

Articles: Page 1 to 2 – The yields of the bottom-up approach. Page 3 —Resistance to neo-liberal land reform. Page 4 — The MSDF Working Group Meeting.

WHAT THE BOTTOM-UP APPROACH IS YIELDING: 2014 HIGHLIGHTS

Introduction

Farm workers and dwellers on commercial farms as well as small-scale farmers remain one of the most marginalized, isolated and discriminated segments of South African society. The absence of a strong collective capacity perpetuates the lack of rights enforcement and service delivery by government and statutory bodies. In order to deal with the weak organisational capacity of the sector ECARP facilitates the formation of grassroots structures to participate in change processes. These structures are in the form of farm committees, area committees and Phakamani Siyephambili (a social movement made up of farm and area committees in the Cacadu and Amathole district municipalities).

Through these structures farm workers, farm dwellers and small-scale farmers enhance and expand lobbying and advocacy campaigns to improve working and living conditions. Hence they are also able to improve their social, economic and political status through this bottom-up approach. In 2014, farm workers, farm dwellers and small-scale farmers working with ECARP continued to intensify their actions and initiatives to positively change their standards of living and socio-economic conditions. This was done through the commitment they share with ECARP to support and expand social mobilisation and organisational capacity to strengthen collective capacity in a historically disorganised sector.

In the previous year the partners recognised the importance of a democratic bottom-up collective voice in forging equitable conditions to enable poor and low waged sections of the rural population to benefit from economic growth. For example three farm committees and three area committees were established in 2014 taking the total number of these collective structures to seventy-two and fourteen respectively. Gender discriminatory behaviour and attitudes and divisions between various categories of workers on commercial farms continued to corrode within the collectives. Women and the youth continued to play significant roles in the functioning and operations of the collectives, and in the engagements with multiple stakeholders. To illustrate this, forty-four per cent of farm committees had 50 per cent or more women in leadership positions and

22 per cent had at least 40 per cent of their executive committee membership made up of youth. This illustrates the fostering of democratic principles and practices among people participating in the collectives. This article will bring to the fore what the bottom-up approach yielded in the year 2014 as well as discuss some of the lessons that were learned from this approach.

Governance from the bottom

One of the important highlights of 2014 includes the vulnerable, poor and low-income rural communities claiming back resources that will enable them to sustain livelihoods. In the aforementioned year the collective structures from the farm level to the district level initiated engagements and dialogue with both the private and public sector agencies to implement and enforce socio-economic and political rights and to stimulate sustainable and pro-poor agrarian change. Such agencies included farmers, agri-businesses, social standards audits, academics, and various government departments. The collectives used the Integrated Community Development Plans (ICDPs) which were developed at area and municipal levels and which incorporate the vision and aspirations of farm workers, farm dwellers and small-scale farmers as catalysts in these engagements.

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In 2014, the Grootvlei, Zuney and Valencia area committees in the Sunday’s River Valley (SRV) municipality held meetings with local ward councilors and local municipalities to try to get their ICDPs to be incorporated into the municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). In the later stages of the year, the Grootvlei and Zuney area committees took a further step and engaged the Office of the Premier of the Eastern Cape urging this office to implement their ICDPs. The SRV municipality has subsequently incor-

porated the ICDP of the Grootvlei, Zuney, and Valencia area committees into the municipal IDP. By doing so, farm workers, dwellers and small-scale farmers are in a stronger position to engage local and district government for basic services such as water, health education, and roads. Furthermore, as a result of these engagements the Valencia area committee was able to observe improvements with the storm-water drainage infrastructure in the area.

In 2014, the collectives took their ICDPs forward through the establishment of the multi-sector dialogue forum (MSDF). The MSDF was initiated by Phakamani Siyephambili and supported by ECARP to foster dialogue and constructive engagements on pro-poor transformation among the relevant stakeholders in the agricultural sector. This initiative indicates the willingness of the collectives to seek constructive strategies to address dire socio-economic conditions, unfair labour practices and low wages and the weak positions of small-scale with agro-ecological farming. Through such efforts the collectives have shown their active role in the governance and transformation of their political and socio-economic conditions.

Resistance: Farmers defending their livelihoods

The year 2014 did not only witness tangible results for the rural communities but there has been evidence of transformation in the ideologies, values and norms of the small-scale farmers and stock-owners working with ECARP. In such a case, these communities challenged power relations in the rural communities as well as the control and ownership of resources (specifically land). In 2014, some of the communities working with ECARP showed courage, commitment and strength in defending their rights and fighting the neoliberal policies of the state. These communities engaged in acts of resistance against the government's land reform programme which dismisses these communities. These acts involved communities in the Sunday's River Valley protecting land which is a source of their livelihood against opportunistic big businesses. Similarly, a community in the Makana municipality has resisted the imposition of the land reform programme on them through locking out government officials from the farm and not partaking in meetings called by these officials. As a result, these communities have sustained their livelihoods without any support from the government.

These communities, together with other small-scale farmers working with ECARP have improved food insecurity. They did

this through enhancing social networks and co-operation in accordance with altruistic beliefs and practices in farming and food gardens. For example, in 2014 three hundred and forty-two small-scale farmers working with ECARP improved the quality and quantity of their crops, livestock and herbs through the use of agro-ecological farming methods. These farmers produced agricultural produce worth R1 023 485.50 using 50.8 ha of land during the 2013 – 2014 growing season. Of this, R303 934.50 were consumed by households at an aggregate level, R43 525.00 worth of produce was given away to relatives for free, R549 112.00 was income earned through sales in local and alternative markets, and R126 914.00 worth of produce was retained for use as seed and livestock feed.

Over and above this figure, three hundred and twenty-two farm workers and dwellers working with ECARP have improved food security. These farm workers and dwellers produced agricultural produce worth R210 639.80. Of this agricultural produce worth R57 706.80 were consumed by households at an aggregate level, R13 987.50 worth of produce was given away to relatives for free, R132 238 was income earned through sales in local and alternative markets, and R6 707.50 worth of produce was retained for use as seed and livestock feed. Social networks and co-operation between the small-scale farmers, farm workers and dwellers exceeded the boundaries of farming activities and gardens and also included stokvels and saving schemes. For example, the collectives at the district municipality level through Phakamani Siyephambili managed to collect a sum of R3314.50. At the farm level, 120 members of the stokvels were involved in savings. This number consisted of 106 women and 14 men, who are members of eight stokvels. At the end of December 2014, they had saved a total amount of R 266 463.00. These results reflect the movement of small-scale farmers, farm workers and dwellers closer towards food and financial resilience.

In conclusion

ECARP is highly encouraged by the results that have been yielded by the bottom-up approach. It is evident that farm workers, farm dwellers and small-scale farmers working with ECARP are making positive strides in sustaining livelihoods in the participating areas and farms. The year 2014 has also marked the establishment of the MSDF which has the potential to strengthen the struggles of the collective structures at various levels and to turn the collectives into strong voices in a sector characterised by an unorganised and voiceless poor.

The downside of vague tenure legislation on the rural poor

Land reform in South Africa in 2015 still cannot be said to have made any serious inroads towards addressing the plight of the poor and landless in the country. Racial discrimination and brutal dispossession of African people, who today compose the bulk of the country's poor and dispossessed, is still evident this day in the structural make up of South Africa's economy and land ownership patterns. The landless particularly farm workers and dwellers continue to face the brunt of compromised livelihoods, low wages, eviction and terrible working and living conditions.

Since 1994 the leadership of the new, democratic dispensation against all astuteness opted to go for the willing-buyer-willing-seller model. As a result the pace of land redistribution was severely slowed up. The willing-buyer-willing-seller model was accompanied by legislation aimed at protecting the tenure security of the landless especially in the rural economy. The Extension of Security of Tenure Act of 1997 (ESTA), which according to southafrica.info ... "aim[s] to regulate the conditions of residence on land, the circumstances under which people's right to reside on land may be terminated,

and the conditions under which people whose right of residence has been terminated may be evicted."

However, ESTA is vague on the "... conditions of residence on land..." or the meaning of "... a secure legal right to live on the land". For example, there are no clear guidelines on the rights to grazing and cropping. There is no clarity on whether the land owners can charge farm workers and dwellers for grazing their livestock on their land. There is no clarity on the extent and limitations of the right to use land for cropping. This leaves too much leeway in the way of unequal and skewed power relations between workers/dwellers and commercial farmers or land owners.

There also seems to be no correlation between legislation from different government departments in this instance, the Department of Labour (DoL) and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). For example, with DoL, the Sectoral Determination 13 prohibits commercial farmers from making deductions from their employees' wages for cattle grazing fees. But it does not expand further on this stipulation. This leaves workers and dwellers confused and it opens the stipulation up for various interpretations. For example, mccarthy.com states on their website: "It is important to note that whilst an employer may not deduct from an em-

ployee's wage for electricity, transport and cattle grazing rental, the law does not envisage that employees should get this for free. It means that an employer must enter into separate agreements where the **employee will pay** for the aforementioned by agreement, in the same way that one pays Eskom for electricity, a taxi operator for transport and a land owner for grazing."

The indefinite legislation leads to conflicts of interest between farm owners and farm workers and dwellers and invariably the losers are mostly farm workers and dwellers who are often left uncertain whether they have the protection of legislation or not. This leads to serious socio-economic problems as well to cultural problems. Most of the workers use cattle and sheep for traditional ceremonies and rites. When they are prohibited from keeping livestock it impacts on their culture.

In conclusion, it is necessary that grazing rights and cropping rights of farm workers and dwellers be clear and the limitations of these rights be spelled out. At the moment it is very complicated and the historically powerless are left disadvantaged. The socio-economic conditions of poor farm workers and dwellers can be improved if grazing charges are taken away and if the limits to cropping and livestock they can keep are not kept stringent. This is especially important in the time when they have not yet been able to benefit from land reform.

The MSDF Working Group Meeting

Since the beginning of 2015 collectives of farm workers, dwellers and small-scale farmers held meetings in their respective geographical areas to elect representatives to the Multi-stakeholder Dialogue Forum (MSDF) working group which is due to hold its first session on the 22nd of March 2015 in Grahamstown.

The grass-roots collectives met in their own respective areas and discussed about the outcomes of the first MSDF meeting held in Grahamstown on 9 December 2014. They also chose

candidates they deemed fit to represent their interest at the MSDF platform. A total of 33 initial candidates was forwarded from the 14 area committees. They are Valencia, Dunbrody, Bersheba, Paterson/Nanaga, Zuney, Grootvlei, Carlisle Bridge, Committees Drift, Fort Brown, Douglas Heights, Fort Beaufort, Lowerblink Water, Adelaide, Bedford. Out of these 33 candidates, only 5 candidates coming from each of the 5 local municipal areas in which Phakamani Siyephambili has a presence.

Stakeholders expected to be at the meeting of the work-

ing group along with the democratically elected representatives from Phakamani Siyephambili on 22 March 2015 are the following :- Department of Health, Department of Labour, Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, Commission for Conciliation, Mediation

and Arbitration, Agri-Eastern Cape and Fruit South Africa. The working group was tasked with working out the broad outlines of how the MSDF was going to function. Since it was not practical to

Phakamani Siyephambili elected five people to the MSDF working group from five local municipalities:

- **Makana Municipality**
- **Nkonkobe Municipality**
- **Nxuba Municipality**
- **Sunday's River Valley (2)**

have everyone involved become part of such a meeting, it was decided that each of the stakeholders forward delegates to the working group who will represent their interests.

The initial MSDF meeting outlined items of action which were going to form the basis of the interactions. The action items are areas that the MSDF is going to direct its efforts towards. The working group will also engage with the Integrated Community Development Plans, which were developed by the farm workers, dwellers and small-scale farmers themselves.

LIVING WAGES

Workers are pushing for Living Wages because the minimum wage (MW) is just not enough. According to a submission ECARP submitted to the Department of Labour in 2012 "...the annual adjustment mechanism to the MW relies on the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In terms of the current cycle, the MW for farm workers is to increase annually at the level of the CPI plus one per cent. Of great concern is that price increases on food is generally higher than the CPI. ECARP research on the impact of the MW reveals that farm workers on average spend a third of wages on food." Among issues that came from the farmworkers and dwellers during consultations was that - there needs to be an overhaul of the minimum wage. Moreover deductions that farmers are allowed to make on workers' wages need to be considered. These include deductions for housing, wood and water and grazing rights.