



iBandla nomHlaba

News from the Church Land Programme



People's Food and People's Sovereignty

From walking and working with groups and communities who struggle for food and for sovereignty in the lives, we know that there are so many people who go to sleep without food – often for three days and more at a time. Our country's history of violence, conquest and theft undermined the social, political and productive lives of the people. It deliberately attacked the ability of the majority to live their lives to the full and on their own terms. And even after more than 15 years of our so-called 'democracy', the masses of the people, especially in rural areas, still struggle for life. Being landless, penniless, jobless, sick and without the resources for farming (which includes access to safe, affordable water) are some of the reasons why these people cannot produce.

In this newsletter we share some aspects of these different places and the struggles of the people there. There are many things in common across the different experiences and places. But it is also very important to understand the actual situation of each place. In each case, it is necessary to respect the thinking, strategies and leadership of the people over their own lives and struggles. When those who suffer take back their own peoples' power and take their own struggles forward, then there is the possibility to really transform the situation for the better and to really ensure that others and outsiders (like the government or NGOs) work in a positive way with the people to achieve that transformation. What we know definitely does *not* work is imposing the ideas and plans of others and outsiders over the people!



Zamintuthuko

The Zamintuthuko farmers group was given land by the church to use it for "poverty eradication". This land is in Zinqoleni village (called Manzamhlophe) on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, near Port Shepstone. The land falls under the Xolo traditional authority (TA). Zamintuthuko has had a long journey. The group has faced internal and external struggles, but its determination has brought them to where they are today. They were trained in organic farming by the Farmer Support Group (FSG) using a portion of the farm for demonstration. They have produced food, eaten some of it within their families, and also sold some of the produce.

But, after a year, the family that gave them permission to use this portion chased them away! So they moved and prepared another portion where they were not able to produce as before because of moles and the fact that it was not safe for members – most of them are women and the new portion was located deep inside the forest area.

They requested access to a safer portion and the church agreed to this. For the past two years now, they have produced and eaten. Though they face different challenges, they overcome them because they are strongly committed to the dream of feeding their families from their own produce and selling a surplus to support their families.

Zamintuthuko has a number of resource people helping them. But some who were supposed to be supportive actually want to exercise their power over the people. When these outsiders get frustrated,

they start to spread negative reports about the group. Fortunately CLP was there to counteract that because we have a good understanding of Zamintuthuko's journey. The group also experiences oppression from the government extension officer who has threatened the group. She was claiming the group lacks certain skills and that therefore they must include other people in their work. But the group has refused this because they have been through a lot to achieve what they have and this move by the extension is just a way to make them give up some of the land to people they don't know. The extension officer is also insisting they use fertilizer and, although the church is against this, they are being forced to accept it to an extent because they are benefiting somehow from the department. So it is a kind of blackmail. But in all these aspects of oppression, the Zamintuthuko group is resisting.

In 2009, the actions of the extension officer created division within the group when she suggested they remove the crops that were not ready for harvesting so she could show them how to plant according to her methods! This never happened for a couple of months and it was hurting the people because they would have been able to eat if they had not been overpowered by the extension officer's plans. Instead of eating their crops when they would have been ready, a lot of time and work was wasted fetching water from a far distance, buying the new seeds, removing weeds and working very hard to remove their own crops! Some have to walk a long distance to get to the fields in any case so this really took up a lot of the people's resources. They still feel they need the extension officer because she buys seeds for

them and delivers the seeds which save the people some money.

Zamintuthuko's observation about packaged and bought food is that, although the amounts are getting less, the prices are increasing. Their aim is to plant, eat and sell. They find that they can eat more of the "low grade" cabbage they grow even before it's ready for harvest by pruning leaves. This is important because vegetables like cabbage are mostly consumed in winter and the market price tends to increase in such a way that it becomes difficult to buy it. They say it is because it is one of the multi-purpose vegetables and that schools feeding schemes also demand it.

Zamintuthuko does not own this land they are using. Last year they learnt that it has been claimed by the Xolo Traditional Authority (TA). The church is not challenging the claim, but is prepared to negotiate that Zamintuthuko keeps the portion it is using because they eat from this land.

St Joseph

St Joseph, in Ladysmith, is a Catholic mission farm under Diocese of Dundee. The farm is divided into two sections – Zibomvini and Foloyi. Zibomvini is using all the portions that were demarcated for crop farming with the help of Department of Agriculture. At Foloyi however they cannot do this because the engine that they are using is very heavy to use and the people who are involved in farming are old and mostly its women.

Every year they produce, consume and sell. All their produce is organic. Like Zamintuthuko, they were trained by FSG and they don't compromise! In the case of St Joseph, their government extension officer also encouraged organic farming because it's sustainable and produces healthy food. FSG had discussed this with the extension officer before training began, and he has supported the idea.

St Joseph people farm as two groups and also as individuals at their homesteads. Some groups are also involved in chicken broiler production both to consume and to sell in order to support their families. These groups also face a number of challenges but they persevere because they must feed their families from what they get from these farming activities.

This community has been in the struggle for land for a number of years but they are not sitting back and doing nothing. They are actively committed to being involved in farming activities even though they don't actually own land yet. For many years now there has been no progress in properly transferring the land to the people. Initially the church wanted to sell land to the community through government's land redistribution programme but the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) convinced the community to request the church to donate it. The DLA argued that the process was going to take too long since there was no eviction threat like there might be on other privately-owned farms. The church agreed to the idea but the delays and challenges seem never to end. For example, it took about two years for the government just to appoint the necessary service providers for the process to get under-way! There was long delay even after that because the title deed for the land has been lost. For a long time, the church was arguing that the government should get the title deed itself – and the government was saying the owner should get it because one cannot transfer without a title deed. This struggle dragged on for even longer when the bishop retired and the whole process had to wait for the new bishop – that took another two or more years. And when the new bishop took over, there was still a delay because he had to ask the church lawyers to get the title deed. This has taken about another two years over and above the drawn out processes we've already described.

The people of St Joseph requested two things from the church:

1. a ten year lease agreement so that they access the government resources and
2. that the church should apply for the title deed.

The farm committee St Joseph CPA and CLP has been communicating with the church about the lost title deeds up until the 7th May 2010 when they all had a meeting and a letter was read out saying that the lawyers have received a letter from DLA deeds office that the title will be available before the end of May 2010.

Nkunzi

Nkunzi is between Dundee and Ladysmith. There are land-owners and tenants living on this land. The tenants are denied rights – their access to using the land, and even their rights to developing their houses are restricted. Nevertheless, the tenants use land to produce food that they consume and sell. An old woman there produces food crops and sells to shop-owners nearby. She takes mielie cobs to the mill to produce maize meal. She has built her house and paid for her children's education with the money she gets from these activities.



This community feels that the seeds they used to get were better because you could re-use them. But the seeds they get now are full of chemicals and you can only use them once. They feel that by this, the big seed companies and merchants want them to always come back to them for more seeds ...

The people at Nkunzi reported that they used to live on commercial farms. They rarely ate meat because they were far from shops where they could buy it. But now it is simply the high levels of poverty that is the cause for not eating meat – much as they would love to. In the past they used to eat 'traditional' foods like sour milk, beans sjingi (mixture of pumpkin and maize meal), and sjabane (mixture of maize meal and mbati). They say that the modern food we eat is loaded with chemicals and that is why they prefer to produce their own crops – they are healthier compared to supermarket produce.

This community also feels that the seeds they used to get were better because you could re-use them. But the seeds they get now are full of chemicals and you can only use them once. They feel that by this, the big seed companies and merchants want them to always come back to them for more seeds and this community cannot afford this since bus fare is costly too.

Roosboom

The Roosboom community is near Ladysmith. It was once relocated in a forced removal during apartheid and the people lost everything. Since then it has been very difficult for most community members. Although some people were born into well-off families, the community as a whole is poverty-stricken since most community members are unemployed. Some families go to bed hungry. Some survive by picking up things from trash cans and rubbish dumps and selling them to feed their families. Those with odd jobs also try to farm a bit in order to afford a meal for the day. Here, old people prefer 'traditional food' and they also prefer to eat their own chickens instead of meat bought from shops.

People in the community learnt about running a vegetable farm from some Germans. One resident, Mrs Zwane, relies on farming as her main source of income. She plants mealies and sells them to the mills to make healthy maize meal that is chemical free – and it is cheaper and healthier. She tends to buy her meat from the shops but if she cannot afford that, she eats one of her chickens. Another woman plants melons, mealies, potatoes and other vegetables because her doctor told her to refrain from eating meat because it is unhealthy. Another guy said he does not enjoy the traditional food which his grandmother cooks! He also said when he gets odd jobs, he buys himself meat from the shops. Ms Dladla explained some of the difficulties of being unemployed, as she is: she does not have money to buy seeds and even if she obtains money for seeds, it would still be difficult since she would not have enough money to erect a fence to prevent cattle from destroying her plants. If it was possible for her to plant she says she would have planted tomatoes because you only buy seeds once.

Howick

Florence lives on a farm that belongs to the Duncan family in Howick. Since this farmer bought the land, Florence has not lived in peace. The Duncan's cows eat her plants, she has been barred access to the water supply, and Mr Duncan once beat her son on his way home. Sometimes the farmer comes to threaten her with a gun. Despite reporting this to the police, he has never been arrested. Through all of this, Florence has to feed her family through farming to ensure they do not go to bed hungry. She also tries to sell some of her produce to neighbouring supermarkets and her neighbours. She approaches supermarkets herself to get deals to deliver vegetables to them. Sometimes when people pass by her home they see her produce and buy from her.

Conclusion

In visiting the communities we work with, we would like to understand all their challenges so that their efforts, and our support, really can make a better whole life for the people – not just picking one aspect. Most people in these areas have experienced going to bed without even a meal for the day, sometimes even up to three days or more. This is wrong and as CLP we will support and assist these communities in their struggles for change and justice.