



Chapter 3

Different sectors,
different challenges



Chapter 3: Different sectors, different challenges

Traditional medicine traders, mealie (corn on the cob) cooks and cardboard collectors have very little in common as far as their business requirements go: one group needs 'passing feet', space to display goods and in some cases privacy; another needs to be able to build large wood fires and distribute their goods throughout the inner city; yet another brings its goods to a central depot and needs a place to weigh and store them. To optimise these and other similar businesses the Project designed sector-specific interventions.

It is clear, in these instances – as in most others in Warwick – that the livelihoods of traders are best advanced by first understanding how trade is carried out in each sector and then by designing interventions to meet specific needs.

This chapter details the challenges that faced the Project team as it developed this sectoral approach. It shows why an area-based, inter-departmental and consultative approach was critical to its success, and how the businesses of traders improved as a result of this.

The Traditional Medicine Market: The first major sector-based initiative

Writing for the Sunday Times, architect Silberman placed the Traditional Medicine Market under the banner of 'the Best of the Century'. She states:

This is one of the first South African structures which addresses – and celebrates – the informal traders who have come to dominate our city centres.

Sunday Times, 19 December 1999

As the description in Chapter 1 indicates, the *Muthi* Market is one of the most fascinating parts of Warwick, steeped in traditions and customs and with a quiet and focused atmosphere. It is also a very visible sign of the recognition of traditional medicine traders and healers who – for nearly a century – fought for the right to bring traditional healing into the city. They were harassed and repressed by local authorities, who in 1957 passed the Witchcraft Suppression Act, which made it impossible to trade openly. Only in the 1980s did traders begin to return to the streets, although they were still faced with the hostility of the local officials that all street traders faced at the time.

In reflecting back on the past one trader commented:

Then trading conditions were very bad. You couldn't sit where you wanted to sit. The police would come and take all of your stuff. You couldn't trade on the street but we still did. Now everyone has got a site to trade, that's the big, big, big difference.

Traditional medicine trader

Muthi suppliers, traders and healers

The *muthi* trade involves large numbers of herbs, roots, bulbs, bark and other plants as well as animal products such as fats, skins and carcasses. The three main groups involved in the trade are suppliers, herbalists who trade in these products, and *izinyanga* and 'sangomas', who specialise in medical and spiritual healing.

It requires great knowledge and skill to identify the countless numbers of traditional medicines, to grind or mix them and to dispense them appropriately. Treatments and preparation techniques have been practised and passed down from generation to generation for centuries and a rigorous training process is required where trainees serve as apprentices to healers for long periods.





The Traditional Medicine Market

WORKING AS A TRADITIONAL MEDICINE TRADER

Nonhlanhla Zuma

Nonhlanhla Zuma is a 64 year old traditional medicine trader who lives about 40 kilometres away from the city and travels to work each day in a taxi. She has known Warwick since 1982 and began trading in the years of severe harassment when she would have to run from the police and watch her goods being removed. It would take months to build up the stock she had lost. As restrictions slowly lifted she worked along an exposed street pavement where there was a constant risk of her goods being damaged or stolen. At the time the city provided no basic amenities for traders.

In 1998 Nonhlanhla moved into the *Muthi* Market where she finally had shelter, water and toilets. More recently she moved her business to a kiosk in Brook Street that has water and lighting and a roll-up metal door that she can lock at night. This kiosk is close to her friends in the *Muthi* Market. She feels this is important as she and other traders have built up high levels of trust and support for one another. If she does not have a product she refers her customer to someone who does sell it, or she may even pick it up and sell it on behalf of the other trader.

The kiosk has made a great difference to Nonhlanhla's business. She has more trading space and, with lock-up facilities she no longer has to limit her stock to the quantities that can be moved and stored in the general storage facilities. Both of these factors have greatly improved her income. She estimates that the stock that she can now lock away in the kiosk is worth R30 000 and that on a good week she would have a turnover of up to R7 000.



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The disused freeway off-ramps that became the Traditional Medicine Market

Early work with the *muthi* traders

As Nonhlanhla Zuma's account of her life shows, trading conditions before the market was established were congested, unhealthy and dangerous. As there was no storage, many traders protected their goods by sleeping alongside them. Any specialised market for traders would, at the very least, have to remedy these conditions and would have to provide spaces for the different types of activities carried out in the trade.

Chapter 2 mentions the early work done by the health department to introduce health awareness and minimum health requirements. An official in the department had compiled a preliminary database of traders and documented what infrastructure traders preferred. The health department had also begun working with the 12 different traditional medicine traders' organisations. A committee of traders had been established to negotiate with officials on matters of concern, such as the conservation of plants and animals used for medicinal purposes. This same committee represented the traders in the building of the market.

All this provided a solid base on which the Project could build.

ESTIMATES FOR THE TRADITIONAL MEDICINE SECTOR

- Nearly 80% of black South Africans are estimated to use traditional medicine often in parallel with biomedicine.
- In total over 30 000 people in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province were estimated to work in the traditional medicine sector in 2003, mainly rural women harvesting from communal lands.
- Over 8 000 of these gatherers sell their goods to traders in Durban.
- R61 million worth of medicinal plant material is traded in KZN annually, mainly in Durban.
- Over 700 plant species are traded in South Africa.
- 4 500 tons of plant material is traded annually in KZN, with 1 500 tons traded in Durban alone. The total for KZN is about a third of the value of maize harvest in the province.

Drawn from Mander (1998) and Institute for Natural Resources (2003)

Funding for capital works

When the council gave the go-ahead for the construction of the market in 1997 it was a signal that it had accepted both *muthi* traders and the informal economy as a permanent feature in the city. The market was developed in phases and took two years to complete at a cost of R4 million. At the time no other local authority was considering an informal economy investment of this magnitude but, with a turnover of R170 million in the first year of trading, the investment was more than justified: traders had demonstrated their significant contribution to the local economy.

Finding a location for the market

Finding an unused space in such a congested area was a huge challenge, but an essential first step. Several people claim to have had the 'brilliant' idea to build the market on the unused flyovers described in Chapter 1 and to link it to the Music Bridge, via a pedestrian bridge. Whoever the suggestion came from, it was the solution that the Project was looking for.

It was the key that unlocked the spatial congestion experienced in the District. In addition, because this was previously unutilized space, the construction sequence was seamless.

Project leader

As the photograph on page 68 shows, the spurs were originally dirty and unsafe, inhabited by traders (who were often harassed by authorities) in very temporary shelters.

THE TASK TEAM FOR THIS PROJECT CONSISTED OF OFFICIALS FROM:

- Architectural Services
- City Health
- Informal Trade and Small Business Opportunities
- Markets
- Traffic and Transportation
- Warwick Junction Project Team.





An aerial view of the Traditional Medicine Market

Designing the market

There was no precedent to help guide the design of this market. The implementation team approached this task through a combination of observation, snap surveys and consultation, all of which contributed to an appropriate market design.

A lot of time was spent observing the dynamics of the trade: how were products delivered and stored; how were they processed and displayed; did the use of space change at different times of day? For example when business was slow some traders used sunny areas to dry out their plant material while at busier times their sites were converted back to display goods to passers-by. An important consideration was whether the traders relied on lots of pedestrians or whether customers would actively seek out the market for a specific purpose.

The team noticed that traders used the pavement space to chop and crush the plant products, so any surfaces for the new market would have to be robust enough to withstand this type of treatment.

Another challenge was to find out how many traders the new market should cater for.

The area manager conducted a snap survey of who traded in the area and the pavement space used for trading was measured. Lots of photographs were taken which were later useful for resolving conflicts about which traders were present where.

DITSBO commissioned the work and the implementation team provided area-based facilitation and led the ground-level consultation process with the traders.

Consulting

Team members were very conscious of the need to design a market that catered for all the factors that made for a successful trade. This was not possible without extensive consultation and a detailed understanding of the trade, so a multi-departmental consultation team, with a broad range of skills, was set up. It consulted widely and fed information back to the design team.

Before getting final feedback and consensus, the Project team went to a lot of trouble to make sure that traders had a good sense of what they would be getting. They presented architects' plans in the form of a large model constructed out of cardboard. There were on-site demonstrations and, where possible, traders were shown examples of similar infrastructure in other parts of the market.

Consultations included mass meetings, meetings with leaders and

individual meetings. The team worked on the principle that all voices should be heard, so if certain groups or individuals were silent at meetings Project staff often went to speak to these people at their sites.

Through the work of SEWU the women, who constituted the majority of traders, were a much stronger presence in the consultation process. This was a feature that extended to projects throughout Warwick and meant that issues that might have been overlooked by male traders were brought to the forefront.

Project leader

Trader leaders in particular spent a lot of time convincing traders to support the proposal so it was critical that they were not undermined through the ill-considered changing of ideas.

The process moved forward incrementally as details were discussed and approved at each step. Once the overall idea had been accepted the Project worked on the details of the stalls and then had another consultation round to discuss the way that traders wanted to display their goods. In such instances a full scale mock-up was used to demonstrate, for example, different display options. When big decisions had to be taken, traders were given time to reflect and come back to the next meeting with feedback. Particularly at the start, the approach of the Project was to reach consensus no matter how long it took.

It was a slow process, but one that avoided costly mistakes, as the team found that if consultations broke down there was inevitably a substantial reason for this.

The final product

When it was completed the market provided:

- 232 roofed stalls along the length of the space, each about 6 square metres.
- 103 open-air spaces about 2 square metres each.
- 48 semi-enclosed *izinyanga* kiosks with metal roll-down doors that could be locked. (There is more about kiosks in Chapter 4.)
- Basic services – such as water taps and toilets.
- Lockup storage – the market itself is locked at night and patrolled by a security guard. This means that traders do not have to sleep at their sites to guard their goods.

The construction materials used were mostly treated timber poles and pre-painted corrugated metal sheeting.





Allocating sites for the new market

Once sites were ready to be allocated, it was clear that there were going to be more traders wanting space in the market than the Project had catered for. Some had not registered on the database compiled by the health officials; others emerged from isolated parts of the city, wanting a site; and seasonal trading also skewed numbers.

Eventually the traders decided to hold a public 'roll call' to identify those who had been long-standing traders – and would therefore qualify for a site. The roll call took a day as an official called out names one by one and traders stood up to be identified. Contested decisions were set down for negotiation and others simply accepted the decision of the community. A council official described the event:

There was a general air of understanding and the day passed without incident – a tribute to the community's involvement with, and commitment to, the Project.

The Project leader explains the eventual solution to the thorny issue of who was assigned which site.

The next challenge was who goes where? Clearly, there were some stalls that were considered more prime than others. At one meeting, and mostly out of desperation, I started brainstorming stall allocation options. One was to put all the names in a 'hat' with stall numbers in another, the idea being that the traders would have their names drawn and matched to a stall.

I can still recall the mass groan of utter disapproval at this suggestion! What I had not realized was how important past relationships from the pavement days were. You depended on your neighbour for survival on the streets. In hindsight it is embarrassingly obvious!

So, the eventual stall allocation generally retained the relationships that had existed before the move, which I believe contributed to the harmonious transition into the new market.

Combining sector support with the protection of natural resources

An innovative and exciting project developed between *muthi* traders, DITSBO and the Institute for Natural Resources. Its aim was to provide economically informed sector support while at the same time protecting natural resources that were being stripped as a result of the trade.

The Institute was commissioned to analyse all stages in the production process for *muthi* products and to make suggestions to the city and the province about how best to support traders in this sector. A major concern was that the natural reserves of *muthi* products were and are being denuded. For example, wild ginger and the pepper-bark tree, both popular for the preparation of medicine, are now extinct outside of protected areas in KwaZulu-Natal.

Having conducted a careful analysis of the chain of activities from start to finish, the researchers identified possible interventions at the point of cultivation or gathering of popular products and improvements in processing and marketing.

The council, alongside provincial government, established a project that included:

- Training gatherers in sustainable harvesting techniques. This led to the establishment of a bark harvesters' association, the first of its kind in South Africa.
- Setting up a medicinal plant nursery to produce seedlings for farmers and to train traditional healers in growing methods.
- Setting up five additional pilot nurseries to produce seedlings for subsistence food crops and landscaping plants that are bought by the municipality's landscaping department.
- Experimenting with improved processing, packaging and marketing so as to service existing customers better, and enter into new national and international markets.

Looking back

The market was a significant achievement. It improved the working conditions of traders and gave them much greater recognition. It also raised the standing of the Project in the eyes of both previously distrustful street traders and the council; and opened up possibilities for new initiatives. Officials realised the importance of their contribution in the construction of a market that was unique in South Africa. They had gained new insights that would influence their work in future projects and had become more enthusiastic about their involvement in the Project.





Mealie cooking conditions prior to project interventions

Cooked mealies: a hazardous trade with a high turnover

A few years back it was calculated that in mealie season between 120 and 140 people were involved in this activity and between 26 and 28 tons of mealies were sold on Durban's inner city streets a day. The gross turnover from this informal activity was calculated as over R1 million a week.

Former trading conditions

The method used for boiling mealies involves building large wood fires around 200 litre steel drums – a potentially dangerous process if carried out along sidewalks filled with pedestrians. Initially, however, this is where it took place. If the Project had not found a solution to this the council would have had to close down an activity that was making a substantial contribution to the economy as well as providing a low cost fast food.

The mealie cooks operated from three areas in Warwick, two on paved sidewalks and the other from a large vacant site. The heat from the fires damaged the pavements and ash and mealie leaves clogged up the storm water drains. The vacant site was saturated with the wastewater and a potential health risk. The mealie cooks needed to be relocated. An interdepartmental task team was put together to work with the cooks to find a solution.

The story of how a solution was found that satisfied both the mealie cooks and the municipality makes for interesting reading.

The 'cook-off'

THE TASK TEAM FOR THIS PROJECT CONSISTED OF OFFICIALS FROM:

- Architectural and Building
- City Health
- Emergency Services (Fire)
- Real Estate
- Storm Water Management
- Urban Design
- Warwick Junction Project Team.

Understanding the cooking process

Before attempting to find a solution it was necessary to understand the whole process of cooking mealies. In one of the first meetings with the cooks the Project leader designed a process to help him with this. Using beans to symbolise the mealies, little plastic containers for the drums and matches for firewood, the mealie sellers took him through all the stages involved in cooking their mealies.

The first problem to address was the use of open wood fires and the team suggested using low-pressure gas instead. The cooks were adamant that this would not work and when explanations failed, they suggested an experiment where they would cook on their fires and a Project member would use gas.

This 'cook-off' was to determine the future of inner city mealie cooking.

A 'recipe' for bulk mealie cooking

- Pack 13 dozen (156 mealies) into the drum and put in 50 litres of fresh water.
- Add 45 grams of bicarbonate of soda.
- Build a very hot wood fire, large enough to surround a 200 litre steel drum. Cover the top of the drum with a polythene bag and bring to the boil.
- Boil for one and a quarter hours.
- Remove mealies and place into large poly bags.
- Place these bags inside other larger bags and fill the space between the two bags with some of the boiling water.
- Place the bags in a supermarket trolley ready for hawking throughout the inner city.



Mealie cooking at the new site

The 'cook-off' took place on the vacant site with a group of cooks, the Project leader and some officials from the task team. The women had agreed to provide all the necessities for the experiment, with the exception of the gas. They paid someone to deliver the two 200 litre drums to the site, both filled with 50 litres of water. A second operator delivered firewood and kindling. Barrow operators brought the fresh mealies. Finally the mealie cook arrived with her supermarket trolley and polythene bags, two of which were used to cover the tops of the drums.

Once the drums were packed, one was placed on the top of the gas burner and connected to a 40 kilogram bottle of gas and the other on the wood. The kindling and the gas burner were lit.

In 20 minutes the water in the mealie cook's drum was boiling while the gas heated water was only lukewarm at the bottom. The mealie cooks had proved their point. The Project leader described the demonstration as "polite, non-verbal and utterly conclusive".

The cooking process was finally understood as a result of an innovative suggestion that arose from the mealie cooks and that the Project team was prepared to engage with. A final solution to what was becoming an intractable negotiation was only reached because the team respected this knowledge and experience.

Another reason why the matter was finally resolved was that a high level of trust had already been developed between the two parties. This had been achieved through numerous consultations. As a result the women were prepared to demonstrate the process, trusting that the Project team would be prepared to change its proposed solution if necessary.

A solution to pavement cooking

Once the process was understood the municipality agreed that the wood fires could continue, provided the cooks relocated to a safer part of Warwick away from shops and pedestrians. A portion of municipal owned land was set aside and fenced. The Project team designed a system of grates, fixed to the drainage outlet, that stopped the leaves and ash from entering the underground pipes. Its simple yet robust design enabled the cooks to maintain this system. Since wood smokes less when it is dry, a wood shelter was constructed. This helped to reduce the air pollution generated by cooking mealies. In total the facility cost R65 000.

Working in Warwick: Cooking and Selling Mealies

WORKING AS A MEALIE COOK

Tandekile Ngcobo

Tandekile Ngcobo is 46 years old and has been in the business of cooking mealies in Warwick for over 20 years. When she started cooking she was in what she describes as an 'awkward space' near one of the bus ranks. She is now operating out of the area provided for mealie cooks. She says 'Although it took them a long time, they have now built us a good place for cooking'.

She explained how in 1999 there were a number of meetings with council officials about mealie trading. When she recalled the day of the 'cook-off' she laughed and laughed. She said:

The gas took a long time to start burning whereas the firewood was quick. We were actually a bit disappointed because we were excited about using gas. The idea of using gas seemed more modern.

When they moved to the new facility there were two groups of mealie cooks who did not know each other. She explained how at first they would quarrel a lot but that now this was largely forgotten – 'we really support each other'. When they first moved into the facility there were 44 cooks but she explained that 10 of her peers have since died.

On the whole Tandekile is satisfied with the new vicinity for the cooks although she says that the council should now build an extra shelter so the cooks are better protected from the sun and rain.

She explained how mealie cooks bought mealies from traders who buy them directly from farmers all over the province. The vans now come to the facility so they no longer have to employ barrow operators to fetch the mealies. Mealies used to be available only from November to April but since 2004 are available all year round.

Tandekile employs two people to hawk her mealies around the town. In season mealies are sold for R5 and in the off season for R6 each. On a busy day Tandekile can expect to sell about 60 mealies. On hot days people don't buy as many mealies and she only sells about 40.

With the profits from mealie cooking she has managed to educate her children. One child is currently at university. She and one other income earner in her household, support eight children and one grandchild.



With the profits from mealie cooking Tandekile Ngcobo has managed to educate her children.



Cardboard collectors waiting to sell materials salvaged from the neighbourhood

Cardboard collectors: dealing with exploitation

Informal cardboard collectors operate at the bottom of a chain of employment. They supply larger collectors who in turn deliver the paper to be recycled by large formal recycling companies – in this case the multinational paper company, Mondi. The problems associated with this sector presented the Project with a set of challenges quite unlike those posed by other sectors.

Working conditions for cardboard collectors

Cardboard collectors are amongst the poorest of informal operators yet are very visible presences in the city, searching for waste and carrying or wheeling their large bundles to a depot. Working throughout the inner city and its surrounds, over 500 women and men collect about 30 tons of cardboard a day, yet their value to the city and its environment had gone largely unrecognised.

In the mid-1990s the Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU) started organising cardboard collectors. SEWU approached the Project staff, outlining a number of the problems the women faced. They found that the person purchasing the cardboard from the collectors often paid them much less than the market value. He insisted on weighing the goods at the end of the day, often at twilight, when it was difficult to read the scale. In addition few of these women were numerate and some suffered from substance addiction and were thus vulnerable to being exploited.

The collection point used by this middleman was in Brook Street and since the collectors had nowhere to store their goods during the day, cardboard was left along the pavements all round this area. This caused an urban management problem as the goods obstructed pedestrians.

Improving working conditions and livelihoods

The Project assembled a team of officials to assess the trading conditions in this sector and to find a way of helping the collectors break the cycle of poverty in which they worked and lived. As a start the team established a database of people and activities involved in the collecting. They also looked at the commercial buy-back centres used by the Keep Durban Beautiful Association¹² and linked up with a waste minimisation campaign driven by Durban Solid Waste. This campaign not only wanted to minimise waste going into the landfill site but also to recognise that this was a livelihood for many Durban residents.

¹²This is now called the Association for Clean Communities.

The team decided to establish a buy-back centre in Brook Street as part of a public-private-community partnership. The city council provided a small plot of land, centrally located at the end of Brook Street, to set up the centre, and Mondi agreed to provide the scales, storage containers for the cardboard and trolleys for the collectors. SEWU worked alongside city officials to design the intervention and train the cardboard collectors on how to weigh their cardboard. SEWU also helped identify one of the collectors who was trained to manage the site. Through this intervention the collectors sold their cardboard directly to the recycling company.

The site was paved, fenced and gated and was only open during the day. A converted shipping container, painted with the South African flag, served as a container for the material. A scale was suspended from its doors for weighing the bundles, and cardboard could be stored overnight if necessary.

Establishing the Brook Street buy-back centre cost the city approximately R30 000, an intervention that more than doubled the (albeit still low) incomes of the waste collectors operating in the inner city.

THE TASK TEAM FOR THIS PROJECT CONSISTED OF OFFICIALS FROM:

- Architectural Services
- City Health
- Durban Solid Waste
- Informal Trade and Small Business Opportunities
- Keep Durban Beautiful Association
- Warwick Junction Project Team
- Traffic and Transportation
- Urban Design.



The cardboard buy-back centre in action

Problems encountered in implementation

The Project faced a number of problems in implementing the buy-back centre. First there was a dispute over the land. An official from the Metro Police had made an idle commitment to the taxi operators that this land would be developed into a taxi rank. This delayed implementation for over a year but was eventually resolved. Greater communication could have avoided these delays. Another problem was the reluctance of the middleman and Mondi to cooperate in this venture. The middleman strongly resisted this initiative as he stood to lose his income and Mondi refused to pick up cardboard directly from the buy-back centre because they claimed their trucks could not get through the narrow streets surrounding the centre. In addition the woman assigned to manage the site needed a cash float or bridging finance to pay the collectors.

In the end the solution was to involve the middleman in the buy-back centre. He had a small truck and could then deliver the goods directly to the recycling companies. He also agreed to put up the finance so the collectors could be paid immediately. He charged a standard mark-up for these services.

Although this initiative did not go altogether as planned, the average price paid to the collector rose from 18 to 45 cents per kilogram – an increase of 250%. This significantly improved the status of the cardboard collectors.

This Project demonstrates how a small intervention, informed by an understanding of the economics of an informal activity, can lead to a significant increase in incomes. The key factor is understanding where informal operators fit into a broader set of economic processes.

WORK AS A CARDBOARD COLLECTOR

Mpume Khumulo

Mpume Khumulo worked at a clothing factory for eight years until she was retrenched. For the past eight months she has collected cardboard in the Warwick area. Mpume starts work at 7.00 a.m. when she begins a round of the stores in the Warwick area. Sometimes the owners of the stores keep boxes aside for her but she also looks for boxes along the pavements and outside stores.

The work is tiring, she says, but bearable, 'because at home we do just as much'. However, there are aspects of the work that she enjoys. As she puts it:

I enjoy my working days because I work for myself at my own pace. It is just me and my cardboard. There is nobody who bothers me. I do not have to report to anyone.

Mpume's earnings fluctuate. Fridays and Saturdays are good days for collections and she can bring in about R120 but there are not many boxes from Monday to Thursday when she is lucky if she gets R70 a day.

Of her earnings, Mpume says, 'it is better than nothing'. One of her children receives a disability grant¹³ and with this money and her meagre income from cardboard collecting, she supports seven children and four grandchildren.



'I enjoy my working days because I work for myself at my own pace.'

¹³In South Africa state grants are available to parents of young children and to the disabled. There is a state pension for citizens over 60.



Household goods trading outside the Early Morning Market

A closing reflection

Street traders are one point in a chain of economic activities. While they have many needs in common such as the right to operate and access to basic infrastructure, financial services and training, other requirements vary depending on the nature of their trade and their position within the chain. This chapter has used three sector-specific trades to show how diverse these requirements can be. For example, the intervention to support the work of the cardboard collectors differed enormously from that for the mealie sellers.

Any attempts to make trading more economically viable must take these diversities into account. This is a challenging process: it requires a clear and detailed understanding of each trade which in turn requires patience, a willingness to respect the knowledge and experience of traders, and mutual trust. This economic understanding needs to be supplemented with an understanding of the role of infrastructure and other services in the pursuit of the right to work.



Trading outside the Early Morning Market