

Greening & Feeding

Known as the “Eastern Cape on Cape Town’s doorstep”, the Cape Flats townships are populated largely by economic refugees from the previous apartheid homelands of the Ciskei and Transkei. New arrivals into Cape Town are officially estimated to be 1200 per month and unemployment figures are in the region of 30-40%. Abalimi Bezekhaya is attempting to alleviate poverty and create self-employment through gardening and micro-farming in the sandy soil of the Cape Flats.

Voluntary association ABALIMI was founded in 1983. It is an urban agriculture and environmental action association, working to improve sustainable food production and environmental greening amongst the poor in Cape Town. In particular the project targets women - mothers and grandmothers - who often represent whole families. “Abalimi” means ‘the planters’ in Xhosa, the predominant language of their target community.

Helping people survive

The foundation of ABALIMI’s target group are pure survivalists, who “temporarily” engage in vegetable production at home until a “job comes along”. By supporting such individuals organic gardening culture is becoming a permanent feature of the urban environment among the poor in Cape Town. The skills learned by survival and subsistence gardeners remain with them, even if they stop “when they get a job” and can be

drawn upon again in future.

ABALIMI supports individual households and groups to implement their own gardening and micro-farming projects. This includes between 300-1000 home based vegetable gardens and 50 community group projects (school gardens, community gardens, communal gardens) per annum.

It runs two non-profit nursery projects in Nyanga and Khayelitsha. Called People’s Garden Centres, they supply free advice, information and subsidised gardening inputs such as trees, ground-covers, soil improvers (e.g.: manure), seed, seedlings, basic tools, windbreaks and safe pest control remedies.

Up to 1000 people are trained each year through 4-day basic organic vegetable growing courses plus year-round on-site technical follow-up support visits and demonstrations to projects. Social benefits are enhanced through activities

such as:

- mutual help work events to accomplish large or difficult tasks
- horizontal (farmer to farmer) learning events.
- Savings mobilisation

Other activities

Greening the townships: Indigenous trees are planted mainly in community gardens as windbreaks, but also (on request) in community institutions such as educares, community centres and schools.

ABALIMI has also established the **Manyanani** “we do it together” Peace Park -a unique community & environmental centre - and **Moya we Khaya** “spirit of home” - a pan-African intergenerational cultural community home, which gives everyone - women, elders, youth and men – a healthy and related place in the community and in nature.

Recognition

Since 1991 ABALIMI has received numerous awards, including three Green Trust-WWF awards, two Presidents Social Forestry awards, and the Khayelitsha Achiever Award for Community Development. An average of 25 new applications from community groups for help with their gardening and micro-farming projects is received every year. ABALIMI community gardens are the first to have proven that at least two sustainable family livelihoods can be created on 1000m2.

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Home Gardens

The Home Garden Movement, also known as “Individual Membership sign-up” campaign, is asking individuals in the townships of Khayelitsha, Philippi, Nyanga, Crossroads, and many more to sign up for a one year membership for R25. In return the individual gets a demonstration on how to start a garden and how to grow vegetables, a starter-kit (enough for two seasons) worth R50, and constant access to follow up at the Garden Centres, to get answers and help for growing vegetables at home.

Case Study

Alice Veliswa Xala (62) came from the Transkei to live and work in Cape Town. Her family used to have big land to plant and she grew up working in the garden. She found out about Nyanga Garden Centre and signed the membership form, got her 1st season package and developed her home garden, mostly motivated by selling her products in small scale. She is living with her adopted son and the garden looks prosperous and has enough veggies for them, and also for her two daughters’ families, who are living in other townships. On good days she can even give to neighbours. She is planting cabbage, parsley, turnips and onion, but also traditional African tobacco, which she can sell for traditional events.



Harvest of Hope

Since 2007 surplus produce from subsistence gardens has been sold to the wider market outside of the townships on a weekly basis.

Launched in 2008, the Harvest of Hope project collects, packs and delivers organic vegetable boxes to families in Cape Town. This project offers regular income security to the community farmers, by contracting them to grow seasonal organic produce at guaranteed prices. Customers also have the knowledge that their money is giving people jobs and conserving the environment through local organic farming among the poor. Therefore the best market place is at schools, where parents come to fetch their children after the classes and are anxious for fresh and organic vegetables for their families.

Harvest of Hope is now producing more than a hundred of these extraordinary vegetable boxes, from 50 farmers in 20 community gardens, every Tuesday. The medium term aim is to increase to 150 farmers and 600 boxes and then to many more. Every box consists of 11 items of seasonal organic veggies, and people can sign-up to be standing order customers. For more information contact harvestofhope@abalimi.org.za.

