Life histories and livelihood trajectories

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Introduction

Chapter 12 provided an account of rural livelihoods in the two villages that was mainly quantitative. It showed that at the level of the homestead various livelihood activities and domains were actively being combined in different ways by different homesteads, resulting in livelihood diversity among homesteads. By and large the picture that was painted represented the situation as it applied during the periods of data collection. In this chapter livelihood transformation within homesteads is the focus. We will do that by examining how, and why, rural livelihoods have changed over the past four to five decades and by focusing on the nature and extent of processes of differentiation and the resources that have been critical in such processes. As argued in chapter 1, an analysis of livelihood transformation benefits from stretching the time horizon as far as possible, as was shown in the study of Van Onselen (1996) about the life of Kas Maine.

The life histories presented in this chapter more or less cover the period 1950 to 2004. The main actors grew up and started working during the era when male migration from the rural areas to the urban centres of South Africa was still a general pattern. The life histories also cover the homeland era, from the time when the Ciskei was pushed towards self-government and ultimately to nominal
independence in 1981 until it was re-incorporated into South Africa in 1994. Important socio-economic processes that occurred during this era were the influx of surplus people into the Ciskei, linked to the mechanisation and modernisation of white commercial farming, and the active involvement of the Ciskei government, with funding from South Africa, to provide people in the homeland with some kind of income. Guided by the policy objective of “one meal per day for every Ciskeian”, various employment strategies were used, including growth in the size of the civil service, the establishment of industry in centres such as Dimbaza and Fort Jackson, the development of irrigation schemes, such as Keiskammahoek, Tyefu, Shiloh and Zanyokwe, the employment of large numbers of service workers at low wages by large organisations, such as the University of Fort Hare, and the use of temporary drought relief projects which specifically targeted the rural areas (chapter 2). Finally, life histories cover the post-1994 era, characterised by economic restructuring and large-scale retrenchments, particularly of unskilled workers, the emergence of international tourism in the Western Cape, growth in the public grant system, both in terms of eligibility and the size of the grants, and renewed urbanisation, this time involving entire homesteads.

The context in which the different life histories unfolded is covered in detail in other chapters. Chapters 2 and 4 analysed the dynamics involved with Apartheid policies aiming at racial segregation, betterment planning interventions, and population increase due to movements brought about by forced removals and surplus people from nearby white-owned farms. Chapter 11 highlighted changing migration patterns, partly in response to the lack of opportunities in the villages, but also because restrictive legislation was repealed, making it easier to migrate to urban areas, which are often perceived by villagers as attractive places to seek to improve their livelihood. The recent social phenomenon of the rural-urban drifters in South Africa shows that this perception is in many cases unrealistic. Chapters 4 and 5 pointed at agro-ecological events and processes, such as drought and environmental degradation, which affect use and quality of local natural resources. Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10 showed how livelihoods relate to the use of these resources in varying degrees.

Analysis of the life histories provides an indication of the different directions in which the livelihood of homesteads in the two villages has changed. These different directions are called livelihood trajectories (chapter 1). The material presented in this chapter illustrates that the livelihood trajectories of homesteads in the two villages are not uniform. The different life histories presented in this chapter focus on the livelihood of homesteads that remained in the two villages. This means that the material deals with ways in which rural livelihoods have been constructed and reconstructed. The life histories of homesteads that have left the two villages constitute another important reality, but they do not feature here.

The life history accounts were collected between 1998 and 2005. The selection of cases was informed by insights gained from an analysis of the 1997
and 1999 survey data. The cases presented here are selected from the lists of people living in occupied homesteads (Table 11.4). This selection excluded those that lived elsewhere but maintained some kind of social and economic relationship with their relatives and friends. The cases were also selected with a view to covering the four livelihood domains identified in chapter 12: (1) productive use of parts of the landscape (i.e. land-based activities), (2) transfers from kin and the state, (3) labour made productive outside the village and (4) from wages, petty trade and self-employed activities locally in the villages.

The following livelihoods categories, each with specific dynamics and outcomes, were identified for further elaboration and analysis:

1. The role of natural resource use, particularly in the form of cultivation, has diminished substantially. A number of homesteads, however, continue to invest in cultivating crops and livestock production. We bring together here five cases, some extended and some succinct, that together express the relevant variations within such a rather broad category of rural livelihoods.

2. Locally based livelihoods are few in the villages (petty businessmen, chapter 12) and the strategies vary enormously. Piece work or casual work for others or running a spaza shop or shebeen stands for what the local economy has to offer. Cases 7 and 8 but also case 6 reflect in their own ways the dynamics.

3. Rural livelihoods in Guquka and Koloni revolve principally around transfers ('grantholders', chapter 12). Case 9 and, to a certain degree, case 5 illustrate in more detail the complexities of transfer-based livelihoods.

Data were collected during the period 1998 to 2001 using a series of semi-structured interviews complemented by participant observation. Subsequently, the homesteads were again interviewed during field visits in 2004 and 2005, to obtain information on recent changes that had occurred. The interviews were conducted in Xhosa with the help of field assistants who translated the conversations. These interviews were held with men, women and elderly children, and involved visits to their homesteads.

Case 1: Mengezelei and Kulukazi Mbangi: Migrant, home gardener, pensioner

Mengezelei and his spouse Kulukazi were residents of Guquka. In 1998, Mengezelei was 61 years old and Kulukazi 59. Mengezelei looked young for his age and he was still very fit, but Kulukazi had trouble walking due to a leg injury and used a stick to support her. She was mainly occupied with housekeeping and cooking, but she also repaired clothes with a mechanical sewing machine. In 1997, Mengezelei’s homestead survived on an income of about R120 per month, well below the poverty line at the time of about R800 per month.

Mengezelei was born in 1937 on a white owned farm named Cathartvale near Seymour. At the age of 11 he began to work on that farm. Not satisfied
with life as a farm worker he moved to Johannesburg in 1955 at the age of 18 years. First he found work as a miner in the RPM Mine in Boksburg and in 1957 he moved to the Goedvlei Mine in Springs, where he worked until 1967. At age 30 he returned to Seymour and found work at the construction site of the Kat River Dam. When he was laid off in 1971, he accepted work in the Geduld Mine No 7 FSG in Free State, where he remained until 1988. In 1974, at the age of 37, he married Kulukazi of Hermest Farm near Fort Beaufort.

During his stay in Boksburg, and even thereafter, Mengezelei used Cathartvale Farm as a home base. This arrangement suited him well until the sons of the farmer took over the farm. The new owners did not make him feel welcome on the farm, and he decided to look for a place of his own. Mengezelei’s brother had relatives living at Guquka and they were prepared to support Mengezelei’s application to the Tribal Authority of Makhuzeni for a residential site. When a residential site became available at Guquka, following the death of an old lady, Mengezelei purchased the site from her children when they sought to sell the site and the *rondavel* that was built on it. Mengezelei could no longer remember how much he paid for it. The village headman and the Makhuzeni Tribal Authority were informed of the transaction. Mengezelei was informed that his name was entered into a register kept at the Alice Municipality. As proof of the transfer he also received the original Permission to Occupy certificate of the site that had been made out to the previous occupant. The sellers handed this certificate to him, but somehow it was subsequently lost.

When working in the Free State, Mengezelei was keen to obtain an arable field. He believed that as a miner he earned sufficient income to finance crop production. However, he was told that no land was available at Guquka. He then tried to lease land from landowners, but none was interested. The only arrangement they were interested in was sharecropping. Mengezelei did not consider sharecropping to be a good deal because benefits accrued mainly to the landowners. In 1998, Mengezelei had all but given up on the idea of producing crops on a large scale, even though he was convinced that field cropping could provide substantial income. He pointed out that water from the Tyume River could be used to produce irrigated vegetables but for him it no longer mattered. Without a regular income to invest in ploughing and planting, field-scale cultivation was not feasible he said. He had also given up on finding employment because there were no jobs around in the area. He repeated his opposition to sharecropping as an arrangement because all the risk had to be carried by the landless partner, who had to bear the full cost of production and do all the work. In return for making available their fields landholders demanded an equal share of the harvest.

After his return from Geduld Mine in 1988 Mengezelei never found permanent employment again. He derived income from casual work in Guquka and neighbouring villages and from the occasional short-term contract in Alice. His piece work in the local rural settlements usually consisted of fencing residential sites and digging pit latrines. In 1998, he was paid R400 to fence a 1,250 m² site...
with a circumference of about 140 m, and R100 to dig a pit latrine. Digging a pit latrine in the shallow soils was hard work because the major part of the pit had to be dug into the mudstone rock. Mengezelei last worked in 1996 in Alice, when he was digging trenches for the new municipal sewerage system.

Mengezelei never owned livestock (for reasons explained in chapter 4), but he had built a small kraal of about 10 m² in the top corner of his plot. When asked about the function of the kraal, he said that it was built for ceremonial purposes to provide a place for men to get together and talk as is demanded by Xhosa tradition.

From 1998 onward, Mengezelei’s main farming activity consisted of gardening. He regularly managed to produce high quality vegetables that fetched high prices in the village. However, the main part of what he produced was consumed at his home. All Mengezelei’s production occurred in his home garden, which formed part of his residential site. His residential site was about 1250 m² in size and about three-quarters of this were used for gardening (see chapter 6 for a detailed description). Mengezelei also kept chickens which he sold locally. The chickens, like his vegetables, were highly regarded and fetched good prices.

When asked about the meagre income he and his wife survived on, he pointed out that his small family purchased very little. On a monthly basis they bought 12.5 kg maize meal and the same amounts of crushed maize (samp) and wheat flour. To that they added 2.5 kg rice and sugar, 2 litre sunflower oil, a packet of tea, a medium-sized tin of cheap coffee and soap. They also bought a 10 kg bag of potatoes, 1 kg of dry beans and a cabbage, whenever these items were not available form the garden. He pointed out that the income he earned from casual work and selling chickens and vegetables was usually sufficient to cover these expenses, and he was adamant that his family had never known hunger. As a migrant worker he had bought a lot of clothes, enough to last him a lifetime. Whenever a piece of clothing needed repairs, they used the sewing machine, which he bought for Kulukazi when he was still working at the mines, to do the repairs. Kulukazi was handy with the sewing machine, and every so often she repaired clothing for other people in the village, for which she charged R3.00. When emergencies arose and there was no money in the house, Mengezelei borrowed money from other households, to be repaid by doing a job for them.

In 2004, the livelihood at Mengezelei’s homestead had improved considerably. Both he and Kulukazi were now receiving old-age pensions. Kulukazi started receiving this in 1999 and Mengezelei in 2003. From an absolute poverty perspective the homestead had progressed from the ultra-poor into the non-poor category, but in terms of livelihood activities some changes had occurred. Mengezelei was still growing vegetables and producing chickens, but he had stopped doing casual work for other homesteads, pointing out that there were others in the village that needed the work more than he did. Instead, he had started constructing roasting grids. People use these grids to bake a particular type of bread roll, known as rostile. When produced commercially, these
grids are welded together, but Mengezelei constructed them with a pair of pliers. Mengezelei commented that his gardening had become easier, now that he had money. In the past he left selected vegetable plants to go to seed for the subsequent seasons, but since receiving a pension he had started to buy new seed each time he planted. The seed he bought from Umthiza, an agricultural supply store in Alice. He still did not buy fertilizers. Now that he had a pension he had more or less stopped selling vegetables directly to customers. Instead he delivered his produce to a local shop, selling it at considerably lower prices than he used to charge in the past. He explained that he changed his approach because people in the village tended to be jealous of others who were better off.

During one interview Kulukazi arrived back from Alice where she had purchased groceries. She was accompanied by a young girl who we had never seen before. Kulukazi was looking good. Her leg had healed and she was no longer using a stick. Mengezelei explained that they were raising the girl, who was the daughter of a neighbour and that they had started helping the girl in 1996 when her mother moved to Bizana in Transkei. At that time the girl still slept at home, but since Kulukazi received a pension in 1999 the girl had come to live and sleep with them. This more or less coincided with the move of the mother of the girl to Cape Town. It seemed that Kulukazi was particularly pleased to have the girl as part of the family because every time the child was mentioned a warm smile appeared on her face.

Case 2: Mlami and Nomtandasa Tibani: Migrant, local employment, migrant

When we met Mlami in 1998 his homestead consisted of two adults and four children and lacked any income. Mlami was born in Guqqua in 1953. In 1969, when he was 16 years old, Mlami left Guqqua and moved to the Western Cape where he found work at a dairy farm. In 1972, at the age of 19, he became a dock worker in Cape Town harbour, loading and off-loading ships. He returned to Guqqua in 1976 and stayed there until mid 1977. He then tried his luck in Johannesburg but failed to find work. Early 1978 he returned to Cape Town where he worked as a waiter in different hotels. In 1981, at the age of 27, Mlami married Nomtandasa who was also from Guqqua. Following the marriage, Nomtandasa visited him occasionally, travelling to Cape Town by bus. The young couple were desperate to stay together on a daily basis, and Mlami started looking for work closer to home.

In 1982, Mlami found a job at Fort Hare as a casual security guard, and in 1986 he obtained permanent status. Guards worked in shifts, including night shifts, which Mlami disliked, because it prevented him from returning home daily. In 1994, he successfully applied for a transfer to the Gardens and Grounds section of the University, where he worked from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm, an arrangement that suited him much better. In 1997, the majority of such employees at Fort Hare were retrenched to address budgetary difficulties
(chapter 3). Mlami was one of them. When interviewed for the first time in 1998 he was still upbeat, but when that episode in his life was discussed again in 2005 he was extremely bitter about it. In 1998, Mlami and his family still survived on the retrenchment package paid out by Fort Hare, without any other significant source of income. Mlami enjoyed being at home throughout the day but by then he was well aware that his financial reserves were limited. Nomtandasa generated an occasional income from sewing uniforms, whilst Mlami was extending his house using wattle and daub. He indicated that once the work on the house was complete he intended to start looking for a job. He pointed out that he would prefer to stay with his family, but he had little hope of finding employment that would enable him to do so.

Mlami was born in a family that owned arable land in the village, but being the last born he was not eligible to inherit the land holdings and the residential site of his parents. When he got married he applied to the tribal authority for a residential site. This was allocated to him in 1989 free of charge. When employed at Fort Hare, Mlami did not have much interest in agriculture. The wages he earned were adequate to buy food and other necessities, and full time employment did not leave him with time to devote to farming. Moreover, his wife had her hands full around the house, looking after the children and using her spare time to sew. Over time, they had established a tiny home garden in which they grew a few vegetables for the household and, according to Mlami, that was about as much as they could handle. Now that Mlami was no longer employed he realized that he needed to grow more of his own food. In 1998, he applied to the Residence Association of Guquka to be allocated the vacant residential site neighbouring his home for use as a second garden, because his existing home garden was too small. The vacant site had been allocated twice to different people, but both had rejected the site. As a result, the Residence Association had no objections and approved his application. He had the site ploughed and intended to plant the land to maize that same year. Unlike several others in the village, Mlami had never invested part of his earnings in livestock. The homestead did not even keep poultry. Yet, Mlami indicated that he was keen to explore the potential of agriculture as a livelihood option because it would enable him to remain at home with his family. He pointed out the opportunity of using arable land bordering the Tyume River for irrigated crop production. Considering the high rate of unemployment in the village he was of the opinion that many people would be interested in a project that introduced irrigated farming in the village. However, he was of the opinion that external assistance would be needed to implement an irrigation project because people in the village only knew traditional farming methods and needed to be trained intensively before they could handle commercial agriculture.

When we visited his homestead in 2004 he was no longer at home. The garden on the neighbouring residential site was fallow and covered with weeds. When we interviewed Nomtandasa she told us that Mlami was working in Knysna. Towards the end of 1998 Mlami’s retrenchment package had been con-
sumed and the homestead had run out of money. In 1999, Mlami had found contract work for six months in Alice, which had kept them going, but when the contract was finished their problems returned. In 2000, Mlami travelled to Knysna to collect the remains of his brother, who had suddenly passed away. At the time of his death his brother was working as a petrol attendant, and while in Knysna Mlami was offered his brother’s job. Mlami left Guquka in September 2000 and after working as a petrol attendant for a few months he took up a second job. From 7 am to 4 pm he pumped petrol and during the night from 10 pm to 6 am he worked as a guard. After a while, the lack of sleep started to affect his health, and he had to resign from the petrol station because security work paid better than dispensing petrol. However, his earnings were still not enough to provide a reasonable income for his family. Early in 2003, Mlami applied successfully for a position as a tour guide because of his ability to speak English and his experience as a waiter in Cape Town. His work consisted of accompanying foreign tourists on a bus tour of the Knysna region visiting the local sites and attractions. The new job paid well, enabling him to send more money home.

On the day of our visit Nomtandasa arrived by taxi from Alice loaded with groceries. She had been elected chair person of the residents’ association of Guquka. She and the children looked happy and healthy. I asked her about the neighbouring plot. Nomtandasa explained that they had only cultivated the plot for two years. When Mlami left no one in the family remained who could cultivate the plot. When the eldest son, who had turned into a strong young man, was asked why he did not keep up with gardening, he responded that he focused on school and rugby practice and that there was no time for him to look after the plot.

When we visited again in July 2005, Mlami was back at home, retrenched from his job as a tour guide. While he was in Knysna, one of his daughters had become ill, and now she was bound to a wheel chair. Being away whilst his daughter’s health was deteriorating had been a traumatic experience for him, and he was adamant that he would never be a migrant worker again. The family was clearly suffering. Nomtandasa had aged and most of her teeth had been extracted. Mlami said that his family was very hungry. Since his retrenchment and return to Guquka, Nomtandasa’s brother had been helping the family by donating R250 or R300 every month to buy food but this had not been enough to feed the family. Reflecting on his stay in Knysna, Mlami explained that moving there had been a difficult but necessary decision because in 2000 the family had run out of money. Cultivating the plot next door in 1998 and 1999 had provided them with some food, but his family needed money because the children had to go to school. In Knysna he had worked hard to earn enough money to provide for his family but being away from home had been very difficult. During that period he visited home about twice a year, which was not enough. He pointed out that when he was young and engaged to Nomtandasa, she had travelled to Cape Town often, and he had felt less lonely than when
living in Knysna. His overall situation had improved when he landed the job of

tour guide. He had earned a basic monthly salary of R2000 and had been
allowed to keep all the tips he received. He proudly pointed at the large ghetto
blaster, the centre piece of their small living space, and said that he had pur-
chased it with his earnings as a tourist guide. The closing down of the company
had been a heavy blow to him, but the worst was not being there when his
daughter’s health started to deteriorate. Despite the precarious situation of his
homestead he repeated over and over that he would never leave his family
again.

When asked about his plans, he said he hoped that the water harvesting
project that was started by the University of Fort Hare would assist him. He also
explained that he was playing a leading role in an initiative aimed at improving
rural security assisting the police with prevention and solving of crimes,
particularly the theft of livestock. Mlami argued the benefits of this proposal.
He pointed out that a return to safety would trigger an era of investment in
smallholder agriculture, which would benefit the area and reduce poverty. How-
ever, it was evident that his main concern was to secure a job that provided him
with a regular income whilst allowing him to stay at home.

Case 3: Mzoli and Thandeka Mrwetyana: Reversing gender roles

In 1999, the Mrwetyana homestead in Koloni consisted of six members,
namely, Mzoli, his wife Thandeka and four children. Three of the children
attended high school in Zwelitsha near King William’s Town and one, who’s
hearing was impaired, stayed at home. Mzoli was unemployed and no longer
actively looking for work. After several years without luck he was tired of
searching for a job.

Mzoli was born in Lady Frere in the Transkei. He passed grade 12 and found
work in the civil service as a clerk in the Transkei Department of Local
Government where he worked from 1971 to 1976. He was transferred to the
Transkei Department of Internal Affairs where he worked from 1977 to 1980. In
1981 he was employed as a teller in a branch of African Bank where he worked
until end of 1982. Mzoli kept on hopping jobs in order to earn more.

When he failed to secure a well paid job, he decided to follow his father’s
footsteps and become a teacher. In 1982 he registered as a full time student in
Clarkebury Teacher’s College. During the first year he managed to pay his
educational expenses, but during the second year he ran out of money and
requested assistance from his father. Later that year his father passed away, and
as a result Mzoli could not complete his teacher’s training course. He had to
look for a job again but found it difficult because he was not qualified. Never-
theless, he found several temporary teaching jobs in different schools in the
Ciskei. He was already married then and he and his wife had moved to Ciskei.
He usually replaced teachers who were on study or maternity leave. His last
temporary teaching post was in 1995, and since then he has never taught again.
Instead he had taken to cultivating the home garden and to assisting his wife who was a teacher.

Mzoli’s wife, Thandeka, was born in Matatiele in 1949. When she was still young her parents moved to Ginsburg, a township of King William’s Town. She passed grade 10 and enrolled for a teacher’s course at Lovedale College in Alice, qualifying in 1970. In 1971 she started working as a teacher and taught for five years. She gradually realised that she did not like teaching very much and decided to change to nursing. She went to Port Elizabeth where she started her nursing career. She was unable to finish her studies because she became pregnant and therefore was expelled from school. After her baby was born Thandeka started to look for a teaching job once more. Like her husband she was only able to get temporary jobs, replacing teachers who were on leave. In 1984 she was again employed as a full time teacher at Cala Junior Secondary School in Transkei until 1987. It was not easy for her as her family was in Koloni. For this reason, she started to look for a job closer to home. In 1988, she obtained a post at Koloni Junior Secondary School, but in 1990 she was transferred to another school in a nearby village. In 1999 she was still teaching in that school.

Mzoli’s and his family did not stay in their own house in Koloni. The homestead belonged to relatives who had moved to East London and left their home in the care of the Mrwetyanas for the time being. The Mrwetyanas owned a residential site in the new section of Koloni (see chapter 6). They had applied for that site, but they had not yet built their own house. They planned to start building as soon as possible, because they were not sure how long they would be able to stay in the house they were taking care of.

Since about 1996 Mzoli’s homestead had been relying primarily on Thandeka’s salary for a living. Mzoli worked in the home garden and grew vegetables, mainly for home consumption. He produced potatoes, cabbages, spinach, beans, onions, carrots, butternut, baby marrow and beets. When there was surplus he sold it locally. Mzoli cultivated the garden by hand, using a spade and a garden fork. He grew crops in the garden year round. The garden was divided into plots. As soon as a plot was harvested he planted a new crop, after digging in manure. At least once a year he also applied chemical fertilisers. Manure was carted from the neighbour’s kraal where it was available free of charge. He also irrigated his crops, always when planting and occasionally thereafter when necessary. He talked about building a small dam inside the garden to collect rainwater for irrigation.

When we visited Mzoli again in 2004 he pointed out a few changes. Two of their children were attending university, but they did not have a bursary or study loan. As a result, half of Thandeka’s salary was used to pay off the fees. The third child had also passed Grade 12 two years ago but was not studying. The parents could not afford to pay the tuition fees of three university students. The family was also adopting a 9-year-old nephew whose mother was ill. Compared to five years earlier, the family was struggling to make ends meet. Thandeka
apologised for not offering tea during the visit, because they had neither tea nor sugar in the house. Mzoli confirmed that things were tough. He said that when some food items ran out before month-end, they were not replaced until Thandeka got paid again. Five years ago, the family was ready to start building a new house, but those plans had been shelved, and from the look of things building would have to wait for a while. Thandeka indicated that she was seriously thinking of requesting for early retirement, because the lump sum she would receive would enable them to build the house. One thing that had not changed was Mzoli’s engagement in home gardening. He was still producing food for his family, who needed it more than ever before.

Case 4: Vuyo and Zolile Grootbooi: Retrenched migrant to farmer

In 1998, the homestead of Vuyo and Zolile in Guquka consisted of seven people, three adults and four children subsisting on a single pension of R470 per month supplemented by a modest in-kind income from home gardening. Zolile, Vuyo’s wife, was born in 1959 in the Township of Cookhouse, a town located about 100 km north of Port Elizabeth. She grew up in Cookhouse and attended school there until 1977, completing grade 8. In 1978 she found employment as a domestic worker in Port Elizabeth, where she stayed for two years. In 1982 she married Vuyo and moved to Guquka, her husband’s home. Vuyo worked in a Free State gold mine from 1982 until February 1998, when he was retrenched. Following his retrenchment the homestead was left to rely on Vuyo’s mother’s pension as their only source of cash income. Whilst working at the mine, Vuyo had applied for a residential site. The Residents’ Association allocated the couple a site in the northern section of the village. They built a substantial cement-brick house on that site and roofed the dwelling, but in 1998 they were delaying occupation until the house had doors and windows. Vuyo’s retrenchment had prevented them from completing their new home. Vuyo had also invested part of his wages in livestock, purchasing five cattle, two goats and twelve sheep over the years.

When Vuyo was still employed as a miner the homestead obtained access to arable land through a share-cropping arrangement with a land holder. This arrangement required them to crop the land with their own labour and inputs and share the yield with the owner of the field, each receiving half. Both Vuyo and Zolile were of the opinion that the arrangement was extremely unfair towards them, and after a few years they gave up. In 1998, they were concentrating their efforts on home garden production. Zolile produced crops in the parental garden and also in the garden of her neighbour, who had moved to Cape Town leaving home and garden in her care. Carrying buckets of water from the stock watering dam, which was situated about 200 m from the homestead, Zolile irrigated a wide range of crops. She produced her own seedlings in a seedbed and transplanted these to the garden plots. The plots were fertilised with kraal manure. Zolile explained that after being transplanted, seedlings
were very weak and sensitive to water stress, making irrigation essential for survival of the plants. She did not like the idea of the water harvesting dams used by William because she believed that the presence of water bodies near a home caused the occupants to get strange diseases, such as pimples and swelling of the face. Zolile was very interested in an irrigated crop production project in the village. As a dedicated producer of crops she was of the opinion that such a project would provide both food and income to her family. She expressed preference for involvement in a group project with a membership of both men and women. Vuyo, on the other hand, expressed the wish to find employment but supported his wife’s aspiration to be a member in a crop production project. Zolile knew of two other women in the village who would be keen to join such an agricultural project. They were also landless, but still practised share-cropping. Zolile viewed access to land as a key constraint. She feared that the reluctance of landowners to rent out their land stood in the way of an irrigation project. Consequently she had decided to concentrate her efforts on garden production until such time solutions to the land issue emerged.

Visiting Guquka in 2004, we found Vuyo outside the village shebeen. He stated that he had time to talk with us if we bought him a bottle of beer. Upon arrival at his mother’s place (their new house remained unfinished), we were welcomed by Zolile. She and the children looked well, and there was a new toddler running around the site. Vuyo’s mom had passed away the previous year, which meant that the family no longer had pension income.

Vuyo had secured the use of a field. When his maternal grandmother had passed away he and his mother had requested from the rest of the family the use of the field previously cultivated by Mr. Dibela. Since the person first in line to inherit the field was no longer living in the village, they had agreed to his request. He pointed out that he was allowed to use it until such time as the rightful owner claimed it back. Vuyo’s homestead was using the field to produce maize, beans and pumpkins for home consumption and potatoes for income. Grain was being used to raise pigs and chickens on the residential site. Producing pigs was a new initiative, aimed at replacing sheep. Vuyo explained that theft of sheep had become “a real curse in the village”. Of the twelve sheep he once had, eight had been stolen, and now he was left with only four. Vuyo was not the only victim of livestock theft. The day we arrived at Guquka the son of the former village headman was found dead in his sheep kraal. Neighbours speculated that during the night he had woken up when hearing suspicious noises outside the house. Inspecting the source of the noise he had probably stumbled upon the thieves and they had stabbed him to death. His corpse was discovered the next morning by his father. Vuyo explained that pigs were not so easily stolen because they made a racket when disturbed. The other advantage of swine over sheep was that they reached market readiness a lot faster. Sheep, on the other hand, had the advantage that they produced wool, but income from wool was very meagre. In 2003 he had sold the clip obtained from the six animals he held at that time to a travelling speculator for R70.
Zolile was responsible for looking after the pigs. She employed an improved scavenging system, supplementing whatever food the pigs found around the village with poor-quality maize grain on a daily basis. Using this system the pigs took six to eight months to reach market readiness. Pig production was aimed at the Christmas market, when migrants returned home from their urban places of work and homesteads in the village had money to buy meat. The month before Christmas she increased the maize rations to give the pigs a growth spurt and ensure good prices. The income earned from pig production was used primarily to plough the field. In 2003, hiring a tractor belonging to one of the local contractors had cost R1080 to plough the entire field, but as yet the homestead had not had enough money to cultivate the full area. Instead they had subdivided the plot into twelve sections, and in 2003 they had planted nine of these. The largest portion, approximately 2.1 ha in size, was planted to a mixed crop of maize, beans and pumpkins, using an animal-drawn, single-furrow planter.

This particular indigenous technology is widely used in the Transkei region, (Mkile 2001), but less commonly in the former Ciskei (Van Averbeke & Mkile 2007). It involves the placement of a mixture of air-dry pulverised crushed, air-dried kraal manure, chemical fertilisers and beans and pumpkin seeds in the fertiliser bin of the implement and maize seed in the seed hopper. During planting the implement deposits both the fertilizer-seed mixture and the maize seed in the furrow it opens up, yielding a three-crop stand planted in rows.

The Grootbooi homestead did not own a planter but borrowed one from another homestead. In return they helped the owners of the implement when they planted their field. Once the crop was established weeds growing between the rows were controlled with an animal-drawn cultivator, an implement the homestead did own. Any weeds found in the rows were removed by hand hoeing. Vuyo and Zolile estimated that in Guquka there were four families who owned a planter and about ten who had a cultivator. The family harvested their summer crop in June and stored the produce in a rondavel for their own consumption. As the need arose they shelled enough maize cobs to fill an 80 kg grain bag, sorting the kernels into two classes, one suitable for human consumption and one for use as animal feed. Poor quality grain was fed to pigs and poultry and sometimes to the sheep. The good quality grain was taken to Phandulwazi High School across the river from Guquka, where it was milled into a coarse meal at a cost of R10 a bag. Processed grain into samp, the broken maize kernels sed to cook a popular dish of maize and beans, Zolile did at home. Vuyo reported that his maize harvest lasted the family for about nine months, until March, and grain from the new crop becoming available in June. The main reason for the gap was that the quality of the grain deteriorated with storage duration, because of weevils. During 2003 the homestead had planted the rest of their plot, about 0.14 ha, to potatoes. They were very pleased with the results because the crop had generated a decent income, having been sold
entirely to households in the village. The potato crop had been so encouraging that they intended to plant a larger section next year.

In 2004, Vuyo still held cattle. His herd had expanded through reproduction and inheritance from his parents to eleven animals. At a livestock auction at Phandulwazi High School he had sold one old cow, which had persistently been incapable of weaning its calves, for R2600, using R2300 of the income to buy a heifer from a livestock owner in the village. He had also slaughtered three animals to comply with local customs surrounding the death of family members. Vuyo ran his cattle on fallow arable plots that were not fenced in. He admitted smilingly that the owners of the fields did not like this at all and that on occasions there were quarrels about that. The main argument of the owners was that grazing his cattle in their fields prevented them from obtaining thatching grass. Vuyo was not impressed with that argument because nearly all of the dwellings in Guquka had corrugated iron roofs. The main benefit the homestead derived from their cattle was milk, but draught power and manure were also important. Vuyo estimated that the cows in milk, usually about five of the eleven animals, produced about 7.5 litres milk a day over six months of the year. All of this milk was transformed into amasi (sour milk) and consumed by the household. Vuyo was keen to develop a system that would ensure year-long milk production, but lacked knowledge on fodder production to achieve this goal.

Vuyo appeared to have accepted his new land-based livelihood, and Zolile loved it. Vuyo admitted that given the chance he would still prefer to work in the mines, but he was confident that his homestead could survive from farming. Their experiences with potato production had shown them that the farm could be utilized to generate both cash income and food. The couple intended to educate their children provided there was enough money, but they pointed out that they should also learn to farm as part of a range of life skills.

Case 5: Mpendulo: Migrant to farmer

In 2000, Mpendulo’s homestead consisted of his wife Nomvuyo and their six children. Mpendulo was 58 years old, having been born in Koloni in 1942 in a landowning family. He went to school but only passed grade six because, as he said himself, of laziness. After he had left school he began to look for a job and found one in Zwelitsha at Da Gama Textiles. He worked there for more than 20 years after which he returned home in the early 1990s. Upon his return Mpendulo started to engage in agriculture but also operated a bakkie, which he used to transport goods and people. After a few years he sold the bakkie because he could no longer maintain it. Since then, agriculture became the only source of livelihood for Mpendulo’s homestead. Unlike most other families in the village their main purpose in cultivating crops and keeping livestock is to earn cash income.
The Ngxobo’s have a field (field no. 74, Map 8.2), which they cultivated every year. They also have access to two home gardens where they grow vegetables. One is on their residential site and the other is at his brothers’ homestead who has not yet constructed a house on it. One of Mpendulo’s main tasks is taking care of the cattle, sheep and goats when the animals are sick. His wife does not take part in all this, she says, as she does not know anything about animal diseases. Although Mpendulo can easily tell when an animal is sick, he lacks the knowledge of diseases and their treatment. Most of the time he relies on traditional medicines he picks from the rangeland to bring the animals back to good health. Amongst these traditional medicines, there is one usually called *uzifozonke*, which is used to treat a wide range of diseases.

Decisions regarding selling animals were also entirely in the hands of Mpendulo. While pointing at an ox he said, “I have decided to sell that ox; it is old”. The sheep he had were kept both for wool and meat while goats were kept almost exclusively to be slaughtered for ceremonial purposes. Wool was sold to marketing agents, who usually travel to the area to buy wool during shearing time. Cattle, sheep and goats graze on communal rangeland. Sheep and goats are *kraaled* every night, but cattle remain in the camps and are only kraaled at the time of ploughing.

They also kept a few pigs and chickens but these were mainly for own consumption. Once in a while Mpendulo makes a little cash by selling a pig; eggs he sells, however, almost every day. Eggs are sold locally at 50c per egg. Mpendulo’s wife is responsible for the small livestock activities. Chickens and pigs are kept in buildings on the residential site where they are fed with maize. The maize comes from their own fields. Two bags of maize were normally reserved to feed the chickens and pigs. When that is not enough maize was bought from supermarkets in King William’s Town. Specially formulated feed for chickens was also purchased there, but supplemented with maize that was crushed at home.

The crops Mpendulo planted in the arable field included maize, which normally occupies more than half of the land, pumpkins, potatoes, melons and dry beans. In the garden mostly vegetables were grown. Most of the maize was sold locally at R60.00 per 50 kg bag. He said that he did not have much trouble selling maize in Koloni. The only marketing that was needed was to announce in a meeting that their maize is ready for sale. His customers were also from neighbouring villages. In good seasons, Mpendulo makes a relatively high net return from selling maize. For example, during the 1999/2000 cropping season he harvested 16 bags of maize grain, ten of which were sold, bringing him R600.00. The other six bags were kept for personal consumption. He sold a bag (10kg) of potatoes for R10.00, and a pumpkin brings R3.50. Dry beans and melons were not sold. Some melons are fed to the pigs whilst household members consume others. Vegetables are sold the same way as field crops with local people coming and buying at their site.
Case 6: Phindile and Nolulamile Ngwevu: Rural entrepreneurs

Phindile was born in Cathcart near Stutterheim in 1953. His parents were farm workers. Phindile attended a farm school that did not go further than grade 4. When he could no longer attend school he started helping his parents who were looking after the animals of Mr. Hart (a white farmer). He stayed on the farm until 1972. When his parents were too old to work, the owner of the farm asked them to leave the farm and look for a place to stay in the Ciskei. His father had relatives in Guquka and approached them to find a residential site for him and his family, as it was not easy for a stranger to apply for a site in a village without mediation by one or more of its residents. His application was successful, and by the end of 1972 they settled in Guquka. They arrived with a herd of about 18 cattle, which his father obtained from Mr. Hart, some as gifts and some bought at a good price.

Phindile and his wife, Nolulamile, had seven children, four girls and three boys. Five of these children were still at school and at home in 2000. Two older girls had both passed grade 12 and stayed in Johannesburg looking for jobs. Phindile and his wife also took care of a nephew whom they treated as their own child.

The Ngwevu homestead made a living from trading and activities including chopping and selling firewood, digging and selling sand, buying and selling food in their spaza shop, ploughing for other people in Guquka and neighbouring villages. Their business benefited substantially from what they owned: a tractor, a truck, a bakkie, two ploughs, a planter and garden tools. There were four buildings on the residential site, two of which looked very modern and were made from cement bricks. There is a garage to keep the tractor and other vehicles. During harvest time one of the houses is used as storage to keep the produce from the garden. They also have two fridges and one of them is used to store food products bought for the purpose of selling. There also had a pig sty and a chicken house. Next to these assets they had access to two gardens; one was on their residential site and another elsewhere. Both gardens are used to grow crops and vegetables mainly for home consumption. They did not own a field but had access through share-cropping in the past (chapter 8). They owned about six head of cattle as well as pigs and chickens. Cattle were mainly kept for ceremonial functions that take place irregularly. They do not milk their cows but allow it to go entirely to the calves.

Phindile is in charge of chopping and selling wood as well as selling sand. Firewood is chopped in a forest that belongs to Cwengcwe, a nearby village. Phindile obtained a permit to chop wood from the Residence Association and had to pay R15.00 per load. They transported at the time at least two truckloads of sand and three loads of firewood every week. These were sold at R150 per load. He employed four people from Guquka to chop wood and load the firewood on his truck. These workers also dug and loaded sand. They earned some
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R50.00 per week in 2000. The workers were often also paid in kind in the form of a meal at Phindile’s home.

Nolulamile was also trading. Nolulamile used to work as a domestic worker in Hogsback, but she stopped in 1993 to become a fulltime housewife and entrepreneur. She had to stop working because her mother-in-law, who helped take care of children, passed away. She operated the spaza shop since then, which entailed buying and selling broilers, fish and soft drinks. The chickens are bought from a farmer in Cathcart. Nolulamile buys 20 chickens at a time and these were delivered at her house once a month. Each chicken cost R15.50 and R0.50 for delivery. Nolulamile sold each chicken at R30.00 to people in the village. The fish is bought from Multisave Supermarket in Alice. She usually buys one packet of fish at R20.00 every week. Each packet has about 7 to 8 fishes and each fish is cut into five smaller pieces which are sold at R1.20, making a profit of about R6 per fish. She said that the students of George Mqalo Secondary School were among her best clients. Nolulamile’s daughter was in charge of the selling related activities, such as soft drinks that are bought from a soft drink store in Alice. A case of 12 one litre bottles costs R36. Each litre was re-sold at R5.50 in the village. She explained that it is not big business and that only during special holidays such as Christmas or Easters does she manage to sell reasonably well.

Phindile also made money by ploughing fields in the village with their tractor. He learned how to plough with a tractor while he worked at the farm where he was born. His father had bought the tractor just before they settled in Guquka. After Phindile’s parents passed away he inherited the tractor and since then has ploughed other peoples’ fields. He still does this charging R60.00 per acre and between R50.00 and R100.00 per garden depending on its size. He also inherited his father’s cattle but never used them to plough.

At one stage Phindile had thought about looking for a salaried job but in the end he decided to stay fulltime in the village. He bought a bakkie in 1979 that he used to transport people to and from Alice as there were no taxis at that time. During ploughing time Phindile would stop transporting people and concentrated on ploughing, as he was making more money by ploughing than from transporting people to town.

The Ngwevu’s never owned an arable allotment. All arable land had been allocated by the time they applied for a site (chapter 3). Nevertheless, they managed to access a field through share-cropping till 1987. Growing crops became one of Nolulamile’s tasks, while Phindile transported people on a full-time basis. Phindile would only help with ploughing and planting because these were both done mechanically. Thereafter, Nolulamile cultivated the field all by herself, but sometimes she got help of friends and relatives, including some members of the household that owned the field, but they only assisted with harvesting. In the field the Ngwevu’s planted maize and pumpkins. The produce was divided in two parts, half for their family and half for the owner of the field. The Ngwevu’s were happy with that arrangement, but in 1987, they had to stop
share-cropping (chapter 8) because Nolulamile was still working as a domestic in Hogsback and it became impossible for her to tend to the field. In 1996 they regained access to a field. The owner of the field, who stayed in the village, asked them to use his field as it had been fallow for some years. Two years later he terminated the arrangement because of family pressure (chapter 6). Crop production since then was restricted to vegetables grown in the home gardens. Nolulamile does most of this work. Cultivation was mainly done by hand even though they owned a tractor. Phindile also kept dual-purpose chickens which were kept mostly for themselves and supplied them meat and eggs.

Five years later, in 2004, the fortunes of the Ngwevu’s have altered. Three of their children no longer stayed with them. Two were married and now lived in Cape Town. One stayed in Fort Beaufort where he worked as a village health worker, only coming home once a month. The nephew also no longer stayed with them.

They were still engaged in trading but on a much smaller scale. The number of workers had dropped from four to two. Phindile no longer transported and sold sand. The truck had broken down beyond repair. This had also affected Phindle’s firewood venture. The tractor that was now used for transporting firewood is much slower than the truck; the number of loads had dropped from three to one per week. Phindile also pointed at other reasons for his declining firewood business. Most people in the village, he said, were shifting from using firewood as a major energy source to using electricity. The business was only good at certain times only e.g. during the December holidays when people are busy with ceremonial functions.

Home garden production was still done. Now that the nephew who previously worked quite a lot in the gardens had left the house, Nophumzile whom from now and then obtained help from her husband who when at home has takes over the gardening. This means that Nophumzile has added activities. The Spaza shop she ran from home was no longer a good business. According to Nophumzile, there were lots of people in the village involved in this kind of trading. As a result the number of customers had dropped. Nophumzile was also no longer a member of Umgalelo money club as she was five years ago. She no longer had money to pay the monthly subscription. Compared to five years ago, the Ngwevu homestead was no longer making the same amount of money; the fortunes have turned and quality of life seemed to have slowly deteriorated because of competition, changing life styles and declining purchasing power of their customers.

Case 7: Nombulelo Nqolo: A destitute piece worker

Nombulelo was 46 years old in 2000 and as an unmarried mother was head of a family of three children. Two children, Phumzile and Mandla were then 19 and 12 years old, stayed in Guquka with Nombulelo and were still at school doing grades 7 and 3. Nombulelo said that her family did not have enough to eat. The
father of her children, who is a part time builder and has his own household, supports Nombulelo’s household by paying R50.00 or R100.00 every four to five months. Her eldest child, Thembisa, was 24 at the time and had lived for the past two years in Mdantsane, a township near East London, with Nombulelo’s stepsister. Thembisa was attending fashion design school. Fees, meals and accommodation were paid by her family in Mdantsane as Nombulelo cannot afford the costs. In return, Thembisa helps in the running of the Mdantsane household. What Nombulelo really wanted for Thembisa was that she could to finish her course, get a job and save the family from poverty.

Nombulelo was not born in Guquka but elsewhere. Nombulelo had to quit her regular job because of health problems. She made a living from piece jobs done by both herself and her son Phumzile. In the past she worked as a house-keeper and later as a sewer, sewing clothes for somebody in a neighbouring village. She earned a regular source of income, albeit very modest. Besides sewing she cleaned houses, did laundry for people (especially for those homesteads where there are only old people and children or where adult members are working) and babysitting. For this kind of work she was mainly paid in cash but also in kind. She said that she left it to the customer what and how to pay. If they wanted to pay for her services in-kind, she would accept, particularly at times when she had nothing to eat.

She also said that she turned to other people for help. Often, she was given something without a need for reciprocity. This helped her to cope with acute food shortages that mostly occurred towards the end of the month. For people like Nombulelo, seeking assistance was a day-to-day struggle, aimed at satisfying the immediate need to relieve hunger. She said she maintained good relationships with her neighbours: “When we do not have anything to eat I go to them and ask for something”. She stressed that it was a reciprocal relationship, but added that she found it was not always easy to ask other people for help.

Most people are tired already, when they see me, there is only one thing on their minds, ‘she has come for food’. I do not blame them, it’s not their fault that I’m in this position and it’s not easy to feed someone for free when you yourself, do not have enough to eat.

Most of the time she approached her relatives for assistance, and she had only few of them in the village.

Her son Phumzile also brought in some money. Though still at school, Phumzile made sure whenever he could that there was something to eat. During holidays and weekends Phumzile did piece jobs in Guquka. He often worked for Ngwevu (this chapter) chopping wood. He was paid in kind in the form of three meals and R10.00 per day. He always gave his earnings to his mother so that she could buy some food.

Nombulelo did not own many assets. She did not have a field, because when she applied for a residential site arable land had already been allocated. She did
not have livestock either, not even chickens. There were two small buildings on her site. Both are made up of mud and wattle. The walls were falling apart and the roofs (old corrugated iron with big holes) leaked. Inside the house there was very little furniture, only a small table, a cupboard, and a small black and white television. Firewood was the main source of energy used for cooking even though there was electricity in the house. Electricity was used for lighting purposes only, when they had money to buy a pre-paid card. When she did, only R10.00 was spent, which would last a month. Firewood was collected from the rangeland, and most of the time this was Phumzile’s task. Sometimes Nombulelo also collected dead wood from the bushes next to Tyume River.

One of her few productive assets was her hand sewing machine, which sometimes earned her a small amount of money. The sewing machine was used mainly to sew and repair clothes for people in the village. People came to her with torn clothes and Nombulelo would repair them. According to her, this happened once in a while. Sometimes she did not get anything to sew during an entire month. She asked for R10.00 to R20.00 per item depending on the extent of damage but sometimes she did not get paid. She says she was often paid in kind.

Nombulelo cultivated a small garden. Here she used to grow maize, sorghum, melon and vegetables, including potatoes, cabbages and spinach. The crops were grown under rain-fed conditions, and because of that, the garden was usually planted only once a year. Manure was obtained from relatives free of charge. Home gardening was one of Phumzile’s main activities. After school, he attended to the garden instead of doing his schoolwork. They did not own a single garden tool. All tools were borrowed from neighbours and relatives when needed.

Garden production was mainly for home consumption. However, sometimes Nombulelo exchanged for other food products that she did not have or did not grow in their garden. In a good season (when the harvest was abundant), bartering food saved Nombulelo and her family from hunger. But such good times did not occur often, and when they did they were usually of short duration.

When we wanted to interview Nombulelo again in 2004, we were told that she had passed away in 2001. Her children, Phumzile and Mandla, were taken up by different relatives, and another relative took care of the home. Phumzile moved to Cape Town and Mandla to Port Elizabeth. In 2004, rumours in Guquka had it that Mandla had moved to Johannesburg where she worked as a fashion designer. Relatives in the village claimed that she did not support her brother and her exact whereabouts were not known.
Case 8: Mncedisi Mcete: Young man with a locally based livelihood

Mncedisi Mcete was born in 1972 in Koloni. He grew up in the township of Mdantsane in East London. Since his late teens, however, he has lived with his uncle in Koloni and his livelihood is now based entirely within the village.

Mncedisi’s uncle, Lunga Mcete, was a relatively wealthy individual with a strong entrepreneurial drive. Although he was an employee at the Department of Health in Fort Beaufort, he also derived cash income from driving a taxi on the local run between King William’s Town and Middledrift on weekends and through substantial engagement in agriculture. Responsibility for these agricultural activities has increasingly come to rest with Mncedisi in recent years and this is now almost a full-time activity for him.

During the growing season Mncedisi has responsibility for all activities associated with crop production. This includes harrowing, ploughing and planting the arable field, hand hoeing the crop to control weeds and harvesting the crop at the end of the season. However, access to resources for crop production is based on the social networks arranged by his uncle. For example, access to the field Mncedisi has used for the cultivation of maize (field no.40, Map 8.1) was arranged through a rental agreement between Lunga and the field owner who now resides in Mdantsane (see chapter 8). Likewise, during the 2003-2004 cropping season manure for crop production was provided free by Sicelo Ngxowa on the basis of his longstanding relationship with Lunga, and the tractor and trailer used to transport the manure to the field was arranged through a contact Lunga has in a neighbouring village (see chapter 8 for more details). Thus, whilst Mncedisi has responsibility for overseeing most aspects of crop production the real power in negotiating access to the necessary resources with Lunga.

Throughout the year Mncedisi also has responsibility for the general husbandry of all the livestock (cattle, sheep, goats and chickens) belonging to his uncle. This is a considerable job as his uncle was the largest livestock owner in the village. His current holding includes some 45 cattle, 65 sheep and 13 goats. The husbandry activities involve treating the animals with appropriate medicines (both on an individual basis and as part of the regular communal dipping). Mncedisi was also involved in the fairly onerous daily activity of herding all the animals to pasture and collecting the small-stock and cows with calves for kraaling in the evening. However, given the extent of this task he is assisted by a full-time shepherd from the village who also takes responsibility for caring for the animals during the day. The shepherd, Mr Siximba Ntlangweni, has been employed by Lunga Mcete for this work and receives R300 a month. Other less regular tasks Mncedisi is responsible for include the construction and maintenance of kraals using locally collected bush materials. Although Mncedisi may be involved in herding cattle to sale, Lunga is ultimately responsible for deciding which animals are to be sold and in negotiating the price for them. These
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Sales take place both within the village and at the local stokvel. Lunga also has complete control over the sale of wool and through connections he has with the Department of Agriculture negotiates the best possible price for his wool at the wholesale facility in Port Elizabeth (see also chapter 9).

Mncedisi’s livelihood scenario is one of complete dependence on his uncle at this point in time. In return for his day to day involvement with these agricultural activities he is provided with accommodation and food (although he is expected to undertake all cooking). Although he receives no formal payment for his services from his uncle, Mncedisi is relatively happy with the arrangements as they stand. He feels he is indebted to his uncle as he paid for all his school fees when he was growing up. Furthermore, over the years he feels he has learnt a considerable amount about agriculture (and general entrepreneurship) from his uncle, which has provided him with some important skills. He is also able to foster some element of independence as during the week he stays on his own in a relatively large house in the village, which belongs to the family but is unoccupied for most of the year.

Nevertheless, in recent years Mncedisi has shown signs of a desire to broaden his horizons. In order to generate some cash of his own he has engaged in piecemeal jobs around the village and has recently taken on part-time employment as a night watchman at the local clinic, although this is very poorly paid. It also means that several days per week he works for his uncle having had little or no sleep the night before. He has expressed an interest in striking out on his own and eventually moving to one of the towns or cities to find work. How realistic this is given his general lack of formal qualifications is difficult to assess. He has attained a certificate in basic computing skills but has no success in even being interviewed for any of the administrative jobs he has applied for. There seems to be a growing acceptance by Mncedisi that ultimately his future may not lie in finding paid employment outside Koloni but instead in making the most of the skills he has acquired by developing an agricultural-based livelihood within the village. Given that his uncle has no sons of his own, he stands to inherit a considerable amount from him in the longer term, which will allow him to make a living from agricultural activities if he is prepared to wait. In this respect the future appears to be in his own hands.

Case 9: Margaret Xholo: Female pensioner

In 2000, Margaret was 75 years old, divorced and living in Guquka. She was born in neighbouring Khayalethu. She had passed grade 5 and had 4 children, who were all adults. Three of them had their own families, and one was not married. Margaret had two of her grandchildren staying with her in Guquka since 1990; she raised them as her own children. The mother of the two children was living in Cape Town and did not support them significantly. Both children attended primary school, and Margaret took care of their education and other needs.
After leaving school Margaret worked as a domestic for ten years, from 1941 to 1950, first in Hogsback and later in Grahamstown. At the end of 1950 she married and became a housewife. Ten years later she divorced her husband, returned to Guquka and found a job as a domestic worker in Hogsback. At first she stayed at her place of work returning to Guquka during month-ends only. She applied for her own residential site, which was granted to her at the end of 1971. By then she had already stopped working because of health problems. Margaret was diabetic and suffered from high blood pressure. Her elder son, who was working and not married at that time, took care of the homestead. Margaret’s father also supported them with remittances in kind. At the age of 60 she became eligible to claim an old age pension.

Margaret’s homestead survived largely on the pensioners’ grant, amounting to R520 per month in 2000. She received this money during the first week of every month. On these days, when the grants were paid out, Margaret woke up very early in the morning. She hurried all her normal morning activities to get ready in time to walk to the church building in Guquka, where local pensioners received their grant in the form of a cheque. Though the church building is only 2 km from Margaret’s home, she had to leave the house early, because she was old and walked with difficulty. She also wanted to arrive in time, because this gave her one of the front seats in the church, enabling her to get her money early. This left her with enough time left to travel to Alice, where she cashed her cheque. She explained that on pension days there were long queues at the bank, as pensioners from other villages also sought to cash their cheques.

Margaret relied on public transport to get to Alice. During pension day, the taxi owners bring their taxis close to the pay point so that pensioners do not have to walk to the taxi rank. Pension day is a good business day for the taxi-men. Not only pensioners are going to town, but also their family members. Some, like Margaret, are too old to walk by themselves around town and need assistance. After cashing her cheque, she proceeded to the supermarket and bought groceries with the help of her older grandson. The groceries she purchases consist mainly of large items (10 or 12.5kg bags of food), which Margaret cannot carry. When shopping is completed, her grandson brings everything to the taxi rank. Apart from paying for travelling costs, for her and her grandson, Margaret has to pay also for the transport of the large food items. The return trip to Guquka cost R30. She has by now almost exhausted her pension on groceries and transport. One of the key question for people like Margaret is whether food they have bought will last until the next pension payday. Margaret argued that this is extremely difficult and that often she needed to borrow from friends, relatives or neighbours.

Margaret owned a field in Guquka, but she had not used it for many years. The field looked heavily eroded in 2000 and was last cultivated in 1988. Margaret portrayed her field as “a huge house with many rooms. The sad part is that while we still grieve from the fact that we cannot grow crops on it, it is like a hiding place to other people”. She wished something could be done to close the
She cultivated instead a small garden near her house, growing crops and vegetables she consumed herself. She did not own cattle or goats, and only a few garden tools. The garden has always been important to her and she did everything to cultivate it as this protected her from food shortages. “What I grow, I do not have to buy or borrow from neighbours”, she said. She usually worked alone in the garden, but when she did not feel well, her older grandson would help or they would hire somebody in the village to do it.

When we spoke to her in 2004, Margaret had fallen seriously ill. She suffered a stroke in October 2003, could not speak and was no longer staying in her own homestead. A relative from the neighbouring village of Makhuzeni was taking care of her. The two grandchildren she used to stay with now lived elsewhere. One of them was in Cape Town staying with his mother. The other was still in the village but stayed with a relative. Margaret’s house was not left unoccupied but was looked after by this relative.

Analysis of livelihoods

In this section we want to draw some general lessons of an empirical and analytical nature about rural livelihoods from the above cases. The chapter has documented some livelihood trajectories that together point at what remains strategic: building a homestead as well as maintaining that homestead. Taken together the life histories underlined that livelihoods have shifted from making a living locally to one based on transfers, which is consumption that is derived from earnings elsewhere. However, this being the predominant trend, the case material also pointed at the continued importance of crops and home gardening in particular for securing livelihoods. It would be a mistake, of course, to lump the trajectories together. In contrast to chapter 12, the life history accounts of this chapter enable us to highlight the processes that differentiate them.

The case material may be approached by linking two levels of analysis. One is that the cases presented point at two prominent dimensions and related processes upon which rural based livelihoods in Guquka and Koloni hinge. The cases also display the strategies devised by the social actors to make a living and the social networks in which these are embedded. This then is the second layer of the analysis. By analytically combining ‘dimensions’ and ‘strategies’, we will be able to explore not only how these combine empirically in the construction of a livelihood, and thus how the process of transformation works out locally. This will also point out the dynamics and how local actors experience the factors that constrain the options to expand land based livelihoods and what options are available. The blending of ‘dimensions’ and ‘strategies’ also highlights and underscores the analytical importance of situating livelihood analysis in context (chapter 1). Besides, context does not necessarily operate as structuring and determining social and economic behaviour. If this were so, one would expect much more homogeneity. Let us turn to the dimensions first and then elaborate on the strategies and social networks.
The first dimension is best presented as the resources dimension. This dimension reflects a combination of institutional issues such as access and control, for instance, land and labour as well as the quality and quantity of the resources that are generally important to construct rural-based livelihoods, whether derived from land-based or non-land-based resources. How these are accessed and what people do with their resource entitlements becomes clear from the cases. The second dimension represents time, which in the South African context has two key aspects. A ‘structural’ feature that has shaped the fortunes of people is the role played by one’s place of birth. The cases clearly suggest that whether one is born or not born in Guquka or Koloni matters in accessing key resources such as land. The time dimension thus emerges as important, which in the South African circumstances, is largely formed by the politics of segregation and associated regulations such as the Pass Laws and the Group Areas Act (chapter 2). However, as some of the cases highlight, social actors attempted to reshape their fortunes through negotiations. Most of these negotiations were not successful which in turn points at the complexities of institutional relations such as land tenure in the two villages; these were pointed out earlier in chapters 6 and 8 in more general terms. On the other hand another aspect of time is age; age carries some weight as well in accessing and above all utilising resources. In the South African context, old age in particular implies becoming eligible for a monthly pension. This potentially enhances the opportunities of individuals and larger groupings such as the homestead to sustain a livelihood based on consumption and/or assists in removing some of the constraints to utilise their land resources beyond the level of home gardens (chapter 8) and/or to keep cattle (chapter 9). This also enhances the identities pensioners derive from what they do with their entitlements.

The strategies employed by the social actors to make a living are manifold and, as the cases illustrate, are not linear timewise. Sometimes they are combined and therefore labelled by Ellis (2000) as diversification; sometimes they are sequential. Of these strategies, migrancy or seeking wage employment stands out as a prominent one and has shaped local peoples’ fortunes in many different ways. On the one hand, migrancy serves to find permanent wage employment to establish oneself as a worker. On the other hand migrancy is also part of the strategy to accumulate funds to invest in crop production, either home gardening or field production. Migration, as previous chapters, notably 11, have shown, takes many forms of geographical mobility. Such mobility serves to keep the many options open that potentially are available to people in the villages. But as the case material underlines, carving out a living in the local village economy engaging in commercial agriculture and casual labour is attempted; it is not easy but it is possible. Again, here we encountered diversity in strategies and dynamics. Land-based livelihoods are rather minimal quantitatively but socially important.
CHAPTER 13

The differentiated nature of rural livelihoods in Guquka and Koloni challenges contemporary policies and the way policies are designed. A number of issues clearly come to the fore.

(1) **Migrancy**, as cases 1 and 2 illustrated, has a differentiated effect upon livelihood options. Being born or not in the village matters substantially. Mengezelei’s livelihood trajectory (case 1) is like Ngeni’s (case 8), marked by being a newcomer to Guquka. Mengezelei’s livelihood was largely formed by being a miner but one who did not succeed through negotiations to access an arable field. At a later stage he combined piece work in the region with home gardening, which he does extremely well, as reported also in chapter 8. The livelihood fortunes of Sonjani, Philaph and Mlami (case 2) unfolded in rather similar ways. Mlami’s life is, however, not just a variation on the theme that Mengezelei represents. Mlami’s fortunes are continuously marked by migrancy, and retrenchments, returning home for a while to seek a livelihood locally. In contrast to Mengezelei, Mlami did not succeed and reverted back to migrancy again as he found security in a paid job to be a key ingredient of his livelihood strategy. This in turn draws other processes into the equation, namely that Mlami’s and other people’s job security were threatened by macro-political processes. Similar cases are that of Mzoli (case 3) and of Mangqila who like Mlami lost his job at Fort Hare. Mzoli lost his civil servant job and did not manage to find a new one. He reverted to home gardening and managed to diversify his livelihood while also relying on his wife’s salary. Mlami, Mengezelei, Mzoli and Mangquangoza typify those whose livelihoods were clearly affected by the restructuring of the South African economy which led to retrenchments and unemployment.

(2) The cases of Mengezelei and Mlami also highlight that factors such as age need to be taken into account in analysing people’s pursuit of a livelihood. Cases 1 and 2 clearly illustrate that age matters and how it matters. When Mengezelei and his wife Kulukazi became pensioners, socially and financially their lives improved substantially. Mlami, when retrenched and without a paid job, had difficulties to feed his family, and only managed to survive because of his brother’s financial contributions. Mangqila ended up in a rather similar position as Mlami but was much better off because of her pensionable age. Margaret (case 9), as much as Makhise and Mcate, shows a livelihood that is constructed on state transfers such as pensions. Their cases show that getting older provided social and financial security on the basis of which many other individuals get fed and are offered shelter. However, most pensioners found it difficult to sustain crop production while supporting other members of the homestead.

(3) Chapters 3, 7, 8 and 9 showed that the role of agriculture as a livelihood resource has substantially diminished over the years. A number of homesteads
continue to invest in arable farming and livestock production. At this point, however, it becomes interesting to distinguish:

1. Livelihoods revolving around migrancy but with attempts to secure access to local resources for farming purposes. This process is clearly illustrated by Mengezelei’s and Mlami’s cases (1 and 2). Vuyo’s (case 4) life also depended on migrant labour until recently.

2. There are homesteads that demonstrate that it is possible to make a living from agriculture on a scale larger than home garden production; although very few of them exist in either Guquka or Koloni. These cases also point out that the continuity of farming builds upon past experiences when being a migrant. Cases 4 and 5 stand for this process. Grootbooi (case 4), Ngxobo (case 5) and also the homesteads of Msiwa, Mfengu and Mandeya (chapter 8) demonstrate the continuity of farming and building upon past experiences gained when migrant wages were used to invest in crop production. Vuyo Grootbooi continuously attempted to access fields though share cropping and later managed to secure land through distant kin relations. Mpendulo Ngxobo began farming at an older age and accessed land through inheritance. More than any other, he was actively commercialising livestock production.

3. Other trajectories denote that agriculture often is of cyclical or irregular importance for making a living. The relevant cases for this dimension of farming are those of Neku and Mxolisi (chapter 8). They always combined their pensions with investing resources in crop production whenever there was an opportunity. Ngewni (case 6) combined piece work with crops when opportunities occurred and, together with his wife, engaged in many other activities including collecting and selling firewood, gardening and the running of a shop.

(4) Locally based livelihoods are few in the villages and the dynamics varied enormously. Piece or casual work for others or running a spaza shop or shebeen take advantage of what the local economy could provide. Mombulelo’s livelihood (case 7) illustrated what this entails when one lacks other ways to make a living. Mombulelo’s homestead barely survived and required others to organise social security. Mncedisi’s livelihood (case 8) is also one that hinged on working for others, but he found security in such arrangements. The fortunes of Mr. Mandeya of Koloni were rather similar. Nombulelo’s and Mncedisi’s cases represent livelihoods that are derived from the local economy. Nombulelo was a so-called piece worker selling her labour to earn cash. In most cases there was a daily search for work and the rewards were not certain, as a result of which Nombulelo and her children continuously struggled to earn a living. Nombulelo’s case also illustrated what poverty entails in villages like Guquka and Koloni. Mncedisi’s case illustrated how an adult man survives in Koloni who does not control any significant resources other than his own labour and knowledge. His case, like Nombulelo’s livelihood, is entrenched and embedded
in-kin based social networks. The cases of Margaret and Nombulelo to a certain extent highlight that social security is embedded in networks that stretch beyond immediate kin relations.

Conclusions

The life histories or parts thereof presented here underline that livelihoods are heterogeneous and do not unfold in one and the same way. The case material presented here allowed for an analysis and understanding of how situations and events in the wider family-, village-, and regional historical context shaped rural livelihoods. These events and situations produced many outcomes. The themes pointed out in previous chapters – mobility and variability – become extremely clear.

The nine cases documented here not only illustrate that different livelihoods have evolved but also show how the key resources required for such livelihoods are accessed and utilised, whether these strategies were successful and what other outcomes have been achieved. Some of the livelihood trajectories presented here elucidate the ways in which negotiation, bargaining and struggle may or may not change circumstances, which may bring about new patterns of interaction between individuals within and outside the household as they collaborate and struggle to reconcile individual and collective objectives and aspirations. The cases underline that it is conceptually useful to view livelihoods as evolving in arenas where actors with unequal power negotiate within homesteads and between members of communities or villages.

The cases presented also illustrate that fortunes of social actors usually form part of social networks beyond the immediate family. Reciprocity of gifts and favours is crucial for the survival of those who do not manage to control, and gain access to, key resources such as land, labour, and money. The strategic importance of pensions is that they prevent many from falling into poverty. Age, however, excludes a few from receiving such assistance. Age and being excluded from networks are part of an exclusionary script that is known as poverty.