

# **Filling the gap: Civil society organisations and service delivery to farm workers in the Free State**

By

*Anja Benseler*

**HSRC**

*Pulani Simes*

**Consultant**

January 2003

## Table of contents

1.	Introduction.....	2
2.	An overview of service delivery to farm workers .....	3
	a) Social services.....	3
	b) Health services .....	3
	c) Economic services.....	4
	d) Educational services.....	5
	e) Legal advice.....	6
	f) Private initiatives.....	6
	g) Multi-sectoral organisations.....	7
3.	Organisational capacity and funding.....	7
4.	Interaction with local government .....	9
5.	Non-state organisations as mediators .....	10
6.	Access to farms and working through the farmer.....	10
7.	Farm school reform and possible implications for service delivery to farm workers....	11

# 1. Introduction

Farm workers form one of the most marginalised social groups in South Africa. Due to the dispersed spatial location of farms, farm workers live and work on private land owned by the farmer. They are dependent on the farmer to provide their basic services, such as accommodation, sanitation, and electricity. Therefore, gaining access to social services such as legal advice, health services, and education is often very difficult.

The provision of these services by government departments has been a challenge due to the geographical distribution of farm workers in the rural areas in the Free State. Dispersed service delivery is typically expensive. In addition, there have been a strong trend towards urbanisation, which has further decreased the number of farm workers in the rural areas and has increased the extent of their marginalisation.

With the municipal amalgamation process, there has also been a shift of focus away from the rural areas as the TRCs (Transitional Rural Councils) have been disbanded, and basic service delivery towards rural areas has decreased. After the amalgamation of rural and urban municipalities in 2000, the question remains regarding the locus of responsibility for service delivery in the farming areas, and whether local or provincial governments are responsible for the provision of basic services to farm workers. Additionally, with the new policy of the Department of Education in the Free State, farm workers' children will be moving to hostels in the urban areas which will add to the depopulation of the farm schools and thus of the rural areas.

This study, which was undertaken in mid-2002, began by identifying non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit organisations (NPOs) delivering services to farm workers. These organisations were identified by consulting the Department of Social Development's register of NPOs. The HSRC sent letters to all the NPOs which appeared to provide services to farm workers. Those NPOs which responded to the letters were then interviewed telephonically.

The interviews showed that the service delivery gaps have been increasingly filled by non-state bodies, which have taken the initiative to provide social services to farm workers themselves. There are also several private initiatives where the farmer or the farmers' wives provide skills training, education and social support to farm workers.

Although there are several initiatives providing services to farm workers, this does not take place on the same scale as the erstwhile Rural Foundation. Whereas the Rural Foundation, before 1995, formed part of a nation-wide programme, well-funded and with adequately remunerated staff, and with well-developed linkages to municipal and provincial government, the current picture is one of numerous small, under-resourced and isolated organisations.

## **2. An overview of service delivery to farm workers**

### **a) Social services**

Social services tend to focus on basic life skills training is offered. This includes spiritual and physical well-being and interpersonal relations such as marriage counselling. Several organisations also address the prevalent problem of substance abuse, especially alcohol, amongst farm workers and the accompanying domestic violence and child abuse.

Religious organisations such as the NG<sup>1</sup> Church's Amos Initiative offer spiritual guidance as well as life skills. For example, the Amos Initiative offers a marriage counselling course which focuses on reducing domestic violence. Another example is the Oranje Vrouevereniging (OVV), which has offices throughout the Free State and concentrates on social services such as child and alcohol abuse, marriage counselling and counselling on social issues. Farm workers usually approach the organisation for help, but the OVV also goes out to the farms to help the farm workers when a problem is brought to their attention.

Another example for social services provided to farm workers is the People Against Child Abuse organisation in Odendaalsrus. The organisation focuses on child abuse and labour rights. Although the organisation concentrates on the community at large, many farm workers approaches it them for assistance. Lesedi FM Radio is used to advertise the workshops amongst farm workers.

A further example is Ntshireletse, which focuses on the elderly, disabled and abandoned children and farm workers. The organization focuses on social welfare issues and help farm workers with personal problems on a spiritual and physical basis.

### **b) Health services**

Several organisations offer HIV/AIDS programmes as their main focus, or as part of their other functions. An example is the Bambanane Trust, which provides training and education on HIV/AIDS on farm schools and in townships. They access the farms by contacting the farm school teachers. They then visit the schools and give presentations on AIDS awareness, TB and malaria. In 2001, the Bambanane Trust worked in ten schools. The organization works together with the Department of Health and the Department of Social Welfare. The latter provides them with transport to the schools free of charge.

---

1 Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church).

The Partuma Aids Awareness Group in Parys is also actively involved in the provision of workshops on Information, Education and Counselling (IEC) for HIV/AIDS and other diseases on farm schools. During 2001, the organization held 11 workshops.

Local government and departmental initiatives are also involved in the provision of health services in isolated cases. The Department of Social Development in Smithfield is an example of interdepartmental co-operation and the pooling of resources in order to access the rural areas. The Department offers social welfare services to farm workers in collaboration with the Department of Health, the South African Police Services (SAPS), who deal with legal issues, as in rape cases. The Department of Health also provides mobile 'roadshows' to the farms on a quarterly basis. The 'road shows' are mobile workshops that address farm workers who gather for the workshop from several farms. The workshops deal with prevention programmes and awareness campaigns concerning health issues.

### **c) Economic services**

Economic services include the promotion of income-generating skills such as food gardening and recycling practices. Another focus area is farm workers' agricultural skills development, such as wool shearing, tractor driving, weaving and baking. Several organisations also offer entrepreneurial and empowerment programmes, as well as managerial and financial skills, business plan and constitution drafting and even project development, implementation and project after-care.

An example is the Mediation and Reconstructive Recruitment Agency in Kroonstad. The organisation offers workshops in which skills such as wool shearing are taught. Although the organisation raises its own funds and thus operates on a shoestring budget, it has provided three workshops to farm workers already.

Another example is the Partnership for Development Models (PDM) in Harrismith. PDM has recently launched a project which works with displaced farm workers. Due to the new labour laws and land ownership issues, farm workers are increasingly being evicted from farms, and then they move to the nearby rural towns. The aim is to help farm workers to start their own farming practices in order to develop into commercial farmers. The project is currently running a pilot study with one ex-farm worker, who will be helped to develop his own farming initiative. The PDM is funding the project itself but they need additional funds and have applied for funds from the National Skills Fund to help two hundred displaced farm workers with this project.

Another economic project is Thusanang Development and Training. The project began as a small knitting group in the 1980s on a farm outside Bothaville. It grew to become an NGO, which focuses on skills training and job creation for rural women. There are now seventy groups all over the Free State and the North West Province. Skills such

as hand knitting, crochet work, hand embroidery, catering, flower arranging, brick making, building, welding and paper making are taught. All skills programmes include a business skills component to educate rural women in how to run their micro-enterprises. The biggest problem experienced by Thusanang is to find a viable market for the products made by the women. Thusanang helps its members to market their products at local and international shows and even on the Internet by working with export companies.<sup>2</sup>

#### **d) Educational services**

Organisations provide educational support such as adult literacy programmes in which the Department of Education is very active. Several organisations also focus on pre-school training initiatives in which the farm worker's wives or the farmer's wives are trained in becoming pre-school teachers in order to look after small children while there are parents working.

An example for such an initiative is the Lesedi Educare Association in Westminster, which focuses on "early childhood development needs of farm and rural village and town communities"<sup>3</sup>. Lesedi developed from the Rural Foundation. It initiated pre-schools in April 1993, to address the dire need for trained preschool teachers. The project has expanded throughout the Free State and has extended to the Eastern Cape.

The project which began as a pre-school training project, has expanded into Health and Nutrition Education. A managerial and financial training program has been added for the management committees of the preschools and for the farm workers themselves. Additionally, Lesedi offers Adult literacy and has also launched an AIDS program in the pre-schools. The newest addition to the programme is the Rural Family Support Program which focuses on gender issues, i.e. women on the farms (farm workers' wives and female farm workers) and their rights, as well as children's rights. The pre-school teachers are usually the wives of farm workers. The pre-schools are located on farms and in the old Trust Areas, informal settlements (because many of the farm workers have been retrenched and have moved to the urban areas), as well as the southern Free State and the old Transkei area in the Eastern Cape. Currently the programme reaches 7500 children.

A similar project is the Ntataise Trust which was founded in the Free State and which has expanded into a network of NPO (Non-Profit Organisations) throughout the country. The Trust provides early childhood development training to farm workers' wives and women from the community, and trains pre-school teachers. The Trust offers levels one to four of pre-primary school training (according to the National Qualification framework), including monthly workshops and monthly monitoring sessions. Courses in

---

<sup>2</sup> Thusanang Development and Training information leaflet.

<sup>3</sup> "Lesedi Educare Association Organisational Profile", June 2002.

HIV training, financial management and committee management are also provided. The emphasis of the projects is on rural women from disadvantaged communities.

### **e) Legal advice**

Several organisations offer legal advice to farm workers. Due to the history of illegal evictions, unfair labour practices and low wages, the government has developed a legal support base for farm workers. Due to the problems of spatial distribution, illiteracy and dependency on the farmer, however, the majority of farm workers are still ignorant of their rights. Several organisations thus offer advice and counselling in labour rights and they educate farm workers on the legislation as the Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA). Farm workers are often evicted from the farms on which they have been living all their life. In the case of evictions, the farm workers can approach these organisations, which aid them in finding a solution.

One example is Kgotsong Family and Child Welfare. The organisation assists farm workers with labour and human rights issues such as ESTA, and provides welfare support to evicted farm workers in the form of food provision, as many of the farm workers live on the edge of survival once they are driven off the farms. Workshops are held for the farm workers on their basic rights and how to protect these rights, and how they can access support.

In the light of the problem of domestic violence, some organisations also place an emphasis on gender rights and children's rights. Human rights issues are also addressed to improve the sometimes abusive dynamics between farmers and the farm workers.

In addition to this, several organisations and private initiatives taken by the farmers themselves include helping farm workers to attain their birth certificates and identification documents in order to help them to qualify for social grants, child support grants and pensions.

### **f) Private initiatives**

Not only NGOs and NPOs or government departments provide services to farm workers, but also farmers and farmers' wives take initiatives in helping their farm workers.

An example for a successful private initiative, independent of any organisational help is that of Mrs. Wieldan in Viljoenskroon. She has initiated several improvements for her farm workers on her farm. She registered her farm workers women in order to access the child support grant. This, in turn, meant organising identify documents for the children. She also held an AIDS workshop in co-operation with the local Hospice centre and a local cultural group. The workshop was attended by approximately 60 people. In addition, she planted a communal vegetable garden together with her farm workers and with the help of the Local Department of Agriculture, and also taught farm

workers how to pickle vegetables for later use in the year. She obtained the seeds for the communal garden from the Department of Health.

She is also actively involved in the farm school that is on their farm. She attained R2000 –R3000 worth of resources from READ, a literacy project. The project uses discarded books for distribution. Mrs Wieldan obtained the books for free and brought them to the farm school. Subsequently, she established a school library.

Furthermore, she has a school feeding scheme and has upgraded the school' infrastructure by placing stoves as heaters in the school, and has installed new toilets. She also arranged for eleven adolescents to be sent to an Agricultural high school in the region.

Moreover, their farm has been chosen by Project Literacy and UNISA as a pilot site to teach parents how to read to their younger children. She has also initiated a crèche on the school, which opened in June 2002. Sixteen children will be accommodated there.

Furthermore, Mrs Wieldan has installed a public phone for the farm workers on the farm, and has organised twenty bikes from Afribike, which allow for increased mobility and access for the farm workers.

### **g) Multi-sectoral organisations**

Most organisations concentrate on one type of service that they deliver. Only very few organisations, which have sufficient resources, provide a variety of services to farm workers. One such organisation is the Sunrise Resource Centre in Bethlehem. The organisation deals with most aspects of service delivery to farm workers: training and the provision of workshops in terms of ESTA, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution; HIV/AIDS programmes; youth development on farms; training in terms of entrepreneurship; and the provision of general life skills. The organisation creates linkages between the different issue areas that it addresses. For example, ESTA and entrepreneurship are promoted in conjunction with one another: When a farm worker has lived on the land for longer than 60 years, he/she has security of tenure of a certain portion of the land. The Sunrise Resource Centre helps such individuals to use the land in the most profitable way. The organization has also been involved with Local Economic Development (LED).

## **3. Organisational capacity and funding**

In the Free State, most of the civil society organisations lack the capital as well as the financial means to be operating in their full capacity. The average number of staff in an organisation is about ten to fifteen members, who operate on a voluntary basis and



who get no remunerations for their efforts. Most of the organisations have offices, although some of the members work from their homes.

Approximately half of the organisations currently do not have transport for their organisation. Only the formally established organisations, such as the Oranje Vrouevereniging, own a company car. Some of the organisations use their private vehicles but many do not have access to a vehicle. This makes it very difficult for them to reach farm workers on the farms. Some of the organisations have made alternative plans such as borrowing a car or getting a lift with government officials or the municipality when they visit the farms.

Most of the organisations generate their own funds through minimal payments for their services, or by donations received from the community, the municipality or private companies. Most of the organisations receive little or no support from the government although most of them have applied for funding from various government departments and the National Development Association. Very few have, however, received any response from the government.

A few organisations have received external funds from government departments and local funders. For example, the Free State Rural Development Association is funded by the National Land Committee, the Partuma AIDS Awareness Group has received funding from the Lottery Board, and the Sunrise Resource Centre receives funding from the Foundation for Human Rights. Larger organisations such as the Oranje Vroue Vereniging are subsidised by the Department of Welfare.

Some organisations are internationally funded. One example was Ulwazi, which was internationally funded by UNESCO for a labour and human rights project. This, however, was a once off, two-week project and funding ceased after completion of the project. Sunrise Resource Centre in Bethlehem has also been internationally funded (by the Swedish SIDA) and is now being supported by the Foundation for Human Rights. The SA Council of Churches is also being funded by international church organisations (Danish and Swedish church aid and other foreign congregations).

Because many the smaller organisations lack funds and continually work on a shoe-string budget, they are not able to achieve their full potential in providing services to farm workers. Many lack basic infrastructure such as telephones and fax machines. For example, People Against Child Abuse has no offices nor vehicle. They consist of 44 members, none of which receive salaries. They raise their own funds and attract farm workers and township residents to their workshops via the radio.

Additionally, many of the organisations do not know how to access government funds. They lack the knowledge on how to write a basic business plan for their organisation

and they do not know whom and how to address government departments and funding organisations for financial support.

The Department of Health has several partnerships with NGOs that target farms with their services. The Department is also trying to include Farmers Unions and work through them to formalise goodwill between the farmers and the managerial level.

One of the problems is that in the rural areas there is little or no capacity to make development sustainable. Organisations invest in and develop a certain area and with their withdrawal the structures that they have created collapse, due to lack of sustainability. Additionally, NGOs often lack the management and financial skills to make an impact. Therefore the Department has commissioned KPMG to capacitate these organisations in basic management and financial issues such as banking, cash flow, and monitoring. This initiative is being funded by Ireland Aid.

The Department of Social Development's Life Skills programme works in cooperation with several NGOs as well as several government departments such as the Department of Health, Education, Labour and Agriculture.

The department uses farmers as contact persons to obtain information and to render support to the employees concerned.

The department provides funds to NPO's and NGO's, which are involved in social welfare issues. They can access the funds by submitting a business plan. The department offers training on how to write a business plan in order to submit it for funding. Projects related to children enjoy preference.

#### **4. Interaction with local government**

There is very little interaction between service delivery organisations and municipalities. Several organisations mentioned that they had tried to establish ties with the municipality, so that they could get some help with transport facilities such as faxes and photocopiers, but these relationships typically do not last. Although there are a few cases where organisations use an office at the municipality, most organisations are functioning independently without receiving any support from the municipality.

There are a few cases where councillors and municipal officials have taken the initiative to create organisations, which deliver services to farm workers. One example is Kgotsong Family and Child Welfare in Bothaville. Mr Modisenyane, who is the head of the organization, is also a councillor from the Nala municipality. The municipality occasionally provides donations to the organisation and sponsors and supports their workshops. It also provides transport, premises (community halls), telephones and fax facilities to the organisation. Another example is Sunrise Resources Centre in

Bethlehem, headed by Mr Molaba, who has been appointed as the LED Councillor in their ward. Additionally, the organisation helped to prepare the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for the Dihlabeng municipality.

## **5. Non-state organisations as mediators**

Many of the organisations that provide services to farm workers act as mediators between the community and local government. Their role as facilitators includes referring farm workers to the relevant departments (such as Health or Social Development) if they are not able to deal with the issues at hand themselves. An example is the Free State Rural Development Association in Kroonstad, which investigates cases of unlawful evictions and labour practices and then refers the cases to the Departments of Labour and Land Affairs. A further example is the Thabong Community Advice Centre which refers communities to the Department of Social Development and other NGOs for social queries.

This role is, however, undermined by the poor interaction between these organisations and the municipality. Improving this relationship will not only improve the support base for the organisations but will also promote the effectiveness of these organisations as a channel through which farm workers can gain access to municipal and departmental services.

Simultaneously, the interaction amongst organisations should improve. In the Free State, organisations that offer services to farm workers tend to act as isolated pockets of initiative. Most of them do not know of other organisations that provide similar services to farm workers in their region and there is very little, if any, co-operation amongst them. Facilitating coordination and interaction between the organisations could enhance efficient service delivery to farm workers and avoid duplication of efforts. Additionally, co-ordination could enable organisations to pool their resources and therefore reach farm workers more easily and thereby provide a broader spectrum of services.

## **6. Access to farms and working through the farmer**

One of the problems that several organisations mentioned is the difficulty in accessing farm workers, due to mistrust and hostility from farmers and the farm workers. The problem of accessibility to farms denies farm workers basic services provided by government departments and organisations.

Another problem that organisations and departments have encountered is that farm workers are often not available during the weeks as they are working in the fields. Most of them are only accessible on weekends, at time when the organisations and the departments are not operating.

In order to gain access to the farms, communication and interaction has to be facilitated through the farmer. An example is the Department of Social Development in Smithfield, which works through the farmer and the teachers at the farm schools in order to gain access to the farms. Some of the organisations, like the Lesedi Educare Association, stated that where there has been support of the farmers for the preschools, the schools have been more successful than in other cases.

Once a formal relationship has been established, farmers tend to develop sufficient trust to contact the organisations themselves for help for their farm workers. For example, farmers have approached the Benesa Training and Enterprise Development Services to provide training to their workers. The farmers pay a fee to the NPO. Some of the farmers group together and share the costs of employing Benesa to train their farm workers. Approximately ten farmers have already approached them for training.

Sunrise Resources also accesses the farm workers through the farmers and the organisation has built up such a good relationships with the farmers that the farmers even call the organisation for help and mediation and negotiation. Sunrise Resources stated that the reason for the good relationship is that it is essential to know how to communicate with the farmer; for example, if the farmer insists on speaking Afrikaans, then that should be accommodated

## **7. Farm school reform and possible implications for service delivery to farm workers**

Many of the organisations have been working through the farm schools, which facilitates access to farm workers and their children. For example, in the case of HIV/AIDS awareness, organisations organise the counselling sessions through the farm schools, which ensures that farm workers' children from several farms were involved. This also created the opportunity for the farm workers themselves to attend the sessions.

However, in the light of the new policy of the Free State Department of Education, to transfer farm workers children to hostels in the towns, this system of service delivery will be lost. Although the hostel system may be beneficial for the children and may provide a better alternative in terms of education than the farm schools, access to farm workers will be made more difficult for organisations due to the lack of a communal base where everyone can meet. This could entail the further marginalisation of the farm workers who remain on the farms, whereas their children will be receiving the training and skills at the schools.

An alternative to this system is what the organisation RT Distributors has done: They are in the process of converting the existing infrastructure of the farm school near Kroonstad (of which only 30 % is used) into a multi-purpose Community Service Advice

Centre. The centre will function as a pension pay-out point, as a centre for ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training), as an emergency reporting centre, and as a health centre. This will allow the continued use of the school's infrastructure as a community base where organisations can help farm workers collectively. More such initiatives are needed to ensure that farm workers are not further marginalised and neglected.