

**SUBSISTENCE GARDENING FOR FOOD SECURITY: A CASE STUDY OF THREE
TOWNSHIPS IN GRAHAMSTOWN, EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE.**

By

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Abstract

Food gardens are popular first projects taken up by African women's groups in South Africa. The aim is to improve nutrition and create livelihoods for the urban poor. As the HIV/AIDS pandemic peaks in South Africa, a healthy diet is essential to ensure the well-being of persons living with HIV/AIDS and their carers. One might expect vegetable gardens to flourish in the African townships of the Eastern Cape Province, one of the poorest of South Africa's nine provinces with the highest unemployment rate. However, a representative household survey of Grahamstown East (n 862) found that only one in two households grew a vegetable garden in 1999. Oral history has it that township gardens were in abundance in former times. The paper reports on the results of an investigation into the history of subsistence gardening in Grahamstown East. Stories told by elderly respondents about their gardening activities reveal attitudes towards growing vegetables in former and contemporary times. The analysis sheds light on the incentives and disincentives to grow vegetables including start-up costs, drought, access to commercial produce, inadequate land for cultivation, lack of proper fencing, hunger and poverty alleviation, crime and youth apathy towards gardening. The study also exposed a decline in gardening activities in the historically black areas, which has a negative impact on the largely impoverished communities

Introduction

The study area

Interviews were conducted with elderly respondents in three townships in the eastern part of Grahamstown commonly known as Rini. Grahamstown is a small university town in the largely rural Eastern Cape, it is also the seat of the Makana Municipality. It is approximately 120 kilometers east of Port Elizabeth, which is one of the major industrial cities in the Eastern Cape. The population in the city is more than one hundred thousand and it is rapidly increasing due largely to migration from nearby farms. Grahamstown boasts a rich historical heritage, which includes the battle of Grahamstown and the 1820 Settlers monument. The city is also popular as an educational centre owing to the fact that good secondary schools and one of the leading South African universities are situated in Grahamstown. The annual arts festival also contributes towards the city's economy as it attracts local and international visitors. In spite of all the aforementioned positive attributes of the city, Grahamstown remains an island in the midst of poverty. The Eastern Cape is the second poorest province in South Africa and it has an unemployment rate of some 45% and approximately two thirds of the population is living in poverty (SAIRR, 2002). Grahamstown is also characterized by a very high rate of unemployment and a heavy reliance on social security grants. The main sources of employment in Grahamstown are the university, schools, the high court and various service oriented industries. The city has no industry, which exacerbates the unemployment problem. The rate of unemployment is estimated to range from 46% to 54% (Moller et al, 2001)

The study of gardens reported here has been inspired by an earlier probability sample survey of household living conditions and quality of in Grahamstown East that was conducted in 1999. The sample survey consisted of 861 households. Results from the survey revealed that 51% of the households reportedly grew their own vegetables. It also emerged from the study that a large majority of non-gardening households had a desire to start a food garden. The study also found that households in all income categories and all neighbourhoods grew gardens but the incidence of gardens increased with length of residence. Households with fenced plots who kept dogs were also more likely to grow gardens, and vegetable gardens were more common in neighbourhoods that reported a crime-prevention initiative. Above-average numbers of larger and pensioner households grew gardens.

Motivation for Conducting the Study

This study was mainly aimed at establishing the factors that motivate respondents to grow food and the obstacles they encounter in the process of growing their gardens. If households in all income groups grow gardens, as revealed by the previous survey, and gardens increase the well being of the household, why do not more township households that have access to land for gardens grow gardens? Are food gardens making a contribution towards food security in the township.

It was envisaged that interviews conducted with gardeners in Grahamstown East would provide responses to these questions. The study deliberately targeted older township neighbourhoods in order to identify householders who were more experienced gardeners. The researcher grew up in the study area and had heard stories of a thriving gardening culture in Grahamstown East in the past, it was therefore advisable to recruit older persons whose memories would go back further.

The Three Research Sites

The study targeted three of the older settlements in Grahamstown East. One of the sites is Fingo village, which is the oldest of the three neighbourhoods. Fingo village was established mainly to accommodate people of 'Fingo' origin who collaborated with the colonists during the frontier wars of 1850-3. In 1857, freehold title deeds to surveyed plots were issued to the Mfengu.

Tantyi, the second study settlement came into existence in 1870 when leasehold plots were released to residents. The third settlement is Joza. This settlement was developed by the municipality in the 1970s to cope with the large housing backlog, which resulted from apartheid policies. Joza was the administrative centre of the Black local authority in the 1980s.

Methodology

Interviewees who had planted gardens in the three settlements were purposefully selected for the study. In total 21 respondents were recruited: ten in Fingo Village, seven in Joza, four in Tantyi. There seemed to be fewer cultivated gardens in Tantyi and Joza, hence few respondents were drawn from the two sites. Data collection occurred between January and March 2003.

Semi-structured interviews were employed as a means of collecting data. Open-ended questions were posed and a number of standard cues were put to the respondents who were free to respond in their own words. Respondents were interviewed in a language of their choice, in their homes or outdoors in their gardens. The interviews, which lasted approximately one hour, were tape recorded and transcribed into English and the transcripts were content analysed according to main common themes.

In terms of the actual contents of the interview, a wide range of issues relating to gardening was covered by some 18 cues that were put to the respondents. Interviewees were probed to describe their experiences as garden cultivators, specifically the benefits obtained from gardening, the obstacles encountered in gardening, the contribution made by gardening in their livelihoods, and the motivations for taking up gardening. The main focus of the study was on the contribution made by gardening in improving food security for households that engaged in cultivation.

The interviewees

In terms of the gender breakdown of the respondents, fourteen men and seven women took part in the study. In contrast to other African countries where urban farming is primarily an activity of women, in the study it proved to be an activity that is dominated by males. For example, in Kampala, Uganda, nearly 80 per cent of the labour is provided by women and both production and consumption decisions are predominantly made by women.

The average age of respondents was 67 years. The youngest respondent was 33 years old and he had only started gardening in 2002. The oldest respondent was 93 years old and he had been engaged in gardening since relocating to *Tantyi* townships. The composition of the households ranged from 1 to 13 persons with an average of 4 persons.

A profile of the Respondents

A majority of the respondents were pensioners or had reached retirement age. Eleven respondents were state old age pensioners, five respondents were employed, and two respondents were unemployed. The state old-age pension and paid work are the most common sources of income in Grahamstown East, according to a 1999 survey

Urban Agriculture: A General Overview

Urban agriculture is usually viewed as a household survival strategy, which is utilized to counter an extremely hostile urban economic environment (Maxwell, 1996). Subsistence food production is usually assumed to decrease in importance as urbanization increases, partly because of the reduction in the amount of urban land available for subsistence agriculture due to rapid urbanization. However, recent studies reveal that in most cases, in the face of escalating poverty, urban agriculture is increasing both as a national and a household strategy in response to escalating food prices or shortages. It is widely believed to make an enormous contribution to the livelihoods of urban poor in many developing countries

Urban agriculture generally encompasses:

- aquaculture in tanks, ponds, rivers and coastal bays
- livestock raised in backyards, along roadsides, in poultry sheds and piggeries
- orchards, street trees, and backyard trees, and
- vegetable and other crop production in backyards, in vacant tracts of land on industrial estates, along canal, on the grounds of institutions, on roadsides and in many peri-urban and urban farms

In addition to these attributes, urban agriculture also tends to be labour intensive and occurs in small plots that are widely dispersed around cities in virtually any available and appropriate location. It is usually distinguished from rural agriculture by the legal status of farming in urban contexts and the limitations on access to suitable land for cultivation.

Figure 1 – Urban agriculture in Africa

Country	City	Prevalence of farming (%)
Burkina Faso	Ougadougou	36
Cameroon	Yaounde	35
Gabon	Libreville	80
Kenya	Nairobi	80
Mozambique	Maputo	37
Tanzania	Dar es Salaam	68
Uganda	Kampala	33
Zambia	Lusaka	45

Table adapted from UNDP, 1996

Urban agriculture has important benefits to the urban poor, for instance:

- it has enabled urban dwellers to engage in urban and peri-urban agriculture in response to economic harshness, as a survival strategy and as a diversification strategy often involving commercial operations
- it is an important source of employment and food security for the poor
- it provides a valuable source of nutrition and
- it has environmental benefits and often involves the recycling of both water and solid waste

Even though urban agriculture is rapidly spreading and is pivotal to the livelihoods of many urban dwellers, it does not necessarily provide a panacea for urban food security problems. There are certain constraints on urban agriculture, which include:

- limited evidence of regulatory or political support for urban agriculture in many developing countries
- security problems because crops are often stolen or damaged by livestock
- high infrastructural and material costs which reduce the potential productivity of urban agriculture, for instance, a lack of water pumps and other essential inputs
- insufficient water supplies and pollution, and

- the need for measures which alleviate the adverse effects of urban agriculture such as disease transmission and land-use conflict (UNDP, 1996; Binns and Lynch, 1998)

Hunger and malnutrition at household level is rife among the majority of South Africans, particularly in rural areas. This gave the impetus for the South African government to embark on various initiatives such as the integrated food security and nutrition programme in an attempt to improve food security. The fundamental objective of this programme is to eradicate, hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity. The costs of food insecurity are very high because they affect all levels of social and economic life. Food insecurity often leads to high health and medical costs, high funeral expenses and low labour productivity. Food insecurity usually affects the most vulnerable members of the household, particularly children and women.

Food Security Defined

In this paper food security will be defined as the physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food at all times to meet dietary and food preferences for an active and healthy life¹. This definition of food security consists of three components that are inter-related.

1. Food availability – relates to effective or continuous food supply at both national and household level.
2. Reliability of food – utilisation and consumption of safe and nutritious food
3. Food access – refers to the ability of the nation and its citizens to acquire sufficient food on sustainable basis. This component also addresses issues that relate to purchasing power and consumption behaviour.

Food Security in South Africa

According to Statistics South Africa, about 35 per cent of the population in South Africa is vulnerable to food insecurity (Stats SA, 2000). The Eastern Cape being the second poorest province in the country is highly affected by food insecurity.

In the South African context food security is part of section 27 Constitutional rights in South Africa. The Constitution states that every citizen has the right to have access to sufficient to food and water, and that “the state must by legislation and other measures, within its available resources, avail to progressive realisation of the right to sufficient food”.

¹ Definition adopted from the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)

To realise the Constitutional right to food security, the Cabinet launched an updated national food security strategy aimed at streamlining, harmonizing and integrating diverse food security sub-programmes in South Africa into Integrated Food Security Strategy. This strategy seeks to, *inter alia*, eradicate the widespread inequalities and abject poverty among the majority of households that is characterised by insufficient and unstable food supplies, lack of purchasing power, poor nutrition, inadequate safety nets, unemployment and weak food emergency management systems (IFSS, 2000).

Broader objectives of the IFSS

The Integrated food security strategy encompasses the following broad strategic objectives:

- Increase household food production and trading
- Improve income generation and job creation opportunities
- Increase safety nets and food emergency management systems, and
- Improve nutrition and food safety

Research Findings

Gardening Practice

The interviewees reported that they plant maize, potatoes, beans, pumpkin, cabbage, beetroot, carrots, and spinach. Other respondents reportedly plant onions, tomatoes, peas, green peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, and lettuce. Apart from watermelon none of the respondents mentioned growing fruit.

Most respondents mentioned that they did a large portion of the work in their gardens. However, some older respondents employed someone to assist with certain tasks such as preparing the soil, planting or weeding. In their younger years they had tackled their gardening activities with enthusiasm but due to old age these tasks had become too arduous and they hired assistance if they could afford it. A few respondents received assistance from other family members, for instance, Mrs M from Fingo village, who is in her sixties, said her sister occasionally helped her because “she is quite an expert at gardening”. Other respondents received help from their grandchildren. However, Mr G who stays on his own in Joza stated that he did not want his children to do the work as they would not meet his exacting standards: “they will not do the work the way I want it to be done”. Informal ‘share-cropping’ appears to be a fairly common practice. Mr H from Fingo village is still employed, he can only work in his garden over the weekend and on holidays. His brother who is a pensioner helps him in the garden and the two brothers share the harvest.

Home Consumption

Almost all households in the study grew vegetables mainly for home consumption. The largest household of thirteen in the study had no surplus to sell even if their garden in Fingo was larger. One of the respondents, a disability grant recipient who supported a pensioner wife and two grandchildren in Joza grew his garden his garden for home consumption only to “keep hunger at bay”

A considerable number of respondents shared their vegetables with relatives. Mr T from Joza who has a small family shares his harvest not only with friends but also with poor people in need. Another respondent in the study stated that he gives vegetables to his sister who assists him with buying seed.

However, some of the respondents sold their surplus vegetables. Mrs M who is a retired teacher from Fingo village reported that she had sold the surplus from her potato harvest before the potatoes perished. Mr R who is unemployed put up a vegetable stand on the main road last year and sent a young boy to sell his surplus produce. Mr K from Fingo reported that he usually sends his grandchildren to sell his harvest if the produce is good. Last year Mr S from Tantiy reported that he harvested a good crop and sold his surplus pumpkins to some of his neighbours. Mrs K, a former health worker from Tantiy, was one of only two respondents who specifically grew their gardens with the intention of selling their produce. Surplus from her well established garden earns her money for seed for the next season, “If someone wants to buy I sell them some vegetables. People usually buy green peppers and cabbages. I sell to make some money to buy seed again.

Motivations to Garden

The main focus of the study was on the motivations and incentives for growing a garden, and conversely, on the disincentives, problems, and setbacks for gardeners. We start by reporting on how respondents came to take up gardening and their accounts of the benefits they gain from their gardening activities and products before reviewing the typical problems that gardeners in Rini face.

Why do people plant a garden? The respondents named three main reasons.

Firstly, gardeners hate to see natural resources go to waste. Using the land is an important principle in their lives. Many of the gardeners had learnt gardening and its value from their grandparents and parents who had been gardeners or farm workers and had the knowledge and habit of tilling the soil. They had followed in their footsteps. In some cases a parent or grandparent had started their gardens. Gardening reminded them of their childhood when food was plentiful and their household was self-sufficient in vegetables.

Secondly, respondents pointed out that gardening alleviated poverty and helped low-income households to save. “Gardening helps us survive” was how one respondent put it. Producing one’s own vegetables freed up cash that could be used for other purposes including groceries, fuel, and education for the children. Pensioners were able to supplement their income and maintain their financial independence and self-respect. Gardeners were often in a position to help others worse off than themselves.

Thirdly, gardening was a matter of healthy living. Fresh produce was good for one’s health. Gardening provided good exercise and relieved boredom.

For the former schoolteacher in the study the importance of the three motivations had shifted in the course of a lifetime. Her chief preoccupation when she had been destitute on arrival in Grahamstown was simply to escape from poverty. She succeeded in feeding herself and her sister’s two children from her garden. Later, “when I was employed and I had an income, I did not want the land to be wasted and lie fallow.” As an older person, she now believed that “the plants from my garden are healthier than the plants I buy from the market.”

The following chart contains excerpts from the interviews to illustrate the three overarching motivations for growing a garden.

CHART I: WHY WE GARDEN

The tradition of the land: ‘waste not want not’

We cannot let the land lie fallow. We have to use productively whatever piece of land is available. I originally come from a farm, .. so I am accustomed to using the land for agricultural purposes. I cannot let land grow weeds instead of vegetables for food, however small the garden may be. (Mrs K, 73 years, who has a very small garden in Joza)

My father taught me how to grow the garden and how important gardening is to a person’s life. I have kept that tradition until now. I always grow my garden in order to eat vegetables from the garden. My father liked working in his garden very much. He was a farm worker and this is where he acquired knowledge about agriculture. (Mr M, 93 years, Tantiyi)

It worries me to see land unutilised. I don’t want land to lie fallow. I want to always work on the land. (Mr S, 52 years, Fingo)

I learnt gardening from my father. He used to work as a gardener in town. He was very good at gardening. I used to go to work with him and he used to show me how to do gardening so that's how I learnt the value of gardening. (Mr D, casual gardener in Fingo)

I like gardening very much. I grew up on a farm. When I grew up my parents used to cultivate their garden and they had agricultural fields of their own. We were fed with food from the garden and the field. I learnt about gardening and the value of growing a garden at a young age, so when I came to stay here growing a garden was like a habit to me. We never bought vegetables, as there were storage places for maize and other vegetables. Food was abundant. (Mrs G, 62 years, Fingo pensioner who feeds a family of thirteen from her garden)

I grew up in 'I' Street and I showed an interest in gardening at an early age. My mother used to work at one of the Rhodes kitchens and bring potato peels from work. I used to plant the potato peel and get lovely potatoes. So gardening is something I started at a young age and I still have not lost interest even now. If you grow your garden you will never starve. (Mr G, 69 years, who lives on his own in Joza).

CHART I continued

Fighting poverty

I think it is largely poverty that motivates me to cultivate my garden. You notice that people who are well off do not cultivate their gardens because they can afford to buy. I do not have money to buy everything. When I have something that can help me like the garden, I have to use it and not let it lie fallow. If you grow your garden that allows you to save money. Instead of buying vegetables you can use the money you save to buy paraffin, electricity and other things. (Mrs L, Fingo pensioner)

I am a pensioner and the money I get is very little. Sometimes I run out of food before pension time so I rely on food from the garden. (Mr S, Tanti)

I grow the garden because it helps augment my pension. If I don't have something to eat, I will not bother my neighbours asking them for food. Instead I will pick some vegetables from the garden and cook. (Mr P, Joza)

Health and wellbeing

Growing a garden is very good. I sometimes tell my fellow old pensioners about how good growing a garden is. Sitting idle at home does not help anyone. (Mr T, 75 years, Joza)

I have nothing else to do because I am old. So in order to avoid boredom, I decided to work in my garden. (Mr N, 76 years, Fingo) I like working in the garden because apart from getting food, it is also a form of physical exercise. It keeps my body healthy. (Mr A, 53 years, Joza)

Growing a garden is very good for my health. I was suffering from high blood pressure before. Eating lots of green vegetables has helped to lower my blood pressure. (Mrs K, retired health worker, 73 years, Tanti)

Sharing Garden Produce

Respondents were asked if their neighbours also benefited from the produce they raised in their gardens. When the harvest was good, most gardeners shared some of their produce with neighbours as well as the extended family and relatives. Only a few gardeners in the study said they had too little to share or they expected their neighbours to buy their own vegetables. Gardeners were more likely to share with neighbours who supported their gardening ventures and with the needy who asked for food.

Mr S in Fingo Village, who had recently presented his neighbour with one of his homegrown pumpkins, cited the principle of mutual assistance, which still prevails in the Grahamstown township. “We help each others as neighbours. ... Yes, I do give some to my neighbours because they also help me with the manure and other things. So I have to reciprocate.” Mrs G, another Fingo gardener, echoed this sentiment: “Even though produce from the garden is only sufficient for home consumption sometimes we give some vegetables to the neighbours because we normally help each other.” However, Mr K from Fingo was more reluctant than others to share his vegetables with neighbours because “they don’t reciprocate.”

Gardeners were likely to support fellow pensioners and retired persons.

“I give some to my neighbour because she is not capable of growing her own garden, as she is too old. In return she supports me by buying turnips from me.” (Mrs K, Tanti)

“Most of my neighbours are pensioners and the pension money is little which means they sometimes approach us for help. When we have something in the garden, we generously give to them if we can”. (Mr Q, Joza).

It is perhaps telling that the youngest and novice gardener in the study, who is also a part-time worker with a community advocate organisation, reported that his HIV positive neighbours had benefited from his fresh produce. “Some HIV-positive people have approached us asking for lettuce and other vegetables which we give them.” His was one of the few spontaneous mentions of the benefit of fresh produce to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Benefits of Gardening

What savings do households with gardens incur? There were no straightforward answers to this question. Using housewife’s logic, savings were substantial.

“If you have got 10 Rand you won’t be able to buy potatoes and carrots for that in town. But if you grow your own vegetables, you will cook from the garden instead of buying from town and keep that 10 Rand for buying electricity.” (Mrs L, Fingo)

Some households were virtually self-sufficient in vegetables. Casual gardener, Mr D from Fingo Village, bought only vegetable seed. Many of the respondents interviewed in the first two months of 2003 stated they had not bought vegetables since December, the Christmas holidays, or during the past two months. This is no mean achievement for a household of thirteen.

“A bag of potatoes, for instance, is very expensive. I usually buy a 10 kg bag of potatoes because I have a big family. Since December last year I have not bought potatoes,

pumpkins and cabbages. I did not buy vegetables for the whole of last month as I had harvested from the garden. I can't really estimate the amount of money saved from growing my own garden". (Fingo pensioner Mrs G who feeds her family of 13 from her garden)

Disincentives to Gardening

A list of disincentives was drawn up from the responses to the question on why people were no longer interested in gardening. Perceived disincentives included laziness ("I don't see why an able bodied male in a household cannot take a spade or fork and work in the garden"). Lack of implements ("You cannot go around borrowing garden implements") and increasing levels of crime ("People say growing a garden is a waste of time because at night thieves will come and steal your vegetables"). Space constraints ("Most people have built flats for rental on their land"); and instant rewards ("They don't want to work and wait before they can eat"). The closure of the vegetable market when the Market Square shopping mall was built, was seen as a further disincentive to grow a garden.

The perceived disincentives in the list above correspond to many of the problems, which the gardeners in the study face. While the veteran gardeners are determined to overcome such problems or make light of them, novice gardeners may not be as hardy.

Problems Encountered by Gardeners

Respondents were asked whether growing a garden was an easy or difficult task. The respondents identified several problems. Pests and stray animals were major headaches for many gardeners. Theft was a minor problem except in Tantiyi. The weather and labour were worries for a few. Only the novice gardener admitted that he required instructions to become an expert although many said they felt helpless in coping with their pest problem.

Pests of all kinds appeared to be the worst problems for the gardeners. Moles, caterpillars and snails added to the problems. Mr Q of Joza was not alone in admitting defeat: "I don't have any remedy for them so I do nothing to get rid of them." Two gardeners from Tantiyi said they had invested in commercial pesticides bought from Phoenix Roller Mills and another outlet in town. Others found ash very effective and more affordable. For example, Mrs G, a Fingo pensioner complained that she could not consume last year's cabbages from her garden because they were worm-infested. "I usually sprinkle ash to kill pests because I can't afford to buy pesticides, but ash is sometimes difficult to find as most people use paraffin for cooking."

Livestock such as cattle, goats, and donkeys, which roam freely in Grahamstown East, are a major problem for all gardeners especially for those whose fences are in disrepair. Even fences are no deterrent to the neighbours' dogs and chickens that bury under fences and dig out seedlings. "I report them to their owners but nothing is done to stop them." Good relations with neighbours were often strained by the livestock problem in Joza. "It is difficult to just impound someone's livestock because we try to maintain good relations with our neighbours." Another Joza gardener said cattle were less of a problem than formerly because his neighbours now grazed their cattle on the commonage on the edge of the township.

Another Joza gardener said he relied on his dog and a locked gate to scare away potential thieves. Roaming livestock and theft are lesser problems for gardeners such as Mr S in Fingo who have a good fence and lock their gate.

"I have a good fence here as you can see. Livestock enters only if someone has forgotten to lock the gate. Theft is not a problem at all here. I can even leave my washing outside and it won't be stolen."

Other gardeners reported few problems except for the weather. Mr N of Fingo expected a poor harvest for the season: "We have had very little rainfall and the sun has been very hot." Mr G of Joza referred more generally to the erratic and extreme weather conditions in Grahamstown, which borders on the semi-arid grazing lands of the Karoo. "We sometimes experience severe droughts here in Grahamstown that badly affect our crops. Sometimes rain damages our plants. It can rain heavily when it rains." Mr S from Fingo Village likened his gardening to a small business. A businessman must be prepared to take some risks. Investing seed money was a gamble. "You don't always get a good harvest. Sometimes that means you have lost. You see it is like running a business."

Some few respondents said that their age made it more difficult for them to work in the garden. One of the older gardeners complained of back strain. However, older experienced gardeners were often reluctant to let other members of family or hired help take over tasks, which required special skills such as planting.

Only few incidences of theft of vegetables had occurred. Tanti gardens seemed to be worst affected. Mr M recalled that "one night I was going to the toilet and I found a thief stealing my tomatoes. Unfortunately when he saw me he ran away." The 89-year-old Tanti gardener, who lives alone, thought his garden was a target. "Because I stay alone, people see when I am not here and they come and steal my potatoes. I think it is young boys who are sent to come and steal vegetables. This is becoming a major problem."

Theft was not a problem in Fingo and according to Mr T, Joza thieves were more interested in expensive appliances than his vegetables. His gardening implements had been stolen one night but not his vegetables: "Thieves came one night and stole my wheelbarrow, two watering cans and other implements. I woke up at about 5 am and most of my implements were gone. If I were someone else I would have completely stopped gardening. "

Costs of seed and labour were a lesser problem except for pensioners on a tight budget. For example, the retired health worker relied on paid assistance. The retired schoolteacher in the study thought the outlay of some 200 to 300 Rand to employ a person to prepare the soil and a further 100 Rand for the planting was reasonable and worthwhile. However, Mrs G, a pensioner in Fingo, who feeds a household of thirteen from her garden and cannot afford to employ labour, said she was sometimes forced to do the hard work of cleaning and tilling the soil if her grandchildren were busy with their school work during term time. Mr Q of Joza explained that he had prepared the ground for planting but would have to wait until pension day to purchase seeds.

The young novice gardener from Tanti was the only one to state lack of knowledge as a problem. He had recently bought an almanac that contained useful gardening tips. He was keen to learn more about the best times to plant and how and when to apply fertilizer.

After hearing the list of problems which gardeners face, it became clear that even the worst of these problems, such as pests and occasional theft, would not deter most gardeners from working the soil. As the Tanti gardener who has experienced both problems of pests and theft declared: "We continue to plant our gardens despite all these problems."

Conclusion

The mainly older individuals interviewed in the neighbourhoods of Fingo Village, Tanti and Joza in Grahamstown East/Rini in early 2003 are dedicated gardeners, who are convinced of the value of gardening. In their experience, gardening is an essential part of life. Gardeners know they can feed themselves and their families and will never starve. There are many different types of returns from growing food ranging from the convenience of 'eating from the garden', to savings, to self-respect and enhanced health and wellbeing. Gardening appeals to people's sense of beauty and gives purpose to life. Knowing one will never starve or have to beg for food from neighbours is a strong incentive to garden, which boosts the self-respect of pensioners. Pensioners with fresh produce to spare are in a position to give as well as receive from family and neighbours.

Although respondents cannot attach a price tag to the yield from their gardens, they know that their efforts are worthwhile and contribute to a better standard of living. Without the savings from not having

to purchase vegetables, they would have to forfeit many basic needs. Garden produce has helped to put children through school and to pay the electricity bill. The less tangible rewards, which enhance quality of life, are the nutrition and exercise benefits and the sense of fulfilment in reaping the fruits of one's labour. These gains may be just as important as the monetary ones.

The discussion with the older residents revealed that there is more than meets the eye to gardening. Gardens may make for neat and tidy surrounds to a township home and beautiful to behold. However, the dedicated gardener also understands the underlying values. He or she respects the environment and wishes to play a part in protecting it for future generations. Land should be made fruitful, not wasted was the viewpoint of the gardeners in the study.

One might think that the rising cost of food, especially of staples such as maize, would enhance the appeal of growing one's own fresh produce. However, as the study shows, food gardens belong to a bygone era in Grahamstown East. Many of the once beautiful gardens of Fingo Village have vanished. The owners have sacrificed them to backyard tenants or have let them become overgrown with weeds.

It is evident that gardening suffers from an image problem. Gardening is with an old-fashioned lifestyle, with backbreaking, boring, menial, and dirty work. The youth are interested in the fast life rather than an occupation that depends on seasonal change and the unpredictable changes of wind and rain.

Gardening is also associated with survival rather than affluence. It is regarded as a matter of constraint rather than choice. As one pensioner from Fingo Village put it: "Maybe they are not struggling like I do. When you are poor, you resort to anything in order to survive." Poverty alleviation, income supplementation, and a means of saving were some of the major motivators for gardeners identified in the study. Nonetheless, even if gardening is associated with pensioner survival rather than youthful ambition, the older gardeners in the study maintain that growing a garden keeps them young and healthy,

A major concern for the older gardeners in the study, most of whom learnt gardening skills in childhood from their parents or grandparents, is that the tradition of gardening will soon be lost if ways are not found to interest the young generation of its value.

For the respondents of the survey, the young generation epitomises the attitude of self-indulgent, thoughtlessness and lack of respect for people and the environment typical of people who are too lazy to garden. Some of the respondents who have tried to pass on the tradition of gardening to the younger generation have found their efforts have been in vain. Their advice has fallen on deaf ears. Some of the older gardeners admit that even their own children and grandchildren are not interested in following in their footsteps. They are worried that when they die their children will not care for the garden they have nurtured for many years.

The disincentives to garden listed by respondents are a broad reflection of the general social problems facing contemporary South African society. Social mobility in urban areas has undermined neighbourliness. Rising unemployment has taken its toll on the social fabric. Lack of respect for neighbour's property may render gardeners' efforts in vain. Moreover, the value of self-reliance appears to have been lost in the Eastern Cape, which is highly dependent on government assistance to survive. The state old age pension feeds entire households in the poorest of South Africa's nine provinces. The respondents in the study argue that savings from growing a garden makes the pension go further. In their view, the youth do not seem to value their efforts to secure livelihoods for their families.

The respondents see themselves as the custodians of a dying tradition. They are afraid they may not succeed in instilling a love for gardening among the younger generation until it is too late. They place their hopes on reviving interest in gardening through public education. For the sake of bringing back the gardens, respondents might be willing to back mass campaigns and communal projects, which they know, have limited chances of success. However, support from local government and non-governmental organisations may be vital for the success of the campaign aimed at reviving the culture of gardening. Meanwhile, the gardeners in the study serve as role models to spread the word that gardening enhances quality of life and improves food security.

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