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## Land reform and participation in South Africa

by ALASTAIR BRADSTOCK

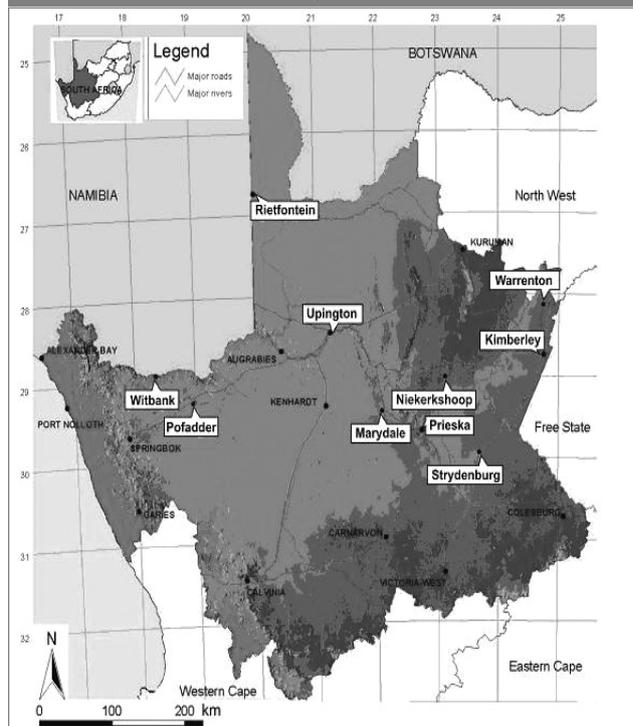
### Introduction

Shortly after coming to power in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa launched an ambitious land reform programme. It aimed not only to reduce poverty but also to remove discriminatory legislation that, over many decades, had alienated black people from their land. This land reform programme has three elements:

- land tenure reform – to develop new systems of land holding, land rights, and forms of ownership, focusing in particular on the former homelands;
- land restitution – to restore land to those people who were displaced as a consequence of discriminatory land legislation; and
- land redistribution – to redistribute land to the landless poor, labour tenants, farm workers, and emerging farmers for residential and productive uses, to improve their livelihoods.

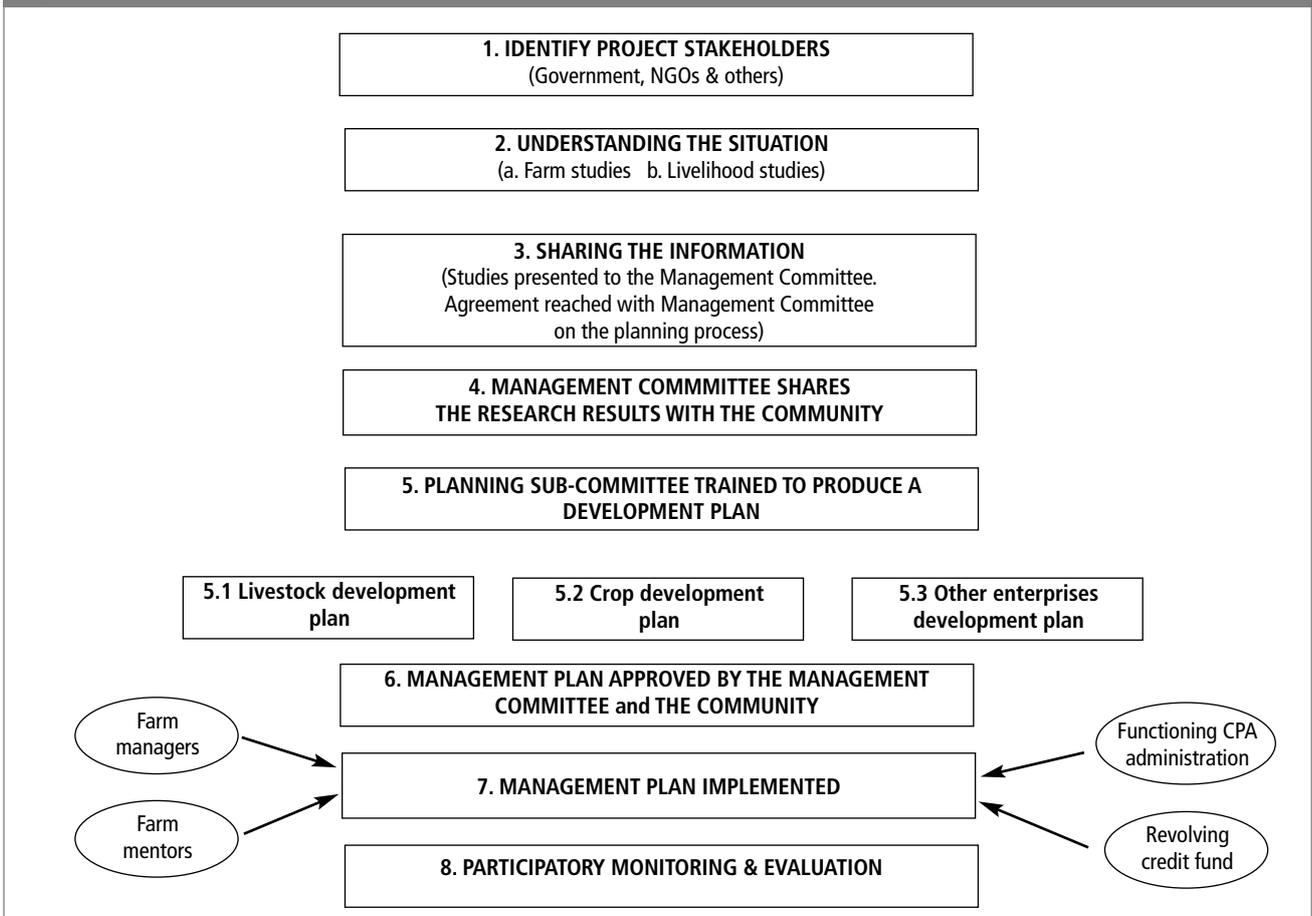
The government is transferring land from white to black ownership, albeit at a slow pace, but the Department of Agriculture (DoA) has no methodology for supporting land reform groups in the process of developing and implementing land management plans. To address this, FARM-Africa developed a participatory land use planning methodology which it piloted over a two-year period in the Northern Cape

Figure 1: Map of the Northern Cape Province showing FARM-Africa's project locations



Source: Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, South Africa, 2004.

Figure 2: The PLUP process



Province of South Africa.<sup>1</sup> The project worked with eight land reform beneficiary groups (also known as CPAs – Community Property Associations) – Witbank, Pofadder, Khomani San, Marydale, Prieska, Niekerkshoop, Strydenberg, and Warrenton (see Figure 1). This paper describes the experiences of implementing this new approach with the land reform groups, many of which had little experience of farming.<sup>2</sup>

**Developing a participatory land use plan**

Figure 2 shows the participatory land use planning process (PLUP). The figure is a simplification of a much more complex multi-dimensional process, and emphasises the key elements in developing a plan.

The main entry point into most land reform groups is through a management committee. This committee is democratically elected by the membership prior to the transfer of their farm. It manages the group’s land according to its constitution and has the power to delegate specific tasks to sub-committees. Before engaging in the PLUP, the process should be discussed with them and approval sought to implement it jointly.

**Step one: identify project stakeholders**

Few land reform groups know which organisations can support them in developing their farms. This is inefficient and

<sup>1</sup> The project was called ‘Capacity Building in Community Natural Resource Management’, funded by DFID, EU, Comic Relief, and a Dutch NGO called CORDAID. The purpose of the project was to strengthen the ability of land reform beneficiaries to manage their natural resources.

<sup>2</sup> Such a situation is unique in Africa where the majority of rural people have an intimate understanding of agriculture (Ellis and Mdoe, 2003; Bradstock, 2005). The reason black people (mostly men) lost their farming skills was because of discriminatory land legislation enacted in the early twentieth century which alienated them from their land and forced them to work in the mines (Bundy, 1985).

**Box 1: Generating an organisational map with the Dirisanang group, Warrenton****The Process**

- The management committee selected five of its members to participate in the exercise.
- The group started by drawing a circle in the middle of an A1 sheet of paper that represented their group. It then added additional circles that represented other organisations that had either a direct or an indirect influence over them. The distance between the organisations and the Dirisanang group circle indicated the strength of the relationship: the closer the two organisations, the stronger the relationship. The size of the circle indicated the potential influence that the organisation had or might have over the way in which the group managed its farm.
- Facilitators should have an in-depth knowledge of the local area thus making the

exercise a learning process.

- Five participants is deal. Larger groups tended to split with a resulting loss of focus.

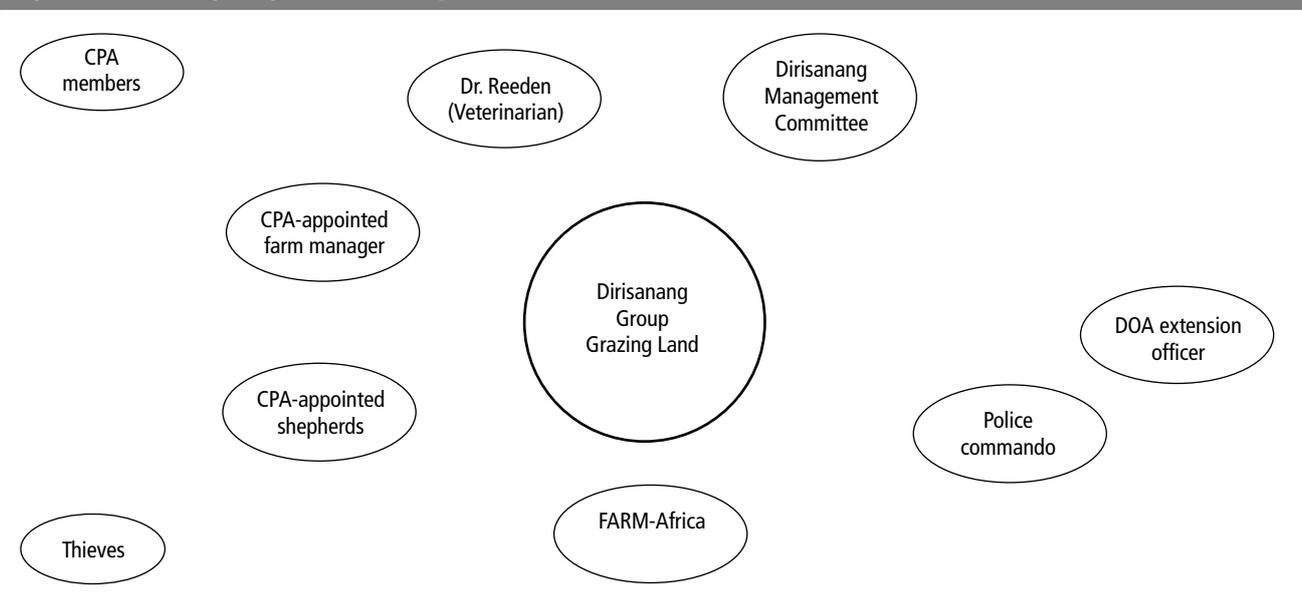
**Findings**

- The exercise emphasised the poor understanding that the group had of the local economy, and of organisations that could provide support to them. The omission of the Department of Land Affairs (responsible for the land reform programme) was surprising, as was the failure to include the local municipality and the agricultural cooperative.
- Another surprising result was the position and size of the Department of Agriculture's extension officer. The DoA is responsible for supporting land reform groups after they have received land and is therefore a central player

in the land reform process, but it did not appear as a key organisation on the map.

**Impact**

- Considering the low levels of understanding that management committee members had of key stakeholders, the most tangible benefit was to start to build this knowledge.
- By the end of the exercise, the group had developed a resource list of organisations that could be approached and drawn upon for technical and managerial support. One important outcome was the group's decision to engage with the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, to negotiate the rescheduling of their water debt. In addition, the group approached the Land Bank and started to negotiate a production loan.

**Figure 3: Dirisanang's organisational map**

can lead to financial losses, especially if crops are planted late or not at all. So the first step is to help the group identify the key stakeholders who can provide them with agricultural and managerial advice, using an organisational map (Box 1 and Figure 3). The map illustrates the failure of some key state actors to engage with the Dirisanang group. Some months after this exercise the local municipality, which had not appeared on the map, made contact with the group and is now providing technical support.

**Step two: understanding the situation****What information is needed?**

Before planning, it is important to have a better understanding of the following areas.

**Objectives of land reform group members**

It is unlikely that all group members will share one common objective for how the farm should be developed. The land

A rural family  
in Witbank



Photo: Pieter Roos

reform programme offers only small grants for land purchase, often forcing the founding group members to recruit more individuals to secure additional funds to buy land. Groups therefore often consist of two types of members:

- a minority core group who want to make agriculture a more important component of their livelihood, and will have initiated the land purchase process; and
- a larger group of people who are less interested in farming but expect to receive cash benefits from their investment.

To avoid conflict, group objective(s) must be discussed and agreed.

#### Asset holdings of members

An understanding of the asset holdings and technical skills of members is essential so that when land-use options are developed it is possible to identify any training needed to implement the plan.

#### Productive potential of the land

It is very important to explore the productive potential of the farm, the condition of its infrastructure, and capital assets. Because black people were alienated from agriculture for decades, and due to problems in accessing their farms, it can be difficult to get members to engage effectively in this part of the process.<sup>3</sup> Government rarely commissions these types of studies, but missing this step deprives the group of fundamental technical agricultural information which they must have if they are to plan their activities sustainably.

#### Gathering information: the research process

FARM-Africa provided training for individuals, mainly management committee members, in a range of participatory tech-

<sup>3</sup> The majority of the groups that FARM-Africa works with live at least 20 kilometres from their land, thus effectively excluding the poor who cannot afford to pay for transport to their farm.

niques. These included: wealth ranking; seasonal calendars; timelines; pairwise ranking; pie charts; semi-structured interviews; key informant interviews; and household surveys. It was very important for the management committee to play a key part in the research, increasing the chances of the outcomes being owned and used by the group.

The information developed during these workshops was always presented to the whole group in a plenary session that took place at the end of the workshop, and usually lasted for a day. While these discussions sometimes revealed that groups had described an ideal situation that they hoped to achieve in the future rather than outlining the status quo, the workshops had a positive effect on group strength.

A second workshop was held immediately afterwards to explore factors that both hindered and helped groups to use their land. FARM-Africa used semi-structured interviews to try to gain a better understanding of issues such as:

- why agricultural services were not being delivered effectively;
- what factors had prevented members from accessing their land; and
- what had constrained members from making agriculture a more central part of their livelihood.

### Steps three and four: sharing and making use of the information

The next step is to discuss the research findings with the management committee and continue the process of ensuring they 'own' the information. The committee is expected to synthesise the findings and distribute a written summary to members approximately two weeks before presenting them to the whole group at a public meeting. While most management committee members are literate, FARM-Africa had to provide support for this activity as most had not attempted a task like this before.

It is not uncommon for members of land reform groups to become alienated from the development of the farm because management committees operate in isolation. By running activities of this kind, the committee can demonstrate its intention to be more inclusive and transparent in its decision-making processes. At one of the Dirisanang group's public meetings in 2001, the management committee presented the group's accounts for the first time since it formed three years previously. Similar achievements were recorded at other FARM-Africa groups.

### Steps five and six: training the planning sub-committee and approving the plan

The final task of the 'sharing information' meeting is for the

#### Box 2: Strydenberg's planning sub-committee training sessions

In **session one**, the facilitator introduced the roles and responsibilities of the PSC and described what training inputs were needed to produce a plan. Research findings were discussed, providing the PSC with an overview of the different factors affecting the development of their farm. The different objectives expressed by group members were discussed and agreed.

**Session two** introduced the concepts of natural and physical capital.<sup>4</sup> The PSC grouped its farm assets accordingly. A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) matrix was used to analyse these two sets of assets.

**Session three** focused on identifying and quantifying the financial capital of the group. The culmination of this step was an inventory of the group's financial assets.

**Session four** explored the skills that existed within the group that could help develop the farm. These are not restricted to academic achievement but include practical skills (for example, driving a tractor, vaccinating animals, how and when to irrigate a crop, etc.). The steps determining how members apply for the right to use their land were also defined, as well as how much they would have to pay for that right. The management committee is responsible for agreeing these rates, which will differ for grazing and irrigable land.

In **session five**, the PSC used the information from the other four sessions to develop options to achieve the group's stated objectives. The facilitator introduced the concept of implementation plans and each option was translated into a plan. This included a narrative description of the activities, outputs, outcomes, and a budget.

As a result of the planning, the group successfully secured a loan from the Land Bank to purchase ostriches that it planned to fatten and export to Europe.

group to elect a planning sub-committee (PSC). FARM-Africa's experience of sub-committees is that, if members are not paid for their services, they are usually ineffective. This is to be expected as most land reform beneficiaries are poor and cannot afford to work for free, and farms do not produce immediate benefits.

Once the PSC has been elected, its members receive practical training in a variety of planning tools, according to need (see Box 2 for an example). Once the management plan is completed, it is presented to the management committee for their comments and approval. The final draft is then taken to a general meeting where the management committee presents it for approval.

<sup>4</sup> Natural capital comprises renewable natural resources such as land, trees, water, fisheries, and non-renewable resources such as oil and coal that people use to generate a means of survival. Physical capital is produced. Examples include roads, machinery, irrigation channels, power lines, water supplies, dams, and tools.

**Box 3: How revolving funds operate**

The idea behind revolving credit facilities is that poor people who cannot access the formal credit market access money from their own fund and are expected to repay the capital sum and interest over a given period of time.

FARM-Africa established revolving credit facilities that were funded by the project's donors. All groups converted a substantial part of their fund into livestock, creating 'livestock banks'. Small livestock are acquired by the bank with the aim of increasing numbers as quickly as possible before making loans to individual members. On joining the scheme each member is given eight ewes. After a period of 27 months they are expected to return 10 ewes to the bank. The additional two ewes represent interest on the initial loan of eight animals. Every group member contributes 90 Rand (approximately UK£9) on joining the scheme, and then 23 Rand (approximately UK £2.30) per month for the following 27 months.

The scheme is still in its early stages, but the most successful group almost doubled its livestock in two years.

**Steps seven and eight: implementing the management plan****Accessing credit**

A common constraining factor in implementation is a group's inability to access credit. Due to the size of the farms being transferred, the working capital requirements are usually beyond the ability of the group to meet through community-based saving schemes. Most formal financial institutions are unwilling to lend to Communal Property Associations, as the political costs of foreclosing on a loan are judged to be too high. FARM-Africa helped groups to overcome this by introducing revolving credit funds (Box 3).

**Accessing agricultural advice**

The lack of good quality, agricultural extension advice is another problem for land reform beneficiaries when implementing their plans. The lengthy process of transforming the Department of Agriculture so that it addresses the needs of black rather than white farmers has created a service delivery vacuum.

An initiative that FARM-Africa has piloted is to hire white farmers to supply agricultural advice to groups. This has proved successful in the short-term and most groups have managed to make use of this service, improving the way in which they manage their farms. For example, at Khomani San the ex-owner provided extensive day-to-day farm management mentoring to the management committee.

However, there are concerns about whether such an initiative can be scaled-up. Few groups have sufficient funds to pay for this type of advice. There are also concerns that the support is too narrowly focused on commercial agriculture and not subsistence agriculture. Also, few white farmers have experience of working with groups of black farmers, and their input can be 'top down' unless they are given training in participatory techniques.

**Other constraints**

Groups also face other physical or institutional difficulties that made adopting outside technical inputs difficult. For example, the Dirisanang group was constrained by its management committee, which showed low levels of commitment to the development process. The Khomani San group was constrained by the distance many members had to travel to access their land, coupled with low levels of literacy.

Witbank was the most successful group, raising agricultural productivity and income. A number of factors made the project successful:

- the group lived on their land;
- key members of the management committee demonstrated high levels of commitment to the farm and this created a favourable environment for the uptake and application of inputs;
- the group benefited from technical advice from the Department of Agriculture and they received a substantial gift of agricultural equipment from an overseas donor in the 1990s, which gave them the means to develop their irrigable land.

**Conclusion**

A fundamental shortcoming of South Africa's land reform programme is that black people are being given land without any plan to help them manage and develop their farms. FARM-Africa's experience has shown that a participatory planning process can help to address this, resulting in the development of land use plans which can be implemented by the groups.

A participatory process offers management committee members the chance to learn new skills to improve how they manage their group and farm. It also provides them with a chance to learn about the institutional and organisational environment in which they operate. They can learn what resources they are entitled to draw upon, especially agricultural advice from the Department of

**Sheep grazing  
in the Kalahari**



Photo: Pieter Roos

Agriculture, and how best they can access complimentary resources.

Participatory tools also help improve the way a group works on a day-to-day basis, for example, by improving communications between the management committee and ordinary members.

While participatory tools are a key part of the planning process, their effectiveness in exploring natural resource issues is limited when group members do not have much agricultural knowledge. As this kind of information is key to the planning process, it must be collected in other ways, but in an inclusive manner, offering groups the opportunity to learn about their

farm's natural resources.

A clear lesson from FARM-Africa's experience is that this planning method should be initiated much earlier in the land reform process. If it were to occur before a farm is transferred, the group would be better prepared to cope with the inevitable challenges that arise from managing a farm. A key factor, however, in determining its success is the ability of the group to be able to access a high quality facilitator. Outside agencies (government departments, NGOs, and private sector organisations) need to work closely with the groups to build their understanding and capacity to use new participatory tools and processes.

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FARM-Africa is working with partners towards institutionalisation of the PLUP in the Departments of Agriculture, Local Government, and Housing, enabling agricultural extension officers and development officers to work more effectively with land reform beneficiaries. If these departments can apply the PLUP, especially in the pre-designation phase of the process, this should lead to more empowered groups, better able to make informed decisions about their farms. Agriculture may then become a more central part of their livelihoods.

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