covid precautions. Women queue to have their temperatures registered by Mdukatshani staff members Gosi Lamula and Thokozaan Xulu, before washing their hands with sanitizer.



Gugu Mbatha welcomes Mdukatshani chairman, Deborah Ewing, who did the presentations to the crafters.

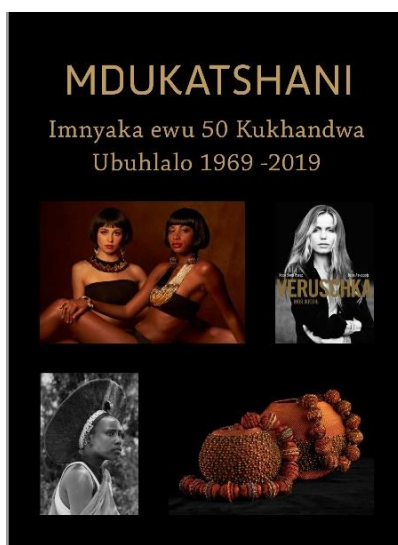


With the speeches and presentations over, the crowd moved to a terrace near the river, and waiting for a large, cooked lunch to be served, there was time to start studying the books.



HlekelaPhi Dladla (73) a veteran beader sits engrossed in the pages.

It was going to be a day to remember, starting with a prayer and a moment of silence for the crafters who had died that year. The pain of their deaths was still very close, and the underlying sadness gave a gravity to the event, a reflection on the past we had shared. The Mdukatshani Trustees had travelled up for the day, and the women were glad of their support. There weren't many formal occasions at Mdukatshani, and after the speeches our chairman, Deborah Ewing, handed each crafter a gift. There were T-shirts with our logo in some very large sizes and a copy of the book celebrating the Jubilee history of the beading project. The book has been translated into Zulu, and although few crafters can read, the photographs on the pages brought cries of recognition. Had they really been so young and beautiful once? (Later the books would be read aloud at home by literate members of the families). Lunch was served on a shady terrace looking out across the Thukela River, a huge meal, prepared by staff and interns, who handed out plates heaped with one treat after another, including ice cream cones (melting in the heat) and slices of the Jubilee cake. (Copies of the English version of the Jubilee book can be ordered at www.mdukatshani.com)



The Zulu version of the Jubilee Report. An English version can be ordered at www.mdukatshani.com



Remembering the faces of the past. from the left: Khulelaphi Mbatha, Gidephi Mpungose, Ngenzeleni Dladla, Ngenzeni Mvelase.

GOAT AGRIBUSINESS PROJECT



The late Zulu King Zwelithini officially launched the Goat Agribusiness Project at Msinga in January 2016, buying 24 goats to add to his herd in Zululand. Here he discusses some of the goats on display with Cyril Xaba (centre) then MEC for Agriculture in KZN.

THE FIVE-YEAR CLOSE-OUT PILOT REPORT

The final official on-site meeting took place under a thorn tree at Ncunjane, sheltering from the summer sun. It seemed appropriate. That's how the project started. Chatting to farmers in the shade of thorn trees, out in the open, close to their homes. They all owned goats. What did they think of enlarging their herds to make them a commercial proposition? It was exciting talk, although only a small farmer knew the problems facing the implementation of new ideas. Isolation. Disease. Distance from markets. Lack of veterinary help. And the real problem, which nobody talked about, was simply this: Goat farmers were not considered farmers at all, so they fell outside official help. Could this change?

The farmers were interested, government was interested, but where did you start? It would take three years to get the Goat Agribusiness Project launched, a unique model tying two NGOs, Mdukatshani and Heifer Project South Africa, (HPSA), to two government departments, the national Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DLARD) and the provincial Department of Agriculture and Land Reform (DARD). It was a non-consultancy arrangement, with each party contributing to the funding, but while the NGO's tested ideas in the field, government had the role of scaling them up if they worked.



Left: Mr. B.M. Thabethe, KZN Director of Rural Enterprise and Industrial Development for DLARD, tries his hand at making goat feed blocks.
Below: The close-out meeting at Ncunjane with Ms Phindiwe Dingile, the acting Deputy Director General of DLARD and provincial staff.





Although goat meat is tasty and palatable it is yet to make its mark as a culinary delicacy. These dishes were prepared for a Farmers' Day at the Cedara College of Agriculture, Pietermaritzburg.



It just takes a bit of imagination. When King Zwelithini launched the GAP project at Msinga staff from Durban's International Convention Centre prepared an array of specially created goat products which included stir fry, roasts, salamis, polonies, and sausages, while local caterers competed to prepare The Best Goat Dish.

Five years later the gains and losses have been counted up in a close-out report that runs to 78 pages with 82 appendices*. The result is a remarkable record of a project that worked at the most basic level - in the shade of trees - to put indigenous goats and small-scale livestock farmers on the national stage. Today the goat industry is a common discussion point in political and agricultural circles, while a Goat Master Plan is now included in the National Agricultural and Agri Processing Master Plan which sets livestock policy for the next 10 years.

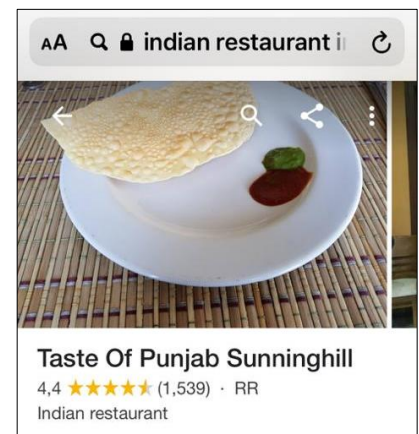
On the ground 9 122 farmers (5252 of them women) are actively commercializing their goat herds, and it is here that the success of the pilot must be judged, among the capable, but often illiterate rural people who have seen a chance to improve their livelihoods by developing their skills with goats. They are eager for training, despite their lack of education, and quick to engage in debate. Few speak English, so, the SETA-approved training modules have had to be adapted for Zulu-speaking trainers - and the limitations of classes under the trees. In addition to training GAP has offered support with interventions that have ranged from veterinary care to the development of marketing opportunities. GAP staff don't work from offices. They spend their days on foot, visiting farmers, providing feedback on their problems, and establishing the connection that has made the pilot real to those involved.

The close-out report is frank about the difficulties. It was launched in the middle of a three-year drought, followed by the Covid lockdowns, as well as an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease which led to a ban on sales. It wasn't an easy time to operate, but despite the problems GAP could list the following achievements:

- Goat productivity improved by an average of 50 percent
- 32 640 farmers trained in animal health care.
- 9122 farmers (5252 of them women) actively commercializing their goat herds.
- 624 community animal health workers (CAHWs) trained as paravets.
- 12 Agrivet shops set up.
- 2 800 women involved in goat nutrition experiments
- 19 auctions held with sales of R10 million
- District sales organised with R270 million in direct benefits to the farmers.
- 35 goat dips built with 134 000 goats dipped in the past two years.
- More than 10 000 Indigenous Goat and Chicken Production handbooks distributed.
- 15 innovation platforms held
- 100 000 farmers in 151 dip tank areas interviewed for an annual livestock census.
- Seven Livestock Associations in five district municipalities trained quarterly.

(Other groups trained included state officials, NGOs, literate youth, etc).

The lessons of the pilot are available on a website developed specially for GAP as well as an accompanying Facebook Page. www.facebook.com/GAPKZN



Evidence there is a market for goat meat in the city. A board advertises Goat Curry and Rice, a Chef's Special at the Taste of Punjab restaurant in Sunninghill, Johannesburg.



Mr. Vusimuzi Buthelezi lives in the Mngwenya area, outside Weenen. Chairman of the Nkosi Langalibalele Livestock Association, he farms both cattle and goats, which he sells at municipal monthly sales, or to speculators he has met through GAP.

THE PROBLEMS OF BUYING AND SELLING

When the first big goat auction was held at Msinga in 2013 everyone had a lot to learn. More than 2000 goats on offer, and at the end of the day prices were down to R50 a goat. Owners wanted to sell their animals one by one, not in lots, and it was dark before the last goat was led into the ring. There had to be a rethink. There had been too many goats, and too many disappointed people. Yet the auction had served its purpose. It had set prices so speculators could no longer take advantage of local farmers. Although auctions are a necessary step in commercializing goats, they are expensive to set up. GAP had a budget for auctions, and by trimming frills, like catering, was able to reduce the government costs of an auction from R1 million to R 200 000. However, plans for auctions were going to be hard hit by DARD's non-payment of its share of the project, and then the Covid lockdowns and a foot-and-mouth outbreak.

Sales went on, however, the most successful innovation being district sales using 12 portable metal gates that could be erected anywhere. Nine sets were given to Livestock Associations, two were kept for GAP training, and the direct benefits to farmers were sales of more than R 270 million. Whether the trade is formal or informal, there are problems, however, which were freely discussed by both buyers and sellers when GAP organised a series of focus groups on marketing. Both sides have their complaints. The farmers say they can't find buyers when they need them, and buyers say they can't afford to travel long distances to go homestead to homestead to make their trip worthwhile. They need a guarantee they can get the goats they need, and they want white goats, not black - can farmers breed for white? They also need a cashless payment system. It is dangerous to travel with large amounts of cash.



Because it is difficult getting accurate figures on the informal trade, GAP has started recording weekly sales from farmers in three project areas. Here Gugu Mbatha records Mr. Buthelezi's recent sales while Zanyiwe Ziqubu, teaches two interns, Nobuhle Mvelase, and Thandeka Mbatha, how to fill in a sales record sheet.



Successful buyers head home from Neunjane with goats bought from a local farmer. Although goats sold to "foot traffic" make up a large part of commercial sales, there is no way to put a value on such sales.



A November auction organised by the Indigenous Veld Goats Association produced record prices for breeding stock. But without transport, how do goat owners get their animals to town?



A successful alternative to big auctions were small local auctions which could be set up anywhere using a system of 12 mobile gates like these used for a sale at Godini.



Large auctions relied on existing yards like this one at Jozini, where GAP was able to cut away frills to reduce the government costs of an auction from R1 million to just R 200 000.



Getting to know you. Auctions provided useful connections between buyers and sellers, which led to regular direct sales from home kraals to the benefit of both parties.



Bakkie trade speculators have become the main buyers at GAP's monthly or local sales- the goats loaded up and resold along roadsides or at taxi ranks in urban areas.

Whether farmers sell at auctions or monthly sales, one outcome has been the relationships forged between buyers and sellers. There are now a number of speculators who buy from farmers weekly, and GAP has recommended that each area compile a list of buyers and speculators that service the area, and help them access farmers whether through home sales, auctions or monthly sales. Meanwhile, in an attempt to quantify the invisible trade, GAP has started collecting weekly sales information from farmers in three project areas. GAP is hoping that with enough detail from these areas it will be easier to see what is happening, and what systems exist that can be built on and supported, rather than competing with what is already there.

THE VACCINE CHALLENGE



Qondeni Njoko of nGodini, near Weenen, flinches as she waits for her jab.

The problem was the taxi fare. A hundred rand was a lot of money to spend on a trip to Tugela Ferry to get a Covid vaccination. And with two jabs necessary that doubled the cost. No wonder there was hesitation. We did what we could to help. First all the Mdukatshani crafters were given the taxi fare (as well as a little extra for food). Then we provided transport for the disabled and elderly to make sure they had the jab. But we didn't have the means to help the wider communities among whom we were working. Our staff had all been vaccinated, and at every meeting or training they described the Covid situation and urged farmers to go in for vaccination. In September, however they had the chance to do more when the Tshikululu Investment Fund provided support for a Vaccine Challenge. The main objective was to create awareness of Covid 19, while getting 1000 people vaccinated in each of four districts. The preliminaries took a little time. Staff had to meet with the Department of Health officials at district level to introduce the project and agree on areas of collaboration. Working with government can often be challenging, but this time Gugu Mbatha, our project manager, described the collaboration as 'wonderful'. As people could not afford to travel to vaccination sites in town, the jabs had to be available in outlying areas, and while the DOH had outreach teams, they needed a minimum number to come to a site. This meant our staff had to mobilize communities, and only when they were sure they had a minimum number, could nurses come out to do the jabs. The project operated in the Mzinyathi, Thukela, Zululand, and King Cetshwayo districts, where a total of 4 719 were eventually vaccinated out of a total of 5 342 who registered that they were willing. Creating Covid awareness in schools was part of the project, and while some principals were happy to let our staff address the learners, others were clearly hostile to vaccination and refused. The learners themselves showed a lot of interest, and most promised to get vaccinated during the school holidays as DOH has no agreements to let it vaccinate at schools. In December Tshikululu approved the extension of the project to the Mkanyakude district, while staff prepared their final reports, listing transport as a real and continuing problem. "We overspent on mileage, transporting people to central vaccination points," says Gugu. "But this was an incentive to get as many people as possible to vaccinate".



A LATE NIGHT PHONE CALL

The phone call came from Croatia late at night. On the line was a senior official from the KZN Department of Agriculture and Land Reform (DARD), calling with an urgent request. Please could the Goat Agribusiness Project immediately purchase 1000 goats for a government poverty relief scheme. An amount of R 5 million had been approved for the purchase, but it would have to be spent in the next five days. It was an impossible request, and GAP refused to get involved, but the scheme has recently reappeared in documents DARD has lodged in a case of arbitration. *PAID R 5 million* says the official stamp on a DARD form - with blank spaces where GAP's signatures are missing. The case between GAP and the Department goes back to an agreement signed in 2016 when GAP was launched as a partnership between two government departments and two NGO's. DARD's share of the project included funding auctions, training, publications and vet kits. All went well for the first two years. Then payments stopped. After innumerable meetings with top officials, GAP met up with the chairman of the KZN Finance Portfolio Committee, but despite repeat promises of an early response, silence followed every meeting. By the time GAP decided to go to the Arbitration Commission DARD owed the project R 4 826 620.

Although DARD initially ignored all GAP's correspondence, it subsequently briefed the State Attorney to oppose the matter, arguing that as a department it could not be bound by the arbitration process and would prefer to go to court. It also refused to pay its half of the costs of initiating an arbitration, an amount which GAP had to pay for DARD to make sure the arbitration went ahead. In December an advocate appointed by the Arbitration Commission of South Africa ruled that the Arbitration Commission was the correct body to hear the case, and DARD was ordered to pay all costs thus far. The next step in the process is the presentation of heads of evidence and a list of witnesses from both parties so that an arbitration date can be set. Meanwhile DARD has set up a programme using GAP's materials and methodology, and according to reports from members of our communities, officials are saying the GAP project stalled because it misappropriated funds. Although DARD has promised to employ community animal health workers (CAHWS), neither stipends nor medicines have appeared so far. State budgets are so tight that local garages are insisting that government officials pay in advance for their fuel as their petrol cards are so frequently dishonoured.



KZN Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.



A DIFFICULT YEAR FOR THE DAGGA GROWERS

The roadshows, the expos, the seminars go on - but with all the talk of commercialising dagga, local growers have seen the price drop and for the first time in years large areas have been left unplanted. Police continue to arrest drivers transporting dagga, even as government works on a draft Master Plan for Cannabis to "provide a broad framework for the growth and development of the cannabis industry in the country." The Plan recognizes the 900 000 smallholder farmers in the county who grow dagga, but nobody seems to know how to integrate them into a high technology industry dominated by foreign investors. According to the Plan areas suitable for cannabis cultivation should be identified and zoned, and should preferably be in areas with high rates of poverty and unemployment. So far so good. And then? Perhaps it is time some of the roadshows detoured to the dagga growing areas. If smallholders are considered an important part of the national strategy they need to be given a voice.



GAP saw no goats without herder's, these herders in the Herschel area said they were from Lesotho and were paid for their services, which included veterinary care. Because of the high costs of herding few households keep goats, and stock theft is a problem. Mixed herds of sheep, cattle and goats were the norm on the commonages.

A Trip to the Eastern Cape WHERE ARE THE GOATS?

According to available statistics the Eastern Cape has the highest number of goats in the country - 2 to 3,2 million. It also has the most sheep with an estimated 7,6 million. Yet there was little evidence of these numbers on the veld when four members of GAP travelled through the Eastern Cape on a fact-finding trip in September. They set off with a list of questions, curious to know why so few Eastern Cape goats reached the KZN markets when the area had been identified as part of a national "goat corridor", and hoping to observe a working system of transhumance, which is unknown in KZN. The GAP team began by meeting agricultural officials at the Dohne Research Station, and then drove through the Joe Gqabi and Alfred Nzo districts (reported to have the highest densities of goats) talking to farmers and herders.

They found some similarities with KZN. Goats were sold for sacrifice at informal markets, and white was the preferred colour. June and December were peak seasons for family rituals (such as circumcision) and prices soared in these months. There were the same diseases and high kid mortality as noted in KZN, but no official support for goat farmers from the state. What came a surprise was the negative attitude of commercial farmers towards goats. They complained goats "broke out" and the costs of herding were high. Given that the majority of herders were not the owners this did raise the question. To raise productivity through better husbandry - whom did you train?

(Show me the goats, - Eastern Cape Report September 2021 can be found on our website www.mdukatshani.com)



A herder moves livestock away from the homes in a peri-urban area to graze on commonage nearby.



Gugu Mbatha, GAP's Project Manager, demonstrates a goat weight belt to farmers at Sterkspruit



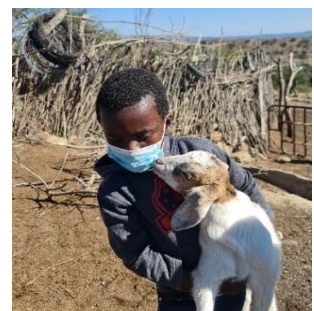
The children have had to use their own creativity to fill the empty hours during lockdown. These boys listened avidly when they attached themselves to a GAP farmers' training session.

THE CHILDREN

With no facilities for online learning for children in rural areas one way to measure the effect of the Covid lockdowns on local education is to count the little football fields that have sprung up everywhere. The children have cleared the ground themselves, marking off small plots, carrying away stone, and making their own soccer balls out of plastic bags wrapped tight. Some fields have goalposts, most don't, but every stony patch is an expression of creativity. Like the proliferation of wire cars propelled long the road by the small engineers who have constructed them with an eye for detail. Or the play villages the girls have spread out under the trees, complete with tiny bundles of wood. One result of the Covid lockdowns has been the large numbers of young people out in force at GAP events, like dip days.



The children are already expert at handling goats, a lesson that starts when they are toddlers, learning to separate new-born goat kids from their mothers. It's often the children who first notice an animal is ill. They know the movements of the flocks, the paths they follow, and the plants they browse. If an animal is missing the children will search for it, and nobody misses the excitement of a round up on dip day.





“COVER DE NOSE! COVER DE NOSE!”

Although children can chant the words in unison, it’s a difficult rule to observe, and even those who are wearing masks tend to drop them politely when greeting an adult. Schools seem ambivalent about the rules, with masks worn at assembly, but rarely out of doors. As a result, Mdukatshani staff carry a ready supply for all the children who gather at events.



This is knowledge that gets very little recognition, which is one reason for the project’s animal health programme at local schools. Working with Grade Five learners Mdukatshani aims to give value to what the children already know, while building on that knowledge with story and activity books, practical demonstrations, and visits to local farmers. In 2020 the programme had to be suspended due to Covid lockdowns, but with the easing of restrictions this year the activities of the Animal Health Clubs have been resumed at three local schools. Senzakile Mntungwa is currently in charge of the programme, meeting weekly with different groups of children at Ntombiyodumo, Bambanani, and Snqomeni Primary Schools. When Covid vaccinations for children became available in November, Sindi Ngubane did a vaccination mobilization tour of local schools, explaining the benefits of vaccination to teachers and pupils alike. The Ncunjane children photographed below may demonstrate the problems of wearing face masks, but they were jubilant about their vaccination.



Right, Mrs. Vamsile Manana of Mngwenya, near Weenen, describes the success of her experiments at a Farmers Day. Hearts lifted at the mass flowering of the *Msasane* trees (*Acacia tortilis*) last December, but it was going to be another no-pod year, leaving local livestock without a crucial protein supplement during the hard winter months.



FEEDING EXPERIMENTS

Goat kid mortality was taken for granted when GAP started its pilot in 2016. Every year 70% of new-born kids died, due to disease, or the mother's inability to produce enough milk until weaning. In drought years when the kids tried to suckle dry teats, they were viciously kicked by desperate mothers. There was no kind of supplementary feeding to help, so the kids died, and the size of local goat herds remained static. Because dealing with kid mortality was obviously a first step to commercializing goat herds, GAP has worked on a number of interventions, starting with the production of feed blocks. Manufactured and sold from home, the feed blocks were doing well until the Covid lockdowns closed shops and ingredients became unavailable. Few small rural towns stock molasses or dairy meal, so GAP had to look at alternatives.



Thobisile Ndlela at work on a feeding trial at Ntonjeni, Ngxengeni, Msinga.

In 2020 it started a new mother-feeding experiment, working with 66 commercializing farmers with 700 pregnant ewes across five districts. This programme is looking at the value of providing supplementary feed to pregnant mothers during the last three months of pregnancy. Does this help to cut down on abortions (a common problem) and give the mother the ability to provide enough milk until the kids are old enough to start browsing? So far, the results have been good. Fed on a mix of ground acacia pods, stover and lucerne, the mothers have had fewer abortions, while kid mortality has dropped to 30%. Mrs. Vamsile Manana, a widow from the Mngwenya area, near Weenen, took the experiment one step further by feeding both mothers and kids, and her success has been recorded in a GAP video that links her work with other experiments, assessing the value of different methodologies for training purposes. Progress on the feeding experiments is reported at Farmers' Days where farmers discuss their views of the experiments, and the possibility of adapting their farming systems as a result. (The video is available on our website www.mdukatshani.com)

The *Msasane* crop failed, but there was an unusually good harvest of *Ugagane* pods (*Dichrostacy cinerea*).

Right: In January upcountry rains brought the Thukela down in flood, swamping trees on the riverbank at Mdukatshani.

Below: For the first time in six years the Tugela Mudfish spawned. Found on the Thukela and nowhere else the Mudfish is recorded as vulnerable on the Red Data list.



A WET SUMMER

The first sign of a good-summer-to-come was the splash of the Mudfish spawning. It was six years since they had last spawned, and we wondered if they had gone forever. The Mudfish (*Labeo rubromaculatus*) are endemic to the Thukela River, and where once we once saw large shoals migrating upstream in spring, their numbers have dropped, the spawning has become sporadic, and the fish are now recorded as vulnerable on the Red Data list. Their coming-and-going is as hard to read as the rain, which has been below average for the past 14 years.

The 2020 - 2021 summer was going to be a wet one, however, with January storms that turned dry stream beds into torrents, submerging local bridges and washing away an unwary taxi that tried a crossing. Up country rains brought the Thukela down in flood for the first time in years, and while social media posted pictures of trucks drowning, and Ladysmith's streets under water, Mdukatshani staff kept watch on the rising water levels, relieved when the river began to drop before swamping our terraces. The total rainfall for the year was 712,5 mm.



The Bushman's River bridge, Nkaseni.



A taxi was washed away at Mngwenya.



A young croc emerges from the Thukela.



THE DIAMOND DIGGINGS

It was one of the big stories of the year. Diamonds had been found at KwaHlathi, near Ladysmith, and as the news spread hundreds of people in surrounding communities left home to dig. When our staff arrived in the Pomeroy area for a Vaccination Day, they found an eerily quiet countryside and deserted homesteads. Mabasos, Majozis and Bomvus had all rushed off to dig. The KwaHlathi Nkosi, Sphiwe Kunene, was despairing. "The land has experienced serious damage with 100s of pits," he said. And even after experts and government officials had visited the area, collected samples, and declared the stones were quartz crystals, not diamonds - the diggers kept coming in.



AKUCHITWALA !

The appeal was heartfelt." *Sifela impahla ngenxa. Akuchitwala kokudodi. Thank you.*" Our animals are dying because rubbish is being dumped here. Do not dump Thank you." The notice was nailed to a thorn tree near the Skehlenge, a dry stream bed on the Mdukatshani boundary which is commonly used as a dumping ground by vehicles passing over the causeway. There are no refuse removal services in rural areas, so households have to do what they can with the refuse in their own yards. What can be burnt is burnt. The remainder gets scattered by livestock and wind, or gets dumped in an "empty" area by passing vehicles.

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

In November the Mdukatshani Learning Centre once again became the KwaMakhonya Voting Station, where happy voters shared chat, jibes, and pots of food served off the back of bakkies by the different political parties. There was a 78,11 voter turnout, with IFP getting 83,74% of the votes, the ANC 9,61%, the EFF 3,69%, the NFP 2,46%, and the DA 0,49%. At Neunjane, Mdukatshani's "Top Farm" a 66,67% turnout gave the IFP 71,35% of the votes, the ANC 22,55%, the NFP 3,88%, the EFF 1,29 %, and 3 other parties shared 0,92% between them.



A WAR MEMORIAL

In September 1944 Mthembu regiments sharpened their spears on this rock as they prepared to clash with their Mchunu neighbours in the Battle of Ngongolo, a war largely fought on the farm now known as Mdukatshani. In the 77 years since the fight the two tribes have become allies, and guns have replaced spears, but the rock has continued to have a place in Mthembu history, honoured for the deep grooves that are evidence of a past when metal blades were sharpened for war. Despite the curiosity the rock has evoked in new generations, it was never given a special position until June, when men from the tribe gathered at Mashunka pay homage to the spirits of their dead kings, enlarging the fenced area around the royal graves - and moving the rock as a war memorial inside the protected space.



SOCIAL DISTANCING
is a feature on local roads

OBITUARIES

Ntombizini Mbatha

Ntombizini Mbatha (53) knew she was dying when she asked for more work in October. For months she had been ill, but she found comfort in her work, threading beads slowly, warmed by the colour, her finish as exquisite as ever. This time her willingness was not enough, however, and when she died of cancer on November 4th her last packet of work remained unfinished. We are going to miss the gap-toothed smile she wore as a badge of courage. It was her answer to the blows life dealt her, her need to keep trying, and to change the world around with gaiety. She started working on farmers' fields as a child of ten, and was nineteen and already doing crafts when she married Mpikseni Ngubane. They had been married 20 years when he died of AIDS, leaving her five months pregnant with five children to support. She was matter of fact about her HIV status. "That disease" could be treated, and she and her young daughter Thandeka became regular patients at the clinic. In 2011 she went to Cape Town for the Threads of Africa Gold Bowl Exhibition, an experience she would never forget. It was the highlight of a period that seemed free of tragedy before her beloved son Wela (23) collapsed and died suddenly in 2018. Her own illness caught her unawares, and she struggled on with failing strength, knowing she had a responsibility to life, but no longer with the spirit to cope. When she died in hospital she left a huge gap in the project, and a sense of a brightness gone.



Bandlile Mtshali

Bandlile Mtshali (72) was born at Mashunka, in the Msinga district before there were schools, and a tribal girl learnt to cook, sweep, and fetch water. At 16 she started doing casual work on local farms but it was hard to concentrate. "That was the time for falling in love", she said. At 18 she was engaged to Sthenjwa Dladla, and after a part payment of 8 cattle for lobola she started life as a married woman. She had seven grown up children before the lobola was paid in full, and 49 years after she joined the Dladla family she finally had her wedding day, a joyful ceremony with the bride as radiant as a young girl. Nine days later her husband died in his sleep, and soon after the funeral she collapsed. She was going to struggle to take a hold on life and it was a long time before she returned to crafts. She had always been a natural crafter, as accomplished with needle and thread as she was with woven copper wire. Two weeks before she died in November she came to report she was too ill to do that Christmas order, but she was going to Greys Hospital for investigation and hoped they could find out what was wrong. She died at home soon afterwards, surrounded by children and grandchildren, and immensely proud of her son Phelelani Dladla, Mashunka's popular local councillor. She was often a spokesman for the women, and we are going to miss her serene and regal presence, her flashes of laughter, her common sense as well as her beautiful work.



Ntombizini's unfinished silver-gold-copper bowl in the collection of Threads of Africa.



Bandlile's swirl-zigzag copper bowl in the collection of Threads of Africa.