



MDUKATSHANI
RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Annual Report 2022





It was a month when it never stopped raining, and it transformed the arid landscapes of Msinga into steamy green grasslands with little springs everywhere, and streamlets running along the roads. The total rainfall for the year was 848 mm, with a record 171mm making it the wettest December in 48 years.

CONTENTS	
The Jobs Fund Youth Project	4
The Interviews	5
Command Headquarters	6
Youth Day	7
Getting Kitted Out	8
What Did They Do in Their Six Months?	9
Training	11
The Jobs Fund Visits	12
Fire and Flood	13
A Year of Disease Outbreaks	14
Auctions and Sales	16
The Royal Show	17
An Unsafe World	18
The Gardens	19
The Children	20
Hair of the Tail	22
The Crafts	23
The Slow Pace of Land Reform	24
Legalities	25
Visitors	26
Obituaries	27

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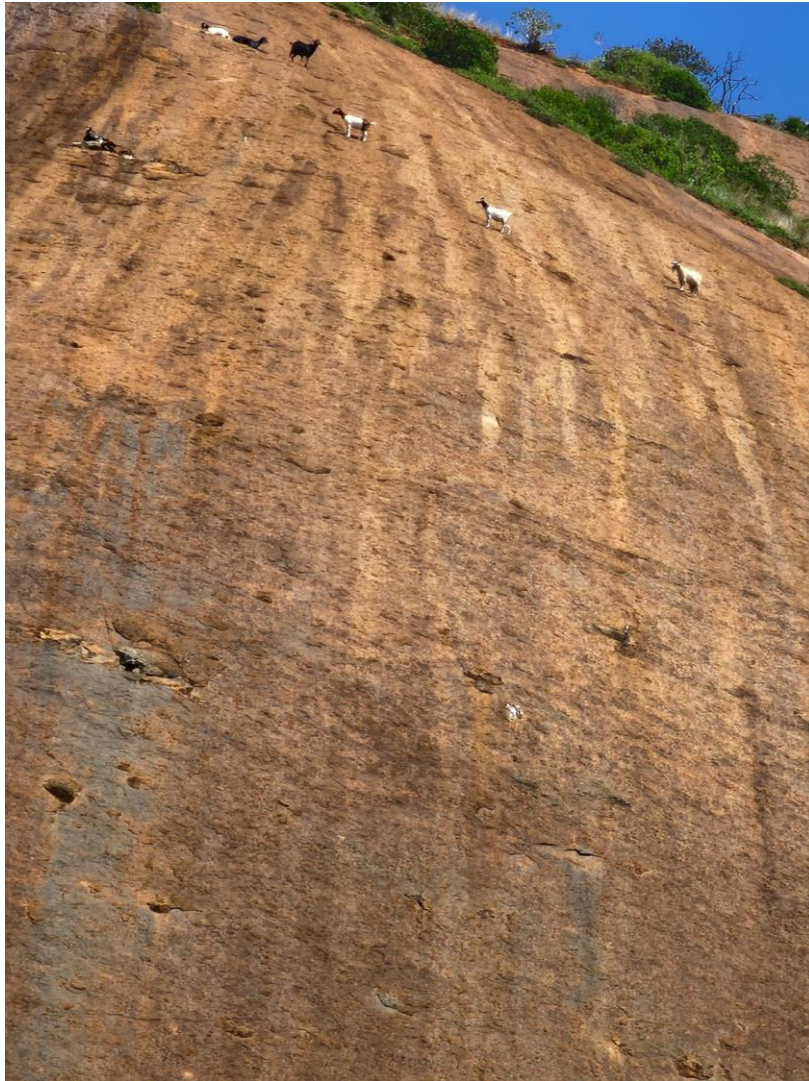
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Mdukatshani's Vision

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.



Goats like airy places, like this rock face in Inanda, a half hour drive from the centre of Durban. Down in the valley there is enough verdant bush to feed the thousands of goats owned by local households, but goats will always wander to get a view from the heights.

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.

THE HOPEFULS



**It was always going to be a bit of a nightmare.
Organizing 3 000 youth from 150 project sites
in 5 districts covering 54 000 square kilometres....**

THE JOBS FUND YOUTH PROJECT

The Jobs Fund has many partners, including the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), and the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention – all concerned with creating jobs for unemployed youth. In November last year the GAP team began work on a proposal for a Jobs Fund project that stipulated a minimum number of 3000 youth be employed 8 days a month for 6 months. Could it be done? Working through our existing structures, yes. Rural areas were something new for Jobs Fund, however, many queries had to be settled before the GAP project was approved, and in March a contract was signed for R 31 million.

Recruitment started immediately, with 10 application forms given to each of the groups with whom GAP is working - traditional authorities, municipal councillors, local livestock associations and dip tank committees. The forms offered a short-term project with meaningful experience which could be used to apply for other jobs. Applicants had to be 18 to 34, not pregnant, proficient in English and interested in working with animals.



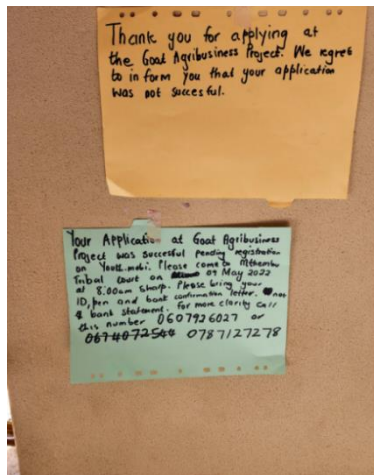
Staff and volunteers worked late sorting more than 4500 applications into the separate dip tank areas that would form the base for each team.



Interviews were brief, but a test of the applicant's English, which varied according to area. Ulundi youth were fluent, while Weenen youth from the old labour farms really struggled with the language. Volunteers like Luke Alcock helped staff do the interviews.



Volunteers, Sienna and Sofia Geraci, help staff to register participants on the online platform, Youth Mobi which will show the youth have been employed and will continue to link them to job opportunities in their home areas after the project.



After more than 4 500 applications had been checked, 3 666 youth were interviewed, and 3 000 offered positions. All applicants were supposed to register on an online system, but as more than 30% did not have smart phones, this proved a major challenge for our staff. There was a good reason for the online platform, SA Youth Mobi, as it could link applicants to a virtual job offer that could be tracked online, and when the project ended would continue to send them updates on job opportunities in their areas. After selection had been completed successful candidates attended “onboarding” meetings where the project was explained, and they were introduced to community leaders. The participants brought their required documentation, and signed a contract to work eight days a month (two days a week) for a stipend of R1 468,55, which included payments to SARS and UIF. The choice of team leaders came next. “At the beginning,” says Gugu Mbatha, the Mdukatshani project director, “we made a mistake. We looked for leaders while doing the interviews, youth who were outspoken and fluent in English. But these were not good criteria, so we asked the teams to decide for themselves.” Each team put up three names, and after interviews 120 team leaders were selected for training. They were going to be crucial to the success of the project, providing the link between daily activities in often remote areas, GAP’s organizers out in the field, and the Hillcrest office where all records were processed.



A mobile call centre for staff was set up in central places that had range, and all prospective candidates were invited to interviews on a specific date. The interviews were followed up with a call if the candidate was successful, or an SMS was sent if they were not. The system worked well, although the project had not budgeted for more than 4 500 phone calls.



The “onboarding” meetings in community halls gave participants an introduction to the Jobs Fund Youth Project, and while many would be working in lonely and isolated places, they came away with a sense of having joined a new and wider community.



The HPSA staff at Hillcrest have been the link between Jobs Fund managers and the Project's team leaders, like those on the left, who are scanning time sheets from the shade of a thorn tree. The hardworking HPSA team has included Thulisile Nomsuthu, Dumile Magwevana, Philani Ndlovu, Ntokozo Mlaba, Jeanne Chainee, and Mavis Blose.



COMMAND HEADQUARTERS

A tiny office in Hillcrest has acted as Command Headquarters for the Jobs Fund Youth Project, connecting the participants of scattered rural areas to meet the demands of the Jobs Fund's managers who need detailed records of everything Online GAP is a consortium between Mdukatshani and Heifer Project South Africa (HPSA), and because the administration was going to be extensive, HPSA became the lead partner for the project, with a special component of five staff who have held it all together. First they had to register all 3 000 participants for online banking, as well as SARS and UIF, a slow process as 20% had no accounts and had to be helped to open them. As soon as team leaders were selected, each was given an entry level smart phone, and it was their job to scan and send weekly time sheets via WhatsApp groups to the Hillcrest office. Here the time sheets from 147 WhatsApp groups were checked for payment, then put online for Jobs Fund to check. It was a system dependent on mobile phones, and assumptions that participants would always be in range, working in villages, not following footpaths, walking long distances to visit farmers in the hills.

This was the Jobs Fund's first experience of KZN's distant and scattered rural areas. Admitting they had a lot to learn the Jobs Fundmanagers treated GAP as a pilot project, always ready to listen to our problems, and flexible in trying to help.



Volunteers walking home together in the Greytown area.



Homesteads are scattered on the hills in the Nkandla area.



THE YOUTH OFFER A HAND ON YOUTH DAY

The annual celebration of the country's youth, the June 16th holiday, became a day of service for the Jobs Fund's young National Youth Service participants who were tasked with helping local widows clean and repair their kraals. Although the volunteers were barely past their training they organized themselves into groups, repairing fences, walls, and shelters, and digging and sweeping until the kraals sparkled. Thousands of blurry photographs were forwarded on their phones, many featuring the owners of the kraals, old women beaming after a day that given them company as well as help. The photographs on this page reflect some of activities that made it a day to remember. For everyone.





Philani Ndlovu and Nobuhle Mvelase in the Alcock kitchen sorting the 120 smartphones issued to each team leader. Because Jobs Fund could not fund data this was an additional cost to the project.

GETTING KITTED OUT
3 000 pairs of boots.
Two thirds in the wrong size!



Delisile Mbhele preparing the small vet kits which each participant would use after training.



The Alcock garage – boxes and boxes of boots.



Bales of replacement uniforms waiting to be loaded for delivery to project teams in distant places

Humans come in all shapes and sizes so the problems with uniforms were not unexpected. First came the safety boots, all in men's sizes, so they did not fit the women who were the majority of participants. Then came the hoodies and track suit pants, all in one size and unsuitable for working in agricultural conditions. After this had been reported we were supplied with boiler suits – without branding. Because GAP lacks storage space, boxes and bales went into the Alcock garage, to be ferried one load at a time to participants in the distant dip tank areas. The cost of transport, back and forth, was never budgeted, nor the cost of staff time, while the repeat trips prevented other work. GAP does not own a fleet of vehicles, which means a single breakdown can be disastrous. When Gugu's bakkie broke down near Nongoma it had to be towed to Vryheid. "119 kilometres," said Zamani, our driver, with feeling. After seven weeks at a Vryheid garage the vehicle broke down again, and had to be returned to the agency, a long period to be short of transport, when the Jobs Fund deadlines made transport essential. Nobody added up the thousands of kilometres travelled to deliver uniforms, although the records are there in our log books.



Not so fast! Because uniforms were slow to arrive these participants from Maconco and Ntunjeni gave a cheer when at last they were kitted out. But their uniforms were going to be replaced by boiler suits like those just handed out to a beaming team from Mashunka.





Treating a newborn kid for coccidiosis, a disease which is transmitted through water and lying in kraals.



Mondli Masondo, a team leader from Ulundi, helps his team members with practical learning in the field.

WHAT DID THE VOLUNTEERS DO WITH THEIR SIX MONTHS

The official title of the project was *Empowering Youth in Agriculture*, and the aim of their training was to support rural farmers in animal health care and goat production. They began their service doing a livestock census with 57 000 farmers, an ongoing GAP project tracking the livestock ownership patterns of African homesteads, a statistic that is currently unknown. A field training in animal health followed, the team leaders tested in a practical exam before they trained their area teams who would be visiting local farmers to help them deal with mange, ticks, fleas and coccidiosis. They each carried a small vet kit, as well as a slimmed down version of GAP's Indigenous Goat Production Handbook to enable them to answer farmers' queries. Lessons in supplementary nutrition for mothers and kids came next, with practicals on collecting local food plants as stover, milled for palatability, with dilute molasses added with olive leaves, acacia seeds or maize. After each group had been taught, they demonstrated the process to local farmers to continue on their own. Feed blocks were another intervention that brought many teams together for the day to produce a target 54 000 blocks that were distributed among 27 000 farmers. Because of Covid lockdowns a shortage of feed products made the acquisition of stock difficult – but we hoped the gift of two trial feed blocks each might prove their value to farmers, who would support any block-making business youth might set up in the future.



A lesson in the many different flavours of stover. Nombulelo Thahe and Sithandile Xulu on a practical, looking for local food plants that can be milled to provide a protein supplement for winter feeding.





The work was varied. Sometimes participants worked alone, sometimes with a partner, and sometimes with their team as tasks like dipping goats or making feed blocks were impossible to do on your own. Whatever the task, however, a signature was required as proof the work was done. The elderly who could not write just made a cross on the page.





Studying theory in the open at Kozi Bay.



A group training in the shade at Mgwenya, Weenen.

TRAINING

There were many different kinds of training during the six months of the project, both theory and practicals, some undertaken in farmers' yards, some in the open sitting under trees. The training was conducted in English "and Zulu," adds Gugu, our Project Director. "It was dual translation", she admits. Her admission is a comment on the fluency of our staff, able to switch from one language to the other to elucidate a point for those struggling to understand. Over the years our staff have become accomplished trainers, and after they had applied their skills to training the Jobs Fund's 120 team leaders, they went out into the field to watch their trainees in action. Not all training was internal, and in August 64 team leaders travelled to Pietermaritzburg for a special two-day short course run by Elanco the international veterinary company. Elanco's lecturers have had a long association with GAP, training dozens of our staff, interns, CAHWs and farmers, and when they started rolling out a brief but comprehensive course on animal diseases and treatment options in South Africa, offered to give team leaders a training. It was going to be the highlight of the participants' period of service. After the first course at Africa Enterprises in Pietermaritzburg, a further 56 team leaders did the short course in Nongoma in October. All who attended received certificates from Elanco, and the costs of training were shared by Elanco and GAP.



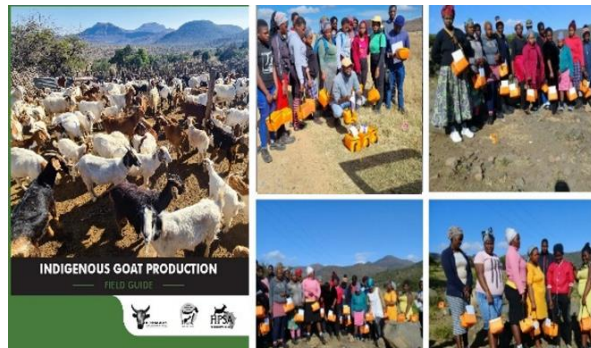
In August 60 team leaders attended the first two-day Elanco veterinary short course in Pietermaritzburg.



In October the Zululand team leaders attended the second Elanco course at Nongoma.



The Elanco course included practicals designed to help participants deal with animal health care problems in the field.



The indispensable GAP handbook was provided as back-up for all the training, together with basic vet kits.

THE JOBS FUND VISITS



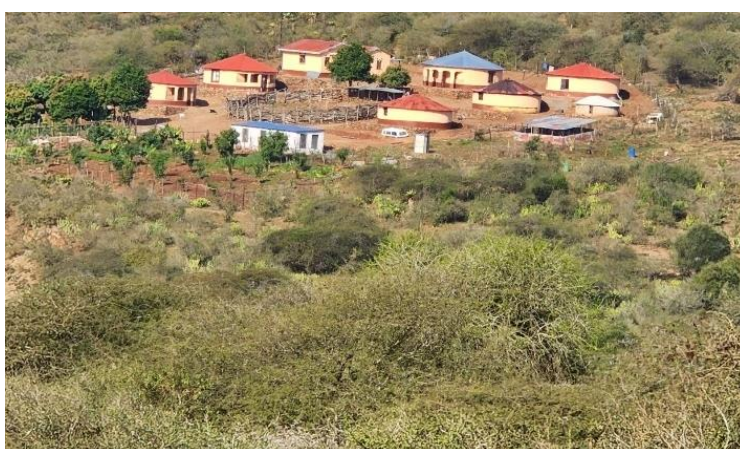
The Jobs Fund team spent a morning with the staff in the tiny Hillcrest office where youth project records are administered.



Multi-generational rural homes are a statistical problem for project managers accustomed to planning for urban situations.



A field trip to the Colenso-Weenen area enabled the team to watch Youth Fund participants at work helping farmers dip their goats.



When a homestead belongs to a family, not an individual who do you interview when attempting a census?

After three months of meeting online, we had become familiar with the searching questions of the team handling our project for the Jobs Fund's National Youth Service (NYS) Programme and welcomed the chance to meet them in person when they flew in on two day field visits in August and again in October. The team was made up of Mulalo Mlimi, NYS Project Manager, Cynthia Kubyana, Financial Analyst, The Jobs Fund, Zamide Ngubo, Monitoring and Reporting Specialist for the Fund, and Ronny Ledwaba, Monitoring and Reporting Specialist for NYS. They knew little about the problems of rural areas when they started but have always been attentive to our difficulties in implementing parts of the NYS programme. Youth with button phones could not interact with the help-line or website, for example, while multi-generational homes raised challenging questions that complicated any census around ownership. The Jobs Fund team had a glimpse of rural conditions when they travelled to Weenen-Colenso and Zululand, happy visits (despite the rain in Nongoma) that confirmed "a good and rewarding working relationship," say our staff. "It has been a refreshing change from the usual interactions with state funders who have little interest in the outcomes of the project."



It was the day the drought broke at last. Although everyone rejoiced at the rain, for Nhlanhla Mthembu, the Zululand Project Manager, it meant changing venues and re-arranging the programme.



The weather meant that the interviews with participants had to be done in one of the homes. Here the group leader explains how the project has affected them.



Two months after this water protest on the Sampofu bridge, torrential rains brought the river down in flood, and two teenagers, Amahle (16) and Lungani Shange (17) were drowned while trying to swim across.



Muden



Keates Drift



Nongoma



Nomoya



Tugela Ferry

FIRE AND FLOOD

Nobody kept count of the service delivery protests that blocked roads and bridges in our project areas this year. Although the blockades were too small to make headlines, they were frequent, widespread, and effectively stopped traffic for days at a time. The bridge at Tugela Ferry was a favourite site for protests as any blockade brought the town to a standstill, but there were many smaller protests in outlying areas where roads were blocked with rocks, burning tyres, vegetation, broken bottles or trenches. Staff became accustomed to changing their schedules because yet another “strike” meant they could not get to work. While most protesters were demanding water, there were also demands for electricity, roads or even speed bumps. The lack of water was acute everywhere, and despite sporadic deliveries from municipal tankers, most homes now buy their water from local bakkie owners, paying R35 for 80 litres which in a family doesn't last long. Yet despite the year's prolonged dry periods, heavy rains in January, April and December brought rivers down in flood, submerging bridges and causeways, and making many roads impassable. Elsewhere in Natal floods cost the lives of 440 people, destroyed thousands of homes, and caused damage estimated in billions of rand. When the streets of Ladysmith were inundated for days on end, all the water eventually drained into the Tugela River, flowing past Mdukathani, and although the river levels were dangerously high, they never got beyond put lower terraces. The total rainfall for the year - 870 mm - was not a record, although it was 16 years since the last heavy downpours produced a total 910 mm in 2006.



Ladysmith



Blaauwkrantz Bridge



Mashunka Road washaway



View from bakkie window, Skhelenga



Tugela Bridge at Jacob Zuma crossing



Rabies Foot-and-Mouth Lumpy Skin Disease

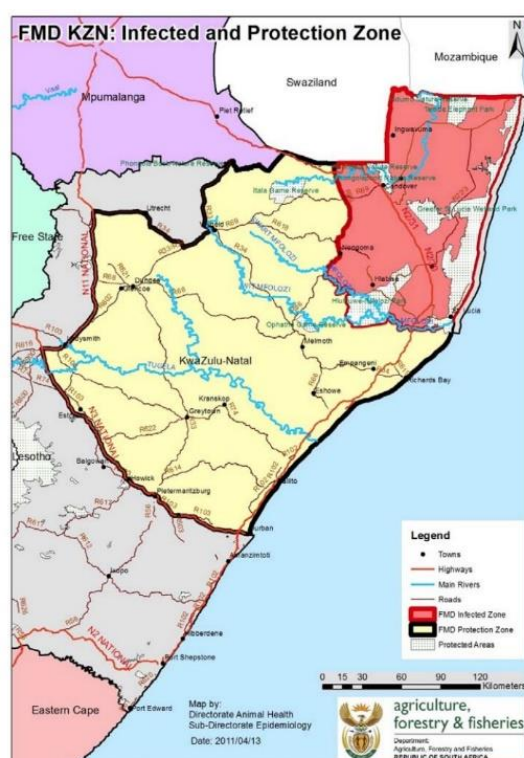
A YEAR OF DISEASE OUTBREAKS

There were many factors behind the outbreaks. Officials absent in the field during the Covid lockdowns meant many annual vaccinations had stopped. Meanwhile above-average rainfall increased the risk of insect-transmitted diseases like Lumpy Skin, which killed thousands of cattle belonging to rural farmers. The first Foot-and-Mouth outbreak began in KZN in May 2021, and after a second outbreak in Limpopo in March 2022 spread to four other provinces, leading to a nationwide ban on the movement of cattle in August. A month later the ban was lifted in most areas but the cost is still to be counted up. (The last KZN outbreak in 2011 cost the country more than R12 billion due to a 3-year ban on the export of red meat and other livestock products).

Because all available government staff were busy on vaccinations in Foot-and-Mouth quarantine areas, African livestock farmers were on their own when Lumpy Skin hit their animals. The experts had seen it coming. "This year's above average rainfall has led to an increased risk of insect-transmitted diseases," warned Professor Jannie Crafford, of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Pretoria. Noting increasing outbreaks of Lumpy Skin disease across South Africa, he described the permanent effects of damage in the animals that survived. Although penicillin is the recommended treatment for sick animals, as a controlled substance it is only available to vets so there was little our staff could do to respond to farmers who were watching their animals sicken and die. The lack of veterinary help for African small farmers has been of concern to outside observers, such as the European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), and in November GAP was invited to join a Multi-Stakeholder Platform set up by the two organisations to consider how to support and extend the training of veterinary paraprofessionals as there are just not enough vets to go around. In KZN for example, there are only 13 state vets available for more than 270 000 rural African households involved in livestock production.



Thousands of African cattle have died of Lumpy Skin disease due to lack of vaccinations. This animal died at Ncunjane in September.



Map showing extent of Foot-and-Mouth outbreak in KwaZulu Natal

RABIES

Rabies outbreaks are nothing new to Msinga, so everyone has welcomed the annual visits of the government's Animal Health Technicians, giving jabs to the local dogs. But for the past three years officials have been busy elsewhere, and according to the National Institute of Communicable Diseases, outbreaks of dog rabies have led to an increase in human rabies cases, with 20 people dying of rabies in 2022, most of them children. (Thirteen cases were laboratory confirmed, six probable). Reporting on the continuing outbreaks of dog rabies in different districts of KZN, Mack MaKhathini, spokesman for the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, said contributing factors included the large number of veterinary vehicles hijacked in 2019, the Covid restrictions which limited effective mass immunisation campaigns, as well as the Foot-and-Mouth outbreaks which took staff away from rabies campaigns.



The gang with their dogs. Most of the year's human deaths due to bites from a rabid dog have been children.

Doing It on Their Own
Community Animal Health Workers test “Mobile Vet Shops” selling medicines direct to farmers.



Nokubongwa Mdletshe
Nongoma



Nobuhle Mvelase
Nkosi Langelibalele



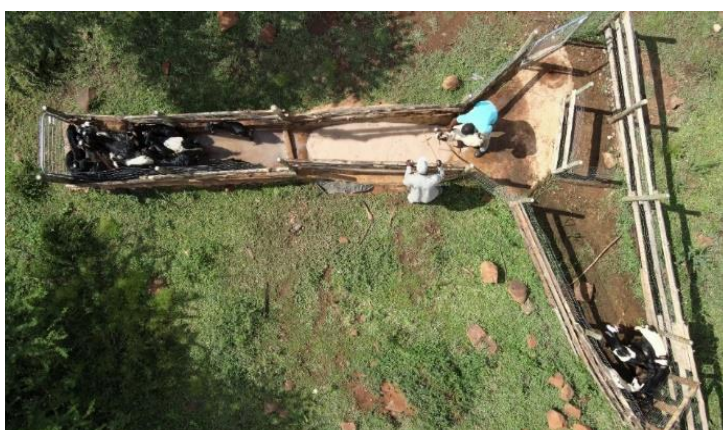
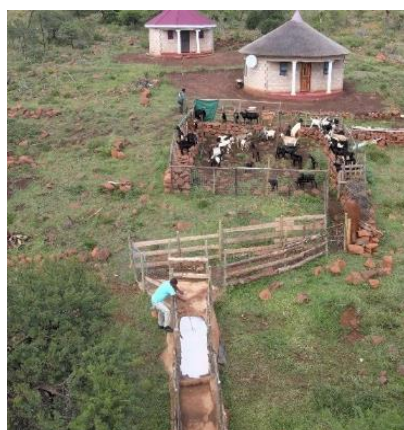
Sabelo Mvelase
Msinga

At present South Africa produces about 170 vet graduates a year (compared to 2 400 medical doctors) which emphasises the need for Animal Health Technicians (AHTs), although until new legislation was passed recently, they were unable to offer advice or inject an animal without special dispensation (as in the case of rabies). While the need for professional paravets may be great, the state is short of money to fund them, which is why the Platform plans to help AHT's develop their own primary animal health care businesses. This is something. GAP has already started piloting with an experimental project that has given nine Community Health Workers (CAHWs) a loan to start using their skills to make a living selling veterinary medicines direct to farmers. Because most rural farmers live a long way from shops selling veterinary supplies, our young CAHWs have been testing the idea of “mobile vet shops”, and the results look promising, with sales of R 62 218, and two thirds of the initial loans of R 35 000 already repaid.

Another initiative that has taken place without government help has been GAP's introduction of goat dips as a disease preventative measure. Ever since GAP's first demonstration goat dip was built at Owen Sithole College of Agriculture there have been requests for goat dips across the province. Communities pay for the dips themselves, and supply their own chemicals for dipping, fully aware of the benefits of a monthly exercise that keeps their animals free of parasites, ticks, mange and fleas. As interest in goat dips has spread, so has the idea of single farmer dips, something that has kept our staff busy this year, testing options at Farmers' Days before incorporating suggestions into the design. The dip feeder system alone has been changed five times, as farmers have wanted a new method of putting their goats in the water without hurting them. The results can be viewed on GAP's YouTube channel

<https://www.youtube.com/@goatagribusiness/feature>

All GAP's videos can also be found on the GAP website at www.gapkzn.co.za.



Some demonstrations of the single farmer dip. Many farmers come to the launch of a new dip without their goats, sceptical of the process as they have never seen goats dipped before. Although concerned that their goats might die while being dipped, they are soon reassured and start calling their children to bring the goats from home.

AUCTIONS AND SALES

Because of the restrictions following an outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth disease in KZN, GAP was only able to hold two auctions during the year, both at Umhlumayo in the Ladysmith area, and working through the Alfred Duma Livestock Association. The auctions resulted in sales of R498 880 for a total of 366 goats. In an attempt to catch up on the year GAP organized a series of bi-weekly mini sales, with all speculators informed in advance.

The real sales, however, took place out of sight as buyers travelled to rural homes where they now buy direct from farmers. Establishing the contacts between farmers and buyers has been one of GAP's big achievements, but although it is an ideal system, the results are impossible to measure. Yet there are many indications of the steady commercialization of local goat herds. At Nkaseni farmers report they now sell 40 goats a week. A Howick buyer has just bought a ten-ton truck for his business. And one of the regular speculators, who never buys less than 60 animals at a time, is reported to be making R 1 million a month from sales.

An ongoing problem for GAP is trying to find a non-cash payment system that caters for small farmers in rural areas. At present all transactions are done in cash, which is dangerous for both parties. Although various cashless banking systems exist, they all require documents that are not available to rural residents. A direct approach to the banks to explain the difficulties is planned for the new year.



Our Auctioneer

Bongani Sibisi grew up at Msinga, and first visited Mdukatshani when he was eight years old, carrying a bag of bones to swap for yellow mealies at one of our work-for-food drought relief projects. He remembered the bones when he returned 40 years later to run GAP's auctions as a much-sought-after professional auctioneer. He says he knew he wanted to be an auctioneer the first time he saw a cattle auction in process, and although his training took him to the city, he returned to work in the rural areas of his home district where his ability to run auctions using English and Zulu interchangeably has made him an invaluable asset. He currently works as Agricultural Manager at RASET (Radical Agrarian Socio-Economic Transformation).



Estcourt town on Christmas Eve. Speculators selling goats off the back of their bakkies.



The first auction of the year since the Foot-and-Mouth ban was lifted was held at Umhlumayo in rain and mud.



All a mini-sale needs is adjustable gates, and small bi-weekly sales have provided useful outlets for local farmers.



Left: Our youth team showing off the President's Trophy for Special Endeavour - Snethemba Dlamini, GAP Community Health Worker or CAHW, Luke Alcock, a gap year volunteer, and Sanele Simelane, also a CAHW.

Below: The goats fought hard to avoid the disinfectant trample bath, part of the strict bio-control measures enforced at the Show due to Foot-and-Mouth restrictions.



THE ROYAL SHOW

Young people took over the design of our stand at the Royal Show this year – going on to share the President's Trophy for Special Endeavour, an award for the best section on the Show. The Stand was certainly popular, drawing hundreds of visitors over the 10 long days of the Show. Our team were kept busy answering questions, as well as looking for green stuff to feed the goats as “snacks”. It was not that the goats were hungry. They were well provided with feed. The problem came from passing children, who all wanted to feed a goat. Eventually a stock of Seringa twigs was cut for the purpose. The species is an alien on South Africa's banned list, but as there were Seringas all over the Showgrounds, they could be harvested as a nibble for the goats.

Although this year's Royal Show was beset by problems, a total of 114 217 visitors passed through the gates, an encouraging sign of the support for the Show, which had to be cancelled due to Covid in 2020 and 2021. This was the 170th Royal Show and would have been due a special celebration had there not been outbreaks of avian flu and foot-and-mouth disease which affected both the displays and competitions. Although cattle, sheep and goat breeders from around the country attended the Show, livestock numbers were down to 1 577, compared to 4000 in 2018. Although strict bio-control measures were enforced for the duration of the Show, the foot-and-mouth regulations meant the annual goat auction had to be cancelled.

City children were enchanted by the goats, animals they had never seen before, and when they begged for the chance to feed or touch a goat kid Snethemba was there to help.





Tensions remained high after the looting, and for months the army continued to be deployed on the freeways.



Billboards warned the public against trafficking in looted goods that were still in circulation after last year's riots.

AN UNSAFE WORLD

In a year that began with the burning down of the Houses of Parliament, many local events went unreported, of little account in a world where violence was commonplace. In KwaZulu-Natal the army continued to be a presence on the freeways, a reminder of the July 2021 riots and looting which left the shells of burnt-out buildings across the province. Sixty-one people are currently facing charges of instigating the violence. But it seems old news, long ago. The following are some of the events that touched on the lives of the communities surrounding Mdukatshani during the year.

On April 13th four Mchunus in search of missing cattle were accosted by a group of Nomoya men, who disarmed them before killing Kehla Phendulani Zungu with a shot to the head. There have been no arrests.

On June 6th "Gauteng's Most Wanted Man" was killed in a shootout with police at Sahlumbe, the area adjoining Nomoya. According to the police Mbuso Ndabazovela Biyela was wanted for eight cases of murder, including the murder of a police officer.



On June 20th police raided two houses in Weenen where they arrested eight men with 24 firearms, two explosive devices and 90 rounds of ammunition.

On July 5th 17 year old, Zodwa Nsele, was killed during an armed robbery at the pension pay-out at Tugela Ferry after she recognized a neighbour among the ten gunmen. As police rushed to block all access roads to the town, four armed men were arrested with a large amount of money.

On September 8th two Msinga councillors were attacked by unknown gunmen while travelling to a municipal event. Siyanda Magubane was killed instantly, while Lungisani Ntuli was injured but survived. Magubane was chairman of the Municipality's Public Accounts Committee, while Ntuli is chairman of the Technical and Infrastructure Committee.

On October 17th Msinga's mayor, Mletheni, Ndlovu, appeared in court charged with failure to lock away a gun in a prescribed safe, as well as illegally handing a firearm to an unauthorized person. Two IFP councillors, Thokozani Sokhela and Mhawukeleni Sokhela, and the mayor's two bodyguards, Msawenkosi Malembe and Mvikeleni Mzolo appeared with him, charged with unlawful possession of a firearm and ammunition. In November the mayor and councillors were fired by the Inkatha Freedom Party, and the Speaker, Councillor F. Sikhakhane was appointed Msinga's new mayor.

On September 9th the body of Fodo Mtshali was found at the foot of a cliff at Mathintha, stoned to death for the money she had been carrying. Her death caused widespread shock. Fodo was formerly a much-loved member of our maintenance team.

On September 10th Bongeni Qhude Mvelase, an alleged stock thief, was killed at Makhupula on Mdukatshani's boundary after being castrated with pliers. Three men have since been arrested.

The year ended with another court appearance of the six men charged with killing whistle blower, Babita Deokoran. Two of the six are local men. Deokoran was killed in August 2021, a hit which Gauteng Premier, Panyaza Lesufi recently admitted was due to her exposure of R 1 billion worth of irregular tenders at Thembisa Hospital. The trial will resume in the new year.

A looter-proof fence in the industrial area of Pieters, Ladysmith.



Two gardeners on their way home, carrying bundles of *mfino*. The women wear Wellington boots as protection against the biting ants that swarm everywhere. Known as Pugnacious Ants (*Anoplolepis custodiens*), they are described as “fast running, very aggressive and predatory”.

THE GARDENS

The costs of irrigation have always set limits on the gardens. Once funders helped to cover the costs, but when support fell away the gardens became a grazing camp which sustained local livestock in winter. There are two factors that have helped to bring the gardens back in production: Hunger, and a new found confidence, acquired from growing dagga. Not every woman has grown the crop, but those who did learnt to use pumps, and better still, gave up the hard toil of hoeing by hand to hire the local tractor. Past tense? After years of steady expansion, the local industry has almost come to a standstill with large areas left untended due to the uncertainties around legality and price. In addition a tribal land dispute led to a ban on the gardens on our boundary. But even before the slow down in the dagga market, Mdukatshani had been approached by a deputation asking if the old vegetable gardens could be re-opened. Households were hungry, grants didn't stretch far enough, and this time they would pay for the irrigation themselves.

It has been a long job, clearing the trees, re-fencing the area, laying pipes, and then measuring and allocating plots in the presence of the Mashunka Induna, Nomthoko Ndlovu. Every gardener contributed one roll of fencing, which was added to a gift of poles and fencing from the local Councillor, Pheleleni Dladla, while our contribution has included labour, the pump, the pipes, and some of the goat proof (but not monkey proof) fence. Everything else the gardeners handle themselves. They pay for the fuel, hire the tractor, buy the seed – and show off their harvests, grinning. Spinach. Pumpkins. Beans. Potatoes. Onions. Carrots. Beetroot. Cabbage. Peppers. “Monkey nuts?” asks a young woman with longing. She's only ever grown dagga. Is it too late for monkey nuts? A wet summer produced wonderful crops, and over Christmas bags of green mealies were reaped for sale, cooked, at Tugela Ferry. The women avert their eyes from the neck-high grass on the verge of their gardens. There's hard toil ahead, clearing the land. They will worry about it later. Not now.



December's rains have been good for the maize, but left the road and pathways buried in grass.



Gardeners wait hopefully for a lift up the hill with their buckets of green peppers.



Qwengukile Madonda shows the monkey damage to her cabbages. She is in her garden almost every day, and over the Christmas season sold her large crop of green mealies to buyers from Tugela Ferry.



Grade Five children from Sinqumeni and Ntombiyodumo line up for the caps and pencil cases which are always presented at the start of a camp.

THE CHILDREN

After two years interrupted by Covid lockdowns, our Animal Health Promotion Clubs were back in full swing with regular meetings of Grade 5 learners at three local schools, Ntombiyodumo, Bambanani and Snqumeni. With lockdown restrictions lifted at last it was also possible to catch up with the delayed weekend camps that have always been the highlight of the Clubs' activities. This year the camps were held at Greystone, an adventure centre above Wagendrift Dam near Estcourt, which had the facilities for 60 learners, together with our staff, school teachers and volunteers. The first camp took place in March, the second in August, and although only vaccinated children were allowed, it did not seem to pose a problem. Although the camps are designed to summarize the work of the previous year, with practical lessons indoors and out, there are enough fun activities to make it an experience for the children. This year Covid was included as a subject in the training programme, and the children were offered a chance to take part in an initiative at **#keready2flex** which offered a prize for any school or group promoting vaccination through dance, song or drama using any media. The results were voted for on social media, and one of our groups won R 10 000 for a video of their performance. A lesson on Covid has been included in the revised AHPC Grade 5 handbook, which was piloted at the camps, and the new stories were obviously engrossing, judging by the attention the children gave to their books.



Children get their first glimpse of snow on the Drakensberg.



A nature walk through the game park at Wagendrift Dam.



Thokozaan Xulu explains the purpose of the new handbook.



Storybook time, and the children settle down to read.



The acting was vehement, intense, with lots of action and a dead body at the end. It was only a brief three minute drama, but the children managed to capture the essence of the controversies around Covid vaccinations, and showed they were acute observers of the world. A video of their performance was going to win them a prize of R10 000, which was shared out among the group at formal school ceremonies, with cash for each child who had attended the camp, as well as a brand new school satchel.



A cash prize and new school satchels for the group.



Winning smiles.

The period of lockdown had some benefits for our staff, who used the time to research, prepare and write a long-awaited AHPC handbook for Grade 6 learners, which means from next year the children will have two structured years as club members, not one. The proposal to expand the programme has been under discussion for some time, and was backed by an evaluation that found both parents and children wanted a second year as they felt the single year in Grade 5 was insufficient. The new Grade 6 handbook includes photographs, lessons and translations, and an initial small print is being tested with both teachers and children. A teachers' guide has also been developed and tested. The guide makes it possible to hand teaching to people who are not members of the Mdukatshani staff, or anyone interested in trying the project in areas where we have no reach. Teaching with both the revised Grade 5 and new Grade 6 handbooks will start in earnest in the new year.



The children call them "Facilitator". Sinezekile Mntungwa (left) is School Field Manager, while Sindi Ngubane (right) helps with the Animal Health Promotion Clubs in her capacity as Area Leader.



Hold, measure, write up, pluck, seal the envelope. The undignified but important process of plucking a goat tail hair and sending them to Pretoria University to be genotyped.

HAIR OF THE TAIL

African goat herds have never been studied in detail, so little is known about the genetics of these herds. Until now. Because goats are animals that can tolerate a future, warmer, harsher planet, they are of particular interest to Carina Visser, Professor of Animal Breeding and Genetics at the University of Pretoria, and she is currently at work establishing a DNA data base that will describe African goats for the first time. Professor Visser and GAP are old friends and collaborators, and the GAP team contributed to the project by helping to obtain a genetic sample of 1 500 indigenous African-owned goats across KwaZulu-Natal. Every goat was measured, described, and had 30 hairs pulled out of its tail and placed in a sealed envelope for forwarding to Pretoria, these hairs will be used to extract DNA to be tested. They will each tested for specific ‘morphometric traits and for linked phenotypic characterization’ this will try link the physical characteristics that farmers breed for with the invisible DNA markers used to understand the link between these. Professor Visser’s study also seeks to create a data base that will record the characteristics of these goats, their genetic diversity, and importantly – the goat’s colours and the role it plays in the animal’s adaptation to its environment. This will help preserve the identity and genetic diversity of these unrecorded goats.

WHITE – the new “purity”.

One of the results of the steady commercialization of goat herds has been a change in colour from dark to predominantly white. There are few ritual ceremonies that make use of dark brown or black-coloured goats, which explains why these animals remain unsold after auctions or mini-sales. There are inherent dangers in a fundamental shift towards white, not only because of the increased possibility of sunburn, but because often unrealized linked genes may be bred out. To track what is happening in the five areas where GAP is working, we developed a questionnaire to look at how, why and towards which colours farmers are breeding, and 10 000 farmers across the province have now been interviewed. A separate process is underway aimed at questioning speculators and traditional healers on their preferences.



Black goats do not necessarily have black kids.



A normal herd is a mix of many colours.



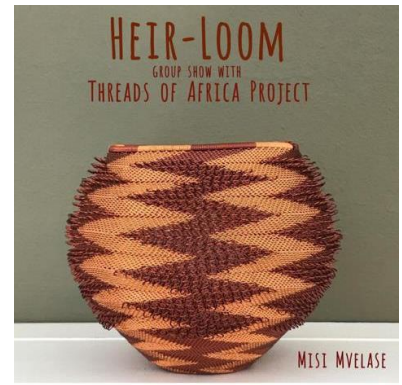
White pigmentation leaves goats vulnerable to sunburn, among other problems.



Votive candle holders ready for an order that will go overland to Kenya.



Distinguished guests at a royal event at Tugela Ferry bought lavishly.



A Threads bowl by Misi Mvelase exhibited with the work of potter Sarah Walters.



Beaded copper bonbon bowls were also part of the order that went to Kenya.



A beaded ostrich egg – the first order for an ostrich egg in 20 years.



Our beaded napkin rings selling in Spain. They were a popular item this year.

THE CRAFTS

The first order of the year never reached its destination. It was burnt en route to Cape Town when the courier's truck and trailer caught alight. What caused the fire? Apart from a police case number we were given no details. The beads were destined for an American customer who had paid R15 000 in advance. The courier's offer of R1 000 in compensation came as a shock. The project does not have the reserves to make up a loss of R14 000.

External events impacted on the project in other ways too. In October, in the middle of the Christmas rush, crafters had to sit idle waiting for copper wire stranded on a lorry caught in a truck blockade on the N3 at Harrismith. The lorry was subsequently damaged by protesters, which led to further delays. There had already been delays in June. "All wire flooded," our supplier reported. "Opened a new container and it was full of mud. Have to get more in Johannesburg."

Our spirits lifted a little when the Gold Restaurant in Cape Town made contact after two years of silence. *We are starting to see some green shoots so things are looking up for us*, wrote Cindy Muller with a large order for needlework, some of it to be worn by their waitresses. As our needlewomen had not picked up a needle in two years they rejoiced. The wire weavers had been luckier, with sporadic orders copper for bowls and bangles throughout the Covid lockdowns, but they were glad when sales picked up and they could work fulltime again.

Our collaboration with Julia Meintjes of Threads has continued, with special orders for our elite weavers. Julia now works from a studio in Cape Town, and although she had long-term plans for another exhibition of our work, the war in Ukraine and the general economic situation have given her reason to wait. In April she was asked to do an evening Zoom talk on the Threads project for a group called the Midlands Forum, and despite her anxiety "entranced" an audience of 300 who afterwards wrote a letter of appreciation to the weavers. (Her talk can be viewed on https://youtu.be/gzFg_3bvIAc). Also in April – Mdukatshani was invited to a royal event at Tugela Ferry where the Mthembu Nkosi, Siphamandla Mvelase hosted a visit from "African Chiefs and Queens" from countries that included Nigeria, Ghana and Ethiopia. Gugu Mbatha, the MRDT Project Director, did duty for us, setting up a gazebo and tables at the Mthembu Courthouse, where she handled the queries of the foreign dignitaries, and did rapid calculations to sell beadwork in dollars.

While the year started with fire, it ended with such heavy rains that springs rose under the flagstones in the Learning Centre, and every bead in every bin has had to be lifted out, dried and stored in temporary plastic boxes. Despite sunny days, the oozes show no signs of abating. Every day they visibly ooze a little further. It will take months for our floors to dry out.

How much land has been redistributed to Africans since April 1994? And what has it cost?

THE SLOW PACE OF LAND REFORM

In response to a question from EFF MP, Sam Matias, Thoko Didiza, the Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, told parliament government had spent R19.809 billion buying 5 198 594 hectares to settle 82 549 land claims. A total of 8 938 claims were settled through land restoration, the remainder through financial compensation. A total of 6 685 claims dating from the 1998 deadline remain to be settled.

One of the transfers stuck in a government office somewhere, is Mdukatshani's attempt to cede a portion of the farm Loraine to the Mthembu people. In March 2020 the Department appointed surveyor Siggy Lautenbach to do the necessary subdivision, but he is still waiting to be paid for his work, despite his appeals for a way forward "so that the matter can be finalized on behalf of the labour tenants who are to take transfer of the farm portion".

Thoko Didiza has been involved with land reform for 20 years, first as a bright young star appointed in 1994 as deputy minister of agriculture and land affairs, and later as minister in 1999, and again in 2018. Her current portfolio is a difficult one, but her experience has made her very clear on where the problems lie, and how intractable they are, and she does not minimize the effects of corruption on the ground. In May she welcomed South Africa's first Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan, co-signed by government and organised agriculture, and in June GAP was invited to a Round Table meeting to discuss how to start the process of building national training systems to take the Plan forward. Most of those attending came from agricultural colleges or academic institutions which offer degrees to train future government agricultural officers, and GAP encountered an attitude of "we'll train the managers, you train the workers/labourers". A promised follow up meeting has not materialized.

Two weeks after Didiza's Round Table GAP was back in Gauteng for a Stakeholder Consultation Workshop on the government's Youth Empowerment Strategy. This time Didiza was absent, and the strategy was presented by Professor Tafadzwanashe Mabhaudai of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Although once again the strategy was tabled, there has been no follow-up since, an indication of the state's general inability to implement projects, despite the many good programmes lined up.



Ms Thoko Didiza, Minister of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. "She is very clear on where the problems lie, how intractable they are, and she does not minimize the effects of corruption on the ground."



Still waiting...In March 2020 these Mchunu and Mthembu men accompanied Siggy Lautenbach when he surveyed a sub-division of the farm Loraine which Mdukatshani is trying to cede to the Mthembu people – a transfer stuck in government bureaucracy.



Rauri Alcock describes GAP's achievements at a workshop organized by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development in Pretoria in January.

GAP AND THE FUTURE

In 2020 GAP was approached by the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) to develop a Goat Master Plan which would be incorporated into the national Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan, signed with much fanfare in May. GAP is referenced as the main social partner for the goat section of the Red Meat Master Plan, but what is the role of a social partner? To offer ideas to consultancies who will do GAP's work through tender contracts with government? In January the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) invited GAP to a Pretoria workshop to do a presentation "showcasing the achievements" of the Goat Agribusiness Project. The assumption was that this was to engage further on GAP's proposal for extending the project across the country, but it turned out to be a presentation to a group of consultants pre-selected by the Department to use GAP's ideas to get contracts from government doing GAP's work. While GAP will continue interacting with the Department, it will not be through this tender-type process.



Increasingly empty offices. The KwaZulu Natal Department of Agriculture and Rural Development lost an appeal against taking the case to arbitration and was ordered to pay all costs to date, which it has done. However, a hearing before the Arbitration Commission seems as far away as ever.



More than 800 pages of evidence have been submitted against a stalling department that has no witness statements yet.



LEGALITIES

In 2016 an agreement was signed launching GAP as a partnership between two NGOs and two government departments, one of them DARD, the KZN Department of Agricultural and Rural Development. DARD's share of the project included funding auctions, training, publications and vet kits. All went well for the first two years. Then the 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 R4 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. In December 2021 an advocate appointed by the Arbitration Commission of South Africa ruled that the Commission was the correct body to hear the case and DARD was ordered to pay all costs so far. The next step in the process has been the presentation of heads of evidence, and a list of witnesses from both parties to allow an arbitration date to be set. GAP has submitted three files of evidence with more than 800 pages, including witness statements, but the Department has been stalling, and has produced no witnesses to far. In August GAP's advocate sent a letter to the Arbitrator demanding a final date for a hearing be set and enforced. There has yet to be a response.

Meanwhile the Department has been in the news for another reason. In September the Hawks arrested Dr. Sipiwe Mkhize (63) former Head of the Department, and Acting KZN High Court Judge, Advocate Sthembiso Mdladla (62) in connection with charges of fraud, corruption and money laundering. After an appearance in the Pietermaritzburg Magistrate Court, they were released on bail of R5 000 each.



Confusing Trade Marks?

GAP Fashion and Accessories Lodges an Objection

In order to prevent the unauthorized use of our name and materials the Goat Agribusiness Project embarked on a legal process to have GAP registered as a trade mark, and although the initial application was accepted, an objection has come from the GAP Clothing Company in the USA which states that it is an internationally recognized fashion and accessories business based in San Francisco, California, and because of its extensive use of the GAP Trade Mark in South Africa in particular, when the GAP mark is used, members of the public are immediately reminded of the fashion brand, which, it claims," has given it substantial common law rights to the GAP Trade Marks, in addition to the statutory rights that it has acquired through various trade mark registrations." The dispute is ongoing.

VISITORS

In March the project was visited by a team from ESWADE, the Eswatini Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise which supports Swazi farmers in the same way as GAP as part of that country's Smallholder Market-Led Project. Our visitors wanted to look at goat dips and was particularly interested in GAP's feeding and pre-priced selling systems. Because they got lost on the way which cut their time short, nobody thought of taking photographs.



Over the years GAP has hosted visitors from most political parties, but Nthako Sam Matiase was the first member of the Economic Freedom Forum to make the trip. A Member of Parliament for the EFF he has made land issues his special interest (See his questions to Thoko Didiza on Page 24) and came to Mdukatshani as part of his attempt to understand rural farming problems. Rain limited the plans for the day, but the discussions were warm and open.



In March a group Harvard academics visited the project as part of a study on potential sources of employment in South Africa, a rich and urbanized country with the highest unemployment rate in the world. They wanted to look at rural economies and the options of job creation, and we set up meetings with unemployed youth, and organised men's and women's focus groups for discussion. Patricio Goldstein, from Argentina, was Research Manager from the Growth Lab, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, and his team partners were Alexia Lochmann, a Growth Lab Research Fellow who came from Italy, and Nidhi Rao, a Research Assistant from India.



Of all the researchers who have worked at Mdukatshani, Manqhai Kraai was the most loved, making herself so much part of the community she became family. There were tears as well as laughter when the Ncunjane people gathered to bid her farewell in September. Manqhai had done the fieldwork for her PhD on goats at Ncunjane, and later, as a Natal University lecturer supervised follow-up research by Masters students. In fact she never left, and this was one reason for the warmth that sent her on her way to take up the position of Senior Lecturer in Zoology at the Sol Plaatje University. In Kimberley. She may have gone, but she hasn't left. Everyone knows she will be coming back. Here she shares a hug with Khonzeni Mchunu.



When Chief S.S. Kunene visited Mdukatshani with nine tribal elders in November, it was the renewal of a friendship that went back 57 years to a time when the Kunene people were still living on Hlathikulu, The Big Forest, on the farm Boschhoek. The tribe had bought the farm in 1870, and 98 years later were forcibly removed by the apartheid government as a "black spot" in a white area. Our founder organisation, Church Agricultural Projects, fought hard to prevent the removals, which saw the tribe moved to an arid area bordering Msinga, while Boschhoek became a military training ground for the Department of Defence. Most of the elders present at the meeting had been born at Hlathi, direct descendants of the 110 tribesmen who marked their names with crosses on the original Trust Deed, a document one of our researchers had come across by chance in the Natal Archives Depository. A copy was restored to the tribe recently.

OBITUARIES



On September 5th David Sithole (9) was swimming in the Tugela River with friends, when he jumped off a rock and disappeared. His body was recovered two days later after divers from a Search-and-Rescue team had been called in to help. On September 30th another small boy, Maqhing Ndamane (10) drowned while swimming upriver near the Nomoya Bridge. Their deaths were a tragedy that left our communities full of heartache.



When Jobe Sithole died in August aged 35, the tears were for his life, not his death. He had had so little from the beginning, carrying burdens of the spirit that broke his mind. He came into our lives when he was five years old, a serious little boy who kept his thoughts to himself and ran errands for everyone. He was reared by his grandfather, Sikiza Dladla, a gentle man, dying of cancer, who tried to give the boy a home. And a surname. When Dladla died Jobe joined the Mdukathani Childrens' Group, helping in the gardens, attending literacy classes, and learning to weave copper wire. At 12 he had a wire bowl exhibited in London, and by 2004 he was weaving with gold. But did we always under-estimate the strains he was carrying? For he was born a Sithole, not a Dladla and when, after a long struggle, he obtained an ID he named himself Mzikawulahla. *He-who-has-lost-a-home* Sithole. The first signs of breakdown appeared seven years ago and he was cared for by his mother, Ngenzeleni, until he died. Yet his grave seemed a place of resolution. His funeral took place in the Dladla home but was arranged by the Sithole family. His Sithole grandfather was there, and the father he had never known, as well as all the Dladlas who had loved.



In early February Mhlaliseni Mntambo (27) was killed by lightning while sitting in a chair at a neighbour's house at Cwaka, chatting during a storm. His two sisters, sitting on grass mats on the floor alongside him, were unharmed. Mhlaliseni had only ever had one job, that of a community Animal Health Worker, or CAHW, and it had given him purpose in a world without work for young people. His uniform, neatly folded, lay next to his grave at his funeral, and together with his vet kit would be buried with him, a measure of the achievements of his life.



Khalisile Mvelase was light of foot and light of heart, and she created a radiance around her. One of the rare local women who never learnt to do beads, although she tried, she became head of our maintenance team instead, mudding walls, sweeping floors, cleaning windows, weeding, slashing, cutting, clearing. She tackled her work like a form of dancing, flourishing her broom as she carried her lightness with her, eager, curious, observant, and engaged, transforming drudgery with her sparkle. She had been frail for two years with an undiagnosed illness when she died on in April, ready to go, but she has left us bereft of the sound of her laughter, and the gaiety that gave us a share of her light. Long widowed, she left three adult children and a crowd of small grandchildren who loved her.