



MDUKATSHANI
RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Annual Report 2024





Just a stone's throw, more or less, from the seat of government, a tethered goat raises questions about political power, and the traditional world of the spirits. How did it get to the Union Buildings? What was it doing there? While it waited in the shade for what might come next, not far away the future of South Africa's goat industry was being discussed at a Round Table meeting set up by the National Marketing Council.

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Contact us

Staff:

Rauri Alcock, Gugu Mbatha, Sindi Ngubane, Thokozane Xulu, Zamani Madonsela, Zanyiwe Ziqubu, Busisiwe Mtungwa, Senzegile Mntungwa, Thobsile Ndlela

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

Trustees:

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

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 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.

OUTDOOR EVENTS



A meeting to relaunch goat groups in the Phuphuma area.



An Innovation Platform on the Live Fowl trade at Colenso.



An Innovation Platform on livestock feed blocks at Pomeroy.



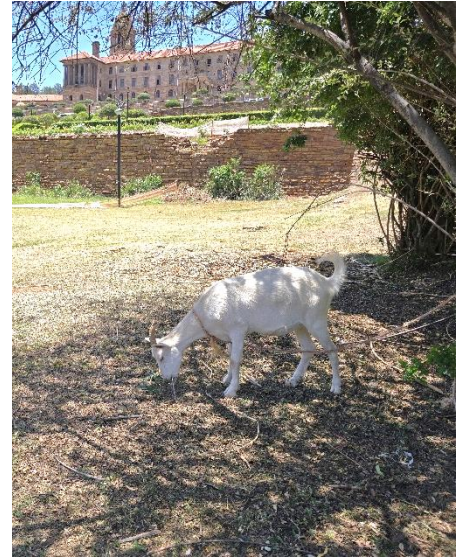
Mdukatshani gardeners at a meeting with Councillor Phepheni Dladla.

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.



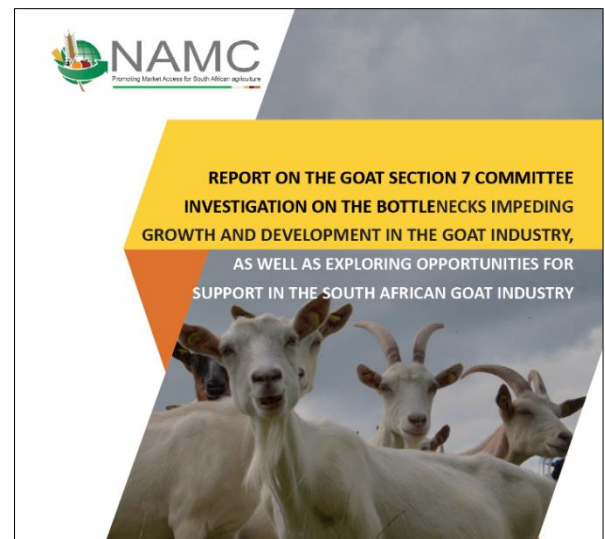
The inaugural meeting of the Livestock Value Chain Round Table took place in Pretoria in July. And no, the table is not exactly round, but this is the group now responsible for implementing the recommendations of the Section 7 Committee report on South Africa's goat industry.



And not far away, while they deliberate a lone goat browses near the official seat of government.

MIRE IN POLITICAL DECISIONS

Mdukatshani knew little about the labyrinths of government when we started talking about a national programme for goats in 2006. In the 18 years since we have made slow progress. After setting up GAP, the Goat Agribusiness Project, with our partner HPSA, we began working with departments, committees and councils, while producing endless reports. One of our big achievements was getting NAMC, the National Agricultural Marketing Council, to set up a Section 7 Committee to investigate the goat value chain in South Africa. A Section 7 Committee is a mechanism to get things moving, and when the report was completed in March this year, it recommended the establishment of a national goat support and oversight organization to help solve the challenges facing the industry - with GAP playing a leading role. But the report was presented to Minister Thoko Didiza just before she left to become Speaker of the House of Assembly in Parliament, and with a new Minister, John Steenhuisen, in the job, the whole process must be started again. Meanwhile agricultural economists are asking when the new administration will roll out the much publicized Agricultural and Agri-Processing Master Plan, AMP, which like the goat report, is considered crucial for job creation, and the production of wealth from agriculture.



Not just another report. A NAMC Section 7 Report may sound dull, but the findings inform policy and have to be implemented by the Minister.



A delegation of the National Agricultural Marketing Council learnt a lot about the informal goat market when they met up with farmers at Neunjane, in the Nkosi Langelibalele Municipal area in February.



"I built my houses by selling goats, and I buy groceries with my money for beads." Nyelisile Sithole was already ill when members of NAMC visited her home in February, and she died six weeks later.



In January the Tugela River covered the Nomoya bridge.



The Ncunjane woodland in flower – before the hail.

THE WEATHER DOMINATES

The year started well. In January heavy rains brought the Tugela down in flood, the woodland into flower, and covered the hills with grass. A heavy hailstorm in June, however, destroyed the gardens, as well as the woodland's acacia pods, a high protein supplement which helps to get livestock through the winter. Then came snow in September – a disaster that blocked the N3 freeway for days, with heavy falls in arid areas like Msinga, where hundreds of newborn kids died in the cold. In a sample survey of 30 farmers from 20 areas we found adult goats had been resilient, with only 24 out of 1254 dying. However, there were heavy losses among kids, where 197 out of a total of 426 had died. The snow melt provided a little moisture for spring, but the month ahead would be hot and dry. By December fields of mealies were scorched white, and Fridays were set aside as a day to pray for rain. A storm before New Year brought some relief, but the total rainfall for the year was well below average, as shown by the following figures for the past five years: 2020 – 712 mm, 2021 – 616 mm, 2022 – 848 mm, 2023 – 683 mm, 2024 – 533 mm.



Burning firebreaks at Mdukatshani in July



Stock losses with snow in Msinga in September.



Boys from the age of 5 work with the livestock and learn how to control the seemingly fierce animals

A NEW LOOK AT CHILDREN

Rural children grow up close to livestock, learning by observing, sharing in the tasks at home. They collect eggs, feed the chickens, fetch sick animals, look after newborn goat kids, milk cows, drive goats and cattle to the dip, and become experts at anatomy watching dead animals being skinned. They are curious about everything, eager to learn, and will always form a crowd at the edge of adult meetings, listening in. Are they an overlooked resource? During a year when we reflected on the effectiveness of our interventions, and interviewed farmers on their views of the future, it became clear we had to do more to draw young people into project activities, and in February we started piloting holiday clubs for children in all our project areas.

The Holiday Clubs were designed to provide informal training, out in the open, to support the activities of children who were members of the formal school Animal Health Promotion Clubs. “But it had to be different from adult training,” said Gugu Mbatha, our Project Manager. “It had to be entertaining. The children had to learn without feeling they were at school. It had to be exciting, so everyone looked forward to it.” There was no doubt about the excitement. The Clubs were not restricted to AHPC members, and we were soon overwhelmed by large crowds of children of mixed ages which were difficult to manage. It was going to take time and a little organisation before local groups began to take shape.



Pre-pubescent girls (left) have no restrictions to working with livestock they are the eyes and ears Mdukatshani want to support in livestock health. The wet years have allowed for the milking of cattle (above) for excess milk, a practice that had stopped during the dry years. The milk is shared with family and sold to community members.

Three members of staff are involved with developing the Holiday Clubs: Gugu, Senzekile Mntungwa, our Information Specialist, and Sindi Ngubane, our Area Leader. They have years of experience working with children in the formal school clubs, and combine warmth and empathy with a sense of play, which is an essential part of informal training.

Initial sessions were designed to find out what the children already know. Because many act as messengers collecting the family's monthly doses of chicken vaccine, this has been a starting point for the training. Everyone has chickens at home. What is Newcastle disease? How does the vaccine work? What precautions are necessary when handling vaccines? How should the dosage bottle be carried? The children are taught about chicken nutrition, and the problem of predators. Snakes and hawks. Gugu laughs. "Of course they are predators too. Kids are always stealing eggs. Their mothers want to get chicks from the eggs. The kids steal to eat."

Although we are looking at the possibility creating training material specifically for the holiday groups, at present we are using our Grade 5 and 6 school club manuals, with stories which are read aloud, a few lines at a time, by children who volunteer. There are frequent stops for role playing, or questions, and a good answer can earn a child an apple, orange lollipop or piece of cheese. The children's existing knowledge often surprises our staff, and having their competence recognized gives them an incentive for learning more. The year ended with a critical assessment of the informal training and staff are now busy with proposals for the year ahead.



First task of the day, fetching water for the home at Mathintha.



Boys and girls help in the goat kraal, keeping watch for sick kids.



A holiday group at Ezisululwini



Eager children answer questions in a holiday group at Neunjane.



Children of nine to 15 are the ideal age for the Holiday Clubs.



And what comes next? A chicken vaccination lesson at Macanco.



Writing the assessment at Ntombiyodumo Primary School.

**Braids?
In school?
Aaah but this was a special week.**



Sindi Ngubane at Sinqumeni Primary School.

THE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

Hair braids are banned in schools, but the last week of the school year is a special time for all Grade Seven primary school children. Next year they move to high school, and the farewell celebrations allow the girls to parade a wonderful variety of hairdos. They may be rural children, but they follow fashion closely, and their braids proclaim they are almost grown up.

The outward display of sophistication caused a lot of teasing and laughter when children from our Animal Health Promotion Clubs met for a final assessment at the end of the year. They had all completed our Grade 5 and Grade 6 storybooks. They had all done practicals. They had all been on school camps. But what had they learnt from the programme? What knowledge had they carried home? Their mothers were there to clap and cheer



Answering questions at Ntombiyodumo.

and compete in providing the answers, and our Trustee, Umntwana Mkhosi Mchunu, was there to hand out certificates and prizes. The written assessment came first. When the children first joined the AHP Clubs they wrote an assessment, and their final assessment two years later would provide a comparison of what they had gained from the clubs. This was important information for our staff who were using a year when funds dried up to do a critical assessment of a project which was launched as a pilot in 2008. "So long ago," laughs Gugu Mbatha, "that sometimes we are greeted by young married people who remind us they were once members of the clubs." The clubs were designed as an after-school activity for children in Grades 4 to 6, the age group which spends most time with the livestock at home. Deborah Ewing, a child participation specialist, worked with our staff to develop illustrated handbooks which use stories to teach lessons on basic human and animal health, while practicals teach the children how to handle goats and identify diseases. There are guidebooks for teachers and staff, and an annual camp is the highlight of the year.



Have the children carried any of their learning home? Mothers and children compete in a quiz that tests the transfer of knowledge from school to home.



Certificates for members of the newest Animal Health Promotion Club at Ngxongwane Primary School at Nongoma.



In February 25 learners from the Ngxongwane AHP Club celebrated the completion of their course with a weekend camp at the White Elephant Game Reserve near Pongola where they learnt about conservation on a guided walk.

There is no organized sport at African schools. If children want to play sport they organize themselves, kicking balls made of plastic bags round open, dusty spaces. Among the many benefits of the AHP Clubs – they provide an after-school activity. Although government teachers have welcomed the programme, their duties lie with an already overloaded official school syllabus, which means the AHP Clubs often have to give way to the formal schooling. This is frustrating for both the children and our staff, who spend a lot of time on preparation.

Is there a better way of supporting the children and their families? This is one of the questions we are now considering, using the insights of our staff who share years of experience in making learning fun. Gugu started working with children in the tentative early days of the project, 16 years ago, Sindi Ngubane joined 12 years ago, and Senzekile Mntungwa five years ago, and if you watch how the children respond to their lessons you understand their value as teachers. There are currently five primary schools involved in the project: Ntombiyodumo, Ngongolo, Sinqumeni, Bambanani and Ngxongwane, although the clubs will remain on hold until our evaluation is complete in the new year.



Ntombiyodumo club members with first-ever certificates.



Chickens were awarded as prizes to the winning quiz team at Ntombiyodumo Primary School where this group correctly answered questions that included: What are the ingredients used in making feed blocks for goats?



Mdukatshani Trustee, Umtwana Mkhosi Mchunu (right) and Teacher DN Choncho present certificates at Ntombiyodumo



Mdukatshani Chairperson, Deborah Ewing, speaks at the farewell ceremony for AHP club members at the Sinqumeni Primary





A bakkie full of MK supporters arrived to sing and dance.

A NEW POLITICAL REALITY

The run-up to the national elections in May generated a lot of heat which made it difficult, at times, to operate in rural areas. Although Election Day passed without violence; the results produced uneasy alliances with political turmoil expected ahead.

As predicted, the ruling ANC lost its majority for the first time in 30 years and had to negotiate a new national government made up of ten parties. In KZN Jacob Zuma's MK Party won 45% of the vote but was forced into opposition when four smaller parties formed a coalition that gives them 41 seats in the 80-seat provincial legislature.

For the GAP project the immediate effect of the changes are new ministers in charge of our work, both nationally and provincially, which means a need to form new connections and contacts with decisionmakers. We are already feeling the loss of Thoko Didiza, the former Minister of Land Reform and Agriculture, with whom we built the Goat Master Plan. After 17 years in this portfolio Didiza has been appointed Speaker of the National Assembly, a powerful position, but far away from her previous work.

The 2024 elections were the sixth since democracy, and very different from those that had gone before. Quite apart from a decline in voting numbers, and ballot papers with a bewildering list of 52 parties and independent candidates, why were there no bakkies serving pots of food to the party faithful? Once rival parties set up catering stations along our drive, and the sound of revelry went on late into the night. This year there was clearly no money for catering, and the revelry arrived with a single noisyt bakkie carrying Jacob Zuma's MK supporters, youngsters who stopped just long enough to dance a challenge, before moving on to dance at other polling stations in the district. But did any of the young people actually vote? Or was Election Day just an excuse for a party? The vote has lost its magic and although 42,3 million South Africans were eligible to vote, only 27,2 million registered, and only 16,3 million voted on the day.

The following are the results from our local voting stations:

KwaMakhonya (Mdukatshani): 236 registered voters

Inkatha Freedom Party: 56,52 %

Mkhonto weSizwe: 34,16 %

African National Congress: 6,21 %

Ncunjane: 406 registered voters

Inkatha Freedom Party: 67,65 %

Mkhonto weSizwe : 24,26 %

African National Congress: 4,41 %

Mabizela High School: 923 registered voters

Inkatha Freedom Party: 77,37 %

Mkhonto weSizwe: 10,29 %

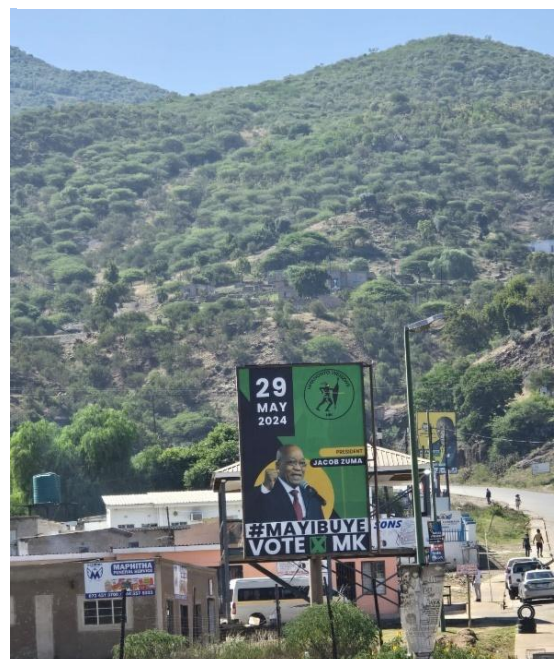
African National Congress: 9,05 %



Dhayimani Dladla lost a good job in the 1980's going on strike for change, and although he is now cynical of promises, he is always an early voter on Election Day.



The IFP campaigned with banners of their founder the late Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, urging voters to *Do It For Shenge* (his Zulu honorific name).



Although Jacob Zuma's face on the MK billboard dominated Tugela Ferry, the district of Msinga remained an IFP stronghold.



Phangiwe Dladla (80) heading home with onions on her head. Nobody knows how she does it, but although she has to walk with a stick, she casts it aside when she's ready to hoe or weed.



The day after the hail, with shredded cabbages going cheap. Velephi Mdlolo has a garden of her own, although her crippled feet mean other members of the family help to tend it for her.



Bongiwe Chonco made R 4 600 from her green mealies this year. "It's the manure" she says. A star gardener who rotates her crops, she shares bags of rich goat manure with the other women.



Cabbage and potato fields just before the hail hit in June. It was a heavy blow for a consortium of three young women who had been steadily expanding the area they worked, ambitious to make a living on the land as real farmers.



It took an effort for Zamisile Dladla, Ndundu Mbhele and Phindile Mgunu to summon up smiles, for these were hail-bruised tomatoes, sold cheap. The buyer was willing to take all they had.

THE MDUKATSHANI GARDENS

After two wet years which produced good crops of mealies, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes, some of the Mdukatshani gardeners decided to expand, forming small consortiums that could share the hard work and the costs of fuel for the pumps. Soon large beds of winter vegetables were visible from the road, drawing comments from passersby. The first tomatoes were just starting to ripen when hail hit in June, an unseasonal storm that smashed the tomatoes, shredded the cabbages, and left potatoes and peppers buried in ice.

The gardeners surveyed the damage with heartache. While there were buyers for bruised tomatoes and torn cabbages offered cheap, most of the gardens were destroyed. This was the second hailstorm in 13 months. Was it worth the effort of starting again? A donation from a well-wisher gave each gardener R 200 towards the costs of the damage, and it was back to work, preparing seed beds.

By September hopes were high again, and for the first time hired tractors came in to plough the gardens from the river the road. Those who had the strength brought in bags of goat manure, loaded on our bakkie every afternoon. A flock of guineafowl came in too, scratching up the mealie seed just planted in the ground. Those who had the means started to irrigate their fields. The majority waited for rain.

It was going to be a long wait, the heat so intense that all the maize in the district shrivelled white, as if afflicted with some disease. In November the gardeners started to pray for rain, setting aside every Friday as a communal Prayer Day at Mashunka, but when the rain fell at last, just before New Year, it was almost too late. Even the fields which had been irrigated were scorched. The heavy costs of irrigation affect everyone, and a dry and withered garden speaks of hardship not neglect. Three families have small pumps of their own, but most of the gardeners are dependent on the Mdukatshani pump which Mandla Magasela will set up on their behalf if they provide the fuel.



Tractors are an innovation that arrived in the heyday of the dagga industry, and they are a boon for gardeners like Hlengiwe Mbatha who struggles to walk, but plants a large field.



Most of the gardeners live at least an hour's walk from their plots and depend on an ancient bakkie to help them get their crops home at reaping time.

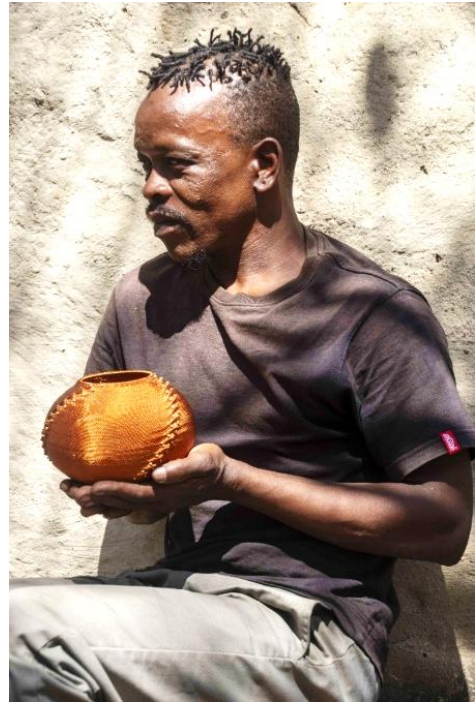
"Two litres," Victoria Lamula promised Mandla recently. She had done a calculation and could just afford it. She would send the money for two litres after Pension Day. Mdukatshani lies on the boundary of two municipal areas, and this year councillors from both areas donated pumps to help the gardeners with the problems of irrigation. The first, in May, was presented by the Mayor of Msinga, F. J. Sikhakhane, and Pheleleni Dladla, our popular Mashunka Councillor. The second was presented, in December, when Thabisile Dladla, the Deputy Mayor of Nkosi Langelibalele Municipality had a meeting of his constituents at Nomoya, and handed out pumps and seeds to two groups from different places. With celebration the seeds were planted the next day.



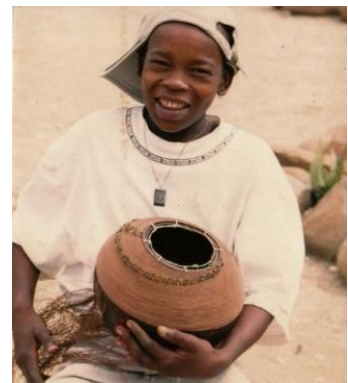
Selling sweet potatoes along the road. Because gardeners have no transport themselves they are dependent on lifts to get their crops to market or sell across the fence to hawkers.



Six months ago this field was destroyed by hail. Today the tomato crop is almost finished, and the mealies are ready to reap.



Mgongo Ngubane never intended to be a crafter when he started weaving copper bangles with the Mdukatshani children's group more than 20 years ago. These pictures show the boy, and the man he has become, a little careworn with lost hopes, but a master weaver of woven metal wire bowls, like the beaded bowl, above, currently on display at a wirework exhibition called "Weaving Meanings", donated to the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, USA, by collector David Arment and Jim Rimelspach.



THE CRAFT PROJECT

It was a good year for the crafts, with fewer lulls between orders, and better paid work for the crafters. The demand for décor items continued, especially beaded napkin rings and tealight holders - small items, but surprisingly slow to weave. Many of the women were often torn between bead deadlines and the needs of their gardens, and there were times when we could have used extra hands to keep up with orders, particularly in the ploughing season, which coincided with Christmas deadlines.

Our elite crafters continued to collaborate with Threads of Africa, weaving bowls and bangles in silver, copper and brass, some of the work commissioned by collector David Arment who would feature our bowls in a major exhibition of telephone wire art which opened at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in November. Called "Weaving Meanings" the exhibition was curated by Elizabeth Perrill, an expert on Zulu ceramics, and is based on a collection of more than 2 000 pieces of wire art, part of which has been donated to the Museum by David and his husband, Jim Rimelspach.

The collection began in the early 1990s when David and Jim were travelling through South Africa, buying wire baskets along the way, and a friend, the fashion icon Marianne Fassler, put them in touch with Marisa Fick-Jordan, an artist and designer who was working with women at Siyanda, an informal settlement near Durban, developing their skills in wire art, and struggling to find outlets for their work. David has described his first visit to Siyanda as "life-altering", and it marked the beginning of a friendship that has seen traditional wire work recognized as an art form, with expanding sales across the world. "For that was our initial goal," says David. "To recognize the artists and ensure they made a livelihood out of their art." The excitement has never faded. After that first sweltering day in the township David and Marisa sat up late planning a book, *WIRED: Contemporary Zulu Telephone Wire Baskets* which was eventually published in 2005, with examples of Mdukatshani's copper work included. For Marisa had taken us under her wing and was helping us find sales outlets too.



Left: David Arment with part of his telephone wire collection, our very different copper bowls visible on a shelf behind him. Below: The International Folk Art Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where the exhibition will run for a year.



“She has collaborated with everyone, from Herve DiRosa to Christian Dior.” And us. Marisa Fick-Jordan with David Arment and Jim Rimelspach at the Santa Fe exhibition.

Marisa arranged the first exhibition of our woven copper wire bowls at the Alliance Francais. She found us money for training. She got us orders from Oprah Winfrey – and she introduced us to David Arment. She is the most reliable of friends, as passionate about the details of the crafters’ lives as she is about their work, and always willing to go a little further to help. She has handled the formalities of Customs on our behalf, and when a large order arrived in a wooden crate, she sighed. The crate couldn’t leave the country without first being fumigated, which meant opening it up, unpacking it, spraying it, and closing it up again, all of which she did without telling us.

Wirework has changed dramatically in the past 30 years, and although recognition has meant higher earnings for many of the artists “not everyone selling baskets is as *fair trade* oriented as they claim,” says David. And for most crafters even well-paid work is sporadic. While it makes a valuable contribution to the family income, it seldom provides a livelihood. Even a master weaver, like Mgongo Ngubane, can earn more as a farm labourer paid the government’s minimum wage of R 220, 64 a day. This is a heady amount for any crafter, but a theoretical one in our area where the exodus of white farmers due to land reform means there are no longer any farm jobs available.



A different kind of artist. Msawenkosi Mchunu carves Wild Olive sticks for a living, the satin smooth surface of his sticks beaded for orders by our crafters.



There are too many male birds in home flocks (above) and as their meat is tough, they have a low value at Live Fowl sales - unless the colour of their feathers is in demand.

Left: Young chicks prance like ballet dancers with plastic wing attachments called *Irockets*, a protective device we are testing against hawks which swoop in on chicks not yet three months old. The plastic alters the chicks' shape and makes them look bigger.

Making an Invisible Market Visible

THE LIVE FOWL TRADE

The women were intrigued. They had been invited to attend an Innovation Platform - a meeting to discuss an experiment with chickens. Everyone had chickens. Everyone ate chickens, sold chickens - and had all kinds of problems with chickens. The problems were for another day. This meeting would be about sales. Our staff had been running test sales at village markets, and were going to report on the potential of the live fowl trade, covering subjects such as the pricing differentials based on colour and demand, and cages for presentation. Much they passed on would be a revelation. It was going to be a memorable day.

Although chickens are a familiar sight in African yards, they are regarded as a source of food for the home, with little recognition of their value for the live fowl market. This was the subject our staff tackled at two Innovation Platforms early in the year, with many smaller farmers meetings in the months that followed. And the results are becoming visible in the number of birds now being sold at formal livestock auctions, as well as village markets, sometimes a cage full of fowls, sometimes a single bird in a special colour. For if the chickens are needed for a traditional ceremony, colour is crucial, and prices will be dependent on colour. Most buyers say "white chickens have no parents". They were hatched in an incubator, not under a real chicken, so cannot be used for spiritual ceremonies and this is reflected in the price, for while a broiler sells for R70, a speckled fowl sells for R 120, and a sought-after rare grey chicken for R 450.

Not all live fowl sales are linked to colour. There is also a market for tough, non-broiler chickens which are made into specialized stews called "Cornish hen curries", a local delicacy among Asian people who willingly pay twice the price of a broiler for one of these birds. And of course there is a market for broilers too, those "orphan" white birds which are bought as chicks and reared to be sold from the back of bakkies of informal African traders. It may not be a market for our farmers, but they listened intently to the broiler sellers who came to our meetings to explain prices, and the periods in the year with high volume sales. The project is hoping that as chicken production increases, these bakkie sellers will help to connect rural farmers to the urban centres, where the real market lies.



A brisk trade in live fowls on the side of a formal auction at Colenso.



Luxury suites



Sticks and plastic ready to be hoisted.

DESIGNER NESTS



Old Tyres



An old iron drum

In June we conducted a baseline which showed farmers were selling and slaughtering at least 35% of their grown chickens. However counting their flocks revealed only 56% were female, a common problem in chicken flocks where at least half the chicks hatched are male. Given their low value as unproductive (non-laying birds), with tough-textured meat, they are difficult to market at live sales. Of the eggs laid only 5% became chicks that added to the flock. This could be from eggs being eaten or lost. Because nests are often badly designed or non-existent, and very vulnerable to predation by cats, dogs, snakes (as well as children who steal eggs to eat) the project has

been working on practical examples of nests which can be made out of local scrap material, and scaled up to protect eggs and increase the number hatched. We are also looking at ways of protecting small chicks from birds of prey by giving them wing attachments of bright coloured plastic which alters their shape and makes them look bigger than they are. Hawks are cautious about attacking birds too big to scoop up at speed, so mature fowls and chicks older than three months don't get predated. The experiment is being tested across the project area with wing attachments in different sizes and colours, and if it is successful we will scale it out with farmers.



Live fowl sellers are an increasingly common sight at auctions and markets, some offering a cage full of birds, others just a single fowl in a striking colour

A Scaly Leg Outbreak

Chicken legs are eaten as a delicacy, so a widespread outbreak of “scaly leg” meant many farmers could not sell their fowls and appealed to Mdukatshani for help. “Scaly leg” is caused by tiny mites that bite the legs of chickens, causing large scales, or scarring, an ugly condition that affects the health of the birds in addition to making them unsaleable. Farmers asked if there was a simple, cost-effective way to treat the problem, and we tested four treatments: Paraffin, two locally available insecticides, as well as the chemical benzyl which is considered an organic treatment although it is difficult to source. Different farmers tested the different treatments, dipping the legs of affected fowls in selected solutions weekly. And paraffin was the answer. At the end of a month the birds treated with paraffin had legs once again clean and healthy.



Staff members Sindi Ngubane (left) Thobsile Ndlela and Busisiwe Mntungwa demonstrate the effects of scaly leg mites on chickens at a farmers' meeting.



The legs of a healthy chicken (left) compared to the deformed feet and toes of birds affected by scaly leg mites.



Different treatments done weekly for a month – with the best results from paraffin.

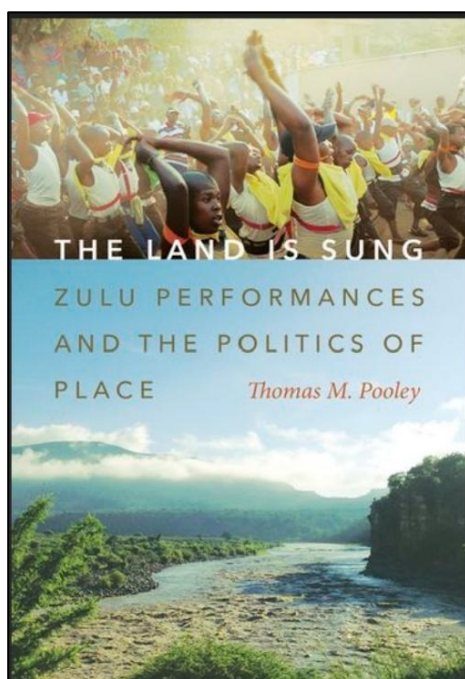


It's hard to conceive of an event like this taking place in a suburban home, yet this is an ordinary dance team at an ordinary *memulo* at an ordinary home on our boundary.

The Land is Sung

It's hard to conceive of a *memulo* taking place in a suburb. A *memulo* is a traditional Zulu coming-of-age ceremony, a two-day event with different parts attended by the entire community. A *memulo* marks a girl's readiness for marriage, with singing and dancing and rituals to the spirits – a celebration that recognizes two worlds. One of them a political world? Is that what underlies the singing? In 2011 Thomas Pooley attended his first *memulo* at Mdukatshani, the start of a research project that would stretch over 10 years and finally appear this year as *The Land is Sung – Zulu Performances and the Politics of Space*. * “This book is about performances as political acts,” he says as he sets out to describe the ordinary events of ordinary communities in three different areas of KwaZulu Natal, following migrants to their dances in the hostels, while discovering the vitality of singing in schools. It is difficult to summarise his results for a non-academic audience, but in a review of the book Harvard Professor Jean Comaroff wrote *Sound, he suggests, can be seen as a means of occupation; to make sound is to declare a kind of territory – or ‘sonic’ space – one uniquely porous and unbounded.*” Tom put it another way. “The singing of Zulu cultures in the land of their forebears is a powerful rendering of spiritual commitment across generations. To be in and of a place is to draw strength from it...”

**The Land is Sung- Zulu Performances and the Politics of Space* is published by Wesleyan University Press
Thomas Pooley is Professor of Musicology at the University of South Africa



The first day of a *memulo*, danced on a ground outside the homestead.



The second day of a *memulo* danced in the cattle kraal at home.



Whatsapp has transformed marketing in rural areas. First launched in 2009, the app was immediately popular in urban areas, with 20 million users by 2015, but it took a while for farmers in “deep rural areas to realize the benefits, investing in smart phones to sell goats and negotiate prices.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF SELLING

Nobody who was there will ever forget The First Great Goat Auction at Msinga. It was a huge achievement – and a nightmare. The timing was bad. March 2013 was a month of searing heat, with the goats in poor condition after drought. There was no water at the sales yards at Tugela Ferry, and no transport for the goats. Our staff worked until midnight, providing both. They were exhausted, but light-hearted when the bidding started the next day. For the first time indigenous goats were getting recognition. This auction was making history.

The first auction raised R 565 250 for 564 goats owned by 150 farmers. That was about R 1000 a goat, and the news spread rapidly. When the second auction was held that November there were more than 2000 goats on offer, and the crowds who arrived to pack the stands were there for entertainment. They hooted in delight as the auctioneer began his singsong. What a sound! Was he talking or singing? Did it matter? More people crowded in to listen. In the holding pens outside goats sweltered in the heat as arguments broke out over sales. Farmers refused to sell their animals in lots. They wanted to sell them one by one. The results were predictable. It was dark before the last goat was led into the ring, prices had dropped to R50 a goat, and with about 1000 goats going back unsold, there were a lot of disappointed people. AAM, the auctioneers, worked late into the night doing payments, with a final tally of 1027 goats sold for R 731 240.00.

Was it worth it? Nobody totalled up the costs, most of it carried by the Department of Agriculture, with Mdukatshani’s share about R 150 000,00 which meant an average of R 146, 00 for every goat sold. A big subsidy. Yet despite the problems and the costs, the auction had served its purpose. It had set prices so speculators could no longer take advantage of local farmers, and it had alerted buyers to the number and quality of goats in the area.

Much has changed in the years since. By 2017 we had joined forces with Heifer Project South Africa to form GAP, the Goat Agribusiness Project, and although smaller, more local auctions continued, we started experimenting with sales. A sale was different from an auction. The one needed an auctioneer who charged commission, the other needed a set of metal gates. The gates are portable, can be erected anywhere, and buyers and sellers can meet direct, with sales free of commission. The sales have been popular with everyone and by 2023, to cope with the demand, our staff were organizing mini sales at local dips, close to farmers’ homes, informing speculators in advance that the goats would be there, a system that guarantees stock, makes access easy, and works well.



More than 2000 goats were on offer, but only 1027 would be sold.



The costs of setting up the pens was high.



In an attempt to get CAHWS and farmers to take over sales, Mdukatshani is trying a new hybrid system that will enable young farmers to earn a commission from selling goats.



The first test sale was planned as a partnership between the Colenso and Ncunjane communities, with lots of opinions beforehand, checking everyone knew what to do



Despite training farmers continue to object to selling their goats in lots at a single price. The new hybrid system allows for bidding to push individual prices higher.



Prices are often linked to where the goats are in the queue, which causes farmers to argue about fairness. This is a problem still being negotiated for future sales.

Over the years we have developed a large network of buyers and speculators, connecting them to farmers and drawing them to our sales which ensure quality animals, medically vetted, which are not stolen. Even a small sale costs money to set up, however, and to relieve Mdukatshani of the costs of management and planning, we have started initiating a hybrid sales system, part-auction part-monthly sale, which can be run by young farmers earning commission on sales. The first was planned as a partnership between the Colenso and Ncunjane communities, the young farmers running every aspect of the sale, including bidding to push prices higher, with a pre-arranged commission on every goat sold.

There had been three sales before the end of the year, despite the challenges of co-ordinating the many activities and responsibilities of an auction across different groups of people. And it remains difficult to get widespread acceptance of the electronic payment system. In addition, prices are often linked to where the goats are in the queue. It takes about 20 goats for prices to settle as buyers and sellers get a feel of supply and demand. Then after midday prices drop as buyers push for bargains to fill their vehicles so they can leave. This means goats presented at the beginning and end of an auction are at a disadvantage, and groups of farmers will argue hotly on the fairness of their place in the queues. This is a problem yet to be resolved.



They may be on home ground but these women farmers dress in their best to watch their animals being sold, the prices varying according to age, colour and size.



A Footbath to Prevent Limping

The problem of ticks has increased with the recent wet seasons, and many farmers have complained of their goats limping as ticks bite in between the hooves. There is a cheap and reliable method of prevention - a foot bath the goats walk through on their way back from the veld, something we built in the 1970's for a goat milking project underway at that time. After discussions with farmers it was agreed we experiment with a footbath that could be integrated into a farmers' yard and management system, and Nyoni Mchunu, one of the farmers commercializing goats, offered to help build one in his kraal - with the proviso it be protected from children and chickens when not in use as the liquid dip was deadly. A template was taken from the original foot dip and the photographs show the result. There is just one problem - getting the goats to walk through the footbath as part of their daily routine. Goats hate getting their feet wet, so the first part of the experiment is seeing how long it takes for them not to be bothered by the footbath.



A post-mortem to find the cause of death.



Learning how to castrate a goat.

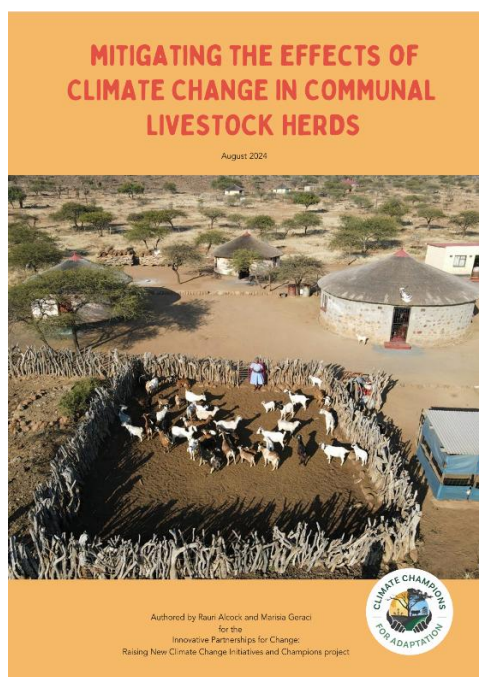
The Community Animal Health Workers

The year began with an extensive evaluation and revision of the Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) project. Each part of the project was evaluated, from the recruitment methods that got us the best CAHWs, to the type of work that proved most successful. The training programme was also evaluated, and parts reconfigured based on what had worked best. Although CAHWs and staff had taken part in postmortems during trainings with MSD, it had been a hands-off situation, and we launched a series of post-mortem trainings to give them a better understanding of what to look for, and how to support farmers who reported dead animals without knowing the cause of death. Because castration to improve herd productivity was not sufficiently understood, CAHWs and staff were trained, and then tested on how well they could carry out what they had learnt. A popular part of the training was dosing each other with condensed milk - an exercise aimed at showing the complexity of getting medicine swallowed and preventing animals choking when being dosed. Our staff also helped CAHWs to create online profiles to attract clients, showcased them on social media, and helped with the



Dosing has to be carefully done to prevent the animal choking.

production of posters and labels to promote homemade energy blocks. And to help the CAHWs build up and manage their financial reserves, former staff from SaveAct provided training on how to set up a Saving Club, and with a joint account now active, CAHWs will report on progress.



African farmers produce 3% of South Africa's grain
 They own 10% of the country's chickens
 They own 12 % of the country's sheep
 They own 31% of the country's cattle
 And they own more than 84% of South Africa's goats.

While statistics show the number of households involved in farming activities in South Africa is steadily dropping – only in goat farming is the number increasing, a trend linked to a hotter, drier climate? In August Rauri Alcock and Marisa Geraci took a look at the future of livestock in a warmer, drier environment, reporting their results in a report which concluded “Livestock support for African farmers seems to be the way to avoid the worst of climate change.” *Mitigating the Effects of Climate Change in Communal Livestock Herds*, is published by Innovative Partners for Change: Raising New Climate Change Initiatives and Champions Project.



Staff member Busisiwe Mntungwa, at a Farmers' Theme Day at Phuphuma, telling farmers of the possible benefits of Supacalf, a new medicine on the market which we are testing as a treatment for diarrhoea in goat kids.



Goats lined up ready for inspection at a Farmers' Theme Day on diarrhoea at Phuphuma, near Pomeroy.



A Theme Day is an information-sharing day for farmers like these at KwHadebe, Ellesmere Dip.

Farmers' Theme Days

Diarrhoea. It's a favourite topic at Farmers Theme Days, when farmers choose the theme, and we try to respond, sharing information and practicals. While worms, heartwater and pneumonia also feature on the request list, diarrhoea is the real killer. In a bad year 60% of goat kids born may die of diarrhoea, and even in a good year a farmer may lose 40% of his kids. So what causes the diarrhoea, and how can it be treated? There are three types: One caused by food poisoning, one by tape worm but the most difficult is caused by Coccidiosis, a protozoan parasite that affects the intestinal tracts of animals. It is a complicated bug that forms a type of seed pod in the soil where it waits for new victims, which means it is hard to prevent. It can really only be treated. Most farmers attempt some form of medication. But is it correct? And are they diagnosing properly? A Theme Day is a two-way discussion held at a farmer's home where his goats have been held back for inspection, and he takes the lead, explaining how he checks his animals, and what medicine he uses to treat them. Our staff are there to check his animals for any signs of diarrhoea, to explain what medicine should be used, and to demonstrate how treatment should be done. Because diarrhoea in newborn calves is as much a problem as it is in goat kids, a new type of antibiotic, Supacalf, has appeared on the market, and we are currently testing this on goats.

IN BRIEF

A Farewell for Three Members of Staff



Mphephetho Masondo joined our project as a trained craft worker in 1974, but his exceptional ability at anything mechanical soon had him in charge of all our vehicles. Although he is now in a wheelchair, when a machine breaks down, it is still taken to Masondo for advice. Deeply interested in politics, he led many initiatives in the early days of our land reform programme, despite a leg crippled by polio as a child, and an ongoing battle with ill-health. He lives in retirement with his family on Mdukatshani.



Nobuhle Sithole had a special gift with women and children, and in her 15 years with Mdukatshani she started the project's home chicken programme, working closely with chicken expert, Ed Wethli, training women farmers on chicken production and productivity. She started our vaccination programme against Newcastle disease, and helped to set up the first Animal Health Promotion Clubs at local schools. She had laid strong foundations of affection and trust when she left to become Mrs. Sibiya.



Falakhe Ndlela was one of the best farmers in the district when he joined Mdukatshani in 2014 as a teacher with knowledge to share. Nobody noticed he was illiterate. His fields of maize and his large herd of cattle spoke for him. He had never had training, but his practical knowledge of farming went deep, and his demonstration fields at Mtatheni produced butternuts (a new crop in the district), varieties of green manure, and maize, all of which were readily marketed. He was sorely missed when he retired.



Willem Kleyn, Sipho Hlophe and Faffa Malan at a Nongoma training.

Willem Kleyn and Dr. Faffa Malan have been training farmers and Paravets in partnership with GAP since 2015 when we became the first community initiative to use their chicken vaccines. Working first for MSD and then for Elanco, they have over the years been big supporters of our CAHW programme, with annual trainings at the Malelane Training Academy. When MSD closed their training division, they became a travelling team with Bayer, which was then bought by Elanco, an international animal health company.

In March we had a two-day Animal Health Workshop hosted in Pietermaritzburg by Elanco Veterinary Medicines. There were 70 participants, including staff on refresher training. We have since heard that Elanco has restructured that division, retrenching most of the staff, so the future of training is unclear. These changes reflect the state of the international animal health industry, which is cutting back on physical stores in favour of online buying, with reps going in person to large factory farms - a situation that leaves small farmers to struggle on their own.



In November the National Development Agency held a meeting at the Mchunu Traditional Court, informing the community of available funding opportunities, and encouraging farmers to set themselves up as co-operatives.



In October Rauri Alcock gave an overview of South Africa's goat industry to a Livestock Academy organized by Landbouweekblad at Nampo-Alfa, Bothaville. Here he is seen with the Editor of Landbouweekblad, Chris Burgess.



Sorting out the audit rules. From left: Rauri Alcock, Cleonna Ilett (Misereor South Africa Desk), Christian Maywurm (Misereor Germany), Hayley Lourens (MRDP Bookkeeper), and Gugu Mbatha (MRDP Project Manager).

A Visit from Misereor – Auditors and Paperwork

In May Mdukatshani had a visit from Christian Maywurm, who works for Misereor's Quality Assurance Department, part of a team that reports to the auditors of the German Government who are the majority funders of a project like ours. Christian was visiting to sort out some issues the German Government had raised around its rules and funded organisations, which meant a clearer reporting and documentation system that aligned with these rules. The first audit of the new Misereor grant is underway and should clear up any technical issues. Meanwhile we started on a massive office clean-out, going through the files of years and projects past, deciding what was relevant for scanning and archiving. Because we are expected to hold all documents and financial records for at least six years, we already have a filing system in place, but as most slips fade over time, we are now digitalizing all files going back to 2016.



Marisia Geraci of HPSA, left, and forensic auditor Margaret Kruger at work on the financial records that underlie our claims.

AN UNEQUAL CONTEST

It has taken six years, and 6 000 pages of documents to get the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to concede it owes GAP an amount of R 600 000 for costs incurred in a shared project in 2019. But that is all the Department is willing to concede, and in August 2025 all parties will once again, return to the Arbitration Commission to argue over an amount of R 4 248 750,00 which GAP maintains is still due for auctions, training, publications and vet kits. Pitting an NGO against a government department will never be a fair contest, which was obvious in August when the two sides met the Arbitrator for what was meant to be a final hearing – DARD there with five legal advisors, GAP present with two. From the start DARD has played for time, aware that an NGO has no resources to cover legal costs, and in 2021, when the department made a fruitless attempt to have the case removed from arbitration, it was ordered to pay the legal costs we had incurred to that date. We really thought the end was in sight when a date was set for five-day hearing in August, but despite weeks of preparation our legal team was not going to be needed after all, for at the last minute DARD introduced a forensic auditor, Margaret Kruger. Admitting she had sat on the case for eight months, she spent the next two months with Rauri Alcock and Marisia Geraci, examining our faded slips and invoices. As DARD has conceded it *did* owe us money after all, the Arbitrator's job has been simplified, settling how much time and mileage we are due, and at what cost per unit.

IN BRIEF



Did we really generate all that paper? Staff worked for days going through cupboards, filing cabinets, bins and boxes, sorting what could be thrown away and what was needed for the archive.



And here are some of the files that piled up for scanning to create a digital archive of our records.



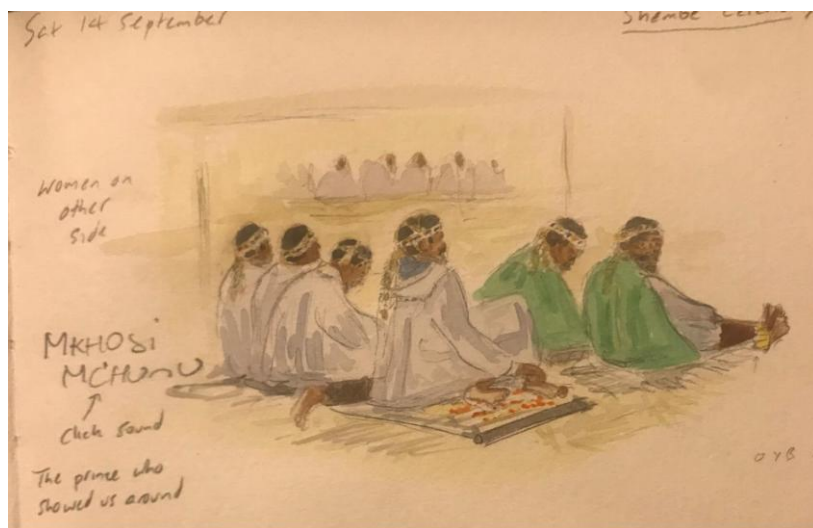
In January work started on partially rethatching the Learning Centre roof to repair the damage caused by old age and termites. A wet summer made it a stop-start operation, but most of the leaks have now been contained.



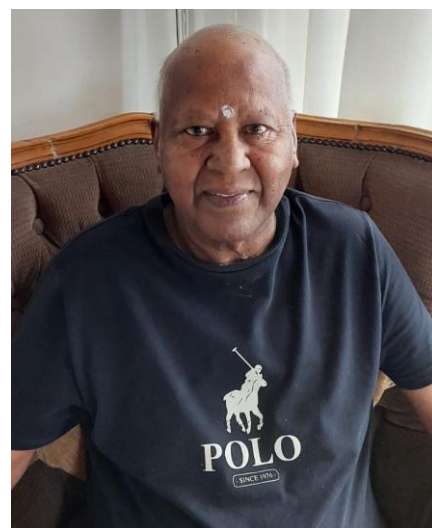
Because fence droppers are highly prized in our valley, theft had made our boundary fence sag when Mandla Magasela and Mondli Mchunu started work on repairs, using Tamboti logs chopped in the bush. The Tamboti tree oozes a poisonous sap which makes the wood difficult to handle and so far our fence has remained intact.

IN BRIEF

On February 28th our driver, Zamani Madonsela, and our Trustee, Umntwana Mkhosi Mchunu, were caught at the scene of a cash-in-transit heist when they came round a bend near Estcourt, and found a gunman on the road, yelling they must reverse. It was impossible to move with cars piling up behind them, so they sat, shaken, watching the cash van burn as police arrived to give chase to 15 suspects. Four were killed in a subsequent shoot-out, one of them the gunman who told our driver to reverse. Two law enforcement officers were also shot and injured. There was no indication of the amount of cash stolen



“Mkhosi Mchunu. The Prince who showed us around.”



Shan Pillay

King Solomon`s Mines

In 1885 London billboards announced the publication of “The Most Amazing Book Ever Written” launching Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*, an immediate best seller which had printers struggling to keep up with the demand. The book has been filmed at last seven times since, and now a documentary is on the way, looking at events which may have influenced the author when he wrote a story that would pioneer the lost world genre in literature. A lost world that took shape in the young man’s mind as he sat in the moon light on a mountaintop in Msinga, listening to an old chief speak? Haggard was 19 when he accompanied Sir Theophilus Shepstone to the royal kraal of the most powerful chief in Natal, Pakade of the Mchunus, who lived on the summit of an impregnable hill, among wild and desolate valleys. In a letter to his father, written from their campsite on May 13th, 1876, Haggard gave a haunting account of their visit, an account he later turned into his first published article, which eventually led to the book? When filmmakers Simon Chapman and D J Clark visited Msinga in September they were looking for the lost world



And some of the shoes made with his offcuts.



Simon Chapman with Umntwana Mkhosi Mchunu, the great great great grandson of Chief Pakade.

that had inspired Rider Haggard, which meant a visit to Chief Pakade’s grave on the summit of Ntanyane,” the wild and lovely place” where he had lived for 40 years. Once known as Pakade’s Kop, the peak is a landmark visible for miles, and the grave has become a holy site for the tribe. The film team were going to be guided by Umntwana Mkhosi Mchunu Pakade’s great great great grandson, who is also an Mdukatshani Trustee. Gugu Mbatha, our Project Manager, went along as interpreter and returned, eyes shining, at the end of the day having learnt a history that was new to her. The film on Rider Haggard is one of a series investigating the links between classical fiction stories and the accounts of early explorers, and in 2018 Simon and DJ trekked into China to produce “Where is Shangri-la?” an account of their search for a mythical place.

Shan Pillay

Although Shan Pillay was a famous photo-journalist, he was also a businessman, and at 88 still went into work every morning at Divine Shoes, the factory he owned with his son Nellan. The Mdukatshani staff knew Shan well, and were regular visitors to the factory, going in to fetch large bundles of leather offcuts he set aside for them, providing material for a small industry of Msinga leather workers who work from home to produce a range of shoes, bags, belts and waistcoats. Shan knew none of them, but they grieved when they heard he had died in May. While most of their work is done with tanned cattle and goat hides, the factory offcuts gave them soft linings and coloured leather that inspired many new designs. (In August the factory was burnt to the ground and with love and support re-opened five weeks later).



The remains of the tree where he was hanged.

Gosi Mntambo

Early on the morning of August 26th a passing schoolboy saw Gosi Mntambo's body swinging from a Tamboti tree close to the road on our boundary. He had been beaten and then hanged the night before. Everyone knew Gosi. He had grown up at Mdukatshani, easy going, likable and a good stockman, whether he was working with cattle or goats. So why was he killed? Because Gosi had a drinking problem, loose talk was dangerous, and spoke too freely when he was drunk?

The day before Gosi was abducted and hanged seven stolen goats were found tethered to the tree where he died. Nobody believes Gosi stole those goats, but he probably knew who did. He was last seen at about 9 pm heading for home after drinking all day at a local celebration. His killers must have been watching and waiting with a bakkie, for he was driven in the dark to the hanging tree, where he would be found the next morning.

Because he could not control his drinking he had lost his job his wife and his children, and while nobody at his funeral disguised what had gone wrong, there was a huge affection for him, shock at his death, and heartache for his mother, Victoria Lamula, who lost her only child.

A few days after the funeral the Nomoya Induna, Nhlanhla Dladla, summoned the local men to the hanging tree. There had to be a cleansing. The Mashunka woodsman, TJ Mbatha, came down from the mountain with his electric saw, and after the trunk had been sawn to the ground, the men used axes to chop up the branches, before setting them alight with a plastic container full of diesel. Then they watched the tree burn until nothing was left but ash. For days passersby could see the ash steaming. Then there was just empty space.

OBITUARIES



She always kept her smile hidden from the camera, shy about her missing front teeth. Saibina Dladla (left) and fellow teachers, MaJeyi Skakane and MaXimba Dladla.

Dambile Saibina Dladla

Her close friends called her Saibina, but for a generation of children she was Ma'am Sithole. Ma'am the teacher, with her broken smile, her lively warmth, and a concern for others that kept her going despite heartaches of her own. Ma'am only ever had a Standard One, but in an area without schools that made her an educated woman, and when the Mdukatshani Barefoot Learning Centres were launched in 1979, she became a much-loved teacher, later teaching the Mdukatshani children's gardening groups. When we first met Ma'am and her husband Stezi, they were living in a tiny iron-roofed hut at Nomoya, an area where they had been forcibly removed by government in 1969 – so close to their old home they could see the site from their yard, just across the Tugela River. In 1979 Stezi was shot on a path on his way to Mdukatshani, a random victim of a local conflict that was going to intensify. Ma'am struggled on with their three small boys, making the best of the life God had given her. If she had a dream, it was "Moving back to the place where I danced the day I was married." She was 62 when the impossible happened. Democracy arrived with land reform, and she was one of the first to wade across the river to rebuild her home. "On the ground where I danced on my wedding day." She died in August, aged 91, slipping gently into eternity.

Nyelisile Sithole

Nyelisile Sithole (61) was a strong woman, and she had confidence in her strength. It had carried her through everything except that sudden last illness which she fought so hard, in disbelief, struggling to walk, struggling to do beads, with hospital visits that didn't help. *The machine isn't working – come back in a month.*

She had always found strength in her work, and now she kept working. She didn't stop. There were goats to be dosed, and a bead order to be done in time for Christmas. She had never missed a deadline, not even at the end, when she brought in an order for beaded copper bangles, each neatly labelled in her small, precise handwriting. *Nyelisile*. "I'm not well," she admitted, leaning heavily on a stick. She needed a break but would be better soon. In the new year? She started demolishing the mud-and-thatch rondavel in her yard. She had saved enough from the sale of goats to build a modern room out of concrete blocks, with a red iron roof and white pillars. It was only half-finished when she died in Estcourt Hospital on March 26th and mourners sat on the raw earthen floor when she was buried two days later on Good Friday. It was a funeral full of heartache for her children, the four girls and a boy who were hardly grown up, and must now make decisions on their own. But they had all inherited some of her strength, for they worked hard on the unfinished house, and before Christmas it stood completed with a tiled floor and windows gleaming.



Nyelisile Sithole