FACT
Food Agency Cape Town

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# FACT DIALOGUES DIGEST

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Sanelisiwe Nyaba

Table of contents

## The Facts about FACT

Food Agency Cape Town (FACT) is a community led organisation in which members use food to unpack food injustices, advocate for food agency in Cape Town and surrounds, and to connect communities. Members include urban farmers and community kitchen heads, many of whom have played an important co-research role in food security studies. FACT is still very young and now becoming more formalised through assistance from Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT).

As FACT we are also partners in TMG's Urban Food Futures programme, along with other organisations and academic researchers. Urban Food Futures is a programme that aims to fundamentally rethink urban food systems with a view of identifying, testing and adapting concrete solutions for livable futures in African cities. It's currently in its scoping phase and as part of that, Cape Town partners have been doing groundwork to create a plan of action for the next 4 to 5 years.

FACT emerged from different co-research activities since 2016. Co-researchers are people that are actually doing the work in the communities. There are networks of such people that could be more connected, who can then connect dots with other communities, and together look at solutions and the deeper underlying issues.

Working with communities means presenting findings in a number of different ways - not only academic papers, articles and reports, but more creative and accessible forms like podcasts, blog posts, videos and social media. Using film and other media like podcasts, blog posts and social media is a key strategy in communicating academic papers and research to community members, and an important part of the FACT toolkit.

## Motivation of the dialogues

Covid lockdowns highlighted that we have been hungry for a long time before this, and there has been a lot of violence, especially gender based violence. A lot of kitchens popped up in Covid to deal with the hunger, and with them the questions: *Where's the government? Where are our ward councillors?*

These came out of frustration that we had when we observed the distribution of food parcels in our communities and what was in those parcels. During that time a lot of organisations and government departments got together and started discussions, and provided what they thought were solutions to our food crises. *What they forgot was to invite us, we were not offered a seat at the table – a lot of conversations and dialogue was happening about and around us but without us.*

A vision then emerged which came as a recommendation from the communities themselves to bring the dialogues to the communities; to sit and talk about food, talk about being hungry, in a language that we all understand.

Realising all of this, we need to debunk the myth that it's uncomfortable to talk about

hunger. A common sharing from community members was: *"I don't feel comfortable to go next door and show my shame of hunger, my pride kicks in, yet everyone is suffering from the same thing. Why is it like that? HIV was a stigma, but today people are wearing positive t-shirts. Why not the same with hunger?"*

Our vision for the dialogue process to follow became to destigmatise hunger, realise our challenges and together come up with solutions – which is the beauty of co-research.

When communities come together we see challenges together.

We know soup kitchens are a bandaid; people queueing for food is a temporary solution. So how do we use these spaces to begin to build resilient food systems? Why not rethink the kitchens? Community kitchens could be hubs where I can talk to someone, learn like how to grow food, People are falling through the cracks, we jump over them when can we share skills and include them. We delved into food agency, food as a commons and debunking academia - researchers extract information, but this is our data. Collaboration recognises food industry within our own communities. We recognise and appreciate the small things our communities do and want to grow them.

In the Food Agency study, many of 1824 people who were interviewed sought a platform to talk about food. The newly developed connections between the established co-researcher group and the neighbours they met through the research allowed the core team of co-researchers to grow and establish relationships beyond their farming or fishing peers and cooperate with vendors, chefs, and activists.

From these engagements, a clear theme that came out of the Agency study was the need for collaboration to bring together people who have different stories as they journey in transforming their communities.

Elsewhere in the world, food committees have show potential as a cross-sectoral platform to engage local food system actors in dialogue, plan specific interventions to improve local system governance, and develop community-based models for democratic food systems governance. Locally, the Community Action Networks (CANs) which emerged in response to the Covid-19 crisis have shown a huge potential for these kinds of cooperation.

A food committee in St. Helena Bay will probably look very different from one in Mfuleni or Gugulethu. The members determine the agenda and programme. While one committee could focus on technical work and training, others could be shaped by artists and use food as a means to talk about intersectionality, while others work toward the establishment of small entrepreneurial structures. These specific flavours will make a great city-wide platform of committees fostering local food system change through community led processes in organised engagement on a local level.

FACT was inspired by this potential of communal power to engage and challenge

the government on the one hand, but of equal importance, create a space to talk about food, engage with food, and develop new links with existing community-driven solutions.

Based on these insights a decision was taken to initiate a series of food dialogues in the hope that they might become the seeds for longer-lasting food committees over time.

## Dialogues and Food Committees: a theory of change going forwards

The theory of change underpinning the dialogues work is that through facilitating food system dialogues amongst actors at very local levels, it would become possible for these actors to self organise into informal coalitions capable of identifying key challenges, priorities, opportunities, and action plans for more democratic and localised food systems. And further that they would be able to implement these in principled and collaborative ways.

We refer to these ward level coalitions as food committees.

Food committees, as imagined by the study team, are micro-level networks that focus on food sovereignty across all sorts of things including farmer-to-farmer training, stokvels, cooperatives and small businesses, solidarity, and advocacy. Also, these dialogues in food communities on the local township level foster exchange and collaboration among local actors: food garden producers, community kitchen chefs, spaza store owners, informal vendors, ECD staff, teachers, activists, food artists, input producers, waste managers, and of course, consumers.

Through the co-learning and organising structure of the food committees, local actors will be better positioned to respond effectively to obstacles, gaps, and opportunities in the production and distribution of food and to build durable democratic models for planning local food systems.

These in turn will lead to improved food access and dietary diversity and greater inclusion in economic activity for local actors and end users.

## Objectives

With this theory of change in mind, the Food Dialogues therefore served a dual purpose.

Firstly they were a means of returning the findings of the Agency study to the co-researchers and communities that had participated in the research. This was seen by the research team as a fundamental obligation to the collaborative, non-extractive ethos they had established for the Agency study research process.

Secondly, these food dialogues held the potential to build on the initial momentum and relationships that had been developed through the Agency study into more established ward level food committees.

There was clearly an urgent need to deal with hunger and other food related challenges. The Agency study had brought

this into focus and identified a network of local actors willing to take up the challenge in their own wards. A seed had been planted.

The next step was to water this seed, providing the energy and structure needed for it to grow.

With this bigger goal in mind, a decision was taken to focus the supporting the ward level nodes of co-researchers and interested citizens to conduct a series of food dialogues around the following practical visions:

1. Develop an increased understanding of systemic causes of food security to increase individual agency
2. To enhancing collective agency and community voice to participate in food research and governance processes
3. Destigmatise hunger and food insecurity

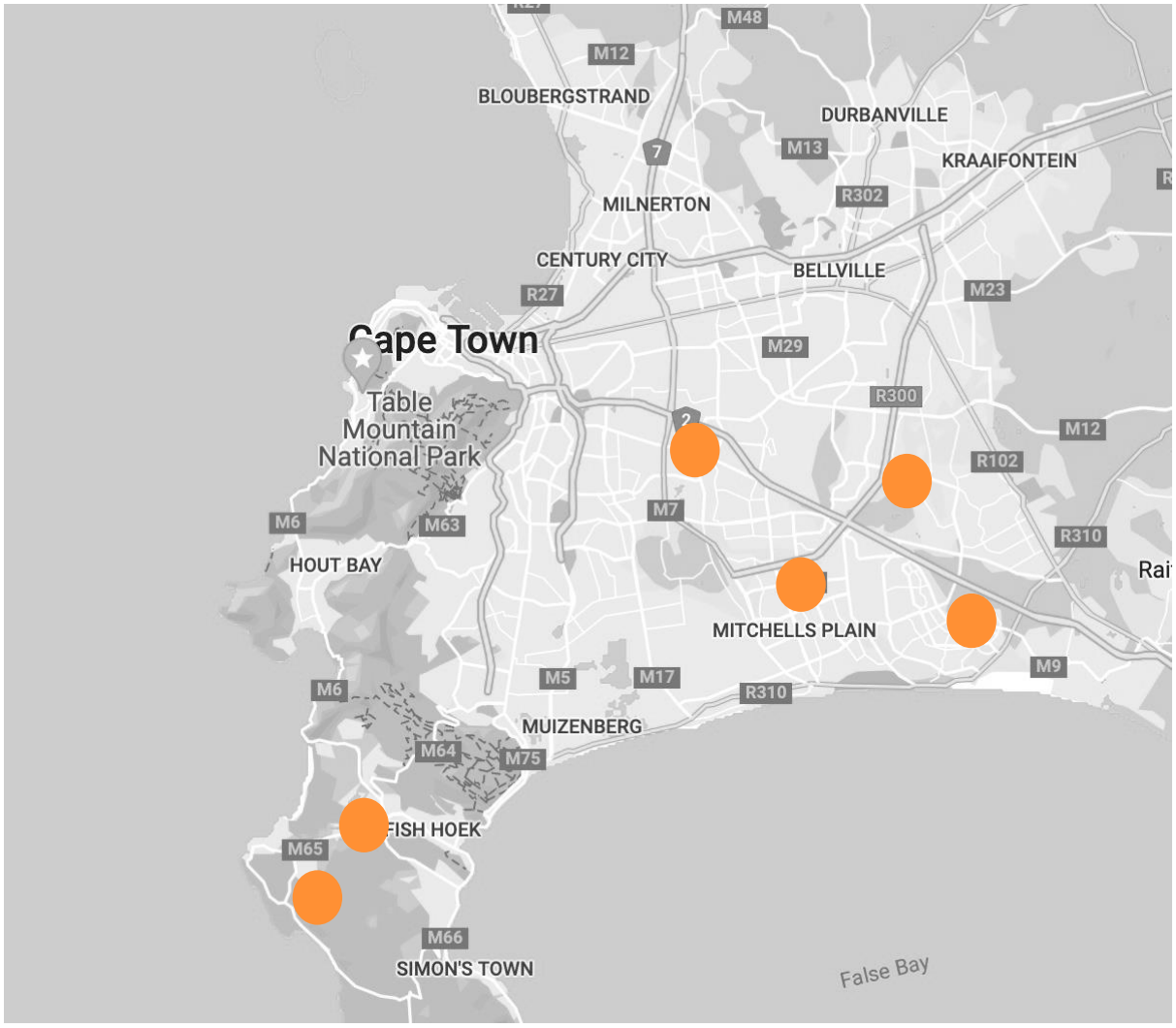
## SIX FOOD DIALOGUES: "Let's talk about food security"

From October to December 2021 co-researchers from five of the original study sites, plus a new team from a sixth ward in Ocean View took to their communities to host food dialogues. These food dialogues were framed as Dinner Parties, at which food and information was shared.

In addition to the opportunity to come together intentionally over a meal, each community decided to share different research or storytelling "dishes" as appetisers to stimulate discussion. The six wards, their dinner dialogue host, and their story telling dishes are summaried in the table X below.

| Location | Dialogue host | Story telling dish | Diners |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mitchells Plain | Washiela Isaacs | Fact Sheet | 17 |
| Masiphumelele | Matilda Tsitsi Fakazi | engaged on food distributed and served in kitchens | 13 |
| Mfuleni | Nozie and Hazel | played *Isiswenye*, the film made by FACT which displayed a household's food insecurity during COVID -19 | 12 |
| Gugulethu | Vuyani Qamata and Busi Selana | shared the Community Research on Food Justice and the Podcast | 17 |

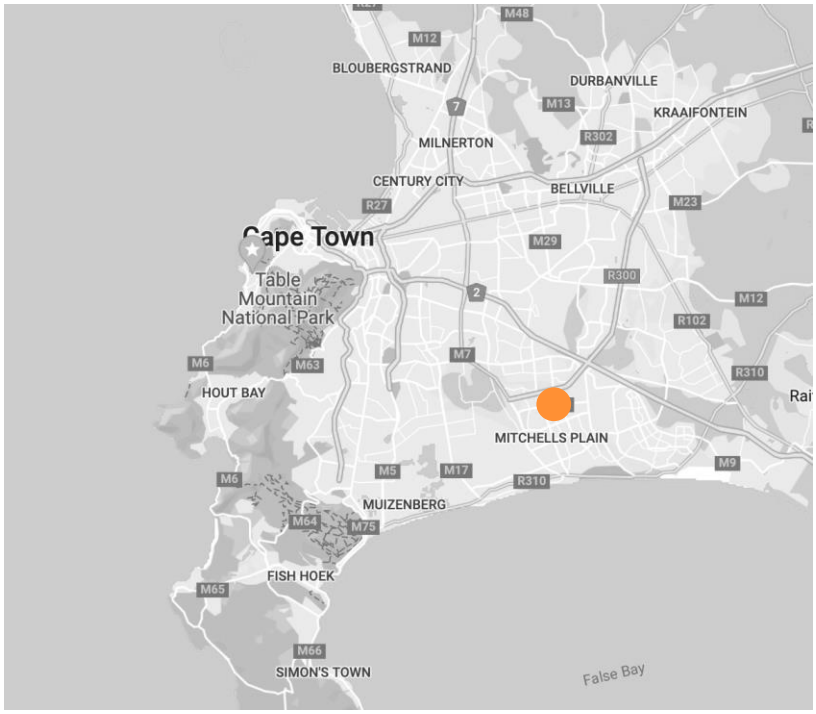
| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oceanview | Sophia Grodes | gathered ladies that were running kitchens and they each shared how they started their kitchens, the support they receive and what challenges they face | 11 |
| Khayelitsha | n/a | could not host their dialogue and together we looked at their challenges and together advised on possible solutions. | n/a |




While the food dialogues all shared a common intention, this was a new process which all the co-researchers and FACT were designing and adapting as they went along. At the end of the day each of the dialogue sessions had its own unique style and flavour.

The following section offers a basic summary of the discussions, reflections and needs identified in each session.

# Mitchell's Plain




| | |
|---|---|
| Date | 28 October 2021 |
| Time | 10am – 1pm |
| Hosted by | Washiela Isaacs |
| Participants | 17<br>(3 youth;<br>A mother and son) |

## Discussion

The discussion lead by Washiela Isaacs in Mitchell's Plain kicked off on the topic of youth unemployment – a theme that would be a topical issue throughout the dialogue sessions.
There was a focus on asking why youth drop out of school and the fact that waiting for government to sort out the unemployment issue was not an option. The potential of urban agriculture came up as an option for constructively engaging unemployed young people in the food system. However, in this respect there was an acknowledgement that this wasn't easy and that there were many skills that needed to be learnt before young people were likely to be able to make a success of this.

In terms of unemployment, participants felt that the percentages in the Agency study fact sheets didn't reflect their experience, the levels were not always as bad as the report suggested in some cases, but were much worse in others. This depended on ward of the co-researcher and where they surveyed within their area. Relatively speaking though, the fact sheet gave them a picture of other wards relative to their own which was interesting. They also rejected the notion that there was so many male headed households, saying that their homes aren't run by men, but grannies who are looking after grandchildren.

There was also an appreciation for the opportunity to reject the official figures and say 'That doesn't reflect us'. A point which reiterates the value of open discussion and feedback to ground-truth research with the communities that the research is about: 'When you bring back and share

then you're not talking about without us'. This in turn supported co-researchers and local citizens to value their own local knowledge and hold traditional research processes to account.

In terms of food security, there were fears to ask for more support from government and other agencies. Dialogue participants felt that very often people didn't know where to go for support on food related issues, and as a result, people in their communities needed guidance about which doors to knock on.

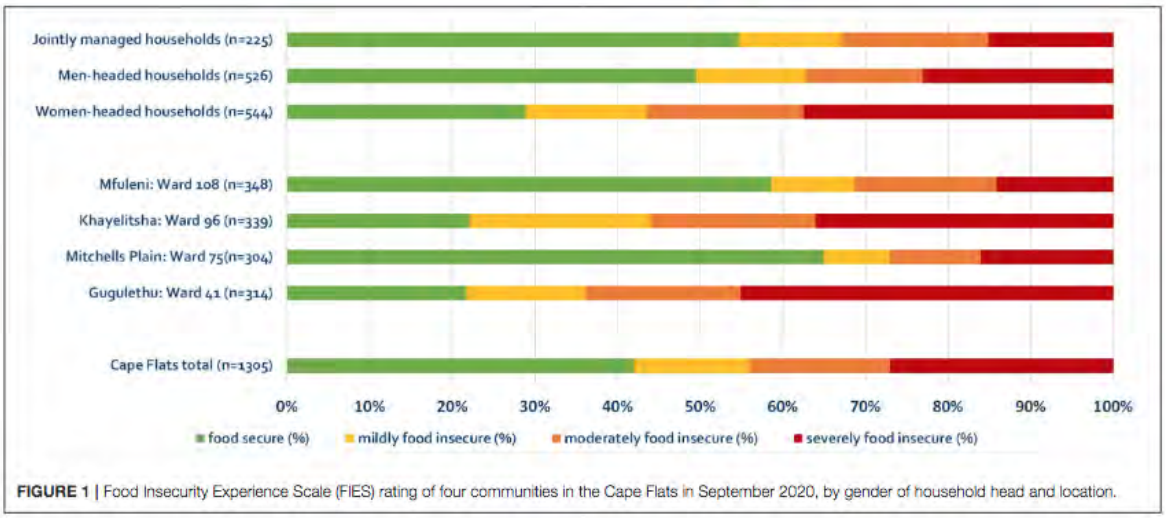



*Figure 1: Excerpt from the fact sheet comparing food insecurity across sites.*

Coming down to their own work serving food via community food kitchens, there as a desire to serve more fresh, local produce. In achieving this, they realised that there were a number of gardens in their community which they could source these local ingredients from, not just the one they were currently sourcing from. Working out how to better connect community kitchens with local gardens was a point identified for further investigation.

The Mitchell's Plain Community Action Network (CAN) was identified as a network of kitchens which has multiple cross-connections with their work that could be tapped into more in future.

There was frustration that sometimes researchers come in and they get the acknowledgement rather than those doing the cooking and dishing.

## Needs

There was a call for workshops on gender based violence, community safety and social structures.

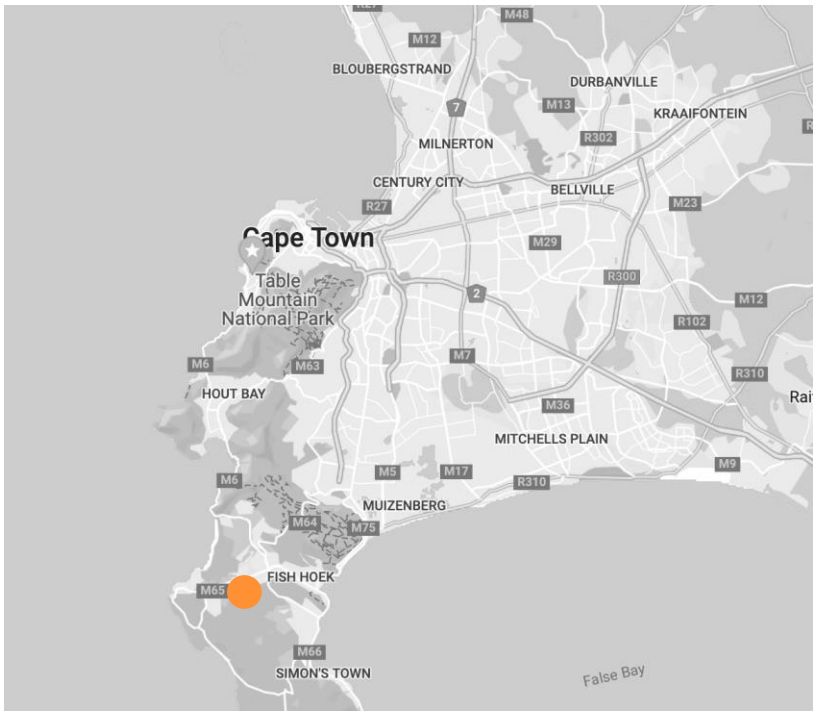
Linking to this, a range of related needs relating to youth came up. These included finding ways to deal with youth underemployment and unemployment. Idle youth were a major challenge and there was a strong need expressed to find ways of engaging them in this work. What aspects of the food system work would be interesting to them, and how could this work be framed In a way that it was exciting for them. At the same time, there was also a recognition of the need to bring youth into the dialogues around food security as it is something that affected them deeply.

The need to develop skills among young people in an inclusive way was also highlighted.

### Reflections

There was a deep sense of community, familiarity and sharing among the Mitchell's Plain group. The sharing on the fact sheet felt easy and there was a high level of buy in and engagement with the process.
There is a challenge of everyone being very busy and not being able to attend dialogues.

## Masiphumelele




| | |
|---|---|
| Date | 11 November 2021 |
| Time | 6pm – 8pm |
| Hosted by | Matilda Tsitsi Fakazi |
| Participants | 20 invited<br>13 attended |
| Venue | Visionary Can Ladies Community Centre |

### Discussion

The work and food of the community kitchens that had been operating since March 2021 were used as a starting point for Masiphumelele's food dialogue.

The quality and variety of food was a focus point of the discussion.

There was recognition that people ate the food from the kitchen as a necessity and not because they enjoyed it. While people who frequented the community kitchen were happy to have a meal every day they would have loved something tastier. They felt it would have been nice to have some meat occasionally.

Breakfast was seen as a necessity but, as with the lunches, there was some frustration that it was always the same type of porridge (pap and peanut butter). A suggestion was to offer diversified breakfasts.

Given the limited budgets available and the growing need, this raises questions about what people expect community kitchens to be and whether it's better to cater to a wider number of people more frequently, or provide smaller number of people with a more enjoyable experience? It also raised the need to consider ways in which to diversify meals without sacrificing nutritional value or increasing costs. In light of the shift in framing from soup kitchens, to community kitchens, this shift in focus beyond the bare practicalities of providing a basic meal seemed important to reflect on.

Reflecting on the timing of meals, some children missed lunch as sometimes it's served whilst they are still at school. The community unanimously agreed to serve the food at 2pm as it caters for all the children from school.

Participants indicated that most people can manage to provide their own meal for dinner. In exceptional cases the community identified the five most vulnerable families that could not afford a meal at dinner and suggested that they at least get a grocery hamper every month.

There was an aspiration toward great diversity and inclusion. It was suggested that sharing cultural recipes together and eating together could be one starting point for this.

## Needs

As mentioned about, there is a need to bring diversity into the meal offerings and to ensure that meal times are aligned with school hours to allow children to benefit from the meals too.

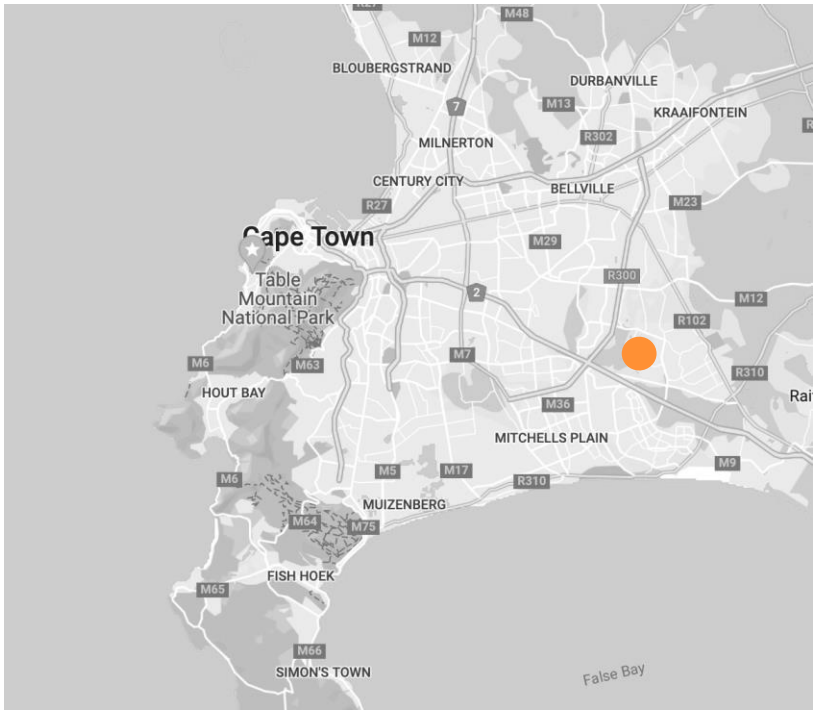
In addition to this, a longer list of non-food related needs also came up. These included:

- Depression counselling as the Masiphumelele has seen a sharp increase in depression.
- Youth need employment to keep them from the streets.
- Women need gender based violence support and empowerment. No mention seems to have been made about the work men need to do in preventing GBV.
- There is a need to create equal opportunities for all.

## Reflections

Participants reported that the dialogue brought them so much together as a community and all participant's opinions were well respected. The research process was very informative and helpful in acquiring information from our beneficiaries. They felt it would help to improve the quality of service provided for their community.

# Mfuleni

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|---|---|
| Date | 24 November 2021 |
| Time | 2pm – 3pm |
| Hosted by | Nozie and Hazel |
| Facilitator | Sanelisiwe Nyaba |
| Participants | 12 |
| Venue | Uphakanini Community Kitchen |

## Discussion:

Participants in the discussion were people who are within community projects of food growing and soup kitchens. The group was old and young, with a mixed of genders.

The film, *Isiswen*ye was show to participants as an opening story telling appetiser for the dialogue. The short film highlights household poverty during the covid-19 pandemic, challenges of growing food in urban and township spaces.

*Figure 2: Scene from the film Isisweni*

The first round of the conversation in response to the film invoked a lot of emotions and was a way to find people's perspectives on growing your own food, and the experiences of trying to do so.

Personal reflections and reactions from the film included:

- Food insecurity affects young children's nutritional balance
- Growing your own food in public spaces leaves your crops subject to vandalism and theft, as there are gangsters all over.
- People look down on someone growing their own food until the crops are fully grown and start coming to ask for it or even steal from the garden.
- Farming is important, and growing your own organic food is good for the promotion of good health.
- The problem is people in our communities do not know the importance of growing their own vegetables. We need to teach them how to do it, by including them in all our existing community food gardens – farming is important.
- Where there is not enough planting space vertical planting, pot planting becomes the only option)
- To be an organic food grower you need patience
- Having control and knowledge of the food we eat (food sovereignty) that gives us confidence (as black people) helps maintain nutritious diet

As in previous sessions, participants in Mfuleni highlighted the issue of youth unemployment and the ways in which youth hopelessness can lead to suicide and substance abuse. Youth unemployment and hopelessness in turn connects to issues of crime and safety, as theft was generally done by youngsters. Crime and violence, in turn, affects everyone.

In light of the above, there was a sense that gardens are important, but skills, land and security of crops are problems. Growing one's own food is not an all-encompassing solution to hunger. Rather, it is something about seeing a plant grow, when you put a seed in the ground, it requires a mental shift – not just in understanding where food comes from but also in patience, shifting how we see things.

In pursuit of this, respondents wanted to mobilise further and get people growing food so they don't rely as much on food parcels and coming to the soup kitchen. Through growing food, it was also suggested that local food producers could also contribute in the community kitchens.

This in turn sparked a discussion on the question of how to work together as a community and how to protect community spaces?

Deliberation on the point of community collaboration and collective action lead to wider discussion of more systemic issues. People felt powerless to influence policies affecting them and wanted to know what agency they had in relation to policy? Most people felt excluded: Youth felt excluded by their age, while older respondents felt that a number of pro-youth policies excluded them.

## Needs:

The Mfuleni group framed its needs as solutions, suggestions and plans for action which centred around fostering inclusivity and developing agency.

Inclusivity

- *'We need to find ways, among ourselves, as a community to work well with one another to ensure trust.'*
- *'We need to bring forward other members of the community for common action.'*
- *'We also need to change our mindset and belief that food growing is for a particular group of people and do away with the character of being consumers.'*
- *'By working collectively, we can help define the type of development we want for ourselves in and our communities.'*

Agency

- *'United as a community we have the power to impact change by influencing shifts on the strict (top down and imposed) policies that restrict and limit us from flourishing, especially as marginalised groups'*
- *'People do not want to engage or be involved due to lack of trust, and as a result their agency at a societal level becomes limited or contained. But they really want to do things – trust becomes the issue.'*
- *'The limiting government policies needs 'community's agency' as a collective for them to change, reflect and shape the life we all want.'*

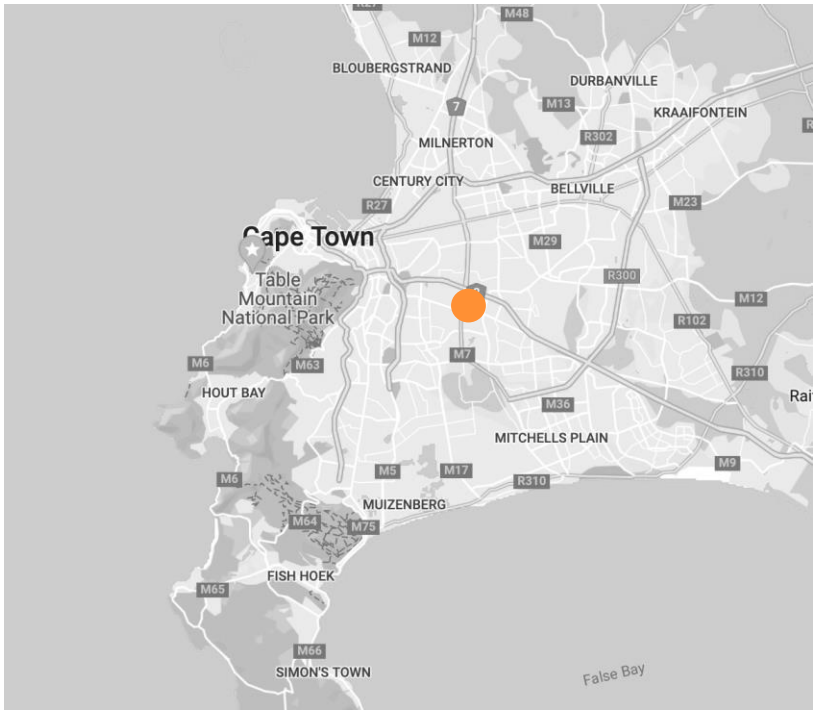
## Reflections

Over the course of the dialogue the conversation moved on from the food gardening focus it opened with towards a focus on spaces for community mobilisation. Reflecting on what had taken place, the group felt that there's a possibility for the kitchens to be community hubs - spaces where people gather, connect and have unifying conversations. These could be spaces of empowerment, knowledge sharing and education based on the philosophy of each-one teach-one, and looking together at how to solve the issues they are faced with.

In closing the group left the session with the following questions:

- How do we have more dialogues and encourage people to be part?
- How do we get the youth involved in these dialogues in future?
- What are the solutions for unskilled and unemployed youth?
- How do we protect our community spaces?
- Who informs policy, what is our role in policy formation and how do we get involved?

# Gugulethu




| | |
|---|---|
| Date | 3 November 2021 |
| Hosted by | Vuyani Qamata and Busi Selana (GUFFI) |
| Participants | 17 |
| Venue | Masikhanye Centre in Gugulethu |

## Discussion

The Gugulethu dialogue lead by Vuyani and Busi used a reading from the co-research book "Agency in South Africa's Food System" as the story telling dish. A variety of food system actors participated in the dialogue. These included members of soup kitchens, street vendors, youth organisations and food growers.

After the initial recap of FACT and a discussion surfacing terminology and concepts such as co-research, power, and agency, a nice pot started to boil.

This resulted in a broad discussion which started on the topic of agency, then through a series of connected concepts. This has been paraphrased and summarised below.

Agency gets people thinking about their autonomy and leads them to ask themselves questions about what it means to define their power. This was seen as a powerful question.

Food agency takes the concept of individual agency a step further recognising the power local actors have when they build a strong voice as a combined group active in the food sector.

It was widely acknowledged that there was a need for dialogues between food growers, chefs, kitchens, vendors and others, to assist in coming to an understanding of the systemic nature of challenges. A key outcome from continuing such dialogues would be to develop a shared

understanding that solving the challenge of food, is about so much more than farming and food production.

As a group of food actors, participants felt that they needed to take a lead in such dialogues and take ownership of the space. Podcasts are one way of doing sharing the stories more widely and have brought a lot of engagement so far.

In a way, these dialogues were a community of practice of sorts which could support in sharing information and education about issues affecting participants' community. Participants envisioned kitchens as a place that could anchor communities of practice, spark conversation and help with education. For example, Vuyani noted that often African men do not talk enough about health, such as key issues including high blood pressure and prostate cancer, and the links with diet and what they eat. It was emphasised that there were many roles that kitchens could provide in terms of education and dialogue.

There are songs all the time when there's a meeting, but very little dialogue in our communities to look for actual solutions, *'dialogue is important but now we've put a price on that dialogue'... 'It's come to the point that there's no meeting if there's no catering, venue, transport.'*

This reiterated the idea that community kitchens were potential place of strength in the community where home-grown solutions could be developed. The use of dialogues represented a chance to revolutionise the idea of the community kitchen, to de-stigmatise hunger and the act of receiving food at a community kitchen. The possibility of re-programming community kitchens as creative and empowering hubs, places where people can gather for food to nourish and also to share ideas and talk about how to solve issues within the community.

A suggestion was made that community kitchens should offer people a chance to select what food they would like to eat, not just provide one type of food. They felt that this would further help with empowerment and de-stigmatisation and the sense of shame which many people experienced.

This suggestion lead to a wider conversation on the deep issue of shame. People were ashamed to queue up for food even though they were desperate at home. People needed to realise that it's not of their own making, there are systemic failures that are beyond their control. Talking about this shame, and the systemic nature of the problem is an important way of letting go of the shame about poverty.

This connected to the notion that *'as Africans we have been brainwashed by Western thinking'* There has been a loss of a tradition of supporting one another in community eg families with more resources might lend livestock and help others to build up their resources.

*'We disrespect our potential and our ancestral knowledge, we prefer a project to pay us to farm, instead of doing it for our needs, we disrespect for traditional knowledge that is commodified by outsiders and sold back to us.'*

We need to break a cycle of education that is preventing us from building independence from outside influences within our communities and eliminating the element of always needing to pay entities from the outside, '*We grew up slaughtering our own chickens and now instead we are stuck buying everything'.*

Participants saw clear links to between food soverignity, nutiriton and the wider ills Gugulethu*: 'Food and nutrition deeply affects us in our communities; the types of food we are eating are contributing to dysfunction - influences our moods and behaviours and the way we interact: for example, poor nutrition may be one factor that can contribute to gender-based violence.'*

## Needs

The need for solutions developed from within the community of Gugulethu. 'We know best our own challenges and often we solve our own issues at the local level'.

Connected to the previous point there was a need to draw upon existing, long-term strengths within the community, such as street committees, which have often had the same leadership for 20 years and are a first level of response for communities. These kinds of structures can help with conflict resolution, and are well-positioned to help with research.

This required community champions, who can step forth people who speak on behalf of the community to challenge existing power. However it remained unclear how these champions and the outputs of co-research processes would actually inform policy. Participants wanted to know 'what is our role and how do we get involved?'.

A participant also identified the need to break a cycle of education that is preventing us from building independence from outside influences within our communities in order to eliminating the element of always needing to pay entities from the outside.
This linked to the need to develop localised economies.

## Reflections

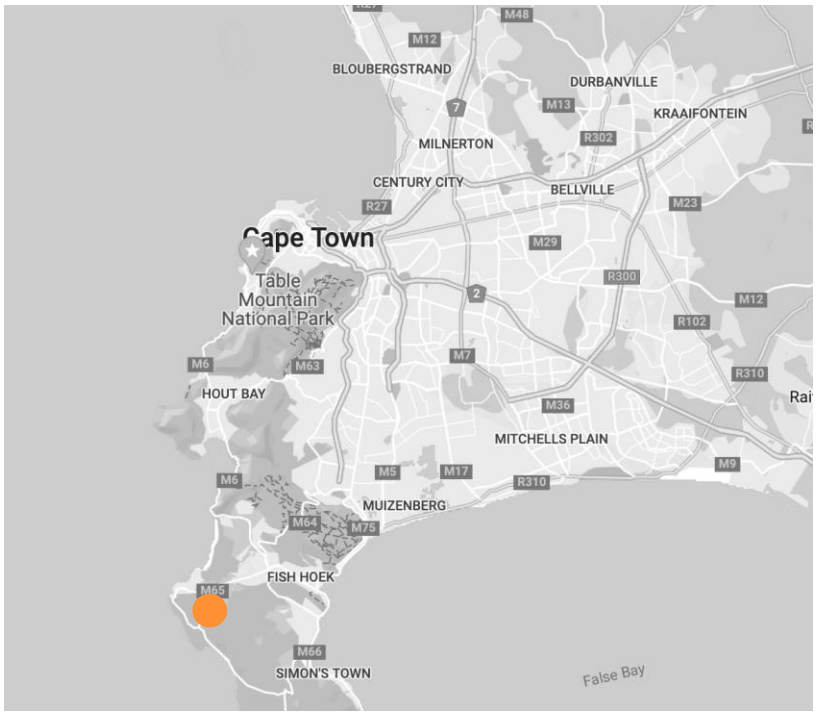
This was a politically astute group who grappled head on with issues of power, agency and responsibility. Not shying away from recognising and naming the systemic injustices that forced people into situations of poverty beyond their control, calling for the decolonisation of education systems and the honouring of African traditional knowledge. But, at the same time, the group internalised notions of their own power, also grappled with questions of responsibility and individual accountability, calling out members of their own communities, whom they felt were

not stepping up to the work required of them. They appeared to be able to hold both the systemic failures and their own with equal sensitivity.

The dialogue provided enough time to start a conversation and help participants think about if they wished to be part of a further conversation. The experience was informative, with a lot of new terminology and concepts being unpacked. This included taking back local power, the importance of age diversity and how to use this research to move our communities forward.

It was agreed that more youth members should be part of future conversations.

## Oceanview




| | |
|---|---|
| Date | 24 November 2021 |
| Hosted by | Sophia Grodes |
| Participants | 11 |
| Venue | Ocean View Organics Farm |

### Discussion

Eleven ladies attended, two of which are are running soup kitchens, Bronwyn Williams and Desiree Lombard. Desiree concentrates on cooking for the frail and elderly. No specific storytelling dish was shared from the co-research process. Instead, the ladies decided to spend their time together reflecting on challenges they have running the two soup kitchens.

One lady said that her mother had a soup kitchen many years ago. Her wish is to carry on with her mother's great legacy. That is a good feeling for her and it's comforting to know that people are not going to bed hungry.

Another lady shared that she started a soup kitchen out of her own pocket after people started to knock on her door asking for something to eat.

Currently both their kitchens are registered NPO's and are receiving some donations from the Mosque in Ocean View. However, often the ingredients that get donated to them can't be cooked on their own, so they will still need to source additional ingredients in order to be able to make a meal.

One lady has also started a garden at a school where she harvests for the kitchen and she is only able to cook them with soya because that is all she can get. People still ask for meat.

Their aim is to have the word "hunger" to be erased in their vocabulary as they felt food should be available and easily accessible. Part of this, meant that people must learn how to grow their own food.

The issue of shame came up again, as another lady said she felt embarrassed waiting for food in line for food. As a solution, she offered one of the ladies that has a community kitchen to go and help to cook. That way she feels she is contributing towards her meal and helping others in the process.

## Needs

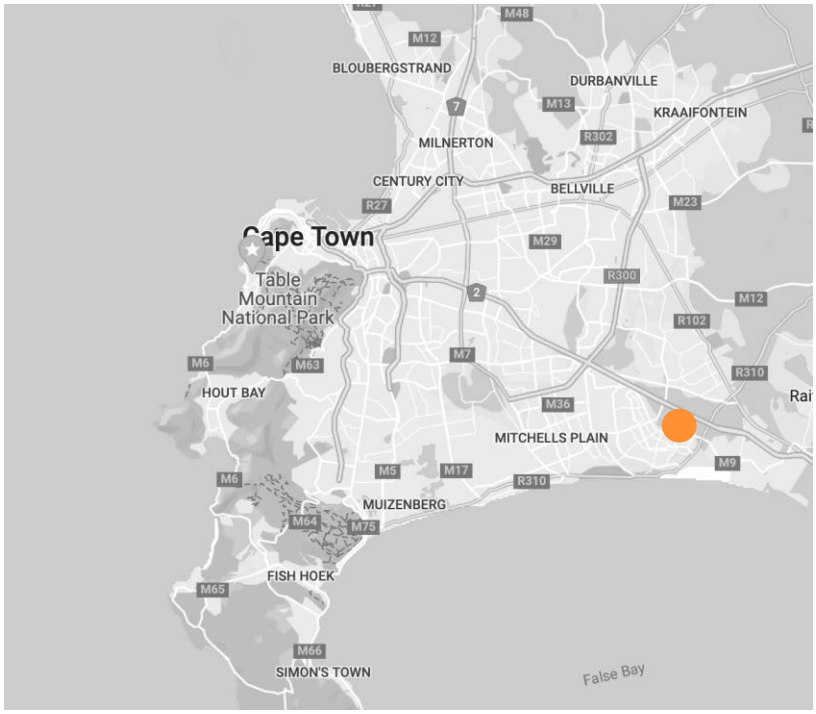
No direct needs were discussed. Drawing from the inputs above, two needs can be deduced. Firstly those running community kitchens still needed additional supplementary food support to provide rounded meals to their community. Secondly, beneficiaries of the community kitchens expressed a need for ways in which to feel they were 'earning' their meal by having a chance to contribute to the work of the kitchens.

## Reflections

The Oceanview dialogue was with a relatively new group, which was not part of the initial co-research. The session did not seem to have run on as long or cover as many topics as some of the other dialogues. There was also no record in the dialogue notes to suggest any preference for continuing or discontinuing the dialogues in future.

This suggestion of recipients of food support having opportunities to support the efforts of the community kitchens was an interesting proposal which did not seem to have come up in any of the other dialogue sessions. It would be interesting to reflect on the experiences of other kitchens to understand how they had made use of this practice in their contexts and what their experiences had been?

# Khayelitsha




| NO SESSION WAS HELD | |
|---|---|
| Date | n/a |
| Hosted by | n/a |
| Participants | n/a |
| Venue | n/a |

We didn't have a party because of 'Busyiness'. During the digest session that followed, there was a reflection on this.

People have a lot going on and there was not enough energy to get a dialogue going. Work, parenting and community activities left little time for much else. *'We are mothers, housewives, we have community activities, many commitments.'*

Lack of communication, fear of overstepping peoples' boundaries and peace-keeping also seemed to have prevented the Khayelitsha dialogue from happening.

*'We have a co-researcher in Khayelitsha who has been called as a healer, she has been in a lot and we have to respect that. We don't want to overstep boundary. We don't see not having a party as a failure but a learning to see how to go forward. We need more support to allocate time and break down the working programme.'*

In dealing with these challenges delegation was identified as a point to work on. Duties need to be shared so that one person is not the main holder of the work.

Never easy to organise an event, many parts have to come together. Khayelitsha is a big suburb. In future, the suggestion is, therefore, to focus on the small areas and start the conversation, even 1 other person is enough some times. The most important thing is to start, because when you start you'll know where to go next.

When asked who would have been invited to the dinner party if it had happened one community member responded:

*'Community members stakeholders who are actively involved e.g. care givers, youth, creatives, this can motivate, fathers who are not working and are not invited in many things, can see themselves as useless.'*

## Reflections on the dialogues

Remembering that the dialogues were originally designed to achieve the following three visions:

1. Develop an increased understanding of systemic causes of food security to increase individual agency
2. To enhancing collective agency and community voice to participate in food research and governance processes
3. Destigmatise hunger and food insecurity

What insights emerged?

### We've become researchers, and done the research. Now what?

The Gugulethu dialogue posed the question *'how to use this research to move our communities forward?'*

Conducting research in a collaborative and transdisciplinary ways is the first step and offered a range of benefits in its own right. These included the reflective awareness and appreciations for of co-researchers local knowledge and expertise, a chance to reimagine one's identity, an opportunity for learning and network building. Not to mention, the discovery of new insights into the places people live, work and eat.

However, an important part of the driving force behind the research process, was the hope that, once completed, the research outputs that were created would be able to be used to create change in the system at large. This raised the question about how the research, now completed, is carried forward by FACT and its partners into the governance and policy landscape. Beyond being a rich entry point for dialogue, how else could FACT and their allies carry use this research to bring about the change they envisaged for the food system?

This important question seems to remain unanswered.

No clear formation or even mention of particular formal or informal governance forums came up from the dialogues. The one exception being one mention of existing street committees which operate at the hyper-local level in some areas.

No policies were referred to even in broad terms, nor were any specific policy documents, decision makers, or government departments mentioned or named.

Without a clearer understanding of this, its hard to know when and how to begin engaging with governance and policy arrangements. When is a policy the problem and when is there need to should we hold

those responsible for applying the policy to account instead?

Far from being an indictment on the participants, or even the process, this absence is perhaps most accurately interpreted as an indication of how distant people feel from even the vaguest sense of connection to governance and planning processes. This, if nothing else, is a further expression for the need for such dialogues and the kinds of social arrangements they could bring about.

It also speaks to the need for a different kind of learning and awareness building process. One that on the one hand helps make these governance and urban planning processes visible to FACT and its allies. While, on the other, putting FACT forward as a vehicle for bringing local knowledge to food governance table in order to help inform those with a more systemic view on the governance and policy landscape where and why current arrangements are falling short.

This is no doubt a vast and murky void, but reflecting on the dialogues in relation to FACT's wider work, it does seem important to begin offering some initial opening entry points for engagement in the wider food governance arena. To borrow a quote from Nomonde in the Khayalitcha reflection '*The most important thing is to start, because when you start you'll know where to go next.'*

## Food is just the doorway to a much bigger house

As if the question of agency in food governance was not big enough, was far from the only or even biggest issue on participants' agendas.

Many of the most pressing needs identified in the dialogues were not directly food related. Although they were issues that clearly intersected deeply with food system challenges – as most things do.

Three which emerged through the dialogues were:

1. Youth and the challenges they face
2. Unemployment and the need for livelihood opportunities
3. Crime and safety, specifically GBV

These three are unsurprising given what is known about the socioeconomic landscape across the Western Cape.

Their presence in the dialogues highlights the multiplicity of intersecting issues faced by these communities and, hence, the broader value of building spaces for collective agency and action beyond just food related issues. While FACT's mandate may remain within the food system, the knowledge, networks and social muscle that get built through this process are transferable social assets to the communities in which it operates.

## We're trying to change the food system, but you're just here for the catering!

While questions of power and agency were a central theme, there was also a frustration among some dialogue participants that very often local community members weren't showing up within these processes in the ways they expected them to.

Typically this was expressed in the perception that people came and joined in not just to see what they could get out of these processes. Sometimes because they liked being together, or because they could earn a stipend or get a free meal. While justifications and explanations could be theorised for this opportunism and apathy, it was a source of frustration and despondency among those whose hearts were really in the work.

Reading between the lines, this was perceived by active members of the dialogues as a frustrating wilful failure to exercise one's own agency and participate in processes of collective agency building. There seemed to be a feeling that this could not be blamed on oppressive external forces or influences and, instead, had to be reckoned with from within the parameters of individuals' own behaviours and archetypal narratives. To sum this up in a hypothetical quotation *'I'm from the same community you are, we share a common history – therefore if I can pitch up for this work, I don't buy your excuses for why you aren't.'*

As one passionate participant from Gugulethu said '*We disrespect our potential and our ancestral knowledge, we prefer a project to pay us to farm, instead of doing it for our needs, we disrespect for traditional knowledge that is commodified by outsiders and sold back to us.'*

For those with a serious intent to bring about change from within their own communities with the resources they had at hand, the apathy of their follow citizens was a real issue.

This in turn sparked a discussion on the question of 'how to work together as a community'. This question of working together as a community seems like a key question as it becomes a collective capability with the power to evolve and address more systemic issues and respond to unique crises as they emerge.

## Can we break stigma?

Dialogue and the chance to talk and share openly has come up through FACT's experiences as a powerful approach for destigmatising hunger. These dialogues and the digest session which followed (see section x) reaffirmed this.

While dialogue is one way, two other suggestions also came up dialogues. The first was to give recipients more choice in the type of meal they received, and the second was a chance to earn their meals by contributing to the work of the kitchen.

Questions of choice of meals at community kitchens came up in the Masiphumalele and Gugulethu dialogues *"Possibility of kitchens as places that people could even select what food they would like to eat, not just receive*

*one type of food, which would further help with empowerment and de-stigmatisation."* This element of choice was not just about having option to choose from on the day, but also about offering variety in meals over time.

In Oceanview one community kitchen beneficiary said she would feel a lot better about lining up for meal, if she had been able to help in the preparation of that meal. She wanted to chance to earn her meal. As noted in the Oceanview reflection, this suggestion of recipients of food support having opportunities to support the efforts of the community kitchens was an interesting proposal which did not seem to have come up in any of the other dialogue sessions. This is surely an old idea which has been around for as long as people have fed the hungry, and it would be interesting to reflect on the experiences of other kitchens to understand how they had made use of this practice in their contexts and what their experiences had been?

There is surely no silver bullet when it comes to destigmatising hunger and the sense of shame people experience in turning to others to meet their food needs, be this through asking a neighbour for something to cook in private, or lining in public to get a plate of food from a community kitchen. However, two examples represent two quite different, although by no means contradictory, approaches to this question. The first addresses shame by expecting those running community kitchens to do more (source more ingredients, provide more options), while the second addresses the question of shame by offering recipients of food a chance to do more (by help in the preparation of meals, or undertake community work of another kind). Something which would be interesting to reflect on from the perspective of power and agency in future dialogues.

## Digesting the role of growing one's own food

Despite its limitations, growing food or the idea that growing your own food is part of the solution was still a prevalent idea. Despite FACT's acknowledgement that growing food is 'just a bandaid', it may be one of the very few spaces where people feel that they have an immediate sense of control and agency over the situation. Even if you can't make someone give your child a job, fund your kitchen yourself, or hold your city government to account, you can plant a spinach seed. This doesn't mean it will solve the situation. But it's at least one action that can be controlled. This may be one reason backyard farming seems to remain symbolically significant to many people in the dialogues and a proposed solution that so frequently emerges.

*"We want to mobilise further and get people growing food so they don't rely on food parcels and coming to the soup kitchen."* While this statement reflects an unrealistic expectation of urban agriculture, it is symbolic of the wider discourse.

It takes at least 4m2 to grow just 1kg of maize over the course of a three month growing season. Seen from an economic perspective, this means an urban resident would have to spend three months of the

year and allocate 4m2 of valuable urban real estate to earn the economic equitant of R10 worth of maize over a three month growing period (assuming the crop comes to successful harvest). This equates to an income of R3 per month. To put this into perspective, South Africa's *hourly* minimum wage in South Africa is R20. It's not hard to understand why urban agriculture as a solution to hunger hasn't taken off.

As was noted from the session in Masiphumalele, *"Having control and knowledge of the food we eat (food sovereignty) gives us confidence (as black people) and helps maintain nutritious diet"*. These benefits beyond solving hunger are significant. However, quotes like this have an implicit dark side to them too. Especially when considered in light of accompanying attitudes such as "*The problem is people in our communities do not know the importance of growing their own vegetables. We need to teach them how to do it.."*

For most intents and purposes, organic growing and taking control of one's diet and destiny through sustainable production in urban contexts could be seen as a highly unrealistic goal. It may bolster a collective sense of purpose in the short term, but often re-enforces a individual sense of failure in the longer term when crop production fails to live up to expectations.

Recognising the limitations of urban agriculture does not negate the viability of urban and peri-urban market gardening as a livelihood strategy for a small number of pioneering entrepreneurs. While these livelihoods and can and should be celebrated, their contribution to the wider food security question will likely remain limited.

Whichever angle it is seen from, and whatever the participants mixed views on urban agriculture may have been, the dialogues clearly provided a fertile space for deepening the discussion. Given the prominence of the productivist narrative this opportunity to open up for critical reflection seems valuable.

### Choose your dialogue dishes wisely…

Unsurprisingly, the 'story dishes' biased the discussions significantly. Those who watched the movie Isisweni spoke a lot about the role of food gardening (perhaps also influenced by Hazel's view on this) and those who drew from the Agency handbook dwelt heavily on issues of power and agency. This connects directly to the afore mentioned point on the prevalence of urban agriculture in the discussions and the way in which FACT chooses to frame future dialogues.

## DIALOGUE DIGEST SESSION

With the six Food Dialogues in the bag, FACT then came together with co-researchers and community members for two days in December to digest and share the findings of these dialogues with each other. Had this been a group of university academics, they would perhaps have called this two day imbizo a *Research Synthesis and*

*Methodological Review Workshop*. Fortunately no such haughty language was used by this team of researchers.

Broadly speaking, day one was dedicated to the review of the use of community dialogues as a method. This asked three questions:

1. Are dialogues useful, should we have them?
2. What makes a dialogue powerful?
3. Why do we need dialogues?

Based on questions and needs which emerged through the course of the first day, day two was spent discussing FACT and its place in the system.

The workshop was facilitated by Adelaide Cupido who came in as an external facilitator to enable FACT and its members to participate fully.

## DAY 1. Assessing the dialogues

The first day kicked off with watching the film *Isiswenye*. Members of the team who created the film reflected on their process, from coming up with a story that weaves all the main issues, to working together on the set and performance, and then the filming itself. Lead actress and urban farmer Nhlanhla … reflected on the experience of performance, and drawing from her real life experiences.

Sanelisiwa Nyaba also reflected on the Podcast and the process of drawing from research to create a narrative.

Having wet their appetites, communities shared their Dinner Party experiences and learnings.

### Day one questions and conclusions:

Question 1. Are dialogues useful, should we have them?
Yes they are. Dialogues raise awareness and provide an information sharing platform that links generations, and enables people to learn from each other. They were an means of effective communication in which everyone felt safe to make their voice heard. On Whatsapp groups, we don't know who's there, people are quiet and can remain invisible. Dialogues are a way to bring conversations to the people where discussions and decisions can be made together and people can reflect on the past and reimagine the future. These kinds of dialogues offer the potential for future growth, allowing participants to physically experience the change they feel in terms of self-development.

What makes a dialogue powerful?
Dialogues are most powerful when they are based on facts, research material and visuals.

They need to involved a diversity of stakeholders from a diversity of backgrounds. For example, foreign nationals, people with disabilities, all levels of education, age,
gender and lived experience. All of these parties need to come being open to listening and learning from each other and understand from the beginning that dialogues are not just soap boxes for sharing

their views.

Dialogues need an empowered host to hold and manage the process. They need to ensure that different views are allowed and that it is a safe space in which those with ulterior motives or agendas are not allowed to disrupt the process. Sometimes maintaining a safe space for the majority requires a level of gatekeeping that keeps some out.

Why do we need dialogues?
People urgently need generative, safe and inclusive platforms for tackling the issues confronting them. These range from issues at a very personal level, through to long-term ongoing process that work towards systemic change. Dialogues are a method to challenge, communicate and collaborate with government, academia and others in new ways.

They can surface issues for research, reveal gaps where communities need more knowledge, set rules of engagement around extractive research and ask questions of those coming in.

Dialogues are also spaces within which to translating policy for the everyman. They are tool that government can use to talk to communities, that guarding against being hi-jacked by personal agendas and outside influences.

Critically, they are spaces of collective learning. An opportunity for knowledge sharing and learning from one-another. They create safe spaces in which people can learn not just about *things* but also about *themselves*, the wisdom they carry and the ways in which they relate to others. They are spaces through which collective intelligence can develop as people become able to more easily turn to others for help and advice in times of needs. This includes tapping into often forgotten indigenous and cultural knowledge.

There is a need for spaces that take discussions away from echo chamber of social media. On social media there is a wide attendance but we tend to 'be at' one another, with no solutions being forth coming. These kinds of dialogues are different to social media in that they offer a spaces for very different kinds of conversations. Conversations that activate agency, unity, shared vision. Conversations that create a sense of being 'with' and 'for' each other rather than 'at' each other.

Facilitated dialogues are also important for lifting quiet voices such as youth and those who are under-represented and don't get their vision shared. They offer people a chance to speak in comfortable language and use words that are understood, where people can move at the speed of trust. Over time, following up on how things and plans are unfolding, reconnecting with each other.

## DAY 2. Reviewing FACT and its place in the system

In response to the questions that had come up on the first day, we spent the whole morning on the second day looking at who FACT is as it had become clear that communities were confused about this.

This therefore needed to inform the next round of dialogues in order to reintroduce FACT to the broader community.

FACT is an entity that wants to bring in the community voices in their agency for food and change. So the community to be a part of fact for change to happen.

We've been operating as co-researchers loosely, using previous networks and driven by passion. Now we need to structure, it's a process, it takes time to build a quality organisation, takes time to cook samp, its tough and needs to simmer. SCAT is helping to structure FACT.

It was explained that there are many ways to contribute to FACT's vision. For example, there are a lot of creatives in our communities, they're not recognised, their power is not recognised, FACT can give them a platform and they can help bring attention to problems and solutions, textbooks aren't for everyone, we need ways to make our knowledge accessible.

ECD's, community kitchen's, GBV activists, youth organisations etc are all invited. So too are academics and researchers. Historically there has been a lot of support from academic institutions and help us to unpack and understand and to communicate with higher level language.

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The Dialogues Digest was like being served a giant meal, dividing it into bite size portions and digesting it, and we all shared the taste it left in our palates. We have been cooking a stew and like all stews, it's been slowly simmering and we will see with the next round of dialogue if it's starting to bubble at the surface.

The question we were left with however was*: Are we as FACT moving at the speed of light to keep up with our institutional partners but leaving our communities and co-researchers behind?*

There is a concerning gap emerging between the small core team at FACT, and the wider network of co-researchers and community members FACT works with.

From FACT's perspective, there are a number of factors contributing to this.

Firstly, most of the partner meetings have been happening on the digital space. Covid restrictions, multi-country partnerships and basic logistical preferences all contributed to this digitisation. This worked for academic and TMG partners, as well as the core team at FACT who were digitally resourced and more familiar with online meetings platforms like Zoom and MS Teams.

However, the frequency of digital meetings created an exclusionary dynamic that left many co-researchers out of important conversations. Keeping multiple parties connected and up-to-date in complex transdisciplinary collaborations is hard in any situation. Adding the complex technical and social dynamics of a very real digital divide in South Africa to the mix has created an additional layer of difficulty.

Then secondly, there's also the reality, that people just get bored of too much talking – especially on digital platforms.

Reflecting on FACT's experience, it's clear that our ability to connect with community partners and co-researchers is much better when done in person.

Hence, going forward, we stress that for our co-researchers and communities partners, having a face-to-face meetings in a shared physical space is really important.

Moving at the speed of trust…

As Adelaide puts it "We move at the speed of trust". At the end of the day, its trust that holds this process together and limits how far and fast we can move as a team.

As this co-research process unfolds relationships are built with other governance actors, multi-country connections are strengthened and the work takes on a life that is bigger than (and beyond the control of) any of the individual partners. As this happens, it will not be possible to keep all parties up to date with what everyone else is doing all the time. What's critical is trust in each other's values and our commitment to a shared agenda. This means clear channels of communication need to open and supported at all times and processes for ongoing trust/relationship building need to be a core activity of the network. People need to feel free to ask questions about the process at any point and to get answers back in timeframe and a format that makes sense to them.

Linking to the previous point on the negative impacts of network digitisation, trust, communication and relationship building happen far better in person.

Looking forward, this poses a number of questions about how we strengthen the interpersonal relationships that lead to a trusting system? How does the wider UFF network communicate and connect across its various facets? Who are the key network knowledge brokers and what responsibilities do they carry? And, last but not least, how do we create a spaces in which all partners feel like they have as much information about the overall process to remain committed, connected and effective in this working relationship?

*This is not just a learning process for co-researchers…*

*"I mean, it's also being honest, the partners really also need to get with the program… there's also a lot of work that needs to be done on the relationship that FACT has with its partners, that visa versa, how do we handle that?"*

During the scoping phase there has been a big focus on building the agency and capabilities of co-researchers in this process. Examples include research methods training and reading circles to go through academic content. In this respect, co-researchers have been walking the mile to learn the new skills and languages necessary for transgressive collaborations.

However, as much as the co-researchers need to walk the mile in terms of building the skills necessary for collaboration, other institutional partners need to too.

For academics, the ability of co-researchers to engage in their world of written words and metaphysical theories is a cornerstone of effective collaboration. So, if monthly

reading circles are an effort made by co-researchers to enhance their ability to work with academics and policy makers, then what would a corresponding commitment to mutual co-learning look like on behalf of academics and other TMG partners?

*"that's the thing about sitting in the office, you know, not to critique or dismiss their work or anything like that. But as soon as you're removed even a little bit, you know, it gets a bit harder to cross that boundary, to emphasize."*

The most obvious example of a reciprocal commitment to co-learning on behalf of academics and other institutional partners would be their willingness to participate face-to-face dialogues and share hands-on work in community settings.

As FACT we will continue to build and strengthen agency and FACT in our community, through dialogues and conversations We will continue to collaborate and partner with other actors as well as start on building a school of thought in our communities where we will implement the each one teaches one concept. We will continue to capacitate on another and support each other as coresearchers. We will continue unpacking social injustices through dialogues and co-research.

# TMG Research

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