



GOING FOR GREEN

THE GARDENS OF HOPE

"In my garden there is a large place for sentiment. My garden of flowers is also my garden of thoughts and dreams. The thoughts grow as freely as the flowers, and the dreams are as beautiful."

ABRAM L URBAN



Manenberg on the Cape Flats is infamous for its gang violence and daily loss of life, but it is beginning to serve as a model for other communities on how to transform tragedy into hope and become caring and helping communities. Alcohol, drugs and unemployment are still a major problem in the area, but one that is being addressed using a rather unusual type of therapy – getting one's hands dirty.

Abalimi, a non-governmental organisation established in 1982 to alleviate poverty by teaching communities about community greening and micro-organic vegetable gardening, is but one of the organisations that has assisted Manenberg to renew its environment, a project that has had a considerable impact on this area of the Cape.

The residents of Manenberg are beginning to believe that there is an alternative to the violence that permeates their lives and they wish to share what they have learnt with their fellow human beings.





High levels of unemployment make crime and gang activities a daily part of the lives of those living on the Cape Flats and in surrounding areas. However, it is in the midst of this seemingly hopeless situation that one finds an oasis of vegetable gardens and some of the most threatened floral species within the unique Cape Floral World Heritage Biome.

"Our projects not only teach people about cultivating their own micro-organic gardens, but also about the wealth of plants on their doorstep," says Rob Small, Director of Abalimi. "As a result of the programmes we have introduced, people now have the confidence to engage in the cultivation of crops, thereby creating a means of employment for themselves. In addition, they are proud of what they are doing and realise that an activity such as this can



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have an impact on other areas of their lives. For them, violence is now not an option."

Abalimi helps individuals and communities to grow their own organic vegetables so that they can supplement their diet, improve their food and nutrition and earn additional income on a regular basis. "It is our experience that organic gardening by groups promotes community building, personal growth and the development of self-esteem," says Rob Small.

While the focus of the project falls mainly on women, the disadvantaged, the poor and the unemployed are also involved. In addition to encouraging home gardens, Abalimi supports a number of other projects, such as community greening projects, flora research, training and development. Abalimi, which means "the planters" in Xhosa, annually supports about 3 000 community-based growers working in about 2 000 home gardens, 100 urban agricultural projects in schools and communities, and about 100 urban greening projects.

From 1994 to 2003, Abalimi's successes in the urban agricultural environment have been considerable and, from 1997 to 2003, the demand for gardens increased by more than 1 000 percent. More and more residents are realising the potential of the project and are asking to be taught how to begin their own gardens.

Supporting thousands of gardeners

Abalimi has two non-profit Garden Centre nurseries in Khayelitsha and Nyanga which provide individuals, groups and organisations with subsidised gardening resources such as manure, seed, seedlings, tools and organic pest-control remedies. Currently, these nurseries supply more than 2 000 individual gardeners every year. Moreover, they are

located within the communities themselves, thus allowing easy and affordable access.

The Garden Centre nurseries are also used as training venues and include gardens designed to show the beginner how to begin his or her own micro-organic garden. Abalimi's aim is to establish a network of these centres throughout informal settlements on the Cape Flats, thus encouraging people to leave the streets and use their backyards to create a sustainable livelihood.

By supporting individuals who survive by gardening, Abalimi is also instilling a culture of organic gardening. Apart from the training that is provided, the individual receives a start-up pack, both of which are subsidised.

Teaching children the value of the land

One of the many successful projects launched by Abalimi is the School Environmental and Educational Development (SEED) Project that is intended for schools on the Cape Flats. This project empowers teachers to develop and use their outdoor classrooms for imparting knowledge and life

skills, thereby enabling children to learn the value of using land appropriately and responsibly.

"This has also had a considerable impact on the children themselves, because they now understand that they can change their environment and, at the same time, change themselves. An added benefit is that it instils in the children the realisation that they are responsible for themselves and for what they do in life. Moreover, they have begun to



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realise that they can make a difference," says SEED Project Coordinator, Leigh Brown. "The underlying philosophy is that, if children are made aware of greening activities and of the environment, and of how these can enhance the lives of individuals, families and the community, they will become enthusiastic about the project and ensure that it continues to be a success in the future."

Funding for grassroots needs

What Abalimi has achieved has not been solely of its own doing. Other organisations and individuals have also given of their time and energy, and while Abalimi has received much-needed funding. In the past three years, for instance, it has received funds amounting to R275 000 from AngloGold, De Beers and the Anglo American Chairman's Fund. First National Bank (FNB), in particular, has assisted considerably in launching certain core projects. In addition, First Rand Foundation and the FNB Fund have both played a major part in the past two years by providing funds

amounting to R200 000 per year, whereas, in the current year, Wesbank has pledged R200 000 for various projects. The purpose of all these generous contributions is ultimately to make a difference within the community.

"A most impressive project is the Abalimi greenhouse and packing shed for organic products from the townships. This venture is sponsored by the Ackerman Pick 'n Pay Foundation, with such sponsorship being in excess of R1 million," says Rob Small. "This is truly a worthwhile project, as the effects on micro-farmers throughout the Cape Flats will be considerable. Among other things, it will in future allow them to have greater access to a wider market through the Pick 'n Pay brand."

A further project that has recently been launched is the Phillipi Business Place project being undertaken by Investec in collaboration with a number of other organisations, including Abalimi. The Phillipi Business Place initiative is part of a national network of centres designed to develop entrepreneurs under the auspices of Investec. Apart from developing entrepreneurs, the initiative also focuses on assisting emerging entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector to become established and to reach a wider market.

Written by Marj Murray. For more information on Abalimi call 021-371-1653.



A WORLD OF SUPPORT

Abalimi has proved to be one of the most successful non-profit organisations in providing a sustainable future for the people of the Cape Flats. However, such success could not have been achieved without the continuing support of businesses, organisations and groups of individuals that believe that any contribution, no matter how small, makes a difference to people's lives.

Businesses can assist in bringing about greater socio-economic equality by continuing to invest in projects such as those being undertaken by Abalimi and by taking up the challenges of empowerment.

"In addition to the companies already mentioned, Abalimi is also grateful to the Nedbank Green Trust – WWF which has been a principal funding partner for over 10 years, assisting us to create a community-based nature conservation movement through organic gardening and farming," explains Rob Small. "Abalimi also acknowledges the support of those many individuals, trusts, service groups and businesses that contribute in excess of R500 000 each year for the purpose of enabling Abalimi to carry out its most important work."