



An urban micro-farming project with 3000 home and community gardens on the Cape Flats offers a food security model for the country.

We have been conditioned to believe that farming must be intensive and make large profits, that big is best and small is a waste of time. But an agricultural NGO working for 25 years on the Cape Flats has shown that good food and money can be made by uneducated people from tiny urban gardens.

From seed to table.

The organisation, Abalimi Bezekhaya (people who farm around the house), has a simple structure. Two non-profit nurseries and training centres form the base, one in Khayelitsha and the other in Nyanga. Here people buy seeds, seedlings and manure and get advice and training which they use to start their own gardens.

People start at a survival level growing for themselves, then progress to subsistence level with a small surplus to give to neighbours, and then to livelihood level where 50% is for their own consumption and 50% is sold. Abalimi tries to stabilise its farmers at this level.

According to Rob Small, resource mobilisation manager of Abalimi, "Funders don't understand why projects stop – they think that poor people must farm with nothing, that organics don't work, that micro-farming isn't viable, and that black people can't farm. These are myths. The truth is that you have to give basic support forever if you want to have food – consider the massive industrial farming subsidies given in the EU and USA. Small farm support costs very little – it takes a subsidy of less than R100 per month to provide one farmer with training, supplies, basic business skills, and support. That person goes on to feed a family and generate an income. It is a powerful model."

The grandmothers' farm.

We visited a community garden, Masicendane (help each other) in Guguletu run by five women farmers, all grandmothers. "Women understand intuitively that little things make a big difference."

Masicendane is surrounded by informal housing. An electricity pylon stands in the middle, but according to Rob it is safe and hasn't affected the growth or size of the produce. Water is from a borehole which has been tested for purity. Interestingly there is very little theft – vegetables are not a big steal.

Mama Gladys, 86, walked up and down the rows loading the harvest into a pull-barrow. Her sunhat is made from woven plastic bags. "I eat greens from the land every day and drink the cooked water like tea." The women produce vegetables for their homes and to sell, and earn up to R1500 each a month after costs.

I asked Rob about organic certification. Standing next to a luscious compost heap he explained: "Getting certified is too much admin;



it's a lengthy process and needs to be done annually. We provide our own guarantee and certification. At the end of the day it's about trust in your own farmers." He described how the grandmothers' garden could be farmed far more intensively and generate R30 000 per month. "However, if you push nature to the edge there is a come-back; and when farming moves beyond livelihood level to commercial level, people no longer share. It becomes about getting rich."

Harvest of Hope.

To help micro-farmers sell their produce, Abalimi started a marketing programme called Harvest of Hope last year. This ensures farmers an income via a box scheme selling organic vegetables to people in the suburbs. On Tuesday mornings farmers harvest their crops; Abalimi takes the produce to the packshed where it is cleaned, packaged with biodegradable cellulose, boxed and delivered. "Growing for a market is far more challenging than growing for oneself," Rob explained. "It forms part of our training."

Rob showed us the list of orders through local schools and UCT. The aim is to sell vegetables in a direct, friendly and personal way. It is a win-win arrangement. Big boxes sell for R95 and small ones for R65, with half the profit going to the farmers and half towards Abalimi's operational costs. The profit is used to train more farmers, and 10% of the crop goes to charity each week – an inspiring example considering that profits are small.

Farming is alive, like a family.

Abalimi's programme has a low carbon footprint, creates food security and jobs, and is sustainable. It is a model that works and can be copied in urban areas across the country. Government has often neglected small-scale farming in favour of subsidising intensive commercial farming that generate big profits without paying for the environmental damage. Abalimi therefore offers an important and missing part of the agriculture equation in South Africa. Let's hope that others will see what needs to be done – and how simply it can be achieved.

"Farming is not like any other business," Rob said in parting. "It needs love and support, its alive, like a family." [JC]

Read more at www.abalimi.org.za

franschhoek valley greening up fast

Franschhoek would like to be the first environmentally sustainable wine Valley in South Africa.

They are undertaking a variety of initiatives to get closer to reaching this goal. Within the Franschhoek Valley there are only a limited number of natural resources. To ensure the long term prosperity and safety of the Valley, the community needs to adopt sustainable practices on both environmental and social levels. They aim to minimise any further loss to the biodiversity and encourage sustainable practices to incorporate all aspects of the Valley.

Regular water analysis samples of the Berg River Dam will be conducted with the involvement of local schools. Of the local wineries Boekenhoutskloof, Boschendal, Glenwood, Haut Espoir, Montagne, Franche Hoek Estate and Plasir de Merle wineries are all BWI (Biodiversity and Wine Initiative) members. Graham Beck and La Motte wine estates are BWI Champions of which Franschhoek Valley is very proud. Dieu Donne was the first winery in Franschhoek to conduct a carbon footprint assessment – this assessment is undertaken to measure energy usage, fugitive emissions, waste treatment, employees commute patterns and distribution of products. Recommendations are then made for improvement as part of the process of becoming carbon neutral.

Solar and wind back-ups at L'Ermitage

L'Ermitage Chateau and Villas have installed a system where as soon as a guest checks out on their computer system, the geyser, lights and air-conditioner automatically switch off. This saves an enormous amount of electricity. They have installed a system that provides a back-up for the hotel when there is a power outage and it also generates power. The combination of these installed systems of both solar and wind power generates 104-150kw of power per day. Le Franschhoek Hotel and Spa have received a Silver Classification from the Heritage Foundation. They received this recognition for implementing steps to mitigate their environmental impacts.

The Heritage Foundation is Southern Africa's only tourism quality assurance management company providing a number of consulting and development programmes for the tourism sector. Le Franschhoek Hotel and Spa seeks continuous improvement in its environmental performance and encourages all managers and employees to take part in this process.

"Awareness and education have been identified as two key areas for the success of our sustainability goal. All stakeholders and residents of the Valley are encouraged to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and business practices so that the long term future of the Valley can be secured", says Jenny Prinsloo, CEO of Franschhoek Wine Valley Tourism Association.

magical space

There is a magical space in Klein Joostenberg outside Stellenbosch where you can get lost in the sacred marriage between nature and creativity.

For years I would walk into every nursery with my standard question: "Where are your indigenous plants?" Blank look. One day things will change and people will understand. So I would wander and search and try to figure out what falls into my required waterwise bracket.

Then I found a rare gem - **Van den Berg Garden Village** outside Stellenbosch. We had hardly parked outside this sprawled out, rambling place, when I noticed the difference. All kinds of natural art greets you. Trees shaping into creatures. Furniture from raw wood – you feel like you're still in the forest. Not a spot left untouched by the creative owner and earth woman, Toos van den Berg. Toos hails from the Netherlands, where she studied horticulture before travelling around Europe and ending up in Africa. She met her husband Piet here and stayed...

After having nurseries in Durbanville and Kirstenbosch, she transplanted to this green space and started her transformation work. You need to see this for yourself. Here is an earth artist who paints with plants and transports you to another reality. Different types of plants – Proteas, Leucadendrons, Leucospermums - grouped together in spirals, rainbows, shapes shifting daily. Waterfalls, fish ponds with little benches to sit on and dream. 80% of the plants are indigenous. "The birds don't know the difference," quirs her weathered face. She also grows exotic and unusual plants. There's an orchid shade house, shrubs and trees in alphabetical order.

To save water she makes ingenious plans. "Often seedlings die when they're planted out, as their roots get hurt," explains Toos. Now she fashions seedling containers from old newspapers and newsprint scraps. You simply stick the plant, with bowl, right into the soil. This keeps the roots protected and holds more water near the plant. And makes planting even easier. "You save a lot of water this way. Eventually the roots walk out of the container when the paper rots."

Grant yourself a great family outing to this little village - right next to a deli, a bistro restaurant, a Bali shop and a rose nursery. You can spend your whole Saturday here, breathe in this beautiful space and bring home what will continue to bless your own space. [EP]

Full Circle offer the following services

- Garden Refuse drum services
- Organic supplying of worms
- Chipping Service
- Rubble Removal
- Garden Service

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Full Circle is a 'green' concept operating in the Helderberg Basin only.

aspidistra
TUINSENTRUM

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nursery
tea garden

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Phone 021 881 3494

Van den Bergh Garden Village

Klein Joostenberg outside Stellenbosch
phone 021 884 4095, e-mail toos@mweb.co.za

GET SWEEP

Chimney Sweeping & Extractor Fan Cleaning

Avoid the fire hazard of a dirty chimney – creosote can spontaneously combust! Domestic chimneys need sweeping once a year and restaurants twice a year.

ECO TIP : Prepare your soil with soot taken from the flue. Mixed with lime it makes an excellent insecticide.

GET SWEPT also maintains restaurant extractor fans and gutters, cleans air ducts and dryer vents, installs chimney caps and fixes smoking and draft problems.

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