

## Shielding Rural Migrants from Unemployment-induced Poverty: The Informal Prickly Pear Market

Sinazo Ntsonge and Gavin Fraser\*

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Economics and Economic History, Rhodes University,  
Makhanda, South Africa*

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**ABSTRACT** This study highlighted the role that an informal market plays in shielding unemployed rural migrants in urban areas from unemployment-induced poverty using the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (NMBM) informal Prickly Pear Market as a case study. The purpose of this study was to show how earnings from self-employment or informal employment can be effective in reducing poverty. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework was used as the theoretical basis for unpacking the household socioeconomic factors that influenced the informal prickly pear marketers' decision to engage in the market. The study found that despite the prickly pear's short-term availability, the income was channelled towards school supplies and sustained households during the month in addition to social grants, especially after the grant income had finished. The study aimed to revive interest in the *Opuntia ficus-indica* species, as one of the ways by which poverty can be reduced in the Eastern Cape.

### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of people migrating to cities is often a response to 'push factors' in their areas of origin, and 'pull factors' in the more developed regions to which they migrate (Adepoju 1995). The distinction between push and pull determinants of migration is that the former results from poor socio-economic circumstances in the areas that people migrate from, while pull factors refer to the perceived economic opportunities in the more developed migration destinations (Thet 2014). In South Africa, a politically motivated migration event was that of forced removals of people from their places of birth to different residential townships and tribally based 'homelands' according to race under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Kgatla 2013). Although after 1994, these restrictions were rescinded, the majority of elderly black people remain in the former homelands while the younger generations have been migrating to the urban areas in search of better educational, employment, and lifestyle opportunities (Roodt 2018).

Unemployment rates, using the expanded and narrow definitions, between the rural and urban areas within the Eastern Cape were compared to assess whether there were any differences which would lend credence to the notion

that migration is beneficial for economic reasons (International Organisation for Migration 2005). Using the expanded definition of unemployment to compare unemployment rates between the Nelson Mandela Bay and the surrounding rural areas, it was found that there were less discouraged workers in the Bay compared to the rural regions (International Organisation for Migration 2005). This pattern highlights the phenomenon of people migrating due to observed income differences between rural and urban areas (Todaro 1982). People observe the relatively high levels of development in urban areas and rationalize that the probability of securing a job in an urban area is higher compared to work opportunities in rural areas (Todaro 1982). However, despite having high hopes for employment in urban areas, rural migrants are often also met by high levels of unemployment in urban areas (International Organisation for Migration 2005). Nevertheless, people from rural areas continue to migrate, often subjecting themselves to the unhygienic living conditions in informal settlements which they perceive to be temporary or transitional, as they remain hopeful that their economic and living conditions will improve once they find employment (Turok 2015). Taking a dichotomous view of informal settlements reveals that they can either be ladders to work, or poverty traps when the occupants fail to obtain the jobs they had hoped for (Turok 2015). This view of informal settlements as affordable

\*Address for correspondence:  
E-mail: g.fraser@ru.ac.za

entry points into the urban space from which migrants can progress economically as they acquire skills and secure gainful employment, suggests that the conditions of poverty that influenced their move are temporary and can be fixed by simply moving to an urban area. However, considering the possibility that they may never find the jobs they desire, or at least not immediately once they get to the urban areas, the role of informal markets in shielding these unemployed people from poverty needs to be explored.

This paper analyses the influence that unemployment has on people's decision to migrate from the rural areas situated on the outskirts of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, into the metropolitan area. By means of a case study of the prickly pear informal market, this paper aims to highlight how the economic outcomes of rural migrants in the municipality deviate from previous economic models that viewed rural-urban migration as a socially beneficial process that drove the urban industrial complex through cheap labour from rural areas (Turok 2015). Due to cheap labour supply exceeding demand as well as the structural nature of unemployment, not only in the Eastern Cape but in South Africa as a whole, many of the people who migrate to urban areas in search of jobs mostly end up in informal markets as street traders (Seekings 2014; Masanja 2018). By highlighting the importance of the 'second economy' by way of assessing the importance of the informal prickly pear market to livelihoods, the objective of this paper is to illustrate that rural-urban migration can still be beneficial towards livelihood improvement, even outside the context of formal employment in industries.

### **Racial Composition of South Africa's Unemployment**

South Africa's unemployment levels are counted amongst the highest in a comparison of developing and emerging market economies (The South African 2016). Further assessment of the unemployment rate by race reveals that Black South Africans are more represented in unemployment statistics compared to the other races (Stats SA 2019). Compared to only 7.6 percent of unemployed White people in the fourth quarter of 2018, the number of unemployed Black

South Africans was quoted as 30.4 percent while for Coloureds it was 21.6 percent (Stats SA 2019). The high rates of unemployment among Black Africans is largely because of the apartheid regime which was abolished only 27 years ago. One of the lingering effects of apartheid are the effects of its education system which administered inferior education to Black Africans and concentrated skills training in the hands of White people (Wolpe 1972). As a result, Black people who experienced it are still unable to benefit from work opportunities available to them in the post-1994 era, since they lack the relevant work-related skills (Seekings 2014).

Unemployment levels in the Eastern Cape also showed a skewness towards Black Africans. The Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Review and Outlook reported the 2016 unemployment rates amongst the different races as 30.1 percent for Black Africans, 24 percent for Coloureds, 4.8 percent for Whites, and 0 percent for Indians/Asians (DEDEAT 2017). The high levels of unemployment amongst Black Africans in the Eastern Cape were attributed to the in-migration of relatively unskilled people coming from the surrounding rural areas into the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality (DEDEAT 2017). The lack of industry-relevant skills amongst those migrating from rural areas meant they could not take advantage of the job opportunities that were presented to them (Mbatha and Roodt 2014). As a result, unemployment rates continue to rise in urban areas owing to the influx of job hopefuls migrating from rural areas (DEDEAT 2017). Emerging literature on informal markets has revealed the role of the commercialisation of natural resources in providing an income source for migrants to sustain themselves in the interim, as they struggle to find employment in the urban areas (Ah Goo and de Wit 2015).

### **The Role of Informal Markets in Shielding Rural Migrants from Unemployment-induced Poverty**

Migrants into urban areas are more likely to end up in informal markets or unemployed than in casual or permanent jobs in the formal sector, compared to local urbanites who have permanent residence (Mbatha and Roodt 2014). Various 'street markets' exist in urban areas where

people sell medicinal plants, fruits and vegetables, operating shoe repair stalls by the sides of the road and selling cooked food from makeshift kiosks in taxi ranks, (Kepe 2007). Although people's reasons for engaging in informal markets vary, the main motivation is often unemployment (Mlambo 2018).

Most informal market activities are characterised as 'survivalist', since participants usually have little to no other income-earning options to support their livelihoods. Moreover, since the financial gains from trading informally are typically low, the income is usually supplementary, and the informal trade is pursued in conjunction with other income generating activities in the household (Shackleton et al. 2011). Etim and Daramola (2020) corroborated the claims of informal markets being instrumental in providing unemployed youth and women with the means to survive until labour absorption by the formal sector improves.

Due to the structural nature of the unemployment amongst rural migrants owing to low levels of education and sometimes the advanced ages of those who typically participate in these informal markets, household income diversification usually consists largely of state social grants<sup>1</sup> as the most stable source of household income (Ah Goo and de Wit 2015). In households that consist of other people who are of working age, the livelihood portfolio is more diversified as each household member can pursue other income-earning activities as a key strategy in reducing poverty levels in the household (Ncube 2012). As one of the means by which households diversify their livelihoods, informal trading is sometimes also pursued by those in urban areas during times of economic crisis in the household, such as when the household head or breadwinner is laid off work (Shackleton and Shackleton 2011).

Despite the positive aspects of informal trading in supporting the livelihoods of the unemployed, informal markets are often stigmatized for destroying the aesthetics of the city, with claims of trading stalls creating a cluttered environment along the cities' street pavements (Setsabi and Leduka 2008). Arguments against informal street market stalls are even more intensified in situations where those who are trading are immigrants escaping poor socio-economic

circumstances in their countries of origin (Gamiendien and van Niekerk 2017). The displeasure towards foreign nationals operating in informal markets has often led to violent xenophobic attacks which have been attributed to the perceived threat that foreign nationals steal economic opportunities from South Africans (Gamiendien and van Niekerk 2017).

Another way the importance of informal markets has been displayed is through their ability to facilitate the introduction of women into the labour force. Informal markets have especially been instrumental in assisting women who have been restricted by socio-cultural practices in some African societies which assign women the default role of homemaker alongside the male breadwinners (Tuwor and Sossou 2008). In such societies, when the male household head is no longer around, the women who were formerly housewives are often forced by economic circumstances to find ways of earning an income to support themselves and their families (Legodi and Kanjere 2015). This explains the prevalence of women in these types of markets. Since the women typically possess low levels of education because of these restrictive socio-cultural norms imposed on them, they are faced with limited options for livelihood diversification, leaving informal markets as the only option available to support themselves (Legodi and Kanjere 2015). Mabilo (2018) discussed how low education levels amongst black women have resulted in them being unable to access formal employment opportunities.

This paper aims to contribute to the growing body of literature that explores the usefulness of invasive alien species to livelihoods using the informal prickly pear market operating within the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. To this end, the specific objectives were to identify the people involved in the prickly pear market and compiling their socioeconomic profile, analyse the market value chain, to identify and discuss the people's motivations and reasons for engaging in the market, to analyse the importance of the income earned to their households, and explore some of the market opportunities and challenges met by the informal prickly pear marketers. This study aims to investigate the economic value of the informal market for the *Opuntia ficus-indica* fruit to the livelihoods of poor

people in Nelson Mandela Bay. Since literature records document the popularity of the species in the Eastern Cape in years past (Beinart and Wotshela 2003; Beinart and Wotshela 2011; Shackleton et al. 2011), this study sought to find out if the usefulness of the species could be weaponised as a viable strategy for poverty eradication in the Eastern Cape, whereby considerations could be taken to establish an agro-processing industry using the prickly pear as the raw material to produce value-added household products.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods approach. The qualitative aspect employed the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) as the theoretical framework. The SLA classifies people's livelihood capital assets into five classes, namely, human, social, physical, financial, and natural capital (DFID 1999). The socioeconomic profile of the informal prickly pear marketers, which was compiled using the primary data that was collected through interviews, assisted with the identification of the livelihood assets that the informal marketers had at their disposal. The socioeconomic characteristics of the informal marketers were categorised under each of the livelihood assets. Livelihood assets are combined to yield the desired livelihood outcomes as well as ensure sustainability of an individual or household's livelihood. The analytical approach used was interpretivist, since the study relied on interviews, observations and case studies which constituted the background literature on the topic. This approach was used to make sense of the research participants' understanding and interpretation of the world around them (Willis and Jost 2007). Interpretivism is advantageous in that any new theories or interpretations emerging from the findings, which differ from those in the literature serve to build on already existing theories on the phenomenon being studied (Thomas 2010; Bhattacharjee 2012).

The quantitative aspect mainly focused on the financial assets of the informal marketers and on estimating the average economic value of the informal prickly pear market. These calculations were performed using the income amounts

that were given by the interviewees as their gross estimated incomes over the three months of the prickly pears' availability. The income data was reported for each group of participants in the informal prickly pear market (harvesters, transporters and sellers). Following from this, the analysis of income data was narrowed down to the household level, with a table summarising each person's household income streams that were being supplemented by the prickly pear income.

### Study Area

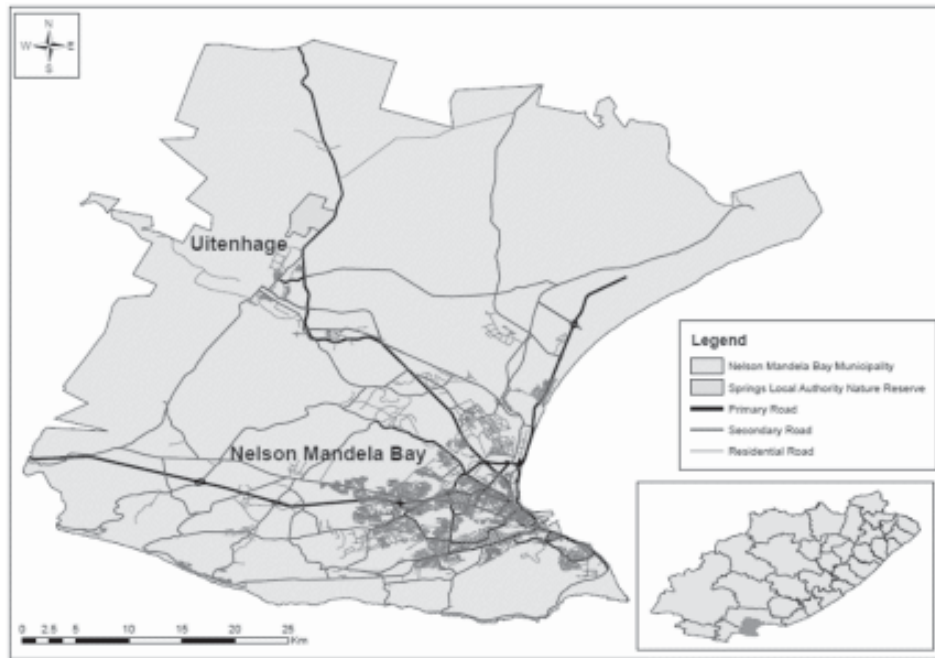
Figure 1 shows the area in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality that was covered by the study. The sellers of the prickly pears were found selling the prickly pear fruit nearby primary, secondary and residential roads. The Springs Local Authority Nature Reserve is where majority of the prickly pears were harvested since they were most abundant in that area.

### Sampling Methods

Snowball sampling is a technique that allows the researcher to access populations that are difficult to reach or hidden by taking advantage of the social networks of respondents that have already been identified (Atkinson and Flint 2001). With snowball sampling, participants that have been interviewed give the researcher the names of other potential contacts who can also provide information on the topic. The series of referrals by previous respondents supply the researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential research participants until the researcher feels the number of people selected for the study is sufficient to base a study on (Atkinson and Flint 2001). Since referrals were made by acquaintances, the researchers had to build rapport and a certain level of trust with the initial participants. This was achieved through researchers' self-disclosure which included sharing some life experiences that matched the respondents' personal stories.

### Data Collection

The interviews were conducted in the local language (IsiXhosa), which was also the researcher's mother tongue. This was to ensure that the rap-



**Fig. 1.** The area covered in the study in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality

port that had been established through the initial conversations was maintained and to allow them to share their stories without the language barrier.

The decision to interview 38 respondents was at the discretion of the researchers and because the data was beginning to reflect redundancy, which was an indication that the point of data saturation had been reached (Liamputtong 2007). The respondents were classified either as a harvester, transporter, or seller based on what they said was their main activity in the prickly pear market. None of the respondents were under the age of 18 years.

### Data Analysis

Literature outlining reasons people choose to migrate from rural to urban areas was consulted as part of secondary data. The themes discussed in the secondary data were compared with those from the primary data collected to derive a richer and context-specific interpretation of the topic under study. To account for the

observed differences in the reasons given by respondents compared to those in the secondary data, interpretive analysis was used to analyse the unique themes emerging from the primary data. Interpretivism is the way in which a researcher makes sense of research participants' understanding and interpretation of the world around them (Willis and Jost 2007). Through interviews with research participants, the researcher observes any patterns that may emerge in the responses and interprets those in the context of the social setting of the study area (Bhattacharjee 2012). Any new theories that emerge from the primary data collection process serve to build on already existing theories on the phenomenon being studied (Bhattacharjee 2012).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Gender Representation in the Market

There were more female than male informal prickly pear market participants amongst the harvesters and sellers (Table 1). This was con-

sistent with literature findings that women tend to participate more in informal markets than men (Kepe 2007; Ah Goo and De Wit 2015). Furthermore, more than half of the women interviewed across the three categories of market activities were the heads of their households. Since women often participate in informal markets as a last resort to provide for their families when the traditional male household head is no longer around, their participation in these informal markets is most often motivated by their inability to participate in the formal employment market due to low levels of education. Table 2 shows the education levels of the prickly pear informal market participants.

The overall findings on the education levels of the informal prickly pear marketers showed that the majority either had no schooling or only had a primary school education, which translated to low levels of education (Table 2). Malta et al. (2019) explained the overrepresentation of women in informal markets as being the result of

the prevailing gender gap in education between men and women especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where women are more likely to be less educated than men, thus disqualifying them from securing jobs that require skills that can be obtained through education. In the study by Ah Goo and De Wit (2015), the majority of participants in medicinal street trading were elderly and middle-aged women who had little formal education. Since there are low barriers to entry in terms of skills and education, informal trading remains one of the main ways by which women can make a living for themselves and their households (Ah Goo and De Wit 2015; Mabilo 2018). The age factor was also noted among the informal prickly pear marketers where most participants were over the age of 35 (Table 3). This echoes the argument made by Malta et al. (2019) that pregnancy and early marriage is another factor, which could also explain why most informal market participants are sometimes in the middle-aged and elderly categories.

**Table 1: Gender distribution in the informal prickly pear market in the NMBM**

	<i>Harvesters (n=20)</i>		<i>Transporters (n=3)</i>		<i>Sellers (n=15)</i>		<i>Total (n=38)</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	5	25	2	67	4	27	11	29
Female	15	75	1	33	11	73	27	71

**Table 2: Education levels of the informal prickly pear marketers in the NMBM**

	<i>Education levels</i>							
	<i>Harvesters n=20</i>		<i>Transporters n=3</i>		<i>Sellers n=15</i>		<i>Total n=38</i>	
None	7	35%	-	-	2	13%	9	24%
Primary school (Grade 1-7)	7	35%	1	33%	6	40%	14	37%
High school (Grade 8-12)	6	30%	2	67%	7	47%	15	39%

**Table 3: Age profile of NMBM informal Prickly Pear marketers**

<i>Age range</i>	<i>Age profile</i>							
	<i>Harvesters n=20</i>		<i>Transporters n=3</i>		<i>Sellers n=15</i>		<i>Total n=38</i>	
21-30yrs	2	10%	1	33%	3	20%	6	16%
31-40yrs	2	10%	-	-	2	13%	4	10%
41-50yrs	4	20%	2	67%	2	13%	8	21%
51-60yrs	7	35%	-	-	4	27%	11	29%
>60yrs	5	25%	-	-	4	27%	9	24%

### **The Dynamics of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality Informal Prickly Pear Market**

The harvesting and selling of prickly pear fruit are livelihood strategies undertaken by those that are unemployed and have limited income options to fall back on. This study aimed to highlight the contribution that the informal market makes to the household incomes of the harvesters, transporters and sellers of prickly pear fruit. Majority of the respondents had migrated from into the NMBM, which is one of the economic hubs of the Eastern Cape. Despite the classification of the respondents into one of these categories, the market activities performed were not mutually exclusive, as there were some who engaged in more than one market activity to cut costs. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework was operationalised as the lens through which the livelihood endowments of the respondents were assessed. Assessing the livelihood assets that the informal marketers have at their disposal and their inability to access other asset types, the livelihoods analysis revealed the respondents' reasons for engaging in the market.

#### ***Harvesting***

Twenty of the respondents that were interviewed identified themselves as predominantly harvesters. Harvesters were found and interviewed in the commonages where they were collecting prickly pears. The post-harvesting procedure included washing the fruit and then rubbing it on the grass to remove any remaining thorns. Once the cleaning process was done, the fruit was packaged into plastic carrier bags and displayed by the roadside for selling. In cases where the fruit was sold in bulk, the person for whom the fruits were being harvested came with their own transport to collect the fruit or the fruit was harvested and delivered to them. For those who did not live inside the commonages, they arranged their own transport to take it to where it would be sold. Those who lived inside the commonages were at an advantage since they could participate in both the harvesting and selling of the prickly pear fruits, simultaneously or specialise in one of those activities. The amounts earned ranged between R150 and R1000 per month, with the larger amounts being

earned from harvesting for other people. The lower amounts were solely from sales.

#### ***Transporting***

The three respondents interviewed owned utility vehicles, which they also hired out to other people who were not involved in the prickly pear trade. Alternatively, fruit was transported through headloads, hitchhiking on the way back from harvesting, taking a taxi or bus, or using wooden carts. The three transporters who were interviewed charged a fee to transport from the harvesting areas to where the fruits would be sold. One transporter mentioned that his involvement in the market began with him doing a favour for a friend who had started harvested and selling prickly pears. Initially, he did not charge the friend but when he began getting more clients, he started charging for his transport services. At the time of the interview, he was transporting six people between KwaNobuhle and Sandfontein Commonage where they harvested. The pricing system used by each of the traders varied greatly and the amount charged per trip was based on the distance travelled. The amounts earned by the transporters varied from R80 to R480 per day depending on the number of users and the distance covered.

There were only a few transporters in the market because most of the harvesters and sellers preferred to transport the prickly pears themselves to avoid incurring transport costs. The disadvantage of self-transporting the prickly pears for long distances was that it reduced the time spent at the selling spots. This was the case for harvesters who were collecting for themselves to sell, and for those who were harvesting in bulk for other sellers in the prickly pear market. Individuals living inside the Uitenhage farms/commonages where the prickly pears were being collected did not face the problem of transport costs and time constraints related to having to walk long distances to harvest and/sell the prickly pears.

#### ***Selling***

Fifteen of the respondents identified themselves as selling prickly pear fruit as their main activity in the market. The sellers were the first

market actors encountered in the field as they were located alongside busy roads and outside shopping centres where there was a lot of customer traffic. The prickly pear selling sites were located all around Nelson Mandela Bay, but the majority were roadside sellers. The other three people were found selling prickly pears outside shopping malls in city, where customers were mainly pedestrians and people visiting the malls. The income earned by the sellers ranged from R150 to R1500 per month, with most of the sellers being at the lower end of the spectrum.

### **Factors that Influenced Decision to Migrate into Nelson Mandela Bay**

Although the focus of this study was to investigate the economic value of the prickly pear to the livelihoods of poor people in the Nelson Mandela Bay municipality, a finding that emerged was that most of the people were not originally from the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. The respondents expressed different reasons for their decision to migrate into the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, all of which were motivated by the desire for economic emancipation. The respondents expressed that they had hoped that the economic emancipation they sought would come through employment in the formal sector. However, since their job searches did not yield any favourable results, the informal prickly pear market became a safety net to the respondents. Mbatha and Roodt (2014) echoed this sentiment, stating that the main reason people often migrate from rural to urban areas is due to economic reasons. This was the case with eighteen (47%) of the 38 participants of the prickly pear marketers, who expressed that they had migrated from the neighbouring rural areas into the Nelson Mandela Bay to find a job. Some of the other reasons for migrating expressed by the interviewees were to be closer to relatives (11%), to take advantage of the prickly pear season and migrate back to the rural areas (11%), they had moved together as family unit when the male household head found a job in the city (13%), forced migration through pre-1994 forced removals (11%), and they had migrated from their country of origin in search of better socioeconomic circumstances in South Africa (8%).

Respondents who had migrated to Nelson Mandela Bay to accompany the household head had ended up participating in the informal prickly pear market to provide for their households after circumstances outside their control, such as the death of the household head and abandonment, forced them into the position of breadwinner and household head. Mabilo (2018) noted another factor that was found to be a contributing factor to women taking up the role of breadwinner was resulting from labour market trends which sometimes caused job losses in the formal labour market which affected male breadwinners, thus removing their ability to function as the breadwinner.

The three respondents (8%) who had migrated from Zimbabwe to South Africa in search of job opportunities to support their families back in the home country mentioned that their involvement in the informal prickly pear market was because of a failure to secure a job in the industries located in Nelson Mandela Bay. Although outmigration is expected to yield economic benefits to the migrants, sometimes the conditions in the regions they are migrating into are not adequate to host them. This was the premise of Turok's (2015) argument, using the case of informal settlements as either poverty traps or ladders to work to illustrate that migrating for potential is a gamble for those seeking better socioeconomic circumstances. Another reason that was given by the respondents for how migration from the surrounding rural areas into the Nelson Mandela Bay intersected with their participation in the informal prickly pear market was that they were on a temporary visit with relatives (11% of the respondents), and they saw an opportunity to take part in the prickly pear market. Since the commonages where the prickly pears were harvested were open access, there was relatively free access to the prickly pear fruit to harvest and sell. Involvement in the market was mostly through reference by others who were already in the market, and this made it easier for those who were new to gain access to the prickly pears in the commonages. Other respondents (11% of respondents) had moved permanently to join relatives who were living in the urban areas and had also hoped to get a job to be able to contribute financially. The other cohort of respondents had been in the Nelson



Mandela Bay Municipality since the forced removals which happened prior to the transition into democracy in 1994 (Kgatla 2013).

### **The Economic Potential of *Opuntia ficus-indica* to Address Poverty and Unemployment in the Eastern Cape**

Compared to the other provinces, the Eastern Cape is the poorest in South Africa with the lowest GDP per capita of R30 249 (Armstrong et al. 2008). However, considered on its own, the GDP per capita is high for a province that has high rural poverty, high unemployment both in the rural and urban centres, and a high proportion of households that depend on welfare transfers to sustain themselves (Westaway 2012). Moreover, considering the high rate of unemployment, the GDP per capita masks unequal income distribution in the province. Recent estimates of the Eastern Cape's GDP indicate that it remains the poorest province in the country (South Africa Gateway 2019).

Over the years, the Eastern Cape's two major metropolitan municipalities, namely Buffalo City Municipality and the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, have increased the province's scope for development through their automotive, manufacturing and agricultural sectors (Armstrong et al. 2008). However, considering the structural nature of the unemployment problem as well as the economy's lack lustre growth which has limited its capacity to absorb new entrants into the labour market, more attention needs to be paid to the role that informal markets, in this case the prickly pear market, play in supporting the livelihoods of people who would otherwise fall into deep poverty without their contribution.

The reasons that were given for why people had migrated from the surrounding rural areas to the urban centre of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality had an underlying common theme of people seeking greener pastures; be it in terms of employment opportunities, access to better healthcare and education, or escaping poverty in the country of origin. Even though other reasons such as migrating to be closer to family seemed to have little to do with one's desire for improved access to economic opportunities, the poverty that the households they were migrating to in the urban areas were living under necessitated the uptake of various income-generating activities to support themselves. This required household members who were of working age to find ways to generate an income and contribute to the household livelihood portfolio. Since they could not obtain jobs in the formal sector, supporting the livelihoods through informal means was the only option they had available to them at the time. This study investigated the economic value of the informal prickly pear market to the livelihoods of poor people in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. Since the prickly pear's fruiting season takes place in the first three months of the year (January to March), the income was an addition to other income sources received by each household represented in the sample. Table 4 presents the different income sources that each household represented in the sample.

The average household size was representative of low-income households, which according to Meyer and Nishimwe-Niyimbanira (2016) tended to experience high levels of poverty since any income received is spread thin to accommodate everyone in the household. This meant that additional income sources were needed to sus-

**Table 4: Household income portfolios of the NMBM informal prickly pear marketers**

<i>Other sources of HH income of the NMBM informal prickly pear marketers</i>								
	<i>Harvesters n=20</i>		<i>Transporters n=3</i>		<i>Sellers n=15</i>		<i>Total n=38</i>	
Informal job	17	85%	3	100%	14	93%	34	89%
Child support grant	8	40%	2	67%	10	67%	20	53%
State old age grant	8	40%	-	-	6	40%	14	37%
Disability grant	1	5%	-	-	-	-	1	3%
Remittances	3	15%	2	67%	4	27%	9	24%
None	2	10%	1	33%	4	27%	7	18%

tain each household's livelihood. The average household size across the three categories of prickly pear market participants was 5.68. The average household size for the sample used in this study was higher than the municipal average which was 3.4 in 2016 (Stats SA 2016). The figures present the incomes that were earned by each category of market participants over the three months of the informal prickly pear market's operation, with accompanying calculations which are estimations of the value of the informal prickly pear market.

As discussed earlier in the paper, the market activities were not mutually exclusive, as some respondents mentioned participating in more than one activity. However, since one activity was performed more than the other ones, the respondents categorised themselves under those ones that they performed most frequently. The incomes earned could only be estimated since the respondents did not keep records of the transactions from sales. This was also the case in Ah Goo and De Wit (2015) and Mabilo (2018) studies, where the respondents admitted to not keeping records of the sales transactions, since the incomes were often spent as soon as they were received.

The harvesters earned incomes of between R150 to R800 per month depending on the time allocated to the market activities. Majority of the harvesters' incomes were earned through harvesting and selling the harvested fruits in bulk to those who allocated majority of their time in the prickly pear market to selling. Also, the amount of prickly pears they could harvest depended on whether they had reliable transport or whether they were instead transporting through headloads to avoid transport costs. The costs of hiring transport ranged from R80 to R200 for a return trip. The highest earner among the transporters was a respondent who was transporting six people and made R480 daily per return trip by charging each person R80. The income that each seller earned was also determined by where they were stationed, whether in the CBD or townships, as those selling in the CBDs could charge higher prices compared to those who sold in the township and other low-income areas. The income from selling prickly pears was highly variable and ranged between R150 and R1500 per month, subject to these factors. The

prickly pears were sold for R10, R15, or R20 per plastic bag depending on where the prickly pear stalls were stationed in the study area. Some sellers revealed that they sometimes reduced their prices for prickly pears if a customer was short of cash and also sold individual fruits for R1 or R2. The variation of prices to be more accommodating to customers is reflective of the survivalist nature of the prickly pear informal market in the respective study area.

The importance of the income from prickly pear varied depending on each household's needs, which were determined largely by its structure. Households that had school-going children were mostly using the incomes towards buying stationary and other school supplies. The income from prickly pear was an important addition especially since the income came during a time when low-income households experience increased financial pressure when the new school year begins. Shackleton et al. (2011) argued that the income was especially important since the season begins following the end of the festive season, which is a time of financial strain for low-income households. The prickly pear income sustained these households when the grants and other income sources ran out before the end of the month (Shackleton et al. 2011).

## CONCLUSION

The urban centres of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality continue to experience large influxes of people migrating from rural areas in search of economic opportunities. Unfortunately for the migrants, the structural nature of unemployment as well as the poor growth of the province's economy prevents them from obtaining jobs in the formal economy. This paper discussed the role of the informal prickly pear market operating within the Nelson Mandela Bay, in absorbing the unemployed people who had migrated from the surrounding rural areas in the hope of securing informal jobs in the urban centres. Despite the income being supplementary, since it was available during a time when majority of low-income households experience financial strain, its contribution was significant. The findings of the current study were in the same vein as those of earlier studies on the safety net and

supplementary income role that informal trading plays in the lives of poor households.

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#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> In 2017 the respective amounts were R1500 for elderly people, R1510 for the disabled, and R380 per child.

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