Izindaba Zokudla (Conversations About Food): Innovation in the Soweto Food System

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Context.
The City of Johannesburg (CoJ) is implementing an urban agriculture policy as part of a larger food security initiative (CoJ, 2014). This policy creates opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement, and Izindaba Zokudla is aimed at creating space for such engagement between urban farmers, stakeholders and the city.
The project.
Izindaba Zokudla advocates and argues for specific approaches to urban agricultural development in Johannesburg. It draws on participatory research to build the capacity of farmers’ organisations in Johannesburg, to facilitate engagement with food enterprises in the city, and to use design and technology development as a means to improve agricultural practices.
The design process.
A process of multi-stakeholder workshops identified issues for the farmers in 2013: land tenure, training, marketing and technology. Each of these have become the focus of Izindaba Zokudla in 2014 and will be addressed in a variety of participatory design interventions.
Izindaba Zokudla is actively engaged with government (CoP, GDARD, DoE), the farmers (RDFF), academic institutions (UJ, Wits) and civil society groups (The Food Gardens Foundation) to identify issues with current policy and encourage its improvement, as well as providing opportunities for better understanding of policy for farmers on a grassroots level.
Aktivism and Civic Participation

Izindaba Zokudla has been facilitating the NPO (not for profit organisation) registration of the Region D Farmers’ Forum (a collective of 32 farming sites and 300 dependents in Soweto). Though our engagement with them, a process of participatory workshops have enabled high level politicians and farmers to meet and discuss issues face to face.

Social change through empowerment
As the project’s name suggests, Izindaba Zokudla is a conversation about how to change the current food system in Soweto, this has required active and regular interaction with farmers and other stakeholders.

Social Interactions and Relations

Conversation as opposed to soliloquy

Active regular interaction with farmers
Izindaba Zokudla is mostly focused on urban farming in Soweto, a previously marginalised township. However, the conversation expands into the inner city of Johannesburg as well as the broader Gauteng City Region since issues of food insecurity and employment are widespread.
Izinadaba Zokudla co-designs technology with farmers to sustainably increase productivity. Fresh produce is then sold through the Soweto Imvelo Market, another co-designed intervention with the farmers. This ultimately leads to increased consumption of locally produced food and provides opportunities for local entrepreneurs to enter either the urban farming or farm equipment market.
The project focuses on training farmers through farmer’s schools and through a co-designed online knowledge portal that will provide and share local, contextually relevant, farming knowledge. Additionally Industrial Design, Graphic Design, Multimedia and Development Studies students are all actively involved in service learning projects that feed into the broader aims of Izindaba Zokudla, this takes education out of the lab, into the ground.
The participatory design methods, used to develop appropriate technology with farmers, provides the opportunity for sustainable intensification and potential increased profit for farmers. This in turn provides visible evidence of urban agriculture’s feasibility for employment in the broader community and this can provide entrepreneurial opportunities for both farming and the manufacture of equipment.
Storytelling and conversation provide the opportunity for visual concept ideation by both expert designers and farmers. This is then re-evaluated and refined through physical prototyping in multiple iterative stages to result in the most viable outcome for the specific context and issue at hand.