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Culture and food security: a case study of homestead food production in South Africa

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Abstract Drawing on case study insights from a home gardening program in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, this study explores the relationship between culture and food security in a local context. Informed by an ideational and a process-oriented understanding of cultural analysis, our inductive approach to field research reveals several elements of culture that have direct impacts on local food production: power, gender, identity and cultural change. The study offers insights into the multi-level dimensions of power as it relates to individuals, households, and broader community dynamics that are central to understanding the local dynamics of food security. Also, the local gardening program played a critical role in maintaining a "culture of farming" at the village level while also navigating important changes to local culture, such as the career preferences of local youth. Research implications include an understanding of the adaptive role that local institutions can play in the food security challenges within South Africa.

Keywords Livelihoods · Inductive methods · Gardening · Power · Gender · Institutions · Adaptation

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Introduction

Global food security is fundamentally tied to local experiences of access (or lack thereof) to safe, sufficient and culturally acceptable food. Such local access is mediated on a daily basis by a myriad of factors including socio-economic status, gender and local institutional capacity. A less recognized dimension of food security involves attention to specific cultural dimensions that can enhance or constrain food security at a local level. Researchers often identify "cultural practices" (Negin et al. 2009) or "cultural inclinations" (Ajani 2008) as important considerations but published research often lacks sufficient attention to culture as an organizing concept. This paper is focused directly on the question of culture and food security where culture is defined as a set of ideas, rituals, and rules about access to and the utilization of food (Bonnekessen 2010). More concretely, in this paper we ask how culture is linked to food security, and then explore answers to this question through case study research in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. This research site offers an important setting to examine the linkages between culture and food because it is characterized by high rates of poverty, limited employment opportunities and the changing role of agriculture in local livelihood strategies. As is the case in many parts of South Africa, the region is also largely dependent on social grants as a source of household income. With a focus on one of the institutions dedicated to enhancing local food production and distribution, the Siyazondla Homestead Food Production Programme (SHFPP), this paper asks how culture is connected to food security in this place. These insights are derived inductively, whereby our research approach was open to discovering key elements of culture that emerged from the field research. We then shaped an operational framework for cultural analysis around these emergent themes. These themes included: power, gender, cultural identity and cultural change; each element of this "cultural frame" offered insights into the strategies and the challenges to enhancing food security within the region.

Before introducing the specific case study material, the next section introduces the concept of culture and an approach to cultural analysis that is utilized in the paper.
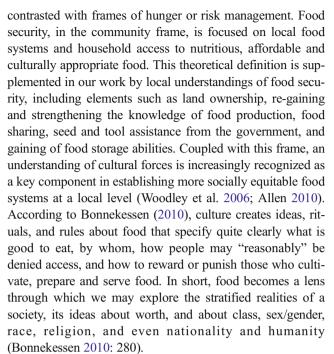
An approach to cultural analysis

Concepts of culture represent an extensive body of work within the social sciences (Crane 1994). Within these diverse approaches a continuum of scholarly interests range from concrete and material forms of culture such as artifacts or language to ideational forms of culture manifest in values, norms, and preferences held collectively by groups. These ideational forms are subsequently observed to guide intention and behavior (Fetterman 1998). Moreover, the first version of cultural analysis is understood as static and somewhat set within a historical frame of analysis and the second version of cultural analysis has a dynamic and process-oriented dimension. Within this range of scholarly work, the approach taken within this paper is largely focused on cultural ideation and cultural processes. According to process-oriented scholars, culture can be defined as the "complex whole of knowledge, wisdom, values, attitudes, customs and multiple resources which a community has inherited, adopted or created in order to flourish in the context of its social and natural environment" (Verhelst & Tyndale 2002: 10). Swidler's (1986) popular model of culture also reflects this particular attention to processes, or what she defines as a "tool kit" of symbols, stories, rituals and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations. Although these process-oriented approaches to cultural analysis have similarities to Ostrom's (2005) institutional approach, we attempt to draw out distinctive cultural dimensions that are not necessarily synonymous with an institutional approach.

Looking more specifically at methodology, Wuthnow (1989) outlines four approaches to cultural analysis: subjective, structural, dramaturgic and institutional. He distinguishes between these four categories based on how culture is understood and defined and subsequently the methodologies associated with them. Using his terminology in this paper, we focus on the structural aspect of "patterned sets of elements" as well as the dramaturgic approach of expressing "something about moral order" with the role of "actors and organizations that require resources and, in turn, influence the distribution of resources" (Wuthnow 1989:15). This application of culture gives attention to the idea that culture is constructed through a series of groups or stakeholders within societies, which then "ritualize, codify and transmit cultural products" (Wuthnow 1989: 137).

Culture and food security

In defining food security, we draw on what Mooney and Hunt (2009) describe as a community food security frame that is contrasted with frames of hunger or risk management. Food security, in the community frame, is focused on local food systems and household access to nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate food. This theoretical definition is supplemented in our work by local understandings of food security, including elements such as land ownership, re-gaining and strengthening the knowledge of food production, food sharing, seed and tool assistance from the government, and gaining of food storage abilities. Coupled with this frame, an understanding of cultural forces is increasingly recognized as a key component in establishing more socially equitable food systems at a local level (Woodley et al. 2006; Allen 2010). According to Bonnekessen (2010), culture creates ideas, rituals, and rules about food that specify quite clearly what is good to eat, by whom, how people may "reasonably" be denied access, and how to reward or punish those who cultivate, prepare and serve food. In short, food becomes a lens through which we may explore the stratified realities of a society, its ideas about worth, and about class, sex/gender, race, religion, and even nationality and humanity (Bonnekessen 2010: 280).

Within this perspective, Bonnekessen identifies 'ideas, rituals and rules', as cultural constructs that operate within the dimension of food security. Similarly, Molnar (1999) addresses food insecurity by focusing on gender relations and cultural patterns that result in an imbalance between men and women, often to the detriment of women. He points to cultural factors that are repressive of women such as a lack of emphasis on education, marriage at young ages, and 'the rule of the father' within families and communities, as patterns that all contribute to food insecurity for women. These practices and beliefs determine the status of women, in general, and their access to food in particular, including "norms regarding who eats first, who eats most, and who gets what is left" (Molnar 1999: 491). Culture plays a role in the formation of patterns of behavior and in the development of norms that result in food insecurity. Culture also plays a role in shaping individual response to food insecurity, as noted in this quote by Molnar.

Coping strategies are the mechanisms used by those facing hunger to alleviate the situation for themselves and their children. Culture provides a matrix or repertoire of responses that may variously include cooperation, self-denial, self-exploitation, risk taking, and other mechanisms for dealing with adversity (Molnar 1999: 491).

In an example of cultural analysis of food security, Woodley et al. (2006) examine cultural indicators of indigenous peoples' food security. This research, based on an extensive survey, recommends a set of cultural indicators that interact with agro-ecological systems through which culture can be observed and measured. However, the authors conclude that their research was limited in the use of culture and call for the further integration of cultural analysis in food security research. Although the

research focused specifically on indigenous populations, this concern can be applied to many populations where basic values, traditions, practices and ways of life are not accounted for in planning and development interventions.

Dimensions of culture

In taking an inductive approach, this study involves recursive moments between data gathering, data analysis and the identification of cultural dimensions as they emerged from field research. These dimensions include power, gender, cultural identity and cultural change. After a brief introduction here, we return to these themes later in the paper and examine how culture is related to food security in this case study.

Within the food security literature the theme of *power* is represented by authors who critically analyze inequalities of power and access within regional or global food systems (Lappe 1973; Raschke and Cheema 2008). But there is less attention to the micro-social scale and how power relations imbue a culture of food security within local food systems. Toward this end, the theoretical perspectives of Lukes (2005: 15), and his three dimensional view of power, are instructive. The first dimension of power is, "a focus on behavior in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of interests." These interests are often seen as expressed policy preferences revealed by political participation. The second dimension of power addresses the less obvious forms of power, which the first ignores. This form occurs not in the actual making of decisions and who gets to participate in this process, but what issues are permitted in discussions and decided upon within a society. The third dimension of power functions within the larger social milieu and is largely subsumed within social forces that orient an individual's values, preferences and behaviors towards the interests of political and economic elites. Within this dimension of power, people accept their role in the existing system making them compliant and unaware that they are subject to anything other than their own free will.

On the theme of *gender*, much of this literature is summarized in documents produced by international research agencies (e.g., The World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Fund for Agricultural Development 2009). A dominant thread within this literature involves recognition of the positive connection between female participation in agriculture and food security, with efforts to strengthen the role of women in local food systems. This literature recognizes that women comprise the majority of the agricultural and agro-processing labour in most developing countries (Adeniji and Maiangwa 2009; Negin et al. 2009) and are therefore at the heart of agricultural process. A study in South Africa and Mozambique found that 60-70 % of

consumed food comes from the work of women (Gawaya 2008). Another theme in this literature involves a more cautionary perspective on gender and food production. These authors claim that assumptions about gender too often ignore the complexity of gender roles in theory and practice (Chant 2006). For instance, a United Nations report on gender and agriculture found that women face limited access to wide-ranging resources, resulting in lower agricultural productivity (The World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Fund for Agricultural Development 2009). Furthermore, research also identifies a lack of recognition of the role of women as farmers in some cultures (Galiè et al. 2012).

A sense of connection and *identity* is also an important aspect of culture. Race, ethnicity, religion, and gender all influence how we see ourselves within the context of a wider cultural identity. This relationship however, like culture itself, is not static. Stuart Hall (1996: 225) articulates that "cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power". For instance, Perrault (2005) shows how subsistence agriculture is not only a food security measure but is also an element of identity among female gardeners in the Amazon Basin. Maintaining a sense of place and stability within a culture in order to adapt to this constant change and continue an identity with that culture can be a challenging task for groups and individuals who undergo periods of rapid change. In order to understand how cultural identities are formed and transformed we can look at individual contributing elements within very specific contexts and times. This task is complicated by the fluid nature of culture, particularly in times of dramatic cultural shift during which people's sense of place and self within their community and culture is being renegotiated.

Background to the study area

Gatyana is a collection of villages, located within the Eastern Cape Province, that lie between the town of Willowvale and the coastline (Fig. 1). Gatyana is part of the former Transkei homeland and its population is made up predominately of amaXhosa people. The population lives in dispersed homesteads linked by footpaths with few roads passable by vehicle apart from the main road running from Willowvale to the coast (Fig. 1). There is little commercial agriculture in the area, but homestead gardens have become an increasingly important source of food production for household subsistence since about the 1950s (Andrew 1992; Fay 2013). The reasons behind this shift towards home garden cultivation, and the widespread abandonment of fields (Shackleton et al. 2013),

are various and complex, but have been influenced by past settlement and agricultural policies, current social grant systems and changing migration patterns (Fay 2013). There is limited opportunity for employment in the villages and migrant labor is common. Small stores, selling limited dry goods, are available and most people travel up to 60 km (km) to the town of Willowvale and back for their goods and services. There is limited electricity in the village but communal water taps are available within 200 m of most homes. A number of challenges face the population such as HIV/Aids, high levels of unemployment, substance abuse and crime. The Eastern Cape Province experiences high levels of poverty, with 82 % living on less than US$550 per annum, compared to 42 % in urban areas. Levels of poverty are even higher within rural areas amongst households that identify themselves as agricultural households as compared to those that do not, indicating that households that participate in agricultural activities, primarily for personal consumption, are amongst the poorest in the province.

Given contemporary challenges to food security in South Africa (Pereira and Ruysenaar 2012) a number of responses were observed at the local level. For example, burial groups and money saving clubs (Stokvel) provide financial savings opportunities, home based care, school feeding programmes and kinship ties, which tend to act through tangible foodstuff support. This support also extends to livestock care, veterinary work and tractor sharing. To provide more in-depth insights into local food culture, the focus of this case study is the Siyazondla Homestead Food Production Programme (SHFPP). This organization was selected because of its close connection to issues of food security and the fact that the programme is province wide, throughout the Eastern Cape Province (Provincial Growth and Development Plan 2004).

The SHFPP was initiated in 2004/2005 in the local municipality of the study area by the Department of Agriculture (DoA). The programme was widely promoted by the state which felt it would receive a high level of response. However, the funding and organizational support allotted was inadequate to cope with the 265 SHFPP clubs totaling almost 4000 members who had registered by the end of the first three years. Lacking human and financial resources to support these numbers, only 56 of the clubs received assistance from the DoA, despite all 265 of them having met the necessary procedures of opening bank accounts, detailing membership, outlining constitutions and roles and having prepared garden plots (De Klerk 2013).

The ability of government to provide the groups with items such as watering cans, gardening tools and seeds as originally intended has continued to decline since the initiation of the programme. The programme continues to function, however, in communities like Gatyana where groups of women have continued to work together. As government interaction has dropped, the focus of the group and the participants have

Fig. 1 Gatyana region, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

expanded beyond the original objectives. Originally, the programme objectives were to "support production of nutritious food within rural and urban homestead gardens, meeting immediate needs while strengthening household livelihoods and laying the foundation for livelihood diversification and enhancement of economic exchange" (Eastern Cape Provincial Growth and Development Plan 2004:16). However, today group participants report that they interact primarily as a knowledge sharing resource and in some cases as a form of income generation for women. Members also express the role groups play in providing food support to the wider community at large through increased access to local produce. This shift in the role that the SHFPP group provides is a reaction to the needs of the participants. They have shaped the organization into a form that fulfills the requirements that they see necessary at this time.

Research methods

Case study methods are utilized (Marshall and Rossman 2011), where the case study population is a subsection of members of a local organization within one community. A triangulated field research design involved SHFPP participant and non-participant observation, and semi-structured interviews enhanced by visual ethnography (Riviera 2010) as well as secondary literature (Richards and Morse 2012). The use of multiple methods and data types to address questions of food and culture within the case study offers the potential for a more holistic picture of the role local institutions play in food security.

Fifteen semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted (recorded and transcribed) with members of the community directly or indirectly affiliated with one SHFPP organization; two of these interviews were with males (one youth and one elder), and the remaining 13 women ranged in age from young adult to elderly. Participants were chosen using referral sampling and interviews were conducted with the support of a local translator. Two focus groups were also conducted, one with members of the case study organization

(five females, all identified their occupation as farmers) as well as a local agriculture class from one of the community schools (18 year old students, five males and four females). Photography and photographic observation was used in conjunction with in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Selected photos were taken of activities and objects in the community and photos (e.g., Fig. 2) were brought into interviews in order to gain community members' interpretation of those activities or objects and their significance. Fieldwork was conducted over a three-month period from February to April 2012.

Linking local culture to local food production

Power

We don't have tanks, wheelbarrow, watering can, those things; I hope in the future we can get those things. We don't have enough material to do a garden [Member of a SHFPP].

Interview participants identified the influence of power in the SHFPP groups at Gatyana in different ways. A clear example is within the relationships between positions of power such as chiefs, headmen or principals of schools and varying SHFPP groups. Participants indicated that these relationships (or lack of relationships) had an impact on group abilities to access markets for the sale of their produce. Participants also discussed differences in who could benefit from support and resources from the DoA (Fig. 2).

> "But lately we have got something that the Department of Education has introduced, nutrition in the schools, oh that's wonderful, because we go to the schools and tell them we have extra vegetables and they will take an order from us [Chief's wife who runs a SHFPP]."

> "The schools have gardens, and also the principals at the schools around here, they know them and so they don't want to buy the food, or maybe they buy from their friends [Member of a SHFPP not connected to a person in a position of power]."

These findings resonate with the work of Lewis (1984), who discussed the role of favoritism and gifting between chiefs and those favored by them, particularly in the redistribution of goods. Lewis explored the structure of the agricultural production in pre-capitalist times in the Eastern Cape and suggested that social classes and class conflict were a missing area of exploration for multiple authors writing on production, labor and agriculture. Lewis argued that in the later part of the 19th century there was considerable polarization in amaXhosa society in the Eastern Cape and that the roles of kinship, chief

Fig. 2 A Community Agriculture Day organized by the Department of Agriculture where food was purchased and provided to participants from only the SHFPP, whose membership included the chief's wife

and the *homestead (umzi)* played central roles in agricultural wealth.

The pressures and dynamics of power within the community were also revealed in the individual, more intimate relationships within the community; among neighbors, family members and friends. An example of this is between those who have large gardens, particularly those growing corn, calling on the help of their friends or neighbors to assist in harvesting and planting the crop.

In an interview with three women who were harvesting corn, two of them were described as friends of the owner of the corn and who, in payment for their assistance in the harvest, would be loaned cattle by the family they were assisting for plowing of their own fields, as they did not have the resources themselves. This suggests that although the homestead system, as an aspect of amaXhosa culture, may not be as prevalent in today's society as it was in the past, still maintains a role in food security and that wealth and access to resources for agriculture are closely linked. It also illustrates a positive expression of power in that there is an expectation that those with resources will assist those without means.

> "[Interviewee]: Those who can afford to plant their gardens, they plant those big gardens, but the other people can't afford. It is difficult to the other people because they don't have the money for the tractor and the others don't have the cattle. It depends on what they have. And others don't have money for the fertilizer; you cannot plant the garden without fertilizer."

> "[Interviewer]: And are you all part of one family [referring to all three ladies working]? Do you all plant one field?"

> "[Interviewee]: They are friends. They are just helping. I don't know about other people, but we, we help each other, even for hoeing."

Examples such as this give evidence of the homestead system Lewis (1984) described as a contemporary situation and the dynamics of power that are established within it having an influence on the food security experiences of the community. Power also influences the rules and norms that dictate largely the success of the organizations. Power plays out on multiple levels, between government organizations such as the DoA, positions of authority and power within the community hierarchy; namely chiefs, headmen and school administrators, as well as between community members based on accumulated resources and wealth. Advantages of being within this circle of power result in greater success for those SHFPPs with members connected to it. However, those who fell outside the relationships of power expressed disadvantages that their group experienced.

Gender and the role of women

As women we do all that, we plant, dig harvest, everything [Member of a SHFPP].

Women play a key role in the continuation of cultural practices and norms surrounding food not only in its cultivation but also in its harvest, preparation and serving. Of nine interviewees asked about the source of their knowledge about agriculture and food, five of them responded that they had learned from their mothers and grandmothers. This suggests that gender roles are particularly important in the sphere of food. However, as livelihood shifts have occurred in the community with a decrease in use and ownership of livestock and large cultivated fields and an increase in reliance on homestead gardens, these gendered roles have changed. In part there is a greater demand on women as they take on a larger proportion of responsibility for food provision.

"Now it is only the Mama who goes to the garden, but in the olden days it used to be all the people in the household used to go to the garden, children go and play soccer and their husband does not want to go to the garden, but in the olden days everyone used to go to the garden [Focus group response of four SHFPP members]."

With the exception of traditional leadership structures, the majority of the organizational structures within the study community are established and managed largely by women, and the SHFPP groups are no exception. The work of women is often unrecognized and undervalued as a strong element in building culture and identity or as a contributing element in coping with stressors and challenges that communities face (Abrahams 1996).

There appears to be limited agricultural activity in the villages in which men are the primary participants or instigators. According to research participants, the role of animal husbandry, which has traditionally been the domain of men, has declined as the use of animals has been reduced due to illness amongst the animals, climate change impacts on agriculture, and out-migration of youth to find jobs. There are also key social factors such as alcohol abuse and social grants that limit the participation of men in community organizations. One of the Headmen interviewed in Gatyana stated that the combination of the social grant system, for example state pensions and disability grants, and easy access to inexpensive alcohol has resulted in a loss of motivation amongst men to work their fields or care for animals.

"But the people have food, only not enough because of the [social] grants, they just wait for the money and don't want to work or garden. My biggest challenge [as Headman] is when people fight and I have to take them to the police, they fight at the bars and they stab each other because they are drunk. They need to close all of these places that sell alcohol so that the men can come out and work again [Headman in Gatyana]."

The tendency for women to be the key participants in community groups is not unique to this community (Jolly 2006). When women were asked about this trend of female action in food security initiatives they indicated that there is a continued role of responsibility on behalf of the women to run the house and feed the family. Interview participants also reported that men no longer participate in agriculture or animal husbandry as was the case in the past.

"The women do everything. If someone wants to help they can help, you can ask someone to help, but the women have the responsibility. The men are into sport and drink beers and the children only playing ball and school. This has been a big change from our parents' generation [Focus group response of four SHFPP members]."

This raises the question of whether these roles women take on act primarily as an opportunity for empowerment and agency or as an added imbalance to the gender roles in the community power structures as Abrahams (1996) suggested. Although there is no clear answer to this question, there are indications that the change in responsibility has created a degree of independence for women and that the SHFPP system has contributed to this. For example, during a focus group held with four of the SHFPP members, the role and importance of income generation from selling produce was discussed. The group, all of whom indicated that they have children, outlined how this contributed to their lives (Fig. 3).

"December we sell the most [vegetables]. It is important to our overall income because we sell in December and in January we have to take our kids to school, January is uniform time [Focus Group of SHFPP Members]."

Fig. 3 The leader of a *Cretch* (daycare) who receives financial relief through the donation of food from a SHFPP Garden

Through growing their own food the women in the SHFPPs are responding to the shifting traditional role of men as the main providers and challenging the norm that only the wealthy or those with significant assets can have food security. The groups represent a notable example in the community of the importance of their cultural roots in agriculture and the role women play in this. They are producing not only a nutritional safety net but also ways of adapting to changes and challenges in the community in a direction that potentially have positive implications for women's status.

Cultural identity

Because we blacks, all blacks, are farmers! [Leader of a SHFPP Group].

The purpose of viewing the SHFPP as a possible contributor to cultural identity is not to define a set 'traditional culture' or a 'true cultural identity' as these concepts are ambiguous and subjective at best. Instead, we examine the connection between the agricultural practices undertaken by the participants in the SHFPPs and how those actions provide members with a sense of identity in some important ways. Some interview participants felt that the act of gardening and farming supported their sense of identity and self. During interviews with members of SHFPPs, the idea of gardening

as part of their culture was emphasized as a guiding principal for their participation.

"Our culture is to teach the young ones you see, how useful the land is, the productivity of the land, you see? Each and every child must know that the money is on the land, you see? It is our culture [Agriculture Teacher]."

The SHFPP group can be understood as a support and builder of cultural identity for its participants, particularly in the face of significant cultural change that the community is experiencing. Gardening becomes a statement of cultural expression for those who participate in it and a way of connecting with what they feel is an element of identity. In his study of *ngoma* (the practice of divination in South Africa) Janzen (1995) identified this institution to be one that was not subject to ethnic or racial barriers and that contributed to a sense of cultural cohesiveness amongst participants. Likewise, the SHFPP groups may act as a link to cultural identity, bringing about a greater chance of their success and continuation because their shared sense of cultural identity creates a purpose and fulfillment beyond the practical service of food production by the women participating in it.

Cultural change

"*I think that when we die, this generation, parents of this generation, when they die, there will be no children planting their garden [Member of a SHFPP].*"

The emphasis on cultural change is an important theme in understanding the relationships formed between the actions of members of the SHFPP group and the cultural shifts influencing their behavior. It also provides a more specific cultural framework through which to view contributions from the youth in the community and their views towards the group and agriculture as a way of life in general. For the SHFPP members, the changes occurring are noticed most significantly in the decline of people participating in agricultural production.

"I think that it has been lost and I don't know how to bring it back. Because in our culture we depend on farming, we know black people depend on farming and it is being lost and I don't know how to bring it back [Leader of a SHFPP]."

This concern around the decline of farming was highlighted during interviews as a key reason for concern about the community's ability to provide for itself. These issues around the decline of farming are complex and result in numerous interrelated impacts and responses. For example, the South African social grant system is applauded for its contribution to increasing livelihood security for those considered most

vulnerable in South African society. However, an area of concern expressed by research participants is the increased dependence on social grants acting detrimentally on the motivation and ambition of people to provide for themselves. Sentiments that the grants are sometimes misused and that they have resulted in 'laziness' from many who no longer see the benefit of working if they are assured support from the government were expressed.
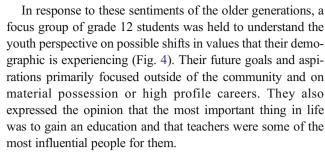
"There are few [young gardeners] yes. Because the people they are lazy these days. I think because they get social grants and child support grants and they don't have to work [Elderly man who gardens]."

The concern for many appeared in the feeling that the grant system, although helpful for some, was a cause for many people to stop working in their gardens. There was awareness of the lack of job opportunities and high unemployment rates within the community, which was attributed, in part, to the high number of individuals receiving grants; but the idea that still providing food for oneself regardless of job opportunities was clear in the interviews.

"There are no jobs, there are no jobs and we are suffering from poverty, recession, everything! We are no longer rich in this country, but if we can just use the soil and the land! I think there can be a better life for everyone. There will be no one who will talk about hunger now, because we will produce food ourselves, plowing, there will be no hunger, no poverty, no one who is waiting for a social grant anymore! People will just be eating [Agriculture Teacher]."

The contradictory influences of the grant system are only one of the influences the group members see as contributing to changes in participation in gardening. Another, which challenges the success and continuation of the work of SHFPP groups and their encouragement of food growing, is the change in values of youth away from a rural, agrarian lifestyle. Education, urban lifestyles and employment, financial status, collection of consumer goods and aversion to physical labor outdoors are all expressions of a movement away from what the older generation feels is their traditional lifestyle. While this is often seen as a negative change by the older generation there are mixed sentiments from others.

"I am trying to say that! (laughs) you know, you whites (laughs) you don't have gardens, you have small gardens, but us, we have big lands, but we don't use them, so I think we don't want to feel dirt now, these days, in the olden days there was no, all these things were not here in our sight, everything, so now even, especially young people, they don't have any time to work hard, they have time to go to town, parties, boozing, they don't have time to do important things like growing food for them [Agriculture Teacher]."

In response to these sentiments of the older generations, a focus group of grade 12 students was held to understand the youth perspective on possible shifts in values that their demographic is experiencing (Fig. 4). Their future goals and aspirations primarily focused outside of the community and on material possession or high profile careers. They also expressed the opinion that the most important thing in life was to gain an education and that teachers were some of the most influential people for them.

The value and emphasis placed on education and its fundamental link with finding a job highlights the uncertainty and instability that the youth see in continuing with the livelihoods that their grandparents or parents' generation was rooted in and that their parents' generation is struggling with as social, political, economic and environmental changes beyond their control shape their opportunities and access to resources. The sentiments from the adults in the community that the youth are 'lazy' and do not want to work hard is not echoed by the youth themselves who simply see a lack of opportunity to thrive in the role of a farmer.

Increases in alcohol and drug abuse are adding to the complexity of the changes that impact the culture and food security of the community. In September 2011, the Minister of Social Development, Bathabile Damini, addressed the concern about alcohol abuse, particularly amongst youth in the rural communities of South Africa. Her address was followed by calls for a ban on the advertisement of alcohol and marketing to combat the issue (Parry et al. 2012).

The statements surrounding these changes reflect a struggle between a past way of living in which livelihoods revolved around self-sufficient food production and the increasingly western influence of modernization that is reaching into the community. All of these cultural aspects (power, gender, cultural identity) interact in complex ways to foster an atmosphere that research participants understood to be irreversible, yet with hope that ongoing cultural change would once again make local agricultural activities an enduring aspect of local culture.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, the link between culture and food security was observed in the local context through key elements of culture. Applying this cultural lens to the SHFPP reveals a degree of success in a programme that might otherwise be regarded as a failure, and highlights the ways in which culture offers a 'toolkit' with which community members navigate, respond to, and cope with change. In this section we examine the dimensions of culture and then discuss the implications of a cultural frame for understanding community responses to food insecurity.

First, power impacted the success of the SHFPP, based on the connections of group members with people in positions of

Fig. 4 Grade 12 focus group discussion about future career aspirations

influence or affluence, either through an increase or decrease in their access to resources or market options. Power also expressed itself in the relationships and wealth observed in families with greater agricultural assets. Based on the dimensions of power as proposed by Lukes (2005), the first dimension of power is observed in the favoritism of local chiefs and in those who were allowed to distribute agricultural products and those who were not. The second dimension of power is more difficult to document empirically but deals with what issues are permitted in discussions and decided upon within a society. This second dimension may be evident through the homestead system as an aspect of amaXhosa culture that continues to be a relevant force within the communities. The third dimension remains unexplored in this study but may be even more relevant to issues of food security within the region, particularly for those who take more critical perspectives on the role of elites and global capitalism (Raschke and Cheema 2008). In this third dimension of power outlined by Lukes (2005) instead of accepting and internalizing the interests of political and economic elites, Baker (2004) reminds us that there is a clear political aspect to gardening, in ways that may not have been entirely conscious within the minds of farmers. Yet this perspective resonates with other groups and other regions of the world where a right's based approach to food sovereignty is more clearly articulated (Wittman 2011).

In these examples, power relations at the micro-social scale appear to be important determinants of local rules and norms that influence behavior. On one hand, a 'cultural lens' offers insights at the local level, but it also provides insights into the relationships that feed into other levels of social organization and local governance, and also how those channels are constructed and reconstructed iteratively between multiple agents of change. Systems of local agricultural production are tied fundamentally to underlying power relations that are observed between people as well as manifested in the informal rules that guide those relationships. For example, this perspective highlights the relationship between the schools and the SHFPP's. The access that certain groups had to schools was based on their relationship to members of the traditional leaders within the community. The cultural lens, however, shows us that on an individual level there is a degree of influence through direct family relationship

between a member of a SHFPP that sold their group's vegetables to a school and the principal of that school. This level of kinship contributes to the power/hierarchy in the community and the success of the SHFPP group that is not observed at the group level but impacts the functioning of groups nonetheless. In response to the second questions that guides this research (does a 'cultural lens' offer novel insights?), without a cultural lens we may miss this analytical insight by drawing on units of analysis at the household level or at the local organizational level without exploring adequately the interstitial connections at multiple levels of the cultural setting. Culture acts as both an individual element in that it impacts people but is also present within a group/community setting. As an essential element of culture discussed above in the literature review, culture is constructed through a series of groups or stakeholders within societies, which then "ritualize, codify and transmit cultural products" which, in these ways, become institutionalized.

Second, women in this study were observed as key players in food security and local initiatives. However, the increased role that women now play in food production may prove to be a significant burden, a finding that is consistent with the work of other authors who identify the triple burden of responsibility on women (i.e., productive, reproductive and social) resulting in additional gender inequalities at the local level (The World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Fund for Agricultural Development 2009). Groups such as the SHFPP may provide critical support for this increasing role. The SHFPPs may provide avenues for women's increased economic independence through food sales. In this sense, food and food responsibilities as aspects of a group's culture manifest the possibilities for retrenchment or amelioration of inequality as it relates to local food production.

Third, participation in the SHFPP was understood to promote a sense of cultural identity grounded in the local history of agricultural practice. This sense of identity contributes to the continuation of the SHFPP programmes as participation provides not only food security but also a connection to this important cultural dimension. Du Gay and Hall (1996) expressed cultural identities as changing on a continual basis and in the same way the SHFPP provides grounding for those who participate; a sense of belonging and continuity. This outcome from the study may indicate that people want a sense of stability and continuity in their cultural identity and the SHFPPs provide a setting to realize these aspirations. Participation in the SHFPP provides a setting that allows members to place themselves in relation to the specific activities of this programme as a stable and understood element of their identity. In this connection with a local identity, the cultural view allows us to understand why some local groups, such as agricultural activities in the form of the SHFPP, persist, despite changing socio-economic contexts while other organizations can disappear.

Fourth, research participants cited cultural changes that impacted efforts toward local food production. The social grant

system was critiqued for decreasing motivation, ambition and increasing dependence on its support. Youth expressed disinterest in an agrarian livelihood with increased exposure to western values and ideals, and an increase in drug and alcohol abuse. Substance use was reported by all age groups as negatively impacting participation in agricultural activities and local organizations. The community appears to be at a crossroads, looking back at a past way of life and looking forward to an unclear picture of the future. Using the words of Swidler (1986), the community is in an "unsettled" state and people are re-establishing what 'tool kits' they have in order to renegotiate elements of their culture and in particular their relationship to agricultural livelihoods. Participants expressed these changes as key challenges in efforts to produce food locally.

Looking more pragmatically at the measures of success and failure of government or national efforts such as the SHFPP, using standard measures, one might conclude that this programme is not a success story. It lacks the coordination, funding and human resources to provide support for many community groups and many have become defunct. Through a cultural lens, however, we can see that this programme has enjoyed a degree of success in several ways: (1) it has brought more knowledge sharing, awareness raising and discussion of gardening and agriculture to the community, (2) it has contributed to participants' sense of identity in a community experiencing dramatic cultural change and (3) it has created forums and opportunities to face challenges at a community level. These challenges include dialogue between generations and empowerment of women in their ability to provide for themselves and their families.

Drawing on Swidler's (1986) concept of 'culture in action' observers can understand the SHFPP as an adaptive strategy or a cultural tool to navigate new challenges and opportunities. The tool kit that the community has to cope with food insecurity determines what action they can take to adapt to changing circumstances. SHFPP members used selective elements of their culture to form supportive gardening groups and a sense-of-self as farmers and agriculturalists. All of the gardeners who participated in a SHFPP said that they gardened in order to grow fresh food, save money and simply because they loved to garden. In response to these insights, this study emphasizes the potential contribution of community-based organizations in enhancing local food security, an aspect of public policy support and development intervention that may not be adequately recognized at this time. In future research it would be helpful to focus more directly on questions of cultural change, especially over time as the Gatyana region adapts and responds to the changing "culture" of agriculture and the emerging challenges of local food security.

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