

UNIVERSITÄT HOHENHEIM



The impact of an organic food production and life skills
training program on food security and livelihoods of
unemployed rural women in South Africa
– A case study

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Organic Food Chain Management

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Summary

South Africa faces severe poverty, high income inequality and high unemployment which are considered as main causes for food insecurity. Considering the fact that women play a vital role in agriculture and improving the quality of life and household food security, especially in rural areas, women's empowerment, education and participation in household income generation seems to be an urgent requirement in reducing their vulnerability and overcoming poverty and food insecurity. This research is situated within the larger project "Food security and right to adequate food in the context of land and agrarian reform in South Africa" and investigates the impact of an agricultural training program, embarked by the non-profit organisation Grootbos Foundation, on food security and livelihoods of unemployed rural women in the Western Cape, South Africa. The project entitled "Growing The Future" (GTF) is a one-year organic food production, agricultural extension and life skills training program, teaching organic food production, computer literacy, maths and English. A qualitative research approach was used applying participant observation and continuous reflections, interviews and focus group discussion. Data was analysed both manually and with the qualitative data analysis software *NVivo 9*. Results demonstrate that the GTF project has improved certain livelihoods assets of the participating women, such as human capital, through gaining of knowledge and skills. However, to start a small-scale agricultural project after this course the women face constraints such as limited access to other livelihood assets and productive resources, still largely being dependent on support from GTF and also the government for social grants. Organic agriculture, as it is based on the use of locally accessible resources and low need of external input and financial capital, is an alternative to conventional agriculture and highly relevant for the GTF graduates. The lack of motivation that could be observed among the women, as well as their elaborations on future livelihood options, reflect the huge gap these women are facing with regard to access to livelihood assets and support structures. This leads to the question whether capacity building as a main strategy of the GTF project is a viable option. The fact that the project is not sustainable yet hinders the possibility of converting or expanding it to a microfinance institution. Considering that the GTF project was only established in 2009, more time is needed to implement its aims and to adapt experiences made during the first year to future courses. Further, a balance is needed between two competing aims, on the one hand to make the project sustainable and to secure future funding, and on the other hand, to pursue its strategy of training and capacity building for rural women to enhance their food security and sustainable livelihoods.