

## **Abstract**

Urban food gardens and community development: A case study of the Siyakhana initiative, Bezuidenhout Valley, Johannesburg.

The aim of this study is to explore the links which exist between community development and urban food gardens. South Africa has experienced a twenty five percent growth in the urban population from 2005-2010. It is further predicted that this will increase by a further thirty six percent to thirteen million inhabitants by 2015. The practice of urban agriculture is one of the strategies that can assist in addressing development challenges in an urban setting in South Africa and around the world. Urban agriculture has the potential to provide a survival strategy for the poor and thus contribute to poverty alleviation, employment, food security, social integration and skills transfer. This research explores the economic, social and ecological benefits of the activity, questioning the ways in which the Siyakhana food garden (and larger initiative) contributes to the Siyakhana community. For the purpose of the research the Siyakhana community refers to the Siyakhana group (eight women in the inner city of Johannesburg who run Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs)) and the gardeners who work in the food garden.

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews, in-depth questionnaires, participant observation and informal conversation, as well as primary and secondary sources. The data was collected for a twelve month period from June 2010 to June 2011. In total the food garden was visited thirty times during the field work and the ECDCs twelve to fifteen times each. Because of the initiatives potential in community development, the focus of the research gives in-depth insights into the Siyakhana group, their history with the initiative, details about their ECDCs and their expectations and their perceived benefits of being involved with the Siyakhana initiative.

The key findings of the study are that there are two primary ways in which the Siyakhana group benefit from being involved in the Siyakhana initiative. The benefits relate to the supplementary food which the Siyakhana group receive on a weekly basis and the practical

learning environment of the Siyakhana food garden. This research shows that through their connection with the Siyakhana initiative the Siyakhana group act as a conduit for inner city community development. The healthy and nutritious food from the food garden and the knowledge obtained from being involved with the initiative is shared with a range of stakeholders within the inner city. The Siyakhana food garden is a unique example of a community project which embraces the concepts of ecological health promotion in a multiplicity of ways – through the distribution of food, training, conscientisation and mobilisation. Finally the study shows that when exploring the links between urban food gardens and community development it is not a pre-requisite for the community to physically engage in the production activities of the garden for empowerment and skills transfer to take place.

**Keywords:** urban agriculture, food security, urban livelihood strategy, sustainable livelihoods approach, sustainability, survival urban agriculture, alternative theories of development, parallel economy, community development, participation, empowerment, Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs)