



# The garden metaphor

by Beata Mukarusanga



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## Abstract

Inspired by the folk cultural methodologies developed by narrative practitioners, such as the Tree of Life and Team of Life, this paper describes the use of gardening metaphors in work with adults and young people in Rwanda. Many Rwandans have experiences of farming and gardening and readily took up gardening metaphors to reflect on their experiences, developing ideas like the need to 'weed' unhelpful influences, protect themselves from 'pests' and keep their preferred values and skills well 'watered'. Using this culturally resonant language allowed us to move away from Western ways of understanding to elicit and value local knowledges and cultural practices, including exploration of the ways in which expert knowledge about tending crops could be applied to the care of children. In this way, the use of gardening metaphors contributed to decolonising therapeutic practices.

**Key words:** *gardening; metaphor; young people; youth; parents; decolonising; definitional ceremony; Rwanda; narrative practice*

## Gardening as folk culture

From the time I first met narrative therapy, I have particularly valued its use of folk culture to co-create, with our clients, ways of telling stories using art and culture. Narrative practitioners have developed many culturally resonant metaphors to prompt new reflections and storytelling of experiences. Examples include the Tree of Life (Denborough, 2008; Ncube, 2006), Team of Life (Denborough, 2008), Crossing the River (Hegarty, Smith, & Hammersley, 2010), Recipes of Life (Rudland-Wood, 2012) and My Meeting Place (Davis, 2017). These flexible approaches allow practitioners to draw on their clients' creativity while giving value to cultural knowledge about healing. In turn, such practices can contribute to the continuation of valued local knowledges and practices (White, 2004, p. 104).

For many people in my country, gardening is an important part of culture – many Rwandans are engaged with cultivating the land and 72% of the working population is employed in agriculture (FAO, 2019). Since my own childhood, I have enjoyed gardening. For me, flowers mean beauty, life, fragility and the need for care. When they are made into a wreath, they suggest welcome, love, care, joy and happiness. Flowers connect me to beautiful memories: going to the parish on Saturdays with my friends to prepare the church for the Sunday's holy mass; the beauty of my natal village. Growing one's own vegetables is also highly valued. The practice of children participating in income-generating activities like farming a small piece of land is called *kwiharika* (working for self-reliance). This is a traditional part of Rwandan culture. I remember the first time I grew my own parcel of soya plants. This little plantation encouraged me to grow more vegetables – cabbages, carrots, amaranth and leeks. Nowadays, I enjoy the whole process of growing both vegetable and flowers.

I have found that gardening metaphors are readily taken up by the adults and young people I work with, many of whom bring their own experiences of working gardens. They have used gardening language to develop ideas like needing to 'weed' unhelpful influences, protect themselves from 'pests' or make sure their preferred skills are well 'watered'.

This paper describes the therapeutic use of gardening metaphors in a hands-on vegetable growing project with a group of school students and their mothers, and the use of garden metaphors to elicit the local knowledges of parents and carers in a parenting course. In both projects, gardening provided a series

of locally resonant metaphors that helped participants to identify their values, knowledge and skills, and supported the decolonisation of therapy through the valuing of folk cultural knowledge.

## Identifying gardening as a metaphor for life

The idea to use gardening as a therapeutic metaphor came from my work with a young boy called Mugisha.<sup>1</sup> When I asked him about his dreams for the future, he replied 'I will be rich!' I asked what would make him rich. He replied: 'I will pick up a bag full of money somewhere!' I asked if he knew someone who had had such an experience. Mugisha replied that he knew someone who had become rich after picking up a large amount of money near a swimming pool. Mugisha thought he was useless, incapable, lazy and 'good at nothing'. This negative identity conclusion stemmed from having never completed any of his studies. His plans for the future depended on repeating such a poolside lucky find. I invited Mugisha to go outside into the garden and think about something he had tried and completed. Soon after, I was surprised to see him coming back in smiling. He told me that he had once made a garden: *akarima k'igikoni* – a kitchen garden. This was an amazing unique outcome, and we had a long conversation about all the efforts he had made to care for the crops until they were ready for harvest. Soon after, Mugisha and I lost contact as he was sent to a rehabilitation centre for his 'delinquency'. The good news is that when he was asked to choose between options for vocational training, he chose to study agriculture! I think this choice may have been connected to the preferred identity he found during our last conversations. My conversations with Mugisha led me to wonder whether experiences with gardening might be shared by the other young people I work with. I wondered whether gardening metaphors would resonate with them, and whether a practical gardening project would be a good way to engage them.

## Introducing the gardening metaphor through a hands-on project

I brought the idea of gardening as a metaphor for life to a group of young people I was working with in a

public high school. I had been asked to support 10 boys, aged between 12 and 15 years, who had been seen as 'impossible people' because they disrupted the teachers and other students. Garden metaphors and activities were not planned from the outset, but evolved little by little. During our fourth session together, I initiated a conversation about their projects in life other than school and studying. I was curious about what they had tried to further a passion or address their financial needs.

Beata: Outside of school, at home, what projects have you tried?

Ro: I tried to raise hens. My first wish was for turkeys. I saved money until I got 5000 francs. Unfortunately, when I went to the market, I was badly surprised that I could not buy even one turkey. Then I changed to hens.

Beata: Why do you prefer turkeys?

Ro: Because their eggs are very expensive. I planned to make lots of money from the eggs. I also hoped that even starting from one, it would reproduce and make many turkeys.

Beata: Why is so important to have money for yourself?

Ro: I want to contribute to the cost of my schooling.

Beata: Really? [To the whole group] What would you tell Ro?

Ce: He has good ideas about how to make money. His parents should be proud of him.

Beata: Wow. And you, Ro, what do you think after hearing this?

Ro: I am glad. I think that I will make it possible to have turkeys from my hens.

Beata: Has anyone tried something else?

Fab: Yes, I started with one rabbit, and it reproduced until I had 12 rabbits. Unfortunately, when my parents went out for a community gathering, thieves came and stole all of them.

Beata: I'm sorry to hear that. Do you think you will restart your project?

Fab: No, not until I finish school, because my mum cannot be at home all the time to protect them.

After hearing these and other young people's stories, I decided to introduce gardening metaphors through a practical project. My intention was to use a child-friendly tool to explore the children's values, hopes and dreams to boost their consciousness about themselves. Child-friendly tools invite play, singing, drawing and activities from daily life as ways to start a conversation. I believe that children and young people like activities and talking from something tangible, so I proposed that we start a vegetable garden together. The young people were enthusiastic. Ce committed to finding a space for the garden. Others committed to finding hoes and other tools. As a group, we discussed the kinds of plants we would raise. Before the end of the session, we took time to list all the tasks that are needed to make a garden, from preparing the soil and planting seeds to caring for the plants until the harvest. This exercise helped us to identify the effort it takes to enjoy the results of a project.

In the next session, we started to immerse ourselves in gardening as a metaphor.

Beata: Do you remember the exercise you did about the work that's needed in a garden until the harvest? There were quite a lot of tasks! Do you remember them? If we think about gardening as a metaphor, what might we discover about our own lives? Do you have any ideas? For instance, what if we consider weeding?

Ce: To make room for new knowledge and skills and to sustain my brightness, I need weeding. *Kufira* [removing bad plants] is also like keeping away friends with bad intentions.

Beata: And what if we consider other tasks in the garden?

Ged: I like watering crops. When you water crops, you want them to grow! The crops are my skills, and coming every day to school is a way to water them. [In this sentence 'every day' is key. It means not only increasing skills, but also resisting temptations leading to school dropout, one of the challenges at this school.]

Abd: Kugemuura [transplanting the crops from the nursery to the garden] is the best way to make sure the crops have enough space to grow in. I think that I need sometimes to be away from the group of classmates and find just someone to repeat the courses with.

Em: Insects attack the crops and make them sick. For me, applying pesticides is like resisting the temptations. It is like protecting myself.

There was a long conversation on the theme of pesticides. The group members described themselves as crops, and used insects to represent temptations like leaving their studies, misusing drugs, and having friends who discourage them from their paths towards their dreams. They continued to use garden language over the following weeks as we planted and tended our garden plot over the final weeks of the program.

## Planning our closing ceremony

The project I work with offers a small party at the end of a program.

Beata: What will we celebrate at the end of our sessions?

Ad: We will celebrate the changes that our conversations have enabled in our lives.

Beata: Do you think that there have been some changes enabled by our conversation group?

All: Yes, many changes!

Ab: You don't know what we were like before coming to this group. We were good at running in the classroom while the teacher was in and making noise in class.

Ro: I used to not pay attention to my courses. I would start noting in my notebook, but not ending sentences. I could not concentrate.

Pac: The maths teacher asked me what happened to provoke changes in the way I can follow his course without disturbing others.

Beata: Wow! That is so great! What did we do in these sessions to enable these beautiful changes?

Ce: We have discovered our values!  
[*Twavumbuye indangagaciro zacu*]

I got goose bumps at this answer.

We commenced preparations for a ceremony to conclude our sessions. In addition to planning songs, dancing, soda and cake, we wanted to invite the young people's mothers to witness the boys' achievements and to consider their own gardens of life.

Throughout our sessions together, the contributions of important people – and mothers in particular – had struck a strong chord. In my first meeting with this group, I had invited the participants to explore their values, hopes and dreams, resource persons, secure places and preferred leisure activities. For this purpose, I introduced a 'shaking hands' activity in which each finger of a picture of a hand was used to represent one of the above areas of exploration. On the index finger, the young people were asked to list important persons and the values these people embodied. To my surprise, all of them named their mothers. Two of the boys shared stories of their mother's bravery. Both of these mothers had resisted family separation and made efforts to stay in their homes, protecting the children, while their spouses were cheating on them with other partners. To acknowledge those two stories, the young people had come up with a lullaby for mothers: 'With a profound meaning, children are now grown up. There is no longer crying. Their children are their consolation'. This important piece of work led to us including the mothers in the young people's journey through the program, and in particular in its closing ceremony.

## Extending the garden metaphor to the young people's mothers

Together we composed a letter to the participants' mothers, asking them to come to the closing ceremony and inviting them to reflect on their own garden of life. The letter included a series of questions for the children to discuss with their mothers:

Is there work in the garden that you particularly enjoy? Have those tasks or the growing process ever reminded you of the tasks of raising your children or about other life experiences?

These questions were intended as an opportunity for the mothers to hear about what the children had gained from the sessions, and for the mothers to talk about their expectations, hopes and dreams for their children, and their efforts to contribute to the children's understanding, skills and values. The questions invited reflection on how experiences of gardening, from *Guhumbika* (sprouting seeds) to *Gusarura* (harvest), might represent the process of raising children or other life experiences and values.

Em's mother responded to these prompts about 'the vegetable garden (akarima k'igikoni) that becomes the garden of life (akarima k'ubuzima)':

I like cultivating. I like the process of growing. It is very quick. In a few days there is germination and after some more days the garden produces fruit. I like weeding in my garden. It makes me think about my children. Children need a kind of weeding. I teach my children about how to be disciplined. When I am gardening, I expect a harvest.

- *Guhumbika* [sprouting seeds]: for me, this is like the actions I do as a treasure I keep for my children.
- *Gufumbira* [spreading manure]: I help them to attend school to gain more knowledge so that they increase what they already have.
- *Gusasira* [covering the soil for germination]: I protect my children from beer and other drugs that may damage their image.
- *Kugemuura* [planting crops]: this is like my children spreading discipline among their mates and neighbours' children.
- *Kubagara* [weeding]: this is like protecting them from losing the values that I have taught them.
- *Kuvomerera* [watering]: watering is giving a balanced diet to my children so that they grow well.
- *Gutera umuti ku dusimba* [using pesticides]: I make sure my children aren't influenced by bad peer pressure.
- *Gusarura* [harvesting]: I expect satisfying report cards from their schools – success. I also expect a disciplined child [umwana mwiza – this means many things: respecting others, being obedient]. I want them healthy mentally and physically, and well disciplined.

Em's mother's responses suggest many implicit, not yet told stories of raising children. Her responses, and those of many of the other mothers, made me want to meet them for longer conversations so that I could ask questions about their actions and intentions for their children, at the same time nurturing the sense of agency of the parents in this context.

I later heard that the questions sent home in this letter had facilitated connection between the two generations as the mothers and sons shared experiences, asked questions and explained their experiences and values to each other. The garden of life metaphor gave the young people a language to talk about hardships and ways to overcome them. For the mothers, it reinvigorated their pride in the courage and commitment they had shown while raising their children. The questionnaire also gave mothers a friendly way to talk to their children about the 'harvest' – their expectations of their children. This demonstrated that folk psychology 'casts people as active mediators, negotiators, and as representatives of their own lives, doing so separately and in unison with others' (White, 2004, p. 67).

## The definitional ceremony

One of my favourite ways to end community counselling programs is to create an audience to hear and acknowledge the stories we have co-created. These 'stories are not yet stories until they find their audience' because 'unless we exist in the eyes of others, we may come to doubt even our own existence' (Myerhoff, 1982, p. 103). The program for our closing ceremony took the form of a definitional ceremony that bore witness to the young people's new stories:

- a welcoming speech by a school representative
- a dance with the mothers
- presenting certificates to the young people
- a small reception with drinks and cakes
- a surprise: presenting the mothers with a song of recognition and certificates created for them by their own children
- witnessing speeches by the mothers
- a closing prayer and dance.

I was the master of ceremonies, the school representative was a teacher trained in narrative therapy who could speak with respect to young people

in the room, and we had a pianist to provide live music. Here I will describe the dance, the certificates for young people, the surprise and the mothers' responses.

### ***The dance with the mothers***

The song to dance to was chosen at the ceremony. I asked the young people to choose a *bushari* (old song). The song that came was 'Naraye ndose inzozinziza', a popular song made for lovers. The melody is so beautiful, and its beat is specifically Rwandan. The young people succeeded in getting all the guests to dance with joy and happy faces.

That dance was very enthusiastic, and it made all the people there feel together and friendly to each other. For me, it was a natural way to say: 'I feel safe, as my body and my soul are moving with yours. I am open to each and every one here, wishing everyone to enjoy the ambiance'. I give this meaning to the dance in my African context.

### ***Collective certificates for the young people***

At my workplace, it is a habit to give certificates to participants at the end of a program. Each certificate records three of the participant's values that we have discovered. Participants collaborate to determine what to write on each certificate. In this particular ceremony, the mothers, the young people themselves and their mates contributed to identifying the values, skills and competencies to write on each certificate. As each value was stated publicly, we could see smiles and other nonverbal patterns showing that they were so happy about what was being said about them.

We heard stories from the young people themselves:

I was not able to smile before this support group. I was always alone, not participating in the classroom and avoiding people, even in my family. Now I feel open to the world and safe [ndisanzuye].

I was distracted by anything in the classroom, even while the teachers were explaining important things. Now, I can concentrate and do my homework.

We also heard from each of the mothers about the changes that had been occurring in the lives of their sons:

Ged used to come back home very late after the class, without a known purpose. I had tried my best to get his attention at home in vain. Now, he

is focused, and he takes initiative in household activities. I was surprised to see him coming home from school earlier, folding his clothes and ordering stuff in his room.

To this feedback, Ged was smiling, and his nonverbal attitude expressed joy and pride.

Em's foster mother spoke of significant changes:

I acknowledge the changes that have occurred in Em's life. He used to be a bit distant, with no focus to his studies. I was not sure about how to relate with him. Nowadays, he seeks advice from family members, especially from me. We feel more connected with him, and I was very glad when I surprised him preparing dinner for the whole family. Over the last weekend, he took a machete and went to bring grass for the cows. This is quite new. He is much involved in home tasks and looks glad. One evening he came to find me and told me that he feels warmth when we are together. I am really privileged to be his mum.

Rob's mother spoke briefly and with emotion:

I can't imagine Rob is the same I used to be with. He is now very careful. He cares about me and others, but also, he is more aware of the value of things: no wasting. It is a kind of maturity I cannot describe.

The testimonies of mothers, the participants themselves and other young people who were present contributed to identifying the values, skills and competencies recorded on the certificates. After completing and signing the certificates, we had a small ceremony to formally award the certificates, and after that we celebrated with soft drinks and donuts as the young people had wished.

### ***The surprise: celebrating the mothers' values***

The lullaby the young people had started writing in our first session had been developing throughout our sessions. It was now ready to share, with the chorus to be sung by the whole group and verses to be sung by each individual. After singing their verse, each participant offered a handwritten certificate to his mother, honouring her values and bravery. The ceremony became so emotional as the lyrics of the song invited the mothers to cry with joy. The chorus can be translated as 'You no longer deserve to cry, sweet Mum. My dreams are becoming true, sweet Mum. It is time to cry for joy, sweet Mum'.

## **The mothers' responses**

The mothers wanted to talk. They told stories of gratitude and love for their children, and acknowledged how profound their children had been in creating the song, the certificates and the whole heart-touching process of the ceremony. They were most thankful of the fact that their children were aware of their mothers' bravery, and that they had used skilled manners to honour their parents.

We closed the ceremony with a dance, thanking God for having been there. Rwandans believe in God, and prayer is significant when we open and close ceremonies.

## **Mutual contribution in creating preferred stories**

From my very first contact with the young people in this group, our conversations focused on their preferred values and their favourite people. During the definitional ceremony, these values were visible and celebrated with important people, making a very strong impact shown by tears, silence and later by collective dance and songs. The mothers were very happy and proud of how their identities had been defined by their children. And in turn, they talked about the beautiful changes they had witnessed in the lives of their children. Listening to this mutual contribution made me strongly believe that 'structuring the therapy sessions as ceremonies provides a context for rich story development. These ceremonies are rituals that acknowledge and regrade people's lives in contrast of contemporary culture that judge and degrade peoples' lives' (White, 2007, p. 165). Even without a structured outsider witnessing process, the certificates, the songs and the dances led to a true catharsis, enabling connection. It was as if they had told each other 'I am, therefore I belong, I participate, I share' (Chilisa, 2012, p. 22). Rwandans believe that this *ubuntu* (essence of humanity) philosophy is co-built through interpersonal relationships. Why not children and their parents, and vice versa?

## *Gardening as a decolonising metaphor for parenting*

The work of this group of young people and their mothers later contributed to a new project designed by SOS Children's Villages Rwanda. This project sought to address climate change by planting trees and empowering families. The zone targeted in this project is very dry; hence, children, young people and their parents need mutual support to overcome poverty.

The program sought to prevent family separation by supporting the fertilisation of land and equipping caregivers with skills to respond to children's needs through 'green parenting' sessions. The goal for these parenting sessions was to create a context in which parenting skills could be discussed in a decolonised way and to encourage participants to become agents of change in their community. We are trying to decolonise the way we approach parent education. From our previous experience in trainings and capacity building with caregivers, we realised that many of the concepts used in parenting skills have been defined for Western contexts, and that they need to be made accessible and appropriate to African cultures and to local contexts.

Introducing the gardening metaphor allowed us to build on the indigenous knowledge of the farmers. The wisdom used in gardening – knowing the seasons, how to prepare the land, fertilising, watering, managing domestic animals – can be used in parenting. Positioning the parents as gardening experts and helping to transpose their insider knowledge about gardening to the care of their children was very meaningful. Some big themes came in, like children's rights, safeguarding children in a modern world with the influence of technology, early pregnancies among youth, and street situations for some children with poorly engaged parents.

In the first green parenting session, my workmate Serge Nyirinkwaya invited the participants to think about the challenges presented by climate change in their context and how the project had already contributed to adaptation and increasing their yields. Four factors were mentioned as having helped to increase their harvest in the past season: preparing the land, the timing of the rainy season, using fertilisers and watering. This was used to introduce a discussion about gardening as a metaphor for parenting.

Serge: Do you see any connection between the importance of preparing the land before planting crops and caring for children?

Neza: Yes. There is a proverb: *Igiti kigororwa kikiri gito* – if you delay caring for your children while they are young, you cannot hope for satisfying results from your later education.

Serge: What are the consequences of that delay?

Neza: There is a risk of stunting. When you intend to cultivate your land, you first think about the whole project: preparing the

land, nursing the crops, the pesticides you will need against insects. It is the same in the education of children. From the time you think about having a new baby, you immediately make plans about medical insurance, feeding him or her, caring for the pregnant mother, clothes, even schooling.

Marie: The child needs also home education whereby as parents we are called to teach them discipline and human values.

There was great enthusiasm in the room, and a grandfather called Dio described in detail the ways in which gardening is very similar to parenting. His ideas are gathered in the table below.

Planning a new gardening project	Planning to raise a child
Preparing the land and cultivating.	Thinking about the space the child will take in the family. Mental preparation for the parents and any siblings.
Cultivating, seeding, nurturing the germination, care for the plants while they're in the nursery.	Nurturing the child in utero, tending to the mother.
Spreading manure, watering and other forms of care for the crops.	Providing balanced food for the child and the mother, and for the whole family. Thinking of the child's future after they are born.
Transplanting the crops from the nursery to the garden. Close follow-up of the crops, weeding.	Schooling, getting medical care for any illnesses, preventing stunting.
Each kind of crop needs to be planted in a particular season and a particular kind of land, and to be given a particular amount of water and manure.	Every child is unique. Particular attention is needed for the uniqueness of the child and what they need to achieve their goals.
Preventing insects and treating diseases.	Protecting children from negative peer pressure, teaching them discipline ( <i>kubigisha kubaha</i> : instilling respect), getting medical insurance, seeking medical treatment when children are sick.
Plants' blossoming is very enjoyable for the farmers.	Children's blossoming: at a certain age, parents enjoy seeing their children do well.
Harvest: we expect prosperity. A poor harvest makes gardener/farmer very sad. <i>Kurumbya imyaka</i> <sup>2</sup> is not what we expect as farmers.	Harvest: we expect success of our children. The efforts we make lead us to expect satisfying results. <i>Kurumbya abana</i> makes parents very sad.

This mapping of how gardening knowledge might be applied to parenting led to rich conversations about the values of caring for children. Emma, one of the mothers participating in the group, was invited to reflect about one of the aspects that had touched her in Dio's parallels. She described how she had grown up as an orphan after losing her parents at the age of 12. She was the elder child and had to look after her two siblings. A very tender-hearted neighbour became for them a kin grandmother. She would make sure Emma and her siblings had enough food, went to school and were protected from any harm. When she grew up and got married, Emma continued to care for her siblings.

She had learnt from that kin grandmother to always protect children. She is known in her area as a person with much compassion for children, and she considers this to be a legacy to pass on to her children. Their home receives many children who need support. During the session, we took time to remember that grandmother who educated Emma and her siblings, inviting other participants to tell their own stories of people who showed care and love.

Many stories emerged from the participants about how they were caring for children who had lost their parents, and the values underlying this: preventing harm to

children, generosity, compassion, empathy, friendship and accountability. This conversation closed with a number of proverbs:

Gira neza wigendere [do good things and just wait].

Ineza uysisanga imbere [the good we do waits for us in the future].

Umwana ni umutware [children are kings to serve].

The leading values among many of the parents who cared for kin children were *ubuntu*, *ubumuntu*, *urukundo nyampuhwe* (generosity, humanity and compassionate charity) for vulnerable children.

An interesting outcome of this conversation was a wish to invite young folks to come to some of the green parenting sessions. They joined a session that focused on another folk culture metaphor: the 'Forest of Life' (Denborough, 2008). Parents and young people together talked about the 'storms' they had faced in life and the forest's survival skills. The storms named included hunger, poverty, aridity, early pregnancy, drug misuse and parents not having time to talk with their children. I asked about how communities of parents and young people had responded to these challenges. There were strong responses about the storms of poverty, hunger and aridity: VSLAs (village savings and loans associations) were identified as a powerful way to respond to poverty. Working hard and husbandry activities could add fertility to the land. However, at first the group could not identify ways they had responded to young people's behavioural challenges like early pregnancies, drug misuse and lack of conversation between parents and their children. We returned to considerations of how practices of care for land, crops and domestic animals could inform the education of our children. This led to new plans for responding to these challenges. We concluded the session by breaking into two parallel groups, one of young people and one of adults. Each wrote down burning questions about issues that were repeatedly coming into our talks. The three generations learnt from each other through these questions and the answers from each group.

## Conclusion

The use of treasured aspects of folk culture as therapeutic metaphors has been embraced by a number of narrative practitioners and the communities they work with. They give value to cultural knowledges and practices, allowing people to speak from a position of pride and a 'safe territory of identity' (White, 2006), and in turn contributing to the continuation of local culture. The use of gardening metaphors with Rwandan young people and adults built on practical everyday experiences in which they had developed skills in working towards a harvest, and specialist knowledge about managing soil, crops, pests and weeds. Gardening offered many rich metaphors which people took up in creative ways, not only to describe their experiences, but also to connect with their treasured values. Through therapeutic conversations and practical gardening activities, the young people travelled from being 'impossible people' who could not concentrate and disrupted classes to becoming people who had discovered their values, connected with treasured support people – particularly their mothers – and were keen and able to contribute at home and learn at school. Gardening metaphors resonated across the generations and provided a shared language for parents and children, fostering connection between them. Gardening metaphors also helped us to elicit the local knowledges of parents and grandparents about raising children, allowing us to find a decolonising language and practice for parenting classes. This led to the sharing of rich stories about practices of love and care for children.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this article.
- <sup>2</sup> *Kurumbya* is a very expressive Kinyarwanda concept meaning at the same time an unfulfilled expectation and the emotional consequence felt. It was used about both gardening and parenting. Its antonym is *uburumbuke* (prosperity) due to a satisfying harvest (*umusaruro*). This is also a very expressive word meaning both the success and the feeling related to it.

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