

*The Journey of  
Mma Tshepo Khumbane*

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2010



# *The Journey of Mma Tshupo Khumbane*

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# 1. Background

South African legislation acknowledges water as an asset and strategic resource, and the National Water Act (NWA) of 1998 requires sustainable and equitable management and use of national water resources for the benefit of all persons. The NWA has introduced radical change in South Africa's management of water. A hierarchy of water entitlements that allow minimally regulated access for smaller users, particularly the poor, through a series of regulatory categories, has been established and mechanisms have been defined for balancing water allocations for economic versus social and environmental benefit.

Integrated water resource management (IWRM), embodied in

the NWA and operationalised on the basis of the National Water Resources Strategy, is being implemented in nine water management areas. In South Africa water service authorities are legally required to supply 6 000 litres per household per month within 200 metres from every household, at no cost to the user. This is called 'free basic water' and is considered a basic human right. Water consumption above the 'free basic water' limit is provided charged at cost.

Water is a main limiting factor for small-scale agriculture and other productive enterprises. Water availability remains a critical constraint, particularly in the mid-winter months from May to September, which are effectively

dry from a crop-production point of view; making supplementary irrigation essential for any production other than established tree-crops.

Rainwater harvesting has the potential to transform the lives of poor communities living in subtropical regions that experience protracted periods of low rainfall to break through the food insecurity barrier by harvesting rainwater. Most specifically this is achieved by engaging the communities in improved management of rain-fed farming through rainwater harvesting and soil moisture management and by empowering them through processes that promote self esteem, and facilitate access to land use rights. □



## 2. Project context

**T**shepo Khumbane, or Mma Tshepo as she is endearingly known, is a well known woman in rural development and food security circles. As a renowned grassroots activist, she has worked with, mobilised, and inspired people on both local and international soils.

Mma Tshepo is an activist and typically, as is the case with activism, her aim is to alter and improve the lives of people. Over and above the lives she has touched, she has served on numerous national boards (See *Table 1: Annex*), including the National Water Advisory Council,

the Agricultural Board, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Mvula Trust, and has received Ministerial recognition through the Woman in Water Award (Munnik & Phalane, NDA) (See *Table 2: Annex*).

She has in the last decade specialised in development strategies focusing on nutrition and home food production, and is a founding member of the Water for Food Movement (WfFM). Her understanding of poverty and the institutional, psychological and technical pathways out of poverty, determine her place as an

invaluable resource on any developing planning and policy formulation team (Khumbane, NDA).

While her achievements and awards reflect her well deserving acclaim and applaud her achievements, it is the emotional responses that she elicits from those she has touched, that truly reveal who Mma Tshepo Khumbane is. Mma Tshepo mesmerises people and commands their attention. She crafts her message through poetry, physical touch, emotive speech, appropriate and original technical designs that she follows through with practical action. A character that enthral, she is volatile, emotional, energetic and irrepressible.

At times the expansiveness of her character might be perceived as overwhelming, but she has a personality that is able to tap into the potential in others to achieve their goals. Mma Tshepo has a unique touch, and when she works with individuals she is able to make their inhibitions disappear and even the shyest of individuals 'loosen up' and take up the gauntlet she throws at them to 'think out of the box.'

A bold lady, she has a seductive and charismatic personality, which commands attention. Mma Tshepo enthral and entices others through humour, mimic and, if necessary she



*Grassroots activist  
Mma Tshepo  
Khumbane.*

raises her voice and shouts her message out! Overall, she is positive and optimistic about life and she believes in the potential of human beings to reach great heights. Hers is a confident and contagious optimism. Mma Tshepo's is an ongoing struggle to achieve more and to make an impact on the lives of others. Her fight is for a better society.

Mma Tshepo is a social entrepreneur and she has an ability to adjust to changing social settings and realities. Typically, as a social entrepreneur she recognises a social problem and uses entrepreneurial principles to organise, create, and drive social change. Her main objective is to advance social and environmental goals.<sup>1</sup> Many social entrepreneurs measure their successes in terms of the impacts they make society. Mma Tshepo wishes she could do more. Agile in moulding social spaces to her advantage, she is versatile and effective on a one-to-one basis or in a group situation. A skilful social entrepreneur, she adjusts and adapts her strategy, always adept at ensuring that the 'pupil' benefits from a 'best fit' knowledge transfer.

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_entrepreneurship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_entrepreneurship)

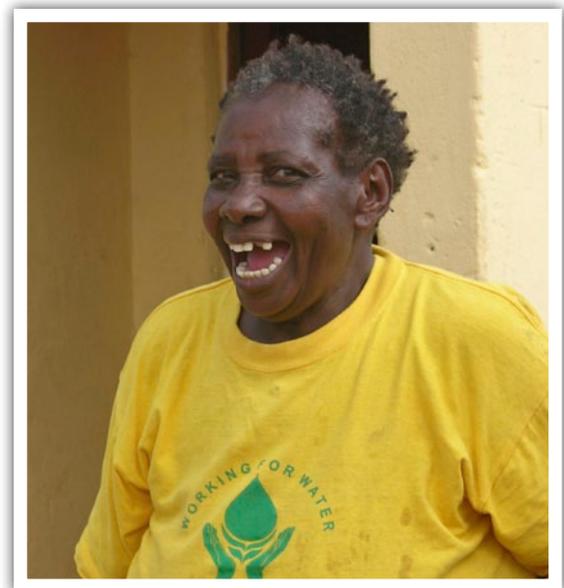
**"My overview, the struggle she is in, is not because she wants people to see that she can struggle. It's not a show off. The struggle is in her. So, there is no way she can really escape from that. So she's doing this because it's in her" [Daniel, 2009].**

*"She has been there, she knows. She has worked with the people. She doesn't rely on abstract things. She wants people, things that can be singly applicable...She has gone through all these miseries and has seen people die, people suffering. So I think Mma Tshepo is extra gifted" [Nong, 2009].*

Highly volatile and vocal, Mma Tshepo becomes quiet and introspective when engaged in practical activities, such as planting or preparing soils. At these times this expansive personality is concentrated and silent, focused and centred on the action, the 'doing.' This quietness and focus is hypnotising and those who are with her watch the way in which she skilfully goes about her work, cultivating the soils and caring for the seedlings or food plants with concentrated devotion.

*"She is someone who believes. Someone who thinks of tomorrow and the future. Someone who shares" (Chief of Ga-Tisane's wife, 2009).*

When one listens to Mma Tshepo, one is drawn into her speech which is dramatic, often repetitive, hypnotising and peppered with analogies. Her oral word has been influenced by the tradition of oral narratives, influential during her formative years. The extract below reflects a rhythm that is typical of her speech



and that is constructed to inspire and drive others to action.

*"We can walk this road together. And I am saying I have walked the road of hunger and poverty and persecution and all those things. The same as all of you have been walking this road in different ways. And I am saying, here, I have got no gold and silver. Neither do I have any bags of mielie meal, nor a bag of sugar, nor a loaf of bread. I have nothing. I have got ten fingers. I have got a very strong wind that pushes my emotions out. To say, I see you my dear you are like me. I am stretching my hand to hold your hand. And I say if you can accompany me and go and share and see what I am able to do to silence the drums that are beating and confusing me and disempowering me every day. So I am focused. And I must march*

*Mma Tshepo's enigmatic personality is captivating and infectious.*

## *I breathe the spirit of passion*

*The love I have for what I do fills me up with hope for the future*

*The love I have for my hands fills me with commitment to achieve more*

*The love I have for my brain, fills me up with creative thinking*

*The love I have for my environment cheers me up when I see green*

*The love I have for my garden gives me a cradle for relaxation when I feel tired and disempowered*

*I love my garden*

*I love my rainwater harvesting strategies*

*I love my designs*

*I love the food I harvest from my own sweat*

*I love to share my joy and pleasures, from what I think, from what I do*

*I love to spread the Gospel to all who struggle to survive*

*I love the poor because they can, if all is well, be motivated to stand for themselves*

*I love the road I travelled through my life because it has moulded me to be what I am*

*I am a nobody without description*

*I am a nobody with confidence*

*I have learnt not to beat about the bushes because pretence is a recipe for confusion*

*I love to fly in the air all the time – that is my helicopter exercise, it is never ending*

*It is my journey to self-discovery –*

*Thatha to local gossip*

*Thatha to unfounded prejudice,*

*Thatha to apathy and helplessness*

*I am on a journey to nowhere, but walking the road to self-discovery*

*I lay down my own rules to manage my time*

*To manage the weather cycle. To manage my mind.*

*To manage my health. To manage my hygiene habits.*

*I have no money, I recycle what the rich throw away*

*I want to be the champion of my own destination*

*I am not pushing anyone away. I am pushing away anti-social behaviour*

*I am pushing away greed. I am pushing away superiority complex*

*I am pushing away inferiority complex*

*I am pushing away fear*

*I want to be myself. I want to create an enabling environment for personal growth and stability for all*

*I want to hold your hand so that we can all walk this road together for security, peace and harmony*

*Let us all light the candle of peace and security for all*

*Let us roll back the red carpet of pain and roll out the green carpet of hope for the future of our children*

*I see you through the window, I see you through the door,*

*I see you through the gate, I see you in the street*

*I see you and meet you to join the chain of humans across the globe to the land of hope.*

*The slogan for the day is*

*“We all care for one another*

*We all care for the environment*

*We all care for the natural resources and share them equally*

*to benefit all – but only if we take responsibility*

*Is that not nature’s law!!”*

*Amen – Good-bye I see you through my spiritual eye  
Even if I will not meet you again*

*[Khumbane, 2007]*

*to the road that I say is never ending. And I have got a vision out there that poverty can be tackled. We can do it, and all of us can do it. If only we start” [Khumbane, 2009].*

The sheer power of these words quickens the pulse. These are the words of a leader, a teacher, an expert commanding attention. Her task is important – it is to combat servitude, laziness, passivity, inaction and to urge people to take responsibility for their own lives and to wake up and act to make their everyday living better and take themselves out of poverty. The characteristic of some leaders is to make decisions on behalf of others, to command and bully people into action, but Mma Tshepo wants to shake people up so that they shape their own destinies and make their own decisions.

Her pedagogic style is nurturing and facilitating because her goal is to unlock people’s potential so that they are empowered to do things for themselves. Although exuberant and sometimes overbearing, her self confidence is balanced with a sincere modesty. This woman has an ‘elevated’ status as a respected teacher and leader in her field, but she is humble and unpretentious, convinced that everyone possesses the quality of a leader and that each and every person can, if willing, determine his or her own destiny and the destiny of their community. Her mission is to combat inaction and passivity and to muster up in others a will and passion for action. □

*Meeting Mma Tshepo.  
Every stranger is welcomed and is taken in as ‘family’.*



*Above: Mma Tshepo greets an old friend during a visit to the village of Ga-Masha. Despite her age she has boundless energy.*

*Below: Mma Tshepo at home.*





## 3. Life History of Mma Tshepo

"I love the road I travelled through my life because it has moulded me to be what I am" [Khumbane, 2009]

Who is Mma Tshepo? She is a big personality and like many leaders and achievers, she is riddled with contradictions. The great French writer Andre Gide said that 'one does not discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time' and at times (not a very long time), our heroine wanders. She loses herself and meanders far from the topic. Compassionate she can be impatient, straight forward she can sometimes be convoluted in her expressions, simple with words and yet 'scientific' when she chooses to be, we see before us a complex person, with character attributes that do not fit neatly into a box.<sup>2</sup> What makes Mma Tshepo different from others? What has made her a leader in her field? In decoding the trajectories that have driven, guided, obstructed and enticed her, we turn to the early days of Mma Tshepo Khumbane.

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*2 At the time of conducting this field research, Mma Tshepo is older and perhaps confused and overwhelmed more often than she might have been in her younger days. She becomes overwhelmed by her desire to share her knowledge and feels that she has too much still to convey to others with too little time to do so*

Mma Tshepo is a product of apartheid South Africa and has been shaped by the political and social landscapes of apartheid and post apartheid times. A short overview of the landmarks in South African history is relevant for these directly or indirectly affected our heroine.

### History of South Africa

Mma Tshepo was born in 1937, a time of change and hardship for many in South Africa. This was the year when the acquisition of land in urban areas was prohibited and black people could not purchase land from the non-black (Horrell, 1978: 3). It was the year when strict regulations were introduced regarding the urbanisation of women as part of influx control ('sahistory'). Mma Tshepo's life history is entangled within a fraught political environment where, as a young black woman, her own movements were restricted. The political and social landscape was clouded with prejudice, inhibition, stigma and shame for many who were humiliated and discriminated against because of the colour of their skin.

Her birth co-incides with the twenty-fifth year of the African National Congress (ANC), the beginning of a transitional period in African politics.<sup>3</sup> The ANC's resistance to colonial rule took the form of an armed struggle. This was a dynamic period in the history of South Africa, with constant and dramatic changes and tensions that rippled through the everyday lives of all South Africans.

The government's popularity with its voters declined. An economic depression in the early 1930s forced Genl JBM Hertzog into a coalition with Genl Jan Smuts in 1933 (the year before South Africa became independent from Great Britain).<sup>4</sup> The Hertzog-Smuts coalition fell apart with the Second World War, Smuts winning the power battle to form a government that took South Africa into the war. Afrikaner

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*3 The movement began in 1912 and was originally called the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). The name was changed to the ANC in 1923.*

*4 Their parties fused as the United Party, but Hertzog's move was balanced by the breaking away on the right of DF Malan's new Nationalist Party as a political home for the more extreme Afrikaner nationalists.*

opposition to the war strengthened Malan's support base ('southafrica').

At the same time, developments in the ANC symbolically marked the start of what was to be nearly 50 years of head-to-head conflict between the organisation and the Nationalist Party. In April 1944, when Mma Tshepo was a little girl, the ANC Youth League was formed. Its first president was AM Lembede (who died three years later); Nelson Mandela was its secretary. Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu were among those who came to the fore as the influence of the Youth League in the broader ANC increased.

The Nationalist Party, however, was gathering strength and, in a surprise result, gained power in the 1948 election – power that it would not relinquish until 1994. Apartheid became official government ideology ('southafrica').

Mma Tshepo's first memories of apartheid are reflected below:

TK: *"Yeah I know, because now I was one of the little ones in 1952, we were carrying the little flag when Verwoerd came. I was on the line, the front line... There was a lot of resistance from the Mission school in Ha-Ramokopa ne? Where they even took steps to court and so on. I'm not very clear, I was still very, very young. Still very young... But I remember, the first thing that apartheid did was bulldoze the mission schools. And then so, 'the heathens are animals' and what-not and then, so I'm sure I was listening*

*to all those stories with fear."* (Manwaring 2006)

The South African apartheid system – and in particular the migrant labour system, had an indelible effect on the lives of ordinary women. Families were displaced. Women ran the household and bore the brunt of poverty, deeply rooted in apartheid with its degraded social, political and environmental landscapes. It was this political and social landscape that haunted Mma Tshepo's early childhood. Yet, this restrictive environment was not a barrier but an incentive to break bounds. In the place of stigma or shame, Mma Tshepo felt pride, dignity and a sense of achievement because the walls that surrounded her spurred her on. Like other apartheid heroes and heroines, she rose to the challenge not despite apartheid but because of it, revolting against apathy and against the unjust system that inhibited people and tried to stop them living a decent life.

## Early childhood and struggle years

Tshepo Khumbane was born on the 26 April, 1937 in Tshukudung, Northern Province.

*"Grandfather was the builder, the founder of that village, from the Berlin Mission, Lutheran Church, staunch. And there are dynamics associated with that, because they*

*denounced everything that was traditional, so we went to a mission school."* [Manwaring, 2006]

Mma Tshepo's early childhood was rich in social rather than financial capital:

*"We didn't have the Mercedes Benzes, the four-by-fours and what-nots. But life when we all eat, it's so nice. It's so nice... Social systems: that is what I call social security. Social security today, what they are saying social security, they are saying social security is grants; for me, I am saying social security is human. That's humanity in harmony with itself. Ubuntu, relaxed. A person is a person... because of other people. Exactly that. We knew no colour. We knew no tribal identity, per se. As long as you are a human being, you are my brother, you are my sister."* [Manwaring, 2006]

She was an achiever at school and was top of her class:

*"Yeah, because when I was doing secondary [school], I was topping almost everything, and then I was supposed to get a bursary from the Tribal office. And then because my dad was building – he was the only fine builder in that one – and then every government offices or houses and what-not were built by him. And then he [presumably the person giving out the bursaries] said: 'No. He's [presumably Tshepo's father] going to take over everything, because ... the tribe is working for him. And so they refused me a bursary."*

**"Treasure is in the soil. You work the soil and you pick your treasure. And you'll never be lonely; you will always be happy. You will swim in the pool of abundance."**

Despite the fact that she was an accomplished child with a strong will, her early childhood was not without tragedy:

*"...When I was six or seven, my mother died [and] my aunt took me and raised me....And then, maybe I, I think my, my Grandma and others were trying to, but then I think my father wanted to take me to his sister. So, I was taken next to Louis Trichardt, on a farm [to] my father's sister. And then I was raised there. It was on the farms, very far from anything. I got whooping cough. And there was no transport. They were using horse-carts. And then I would sleep all the way, and then I arrived. So I think I was six or seven I'm not sure. Er, and by the time my Father said: 'Bring her', and then so they got me on that one, when I arrived at home, because of the overnight and all what-what, I had a complications: measles. Whooping cough and measles.*

*They say I was almost gone. And then it had rained, he said to my brother – my brother, my brother is how many years? About four years older than me – go, take your bicycle, and go to Munnik – Munnik was ten miles away – to Doctor Montgomery. I am sure it was around the late forties. And then, he took a bicycle and cycled ten miles to Dr Montgomery. That was an English doctor in Munnik. He got into his horse cart, packed everything, came home. He is a business guy. I mean a medical professional. He was just a doctor running his own surgery, but a friend to my dad. You know he slept at [our] home for two weeks, to*

*see me through. And then he said to my dad: 'If you had have thought of getting her on a cart, and following her up, she would have died on the way. That is ubuntu: beyond business. What do you call that? [Manwaring, 2006]*

**Mma Tshepo's grandmother was an inspiration to her:**

*"My grandmother was a philosopher. She had all these fun philosophies. She would talk in proverbs. I remember all those parables and the way she was telling me. Sit down and, you know, then she would tell me. I'm sure she was worried that this child is growing [up] without a mum. I'm sure she was, I think she was worried. She wanted to give me some philosophies that would make me a person." [Manwaring, 2006]*

**The following is a typical parable and it was this type of narrative that influenced Mma Tshepo during her formative years:**

*My grandmother told us a story: 'There was this family, and with this rich man. This man had cattle: lots and lots and lots. Lots of cattle. He was wealthy. He had seven sons. The seven sons and he had fields: stretches and stretches of fields he could plough, and he was a hard worker. He used to plough and harvest a lot; store, exchange and barter for more cattle, for more sheep [and so on]. But, when he was getting older and he was thinking he will ask himself whether, when he dies, his children would be able to work those lands; will they be able to look after their mothers; you*

*know? He was asking himself these questions. And then he sat down and said: 'I am going to tell them a story.' And then he called them and said: 'You know what? You can see I am getting old, and you can see I am sick. One day I am going to die. You know? I want to tell you now, that I have hidden jewellery, treasure somewhere in these fields. But I can't remember where: I don't know.' He said now: 'Now all the treasure that I've worked for all my life is buried somewhere in these fields.'*

*And then, he died. And his children were saying: 'Hey! Let's go and look for the treasure.' And they all went, this one got to this corner, this one to this corner, this one to this corner ... They scooped the soil – turned it upside and down, upside and down, upside and down by hand: no treasure. They went again, everywhere: no treasure. They went again, now everywhere: no treasure. And ultimately, they realised they already worked these fields by hand so well and they found nothing's better if, they should just plant. So they planted.*

*And because they had dug deep, and when it rained the water was retained by those good soils and what-not. The harvest was a bumper, to the level where they did not know what to do with the harvest. So they sat down and say: 'Oh. Maybe this old man was trying to say to us: Treasure is in the soil. You work the soil and you pick your treasure. And you'll never be lonely; you will always be happy. You will swim in the pool of abundance.*

*And from there, they started now strictly making their programme to use their lands to the maximum. And their wealth multiplied as they did. And they employed people, you know? They were honoured and .... And when she finished she would say: 'Ei! I told you: if you are lazy, you will eat the crumbs of your friends.'* [Manwaring, 2006].

Today Mma Tshepo is unashamedly non-conformist, but this was not always so:

*"I was never a rebel. Hmmm. I conformed."* [Manwaring, 2006]

As she grew older, she questioned this impulse to conform. The apartheid regime around her and an atmosphere shrouded with repression and political instability made her cynical and abhorrent of the social norms and systems that shaped the lives of the people around her:

*"I conformed until, until the removals came in 1957. They came at the time when I was doing matric, and intermingling with all these other...you know being at a boarding school and all, it's all people put together; you are no longer focusing and understanding the dynamics within the context of your smaaaall little island and so on. Your are becoming broader.*

*And then particularly, when, because there were no papers né There were no radios ...so what was happening in the city we didn't know. Er...but mingling with those children who were like, too angry; very violent; very determined;*

*clear minded, and all those things, we were asking questions. Asking questions all the time [at a whisper], then I understood because we had to understand the situations of that we do. And I'm sure that thing also helped me to not be narrow focused and very naïve.* [Manwaring, 2006]

Mma Tshepo, a pioneer in her field today, was already breaking new ground as a youngster:

*"I was the first pioneer – social worker. The first. Pioneered everywhere where I've gone. Bochum the first [laughs]; and a volunteer then a mobiliser – the first; everything the first. I am a [laughs] even at home they were saying: 'The first, the first woman to do matric: Tshepo. The first woman to go to the university: Tshepo.' Everything I have done is first; first everything."* [Manwaring, 2006]

Mma Tshepo believes that it was her early childhood that gave her a sense of purpose and stimulated her creative instinct:

*"...so, the present children have lost that. Because, I think they live in a life driven by policies. When I grew up there weren't any policies that were forced [on] us; people had to be creative. Innovation: they had to develop systems. Communication to one another was free channels of communications, you know? The status and what-not was not an issue. The class thing was not there. We had people who were rich and what. But the class conscious thing was not as pocketed in boxes like it is now.*

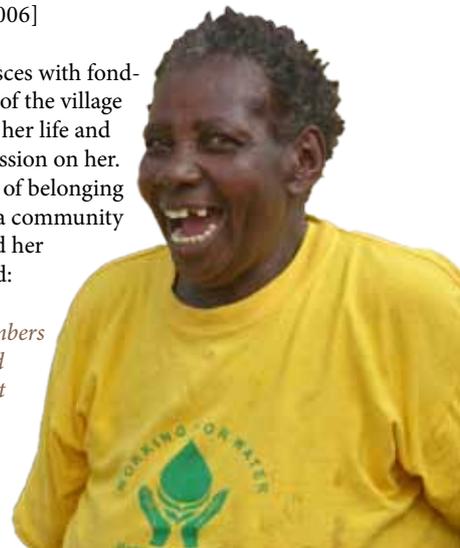
*That's why it was possible to have village by-laws; systems.'* [Manwaring, 2006: 94]

Her own ability to captivate others through lively dramatic speech and to weave a good story started young but she was also aware from a very young age of the relationships between people and their environment:

*"I wrote so many, so many tales. You know when I was fed up I would take a pen and then I would write.... this is how we grew up. I mean with sanitation; with water, for instance. That... water management systems, the hygiene part of it. We knew all the rivers and the little valleys carry our water... And then my grandmother used to, we all, because it was a small village, all the children would come and ...at home. In the evening there was this big rondavel I was talking about, with this in our one, and then that one.'* [Manwaring, 2006]

Mma Tshepo reminisces with fondness about members of the village who have influenced her life and made a lasting impression on her. This gave her a sense of belonging and commitment to a community that extended beyond her immediate household:

*"The community members of Tshukudung, raised all the children in that small village as a big extended family; guiding us and protecting us to grow up with deep*



*sense of human values and norms, that have shaped us to be responsible citizens of our communities and country, enhancing ubuntu with clear commitment for peace at all times. I sometimes wish I could turn back the clock to those days when I see crime and conflict ruling our communities.”* [Manwaring, 2006]

Mma Tshepo’s upbringing in rural South Africa kept her closely in touch with traditional farming methods and the dominant economic activity in her own village was farming. Agricultural methods were holistic. Farmers, dependent on their natural environment also protected it. Household members worked together to ensure food security.<sup>5</sup>

*‘How we looked after the forests; how we looked after the wells where we were getting the water; how we looked after the rivers, you know? All those things... ploughing time, inner joy, harvesting time. You, as children, getting into the bushes, herding cattle, harvesting locusts – we come back with tins of harvest and wild fruit and so on. The environment was giving because people cared for it. Today, people don’t care: they don’t even care for their own lives. And then how would they care for the environment?’* [Manwaring, 2006]

Rituals and ceremony reinforced the importance of the environment. Stories told to the young emphasised a symbiotic relationship between nature and people.

<sup>5</sup> A typical farming is reflected in table two in the appendix of this report.

During the period of mantlwantwane, the children would be freed from household activities to do their own activities. The rituals were an important platform for the resocialisation of the youth and the transfer of skills for survival [Khumbane, NDA: 7].

## Formative years

While Mma Tshepo’s childhood is characterised by a stable family and community environment, her adolescence and early adulthood were characterised by change, movement and dislocation:<sup>7</sup>

*“I left home in 1957 when I was going for matric ‘57, ‘58, I was doing my matric at Mokopane. That was a*

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<sup>6</sup> Mantlwantwane translates directly in my Northern Sotho dictionary as: ‘play with dolls’. See ‘Mantlwantwane’ in T. J. Kriel, *Popular Northern Sotho Dictionary: Northern Sotho – English. English – Northern Sotho* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1994). When I thought about what Mma Tshepo had said, it suddenly occurred to me that I’d read about this elsewhere. One Northern Sotho (Sesotho sa Leboa) tradition was to create a Mandwane – play village. ‘...play lasted all day and ended with dancing and singing. For ten days or so this enactment of the domestic round continued and then the children’s village was burned to the ground.’ Martin West and Jean Morris, *Abantu: An Introduction to the Black People of South Africa* (Johannesburg: C. Struik Publishers, 1976) p 134. (Manwaring, 2006: 3)

<sup>7</sup> See Table 2 for chronology of formal training years.

*boarding school then. That was the first time I ever left my home town... And then from there I went for [a] teacher’s course in Pretoria. Getting out of a rural area into a township for the first time in my life; I don’t know how many times I phoned my father to come and collect me.”* [Manwaring, 2006]

Although Mma Tshepo experienced the teaching environment as constricting, she was first and foremost a pedagogue. But because of feeling hemmed in and restricted as a teacher, she changed her career path and turned to social work. Being a social worker during the apartheid years was no easy task:

*“If I had gone straight to social work, but it was not there for black people. It wasn’t a career. And then it became a career when Bantu Education syllabuses and curriculum were consolidated into Bantu Education, into Bantu Universities. And that was it. Because the first and the last students of social work were at St Peter’s, that’s the Winnie class: Winnie [Madikizela] Mandela. Those were the ones at St. Peter’s, and I am sure they [the apartheid government] stopped it. And then when they resumed it, it was us, the first ones, Bantu Universities. But it was a battlefield, I tell you. But it opened our eyes. It made us see through and understand what was happening around us.”* [Manwaring, 2003]

Once again, Mma Tshepo’s non-conforming nature made it difficult for her to feel comfortable working as a social worker. For her, it was once again a restrictive work space that inhibited her and she revolted



*Far left: Mma Tshepo's house in Cullinan, outside Pretoria.*

*Left: Mma Tshepo's garden.*

against the principle that citizens were treated as objects and were dependent on handouts from the State. It was her opinion that the educational system, as well as the social work environment, were unhealthy because they fostered dependencies and operated in such a way that development of people was not advanced but hindered. As an independent spirit, her role was to inspire, empower and mobilise communities around her and her choice was to treat people as equals and to get them to determine their own destinies and be active agents in their development path, not passive recipients of state grants and handouts.

## Current status

Mma Tshepo is currently living on a plot, outside Cullinan, near Pretoria. The area falls under the Dinokeng Local Municipality. It is a private property. There is no municipal water and no communal water source besides the river [Khumbane, 2005].

Water for domestic consumption is from water tanks and for the vegetable garden on her plot has been harvested through rain water.

Over the past 18 years, Mma Tshepo has worked as a grass roots activist, tackling the root causes – and effects – of poverty. Much of her work has been as a volunteer and she has benefited very little from

donor or government funds. She has mobilised community participants through passion and a single-minded drive to inspire groups to tackle poverty related issues for and by themselves. [Khumbane, NDA: CV]. Today she works as an independent development activist. She is a Board member of the Mvula Trust and the founder member of the Water for Food Movement.



*Water harvesting techniques at work in Mma Tshepo's garden.*



## 4. Mma Tshepo's impact on the water landscape

*Nong, the 'think tank' of the Water for Food Movement.*

Mma Tshepo's process of mobilisation, empowerment and implementation, discussed in sections below, is both simple and sophisticated. Implementing procedures include organic gardening, waste management, food storage and processing, community awareness, youth resocialisation,

time management, recordkeeping of crop production, self-reflection and vision-building workshops as well as food festivals.

*'She has demonstrated that it is possible to successfully apply many of the traditional African food production approaches on a plot of the average size of a homestead in the former homelands'. [De Lange & Penning de Vries, 2003: 11]*

On 13 March, 2009 three villages were visited in Limpopo. Four trainers from a non-governmental organisation in Mpumalanga accompanied Mma Tshepo to the villages. The objective of the visit was to transfer skills from Mma Tshepo to the trainers who work in similar rural villages so that their own work could be enhanced for the benefit of their target beneficiaries, namely small-scale farmers and women's groups in Mpumalanga and Limpopo.<sup>8</sup>

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*8 Present on field trip: Tiffany Gordon, Alex Diepering, Mma Tshepo Khumbane, Moses Thabethe, Thandi Magagula, Kate Mathonsi, Daniel Madidamalo, and Khanyi.*

### Ga-Mashabela

The village of Ga-Mashabela, which falls in the Sekhukhune district, was the first stop. A gentleman by the name of Nong, was the first port of call. Nong has been on the Board of the Water for Food Movement since 2001, and has worked with Mma Tshepo for many years. Mma Tshepo refers to him as the 'think tank' of the movement. As Mma Tshepo arrived at Ga-Mashabela, she was given an extraordinarily warm greeting and hugged and embraced by welcoming villagers. Nong farms chickens on his large home plot. He is a great admirer of Mma Tshepo.

### Ga-Masha

The second village was Ga-Masha. Here, Mma Tshepo was greeted by sisters, Lily and Lucy Masha, who form 'the core group' of the Water for Food Movement at Ga-Masha. When Mma Tshepo approaches a village, such as Ga-Masha, her first step is to identify the poorest of the poor. Those villagers who choose to form a group and work with Mma Tshepo then form a committee



and plan, operate, manage and control project activities under her guidance.

The group in Ga-Masha is small and they had not seen Mma Tshepo for three years. Clearly, Mma Tshepo was thrilled to be there. Many of the villagers screamed, jumped, and sang when they saw her. She responded with song, and the energy was electric. Once the initial excitement has died down, people were proud to show her what they had been doing. They gave us a tour of their homesteads and spoke with pride about where they lived and what they were doing. The students had become teachers and had been empowered by the time they had spent under Mma Tshepo's guidance.

Mma Tshepo's spirit flows through the women with whom she works. There is a deep bond between her and the women of Ga-Masha.<sup>9</sup> The project members radiated when they showed off their gardens. These women had been inspired and were great admirers of Mma Tshepo's techniques that empowered and fostered such deep changes in their own lives.

As is the case with much of her training, it is women who are the most active in food gardening. In Ga-Masha there is an earth pond and bulk water is harvested. Mma

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<sup>9</sup> Mma Tshepo is more interested in the humanity of exchanges with these women whom she had not seen in a long time, than in showing off her work or talking about the processes of knowledge transfer.

Tshepo refers to women in general, and these women in particular as being 'custodians of water:'

*"They are using it, not regulating it, but using it daily. It affects them because they are custodians and caretakers. Every single, every household, women must be there to be able to manage the livelihoods of the family. So they are a critical part of water allocation as well, and the water use. And water conservation as well. And socialisation of the youth ..."*  
[Khumbane, 2009]

## Ga-Tisane

The third village visited was Ga-Tisane. This village used to experience food insecurity but this is no longer the case.<sup>10</sup>

An interview took place between the research team and the village chief, his staff and members of the royal family. In some villages where Mma Tshepo has worked, the chief felt threatened by her power to attract a following. In this village, the chief is not threatened by her presence and is a staunch supporter of her approach.

The chief's wife feels a strong connection to Mma Tshepo and has joined her on trips to Lesotho. This village is one of the strongest examples of participatory action

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<sup>10</sup> Ironically the government was delivering food parcels to the residents of the village despite the fact that there is no need for food parcels because many of the women are producing their own food.



**Above:** A villager proudly shows off her garden in Ga-Masha.

**Below:** Happily reunited. Mma Tshepo (second from left) and the ladies of Ga-masha had not seen each other in three years.



**Right:** Solly, a resident of Ga-Tisane proudly shows off his garden.

**Far right:** An example of Solly's creativity. Note the beer bottles which act as a border.



**Left:** The wife of the chief of Ga-Tisane proudly shows off her garden.

**Right:** A villager's creativity at work – a makeshift sprinkler.



government officials about the merits of this approach.

Many of the villagers have been deeply touched by Mma Tshepo. One garden in particular is noteworthy. This villager's garden is lush and produces vegetables in abundance. Each bed has been decorated with

upside down beer bottles. The owner has used a plastic bottle with poked holes in, which was in turn attached to a hosepipe connected to a natural borehole in his garden. This acts as an efficient sprinkling system.

Other manifestations of creativity include a homemade chair that had been constructed with recycled materials. This gardener's plan for the future is to open a market to sell his own produce. When asked about his garden – he replied spontaneously 'I love it 150%!'<sup>11</sup> □

in development. The chief and his spouse are key stakeholders in the projects and believe in the merits of rainwater harvesting. They themselves have lobbied local

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the chief's wife mentioned that they have not had piped water since last year. During this time the villagers have had to rely on two boreholes for their water supply.



# 5. Technical transfer of knowledge

## Experience of the transfer of knowledge

Mma Tshepo has extraordinary pedagogic qualities and her knowledge and expertise of rainwater harvesting techniques is part of the body of knowledge that contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between rainwater and food security.

Mma Tshepo teaches by example. She is a living example of a grass roots activist and her own home provides an excellent example of 'practicing what she preaches'. The plot near Pretoria where she is currently living was purchased in 1996 and it has a slight slope. On this land she laid out her homestead yard to be roughly similar to a typical rural homestead plot of 45 metres by 45 metres (2 025 square metres), so that her results would be seen to be achievable by women from poor families [De Lange & Penning de Vries, 2003: 9].

The four trainers who came into contact with her for the first time

were astounded by her inspirational ideas. Meeting beneficiaries in villages where Mma Tshepo has worked provided practical first-hand information on the positive spinoffs exposure to her techniques and personality has on others.

According to one of the trainers: *"[The] water tanks are amazing – people that we met were full of happiness about what they got. Started to feel guilty about most of the projects we work with. Only manage to get water in summer and in winter start growing vegetables and by that time the rainwater is gone. Even with 5 000 litres it is so little to depend on the whole winter. I like the size and quantity – so big that you can depend on it."* [Daniel, Ecolink, March 2009]

Many of the rainwater harvesting methods that have been put into place are unique and they are 'best fit' for the communities where they have been applied because they are low cost and appropriate technologies.

Moses, one of the trainers, had this to say: *"We can build an underground water tank ... can't leak. The way they explain to us – from the foundation to build a tank – how they put inside*

*from the ground – they put the bricks in the foundation. If we do it like that we don't have a leak .... Plaster inside"* [Ecolink, March 2009].

Mma Tshepo's lessons were well internalised in all three villages. Her messages are simple, her training sessions well designed and the villagers beamed with pride as they shared their own experience and knowledge with newcomers.

Mma Tshepo's teaching procedures are well developed and although her approach and methods are adeptly adjusted from one village to another, the following procedures are common.

*Mma Tshepo practices what she preaches in her own garden.*



## Village scoping

A participatory scoping exercise is done in the village to identify chronically food insecure households. Village scoping is an exercise that maps village relationships, organisations, history and so forth. This scoping provides the background for future actions [Khumbane, NDA]. The scoping includes extracting responses to the following questions:

- Who lives in the village?
- Who are the institutions or important stakeholders in the village?
- What infrastructure, social institutions, businesses etc are in the village?
- What problems do people experience?
- How do people cope?
- Who are the food insecure households? [IWMI, 2009: 6].

Following the initial scoping exercise, a report is written that captures the responses. The report is given to the community for comment. A

*The team from Ecolink getting a closer look at a village water tank.*



group that is selected as the poorest in the village is then targeted to take part in the mobilisation workshop. This is a seven-day workshop that takes place at Mma Tshepo's home in Cullinan.

## Mind mobilisation

The Water for Food Movement, which was founded by Mma Tshepo, targets food insecure households through the process of 'mobilising the mind' and transferring household food security. Skills are shared during a seven-day workshop at Mma Tshepo's home that includes training around the following topics:

- Land and water design to capture and channel rainwater into food production bed;
- Holistic approach to food security that encourages the practice of multi-cropping and the use of indigenous seeds around the house to provide continuous food supply throughout the year;
- food storage and processing; and
- Recycling of household organic waste for plant nutrition.

It is the mobilising of the mind that allows people to realise that they have the power to make decisions themselves about their everyday lives:

*"By mobilising the mind and transferring skills, the Water for Food Movement encourages and enables food insecure households to take responsibility for their own livelihoods, starting with food as a priority to liberate the minds and rebuild*



*By practically applying her own philosophies Mma Tshepo has established her own successful food garden with little financial input.*



An example of multicropping.

*the family and the community as a primary institution for resocialisation of the youth and to regenerate values. Breaking the cycle of apathy is achieved by taking participants from the stage of helplessness into a stage of self-confidence and creativity to enable them to face the challenges of rebuilding their lives through their own initiatives.” [Khumbane, NDA: 5].*

This process allows the person to exit from a situation that is not good for themselves and their households and to closely examine their everyday life.

According to Mma Tshepo: *“This person is in this position because her eyes are glued; she can’t see well. And then her mind, it’s, like, in a plastic bag, and sealed, you know? ...She doesn’t read, she’s looking out there; the sun – although the sun gives light and it’s so bright – but because her*

*eyes have got glued, she is half-blind. She can’t see through. And then so I give him the opportunity to come – get away from your situation – sit here: look at yourself; walk through, walk through yourself; fly over, work through your present situation and see.” [Manwaring, 2006: 170]*

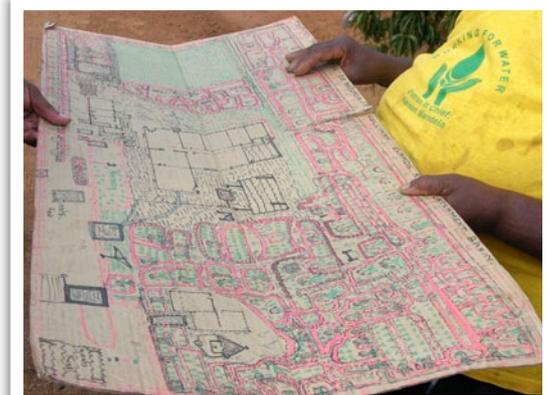
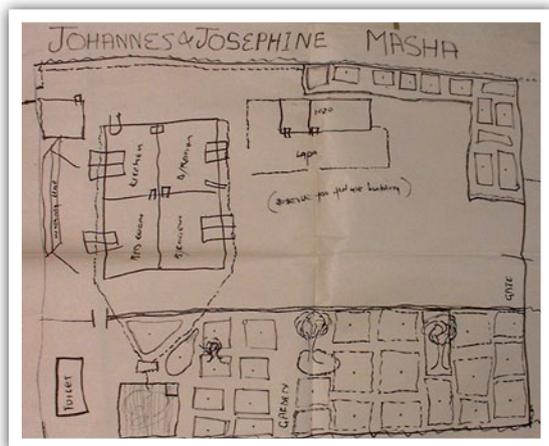
*“I’ve been saying to them all the years, that you can’t start building a house without digging the foundation and laying the first bricks. Otherwise the house is going to collapse.” [Khumbane, 2009]*

## Helicopter plan

Women from the most vulnerable households participate in a process of self-analysis. This is followed by real-life accounts of women just like themselves who have fought and won the struggle against hunger. The women who go through this process with Mma Tshepo emerge hopeful and determined to take control of their lives. The act of looking at oneself, looking at what steps one has or has not taken and then sharing one’s

*Top right: Example of a five-year food security action plan, also called the ‘helicopter plan’.*

*Middle and bottom right: Mma Tshepo also has a helicopter plan for her own garden.*



personal experience with others that are in a similar situation, is a powerful tool that mobilises people to take action.

*“we’re reporting, we’re sharing – it gives her the courage, ne? The courage stimulates the energy...And then now, here, you just, you challenge, you put a situation, you are challenging her: forcing her to come out. But then, with group therapy, she is not doing it alone. ..Find herself. Walk that road and find yourself.”*

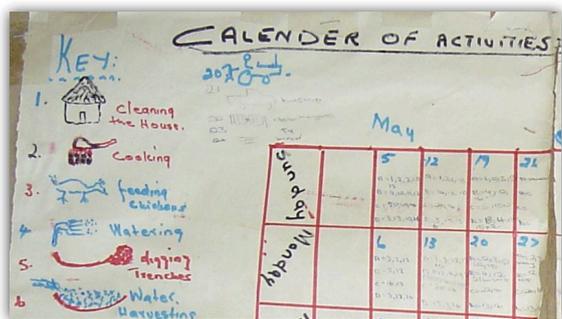
[Manwaring, 2006: 170]

## Weather and time management chart

Guided by the ‘findings’ that come out of the helicopter exercise, each participant develops a clear, individual plan for food production on her homestead plot as a starting point for future development. A few guiding principles are worth noting:

- Catching and storing every drop of rainfall and runoff;
- Low-cost food production methods;

An extract of a family time management chart.



- Family time management; and
- Education about nutrition.

Weather charting helps the family understand the relationship between plants and the climate. It provides information around what crops should be grown at a given season, how long the crops take to ripen and what, when and where to plant. The weather and time management chart is designed to combat pest infestation and to maximise the opportunity for harvesting rainwater. The weather charting steps also take the participant through ideas of evaporation and plant fatigue from heat and provide the guide for how to make seed beds in summer when too hot [Khumbane, NDA].

Planning before planting is pivotal to the teaching and this step-by-step approach allows the farmer to look after himself and his family over time because it gives a good sense of past, present and future needs. In this way, an individual can take himself/herself beyond just the needs of the present so that individuals are more responsive to changes over time.

## Follow-up visits for building household food security

The Water for Food Movement allows for a two-month implementation period where participants are on their own. After this time, Mma

Tshepo offers follow-up support. A strong principle is not to dictate or prescribe, but to stimulate individual creativity and do-it-yourself strategies for sustainability. The follow-up support visits also create an opportunity for the village to learn more about low/no-cost food production methods. [Khumbane, NDA: 5].

The aim of the follow-up visit is to guide participants and troubleshoot any aspects that come up in the process of implementing the helicopter plans that have been designed during the workshop. During the follow-up visit there is interaction with the broader community, including community leaders. The idea is to make the community – and their leaders, aware and appreciative of the achievements of workshop participants and to show the benefits of being able to implement their own helicopter plan.

## Fruit tree campaigns

Fruit tree campaigns in the village at household level ensure reforestation and improved nutrition. Reforestation leads to long-term food assets at household level with an impact on nature conservation, ultimately generating social forestry. This helps to raise awareness about environmental care programmes based on norms and social values at the village level, which the local government can support with laws that suit the local situation [Khumbane, NDA: 6]. □



## 6. Conclusion

**M**ma Tshepo is an inspiration. Like many of the apartheid struggle heroes she is a product of her time. Hers has been a struggle against inertia and passivity of people who looked to external responses and solutions outside themselves instead of accepting that they themselves could change and shape their own lives.

Mma Tshepo is a fighter and her fight is against impotence and ignorance that undermines natural

and social landscapes. Our heroine has, and still is, single minded in her quest to mobilise grassroots women. All women must be able to feed themselves and their families and water and food should never be in short supply. Her unique approach to rainwater harvesting has made its mark in South Africa and beyond.

She has gained international acclaim and although she is now coming to the end of her active teaching career, her teaching

continues to inspire and inform grassroots trainers. Those she has taught many years ago, still welcome her with so much warmth and appreciation that it is quite evident that she has inspired and touched their lives deeply. A good teacher can be judged by the achievements of her/his pupils. Mma Tshepo's words and actions as a teacher have inspired thousands of women to change their lives and to become proud and self-reliant farmers. □



*Mma Tshepo conducting a follow-up visit.*



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## 8. Annex

Table 1: Service on Institutional Boards

Boards/Councils	Date	Awards
National Water Advisory Council		Women in Water Award
Mvula Trust	1995	Nutrition Award
Agricultural Marketing Council	1996	Green Trust Award
SA National Parks Board	1999	Spirit of Hope of South Africa (SANGOCO)
SABC	1993 – 1995	
University of Pretoria	1996	
TNDT	1996 – 2000	
Nozala Investments	1999	
Rural Housing		

Table 2

Item	Description
Crop production	Field crops for food
Animal husbandry	Milk, occasional meat and power (tractor cattle)
Forests	Fruit, medicinal plants, firewood as well as the consumption of birds, locusts, beetles and Mopani worms
Ant-hills	Dimenemene, Dinhlwa and Makeke (types of food ants)
Mountains	Certain wild plants such as the Mehlatwa (fruit tree). Many shrubs grow in between stones and bind the soil, preventing soil erosion
Family kraal	Storage, food processing, art work etc
Environmental care	People were dependent and respectful of the environment and rivers, fields, wells, schools, wildlife, forests and mountains were seen as a whole

Source: [Khumbane, NDA: 2-3].

Table 3: Formal Training Years

Year	Organisation	Services rendered
1955-1957	Medical Social Work	Jubilee Hospital, Hammanskraal
1959	Vlakfontein Teachers' Training College	1 <sup>st</sup> year Secondary Teachers Training Diploma
1960	University of the North	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Secondary Teachers Training Diploma
1961-1963	University of the North	Social Work Diploma
1957-1973	Voluntary Service – Lesotho	<p><b>Group work:</b>                      Leprosy Asylum                      Botshabelo Hospital, working through Tokh Charity                      Cripple Care Occupational Therapy – Vagrant Boys Programme. Organised the boys from the street into a self-help project through Save the Children's Fund (SCF)</p> <p><b>Community organisation:</b>                      Youth programmes for development                      Women's groups for handicraft and food production: sewing co-operatives, pottery, weaving, cooking and food processing                      Environmental awareness programmes                      Tree planting programmes</p>

[Khumbane, NDA].

Table 4

No	Title	Author	Type of document	Published	Source
1	Water for Food Movement: Poverty eradication through mind mobilization	Tshepo Khumbane and Lisa Andersson	Essay: World Water Forum 4	Yes	Marna de Lange
2	Tshepo's Struggle for food security at House Hold level	Tsepho Khumbane	3 <sup>rd</sup> paper	No	Marna de Lange
3	Water is Life, Water is Power	Tsepho Khumbane	2 <sup>nd</sup> paper	No	Marna de Lange
4	"We all Care": The Water For food Movement in Rural South Africa	Unknown	Paper	No	Marna de Lange
5	Water For Food-Tshepo Khumbane 2001	Tshepo Khumbane	Paper	No	Marna de Lange
6	Integrating Food Security and Traditional Knowledge: ermaculture Approaches For Poverty Alleviation In South Africa	Tshepo Khumbane	Conference Key-note Presentation (Paper)	Yes	Marna de Lange
7	Food Security For Rural Poor Communities	Tshepo Khumbane	Draft paper	No	Marna de Lange
8	Identify and Estimate the Quantities of Water Supplies and Uses on Plot. 66, Dewangsdrift Of Mrs. Tshepo Khumbane	Sendagi Stellamaris	Thesis report	No	Marna de Lange
9	South African Farmers: A revisiting to Development of Thai Farmer Networks	Dr. Sawaeng Ruaysoongnern	Paper	No	Marna de Lange
10	Harnessing the Potential of Water for Improved Livelihoods in Rural Households in Pretoria, South Africa.	Stellamaris Sendagi and Isobel van der Stoep	Paper	Yes	Marna de Lange
11	Integrated Approaches to Natural Resource Management: Theory and Practice	Marna de Lange and Frits WT Penning de Vries	Workshop paper	Yes	Marna de Lange

Table 4 (continued)

12	Poverty Alleviation Through Water Management	Tshepo Khumbane	Paper	No	Marna de Lange
13	Water for Food Movement (WfFM) – Vision	Tshepo Khumbane	Vision paper	No	Marna de Lange
14	Preliminary Study: Preparation, Storage Capacity and Water Flow and Distribution of vegetable Gardens/Beds on Plot 66 Dewangsdrift, Pretoria of Mrs. Tshepo Khumbane	Sendagi Stellamaris	Thesis Report/ Preliminary Study	No	Marna de Lange
15	Stories of Mma Tshepo Khumbane: Walking the Road (2006)	Paul Manwaring	Interview	Unknown	Barbara van Koppen
16	Amakhosazana Emvula/ Celebrating South Africa's Women in Water	Lani van Vuuren (Editor)	Book	Yes	Water Research Commission (WRC) – Lani van Vuuren



