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A YOUNG FARMER AND HER FAMILY ARE GETTING INVOLVED WITH ABALIMI




If you can grow vegetables in this soil you can grow them anywhere!



Babalwa, her husband Gerald and their 6-year old daughter Sisanga.

Babalwa Mankayi's way into farming was sparked off by a key moment at her home in Khayelitsha: One day she put some old sprouting potatoes into the soil outside her home. After a few months she was more than surprised that new potatoes had been growing at this very place without any effort on her part.

In 2015, Babalwa attended the *Abalimi Young Farmers Training Centre Apprenticeship at SCAGA (Siyazama Community Allotment Garden Association)* in Khayelitsha. While studying at SCAGA, Babalwa was able to obtain her own garden beds at a large community garden very close to her home in Khayelitsha.

After only 1,5 years of being involved with Abalimi, the mother of three is a successful farmer of Harvest of Hope. Also her husband Gerald found a job as a driver, delivering vegetable bags for Harvest of Hope. Additionally she has been selected as our newest and youngest fieldworker! Of course she will still carry on growing and selling veg as well.

Meals at home have changed as now she is able to cook with vegetables that she couldn't afford before, e.g. broccoli or cauliflower. "Farming is an essential skill to learn" she says,

"Home grown vegetables are healthier than the ones that come from the supermarket."

people working there. He was impressed by the capacity of the garden. They exchanged contact details and in December 2015 they called him and invited Andile to join their garden. Since then Andile is responsible for all the admin. Furthermore he is checking the quality of the soil and the produce that comes out of it. He believes that vegetables grown using organic methods are "a kind of healthcare." Andile has learned a lot about work ethic from the elderly farmers. "But soil quality is poor. We still lack electricity and the biggest challenge is vandalism and theft", he says.

Besides gardening, Andile is a Tuesday Garden Tour leader for Abalimi and is a member of VUFA (*Vukuzenzela Urban Farmers Association*). In future he wants to do philanthropic work, be an entrepreneur, travel the world and own a farm that is self sustaining. "You can be a farmer who does more than just producing crops", he says.

Andile would also like to grow strawberries because "Strawberries are very intimate, they bring lovers to your farm, couples and people with families."

Although he lives more simply since he left the corporate world Andile says: "I am happier than ever before."



EDITORIAL

Tenjiwe Christina Kaba
New CEO of Abalimi Bezekhaya

Dear friends of *Abalimi Bezekhaya*, we have come a long way over the past 35 years. From Green Point, our office moved to Observatory and finally settled in Philippi 10 years ago. We now have an office and also a busy packshed, that is accessible to our farmers. Many of our farmers are making a living from their community gardens.

Last year I was appointed CEO of Abalimi, taking over from Rob Small, who has led and served us well for many years. Rob remains a trusted advisor, friend and resource mobiliser under the *Farm & Garden National Trust*. As a community grassroots leader, I am supported by a small hard working team of qualified professionals who love our vision and mission and ensure that *Abalimi* is managed well. In the next few years I intend to pass the leadership of the *Abalimi* movement on. What is important to me is to see people happy, that people have something to do. The problem of food security hasn't changed, it is still continuing; and Abalimi is here to help those who can't help themselves.

Abalimi Bezekhaya is a community organisation. We come here because we love to work with the community. Our job is to help the poor. Food security is our purpose for being here, not only money. We need to stay as a family, we need to help each other. But as a family we need to grow; allowing new, young people and new ideas to come in.

We won't forget who we are and where we come from. If we stick with that, then Abalimi is indestructible. I will always stand for the name of Abalimi in the community, until I die. I will always defend Abalimi, according to our vision and mission, which you can see on our website.

This newsletter tells stories that point to our future and the anniversary insert brings back memory of our path through the years. I hope that you are inspired to become, or remain, our friends, on South Africa's Long Walk to Freedom. To us, Mandela's vision is more alive and urgent than ever. We are showing that it is possible for unemployed people to feed and employ themselves, through a new culture of family micro-farming, while building democracy, from the ground up, with love and respect for all.

ANDILE THE ALL-ROUND TALENT



Andile is one of the latest additions to the Abalimi farmer network. He has been with Abalimi and Harvest of Hope since April 2016.

Andile's dream was once to become a buyer in the fashion industry. He thought a job there would give him the opportunity to travel around the world. He then studied IT system support engineering for two years and worked at Vodacom for ten more years. But he never really felt connected with the work he was doing. Andile finally came to the conclusion:

"Farming has always been a part of me and I love it more!"

Back in Eastern Cape his father has a farm with livestock, mainly cattle. One day when visiting some friends in Khayelitsha, Andile passed by the Masithobelane Garden and spoke with the

A "CONNECTING POINT" OF THE HARVEST OF HOPE NETWORK



Harvest of Hope (HoH) runs as an intricate, well-oiled machine; farmers, drivers, packing staff, volunteers and customer-members all play a vital role in the operation. The HoH drivers tie the network together, and this is their moment to shine.

Anele Qutyelo has been a driver for HoH for 2 years. He rises at 6am every Tuesday to leave his home in Khayelitsha D Section where he lives with his mother, sister, niece, and younger brother. Before 9am on a typical Tuesday, HoH delivery day, Anele weaves through Nyanga

and Khayelitsha farms to pick up freshly harvested vegetables and bring them into the HoH packshed. After everything is packed into the bags and stored in his truck, Anele will drive to Oakhurst Primary School, Montebello Greenhouse and UCT to offer a kind greeting along with carefully packed bags of those same vegetables. Mondays, too, include pickups and the latter half of the week brings a combination of seedling and manure deliveries, restaurant drop offs and compost collections.

In his two years as an Abalimi - HoH driver, Anele has experienced a car crash and escaped a carjacking. Nevertheless, when asked what the scariest part of his job is he replied "the moments when I need to do an important task for the first time. Driving to a new drop off point in an

unexplored neighborhood through thick Cape Town traffic can be nerve-wracking when you have a series of hard deadlines to meet." Anele takes punctuality seriously and the pressure falls on him when the packshed finishes twenty minutes late, a traffic jam builds up, a bag is missing or becomes wet due to the rain.

Reflecting on his time with HoH, Anele said, "I've learned how to work with people." He loves interacting with friendly colleagues and farmers, like the smiley administrator at UCT Chemical Engineering and the talkative chef at the Black Sheep restaurant.

The relationship goes both ways: HoH customers commonly praise Anele for being kind and effortlessly friendly.

HEAVY METAL IS NOT JUST A MUSIC GENRE



Chris D'Aiuto and Liziwe Stofile giving soil science training to the farmers.

Soil nutrient and heavy metal testing is a new Abalimi initiative and that has shown our soils are healthy.

Our Production Manager and soil scientist Christopher D'Aiuto, who has been working with Abalimi for almost three years, introduced the tests in 2014.

The aim is to test 50 Abalimi market gardens over the next five years. One test is all that is needed, as no new metal inputs are likely. So far 20 gardens have been tested. The gardens are tested in order of total production of kilograms –

starting with the most productive ones and then heading to the smaller gardens.

Abalimi handed out Soil-Awards in August at the Abalimi Nyanga- and Khayelitsha-People's Garden Centers. Abalimi farmers from a variety of gardens came together to learn more about the soil and to receive awards for healthiest soils in soil carbon, pH, potassium, phosphorus, calcium and magnesium.

Canadian soil regulations were used as they are the most stringent and complete regulations available. All gardens tested were well within safe limits and our farmers continue to add value to their farms' soil.



his normal repertoire. His eccentric offerings include deep fried kale, aubergine atchar, kohlrabi kimchi, and an unbeatable turnip and basil combination he credits to his father.

"It's a conscious effort to make very unusual and interesting things," he said.

Chef Japha, whose 25 years of experience spans Michelin star restaurants and high-end gastropubs, seeks out smart combinations. And for him, that also means locally sourcing ingredients. Japha's philosophy is simple; if it's imported, he doesn't buy it. Beyond limiting the restaurant's carbon footprint, nearby food, he says, "simply tastes better." Japha heard about Harvest of Hope from indigenous plant expert and Abalimi Friend Loubie Rusch.

"I love the fact that I get to cut out the middle man," he noted. "And what I get for doing that is a better product, that is way fresher."

Black Sheep's entire kitchen staff hail from Khayelitsha, same as many of the farmers from whom they buy their vegetables. Not one attended culinary school, like many of their counterparts at comparable upscale eateries. Their learning-by-doing spirit mirrors that of Abalimi's farmers, who are constantly mastering new techniques for optimal harvests.

You can find The Black Sheep at 104 Kloof Street; it's open Mondays from 18:30, and Tuesdays to Saturdays for lunch and dinner. Reservations are recommended, the earlier the better.

THE BLACK SHEEP: MASTERING THE ART OF QUIRKY VEGETABLES

The Black Sheep restaurant is just like any other Harvest of Hope customer, except their weekly veg box is gigantic. It's been almost a year since the family-run local eatery began their partnership with Abalimi Bezekhaya. South African born Chef Japha reveres the opportunity to use seasonal ingredients outside



Babalalo on his grandfather's farm in the Eastern Cape overlooking thriving crops of spinach and cabbage that he helped to plant.

DOING SPIRITUAL WORK THROUGH ORGANIC FARMING OF INDIGENOUS HERBS

Whoever has already set foot on the premises of Philippi Village, where Abalimi has its HQ, has likely gotten in touch with Babalo, a young entrepreneur who grew up in the Eastern Cape on his grandfather's 16 hectare farm.

Babalalo noticed that Imphepho was growing wild everywhere on the farm. Imphepho is a traditionally important indigenous herb, perhaps best known as a ritual incense used during healing ceremonies. Convinced by the good quality of the Imphepho and with a small start-up donation from the Farm & Garden Trust, he decided to harvest it sustainably and bring it back to Cape Town, earlier this year, for selling to the community.

Imphepho has many uses- as an antiseptic, insecticide, anti-inflammatory and for pain relief.

The parts of the plant used are mainly the leaves, stems and flowers and sometimes the roots. New born babies are washed in Imphepho to cleanse and protect them. The herb is stuffed in bedding for both humans and animals to repel insects. The plants are usually wild harvested and plated in garlands or tied in bundles before drying. Babalo managed to get dozens of 40 kg bags full of Imphepho via Bus from the Eastern Cape to Cape Town as his start-up stock.

Babalalo's spiritual mission is to "strengthen the souls of people, who have been lost in the city, by reconnecting them to the land, sustaining African cultural heritage and any kind of good business." while also supporting himself and his wife and two children. He is also starting a charcoal from wild Acacia tree business. Currently he is sustainably harvesting huge forests on his family farm in the Eastern Cape.



WELCOME ONBOARD!

Whenever a family has a new member it is always a big change. Change is even bigger if that person becomes the new head of the family as it is the case with Gaenor Munnik – new General Manager of Abalimi Bezekhaya.

Gaenor appeared in the organisation recently, but she already seems to feel at home. She brings sensitivity, frankness and humour we all appreciate. And hugs! She is never in shortage of hugs for everyone.

Gaenor has been around Abalimi for quite a some time now and she comes with the feeling of what we do. With her vast business and accounting experience it is hard to imagine someone better to manage Abalimi's current issues and the future growth. It is fortunate that we've found a leader who combines both professionalism and understanding of our values.

With Mama Kaba as a CEO and Gaenor Munnik as General Manager we will become more efficient, yet keep our heart. *Welcome Gaenor!*

SEED SAVING AND BIODYNAMIC FARMING WITHIN THE ABALIMI MOVEMENT



Sibongile with radish seeds being dried out for planting next season.

The seed that gardeners and farmers hold in their hands at planting time are living links within an unbroken chain reaching back to antiquity.

Our grandparents and their ancestors were seed savers by necessity. Their best plants were carefully selected to produce the next year's seeds, which were traded over the back yard fence with neighbours and faithfully passed down to new generations of gardeners.

Abalimi, with the help of Wendy Crawford, a leading young Biodynamic Farming practitioner and trainer, wants farmers to reconnect with tradition and to actively save seed. Sibongile, an existing Harvest of Hope Farmer, is one of the "Seed Savers". He has been already saving seeds from coriander, radish, rocket, green and broad beans, peas, celery and pumpkin since last year.

The positive effects for the farmers are obvious: the farmer saves money while plants that reproduce through natural means tend to adapt to local conditions better.

Abalimi farmers are also curious to embrace biodynamic farming practices. Biodynamics uses specially prepared substances, for instance the Cow Horn Preparation (or Preparation 500) that have a powerful impact on soil and plant health and quality. Mainstream agriculture (for instance in the wine industry) has started to convert to biodynamics in Europe and also here in South Africa, because of the superior quality of the wines produced from biodynamic grapes. This improvement of quality also occurs with vegetables!

Honouring of the cow is deeply embedded in Xhosa traditions and understanding of fertility. Hence there is a natural bridge between the practices of biodynamic farming and the renewing of Xhosa traditions on a spiritual, material and practical scientific level.

Currently there are 10 Abalimi micro-farms that are being treated with biodynamic soil preparations. The Cow Horn Preparation is made from fresh manure packed into horns, and buried underground for six months. When the farmer brings the horns up from under the soil, the substance is very concentrated with Life Forces. This substance is mixed with water and then stirred for 1 hour. The water in combination with oxygen and the manure makes this liquid a micro-nutrient rich and Life-Filled. From there the farmer sprays the potentiated water on the soil, which "wakes up" the soil and is therefore especially good for spring time.

Sibongile of Asande observed: "It really helped a lot! After that my crops were more healthy, big and happy!"



Mandela Day helpers wearing T-shirts donated by CTICC for the occasion.

WHAT MANDELA DAY MEANS AT ABALIMI BEZEKHAYA

"Mandela Day is very potent because you see people from all over coming to help us,"

said Mama Nancy, one of the farmers, and Abalimi Chairperson.

Ma Nancy, a former school principal and school management consultant, is now a seasoned farmer, who turns 70 this year. But that didn't stop her from stealing the show. On a tanbark red carpet, she strutted towards a semi-circle of volunteers. "Mandela!" Mama Nancy sang repeatedly, shimmying with arms splayed and tapping soil-covered shoes.

A brand-new fleet of wheelbarrows, spades, and rakes—generously donated by Cape Town International Convention Center (CTICC)—were put to work. Additional participating organizations included Mt. Nelson Hotel, Western Cape Police on Boots, trainees from Abalimi's new Young Farmers Training Center (YFTC), DoA-CASIDRA, African Climate Reality Project, and Change Agent Collective.

After a morning full of activities, the volunteers ducked under the garden's roofed structure for freshly picked vegetable and lentil soup, doled out by the farmers. And the food kept coming. Umfino, samp, mutton and fried chicken simmered in family-sized cooking pots. Event goers rejoiced with cake, along with smoothies, additional cold drinks, and donated snack packs.

Over 150 Capetonians joined *Moya We Khaya* ('spirit of home') Peace Gardens, Abalimi's award winning lead micro-farming project partner, on Monday, July 18, for the annual Mandela Day festivities. The volunteers plucked pesky weeds, fertilized new crops, and turned fresh compost under the morning sun.

On Mandela Day most South Africans try to give 67 minutes—one minute for each year of Mandela's public service.

At Moya, there is always plenty of work to do. The Khayelitsha-based plot spans 10000m², the largest of Abalimi's gardens, and is adjacent to the Manyanani Peace Park - also established by Abalimi. The latter was the first successful community initiated park in Khayelitsha since the end of Apartheid in 1994. Rows of soil bulge with leafy greens, carrots, and a wide assortment of other vegetables that need constant nurturing. A dozen farmers tend to the garden full time.

ANNUAL ABALIMI FACT SHEET

MICRO-FARMERS	NEW 895	YOUNG FARMERS SERVED 513
RETURNING 1835	TOTAL 2730	Male 33% (171)
Total on Farmer Register since 2008 6395		Female 67% (342)

SALES

Sales of production inputs like manure, seed, seedlings to micro-farmers:

APPROX R500,000.00 *This is the portion they paid themselves.*

HARVEST OF HOPE (HOH)

GARDENS SUPPLYING HOH 55-127
Involving **196-381** micro-farmers

Turnover
R2 134 757.00

Earned by farmers after costs
R775 249.38

Highest earnings per farmer/month
R8906.00

BAGS & BOXES PER WEEK

MIN 395 MAX 450 Total sold for the year **21 689**

Lowest earnings per farmer/month
R116.00

TRAINING

ATTENDED BASIC TRAINING 165

Trained since 2008 **1672**

Young Farmers Training Centre (YFTC) Apprenticeship (est 2015) **12**

Micro-farmers attending monthly workshops on specific topics (eg quality control, soil improvement, water quality) **min 20/Max 40/month**



WHAT'S NEW AT THE YFTC?

After the pilot of the Young Farmers Training Centre (YFTC) at the Siyazama Community Allotment Garden Association (SCAGA) in Khayelitsha started in 2015, Abalimi was very happy to run a second cycle, which started on the 11th April 2016. "The aim is to give aspiring young farmers a solid basic foundation in organic micro-farming up to Livelihood Level in 6 months", says Dave Golding, training course designer and YFTC founding trainer-manager, says.

What has changed since the pilot project in 2015? The Training is now a full time six month apprenticeship, every week from Monday to Friday. Theory classes are one day a week and the rest is practical. The YFTC is run like a small business and the future idea is to make

it sustainable in terms of production costs and stipends. "The YFTC is starting very grassroots and has not got all the funding it needs, but it's slowly coming together" says Dave. The hardest part, according to Dave, is getting funds for stipends, to assist apprentices with transport and living costs, which are needed by young people who apply for this apprenticeship. From next year on, the aim will be to start the first cycle in the beginning of March and the second cycle at the beginning of September, so it goes with the season. Another thing is to give the next apprentices more information about small business development, to prepare them for the time after the training.

On 31st of August took place the Certificate Ceremony for this years group. Seven of the formally nine apprentices completed this years apprenticeship. "They are a good bunch of people" Dave says, "it's been great to work with them. We got lucky to have people who want to learn." Asked about why it is so important to train the next generation of young farmers, Dave replied: "We gotta bring Youth into the movement, they are the future!" Thanks to Rotary Constantia & partners, including Pick n Pay and also to the Avalon Foundation from the Netherlands for special assistance thus far.



ZODIDI LANGA IS THE FIRST HARVEST OF HOPE-PACKSHED MANAGER

Farmers, local partners, and outside suppliers all dial Zodidi Langa's digits expecting answers - what crops to sell, when to plant their seedlings, how to repair a broken borehole.

Zodidi's phone seems to constantly buzz. The ringtone, a melodic Maskanda folk tune, originates from her birthplace, the Eastern Cape. As Harvest of Hope's packshed manager and a former fieldworker, Zodidi links together the delicate network of Abalimi's Harvest of Hope supply chain.

The 39-year-old multitasking packshed-manager is an indispensable part of how organic vegetables from 55 to 128 township gardens are distributed to drop-off points across Cape Town -- and how the farmers get paid for their harvests. Each Wednesday, Zodidi traverses Khayelitsha, Nyanga and surrounds by "bakkie" (pick-up truck). She visits expansive community gardens and compact home plots alike to compile the following week's inventory, or "picking list." She walks from bed to bed in every garden and estimates the exact number of kg or bundles that the farmer will harvest for the upcoming Tuesday. She also uses this time to help the farmer improve or overcome challenges like pest for example. Then, when all produce gets delivered to the packshed, from bulky squash to feathery thyme, it is weighed on a scale, before being bundled for distribution.

On top of her all-consuming post, Zodidi is taking care of an abundant garden of her own at a community garden called "Eden Forest". Zodidi Langa is Abalimi's second most productive farmer of 2016, according to soil scientist and production manager Chris D'Aiuto. In six months, Zodidi and her hired field hand harvested over 1,400 kilograms of vegetables from her own plots.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Babalwa Mankayi

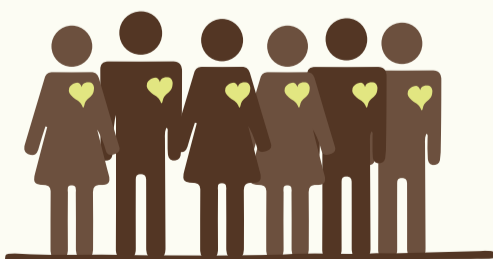
After successfully finishing the SCAGA Apprenticeship in 2015 and getting involved with Mama Monica Foca in the Khanyisa Garden, Babalwa is now on board the Abalimi Field Team and will be our brand new Khayelitsha Fieldworker.

Gerald Mankayi

Babalwa's husband is one of our kindest additions to the busy team of Harvest of Hope drivers. Since the beginning of 2016 he picks up the vegetables and ensure that they reach the drop off point safely.

Jenny Willis

Jenny has joined Harvest of Hope as our new Orders Manager. She will be handling the restaurant supply side of things. She has worked for chefs in South Africa, Italy, and the United States and also has experience in front-of-house and on a kitchen farm supplying one of the best restaurants in America.



Many thanks to our current Board Members who are: **Nancy Mandokose Maqungo (Chair)**, **Christina Tenjiwe Kaba**, **Charl Pienaar**, **Dave Golding**, **Thobeka Nkholha**, **Grace Stead**, **Natalie Van Eeden**

FAREWELL & THANK YOU



We bid a fond farewell to **Ineke Meijer**, **Jenny Smuts** and **Gerrard Wigram**, who have served on our Board in a voluntary capacity for many years, as well as doing other important voluntary tasks and donating funds. Ineke, Jenny and Gerrard, you are and will always be, considered true friends of Abalimi. We simply have no words to describe sufficiently all the gifts you have brought. Your continued Friendship is a huge blessing and we will always look forward to you popping in for a visit from time to time. They will always be part of the Abalimi Family.

Farewell also to our beloved **Ria Schuurman**, who quietly volunteered for many years and assisted with a number of key research projects, collecting and processing data, correcting the Farmer Register and encouraging young farmers. She continues to assist young farmers and their growing businesses.

Eugene Fischer

Eugene was a local volunteer for many years then became a staff member, helping with anything and everything. We will miss your happy smile and welcoming ways.

Norbert Kuntz

Norbert hails from Germany and decided to spend a whole year with us, assisting with management, fundraising and young people's empowerment. It was great to have Norbert with

Abalimi - he brought so much solid kindness and connectedness.

Vincent Keller

All the way from Kassel, Germany, Vincent was the SAGENET-intern of many trades. He was famous amongst our farmers for his veg bread and smoothies. He also worked on HoH packing, mapping the gardens, data management, and engineering projects such as building a solar oven.

Felix Grünwald

From Münster, Germany, Felix was our SAGENET-intern designer extraordinaire. He has made numerous fliers and posters, worked on the website, helped with HoH packing and assisted with data research and analysis.

Kate Cullen

After finishing her Environmental Science studies in May 2016, Kate came to Cape Town to volunteer for two months at Abalimi. During her time with Abalimi she was busy updating our website with content and helping Rachel with the Harvest of Hope business.

Hannah Norman

Coming from sunny California to the wintery Cape Town, Hannah has helped us a lot in her two months at Abalimi with updating our website content by interviewing farmers and local partners. Besides her unique texts, her photo skills were also much appreciated.

Elisabeth Boomgaarden

Elli finished high school in Germany and came to work with Abalimi for the whole year as a SAGENET-intern. She handled customer service, so whomever bought our vegetables was treated with care and attentiveness by this tall, charming lady. We wish her all the best and hope she had as much fun with us as we did with her.

Leander Lerch

The 19 years old Leander from Bielefeld, Germany was another one of our SAGENET-interns. He became good spirit of Abalimi, helping in every aspect of our work. His particular interest in seeds and fieldwork - as well as willingness to fit in any space when needed - not only captivated us but will make us miss him a lot.

Samantha Mandiriri

Hailing from Zimbabwe with a background in Accounting and Auditing Samantha Mandiriri was responsible for finances of Abalimi. Thank you for your help, Samantha!

Cathrine Chatambudza

Cathrine joined Abalimi Bezekaya in July 2016. She worked extensively on two big projects: farmer payments and the farmer register. She handled her tasks with great responsibility and we are sure that bright future awaits her.

Suren Sewchuran

Financial director and manager, Suren, started working for Abalimi Bezekaya in April 2015. From June 2017 he is no longer with the organisation.

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PROUD OF OUR HISTORY, WE STICK TO IT

Abalimi Bezekhaya is 35 years old! It took us many years to grow from a small project within Catholic Welfare & Development into a separate entity that impacts thousands of lives.

In the contemporary world, becoming bigger brings the temptation of following a more commercial and

'global' path. But we grow from within our history and roots. Bringing change to the lives of the poorest, we choose gradual progress that lifts and sustains everybody. We keep on walking the 'long road to freedom' with micro-farming projects that others might abandon.

It makes us more vulnerable, since donations remain essential. But proud of our history, we stick to it.

We thus present you with this anniversary addition to our newsletter. We present one, in depth story, that would deliver the message of both our path and values.

MAMA KABA – A LOVE STORY

A story of a farmer, of Abalimi Bezekhaya and South Africa itself.



Mama Kaba settling one of the first gardens in Khayelitsha (1989) and working in the packshed, twenty five years later.

Christina Kaba. If you enter this name in Google, you'll find yourself flooded with articles, prizes and accolades, with facts and accomplishments. Christina Kaba, or Mama Kaba as we call her. CEO of Abalimi Bezekhaya.

One question I wanted her to answer was: 'how?'

HER JOURNEY WITH ABALIMI STARTED IN MAY OF 1989.

'I entered the room, it was Dave there, our Dave,' Mama Kaba mentions Dave Golding (a co-founder of AbalimiBezekhaya), as

she drives me through Khayelitsha. 'They had boxes with seeds and seedlings, they asked me about them. I knew it all from the farm where I grew up with three white boys. This is where I fell in love with the soil.'

It was the very same farm her parents were chased away from after years of service. They were too old. Not useful anymore. They were taken away to the dirt crossroads and told to find themselves another occupation.

Mama Kaba was not there to see it. She was already in Cape Town; working,

looking for opportunities, like the job in Abalimi Bezekhaya. She didn't yet possess the confidence which she emanates now. She was nervous – earning 75 rands a month as a maid, she viewed Abalimi's opportunity as unique.

'I remember when they called after the interview. I was making porridge for my children. They said: Christina, you got the job. I said: No, no, no, no, Christina is a standard name. They don't think about me. But I started the next Monday.'

I ask her how that uneducated farm girl, who couldn't read or write, who spoke no



Abalimi Bezekhaya brings its farmers meaningful income.

English, years later became CEO of an important NGO. Where did she find the strength?

‘It’s all Abalimi,’ she says with modesty. ‘They gave me everything, they made me learn, go to night school. They even gave me money for the ticket, so I could bring my father home. When my father saw my house, he turned around and shout across the street: look, this is my daughter’s house. He couldn’t believe this magic.’

Soon Mama Kaba was working for Abalimi on the school greening projects in Khayelitsha. Responsible for cleaning and preparing apartheid era school grounds, which she calls ‘deserts full of rubbish’. Greening projects changed many of those deserts into sustainable sources of organically grown vegetables – when later the first community gardens were started on their grounds.

BUT SHE WAS MEANT TO BE MUCH MORE THAN A FARMER.

‘There was a boy from Eastern Cape I once knew. One day he saw a police car in Langa. He ran. He was afraid, just afraid of men with guns. Police shot him. This day I decided I have to work with the community, I have to get into politics.’

After the fall of the apartheid Abalimi Bezekhaya and other NGO’s wanted to build a park in townships. When they failed to receive the land from the municipality, they knew there is only one person that can help.

‘So they called me. It was a political thing,’ says Mama Kaba. ‘It was all very political back then and they knew I understood those structures.’

She did. Soon Manyanani Peace Park was there in Khayelitsha. It was a first step in a new direction, a direction that Abalimi Bezekhaya didn’t necessarily want to follow.

‘They said we are here for the veggies and trees. They told me: you’re starting trouble. You want to be a social worker now?’

Mama Kaba did want that, so Abalimi began to help the township community in other ways as well. Abalimi even went so far as to assist Ma Kaba to inspire the first public swimming pool in the history of Khayelitsha!

‘A boy drowned in the wetlands. I thought : we need a swimming pool. I contacted some people. The British and Americans said they will try to helps us with funding. They said they would go to the White House’, she laughs. ‘I didn’t know what ‘the White House meant at the time - to me all the houses where white! In the end the City of Cape Town built the swimming pool and we planted the trees.’

In 2014 Mama Kaba became responsible for creation of Moya we Khaya Peace Gardens, a 10 000 m² community garden where people strive together to grow veggies sustainably and earn money. Despite being the youngest of Abalimi’s undertakings, Moya produces now more veggies than any other garden.

‘My secret for Moya was competition. Every farmer has his own plots, he puts manure there and works on it – he feels responsible for it.’

The smile of pure joy brightens Mama Kaba’s face when she shows me her plots. She is responsible for 60 of them. She employed a few people to help her. This is the fourth stage of Abalimi’s sustainability model coming to life: creating jobs on urban micro-farms.

It is here, between spinach and carrots I finally get my answer as to what drove her through all those years.

‘I loved what I did. I knew I had no education, only my heart, my skills and

mind, nothing else. I could lose everything. So I focused and worked hard. I planned everything, I planned every day and every week.’

In 2016 she was appointed as CEO of Abalimi Bezekhaya. A model designed more than 30 years before finally came to life. Farmers took over the organisation.

Mama Kaba works *with* people. She listens. Long before she was even given the formal control, she already had power that came from the respect of the community. No one understands the townships like she does.

‘OF COURSE, WE MADE MANY MISTAKES’ SHE ADMITS.

But then again, this is what her leadership and idea of Abalimi seems to be about: guide people, don’t control them. Let them make mistakes and learn from them.

Asked about the biggest challenge, she doesn’t hesitate a second:

‘FUNDING. WE NEED FUNDING TO SURVIVE.’

She says she’s old. Her energy and powerful voice obviously contradict the statement, but she mentions retirement.

‘It’s a different time now. The time of Mama Kaba is over, now it’s a time for new, educated people.’

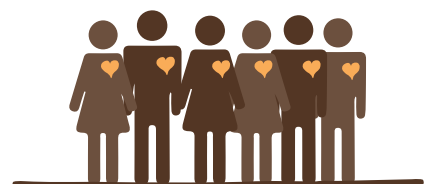
I ask her, what would she do on a retirement. She turns around, her hand pointing all over the Moya garden.

‘I will be here, all days. With my people.’

Maybe it wasn’t the love of the soil or the farming that made her go through this path. It appears to me it’s more love to her community, her people.

And just as I think I have the perfect conclusion of the article, we walk on among the plots, in the dimming, afternoon sun. Mama Kaba tells me about new plans. About her dream of a community centre, where locals could learn and gather and share. About new seeds she would like to experiment with.

Mama Kaba is full of plans.



If you’d like to contribute to Mama Kaba’s plans, please use our donation form to be part of Abalimi’s future.

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OR

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I would like to support the work of abalimi. Herewith a cheque/postal order/
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PLANT TREES

It costs R150/ £9/ \$12/ €10 to plant 1 tree, with training and follow-up.



MICRO FARMER

It costs R100/ £6/ \$8/ €7 (community garden) or R50/ £3/ \$4/ €3,5 (home garden) to support one micro-farmer with affordable inputs, training, follow-up, monitoring, evaluation, networking, management & marketing services for one month.



General Donation (Other amount) :



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It costs R1350/ £78/ \$101/ €86 to establish one new township home veg or community market garden plot (minimum 100 m2), together with training, trees and follow-up.



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Sponsor a weekly Harvest of Hope vegetable box at R120/ £7/ \$9/ €8 (small) or R160/ £9/ \$12/ €11 (medium) per week, to feed the sick and needy

NOTE: Forex conversions are averaged out as at Aug 2017

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SA RAND: Standard Bank, Thibault Square, Cape Town
Branch Code: 020909
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Account Type: Cheque/Current
Account Name: ABALIMI BEZEKHAYA

FOREIGN CURRENCY:

First National Bank, Adderly Street, Cape Town
Branch Code: 201409 Swift Code: FIRNZAJJ461
Acc.No. 50050041661
Account Type: Business/Current
Account Name: ABALIMI BEZEKHAYA

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