

## **PROFILES OF POSSIBILITY (Emerging Voices 2)**

### **Pockets of resistance, action, learning and hope outside of formal institutions**

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To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

(Howard Zinn, 2011)



[Abalimi Bezekhaya, Cape Flats](#)

To be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing.

(Raymond Williams)

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## 2. BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE PROFILES OF POSSIBILITY RESEARCH

The Education Policy Consortium (EPC), made up of five units<sup>1</sup>, is currently involved in a large-scale research project on Building a Progressive Network of Critical Research and Public Engagement: Towards a Democratic Post-School Sector. This project, funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) calls for ‘alternative research’ to inform and challenge current thinking on the post-school education and training (PSET) sector.

A component of the EPC project is Emerging Voices 2 (EV2): Towards a Progressive Post-Schooling Sector which aims to:

- Gain a deep understanding of learner-citizens in communities and their experience of PSET, and
- Generate an imagination of PSET that will better serve a progressive vision for human development.<sup>2</sup>

Four centres are involved in EV2 and the research has already resulted and will result in various outputs, including a book. A large part of the research focuses on formal institutions, such as Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs). Non-formal and informal learning spaces are also studied through the Community Snapshots and Profiles of Possibility. This report focuses on the *Profiles of Possibility* - research undertaken by the Nelson Mandela Institute (NMI) (University of Fort Hare).

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<sup>1</sup> The units are: the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT), University of Johannesburg, the Centre for Integrated Post-School Education and Training (CIPSET), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the Centre for Researching Education and Labour (REAL), University of the Witwatersrand, and the Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development (NMI), University of Fort Hare

<sup>2</sup> <http://epc.cepd.org.za/?q=content/projects/emerging-voices-2-towards-progressive-post-schooling-sector>

### 3. PROFILES OF POSSIBILITY: WHAT ARE THEY?

We live in a global context within which many are hungry, sick, oppressed, unemployed, dehumanised - victims of a system which increasingly favours only a few. According to the latest research by Oxfam, the wealthiest 1% of the global population will own more than 50% of the world's wealth by 2016.<sup>3</sup>

Restakis writes of “the tangible effects of this global economic order “which he says “are visible in the wages people earn if they are lucky enough to have a job, in the prices they get for their coffee beans, in the cleanliness of their drinking water, in the quality of their shelter and whether or not their children will go to school. These are the battles for survival and the prospect of life with dignity that billions of people the world over have to wage day in and day out” (2010: 2).

Within this unjust system, there are millions who are angry and fighting back in many forms - showing their resilience, strength, courage and desire for change - for a fair and just world for them and their children. ‘Enough is Enough/Ya Basta!’ is heard in many languages in many countries. People are victims of a system, but they are not victims within.

These numerous movements, spaces, groupings, organisations, ideas, learnings, activities, and ways of doing things differently - relative to and against the dominant, oppressive system of global corporate capitalism - are referred to by different terms, such as ‘possibilities’, ‘alternatives’, ‘transitions’, ‘prefigurative expressions’, ‘intermediaries’- these are characterised by forms of ‘socially-useful work’ and are part of the ‘solidarity economy’. We will use the term ‘possibilities’ to refer to these spaces/entities for the purposes of this report.

These ‘possibilities’ argue for something new, possible, better, equitable and just. They often do this against all odds - they struggle to survive and constantly bump up against power and domination. And yet, against all of this, they are there - they exist, even if they are marginalised and invisible to many or even to most.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-30875633>

Prior to this research (Profiles of Possibility), the NMI undertook research to do with the nature of work<sup>4</sup> and looked at work that serves a purpose other than economic, sometimes referred to as ‘socially-useful work’. The Profiles of Possibility research flowed from and drew from this earlier research work. The Profiles of Possibility research explores groups involved in this sort of work with a specific focus on the *learning* that happens there – learning which may not be confined to a classroom; or to a day, week or month; or may not happen in a traditional way of ‘teacher - expert’ and ‘student - empty vessel’; or may not be prescribed; or may not have formal assessment, but which takes place everywhere in a more-or-less continuous process of engagement with ideas, strategies and actions. Our search was for learning within a group/organisation/community<sup>5</sup> that is connected to the everyday struggles of people within that group. We concur with Foley as he states: “For me the most interesting and significant learning occurs informally and incidentally, in people’s everyday lives. And some of the most powerful learning occurs as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways of doing something about it” (1999: 1-2).

This kind of learning can hopefully point to something new, better and more meaningful in what has come to be termed the ‘post-school’ sector - the education/training/development that happens *around* schooling. For example, within this sector, one would find an adult learning to read and write for the first time and a student at a higher education institution.

The Profiles of Possibility research was undertaken for almost a year (most of 2014) and took us around South Africa (and globally via the Internet and books). We visited nine South African groups - Is'baya Development Trust; Khanyisa Education and Development Trust; Istoseng Women’s Project; Abalimi Bezekhaya; Workers’World Media Productions; Workers’ College; Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action; Unemployed People’s Movement; and Bulungula Incubator. We conducted an additional five interviews with the following: Biowatch South Africa; Community Monitors; Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre; Earthrise Trust. The Rustlers Valley Development Initiative; and Simbhademe.

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<sup>4</sup> See: Baatjes, B. 2014. Work: hope and possibilities. Johannesburg: CERT, University of Johannesburg (joint NMI, CIPSET, CERT publication)

<sup>5</sup> We use the term ‘group’ in the report to refer to ‘group’ and ‘organisation’ and ‘community’

The international examples include: Barefoot College; Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative; Florestan Fernandes School; Self Employed Women's Association; The Social Science Centre, Lincoln (Social Centres); The Rad School; and Trade Schools (the last one is an alternative *model*, rather than a single example).

The nine South African examples are described and discussed in detail in this report. The five additional interviews are referred to, but not described and discussed in detail. The seven international examples are described briefly. Learnings gleaned from these are then discussed.

All groups willingly accepted our request to visit (no official letters were required; e-mail requests sufficed). With regard to how the visit/s unfolded, we asked each group what would suit them with regard to the number of days we could spend with them, etc. (we informed them what the research entailed/what it was we wanted to learn from them). Visits ranged from a few hours to three days. Prior to the first visit, we prepared a questionnaire which we did not go through question-by-question after the first day of the first visit! (See the questionnaire - Appendix One). It simply served as a guide and was helpful for researchers who joined visits for the first time - see more on this below. We held discussions with participants in the language of their choice. Translation either happened on-site or after the visit. We adapted and changed questions as the visits progressed. We did this so that we could have deeper discussions and understand what was happening more fully. "The nature of qualitative interviewing means that the questioning is redesigned throughout the project" (Babbie, 2013: 346).

The broader questions of this research beyond the questionnaire are as follows:

- Where is the group located, what is its history, what are its 'objectives', what activities take place, who is involved, etc.?
- What about this group caught our attention? Why was it selected as a Profile of Possibility? What is happening that demonstrates/points to new possibilities for the post-school sector (this may just be certain *elements* from each)? What are the struggles, barriers and threats that the group faces? What is the group's response to them?



- How do people involved in this group (participants, facilitators, co-ordinators, others connected in some way, etc.) experience it? How do participants experience the relationship between what they learn and their lives?
- What are the lessons to be learned from this group and their application to the post-school sector?

We did not prescribe how many participants from each group should take part and therefore the numbers ranged from very few (Workers' World Media Productions) to many (Is'baya Development Trust interviewees).

Besides the discussions, we were able to observe some 'learning in action' as part of the visits. For example, we sat in on a workshop while visiting Khanyisa Education and Development Trust and one researcher attended one day of a Women's Assembly (Unemployed People's Movement). We also observed people doing their work, such as the Itsoseng Women's Project (recycling) and the Abalimi Bezekhaya farmers.

I attended all nine visits and interviewed people from the five additional organisations. Numbers of researchers per visit ranged from four to six. Prior to each visit, an invitation was sent out to all EV2 team members including the Young Research Learning Advocacy (YRLA) teams. Different YRLA team members joined for all visits. Three EPC team members (not EV2) also attended visits (two - UPM; one - Bulungula Incubator) as well as a volunteer from the USA (volunteering at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) at the time) - she joined for Workers' College, PACSA and Biowatch South Africa.

I remained in e-mail contact with all the groups visited and a draft report was sent to them for their comments. Most groups responded. Earlier drafts of the report were sent to EV2 team members who were able to provide feedback as the research unfolded. This work has also been presented in various fora, such as the EPC Annual Researchers Workshop 'Building our emerging critique, alternative landscapes' (held in Johannesburg from 9-11 December 2014). The research process allowed for more participation and interaction as compared to a more traditional academic research process.

*AN IMPORTANT NOTE RE 'WHERE'*

The examples we found are not located within formal institutions - even though some are connected to formal institutions, such as Workers' College (to UKZN) through a programme. We acknowledge that there are people, groups and organisations doing or attempting to do something 'different' to the mainstream/traditional within formal institutions - like the Grounding Programme at Fort Hare University and the Community Education Programme (CEP) at the Centre for Integrated Post-school Education and Training (CIPSET) at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). There are global examples too, such as the International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics who argue for something other than neo-classical economics to be taught (see their open letter - Appendix Two). Even though our research does not include these kinds of examples, we are aware of pockets of 'otherness' happening in many spaces, including in traditional, formal institutions.

What follows is a detailed description of the nine South African examples (Profiles of Possibility) followed by a brief description of the seven international examples and the five additional South African 'interviews'. Thereafter, we provide our findings and analysis and recommendations. It is important to note two points. Firstly, we have highlighted elements that we believe can serve to strengthen the post-school sector. We did not critique each group, but rather pulled from each the elements we think are useful and valuable learnings, such as the use of Mother Tongue as the teaching/learning language, etc. However, having said that, we are mindful that context is key and what works in one context may not necessarily work in another.

Secondly, we note and acknowledge the fragility and vulnerability of most of the groups we visited and studied. They exist, but exist within a harsh framework which does not necessarily support, want or need them. Their very existence is based on struggle and hardship and it could end at any point because of the current context we all operate within. However, their fragility or vulnerability should *not* prevent us from acknowledging and learning from their many strengths and possibilities.

#### **4. SOUTH AFRICAN PROFILES OF POSSIBILITY**

**Is'baya Development Trust** in a few words:

## *Learning for and from the whole village*



Fruit and vegetables in Noqhekwana and Qhaka Villages, near Port St Johns

Is'baya Development Trust<sup>6</sup> was founded in 1998 and was registered as a public benefit trust in 2001. Is'baya believes that in seeking rural development solutions, people should be at the centre of their own development. Is'baya identifies partners and resources, and co-ordinates all activities including assisting with building capacity in communities for the attainment of greater self-reliance. Is'baya has an office in Somerset West, Western Cape, and a field office in Port St Johns, Eastern Cape. Is'baya has worked in the Port St Johns area for 15 years. The initial Is'baya work in the area - with the Agricultural Research Council's Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops - was a feasibility study to test, amongst other things, soil and water, but very soon (according to Rosemary du Preez from ARC) there was a realisation that this was not simply about what fruit and vegetables can grow well where - this was "about people's lives".

Noqhekwana and Qhaka, the two villages we visited in the Port St Johns area, Eastern Cape, are nothing short of picture-perfect. In fact photographs do not do their beauty justice. One has to be there to 'feel' the immense beauty. While the setting is breath-taking - greenery everywhere, mountains to one side, the sea to another - the daily lives of the villagers is not without hardship and struggle. Amid the abundant fruit and vegetables which villagers grow so that they can feed themselves and their communities, there is a long walk to fetch water and a shortage of other resources, like farming implements, transport, amongst other things. Khanyisile Ngalo, one of the researchers, sums up the hardships which are common-place within the village:

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<sup>6</sup> Visit One - Is'baya Development Trust, 14-15 April, Researchers: Sonya Leurquain-Steyn & Olwam Mngwazi (CIPSET, NMMU) and Khanyisile Ngalo & Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH)

Noqhekwana Village is 10km away from town, a misleading measure if gauged by the urban experience. The village was roughly a 40 minute drive from town owing to the gravel road, pot holes and the mountainous landscape, telling of the spatial inequality between the rural and its urban counterpart. On our way to Noqhekwana we passed children playing in a lake on the side of the road to keep busy, while parents washed their clothes.

Further along we saw a young girl - head wrapped to cushion it from the heavy bucket of water on her head - walking up the hill to her home. We drove through many scattered clusters of huts and counted one school and one clinic.

Sites and scenes perhaps telling of the challenges we were to be acquainted with in the village we were about to visit...

Is'baya's current initiative, in partnership with the ARC-Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops is Uvuselelo - Integrated Village Renewal Programme (IVRP) - a long-term (seven years plus) holistic rural development model that integrates various elements and is implemented interactively with organised village communities. Currently there are 57 villages involved (over 5 500 households).

The various programme elements, not all of which are yet in operation - mainly due to financial constraints - are:

- agricultural production - integrated farming based on conservation agriculture (small-scale);
- technical support and training;
- trade and business development strategy;
- heritage study;
- community health management strategy;
- appropriate ICT resources;
- economic impact; and
- infrastructure - including access to water, roads, communications, schools, etc.

Each village has a Community Development Association (CDA) (Uphuhliso) in which all village households are invited to join and participate - the idea is that the community as a whole should be engaged so that the whole village can be developed. Through the

Community Development Practitioners (CPRs), the CDA gathers the needs of community members. At the moment agriculture is the activity mostly done in the villages - it is the most viable economic activity (other activities/enterprises are not discouraged - on the contrary - but funding to date has largely been for agriculture). See more below under 'The village as a site of development'.

If a household agrees to join, they will (after some training by ARC) be able to grow fruit and vegetables in order to feed themselves and also sell to other villagers. The producer and consumer are brought closer together - there is a greater connection between the two - this we know is better for the local economy and for the environment, amongst other considerations. Each household makes a contribution to the cost of the trees. A farmer said: "These are my trees". 'I live off my own produce. I sell them too'.

Besides household production, there is also commercial production. 'Commercial' can be understood to mean the selling of produce within the village/s - farmers set their price within a village so as not to compete but to co-operate (for example, all farmers may decide to set their banana price at R1 - there is no under-cutting of one by another). Soap is also sold within the village/s as is juice.

There are a few examples of more conventional 'commercial' selling by what Is'baya terms the 'lead' farmers (e.g. to guesthouses in the area). But there are numerous barriers to the farmers doing this more broadly. These include a lack of transport - some of the villages are not easily accessible even by car; issues with regard to health and safety - the value-added goods, like the jams, are not made in an environment that meets health and safety requirements; and marketing constraints (to do with resources, both financial and human).

The aims of the programme are:

- Households are able to produce at least sufficient food for themselves;
- Farmers make the transition from subsistence farming to commercial production;
- Farmers have access to timely and quality technical services;
- Farmers can convert these inputs into improved food security<sup>7</sup> and livelihoods.

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<sup>7</sup> While Is'baya refers to 'food security' (and by this they mean "nutritional security for every household"), what they do could, in fact, be termed 'food sovereignty'

Food sovereignty<sup>8</sup> is about putting the people who produce, distribute and consume food at the centre of decisions on food systems and policies, rather than corporations and market institutions which have come to dominate the global food system. It is about transforming the agricultural sector towards sustainability; it is about localisation of production and consumption. It opposes the commodification of food and is about the re-democratisation of it. Food sovereignty advocates agroecology which is essentially a way of farming that works with nature rather than against it, using traditional knowledge as well as new knowledge generated largely through practice and scientific research. It is linked to the struggle for social and economic justice.

Food security, on the other hand, is about making nutritious food universally accessible. As long as the food system is controlled by multinational corporations who have commodified food, nutritious food will remain inaccessible to all. Food security is *not* about transforming the way the system is set up or the way it works while food sovereignty is precisely about that.

Is'baya and ARC have introduced to the villages an integrated farm system which produces a continuous, reliable and balanced supply of foods. Fruit is intercropped with vegetables and herbs (essential oils) are also grown. Manure, compost, etc. are natural and sourced from the surrounds as much as possible.

Farmers (who are mostly female) receive agricultural training from ARC technicians. The training happens 'on-farm' - in each village - and starts with some theory - the 'how' and 'why'. The majority of the training is practical. The training happens over time (ongoing) and is in sync with the growing of the trees/plants. For example, planting is taught and then 'application' happens. Then an ARC technician returns and teaches the next phase of the growing cycle (for example, a pruning technician will teach pruning, etc.). Then application happens. And so it continues. There are handouts in isiXhosa and in English with clear visuals. Farmers do not have to be 'literate' - those who cannot read or write are assisted by those who can. Farmers are taught how to make the 'value-added' products such as jam and juice in the village/s too. This is done by demonstration.

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from: Baatjes, B. 2014. Work: hope and possibilities. Johannesburg: CERT, University of Johannesburg

This education, which is not formalised, is accompanied by informal learning in 'sit-by-Nelly' scenarios - farmers told us they teach others what they have learned. Coombs (1985) defines informal learning as "the spontaneous, unstructured learning that goes on daily in the home and neighbourhood, behind the school and on the playing field, in the workplace, marketplace, library and museum, and through the various mass media" (Merriam et al, 2007: 35). This is aptly captured in the phrase: "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me, and I may not remember. Involve me, and I'll understand" (this thought to be of Native/indigenous American<sup>9</sup> or Chinese origin).

We refer to the terms 'literacy' and 'illiteracy' throughout this report. Today, despite changing definitions over the years, this still refers to the technical act of being able read and write (or not). We, like many others, challenge this 'standard picture of literacy'<sup>10</sup>.

Village Monitors (many of whom are young females) serve as the link between the farmers and Is'baya/ARC (they too have been trained in farming). They prepare and present a weekly timesheet to Is'baya highlighting any areas of concern, amongst other. They speak, read and write in English and are responsible for translating in the village/s if need be. Village Monitors receive a stipend.

Community Development Practitioners (CDPs) act as a link between the village/s and Is'baya. They are at the forefront of mobilisation and planning. A group of CDPs were trained by the South Africa Reflect Network in 2009 in REFLECT methodology. Initially Is'baya staff were also trained so that they could provide support to and monitor the CDPs. The training dealt with literacy and numeracy and conducting small group meetings in order to determine the needs expressed by community members (baseline studies) using participatory methods. The needs (per village group/s) are then presented to the CDA and put into the village plans. REFLECT stands for Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques and draws on the theories of Paulo Freire and participatory methodologies developed for Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

REFLECT<sup>11</sup> is an approach which encompasses the following. It:

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.jameshuggins.com/h/quo1/quotations\\_native\\_americans.htm](http://www.jameshuggins.com/h/quo1/quotations_native_americans.htm)

<sup>10</sup> See Winchester (1990) and also see 'What did we find and what does it mean?' below

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from: <http://www.sareflect.org>

- is overtly political and not 'neutral';
- respects and values people's existing knowledge and experiences. However, this does not mean one cannot challenge others' opinions or prejudices;
- involves creating a democratic space - one in which everyone's voice is given equal weight. This needs to be actively constructed, as it does not naturally exist;
- involves a continual cycle of reflection and action - it focuses on the practical and the connection to lived realities;
- uses a wide range of participatory tools;
- happens on an ongoing basis;
- expects the facilitator to engage in the process alongside the participants, subjecting her/his behaviour, experiences and opinions to the same analysis, rather than standing outside as teacher and judge. Ideally, the focus of the process should be towards self-organisation, so that groups are self-managed where possible rather than being facilitated by, or dependent on, outsiders.

The CDAs receive training relevant to their function within the village/s, such as 'roles and responsibilities' of an association/committee. Is'baya/ARC is responsible for this training. Other training includes an introduction to book-keeping/record-keeping and cooperative training done with DGRV (Deutscher Genossenschafts- und Raiffeisenverband e. V. – German Cooperative and Raiffeisen Confederation). This is done for the lead farmers (there are 39 cooperatives in the villages). Farming is done per household (not communal-ly) but things like purchasing supplies and marketing are done via the co-ops.

**Khanyisa Education and Development Trust** in a few words:

*Our dignity, yes land is our dignity*

*Land is life*

*1913 Land Act is gone*

*No, it is going*

*Yes it is still to be going*

*Free my soul*

By Gerald Mkele ('Free my soul' 2013).



Khanyisa Education and Development Trust's<sup>12</sup> office is located in Central, Port Elizabeth and it operates in the localities of the Sarah Baartman District Municipality in the Sundays River Valley, Kouga Municipalities and in KwaNobuhle, a township in Uitenhage.

Khanyisa was started in 1990 in response to the crisis in 'black' education in South Africa. With the advent of democracy in South Africa, the new government was tasked with dealing with education and, thus, Khanyisa shifted its focus. Its new focus became poverty and land, specifically access to and use of land. Khanyisa's bias is to the rural poor and those living in peri-urban settlements. Key to Khanyisa's work is to assist with the building of organisations. Khanyisa uses an approach called People's Participatory Planning and Action which is to do with organising and mobilising in order for people to effect change. Khanyisa's role in this is to support organising and mobilising. Khanyisa works with poor small-scale farmers (livestock, crop, small gardens - for example at schools); with those who have got land or who are trying to get land through the land reform programme or through the municipal commonage programme (in which land is leased to those who were unfairly discriminated against); and with those who have no land and have claims.

Simphiwe Dada is the Acting Director of Khanyisa and works with a team of four people (including himself) plus two interns. Khanyisa is affiliated to the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE). In May 2010 the Makukhanye Rural People's Movement was launched - it is supported by Khanyisa. In 2011 it had 1 200 members (no stats available currently). One of its successes has been its support for the work of rural women.

Khanyisa's work includes:

#### Land use

Khanyisa believes in working with nature in relation to land use. Agroecology is promoted and used (see more on agroecology under Is'baya above).

#### Gender

Women and leadership is a focus area of Khanyisa's. Issues of oppression, exploitation and challenges facing women in the household and at community level are being dealt with in a series of workshops facilitated by Khanyisa/DELTA. We attended a few hours of one such workshop on the 12 May. There were 12 participants (all female) from the

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<sup>12</sup> Visit Two - 12-13 May. Researchers: Enver Motala, Milisa Janda & Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH) and Mandisa Ndletyana (CIPSET, NMMU - YRLA team member)

Makukhanye Rural People's Movement. The workshop was facilitated by Nosandla Malindi from Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action (DELTA). Ms Malindi is based in Libode - one of the smallest rural towns in the Eastern Cape and she works with women from grassroots communities in order to assist them "to participate and hold leadership positions in decision-making in South Africa".<sup>13</sup>

DELTA describes itself as:

A collective training event to prompt action for social change. Its roots are in Freirean critical awareness, human relations training in group work, organisational development, social analysis and a conceptualisation of transformation derived from liberation theology.<sup>14</sup>

When we joined the group, the participants were in the process of giving feedback on flip-chart paper. Everyone spoke in isiXhosa and it was clear that the participants were quite comfortable in a participatory environment - everyone felt free to speak and voice their opinion/s. The various groups from different areas reported on what they had done after the last workshop. Issues ranged from a school having too few teachers (the group had written a letter about this), to a problem with dirty water (since resolved after they spoke to the councillor), to a concern about children going to school not washed and with dirty clothes (social workers subsequently intervened after the group sought help), to houses which had collapsed (but were then fixed). In the time we were in the workshop, the only references to farming were to some land which had just been handed over in Hankey and the facilitator's suggestion to one of the other groups to encourage community members to start their own backyard gardens. This is indicative of how an issue such as farming (particularly when one is poor) is inextricably linked to many other issues, such as those noted above. Being a poor farmer is a struggle and it is a struggle against many issues. Indeed, the group sang:

"Singabafazi Singumzabalazo" (We are the women. We are the struggle).

Khanyisa has an agreement with DELTA with regard to facilitating workshops. Khanyisa has facilitated several workshops on lobbying and advocacy and DELTA has reciprocated by facilitating workshops on women empowerment.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://blog.world-citizenship.org/wp-archive/963>

<sup>14</sup> <http://word.world-citizenship.org/wp-archive/1622>

## Youth

Generally stock farmers and crop producers are older and agriculture is often something viewed as and done by those who have no other opportunities. We were told that the youth are not that attracted to farming (indeed this is the dominant discourse view) - we have found some examples to dispute this - see Is'baya and Abalimi. One of the farmers we spoke with said that the advice he got from his Uncle was: "Ungaze uti uyindoda ungabinayo inkomo" (As a man you should have cows). He feels it is different with the present young generation including his children and said that "the culture has changed". We were also told that the farmers' children see their parents struggle in their farming and so do not want the same life. They would prefer a 'job' and therefore many sit at home and wait for a 'job'.

Khanyisa would like the youth to get more involved with agriculture/land and it has made some headway in this regard. They work with youth in certain areas. Khanyisa believes the youth will bring a renewed energy to this sector and its struggles.

Khanyisa also runs workshops on

- how government works, particularly with reference to policies to do with land, water, etc.;
- the political economy;
- building of organisations;
- how to build a campaign.

The workshops are usually in response to something - a problem or issue. For example, an organisational development workshop was held in response to certain challenges happening within the organisations and issues to do with leadership. The process works in the following way: discussions are held with a small group and a workshop is developed. Materials (including DVDs) are sourced from various NGOs, online, etc. The material is mainly in English and translation is used during the course (participants speak isiXhosa and Afrikaans). The workshops are not disconnected from the everyday struggles of the participants. In fact, they are in response to the everyday struggles - part of the learning within the workshops is to decide how the problem/issue will be taken up. This is action learning.

**Itsoseng Women's Project** in a few words:

*Rooted within the community - grassroots, organic, responsive*

The site where this community-based organisation, Itsoseng Women's Project<sup>15</sup>, ('Wake Up' in English) is located could be described as a site of rubbish, waste and dirt - it is that, but it is so much more! The poster hanging in the office of Gladys Mokolo (one of the founders) - a small room within a corrugated iron structure - succinctly sums up Itsoseng:



The saying “One man's trash is another man's treasure” couldn't resonate well enough, except that this group is made up of women (except for Bricks Mokolo (the other founder) who runs the Orange Farm Human Rights Advice Office - offering free advice - from a small container on the site).

Orange Farm is located approximately 45 km from Johannesburg. According to Ms Mokolo (Sis Gladys as she is known), Itsoseng was initiated in this informal settlement in 1997 as a response to post-1994 government policies such as GEAR, which resulted in more unemployment, more privatisation - such as the notorious pre-paid water metres in the area - and hence more poverty.

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<sup>15</sup> Visit Three - 19 May. Researchers: Enver Motala & Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH), Sonya Leurquain-Steyn (CIPSET, NMMU) and Nompumelelo Cebekhulu & Sandile Zwane (CERT, UJ)

Itsoseng and Sis Gladys' office may be small, however Itsoseng is an organisation of great strength and resilience. This community-initiated, organic, grassroots, bottom-up grouping has faced and still faces many hardships and hurdles. Despite these, Itsoseng has 15 women who work in the recycling section (and earn a salary and receive some benefits such as being on a Provident Fund) and six who work in the crèche (who each receive a stipend). Community members who bring waste to the site also benefit financially and by having a cleaner environment in which to live.

The Itsoseng Women's Project started with women planting and growing vegetables in their own yards and then became a food garden on land the group was able to secure at Reamohetswi Primary School. The initial group of about 30 women was able to provide food and income for themselves and their families. Not only was the garden a space to plant and grow food, but it also became a space for women to discuss social problems and to try to find solutions together. Some of the women brought their children and babies to the garden, as they had no childcare. So the group decided to start a crèche - some women would look after the children while others worked in the garden. The local municipality gave the project some additional land and the group erected two corrugated iron structures to house an office and the crèche. The Itsoseng Day Care Centre was born and, after a while, other children from the community started to attend and the parents/caregivers of these children were charged a minimal fee.

While the food garden was initially a success, insufficient rain during the dry winter months started to impact negatively on the garden and so the members decided to look at doing something else too. The garden was taken away from the group when a new principal took over the school.

After visiting a recycling project in Tembisa, the group got the idea to recycle and they began by collecting glass bottles. Waste recycling has become the main source of income for Itsoseng. Today, glass, paper and plastic are collected, separated and baled by the members of the project. Community members bring their waste to the site, as do local shebeens, bottle stores and street traders. Shops are also encouraged to bring their waste to Itsoseng in exchange for cash.



Recycling in Orange Farm

In addition to the recycling work and the crèche, the Orange Farm Human Rights Advice Office, run by Bricks Mokolo (a paralegal and community activist), offers free advice to community members on things like applications for grants, labour issues, HIV & Aids, basic services, domestic violence, child abuse and xenophobia.

One of the researchers on this visit, Sandile Zwane, explains Itsoseng like this:

Women use their ‘informally-learnt’ skills to cultivate land and plough vegetables. They received no formal training to operate the machinery they use for their recycling project and with these ‘informal’ skills they are able to feed their families. They received donations and funds from different organisations. The Itsoseng Women’s Project is proof that there are skills in the community and there are means of survival even in these difficult times of high unemployment.

**Abalimi Bezekhaya** in a few words:

*Feeding one’s family and capturing a niche market with locally-grown, fresh, organic vegetables*



Vegetable gardens - Cape Flats

Amid the shacks of Khayelitsha, Nyanga and the surrounding areas of the Cape Flats hides what one can only describe as an oasis - the Abalimi Bezekhaya<sup>16</sup> farmers' many gardens filled with a variety of organic vegetables. Abalimi Bezekhaya (Farmers of Home) was started in 1982 and today consists of 4 700 farmers (mainly women from the Eastern Cape, who left their homes in search of work). During our three days with Abalimi, we spent time with two of the management team - Christina Kaba (or Mama Kaba as she is known) and Robert (Rob) Small - and farmers and trainers.

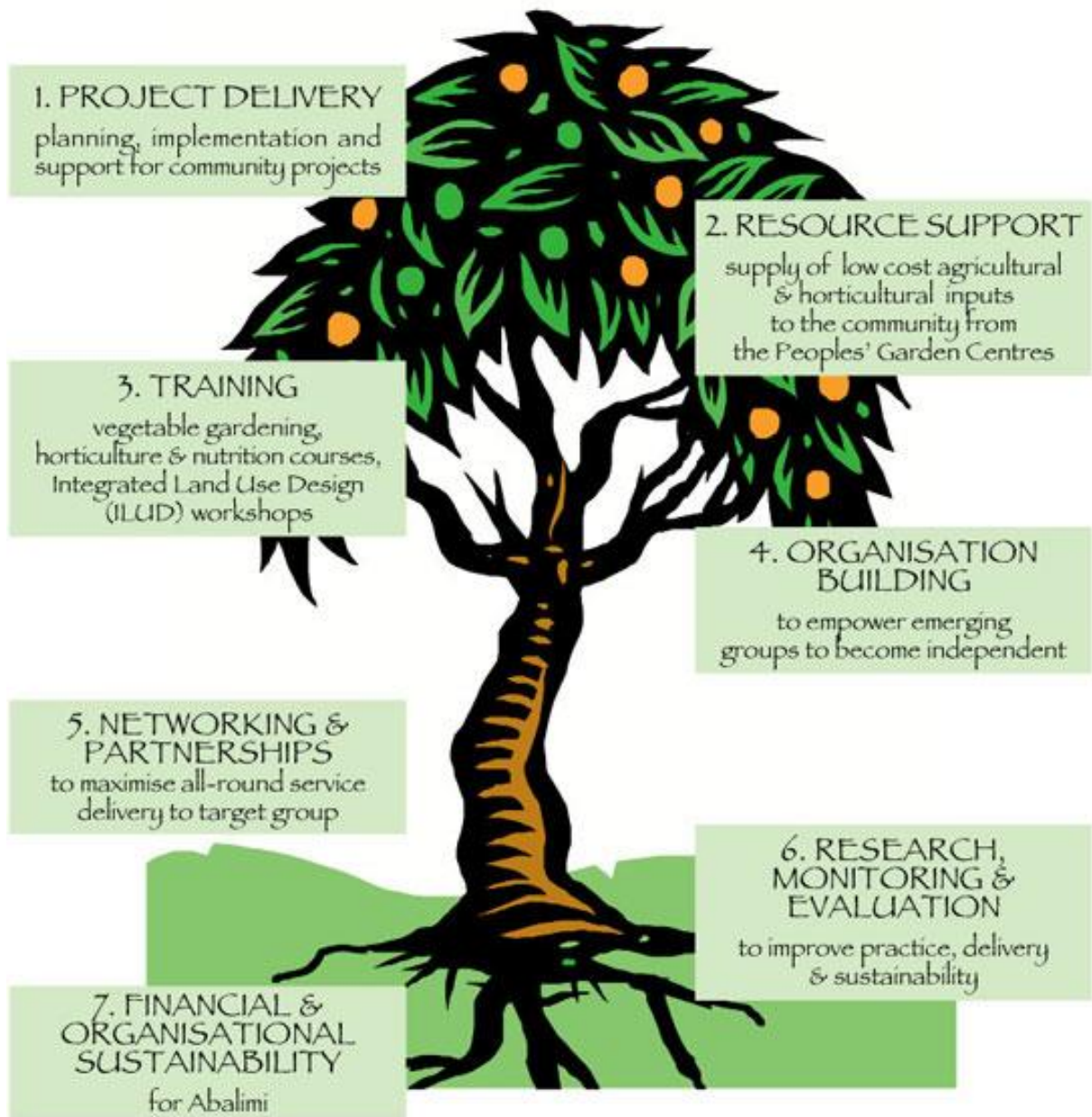
Abalimi Bezekhaya is a non-profit urban eco-farming association which assists individuals, groups and community-based organisations to initiate and maintain sustainable organic food growing projects at home and in community gardens, and to thereby help reduce poverty by creating self-employment and to improve the health and nutrition of people. Abalimi means 'the planters' in isiXhosa, the language most spoken by the farmers. Abalimi also strives to transform the dune-sands of the Cape Flats into a sustainable water-wise urban environment.

See diagram below for what Abalimi does.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Visit Four – 24 - 25 and 27 June. Researchers: Sonya Leurquain-Steyn (CIPSET, NMMU), Enver Motala & Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH) and Thulani Pango & Asanda Sobuza (NMI, UFH - YRLA team members)

<sup>17</sup> <http://abalimi.org.za/about-abalimi/what-we-do/>



There are two Abalimi non-profit people’s garden centres - one in Khayelitsha and Nyan-ga. They are run by fieldworkers from the communities and are accessible and affordable to the surrounding community members. These centres are the first place of contact between Abalimi and anyone interested in starting a vegetable garden. They serve



as training venues from which courses such as the Basic Micro-Farmer Training Course are run. The centres also provide ongoing support, mentorship and advice. There are demonstration gardens and low cost, subsidised gardening resources such as manure, seed, seedlings, compost, organic pest control remedies and tools. The Khayelitsha Garden Centre is located within the Masiphuhlisane ('let us develop each other') Community Development Centre which also houses a Labour Community Advice Media and Education Centre (Workers'World Media Productions) (see more on this below), Life-Line, a soup kitchen, social workers, amongst other.

At the beginning of 2008, Harvest of Hope (HoH), a cooperative was started. The aim of this co-op was to allow for the farmers to sell their produce in a direct and personal way to people who wanted to buy freshly-picked, organic and locally-grown vegetables for their families. Farmers are not exploited financially as they get a fair price from the co-op. Customers also have the knowledge that their money assists poor farmers and helps to conserve the environment through local organic farming. We visited HoH at The Business Place Philippi - a hive of activity and learning - and watched the packing of the Abalimi vegetables in the pack-shed. HoH started by selling 78 vegetable boxes and today sells 450 a week!

There is some selling of vegetables within the communities on the Cape Flats but it is not consistent and farmers say they have to compete with shops selling (non-organic) vegetables for less than their organic produce. Some vegetables are given away to those in need. The 'market' is a niche market of middle-class Capetonians who buy the vegetable boxes on a weekly basis.

The Farm and Garden (F&G) National Trust assists Abalimi in building infrastructure, funding, training, networking and promotion. The F&G Trust's intention is "to replicate, promote and support this type of activity countrywide in order to develop a thriving national micro-farming movement in South Africa". Trust founder, Rob Small, states:

My colleagues and I at the Farm and Garden National Trust have proven over and over again that starvation is entirely avoidable - even in the worst situations - if people are given just a bit of land, some seed and some water. We have gone on to

prove that it is even possible to create one full-time job on as little as 500m<sup>2</sup> (and less) of land<sup>18</sup>.

The majority (90%) of the Abalimi micro-farmers work at survival or subsistence level. 10% are at 'late subsistence' level, which according to Rob Small, is very similar to livelihood level but is not as productive. About 10 farmers are at 'early to mid-livelihood/semi-commercial' level. This is directly related to the vegetable boxes (HoH).

The idea is not necessarily for farmers to progress along the chain (not everyone wants to become a commercial farmer or should become one). (See 'food sovereignty' - Is'baya).

According to Rob Small, the following should be in place to ensure 'success':

- Permanent agri-inputs supply centres - affordable and within easy reach;
- Permanent, responsive training, advisory and scientific services (no or low cost);
- Guaranteed local short-food-chain market/s - farmers should be fairly paid;
- Easy access to grant capital for start-ups and development of existing projects up to late livelihood level. Loans from livelihood to commercial levels (zero/low interest).<sup>19</sup>

### More than just planting vegetables

We met farmers who earn about R3 000 per month on a 500m<sup>2</sup> piece of land. We met some who earn more. In addition to earning money monthly (most were unemployed prior to joining Abalimi), farmers all spoke passionately about what it is they do.

Farmer/Trainer A who started farming with Abalimi in 2000 said: "I still love the garden, still now, I'm so passionate about it. I love it".

Farmers we spoke with mentioned learning about new vegetables, like rhubarb, and learning to cook new and different vegetables. They also spoke about the nutritional value of the food they grow and that working in a garden is good exercise. Growing vegetables is so much more than just a technical exercise for the farmers!

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<sup>18</sup> The Farm & Garden National Trust Brochure

<sup>19</sup> See: Farmer Development Chain and Sustainability Index Assessment Tools

(<http://farmgardentrust.org/resources/farmer-development-chain-fdc-and-sustainability-index-si-assessment-tools/>)

Asanda Sobuza, one of the researchers on this visit, captured Abalimi in the following words:

Being part of this EV2 Profiles of Possibility site visit, I quickly learned that there are people who view education differently to the mainstream - away from the school, desk and qualification mentality. They see it as much more than a qualification and a tool to find a job. I met people who are generally regarded as 'illiterate' by society because they lack education qualifications from institutions of learning.

But they are much more educated than most of society is willing to realise. Their projects and gardens - made from indigenous knowledge - and their determination bear testimony to this. This tells us that 'education' is boundless.

These ladies and gentlemen taught me something, to nurture a dream like a seedling; watch over it, work hard on it and when it blossoms, harvest a great deal from it. And that's exactly what Mama Kaba and her team are doing. Reaping what they sowed.

**Workers'World Media Productions** in a few words:

*An alternative voice to the dominant discourse*

In the midst of the proposed Protection of State Information Bill (the 'Secrecy Bill') and the growing threat to journalists both in South Africa and globally, there exist a handful of alternative media organisations that capture the voices and struggles of the majority of people who are seldom heard in the mainstream media. Workers'World Media Productions<sup>20</sup>(WWMP) is one such organisation. It is an independent, non-profit labour movement media project working in the interests of the working class. It was established in 1999 by labour movement activists as a project of the Labour Research Service.

WWMP is located in Community House (Salt River, Cape Town)\* and also has an office in Johannesburg. WWMP's work includes:

- providing an alternative quality, relevant and informative media source for working class people;

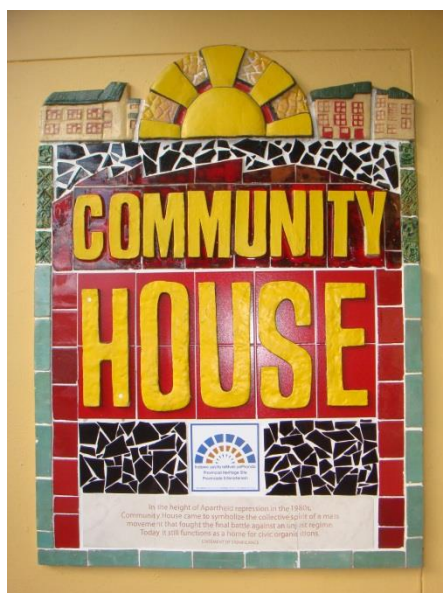
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<sup>20</sup> Visit Five - 26 June. Researchers: Sonya Leurquain-Steyn (CIPSET, NMMU), Thulani Pango & Asanda Sobuza (NMI, UFH - YRLA team members) and Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH)

- training and support in media production so that trade unionists and working class organisations can make their own media; and
- education (in the form of their Mass Education Campaign amongst other) so that people can question the dominant discourse prevalent in all forms of mainstream media - the words of Steve Bantu Biko resonate here: “The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”<sup>21</sup>.

WWMP’s more recent work is in the form of ‘building and strengthening much needed grassroots organisation and leadership - at workplaces and within local communities and to build political and organisational bridges between these two terrains of working class life and struggles’.<sup>22</sup>

\*Community House really needs to be visited because it is very difficult to describe its aesthetic beauty and its powerful presence in writing. Words do not do the space and its amazing artworks justice. Not only is it visually engaging and captivating - it is filled with a rich history of struggle. The space - through the various organisations housed there and the numerous events held there - continues this struggle for a just and equitable society.



Community House, Salt River, Cape Town

## Roots in radio

<sup>21</sup> Biko, S. 1971

<sup>22</sup> WWMP 15 Year Report, page 4

Even though the internet and social media are pervasive and increasingly so, WWMP believes that “Radio is still the internet of Africa, able to reach workers and poor people everywhere”. WWMP’s first project was a radio project. In 1997, a collective of labour service organisations carried out a radio pilot project called Workers’World. It consisted of 12 weekly 30-minute slots on Bush Radio, a Cape Town-based community radio station. The project was successful and Workers’World Radio Productions<sup>23</sup> was launched in August 1999 to take it forward. It became a national project and was broadcast in five languages. Today it is called the Labour-Community Media Project (LCMP) and, together with community and public radio stations across South Africa (and, more recently, across the continent), WWMP produces a weekly one-hour labour show on over 40 community radio stations in five languages. WWMP has trained radio presenters and union activists in labour issues and radio presentation.

The Labour-Community Media Training Course grew out of WWMP’s community radio partnership and the first training course was piloted and delivered in 2013. Community and union activists are provided with training in the theory and practice of media.

Other projects include:

#### Mass Education Campaign (MEC)

After identifying serious capacity issues among trade union and community activists, WWMP embarked on a mass education programme. The campaign, in partnership with COSATU’s national education desk, was launched at a national conference in 2010. This mass political education campaign is delivered mainly via Labour-Community Media Forums (LCMFs) and COSATU Locals at community level and aims to rebuild and deepen working class politics and organisation on the ground. For the past two years, WWMP has focused on 12 areas in South Africa and recently held a workshop in East London which included representatives from Mthatha and King Williams Town. The strategy is for these local forums to direct and execute their own popular education and media in the longer term.

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<sup>23</sup> During 2006 WWMP changed its name to Workers’ World Media Productions as its work focused on more than just radio, for example it has a weekly labour television show on Cape TV (CTV) and has produced, together with the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC), a documentary film called False Profits. Currently WWMP is piloting a community newspaper in Khayelitsha

### Labour Advice Media and Education Centres (LAMECs)

In line with WWMP's shift to grassroots level and ensuring resources are housed within communities, it established Labour Advice Media and Education Centres (LAMECs) in 2011. LAMECs are like social centres (see section on social centres under 'International Examples') in that they provide office and meeting space, communication technology, admin support and regular education and training (such as study circles and young workers' forums). The concept of a LAMEC<sup>24</sup> is to provide continuous, long-term institutional support within communities - they are an attempt at increasing the ownership and control of projects to community members. A vital new component of WWMP's work through the LAMECs is to assist marginalised workers with advice and organising support. For the latter WWMP works mainly, but not exclusively, with careworkers and call centre workers.

There are currently two established LAMECs - one in Khayelitsha (Cape Town) (which is housed within the Masiphuhlisane Community Development Centre where we visited one of Abalimi's Garden Centres) and one in Alexandra (Johannesburg). One is partially established in Zwide (Port Elizabeth) and there are plans to establish two more by 2017 in Mdantsane and Rustenburg. This depends on resources which, as with all the Profiles of Possibility visited, remain a huge challenge.

### Educational material

WWMP has developed a range of educational and training material including the Basic Shopstewards' Training Manual and Let's Get Organised! A Handbook for Trade Union and Community Activists, amongst other resources. This is part of its strategy to support grassroots activism and to 'fill in the gaps' where unions have failed.

### Labour film festivals

Every year since 2006, WWMP has hosted a public labour film festival. Most recently the film festival was held in 11 townships and cities. Films such as 'The Story of Stuff' (Director: Louis Fox) - about the power of consumer culture and the obsession with things (stuff) and the resulting damage it has done and is doing to the environment, etc. - have been shown.

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<sup>24</sup> See COPAC's SEECCs (Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperatives) (further on) which resonate with the concept of a LAMEC in terms of a structure being firmly located within a community

## Women and youth

As with the other Profiles of Possibility, WWMP has a focus on women and youth.

WWMP works with women's organisations such as Sikhula Sonke a women-run farmworkers union. WWMP also ran a campaign for justice for Pinky Mosiane, a female mineworker who was raped and murdered while at work.

From 2003 to 2009, WWMP developed DIGGZ Youth Leadership and Media Development Programme which aimed to develop young activists in the use of media and organising themselves with a focus on issues faced by young people. In 2009 the programme shifted to focus more directly on young workers.

Alternative media is a form of education not confined to a classroom and it can and does happen anywhere. Working class people are at the centre of the learning process and their knowledge and experiences are recognised and valued. Education is connected to people's lives and is about action for change.

While researching WWMP, we also came across 'GroundUp'<sup>25</sup> which is a community journalism project which reports stories from South Africa's townships. Most of its stories are about health, education, women's rights and immigrants' rights.

All the people on the GroundUp project, including the editor, sub-editors and journalists, are learning on the job. Most of the journalists used to be activists in social movements. They have joined GroundUp because they want to learn to become good journalists.

## **Workers' College** in a few words:

*Learning for and as a collective. Blending of Popular Education with formal*

Workers' College (WC)<sup>26</sup> is located in the James Bolton Hall (building of the Southern African Clothing Workers' Union (SACTWU)) in Magwaza Maphalala Street (which was Gale Street) in Durban - a bustling street of unions and bargaining councils. It was

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<sup>25</sup> <http://groundup.org.za/about-groundup>

<sup>26</sup> Visit Six - 16 July. Researchers: Ivor Baatjes (CIPSET, NMMU), Milisa Janda & Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH), Bizo Bomela (NMI, UFH - YRLA team member), Raymond Tebeila (CEPD YRLA team member) and Angela Abiodun (a volunteer at UKZN - from the United States)

founded in 1991 in order to serve the labour movement and its culture is drawn from the values embodied in community and trade union activism: selflessness, collectivism, egalitarianism and a commitment to working class struggles.

Transformative education<sup>27</sup> which in a workplace context deals with the lived experiences and struggles of workers and is, most importantly, about change is embraced by WCs and encompasses the following:

- Trade union rights education is about empowering trade unionists to be able to effectively represent and defend workers, and to advance the working class agenda.
- The theoretical and ideological education of workers is about equipping workers with analytical tools that will help them interpret the world (understanding the material basis of their class position in society and linking that with their everyday struggles as workers), and act upon it (Freire's 'reading the world').

### Brief history of WC

WC was founded in 1991 in order to serve the labour movement. It was set up to assist with the education and development of trade union activists. As particular socio-political realities unfolded after 1994, WC also prepared workers to engage with neoliberalism's increasingly damaging influence and impact.

The first course was Labour Studies and the courses that followed were responsive to the pressing issues and needs of the time (students requested courses they felt were relevant). Courses were open to all unions (affiliated and non-affiliated - it was about building a united working class). Kuki Ndlovu (an educator at WC) said in relation to this: "On the shop floor, we fight as a unit".

In 1997, an arrangement was established with the then University of Natal, providing for an accreditation link. In 2000, a part-time, five-year Bachelor of Social Science degree was designed for WC diploma students in collaboration with the Industrial and Working Life Project (IWLP) (University of Natal). It was designed to address workers' issues and 'talk to the working life'. On successful completion of the diploma course, students qualify to enrol for this degree.

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<sup>27</sup> Adapted from: <http://www.workerscollege.org.za/about-us/what-is-worker-education/>



Since 2000, WC has focused on linking trade unions with community organisations and has been committed to the development of both trade union and community activists. Both trade unions and community organisations are confronted by the same issues and work with the same constituencies. This important piece of information answered one of our questions about the growing number of working class people who actually do not have 'work' (i.e. a job). Not surprisingly, Kuki Ndlovu explained to us that less and less industrial unions send participants and most of the unions who send participants are public sector ones.

### Individual vs collective learning

Participants are selected by their organisations, which need to commit to support the individual/s. The education/qualification at WC is about building individuals in order to build organisations. "One does not learn for oneself but for one's organisation" (Kuki Ndlovu). Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) from working class struggles is one of the core pedagogical practices at WC. Part of showing commitment is a nominal fee of R900 which each organisation pays per person. Organisations can also become part of the Council of the College and they then play a role in governance.

### Programmes

Initially diploma programmes ran twice a week, but now they are run as residential courses for five days each (25 days - five blocks). This is to accommodate those who do not live in KwaZulu- Natal or South Africa.

There are currently four Diploma Programmes, with six modules each, including the generic modules of 'Activism' and 'Field Work'. The diploma courses are:

Labour Studies Diploma; Labour Economics Diploma; Political & Social Development Diploma; and Gender & Labour Studies Diploma.

The field work module is a practical/project and is an attempt to link theory with practice - praxis. It is 'education in action'. The field work module changes year by year. In 2014, participants worked with informal traders who trade at Warwick Junction. The participants volunteered at the site and soon realised (if they did not already know) that this, too, is a

'workplace'. Traders and participants researched together. Much of this module happens outside of the classroom.

WC still offers the Industrial & Working Life Programme, run jointly with UKZN. Trade unionists and community activists who register for this degree attend lectures at UKZN once a week. Entry into the degree programme is based on whether the participant has completed one or more of the WC's diplomas. This means that if the trade unionist or community activist has done the WC's 1-year diploma course, a matriculation pass is not necessary. The diplomas are either recognised as a university entry or a 16 credit module. Currently a new Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is being negotiated.

### Dealing with language

Students do not need to have a matric but they do require basic English (to read and write at a basic level). There is a written entrance assessment (which seeks to determine a participant's ability to communicate in English and also their understanding of their role within their organisation and broader society). This is not the sole entry requirement - the RPL admission policy allows for other considerations such as recommendations from participants' organisations, their length of experience and the leadership position they hold in their organisation/s.

Classes are taught in English and materials written in English. However, Kuki Ndlovu explained that WC constantly struggles with how it can be more accommodating of other languages. WC develops materials in other languages if required by, for example, a union (WC also develops short courses). Writing practice is integrated in the modules and participants are encouraged to read. Language 'correctness' is not marked - content/thinking is marked. Students are encouraged to do drafts which are then commented on.

### Blending of formal and Popular Education

While the diplomas are formal in the sense that they are certificated, structured, etc., one can strongly argue that Popular Education is present in the content and teaching/learning methods used at WC.

In a context where so many say that what is taught in formal institutions is 'out of touch' and/or 'not relevant' and/or 'disconnected from everyday lived experiences of people', WC programmes are deliberately accessible to members of trade unions and community organisations and the content is practically linked to issues and struggles in the workplace and community. WC acknowledges and values the prior and existing knowledge, skills, learning and experiences of its students, many of which were/are acquired outside of formal learning spaces. WC acknowledges that there is a body of conventional knowledge that resides in formal institutions of learning - this has always been powerful and valued. Experiential knowledge is often dismissed as being less important. WC's approach to RPL attempts to explore and - where necessary - challenge the relationship between formal knowledge in the academy and experiential knowledge (formal knowledge is not ignored nor discarded, but rather *critically engaged with*).

Howard Zinn (the American historian and social activist who wrote *A People's History of the United States*), says (referring to the American experience, which is not dissimilar to ours): "I'm worried that students will take their obedient place in society and look to become successful cogs in the wheel - let the wheel spin them around as it wants without taking a look at what they're doing. I'm concerned that students not become passive acceptors of the official doctrine that's handed down to them from the White House, the media, textbooks, teachers and preachers"<sup>28</sup>.

WC encourages critical thinking, questioning, reflection and action! No so-called 'successful cogs in the wheel' there!

Particular principles and values run throughout all modules. These are to do with building a just society - WC embraces democracy (in its true sense!) and non-discrimination on the basis of 'race', sex, religion and/or political affiliation. Open and critical debate is encouraged.

Staff at WC develop the curriculum and materials and this is done in an open, reflective way - all staff members comment on each other's work and materials are constantly being changed and updated. Student evaluations on content, facilitation, relevance and impact are conducted annually, and there is an annual evaluation workshop which includes a

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<sup>28</sup> [http://blogs.umb.edu/joinercenter/2011/02/22/howard\\_zinn/](http://blogs.umb.edu/joinercenter/2011/02/22/howard_zinn/)

network of people and organisations. WC uses participatory methods (associated with Popular Education) in its teaching and learning, such as group work, discussion and debate, poetry, drumming, art, reflection, etc.

**Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action** in a few words:

*Autonomy, walking alongside people in struggle*

The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA)<sup>29</sup> is a faith-based social justice and development NGO that was founded in 1979. PACSA operates in the uMgungundlovu region of KwaZulu-Natal, and focuses on socio-economic rights, gender justice, youth development, livelihoods and HIV & Aids. It was initially called the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness and was targeted at 'white' Christians to draw them into the struggle against apartheid. It did this through its fact sheets, amongst other. Many victims of apartheid violence went to PACSA for medical care, counselling and support. PACSA founder, Peter Kerchhoff, and staff were involved in crucial peacemaking activities in violence hotspots, and some were detained or killed.

After 1994, PACSA asked itself whether it still had a role to play. It continued to raise awareness within churches and other community structures on issues of social justice, with a strong emphasis on human rights and building active citizenship. Its trainings included democracy, gender and HIV programmes. When factory workers started to lose their jobs in and around Pietermaritzburg, PACSA's response was the development of an Economic Justice Programme. PACSA continued to work in this way, running trainings, workshops and developing materials, such as the Training for Socio-economic Transformation Programme (with the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) 2008/9).

In 2010, PACSA again asked itself what it was doing and why. It asked: Is knowledge enough? It decided to rather put its energies into "walking alongside people engaged in struggle". It asked itself: In what ways can we support what people in struggle are already doing? Mervyn Abrahams, PACSA Director, explains: "Our vision and mission continue to

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<sup>29</sup> Visit Seven - 17 July. Researchers: Ivor Baatjes (CIPSET, NMMU), Milisa Janda & Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH), Bizo Bomela (NMI, UFH - YRLA team member), Raymond Tebeila (CEPD YRLA team member) and Angela Abiodun (a volunteer at UKZN - from the United States)

be grounded in ‘working with people rather than for people’ and being in critical solidarity with the poor as they lead the struggle against socio-economic inequality”<sup>30</sup>. This way of working is reflected in their name change –from ‘Christian’ to ‘community’ and from ‘awareness’ to ‘action’.

PACSA makes available its human resources to accompany local community partners on their journeys towards reconciliation, building true democracy and social transformation and development. This journey has led PACSA to opt for process facilitation as its core methodology. This means that self-organised grassroots organisations act in their own names and are accompanied in their own advocacy and development. PACSA does not impose itself on groups (as many NGOs do). Rather it works with people/groupings when/if invited to do so by the people/group and/or who have a historical connection to it. PACSA’s work and its practice seek to enhance human dignity and it is convinced that those who carry the brunt of the problem must be a part of the solution. At the heart of PACSA’s core strategy is the notion “nothing about us without us”. Currently PACSA works with 18 community partners.

In order to ensure their autonomy, groups are guided by a set of questions:

- Is this in our own voice?
- Under our leadership?
- In our space?
- With our resources?
- With our connections?

The answers to these questions will assist with making sure groups are acting autonomously as opposed to an NGO acting on their behalf. This principle is the same as that expressed by Ashraf Cassiem, from the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, who sent a letter to a Cape Town NGO under the title “We are poor, not stupid”. (See more on the role of NGOs under ‘What did we find and what does it mean?’).

PACSA also acts in its own name to build social justice activism in the broader society. It reaches out to the broader community to grow consciousness and support for justice

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<sup>30</sup> PACSA Annual Report 2013, page 2

issues. This is done through various means including the recently held PACSA Film and Arts Festival, amongst other.

PACSA is well-known for its food price barometer research (various newspapers and radio stations report on this). PACSA started tracking food prices in 2006 and it has noted that every year food prices continue to rise.

The 2014 PACSA Food Price Barometer shows that a basket of 32 foods which form the basic foods in the shopping trolleys of poor working class households in Pietermaritzburg increased from R1 509.34 to R1 640.05 in September 2014 (relative to September 2013) - an increase of 8.66% year-on-year.<sup>31</sup>

This has huge negative implications for the dignity, health and wellbeing of poor people.

**Unemployed People's Movement** in a few words:

*Engaged learning in action intrinsically intertwined with struggle - sometimes with suffering and loss*

The Unemployed People's Movement (UPM)<sup>32</sup> is a social movement which operates from a very small, modest converted house in Grahamstown. It has not been around for long (2009), nor does it have many resources (there were not enough chairs for all of us to sit and the one telephone was newly-acquired), yet it is a powerful force. It has challenged unemployment, poor-quality housing, lack of housing, lack of water and sanitation, lack of electricity and street lighting, violence against women and problems with the social security system. In 2011 it staged an 'Occupy Grahamstown' in solidarity with poor and marginalised people from around the world. During this protest, members dumped bucket loads of human faeces in the foyer of the Grahamstown City Hall (where the Makana Municipality's offices are). This was a protest about social and economic inequality - in which millions are de-humanised and robbed of their dignity (bucket toilets in a democracy is a contradiction in terms). During our interview, Ayanda Kota (founder) spoke about UPM

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<sup>31</sup> [http://www.pacsa.org.za/publications/research-reports/food-price-barometer#!2012\\_PACSA\\_Food\\_Price\\_Barometer\\_small](http://www.pacsa.org.za/publications/research-reports/food-price-barometer#!2012_PACSA_Food_Price_Barometer_small)

<sup>32</sup> Visit Eight - 11-12 September. Researchers: Thalia Eccles & Anele Dloto (CIPSET, NMMU), Mamagase Nchabeleng (CEPD YRLA team member), Samuel Morokoane (CERT, UJ - YRLA team member) and Enver Motala & Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH)

having “a politics of humanity, a politics of dignity”. The UPM is not about party politics. UPM, in a press statement, described itself like this: “Some of us are reading and discussing Frantz Fanon in the squatter camps and broken RDP houses. But it is clear that a new politics is required. We are inspired by movements and communities in struggle around the country and around the world. We need what has been called a living politics, a politics that is rooted in the everyday lives of the people, a democratic politics, a politics of the people, for the people and by the people”<sup>33</sup>.

The UPM has marched; held meetings, including with the state; submitted memorandums of demand; written deputations; and held sit-ins. It engages in ongoing learning that is intrinsically intertwined with the everyday struggles and crises that it seeks to address, challenge and change. Similarly, Anne Harley explains the ‘University of Abahlali’ (the shackdwellers’ social movement - Abahlali baseMjondolo) as such:

“The ‘University of Abahlali’, as I understand it, is the whole movement, because the struggle is a place you learn and theorise –i.e. it’s not an ‘event’ or a ‘place’”.<sup>34</sup>

While conducting our interviews, a group of UPM members had gathered in the room next door and were deep in discussion about an upcoming meeting that was to happen with the municipality - in response to UPM’s recent (August 2014) march about the lack of water, unemployment, incompetence of the municipality.

This is a good example of how learning happens within a social movement. The learning is intrinsically linked to ones’ life and happens on an ongoing basis. Desks and chairs are optional, engaged citizens aren’t.

Siyasanga Bentele, a member of UPM and one of the administrators, told us that:

“...since joining the UPM I have learnt a lot of things...because first of all politically I was not ...I didn’t have that much experience, but joining the UPM I have managed to be more informed of what is happening around me”.

Lave and Wenger (1991), well-known for what they call ‘communities of practice’, do not believe that learning is simply the transmission of abstract and de-contextualised knowledge from one individual to another. They believe (like many others) that learning is

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<sup>33</sup> The rebellion of the poor comes to Grahamstown, 13 February 2011. <http://abahlali.org/node/7794/>

<sup>34</sup> E-mail correspondence, 29 October 2013

a social process whereby knowledge is co-constructed. It is about the sharing of something (such as an issue or problem) that concerns self-organised members who are located within a specific context and participate on an ongoing basis in order to deepen their knowledge about the issue/problem/etc. This aptly describes learning within a social movement.

Learning within a social movement is also experiential. Experiential learning<sup>35</sup> is based on the premise that learning happens in a cycle (or spiral). One follows a process as one learns. Learning happens through:

- experience of something concrete;
- reflection on that experience;
- analysis/abstract conceptualisation in order to explain the experience;
- active experimentation to solve problems and make decisions.

Learning happens as a result of direct participation in the events of life. This kind of learning involves action and in the case of social movements, action is an integral part of the process of learning (indeed of the movement itself!). This action can sometimes result in victory and sometimes in pain, suffering and loss - people have and can die. Ayanda Kota captures this as such: “Yes we could have chosen another road. A path of expensive whisky or building a R4-million rand house and getting fat on tenders...but we chose this road. This isn’t a road for sprinters, it is a long road when it comes to the question of fighting for our humanity. Others have been down this road before us and we have seen what has happened to them. It is incredibly difficult if not gruesome. We know that travelling this road comes at a price, but we are prepared to pay even the highest price”.<sup>36</sup>

While learning occurs while marching or while reading and discussing books (such as in UPM’s ‘political schools’ where people ‘teach each other’ in the form of study circles, etc.), UPM is also connected to organisations such as Masifunde Education and Development Project Trust (working on farming projects) and COPAC (working on cooperatives). Individuals from Rhodes University also work with UPM and assist with resources, such as facilitators and venues for workshops. Thalia Eccles was invited to attend the UPM Women’s Assembly which took place on the 12 and 13th at Rhodes University. Thalia

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<sup>35</sup> See Kolb in Merriam et al. Learning in Adulthood

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-02-07-ayanda-kota-unapologetic-anc-apostate/#.VHSOQosQIYc>



attended the first day. The Assembly dealt with, amongst other things, what it means to be a woman in South Africa today and still to have no say, despite women occupying leadership positions.

## A NOTE ON STEVE BANTU BIKO



Across the road from UPM's office, Grahamstown

Across the road from UPM's office is graffiti which states: 'Biko lives! UPM'.

A few of the researchers attended the Steve Biko Memorial Lecture at NMMU the evening of the 11th after our visit to UPM. Peter Jones (the last comrade to see Steve Biko alive and the Director of Is'baya, our first Profile of Possibility) gave the keynote address and it bore much relevance to our earlier visit and, indeed, to other visits. Jones' address, titled 'Imagine another country. The relevance of Steve Biko, his legacy and movement' included something on social movements. He said:

The new social movements, most of which are sporadic and crisis driven, and which express the frustrations of millions of ordinary people, have begun in myriad ways to question the 'incomplete' liberation in post-apartheid SA. The revolution in listening to them is premised on a radical mutation in consciousness that takes

place when a grassroots movement politically asserts itself. This necessitates that one breaks with the idea that what the movement needs is a self-appointed leader/spokesperson, or ‘public intellectual’ to speak for it. Successful action, reflection and interaction, depends on a return to the idea and practice of ‘becoming human’. So these movements require organisation, not of the vanguard type, but a practice of self-organisation intimately connected to the organisation of thought in the most open and democratic sense, proving that the opening up of space for this thinking is the precondition from which new subjectivities can and do emerge.

**Bulungula Incubator** in a few words:

*Strength and perseverance from a forgotten place*



[Nqileni Village, Xhora Mouth Administrative Area, Wild Coast](#)

In 2004, in Nqileni Village, Xhora Mouth Administrative Area (Wild Coast, Eastern Cape) an eco-friendly backpacker’s lodge was opened. The lodge was initially partly community-owned and has become, within the last few months, 100% community-owned. It is Fair Trade accredited, uses renewable energy, composting toilets and harvests sustainable

rain and ground water sources. It operates on an 'honesty' system whereby one writes down on a piece of paper what one eats and drinks.

Bulungula Lodge<sup>37</sup> was established as a project to see if it would be possible to create a sustainable and eco-friendly backpackers lodge in one of the poorest and most remote parts of South Africa in an effort to alleviate poverty and bring social and economic benefit to the local villagers.

This is one of the reasons we wanted to visit the Bulungula Incubator<sup>38</sup> - the fact that it is situated in a village that is in "one of the poorest and most remote parts of South Africa". Not only is there a lodge, but also a preschool - the Jujurha Preschool - which won the ABSA/Department of Social Development Best ECD Centre Award in the Eastern Cape in 2013 - and other programmes to do with education, basic services, health and sustainable livelihoods (see more on them below). In fact, we were so determined to go that we made two attempts to get to the village - our first attempt to visit Bulungula in September 2014 was rained out!

In 2007 (with seed-funding from guests who had stayed at the lodge), the Bulungula Incubator (BI) was established in order to address the many challenges of rural poverty in the community, while promoting and preserving traditional African lifestyle and culture. The rehabilitation of the Noofisi Primary School in Nqileni Village was the project that prompted the launch of the Bulungula Incubator. Even though education has always been a central focus of the work, Bulungula Incubator realised very early that it needed a holistic approach to its rural development strategies. Therefore, it chose to have a broad range of projects in an area in order to have 'depth instead of breadth'.

The programmes include:

### Education

Includes:

- Early Childhood Development in the Home (ECD @ Home): 0-3 years

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.goabroad.net/Bedfords\\_World\\_Tour/journals/5720/getting-real-in-bulungula-july-31-aug-5](http://www.goabroad.net/Bedfords_World_Tour/journals/5720/getting-real-in-bulungula-july-31-aug-5)

<sup>38</sup> Visit Nine - 18-19 November. Researchers: Sonya Leurquain-Steyn, Olwam Mngwazi & Nwabisa Madyibi (CIPSET, NMMU), Nosipho Tom (NMI, UFH - YRLA team member) and Britt Baatjes (NMI, UFH)

- Centre-based ECD 3-6 years (Jujurha Preschool)
- Library
- Primary school after-school programme
- Using technology
- Parent activism and participation in education (e.g. workshops).

The Bulungula Incubator staff believe that ECD is imperative (particularly for children whose parents have had little formal education and where books and educational toys are scarce), and they have established what can only be described as an excellent preschool. Our interviews were conducted in the school library and it was clear from the two days we spent there that the school is a hive of activity, enrichment and energy. Once the preschool children leave, primary school children arrive for their after-school programme. Mothers cook in the kitchen and tend to the vegetable garden. The preschool is fully resourced and has two teachers for every 12 children! The importance of ECD starts in villagers' homes prior to children attending preschool. Parents have been shown various activities to do with their babies/toddlers (the ECD @ Home programme).

Olwam Mnqwazi, one of the researchers, reflects on an interview with a preschool committee member as follows:

What stood out for me, amongst other things, was the interview we had with a preschool committee member who never went to school. She provided an oversight of the activities that take place at the ECD centre. She explained her role as that of a person who comes and checks if the educators, the support staff and the management of the school really do what they are supposed to do. She comes in and checks to see if the gardens are in order, if the educators are busy with the children or if there are any challenges within the school. She told us that she even asks the children to sing to see if they are taught anything new at school. She told us that when she first came to the school as a committee member, she saw the learners coming in to sit in a circle. She realised that they were coming and sitting in front of a piece of paper which, as someone who can't read or write, she could not understand what was written on the papers. As she enquired, she was told that each piece of paper had the names of the learners who were supposed to sit in front of them. That made her think how education is crucial in one's life. She described herself as one who is 'blind and deaf' since she is not able to read or

understand English. She also expressed her wishes that the younger BI staff members study further to take the work that has been initiated further. She said she does not think it is an insult when others call people like her 'illiterate' because they really are: "Abasithuki abantu xa besibiza amaqaba ngoba singawo".

She said she feels that she cannot see or hear many things that happen around her when she is around English speakers or looking at a text because of her being 'illiterate'. Two of my colleagues, who are English-speakers, told her that they are also 'illiterate' when they listen to her speak in isiXhosa and they cannot read things written in isiXhosa. This is why we believe that 'illiteracy' should be used as a relative term that doesn't discriminate against forms of knowledge, wisdom and understanding that might come from different people. Maybe the most important thing she said was that she was not about to consult a book/policy to help her make decisions but that she relies on her own thinking which tells her that this is not how things should be, and that this is how they are supposed to be. She said she would not know what might be the solution per se and that the ones who can read should then consult their books to determine the way forward.

### Health and Nutrition

Includes:

- Monthly on-site voluntary HIV testing and counselling facilities
- Community health workshops
- Home-based care for the elderly, chronically ill and people living with HIV
- Home-based care for children and youth
- Community care workers and a Community Health Point\*
- Vegetable gardens and nutrition
- Sport (we interviewed two young German volunteers who are staying in the village for a year and running a sports programme with the school children).

\*The Bulungula Incubator started the Community Health Point in Masizini. It is serviced in partnership with the local Department of Health. Prior to this villagers had to walk two hours, including crossing a river, to get to the nearest clinic. This health point provides a venue for community members to receive ARV distributions and basic clinic services.

Nwabisa Madyibi, another researcher, reflects on an interview with a caregiver as such: “I liked what one of the caregivers said ‘ndiyawuthanda umsenzi wam ngoba ndiye ndive kamandi xa untu esithi ndaamnceda xa wayegula loo nto Indenza ndizive kamandi xandenze umehluko empilweni yomtu indenza ndizibone ndibalulekile”.

(I love what I do because it makes me feel good when someone says I helped her when they were sick, that makes me feel good when I make a difference in someone’s life, it makes me feel important).

### Sustainable Livelihoods

Includes:

- Ecologically sustainable community-based tourism
- Development of the local economy (pottery, dressmaking, honey harvesting, lemongrass farming)
- Establishment of a Rural Skills Centre

### Basic Services

Includes:

- Rainwater harvesting
- Education about water usage
- Water filters
- Solar and wind power.

## A NOTE ON THE CWP AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Another reason we wanted to visit the Bulungula Incubator was to see how government support (mainly in the form of the Community Work Programme (CWP) in Bulungula’s case) is working. From the interviews and our observations, it is clear that the relationship works very well. Apart from the fact that the CWP now employs 200 people in the village (it has grown from 60 in 2010), villagers are responsible for deciding what it is they want to do - it could be work in the preschool, home-based care, or environmental or infrastructural development. Government provides support - people are employed for eight days a month at R76 p/d. The CWP is a programme of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs.

An interesting piece of information was that Bulungula Incubator has, over the years,

approached government for support in various ways, for example, Bulungula approached the government with regard to the CWP; it approached the government with regard to the Health Point; and Bulungula started fixing the road into the village and was then assisted by government. Bulungula also got government to put piped water in the village. This is an example of the strength and perseverance of a small NGO.

## 5. INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

What follows are brief descriptions of seven international examples and some learnings gleaned from each example - which are dealt with in more detail under 'What did we find and what does it mean?'

As with the South African examples, we did not critique each group, but rather focused on elements which we feel could be useful for re-imagining the post-school sector. The international examples allow us to compare and contrast what is happening in South Africa with what is happening elsewhere.

Very importantly, these examples show us that there is a global 'movement' in which alternative possibilities are being explored in response to the devastating effects of global corporate capitalism. All kinds of new possibilities have emerged and are emerging, and although they might not appear to have great impact individually (i.e. beyond their immediacy), they are critically important as *concrete examples of possibilities*. They point to a way of doing things differently in a society we can only re-imagine and they show us the importance of local ideas, activities and initiatives, even if they are small and may appear insignificant.

The information that follows was gathered by desktop research. In addition to this, I briefly visited the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in Boston, USA, in February 2014 (this was not done as part of this research but in my personal capacity). I also interviewed Aziz Choudry about Rad School, Montreal, Canada - while he was in South Africa (October 2014).

The international examples are grouped according to the following: social movements and unions - ideas for learning spaces; learning for livelihoods; whole village development and higher education done differently.

## **i) Social movements and unions - ideas for learning spaces**

### **Florestan Fernandes National School (Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes - ENFF)**

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) is a mass social movement, formed by rural workers and those who fight for land reform, justice and social equality in rural areas. It started through a process of occupying large landed estates (latifundios) and became a national movement in 1984. Since then, the movement has led more than 2 500 land occupations with about 370 000 families. Through their organising, the members fight for land, schools, access to healthcare, the promotion of indigenous cultures, gender equality and credit for agricultural production and cooperatives in order to live in a healthy and sustainable environment.

The idea of the Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes (ENFF) came about as a way to develop political and ideological training for MST activists and leaders, other like-minded social and ecological movements in Brazil and Latin America, as well as for the working class. The school is located in Guararema near Sao Paulo. Since 1999 the ENFF has run formal and non-formal courses in training centres in several Brazilian states, making it "a school that is many schools".<sup>39</sup>

In 2000 the construction of the school campus by Voluntary Work Brigades from settlements throughout the country began and the ENFF opened in 2005. Since then more than 10 000 social movement activists have participated in programmes and activities carried out by the school.

Udi Mandel, Kelly Teamey and several other co-travellers made a documentary film and wrote a blog re-imagining higher education.<sup>40</sup> They describe ENFF as in this way:

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.mstbrazil.org/about-mst/floristan-fernandes-history>

<sup>40</sup> <http://enlivenedlearning.com/category/enff/>



- Decision-making across various aspects of day to day life and about the direction of the movement are taken through constant deliberation, debate and voting. The aspiration for a participative culture is infused in the movements' very pedagogy, the way they practise and understand the role of teaching and learning.
- ...here in this place of learning these qualities of friendship and solidarity, so often absent or repressed in more traditional academic spaces, were very much present.
- Experiencing how learning spaces can accommodate and nurture these dimensions of our being, as we have tasted along this journey, has been inspirational for us showing that there are some powerful ways of re-imagining higher education.

*What can we learn from this example?*

- MST's struggle, like other social movements, is for their full citizenship - the realisation of their political, social, economic, environmental and cultural rights. Social movements may focus on a particular issue, like access to land, but their struggle extends beyond just that issue (see Khanyisa above, specifically with reference to the DELTA workshop, and UPM);
- The school extends beyond its single physical space as courses are run in several Brazilian states - learning can and should happen 'out there' and does *not* have to be limited to one physical space. All the Profiles visited point to this, including those that may appear to be in one space, such as Workers' College (described earlier), which has a field work module which is an attempt to link theory with practice - praxis. It is 'education in action' and in 2014 it involved working with informal traders in Warwick Junction in Durban;
- A "participative culture" is present in the classroom; "friendship and solidarity" are also present (see more on this under Workers' College above and the Social Science Centre below). This, as we know too well, is often lacking in post-schooling institutions, indicative of the kind of world we now live in, which is competitive and cut-throat.

### **Self Employed Women's Association**

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a trade union which was registered in 1972. It is an organisation of poor, self-employed women workers. The women do not obtain regular salaried employment with welfare benefits like (many) workers in the organised sector. They are part of the unprotected labour force of their country, yet constitute the largest group of workers. Their work is not counted as 'work'.

SEWA has been involved in educational activities to build capacity of its members and other groups for many years.

Chris Bonner describes their work and learning spaces as follows: "In India, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) leaders educate women in their community areas.

Equipped with special bags and aprons containing educational posters and materials, they arrange short sessions in community spaces, or in the streets where women live and work. For example, the SEWA health workers educate them about health and safety matters such as nutrition and reproduction, and about the union".<sup>41</sup>

In an effort to bring all the education/training together, the SEWA Academy was formed in 1991. SEWA Academy serves as its members' 'university' and offers training (particularly with regard to leadership), capacity building and research.

### SEWA and Media

Video SEWA has been functioning since 1984 as a tool for developmental communication - to bring video technology into the hands of ordinary women. In April 2005, SEWA began its first community radio programme, Rudi no Radio, a weekly 15-minute programme produced and broadcast by members of SEWA for its rural audience. This source of education and communication reaches the remotest villages of India.

*What can we learn from this example?*

- Meaningful education and learning can and does happen anywhere, even on the street!
- 'Universities' can be deeply connected to students' lives (the knowledge and skills taught at the SEWA Academy are inter-connected with the women's lives and livelihoods);

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<sup>41</sup> WIEGO-SEWA-Cornell, Exposure Dialogue Programme 2005, Ahmedabad, India in Building and Maintaining a Democratic Organisation of Informal Workers, page 41

- Alternative media is vital - not only to provide an alternative voice but also as a means to provide education for those in remote, marginalised areas;
- ‘Ordinary’ community members can and do make their own media (they produce and broadcast - also see Workers’World Media Productions).

## ii) Learning for livelihoods

### **Barefoot College**

Barefoot College in India trains semi-literate and ‘illiterate’ women (many of them grandmothers) to assemble, install, repair and maintain solar systems. Women are chosen by their village and undergo six months of training at Barefoot College. Here they share basic knowledge and are given intense hands-on practical training. They then return to their communities to install solar systems in each house in the village. Each family pays a monthly contribution for them to repair and maintain the units.

*What can we learn from this example?*

- This work is the women’s livelihood;
- Like Is’baya (above) and DSNI (see below), this is an example of self-reliance within a poor village/area. It is yet more confirmation that knowledge, skills and wisdom are found in all places, including within poor areas, even if it is not formalised/recognised. The so-called lack of knowledge and skills (that we hear about all the time) was not an issue in any the Profiles visited. In Hankey (Khanyisa visit), we were told by a farmer that students from various institutions, like Fort Hare and the Durban University of Technology, had spent time learning the practicalities of farming on his crop farm;
- ‘Illiteracy’ often acts as a barrier to people trying to access a job and/or education or training. This does not have to be the case as seen in the Barefoot College example (and in other Profiles visited - see ‘Education and learning - some useful learnings for re-imagining the post-school sector’ below for more on this);

- The learning is deeply connected to the lives of participants (see more on this under ‘Education and learning - some useful learnings for re-imagining the post-school sector’);
- This kind of education is *vocational* (as are the agricultural examples cited in this report);
- Solar systems contribute to saving the environment by reducing carbon emissions.

### iii) Whole ‘village’ development

#### **Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)**

The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) is a non-profit community-based planning and organising entity located in the Roxbury/North Dorchester areas - poor working class neighbourhoods of Boston. It was formed in 1984 when residents of the Dudley Street area came together out of fear, anger and concern to revive their neighbourhood that was devastated by the usual things that poor neighbourhoods are subjected to - a systematic breakdown of everything, neglect and predatory outside speculators. It was used as a dumping ground for numerous things, including rotting meat and old cars, and arson was commonplace.

The DSNI has grown into a collaborative effort of over 3 000 residents, community development corporations (non-profit, community-based organisations focused on revitalising the areas in which they are located), businesses, religious institutions as well as banks, government agencies and foundations - all committed to rebuilding and revitalising this culturally diverse (African American, Cape Verdean, Latino and ‘white’) neighbourhood of 24 000 people. The DSNI develops resident-driven strategies and plans that ensure that local residents are the primary beneficiaries of the community economic growth, and that human development and environmental issues are addressed. The Dudley Street neighbourhood is an ‘urban village’- it is alive with community collaboration and a shared goal of creating a vibrant, thriving urban village (See more on this under ‘The village as a site of development’ below).

The DSNI focuses on three strategic areas: community economic development, leadership development and collaboration, and youth opportunities and development. Talented young adults return to the community in large numbers to play their role in sustaining change.<sup>42</sup>

DSNI's community land trust ensures community land ownership, permanence and affordability - it is the only neighbourhood in the city of Boston that can ensure this.

The Virtual Village is the DSNI's experiment using computer and software technology as community-building tools. It is to enrich the relationship with residents of the Dudley Street neighbourhood and to expand boundaries beyond Boston to interact with others who are interested in this unique neighbourhood. The DSNI envisions this becoming a vehicle for mutual learning. They also hope it will serve, amongst other, as a tool that will help demonstrate how locally-based economies can be viable - even flourish - in the global context in which we find ourselves.

*What can we learn from this example?*

- The DSNI is an excellent example of poor marginalised community members demonstrating agency;
- Its work is collaborative and for the betterment of the whole community - for example, the community land trust ensures that residents will always be able to afford to live in Dudley Street because the trust operates outside of the 'market';
- The DSNI has programmes ranging from birth to the elderly and is well-known for the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative Multicultural Fair - more examples of its commitment to inclusivity;
- Young people remain in the area and/or return to it - their 'better life' is at home (also see Rustlers example below).

#### **iv) Higher education done differently**

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.dsni.org/history>

With regard to learnings from the following examples, they are also applicable to TVET and other forms of adult education - not just to higher education.

## **Social Centres/The Social Science Centre, Lincoln**

### **Social Centres**

A social centre is an autonomous community space, open to all community members and used for a range of activities. Some people draw a distinction between a 'social centre' and a 'community centre' by claiming that a community centre is any centre of 'public' activity which may be sanctioned by the state, a government department, private interests or an NGO, while a social centre is a free and autonomous space. In a social centre, what is offered is determined by both the needs of the community and the skills which the participants have to offer. Social centres embrace principles of mutual aid, solidarity and co-operation.

### **The Social Science Centre, Lincoln**

The Social Science Centre (SSC)<sup>43</sup> was born in 2010 out of a desire to preserve public space for social science education and research after the government withdrew funding for the teaching of social sciences and other forms of knowledge that, in its view, were 'non-essential' in universities. In addition to this, those who founded the SSC (who worked at universities and colleges), were also concerned that higher education is increasingly oriented towards satisfying the perceived needs of business and industry and that it embraces the highly competitive, profit-driven motives of the capitalist market.

The SSC drew inspiration from the network of social centres across Europe.

The SSC offers opportunities to engage in a co-operative experience of higher education. It is run as a not-for-profit cooperative and is organised on the basis of democratic, non-hierarchical principles, with all members having equal involvement in the life and work of the SSC. Themes that are studied draw on the core subjects in social science: sociology, politics and philosophy, psychology, economics, journalism and photography. The Centre organises study and research at all levels including undergraduate, Masters and Doctorates in Philosophy.

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<sup>43</sup> Adapted from: <http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/about/>

The co-operative principles that guide the organisation of the SSC also extend to the ways in which courses are designed and run. All classes are participative and collaborative in order to ground inquiry in the experiences and knowledge of the participants. Critical thinking, experimentation, sharing, peer review, co-operation, collaboration, openness, debate and constructive disagreement are all encouraged and valued.

Student-scholars and teacher-scholars have opportunities to design courses together, and those new to teaching and independent learning are offered support from others. All members are able to work with academics and other experienced researchers on research projects, and to publish their own writings through the SSC. A key guiding principle of the Centre is that 'teachers' and 'students' have much to learn from each other.

The SSC is entirely self-funded and operates on the basis of its members' contributions. All members of the SSC are asked to pay an annual subscription, which is based on the level of their salary (usually one hour's wage of a monthly net salary). There is no subscription fee for anyone who is unemployed or who has a low income. The SSC also accepts monies and other forms of 'payment in kind' from donors who share the SSC's ethics and values. No one is paid for their work with the Centre. The Centre's members donate their time and expertise freely and do not receive any monetary payment; all monies received are reinvested into the Centre's work.

*What can we learn from this example?*

- The SSC (and other similar entities) does not depend on the decisions of the powerful, but rather on the people who work and study at it;
- It is not-for-profit and flies in the face of current practice at higher education institutions globally where institutions have had to become more and more competitive in order to secure more funding; fees are constantly increasing and students leave the institutions often deeply in debt (the inadequacies of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) being a case in point) ;
- It values what those in positions of power have devalued - the social sciences;

- It is a non-hierarchical, collaborative space of learning from curriculum design to classroom practice;
- It may be small in size (SSC has between 40-50 student-scholars), but it, like other free higher education institutions (and social centres), is realising an alternative by demonstrating it. It shows us what is possible. As one of its founders, Mike Neary<sup>44</sup>, says:

“...it is very small. The initial cohort was only nine students strong...But it has big ideas. It is about the possibility of creating a new kind of higher learning out of the ruins of what the ‘idea of the university’ has become”.

### **Trade Schools** (NOTE: this is a model, as opposed to a single example)

A trade school is similar to a social centre in that it also embraces the principles of mutualism, co-operation, social justice and democracy. It is *different* to the more commonly known ‘trade schools’ which focus on teaching for specific trades required by industry.

A trade school<sup>45</sup> is a non-traditional learning space which runs on barter. Anyone can teach a class. Students sign up by agreeing to meet the barter requests of teachers –it is ‘barter for instruction’. On the day of class, students and teachers gather in a space that is made available by trade school organisers. Trade School celebrates hands-on-knowledge and experience. It is a place to learn with other people who value practical wisdom, mutual aid, and the social nature of exchange. Equal value is placed on big ideas, practical skills and experiential knowledge –because everyone has something to offer. Trade Schools are organised without hierarchy. Therefore one can say that both knowledge and power are shared. Local Trade School chapters open whenever a group of volunteers decide to organise one collectively.

*What can we learn from this example?*

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/something-new-in-freedom/2003930.fullarticle>

<sup>45</sup> Adapted from: [http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/trade-school/](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/trade-school/)



- As no money changes hands, this is an excellent example of 'free' education - everyone has the ability to barter something - it could be making sandwiches or cleaning the learning space. Even though Bulungula is not a trade school, a similar principle applies there - parents cook lunch at the Jujurha Preschool and tend the vegetable garden - there are no school fees;
- This kind of model has the potential to be accessible to many different people, including those who are generally excluded from learning opportunities;
- This example shows us that people are interested in supporting one another – co-operation and mutualism are demonstrated;
- As in the Social Science Centre above, all people (students/teachers) matter and count. Professors are not put on pedestals;
- Equal weight is given to things which have become hierarchical, such as theory over practice. Here practice is as important as theory (see Is'baya, Itsoseng and Abalimi);
- The learning space is not about a particular space. It can be anywhere.

### **The Rad School/L'Ecole Radicale**

'A school by and for community organizers'.<sup>46</sup>

The Rad School<sup>47</sup> was started in 2008 and was an informal network of organisers and activists, including academics and students in universities, who came together to organise a series of workshops, forums and panel discussions in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The primary objective was to create a forum and some spaces to bring people from a range of community/activist struggles together to think, analyse, reflect, share and strategise. It was also an attempt to link inter-generationally, and to connect contemporary organising/community/activist education work with earlier struggles.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://radschool.blogspot.com>

<sup>47</sup> The above is based on an interview with Aziz Choudry (29 October 2014) - he was part of Rad School

Nobody 'owned' Rad School, and whoever participated in discussions could propose ideas and/or organise workshops or panels (sometimes a person outside of the group/network was invited to facilitate). While it was conceived as a fairly open initiative, it was often a smaller group at the core of decisions about topics, timing and frequency of activities. Collectively the network would publicise the learning events and mobilise people to participate.

The sessions were held in a range of spaces. Some were held on campuses at Concordia and McGill Universities where free room bookings could be made by staff who were involved in The Rad School. Others took place in community organisation spaces such as the Immigrant Workers Centre. It was a conscious decision to hold the sessions in both university and community spaces.

The intention was that these sessions were self-organised and that the loose grouping would support these events through outreach, etc. Mainly because of the people involved becoming over-committed with other commitments, Rad School ceased to exist in 2011.

*What can we learn from this example?*

- In part, the Rad School was an attempt to break down the divide between 'the university' and 'the community' - it was about learning across institutional/organisational/community boundaries;
- It is another example of a non-hierarchical structure (see The Social Science Centre and Trade Schools above);
- It was an informal network, with no resources or staff, and its existence and functioning relied on its participants. Anyone who came to the events and was prepared to do some of the work could propose and organise a session;
- It was an attempt at creating a non-formal, intentional space for discussion, analysis and reflection with a view to connecting this to organising for change.

As stated earlier, all the Profile of Possibility examples operate within a harsh context (our capitalist world) and their fragility and vulnerability is precisely *because of* this context. The fact that The Rad School had a short-lived existence and The Social Science Centre has a small number of students should not deter us in any way from learning from them and others similar to them.

## 6. SOME LEARNINGS FROM FIVE ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES (SOUTH AFRICA)

The decision to visit additional groups was taken largely because of location, i.e. we decided to take advantage of being in a particular city/province to see additional groups. There are so many examples of possibilities 'out there' and the inclusion of the following five examples points to just that. There are many examples of groups involved in some sort of 'alternative' work, pointing to what is indeed possible. What follows is a brief description of each group and learnings from each.

### **Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC)<sup>48</sup>**

*Key learning - the importance of a grassroots structure –COPAC's Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperative*

COPAC describes itself as "a grassroots NGO and a facilitator of the Solidarity Economy Movement in South Africa". It is "not the movement but an organiser working on the ground with all potential and actual solidarity economy actors". COPAC is involved in "building worker cooperatives; supporting the cooperative movement and promoting the cooperative sector and community sector and economy".<sup>49</sup>

COPAC does research, holds learning events, such as the recent 'Worker Cooperative Activist School' and 'Solidarity Economy Movement Assembly' (1-5 December 2014) and the 'Food Sovereignty Campaign Assembly' (28 February-1 March 2015) and it develops training and movement building tools.

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<sup>48</sup> Interview 16 May, Johannesburg

<sup>49</sup> 'Building a solidarity economy movement. A guide for grassroots activism' and <http://www.copac.org.za>

As discussed earlier, Workers' World Media Productions' LAMECs are structures located within communities as an attempt at increasing the ownership of and control of projects to community members. COPAC has proposed a Solidarity Economy Education and Communication Cooperative (SEEC) network, which is similar to a LAMEC in that SEECs are firmly grassroots-based. SEECs<sup>50</sup> are described as follows:

- SEECs are the backbone of the Solidarity Economy Movement.
- Such cooperatives are a resource to organise the local solidarity economy initiative. The SEEC provides ongoing education and training on the solidarity economy alternative, convenes the local solidarity economy forum and leads transformative struggles.
- SEEC is a network between different solidarity economy sites. It provides a horizontal learning and solidarity channel to enable mutual learning and sharing of practices. The information and communication technology links between these sites strengthens the links between sites and the learning process.
- SEEC is the coordinating centre for the solidarity economy movement. Through the network the strengths and powers of the solidarity economy movement can be focused on achieving its principles, values and objectives.
- All SEECs constitute a collective intellectual developing local solidarity economy knowledge and solutions. The activism developed out of these cooperatives are a product of this collective intellectual practice.

## **Community Monitors<sup>51</sup>**

*Key learning - a different approach to organising*

Community Monitors emerged out of the Bench Marks Foundation corporate monitoring programme. The Bench Marks Foundation (mandated by The South African Council of Churches and other church groups) monitors the policies and practices of multinational corporations as a way to ensure that they respect human rights and the environment, and that their activities are not done at the expense of the larger community, particularly workers and the poor.

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<sup>50</sup> From: COPAC: Building a solidarity economy movement. A guide for grassroots activism, page 63

<sup>51</sup> Interview 17 May, Johannesburg

While they acknowledge that submitting policy proposals and research reports is only one strategy, Community Monitors emerged in 2009 to support local communities who were directly affected by the actions of corporations. Community Monitors focuses on community action to stop the practices of these corporations and what it terms the “omissions of governments”.<sup>52</sup>

This work is done through the Community Monitors School in which activists from various parts of South Africa meet to develop their skills in information gathering, writing and communications (there are links to groups in various parts of Africa). This is done through a number of workshops and tasks in which participants observe and document community issues. They analyse local problems and link them to the global system. The school “is a place where activists think through problems and create alternatives for change”.<sup>53</sup>

Participants’ work is published using local media and the Internet.

Community Monitors attempts to build an alternative idea of organising and organisation - it focuses on activity (information gathering, writing, etc.), reflection and ongoing learning as opposed to being a ‘structure’. The idea is that the activity will be the first step towards mobilising community members to take action on pertinent issues affecting them.

### **Earthrise Trust. The Rustlers Valley Development Initiative<sup>54</sup>**

*Key learning - the importance of conceptualisation - an example of very well considered thought*

Rustlers Valley Farm is situated 23 kms from Ficksburg in the Eastern Free State. This farm is probably best known for the Rustlers Valley Easter Rock Festival held there for many years. The farm was devastated by fire in 2007 and, following the death of the main shareholder in 2008, the property remained largely dormant. A portion of the land is occupied by the residents of Naledi Village, who for several decades had worked on the farm. In 2013, Earthrise Trust bought the farm - its vision being “to use the land to develop

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<sup>52</sup> [http://communitymonitors.net/indexcommnet.php/?page\\_id=18](http://communitymonitors.net/indexcommnet.php/?page_id=18)

<sup>53</sup> [http://communitymonitors.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/534585\\_507373452609279\\_954459382\\_n.jpg](http://communitymonitors.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/534585_507373452609279_954459382_n.jpg)

<sup>54</sup> Interview 20 May, Johannesburg

an integrated participatory partnership approach to building sustainable rural communities” and it made a commitment to transfer a portion of the land to the residents of Naledi Village.<sup>55</sup>

So began a long process of conversations with various people connected to the farm in some way. These included the village elders, the elected Village Committee, the school teacher and the school governing body, previous workers, owners of the farm, a group of owners of surrounding farms, and residents working on social development projects in the area. The primary purpose was to listen and to learn from people who had been part of the farm and the surrounding area, some for many years. During this process, relationships based on mutual trust and respect were forged, and agreement was reached on how everyone could work together to bring new life to the Rustlers Valley Farm and the surrounding areas. In addition to this, the trustees also began a series of meetings with people in local and international not-for-profit organisations involved in rural community development, small-scale farming, social justice, environmental protection and organisation building.

The developmental project has been defined around four integrated goals:

- Reconstructing the built environment - injecting new life;
- Building a cooperative small holder eco farming programme;
- Building a partnership for rural development with Naledi Village;
- Building a retreat and hub for development innovation.

Much considered thought went into the conceptualisation of Rustlers and now the actual ‘work’ is well underway!

Rustlers is another example of the concept of whole village development (as is Is’baya and the DSNI). Villagers have been part of the reconstruction of the buildings and some young people are returning to the farm as there now is work to be done at home. At the end of last year, a youth retreat was held and the participants drafted a statement - see ‘The statement of the Rustler’s Valley Youth Retreat’ (Appendix Three).

## **Simbhademe/Innovations Programme<sup>56</sup>**

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<sup>55</sup> Earthrise Trust. The Rustlers Valley Development Initiative, 14 June 2014

*Key learning - 'development' must be self-defined*

Simbhademe (from the imPondo dialect meaning 'we discover') and the Innovations Programme is precisely about this - self-discovery, determination and reliance. It is "a methodology for sustainable development of self-determined rural communities that directly improves rural livelihoods whilst maintaining ecological integrity".<sup>57</sup>

The Simbhademe/Innovations Programme (IP) works from the basis of being invited into an area (similar to PACSA). The IP is only done within rural communities and is part of the 'Sustaining the Wild Coast'. It operates within traditional systems and processes. This strong focus on indigenous knowledge and beliefs was also evident in other groups visited (Biowatch South Africa in particular). But like others, Simbhademe participants do not reject 'new' ideas if they are beneficial to the communities concerned.

The programme changes depending on the area in which it is used (thus acknowledging that what might work in one area may not necessarily work in another), but there are five overarching core criteria: local language, local belief system, local issues, 'Training for Transformation'\* facilitation methodology, and personal development.

There are three phases of the IP process: firstly, a series of workshops to stimulate discussion and debate about various issues to do with environmental, social and economic concerns, amongst others. Core issues in the community are identified as well as local developmental needs and aspirations. Secondly, exchange visits take place where groups of participants travel to other community-based projects or trainings in order to learn from each other, whether the project/training has been successful or not (this kind of learning from one another was observed on several of our visits to the Profiles). Thirdly, livelihoods micro-projects are established in each of the participating villages. Community needs are directly addressed by the people involved. What the community regards as its development is key. Outsiders do not impose what they think the community needs. While the ethos and principles are about autonomy, the work of the groups can and does feed into local government processes (such as the IDP).

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<sup>56</sup> Interview 7 July, Port Elizabeth

<sup>57</sup> Simbhademe/Innovations Programme, May 2012

\*Training for Transformation is a set of four handbooks written by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, designed to assist adult education workers, community development workers, social workers and others concerned with the transformation of society. The books deal with building self-reliant creative communities. There are also Training for Transformation programmes for community development workers.

During our research we came across other types of programmes and methodologies, such as 'Organization Workshop' where groups learn new organisational knowledge and skills through doing activities.

### **Biowatch South Africa<sup>58</sup>**

*Key learning - size does not matter - David beat Goliath*

Biowatch South Africa was established in 1999 as an environmental justice NGO. It challenges industrial agriculture and demonstrates an alternative through agroecology. It believes in and supports biodiversity, food sovereignty and social justice. Biowatch works with small-holder farmers, civil society organisations and government to ensure that people have control over their food, agricultural processes and resources, and other natural resources.

Its approach is two-fold<sup>59</sup> - it works simultaneously at policy level and directly with projects on the ground involving small-holder farmers. In this way, policy interventions are grounded in the experiences of rural people who work the land; and through the policy work, farmers become more aware of their context, of what needs to be changed in society, of their collective power, and of the need to ensure the accountability of decision-makers.

Poor farmers are commonly given genetically modified (GM) seeds by governments - seeds which are owned and controlled by multinationals. Corporations have privatised and taken ownership of what is part of the commons - seeds from the Earth. There is much 'betting' on food prices in financial markets while the lives and livelihoods of poor farmers are played with, ignored and discarded<sup>60</sup>. To counter this, it is imperative to keep seeds in

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<sup>58</sup> Interview 18 July, Durban

<sup>59</sup> Adapted from: <http://www.biowatch.org.za/show.php?id=2831>

<sup>60</sup> See more at: <http://www.sharing.org/how-to-share-the-worlds-resources/sharing-the-worlds-food#sthash.BhyfYxlk.dpuf>



the hands of small-scale farmers, such as through seed banks and seed sharing. Indeed, Biowatch sees seed sovereignty as fundamental to food sovereignty!

Biowatch South Africa is a very small organisation and is probably best known for taking on Monsanto and the South African state and winning! 'The Biowatch Case' as it has come to be known, originated in a genuine attempt to access information from government about the planting of GM crops in South Africa. After numerous requests for information were either stalled or refused, Biowatch used the law as a last resort. For almost a decade, it battled in court with the state and Monsanto who joined the state's side. Biowatch lost and was ordered by the court to pay the legal fees of Monsanto. This would probably have ended Biowatch's existence (in all likelihood Monsanto's intention). Instead of giving up, it pursued its case through appeal, and in 2009 at the Constitutional Court, the previous judgement was overturned in favour of Biowatch.

This is a clear example of a small organisation demonstrating enormous courage, strength and resilience in the interests of justice.

## 7. WHAT DID WE FIND AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Several findings emerged from the research and we deal with them (and our reflections on them and analysis thereof) below. The first few findings are listed and described as broad themes - all about and related to context. As this report argues, context is inextricably linked to learning. Although each group was set up for a specific purpose (for example Abalimi is about small-scale urban farming), the groups - what they do, how they do it, where they do it and why they do it - constantly intersect with huge social, economic and political issues, and we discuss these as broad *themes* below.

Thereafter we present and analyse findings specifically to do with learning/education under various subheadings - these are the elements that point to new possibilities for the post-school sector. It is our hope that these can assist in re-imagining and re-shaping the post-school sector.

## (A) BROAD THEMES

### i) Exploring the concept of 'poverty' and 'poor'

The terms 'poverty' and 'poor' led to much discussion amongst the Profile of Possibility researchers. All the Profiles of Possibility groups/organisations are considered poor and/or work with the poor. Perhaps the Profiles which are considered the poorest are the villages we visited, therefore we will use them to explain our thought processes with regard to the concept of 'poverty' and being 'poor'.

Noqhekwana and Qhaka Villages (Is'baya visit) are considered 'poor' as is Nqileni Village (Xhora Mouth Administrative Area, Wild Coast) in which the Bulungula Incubator is located. They are rural and located in the poorest province of South Africa - the Eastern Cape. Formal employment is very low in the areas, as are educational levels, and basic necessities, like water and electricity, are not provided in Noqhekwana (Qhaka has electricity because it is slightly nearer to Port St Johns). Nqileni has recently acquired piped water but has no electricity, nor sanitation. The villages are, for all intents and purposes, hidden, marginalised, largely forgotten and ignored by those in power and the world outside of these villages. One of the Noqhekwana farmers gently scolded us (the 'university') for forgetting about rural communities like his - he said to us: "Ukuba nithi niyiyunivesithi nyayabuya niza ezilalini, icacile ukuba iyunivesithi isilibele singabantu basezilalini" (the university is coming back to the rural communities). He felt we had forgotten about rural communities/taken a long time to come back/visit (just like others in positions of 'power/authority').

It is often wrongly thought (usually by middle-class 'outsiders') that because someone is 'poor' i.e. with regard to their material conditions, that this somehow extends to other aspects of the person's life, such as their dignity, happiness, agency, etc. After our first visit (Is'baya), we (the researchers) wrote a reflective piece about 'poverty'. What follows is an extract from our article<sup>61</sup>:

We are aware of numerous studies showing that as people's income and consumption rises, their levels of happiness don't necessarily rise too (see, amongst other, Schumacher's 'Small is beautiful', 1973), and we acknowledge that assets within a livelihoods framework focus on what people have (their strengths) -

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<sup>61</sup> Baatjes, B., Leurquain-Steyn, S., Mnqwazi, O. & Ngalo, K. Two villages, four researchers, one inspiring experience. 2014. Post-school Education Journal. Volume 1. Issue 1. July 2014

and build on that capital - rather than seeing people as passive victims - and concerns about the inadequacies of traditional measurements of poverty based on income or consumption (see reference to the work of Chambers, 1989; Carney, 1998; Rakodi, 2002 and others in Staples, 2007). Despite knowing this, we were all still struck by the 'wealth and richness' of the farmers - a pride and dignity within themselves, a collegial and cooperative relationship with their neighbours and, indeed, a stunning richness in the blossoming of their trees and plants. None of us felt that we were in the presence of 'poverty' - except for the fact that the farmers are lacking in certain basic rights and necessities, like not having easy access to water and not having enough farming utensils. Besides these vital missing components (and we do not wish to minimise their importance at all) - there was no sense of starvation or desperation or helplessness or hopelessness - none of the middle class assumptions or labels of what 'poverty' is.

Questions about having 'enough'; what is enough; what people have done and continue to do to the natural environment to get the things they want (let alone need), are all valuable questions which arose during the course of the research and which we need to keep asking.

Those of us who research the 'poor' need to be very self-critical and take note of and learn from statements like this one: "It's crazy when these outsiders come and teach us development. Is development possible by destroying the environment that provides us food, water and dignity? You have to pay to take a bath, for food, and even to drink water. In our land, we don't have to buy water like you, and we can eat anywhere for free".<sup>62</sup>

NOTE: Even though we have problematised the concept of 'poor' and 'poverty', we have still used these terms throughout this report - by 'poor' we mean those who are poor or lacking in terms of their material conditions; who lack access to basic needs and services; and who are marginalised.

## ii) The struggle for land, food and water

Basic human rights, like land, food and water are meant to be there for all. However, this is not the case in South Africa and globally. People struggle for these rights and sometimes

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<sup>62</sup> Lodu Sikaka, Dongria Kondh, India <http://www.notprimitive.in>

die in the process. India yearly reports more than 17 627 farmer suicides.<sup>63</sup> Some scholars attribute this to farmers being forced off their land.

We found examples of the struggle for land in two of the Profiles we visited - Khanyisa, and Makukhanye who they work with, and the Itsoseng Women's Project (and to a lesser extent UPM (lack of housing)). The Makukhanye farmers' desire to farm is obstructed, interfered with, and prevented because they do not have land to farm on.

The Itsoseng Women's Project, a grassroots group doing much good work within and for their community, operates under very difficult conditions. For example, the land the group is situated on is precarious and could be taken away from it at any time. Itsoseng wants to purchase this land but the City of Joburg Property Company (a company within the City of Johannesburg municipality) will only allow the group to lease it. Itsoseng's permit to operate the crèche may also be taken away because bylaws require 'adequate facilities' which Itsoseng (because of poverty) does not have. So, while various government departments (including the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Social Development) have assisted Itsoseng in various ways, Itsoseng is, at the same time, also hindered by government.

On the other hand, we found examples of land ownership in the Profiles and how vital it is, such as the DSNi which ensured that all land in the Dudley Street area is owned by a community land trust which guarantees community land ownership, permanence and affordability to the local residents.

The farmers we visited in the Port St Johns villages work their own land, as do those farming lemongrass in Nqileni Village - part of the Bulungula Incubator's Sustainable Livelihoods programme. The issue of owning and working one's *own* land was very apparent during our visits - it made all the difference! Having said that, there are other critical issues people struggle with, such as the Noqhekwana and Qhaka farmers who do not have easy access to water and farming implements.

So much is said today about the importance of agriculture and we found examples of people doing just that. Farmers do not lack knowledge nor skills, but resources - and ones that

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<sup>63</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/terezia-farkas/farmer-suicide\\_b\\_5798656.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/terezia-farkas/farmer-suicide_b_5798656.html)

they should have, as enshrined in our Constitution: “(27. (1) everyone has the right to have access to - ... (b) sufficient food and water”. This lack of resources is in direct contradiction to the Constitution.

Much is also being said today about food security and food sovereignty (and, indeed there is some confusion with regard to the two terms - see Is'baya above). Even though the term food sovereignty was not used by Is'baya nor Abalimi, we would argue that both Demonstrate 'food sovereignty' in that all farmers first feed themselves and their families and then sell to others - whether their 'market' is their village (Is'baya) or the middle-class niche market (Abalimi). Their methods of farming are organic, not harmful to the environment and draw on indigenous forms of knowledge and new knowledge - they embrace agroecology although they did not state this (see more on agroecology above - Is'baya). Even though neither the Is'baya farmers nor the Abalimi farmers spoke of their farming as an act of defiance, there are many, like Finley, who would describe what they do as such: “By breaking free from the entrapment of our modern day food system the urban gardener is breaking down a system constructed -- masterminded -- by corporations motivated solely by their own gain. The urban garden is no longer just a garden; it is an act of defiance”.<sup>64</sup>

### iii) Resilience and agency within crisis

As already described and discussed, globally there are people, groups, organisations and communities doing many meaningful and valuable things outside of formal employment and learning spaces. The global system has excluded and marginalised millions. These spaces or 'cracks' as John Holloway<sup>65</sup> refers to them, have been created by ordinary people who refuse to give up and continue to show resilience and agency.

The examples we have provided are simply that - examples of people doing things differently. Some examples may be flawed; some are more radical than others; some may be short-lived; some may be easily crushed by those in power; some are about those privileged enough to have choice; some - particularly in poor, marginalised contexts - are survivalist but could be so much more given a different, non-hostile political and socio-

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<sup>64</sup> Finley, R. Food injustice: The revolution starts in the garden. HuffPost Food Blog. Posted 05/03/2014

<sup>65</sup> See Crack Capitalism, 2010

economic framing environment. All these are about active struggle, mainly at the local level, striving for a truly democratic, co-operative, sustainable, just and community-focused world, rather than a capitalist one which, simply put, does nothing more than exclude and marginalise most of the world's people. They show us that possibilities for something better do exist and that things are being done by people every day somewhere in the world.

While we acknowledge and applaud this resilience and agency, we do not wish to romanticise it - it is exercised within hardship and struggle and sometimes ends tragically, as in the case of Lee Kyung Hae. On 10 September 2003 in Cancun, Mexico, Lee Kyung Hae, a Korean farmer, climbed a police barricade which separated protestors from where the World Trade Organization was holding its conference. He addressed the crowd and plunged a small Swiss Army knife into his chest. He was wearing a sign that said: 'The WTO Kills Farmers'<sup>66</sup>. He had argued (along with others) that the WTO's trade policies had destroyed South Korean farmers, reducing them to poverty. The death of Lee Kyung Hae is a symbol of the struggle of individuals, groups, organisations and communities for justice and against free trade (an essential part of capitalism today) which has destructive and devastating effects on the lives of workers and their families.

We witnessed resilience and agency within crisis at all the sites we visited. Noqhekwana and Qhaka Villages (Is'baya) are testament to people able to sustain themselves in rural areas on their own land and not being at the mercy of capitalists, like many farmworkers, particularly seasonal ones.

What follows is a conversation between a researcher and a group of farmers (Noqhekwana Village) which highlights the resilience of the farmers:

Researcher: What made you get involved in this work?

Farmer A: My husband lost his job. He was working in Johannesburg.

Farmer B: You see now my husband stopped working (retrenched from the mines) but I can continue with this work to keep the family going.

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<sup>66</sup> [https://www.organicconsumers.org/old\\_articles/corp/korean\\_wto.php](https://www.organicconsumers.org/old_articles/corp/korean_wto.php)

Farmer C: Water is a problem because in summer we struggle. The water dries up in some of the dams. Do you see there....(pointing) eSlabeni? We get our water from there, drinking water.

Researcher: How far is it?

All farmers: It's far!

Farmer D: It is far because you are carrying...and you climb mountains to get there. You don't use the road.

The Abalimi Bezekhaya farmers have found a way to survive (and sustain themselves beyond merely 'survival') within an urban environment - the Cape Flats - which has a reputation of being a place of gangsterism and hopelessness. What we saw was a space in which dedicated farmers use the dune-sand to create healthy food and hope.

Rob Small (Resource and Mobilisation Manager) explained that: "Before the gardens existed, there was only an overgrown bare patch of land surrounded by shacks. Now there is an abundant pantry of healthy fresh food available to all".

The farmers (Khanyisa/Makukhanye), who we met in Hankey, farm under extremely difficult conditions - they have no land. They told us that they are not farmers because they have no farms. "Ons is nie boere nie want ons het nie plase". They also said "ons bly met ons beeste" (we stay with our cattle). Their cattle are under constant threat of being impounded or poisoned by commercial farmers if the cows are found on the commercial farmers' land. One farmer relayed the story of being told after his cows were impounded: "Ezi nkomo azifanelanga mntu omnyama" (These cows are not suitable for/are too good for a black person).

One of the biggest differences between the farmers of Noqhekwana and Qhaka (Is'baya) and the Makukhanye farmers is the issue of having their own land or not having land (indeed the struggle for land is Khanyisa's and the Makukhanye farmers' issue!). The struggle for this vital resource is what makes the lives of the farmers incredibly difficult.

Members of the Itsoseng Women's Project also exhibit great resilience under hardship - hardship such as the land on which they work is precarious. They describe themselves as follows: "While we have achieved much in our short history, we have done this with very

few resources and with great commitment and support from community members. There are still huge needs that have to be met if we are to sustain ourselves in the long run”.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious example of agency within crisis is UPM. Here a group of unemployed people (victims of a system that relies on unemployment) collectively think, act, reflect and learn in order to change their situation and that of others who suffer the same - sometimes at great mental, emotional and physical cost to themselves. I would argue that they are the ultimate engaged citizens and concur with MST who believe that “to be an active citizen it is necessary to have an education to understand what is required and your role in it. Citizenship requires both an understanding and claiming of rights, followed by the exercising of these rights. To do so effectively requires critical consciousness” (Beck and Purcell, 2010: 59). Howard Zinn offers a similar argument: “Protest beyond the law is not a departure from democracy; it is absolutely essential to it”<sup>68</sup>.

Linked to agency are the vital elements of *mobilising and organising*, something we witnessed in our research. The following statement by artist and activist, Ricardo Levins Morales, aptly describes the weakness and limitations of outsiders ‘helping’. He explains why organising is key: “If you give me a fish, you have fed me for a day. If you teach me to fish, then you have fed me until the river is contaminated or the shoreline seized for development. But if you teach me to organize, then whatever the challenge, I can join together with my peers...and we will fashion our own solution!”<sup>69</sup> A similar sentiment is expressed in Bob Marley’s famous words: “Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds”<sup>70</sup>.

Community mobilisation and organising<sup>71</sup> are about rallying and uniting community members in order to work together as a group with a view to bring about change. Solving of issues and problems and improving lives requires the active participation of those most affected by the issues and problems. This idea was theorised by Kurt Lewin (the first

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<sup>67</sup> [http://orangefarm.wix.com/itsoseng#!about\\_us/csgz](http://orangefarm.wix.com/itsoseng#!about_us/csgz)

<sup>68</sup> [http://blogs.umb.edu/joinercenter/2011/02/22/howard\\_zinn/](http://blogs.umb.edu/joinercenter/2011/02/22/howard_zinn/)

<sup>69</sup> <http://boardofwisdom.com/togo/Quotes/ShowQuote?msgid=16619>

<sup>70</sup> Redemption Song 1980

<sup>71</sup> Baatjes, B. & Baatjes, I. 2013. The right to adult and community education. Johannesburg: CERT, University of Johannesburg



theoretician of group dynamics) in the 1930s! Brown (2006: 6-10) refers to the work of Lewin who argues that those closest to any change must be involved in the change in order for it to be effective. If we did not need the active involvement of those closest to the problem, then good policies or the dissemination of good ideas alone would achieve the improvements we seek. They do not. The right information alone is not sufficient when it comes to making social improvements or changes in people's behaviour.

With reference to the Profiles, UPM and Khanyisa (through the Makukhanye Rural People's Movement) have both successfully mobilised and organised and their collective actions have led to change. While visiting UPM's offices, members were discussing an upcoming meeting with the Municipality which the Municipality had called after UPM and others marched through Grahamstown in August 2014 to highlight a number of issues. Siyasanga Bentele spoke about 'learning a lot of things' since joining UPM: "I have managed to be more informed of what is happening around me" (see UPM example above). The

Makukhanye farmers (Khanyisa) held a series of sit-ins in Hankey late in 2012 and early 2013 which led to various meetings with different roleplayers such as the Local Municipality. This resulted in interim relief in the form of a moratorium on stock impounding (which lasted for a few months). This pressure also resulted in one of the local farming groups (Milton Farmers Association) receiving commonage land for crop production.

All the learning in the Profiles' examples can be described as learning for and as a collective - and through this –developing agency. Workers' College emphasised that students are selected by their organisations, the idea being that the learning/education (indeed the qualification) a person gains at WC is not for self-interest, but about building individuals in order to build organisations - a very different concept to the mainstream. Beck and Purcell (2010: 55) write about Merriam and Kim's (2008) ideas about traditional non-Western forms of knowledge which includes learning as a communal activity: One's identity is not as an individual as in the West, but is based on the notion of collective identity. In this context the purpose of learning is not for personal but for improving the well-being of the community through the sharing of knowledge and collective and reciprocal activity.

Workers' World Media Productions has amongst its materials: 'Let's Get Organised! A Handbook for Trade Union and Community Activists'.

The acknowledgement of the vital importance of organising and mobilising as part of education and learning is apparent in these examples.

#### iv) In search of a 'better life'- is it urban?

Globally more and more people have left or are leaving their rural homes to move to urban areas. Many people, including rural dwellers, view rural areas as 'backward'. People move in search of a 'better life', however the reality is that this 'better life' is often not better at all. With urbanisation, informal settlements, shanty towns, slums (favelas) have become people's homes, often with no or limited access to water, sanitation, healthcare facilities and the like<sup>72</sup>. Even the jobs, which everyone goes in search of, have almost disappeared - as the crisis of capitalism unfolds. In spite of this, many people desire to live in urban areas, which, of course, is their right.

While people leave their rural land or are forced off their land and migrate to cities and towns, their own land may lie fallow and/or may be transformed into large-scale industrial farm land, a game reserve or such like. Land grabbing by multinationals is a global reality. As Paraguayan ecologist, Miguel Lovera, puts it: "These new 'conquistadors' are racing to seize all available arable land and, in the process, are destroying peoples' cultures and the country's biodiversity - just as they are in many other parts of the planet, even in those areas that fall within the jurisdiction of 'democratic' and 'developed' countries. Every single foot of land is in their crosshairs. Powerful elites do not recognize rural populations as having any right to land at all".<sup>73</sup>

People in urban areas are less likely to produce their own food (let alone see food being grown), less likely to have access to fresh foods,<sup>74</sup> and more likely to consume food that has been transported long distances, including processed foods. This has led to an increase in diseases that people did not previously suffer from, such as diabetes and heart disease (diabetes in places like Nqileni Village is almost non-existent).

While the villages we visited are examples of self-reliance and sufficiency (or have a

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<sup>72</sup> See Davis, M. Planet of Slums, 2006

<sup>73</sup> <http://photolangelle.org/2014/12/18/the-pillaging-of-paraguay-photo-essay-with-analysis/>

<sup>74</sup> A food desert is a geographic area where affordable & healthy food is difficult to obtain unless one has easy access to transport. The available food is usually cheap, processed and fast, such as in many low-income communities in the USA

vision<sup>75</sup> of self-reliance and sufficiency), we acknowledge that these are merely examples of what is possible - we are not generalising to say that all villages function like these. Nor are we advocating that people should remain in their villages or move back to them. We are merely reporting on what we observed in particular villages.

We argue that there are a number of factors that contribute to the 'success' of the villages:

- Villagers are self-organised;
- Villagers engage in activities, such as the growing (and sometimes selling) of fruit and vegetables in order to change the conditions in which they find themselves;
- The farmers we visited in Noqhekwana and Qhaka Villages work their own land and can access additional land if need be (through traditional structures);
- People see themselves as part of nature as opposed to the more commonly held 'modern' view of seeing ourselves as separate from it (many middle-class urban dwellers now yearn for a turn to the 'simple' or 'simpler life'<sup>76</sup>);
- There is support from NGOs, other entities and/or the state (Is'baya, ARC-Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops, Bulungula Incubator). Sustained support is key (see more on this below);
- Women play a critical role in the sustainability of the communities despite gendered relations (see more on this below).

#### [y\) The village as a site of development](#)

The village is an early form of human settlement. In a village people live, shop, work, get educated, socialise and play - it is about family and community.

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<sup>75</sup> Is'baya's vision/plan is about the whole village - Uvuselelo (Integrated Village Renewal Programme) - a long-term holistic rural development model that integrates various elements and is implemented interactively with organised village communities

<sup>76</sup> The Spanish phrase 'buen vivir' is often used to explain that humans should be the stewards of the earth and its resources, and individual rights should be subjugated to that of communities and nature (directly translated it means 'good life' or 'good living'). Its focus is on community/the collective good

A very good example of the concept of 'a village as a site of development' is Is'baya's vision/plan about a whole village - Uvuselelo (Integrated Village Renewal Programme) - a long-term holistic rural development model that integrates various elements and is implemented interactively with organised village communities. Unfortunately mainly due to financial constraints, this has not yet materialised, but parts of it were evident in our visit. An example is the villagers selling their produce, soap and juice to each other at a 'set'price so there is no competition amongst farmers. The idea is to be fair and sell in a co-operative way.

The Bulungula Incubator is another example of a village working together. This is done through various programmes such as 'education', 'health and nutrition', 'sustainable livelihoods'and 'basic services'. We saw much evidence of collective community effort and sharing, for example the preschool is used by primary school children for an after-school programme; mothers take turns to cook lunch at the preschool and tend to the vegetable garden; etc.

Another very good example of 'community-scale village economic development' can be seen in the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI). This 'village' is in an urban area in Boston, but operates like a village in that there is a great sense of the collective - the wellbeing of the whole community is key (there are programmes from birth to the elderly).

The DSNI is an example of community members exhibiting real care and concern for their entire neighbourhood. If the community members had listened to a Harvard professor, they may not have had such 'success', as captured below:

This concept of urban economic development flew squarely in the face of conventional economic wisdom. Harvard economic professor Michael Porter at the time had completed a study that concluded that Boston's inner city was ripe for economic development, that could only be realized if engineered by large private companies and the Harvard Business School. Dudley residents said 'Thanks, but no thanks.'They understood all too well that economic development does not necessarily result in economic power for residents. Rather than become subjects for another Harvard experiment, they chose to pursue a model of community-scale

village economic development -- one that could successfully integrate social and economic goals.<sup>77</sup>

#### vi) Women at work (including in leadership positions) and youth

During our visits, we met many women involved in the various projects and programmes - like the mostly female farmers (Is'baya and Abalimi). We met women in leadership positions, such as Sis Gladys (one of Itsoseng's founders who heads the project) and Mama Kaba (Abalimi Operations Manager who leads 4 700 farmers).

All groups we visited have specific foci on women, for example Khanyisa's work with regard to women and leadership - the DELTA workshop we observed was about this very issue (see Khanyisa above). The UPM held a Women's Assembly just after our visit. Rosemary du Preez (Is'baya) spoke about a growing confidence in farmers and said that women farmers say: "I can do things". She said that their confidence is visible in meetings in which they now talk, something they initially did not do.

All groups have a specific focus on youth (see examples above). We did not get a sense that young people are not interested in farming at all, as one hears fairly often in the dominant discourse (of course we acknowledge that *not* all young people want to be farmers or should be). Most of the Village Monitors (Is'baya) are young women and we saw a few young gardeners at work while visiting the Abalimi gardens. We were told - at one of the gardens - that young 'offenders' work in this garden for a few hours a day instead of getting criminal records. We heard of a young boy who attended jam-making sessions (Is'baya) with his Mother and who said: "I am learning to become a farmer" and an Abalimi farmer shared with us that her three year old likes to remove weeds from their garden (a farmer in the making!).

#### vii) The role of 'outsiders' like NGOs<sup>78</sup>

Globally many NGOs have got a bad name for valid reasons. Some are accused of speaking and thinking on behalf of poor community members; some are accused of doing what funders want as opposed to what is really needed; some are accused of assuming they are 'experts' and going into communities with a heavy top-down approach; some are accused of thinking that poor communities are deficient in ways other than in their material

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.dsni.org/urban-village>

<sup>78</sup> Some organisations we visited refer to themselves as 'public benefit trusts', 'non-profits', etc. We have written about them below under the title 'NGO' but acknowledge they are different entities

conditions, such as with regard to their ability to think about the difficulties, hardships and struggles they face and, indeed, to act to change them.

We would argue that, from what we saw, the NGOs and the groups they work with appeared to have good relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Indeed we would argue that all NGOs visited are genuinely responsive to the needs of the communities they work with and do not assume a role of superiority. PACSA is probably the best example (of the groups we visited) of an NGO which has consciously moved from a training/materials development function to an 'accompaniment' one. PACSA believes: "nothing about us without us" (for more detail on this concept see PACSA above). This sentiment is captured by Lilla Watson (a Brisbane-based Aboriginal educator and activist) who says: 'If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time... But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together'<sup>79</sup>.

All the NGOs visited play a valuable role within the communities they work with and this sentiment was shared by the various community members we asked. Rogers states that: "Non-formal education is usually validated by the learner's experience of success" (1992: 26) as opposed to formal education which has external standards, usually set by the teacher.

Another reason, we believe, for this 'success' is that all the NGOs visited have worked with the various communities for many years, such as Is'baya - it has worked for 15 years in the Port St Johns area. Abalimi was founded in 1982 and PACSA in 1979! Perhaps part of the 'success' of the NGOs and the work they do with community members is the fact that they have built up trust and respect for each other over the years and they are now not really considered as 'outsiders' by community members. We did not witness any 'parachuting in-and-out' and certainly no 'quick fixes', as have become common-place today (consider how many people are, in jargon used by South Africans: 'workshopped and capacitated!').

Considering that we live in a democratic state, one could argue that state support could or should replace NGO assistance. From the Profiles' interviews and our observations, state support (usually in the form of funding) is present in some form or other, usually not

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<sup>79</sup> <http://blog.gaiam.com/quotes/authors/lilla-watson>

constant or ongoing, and definitely not sufficient - sometimes the lack of support is in direct contradiction with the Constitution, such as with examples discussed above (i.e. land and water). The best example of state support we witnessed is the Bulungula Incubator where, after many years of this NGO asking for assistance, government support is evident in various forms, such as through the Community Work Programme (see more on this under Bulungula).

Whether support is from the state or from an NGO, we would argue, from our observations and discussions, that support (in the form of resources and training) is vital. This support should not be misunderstood to mean interference. The group should have control of what it does and does not do. The support structures should do just that - play a *supportive* role. This is aptly captured by S'bu Zikode (Abahlali baseMjondolo) in his words: "No intervention that is said to be for us should be without us. Talk with and not for us. Think with and not for us. Plan with us and not for us".<sup>80</sup>

#### viii) Alternative media

Media is under threat in South Africa and globally as it is controlled by corporate interests and governments who protect them and those of other economic and political elites. The dominant discourse about various issues - such as unions and strikers being portrayed as the reason/s investors don't invest; teachers being portrayed as lazy or incompetent; graduates not having the 'right' knowledge and skills for jobs and the elusive 'Third Force' which rears its head to 'explain' so much etc. - are heard loudly and clearly!

Media is a very important tool in our education and mis-education. Organisations like Workers' World Media Productions provide a platform for other voices (which are, in fact, the majority of voices) to be heard. These voices are not usually heard and/or portrayed in particular ways by the mainstream media. WWMP is one of very few organisations doing work in 'alternative' media with a commitment to working class people and their struggles and increasingly rooted within communities.

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<sup>80</sup> Zikode, S. 2013. The Power of Organizing the Urban Poor to Advance Tenure Security

WWMP combines mass education and information dissemination (through publications (such as local newspapers, etc.), radio, TV and increasing social media). It is involved in the technical training in media of community and union activists which is taught with an important emphasis on ideology and politics - WWMP views its worker education as deeply political. It is an excellent example of an organisation providing education and technical training not devoid of important social, political, economic and cultural issues, but deeply immersed in them. It has structures within communities such as LAMECs which - through the various activities that take place there - serve to support, develop and deepen working class politics and media and leadership capacities.

The SEWA example shows us the important use of media (see above) as does Itsoseng Women's Project which makes use of the community radio station in Orange Farm. Sis Gladys mentioned that they would be using the community radio station shortly after our visit to inform community members about an upcoming protest about the possible closure of the crèche and other crèches. One of the ways in which they get support from the wider community is through the community radio station.

## **(B) EDUCATION AND LEARNING - SOME USEFUL LEARNINGS FOR RE-IMAGINING THE POST-SCHOOL SECTOR**

While the main body of post-school education and training takes place in formal settings and in institutions specifically set up for the purpose as part of the state's overall education system, the examples we refer to in this report are not part of the state-based system<sup>81</sup>. Yet, they can have very important implications for the state system because they speak to a number of very important contextual issues affecting education and training, as discussed above.

The context within which post-school education and training takes place cannot be ignored - a focus on 'classroom practice' alone is limiting. Having said that, good classroom practice is important as a *component of a whole*. What follows are what we consider to be important characteristics to do with education and learning (including good classroom

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<sup>81</sup> Learning within formal institutions like TVET colleges and PALCS are written about in various other related studies as part of the larger EV2 Project



practice). These we observed during the research. As stated earlier, we acknowledge that not everything can simply be replicated in other situations and contexts.

### i. Non-formal education/learning beyond the classroom

The Profiles fall within this understanding of education - non-formal<sup>82</sup> - we saw examples of education/learning intertwined with people's lives, as opposed to disconnected from it ('disconnection' came up as a finding in other EV2 researchers' work with regard to TVET colleges and PALCs). The kind of education/learning is different to mainstream institution-based education in its purpose, what it is that is learned, and how it is learned. It is the kind of education Martin (1996) refers to: "Community education's primary purpose is education within and for communities. This involves a blurring of traditional boundaries and an emphasis on education that grows out of people's experiences and the social interests that are generated within communities" (cited in Tett, 2010: 1).

Education and learning is not about the classroom only. It is deeply inter-connected with the context of the community - its issues and struggles. It is about people's lives and struggles (UPM) and sometimes includes livelihoods (Is'baya, Itsoseng, Abalimi). Jarvis (1987) captures this in the following: "Learning, even self-directed learning, rarely occurs 'in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives; it is intimately related to that world and affected by it'" (cited in Merriam et al, 2007: 5).

There are groups/organisations involved in forms of 'alternative' work but it is disconnected from struggle and is de-politicised. Some of these groups use Popular Education methods in their practice, but their work is about managing the crisis as opposed to attempting to expose, confront and change the structures which create the crisis.

For the purposes of this research we were interested in learning from groups/organisations where struggle related to the basic needs of communities is connected to what is being taught/learned (e.g. food gardens –one can connect this to the interruption of the capitalist food system and how food is being de-commodified by taking it out of the hands of multi-nationals and claiming it as one's own).

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<sup>82</sup> Non-formal education/learning does not imply that one does not value formal education - they have different purposes and it does not have to be a choice between the two

Rogers explains the content of non-formal education by suggesting that: “(It) tends to be concrete, life-related, constantly changing to meet new needs, to deal with real issues of current (and to some extent passing) concern, whereas formal education is based on a fixed body of theoretical, textbook, compartmentalized knowledge of more permanent interest” (1992: 26). The kind of non-formal education Rogers describes is what we witnessed in all the Profiles visited. A good example of this was the Khanyisa/DELTA workshop in which we observed participants being given an opportunity to reflect on their actions - they had met previously and had then gone back to their communities and had ‘acted’. Now, in the workshop, they reflected with other participants and the facilitator and together planned for further actions. This is an excellent example of learning in and for action. Ledwith and Springett (2010: 196) refer to knowledge in action as “engaged in the world rather than alienated from it”.

Non-formal education is usually validated by the learner’s experience of success as opposed to an exam or assessment. A good example of this validation was when the Is’baya and Abalimi farmers showed us their trees, plants and vegetable gardens with an enormous sense of pride. As mentioned earlier, a farmer/trainer who started farming with Abalimi in 2000 said: “I still love the garden, still now, I’m so passionate about it. I love it”.

## **ii. Mostly practical and learning from one another (informal learning)**

With some exceptions, most of the Profiles’ education/learning happens on-site or ‘on-farm’ pointing to the fact that a ‘brick and mortar’ space is not necessarily needed - this could have some bearings on the idea of ‘community colleges’ as institutional spaces - as described in the ‘White Paper for Post-school Education and Training’(DHET, 2013).

Most of the Profiles’ education/learning is practical. Theory is not ignored nor forgotten, but the emphasis is on the ‘doing’ (see Is’baya example above). Ledwith and Springett (2010: 196) argue that western consciousness has placed value on ‘thinkers’ at the expense of ‘doers’, hence there is a divide between theory and practice. In all the Profiles visited, this divide is not there. ‘Doing’, whether it be planting a vegetable garden or taking part in a march is considered important. Is’baya and Abalimi’s education/training courses have a very practical ‘hands on’ approach. Most of the education/training happens outdoors with some theory accompanying the practice.

The Itsoseng group has learned as they have 'lived'- the journey from the food garden to the crèche to the recycling project has been one of learning new knowledge and skills. While there has been some formal training such as safety training from the Department of Agriculture and from Pikitup and a diploma in Early Childhood Development, a great amount of learning happens informally as women learn 'on-site' from each another. Abalimi farmers we spoke with said they took their knowledge and skills back to the Eastern Cape (where most are from) when they visited family. One farmer said when she goes back home, people say: "Nankuya esiza umfama" (Here comes the farmer).

Another example of people learning from each other is captured below:

Three PACSA community partner groups working on livelihoods (in Gezibuso, Trust Feed and Richmond) hosted two emerging women farmers, Ms Ndwandwe and Mrs Mfekayi, from the Zimele project in Mtubatuba, northern KwaZulu-Natal, for four days of shared experiences, peer mentorship and solidarity.

The aim of the exchange was for the Mtubatuba women to demonstrate agroecological methods of farming and provide advice and training on how to preserve seeds for the next planting season. Preservation of seeds provides increased sustainability to groups engaged in farming, contributes to greater biodiversity and is the basis of food sovereignty.<sup>83</sup>

The above points to the fact that knowledge and skills exist within communities even if these are not recognised by some (including those in power). This sentiment is captured in Neville Alexander's reflections on learning at the 'University of Robben Island': "We taught one another what we knew, discovering each other's resourcefulness. We also learned how people with little or no formal education could not only themselves participate in education programmes but actually teach others a range of different insights and skills. The 'University of Robben Island' was one of the best universities in the country...it also showed me that you don't need professors".<sup>84</sup>

### iii. Blending of formal and Popular Education

Firstly, a brief note on Popular Education:

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<sup>83</sup> PACSA Annual Report 2013. People taking control of their livelihoods. Page 19

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/dr-neville-edward-alexander>

The term 'Popular Education' comes from the Spanish and Portuguese words where 'popular' means 'of the people' i.e. the 'popular classes'- the poor and working class. Popular education is, therefore, overtly political and deals with issues of class, struggle and real transformation. It embodies Freire's notion that education can never be neutral - it must side with the poor, marginalised and excluded. It is 'education for critical consciousness.'

Most of the Profiles embrace Popular Education (although this was not stated by some of the groups). Apart from some examples being overtly political (Workers' College, Workers' World Media Productions, UPM, PACSA), we noted the following in their work:

- The curricula come out of the concrete experience and material interests of people in communities of resistance and struggle;
- The education/learning is collective and is about a group's development rather than individualistic (even if it is an individual who is involved in the initial learning, e.g. Workers' College);
- There is a connection between education/learning, organising, agency and social change.

Workers' College is an example of how formal and Popular Education (both in content and delivery) can be blended. This shows us that the two things are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can co-exist, although there are not many examples of this. CIPSET's Community Education Programme (NMMU) is an example of non-formal learning spaces connected to a formal institution.

While WC diplomas are formal in the sense that they are certificated, structured, etc., one can strongly argue that Popular Education is present in the content and teaching/learning methods - participatory methods, such as group work, discussion & debate, poetry, drumming, art, reflection, etc. - are used at WC.

In a context where so much teaching and learning in formal institutions is 'out of touch' and/or 'not relevant' and/or 'disconnected from everyday lived experiences of people', WC programmes are deliberately accessible to members of trade unions and community organisations and the content is practically linked to issues and struggles in the workplace and community. WC also acknowledges and values the prior and existing knowledge, skills, learning and experiences of its participants, many of which were/are acquired outside of formal learning spaces.

A real, deep connection is made between the classroom and the lived experiences of students and those the students work and live with. WC acknowledges the importance of academic learning AND everyday lived experiences and it strives to help shape a society that reflects a value system that is based on justice, dignity and respect and a socio-economic system that works in the interests of the collective. Shaul in Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* captures this as follows: "Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes 'the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (1996: 16).

#### iv. Education/learning is ongoing (years)

Rogers (1992: 26) writes of non-formal education as "a continuing process, not a once-for-all occasion". The most obvious example of ongoing learning is UPM as it is a social movement (see UPM above). While this is so, all the 'learning' of the Profiles visited is ongoing. This can largely be attributed to the long-standing relationships each Profile has with the communities they work with. For example, village members now approach Is'baya because they have heard about the work being done in other villages. Is'baya has a field office in the Port St Johns area and we would argue that this support system (also present in other Profiles, such as WWMP's LAMECS) is an important part of why the Profiles are 'successful'. Education/learning is ongoing. We witnessed no 'in-and-out and no 'quick fixes'.

#### v. Own language and literacy/'illiteracy'

Participants are taught in their own language/s in all Profiles visited except Workers' College where English is used. (See more on this under Workers' College above). In several instances, Mother Tongue and English are used. 'Illiteracy' is not a barrier as it is in so many instances. There are countless examples of prospective students having to have a certain level of literacy in order to access certain programmes. The formalisation of education (SAQA/NQF) in South Africa has played a significant part (not intentionally) in people being excluded from programmes and courses because of their low level/s of literacy. This 'barrier' does not exist for the participants we met. There were some exceptions, like the Is'baya Village Monitors and CDPs who do need some literacy and

numeracy skills as they are required to read and write as part of their work.

With regard to the Profiles, literacy is not learned as a stand-alone, but as other things are learned, e.g. gardening. For instance, Abalimi has written its first book titled How to Start a Garden with only a Few Cents! It is written in isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans and Abalimi hopes it will be available in all 11 languages in the future. We were told on a number of our visits that participants may not have been formally educated, but cope well with learning new knowledge and skills. The Farm and Garden National Trust describes this in this way:

Given its potential, the critical question is whether community-based organic agriculture can in fact play a meaningful role in achieving food security. One of its biggest advantages is that organic agricultural methods can easily be transferred to people with few or no previous skills –albeit at a basic level. In just four days, anyone can obtain the basic skills which, if applied (with some guidance) over two seasons, will result in a permanent ability to grow productive survival or subsistence gardens at low cost.

Although more advanced levels of organic farming require much more training, with the basics in place it is possible to kick-start self-sustaining community farming and gardening in uncontested land such as backyard plots, rural smallholdings, school yards, in servitude and commonage land. Basic-level training can therefore provide a foundation for localised food security among the poor<sup>85</sup>.

While we are NOT advocating that people remain ‘illiterate’, we are saying that people who are deemed ‘illiterate’ are often excluded from education/training because they cannot read or write or do maths at a particular level. These requirements/levels should be re-visited.

A case in point - Mama Kaba:

Mama Kaba (Abalimi Operations Manager) explained to us that she applied for a position to head the new garden centre (Khayelitsha) in 1989 and found herself up against people with matric certificates. She had (as she explained) “a Standard Two”. She said:

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<http://www.farmgardentrust.org/resourcesdir/research/CanCommunitybasedMicroFarmingCreateFoodSecurityCaseStudy07.pdf>

“Ndazibona ndingu zero” (I felt like a non-entity). Despite this, she got the job, learned to drive and got her driver’s licence. She recalls the experience in this way: Her husband liked to drive the car instead of teaching her how to - he felt “it was not a woman’s place to drive a car”. Her advice to other women is “to be strong and confident whether you are ‘educated’ or not and to take/claim your place in society”.

The Barefoot College in India is a good example of a college that does not exclude on the basis of literacy level/s. Rogers (1992: 25-26) writes about non-formal education as “open to anyone, irrespective of their former educational level, whereas formal education is highly selective, dependent on prior success in educational terms, rejecting the many and selecting the few to continue their studies further”. Non-formal education, and certainly the examples we saw, is far more inclusionary.

#### vi. Indigenous and existing knowledge

In a number of sites visited, we were told that indigenous and existing knowledge are valued, respected and used, as is new knowledge.

The acknowledgement of *indigenous* knowledge was probably most evident in two of the additional interviews we conducted - with Simbhademe and Biowatch South Africa. ‘Local belief system’ is one of the five core criteria of the Innovations Programme (Simbhademe) (see Simbhademe above). Biowatch South Africa believes that “seed selection, saving and exchange are at the heart of traditional agricultural systems for millions of small-holder farmers in Africa, contributing significantly to livelihoods and the conservation of agricultural biodiversity”.<sup>86</sup> This acknowledgement and application of traditional practice challenges the current hold GM has over seeds as a commodity.

The importance of *existing* knowledge is probably best illustrated by one of the core pedagogical practices of Workers’ College –RPL - WC recognizes prior and existing knowledge in the form of ‘struggle knowledge’ of its students.

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.biowatch.org.za/list.php?cat=Seed%20sovereignty>

## 8. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

All of the Profiles of Possibility are examples of groups and people who are doing work that has great value for themselves and their communities, despite hardship and struggle. As already discussed, most of the *learning* happens outside of formal institutions and occurs non-formally and informally. It is directly linked to people's lives and, in most examples, to their livelihoods and it is meaningful, valuable and powerful. It is *not* well-supported by the mainstream and remains almost completely hidden in the margins.

There is much we can and should learn from these examples. As described in this report, these learnings include: how communities and their organisations are involved in 'post-school' learning; how this learning is organised; how their curricula is constructed; what methods are most useful for learning to take place; what role is played by participants in the collective learning process; the important question of language; and how learning is achieved without formal assessment.

We need to re-think some of the accepted conventions and ideas about education and training –these are challenged by the direct experiences and learning activities that we observed and studied, and which *concretely demonstrate* that there are ways of doing things differently.

One of the overarching principles framing all the Profiles of Possibility and indeed other similar examples, is the idea of working *cooperatively*—all challenge the common misconception that people are individualistic and selfish by nature, and they show us that much can be achieved if we work together. They reject the Survivor 'outwit, outlast outplay' mentality which has consumed much of our world.

They also show us that even if we think small acts are insignificant, *collectively* they could have immense power. This sentiment is captured in the words of Peter Gabriel's song 'Biko'(1980):

You can blow out a candle  
But you can't blow out a fire  
Once the flames begin to catch  
The wind will blow it higher.



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## APPENDIX 1

### PROFILES OF POSSIBILITY: QUESTIONS

The goal of the site visit is to collect material to compile a written (and visual) profile of the initiative that includes (this is what needs to be written-up afterwards):

- A brief description/overview of the initiative: Where is it located, what is its history, what are its 'objectives', what activities take place, who is involved, etc? This should include both a physical description and photographs.
- A rich description of the initiative including a motivation for the inclusion of the initiative as a profile of possibility: What about this initiative caught our attention? Why was it selected to profile? What is happening that demonstrates/points to new possibilities for the PSETD sector? Also what are the things we wouldn't include and why? And what are the struggles, barriers and threats that the initiative faces? What is the initiative's response to them?
- Voices, stories & experiences: How do people involved in this initiative experience it? Staff, facilitators, participants, others connected in some way, etc. How do participants experience the relationship between what they learn and their lives?
- A synthesis of the lessons learned from this initiative and their application to the PSETD sector? How does this relate to the core questions of EV2?

### QUESTIONS

NOTE to researchers:

- We will need to explain what it is we are researching upfront. We may need to explain what we mean by the PSETD sector and not assume that the people/group/initiative think/s of themselves as part of the PSETD sector (they may not use those words).
- Different groups/organisations use different words: some may say 'facilitator', others 'educator'. Ditto re 'student', 'participant', 'learner'. Ditto re 'initiative' – they may refer to it as something else. We can use their words once we know what they are (when we get there). Also there may not be 'neat categories' like this at all.
- We need to ask for learning materials, if any (I have requested this via e-mail).

Interview Questions for the Coordinator/s (will probably be in a group if more than one)  
(*These are a guide, not a script*)

1. Briefly describe the organisation/initiative. What do you do and what is your primary objective?
2. When, how and why did this initiative start? What do you think is important for us to know about the history of this initiative?
3. What would you say are the foundational beliefs and values of this initiative? What forms its foundation?
4. How many people participate in this initiative and what do they do?
5. (How many facilitators, participants, staff, volunteers, etc).

6. Please describe a 'typical' participant, if possible (sex, age, 'race', level of education).
7. How do participants usually find out about/join the initiative?
8. What would you say are your successes? What is working?
9. What would you say are your main 'challenges' or failures and why?
10. What are the barriers/threats you face? What do/can you do about them?
11. Are you connected to other similar entities or other interested entities/groups/movements, etc? If so, which one/s?
12. Describe the kind of education/learning taking place in the initiative.
13. Is the learning informal, non-formal or formal?
14. Where does it happen?
15. Do the participants need any particular 'requirements' in order for them to participate? If so, what?
16. Do the facilitators need any particular 'requirements' in order for them to participate? If so, what?
17. What are the role/s of the facilitator and the participants?
18. Who decides what is learned? (NOTE to researchers: this is about content)?
19. Who designs and facilitates the learning process?
20. How does learning happen? Is it practical? Theoretical? Both? (NOTE to researchers; this is about what happens in the 'classroom' (process)).
21. What language(s) is/are used?
22. How do you understand the relationship between what is learned and the lives of the participants? Can you give us some examples to help us understand what that looks like in practice.
23. Do you think this initiative has brought about or can bring about any meaningful change? If so, please explain.
24. Could you share something (in a few lines) that describes this initiative or something about this initiative (NOTE to researchers: we are looking for a brief 'story' here)?
25. What do you think others (like us, for example) can learn from this initiative? What lessons do you think your initiative has for the PSETD sector broadly?
26. What hope/predictions for the future do you have for the initiative? Is there anything else that you would like to say about the initiative before we end the interview?

Interview Questions for Facilitators (can be in a group)  
*(These are a guide, not a script)*

1. Briefly describe the organisation/initiative. What do you do and what is its primary objective?
2. How and why did you get involved with this initiative, what were you doing before and how long have you been here?
3. What are the core values and principles of this initiative and how are they carried into the learning space? Please give an example from your own experience.
4. Briefly describe your role in this initiative. (What do you do and what specifically are you trying to achieve? What experience did you bring to this role, if any, that has helped you?)
5. What keeps you here? Why do you stay?
6. Please describe a 'typical' participant (sex, age, 'race', level of education).
7. What would you say are your successes? What is working?
8. What would you say are your main 'challenges' or failures and why?
9. What are the barriers/threats you face? What do/can you do about them?



10. Are you connected to other similar entities or other interested
11. entities/groups/movements, etc? If so, which one/s?
12. Describe the kind of education/learning taking place in the initiative.
13. Is the learning informal, non-formal or formal?
14. Where does it happen?
15. Do the participants need any particular 'requirements' in order for them to
16. participate? If so, what?
17. Do you (the facilitator/s) need any particular 'requirements' in order for you to
18. participate? If so, what?
19. What are the role/s of the facilitator (you) and the participants?
20. Who decides what is learned? (NOTE to researchers: this is about content)?
21. Who designs and facilitates the learning process?
22. How does learning happen? Is it practical? Theoretical? Both? (NOTE to researchers; this is about what happens in the 'classroom' (process)).
23. What language(s) is/are used?
24. How do you understand the relationship between what is learned and the lives of the participants? Can you give us some examples to help us understand what that looks like in practice.
25. Do you think this initiative has brought about or can bring about any meaningful change? If so, please explain.
26. Could you share something (in a few lines) that describes this initiative or something about this initiative (NOTE to researchers: we are looking for a brief 'story' here)?
27. What do you think others (like us, for example) can learn from this initiative? What lessons do you think your initiative has for the PSETD sector broadly?
28. What hope/predictions for the future do you have for the initiative? Is there anything else that you would like to say about the initiative before we end the interview?

#### Interview Questions for Participants (can be in a group)

*(These are a guide, not a script)*

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself.
2. Briefly describe this organisation/initiative? (What happens here?).
3. When, how and why did you get involved with this initiative? (Are you from the community where the initiative is/where the learning happens? If not, where are you from?).
4. Please describe what it is like to be part of this initiative. (What happens on a day-to-day basis? How do you feel when you are here? What are your relationships like with the staff? Educators? Other participants? Etc).
5. What keeps you here? Why do you stay?
6. What are you doing/learning here? Describe the kinds of things you are doing/learning about (NOTE to researchers: 'doing' - not just 'learning' because the participants may be learning AS they discuss issues in meetings or AS they plant veggies – they may not refer to it as 'learning' - they may think we mean a 'formal' learning space like a classroom if we just say 'learning').
7. How do you learn things here? Who decides what it is you will learn? Describe what happens in the learning space (Who learns from whom? Do you feel that you – your experience, your skills, your ideas, your beliefs, your language, etc – are valued in the learning space? Give examples). (NOTE to researchers: the 'space' may not be traditional/conventional (see above)).
8. How is this learning different from other education/training you may have had, if it is? Please give examples.

9. How does what you are learning help you in your everyday life? What are you able to do (or to do differently or better) as a result of your experience here?
10. How have you benefitted from your involvement with this initiative? How has your involvement been helpful to you? What has changed? (Please give examples).
11. In what way/s can the 'education/learning' improve?
12. Could you share something (in a few lines) that describes this initiative or something about this initiative (NOTE to researchers: we are looking for a brief 'story' here)?
13. What do you think others (like us, for example) can learn from this initiative? What lessons do you think your initiative has for the PSETD sector broadly?
14. What hope/predictions for the future do you have for the initiative?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to say about this initiative before we end the interview?

## APPENDIX 2

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2014

# The Statement of the Rustler's Valley Youth Retreat

We are 60 diverse young people from all continents of the world who met in Rustler's Valley, South Africa from November 16 to 19, 2014 to discuss the state of civil society around the world and consider our role as young people within it. We do not claim to speak for all youth, or for the diverse views from within our own countries, but rather we seek to lend our voices to the on-going debate about the role of civil society in the social, political and economic transformation of the world. We also want to respond to and further develop the conversation begun by the [Open Letter for Activists](#) as young people engaged at grassroots, national and international levels.

Increasingly, the face of civil society around the world is a young one. Yet, we recognize much may be learned from other generations; their struggles, histories and lessons. Although we will face many of the challenges of the future, we believe that with intergenerational partnerships and a shared responsibility, we can transform civil society and therefore global society.

Current strategies to address restrictions on civil society space are failing. To create the necessary space at the national level, we should develop radical tactics to mobilize non traditional civil society groups, create platforms for international solidarity, and develop safe spaces where we can come together in a conducive environment to address these issues.

After much reflection, we collectively arrived at four primary topics of concern to those present: race, gender and sexual orientation; democratization of our own organisations and power structures; reform of relationships between civil society and donor organisations; and the divide between grassroots movements and civil society organisations (CSOs).

### **Eliminating discrimination: Race, gender and sexual orientation**

As youth, we witness and experience the on-going reality of discrimination in civil society based on race, gender, and sexual orientation. We call on all sectors, especially media, governmental, non-governmental, and religious organizations, and the private sector to acknowledge and combat discriminatory practices. Civil society should lead the way by respecting diversity and completely eliminating all forms of discrimination from our own environments.

### **Democratization of CSOs and power structures**

As youth, we acknowledge that current political, social and economic systems and organizational structures favour the few, not the many. We emphasize our duty to democratise:

- **Public dialogue** through the use of inclusive and accessible language to broaden participation and break down the hierarchy among civil society and the communities we seek to serve.

- **Structures of power** that prevent us from collaborating across issues and themes to establish civil society-wide avenues of influence and the elevation of our collective voice.
- **Access to intergovernmental and civil society processes** for local and grassroots social movements.
- **Relationships between large civil society organizations and grassroots movements** through the adoption of and respect for higher ethical standards.

Additionally, we should establish new methods of ensuring transparency, through the development of:

- Conflict of interest indices;
- Organization-wide gender parity measures;
- Reporting on executive salaries and board fees;
- Cooperation indices, and;
- Mechanisms that ensure the full integration of all stakeholders into decision-making processes, including volunteers.

### **Rethinking relationships between civil society and donor organisations**

As youth, the driving force of our work is our own vision, passion and values. To better serve those with whom we work, we must question the current relationships between donors and recipients. We pledge to:

- Acknowledge the need to be financially autonomous through self-sustainability.
- Mobilize unions through membership fees as a way of engaging our own constituencies to ensure their ownership and responsibility in our work.
- Create alternative and innovative solutions to generate funds for our work.
- Encourage donors to explore avenues of promoting collaboration between and with civil society organizations.

As youth, we see the increasing danger in becoming more accountable to funding sources than the communities we purport to serve. We recognize the need to first hold ourselves to account, and then:

- Increase accountability of the international community to its by commitments and constituents
- Develop the advocacy skills of community members to more effectively claim their rights

### **Relationship between Grassroots and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

The increasing importance of grassroots actors, both formal and informal, is undeniable in today's world. Gone are the days where NGOs may claim to represent the "voices" of communities. Our communities can and do speak for themselves and stand on their own work. They invert power structures through community-driven development and building people-power globally. We believe in the following tenants:

- **Access.** NGOs should work to access, identify and develop leaders and existing solutions within communities. Serving as enablers, we can support accessibility to and sharing of the core resources needed to foster greater impact.
- **Sustainability.** NGOs should promote capacity-building and community ownership to both catalyse the emergence of new grassroots groups and ensure existing groups con-

tinue their work self-sufficiently and sustainably. Instead of providing ready-made solutions, the focus should be on connecting likeminded leaders in decentralized networks of information sharing.

- **Measuring success.** NGOs should work with communities to develop new, community-supported, ways of measuring and interpreting success around the values of sustainable change and community ownership.
- **Reimagining the playing field.** NGOs should work to reorient all funding systems to align with these tenants and the under acknowledged needs of grassroots organizations.

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENT INITIATIVE FOR PLURALISM IN ECONOMICS

#### OPEN LETTER

# **An international student call for pluralism in economics**

**It is not only the world economy that is in crisis.** The teaching of economics is in crisis too, and this crisis has consequences far beyond the university walls. What is taught shapes the minds of the next generation of policymakers, and therefore shapes the societies we live in. We, over 65 associations of economics students from over 30 different countries, believe it is time to reconsider the way economics is taught. We are dissatisfied with the dramatic narrowing of the curriculum that has taken place over the last couple of decades. This lack of intellectual diversity does not only restrain education and research. It limits our ability to contend with the multidimensional challenges of the 21st century - from financial stability, to food security and climate change. The real world should be brought back into the classroom, as well as debate and a pluralism of theories and methods. Such change will help renew the discipline and ultimately create a space in which solutions to society's problems can be generated.

**United across borders, we call for a change of course.** We do not claim to have the perfect answer, but we have no doubt that economics students will profit from exposure to different perspectives and ideas. Pluralism will not *only* help to enrich teaching and research and reinvigorate the discipline. More than this, pluralism carries the promise of bringing economics back into the service of society. Three forms of pluralism must be at the core of curricula: **theoretical, methodological and interdisciplinary.**

Theoretical pluralism emphasizes the need to broaden the range of schools of thought represented in the curricula. It is not the particulars of any economic tradition we object to. Pluralism is not about

choosing sides, but about encouraging intellectually rich debate and learning to critically contrast ideas. Where other disciplines embrace diversity and teach competing theories even when they are mutually incompatible, economics is often presented as a unified body of knowledge. Admittedly, the dominant tradition has internal variations. Yet, it is only one way of doing economics and of looking at the real world. Such uniformity is unheard of in other fields; nobody would take seriously a degree program in psychology that focuses only on Freudianism, or a politics program that focuses only on state socialism. An inclusive and comprehensive economics education should promote balanced exposure to a variety of theoretical perspectives, from the commonly taught neoclassically-based approaches to the largely excluded classical, post-Keynesian, institutional, ecological, feminist, Marxist and Austrian traditions - among others. Most economics students graduate without ever encountering such diverse perspectives in the classroom.

Furthermore, it is essential that core curricula include courses that provide context and foster reflexive thinking about economics and its methods per se, including philosophy of economics and the theory of knowledge. Also, because theories cannot be fully understood independently of the historical context in which they were formulated, students should be systematically exposed to the history of economic thought and to the classical literature on economics as well as to economic history. Currently, such courses are either non-existent or marginalized to the fringes of economics curricula.

Methodological pluralism stresses the need to broaden the range of tools economists employ to grapple with economic questions. It is clear that maths and statistics are crucial to our discipline. But all too often students learn to master quantitative methods without ever discussing if and why they should be used, the choice of assumptions and the applicability of results. Also, there are important aspects of economics which cannot be understood using exclusively quantitative methods: sound economic inquiry requires that quantitative methods are complemented by methods used by other social sciences. For instance, the understanding of institutions and culture could be greatly enhanced if qualitative analysis was given more attention in economics curricula. Nevertheless, most economics students never take a single class in qualitative methods.

Finally, economics education should include interdisciplinary approaches and allow students to engage with other social sciences and the humanities. Economics is a social science; complex economic phenomena can seldom be understood if presented in a vacuum, removed from their socio-

logical, political, and historical contexts. To properly discuss economic policy, students should understand the broader social impacts and moral implications of economic decisions.

While approaches to implementing such forms of pluralism will vary from place to place, general ideas for implementation might include:

- Hiring instructors and researchers who can bring theoretical and methodological diversity to economics programs;
- Creating texts and other pedagogical tools needed to support pluralist course offerings;
- Formalizing collaborations between social sciences and humanities departments or establishing special departments that could oversee interdisciplinary programs blending economics and other fields.

**Change will be difficult - it always is. But it is already happening.** Indeed, students across the world have already started creating change step by step. We have filled lecture theatres in weekly lectures by invited speakers on topics not included in the curriculum; we have organised reading groups, workshops, conferences; we have analysed current syllabuses and drafted alternative programs; we have started teaching ourselves and others the new courses we would like to be taught. We have founded university groups and built networks both nationally and internationally.

Change must come from many places. So now we invite you - students, economists, and non-economists - to join us and create the critical mass needed for change. See [Support us](#) to show your support and connect with our growing networks. Ultimately, pluralism in economics education is essential for healthy public debate. It is a matter of democracy.

Signed, the member organizations of the International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics:

- Sociedad de Economía Crítica Argentina y Uruguay, **Argentina**
- The PPE Society, La Trobe University, **Australia**
- Society for Pluralist Economics Vienna, **Austria**
- Nova Ágora, **Brazil**
- Mouvement étudiant québécois pour un enseignement pluraliste de l'économie, **Canada**



- Estudios Nueva Economía, **Chile**
- Grupo de estudiantes y egresados de la Facultad de Economía y Negocios de la Universidad de Chile, **Chile**
- Det Samfundsøkonomiske Selskab (DSS), **Denmark**
- Post-Crash Economics Society Essex, **England**
- Cambridge Society for Economic Pluralism, **England**
- Better Economics UCLU, **England**
- Post-Crash Economics Society Manchester, **England**
- SOAS Open Economics Forum, **England**
- Alternative Thinking for Economics Society, Sheffield University, **England**
- LSE Post-Crash Economics **England**
- Pour un Enseignement Pluraliste de l'Economie dans le Supérieur (PEPS-Economie), **France**
- Netzwerk Plurale Ökonomik (Network for Pluralist Economics), **Germany**
- Oikos Köln, **Germany**
- Real World Economics, Mainz, **Germany**
- Kritische WissenschaftlerInnen Berlin, **Germany**
- Arbeitskreis Plurale Ökonomik, München, **Germany**
- Oikos Leipzig, **Germany**
- Was ist Ökonomie, Berlin, **Germany**
- Impuls. für eine neue Wirtschaft, Erfurt, **Germany**
- Ecoation, Augsburg, **Germany**
- Kritische Ökonomen, Frankfurt, **Germany**
- Arbeitskreis Plurale Ökonomik, Hamburg, **Germany**
- Real World Economics, Heidelberg, **Germany**
- Student HUB Weltethos Institut Tübingen, **Germany**
- LIE - Lost in Economics e.V., Regensburg, **Germany**
- Javahpur University Heterodox Economics Association, **India**
- Economics Student Forum - Tel Aviv, **Israel**
- Economics Student Forum - Haifa (Rethinking Economics), **Israel**
- Rethinking Economics Italia, **Italy**
- Grupo de Estudiantes por la Enseñanza Plural de la Economía, UNAM, **Mexico**
- Oeconomicus Economic Club MGIMO, **Russia**
- Glasgow University Real World Economics Society, **Scotland**

- Movement for Pluralistic Economics, **Slovenia**
- Post-Crash Barcelona, **Spain**
- Asociación de Estudiantes de Económicas de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, **Spain**
- Estudantes de Económicas e Empresariais, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, **Spain**
- Lunds Kritiska Ekonomer, **Sweden**
- Handels Students for Sustainability, **Sweden**
- PEPS-Helvetia, **Switzerland**
- Rethinking Economics, **UK**
- Rethinking Economics New York, **United States**
- Sociedad de Economía Crítica, **Argentina and Uruguay**

5 May, 2014

## BACK COVER

### Village at the end of the world

(By Britt Baatjes, inspired by our visit to the Bulungula Incubator)

We drove for nine hours to get to a village

To a village in the former Transkei - an apartheid bantustan, a 'backwater', in the 'bundus'

A forgotten village

Where 'development' took a detour and passed it by

Where the now trendy expression 'off-the-grid' means - for this village - never having been on it

Where a two-hour walk will get you to the nearest government clinic (crossing a river as you go)

Where many are 'illiterate', 'uneducated', 'poor'- and yet, the villagers are none of those words.

After two days we returned to 'civilisation', to modernisation, to 'development'- to the hustle and bustle,

to the rush,

to the instant everything,

to the modern buildings,

to the fast cars,

and to the latest technology which isn't actually that 'smart'.

We returned to the increasing unemployment, the increasing homelessness, the increasing hunger, the increasing poverty, the increasing unhappiness, the increasing pain...

to the thing which we have been told is 'a better life', a dream, progress, something to strive towards...

Oh, how we miss that village at the end of the world - so so far away

Nqileni Village, Xhora Mouth...we miss your immense beauty, your serenity...where nature and people just simply co-exist

Peaceful, unhurried, still.

Where the 'breathing' that Arundhati Roy talks about can, indeed, be heard...