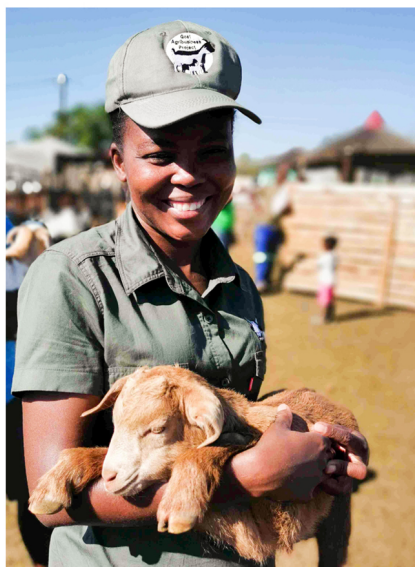
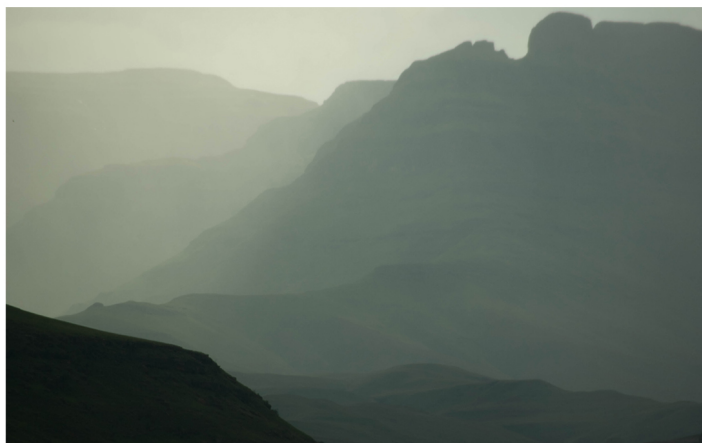




MDUKATSHANI
RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Annual Report 2018-2019





Is it legal - or isn't it? Although government has eased up on regulations relating to marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*), the news has yet to reach this family who live high up in the hills of the Thukela Valley. Late summer rains meant a good crop, and both men and women sit stripping the stalks, preparing the crop for market. (See Page 12).

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

Staff:

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LONDON
South Africa House, Trafalgar Square



PARIS
Revelations Biennale, Grand Palais

In June Mdukatshani's woven copper bowls were on display in London and Paris at the same time. The London bowls were old stock, bought by the SA Embassy in 1995. The Paris bowls were a commission from Threads of Africa and were exhibited by Sophie Ferrand-Hazard as part of a collection of South African work selected for Revelations, Le Banquet, an international fine craft and creation biennale held under the Nave in the Grand Palais, Paris.

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.

This report covers activities and issues in and around the project area and the farmers who we work with. For more specific information on project activities of Mdukatshani, the KZN Goat Agribusiness Project (GAP), the School's Animal Health Promotion Clubs or the Mdukatshani Craft Project, please visit www.mdukatshani.co.za.



OIL FOR GOATS?

It's not yet been officially confirmed but Saudi Arabia has been in discussions with South Africa on a deal that would involve swapping oil for goats. Saudi has oil in abundance, but has a problem finding goats for the millions of pilgrims who come to Mecca every year for the Hajj. Until recently most of Saudi's goats came from Somaliland, not far away across the Gulf of Aden. The Somaliland economy is totally dependent on livestock, and its annual export of 1,3 million sheep and goats has been described as the largest trade of livestock "on the hoof" anywhere in the world. But after fears of Rift Valley Fever led to a Saudi ban on, livestock imports from any countries in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland lost its biggest customer. Although the ban has since been lifted, Somaliland is reported to have made approaches to South Africa, hoping to find an alternative market for its goats.

Whatever the nature of diplomatic discussions, they have helped to raise interest in the economic potential of goats, and this may have been in the mind of Senzeni Zokwana, the National Minister of Agriculture, when he visited the GAP project at short notice in March. It was an on-again-off-again visit, with so many changes-of-plan that the Ncunjane community eventually had just one day to prepare, rushing to borrow a small marquee, chairs, a microphone, cooking pots - and water.

It was going to be a day to remember. First the Minister missed his flight because of a cabinet meeting. Then his drivers missed the turn-off and found themselves lost on a hilltop at Kopei. When at last the official car bumped across the dry riverbed of the Skehlenge, there was a sigh of relief all round. The delays meant the Minister had to miss the auction in Weenen, but no matter - he had arrived. Zokwana's low-key presence was going to endear him to the Ncunjane community. He might be a Minister of State, but he arrived in an unmarked car with two policemen. No blue lights. No bodyguards.



The venue for the Minister visit was the home of Ngitheni (MaYengwa) Mchunu where wood fires were stoked for pots of goat and chicken stew early in the morning.

And although he had other appointments waiting at the end of the day, he showed no inclination to leave when it was time to go, ready with thoughtful questions on how the Goat Agribusiness Project (GAP) could be expanded nationwide. As a farmer himself running cattle and goats Zokwana was able to understand the significance of the questions GAP was trying to address and was impressed with an audience made up largely of women. Unfortunately, he would not be minister for long. After the May elections Thoko Didiza was appointed minister of a new amalgamated Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development.



The Minister was an attentive listener



A largely women audience



Paravets demonstrate vet feed block



Standing room only under the thorns



The 100 kid enclosure



Minister Zokwana at the Agrivet shop



Gugu Mbatha shows of traditional Sdwaba



HLUBI COUNTRY

In March 1995 Nelson Mandela paid an unexpected visit to Weenen to officially launch the KZN Pilot Land Reform Programme. He was shaking hands with the large crowd when he caught sight of Peter Brown, reticent as always, somewhere near the back. Mandela's face lit up. "Peter!" he said. "Ah! Everyone knows Peter!"

Not everyone knew Peter, and those who knew him best were not just the big names on Robben Island, but thousands of ordinary unknown men and women whose lives were changed by this unassuming man. Selby Msimang, a founder member of the ANC, once described his first meeting with Peter: "When I saw him, I knew him. I could see who he was, and I loved him." Selby spoke for many, including the Mdukatshani community who depended on Peter for advice and support during long years of tumult and difficulty.

Peter started working on land issues in the 1950's, and land reform would remain close to his heart until he died. When he was jailed during the 1960 State of Emergency, he was already working closely with "black spot" communities, organizing resistance to government plans for forced removals. His effectiveness in finding legal obstacles to delay removals was one reason he was served with a five year banning order in July 1964, a ban which was renewed for a further five years in 1969. It was a heavy price to pay for effectiveness.

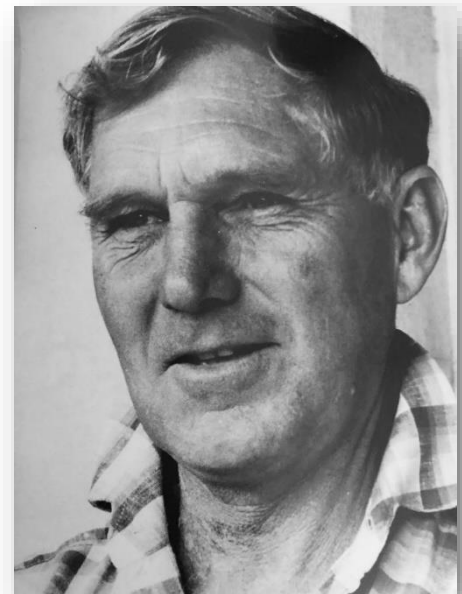
Because so little of his work is documented, it's almost impossible to do credit to the impact he had on people and situations. As chairman and founder of the Liberal Party Peter had a public profile, but his real work was done in out-of-the-way places, in rural villages and on tribal land. And one area of tribal land that was of special interest to him was the Hlubi territory that adjoined his farm Snowflake, in the Drakensberg.

The Hlubi are probably the most famous tribal group in Natal, with a history marked by tragedy and dispossession. Although they were occupying large areas of Natal as far back as 1500, they were scattered by the *mfecane*, and when the whites arrived in 1845 they had been reduced to a remnant living on the border of the Zulu kingdom under their *Nkosi* Langalibalele kaMthimkhulu. In 1848 they entered the Colony as refugees and settled on land the Klip River district - land which had once been Hlubi heritage, but which the Colony wanted for farms. They were told they would have to move, and in 1849, after several ultimatums, they were forcibly driven to a location in the Drakensberg to act as a buffer between San raiders and white farmers. This is where they were living in October 1873 when Langalibalele was ordered to register the guns which his men had earned working on the Diamond Fields in Kimberley.

*Mdukatshani falls under the recently re-named Nkosi Langalibalele Municipality.



Nkosi Langalibalele kaMthimkhulu Hlubi.



Peter Brown.



Left: The cottage on Snowflake, which lies between Giant's Castle Game Reserve and Drakensberg Location Number One, which is AmaHlubi territory.

Below: Red Falling Stars, *Crocossia paniculata*, growing on the banks of the Bushman's River at Snowflake.



Langalibalele was slow to respond. This was his nation's arsenal, and he didn't trust white promises that the guns would be returned. In the confusion which followed more than 6000 troops were moved into the Hlubi location, while Langalibalele fled to Lesotho, where he would be captured, charged with rebellion, and after a trial before an illegitimate court, banished for life to Robben Island. Even before he was convicted, however, his people had been broken up, their homesteads burnt, their livestock confiscated, and women and children indentured as servants to white farmers. But the Langalibalele affair was going to cause outrage far from the Colony, and in 1887, under pressure from the British government, Langalibalele was allowed to return home to Natal, where he died two years later. His people haven't forgotten their history, and every year in October gather at Langalibalele's grave on the slopes of Ntabamhlophe mountain, a memorial that serves to reinforce Hlubi claims to land, as well as a demand that their *Nkosi*, Muziwenkosi Radebe, or Langalibalele II, be recognized as a king.

Peter had been working with his Hlubi neighbours for years when he asked Rauri Alcock to help with some of the legalities around land agreements. Was this a chance to give something back for all Peter had done for Mdukatshani? At the time Peter was working on a range of projects around land, unobtrusive as always, making things happen, leaving no trace. One of his projects was the Midlands Centre for Further Education - the only place in the country that offered practical training for African farm workers. Among the first students were Mdukatshani people, tribal men and women who had never been to school but earned certificates of competence in agriculture. And long before the age of land claims, Peter he had set aside a section of Snowflake for an Nguni project with his Hlubi neighbours. Before he died, he wanted his verbal agreement with the Hlubi *Nkosi* formalized, but it wasn't going to be easy. Because Snowflake lies adjacent to Giants Castle Game Reserve and within one of the nation's water catchment areas, any change in land use needs the approval of a number of different authorities. An agreement was still a long way from finality when Peter died in 2004, and his son, Chris, took over. A draft proposal would form the basis of discussions between the Brown Family Trust and the AmaHlubi Traditional Authority. The Preamble reads: *The Brown family in a spirit of neighbourliness would like to build the community living on its boundary by increasing their access to land in a way which would foster good neighbourliness but also give an opportunity to teach or enhance community knowledge and the practice of veld management and sustainable land use...*"

It has taken 15 years of interminable negotiations to move towards finality, but the end is in sight. The land has been surveyed as a servitude; an arrangement agreed by all the authorities involved which effectively gives Langalibalele's people the use of the land for the next 99 years.



On the roadside at Snowflake. *Nkosi* Muziwenkosi Radebe, known as Langalibalele II, tells Hlubi women about aspects of the agreement between the Brown family and the Hlubi Traditional Authority.



LAND REFORM

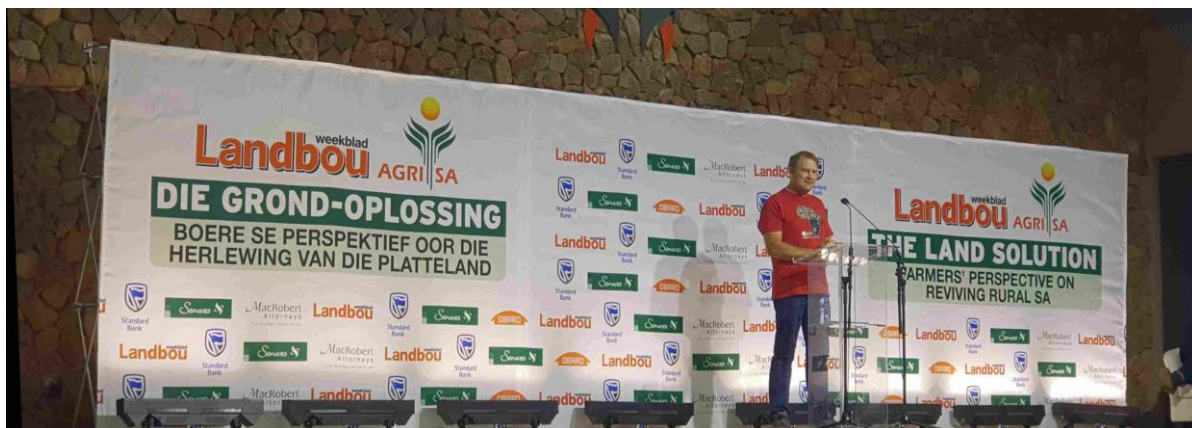
The first shots were fired in August. A burst of anger or a preamble to war? The word spread quickly. The men at Nkaseni were fighting over fields, an old argument with little chance of resolution. "Bring the whites back," scoffed a group of crafters, laughing. "Bring the whites back! Let them build." It was one way to sort out the problem. If the men wanted to fight, let them get on with it. The women had better things to do.

Nkaseni is the name of a land reform community that lives on the farm known as Bushmans' River Mouth. In 1998 Nkaseni was hailed as South Africa's first negotiated settlement under the Labour Tenants Act, and there's a photograph outside the Land Claims Court where a group of smiling faces says it all. White farmer, black tenants, Mdukatshani staff and Land Affairs officials - between them they had pulled off the impossible: an amicable agreement hammered out on the farmer's stoep in a spirit of trust and good neighbourliness. Although Nkaseni set a precedent, there were difficulties ahead, and they revolved around the question of beneficiaries. Who was entitled to inherit the land? The labour tenants living on the farm in 1998? Or former labour tenants living elsewhere who had been evicted many years before? The question of beneficiaries has created conflicts all over South Africa, and the law doesn't help. There are two different Acts which govern land reform. The one deals with land restitution, the other with land redistribution, each handled by different departments which don't speak to each other. At Nkaseni this has resulted in a farm divided between two Trusts. Some land belongs to the people who were there in 1998. Some belongs to new people who have arrived since.

The arguments over beneficiaries is the underlying reason for the conflict at Sun Valley, just up the road, where more than 40 men, women and children have died in recent months, a feud which has blocked our access to Weenen for weeks at a time. Sun Valley is a multi-million-rand citrus farm which falls under the Silindokuhle Community Trust. The farm is managed by a company which has leased the property for the past 12 years, providing work for more than 700 people, as well as funds for the Trust. However, Sun Valley is not the only farm held by the Silindokuhle Trust. Through the land redistribution programme, it holds eight farms, five of which are reported to have collapsed. It also holds a portion of Nkaseni.

Beneficiaries are not the only problem facing efforts at land reform in South Africa. There is also the problem of government officials who have stolen farms. In June Patrick Masoka, a Nkaseni man, made headlines when he appeared before the Durban Commercial Crimes Court in Durban charged with fraud and theft amounting to R 5,3 million for stealing the Kuickvlei farm near Ladysmith. Masoka was a project manager for the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform in northern KZN when he devised "a simple but corrupt scheme" to take over the farm, which had been granted to a family of labour tenants who had worked on the land all their lives. Masoka was sentenced to ten years in prison, and the court was told his case was just one of 28 similar cases involving officials in KZN.

If there are problems with land reform, there are also possibilities, and these are often overlooked in the stories of failure. This is one reason the GAP project is taking part in a countrywide research programme that will advise government on an extension policy for land reform beneficiaries - something that does not exist. The project has been approved by the Office of the Presidency and is being funded by the European Union. Project leader is Professor Ben Cousins, our long-time collaborator, and GAP will be handling the livestock component across all provinces. The project aims to develop a detailed set of policies and programmes to support black smallholder farmers both on land reform farms and in communal areas and will be focusing on best practice models that currently exist.



Rauri Alcock giving a presentation at the Landbou Conference in Bela Bela, which was attended by more than 1000 delegates.

IT WAS A YEAR OF TALKING - IN BIG GROUPS AND SMALL

Land expropriation was the topic of the year, together with the failing economy, and both topics generated a record number of summits, conferences, workshops, debates, consultative discussions, and briefings. GAP staff were much in demand at both formal and informal gatherings, trying to limit commitments so that talking didn't take over from the real work on the ground. Among the events which staff attended was a conference on "The Land Solution - Farmers' Perspectives on Reviving Rural Areas", organised at Bela Bela by Landbou Weekblad and AGRI SA. More than 1000 delegates heard the Deputy President, David Mabuza, open the conference, with 75 speakers discussing questions like: *How do we trust each other?* During the year staff also took part in workshops on subjects that included the concept of an Agriculture Development Agency, and "Connecting Rural Producers to Markets".



After supper conversations were sometimes the most intense. This round table discussion took place at the MSD, Malelane Learning Academy where our fieldworkers were doing a training course in basic animal health care.

THE GOAT AGRIBUSINESS PROJECT (GAP)

Mdukatshani's work with goats is part of GAP, a five-year programme run as a partnership between Mdukatshani, Heifer Project South Africa, National Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, and the KwaZulu Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. GAP targets farmers in five district municipalities in Natal and Zululand and aims at improving food security and rural livelihoods. More detailed reports on GAP appear regularly on our website www.gapkzn.co.za.



R10 million was generated by goat sales for communal farmers in 13 auctions and monthly sales

A BUDGET SHORTFALL

"It's a disgrace." This is how Agriculture and Rural Development MEC Themba Mthembu described the financial constraints which had forced his department to stop funding agricultural projects, his department's core function. The outspoken MEC was going to remain in the headlines during the year, always ready with vivid images to describe a sector bedevilled with problems, both internal and external.

Speaking of his department during his budget speech he said he felt "like a surgeon with a patient on an operating table. Once I open up the primary ailment, I find a plethora of adjacent complications that call for a reviewed diagnosis and clinical decisions that have to be immediately dealt with. While working on the malfunctioning organ you then discover that the tissue is irreparably damaged and for the patient to survive you need a transplant."

But he had only just started. His department was "like a house that is infested with mice, cockroaches and bugs," he told a sitting of the KZN Finance Committee. "You no longer need a spray, you just need to fumigate it." Later, at a media briefing, he said "One of the major challenges faced by the department are the parasitic networks that have caused major damage within the department". These challenges were not new. They had been ongoing for almost two decades. "This has caused the department to see a turnover of seven MEC's and 10 heads of department, including acting HOD's," he said. The instability had destroyed the department with the average time MEC's and HOD's spent in office being 24 months. This had negatively affected organisational culture, professionalism, work ethic and efficient service delivery which had been "exacerbated by politics."

According to Mthembu, forensic investigations had revealed irregular payments of more than R 100 million, and several managers had resigned rather than face the music for looting the department's coffers. "In order to curb this corruption, the department is busy implementing consequence management emanating from the Auditor-General," he said. "This has unsettled a lot of people..."

How has this affected the Goat Agribusiness Project? Since Zulu King Zwelithini launched the project in 2016, there have been three ministers of agriculture, three MECs, two HODs, and three Acting HODs which, in addition to shifting staff, has made it difficult to find out why the department's 2018-2019 funding agreement with GAP has stalled. Despite six months of meetings at various levels of the department, GAP has not been paid the R 3,2 million due for the year, an amount budgeted for auctions, training, publications and veterinary kits. At the most fundamental level, the shortfall has affected our reputation with local communities who assume we have been paid but have diverted the funds for our own use elsewhere. Attempts to get the funds transferred are ongoing.



IT'S A TOUGH JOB RAISING KIDS

The request from DRUM magazine was unexpected. It had heard about GAP's work with goats. Could it take a look at the project? Yes, its readers might be sophisticated, but everyone understood the significance of goats. And that is how an article on GAP's 100 goat kid experiment came to share space with stories on Sophia Lichaba's weight loss 'I've lost too much but I'm going to gain some back'.

The 100 goat kid experiment was set up to see what interventions were necessary to prevent 50% to 60% of all goat kids dying a few months after birth. High kid mortality is a factor that affects all stockowners, whether they own a few goats or many, so there has been widespread interest in the results. Initially two farmers, Mvezelwa Mchunu and Ngamu Ndlovu offered their goats for the experiment. Scrap timber was used to erect an enclosure to house the new-borns and keep them separate from their mothers, and GAP staff helped to tag and vaccinate the kids, keeping a record of costs. Twice a day the kids were allowed to suckle their mothers, but they didn't follow them out to the feeding grounds in the bush. They stayed at home and guzzled a protein feed of milled acacia pods, reaped from nearby trees. The results showed that at a cost of R84,50 per kid mortality in the first three month was reduced to just 5 %, giving the farmer a potential profit of R 110 000,00 on his kids. The experiment is now being extended to nine pilots in the other areas that GAP works in.





THE UNEMPLOYED

The World Health Organisation estimates South Africa is the third-largest producer in the world of cannabis, which provides employment for some 1,2 million people made up of 900 000 cannabis farmers and 350 000 traditional healers who grow their own cannabis for medical reasons.
(KZN Business Report, June 2019)

Some of those 900 000 cannabis farmers walk past Mdukatshani's gate every day carrying small petrol pumps on their heads. Nobody has told them of the big changes coming their way, as they don't read the newspapers, they don't attend Expos, and they've never been interviewed for TV or radio, so although they may be experts on the subject, they are unaware of the "green rush" sweeping South Africa. It began in September 2018 with a Constitutional Court ruling that an individual could grow and consume cannabis in their own private space - whatever that might be. Parliament was given 24 months to provide adequate legislation. Not long afterwards the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority gazetted a 12-month exemption that allows cannabis extracts to be sold in health supplements, provided the products make no medical claims. The changes are hedged about with restrictions, but they have opened a gap on a market that is said to be worth billions. It's a market for cannabis oil and hemp, however, not the crop the women call *gwayi*, or tobacco. While it may be legal to smoke cannabis at home, but it can't be exchanged for money. This is something that tends to be overlooked in the nationwide discussions now taking place on the potential of a crop that can fire up ailing economies.





Four years ago growers began investing in pumps, a development that has enabled them to enlarge their gardens, hiring tractors and donkeys to plough land they once hoed by hand. There may be risks, but they are aware there is a change in policy. The last time police helicopters flew into the valley to spray the crop was 2006. There have been occasional arrests in the years since, but although the crop is planted close to district roads there have been no more raids

"It's a huge business," said the Eastern Cape premier, Oscar Mabuyane, announcing his vision for state dagga farms. Feasibility studies were already under way. He had potential investors standing by, legal experts studying the legislation, and scientists advising on production and use. The small growers, of course, would not be forgotten. They had grown the crop illegally for years. They formed the base of the industry, and he saw them being registered and drawn into formal co-operatives where they would be made to understand that they must work within the law so that we maximize opportunities out of this." While two AmaPondo kings argued over a deal King Dlovuyezwe Ndamase has struck with a Chinese company, Zulu King Zwelithini was telling his people that cannabis was "among the things that we have to consider to help us as a nation". In fact he was already in discussions with a health care company that was proposing a multi-million rand project to cultivate cannabis on 75 hectares of land held by the Ingonyama Trust.

The local growers who walk past our gate are already doing their bit to help the nation. They are an important segment of the population: Part of the 9,4 million officially unemployed. If there really are 900 000 cannabis farmers - and the statistics are shaky - they exceed the total number formally working in agriculture (843 000). But more importantly, they belong to an industry that is totally self-sustained. They buy their own pumps, plough their own fields, and market their own crop - without subsidies or help from anyone. Nobody knows how much they contribute to the national economy, but if the United Nations is correct (another shaky statistic), they produce 2 500 tons of cannabis a year. Sold on city streets for smoking this is a crop which is probably worth at least R 15 billion a year. Can cannabis-for-oil compete? It may be a crop with potential, but it is also a highly regulated industry. Not only does the crop have to be audited and certified before it can be sold or exported to pharmaceutical companies, but the difficult process of producing cannabidoil "basically forces people to become chemists." Does this sound like a crop for a woman with a garden on the river bank? Nobody is talking about the difficulties. Yield, for example. How much oil can you extract from a tenth of a hectare? And there's another question: If there's a switch to oil, what will happen to the networks that sustain the men in town? *Gwayi* is a family business, not just another crop. Any changes in production will touch the family as a whole.

In the faraway cities the talking goes on, with figures that continue to dazzle. There have been three Cannabis Expos in the past few months alone - all held in different casinos: The Times Square Casino, Tshwane, the Sibaya Casino, Durban, and the Emperor's Palace, Gauteng. Do the venues suggest an element of gambling? At home in the valley the *gwayi* is looking good. It will soon be ready for harvesting.

What's this stuff? An Msinga goat lost in a field of green kikuyu at the Cedara Agricultural Research Station. Home ground looks less promising, but it may be more economic than a diet of concentrates and grass.



FINDING THE ANSWERS A Collaborative Effort

Scientists and small farmers tend to live in different worlds, which makes a collaborative experiment on goat weight gain and palatability something quite new. The project was launched at the Cedara Research Station in January when selected farmers from Jozini and Msinga joined up with Zandile Ndlovu, a Scientific Production Technician, to attempt to answer two burning questions: Are their goats smaller than "commercial" goats because of crossbreeding - or nutrition? And how much feed do they need to invest in an animal to get a higher price in the live goat market?

Three groups of goats were going to be tested: Hardy bush goats from Jozini and Msinga, and a pampered flock from Cedara. The veld goats came from selected GAP farmers who had each set aside four castrated goat kids, two for Cedara, two to remain at home. Both sets of animals would be weighed monthly, as Zandile explained when she outlined the project at the launch. GAP has worked hard to bridge the divide between science and the informal sector, so it wasn't the first time the farmers had been to Cedara. It was a first for their goats, however, learning to adjust to a sea of green grass and a diet that included pellets. The first results were shared at a workshop in May when the farmers returned to take a look at "their" goats, and to learn about the costs and benefits of feeding. First there was that question of weight gain. On grass and pellets Jozini, Msinga and Cedara goats performed much the same, so location was not a factor restraining growth. Feeding concentrate, however, had cost R450,00 a goat, which led to a lively discussion. Was this an amount that could be recovered if the goat was sold on the live market? The farmers said no. While the goat might be noticeably fatter, they estimated the sale price would only increase by R 200,00.

There was also the question of feeding goats concentrates to make them economically viable for the meat market. The results were disappointing. When experimental goats were slaughtered for tests on palatability, they dressed at about 45%, which means that sold retail at R58,00 for mixed cuts a goat would realize between R600,00 and R900,00, as against R 1200,00 on the live goat market. As a point of interest - an Estcourt butcher was given a substantial amount of goat meat, which he was unable to sell, even at half price. In KZN people eat goat meat, they don't buy it, but this may change if it is seen as a culinary speciality, another area of research which was on display at the workshop, when farmers were asked to score a delicious lunch of goat meat cooked in various ways by staff of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.



Have they put on weight? Farmers who contributed goats to the Cedara experiment visit "their" kids.



A goat meat tasting exercise. Farmers were asked to score each method of cooking.

LOOK! NO FEET!



Top left: Mla Magasela tries out the electric bike.

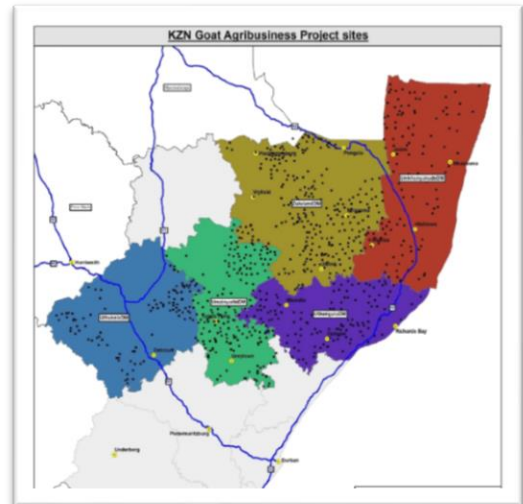
Top right: Map of our five project areas: The UThukela, Mzinyathi, King Cetshwayo, Zululand and uMkhanyakude district municipalities.

Below: Zamani Madonsela, our driver, has become an expert puncture-fixer, working long days on rough tracks.

Above right: The damaged dashboard of the stolen bakkie.



THE GOAT AGRIBUSINESS PROJECT



LOOK! NO BAKKIE!



TRANSPORT

Rauri Alcock's bakkie had been parked outside the Catholic Archbishop's office in Durban for only 15 minutes when it was stolen in January. Half an hour later a Tracker helicopter found it in KwaMashu, the dashboard ripped apart in an attempt to find the tracker device. Repairs would take six weeks - a delay that reminded us of our dependence on vehicles in a project that covers more than 57 000 km² of broken country far from anywhere. None of our vehicles are new, and every day they are tested on tracks that were never intended for vehicles at all. The most difficult distances are the short ones. Although a fieldworker can walk 15 - 20 km to a dip, it's a wasteful use of time. There are few alternatives to walking in most rural areas, however, which is why we have invested in an electric bike which is currently being tested on our steep and stony hills. Meanwhile our driver, Zamani Madonsela, is off before dawn as usual, dropping off staff in remote areas, far from taxis or buses. He will be back long after dark, still smiling. There's another punctured tyre lying in the back, but he'll see to the repair in the morning.



A YEAR OF EXTREMES

In March, Sarah Alcock was bitten by a cobra as she climbed into bed at night. An hour later she was at the Estcourt Provincial Hospital being stabilized. More than six hours later she was at MediClinic getting anti-venom. An insufficient dose. As we were to discover, very few doctors know how to treat snakebite, although an estimated 6000 people are admitted to hospital with snakebite every year. According to a paper in the S.A. Medical Journal (2017) "The management of snakebite injuries remains controversial and a source of endless fascination for surgeons." The fascination is less obvious to the victims in their care, so we were grateful for the friendships forged with two experts, Johan Marais, of the African Snakebite Institute, and Dr Colin Tilbury of a Director of SOS international, who were always on hand for help. For Sarah the recovery was slow and painful, and it was six weeks and three operations before she returned to work.

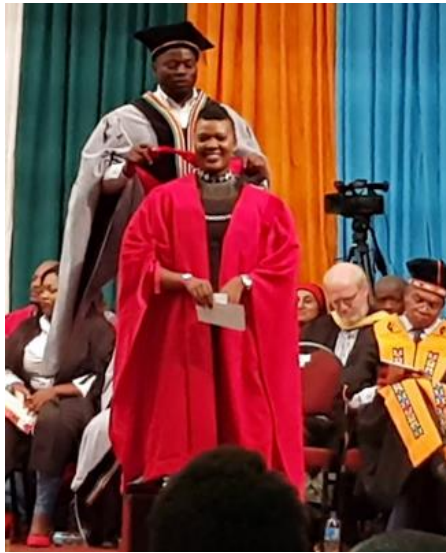
The Thukela Valley is snake country, and close encounters are part of summer. Snakes are killed inside our homes and out, and everyone looks forward to winter because at last "the snakes are asleep". Not so, says Johan Marais. In KZN snakes don't hibernate. And he's right. The day after Midwinter this python was found basking near a kitchen hedge. Pythons are protected by law in KZN, and in our valley they're regarded as a sign of good luck. Makhonya is often called to move them away, but there are problems with relocation. Nobody wants the pythons released near their area as they prey on domestic stock. Zamani Madonsela has watched two of his goats being killed by python (see above) and was relieved when the four-metre-long latest captive was released on Darkest Africa, a neighbour's farm and nature reserve. Almost inert after a chilly night in the bakkie, the python had to be carried into a small gorge where it gradually warmed up and moved off.



In January, our second driest in 44 years, an outbreak of Fall Army Worms attacked local Tamboti trees, leaving groves a ghostly white. *Achaea catella* is no danger to crops, and we are told the trees will recover.



February was our second wettest in 44 years, and plants rushed to catch up on four years of drought producing a long-awaited harvest of thatch grass.



Manqhai Kraai is awarded a doctorate for her four-year study on goat foraging behaviour.



Manqhai has become a familiar figure at Ncunjane where she conducted much of her fieldwork, and she arranged a formal report-back on the results of her research.

MANQHAI GETS HER DOCTORATE

It's something every herdboys knows: You can herd goats, but you can't follow them. This was something Manqhai Kraai learnt the hard way when she started her research into free-ranging goats in 2015. Try following goats and they walk faster... and faster... There is only one way to observe them: You have to know where they are going and keep them in sight. This isn't easy when the goats are foraging in arid savanna, trying to get away, and disappearing in the bush. Manqhai would become an expert tracker over time, gradually accumulating notebooks full of data on the behaviour of an animal about which little is known. The long hours of observation paid off in April when she was awarded her PH. D in Ecology at the School of Life Sciences, College of Agriculture, Engineering and Science, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Manqhai had started her research with a simple question: *How does the availability and quality of food affect the decisions of free-ranging goats living in different size herds?* For there was no doubt they made decisions. They might submit to being kraaled together, but away from their owners the goats adjusted their herd size, big herds splitting into smaller groups, much like their wild counterparts. What did this mean for attempts to commercialize goats? Was there an optimal herd size for each landscape? Manqhai's study confirmed that to avoid competition it was better to live in a small group than a large, but although her results suggested that "small herds were better suited to the semi-arid savanna", this did not rule out goat production. Instead she suggested: "It would be beneficial to farmers to have some idea of optimal herd sizes for each landscape that would maximize production. This information could then inform farmers how often to sell animals to maximize profit."

Manqhai discussed this idea with local farmers when she had a report-back meeting on her results in July 2019. And she hadn't finished with her questions. Currently lecturing in Animal Behaviour and Ecology at the School of Life Sciences, UKZN, she has set two honours students to work on the vegetation in her study areas. Samukelisiwe Colvel and Amanda Nzimande arrived at Ncunjane in June to start fieldwork on two subjects: *The physical defences of acacia trees against goat herbivory*, and *the contribution of pod-bearing plants to the diet of goats in the dry season*.



Semukelisiwe and Amanda in the field gathering data assisted by local assistants

A MASTERS DEGREE FOR SONGEZO



Songezo's silver neckpiece uses a traditional grass weave.



Songezo learns a new pattern from Mdukatshani crafter, Phangiwe Dladla.



Songezo worked over the holidays to draw copper wire for our Paris order.



Lindeni Dladla with the result.

Songezo Baleni started weaving grass bangles when he was a small boy herding cattle on the hills. It was a tradition among herdboys, a pastime that helped to while away the hours. He knew which grasses were pliable for weaving, and he learnt the different methods of twisting and plaiting. He never would have imagined that his pastime would become a career, something that happened almost by accident when he enrolled as a student in a jewellery class at Durban's University of Technology. He was working in silver when he came to Mdukatshani in November 2015 to sit down with our crafters and compare weaves. His visit was arranged by our partner Julia Meintjes, of the Threads of Africa metal weaving project, and Songezo brought samples of his designs with him, exquisite, finely wrought silver bangles and rings incorporating the weaves he learnt as a boy. The Mdukatshani women knew the weaves well - the sieve, the drill, the twist, the snake's spine, the caterpillar, the sleeping mat, the mouthparts of a hyaena - but they had only ever seen the patterns rendered in grass, and they passed Songezo's pieces around marvelling. If they learnt something new, so did Songezo, who was able to add some new stitches to his repertoire. In June 2018 he was awarded a Masters Technical Degree in Fine Art for his thesis: *An Investigation into the use of traditional woven grass bangle techniques to design and develop contemporary jewellery*. Our collaboration has been ongoing. Without Songezo we would never have met the deadline for the Paris bowls, which needed silver and copper wire pulled at short notice. It's a delicate job, infinitely slow and he delayed his leave to help us out. He is currently a lecturer in Jewellery Design and Manufacture at Durban's University of Technology.



Hlekisile Mtshali



Khombisile Mvelase

A MANY-SPLENDURED THING

Some time in 1969 we bought our first - and we thought our last - box of beads. It was a small experiment that nobody would fund. Beads were too ethnic for South African shops, which saw no value in African designs. "It's a passing fad," one donor told us, turning down an appeal for funds. Fifty years later we are still here, however, and we were working on plans for a jubilee celebration when two of our star crafters died. Their deaths have overshadowed the year, and temporarily put the celebrations on hold. Khombisile Mvelase (67) the Mdukatshani Craft Organiser, died in March after a short illness. Hlekisile Mtshali (56) died in June after more than a year of repeated strokes. Both women were widows, with grown-up children, and like all crafters, worked from home. This is where you would find them if you dropped in unexpectedly, sitting outside against their mud walls, stitching or weaving, usually alone. Khombisile could do anything with a bead needle and thread, Hlekisile could do anything with fine metal wire. Customers remarked on the quality of their work, which set a standard by which all craft was measured. They were teachers as well as crafters, and it will be difficult to go on without them. Meanwhile the jubilee won't be forgotten. A special report is in preparation for later in the year.



The Goat Agribusiness Project UPDATES



A BESTSELLER

Good day. I have just come across a book on Goat Production that I find very resourceful for my research on goat production in Kgatleng District Botswana. The book is so resourceful for my study and I can use it as a future reference as I embark on small stock farming. Can you please advise on how I can get a hard copy or buy the book?

Bongani Sethebe, Gaborone.

It's a bestseller, or it would be if it were sold. GAP's publications are free for project and departmental staff, however, and despite a print run of 15 000 the Zulu edition on Goat Production is already out of print. GAP's handbooks appear in English and Zulu and are used for training by a wide range of organisations, as well as educational institutions and extension staff. Due to the current delays in government funding the revised indigenous cattle and chicken books are currently on hold.



PUBLICITY

The goat project attracted attention in unexpected places, including the faraway *Los Angeles Times* which headlined the project in an article on climate change. "They survive droughts, they eat trees - South Africa's goats are helping farmers weather climate change," wrote Krista Mahr. Closer to home five short videos were completed during the year, and together with a film on the goat project can be viewed on the GAP website at www.gapkzn.co.za.



THE ELECTIONS

Once again the Mdukatshani Learning Centre and the Ncunjane Primary School served as Voting Stations for the national elections in May 2019. At Mdukatshani 158 voters gave the IFP a majority of 79 votes, followed by the EFF(26), ANC (23) NFP (14) DA (8) with 8 votes for smaller parties. At Ncunjane 253 voters gave IFP a majority of 146, with 104 votes for the ANC, and the remainder spoilt papers.



Animal health workers collecting statistics from project members at a dip tank.

The Goat Agribusiness Project UPDATES



Training happen where it's convenient for farmers and project members



Nine experimental goat dip tanks were built across the project area in communities



GAP trained Leatherworkers using goat skins to make computer bags and other fashionable items for the market

Chickens sheltering from a windy day during a workshop



Misereor have been long-term partners of Mdukatshani and in January we were glad to meet Dr Klaus Piepel, the Misereor Desk Officer for Southern Africa, and Kathrin Resak, the Rural Development Officer. Here our project partner, Marisia Geraci CEO of Heifer (HPSA) watches a demonstration with Kathrin, Klaus and Gugu Mbatha, the Mdukatshani Project Director.

OUR PARTNERS



Gugu discusses the school project with our visitors.



Peter Blausten worked briefly on Mdukatshani as a student volunteer, and in September was back with his wife Diane, and sons Torin and Rory to discuss funding the project through the Africa Development Trust. This was a lunch break in the sparse shade of a thorn at the home of MaYengwa Mchunu.



An evaluation is always an ordeal, but we were encouraged by the comments of our two evaluators, Monique Salomon (above) and Dr Gerold Rahmann (below) when they assessed the project in May 2019.



Zandile Ndlovu is the tireless researcher who heads the collaborative goat feeding experiment at Cedara. (See Page 14).



The evaluation was led by Professor Gerold Rahmann, a researcher with 30 years' experience in sheep and goat-keeping and a scientific advisor to the German government. Dr Rahmann is currently Director of the Thunen-Institute of Organic Farming, in Westerau, Germany.



OBITUARIES

It's been a year of violent events. Some made the headlines. Many did not. The most haunting death was that of five year old Usmenzelo Mncube, a little girl whose dismembered body was found on the hill opposite Mdukatshani in January. She had just started school at the Mbango Primary and disappeared while walking alone to class one morning. There have been no arrests.

Project staff were shocked at the death of Siphosakhe Myeza (48), and his wife Balungile (40), who were killed in October driving home at night near Pomeroy. Myeza was treasurer of the Msinga Livestock Association and worked closely with our staff. We were also saddened by the tragic deaths of three of our women farmers: Nomasonto Mthembu (40), Thelumusa Mchunu (45) and Ngakephi Masoka (44) who were all from the Mchunu area. They were among the victims of an ex-convict who in a period of four months killed six family members and injured two before being arrested after a shoot-out with police.

In January fieldworker Sazi Mzolo was working at the Cecilia dip near Weenen when a woman grabbed him suddenly and pushed him into a hut. Outside there was a burst of gunfire. When a very shaken Sazi emerged, he found two men had been killed: Bhaca Sithole and Nkosiyethu Njoko. Their deaths were not related to the work at the dip, but a quarrel that had started at Christmas.

Meanwhile violence along our familiar roads added to the death toll of the year. In July three security guards were injured when their armoured bakkie came under fire and rolled at KwaKopi near Tugela Ferry. Explosives were used to open the van, and the attackers got away with an undisclosed amount of money. A week later eleven men died in an ambush on the road to Colenso, an event that was reported on both CNN and SkyNews. In October two Fidelity guards were killed near Mudon while escorting a panel-van with a consignment of cigarettes. After killing the guards, a gang of 12 men armed with high calibre rifles forced the van onto a gravel road where the cigarettes were offloaded into three getaway vehicles. More recently Gqumile Mchunu (28) and Teacher Cele (29) were killed in an attempted hijack in the early evening at KwaThepha, in the Mchunu area. Bakery vans are regularly targets of hold-ups, and in May, Mashunka went without bread after the bakery van was stopped, the driver tied up, and money and bread taken.



Three crafters wear the black of widowhood. Bandlile Mtshali's husband, Sthenjwa Dladla died in his sleep nine days after the wedding. Gcinani Duma's husband, Doboza Dladla, was shot at home at Mashunka, as was Fikisile Duma's husband, Blaauw Dladla - among the deaths that never made the newspapers.