

# Planting a Seed for Transformation

*Women Organising for Social Justice*



*Surplus People's Project*



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## Women Organising for Social Justice

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-Herschelle Milford, SPP CEO.

**A**t the Ithemba informal farming area in Eesteriver in the Western

Cape of South Africa, small food gardens, livestock projects with chickens, pigs and goats bear testimony to the “Women Organising for Social Justice” project more than a year after its conclusion.

Project participants at the Ithemba farm tell stories of how they have steadily grown their food gardens, learned how to take care of their animals and turn their skills into fundraising

activities.

In 2015, the Surplus People Project received USD 30,000 from AWDF to implement a year-long project entitled, “Women Organising for Social Justice”. The project increased women’s knowledge, skills and experience on environmental justice, food sovereignty and economic empowerment.

Specifically, it worked with women to promote their access to land and water; inform them about food, gender and environmental justice; help women engage stakeholders and claim their rights to



land, water and resources; grow women’s participation and influence in the Food Sovereignty Campaign movement; and, through exchanges, encourage women to learn, share and implement agricultural and value-adding initiatives that add income to the household.

The project was implemented at a time where there was growing concern for the inclusion of women and youth in agrarian transformation and in forums such as SPP’s Food Sovereignty Campaign (FSC).

The SPP project was borne out of the recognition that there was much work to be done in raising awareness about the detrimental effects of patriarchy and relating it to women’s lived reality.

“In our interactions with communities, we realised that failure to address (this) reinforces skewed power relations and limit women’s benefits and contributions towards agrarian transformation. The food sovereignty framework

remains a valuable tool for analysis and placing the role of women and youth farm workers, in particular, at the centre. Stimulating political consciousness and awareness, therefore, forms an essential element towards movement building,” said SPP director Herschelle Milford in her final project report.

This analysis of unequal power relations was prevalent in SPP’s community work which was conducted with groups consisting of both men and women.

### Create Separate Spaces for Women’s Leadership to Thrive

“Patriarchy comes through very easily so we needed to find a way to get women empowered so that they could take up a leadership position,” said development facilitator Jose Pick.

“We created separate

spaces away from men so that they could more easily speak about the issues women face on a daily basis.

“And finding ways through popular and political education where they can feel more comfortable to speak and say what they as women would like to achieve, the issues that they face and how to deal with it,” said Pick.

These mixed groups also identified increased numbers of transgender females and gay men within the session and platforms. As LGBTQI issues are not a core function of the organisation, the SPP partnered with other organisations to help people engage on such issues.

The programme included hosting a women’s session focusing on “Patriarchy, Matriarchy and Feminism” which was held in Lamberts Bay and was attended by 39 women from Cederberg, Swartland and Matzikama areas.





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The discussions led to women committing themselves to start doing small things to prevent their oppression while women were also given an opportunity to speak publicly and voice their opinions. The workshop tackled critical issues such as understanding key terminology as well as small skills such as recycling.

“One of the biggest things we saw was the confidence of the women. They can now state their issues; they don’t rely so much on men to speak their issues,” said Pick.

Other training programmes included sessions on Agroecology in the Northern and Western Cape of South Africa; life skills in the Namaqualand region; financial skills training; beading; and dialogues on LGBTQI issues.

The women participating in Agroecology were able to start their own food gardens to produce food for their families.

The life skills training helped women – the youngest aged 16 and the oldest 80 - to explore issues such as communication, how to manage your own finances, and resolve conflict.

Among the benefits of the programme are seed sharing and seed savings and the women are encouraged to harvest and share seeds with one another. The training included value adding and processing training sessions on International Women’s Day in 2016 when the women came together to discuss building alternative markets for their products and services.

### **Creating Alternative Markets**

At this session, women were taught how to make pickled vegetables with their surplus produce as well as how to make chutney, pesto and facial products as recyclable and lucrative initiatives. The aim is for these women to eventually make products to sell in their communities.

The way forward is for women participants to use the acquired knowledge and skills from these interventions to start making their own products and create a local alternative market where they can sell their products in their communities.

In September 2015, the SPP held an alternative market in Citrusdal to encourage emerging farmers, farmworkers, rural women and youth to create their own local markets. The SPP hosted a preparation session to help the stallholders get their products ready for sale. A range of products were sold by the women and youth from the Western Cape, ranging from vegetables and herbs to arts and crafts – many of these were the result of SPP’s interventions.

As part of their advocacy and mobilisation commitment, SPP wrote a memorandum highlighting issues experienced by emerging farmers on the West Coast and delivered this document to the Provincial Minister of Economic Opportunities at an Agricultural Summit in October 2015.

***“SPP helped me a lot. Because of them, I am now empowered to help other people,”***

**- Jacqueline Cox,  
Ithemba Farmer**





**While there were 491 direct project participants in the programme, the women of Ithemba say there are thousands more indirect participants as the project has helped feed families and strengthen marginalised communities.**

As a result, the Department of Agriculture (DoA) set up a meeting with the farmers in March 2016.

Building rural networks was a critical output of this meeting and the Rural Women Assembly (RWA) met several times to discuss issues of mutual importance such as LGBTQI issues, the continuing high HIV and AIDS rate in South Africa as well as governance regulations in rural areas and the resulting impact on rural women.

The RWA also participated in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Summit in Swaziland where the Southern Africa Permanent Peoples Tribunal (PPT) on Transnational Corporations (TNC) took place in Manzini, Swaziland, on the 16th - 17th of August 2016 to highlight the issues of the rural poor, and to rebuild and strengthen the alliance.

The SPP reported greater solidarity between women as a result of the exchanges, joint sessions and collaborative actions.

"The impact of the project is that more women received skills in agriculture, in applying agro-ecological principles," said Harry May.

"Another outcome is that more women took up leadership roles in the food sovereignty campaign which is driven by SPP as well as in their own organisations. More women received leadership positions."

Single mother, Jacqueline Cox, is a community organiser in Ithemba where she also farms.

She estimates that there are about 200 single mothers in the farm area. There were also about 400 children who were supported through the community programme.

The Agroecology garden programme is a way for single parent households to produce food for their families as well as to raise funds for economic empowerment.

More than a year later, many of the food gardens are still growing with members boasting cabbages, pumpkins, onions and beans. Many know how to keep their gardens healthy and pest-free and how to use various natural remedies to promote healthy growth.

"SPP helped me a lot. Because of them, I am now empowered to help other people," said Koff.

While there were 491 direct project participants in the programme, the women of Ithemba say there are thousands more indirect participants as the project has helped feed families and strengthen marginalised communities.

"Access to land and water is an ongoing struggle for women and youth," said Milford. Despite this, SPP is confident that the work will be sustained: "Work around women was done on the grassroots level and community women's leadership was built by women organising themselves. The women identified in the projects or programmes themselves feel ownership over the initiatives we create."





# Grantee Information

Surplus Peoples' Project (SPP) was formed in 1985 by researchers who documented forced removal during apartheid in an effort to address the lack of land and housing for Black people. The purpose of SPP is to build and support social movements in its struggles for food sovereignty and agrarian transformation.

To achieve this, SPP facilitates pro-poor agrarian transformation and food sovereignty. It supports and promotes the implementation of agro-ecological practices as an alternative to the dominant forms of production. The organisation currently works in two provinces in South Africa (Northern and Western Cape). SPP's programs are targeted at small-scale farmers, farm workers and dwellers (women and youth in particular). It has 17 staff members and 7 members on its board of directors steering the affairs of the organisation.

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