



enough
to eat

Western Cape women food producers tell their stories





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enough to eat

Putting food on the table can be a challenge. For many, it is a constant worry whether there will be enough for everyone in their family.

Women are especially vulnerable to the impact of a changing climate. This is resulting in unexpected shifts in weather patterns, and in the availability of natural resources like water. And, because of this, the quality and quantity of food available to their families is reducing. Households are finding it harder to cope with rising food prices, less choice in terms of the food available to them and more frequent shortages.

Through their stories the women featured in this booklet show us some of the impacts of a changing climate. We hope that their stories inspire you to move to action to make sure that we all have enough to eat...







“I have to be creative with my income to ensure enough food for my family”

MARGARET PLAATJIES

Margaret Plaatjies is 21 years old and lives in Hammat Pieterse Square in Rawsonville in the Western Cape, with her husband and two children. Having enough food for her family is the biggest challenge in her home because she and her husband earn very little as seasonal workers on the fruit farms in the area in which they live. She talked about the situation getting worse because of food prices going up, and less food being harvested because of changes in the weather.

Margaret has to make hard decisions in relation to her family's wellbeing and on some nights she will go without food so that she can save the little they have available for her children. Margaret joined a cooperative supported by an Oxfam partner organisation, Women on Farms Project, which aims to build the capacity of seasonal and unemployed farm workers to increase their income and improve their livelihoods options. The Rawsonville

Cooperative grows gourmet mushrooms that are sold to a commercial farmer in Stellenbosch who, in turn, sells them on to restaurants and retailers. This provides the cooperative members with a small income to supplement their earnings from their seasonal work.

Since Margaret joined the Rawsonville Cooperative she says that her family's situation has changed for the better, but that their cooperative is still struggling with direct access to markets and limited resources being available for the purchase of seed and fertilizers.

She also started growing vegetables in the back garden of her informal dwelling to supplement food within the household, but the plants do not grow well because of the poor soil quality in the area and, more recently, because of too much rain and lower temperatures. Margaret believes that this is because of the changing weather patterns in the valley.

“The weather has had an impact on the plants, because by now the food should have ripened and been harvested but now there are no beans or potatoes because the changing climate has weighed heavily on the growth of the vegetables”, she says.

To counteract this, the women have started making their own organic compost with dried grass, fruit and vegetable peels, old newspapers and carton boxes. This organic compost has increased yields and the vegetables are growing and flourishing with the improved soil quality.

“Food prices are much higher than farm workers’ income”

LENA MULLER

Lena Muller (52) lives on a farm called Die Eike in Witzenberg Valley near Ceres in the Western Cape, with her family of 10 members. Lena decided to leave her work as a seasonal farm worker and joined the Dynamic Agri Cooperative supported by Women on Farms Project. They are just starting out and are still looking for an area of land to develop. Cooperative members receive a small stipend once a month from Women on Farms Project to ensure they and their families are able to put food on the table during the start up phase of the project.

Lena says that the increases in food prices are much higher than the salaries earned by farm workers. “The salaries are not adjusted as food prices go up, the farmer just gives the salary and assumes that you will cope; he does not factor in the number of payments one should make such as shop debts, children’s school fees and uniforms. He just takes it that the money is all for food”.

Buying food is top priority for Lena and all of the other household purchases have to be deferred until the family has additional money. “I put food first because if there isn’t food, children do not go to school happy and the men won’t be happy at work because they lack concentration and get sick if they have nothing in their stomachs”.

Lena and other women like her have to deal with food inflation on an almost daily basis. “Five years ago, flour was cheaper, a two kilogram packet used to cost eight rand but now it costs fifteen rand. A tin of coffee was ten rand and now it is more than twenty four rand”.

To increase the amount of food available to their families the women have tried to develop alternative ways of putting food on their tables such as growing their own vegetables. Their success has been limited however, since access to land remains a significant barrier – as does the weather and poor soil quality in the areas in which they live.









“I take the blame when there is no food on the table”

GETRUIDA BAARTMAN

For forty-four year old single mother, Getruida Baartman, planting a vegetable garden was a hobby. When the availability of food became a challenge because of increasing food prices, her family started blaming her for there not being enough to eat. Getruida realised that the food from her garden was a necessity, to supplement the food they were able to afford.

“The shortage of food is such a big issue at the moment, it is really hard because I have a father who is a pensioner, and a brother who is disabled, two grandchildren, a baby, two children at school and one that is unemployed and their brothers. I also have a son who is not at school anymore and is always at home and I am the only one who has to look after them with my little income from seasonal farm work and the cooperative”, says Getruida.

She plants beetroot, beans and onions in the cooperative vegetable garden but says these plants do not grow well due to lower temperatures and more regular frost. She has started planting vegetation to buffer the vegetables from the cold winds, which blow off the fabric that is meant to protect the growing plants from the frost.

Getruida joined the Rawsonville Cooperative that grows gourmet mushrooms, which are presently being sold to one commercial farmer in Stellenbosch. They are looking for more markets to supply; however many retailers prefer larger commercial farmers to small scale food producers.

“From the project I take home some beetroot and the stipend has really helped me buy food for my family. We now have bread and coffee every day”, says Getruida.

“I have walked for two kilometres to fetch water for my garden and for my house”

JOSEPHINE MABETA

Some researchers say that South Africa is predicted to experience severe changes to its climate with the Western Cape expected to become drier and colder. Josephine Mabeta (45) of Rawsonville in the Western Cape is already witnessing water scarcity which she says impacts negatively on her ability to grow food in her garden.

“We have a big problem with water, if there was water I would create a garden but now there isn't. I struggle a lot since I must fetch the water from far away, but despite my struggles I have to have a garden to ensure that my whole family eats”, says Josephine.

Josephine has to walk a distance of about two kilometres to get water and uses a large drum to harvest rainwater, particularly for irrigating her garden but also for her household needs – for washing and cooking.









“If women had access to land, it would reduce the level of hunger in our homes”

ALETTA MITAS

Access to arable productive land in Africa continues to decline because of the pressure of a growing population and land degradation brought about by a changing climate. Aletta Mitas (also known as Auntie Pam) who lives at Die Eike Farm in Witzenberg Valley near Ceres in the Western Cape says gaining ownership of land is a struggle, particularly for the many low income, rural households in the area.

Auntie Pam says small scale food producers do not own land in her community but that land is owned by big commercial farmers. “Lack of access to land is the biggest challenge. We have asked farmers to give us a piece of land but one of them said they could not because it is their family land”.

She believes that if women in South Africa had access to land, it would reduce the level of hunger amongst poorer communities. It would empower them because they would work in their fields, plant vegetables and ensure that there is food on the table. Ownership of land would also allow them to access finance and financial institutions to fund the improvements needed to make their farms more productive.

“My dream is to see strong women like us working together to access land and to be able to feed our families”.



Call to Action

The issue of global hunger sometimes seems insurmountable – it can leave us feeling helpless about making a difference. But the determination of the women of the Western Cape shows us that change is possible.

Show your support for the women of the Western Cape and for communities around the world who are struggling to grow enough food in the face of worsening impacts of a changing climate. There are many ways to get involved.

1. Add your voice to the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance. Sign their petition calling on the Presidents of Africa to act now for climate justice. <http://www.pacja.org/>

The Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) is a coalition of over 3000 civil society organizations in the African continent, brought together by the common goal of promoting and advocating for climate-friendly and equity-based development.

2. Join the global movement working to GROW a better future where everyone has enough to eat always <https://www.facebook.com/#!/GROWgarden>

GROW is Oxfam's new campaign for better ways to grow, share, and live together. A campaign for the billions of us who eat food and over a billion men and women who grow it, to share solutions for a more hopeful future in which everyone always has enough to eat.

3. Join the conversation on Twitter: follow **@Oxfam** and **#GROW #COP17** to contribute to your thoughts and comments about issues around having enough to eat. Log on to **twitter.com** and have your say or follow the Twitter feeds.
4. Go to www.oxfam.org/climate to find out more about some of the campaigns around changes in climate from around the globe.

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