Something is rotten in development's garden

Neglectings, barriers and opportunities for engaging with difference in the co-creation of strategies for change

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Abstract

Acknowledging that development initiatives often fail to bring about the long-lasting changes envisioned, the concept of 'participation' has been promoted to support principles such as ownership and sustainability. Unfortunately, participatory approaches largely fail to engage in and incorporate people's different understandings of the world. Appreciating that when engaging in these differences, dissonance may emerge; and due to the absence of predefined solutions in collaborative settings; social learning approaches can be invaluable in the co-creation of strategies of change. Opportunities for engaging in such approaches were explored through a qualitative case study of a communal food plant garden and seedling nursery initiative in South Africa. More specifically, the (lack of) engagement in such approaches and the reasons for which, were used to shed light on why the initiative deteriorated as it did. Interviews highlighted different understandings regarding the value of the initiative and why people were reluctant to join, left and/or spent less time in the initiative, resulting in the initiative being misaligned to the priorities and preferences of the people it was intended to benefit. Engaging in social learning could have avoided this, but faces many barriers within the current approach to development.

Mfetu (2012)

Table of Contents

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Forward

This could be a story about me. I would have preferred it that way. Those of you with whom I have shared my years of working within what I have come to understand as 'development', would know this. So, although it is not a story about me, it is in many ways a story of my journey from where I have come to where I am now. From here, I hope that we can plot a new path forward, together.

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List of Abbreviations

EC	Eastern Cape
ECNGOC	Eastern Cape NGO Coalition
LED	Local Economic Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
UPA	Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture

List of Organisations[2]

Mfetu	Locally based Community Development NPO
WILD	National Environmental NGO
Nokusimama	A programme of WILD

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[2] All organisations and programme names have been changed

1. Introduction

On his reasons for moving back home, the South Africa author Jonny Steinberg (2015) writes:

> "... When I lock eyes with a stranger on Johannesburg's streets, there is a flicker... This stranger may be a man in a coat and tie, or a woman who wears the cotton uniform of a maid, or a construction worker stripped to the waist. Whoever he is, he clocks me as I pass, and reads me and my parents and my grandparents; and I, too, conjure, in an instant, the past from which he came. As we brush shoulders the world we share rumbles around us, its echoes resounding through generations... We may one day fight one another or even kill one another, yet our souls are entwined because we have made another... I cannot get that on Port Meadow [UK] ... the people who pass are wafer thin. I cannot imagine who they are. It doesn't matter enough..."

(Most of) Steinberg's image is very illustrative of present day South Africans. Who individuals are today and their view of the other is shaped by who their parents and grandparents were during the country's colonial and Apartheid past. Despite the progress in the past 21 years of democracy, the Apartheid-enforced racial segregation still lingers alongside growing socio-economic differentiation (Lemanski, 2006:567). As such many South Africans continue to brush past one another relying on prior experiences and assumptions to understand the other. Nevertheless, Steinberg ends with how those South Africans, despite them being the strangers that they are, matter to him.

The lives of strangers in South Africa (and around the world) also matter for those involved in the development system. Throughout the country many people in development organisations and charities are working to achieve the changes they hoped to have already seen since the end of Apartheid. Here (as in other parts of the world) such initiatives invariably bring together strangers, people with very different cultures, histories, upbringings and socio-economics backgrounds. With the more easily identified differences as Jonny passes Nomie on the street, comes very different realities, values and understandings of the world and along with it, assumptions of the other. These differences when put up against each can also lead to dissonance[3] and often does.

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[3] "Lack of agreement or harmony between people" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015)

However all too often in development, in South Africa and across the globe, the deeper differences are not engaged in while dissonance is avoided. Not only do those on either side of the development relationship remain strangers but the initiatives are misaligned to the realities and understandings of those they intend to benefit. All too often such initiatives simply end up failing to achieve the changes that the individuals involved had hoped for.

Through approaches used in social learning, this thesis aims to explore (lack of) engagement in difference and dissonance at all stages of the project cycle for the co-construction of strategies for change. Furthermore this thesis looks at possible barriers to deeper engagement, the impact this has on development initiatives as well as opportunities for deeper engagement through social learning approaches. These neglectings, barriers and opportunities for engagement will be viewed through a communal food plant garden and seedling nursery in the small coastal village of KwaNiekeri[4] in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. This initiative was developed through a partnership between a local and a national development organisation. Although the nursery and garden were established and supported for the benefit of the local Xhosa residents, if you go past, you will see no-one in the nursery and cabbages rotting in the ground (see Pictures 1 and 2).

Author

Author

Picture 1: Food Plant Nursery, February 2015

Picture 2: Food Plant Garden overgrown with weeds, February 2015

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[4] All names of places, people and organisations have been changed. However, the location of the food plant and garden and the village has not been changed (i.e. it's location along the Eastern Cape Coast in between the former Transkei and Ciskei homelands).

2. Research Problem & Purpose

The word 'development' came to fore and gained its current meaning in the years following the Second World War whereby the West (largely the previously colonising powers), problematizing poverty and considering themselves as 'developed', took it upon themselves to support progress towards modernity in 'under-developed' (largely previously colonised countries) third world countries through 'development' programmes, projects and aid (Tucker, 1999:7, Escobar, 2012:44).

The institutionalisation of development took place with the establishment of international development agencies (e.g. USAid) and organisations (e.g. WWF); national and local development agencies (e.g. Eastern Cape Development Corporation); NGO's (e.g. WILD) and volunteer agencies (e.g. Mfetu) (Escobar, 2012:46). These organisations and agencies facilitate the transfer of resources, ideas, advice, techniques and training with people with more resources providing and those with less resources receiving. Hence the current approach to development has been described as a '*delivery system*' based on a theory of change whereby assistance, through the provision of inputs, can help bring about political, social and economic change. This delivery system approach has been prompted by (amongst other things) the adoption of *business principles and practices* (i.e. cost effective and efficient delivery of goods and services) by many of the agencies and organisations involved in providing development assistance (Anderson *et al*., 2012:34,37).

However, as many authors such as Tucker (1999:1-3) point out - the seven decades of development programmes, projects and aid (i.e. capital, technology, hospitals and roads) have mainly failed to bring about changes as envisioned by those on the providing end. As one of the means to address the lack of sustainability and ownership of development projects, the concept of '*participation*' was introduced. It has also been advocated to support empowerment and democratisation; fairness and transparency; efficiency and effectiveness and as a means to include people in the decisions regarding their own development (Cleaver, 2004:36; Cooke, 2004:103-104; Anderson *et al*., 2012:65-67,125). However, 'participation' has been so widely and loosely used that the meaning of the concept has become blurred with many different understandings and interpretations of what it is, who is it for and why (Mikkelsen, 2005: 53). Overall many authors such as Cleaver (2004:36) ascertain that there is very little evidence

supporting the long-term effectiveness of 'participation' in materially improving conditions let alone as a strategy for social change.

Indeed, at its most rudimentary, 'participation' simply involves using the variety of participatory methods, tools and techniques to identify which people fall into the predetermined target group or to justify predetermined deliverables and projects and then label the decision 'participatory' (Anderson *et al.*, 2012:70-72,75). 'Participation' is also often implemented solely as 'information sharing' where interested and effected parties or 'stakeholders' are gathered and informed about what is planned. If people are invited to share their views there is a tendency for those on the providing end to listen to ideas and opinions but then not acting on what was heard (Mikkelsen, 2005:77,166). Such superficial participatory approaches do not truly engage in people's perspectives in order to co-develop strategies for change.

Therefore, it is not surprising when the initiatives they are appended to are not aligned to the priorities and preferences of the people they were intended to benefit and fail to engender ownership or to sustainably bring about the changes envisioned.

An example would be initiatives aimed at supporting urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) (see Box 1). UPA is advocated as a means to fight urban poverty and vulnerability by supporting livelihood opportunities and food security (see Box 2) (Crush et al., 2010:10; May & Rogerson, 1995:165; Reuther & Dewar, 2005:98). Initiatives to support UPA are often focused on providing what is perceived to be needed (i.e. agricultural inputs, credit, market

> **Box 1: Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture (UPA)**
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> There are varying definitions of UPA (Ruysenaar, 2012:225). According to the World Bank its "*an industry located within ('intra-urban') or on the fringe ('peri-urban') of a town, a city, or a metropolis, that grows and raises, processes and distributes a diversity of agricultural products from both plants and animals, using human, land and water resources, products, and services found in and around that urban area*" (2013:3).

linkages, technical advice and the strengthening of urban farmer's organizations) (Crush *et al.*, 2010:24). However Crush *et al*. (2010:24) highlight the fact that considering the high levels of urban poverty, UPA is not as prolific as expected in Southern and South Africa e.g. 22% of households sampled in Southern Africa (Crush *et al.*, 2010:14) and 4% of anticipated households in the Eastern Cape (Burger *et al.,* 2009:24). They therefore warn against simply trying to apply technocratic solutions without first understanding the fundamental reasons for not many people engaging in UPA in the first place.

Thus far, studies have found that the uptake of UPA involves complex considerations including context. A **passion** for gardening is a key ingredient (see ECNGOC, 2010:65; Reuther & Dewar, 2005:119; Ruysenaar, 2012:241) while **negative perceptions** of subsistence agriculture (especially due to its place in Apartheid) as well as **generational perspectives** may deter some individuals (See Appendix 1.1). The characteristics of **urban poverty** (as opposed to rural poverty) is also important to consider. Urban poverty differs from rural poverty in that urban residents are more reliant on cash income to meet their needs, with goods and services being typically more expensive than in rural areas. This is compounded by structural non-income dimensions such as limited access to basic services and infrastructure (i.e. health, education, energy, water and sanitation); long travel times and high transportation costs; an inability to save costs by buying in bulk due to lack of storage space (Tacoli, 2012:4,6) and a lack of social networks. Introducing UPA without addressing these structural concerns may not go very far in addressing poverty. Furthermore, such structural dimensions increase the burden of those responsible

> **Box 2: Food security**
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> Food security comprises of a complex relationship between food availability (physical presence of enough food), access (ability to purchase/secure the available food) and utilisation (how food is used and stored) (Ruysenaar, 2012:223-224). These are considered hierarchical with food availability being necessary but not automatically resulting in access and access being necessary but not enough for utilisation (Ruysenaar, 2012:224). Poor food security can impact negatively on individual and household health and productivity and therefore livelihoods as well as further food security (Shisanya & Hendriks, 2011:519), thus trapping individuals in a negative downward cycle.

for unpaid reproductive/domestic/care work (often women) who also need to dedicate time to raising an income (Chant, 2007; Tacoli, 2012:6). This concept known as **time poverty** and dependence on cash incomes could be pertinent whereby individuals may not have the time to engage in UPA (Reuther & Dewar, 2005:117). When promoting UPA as an income generating initiative authors such as Reuther & Dewar (2005:115) speculate that uptake could depend on its **income generating potential compared to other sources of income** including government grants (See Appendix 1.2) and highlight that there are other complex factors that need to be taken into consideration. These factors include the **risks** associated with agriculture (See Appendix 1.3); **uneven distribution of produce and income** over the year (See Appendix 1.4); and **upfront investment** while profits materialise later on (See Appendix 1.5).

Since these considerations are not only complex but also contextual, deeper engagement with the very people that UPA support is directed at, in order to become aware of and understand their realities and perspectives, would avoid simply applying technocratic solutions based on perceived needs. It would also avoid implementing projects misaligned to the priorities and preferences of the people the project is intended to benefit.

However, it has been increasingly recognised that 'the community' is not a homogenous entity but rather one made up of different individuals and that these individuals have different perspectives and understandings of the world which often contrast with one another and particularly with those seeking to benefit the said 'community' (Escobar, 2012:xi; Mohan, 2004:163; Tucker, 1999:16). Therefore, when trying to truly engage and co-create strategies for change, those on the providing end are invariably faced with the challenge of having to take into consideration multiple (and often diverging) views, opinions and ideas that not only differ from one another but from their own and the development agenda they may bring to the discussion. Under situations of conflicting understandings and without being able to facilitate problem solving or manage conflict, the process can easily stall or fall apart.

In light of these developments and such considerations there are emerging movements advocating for, and methods in support of, a kind of participation that not only assures socio-economic and demographic plurality but also engages with this deeper plurality of understandings. Authors such as Anderson, Brown and Jean (2012) highlight the importance of people on the receiving end playing an active role in all the stages of the project cycle from conceptualisation and planning through to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Such a process involves both the assistance providers and the assistance receivers jointly discussing issues; constructing, deliberating and prioritising different options; and make decisions together. In order to support such collaborative processes where solutions are not predefined by those on the providing end, social learning authors such as Arjen Wals not only highlight the importance of engaging with differences and conflict but also emphasises diversity and dissonance as essential ingredients for co-constructing creative strategies for change.

Through this case of KwaNiekeri's communal food plant garden and seedling nursery I aim to explore the different understandings amongst the implementers (those on the providing end working in the so-called 'field') and the people they intended to benefit and whether or not

these differences were engaged in at the different stages of the project cycle. Furthermore, drawing on the work of Wals *et al.* (2009) I aim to analyse where and how approaches from social learning could have been used to facilitate a more collaborative approach to developing strategies for change; and could have enabled insights that may have avoided the unfolding of the initiative to its current state. Lastly I aim to highlight the barriers to engaging in social learning approaches and participation in general within the current approach to development drawing on insights from Anderson *et al.* (2012).

The above considerations have been translated into the following operative research question:

How and why did it come to be that the food plant nursery is not operational and that the garden is mostly overgrown with weeds?

3. Context & Background

Social learning may prove invaluable in the context of South Africa where we are all striving for something better amongst all our difference, dissonance and outright conflict. Indeed, South Africa is a country of great ethnic diversity as well as inequality. One could say that the events that brought into being this difference started around 1350. Since then the country has seen great immigration and migration resulting in different people coming into continuous contact and conflict with one another. Domination and oppression by European settlers came to the fore during the colonial era while inequality was solidified during Apartheid. The latter not only limited socio-economic opportunities for non-whites, but also separated white and other. Different ethnicities lived detached from one another and in fear of one another. Today the inequality persists and socio-economic differences have done little to breakdown the segregation both spatially and socially. Shaped by our cultures and historic pasts, our individual upbringings and current realities we perceive and understand the world differently. Separated by invisible divides, the other and their understandings of the world remain largely unknown.

3.1. The South Africa that was

Up until 1350 when the first Bantu people crossed South over the Limpopo River into the geographical space now known as South Africa, the area had been home to the Khoi and the

San people (van Wyk, 2008:332). Since then the Bantu people have split into a number of different ethnic groups (recognised by 9 of the 11 official languages[5] (Webb *et al*., 2010:278)) with the Zulu and then the Xhosa people being the largest (StatsSA, 2012:25). In addition to people of African descent (who make up the majority (79.2%) of the country's current population (StatsSA, 2012:21)) are those of European (primarily Dutch and British) decent whose ancestors brought on an era of colonialism from 1652 until 1961 (Fourie & von Finte, 2009:230; Magubane, 2004). This period saw the introduction of South Africa's remaining two major Ethnic groups namely Coloured (people of mixed ethnic ancestry) and Indian (whose ancestors came either as indentured labour during the British colonial period or as traders and merchants (Majumdar, 2013:480-481)). Today, Indian and Asian South Africans make up 2.5% of the population, while the white South African population is equal to that of Coloured South Africans at 8.9% (StatsSA, 2012:21).

Despite always being a minority and numerous conflicts, battles and wars (Ingham, 2009), the British and Dutch settlers (i.e. the English and Afrikaans), as with other colonisers, were able to gain the power to dominate through processes that were not only militaristic but also economic, political and cultural (Tucker, 1999:5). Discourses of colonial superiority often based on (Western) biologically grounded evolutionary racial theories constructed colonised peoples (i.e. the Bantu descendants, Coloured and Indian peoples) as inferior (Tucker, 1999:5; Loomba, 2005:58).

The marginalisation of South Africa's non-white ethnic groupings was entrenched in 1948 when the Afrikaans National Party came to power with their project of Apartheid. Apartheid was a policy based on white supremacy (Magubane, 2004) which institutionalised white privilege (Castree *et al*., 2013) and aimed to legalise ethnical segregation both socially and spatially (Castree *et al*., 2013; Ingham, 2009; Magubane, 2004).

Legislation enabled the removal black South Africans from where they were living to relocation to one of ten large ethnically homogenous 'homelands' designated for 'separate black development' and eventual (forced) independence[6] (see Figure 1) (Evans, 2012:117;

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[5] English and Afrikaans are South Africa's remaining two official languages.
[6] The food plant garden and nursery is located in between two of these former Xhosa homelands - the Transkei and Ciskei. Although these two along with two others were declared independent between 1976 and 1981 none of them were recognised internationally (Evans, 2012:119).

Moyo, 2013:5394). Later it enabled the forced removal of Coloured and Indian people to specifically designated areas as well (Magubane, 2004). Public spaces (e.g. beaches, restaurants and toilets) were designates as 'whites-only' (Palmowski, 2015a) and mixed marriages and sexual relationships across races was made illegal (Castree *et al*., 2013; Magubane, 2004). Education was also separate and the non-white education system was designed to be inferior according to government standards (Palmowski, 2015a).

Apartheid not only reduced and restricted access land and education but also employment, health care, information and capital (Francis, 2012:532,546) leaving behind deep-rooted structural inequalities. Political participation by non-whites was limited and resistance was severely suppressed (Mgubane, 2004). By the time Apartheid was disbanded, over 100 000 recorded human rights violations had been committed by all sides (Palmowski, 2015b). Thus the South Africans who experienced the country's first democratic elections in 1994 were very different to one another both economically and culturally. They had endured a long history of conflict and had kept very much apart.

3.2.   The South Africa that is

In the 21 years since, inequality persists and is thus perpetuated, reinforcing the past segregation both socially and spatially along socio-economic lines. The former is well illustrated in a 'thought experiment' updated and adapted by Oxfam International (2014) from the 2006 World Development Report. It compares the life chances of a white South African boy with parents who both have university qualifications and well-paying jobs to that of a black girl, born on the same day to a mother with no formal schooling and an unemployed father. The girl is nearly 1.5 times more likely to die in her first year, while the boy who will most probably live 15 years longer. The boy will more than likely go to university after 12 years of schooling while the girl will be lucky to get one year. Her children will most likely be trapped in a similar position. Added to this, not only is inequality seen to persist but the World Bank Gini index[7] indicates that inequality has in fact increased since the end of Apartheid (World Bank, 2015).

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[7] The Gini index measures the extent to which a country's income distribution or consumption expenditure deviates from an equal distribution. The greater the number, the greater the inequality. In 1993 South Africa's index was measured at 59.3. In 2011 it had risen 65.0 and was the highest inequality rating out of the 44 other countries measured that same year (with Honduras, Colombia and Brazil having the next greatest inequality at

In the thought experiment the girl was born in a rural area while the boy was born in a rich urban suburb of Cape Town. As with the rest of the world, South Africa's urban areas are growing due to both population growth and an influx of people from rural areas (including the former homelands) in search of a better quality of life through employment (Tacoli, 2012:5; Thornton, 2008:247). In South Africa, people often end up living in low-cost and informal housing areas commonly known as a townships[8] (Thornton, 2008:247) – areas that are spatially separated and socio-economically distinct from the towns and cities they abut. Residents of townships are amongst the country's most food insecure (Ruysenaar, 2012:220) with poverty rates being the greatest in those around smaller towns due to limited job opportunities (Thornton, 2008:244,247).

As indicated earlier, UPA (including communal gardens) has been advocated as a means to fight urban poverty and support food security but that the engagement in UPA is complex and differs between contexts. Despite (or because of) this, there is much debate between opponents and proponents of UPA and its proposed benefits (in addition to those who are sceptical of how UPA research is conducted). While UPA is often thought to fight urban poverty through food security and/or income generation especially amongst the 'poorest of the poor' there are studies that suggest otherwise. Not only do less people engage in UPA as expected (see Section 2.) but more interestingly, studies have found that the people engaging in UPA are those with more resources as opposed to the 'poorest of the poor' (see Ruysenaar, 2012:227; Thornton, 2008:245; Webb, 2011:197). Finally, advocating for UPA as a means to generate income may need to be done in caution considering that that in their study of Southern Africa (Crush *et. al*, 2010:18-19,22) found that most people practicing UPA do so primarily as an additional source of food with only 3% of those that grow food having derived any income from UPA during the previous month.

Despite these debates, its complex and context dependent nature, and calls to first understand why so few people engage in UPA (Crush *et. al*, 2010:24), UPA is nevertheless broadly advocated and implemented in development projects across South Africa (e.g. the Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Environment's programme supporting 246 urban community gardens - see Ruysenaar, 2012). KwaNiekeri's food plant garden and

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57.4; 54.2 and 53.1 respectively). By comparison Sweden's Gini index in 1992 was 25.4 and had risen to 26.1 in 2005 (World Bank, 2015).

[8] Also known as informal settlements or squatter camps

seedling nursery could also be considered one such project.

3.3.   The little village of KwaNiekeri

The coastal village of KwaNiekeri is located between the two former homelands of the Transkei and Ciskei (see Figure 1). Here, as with many parts of South Africa the country's persistent inequality and socio-economic separation can also be found lingering, with many residents remaining largely unknown to each other. As you approach KwaNiekeri along the only road in, you will first see the township where the Xhosa residents live[9]. As you turn off the tar road you will go through a gate and over a cattle grid though neither seem functional. If you look to your right you will see the food plant garden and seedling nursery. Here at the entrance there also used to be a weekly vegetable market as well as a previous communal garden where each person had their own individual plots – neither are operating anymore.

From the entrance on, there are only dirt roads which get washed away in the rain. Some residents are growing vegetables in home gardens and there are free roaming pigs, goats, cattle, chickens and ducks (compensating for the municipal waste removal service which often doesn't come). The low cost-housing section has individual piped water and water-born sewage. However the water gets turned off if you don't pay your bills. The informal housing area has some amazingly hand built houses. Here there are only communal taps and pit toilets. There is electricity although while I was there, there were continual power outages[10]. Level of alcohol abuse, crime and violence are high. While there are approximately 17 *shebeens* (township taverns), there is no police station and the mobile clinic only comes three times a month, the implications of which is best described by a young female resident:

> "*When we call for the ambulance to come it takes 5 hours and people end up dying ... even the police officers are being raped and attacked every day to their houses ... the social workers are not coming here to check on the families and the children, to get a social worker we need to travel 30km there and 30km back*".

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[9] There is no census data regarding the number of residents. However local residents estimate the population size to be between 2 000 and 3 000 individuals.

[10] This should not be confused with 'load shedding' which Eskom, who have the monopoly on the country's energy supply is currently implementing. Load shedding involves interrupting energy supply to certain areas when there is not enough electricity to meet the energy supply of all of Eskom's customers. Areas are currently experiencing load shedding on a weekly basis (Eskom, 2015).

Most of the people who are employed have semi-skilled and un-skilled jobs in the higher socio-economic (primarily white) residential area. To get there you leave the township, and carry on along the tarred road that leads one up and over a hill and then down towards the sea. Almost all houses on the other side of the hill have piped water and plumbing, some of them are mansions, many are holiday homes. There are also a number of accommodation establishments which fill up over the holiday season - the best time for the Xhosa residents to find a job. People on the coastal side of the hill earn a living from a variety of means. Many have employment in the neighbouring city where they travel to each day (generally in their own cars, which also enables convenient accesses to services such as medical care, education of preference and the police). Many people on the coastal-side drop off their staff over the hill at the township entrance at the end of the day. A number no not go inside, some never have.

What I have described is a much generalised and simplistic picture of KwaNiekeri obviating the heterogeneity of individual realities and the relationships between those from both sides of the hill. Indeed, although the spatial and socio-economic dynamics of KwaNiekeri is quite illustrative of South African towns and cities, like Steinberg's words, they only show a partial picture. What Steinberg's image fails to illustrate, is that in addition to the people who fear that one day they may kill one another, are those that today, laugh with one another and build with one another. Indeed there are those (from both sides of the hill) that speak about '*the community - from both sides of the hill*'. Nevertheless, the hill still remains.

Map 1   **Map 2**   Lehmkuhl, 2010

Figure 1: South Africa before the end of Apartheid showing the former homelands (Map 1) and after with the nine current Provinces (Map 2). The food plant garden and seedling nursery is located along the Eastern Cape Coast in between the former Transkei and Ciskei homelands (indicated by black oval).
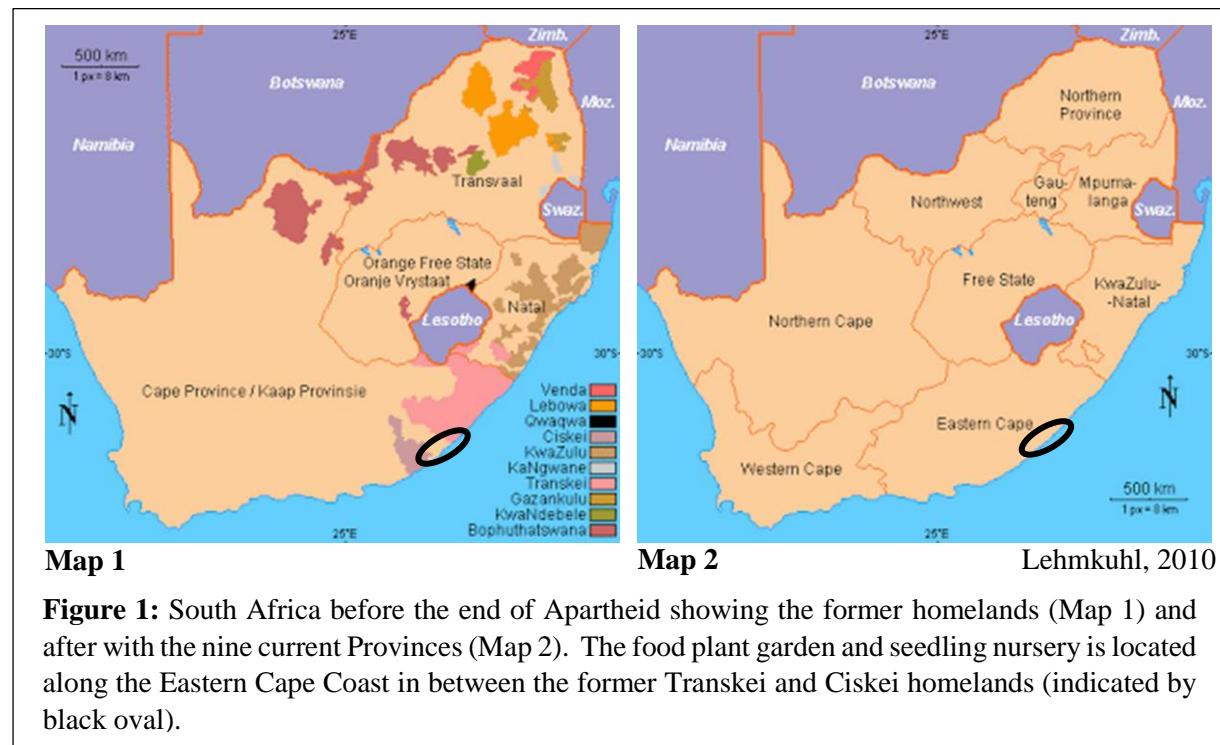
3.4.   Mfetu – a local non-profit organisation

In 2008, in a move to not only support access to socio-economic and environmental opportunities for all of KwaNiekeri's residents but to also build social cohesion[11], some of the latter people officially established Mfetu - a locally active non-profit organisation. It consists of a majority white Committee (most of whom live in the area) as well as a varying number of active and inactive members (not to be confused with the garden 'members') from around the country and the world. The organisation is volunteer based meaning that all its members as well as the committee contribute their time without being paid. The 'Mfetu approach' is to support projects identified by 'local champions'[12] by drawing on input from the members (in terms of time, money and other resources) as well as the champion's passion and energy to drive the initiative. Sometimes however, Mfetu initiates projects anticipating that a champion will emerge and take over the 'driving' role.

Previous involvement with the local Xhosa food growers has included 'Market Day' (the vegetable market mentioned above) which was operating around the end of 2009 and provided an opportunity for the local Xhosa food growers to sell their fresh produce to visitors as well as local residents and tourism establishments every Thursday morning (Mfetu, 2009). It had however stopped running long before the nursery was established in 2011.

Financially, Mfetu has primarily relied on individual donations (without any set deliverables) as well as fundraising initiatives for specific causes. More recently Mfetu has taken on (implementing) partner roles in locally situated development projects such as a craft business[13] as well as the food plant garden and seedling nursery (known as the 'nursery-garden initiative' or simply 'the initiative' from this point forward unless specifically referring to the nursery or the garden component individually).

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[11] ''Social cohesion' can be described as the willingness of members of a group to work together in order to prosper and survive (Stanley, 2003:5).

[12] For instance, if someone was passionate about starting a soup kitchen, or was already running a soup kitchen and approached Mfetu for help, they would be considered a 'champion'.

[13] Around the same time the nursery was being established, an economic development agency approached Mfetu to help establish a female majority small scale crafting business made up of members who would receive technical craft-related as well as business training. Although the initiative initially included a stipend, the agency envisioned that it would become financially self-sufficient within a 6 month period (Mfetu, 2011a). Mfetu expressed major concerns regarding the success and sustainability of such an initiative primarily due to limited market opportunities. However, according to Mfetu the agency needed to have completed the ground work for such an initiative before the end of the financial year in February 2012. As such they kept on persevering until Mfetu finally agreed.

3.5.   WILD & the Nokusimama programme - a national non-government organisation

For the nursery-garden initiative, Mfetu partnered with WILD and their Nokusimama programme. WILD is a national environmental non-governmental organisation with a focus on conservation and capacity development initiatives. The organisation operates a number of programmes including Nokusimama which is in turn made up of different programme sections. The initiative formed part of two such sections namely one which supports large-scale community and school food gardens and another which supports small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

WILD has had a presence in the KwaNiekeri township since 2003 through a number of their different programmes including Nokusimama. Of relevance to this initiative is WILD's recent restructuring whereby the organisation changed from being organised regionally - with everyone reporting to their *regional* manager, to being organised according to programmes - with everyone reporting to their specific *project/programme* manager. I understand this restructuring to be part of a move to adopt more business-like principles in order to ensure, amongst other things, financial sustainability. Such a move included putting systems and checks in place to prevent staff from investing time into initiatives for which there was no dedicated funding to cover their working hours, and therefore their salary[14].

I was working at WILD when this restructuring process started. Therefore, although I have never worked as a WILD staff member on the nursery-garden initiative, my relationship with the initiative started when the nursery was being built in October 2011. I was reintroduced to the nursery-garden as I wanted my thesis to be of value to the people I involved in it. Through discussions, implementers from WILD and Mfetu suggested this initiative primarily to understand why very little has been produced in the garden despite a secure and "*ready market that will purchase all and anything that is grown locally*" (emphasis added by project implementer in email correspondence, June 2014). As such I joined Mfetu as an intern in September 2014 to explore the food plant garden and seedling nursery further.

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[14] Within WILD, funding proposals stipulate the number of working hours each staff member will work on a specific project and at what rate. The money received from the funder for the number of hours worked is to cover the staff member's salary. If not all of a staff member's time is covered by funded projects their salary would need to be drawn from the central reserve which is seen as an unfavourable cost to the organisation.

3.6.   A brief history of the food plant garden & seedling nursery

The nursery-garden initiative was developed in two main phases (see Figure 2). The nursery was established first in October 2011 when Mfetu and WILD (through their Nokusimama Programme) (the (implementing) organisations from this point forward) pooled their funds and labour, designed the nursery and started building (Mfetu, 2011b).

For WILD, the *nursery* was deliverable for the Nokusimama programme with the aim of supporting food production by facilitating local access to seedlings. Mfetu not only saw the nursery as an opportunity to support food production but also local economic development (LED). They envisioned that the participants could sell the seedlings and/or that the increase in home food growing could lead to the revitalisation of the Market Day which Mfetu perceived to have stopped due to the 2009/2010 drought (Mfetu, 2015). Mfetu also saw the opportunity to support one of the local food growers who had been seeking assistance for his idea of establishing a local communal food plant nursery. He would thus be the 'Champion' driving the initiative.

Documentation does state that there were meetings with 'community' before the construction of the nursery commenced (Mfetu, 2011b). However it does not specify which members of the 'community' were represented or the process it involved. A 'stakeholder meeting' was held after the building had started between the two organisations and the champion as well as the local Xhosa leadership, municipality and primary school, to prepare for a larger general meeting to introduce the nursery to the interested residents (Mfetu, 2011c). Although such general meetings were held, not many people attended and no-one ever choose to use the nursery (reasons for which to be discussed in Results and Analysis below).

Sometime after the establishment of the nursery, a WILD field officer acting in his personal capacity, started gardening next to the nursery on the same piece of land as the previous communal garden. Although he was not officially working within the Nokusimama programme, the field officer initiated the garden with the aim of demonstrating to the local Xhosa residents how they could grow their own food with the hope that it would encourage them to join the nursery. Around the same time, the craft business initiative was not earning the income that was envisioned (see Section 3.4). As a consequence Mfetu constructed the

garden as a potential additional/replacement revenue stream for the five women crafters who could work in the garden and sell the produce to local individuals, tourists and tourism establishments. Concurrently, the Nokusimama programme saw the opportunity to support the garden under their small, medium and micro-enterprise (SMME) component[15]. As such, when the women from the craft business joined the garden towards the middle of 2012, the Nokusimama-Mfetu partnership expanded to include the garden as well (Mfetu, 2012).

Although only two of the five craft business women decided to remain, most residents in KwaNiekeri would agree that in the beginning, the garden flourished. Then, as most would also agree – something changed and less was being produced from the garden. General meetings were once again held to get more people involved but none joined. Just before I arrived in KwaNiekeri in September 2014, the field officer brought a young man on board. Later the field officer brought on two more women, one of whom brought on a third women resulting in six garden '*members*' towards the end of 2014. Nevertheless the disharmony continued throughout. By the time I left in mid-February 2015 the nursery was (still) not being used and the garden was being overgrown with weeds.
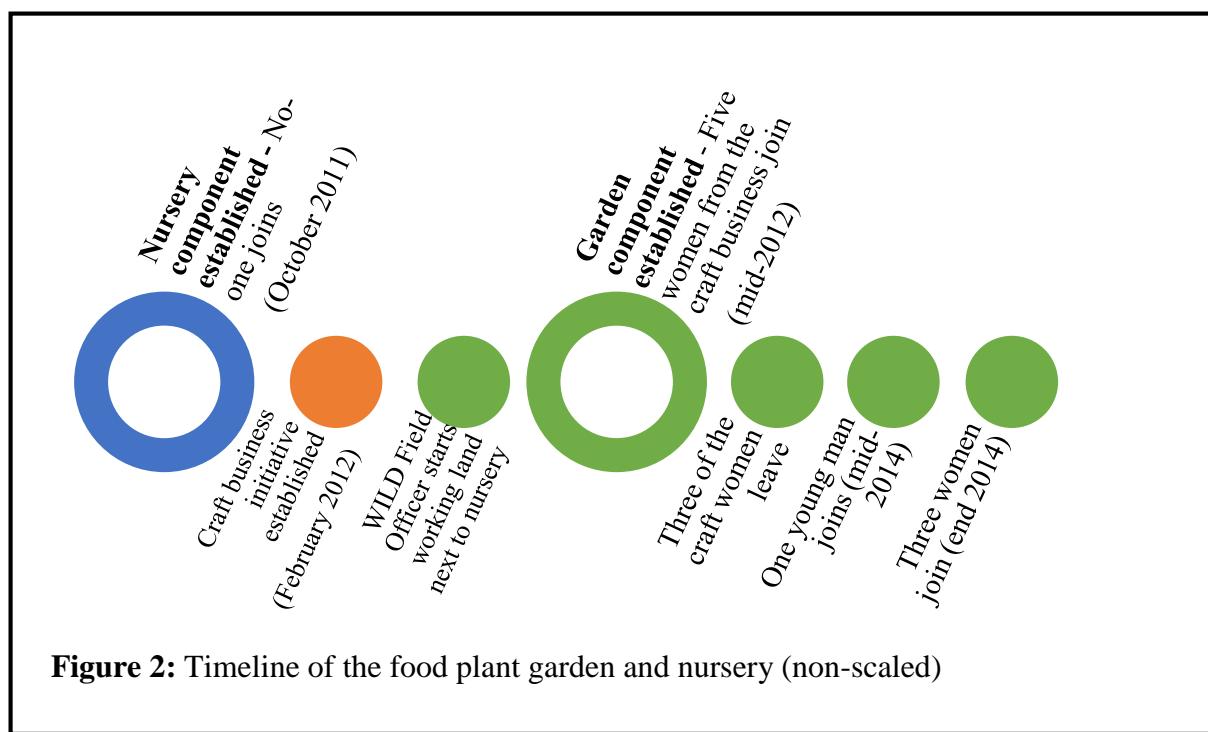
Figure 2: Timeline of the food plant garden and nursery (non-scaled)

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[15] It must be noted that the Nokusimama implementers informed me that the delineation of the nursery for food production and the garden for SMME occurred more in reporting that on the ground (i.e. Nokusimama also saw the garden as a means to support the production of food to eat). However, when speaking with me, all implementers problematized the perceived lack of motivation amongst the garden members as a missed opportunity on their behalf to earn an income.

4. Theoretical Framework

There are many ways in which one could view the unfolding of the nursery-garden. One could say that all of us – the garden members, implementers, food growers, me and even you - the reader - are all standing in a circle around the nursery-garden looking at it from different angles and thus with different views of how things played out and why.

As briefly discussed in Section 2. many researchers have theorised around why urban and peri-urban agriculture may not be as widely and enthusiastically embraced as expected. In addition as indicated in Section 3.5., the initiative implementers looked at the nursery from an income generating perspective and theorised that it may be due to lack of entrepreneurial drive. All these considerations could have been used as a lens to help explain why the nursery is now vacant and the garden is overgrown. However, factors such as these and many others are inevitable. What is important is not whether or not they were operating within the context of this initiative but whether or not these issues (and the different understandings of such issues) were discussed, understood and taken into consideration in the conceptualisation, planning and implementation of the initiative.

As outlined earlier, those on the providing end of development through current participatory approaches are failing to incorporate the people they are intending to benefit and their understandings, in the conceptualisation, planning, implementation and evaluation of development initiatives. As such initiatives are often misaligned to local realities, priorities and preferences and fail to bring about the lasting change as envisioned by the implementers. However once one starts to engage with individuals' perceptions, opinions and ideas, a plurality of different understandings emerge which are often contrasting and can be potential sources of dissonance and conflict.

Social learning is a means to facilitate an inclusive process of change through the collaboration of a wide range of individuals with different backgrounds such as those found in a group of interested and effected stakeholders. Social learning draws on the diversity and different understandings of the group and engages in the dissonance that may emerge in order to creatively address challenges which have no pre-defined solutions. This is because - according to this approach - solutions can only be found through collaborative communication and

therefore no-one is seen to have the 'monopoly' on the experience or understanding that can be used to address them (Wals *et al*., 2009:5). Because of the collaborative nature of the process, social learning requires, but also helps support, the building of social cohesion (Wals *et al*., 2009:28)

In the context of development where development issues are considered complex problems characterised by uncertainty and disagreement and which require new collaborative strategies for solving them (Arkesteijn *et al*., 2015:99), social learning approaches can be invaluable. So to in the context of South Africa where diversity and difference abounds along with an underlying sense of dissonance and a desire for change. The core focus of my research will be to explore the extent to which approaches from social learning were used and could have been used to facilitate a deeper participatory approach in the conceptualisation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the nursery-garden. To do so I will draw on "*The Acoustics of Social Learning*" by Wals, van der Hoeven and Blanken (2009) which provides a framework outlining how a collaborative process for solving problems can be achieved. These approaches will be introduced within the different stages of the nursery-garden initiative under Section 6 - Results & Analysis.

Although not part of the theoretical framework, but in order to highlight barriers to engaging in social learning within the current approach to development, I will draw on "*Time to Listen*" by Anderson, Brown and Jean (2012) which is the culminating book of the Listening Project which brings together the "*experiences and voices*" of more than 6 000 people who have received -; observed the effects of -; or been involved in the provision of - development assistance (Anderson *et al*., 2012:i). The consolidation highlights how the current approach to development translates into practices which make meaningful engagement between development providers and receivers almost impossible. From here I could have drawn on theories surrounding (gendered) power especially within development, but such considerations fell beyond my analysis.

5. Method & Selection

5.1.   Ontology & Epistomology

For this research I take on a social constructivist interpretivist ontology and epistemology as per Creswell (2009:26) and Mikkelsen (2005:135) since I understand (and my theoretical framework advocates) that people hold different worldviews. Thus this stance allowed me to look at and acknowledge the multiple and varied subjective meanings people develop of their actions (i.e. growing food), experiences and of things, as I interpreted them. Furthermore, I understand our subjective meanings to be formed socially through interactions with others and through our historical backgrounds. This was vital as to acknowledge how South Africa's past and the cultural settings we are born and live in, shape our different subjective understandings of the world and effect how we interact in this world in relation to one another. This was also vital for me to understand and acknowledge how my own background shaped my interpretations. Furthermore, I am cognisant that what people share with me is constructed narratives based on what individuals choose to say and how they choose to say it (Silverman, 2013:45). Furthermore, the fact that I was interning with Mfetu while I was conducting the research may have affected the relationship between me and the interviewees and what they felt comfortable sharing with me. Taking all of the above into consideration, I recognise that the knowledge created from the understanding I construct will, in part, be a product of, and be affected by, who we (me and the people I spoke to) are in relation to each other.

5.2.   Positionality & Reflexivity

My view may have been effected by me being a white South African along with my involvement and relationships within the implementing organisations since 2009. Although this may have preconditioned me to see the situation in a certain way, my exposure to different ways of understanding the development system over the past two years and the call for critical thinking has left me continually reflecting on my own understandings and what I have experienced in light of these new and different understandings. Added to this I feel that my experience within these organisations (within development, within South Africa, as a South African) does provide invaluable understanding of the context, something a foreign researcher with limited experience and five and a half months in KwaNiekeri may not have easily been able to gain. Furthermore, my relationships enabled the interviews to be more than quick

snapshots of individuals by allowing me to situate the conversations within my greater understanding of the people I spoke to. Although my relationships may have caused me to tread lightly around certain aspects and prevented me from going into detail, I do not feel that making them explicit in this thesis would have changed the understanding I present, possibly only strengthened it.

5.3.   Research Design

As I aimed to interpret the perceptions and actions of people in order to construct an understanding of the situation, the nature of peoples' behaviour, and their causes; I engaged in an inductive approach using *qualitative* research (Brockington and Sullivan, 2003:57; Creswell, 2009:26,22).   To allow for an in-depth study of the situation through my interpretations, a *case study research strategy* was adopted (Silverman, 2013:143). Such an approach also helped support *qualitative validity* by allowing me to provide, as much as possible, a rich description of how the nursery-garden developed and people's perceptions of such (Mikkelsen, 2005:19; Creswell, 2009:177).

Ragin and Amoroso (2010:59,63) point out the importance of being able to articulate what the situation being studied *is a case of* as it informs the questions I will ask and the topics I will engage in, in order to construct my understanding. I therefore held exploratory conversations with some of the implementers, garden members and KwaNiekeri township residents. These conversations coupled with my experience and observations from working in both implementing organisations, led me to consider the situation as a case of insufficient and ineffective engagement in different understandings between implementing organisations and the people the interventions are intended to benefit.

I found a qualitative approach crucial as I am trying to construct an understanding of the situation through the perceptions of white as well as Xhosa South Africans. Being a white South African, I am very different to the latter in terms of access to opportunities and resources; as well as culturally and through a still salient construct of our country's apartheid past. Indeed, the discussions that I had helped facilitate a greater appreciation of individual realities and world views, challenged my assumptions and contributed to bridging (my) "black and white divide" or what Sliverman (2013:121) more sensitively calls - the "social distance". Despite this, and staying true to my social constructivist ontology, I would not be able to claim that my

interpretations are a holistic representation of the individuals' perceptions or realities even when continually reflecting on how my preconceived assumptions and understandings affect my interpretations.

5.3.1. Research methods

I used a combination of research methods in order to gain a deeper understanding of how and why the nursery-garden played out as it did with the resultant triangulation helping to ensure qualitative validity by highlighting contradictions (Creswell, 2009:177; Mikkelsen, 2005:197; Silverman, 2013:136; Yin, 2014:121). These included formal interviews, a focus group, informal conversations, observations, a research diary and documentation.

5.3.1.1. Formal interviews

My core body of primary data comes from formal interviews as I was aiming to engage in people's subjective understandings of the initiative – something that would scarcely have been possible through methods such as surveys. The choice of respondents was oriented in accordance to social learning approaches which specifies that interested and effected people should be engaged with at all stages of the initiative. From December 2014 to mid-February 2015 I held interviews (which I refer to as discussions or conversations in the Results & Analysis section below) with 17 people representing resident food growers, members of the local Xhosa leadership structure, implementers from both organisations, the garden members as well as the food grower who was initially involved in the nursery. I spoke with a number of individuals from within each group (through non-random sampling) in order to construct my understanding from a wide range of perspectives to help support qualitative validity (Creswell, 2009:177). Open-ended interview questions were prepared beforehand but general dialogue was encouraged with the questions simply used to ensure all topics were addressed[16]. The interviewees and their position in relation to the nursery-garden initiative and the different groups are briefly outlined below and also presented in Appendix 2.

I spoke to eight *food growers* who were known to me as people who have a history of growing food in their home gardens and/or who were suggested to me by other residents (including other food growers) on the merit that they were known as food growers within the township (see Picture 3). One of the food growers, is also a Mfetu committee member who often acts as

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[16] Interview guides available on request

a liaison between the Xhosa residents and the organisation[17]. The two members of the local Xhosa leadership that I spoke fall part of the group of eight food growers. Although it may have been interesting to speak to someone from the leadership structure who was not a food grower, I also feel that it is valuable because as 'food growers', these are the members of the leadership that should have been engaged the most. In addition to the food grower initially involved in the nursery component, I had formal interviews with six[18] of the nine members who have ever worked in the garden. I spoke with four *'implementers'* from WILD and Mfetu. This included one Mfetu member, the local WILD Nokusimama Project Coordinator, a WILD intern that was working within the Nokusimama programme as well as a general WILD field officer who was not specifically allocated to work within the Nokusimama programme but was supporting it. All interviews were conducted

Author (January, 2015)

Picture 3: Food grower's home garden (in KwaNiekeri township's informal housing area) where the interview was held.

at a location chosen by the interviewee and included homes, places of work and one skype call. Conversations primarily ranged between one and two hours. I also conducted a second interview with two of the implementers with follow up (open ended) questions.

As I am unable to speak isiXhosa an interpreter helped me conduct some interviews depending on the interpreter's impressions of the respondent's ability to express themselves in English. I did not use the interpreter for all the Xhosa interviews as I had been building relationships in English over the past months and I felt that bringing in an interpreter would negatively affect the dynamics of our relationship. With this regard I accept that inaccuracies may occur due to

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[17] Despite the fact that she is a member of Mfetu, I have primarily considered her as a *food grower* as, even though she was involved in the *planning* of the nursery, she did not mention participating in the *conceptualisation* of the nursery or the garden and nor did anyone else. Additionally, from my conversations with other food growers and garden members she was never described or referred to as an 'implementer' in this initiative.

[18] I was only able to speak to one of these six very briefly so in the text that follows you will see that I generally refer to the *five* members and that when talking about the members I am speaking about these five unless specified otherwise.

misinterpretation, something that would threaten qualitative validity but which I hope to avoid by engaging with a wide range of interviewees and through a variety of methods (Creswell, 2009:177).

5.3.1.2. *Focus group*

I held one focus group with three food growers as well as one garden member to facilitate group synergy to help me gain a better understanding of the perceived value of the initiative as well as perceptions surrounding how development initiatives such as the nursery-garden should be introduced to the Xhosa residents of KwaNiekeri. The focus group thus fell at the beginning of Belzile and Öberg's (2012:469) continuum of use as the focus was on content (as opposed to group dynamics).

5.3.1.3. *Informal conversations and observations*

In addition to the formal interviews, I had been interacting with and observing individuals from the groups outlined above (and the interactions between them) since the meeting in July 2014 up until mid-February 2015. Over these five-and-a-half months I often had spontaneous and casual exchanges with some of the interviewees as well as a number of other Xhosa residents. Often these exchanges were once off and fleeting but were used to construct a general understanding of the perceptions of those not ever associated with the nursery-garden initiative in order to identify any pertinent issues for the case and/or the interviews as well as any significant differences between their perceptions and of those that I interviewed (Mack *et al.,* 2005:14). This choice proved to be fruitful to guide and fine tune the script of formal interviews.

5.3.1.4. *Research diary*

I have made use of a research diary in which I noted my observations (both what I observed and how I interpreted it), notes from informal conversations, questions and issues I wanted to follow up on and my thoughts since July 2014. Although it allowed me to refer back to previous moments I found it most valuable to explore and reflect on my understanding of the case.

5.3.1.5. *Documentation*

Although I was unable to obtain documentation from Nokusimama, secondary data in the form of committee meeting minutes, public announcements, concept documents and reports from

Mfetu proved invaluable primarily for establishing a chronological order of events especially in relation to the craft business initiative.

5.3.1.6. *Analysis of interviews, conversations, focus group, observations & documentation*

Although the formal interviews were recorded I also took notes and did not find the need to transcribe in full. The responses from the interviews and focus group were analysed according to my theoretical framework – namely the level of engagement in the conceptualisation of the initiative, as well as in differences, dissonance and expectations within a safe space and the reason for such. My interpretations of people's perceptions on the value of the initiative and their reasons for not wanting to participate, leave and/or spend less time in the initiative as well as the implementers' understanding of such were also analysed in comparison with one another. Finally, the individuals' different perceptions on the outcome of the initiative were also compared. This along with the Mfetu documents and the observations were used to construct my understanding of how and why the nursery-garden initiative progressed as it did.

5.4. Generalisability

Since my understanding, and the knowledge this thesis produced, was created within a certain context, with specific people, relationships and histories it cannot be generalizable or considered universal (Rose, 1997:306). Indeed, I would not be able to say that all the food growers, garden members and implementers in KwaNiekeri, WILD and Mfetu have the exact same views and understandings, in the same ratios, of those that I spoke to. Indeed, I would not be able to extrapolate out nationally let alone worldwide. However this case can be generalised to theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014:20-21) meaning that this research could shed light onto reasons why so many development projects fail.

5.5. Ethical considerations & limitations

Although staff and members from both organisations invited me to do this research and consented to participate I have changed the name of the village as well as the organisations' names. The same holds for all interviewees and those who participated in the focus group.

In addition to the views of people I did not speak to (e.g. the Xhosa leadership chairman, the Nokusimama Programme Manager) and the Nokusimama documentation I was unable to

obtain, there are a myriad of brief and extensive interactions, discussions, relationships and common understandings (and misunderstandings) that are unknown to me and am therefore unable to factor in as I construct my understanding. Furthermore, although I was conscious of it, I did not include a social angle of analysis through which differences in age, income, sex and ethnicity etc. would have illuminated certain specific social and historical aspects of dissonance or conflict.

The fact that I have the power to present my understanding here in a formal Masters thesis thus superseding the voices of those actually involved in the initiative engenders some ethical questioning in me as it enables me to share my view while the people I spoke to do not have the same opportunity. As such, I would like to reiterate that the understanding I create here is an understanding of an outsider, but anticipate that it could be used as a basis for further discussions with all those involved, interested and affected.

6. Results & Analysis

"Ongekho akekho
- Who is not there, is not there"[19]

6.1. Potentials for social learning throughout the project

6.1.1. Conceptualisation & Planning

6.1.1.1. *Developing a shared understanding of the problem and context*

Although documentation states that there were stakeholder meetings around the nursery component, it is not clear how much opportunity there was for those involved to share their ideas and therefore shape the initiative. Drawing from my observations and experience with both organisations it is more than likely that the process involved the implementers sharing what had already been planned with limited opportunity for changes. These speculations were confirmed through my conversations with all the implementers but was best illustrated by two. The first noted how the process involved the one-way information sharing 'participation' discussed above - *the whole thing was top-down, not bottom-up. No two-way communication, no proper engagement…there were no proper discussions, no strategies, no meetings between*

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[19] Translation from isiZulu (Webb *et al*., 2010:273)

all stakeholders". In my conversation with the second implementer he brought forward the lack of incorporation of insights of those the initiative is intended to benefit -

> "*the idea came from* [Nokusimama]*, it didn't take into consideration what the community wanted ... The community members just accepted idea, they just went along with it, it was not what they wanted and so it was never fully accepted*".

Indeed the conceptualisation of both the nursery and garden took place with very little engagement (if any) with the people the initiative was intended to benefit and/or those who would have the greatest insight into the value of the initiative.

Although the implementers expressed that the nursery-garden was open to anyone who was interested, I argue that the people this initiative should have actively sought to support, and therefore have engaged in during the conceptualisation, were the food growers of KwaNiekeri township. Almost all the food growers I spoke to emphasised *passion* as one of the most important characteristics of a food grower. Furthermore, this 'passion' went beyond any instrumental value. This is well illustrated by Mfani (who very unconventionally also grows tobacco and pineapples) - *"I like to plant because I don't like to see the land lie bare, I like to see things growing, like to see that magic"* as well as Tuddy (who wakes up at 5:00am to be able to garden) -

> *"When touching soil it makes me remember who I am, where I come from. Man was made from the soil ... God breathed life onto it. One day I will go back to the soil. It makes me respect the soil by working it, making it productive"*

Not only were the food growers excluded from the conceptualisation of the garden component, but those initially working in the garden came from the failing craft business initiative and were not considered 'food growers'.

In the nursery component, although Mfetu may have considered the champion to represent the interests of the food growers, he possibly did not have a good understanding of their interests and perspectives. As such, while the implementers felt that nursery would help support food production by supporting access to seedlings, the food growers expressed that although the lack of locally available seedlings was an inconvenience, the presence of many un-penned pigs coupled with insufficient fencing, followed by water availability, were greater limitations.

Indeed, the three food growers that were not active at that time were unable to garden because they did not have enough secure fencing while a number actually propagated their own seedlings from nurseries they had built at home (see Picture 4). The feelings that pigs engender in food growers is well exemplified by the following quotes from the focus group – "*Pigs! Haibo! I don't like you wena!"* and *"last year there was war at my house*!" Lastly, although the drought may have contributed to the stalling of the Market Day (as perceived by Mfetu), for the residents it was the lack of social cohesion amongst the food sellers that led to its end.

The implications of not having included all relevant interests and perspectives in the conceptualisation of the initiative also becomes clear when exploring the

Author (January, 2015)

Picture 4: A food grower and her home nursery for propagating seedlings.

differing perceptions of the value of the *garden*. While the implementers saw the communal garden as having a great income generating value, food growers perceived individual home gardens as having a higher income generating potential. Indeed, although all the food growers that I spoke to grew food for home consumption in order to save money; all had sold their surpluses[20] at one stage or another and most expressed a wish to sell more but only after home consumption was met, and from their own individual gardens. Undeniably most of the food growers strongly preferred gardening individually in home gardens as opposed gardening communally (see Box 3). Interestingly, four of the food growers that I spoke to had had a plot in the previous communal garden and all four expressed that they would not want to join another communal garden. The implementers on the other hand were not aware of a previous communal garden.

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[20] Food growers sell their surpluses to other residents in township as well as to surrounding residents and tourism establishments.

It must however be noted that not everyone was opposed to the idea of working communally in a food garden. There were those that liked the idea of working with others predominantly for the sharing of skills, knowledge, experience and ideas; for the companionship and to be able to share the workload in order to grow more vegetables. Although economic advantages, such as increased productivity for sales and access to market, were mentioned, it was not often.

> **Box 3: Individual home gardens vs. communal gardens**
>
> Food growers and garden members generally preferred individual home gardens due to the flexibility, proximity and autonomy of individual home gardens where one does not need to hold meetings or depend on anyone else. In home gardens one can multitask (e.g. cook the morning porridge while watering the garden) and can split the gardening up throughout the day (i.e. pull out a few weeds on the way to work). One has complete ownership of what you produce, can sell at your own price and give vegetables away if you so wish. Regarding communal gardens there was an aversion to the need for group work and decision making and potential sources of conflict it brings.

The failure to engage meaningfully with interested and effected parties during the conceptualisation of the initiative meant that there was no opportunity to explore and develop a shared underlying goal - *was it to support home food production or LED through food production or should it have been something completely different?* It also meant that there was no opportunity to develop a shared understanding of the problem - *was there a lack of food production because of limited access to seedlings or because of un-penned pigs?,* or to take into consideration any learnings from past initiatives – *what are the different understandings of why the Market Day and previous communal garden came to an end?*

Social learning authors Wals *et al*., (2009:16-18) assert that engagement in such questions should happen at the very beginning of a project for co-developing strategies for change with a group of stakeholders made up of people who have an understanding of the existing interests and perspectives. Bringing together the different stakeholders including the Xhosa leadership and moreover, the food growers, before the nursery and garden components were conceptualised would have brought together different perspectives of the issue and, especially if done in an environment of trust (see Section 6.1.2.2. below), would have helped facilitate discussions surrounding different understandings of the problems. This in turn would have helped develop a collective understanding of the underlying goal and problem(s) to be

addressed. Such engagement beforehand would also have provided a multi-perspective understanding of the context of the problem(s) including prior history and initiatives

Since this did not occur, the initiative was designed according to the implementers' predetermined (and diverging) goals, their understanding of the problem (e.g. stalling of Market Day due to lack of food production and lack of food production due to lack of local access to seedlings) and what they assumed was needed to solve the problem (a seedling nursery run by KwaNiekeri township residents). Accordingly, the initiative not aligned to the food growers' priorities (e.g. fencing[21] being more urgent than seedlings; gardening skills, knowledge and experience and growing for home consumption being more pertinent than production for income generation) and preferences (individual not communal gardening). Furthermore, the approach meant that there was no opportunity to explore what the food growers were actually already doing. Thus the initiative did not take into consideration and build on existing strengths and capacities such as home seedling propagation and selling surpluses from home gardens.

Authors writing about UPA also highlight the importance of including affected and interested people in the conceptualisation of initiatives aimed at supporting them. For instance, in their paper outlining suggestions for the design and implementation for agricultural projects, Verschoor *et al*. (2005:503-504) highlight the need to take the on-the-ground social realities into account such as farmer preferences and existing cultural and communal practices and skills. Project planning and implementation should be participatory and inclusive of all stakeholders enabling farmers to express their requirements and aspirations and facilitate the use of local knowledge.

In KwaNiekeri, the Xhosa residents that I spoke to were all happy for people to come with an initiative that is envisioned to benefit the people there. However they all said that the initiative would need to be introduced properly. Depending on the initiative[22], it would more than likely need to be discussed with the local leadership structure and then in at least one big community meeting. The residents would need to have the opportunity to go away and think and talk about

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[21] One could see the problem not as insufficient fencing but alternatively as livestock owners being unwilling or unable to pen in their livestock.

[22] The qualifiers for which seemed pretty clear to those I spoke to but which I will not attempt to clarify in this thesis.

it, then come back and discuss some more. More directly, one woman said that it is not ok for people to come with predetermined and set initiatives and that all people (both the residents and those coming with the initiative) "*must come and talk together so they can share ideas*".

However, an implementer from Nokusimama pointed out that when you have a funder with funding requirements, the project will never be able to be fully conceptualised and designed with the beneficiaries. He made reference to Scottish Sword Dance where people working for funder driven organisations such as WILD need to perform complicated steps over metaphorical swords - working with the funder on the one side (to secure the money to do the work) and the beneficiaries on the other (to ensure the work is as meaningful and relevant as possible). He acknowledged that the system is sub-optimal but accepted the jig as something the implementers within the system would always need to dance.

Findings from the Listening Project (Anderson *et al*., 2012:70) highlight how the implementer's metaphorical Scottish Sword Dance is consequence of the current approach to development with its adoption of business principles and practices of cost effective and efficient delivery of assistance. Funders and implementing agents seldom allocate financial resources to cover costs associated with engaging with people before proposals are written and funding allocations are made. When there are resources allocated, it is often insufficient to truly enable meaningful and constructive engagement (Anderson *et al*., 2012:128). Generally, under the current approach to development, most funders want upfront assurances of quantifiable and tangible deliverables (e.g. a craft business, a nursery) to decide if it will be money well spent and to later determine if the project was 'successfully' implemented or not. Before implementing organisations put staff on the ground there needs to be funding to cover associated costs (i.e. time, transport, accommodation and subsistence) – a measure that WILD within the past few years has introduced. However, in order to get funding, implementing organisations need to specify targets such as who and how many people will be helped and how, within certain timeframes and with what inputs. Therefore in order to do so they often end up needing to make contextual assumptions (e.g. people need and will be eager to utilise a communal nursery) and commitments to achieving quantifiable deliverables even without speaking to the people they are intended to benefit (Anderson *et al*., 2012:38,70). When assumptions are made, they are generally about what is needed (e.g. a nursery to propagate seedlings to support home food production). This is due to the development system's delivery system approach to assistance which leads to a focus on what is missing and what needs to be

provided (Anderson *et al*., 2012:38). Since this superficial needs-based approach does not consider the root cause of the need (i.e. the problem) (Anderson *et al*., 2012:38-39,74-75), it gives no incentive to develop a shared understanding of the problem. This approach also limits opportunities to engage with people to identify, take into consideration and build on existing the capacities, priorities (Anderson *et al*., 2012:38-39,74-75) and preferences especially when time is limited (as discussed below).

Overall, within the current approach to development, programmes and projects like the nursery-garden, are often being developed based on assumptions on what is needed without first engaging with the people they are intended to benefit. This limits possibilities, and gives no incentive, to discuss with the people who have an understanding of existing perspectives and interests in order to develop a contextual and shared understanding of the problem. As such development initiatives such as the nursery-garden arrive misaligned to the priorities and preferences of the people they are intended to benefit.

But how does this relate to the Mfetu who are not fully within the funder-driven development system? Although their concept of a champion allows the idea to come from outside the organisation, this case highlights the risk of relying only on one person to represent the interests of many. Indeed, Wals *et al*. (2009:19-23) advocate that after the core group develops a shared understanding of the problem and context, it needs to be shared, re-explored and re-defined within a bigger group of people who may want to get involved and/or have different insights into the situation. By encouraging diversity in knowledge, experience and backgrounds different possible ideas regarding the directions in which solutions could be found can be explored. 'Solution(s)' should then be chosen by the whole group resulting in a strategy that is aligned to the priorities, preferences and capabilities of the group.

In addition to relying on the insights of one champion in the nursery component, Mfetu implemented the garden component anticipating a champion to emerge. Mfetu does acknowledge the lack of inclusivity as a weakness of their approach however shared that - "*there are often initiatives that we believe will benefit many but we just don't have the time to waste to go through the whole community engagement process and to deal with all the headaches it involves*". The implementer's words beg to question what exactly Mfetu, without any delivery deadlines are rushing towards? I acknowledge that the craft initiative was failing and the women involved needed another source of income but what is the use of rushing if it

will only end up with rotten cabbages? Moreover, the implementer's words highlight something that all those involved within the development system are familiar with - as well as all of those who have ever attempted to make plans with other people - *headaches*. Indeed, headaches come when you are trying to develop a strategy while taking into consideration the many different ideas of what the strategy should look like. Dealing with this difference is discussed in the following section.

6.1.1.2. Engaging in difference

When the implementers did engage with the residents and with it, the food growers, it was to get them involved after the nursery, and then later the garden, had been physically established. Nevertheless, the implementers did want the potential participants to have the opportunity to contribute to the planning of the management as well as the individual roles and responsibilities (Mfetu, 2011d). Right from the beginning there was concern on the part of the residents that there was no stipend involved. It appears as though this concern kept on stalling the process since Nokusimama had not factored a stipend into their funding budget because it goes against their policy. As one implementer expressed – "*but the project had already been decided on, it needed to be built, but no-one came as they wanted a stipend. So when they built the nursery, there was no-one to work in it*"

The differing understandings surrounding why the stipend was important further suggests that the matter was never engaged in any deeper. In my conversations with the implementers, they described the stipend request to be due to a lack of 'entrepreneurial drive', a condition perceived to be due to personal character as one implementer explained – "*sometimes it is in their mind-set - they don't see themselves as business people*". Context was also used to explain the lack of entrepreneurial drive as another implementer expressed – "there *is nothing to force the survival reaction to kick in*" citing the financial support of the Government Grant[23] and the close proximity of paid employment possibilities.

From talking to the food growers and garden members, it was exactly that need to survive that made them hesitant to commit. In our conversations the food growers brought forward issues very much aligned to those highlighted in UPA literature (see Section 2). These included

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[23] The South African Government provides a social welfare scheme commonly referred to as the Government grant and includes Old Age, Disability, War Veterans and Child grants (see Appendix 1.2 for more commentary regarding the grant and UPA).

concerns of insufficient income, risks associated with agriculture, times of low productivity and concerns that the income did not regularly enough (something that needs to be taken into consideration if you do not have financial reserves) - *"I could work hard again in the garden but the problem is money, I need to feed three children and my brother. Garden money does not come quick enough"*. One food grower, laughingly, made me feel completely absurd by asking if she would ever consider joining the communal garden - *"No, Madam[24]!! If you are just depending on garden for income and you don't sell then you have a problem!"*

However, although a factor, it is important to note that the lack of stipend was not always the only, nor the primary, reason for food growers not wanting become involved. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, many shared a preference for working individually in home gardens. However, as also mentioned, there were those who nevertheless would have liked to join. One example would be of a food grower who wanted to become involved but was turned away because he had a full time job while garden members were expected to work Monday to Friday 8:00 – 17:00. Since none of the implementers mentioned such preferences and possibilities to me, I assume that they never discussed such matters or appreciated their value.

I use the word *value* because of the significance social learning authors (see Wals, 2007:40-41; Wals *et al*., 2009:5,8-9,11,19-23) put on the different knowledges, experience and backgrounds that a diverse group of people can bring to addressing problems together. When discussing various problems and solutions, different understanding will invariably arise. However, authors assert that the constructive utilisation of these differences can lead to creative solutions (as opposed to headaches) that can be used to co-develop common path going forward. In order to harness the value of diversity, individuals need to be able to recognise, accept, respect and engage with these differences. This engagement requires the provision of a safe space (see Section 6.1.2.2.) where existing assumptions, norms, values and understanding of the world can be shared and reflected on in reference to those of others. Such a process can also facilitate a means by which individuals reflexively adjust their assumptions, biases and understanding in light of an increased understanding gained through interaction with others.

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[24] Much to my dismay and despite my persistent requests for individuals not to call me 'madam', two food growers used the word to address me and could not stop themselves from continuing to call me 'madam'. In general I am very rarely addressed as 'madam' and thus I believe this response could be due to the establishment where they work.

I do understand that possibilities for Nokusimama to provide a stipend were limited since it was not factored into their project budget, as well as their endeavour to develop the nursery since it was written as a deliverable in their funding agreement. This further highlights how the current approach to development with predetermined deliverables in pre-packaged projects further restricts meaningful input by people the initiative is intended to benefit. Indeed, to measure the implementers' work and to determine whether their money has been effectively and efficiently spent, funders more often than not require reports directly tied to the proposals and specified deliverables. Reporting according to the predetermined quantifiable deliverables puts a strong focus on achieving those deliverables. Furthermore, not delivering what was promised and under-spending the project budget is often automatically considered bad management and can negatively impact future funding (Anderson *et al.*, 2012:40,44-45,79).

Since Mfetu was not constrained within funding agreements, I assume their approach was guided by their tendency of not wanting to waste time and to avoid headaches. However by taking the time to engage in the different understandings of the stipend issue, irrespective of potential headaches and over a longer period of time, may have led to greater understandings regarding the different reasons for people wanting or not wanting to join the initiative. This in turn may have facilitated the co-development of a creative strategy for orientating the nursery and the garden so that it could be of more relevance and benefit to those it was intended to benefit.

6.1.1.3.   Engaging in expectations

Although none of the residents ever used the nursery component[25], nine residents were, at one stage or another, involved in working in the garden. The implementers had high income generation expectations for the garden and could not understand why the members were not working harder. Indeed, all implementers shared concerns similar to - "*they don't see the value, they are failing to see what they can earn*" as expressed by one implementer. My conversations with five of the members highlighted significant differences between what they expected to gain from the garden and the implementers' income generating expectations. Significantly, neither of the two original members mentioned that they had expected to earn money. Their expectations and reasons for joining are well illustrated by Mamgobozhi –

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[25] It can be noted that after construction, it was found that the nursery design was not conducive to propagating seedlings (i.e. it was too windy and not warm and sunny enough). However, Nokusimama was reluctant to reinvest money and do the necessary alterations since there was no percieved interest from the residents.

"It was not our garden, we were [the craft business] *but* [Mfetu] *offered the garden as something to eat…. they said - "*Go to the garden and plant! [The WILD field officer] will come with skills and seedlings and you will get food to eat*"… we put in the seedlings and then - it was amazing! … we took the vegetables home and we ate".*

The three newer members that I spoke to had also expected to gain gardening skills, knowledge and experience and all except one (who was already gardening at home and is considered a 'food grower') had joined to grow food for home consumption. All had also expected to earn some money from sales, but as a secondary purpose. Either way, none ever did. Furthermore, the new members were never introduced to the garden – *"I didn't know the exact rules, it was not very clear. There were people already there when I came, I thought they would tell me but they didn't"* or their fellow garden members - *"I would have liked to know the problems of each gardener… good to know what each one likes … good to know the sickness …we were told there was going to be a meeting but no meeting came"*.

Moreover, the field officer who was supporting the garden expressed that he had never been given direction regarding what was expected of him. Added to this, the remainder of the implementers were not sure what roles and responsibilities he was in fact fulfilling[26]. All of the above suggests that there was limited engagement in what everyone expected to gain from the garden or expected from each other.

When speaking of community gardens in the province, ECNGOC (2010:74), stress how lack of clarity regarding what garden members are committing themselves to can lead to confusion and frustration. Furthermore, Verschoor *et al.* (2005:504-505) express the importance of acknowledging the differences within the group in terms of goals (as well as assets, aptitudes and attitudes) in order to supporting stability within the group.

Likewise, within social learning, Wals *et al.* (2009:19) highlight the importance of allowing for space for individual expectations to be shared. This process draws attention to the

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[26] Around this time the WILD field officer's previous project had come to an end and as a result of the national restructuring process (see Section 3.5) and the fact that he had never been officially considered as part of the Nokusimama programme, he found himself without any specifically allocated project work or manager. As such, while his previous project and regional managers were sending regular emails to the head office enquiring what the field officer should be doing with his time, he immersed himself deeply into every aspect of the garden.

differences in understanding and provides the opportunity for unreasonable expectations to be identified and adjusted (e.g. involvement to gain income vs. involvement to grow food to eat). Such a process would also have made explicit what everyone expected from each other (e.g. members working 8 fours/day to produce and sell vs. members working in the garden when they have a chance to gain experience). Furthermore it would have helped prevent the disappointment, frustration and general confusion experienced by the implementers as exemplified by the one implementer - "*People did not take it up as their opportunity, which is a bit disappointing*". Possibly most importantly however, engaging in expectations could have provided a basis for the (implementers') focus of the garden to be adjusted to meet the members' priorities and preferences while building on their capacities.

6.1.2. Implementation

6.1.2.1. *Engaging in dissonance*

In the beginning, despite the differing expectations, it was widely agreed that the garden "*flourished*". The two women from the craft business that decided to remain remember working hard and found themselves selling a lot to the markets that Mfetu had secured, earning a salary at the end of the month. However, as one of the women explained - "*it was growing, going good… but then Satan come and stole all of that….*" Although I heard the accounts of the trouble that 'Satan' caused from a number of different people, I was asked not to discuss it in my thesis and do not feel this thesis is the place to discuss these. What I can say is that although all the implementers knew about the sources of conflict, they did not appreciate their gravity.

However, the implementers did have many discussions amongst themselves trying to understand why the women were spending less time in the garden and spoke of about how, as one implementer put it – "*they could make the initiative work within the confines of the* [Nokusimama] *programme*". These discussions did not include the two women but relied on the WILD field officer to bring his ideas based on his experience with them.

In the end the implementers seemed to have relied on their 'lack of entrepreneurial drive' assumptions and set out on an effort to motivate the two women. For example they went over the garden financials with them, showing them how much they could earn. Indeed many meetings were said to be held with the women. I have attended one such meeting. The

implementer set the agenda and led the meeting, discussion was not encouraged and the women did not seem very comfortable to speak freely. At one stage the implementer called the garden a '*disgrace*'.

Although there was no outright conflict (or at least none that I heard of) there was certainly a degree of dissonance. Such disharmony when people come together in not unusual and especially not in community gardens (see Reuther & Dewar, 2005:114,117). However, within the social learning model dissonance should not be avoided but must rather be allowed to emerge, dealt with sensitively and be used in a positive manner to overcome problems in order to co-create a common path going forward (Wals *et al.*, 2009:5,8,28). Within the garden the implementers addressed dissonance by trying to understand the cause amongst themselves and ended up implementing solutions based on their understandings. The members may have been encouraged to discuss the sources of tension, however, based on my observations I do not feel that such attempts took place within an environment of trust.

6.1.2.2.   Creating an environment of trust or 'safe space'

A 'safe space' (which was also noted above as being vital when exploring and co-creating strategies for change as well as engaging in differences and expectations) refers to an environment built on trust where people feel equally free to openly discuss their views, ideas and concerns and where people equally value, respect, accept, and are willing to try understand and make use of, other people's perspectives. It is one which is inspirational and democratic as opposed to demotivating and hierarchal. The ability of the group to make positive use of their differences and dissonance (and not stall or fall apart) depends on a sense of trust as well as social cohesion - two things which social learning is also seen to help bring about (Wals, 2007:43; Wals *et al.*, 2009:11,12,18,23).

However, an environment of trust was not established and dissonance was avoided. As such the trouble Satan caused was left unaddressed and continued to impact when the final four members joined in 2014. As one of the original members said - *"the garden could be better managed, things should change but I don't know how to change it, I don't have the power"*. Another said – *"I still want to work in garden but with someone responsible, someone to listen to grievances"*. Indeed, the members did not know who they could speak to. A third summed it up well - *"if it was a problem with people working there and they didn't listen, it would be*

difficult. Maybe I would talk to [Mfetu]. *Or talk to* [WILD]*, though I don't know anyone there".*

6.1.3. Reporting, Monitoring & Evaluation

Amongst the garden members only two said that they gained everything that they had hoped from joining the garden. However, only one of the two felt happy to continue in the garden as it currently being managed. Indeed, one implementer ardently stated that it was "*really a disaster, it didn't work*" while another expressed that "*there was lots of learning and incidental benefits though there had never really been buy-in*". Despite the lack of buy-in, unmet expectations and disharmony, the vacant nursery and a garden being overgrown with weeds a third (WILD) implementer felt that -

> *"to a large degree it worked ... it came very close to what I would consider successful. But there was one final hurdle - getting people to turn up and see the bigger picture ... the potential to make money ... and money would come"*

I understand the assertion that the initiative was perceived to be almost a success and the neglectings to engage in the dissonance to be in part due to the focus on deliverables within the current approach to development. Reporting according to what was promised means that reports focus on what has been done (e.g. nursery built, budget spent) and not on what actually happened which provides little impetus to involve those on the receiving end in the reporting, monitoring or evaluation. As a result, there may be little (need for) exploration into what is actually happening or the 'beneficiaries'' insights into the process; what has happened because of what has been done; the long-term and/or unexpected impacts and side-effects (Anderson *et al.*, 2012:41,70,79,80) especially when time is limited.

6.2.   A question of time

The Nokusimama implementer who spoke of the Scottish Sward Dance also highlighted that - "*it is difficult to develop trust and relationships when you work year to year*" commenting on the short one-, two- or three-year project cycles and the need for this trust and relationships in order for all those involved to engage freely about their ideas and concerns.

Additionally, time within these short timeframes, is also often limited and constrained. What the implementer didn't mention is that those on the providing end are very rarely able to focus

solely on just that one initiative within its project cycle. Indeed, for this implementer the nursery-garden was one of many projects throughout the province with the different project areas often located more than 3 hours' drive apart. Furthermore funder-driven reporting requirements and funding application procedures (in order to secure the next cycle of funding) are disproportionately time consuming while interested people also have disproportionately time consuming commitments (see Section 2). To be sure, a strong focus on achieving what was promised within short timeframes, means that opportunities to build relationships are limited while discussions surrounding the intended recipient's ideas and concerns become rushed and may feel imposed (Anderson *et al.,* 2012: 71,79,121,126,129).

In part, Nokusimama had relied on Mfetu for their relationships and contextual understanding. But, as mentioned earlier, Mfetu also referred to time as a major constraint - being volunteer based and with the main committee members holding down two full time jobs, running three tourism operations, a funding-reliant independent school and a household of 12 amongst the four of them. However, the fact that dialogue regarding Mfetu's and WILD's development initiatives in KwaNiekeri are often in English but with isiXhosa first language speakers highlights the need for time to allow discussions to be had at a slower pace and for concepts to be explained again over a number of different occasions. Also, as noted above, decision making in the Xhosa culture takes time. Indeed, in the case of KwaNiekeri where there are two different cultures trying to work together (with different perceptions and realities as outlined above), having time to engage is all the more so vital. Furthermore, not having the time or taking the time meant that there was insufficient follow up with what the field officer was doing and what was actually happening in the garden.

Indeed, not taking the time and the development system's focus on delivering as much as possible with as little as possible, means that there is limited opportunities for implementers and those they aim to benefit to sit down and talk. Under such time constraints, creating an environment of trust in order to effectively engage with different understandings, expectations and dissonance in order create shared understandings to co-construct a strategy for change - an intensive and time-consuming process requiring much dialogue (Wals *et al*., 2009:15,23) can be almost impossible.

7. Discussion & Conclusion

"Lacan starts from the assumption that communication is always a failure:
moreover, that it has to be a failure, and that's the reason we keep on talking.
If we understood each other, we would all remain silent.
Luckily enough, we don't understand each other, so we keep on talking."

Verhaeghe (1995:81)

The KwaNiekeri communal food plant seedling nursery and garden is an initiative characterised by different understandings regarding the purpose and value of the initiative as well as the reasons for people not wanting to join, leaving and/or spending less time as they had previously. I perceive these differing understandings to stem from lack of engagement at all stages of the project development right from when it was conceptualised by the implementing organisations. As a result, the initiative was not aligned to the priorities, preferences and capabilities of the food growers I spoke to. Considering the poor uptake from the rest of the food growers and other Xhosa residents of KwaNiekeri, the initiative was most likely not aligned to their realities either. Lack of engagement during in the garden component meant that everyone had different expectations for the project and for each other, while sources of tension and conflict were left unaddressed. In the end most of the members and all of the implementers that I spoke to expressed that the outcome of the food plant seedling nursery and garden was not quite what they had hoped for. Moreover, the nursery was left un-used and the garden was being overgrown with weeds.

The lack of engagement and ability to develop and shape initiatives more in line with the priorities, preferences and capabilities of those the initiative is intended to benefit is, in part, due to the current approach to development – a system within which the initiative is situated. Overall the development industry's adoption of business principles and practices with a focus on the cost effective and efficient delivery of assistance forces projects to be conceptualised without meaningful engagement with those the initiative is intended to benefit. This along with the focus on needs means that capacities, priorities and preferences are not taken into consideration. The approach also puts emphasis on achieving predetermined quantifiable deliverables in short timeframes thus not allowing for time for engagement in expectations, differences and dissonance while the predetermined deliverables themselves limits possibilities

for changes more aligned with the beneficiaries' realities. Since reporting is aligned to these deliverables, there is often very little time or incentive to engage in what is really happening. Indeed, there is very little time for anything other than achieving the industry's preferred hard results much to the detriment of softer results such as social cohesion and trust which are so vital for diverse people to collectively engage in a process of change.

So what now? As implementers, do we continue stumbling over swords lying on the ground - perpetuating the negative effects of this model of development while knowing that in the end we may still have nothing more than cabbages rotting in the ground? Several authors and experts are saying 'No!' and call for fundamental changes in how assistance is being provided pointing out the many voices of people from within the system who recognise that it is flawed and that it needs to change (see Anderson *et al.*, 2012; Brehm & Silova, 2010; Mikkelsen, 2005; Winther-Schmidt, 2011). Authors acknowledge however that changing the system is a challenging and enormous task but ascertain that since, we, the people in the system, laid down the swords - the policies, procedures and resource allocations - that we have the power to change them. Indeed, many identify the individuals – those that work within any level of the system, as having the power to contribute to the change from within the system by choosing to find and take opportunities to change the way we do things every day.

Anderson *et al.* (2012:146) therefore ask why contentious and responsible individuals dedicated to changing the lives of others (like those at Mfetu and WILD), are content to stay within the confines and structures of a system that they know too often fail? To this I would like to add - why are those not fully confined within the system inclined to operate as though they are? Before ending by reiterating the value of listening, the authors post a challenging question - "*Can a field of change agents change itself*?" (Anderson *et al.*, 2012:146).

Indeed, how can the development 'community' use what we hear to become aware that there is something wrong and move from there to actually bringing about a process of change we would all like to see? For authors like Wals, van der Hoeven and Blanken engaged in social learning, reflexivity is key. As discussed earlier, reflexivity starts with an individual being able and willing to critically reflect on and question their existing routines, norms, values and assumptions through exposure to other ways of understanding the world. From critical reflection, reflexive individuals are able to change in order to alter the everyday systems they live by and often take for granted (Wals, 2007:38,40-41; Wals *et al.*, 2009:9).

It must be noted though, that exposure to other ways of thinking may also lead to discomfort and unease upon reflecting on the appropriateness of one's own long-held views and routines (and the arguments for maintaining these) and realising that they may need to be changed (Wals *et al*., 2009:11-12,21-23). As a result, we often unconsciously block the necessary reflection, ignoring information that contradicts our expectations and views or dismiss it as false or irrelevant (Wals *et al*., 2009:11-12 citing Argyris, 1990[27]).

However, reflexive individuals, able to continuously reflect on their understanding of development in light of others, could prevent policies and procedures such as 'participation' from becoming nothing more than a questionnaire to identify 'beneficiaries' for a predetermined project. Indeed, reflexivity would enable us to question the very intentions of 'participation' and even 'development' itself. As some of the richest opportunities for such is where development is being played out on the ground, reflexivity here is vital. Since this can be supported through social learning approaches, the use of such approaches in all stages of development initiatives has great potential to not only bring about processes of change shaped by those 'development' is intended to benefit but to bring about changes within the system as well.

I understand that it is easier said in thesis than in practice, least of all in a project in KwaNiekeri or in South Africa in general. As highlighted, South Africa is a country of great diversity with a past, and present, characterised by conflict. Most of us alive today have grown up unknown to each other – separated by rules defined both politically and socially. Relationships between "us and them" was and often remains one of unequal power. It's possible however that those exact same complex and sensitive issues which makes social learning so difficult in South Africa, also so vital. Only by letting go of control and openly (re)engaging as equals in our county's numerous differences and sources of dissonance, the past miscommunications, misunderstandings and conflict; will we be able to start understanding each other. Only by truly engaging can we start building a cohesive society willing to embark on an inclusive process to bring about the change that we all deem positive. Indeed, only by sweating up the hill, from whichever side we are coming from, will we ever be able to meet at the top.

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Appendix 1: Considerations affecting the uptake of agriculture

1.1. Negative perceptions and generational perspectives

Thornton (2008) and Møller (2005) express how negative perceptions towards agriculture may reduce people's desire to participate in urban agriculture. Thornton (2008:256) suggests that the confinement of black farmers to small-scale subsistence level-agriculture during apartheid has left a negative stigma towards subsistence farming in contemporary South Africa. The youth have been found to be particularly adverse to agriculture of any kind, seeing it as something their grandparents had to do in the homelands because they could not work during the apartheid era. The younger generation are also seen to be aspiring to a modern urban lifestyle in which they feel agriculture has no place (Møller, 2005:73; Thornton, 2008:256,258). As such the youth do not perceive UPA as an alternative to unemployment or government grant dependency (Thornton, 2008:258).

1.2. The South African Government Grant

The South African Government provides a social welfare scheme commonly known as the Government grant and includes Child, Old Age, Disability and War Veterans Grants. Many studies on UPA in South Africa found that the grant contributes significantly to household incomes and food security. In a study of UPA in Peddie (Eastern Cape) by Thornton & Nel (2007)[28] in Webb (2011:198), 95% of the respondents felt there had been a decline in agricultural activities over the last decade part of which they attributed to a larger number of houses receiving government grants. Thornton (2008:253) suggests that grant receiving households may have just enough income to survive but hinders UPA from reaching its full potential. As such he warns against South Africa's grant policy creating a 'culture of dependence', something that has been echoed by others and is reflected the country's Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy which asserts that "People must learn to work, instead of living on public assistance" (Thornton, 2008:256)

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[28] Thornton, A.C. & Nel, E. (2007). The significance of urban and peri-urban agriculture in Peddie, in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa. *Africanus* 37(1): 13–19.

1.3.   Risks associated with agriculture

Urban agriculturalists are exposed to the inherent risks of farming such as environmental factors including floods, drought and offtake by animals such as insects, mice and birds (Reuther & Dewar, 2005:116) as well as socio-political changes (i.e. land transfers/loss) (Ruysenaar, 2012:227), theft of both produce (Reuther & Dewar, 2005:116) and implements and vandalism of infrastructure (Ruysenaar, 2012:233). This could result in not only the loss of crops but in the money invested as well. As such, a high reliance on agriculture with no other income sources could in fact put individuals and households in more precarious positions (Shisanya & Hendriks 2011; Ruysenaar, 2012:227)

1.4.   Uneven distribution of produce and income

Due to the seasonality of food production, the supply of fresh produce (and therefore income) can fluctuate throughout the year (Reuther & Dewar, 2005:116; Ruysenaar, 2012:234). In his study of UPA in Queenstown (Eastern Cape), Kasumba (2007:91)[29] (in Webb, 2011:198) found that on average, cultivation only yielded produce for three months of the year. In their study, Ruysenaar (2012:234) found the majority of the 110 respondents (23%) experienced 3 months of food shortage a year. The greatest periods of food shortage were in January and June with 64.4% and 52.1% of respondents experiencing the shortages during these months respectively. Factors contributing to their vulnerability during these months could however include increased costs (e.g. school fees and clothing at the beginning of the South African school year in January) and limited employment coinciding with increased expenditure over the festive season. Although Ruysenaar (2012:239) remarks that there have been successful cases which have ensured constant production over longer periods of time he does not elaborate on who they are.

## 1.5.   Upfront investment while profits materialise later

Difficulties accessing inputs such as water, seeds, tools also limits urban cultivation (Webb, 2011:201). Indeed, would-be food growers require surplus resources to invest upfront into gardening and to support the household while the crops are growing with the farmers profits only materialising once the produce is sold (Reuther & Dewar, 2005:99,116).

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[29] Kasumba, H. (2007). Urban agriculture in Ezibeleni (Queenstown), Eastern Cape: An assessment of the practice and its contribution to the cultivator. MA thesis, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth.

Appendix 2: Interviewees

	GROUP		F/M
	Garden members		
1	Mhizana		F
2	Mamgobozhi		F
3	Lindi		F
4	Travis		M
5	Ayanda		F
6	Nolwazi		F
	Food growers		
1	Tuddy		F
2	Mfani		F
3	Nolizwi		F
4	Jeffery		M
5	Nomsinya		F
6	Rupert		M
7	Majola		M
	Implementing Organisations	**Designation**	
	WILD		
1	Peter	WILD Nokusimama Project Coordinator	M
2	Khaya	WILD Intern working on Nokusimama Programme	M
3	Stix	WILD Field Officer	M
	Mfetu		
4	Roberto	Committee Member	M

Figure 3: Groupings of the interviewees and other actors

GARDEN MEMBERS

Mhizana
Mamgobozhi
Lindi*
Zaza**
Siphokazi**

WOMEN FROM THE CRAFT BUSINESS

IMPLEMENTING ORGANISATIONS

Travis
Ayanda

Sheila
Peter
Stix
Khaya

WILD

Nolwazi
Gurtrude

FOOD GROWERS

Roberto   Tuddy   Mfani   Rupert   Chairman during implementation

MFETU

Nolizwi
Jeffery
Nomsinya   Majola

XHOSA LEADERSHIP

PARTICIPATED IN PREVIOUS COMMUNAL GARDEN
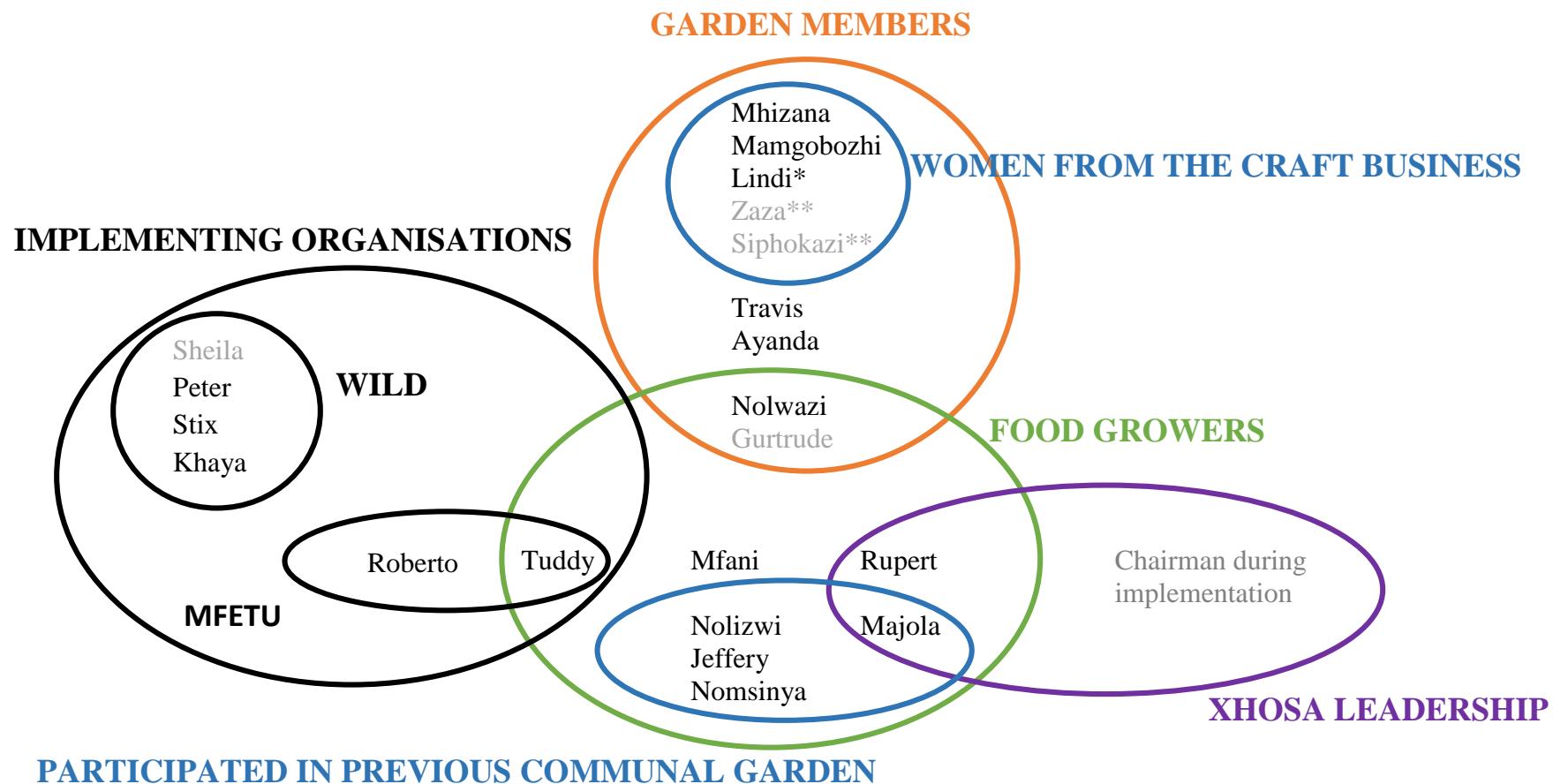
Key
* Left garden in Feb 2013, brief interview
** Left garden soon after joining
Did not interview

eNkosi - Thank you - Tack