



MDUKATSHANI
RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Annual Report 2023





Who does a road belong to? Once upon a time this road was a game track, then a cattle track, a worn cattle track used by hundreds of cattle to get from the dry thornveld hills down to the Tugela River. When a white farmer fenced off the road in 1980 (a drought year) leaders of the Mthembu and Mchunu people asked Mdukatshani for help. Protracted negotiations and a District Roads hearing were going to cost the project R 8000 in legal fees (R 200 000 today) to have the track recognized as a right-of-way. The funds were paid by the Africa Development Trust, and for a critical period 1 800 cattle were able to water at the river every second day. Today the track is a district road, recently graded at a cost of millions, and a smooth ride for the school bus.

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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.



Nobody remembers when last this field was ploughed. Twenty, thirty, forty years ago? Dry land farming is a risky business and forgotten fields have become part of the rural landscapes of South Africa. After two wet summers, however, this field – and many others – are back in production, and as local tractors could not keep up with the demand to plough, cattle were once again yoked and inspanned.



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 (DLARD) 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.



When a film crew flew into Richards' Bay in February for an assignment in rural Zululand they filled three hired kombis with equipment and staff. It takes a big team to film a 5-minute interview, and locals watched with interest as make-up artists, cameramen, and sound recorders got to work.

A FILM SHOOT

Sibusiso Myeza was 18 when he trained as one of our Community Animal Health Workers, and he had become a familiar figure in the Mpongo area near Nongoma, Zululand, when he was selected as a participant in the Jobs Fund project in 2022. There was no doubt about his interest in agriculture. He had started making a living buying veterinary medicines and treating livestock in the area, and when he joined the Jobs Fund project he used some of his stipend to start a spaza shop, while selling indigenous chickens and vegetables from his own garden. He never expected his work would attract attention, but when the Jobs Fund project came to an end, the National Youth Development Agency launched a media campaign, and Sibusiso became a poster boy for the National Youth Service, interviewed for radio, SABC, and social media outlets. The NYDA crew also filmed local farmer, Busisiwe Mtshali, who smiled broadly in her best orange dress as she enacted the work of tending her goats, a task that was eased with the help of Jobs Fund youth during the six months of the project. With an NDYA grant of R 100 000 GAP was subsequently able to do its own branding and social media campaign, and many different success stories can be found on the GAP website, as well as on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, X and LinkedIn.



Sibusiso relaxes as his interviewer gets her make-up touched up.



Busisiwe Mtshali could not stop smiling.



Camera shy? Busisiwe's goats were reluctant to obey instructions.



Busisiwe needed no rehearsal, speaking with ease as she was filmed.



The Tugela River was in spate, flooding the surrounding countryside. when Ndoda Sibisi (below) hosted the first evaluation interviews at his home at Ezilozini. By taking time to listen the team gave farmers and youth a chance to engage in the project from inception to close-out.



Some problems are beyond us “Crocodiles are killing our goats,” farmers complained at Ezilozini, a great bend in the Tugela River where a crocodile had been killed for attacking a farmer’s goats, and the remains stuffed on a kraal fence.



Well, was it worth it? The Jobs Fund Self-Evaluation

In February our management team spent two weeks in the field listening to farmers and youth give their assessment of the six-month Jobs Fund project, *Empowering Rural Youth in Agriculture*. * The project was designed to employ 3 000 youth to support 27 000 small stock farmers (most of them women) at 150 sites across KwaZulu-Natal. But were the numbers realistic? The time frame? The costs? The answers lie in a 55-page self-evaluation report that describes the lessons learned, together with transcripts of the views of youth, farmers and community leaders. But while the report provides a case study on development for future planners, it will probably remain unread. For even before the project came to an end, Jobs Fund was splitting into separate entities with new objectives and reduced funds. There would be no second phase of the project.

This did not invalidate the results of the evaluation which covered 63 sites across KwaZulu Natal, and included interviews with 505 youth and 152 farmers, in addition to headmen, councillors and members of the local Livestock Associations. To allow for open discussion each group was interviewed separately, an exercise familiar to the farmers who were frank in expressing their views. “Our farmers are not shy,” says Gugu Mbatha, the Mdukatshani project manager. “If we are not doing things right they tell us. They are very straight forward.”

Although the farmers had a lot to say, most of it was appreciative.
Goats were looking bad because of mange, kids were dying, and the youth started working and we saw a big difference. Our goats are looking good from what the young people done.
Our goats stopped dying when the youth started working.
Our goats were white with mange but when the young people inject them the hair was restored and silky.
The youth taught us and gave us knowledge. We learned about diseases we did not know.
We learnt a lot from the youth such as the importance of cleaning kraals and dipping.

But the medicines were not enough. Nor was the duration of the project. The youth needed a longer training, more depth, more practicals. They needed equipment for their work. Masks and gloves. Shovels, rakes and wheelbarrows. There should be less focus on feeding the goats, more on disease. And why was there no service for cattle and fowls?

Although the farmers were used to speaking their minds - it was a new experience for the youth. Few of them had ever had a job before, and they were diffident. Despite an onboarding meeting where they had been introduced to their communities, it had not been easy going out into the field to help. Beneficiaries could be difficult.

It was painful to be rejected by farmers in some homes. They were very rude to us in the beginning.

I have learnt if you are working with different people you must always stay calm because other people are too harsh.

It took a lot of patience and pulling yourself down when dealing with these people because they could be difficult and problematic and you would have to be a bigger person to deal with them.

In the beginning farmers treated us very badly, but when they see you making a difference they start respecting you.

Females were not allowed in some kraals. Others were chased away for wearing trousers as uniform. Still others had no uniforms at all. They were delivered late by the National Youth Development Agency, and “the cuts were small and the boots wouldn’t fit”. But the real problem was the shortage of medicines. Often the vet kits did not have enough to service all the goats in one kraal, and farmers complained the interventions did not reach everyone in the project area. Because the youth were often blamed for the shortages, participants suggested that “Maybe farmers should be present when the medicines are handed out so they will know what is in the vet kits.”



How did the youth use their stipends? In many homes it put food on the table, but Mpumulelo Mbatha and Gcinile Mncube saved enough to start a spaza shop and take-away.



Farmers and youth took turns sitting in the shade of these big Marula trees when the evaluation team did interviews in the Mpongo area between Ulundi and Nongoma in Zululand.



Nhlanhla Mthembu, HPSA Project director, welcomes Jobs Fund participants to a farmer’s home which served as a meeting place for evaluation interviews in the Odushwini area.

We were well aware the vet kits were inadequate, but they were all the project could afford. Because Jobs Fund did not have a budget for vet kits, nor training “the project agreed to carry the costs as its own contribution,” says the Report, a budget constraint that essentially “limited the project’s effectiveness and reduced the impact that could have been achieved both for the farmers in terms of productivity, but also for the participants in terms of long term retained knowledge.”

Capacity building had to be trimmed from much of the project activity, which was raised as a shortcoming at the interviews. If the service was intended as a first step towards employment, young people needed to know how to draw up a CV and present themselves at an interview. There was also the question of certificates. Although Jobs Fund had agreed to provide each participant with a certificate of service to be used for future job seeking opportunities, the documents arrived late, without IDS - and some participants never got their certificates at all.

Yet overall, the youth felt they had gained from their service, not only in knowledge, but in the experience of having a job. *We learnt about working in a team and enjoyed it a lot. We are now trusted by the community since we started working. Getting positive feedback about our work made us feel important. Even now farmers keep calling us to come back again.*

The Final Tally

**3080 youth were employed.
2486 completed 364 hours
of service.
1182 transitioned into other
opportunities.**

Some of the participants used their stipends to buy veterinary medicines which they sell to farmers from their homes or at public venues. Others set up small ventures buying sheep, goats or fowls.



Mlungusi Phungula, Nqulwane Dip



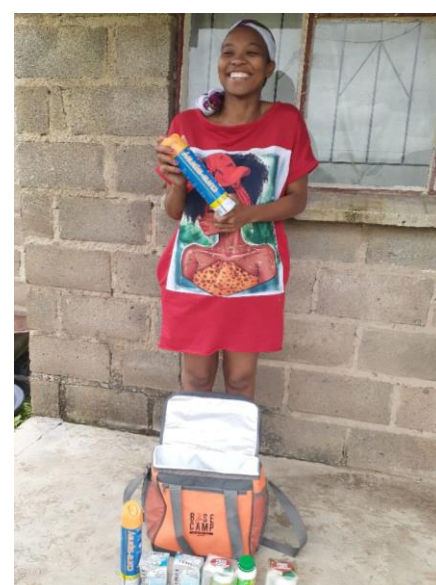
Nokubonga Mdletshe, of Hlabisa



Mfikiseni Sikhakhane, KwaVumbu Dip



Lethiwe Thabede, of Nongoma Dip



Silindile Sithole of Ngubo

In fact, the ongoing demand from farmers was listed as a problem. Because there had been no exit meetings at project sites when the project ended, the youth found they were still on call. While this was a testimonial to the service they had provided, it was also an indication of the huge demand for veterinary services in rural areas - a demand that could create future jobs?

One of the questions the evaluation team set out to answer was whether the youth had been able to find further employment at the conclusion of the project. It's a huge step from "just being at home" to having a job, and the project was designed to help young people onto the path of employment or self-employment. "This getting moving is hard to attribute directly," says the Evaluation Report, but judging by the youth themselves, they made use of their stipends to become active money-earners in a wide range of activities. While some have remained in agriculture, buying livestock, or selling veterinary medicines

and protein blocks, others have enrolled in short courses, paid for driver's licences, or set up small ventures selling everything from snacks and airtime to perfumes and mattresses.

The GAP project is in many ways unique, one of the few in South Africa that has tried to use agriculture to tackle rural youth unemployment, and although there will be no second phase of the Jobs Fund project, the possibilities are now being discussed by local municipalities and leadership. More importantly, GAP is part of a larger programme looking at how to carry this work forward through the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, as well as the Agriculture and Agro-Processing Master Plan.

* The Jobs Fund project was implemented by GAP partners, Mdukatshani and Heifer Project South Africa (HPSA), and the Evaluation Report can be found on the GAP website.

“I wish they should spray the unknown flower that kills our goats and cows because our herd is dying.”
Jobs Fund participant



The Unknown Flower
Parthenium hysterophorus

THE UNKNOWN FLOWER
Dainty as Baby’s Breath – But Deadly?

It was a wet year with fields of flowers - and limping, three-legged goats. Were the two connected? Nobody had ever seen the flowers before. They had arrived with the rains and soon smothered bare places with masses of tiny white flowers. Cattle and goats grazed among the pretty plants, with nothing to suggest the shrubs were toxic. Toxic to swallow or toxic to touch? Did anyone know? Farmers examined the rotting hooves of their goats, looking for signs of ticks. The wounds were clear. What else could it be? The dainty white flower that had appeared from nowhere, and had become a favourite food plant for their goats? In June Dr Trevor Dugmore came to answer farmers’ questions about *Parthenium hysterophorus*, for that is the name of the unknown flower, one of the seven “most devastating and hazardous weeds” in the world, with its many effects on human and animal health yet to be fully studied.

Although *Parthenium* may be new to Msinga farmers, it has been in South Africa since the 1880’s, rapidly invading agricultural land, disturbed areas, fallow lands, roadsides, and watercourses. A native of the American tropics, an adult plant can produce up to 25 000 viable seeds which can mature to flowering in four weeks. As *Parthenium* is edible to stock its ability to take over bare places would make it one of the wonder plants of the planet were it not for its toxicity. Considering its importance surprisingly little is known about the effects of the weed on the animals that consume it, although reduced fertility, tainted meat and lesions of the intestinal tract have been reported. But just touching the plant can have unpleasant results. In humans contact with *Parthenium* can cause skin rashes, inflammation, itchy lesions on exposed areas as well as allergic respiratory problems.



Could a flower cause an outbreak of lame goats with rotten hooves?



Cattle graze in a field of billowing *Parthenium* flowers which are so toxic that even contact can be harmful to humans and animals.



Nhlanhla Mthembu with Dr Trevor Dugmore, who told farmers the known effects of *Parthenium* on livestock.



Goats can’t get enough of the pretty weed, selecting it above other plants “like teenagers with drugs”.



Farmers, scientists and staff share experiences at the Innovation Platform on *Parthenium* poisoning.



The symptoms were not isolated. There were lame goats wherever you looked. These were just a sample, collected for inspection at households nearby. They are being held by staff members Sanele Simelane, Busisiwe Mntungwa, Spehelele Sibiya and Dumisani Gumede. Left: Rauri Alcock inspects and photographs a goat with a rotten hoof.

In animals the symptoms are similar. After walking through, or grazing patches of the weed, cows have been observed to have inflamed udders, followed by fevers and rashes, while common conditions resulting from contact include dermatitis (swelling and irritation of the skin), as well as mouth ulcers and pronounced lesions. But could *Parthenium* be blamed for the festering wounds on goat hooves? It was hard to untangle cause and effect, but as Kusakusa Mbokazi, the AmaBomvu Chief Induna pointed out, their goats were “passionate” about the unknown flower and ate it in preference to other plants “like teenagers with drugs”.

In June farmers gathered at an Innovation Platform at Ncunjane to get some answers to their questions from Dr Trevor Dugmore, an animal nutrition specialist, and Mdukatshani trustee. Trevor was going to give them an outline of what the scientific literature had to say about *Parthenium*. It was a threat to agriculture and immune to control, but there was little to suggest that either rotting hooves or local stock deaths could be directly linked to the plant. It had appeared at a time of unusually heavy rains when there was forage in abundance, yet “in 60 years Msinga farmers had not had stock deaths like this year,” reported Mbokazi. If the unknown flower was not killing their stock, what was? Trevor reminded the farmers there were many causes of mortality and wet years were notorious for bringing out diseases and worms.

But whatever the cause of a rotten hoof, farmers should treat the wound by cleaning it with salt water, before injecting the animal with antibiotics for three days. If bacteria had caused the infection this treatment would resolve it.



Limping goats were a familiar sight, the rotten hooves often falling off leaving the animal with a stump.

CLIMATE CHANGE



It's a difficult word to pronounce if you're not Zulu

UKUGUQUGUQUKA

It has two hard clicks for emphasis. *Change and change again*. Even a child knows the clouds are unpredictable. They come and go, come and go. Out of reach and beyond understanding. Ask the meteorologists who warned 2023 would be a dry year. Instead, it rained and rained and rained. According to Dr. Alistair Clulow, an agrometeorology lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, scientists are in for a hard time. "Climate change certainly complicates the weather patterns we've grown to understand and model," he says. The past was no longer a reliable base for understanding. Take the El Nino phenomenon. It ought to have made 2023 a dry year, but instead there were floods and downpours. "So is El Nino going to be different, is it going to accelerate change, or is it going to reduce its impact? That's the challenge." Nobody knows.

Smallscale farmers tend to be ignored in the debates on climate change, and it is these communities which the European Union is targeting in a four year Climate Champions project. GAP is one of the partners, focusing on the Zululand area, and working closely with those most affected by change – women farmers and the youth. They haven't needed to be told about *ukuguquguquka*. It is one of the problems they discuss every day, trying to farm in an arid environment, with the future uncertain, neither capital nor subsidies, and only their own efforts to see them through. GAP's part of the EU project has been looking at the effects of climate change on livestock, a subject discussed with animation at farmer cross visits where experiences were shared, together with ideas on how to mitigate the uncertain future.



Small scale farmers have little say over the distant events that are bringing change to their lives, and the European Union wants to strengthen and support their mitigating actions.



Is there a future for cattle in a warmer world? This was one of the questions GAP focused on when it presented a webinar on the effects of climate change on communal livestock herds.

To mitigate the effect of climate change on their herds farmers have proposed a number of initiatives, such as one-person-dip tank (right) the depth demonstrated here by staff member Thokozaan Xulu. Another innovation is bucket feeding female goats during winter to prevent abortions, an experiment which is producing results for Ms Sebenzile Thabede (below) who comes from Minya, Nongoma, in Zululand.



Nhlanhla Mthembu of HPSA is leading the EU climate champions project.

GAP project directors, Gugu Mbatha and Nhlanhla Mthembu interviewing farmers at KwaJeke, Mngwenya, near Weenen, on their perceptions of climate change and its effects on their farming activities.

The exchanges have led to a number of interventions, including dip tanks for goats to fight the increased numbers of ticks and tick-borne diseases, as well as a bucket-feeding system for pregnant females to prevent abortions due to lack of feed in harsh winters. The youth have been involved in recording farmers' perspectives on climate change, as well as filming experiments and innovations which they share at youth exchanges, their videos set up to reach a wider audience eventually.

In March some of our farmers were able to take part in public hearings on South Africa's Climate Change Bill, "the first legislation in the country specifically aimed at mitigating and addressing the effects of climate change". In October the Bill was approved by the National Assembly, taking it one step closer to becoming law. But will it make any difference to small farmers on the ground? Try translating this into Zulu: "The Bill seeks to ensure the effective management of inevitable climate change impacts by enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience, and reducing vulnerability to climate change with a view to building social, economic and environmental resilience to an adequate national adaptation response in the context of global climate change responses....."

The partners in the European Union Climate Champions Project include AFRA, FSG (Farmers 'Support Group) HPSA (Heifer Project South Africa), Indigo, and the Institute of Natural Resources.



Wet years or dry, one thing never changes – water must be carried to the home. Although farmers speak of springs drying up, water is considered a service delivery problem as everybody now buys their household water.



Malibongwe Mbatha, a Jobs Fund participant, tells farmers at an Innovation Platform how he uses social media and taxi networks to run his business in protein feed blocks.



For hundreds of years African farmers have used the *Umvithi* tree (*Boscia foetida*) to get their livestock through drought. Very old, very slow growing, and never chopped down, the tree belong to a family with leaves reported to have the highest protein content of any browse plant in Africa, at 14% close to lucerne.

THE TRAVELLING ROAD SHOW BECOMES A BUSINESS

Every farmer remembers 2015 as “the year our cattle died”. It was one of the Great Droughts and it touched everyone. With the smell of carcasses rotting in the bush, cows died giving birth, while goat kids died because their mothers had no milk. The old people in the valley had seen droughts before, but was this the worst? They made the best of it, as they had before, climbing the hills to cut branches of green *Umvithi*, a local tree with protein-rich leaves that was the only supplement they had to keep their animals alive during hard times. “Every morning when I wake,” said Nkomozabantu Dladla, the Nomoya Induna, “I look at the hills and I count the *Umvithi*. Will there ever be enough to last until it rains?”

It was against this background that GAP started working with experts to develop a protein feed block for goats. Even in good years the high mortality of goat kids in winter was preventing farmers growing their herds. But while there was a need for supplementary feeding, cost was going to be as important as the ingredients when designing the block. And it was the cost as much as the easy-to-mix process which held farmers rapt when the project launched a travelling road show through the drought-stricken areas of KwaZulu Natal in 2016.

Much has happened since. During the Covid years the recipe had to be altered when some ingredients became difficult to obtain, but today the blocks are no longer a novelty, and thanks to the initiative of some of the Jobs Fund participants, can be bought at roadside stalls or ordered online. In September farmers and suppliers saw the developments for themselves when they visited some of the youth businesses before attending an Innovation Platform at the home of Malibongwe Mbatha, at Malonjane Dip, near Pomeroy, Msinga.

A Jobs Fund participant and born entrepreneur, Mbatha has set up a Whatsapp group advising farmers on the benefits of blocks, while taking orders from as far afield as Durban, Hammarsdale, and Newcastle. Due to demand he has also enlarged the original brick-sized goat block into different sizes which he delivers through taxi networks, or which he “posts” through Paxi, the remarkable Pep Stores postal service which helps UNISA students get their study documents in rural areas.



And here is the modern alternative, protein feed blocks. being sold by young people who are using modern ideas - and social media - to promote bigger and BIGGER protein blocks for all kinds of livestock.



Nompumelelo Zondi, another Jobs Fund participant, sells blocks in a variety of sizes at a roadside stall at Tugela Ferry, displaying her wares on a banner she designed and had printed herself.



Once this area on Mdukatshani's boundary was covered with cannabis gardens as far as the eye could see. This photograph, taken in September 2023, shows the only two gardens left. Because of land claims and low prices growers have given up.



Carefully tended in 2018, these cannabis gardens have reverted to dry land. *We hear we now need a certificate to grow*, say the women.



The same area planted to cannabis in 2018, the year when the law changed to make private use legal.

THE END OF AN INDUSTRY?

Cannabis growers can date the start of the decline. They live a long way away from the Constitutional Court, but after the 2018 ruling that cannabis be legalized for private use, everything began to change. Traditionally the price went up every year, “and when we started to plant”, they say, “it was selling on good price but since three years back the price just stopped.” The buyers knew what was happening and became selective. They wanted a variety called *iSwazi*, which was a problem for local growers who could not obtain the seed. “They start with *iSwazi*. If it finished, they just buy the normal one and they want to buy it on their own prices because they think they are doing favour for us.”

Even as the growers were giving up – government was at work on a Master Plan projected to commercialize cannabis to create thousands of jobs in the hemp and medicinal oil industries. *More than 130 000 jobs* said President Cyril Ramaphosa in his State of the Nation address in February. *10 000 to 25 000 jobs* amended his Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry, Nomalungelo Gina, when he visited a community-based pilot project near Bergville in March. Eight people were already employed on the farm, 14 in the nursery, and “overall the project was expected to create approximately 150 jobs.”

What did any of this mean for the estimated 900 000 farmers involved in the illegal cannabis market before the changes started? In April Cosatu and Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) pulled out of the Master Plan's working group “after some very difficult engagements with government”, complaining that government was unwilling to “ensure that the historical farmers in South Africa are able to benefit from the legalisation of the industry.” Although the Master Plan process is driven by the Department of Land Reform, Agriculture and Rural Development, it involves 10 other government departments, and “territorial battles by senior bureaucrats” were cited as among the reasons participants withdrew. But because the country needs that Master Plan to provide a framework for an industry estimated at R126 billion a year, in June the presidency intervened to organise a week-long meeting to get the process back on track. And there are lots of good intentions. In October small growers were invited to join experts at a two day conference on cannabis at Bergville, while Siboniso Duma, the KZN MEC for Economic Development, announced roadshows were being planned “to ensure that *oGogo noMkhulu* (the grandmothers and grandfathers from Msinga” and other areas were “integrated into the entire value chain of cannabis up to export.” But he's aiming at the wrong segment of the population. It's the young women who grow the crop.

South Africa's worst bird flu outbreak started in June 2023 and by the time it ended five months later 8 500 000 chickens had been culled. The losses cost the sector R9,5 billion, but although the disease affects wild birds, it never got as far as the flocks of home chickens that supply the live fowl trade.

THE LIVE FOWL TRADE

There is nothing like the flavour of a Zulu chicken. A home grown chicken. An indigenous chicken. Men in the cities yearn for it and often ask for a bird to be sent to town as a treat. But it is not just the flavour that sets the birds apart. It's the colour of their feathers. Red, white, black, speckled, yellow, brown, grey.

“As long as you have the colours we want, we will definitely buy,” sellers told our staff when they visited the Warwick Avenue market in Durban in May. A worn notice behind the sellers told you how long they had been there. Years and years. There were about 20 women selling live fowls at the market, experienced, competent, and confident. Warwick Avenue was a transport junction for taxis, buses and trains where 460 000 people were estimated to pass by daily, travelling to very corner of KZN. The birds were kept in cages for viewing, a dazzling variety of patterns and colours, cocks as well as hens, some sold for meat, some for breeding, but as most were sold to meet the needs of ritual ceremonies, colour was important. Sangomas, for example, preferred black, red and speckled fowls, with little use for white. The sellers were open about prices, paying a farmer a standard R80 for a fowl that sold at the market for R200.

Staff discussed the pricing on the way home. Although local farmers could get R100 to R 120 for a fowl, selling from home or at pension payout points, sales were very slow. The Warwick Avenue market would buy in bulk, but the problem was distance. How did you get the fowls to market without the exorbitant expense of fuel?



“As long as you have the colours we want, we will definitely buy.” Live fowl sellers at the Warwick Avenue market, Durban.



The unexpected result of success. Because of our inoculation programmes farmers complain their flocks are growing so fast they cannot keep up with the cost of feed and need to find new sales outlets.



Airy penthouse accommodation for live fowls on sale



Xolisile Khumalo of Msuluzi has become an accomplished sales woman, selling both goats and live fowls at different venues. Here she is, pen poised, trading in the streets of Colenso.

The need to find new markets for indigenous chickens is the unexpected outcome of success. When Mdukatshani started work at Msinga in 1975 it was rare to find a living chicken in a yard. Local flocks had been wiped out by Newcastle disease, not once but repeatedly. Local farmers were philosophical. The disease was as inevitable as the seasons. There would be an outbreak. Their birds would die. Slowly they would build up a flock again. Then the disease would return, and they would be back where they started.

When the project started work on the commercialization of goats, it had a parallel programme on chickens, which belong to the women in the home. Initially we wanted to stabilize the home flocks to provide a source of protein for the family, while providing an extra source of income for the women. The control of Newcastle disease was a start. One of the world's most lethal poultry diseases, Newcastle's is a highly contagious virus with up to 100% mortality – but it cannot be treated.

However, it can be prevented with a vaccine administered in the birds' drinking water quarterly, and last year the project delivered 180 000 doses of vaccine to inoculation groups in different areas, enabling farmers to inoculate 45 000 home chickens for a small fee. Unfortunately, although there are several effective vaccines for bird flu, or avian influenza, they are not currently registered for use in South Africa, which meant when the first outbreaks started in June, culling was the only answer. By October millions of birds had been culled, and the South African Veterinary Association (SAVA) was talking of "burnout" while questioning the methods of control. "As professionals at the coalface," SAVA said, "it is the responsibility of the vet to tell farmers that their businesses are all but destroyed. They face the workers who will lose their jobs. They oversee the culling of birds, which is very stressful. Many vets who are involved in this are questioning the ethics of large-scale culling programmes instead of vaccination."



COLLECTORS ITEMS



There were two strains of avian flu and while they hit the big producers hard, wiping out a third of the national flock, the disease never reached the indigenous chickens scratching in rural yards. With a national shortage of frozen chickens a real possibility the industry acted swiftly to replenish stocks by importing 100 million fertilized hatchling eggs - a number beyond the imagination of the rural broiler traders who were doing brisk sales of live fowls over Christmas.



In a world of loadshedding - and a world where many families lack fridges - live fowls have many advantages over frozen chickens which defrost in the heat of a taxi going home. But it is more than a matter of convenience. "People prefer broilers because they taste better," says Mandlakhe Buthelezi, a Pomeroy trader who started selling indigenous chickens in 2010, and three years later went into broilers because of the high demand. He buys in bulk from a Newcastle farmer, and sells the birds live from the back of his bakkie, usually on pension days, when business is good.

Pension days are good for the women farmers too, providing an outlet for sales of their multi-coloured fowls. While some birds are bought for meat, *sangomas* and *inyangas* seek out birds in specific colours, and prices depend on colour not size. The relationship between colour and price was one of the subjects discussed at the project's many cross visits and interviews during the year, part of a programme aimed at helping farmers take advantage of a vibrant, growing market by breeding birds to sell, while organizing regular sales outlets.

And mention should be made of the collectors, those who keep birds because they are strange, wonderful or different. When one farmer was being interviewed on the prices of the fowls in his flock he pointedly ignored a request for the price of a striking, slender, beautiful bird. Intrigued, the interviewer pressed for a reply. *And that one?* he repeated. "It's not for sale," said the farmer. "Not that one. That one I love".

THE BROILER TRADERS



(Top row from the left): Simon Sithole of Pomeroy, Nonhlanhla Sithebe of Weenen, Mluleki Zakwe of Msinga Top.
 (Bottom row from the left): Mkipheni Madondo of Sinqumeni, Mdedeleni Ndlovu of Colenso, and Thokozani Mpanza of Nongoma.

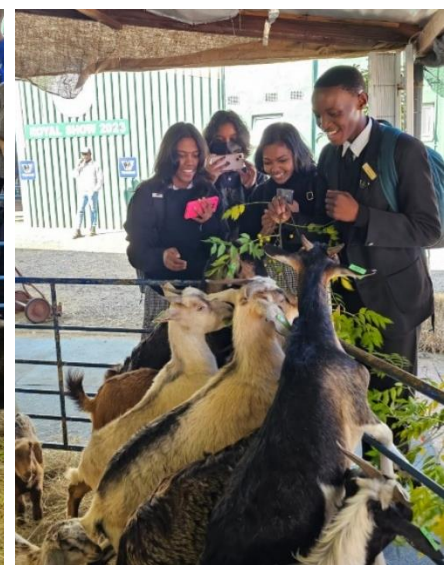


THE ROYAL SHOW

Despite the large crowds that poured in the gates to visit Pietermaritzburg's 173rd Royal Show in May, there was a sense of sadness about the event which was being staged at the Showgrounds for the last time. GAP was first invited to exhibit at the Show 8 years ago, and despite the hard work of setting up and manning a stand over ten long days, staff have enjoyed the interaction with a public that can never get enough of the goats. They are picked up, and cuddled, and fed again and again on a pile of green branches kept on standby as snacks. This year the stand was again awarded a Gold Medal, and apart from displaying the work of the organisation, it sold leather products handmade by GAP crafters, including slippers, bags and mats. Although there was no goat auction as in previous years, all the goats had been sold before we went home. The last day of the Show drew 103 000 visitors, many of them there for the entertainment that will no longer be part of the pared down show that will move to Mount Verde, near Hilton next year. The Showgrounds have been sold to a developer, and the Royal Agricultural Society plans to return to its farming roots "with a business model prioritising agricultural endeavours, innovation, education and technology". All that will be missing is the element of fun.



The baby goats got a lot of hugging at our stand at the Royal Show. Staff member Sanele Simelani (left) helps a toddler to hold a kid while a visitor (above) grins her delight at the goat kid in her arms.





A Grade 5 learner taking part in a session on human and animal nutrition at the September camp for Sinqumeni and Bambanani Primary Schools, Msinga.



Children at the Ngxongwane Primary School in Nongoma, about to start their first lesson in the Animal Health Club programme before doing a practical on the 17 points check.

THE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME

The schools programme continued to expand this year, with Animal Health Promotion Clubs at five schools, including the Ngxongwane Primary School at Nongoma, where 25 learners joined up for the first time. Not only have the number of schools expanded, but this year project began working with both Grade 5 and Grade 6 learners. The proposal to expand the programme had been under discussion for some time and was backed by an evaluation that found both parents and children wanted second year as they felt the single year in Grade 5 was insufficient.

Last year a new Grade 6 handbook was prepared with photographs, lessons and translations, together with a teacher's guide. and after an initial testing, handbooks were printed for all the new Grade 6 Club members. There are now Grade 5 and Grade 6 Animal Health Promotion Clubs at the Ntombiyodumo, Ngongolo, Sinqumeni, Bambanani and Ngxongwane Primary Schools, where the children combine lessons from their handbooks with practicals on handling goats.

The highlight of the year has always been the annual camp, a weekend of fun and learning at the Greystone Camp and Adventure Centre near Estcourt, and this year, to accommodate the different schools and different grades, four camps were held in August, September, October and November. Greystone overlooks the Wagendrift Dam and the Moor Park Nature Reserve, and for children who have not seen much of the world it is an unforgettable experience.



In November a new subject, "We are growing up", was introduced to Grade 6 learners from the Sinqumeni and Bambanani. AHP clubs



Grade 6 learners listened intently as Deborah Ewing, Mdukatshani's chairman, facilitated a session on bullying at the November camp.



The last camp of the year was the most light-hearted. It was summer, the exams were over, and the Grade 6 learners from Sinqumeni and Bambanani were in a holiday mood when they hiked through the countryside above Wagendrift Dam.



Children engrossed in a lesson on herd composition facilitated by Sindi Ngubane.

The camps start with the presentation of books, caps and branded T shirts, before the children take part in a programme that includes theory and practical sessions, as well as videos on subjects that include rabies, bullying, animal and human nutrition, animal and human diseases and environmental health. For the Grade 6 learners there is also a session on “We are growing up.” A guided walk introduces the children to an environment very different from the arid thornveld at home, while in summer there is also time for swimming. One of the most popular activities at the camps involves groups of children presenting plays on different topics, dramatic enactments full of surprises and laughter. And – because the camps are not just for fun – before the children go home there is also an assessment test to see just what they have learnt.

Greystone is a long, long way from Nongoma, so the new AHP club learners from the Ngxongwane Primary School will only have their camp in the new year at a venue not far from their homes. The new year will also see the completion of a third book aimed at the many children who gather at our events in the holidays, watching and listening with curiosity. We want to draw them in - a project outside the formality of school for children who are eager to learn.



Thank you! Can we do it again? Grade 5 learners from Ntombiyodumo Primary School on their way home after attending the first camp of the year in August.



Fields of purple verbenas surround the Msinga auction site, yet another indication of a really wet year which caused heavy mortalities in goats. Two auctions were held at the site which has been little used since it was opened with much fanfare by President Jacob Zuma in 2014

AUCTIONS AND SALES

Because of the mortalities in their goat flocks during the year farmers were either reluctant to sell, or had fewer animals to sell which affected both the formal and informal markets. Although GAP organized three auctions during the year, selling 518 goats for R 855 518, auctions are expensive, so growing success of the project's mini sales has been encouraging, with 2 999 goats sold for R 4 123 850. This makes total sales for the year: 3517 goats sold for R 4 979 368.

The mini sales are a new development that makes use of semi permanent sites in Pomeroy, Colenso and Ngubo, near Tugela Ferry, where goats are sold in single lots, at one price without need of an auctioneer. Because both farmers and buyers want organized sales at regular intervals, staff have also organized mini sales at local dips, close to farmers' homes, informing speculators in advance that the goats will be there, a system that guarantees stock, makes access easy, and is working well.



An auction at Gannahoek Colenso.



Buyers and sellers at a Pomeroy mini sale.





Dudzile Lamula and her dog go everywhere together, and here they are on their way home from the gardens with green mealies for supper and stover for the stock.



Mdidyeli Mbatha has been the driving force behind the gardens. Today the pump is broken and his crops are wilting but he has never stopped dreaming of being a farmer and the extent of his fields makes him proud.



A view of the Mdukatshani gardens showing one pump will never be enough.

THE MDUKATSHANI GARDENS

Good rains helped the gardeners produce bags and bags of green mealies, onions, potatoes and sweet potatoes, as well as buckets and buckets of tomatoes. Women sold their crops to neighbours, hawkers, passersby, and bakkie owners, while keeping a large part for the home. The price of potatoes went up 60% during the year, tomatoes 40%, so there was a good reason for the women's' delight, opening their sacks to show off what they had grown, before lifting bulging loads on their heads. The shortage of sacks was a problem, as was the need for more pumps. During the year two families brought and operated their own pumps as they expanded their gardens into fields, but for the smaller home gardeners there was relief as well as joy when a new pump arrived as a gift from the local Mashunka Councillor Pheleleni Dladla, who had already helped with fencing and poles for the perimeter. The cost of fuel for the pumps hit many of the gardeners, and when they did not have the money to buy petrol for irrigation, carried water from the river on their heads.

There were two disappointments in the year. The first was the peanut crop which produced rows and rows of promising leafy plants - but only small handfuls of peanuts. Nobody had ever grown the crop before, and nobody has bothered to replant. The second setback came with the hailstorm in April which destroyed fields of dry beans. The pods were almost ready to reap, and left the growers with the heartache of wasted effort. It would take a while before they started to replant.



Councillor Pheleleni Dladla talking to the gardeners before handing over the gift of a new pump.



He also made a gift of poles and fencing, examined here by Mdidyeli Mbatha, Sizani Mbatha, Vukaphi Ngubane



Monica Lamula and Qabukani Mvelase starting to clear their gardens to prepare for winter crops.



“MaSithela Mbatha was the first to wrench the door open and to sprint away, swerving across the road to dodge the bullets.”



MaSithela at home with his wife, Nonozi Ndebele. Now in his nineties, his memories remain clear, but he was too frail to attend the peace-making ceremony in June.

The trouble between Mhlangaan and Ndlela started in spring 1982, two Mthembu wards who shared a common boundary and were neighbours. The clans had been at war for a year when men from both sides agreed to attend a peace meeting at the Tugela Ferry Courthouse in September 1983. It was a formal meeting with the magistrate and police present, as well as the Mthembu Chief Induna, and senior tribal officials. With general agreement that a second meeting would be held for the young men who were fighting, the combatants chatted in apparent goodwill, before taking separate rides home. The



Men line up for the cleansing ritual.

It had always been an internal war.
Mthembu fighting Mthembu.
A war fought along the road.

SETTLING THE SPIRITS 40 Years Later



Men from Mhlangaan and Ndlela gather for sacrifice and cleansing as a spiritual recognition of the peace.

Ndlela men got a lift in a police car, and went ahead, while Mhlangaan followed later, feeling nervous, 21 men crowded in Mdukatshani’s panel van. They were passing through Ndlela territory when they were caught in an ambush, surrounded by armed men on both sides of the road. Six men died at the scene, six were injured, and although 13 Ndlelas were arrested in the police follow-up operation, they were released without charge six months later.

The ambush ended the war, but although life gradually returned to normal, there were never any rituals to declare a final peace until June, almost 40 years later, when men from Mhlangaan and Ndlela gathered close to their boundary to perform a cleansing that would mark an end to the war. It was a day of many parts. It began when each man present was washed with special cleansing medicines. After a walk to the shared boundary two goats were sacrificed, cooked and eaten on site, with even the bones burnt in an act of erasure, as nothing must be left behind. There were speeches to those present, followed by addresses to the spirits of dead, asking them to help hold the peace. Then all the men walked to the ambush site, before returning to the shade of the Insizwa Tree, where the day ended with a prayer. “A long day, but good-willed,” said Rauri Alcock, who was among the sons of those who had died who would witness the final peace.

(Those who died in the ambush were Neil Alcock, Loli Dladla Albert Mbatha, Vana Mpungose, Thobolo Muthwa and Mbunzu Sokhela)



Gugu Mbatha describes the process of opening a new bank account at a workshop with crafters in April.

THE CRAFTS

The South African Post Office had liabilities of more than R 4 billion when it was provisionally liquidated in February, and one of the creditors, desperate to get her money, was Buyelaphi Ngubane, an Mdukatshani crafter who was struggling to access R 1140 – wages deposited in her Postbank account months before. Claiming her money was

going to take months, a saga that had become increasingly familiar to the crafters who were having real problems with money short paid, or money withheld, or in Buyelaphi’s case some of it “borrowed” by the clerks. The women took turns describing their difficulties when they attended a workshop at Mdukatshani in April. But we already knew the problems. We paid the women’s taxi fares. Hundreds of rands for trips to and fro, chasing after missing money. With the imminent collapse of the Post Office, bad could only get worse, and the workshop had been called so Gugu Mbatha could discuss the benefits of banking with Capitec, a private bank focused on small account holders. The results were immediate. Crafters set off in groups to give themselves courage, and returned beaming. It was the first time they had been treated as clients.



“If I think of the weavers I have courage, even if my mouth is dry”. In September Julia Meintjes gave presentation on the Threads project at the Strauss Art Club in Cape Town - with two Irma Stern paintings on the wall behind her.

Early in May Julia Meintjes visited Mdukatshani to plan new work with the elite weavers who produce bangles and bowls in precious metals for our collaborative Threads of Africa project. The weavers love her visits, which connect our two very different worlds, and always leave them with new ideas



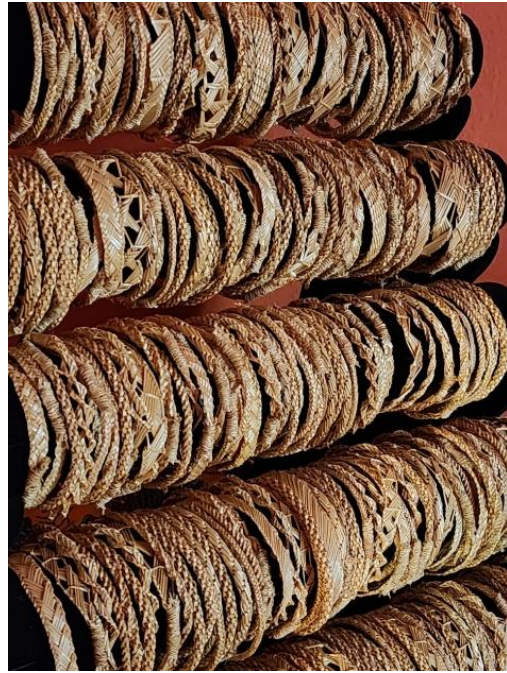
A group of learner bowls show the many different shades of copper wire.



Felix Mukuze of African Robots, in Cape Town, at work hallmarking all the Threads bowls and bangles, using little discs that have the logo, weaver’s name and year, metal content and unique number.



Lost in concentration a young girl walks a path weaving a grass bangle as she goes. A wet year has produced lots of silky stalks of insingizane, or *Sporobolus africanus*, woven by children in traditional weaves, like the difficult *umthamo wempisi*, cheeks of a hyaena, being woven here.



There are 30 traditional grass bangle patterns, a seasonal craft woven by the beaders, but only in wet years when the grass will be abundant along pathways and in damp places. The delicate stalks are never cut, but gently tugged free of the plant before being soaked to make them pliable.

They will never forget how Julia supported them during the Covid years, continuing to send work to prevent them being destitute at a time when she had no orders herself. In May she again worked on new designs, leaving enough work to keep the weavers busy - assuming we could find varied shades of copper wire. Once every consignment we ordered arrived a different colour, with shades ranging from golds, through brick, to burgundy and chocolate. In recent years, however, we have struggled to find the shades we need for variety, and because every roll in 2023 arrived an almost standardized brick colour, work on the Threads order stalled. The lack of variety did not affect our beaded work - eggs, bangles, décor items and bowls – but in August a new problem appeared when our supplier told us “The machine drawing the .50mm is down at the moment. Only expected to be fixed next month”.

And so began a copper wire shortage that lasted for the next four months. Our supplier did what he could to help, phoning around the country trying to locate even one reel in the gauges we needed. However, the shortage seemed to be nationwide, and when he did track down a solitary reel, it was at a price we could not afford. We used what we already had in stock and waited. Despite large Christmas orders the women sat idle, and when the copper was delivered on December 12th, it was too late. Had it not been for the problem of the copper supply, it would have been a good year. The crafters had more work than they could handle, most of it décor items rather than jewellery, which meant adapting old skills to new designs. The year began and ended with heavy rains, and as water oozed through the flagstones in the Bead Room, the beads remained stored in plastic bins



Sizani Mbatha, our packer, is an artist with string and brown paper. Her neatly latched boxes have been photographed many times, and one customer ordered seven of her boxes – empty – for display at a Cape Town exhibition.



A national shortage of certain gauges of copper wire seriously affected our Christmas orders, although we were able to make use of short pieces for beaded tealight holders which were big sellers this year, with napkin rings to match.

IN BRIEF



Are small farmers paying more for inputs than large commercial farmers? In September Derrick Bowles of the Competition Commission used our contacts and staff to spend a week sitting with small farmers who spoke openly about their challenges. The Commission's report on the complaint is yet to be completed.



In April a fierce hailstorm caused widespread damage in the Msinga-Weenen areas, breaking windows, denting vehicles, and smashing the Mdukatshani gardens, destroying the bean crops and pumpkins lying out to dry.



In November the Learning Centre once again became an IEC Voter' Registration Station, staffed by Siyephi Mbhele (left) Zevile Duma, and Mboneni Siphwe.



After a number of false starts a system of cashless payments was finally introduced at our November Msinga auction. The issue of KYC has so far bedevilled our attempts to help local farmers as none of these systems will accept that rural homes do not have registered street addresses. Although there were benefits to the Yoco card system used at the auction, farmers complained at the 3% costs of administration, which added up.



In March Jenny Mushegera and Desire Nzisabira from the Africa Desk of our longtime funders, Misereor, visited the project for discussions, and travelled to Muden to meet one of our chicken commercialization groups.

IN BRIEF



The Wonderkop Hill at Marikana is probably the most famous hill in South Africa, a hump of bare rock where 34 striking miners were shot by police in August 2012. But not many people are familiar with the back of the hill, where goat farmers live under crisscrossing power lines that almost hide the sky. In July GAP colleagues Rauri Alcock and Marisia Geraci visited Marikana while attending the 58th annual congress of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa in Rustenburg, intrigued by the goat farmers on one side of the hill, and a heavy police presence on the other where the EFF was preparing for a birthday rally the following day. Marikana was a sacred site, they said, “where we come in times of joy and difficulty, and where we seek counsel.”



When children started selling packets of green oranges along the road this winter it was a sign that the Sun Valley Citrus Estates had finally closed down. After more than 60 years exporting oranges around the world, Sun Valley was now another failed land reform farm. The trouble started soon after the Estates were granted to the Silindokuhle Community Trust, when two rival clans began fighting over their share of the property. Despite repeated peacekeeping attempts to save the Estates, today the groves stand derelict, the sorting sheds are empty, and the 700 workers who tended the trees have joined the ranks of the unemployed.



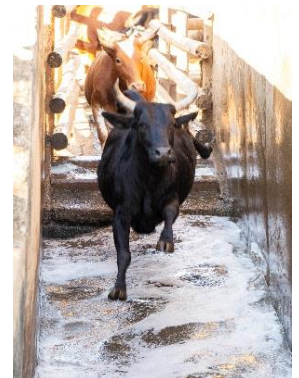
The National Agricultural Marketing Council after a Namibian conference.

It was one of our big achievements of the year – getting the National Agricultural Marketing Council (NAMC) to set up a Section 7 committee on the goat value chain. In simple terms, a Section 7 Committee is a mechanism to get things moving, and not much had moved since May 2022 when the Minister announced, with much fanfare, the Agricultural and Agro-Processing Master Plan. GAP has found a lot of goodwill at NAMC, which, together with the Agricultural Research Council, is the body tasked with pulling stakeholders in the livestock commodity section together. In February GAP proposed a Section 7 committee on goats, in April NAMC accepted the proposal, and in July six months programme of research and consultation was underway in preparation for a report on the country’s goat industry for the Minister. The draft was completed before the end of the year and is now being revised.



The small town of Pomeroy has been renamed Solomon Linda, a man who was forgotten by the world until Rian Malan told his story in the American magazine, *Rolling Stone*. Linda was a singer and composer who wrote the song that became “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”, and the article not only gave recognition to a man who died destitute, it set off lawsuits claiming millions of dollars in royalties for his family. The story has been told many times since the *Rolling Stone* article in 2000, and was also the subject of two documentaries, including *The Lion’s Share* on Netflix.

In October 2022 “due to budget constraints” government stopped supplying dip to KZN’s Livestock Associations. African cattle owners were alarmed. Dipping was the only control they had over lethal tick borne diseases in their herds, and ever since a devastating outbreak of East Coast Fever in 1906, dipping had been a government service. When dipping resumed in November 2023 they were relieved but not reassured. Had dipping started up again because elections were looming. The future continues to look uncertain.



OBITUARIES



Chazeliwe Dladla



On December 7th Chazeliwe Dladla was killed by lightning while sitting at home at Ncunjane during an early evening storm. She was six months pregnant at the time. The grief at her death was not only for her husband, Mamsi Mchunu, now a young widower, and the three year old daughter she left behind, but there was a haunting memory of her grandmother, Thandekile Magubane, who had been killed by lightning 20 years before – but in a different area, many kilometres away. Perhaps the shock impacted most on Chazeliwe's mother, Gosi Mvelase, a crafter who had now lost both her mother and her daughter to lightning. There was additional heartache at the funeral as the postmortem had separated mother and child, and by tradition they had to be buried separately, the unborn baby in a tiny grave next to the mother.



Divane Dladla

Divane Ndimande Dladla was one of the first women to join the Mdukatshani craft project, and although she was a fine beader, illness would often interrupt her work. She was one of the two wives of Sweliswe Dladla, a family that was close but destitute, and at one stage all suffered from TB, Divane would spend six months in hospital, her small daughter four, and when one of her twin boys got TB soon after he was born, he was such a tiny human being with limbs like sticks, nobody thought he would survive. But he would grow up strong to make a home of his own, and was among the six siblings who grieved when their mother died in April. A gentle woman with a ready smile, MaNdimande left us with a memory of her grace, a quality that carried her through a lifetime of hardship, transforming her suffering with radiance.



Nozi Ntshaba

Nozi Ntshaba had a dreamy, lost-in-herself quality which David Goldblatt captured when he photographed her coming up from the river carrying water on her head. Although the photograph appeared on the cover of *Optima*, she never got a copy. What did she know of the world outside the valley? She moved so slowly through life she hardly disturbed the air around her, but she was imbued with such sweetness that men spoke with tenderness at her funeral, building her a grave that seemed fit for royalty. MaNtshaba was one of the finest needlewomen among the crafters, her stitching exquisite, although her work was slow. She had been ill a long time when she died in January, leaving a married daughter who had yet to have a child.



Lungisile Skakane

Lungzile Skakane made a whirlwind of every day. She was passionate, excitable and dramatic, a performer whose gestures turned the ordinary into theatre. Digging a field, crossing a road, hailing a lift, or drinking a mug of tea. Every action was urgent, quick. She preferred dancing to walking, although she did both with flare. The children in the garden groups loved her. She did not teach so much as demonstrate, stamping her feet for rhythm, tossing out comments, singing and laughing, so that nobody ever felt tired. She seemed incapable of weariness herself, at least until the end when she began to fade. At source she had an inner fire and in living a life that seemed full of rejoicing, she conveyed some of her joy to all of us. She died in December, ready to go, leaving four children.