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PROGRESS REPORT – 1 JANUARY 1999–31 JULY 1999

“Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation) there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans. The moment one definitely commits oneself then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no-one could have dreamt would have come their way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.” – Johan Wolfgang von Goethe (1832)

Dear Friends,

Greetings for 1999. The above injunction is proven most true when one witnesses how people manage to rally in the face of apparent impossible odds. Their achievements are our joy. They may seem minute in the face of the massive challenges in the world, but we believe that the groundswell of evolutionary change today is effected precisely through “minute” decisions taken by “invisible people” in the grassroots, as much as, if not more than those taken by the big people in their halls of power. The “Four Minute Mile Principle” is the one we work on. It took only one person to run the “impossible” four minute mile and the whole of humanity has benefited by that one person’s decision and achievement.

The last seven months have been very full and you have probably been wondering what has happened to us since our last newsletter! Without more ado, please join us on an overview of some of our activities and achievements . . .

THE URBAN AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME (UAP):

MASIBAMBANE COMES OF AGE



Before – February 1999



After – first crops, April 1999

The Masibambane Neighbourhood Garden Group has graduated into a Community Allotment Garden Association! In February, this group of women managed to obtain about 1/4 ha of land at Siyazakha Primary School, Philippi, Nyanga. This is a “ground breaking” project because it is the first school in the townships that we know of to agree to give land over to the community for vegetable production. There are about 15 members in this group, all of whom began two years ago to grow vegetables at their homes for the table. Now they intend to earn a bigger income as well as put fresh food on their tables. They are ably assisted by ABALIMI fieldworker Maureen Onceya (front left).



SCAGA STARTS A SEWING PROJECT AMONG THE SEEDLINGS

Ten members of the Siyazama Community Allotment Garden Association (SCAGA) in Macassar, Khayelitsha, obtained sewing machines with funds donated by the ROYAL NETHERLANDS EMBASSY. They went on a training course at the Triple Trust and are now producing beautiful clothes for sale, as well as fresh organic seedlings in their budding nursery. Every community garden is a hub for many other dreams to come true.

DRUM-DRIP TECHNOLOGY GETS THE GO-AHEAD



Pictured above are some women from SCAGA with Jaquita Keet (centre, standing on right of drum) of the Agricultural Research Council (ARC), among the beds in which the drum-drip system is being tested. Jaquita reports: "In early March, home-made and commercial dripper lines were installed on two trenched and two non-trenched beds, fed by two 210 litre drums. These were filled not more than once a day, even on the hottest and driest days. This was done in order to determine which combinations would produce the highest yield with minimal irrigation. All the beds were otherwise treated exactly the same". It can be seen quite clearly from the photograph that the non-trenched beds (foreground) have so far yielded very poorly compared to the trenched beds. In addition, the commercial dripper lines worked better than the home-made version. Major water and labour saving results were also achieved. The SCAGA women now all want this system in their plots! Previously they resisted this technology, saying that it was "backwards". Jaquita will be publishing the results of her research soon and ABALIMI will be looking to install the drum-drip technology in every one of its gardens in the townships. Other benefits of this technology are that it is cheap and easy to install and maintain as well as being readily transferable into the rural areas.

ABALIMI TRAINING LEADS TO JOBS

Mphumzi Gonanda, holding his ABALIMI Training Certificate and Mrs Mbaba, Principal, with children at Noluthando Creche in Khayelitsha.

Mphumzi, a previously jobless young man, completed a Basic Ecological Garden Course with ABALIMI in February. Shortly afterwards, he was snapped up by Mrs Mavis Mbaba, the Principal of Noluthando Creche in J Section, Khayelitsha, to maintain their vegetable garden and newly greened grounds, both of which ABALIMI helped to establish. There have been other examples of ABALIMI trainees getting jobs and we plan to build on this possibility in future. 85 people were trained from February until April in four training courses.



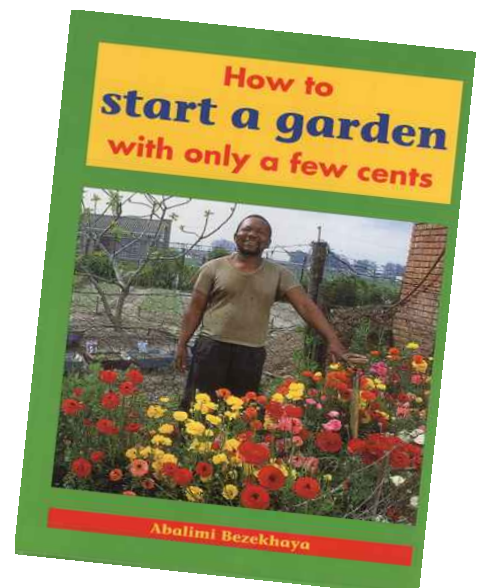
HOW TO START A GARDEN WITH ONLY A FEW CENTS! . . .
and learn English, Xhosa and Afrikaans.

We are proud to announce the release of our first book, published by JUTA, a distillation of years of experience in the field. This book is also an adult literacy textbook and you can now learn English, Xhosa and Afrikaans by digging your own backyard garden! We hope that it will in future become available in all eleven languages. You can buy your copy (R19,95) through any JUTA bookstore or order it from any other major retailer.

MAYFORD Seed Company, OLD MUTUAL and THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF SA made it possible to

keep costs down and supply ABALIMI with 1 000 copies for use in the field.

By buying this book you will also be supporting our work in the Cape Flats townships.



LEARNINGS – A PERSPECTIVE ON THE GENESIS OF AN ECOLOGICAL URBAN AGRICULTURE MOVEMENT IN THE CAPE FLATS TOWNSHIPS

The pictures and success stories reported in our newsletters give little indication of the dynamics that we wrestle with on a day to day level. To understand these dynamics, we must first comprehend a little of the background and context within which our work proceeds. This is by no means simple and what is described here is only one perspective. To begin with, it must be clearly remembered that it is only since the first South African elections in 1994 that it has become possible to work among the township communities in a developmental way. Up to 1994 we could only give a kind of survival welfare support to individuals and groups, who were engaged in an often vicious political struggle. In other words, we provided highly subsidised, cheap resources (manure, seed, seedlings, advice and training) to hundreds, sometimes thousands of individual survival gardeners every year through many a dark day, since 1982/83.

The flood of people to Cape Town from the Transkei and Ciskei crested in the early 1990's at between 2 000-5 000 people per month, and this has now slowed to a constant stream, although we do not possess any recent official statistics. The simple reason for this migration from the former homelands becomes obvious once you visit them. You will behold endless mass settlements of people, with nil employment opportunities, degraded land, no basic services and substandard education opportunities. In short, the legacy of apartheid. We estimate that we have the equivalent of about a third of the population of the Transkei encamped at the gates of Cape Town, mostly in shacks! Unemployment statistics range between 40%-90%, depending on where you care to conduct your survey. And yet, here in Cape Town there is still hope for a better life, whereas back home there is none.

What draws people to the city? This should already be clear, but something more is taking place in the hearts and minds of the "invisible" people we work with that has a direct bearing on our learnings. Simply put, this "something" can be described as an individual yearning to become free – of economic hardship, of certain restrictive customs which no longer give succour and help, of a peasant mentality to name a few. And *the* model presented to everyone for this freedom is a certain species of "modern individual" who is smart, sports a cell phone, drives a car, owns a house

in the suburbs, goes on exotic holidays etc. This archetype, or model, is entirely pervasive and takes many forms. It has prejudiced the majority of people against "alternative" lifestyles, even if they are very modest in their personal aspirations.

In agricultural terms, despite all mouthings to the contrary by those with influence, the agricultural success model on offer takes the form of the "big white/black farmer" with big credit, big land, cell phone in hand etc. This version of the "modern individual" works powerfully against our endeavours. The whole academic and agricultural industry is geared towards the Big Model. Few people *really* believe that micro-farming, even less ecological (non-synthetic) urban micro-farming can make them prosperous. It is not yet "smart or cool" to be a small or micro-farmer, particularly among the youth. Thus the majority of people, despite ever-mounting worldwide evidence to the contrary, still hold out for "THE JOB" and all that goes with it. Very many want to transcend their rural roots, forget their patient ancestors who "toiled from morn till night" in untenable conditions and become their own version of the "modern individual".

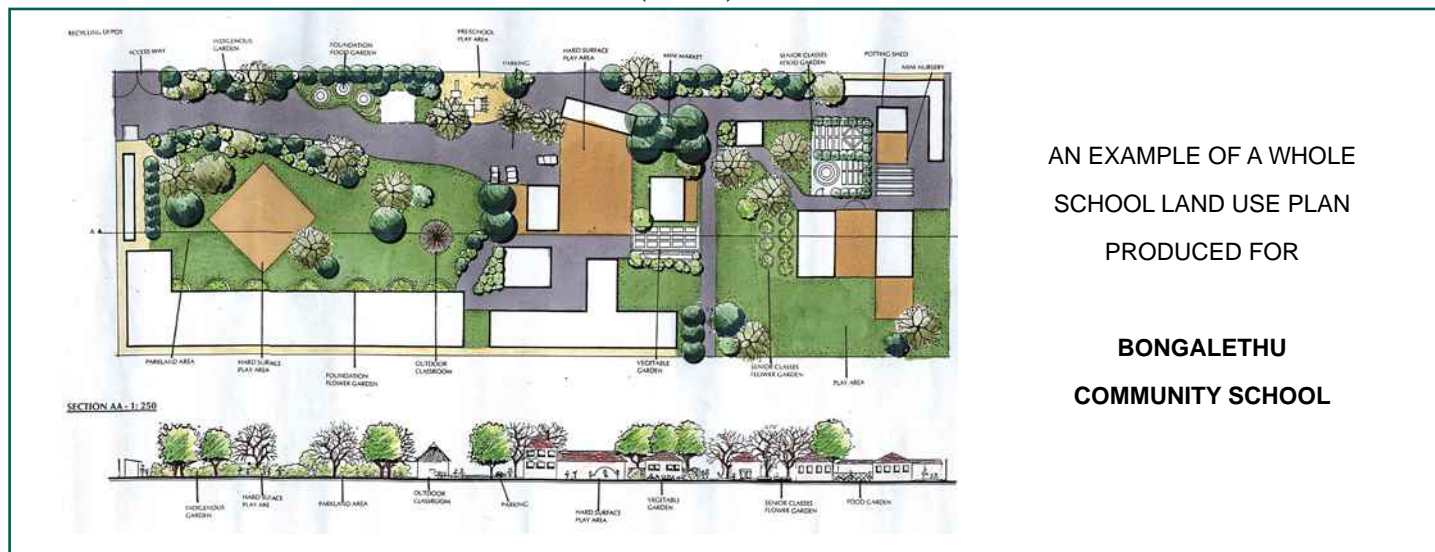
How does the above proposition translate into real learnings on the ground? ABALIMI finds itself at the interface between a culture of unconscious resistance to alternative lifestyles and technologies and a new culture of low-tech innovation. To begin with, people want hi-tech solutions to their lifestyle problems. Small scale agriculture and backyard gardening is seen as a luxury of the rich or a dire necessity for the poor, not an opportunity for upwardly mobile intelligent individuals. ABALIMI has to prove that low-tech, labour intensive alternatives are smart and lead to serious money in the pocket. But this does not happen overnight. Low-tech, labour intensive projects require a number of people to join forces, become highly organised and deeply skilled. They must be willing to learn from failures while at the same time committing to success. The people we work with are often far from being able to understand their own immense potential. This is the most serious hurdle we face in our projects and programmes. Lack of money, land or resources is entirely secondary to people's ability to conceive a vision and commit to it. The first 2-3 years in any one of our grassroots projects involves us in the step by step mentoring of community groups whereby they are able to gain expertise,

confidence and organisational capacity to formulate and commit to a vision and make it happen. Because we are one of very few NGOs working directly at the grassroots level, our groups contain a mixture of people, many of whom do not want to be farmers, but see their involvement with ABALIMI as a doorway to other opportunities. Only a small proportion of any group (about one person in 5) have a real love of the soil and are genuinely open to becoming micro-farmers. The first three years in project establishment sees these two groups separating out and moving gradually apart. This is a complex process.

An example: better educated members of a group – who are often not farmers at heart – can be elected to lead the project. The less educated (and less confident) members can then find themselves marginalised within their own project, leading to a decline in productivity all round. A crisis then ensues, resulting in the need for appropriate intervention to assist with restructuring. Power plays and petty rivalries between individuals add to the mixture – particularly where shared resources and money comes into the picture. These dynamics are intensified where men take over leadership or exert a strong influence. Women tend to allow them to dominate and another crisis inevitably follows. Added to these issues is the political context in which the group emerges and consequent political rivalries within the group and community which can cause demotivation and confusion. The groups must also deal with each other's personal problems and challenges, for example women members who are abused by their husbands and are prevented from coming to meetings and work days because the husband for one reason or another will not permit it.

ABALIMI is learning a great deal through all of this. We are arriving at methodologies which can navigate a clear pathway from inception of a community gardening group until it becomes a stable institution. We have three key models or pilots emerging, which are becoming job creation projects – The SCAGA Community Gardens, the Masibambane Community Gardens and the Hazeldean Community Gardens. The Hazeldean gardens are very new and will only appear in forthcoming newsletters. Further comment on dynamics and learnings in the field will also follow. ●

THE CAPE FLATS GREENING PROGRAMME (CFGPP):



AN EXAMPLE OF A WHOLE
SCHOOL LAND USE PLAN
PRODUCED FOR

**BONGALETHU
COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

This is the year of the Whole School Land Use Design workshop for the ABALIMI greening staff. We took up this methodology in September 1998, after attending a trainers workshop initiated through the PELUM (Participatory Ecological Land Use Management) Association, of which ABALIMI is a member. We have developed our own unique adaptation of this technology and until July 1999 completed five 5-day workshops with five schools, resulting in plans similar to the above, with phased development budgets. A further 8-9 schools were on the waiting list for workshops at the end of July. These workshops have been the main focus of the greening programme during the reporting period and the growing demand for them will ensure that they remain a major activity for the rest of the year. After a workshop, each school has a powerful fundraising and planning tool in support of their overall educational and community building functions.

ABALIMI strives to include ecological and conservation development principles in the planning process which result in schools becoming sustainable, water-wise and environmental education oases.

UPCOMING EVENTS FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTERS WILL INCLUDE: A report on the 1999 Arbor Week, the emergence of Environmental Youth Groups and their projects, a further update on the Manyanani Peace Park, updates on Green Schools, the new Hazeldean project and more.

Our Special Thanks

FOR THIS REPORTING PERIOD TO:

- * **OLD MUTUAL** for this newsletter
- * **ALL our many Friends, both great and small**, for your warm interest, encouragement and gifts, both in cash and kind. Many friends wish to remain anonymous. We list only those who specially give permission.
- * **THE GREEN TRUST** for another three year partnership agreement.
- * **The N/O Fund** for R11 000 to initiate and implement a joint greening project with KERIC (Khayelitsha Educational Resource and Information Centre).
- * **The CONSTANTIA BERG and CONSTANTIA VALLEY Garden Clubs** for R12 550,00 for job creation raised from their magnificent Open Day in October.
- * **MR I.F. Reddihough** for his ongoing and most generous support.
- * **THE DE BEERS FUND** for R15 000 for the UAP.
- * **The S.A. Support Group, Germany** for five used computers.
- * **ANGLOVAAL Mining Limited** for R10 000 for the UAP.
- * **Jambo International Centre** for \$300 for training.
- * **BOTSOC – Botanical Society of South Africa**, for R22 810,00 for indigenous school greening. This donation should have been listed in the last newsletter (No. 21) in which a report on the BOTSOC indigenous schools was given.
- * **The British High Commission** for R20 000 for start-up inputs to emerging community projects.
- * **The COLD CHAIN** for their ongoing support of R1 000/m for household vegetable gardens.
- * **TOTAL S.A.** for R10 000 for their 1998 Green School project partnership.
- * **The Royal Netherlands Embassy** for R11 793,00 to set up the SCAGA sewing group.
- * **Our British Channel Islands Friend** – you know who you are. You came out of the blue and took us all by surprise. Thank you.
- * **CBNP** – for R50 000 subsidised agricultural inputs.
- * **The FLOWER GROUP of the Union of Jewish Women** for R1 000 for 1999.
- * **Newlands Nursery** for plants to the value of R3 000.
- * **CWD (Catholic Welfare and Development)** for R25 000 for garden training.

NOTICE BOARD

- * **ABALIMI'S A.G.M.** will be on Sunday 26th September at 3 p.m. Please contact us if you wish to be there.
- * **A BICYCLE NEEDED:** has anyone got a good used pedal bike with a few gears they want to donate to one of our fieldworkers? Please contact Rob Small at 447 1256.
- * **OPEN DAYS:** ABALIMI will take you on a tour of our projects. Choose a day! Thursday 30th September, Thursday 7th October or Thursday 28th October. Please contact Rob Small at 447 1256 and book your place.

"Apart from having a baby, gardening is the nearest thing on this earth to magic. It makes you feel powerful, creative, satisfied, peaceful and fulfilled." – Shirley Conran.