

Chapter 5

Misrepresenting women:

Development and the permeation of the women's domain

"When I'm grown-up I don't want to be like my mother. She suffers too much. I want to be a nurse and make a lot of money so that I can come home and look after them all [her extended family of 15 members all live in the same house]. Then my mother can rest"

- Young girl [10] selling crafts for her mother on her dreams for the future.

"Last night my boyfriend came to visit. He brought some food for the house and a recharge voucher for my cellphone. He also gave me R50 "

- Dumisile Zikhali boasting about her boyfriend.

Although developers negotiated almost exclusively with local men, most development projects in the region were actually targeted at women. After the LSDI had spent R630 million on infrastructure and eco-tourism projects, the Initiative established several smaller-scale projects aimed specifically at women. Through craft training projects the LSDI aimed to commercialise local women's informal businesses. Smaller developers promoted projects such as the establishment of centres for childcare and teaching local women how to care for terminally ill AIDS patients. For the most part, these projects claimed to address the "feminisation of poverty" in the region¹.

By implementing development projects geared to the specific needs of different genders, developers reinforced the public private dichotomy and created two separate spheres of interaction for men and women. Nature conservation and politics became exclusive male spheres. Men's projects involved enormous expenditure on infrastructure,

taught men skills that they could use in the marketplace, stressed the use of imported technology, and helped them gain access to employment opportunities through building and promoting networks. For example, men were involved in all the negotiations by the LSDI and by Nature Conservation Authorities to establish new nature conservation areas. As such, development projects dealing exclusively with men had to do with the core business of the eco-tourism industry, namely land. Without it, the whole LSDI and Greater St Lucia Wetland Park World Heritage Site might as well have closed down.

On the other hand, the crafts trade, agriculture, nursing and all things "domestic" became a women's sphere. Women's projects emphasised activities that could be done from the home, the supposed nexus of women's lives. Very few of the skills taught in women's development projects could be translated to the formal labour market. Rather, these projects placed a great deal of emphasis on local skills, local materials and appropriate technology. Such skills and activities seldom led to an income sufficient to support a whole family. Moreover, the projects played but a complementary role in the eco-tourism industry. In this complementary role, women were expected to consume and reproduce the ethnic identities constructed within the male sphere. Women, by virtue of their employment in the service industry and their confinement to craft production, thus represented difference and otherness to tourists. In Maputaland this role had dire financial and social consequences for women who became "fetishized" by the market.

In this chapter I will show how development projects in Maputaland were informed by Western gender stereotypes and assumptions about women's economic contributions. As such, most development projects treated women like middle-class

¹ Development literature reflected this notion that women, by virtue of their supposed universal subordination to men, were economically worse off than other sectors of society and needed to be

(Victorian) housewives and concentrated on keeping women in the "home", safe from the outside world. Decisions were made for and about women and very little attention was paid to the income-generating potential of "women's projects". This was despite women's harsh socio-economic circumstances, their long history of considerable activity outside the home, and women's significant organising abilities.

The contradiction between developers' assumptions and the reality of women's lives played itself out in development projects. Here, it became clear that women were more dependent on each other than they were on men and that they were highly organised. Independent from men, women had established female networks of reciprocal help. Contrary to the developers' expectations, women did not confine themselves to single economic activities but expanded their activities into a wide range of informal enterprises. Establishing networks and diversifying enterprises were necessary survival mechanisms in an area where most women's projects generated very little cash and where incomes were often tied to the fluctuating tourist seasons. This was a fact seldom noted by developers when they lament that women did not attend the craft market (or other development projects) often enough to make a profit.

Many of the stereotypes that developers harboured about local women were at best fictitious. Women were far from slavishly subordinate to men as the developers assumed. In Maputaland women showed considerable economic and social independence. Even in cases of domestic violence, women were not passive victims but often gave as "good as they got". They had a sense of pride in the fact that they were able to feed their families and "do" something about their poverty. Women also disdained

targeted by development (See Suliman 1991; Chen 1996 and Fischer 1998).

politicians who promised them better lives as they were convinced that men could do nothing without the working power of women.

In this chapter, I will argue that development projects have undermined the economical and political independence of women. Through the mechanisms of development, women were increasingly forced to "settle down" to single economic activities such as craft production. At the Ubumbano craft market for instance, women were discouraged from doing anything but craft production since that would cost the developer more money in terms of training. However, most economic activities that were seen as suitable for women were only complementary to the eco-tourism industry and did not provide year-round or fixed earnings for women. In this manner development projects restricted the effectiveness of women's mechanisms of coping with rural poverty, and undermined the independence of women's networks.

I will develop this argument first by critically considering feminist theorising about the supposed universal subordination of women, and about the public-private dichotomy that is so frequently drawn in the literature. Second I investigate how craft production projects and community-based nature conservation projects embody gendered assumptions. I will also show how assumptions about gender and class were reflected in health projects. Third, I point to the contradiction between developers' assumptions and the reality of women's lives, and how these contradictions played themselves out in the context of development. My emphasis will be on women's networks and how these created an independent domain for women and a safety net against destitution. Fourth, I concentrate on the relationships between men and women outside development projects and on women's perspectives about their own position.

Drawing the lines: Male: Female, public: private, dominant: subordinate

Feminist literature contains different arguments about gender relations in non-western societies. From the perspective of ethnographic liberalism, contained in the writings of Mead (1928), "native women" often enjoyed greater status than "Western women". This argument highlighted the complaints by women in the colonial world that Western feminism often depreciated non-western gendered practices, and failed to attend to the varying ways in which women perceived their situations. However, this argument had little impact on development literature, which continued to assume that women were universally subordinate to men.

Other feminist anthropologists have sought reasons for the universal subordination of women. Drawing on Lévi-Strauss's structural dichotomization of human thought into the categories "raw" and "cooked", Ortner (1974) asserted that throughout the world women were associated with nature and men with culture. Women were supposedly closer to the earth, whilst men transcended earthly bounds through cultural creativity. Rosaldo (1974) focussed on the universal separation of domestic and public domains. She showed that cross-culturally there was a cleavage between the world of household, reproduction and maintenance of children and adults; and the world of extra-household labour, citizenship, public culture and the state. Rosaldo (1974) argued that societies with very rigid public-domestic distinctions such as Victorian Europe would devalue and disempower private spheres and thus the women with whom they were associated.

Other feminist anthropologists turned to Marxist evolutionist models, explaining female subordination in terms of the emergence of private property. Writers such as Leacock (1978) and Sacks (1975: 211-234) reject the arguments that women's status was directly related to the functions of childbearing and childrearing and that the domestic/public distinction is a cross-culturally valid framework for the analysis of gender relations. Based on historical data, they showed how women's subordination was connected to the development of monogamous marriage, the nuclear family, and to the development of private ownership of the means of production. They systematically linked kinship to the economy, and made the "personal political". However, ethnographic records divulged many counterexamples to the evolutionary model that started with sexually egalitarian small-scale societies. Some Native American societies such as the Seneca and the Pueblos were historically characterised by relatively high female status as evidenced by female political influence (Benedict 1934: 73-76; Albers 1994). Furthermore, Moore (1988: 77) showed that men as well as women suffered under colonialism and asserted that attention should be drawn to the changing nature of gender relations and sexual divisions of labour under capitalism.

Finally, two groups of feminists shunned the grand-theoretical search for key explanations of women's lower status. Following the Weberian tradition of interpretative sociology, scholars such as Wolf (1974) wrote as closely as possible from inside the minds of their female informants. Others emphasised historical and political-economic contexts of the women's lives. In the latter vein, Albers (1994: 175-225) describes how federal domination and the creation of reserves impacted on the status of women. Sioux men were drawn into becoming wage labourers on government farms, and they gained

exclusive control over commodities on which their families' livelihood in part depended. Sioux women on the other hand, contributed to their families' survival through producing food and handcrafts for subsistence. However, the dominance by Sioux men over women was far from secure. From the 1920s Sioux men have generally been without jobs while women have emerged as important sources of income (Albers 1994).

I have generally found universalist explanations less valuable than ethnographic studies on the cultural construction of gender that are sensitive to the very particular historical and political economic circumstances of women's lives. For example, Goheen (1996)'s ethnography of the Cameroon grassfields questioned the supposed independence of the public- domestic spheres and the subordination of women due to their inclusion in the "domestic" sphere. In Nso society, men fill the public political roles while women are relegated to the "domestic" sphere of agriculture. However, contrary to the expectation that women in Nso society would be devalued, Nso women proved to be secure in the knowledge that their productive and reproductive labour underwrote men's power and status (Goheen 1996). In my research, people in Maputaland drew a clear distinction between the (public) world of men and the (domestic) world of women. Like Goheen (1996), I found that this cleavage did not necessarily lead to the devaluation and disempowerment of women, as the relationship between the two worlds was more complex.

The approach that I adopt differs fundamentally from the assumptions about gender that inform development practice. The predominant emphasis in development literature is on the "feminisation of poverty" as an economic fallout of the supposed universal subordination of women (Suliman 1991).

For the most part, development literature assumes the existence of strict public-private dichotomies in economically marginalised societies. In targeting these societies, developers often emphasise the need to equalise the access that men and women have to technology, capital and education. Underlying this emphasis is the assumption that, by virtue of their greater access to resources, men devalue women's work (Rogers 1980: 40-41; Warren & Bourque 1991: 278-284). Development practitioners often aim to "develop" women's domestic domain through the use of appropriate technology and resources. These developers hope that by increasing women's productivity, they would have more time for other obligations (Warren & Bourque 1991: 284).

Rogers (1980: 81-91) criticises development practitioners for applying a Western concept of domesticity to women in the third world without attempting to understand their work beyond the domestic contexts. According to Rogers (1980: 29), Western developers assume that the problems experienced by women in the third world are attributable to their "status" in traditional society. This perception legitimises the attempts to increase women's status by involving them in development. However, these conceptions ignore the enormous variety of situations in which individual women may find themselves.

In this chapter, I will attempt to highlight how the universalistic assumptions about gender contained in development practice could serve as self-fulfilling prophecies, and how these assumptions are contradicted by local ethnographic realities in Maputaland.

Embodying gendered assumptions: Development projects in Maputaland

In Maputaland, developers typically tailored nature conservation, commercial agriculture and business training projects for men; and tailored craft production, small-scale agriculture, nursing, sewing and hospitality training projects for women. The emphasis on typically male and typically female "projects" embodied Western gender stereotypes. A case in point was the differential strategies used by the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (CINDEK) to 'developing' local men and women. In consultation with local men, CINDEK planned a large-scale community conservation project in the Ingwavuma district in 2001². The emphasis in this project was on the potential cash income that nature conservation would generate for the "local community". Through their participation in the project, men on the committee gained valuable experience in the preparation of business plans and in negotiating with local and provincial authorities, skills that were easily transferable to the formal labour market.

Parallel to this project CINDEK started a very small-scale agricultural development project aimed at women. This project was low-cost (the initial capital expenditure was less than R400), relied heavily upon the labour of women and local resources, and was run by a CINDEK employee, Jacobus Knocker. Jacobus handled all negotiations with the "outside" world and oversaw the sale and distribution of the communal harvests. Central to this project was the utilisation of "appropriate technologies" such as planting seedlings in empty two-litre Coke-bottles filled with enriched soil. In this project the emphasis was not so much on the cash income that the

² During my fieldwork, CINDEK estimated that the project would cost in the region of R5 million.

sale of the agricultural produce would generate but on the ability of the women to feed their own families.

CINDEK reinforced the distinction between the public sphere of men and the domestic sphere of women. Men were encouraged to participate in local politics whilst women were "managed". Furthermore, the agricultural project kept women confined to the domestic sphere by emphasising skills that they could use in and around their own homes. Contrary to men, women's skills were not transferable to the public sphere of formal employment. The emphasis in the women's project on their care responsibilities towards their families, rather than a cash income, reflected the idea that women were "naturally" domestic. In contrast, the men's project did not even mention the responsibilities that men had towards their families. The emphasis was on a cash income, the medium of a (public) market.

In the distinctions that it drew between men and women, CINDEK's development project was very typical of other development projects in Maputaland. Most development projects did not only create "suitable" spheres for men and women, but also aimed their projects at what Burke (1996:56) classified as "the respectable, club-going, Christian wife". This aim was illustrated in the LSDI's craft training project for women.

In February 2000, the LSDI singled out fifteen women from the Ubumbano craft market for training in craft production and business management skills. The course stretched over three weeks. During this time the trainees came to Sodwana Bay each weekday from 9 am until 3 pm. After the first course the women had a two-week break. The second course followed immediately after, was two weeks long, and followed the

same routine. Five additional women from Ubumbano craft market joined the second course.

Apart from the lectures on price determination, raw material procurement, quality control and customer care services; the course also included a workshop on household budgets. In this particular workshop, women were told that they had to budget for essential household expenses first before they considered capital expenditures on their businesses. These essential expenses included food and clothes for other household members. Like the CINDEK project, this project emphasised women's domestic care responsibilities.

At the beginning of the course, women like Nomvula Zikhali were very excited about the prospect of receiving training. Nomvula believed that her "certificate" would help her to get a more profitable job elsewhere³. If this failed, she hoped that the LSDI would bring her into contact with possible clients that could place regular orders for crafts. Her hopes were widely shared among the group of trainees. To a certain extent, the LSDI did fulfil their hopes and took on the role of patron in their subsequent contact with the trainees. In June 2000, the LSDI instructors told John Mlambo (chairman of the Ubumbano craft committee) and the trainees to meet them in Durban with as much of their produce as they could carry. John and five women managed to borrow enough money for their bus fare to Durban. On arrival, the group's travelling expenses were refunded and they were provided with food and hotel accommodation for their whole

³ It is a widespread practice among developers in the region to issue certificates at the end of training workshops. I even sat through a ceremony where a local man was awarded what he thought was a doctoral degree by a developer. Among the plethora of certificates and qualifications now in circulation in the area, those awarded by developers affiliated to Universities and large development groups such as the LSDI carried the most weight. Many locals believed that these certificates would impress prospective employers and give them an edge on other people applying for a job.

stay, courtesy of the LSDI. The women sold everything they brought with them at the Durban beachfront. They were ecstatic about their success. At this point, the two LSDI instructors informed the women that they would not organise similar trips in future. The trainees said that they could not return to Durban because they did not have money for transport or accommodation. For example, Jabu Mdluli remarked that “the money of transport and hotels will eat the money of the crafts. It is better to sell crafts at Ubumbano”. They were quite right, as their entire income for the trip would not have covered the transport and accommodation for one night in Durban.

As mediator-patrons, the LSDI later secured orders for the twenty women trainees in urban centres such as Durban and made sure that the clients paid on time. Adam Mthetwa, one of the LSDI instructors, placed new orders by phoning one of the trainees at Ubumbano. She then had to see to it that the order was given to the other nineteen crafters. On an agreed deadline date, Adam collected the crafts at the market and delivered them to the clients. At no point did the crafters come into contact with the consumers.

Apart from the unsustainability of the LSDI’s patronage, the craft training project was poorly suited to the needs of the crafters at the Ubumbano market⁴. For instance, the crafters could hardly use the price determination skills they were taught. If they were to take into account the cost of raw materials, equipment, transport and production times, their baskets would have become prohibitively expensive. In the context of fierce competition within the Ubumbano market, these women would have been severely disadvantaged if they implemented the LSDI’s pricing strategy

⁴In its emphasis on skills training the LSDI conformed to the prescriptions of much development literature (McIntosh 1991a: 252).

Furthermore, the LSDI's hope that the twenty women they trained would in turn train other crafters at the market was not realised. Adam placed exclusive orders with the trained crafters, ensuring them a safe income and the potential of a constant stream of future orders. If the twenty crafters were to train some of the other women, they would relinquish their competitive edge in a market saturated with crafters who all had pretty much the same skills. The first trainees were very aware of this fact and jealously guarded the (largely useless) information they got from the workshops. Since this information was kept secret, many of the other crafters believed that it must have been very valuable and professed that they would gladly go to future LSDI workshops. The LSDI's training workshops thus accumulated credence not because they answered the practical needs of crafters, but because of the status associated with these workshops. In this regard, Simmel (1950) notes that the content of a secret is not as important as its function. He claims that all human relationships contain elements of secrecy and that individuals manipulate the sharing of secrets to connect with other people.

Given the warnings by various authors about the suitability of low-skill craft projects for women, one could suspect callousness on the part of the LSDI⁵. But this was not so. In part, the LSDI failed to relate to the lives of local crafters because their projects were tailored to Western stereotypes about the needs and attributes of the middle-class housewife. Central to this project was the assumptions that women in the area made insignificant cash contributions to the household, could not manage their own affairs, and were dependent upon men.

⁵ Various authors have warned of similar pitfalls in development projects aimed at women. Many point out that where income-generating activities such as craftwork are introduced, they are usually additional to women's routine work and add significantly to their workload. Furthermore, almost all craft work

First, the LSDI and iLala Weavers' decision to select fine craft projects as suitable for women reflected Western gender stereotypes about women's supposed higher aesthetic sensitivity. These projects were earmarked for women regardless of the fact that men traditionally produced the finely woven beer baskets and snuffboxes. In an almost Victorian manner, the LSDI patrons shielded female crafters from the ravages of the market. Adam and other "developers" mediated between the crafters and consumers, assuming that they could ensure fair play. As one developer said,

If it wasn't for me, they would get even less than they currently do for their crafts. Some consumers force the crafters to give them a discount if they buy in bulk. I do not allow that sort of thing when I take orders on their behalf.

Apart from being heavily invested with gender stereotypes, the LSDI's craft training project also projected a definite class bias. The project seemed to expect upper-middle-class behaviour from women they classified as the "poorest of the poor". For instance, the project was organised around tea-times (at 10 am and 2 pm) and lunches (at 12 am) every day for which the LSDI provided refreshments. For the participants, this was a strange way to organise one's time since the majority of them only had one meal a day. Nomvula could also not understand why she was expected to take only one cookie at teatime. "I will not get full on that," she complained. When I asked why she could only have one cookie, she said that the instructors gave her dirty looks if she loaded her plate. In this subtle way, the developers tried to cultivate adherence to middle-class rules of etiquette. Less subtle was their insistence that the participants should contribute

projects are geared to a very limited and unreliable market (Rogers 1980: 87, 95-98; Moore 1988: 89-91).

something to their own training. This demand was informed by the middle-class adage that one would have greater commitment from participants if they had invested *something* (either free labour or personal capital) in the project. Depending on where they lived, the LSDI gave each woman either R2.50 or R3 per day for transport. This was only enough for a one-way journey. The participants had to pay the other half of their transport fares. This was a considerable demand, especially since the participants could not earn an income while they were on the training course. Nomula remonstrated that:

The SDI people think we are rich- how are we supposed to get to the community centre and back home everyday? We have to sit there and listen to them talk, talk, talk and they do not even pay us. While I am there I cannot even go to the market to sell the little crafts I have. My children are hungry at home.

Zodwa Ndlovu (from Ubumbano craft market) had a very similar complaint in October 2000. When I met her, she was clearly vexed. "These people want me to go to the AIDS workshop to learn how to work with patients but they do not want to pay me". To middle-class sensibilities this sounds like a strange complaint, seeing that the training was free and the developer would have covered all costs⁶. However, this complaint illuminated middle-class perceptions of volunteers and charity, assuming that women would volunteer their services free of charge for the "good of the community". In reality, most women juggled a multitude of economic activities and did not have the luxury of "free" time to do community service.

Almost in every development project, women in Maputaland were treated like middle-class housewives. They were expected to conform to middle-class etiquette, to

want nothing more than to look after their husbands and children and to spend their time at home. The majority of these projects were not geared towards creating an independent livelihood for women, and seemed to drag women into low-productivity jobs rather than to help them find more productive and remunerative employment. At the postnatal clinic in Mbaswana for instance, nurses often told women to take control of their reproductive capacity and to “plan for children”. The nurses assumed that having more children was always an unplanned mistake which women tried to avoid. However, such advice did not take into account the harsh social and economic contexts in which women had multiple sexual partners, and had children with economically "safe" men. Many local development projects designed for women welcomed the intrusion of local men. The developers believed that these men took a healthy interest in women's affairs.

How women work in development projects

The developers' assumption that women in Maputaland were sheltered, dependent "housewives" stood in sharp contrast to the reality of women's lives. This contradiction played itself out in the working environment of development projects such as the Ubumbano craft market. At Ubumbano, it was clear that women were more dependent on each other than they were on men. The women were also highly organised⁷, and had a long history of contact with the outside world from which the developers tried to shelter

⁶ I could not get the name of the organisation from Zodwa. Subsequent enquiries from other women also did not bear any fruit. All they knew was the name of the man who had invited them, but not his telephone numbers or other contact details.

⁷ Tripp (1994) shows how similar associational activities between women in Tanzania were fostered by their exclusion from formal political and economic spheres, resulting in a preponderance of small and informal women's organisations. A characteristic of women's associational activity in this country was that women preferred to be in groups with other women (p 163).

them. Contrary to the LSDI and other developers' expectations that women would engage only in craft production under the auspices of a manager such as Adam, women obstinately continued with their other informal activities.

Women in Maputaland had a long history of economic activity outside the 'home'. According to Cunningham (1987: 265), women from Maputaland have traded mats and baskets with Zululand 200 years ago. Apart from the trade with people outside the region, women had been trading at local markets such as Mseleni, Mbaswana and Tshongwe long before the first tourists came to the area. Furthermore, during the hundred years that local men had been migrating to the mines on the Witwatersrand, women were responsible for meeting their households' subsistence needs. Experience taught many women that men's remittances from the mines were often irregular. Women could not afford to be fully dependent on their husbands or male family members and had to secure an independent income for themselves. Through farming and other subsistence activities women undertook responsibility for the daily reproduction of their households. In this context, men did not feature prominently as household breadwinners.

This spirit of independence among women survived into the present. Women were still the major traders at local markets and subsistence agriculture (albeit on a small scale) was still the domain of women. It was common for most women to juggle a multitude of economic activities and to enlist the help of very young children in the performance of household duties (See illustration 8, below). A few women also gained access to formal wage labour as the LSDI extended its operations into Maputaland.

Women's activities 'outside the home' were seldom formalised. Women used various informal social networks to gain access to capital, labour, raw materials, markets

friends and cognatic kin. For the most part, a woman's networks continually contracted, expanded and intersected as she moved from one activity to the next. Through gift-giving women extended their existing networks and secured 'dormant' ones.

Illustration 8: Young girl helping out at the Ubumbano market, December 2000



The case of Jabula Zikhali (Dudu's mother) illustrates the multiple activities and informal networks that women participated in. Jabula had a temporary job at Sodwana Bay Lodge as a 'domestic worker', grew vegetables at home, had five children to look after, sold crafts at the Ubumbano craft market, produced bricks and sometimes sold sweets and cold drinks from her home. She secured the job at Sodwana Bay Lodge through her family network. Her sister, Lebo Mdluli, worked at the Lodge three years ago and asked her manager to hire Jabula after he had fired someone for stealing. In this manner Lebo repaid Jabula for taking in their younger sister after their mother had passed

away. At the time of their mother's death, Lebo could not afford to look after her younger sister although it was her responsibility as the eldest sibling.

While working at the Lodge, some of Jabula's co-workers asked her to join their stokvel (rotating credit association)⁸. Lina Mlambo vouched for Jabula's honesty and reliability, an important requirement in considering people for membership. Although there were no written agreements between these stokvel members, none of them would dream of breaking the stokvel chain. This was because membership to a stokvel allowed people with limited access to formal financial facilities the chance to quickly raise interest-free capital. None of the women whom I interviewed obtained starting capital for their small businesses from a bank or other formal lending agency. Few of the women entertained this idea as a remote possibility. By becoming part of the stokvel network, Jabula was able to raise enough capital to buy crafts that she could sell during the December holidays.

Jabula asked her second daughter to sell these crafts at the Ubumbano craft market and obtained a stall from her neighbour who owed her a favour. A few months earlier, Jabula had given her neighbour some cabbages after a stray goat had destroyed the neighbour's garden. The neighbour agreed to help Jabula by introducing her to one of the committee members of the craft market and vouched that Jabula would adhere to the market's rules. That December, Jabula was able to send her younger daughter to the market to sell crafts. Jabula even had a good location within the market. Dudu asked her boyfriend, a taxi driver, to take her sister to and from the market daily. This ensured her

⁸ A stokvel is a type of credit union in which a group of people agrees to contribute fixed amounts of money to a common pool weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Depending on the rules of a particular stokvel, members may draw their contributions or portions of it either in rotation or in times of need (Lukhele 1990:1-2 cf Lubell 1991: 13).

safety and made her presence at the market independent of the cash she generated from the sale of crafts. Jabula's participation in the craft market proved to be a very successful venture and she was able to send all the children to school with the money she generated from craft sales. Jabula could even buy some new seeds for her vegetable garden. The original vegetable garden started with a gift of seedlings from Jabula's sister-in-law.

In addition to these activities, Jabula also had a brick-making business at their home. She bought the equipment with money she received from the stokvel. Jabula's own children were too young to produce bricks and she worked during the daytime. She could not just appoint anyone to help her in this endeavour as giving someone a job entailed a large favour and the expectation of even larger repayments. Jabula offered a job at the brick-working plant to Lina's daughter. She also employed her sister-in-law's second daughter who lived in Matuba. This contact meant that Jabula's informal network extended beyond the boundaries of the Mbaswana area. A few months later, her sister-in-law let Jabula know that she heard that the trade in crafts in KwaNgwanase was very brisk. On this advice, Jabula sent Dudu to KwaNgwanase with some crafts. Within a month, Dudu had sold all the crafts that she was given.

Jabula used various informal networks to gain access to capital (through the stokvel), labour (through friends at work, the stokvel and her family), raw materials (through her family), markets (through her family and neighbours) and employment opportunities (through her family). Each time she extended her personal network, she had to go through gatekeepers like the neighbour whom had introduced her to the Ubumbano craft committee. With each new contact made, informal rules of reciprocity were established. For instance, Jabula felt obliged to employ Lina's daughter in gratitude

for having introduced her to the stokvel network a few years previously⁹. At no point did Jabula sign any formal agreement with other women and in the majority of cases she did not discuss explicit 'rules of conduct'. However, the wide social network of women in the area ensured that gossip, news and information spread quickly. Should someone for instance default on a stokvel payment, the news would get around that such a person was unreliable. The person in question would then have difficulty establishing new contacts and would face severe social pressure from other women in her personal network. This could severely inhibit someone's economic activities and consequent chances of survival.

Jabula's connection to various networks made it possible for her to operate several economic activities, even though she had a full-time (although temporary) job. The social network she established in this way also gave her constant feedback on her activities and this information helped her to branch out even further.

Despite deploying these strategies, Jabula's economic activities were not very profitable. However, her networks allowed Jabula to spread her risks more evenly in a harsh economic environment. Her family's survival was thus not fully dependent on Jabula's ability to keep her job at the Lodge. For many women, these social networks were important sources of security in times of hardship. They were also more stable than relationships with men. One could 'bank' favours with a social network to claim at a later stage. For this reason, women would often forego responsibilities towards their husbands and boyfriends in order to meet the requirements of their network of family and friends. Women seldom refused requests to help other women and sometimes even volunteered their time and resources to wealthier women without having been asked for it. These

⁹ Bähre (2002) argues that stokvels establish trust in informal settlements. In my research area, stokvels grew out of established networks of trust.

organisations outside the home created an independent ‘domain of women’, characterised by informal rules of reciprocity and obligation.

In the crafts industry, the growth of women's businesses was largely determined by the access that individual stall owners had to social and financial capital. From a content analysis of 131 businesses and the histories of fifty-four businesses at the Ubumbano craft market, it emerged that businesses generally followed roughly the same patterns of growth. With each new stage, the capital required and the distance travelled to expand a business, grew. Generally, most stall owners started their craft businesses by harvesting raw plant material (*ilala*, *ikwwane*, *isikhonkho*, *ulozisi*, monkey oranges, *isundu*) and producing crafts from it. At this stage, the production process was generally very time-consuming. Production included harvesting, the refining of raw materials, and also the actual weaving process. Businesses reached a second stage when stall owners started buying raw materials (commercial dyes and plant materials such as *ilala* and *induli*) from the market in Mbaswana. This allowed women to bypass the arduous harvesting process. During the first two phases, stall owners did not employ anyone to sell for them. Businesses reached a third stage once stall owners started buying finished crafts from local markets such as Mbaswana, Tshongwe, Ndongeni and Mkuze. A large majority (96%) of these stall owners continued to produce some crafts to sell. At this stage, stall owners generally started hiring young women to sell for them at Ubumbano. The next step for many stall owners was to buy pineapples from Hluhluwe. This activity required access to private transportation. Women who sold pineapples often continued to produce crafts but stopped harvesting their own raw materials. A business reached a fifth stage once its owner started buying crafts from Swaziland. Some women extended their

businesses further by travelling to Durban to buy crafts and other ready-made products there. They usually combined these products with ones they bought locally. Finally, two women extended their businesses even further by starting tuckshops at the market in addition to the stalls they already owned. Widely viewed as the most successful woman at the craft market, Elsie Mamlambo, had a tuckshop, a craft stall, and a pineapple stall. She employed four women to sell her goods at the market.

This pattern reflected the actual growth of many businesses and also the way in which women talked about their business histories and plans for the future. For instance, when Lina Zikhali told me about her business, she referred to a particularly bad period at home that forced her to revert to harvesting her own raw materials after she had been selling crafts from Mbaswana and Swaziland. These ‘stages of growth in a business’ roughly overlapped with success and income. I controlled my findings on the ‘stages of growth in a business’ with analyses of daily incomes and profit margins of 368 stall-owners over thirty-two random days. My analysis consistently showed that traders who sold crafts bought in Swaziland and in Durban had higher incomes than traders selling their own products or locally-produced crafts. The profit margins on crafts bought in Swaziland was also considerably higher than on crafts bought in Mbaswana. Furthermore, the inventories of twenty-nine stalls showed that there was a significant relationship between the stage a business had reached and its total worth. Thus stalls in the higher categories were worth more and had the potential to earn more than stalls in the lower categories.

Contrary to the literature and developers’ expectations, my analysis shows that businesses at the Ubumbano craft market run by women in women-headed households

were just as likely to reach the higher stages of growth than those run by women in male-headed households. This provided further credence to the idea that women in Maputaland were more dependent upon their female networks than they were on men. It is precisely because single female household heads had wider access to social networks outside the household than married women, that their businesses were more likely to grow (See figure 5, below). In fact, women who stood at the head of their households owned the two most successful businesses at the craft market.

On the other hand, the bulk of businesses owned by women in male-headed households were represented in the lower growth categories (See figure 6, below).

Figure 5: The distribution of businesses owned by women in women-headed households across growth categories, Ubumbano craft market, June 2000- December 2000.

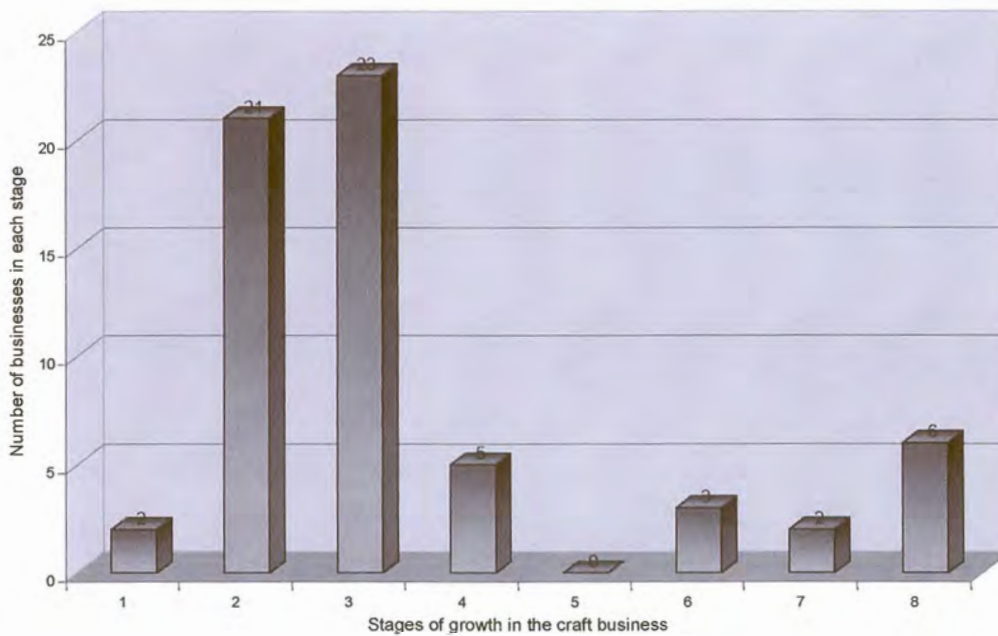
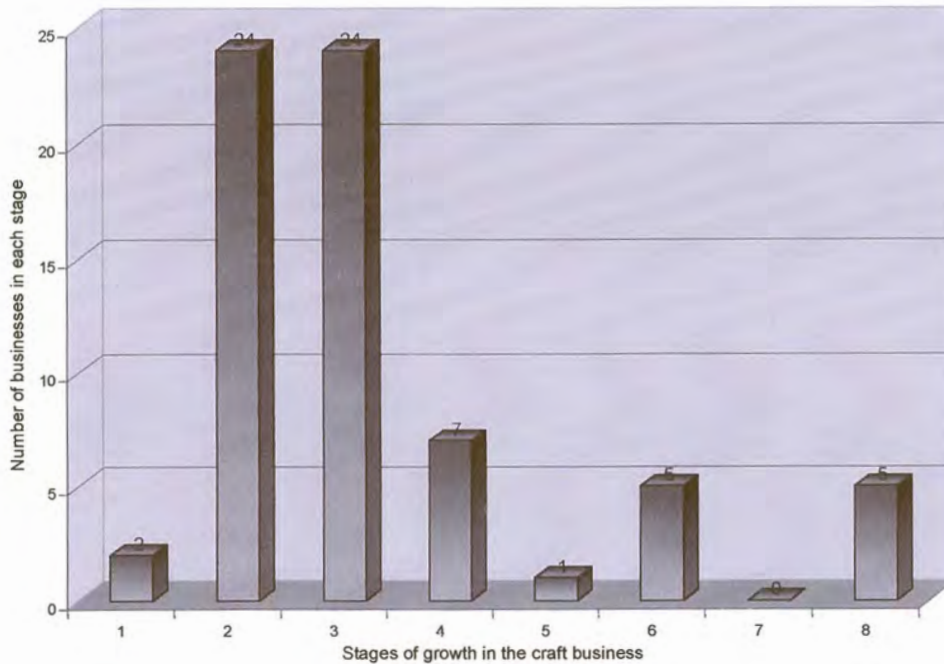


Figure 6: The distribution of businesses owned by women in male-headed households across growth categories, Ubumbano craft market, June 2000- December 2000.



Contrary to the developers' expectation that women would come to the market more often since they started their project, I found that women actually came to the market very seldom. I took a daily attendance record of 253 women selling at Ubumbano craft market over forty-four days. These days included the following periods in 2000; July 20 to August 3 (the tourist low season), August 14 to August 26, September 22 to October 7 and December 17 to December 21 (the peak tourist season). Overall, individual women came to the market only 15% of that time (See figure 7, below). This was because many women were the sole breadwinners in their households and could not afford to take part in a development project that only promised them R240 per month¹⁰. The number of

¹⁰ This was the amount that women who produced crafts for iLala Weavers received for an order that took a month to complete. Although the LSDI paid slightly more for crafts, the women could still only produce a limited number of crafts per month.



traders at the market was also not much higher than during October (See Figure 8, below).

Figure 7: The average attendance of individual women at the Ubumbano craft market, July -December 2000

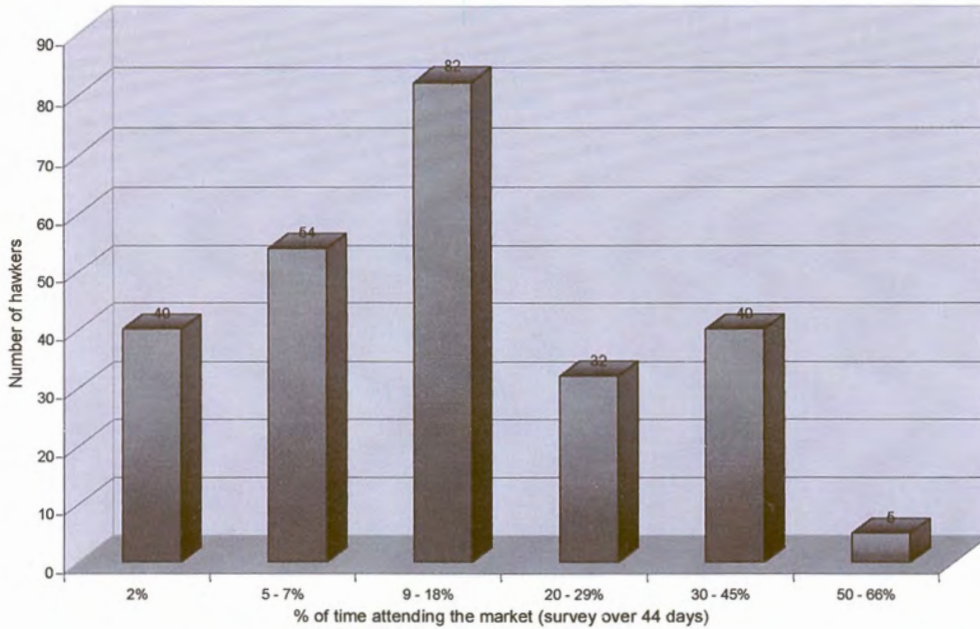
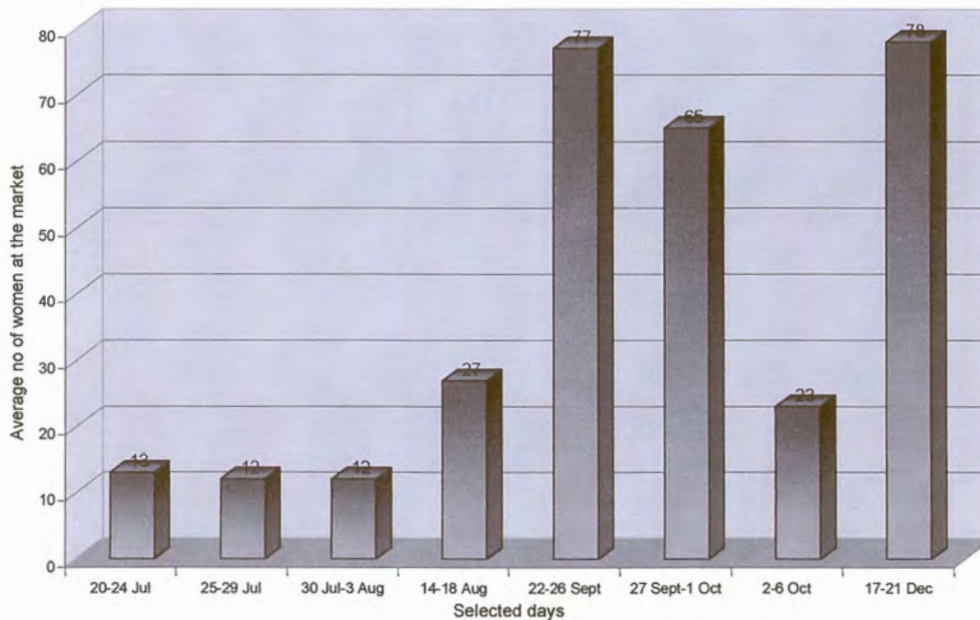


Figure 8: The attendance of women at the Ubumbano craft market, select days 2000

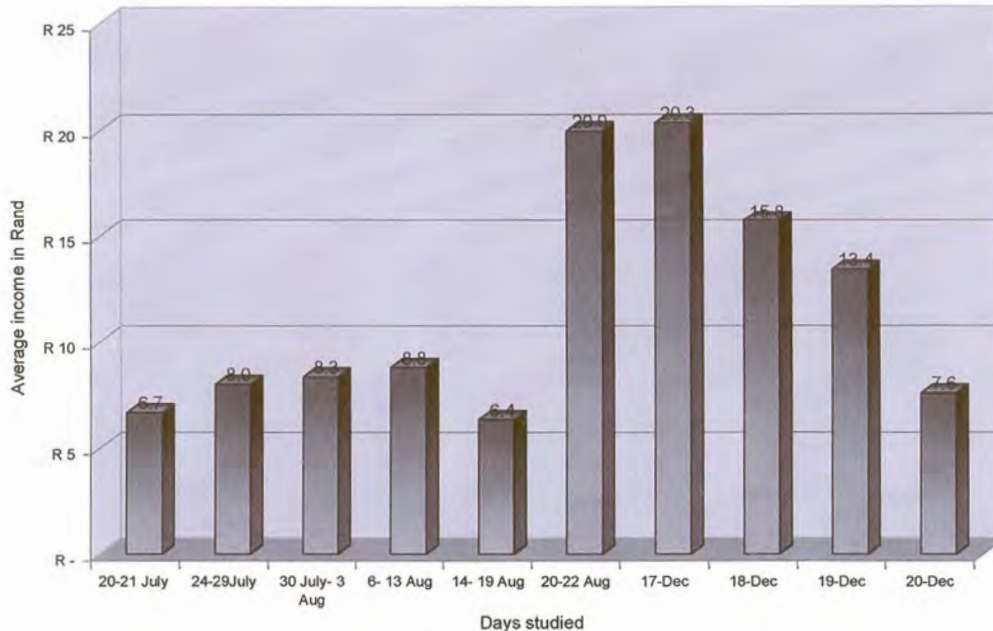


During the tourist high season, many lodges, diving schools and other "formal" businesses offered part-time jobs to women. Tourists also employed women to clean their camping sites and to look after their children. Although these formal businesses and tourists seldom paid more than R30 per day, it was still more than the average income (R10.61) for crafters at the Ubumbano craft market (See Figure 9, below). Therefore, many women opted for the steady income of a temporary job rather than going to the market.

Evidence also contradicts the expectations of developers that the craft industry would lead to a redistribution of income outside the household. Most women traders employed family members just as soon as their businesses showed real growth. The salaries that women paid their workers often undermined their success, forcing them into cycles of growth and poverty instead of the envisioned linear growth projected by economists. At the Ubumbano craft market, wealthier women were forced into positions of patronage and were expected to employ younger family members at their stalls. Such traders had difficulty convincing their families that they could not afford to employ another person, especially if they stopped producing crafts (which was an indication that a business was successful). Salaries paid to young women generally ranged from R300 to R900 per month. At most, successful traders received a bruto income of about R2 000 per month. The bulk of this income went towards household expenses. Less than 40% of the total income generated by a stall was used in the capital or running expenses of businesses. Salaries thus made large inroads on business capital, forcing successful traders to cut down on their acquisition of ready-made products. Since successful traders had to provide year-round patronage, they had to expend more money than poorer traders

during the off-seasons. Eventually, such traders had to "let their help go" and started their businesses afresh, making crafts and buying a few locally produced ready-made crafts.

Figure 9: Average income per day at the Ubumbano craft market, select days 2000



Some of the developers I talked to about these cycles of growth and poverty at the market attributed it to local people's "tradition" or to a "community-orientated" (but fundamentally irrational) worldview. They insisted that this "orientation" corrupted businesses. Findings, such as that presented above, were taken as evidence of this. What they did not take into account was that the women were not wholly dependent on the income from the craft market, but also relied upon a multitude of other activities. Economic survival depended upon a woman's ability to spread her risks. Thus, after a relatively successful business collapsed, its owner was seldom left destitute and could claim favours from those whom she had employed. As I showed in Jabula's case, these favours were seldom paid back in kind. As such, different counter-favours often helped women expand the range of their informal income-earning activities. By spreading their

risks and setting up multiple enterprises, women were able to meet the daily consumption and cash requirements of their households.

Outside development projects: showing the developers up

Outside the realm of the craft market, the stereotypical images of women and their families also informed other development practices. Women in Maputaland did not fit the picture of loyal and submissive housewives waiting at home to fix supper for their husbands while their well-fed and scrubbed children were tucked up in bed.

Despite being associated with the domestic domain, women showed considerable social and economic independence. Women's economic independence stemmed from the fact that any crops they planted and harvested were considered to be their property. Thus, women did not depend on men for their most basic subsistence needs. At the Ubumbano craft market for instance, 121 (92%) of 131 traders planted food at home. Ninety-eight (75%) of the 131 traders also kept chickens. Within the household, women had the right to deny their husbands or other male relatives food. Men rarely interfered in the running of the household as this was considered a woman's job. In this capacity, women made decisions about the education of their children and organised female household labour. Women also catered for the subsistence needs of household members. Women were free to decide in which economic activities they would participate. Husbands who interfered with the affairs of their wives were referred to as "*makoti*" (married woman). Unmarried young women at the Ubumbano craft market showed the same kind of independence in their relationships. Unless a boyfriend had enough money to shoulder all household expenses, he had very little say in what they did during the day.

It was with weariness that some women interpreted “men’s work”. They complained that men spoke all day and accomplished little. The development money that men and women vied for did not improve women’s lives. Dudu was twenty-three years old, unmarried and lived with her two children at her parent’s home. Her mother bought food for their family of nine, clothes and school uniforms for the five children in the household and paid school fees and pocket money for each child. Dudu’s mother also paid a builder to build an extra room onto their house. Three years ago, Dudu’s father lost his job on the mines in Gauteng and returned home. On his return, he could not find employment. Dudu said that this was just an excuse because her father had turned down many offers of road construction jobs by the LSDI, claiming that this was “women’s work”. The growing numbers of women on the road construction teams in the Mbaswana area were conspicuous. Dudu said that this was because the developers had realised that unlike men, women were strong, able workers in her “culture”. Dudu contemptuously exclaimed that her father only wished to “talk politics” with other men all day long. Dudu only dated men from other areas because she did not want her son to grow up as lazy as the men of Mbaswana.

Women were content to subscribe to the legal fiction of male dominance and left public political power in the hands of men, secure in the knowledge that men’s status had been underwritten by women’s labour. As one woman remarked with a smug expression, “let them talk, we’ll see if anything happens”.

Even in cases of domestic violence, women were not passive victims. When women at the Ubumbano craft market spoke about domestic violence, they often recalled how they had retaliated by using kitchen utensils, brooms and sticks. Some boasted how

they had almost “broken a man’s head” or “chased him out of the house”. On one occasion, a group of crafters at Ubumbano pointed a man out to me, whom they called umChunku. There was general merriment as they recalled how a group of them had beaten umChunku to within an inch of his death after he had stolen food from one of the women. UmChunku suffered brain damage because of the beatings and could not work again. He wandered about in the area, picking up papers. Laughing, Elsie exclaimed, “Now he asks very nicely if he wants something- even the old pineapples that we throw out. He won’t steal from us again!” The average woman in Maputaland did not fit the middle-class stereotype of a submissive housewife meekly accepting her husband or boyfriend’s beatings.

Women’s marriages also differed substantially from the middle-class ideal envisioned by the developers. Sexual exclusivity in a marriage was not the norm and marital relationships were characterised by hostility, suspicion and mutual antagonism. On the one hand, employed men saw themselves as struggling to survive in a world where they were surrounded by a sea of ever-needy women¹¹. Kehla lamented that “all they want is just money, money, money”. At the Ubumbano craft market, this was certainly characteristic of young women’s motivations for going out with men. Women like Dudu were often saddled with childcare obligations from an early age and could not afford to have purely “romantic” relationships. Their decisions to start or break off a relationship with a man were by necessity heavily influenced by the economic contribution he could make to the household. On the other hand, many men lost their jobs

¹¹ Ferguson’s (1999: 166-206) study of urban mineworkers on the Zambian Copperbelt showed that women’s dependence upon the remittances of male migrant labourers caused resentment among men. In this context, the family became a site of political struggle and the locus of micro-political contestations

and were likely to remain unemployed. These men were often dependent on women's earnings. Their wives and daughters became resentful of these men and called them lazy.

The LSDI expected that the women they targeted in the Ubumbano craft project lived in "stable" households. This made it possible for the LSDI to claim that they were developing a "community". The fiction of a stable, harmonious community living some distance from the craft market, informed the LSDI's notion that the trainees would in turn train others. Supposing that the women formed part of an integrated community of stable households, the developers believed that the women would want to "develop" others in that community so that all of them would benefit. The LSDI also believed that the skills they taught at their workshops would become part of the bank of local knowledge, which could be supplement in their future workshops.

In reality, a large majority of households at the Ubumbano craft market showed considerable flux in both composition and location¹². A survey of 131 households at the market found that thirty-six (27%) comprised of a husband, wife and their children; twenty-two (17%) were composed of a woman and her children; and seventy-three (56%) could be classified as extended family households. This seemed like a neat categorisation. However, in subsequent interviews, I found that most households were in perpetual flux, with the composition of their members changing frequently. For instance, when I asked Philisiwe Mdluli in June 2000 about her household, she was living with two brothers, a sister-in-law and her children, her mother and her own two sons. Six months later, one of Philisiwe's brothers had moved to Pongola, leaving his wife and children behind.

between wage-earning men and others making claims on their wage-earning potential (Ferguson 1999: 192-206).

¹² Spiegel et al (1996) question the supposed naturalness of nuclear households and points to the actual fluidity of household compositions in Cape Town.

Philisiwe's one son went to live with his grandmother. In December 2000 another change took place when Philisiwe's brother returned home from Johannesburg.

Due to the harsh economic conditions in the region, the volatility of male-female relationships and the ravages of AIDS, many households dispersed their dependants over large family networks in times of crises (See Spiegel, Watson and Wilkinson 1996: 7-30). This strategy required that the boundaries of the household remained permeable, allowing household members to move in and out of the house, as economic and social conditions required.

For instance, when Philisiwe's brother returned from Johannesburg with AIDS, he required much care and attention¹³. Since he came home, they slaughtered two cows, seven goats and many chickens in rituals aimed at healing him. They also paid consultation fees for a herbalist and three western doctors. Apart from the financial cost, Philisiwe's burdens of physical care and household duties increased considerably. She had to contend with visitors at all hours of the day that wanted to talk to the sick man or pray for him. Few of these visitors brought food and Philisiwe had to constantly carry tea and refreshments to them. In anticipation of these financial burdens, Philisiwe sent her son to live with his grandmother "to look after her". The boy collected firewood and water for his grandmother. In return, she fed and clothed him and also paid his school fees. To help pay for some of the bills, Philisiwe's brother went to work in Pongola. The household was thus "shuffled" so that it was geared towards the sick man's care. Similar shuffling took place in situations of dire economic need. In these circumstances, it was usually the children in a household that were placed with other family members. Other

times, a family member with a job from another household was placed in a household with no wage-earning adults.

Thus most households showed considerable flux and "movement". In a certain sense, my findings about Maputaland conforms to Moore and Vaughan's (1994: 225) argument that the household is a nexus of overlapping interests and activities, whose sometimes temporary coherence is an achievement rather than a pre-given fact.

In this context, the LSDI's conceptions of a community and the dispersal of knowledge were fundamentally flawed. They were not working with stable "households" combining their efforts to achieve common goals. Instead, they were training individuals whose household membership was transient and dependent on their economic contributions to it. As such, women did not merely compete with one another, but also with other households. This became abundantly clear when the LSDI trainees refused to train others and kept the information secret. The LSDI's hope that their future workshops would just be able to "build on" the previous ones was also naïve in the context of the great mobility of most women. In order to "develop" all women at the craft market through their workshops, the LSDI would thus have to have constant, parallel workshops.

Conclusion

Even though men and women in Maputaland occupied separate domains of action that roughly overlapped with the public/ domestic dichotomy, women were not disempowered or devalued by virtue of their association with the domestic sphere. Within the domestic

¹³ Since men often fall ill and die first, women and children usually have to cope with the increased burden of caring for the sick, and take on greater responsibility for earning money and providing food

sphere women were autonomous and did not allow men to make decisions for them.

Women took pride in the notion that they were “doers” whilst men were “talkers”.

Women enforced the boundaries of the domestic sphere by ridiculing and violently attacking men who tried to interfere with their affairs.

In this society, the link between women and agriculture (food) had been in existence for a long time. As such, women were responsible for the reproduction of the household and also of the society at large. Since the area was well known for its poor soils, its unpredictable rainfall and diseases and pests, women could generally not rely on agriculture alone to provide in their households' subsistence needs. During apartheid, subsistence in this area became even more precarious as the available land for agriculture shrank due to population relocations. In this context, women diversified their economic activities to spread their risks. Women's networks of reciprocal help played a fundamental role in this diversification process and provided a source of security for many women. Central to the success of women's networks was that they were "informal", dispersed and allowed "savings". The enormous economic importance of these networks made women more reliant on other women than on men. For this reason, there was not a large discrepancy between the incomes of female-headed and male-headed households at the Ubumbano craft market.

Development projects inappropriately projected ideas about Western middle-class women onto the local setting. The developers assumed that the male representatives of women's groups actually represented and controlled these women's activities. The LSDI and KZN Wildlife thus believed that John Mlambo knew what was going on at the Ubumbano craft market, and that he could exercise authority over the women who

(Cassam 1991:113-116; Mullins 2000:5; Obbo 1995: 167-168, 177).

worked there. The decisions that John took on behalf of the women showed just how little he knew about the market. Furthermore, developers hoped that women would "settle down" to a single economic activity such as craft production under the auspices of their patronage. Development projects thus partitioned the women's domain into separate "activities". Craft work, subsistence agriculture and care work became "professions" and the women participating in these projects were discouraged from doing anything else. These initiatives halted the flow of women's activities across dispersed networks, and undermined their economic security. Most of these projects did not deliver anything more than a subsistence income (or less). Since most development projects had a fixed number of participants, women could not give others access to these projects. This made the participants in development projects of little use to the networks.