

SOWING SEEDS OF CHANGE IN COMMUNITIES LIVING NEAR MINES



Community Monitors Activist Training

This booklet is part of a series emanating from the 2020-2021 Bench Marks Foundation Community Monitors Activist Training Programme.

The programme was re-orientated to respond to the challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic and the harsh impacts on communities living near mines.

Activists through a process of discussion in their local communities identified the following key issues for action to be dealt with in issue groups:

- Covid and the disruption to school education
- The food crisis due to an escalation of job losses and price increases
- The health problem of communities living near mines
- The escalation of violence against women

The booklets document the work done in the different issue groups.

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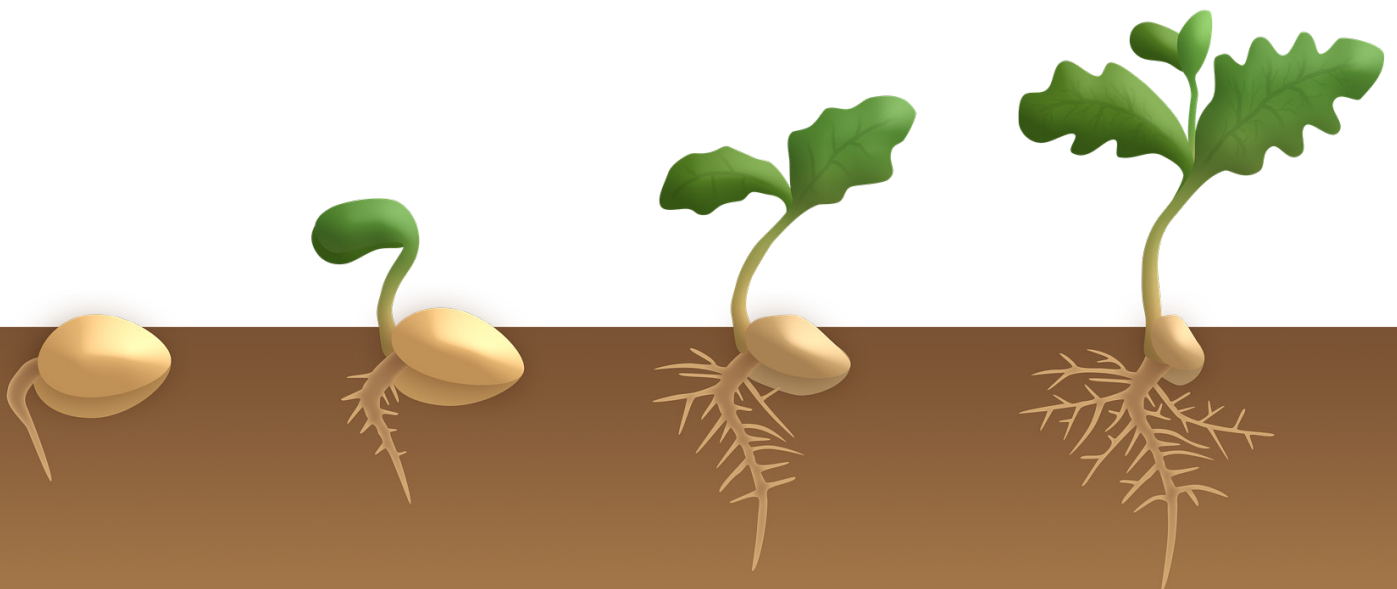
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1. THE SEED OF AN IDEA

The Bench Marks Community Monitor School was set up to train activists in mining communities in core organising skills. A key principle of the programme is that activism starts from listening to the community and engaging with the challenges - and solutions - as they understand and define them. During the COVID lockdowns, the poverty endemic to mining communities escalated due to increased unemployment and dramatic food price increases. While the focus of the Community Monitors in the past was on the impact of mining operations, as the effects of the COVID-19 health crisis exploded into an economic crisis, the programme made a decision to shift. Community members suggested that establishing small home food gardens would help them during this crisis. One group of Community Monitors, the Food Garden group, decided to pursue this idea by providing education, support and an initial distribution of seeds.

Of course, small gardens won't resolve the unemployment problem or the issue of hunger or high food prices. The challenges of communities living near mines are deep rooted and multi-faceted. They face the undermining of the traditional economy, environmental destruction, issues concerning land and water resources and government policies that favour mining extraction with little benefit to the local community. When people become aware of their situation, however, and seek to address it through small, innovative action, they start to build networks of power. We believe this is where seeds of change get planted.

This booklet introduces you to the people – the Farmer Activists - who formed the Food Garden group and shares some of their process, progress and learnings.



2. PREPARING THE SOIL

The Community Monitors responded who joined the Food Gardening group were motivated by the stories they heard of hunger in their communities to explore the potential of food gardens to be a catalyst for change.

Bongani, a former employee: Nkomati Anthracite mine, said life is hard without a salary. They developed a group which is aimed at helping the most vulnerable, teaming together to plough and plant vegetables. They collectively contribute money and buy seeds, and the family remains responsible for maintaining and irrigation. The worse challenge is the water for irrigation and it limits them mostly from cultivating a bigger space. ~ From an interview conducted by Bernerd Ngomane

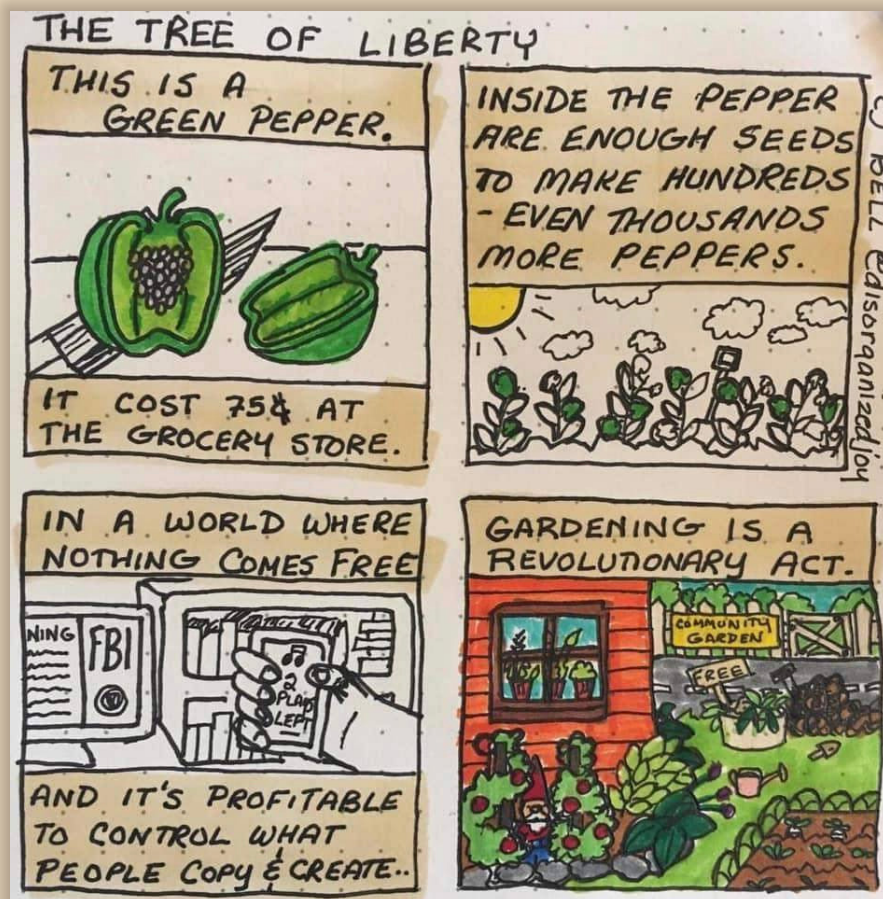
Mr Thobela said life is getting more hard because there are no other means of making income as all business are at a slow down. He further said that he started a garden which is about 60x30 meters. He cleaned it and dug a well which is more than 4 meters deep for irrigation purposes. His aim is to help the community have nutritional vegetables close by and to minimise the travel to town and malls. His challenge is to have enough seeds, a bore hole, a pipeline for the irrigation system and fencing. Livestock do manage to get into the garden. He said that the UIF he is earning is too little to maintain his family and the garden as the price of food has increased. The garden is helpful to many as they do come and get vegetables. ~ From an interview conducted by Bernerd Ngomane

My name is Agnes. I am 15 years old. I was born and bred in Shongoane a rural area of Lephalale. I'm still in high school and I wish Covid-19 could go away. Before lockdown, the place I could get food during the day was at school where they have a feeding scheme. After school I got food at the drop-in centre near my school. My parents died when I was 5 years old due to car accident. I'm now living with my relatives. [...] I remember sleeping more than a week without food, just drinking water. Walking around the streets at night hoping to find something in the dustbins. ~ From an interview conducted by Francina Nkosi

My name is John from Polokwane. I am living in Shongoane now because of seeking employment, but that didn't work out for me because of corruption. I started gardening because of Hunger in my family. I was tired of begging food from my friends and neighbours. I started food sovereignty with one packet of spinach, tomatoes and potatoes I picked from the bin. By then I cared less about what people would say if they saw me picking from the bins. Most thought I was crazy when I picked rotten veggies, not knowing that's what I do to survive. My challenge was chickens that roamed around as I had no fence to protect my garden and water was a challenge. When it was time for harvesting, even my enemies were closer to me for vegetables. Ever since I started my garden, I never slept hungry ever again. ~ From an interview conducted by Francina Nkosi

The challenge that we are facing is that we have a small yard but we have managed to have a small garden so that we will be able to plant our vegetables in this pandemic time. Things have become too expensive since we are facing lockdown. Me and my husband we love agriculture. To plant is our thing and we do love it so much we even encouraged our neighbour to do small garden too. ~ From an interview by Victoria Makgoo

Since lockdown started, me and my family realise that we need to do home gardening even though we have a challenge with water. We were waking at around 2 in the morning filling up the tanks so we would be able to water our crops. Now they are growing very fine. We even harvest and cook. ~ From an interview by Victoria Makgoo



On Sept 10, 2020, participants in the Food Gardening group were welcomed with this voice note:

Dear Comrades. Welcome to the second phase of the activist training program. In the first phase, which we started in June, you wrote about your personal feelings related to COVID and its impact on your family. You also interviewed two neighbours and asked them how they were coping with COVID and the lockdown. You then listed three important issues where you feel action must be taken so that your community can be safe and healthy. In July you focused on a single issue and you wrote a proposal on action that you think could be taken. It is on this basis that we have grouped you into action groups to take on the issue.

Please remember that when you do all these tasks, you are doing two things. Firstly, you are developing your thinking, writing and investigative skills. You are developing your strategy skills. But at the same time you are also taking action on community problems. Now in Phase Two you will develop your skills in planning and action and making a proposal. These are core activist organizing skills. You will make a proposal for action by the 18th of September to a Bench Marks Feedback Panel. Once you have settled your plan after this feedback session, over the months of October and November you will implement your plan. We have carefully chosen issues that affect the community and in this session we are going to think cleverly about how action could be taken.

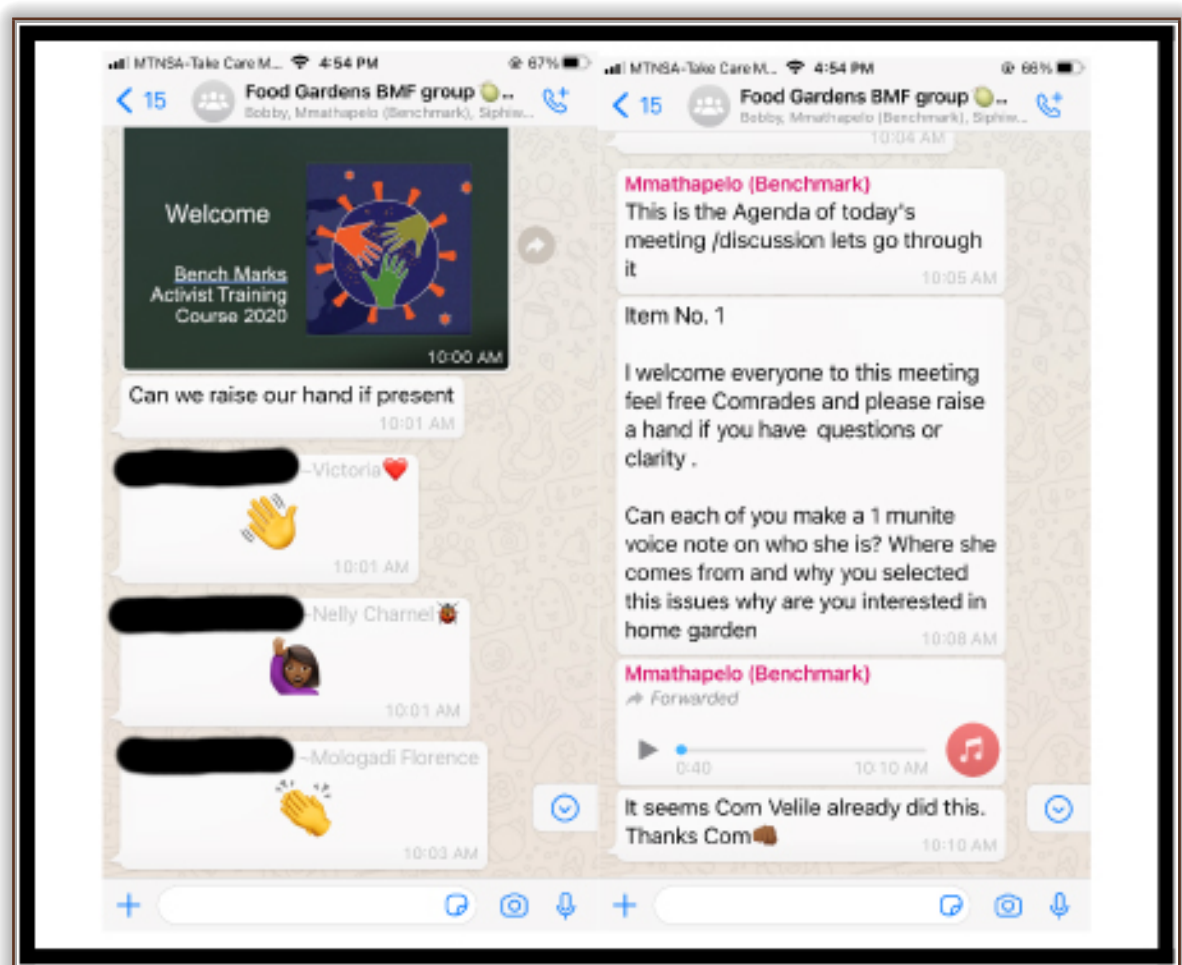
Our problems are enormous, sometimes complex. They've been here for a long time. They represent the oppression and the exploitation of people by mining corporations, by government elites and by corrupt politician. Our little actions - as small as they are - if done well and with commitment are stepping stones to bigger action that would bring about change. We wish you success in your group's activity.

The initial group exploring Food Gardens as a response to COVID included:

Velile Khoza (Mfidikoe, North West)
Florence Mohlala (Phola, Mpumalanga)
Benerd Ngomane (Madadeni, Mpumalanga)
Nelly Nkosi (Ermelo, Mpumalanga)
Victoria Makgoo (Morapaneng Village, Limpopo)
Francina Nkosi (Shongoane, Limpopo)

Mmathapelo Thobejane (Ditwebeleng, Limpopo) acted as both a participant and a guide for the journey.

The group's first task was to develop a plan outlining what they proposed to do in October and November and to present that plan to The Bench Marks Foundation. The participating Farmer Activists were distant geographically and did not have access to large amount of data, so they made use of What's App as their primary means of communication. They sent videos, photos, messages, voice notes and emojis to conduct meetings on What's App. That looked something like this:



This proved to be an effective - and cost-effective way - to communicate across distance.

The plan that was developed – and approved by The Bench Marks Foundation - for October / November was to start home gardens where possible and to encourage other community members to do so as well. This plan was rooted in the activists' analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people in the communities that they call home:

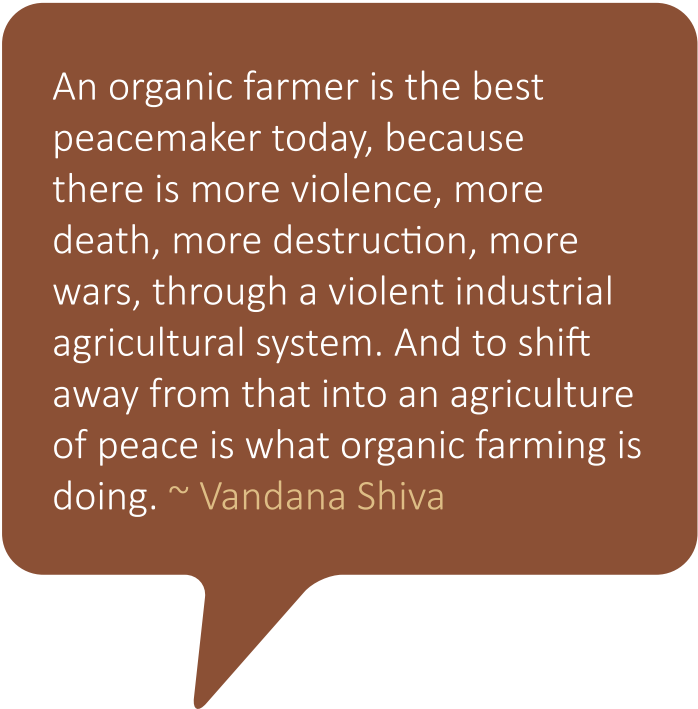
This project has been initiated after Community monitors from different provinces saw the need of food during the COVID-19 pandemic and the way food parcels were not healthy and some did not reach the people who need it. Hunger has been there even before the pandemic, but we have realized that during this difficult time people did not have food and some were going to bed on an empty stomach after waiting in a long queue for food parcels and some did not receive the food.

The problem is that in our communities there's large unemployment and poverty. People do not have money to buy sufficient and healthy food to feed their families. This has become a bigger problem during lockdown with an increase in unemployment and increase in food prices.

The problem we face is to do with bigger problems of our economy, the taking away of land by mining groups and unemployment. We realise that this is a big problem and hard to solve. In our project, we are narrowing down the issue to what action families can take immediately. Through discussion, we will find a way to engage in the bigger problem.

Food gardens will help to reduce the food scarcity in each household that has been created by the unemployment, and mostly women and youth will gain skills and experience to start their own agricultural projects that will contribute a lot to reducing the unemployment in our communities. We feel like we need to solve food issue because is a basic need before we can tackle other problems in our communities.

We will connect with people and we will build hope and confidence in a very difficult situation where jobs are hard to get. Communities will take concrete actions. We will bring them together and help them see bigger problems and the bigger causes. Communities will grow in awareness them we will continue our struggle on the bigger problem.



An organic farmer is the best peacemaker today, because there is more violence, more death, more destruction, more wars, through a violent industrial agricultural system. And to shift away from that into an agriculture of peace is what organic farming is doing. ~ Vandana Shiva

Each Farmer Activist was asked to submit a report every two weeks that included:

- What they had been done during that timeframe;
- What they were growing;
- The challenges they were facing; and
- A report on conversations with two other farmers in their area.

A decision was taken to identify a support person who could host a workshop for the group to help them get started and to support their progress. Mmathapelo reached out to Sipiwe Sithole of African Marmalade who agreed to play this role. Two dates were set for workshops with her and the farmers, October 9 and October 22. These workshops took place on Zoom and data and airtime were sent to all members to enable them to participate. Topics covered included soil fertility, water conservation, seasonal planting, intercropping, seed banks and farming on a shoestring budget.

In a commitment to action -learning, the Activist Farmers agreed to review their progress at the end of October and to revise their plans for November based on their learnings. They also agreed to reflect again at the end of November to agree on what they would do in the future.

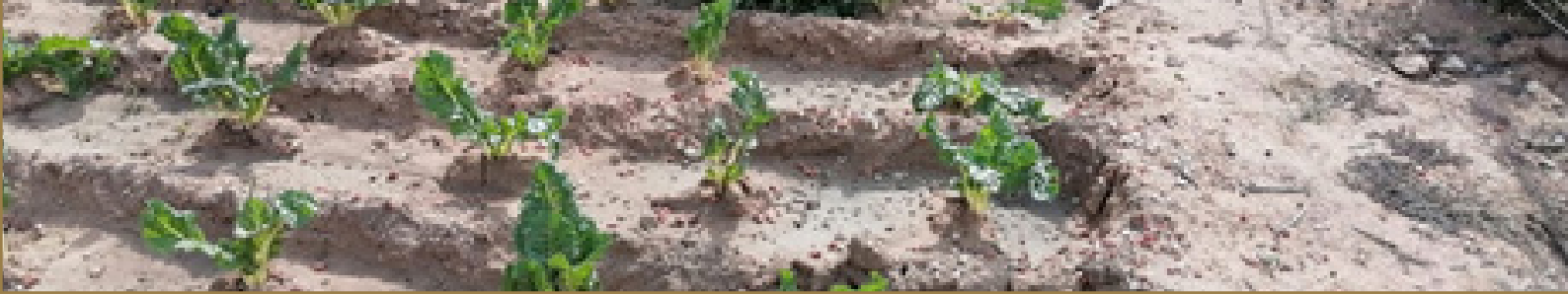
African Marmalade is a grower, sourcer and distributor of naturally grown produce with an emphasis on indigenous crops for South and Southern Africa. They grow indigenous African vegetables and fruits, supply organic seeds and seedlings and secure markets for indigenous produce. They also train farmers and supply farm hands services.

Sipiwe had this to say about her involvement with the project:

“I found the process to be enriching and empowering. I was able to share organic farming methods and also learnt from participants.

The project was well structured. It started with training before the seeds were distributed. Participants had enough time to prepare their gardens, identify problems and seek help prior to planting. I am in awe of the images of gardens that seed beneficiaries share, and I cannot wait for an opportunity to visit some of these gardens.

I am humbled by the opportunity to work and interact with such a diverse group of people who are committed to transform our food system and also take control of what they eat.”



3. SOWING THE FIRST SEEDS

After their first workshop with Siphwe, the Activist Farmers got started. They spoke to people, they listened, they gathered information and they sowed their first seeds.

You will read more about the gardens and farms of the Activist Farmers later, but this phase of the project was about planting more than the vegetable seeds. It was about planting the seed of an idea – the idea that by being active participants in the food system, we can change the system. The idea that growing our own food can impact positively on our health and nutrition, on the environment, on local economies and that it can support great food security within our communities.

I started to like farming because where I am living there is a lack of markets. I encourage people in my community who have small gardens in their yard. I visit them two to three times a week to see if it is growing very well. They plant spinach, beetroot, parsley, cabbage, coriander, tomatoes, potatoes, onion and mint. The challenge is that they don't have enough space where they can plant.

~ Victoria Makgoo

One of our Khuthala members adopted a spot around her yard and turned it into an organic garden. She used to plant anything anytime, but after she was inspired by Khuthala's work she started to take her garden seriously. It is now aligning with the season and it is organised. She has learned not to depend on buying all the time in shops, to save and reuse grey water and to eat organic and fresh. She wants to grow crops and sell them to big markets. ~ Nelly Nkosi

[I spoke to] a young man names Shalate who is unemployed and living the rural area of Lephalale. He started farming due to the COVID-19 lockdown as he was helpless, but he is happy with what he is doing. He said: 'I eat healthy food every day from my garden'. ~ Francina Nkosi

Look how beautiful is my neighbour's garden who I inspired when I started my garden. ~ Velile Khoza



4. HARVESTING LESSONS

At the end of October, participants created a video reflecting some of the lessons they had harvested from the work they had done. A version of the script, which was collaboratively written using What's App, follows:

We are building a movement to solve the Food Crisis in the COVID Pandemic

Introduction

- In the constitution of our country Section 27 it is clear sufficient Food and water is s Right. This supreme law is not followed.
- Close to half the population in our southern African region – do not have sufficient food and water to live a decent life.
- This is true in the communities where we live near mines. Millions of Rands go into the pockets of those who own the mines and the big men in our country – but large numbers of people are not sure if they will have a meal. Children are not growing healthy mentally because they eat to stay alive not to grow as healthy human beings.

The COVID Pandemic brings us instant death. Poverty and hunger is a slow death that we experience. Before COVID we had large scale unemployment. During COVID many more people, even those with informal work, have lost their source of income. At the same time food prices have climbed sky high. In a time of crisis , we must crisis manage. It is for this reason that we turned to gardening, so that we would have the promise of food on to the table that unemployment and prices increases took away. As activists we sat down together and asked the question – what is the problem, who experience the problem, why is there a problem.

The Causes of the Problem

What are the causes of food in security and hunger? Many factors often been intertwined with one another:

- Our economy allows a few people to grow rich with a lot of food and large numbers to remain poor with no food. The food system is to make money, not to feed the people. This is why there is so much food wastage and extra food cannot be distributed to those who don't have. Our government does not have a plan. They leave it to the capitalist system of markets to produce and distribute food. They don't support small farmers and community farming.
- Climate change is creating droughts in our region and even big farmers are failing.
- Corrupt politicians and business people are eating the money that government sets aside for development.
- Now we have COVID

Community Action – Food gardens

We are following the words of our sister activists Nonhle From Xolobeni who said “Development must start from the bottom to the top as a solution”. We cannot wait on government and business to solve this problem. We must start digging where we are. We are setting up gardens in our backyards and encouraging our neighbours to make gardens. We are building a food movement to eradicate hunger and poverty in the community.

What Food Gardens Teach Us

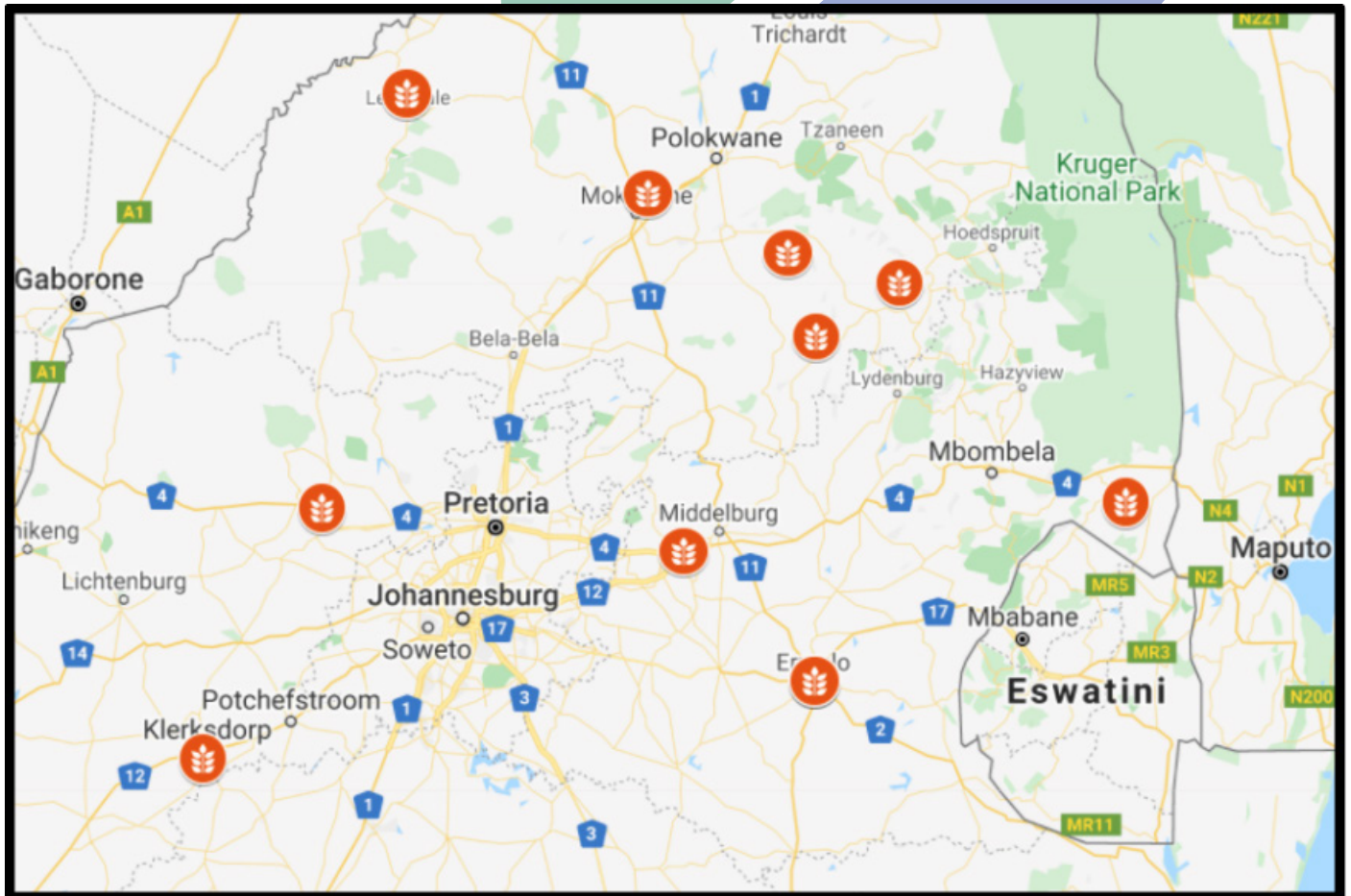
- Food gardens is a way of learning from our ancestors who were not wealthy but they worked the land to provide life for themselves. They were not dependent on business or government. They relied on their own labour.
- Food gardens build the character of people even though they are suffering.
- Gardening helps us to see food waste differently. It is a way to fertilize the garden and enrich the produce.
- We learn to work together as a community and help people help each other.
- We learn that we must care for each other. Those who have must share with those who don't have.
- We create new ways of sharing and exchange. like trading spinach for potatoes.
- The way our food system is organised today has failed.
- Young people can learn valuable life lessons and show selfless responsibility when they work in the garden.

So What about the Future. What are our Plans as a Group?

- We are setting up gardens in our backyards and support each other to be successful.
- We are coming together and setting community owned gardens.
- We are planning to engage Government, mines, businesses to support these community gardens with land, seeds and tools.
- We are linking with other groups to build a food movement to bring about deeper changes to solve the problems at the roots.

The Activist Farmers continued their work through November when they made another proposal to The Bench Marks Foundation to continue the work in the coming year. Although they continued to tend their own gardens during the December period, the formal activities of the programme lay fallow and were only resumed in January.

5. A NEW SEASON



The Location of the Farmer Activists

In mid-February, a decision was taken to merge the food garden group with activists from another group who had been working on the issue of escalating food prices. The following people joined the group at that time.

Limpopo:

Happiness Koma (Moshira)
Eustina Matsepane (Modimolle)
Susan Moraba (Maandagshoek)
Selowa Moshabi (Mmalingine)
Donald Mphethi (Ga-Kgwete)
Mmabore Mpogashoa (Ga-Mogashoa)
Mpho Tjale (Masodi)

North West:

Kgotatso Huma (Thekwane)
Tshepo Mmusi (Jouberton ext. 24, 25 & 1)
Olebogeng Motene (Chaneng)
Phindile Ngobeni (Ikemeleng)
Steven Ramokhula (Ikemeleng, Koronadal)

In this phase, the Activist Farmers were provided with seeds to start – or to extend – their own food gardens. The seeds were sourced through Siphwe Sithole of African Marmalade.

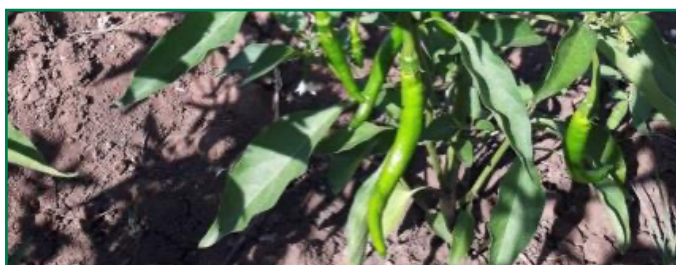
We are very passionate about collecting and documenting indigenous seeds. To us it is not just about let us go back to farming but the big question of what are we going to farm Without seeds or access to indigenous seeds people will grow the same as other farmers and create a surplus which leads food waste. So why don't you talk to us about what to grow.

We have such a wide selection of seeds that your garden will be very colourful and your food options will be increased. If you want to grow to sell, you will offer customers produce that is not easily available and you won't be joining a saturated market. Above that you will get people to reconnect with past, talk about the future and be part of reviving indigenous African seeds.

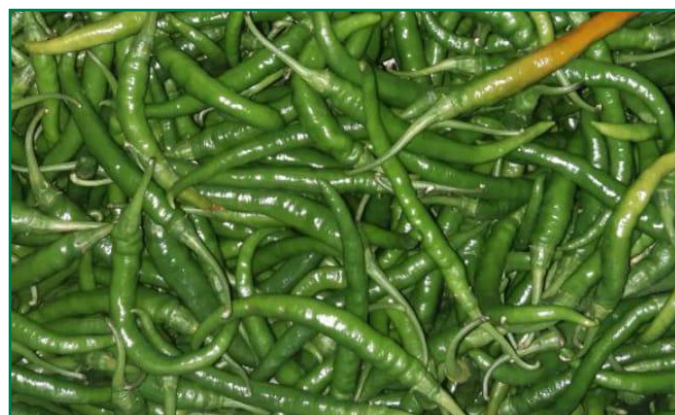
#ForTheLoveOfAfrika
#IndigenousAfricanSeeds
#SeedsFromAfricanMarmalade



On March 13, 2021, before anyone had received their seeds – and before the first meeting – Victoria launched the initiative with some inspiration from her garden:



Dear farmers this what i grow....Ready to harvest 🥬🥦🥒🌶️



To which Mmathapelo replied:

Mmathapelo (Benchmark)

I hope you are all getting ready and preparing your land.

Next week by Friday we will all have received seeds

11:48 AM

On March 22, seven gardeners in Sekhukhune received their seeds. They received Butternut, Ginger, Beetroot, Onions, Spinach and Nasturtium. The group was excited and shared with each other some seeds of plants commonly grown in the Sekhukhune area like morogo, moringa, watermelon, sugarcane, sorghum and beans. They shared how their parents preserve seeds by mixing it with ash (molara) so that the seeds are not eaten by insets (thupa). Seeds were also shipped to Mokopane and Lephalale.

#FoodGardens for solution to food crisis, high food prices and hunger.



12:42 PM



Mpumalanga seeds packaged and send, 2 via paxi and 1 via PostNet and local for 2 gardeners. 5:14 PM

Delivering seeds to people in villages across the country was in itself an interesting challenge. Seeds were sent via taxi, Postnet and PEP Paxi Service. Some methods took more time than others, but eventually all the seeds were received.

While most communication took place using What's App., after the seeds were delivered, a Zoom workshop took place on the morning of April 9. This was the first Zoom meeting of the combined group. Participants were sent data so that they could participate. The agenda was as follows:

Crop Production Workshop

Opening and Welcome

Introductions: All

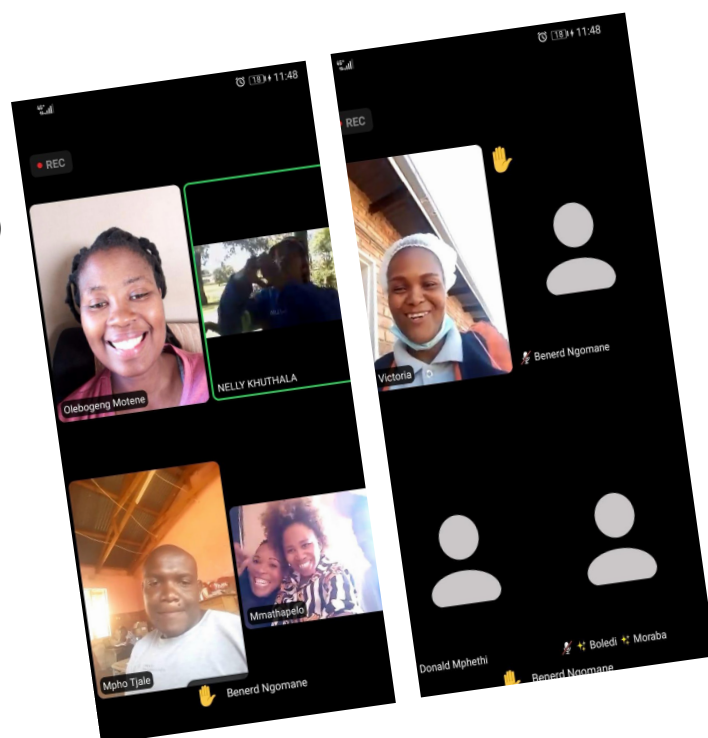
Purpose of the Workshop (Mmathapelo)

Business of the Day (Siphiwe Sithole, African Marmalade)

1. Why must you grow your own food?
2. How should you grow your own food?
3. Soil, water and plants
4. Companion planting
5. Crop Rotation
6. Pest control the organic, sustainable way
7. Harvesting, preserving and storing your food

Questions and Answers (Mmathapelo)

Closure the Announcements (Mmathapelo)



6. THE ACTIVIST FARMERS

During this phase, the Activist Farmers reported regularly on the work they were doing in their communities and on what they were learning. Here is some information on each of the farmers, their activities and lessons.

The only way to build hope is through the Earth. ~ Vandana Shiva



Activists Farmers Weekly Note

Dear Activist Farmers.
We want to share our thoughts and experiences as we go about our gardening.
Each week you must post a Note on this group.
We will compile all these reports into a book at towards the end of April.

Please post the following

- Name and Area, Date

- Your Note |

- 1.What did you do this week?
- 2.What surprised you?
- 3.What is one challenge you faced and what did you do to overcome it?

- Pictures

Post at least 3 photos of your garden for the week

- In addition

Please feel free to post your Poems and Drawings about your gardening experience.
These will be included in our book.

The format for weekly reports



Mmathapelo Thobejane: Ditwebeleng Village, Limpopo

I'm a small scale farmer from the small village of Ditwebeleng in Burgersfort Town, Limpopo. I started farming in 2018 using a backyard at my parents' house. In 2018 December, I decided to buy a little piece of land and start growing vegetables so that the community I come from will access organic veggies and don't have to travel far to purchase vegetables.

I have realised that people started to eat unhealthy meals. Most of the families I knew. they have only meat in their everyday meal. This is very bad for our bodies because we need vegetables and we need to eat nutritious food. The youth in my area had no interest in farming even though they see that unemployment is very high and there are no jobs in the mines anymore. I wanted them to change their mindset about farming because they think is for uneducated people and you can't make a living out of it.

My area is 33 square meters and I have a borehole to water my vegetables. I'm growing spinach, onions, tomatoes, potatoes, butternut, cabbage, chinese spinach, green paper, chillies and beetroot. The challenge I have is that there's no market in our area. For that reason I started to plough each crop in a very small space so that I don't struggle to sell. In 2019, I planted onions in the whole yard and they ended up rotten because there were no customers. In 2020, I started to plough different crops - at least 4-6 crops. At the moment, I have planted spinach, chinese spinach, potatoes, beetroot and butternut.

It is very difficult to run this on my own. Myself and my sister are the ones who are working in the garden because we don't have enough money to hire someone to help us. We do all the work and the ploughing.

My interest in this group is because I have realised that people need food. Especially during the lockdown. Most people needed food and they were struggling because of the unfair process of the food parcel distribution. I saw this as an opportunity to start educating people and also to start a home garden.





The first week after receiving the seeds, my sister and I decided to grow our seedlings first using trays. We are worried about the birds because this year there are too many birds in our area. We are going to use the branches of trees to cover the trays because we are concerned about the seedlings being eaten by the birds.

We are hoping to get a 3 meter green house to keep our seedlings alive and protected. We expect to have 1000 seedlings of Beetroot, 500 of spinach and 250 onions in 14 days from now. We are selling these veggies to the community around Ditwebeleng and neighbouring villages.



Week 2: It's been a week now and the seedlings are popping up.

As I prepare the ground, I used grass and chicken waste for at least 2 weeks before I can start planting. I do this to boost my soil with natural fertilizers. After putting the grass and chicken waste, I put soil on top. Then when I'm going to start planting, the soil will be ready and all the stuff I have put on the soil will be turned to a fertile soil. I will use a fork to turn the soil. I will make some rows and arrange my veggies.

As a Farmer Activist, I have learned that there are natural ways of controlling pests and insects in the garden. For example, we can keep cats or plant flowers that attract insects. There are natural ways of using what we have in our households to treat our crops. You can harvest seeds and keep them safe by using ash and mulching keeps the soil quality. Eating what you have planted is the best, especially when you farm organically.





Susan Moraba: Maandagshoek, Mpumalanga

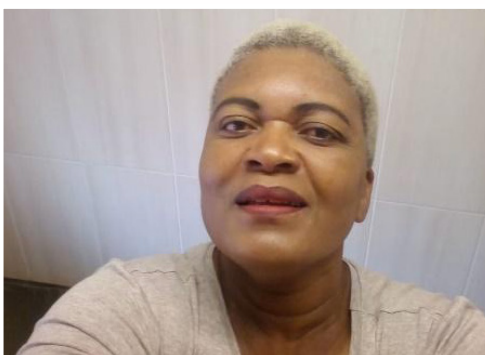
30 April 2020

I received my seeds on the 22th March and started to turn the soil of my garden on the 24th March. I watered it with used water (washing and bathing water) as we have a scarcity of water.

On the 26th, I planted the seeds on mixed red sand so that I can replant them in the turned fertile soil. This is space where I will be planting. I have already planted some lettuce and parsley.

I have learned to take care of my garden on a daily basis. My experience is that in a hot, dry area the soil needs to be turned and watered before planting anything. I have also learned that before I plant my plants, I must make rows and water them. If I plant my plants in wet spoil they cab adapt and not die. Once I have planted, I water my plants twice a day as it's hot and gets dry easily. I water them in the morning before it gets hots and in the afternoon when it's cool.

I have planted spinach, beetroot, carrots, peas, beans and onions. My peas, spinach, beetroot and beans are coming alright and I will plant the onions and carrots in a week. My problem is that my onions are being eaten by birds and I have to cover them so that can grow well. Water is also a challenge. I am using the washing and bathing water to water my plants. The soil needs to be turned every week to keep my plants alive because if I don't, the soil becomes too thick and requires a lot of water.



Florence Mohlala: Phola, Mpumalanga

I am from Greater Phola Women's Forum in Phola. I am not a farmer, but I see my father planting. He has his own vegetable garden inside the yard. It is very important to plant your own vegetables because nowadays things are very, very very dear. That is why we plant our own vegetables - so that we make life easier.

Starting food gardening by growing your own vegetables can ease food supply anxiety and support good health. We are starting to see food shortages as COVID-19 disrupts our food supply chain. The pandemic has caused a labour shortage

that impacts how food gets distributed and sold world -wide and we are starting to realise the importance of local systems for producing our own food gardens to grow different vegetables, which are very much organic and have nutrients. By cultivating our own gardens we can also sell this produce locally and at reasonable prices which people can afford.

I don't have a big space. I am using my neighbour's garden. My challenge is water. I must buy it when I want to water the garden.



Nelly Nkosi: Ermelo, Mpumalanga



I live in Ermelo in Mpumalanga. I am a Chairperson of Khuthala Women's Movement and it's been a while that I have been volunteering with Khuthala Environmental Care Group doing Administration. The reason I have chosen this issue is because as an organisation we want to improve environmental performance since we've declared this as a high priority area in the Highveld. We also want to create environmental awareness in schools, embark on community gardens and encourage people to have backyard gardens regardless of their problems like water and climate change.

As time passed, I fell in love with nature. I even became a vegetarian on this Journey. I started watering plants using a watering can. It wasn't easy because it is a big space in Khuthala.

I was inspired seeing what was planted was growing and I began to eat it before it was ready - because

of excitement and joy. At that time it was just strawberries and spinach, but now I've grown a lot together with the Khuthala Women's Movement.

As we are living in very limited yards in Ermelo, space to plant is a dream. The youth don't know much about gardens, fertile soil or even suitable tools to be used in gardens. We don't have seeds and food is becoming more expensive every single day. When we try to do back yard gardens, stray animals come into our yards and destroy the little we've planted because of unfenced spaces. Water is available, but it is expensive since it's been included in rent so I am using an old Jojo tank to water the garden. This year I didn't plant anything because I don't have seeds and they're unaffordable.

We must not forget that farming is a solution to job creation. There is no retrenchment.



KHUTHALA WOMEN'S MOVEMENT since inception has grown from strength to strength without losing enthusiasm simple due to the amazing work done by WOMIN for WOMEN across the length and breath of AFRIKA.

WE NOTE WITH OUR DEEPEST APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE THE LIFE CHANGING WORK'S YOU'VE DONE TO IMPACT POSITIVELY THE COMMUNITY OF WESSELTON AND ERMELO INCLUDING MPUMALANGA AS A WHOLE AND FOR THAT WE SALUTE ARE NWELOLUDE

The **WOMEN'S MOVEMENT** programs of action amongst others include planting and selling fresh organic spinach and a variety of flowers and indigenous trees

Preparing fresh homemade food at our Kitchen including making and selling **BYME NATURAL SOUPS** for both children and adults made with a mothers love and care

Operations catch them young is aimed at equipping the upcoming generation at a tender age to instill and educate our children about everything wd know to ensure that the future is in capable and knowledgeable

The **WOMEN'S MOVEMENT** is in the forefront of community activism and advocates for **WOMEN'S RIGHTS**.

Bernerd Ngomane: Madadeni, Mpumalanga

Madadeni is the area between the two borders of Swaziland and Mozambique, under the Nkomazi municipality. It sources water from the Nkomazi river. The Nkomati Anthracite mine is the only company in the area which employs more than 30 people and they are now on strike. (The mine reported to them that their employment term has elapsed.)

The COVID-19 pandemic brought serious confusion to the community through the lockdown. Many people who were formally employed are now living their life under the wage of the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF). For most of them, it is less than the half of their salary.

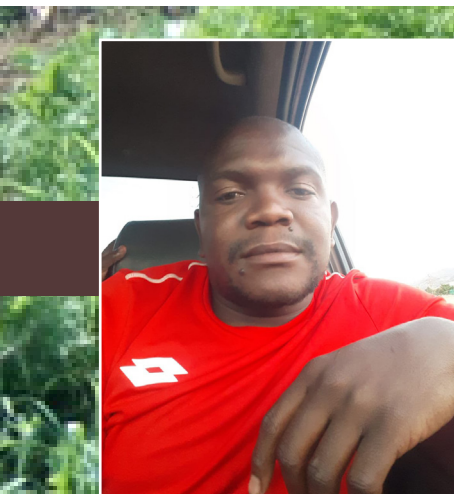


A Food Garden in Madadeni

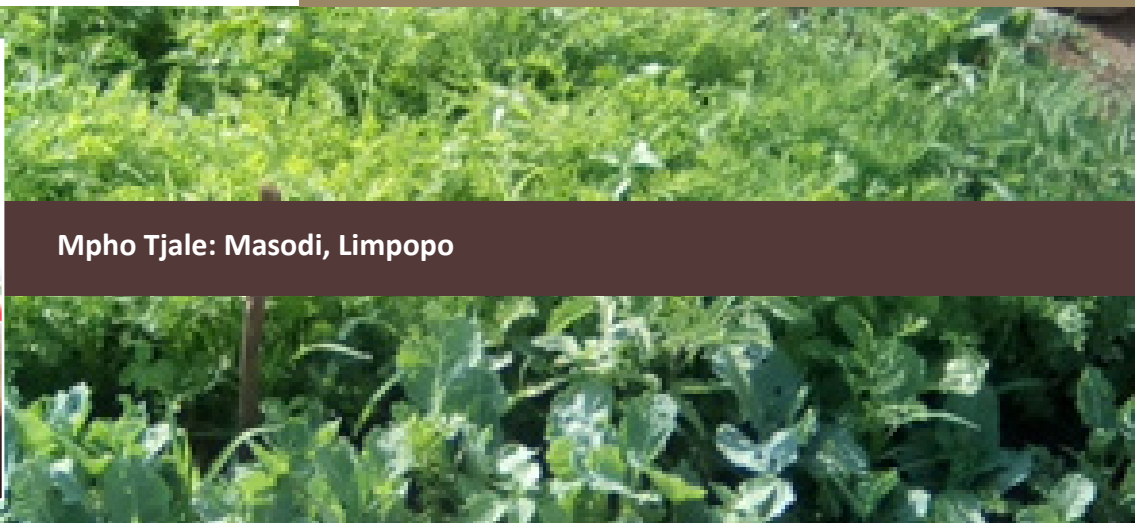


Lessons Learned

- When you plough a new garden for the first time, the soil is a bit hard.
- All vegetables generate their own seeds. I thought things like cabbage, beetroot and spinach cannot bear seeds.
- Boxes and paper can become the best manure.
- Indigenous pest control without harsh chemicals.
- After use water can be used to irrigate.
- Ash can be used to preserve seeds that are kept.
- Seeds can be multiplied by sharing and asking seeds back after harvest.



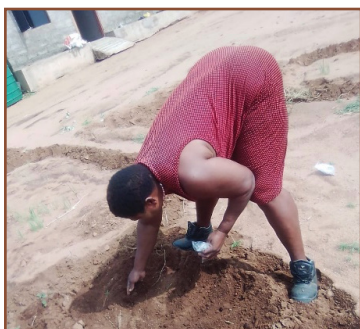
Mpho Tjale: Masodi, Limpopo



Happiness Koma: Moshira, Limpopo



Last week as farmer activists we received seeds from Bench Marks to help the Arekgotlelegeng Disability Project in Moshira Village. They started to plant and the plants are growing. The challenge is small animals. Lizards are eating some, but not too much. The other challenge is the water pump is broken. I am trying all the best to help them. The seeds they are growing up.



Before



After

Francina Nkosi: Shongoane, Limpopo



Food sovereignty is life

I am an activist in Lephalale and a small scale farmer who educates the community about why food sovereignty is important and why they need to know what they eat and who planted the food. This way they can know what they eat and own it, stay away from GMOs, and be able to use and preserve indigenous seeds and share them as farmers.

As a granny to two baby boys, I realized that the cost of living is very high. I started a small garden to feed the family affordably without paying for expensive vegetables from big retailers. Due to the weather, I only planted vegetables that consume less water like watermelon, potatoes, sweet potatoes, spinach, carrots, onions and beetroot.

I pay R600 per Jojo tank to water my plants.

My challenges are as follows: fencing, water, good compost, net and pipes. The Municipality only delivers water once in two weeks. In the meantime, you are forced to buy water. Another challenge is the hot temperatures throughout the day. I am going to collect Maize Meal bags and sew them together for protection. My number one challenge is grazing goats constantly causing damage to my garden. I have lost valuable crops due to them. During this process I have learned how not to depend on chemical pesticides and how to use flowers to protect my plants. I have learned how to use manure on plants and soil and about different types of soil. I have been motivated by my colleagues.



Selowa Moshabi:
Malengine, Limpopo



Monday March 29

The seeds were distributed last week. After I received seeds, I made some rows and thereafter I planted my seeds in separate spots. We believe the biggest challenge will be birds, chickens and storage, however expectations are high that we will reap what we sowed.

No man fears what
he has seen grow.
(African Proverb)



Eustina Matsepane: Modimolle Village,
Limpopo



As a member of the Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network (SEJN) I was having a meeting with farmers from the Molaung Teamong Agricultural Co-operative Limited to distribute masks and also seeds.

They said thanks very much for giving them those products because since they started this project, Bench Marks is the first organisation who cares about them. They really appreciate having Community Monitors who takes care for the community.

The main problem for them is water. Since they spoke to the Councillor for Ward 8 about water until now they are still waiting. Nothing has happened. They have a borehole, but the problem is that they don't have a pump to generate the water, so they use community water to water the plants. It is a distance of 2km to get water and they use a wheelbarrow to fetch it.

Once their plants grew up, they are putting up a net to protect their plants because they have a challenge of birds and chickens. Even if you have a net, though, lizards are a big challenge. During this process I have learned that when you start a garden you must add compost to the soil and mix it in. After, you must make open rows to put seeds. I have learned how to protect seeds against insects, how to get seeds from plants and how to save seeds for the next season.



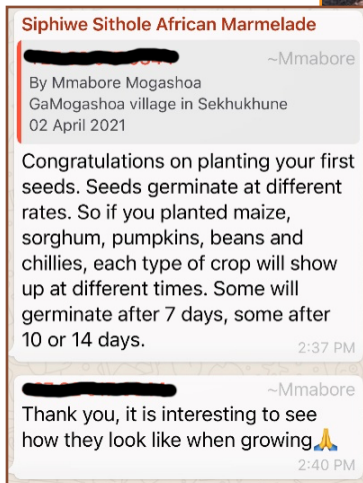
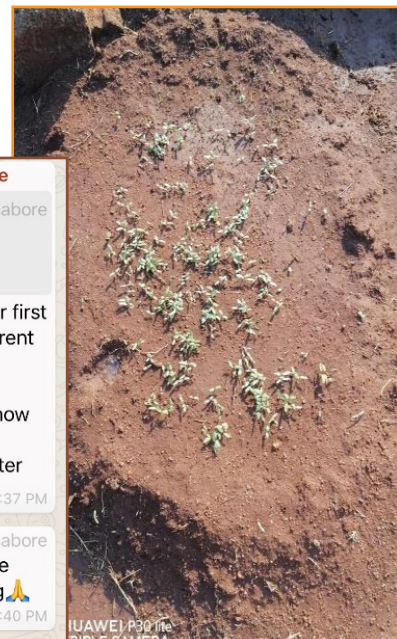
Mmabore Mogashoa: GaMogashoa, Limpopo

This week my mom was helping me to make a seedbed for the seeds to grow. It was my first time doing this because at home we plant mealies, sorghum and morogo yearly and that is done by paying a tractor owner to do the work.

My mom has knowledge and she asked me if we should plant everything. I had no idea and she mentioned that she knows that beans and pumpkin (more like butternut) are not planted in winter. I didn't know how to answer that question and I think the group will assist with that.

After planting the seeds last week and watering the seedbeds, I noticed that some are starting to grow. Only spinach and beetroot are visible. I am still waiting for others to grow. I was expecting them to grow at the same time. though. What makes seeds to grow at different times while planted at the same time?

Up to so far, I have no challenges. We will see when the seedlings get bigger.



A re boeleng temong
By Mmabore Mogashoa

Naga e aparetswe ke tlala
Tlala mo hlokisa batho boroko
Bana ba thari 're gakanegile
Khorona e rile go fihla meokgo ra bona le ya
diputswa

Peu le dipholo di kae?
Boelang lesolong ba opele magabegabe
Legodimo le tsholle meokgo
Naga e hlapiswe mathata

Le reng la rekisa naga?
Le reng la tshilafatsa naga?
Le reng la phalalela nageng disele?
La sia bohwa morago?
Lebapala ka lehumo la lena

Naga ga e bole
Batho ba imelwa ke mebele
Malwetsi ke mehutahuta
Le bophelo ga bo sa le gona
Maokelo a phophoma

Le ja dijo tsa go hloka phepo
Le ja dijo tse le sa tsebeng gore di tshetswe eng
Gona di bjetswe kae

Leroto, thelele, mokhusa le legwahla di kae?
Magapu, marotse le maraka di kae?
Dintshwi le dinawa di kae?
Mahea, leotsa le mabele di kae?

Basadi e swareng ka bogaleng
Rutang bana ka temo
Rutang bana dijo tsa setso
Rutang bana go itlhokomela
Malwetsi a se ba wela wele

Batala ba phetse ba tsofala
Ba phelegile ba sa babje
Le mebele e lekanetse
Ba itemela ka matsogo
Manyoro e le a tlhago

A re boeleng temong
Diruiwa Ga di je mahlaka
Nonyana re bona le tsa kgole
Go maketse le masetlaoka
Lehumo le tswa tshemong

Kgoboketsang dipeu
Re rake tlala
Hlokomelang mobu
Mobu o tla le hlokomela
A re boeleng temong

Donald Mphethi: GaKgwete Village, Limpopo

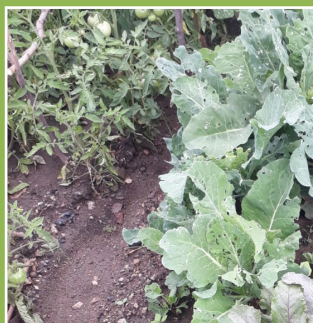
We have done ground preparation today for our garden. We have water, seeds and rich soil. We are very happy to receive seeds from Bench Marks and we really appreciate that. The only challenge we faced during the preparation was the inadequacy of tools. Our spentfork was broken in the process, but we managed to buy the new one.



The seeds are growing. I have managed to put manure on top of the soil for fertiliser. I also have a small net to protect my plants from the sun. The problem is that the net is too short to cover all the area in the garden.



Thanks to Bench Marks for this home garden opportunity and for the seeds that were given to us. I have learned how to prepare soil for planting seeds. It is my first time doing this, but there is progress in my garden. I have also learned how to use irrigation systems and equipment. I don't have any challenges. Everything is well.



The Importance of a Community Food Garden During the Time of Global Pandemic

Facing one of the most challenging times in the history of my generation – the COVID-19 pandemic - has shown us that it is important to have a crisis management plan in the event that our community circumstances change. One of the most important human needs is food, especially because of how it aids in good health.

When news of the pandemic spread, there was great panic because people were concerned about being safe and not going hungry. This was a disheartening time because only those with funds could partake in the panic shopping. Self-reliance became more prominent. This is why it is important for people to self-sustain and manage their health in a way that does not cost them more than they can afford.

Covid-19 has taught us as a community to be self-reliant and to assist people in need, especially the elderly and the children.

~ Victoria M. Makgoo



I am a community monitor, an Environmental Activist and a Secretary of the Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network from Morapaneng Village in Burgersfort Limpopo Province.

I started to be interested in farming in 2018 because I was inspired by Mmathapelo Thobejane. She was teaching me how to plant, how to store seeds and how to harvest. I started to like farming because where I am living there is a lack of markets. I have encouraged people who have small gardens in their yards in my community. I visit them two to three times a week to see if their crops are growing well. The types of crops people plant are spinach, beetroot, parsley, cabbage, coriander, tomatoes, potatoes, onions and mint.

The challenge they have is that they don't have enough space where they can plant so that they can make a big market. They also need to be trained and to find a tutorial class.

The Group I am working with is the Serapeng Project. The soil is ready to be used. Thanks to Bench Marks for distributing the seed to us. We are ready to make our community happy. The challenges we have in our garden are rats, birds and ants. We decided to grow seedlings to make our job to be easy. We have planted spinach, carrots, beetroot, onion, butternut, garlic and ginger.

April 9: Today I discovered that my seeds had grown after I planted them last week. We have put chicken manure on the soil. The soil is rich and we are going to make a row for planting. The nasturtium is growing very well.

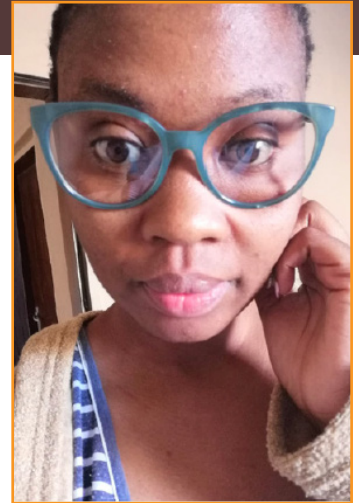
During this process I have learned that most people love gardening. The community I live in is ready to support me. I am even selling to chefs. They are waiting for the vegetables I have planted.

April 28, 2021

With my first attempt, I learned that I don't have a green hand. Our vegetable garden has been my parents activity and we were assigned to watering it only. I tried planting herbs and vegetables, but the result was not as expected. Only the chili I planted survived. Then we let my mom continue with her favourite activity and we had vegetables over January as a result.

I have learned that our soil has termites (motlhwa) which might have affected growth so we used several methods to remedy the problem such as dumping food scraps with less oil on the area we use to plant.

We have had rain. Our soil is black clay and it take time to dry out enough to allow for soil preparation, but we have done that now. We will start planting out beetroot, carrots, onion seedlings as Rustenburg winter tends to be dry. We will plant spinach later in winter. We also planted peanuts, butternut, potatoes and chilies using kitchen waste scraps. I have learned to dispose much less from our kitchen and to start my fertiliser with cardboard and leftovers.



I saw this while looking for recycling ideas for my daughter's formula tins. I remember my late father use to have tusi around the yard with bird feed, water and mashed apples for bees. Yes, the birds did disturb, but not that much because of this. Mom and I will be using this once we have planted. Maybe it can help. It sure did when we were growing up, We had vegetables form the garden throughout the year.

The single greatest lesson the garden teaches is that our relationship to the planet need not be zero-sum, and that as long as the sun still shines and people still can plan and plant, think and do, we can, if we bother to try, find ways to provide for ourselves without diminishing the world.

~ Michael Pollan

**Steven Ramokhula: Ikemeleng,
Koronadal, North West**

5 April

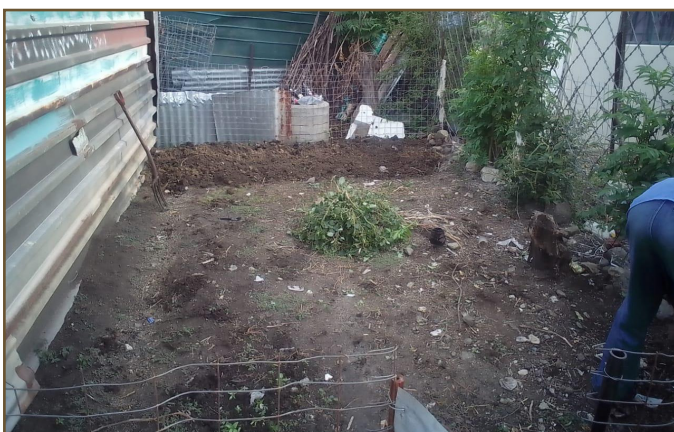
Today I'm putting in my seeds: spinach and beetroot. I will share my seeds with two community members who have big back yards.



April 8

Today I prepared soil for my seeds. The first plants got eaten by chickens. Even though the plants were tomatoes and were not seeds I got from Bench Marks. As I got the experience of chickens eating my plants, I made sure I closed all access to my garden. I will report again when I transplant my seeds into the ground.

This is me with my daughter, my niece and my nephew with the plants that got eaten by chickens.



April 14

Last Thursday I put my seeds in the sand.

April 21

The seeds I have put in the sand have now grown. Today I transplanted spinach. I will transplant beetroot, carrot and onion later this week.



"The time has come to reclaim the stolen harvest and celebrate the growing and giving of good food as the highest gift and the most revolutionary act."

~ Vandana Shiva

Tshepo Mmusi: Jouberton, North West

April 1, 2021

Turning up the soil in Jouberton, Klerksdorp. Tshepo - with the help of his daughter Fency Mmusi - started two beautiful food gardens today.



April 27

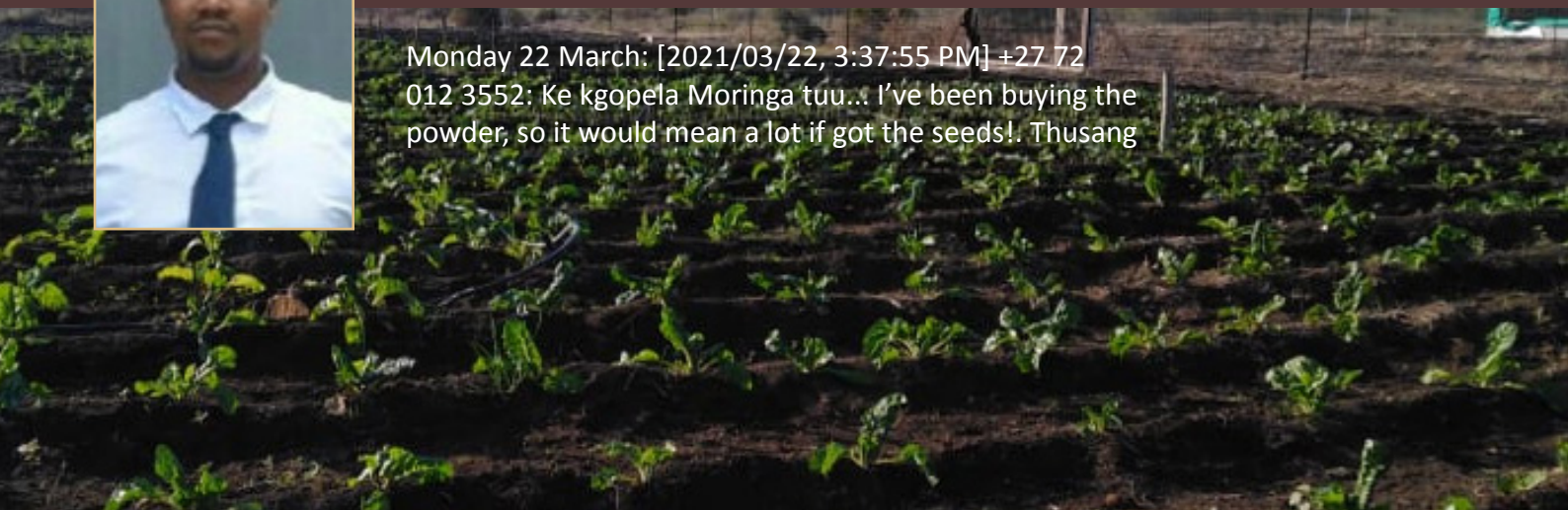
People or members of different communities welcomed the initiative with open arms because they see a need for food gardening. I have been approached by many people in my community wanting to start their food gardens, but I had to turn others back because we ran out of seeds. It feels great to be part of the revolution. Perceptions and perspectives have been shifted and redirected. I feel good about my own food garden is growing up nicely. It's a great feeling to change people's lives.

This is the Lebogang Mosime Food Garden



Kgothatso Huma: Thewane, North West

Monday 22 March: [2021/03/22, 3:37:55 PM] +27 72 012 3552: Ke kgopela Moringa tuu.. I've been buying the powder, so it would mean a lot if got the seeds!. Thusang





Velile Khoza Mfidikoe Village, North West



I am the secretary of Bua Communities. I am a small scale farmer also. I want to be capacitated and to learn more from others and to pass on the skills of organic farming and permaculture. I'm also an organizer who runs the farming project in my village

As an environmental activist, when COVID-19 started I felt heart broken for less fortunate community members who go to bed without food or proper nutrition to supplement their tireless working and hustling bodies.

I started gardening as a hobby in my backyard. When COVID-19 started, I was having a 10 meter garden, but as the pandemic rose, I saw fit for me and my family to extend the garden to produce more vegetables to share them with less fortunate families. It is not 50 meters. We grow spinach, kale, beetroot, onion, carrots and lettuce.

Since I started farming organically, I saw an opportunity to extend the knowledge I learnt from the Work, Learn & Grow program from Seriti Institute by becoming a small scale farmer in commercial farming.

This is the communal garden I worked to feed less fortunate community members.



Phindile Ngobeni: Ikemeleng, North West

18 April, 2021

Only two weeks I planted my seeds. So far I don't have problems. I will plant the last seeds I am left with after sharing with other people. I wanted to see if I will be successful. Now I see I'm coming good. I'm happy.



7. ANOTHER HARVEST: SHARED LEARNING

The work of the Activist Farmers continues, and they continue to learn and to share their lessons with one another. The shared learning that happens in this initiative – across distance and with limited access to airtime and data – is another important harvest. The following will give you a sense of the learning and sharing that is continues to take place.

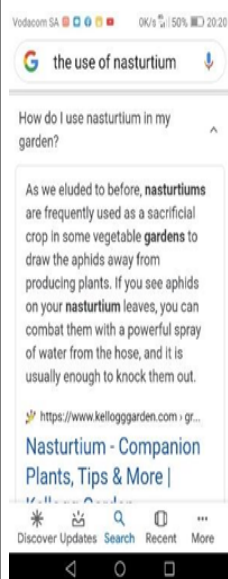
Cdes. What's this? Ya jewa?

It's a flower



Orite orite thanks.

Oh. Those edible flowers sometimes on deserts. Thanks.



Nice. Cause my last year spinach and lettuce was eaten by bugs

We are going to buy a spray for ants.
For birds we have a net but it is not big enough for the space we have.
Rats we have try to kill with ratex.

Siphiwe Sithole African Marmelade

+27 72 567 9403

~Victoria

We are going to buy a spray for ants, Birds we have net but it is not enough for the space we have, Rats we have try to kill it wit...

Please do not use these chemicals to deal with rats or ants. This goes against organic farming principles. We need the group's distributing seeds to emphasize the approach to be followed. I will share with you some of the organic pest controls and useful tips to produce food in a sustainable way.

11:46 AM

+27 72 567 9403

~Victoria

Siphiwe Sithole African Marmelade

Please do not use these chemicals to deal with rats or ants. This goes against organic farming principles. We need the group's di...

I will be glad to get a help

11:49 AM

+27 82 617 0344

~Mmabore

Good afternoon

I have a question. chicken waste and dried cow dung are they all the same as fertilizers? I know for crops at home they use cow dung and chicken waste was never used 🙏

5:48 PM

Mmathapelo (Benchmark)

Is the same but you need to make sure you put them on the soil and it take time for it to decompose. Don't put it direct to the crops because it will burn it

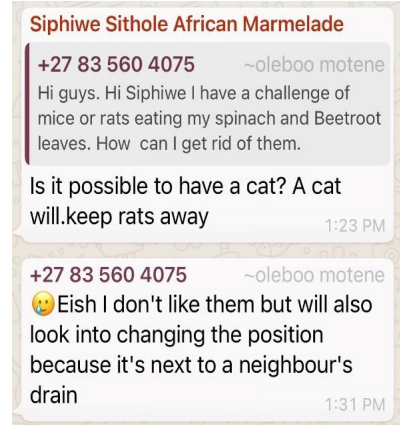
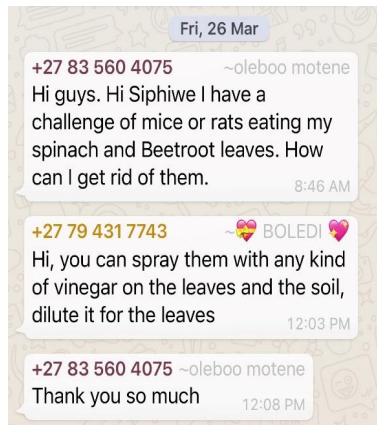
6:12 PM

+27 82 617 0344

~Mmabore

Thank you

6:12 PM



Hello my fellow farmers don't waste your money when testing soil PH, someone comes to your farm collect soil and go without seeing how do they obtain whether your farm has acidic,alkaline or neutral. Let me share with you on how to test soil pH in order to obtain good produce in your farm.

AREAS TO AVOID DURING SOIL TEST

1. Avoid taking soil along the boundary take at middle of your farm.
2. Avoid area where there is manure.
3. Avoid area there is trees .
4. Avoid swampy area.

METHODS USED TO COLLECT SOIL

1. Traverse method.
2. Zigzag method.

HOW TO TEST SOIL PH MATERIAL REQUIRED

1. Soil
2. Water
3. Vinegar
4. Baking soda

-Take soil from different areas of your garden.

-Take soil from different areas of your garden.

-put 2 spoonful into separated container.

-add half cup of vinegar.

RESULT:

-if it fizzes you have alkaline soil with ph of 7&8.

BEST CROP AT ALKALINE SOIL

:cabbage,spinach,beans,leek,sunflower, watermelon etc.

NB;if it doesnt fizz after doing the vinegar test.

-add distilled water to other containers with soil until its muddy.

-add half cup of baking soda if fizzes out you have acidic soil with ph of 5&6

BEST CROP AT ACIDIC SOIL

:kales,beans,potatoes,onions,spinach, sweetpotatoes,pumkin,tomatoes,melon, carrots,bananas etc

NB;if it doesnt fizz after doing the vinegar test.

-add distilled water to other containers with soil until its muddy.

-add half cup of baking soda if fizzes out you have acidic soil with ph of 5&6

BEST CROP AT ACIDIC SOIL

:kales,beans,potatoes,onions,spinach, sweetpotatoes,pumkin,tomatoes,melon, carrots,bananas etc

NB;if it doesnt react either in vinegar or baking soda at all your soil is neutral with ph of 7 and you are lucky

BEST CROP AT NEUTRAL SOIL

:carrots,tomatoes,cucumbers,cauliflower

8. STORING SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

I've learned to build a deeper relationship with community members who are affected directly and indirectly by food pricing and to understand what they are experiencing when they try to do self-improvement. I have also learned to work from home regardless of the challenges I am facing, though I miss physical meetings with partners near and far.

The interviews I have done were extremely shocking for me. I've shared knowledge on food, water, soil, trees, air, climate change and recycling and also on the importance of killing our dependency on shops. The people I've created relationships with are being encouraged in the initiative of having backyard gardens and I am looking forward to doing more.

Doing this work, I saw the power of the system. How it can change and how people can do things. As for me, I am looking forward to start my own seed bank and sprinkling myself with the knowledge that sister Sipiwe has shared with us all. ~ Nelly Nkosi

Although this work is on-going, we have seen how supporting community food gardens has opened up a unique relationship between the activist farmers and the community. In the past, the Community Monitors focused on monitoring the effects of mining companies and engaging mining corporations. In this initiative, their gaze has shifted from what government and mines must do, to engage with community members on what people can do here and now. We hope this opens new possibility for them in terms of their activist work.

As we write, the activists in the Community Monitors Programme are still in discussions about where to go from here. Some of the ideas which are sprouting include:

- A community seed exchange network;
- Crowd funding for seed aid and other support for food gardens; and
- Engaging the mining corporations to fund a larger community food garden initiative.

We are grateful to the activist farmers and community members for their work to date, and are keen to see what comes of the many seeds that have already been planted.

May the nurturing sun shine and may the good rains fall.







**No One Is Safe
Until Everyone Is Safe**