

FARM WORKERS SPEAK

Hope · Heroism · Determination

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The idea of this book is not to penalise farms or farmers, nor to make it more difficult for farm workers. The aim is to bring life to the stories of farm workers. The names of actual farms and farmers have been omitted while the photo's of individual farm workers have been digitally altered. TCOE greatly thanks the farm workers who agreed and gave us permission to use both their names and their stories in this book.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a celebration of farm workers of all kinds. It is meant to be a recognition of the conditions that farm workers live and work under as well as the bravery, hope and determination that exists in farm worker communities. It will take you through the farm worker strike in the Western Cape in 2012-13.

The strike changed the lives and perspectives of many a farm worker, but also had consequences in the form of dismissals and victimization.

Furthermore, the book highlights women's particularly vulnerable position on farms as being second to their male counterparts and often dependent on their spouses for tenure rights and more.

Moreover, the book not only deals with farm workers of South African descent – a large number of labour migrants are employed on South African farms, where they are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, especially as undocumented migrants.

The people who share their stories in this book are not alone. Their stories are similar to thousands of others. The stories reflect the general situation of farm workers in South Africa. Thus, in this book you will read about hardships, abuse, horrific working conditions and

mistreatment, but you will also read about a continuous struggle for change, determination and a stubborn hope for the future.

The TCOE and CSAAWU would like to thank all the farm workers, small scale farmers and farm dwellers who contributed to the book. This includes those whose stories are told here, those who took the photos and those who translated the stories.

We would also like to thank all the partners that contribute to the work of CSAAWU and TCOE in the rural areas. A special thanks to those who assisted CSAAWU in keeping its doors open.

A big thank you also to the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLF), Foundation for Human Rights and Fastenopher Switzerland, Bread for the World and all the partners that support our work with farm workers.

“The issues affecting people on farms are not receiving any serious attention from the government and political organizations in our country. Although people on farms still remain the poorest of the poor in our country today, there are little tangible changes that they have seen since we voted in 1994 April 27”.

QUOTE FROM THE SHOPSTEWARD JUNE/JULY 2010

“The liberation of farm dwellers and farm workers’ communities will require a radical political programme of changing lives and power relations on farms. The redistribution of land to the landless workers, the prosecution of landowners who abuse human rights of farm dwellers and workers and their families must be a priority. The provision of basic services and realization of many socio-economic rights for these communities cannot be postponed if we need to break the cycle of poverty”.

QUOTE FROM THE SHOPSTEWARD JUNE/JULY 2010

LITTLE HAS CHANGED

Farm workers are the most marginalized members of the South African workforce, with unionization below 4% and historically the lowest paid wages.

In the last two decades, poverty-level wages have been exacerbated by high job losses, exploitative labour practices and farm evictions. These factors contribute to an environment in which labour abuses are commonplace and extreme forms of violence and abuse against desperate and poverty-stricken people are persistent. The farmers and the government have thus far refused to listen to rural workers and to transform the rural landscape characterized by dependency master-slave relations, racism, sexism, starvation wages and violations of the limited freedoms won from decades of struggle.

Farm workers do backbreaking work sometimes for 12 hours a day to produce food and wine for everybody in this country and countries overseas. Yet they are forced to work under unsafe and unhealthy conditions, to drink



dirty water, live without electricity, live without toilet facilities, on poverty wages, suffer threats of evictions, violent physical and verbal abuse and intimidation at the hands of the bosses. More and more farm workers are living away from the farms in growing informal settlements. Therefore this hostile environment needs the mobilization of everyone.

Since its formation 10 years ago, CSAAWU has realized it cannot focus solely on labour issues, but must respond to the numerous social inequalities which historically define rural relations. This intolerable situation of deprivation is unsustainable; it must end. Strong organization on the ground is necessary in order to build a rural land free from hunger and want.

In 2010, Csaawu with its partners Mawubuye and TCOE launched the *Speak-out Campaign*. The campaign gives farm workers and farm dwellers a platform to speak for themselves about their living and working conditions and living experience. Activists have made the connection between the speak-outs going on for two years and the 2012/13 farm worker uprising.

The 2012/13 rebellion raised the banner of the 23 farm worker demands which come out of the speak-out campaign. This was the most militant action farm workers had undertaken in decades. Lessons have been learnt. Assessments have been made, and a strategic plan has taken shape to guide the coming victorious struggle.

The belief that workers themselves will change workers' future, and not the charity of government and employers, is a fundamental belief. The struggles for workers and the dignity of rural people must be fought on this belief.

The domination of one by another is very much entrenched in the minds of rural workers as well as landowners. In the workplace and house the male is still regarded as the dominant one, which is accepted by women. This brings new challenges for women struggling to sustain their participation in leadership position in unions.

The lack of resources, extreme poverty, and alcohol abuse are major stumbling blocks to overcome. To break the cycle of poverty, underdevelopment, abuse and years of neglect, it is necessary for the oppressed themselves to develop a radical program of action. CSAAWU is helping to shape such a program of action.

However, we still have a very long and difficult road ahead. We have to deal with immediate needs and suffering as well as to build long term solutions to immense problems. We also need to build workers' confidence and capacities to solve their own problems collectively. It must be done irrespective.

ALUTA CONTINUA

Trevor Christians

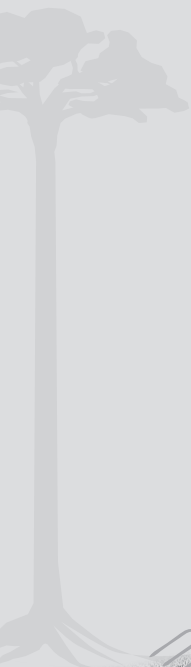
CSAAWU

“Sometimes if you are not feeling well and you want to go to the doctor, they fill your place, so when you come back they say it’s full and you can’t work”.

– YOUNG WOMAN FROM LESOTHO, WHO WORKS FOR
A LABOUR BROKER

“One time I fell off a trailer while we were transporting some fruit and the driver did not stop in time so I was dragged by the trailer. I ended up going to hospital the next day and I was given a week’s sick leave after being discharged. But because I was not going to get money for those days, I ended up losing out. I forced myself to go back to work while my whole left side was still painful, raw and full of bruises”.

– 45 YEAR OLD WOMAN FROM ZIMBABWE, WHO WORKS ON A FARM. THIS WOMAN NOW HAS SCARING ALL OVER THE LEFT SIDE OF HER BODY. SHE HAS NOT EVEN HEARD OF WORKMEN’S COMPENSATION.



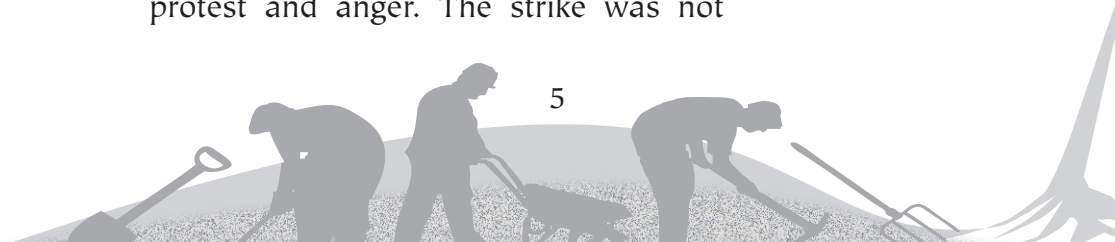
FARM WORKERS ON THE RISE

This book on farm worker stories was conceptualised in the aftermath of the historic farm worker rebellion of 2012-2013 in the Western Cape farm districts. The farm workers' strike was both historic and heroic and captured the spirit of resistance that was dormant for so long – very much like fairytale character Rip van Winkel, who slept for a 100 years.

Farm workers and farm dwellers are largely an invisible section of the rural landscape. Thus when the strikes erupted in 2012-2013, it was both unexpected and unprecedented. South African farmlands had not experienced such levels of protest and anger. The strike was not

“When you see the pictures and advertisements of wine farms, you always see the farm owner’s family, their dogs and the beautiful homestead. We are not in the picture, we are not in the story. We are completely invisible. What we do and how we live, how we suffer in the shadow of beauty of the farm is not there. We are silent.”

*(MARGRET SAVISSER,
MONTAGUE, 2012)*



only unprecedented in scale and size, but also in the nature of the resistance and the levels of the protests.

The first protest action began in late August 2012 on a farm in De Doorns (140km from Cape Town) when workers downed tools and walked off the farm. Poor pay, bad living conditions and unfair labour practices were their main grievances. De Doorns is a region known for table grapes and wine. This initial protest action spilled over into Stofland, a dusty and dry township outside of De Doorns where mainly migrant and seasonal farm workers live in abject poverty.

In a short space of time the protest action spread like wild fire to other farming towns and districts. By November, thousands of farm workers had joined the rebellion, which was now affecting 24 rural towns from De Doorns to Robertson, Bonnievale in the Breede River Valley, to Barrydale and surrounding areas in the Overberg. On the West Coast, Citrusdal was the main affected town. Ceres and Wolsely in Witzenberg region joined the protests, as did towns like Grabouw and Villersdorp.

We saw running battles between strikers and the police; main national highways and other farm access roads were barricaded, as was the railway that runs past the township in Robertson. The farm workers' tactics shifted from "weapons of the weak" and "weapons of the fearful" to direct action, which also saw the burning of vineyards,

marches, occupations and running battles with the police and private security companies that were employed by commercial farmers.

The mobilising in the Western Cape sparked a great deal of repression from the police, agri-business and the commercial farmers' unions. Many farm workers were injured and three strikers were killed at the hands of the police. Tear gas, stun-grenades and rubber bullets were also fired at strikers in almost every rural town in the Western Cape. In Wolsely, the police started using live ammunition when they ran out of rubber bullets.



CSAAWU March in Robertson, 2013



Several townships where farm workers live were also raided at night, and a number of people were threatened and beaten up in their houses by the police. During one incident workers who had been arrested reported that police fired tear gas canisters into the police vans where they were being held. The National Prosecuting Authority also instructed state prosecutors to oppose bail for workers and activists who were arrested in the second phase of the strike and protest actions. A total of **77 cases** were **opened** during the farm worker protests in 2012 & 2013; **At least 367 persons** were **arrested and/or charged** in the 77 cases.

Why did workers join the strike?

There are many reasons why thousands joined the strike. However, it is important to start with the fact that after 1994 and even earlier, agriculture globally had begun to restructure.

It is the appalling conditions on farms and in rural townships in the Western Cape that created the conditions for hundreds of thousands of workers to join the strike.

Along with the initial formation of strike committees, a demand also emerged from workers that the minimum wage for farm workers should be increased from R69 a day to R150 a day. Added to this, workers were demanding paid maternity leave, an end to labour brokers, an end to piece work, rent-free housing, a moratorium on evictions,

and an end to police brutality in the rural areas. Nearly all the unions, the committees and the forums that represented the interests of farm workers placed the need to be treated with respect and dignity high on the agenda.



These demands and the demand to speak to farm bosses directly were largely ignored. AgriSA refused to reach any national or local settlement that would mean an increase in the minimum wage. When the state finally announced in February that the minimum wage for farm workers



would be raised to R105, this was mainly due to pressure the strike created, and not due to slick negotiating skills by union officials.

Perhaps also playing into this situation, was the fact that farm workers did not have a long history of organising or undertaking major struggles, unlike mineworkers, in South Africa.

One of the poorest sections of society finally rose up to fight for justice and better wages. While the strike has been called off for now, it is clear that farm workers will embark on strikes and protests in the near future – many still want R150 and their other demands to be met. So while the battle is over for now, the war is still being fought.

The strike was successful in highlighting the appalling conditions facing the poor in the rural areas, and it has probably changed the outlook of farm workers forever. As such, the strikes that have taken place on the farms and rural towns offer a great opportunity to begin building a militant workers' movement in the rural areas.

Certainly, there is a massive need for worker-controlled structures and radical democratic unions on the farms and in the rural towns that can fight for not only reforms, but eventually meaningful transformation of rural life.

The farm worker strike has taught us many lessons – most significant is the fact that the strike unlocked the

confidence of rural workers and farm workers to build resistance and struggle around their own interests.

The 2012-2013 rebellion was a turning point for farm workers and farm dwellers. New layers came to the fore - young farm workers, women and men who have lead campaigns for a living wage, decent working conditions and a life of dignity.

Some of the stories in this book speak to the heroic moment and how farm workers embraced it as their moment of victory. Other stories speak about the revolutionary shifts that took place in the social relations on farms, and still other stories speak about victimization and hardship that came after the strike. All the stories, though, echo a profound determination to continue the struggle for a better life among farm workers, even though this may be a long time coming. Farm workers are speaking out - they will no longer be silent!

MERCIA ANDREWS



“The one who pays us... We don’t know where is our money. He says he give our money to our partner we work with. We went to ask her, and she says no, she didn’t get the money. Then we call him – he tells us another man has taken the money. And then we go, and that man says he didn’t take our money. Then we meet on Monday, and he tells us again other people took the money. In the afternoon we came here [to CSAAWU legal office] and we called him again. He told a lot of stories. These people here [the legal advisors] called him and we went to his house and got the money and he says we can go to work on Monday. We never tried something like this before. When we didn’t get our money we were so angry. We are suffering because we didn’t have money. We were thinking of quitting the job, but it is hard. I want to go back to Lesotho to make a passport and come back. It is hard to get a job without a passport. We are afraid to loose our jobs because of the passports”.

– TWO YOUNG GIRLS FROM LESOTHO WHO WERE NOT PAID. THEY EVENTUALLY GOT THEIR MONEY, BUT HAD TO STAY OUT OF WORK FOR A WEEK.

MIGRANT FARM WORKERS – EVER EXPOSED, NEVER SAFE

Labour migration is not a new occurrence in South Africa, and labour migrants in the agricultural sector are by no means uncommon. Yet, the issues that migrant farm workers face are extremely under-exposed – undocumented migrants are particularly vulnerable in their work as well as everyday life.

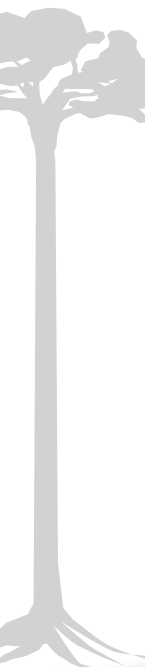
Undocumented migrant workers working in the agricultural sector are often very vulnerable to different kinds of abuse and exploitation, and usually work under very hard working conditions. Added to this is xenophobic attitudes that many migrant farm workers meet.

There is a pressing need for labour and migration regulation to benefit these workers. These should provide them with necessary tools and methods of resilience to stand up to the violence they may face in their everyday lives and re-enforce a human rights regime that accommodates all, including undocumented migrant workers.



Migrant labour in South African agriculture

Labour migration is a phenomenon deeply entrenched in the whole Southern African region, with deep-rooted historical meaning. It has been an important source of



livelihoods for many regional households, just like migrant labour has been a source of labour for many sectors, agriculture not the least. Thus, labour migration has played a pivotal role in building the current regional economy.

Migrant labour has been utilized throughout the colonial and apartheid eras to help build the industrial economy we rely on today. The mining industry in particular has attracted many migrant workers over the years, and the labour migration of this sector has even been regulated through employment agencies managing the migration and employment of people directly. But while the mines have historically been a key employer of labour migrants, we tend to forget about the role that commercial agriculture has played.

Agriculture is a highly labour-intensive industry, always in demand of extra hands, preferably at a cheap price. Migrant labour has historically addressed part of that demand, providing a stable source of cheap labour for commercial agricultural businesses. Statistics show that in 2012, 821 967 people were employed in the agricultural sector. Approximately 7% of these were foreign-born, and the number may even be higher due to the uncertainty around undocumented migrants.

Better to be an irregular migrant than stay home

However, over the past few decades migration patterns have changed significantly. A study on labour migration and



the agricultural sector, *Bitter Harvest*, by Wits University's research unit MiWORC, asserts that there is no agreed labour policy in the SADC or in South Africa. Migration is instead managed through mismatched bilateral agreements. The benefits of labour migration have been increasingly overlooked, particularly from the perspective of receiving countries. Most policies today reflect that sentiment, resulting in limited legal channels of entry as well as limited job opportunities for labour migrants. Yet, many people come to South Africa each year in pursuit of job opportunities and a more prosperous life. They risk their lives crossing borders to make ends meet in support of their children and families left behind in their home countries.

Studies show that one of the major push factors is the lack of job opportunities at home, coupled with an experience of political unrest in certain instances. High costs of legal papers such as visa or passport further pushes people to become undocumented migrants, resulting in acute uncertainty and insecurity. That many people choose to come to the country in spite of a lack of legal entry options speak of the seriousness of their home situation – it seems worth the risk.

A second study from MiWORC shows that foreign-born people in South Africa are more likely than non-migrants to be employed, and unemployment rates for this group is lower. However, that 'advantage' is heavily mitigated by

the fact that migrants are much more likely to work in the informal sector or have precarious employment, and at the same time have access to fewer benefits. It's precisely this tendency for migrant workers to be precariously employed that may explain why many labour migrants find employment on commercial farms.



Migrant workers waits for transport

A series of market liberation policies that have been implemented over the past decades have had big implications for the agricultural sector. It has pushed farmers to become more competitive, resulting in increased informalization and casualization of the work force.



Commercial farms thus have a high demand of seasonal and casual labour – a demand which migrant workers may very well satisfy. The casualization in the farming sector also entails very low entry barriers in terms of both documentation and education – key factors for a number of irregular migrants for entering the sector. Without documents and proper work permits, migrant workers are extremely vulnerable to exploitation. They are often governed by fear of being deported. Since they have a vested interest in staying out of the authorities’ sight they have very limited means of countering abuse.

A tough life!

Exploitation is rife in South Africa’s agricultural sector. Working conditions are terrible in many places, and do not honour basic human rights and dignity. This applies to all farm workers regardless of nationality, who are generally subjected to awful conditions.

There are frequent reports from farm workers of insecure employment, unfair dismissals, shockingly low wages, long and unregulated working hours, harsh working environments, no protective gear, work-place injuries, threats of arrest, poor housing, insecure tenure as well as verbal, physical and sexual abuse. Amongst migrant farm workers, recurring complaints are that farmers who hire undocumented migrants do so because they can get away with exploitative practices of employment.

Migrant farm workers tell stories of exploitative bribery and corruption conducted by supervisors, and threats of police interference and arrest if the worker dares to speak up or just murmur about lodging a complaint. In some instances migrants are working so-called gwaza systems, or piece work, where workers are paid according to performance. The system mainly affects seasonal workers, migrants included, and essentially undermines conditions of a contract and the prescribed minimum wage.



Studies also show that foreign workers are even less likely than locals to be organized in a union. Unionization levels in the agricultural sector is currently not more than 5% across the country, and for migrant workers unionization is very unattainable.

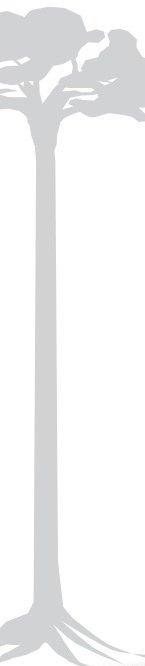
Labour broking – modern slavery

The increasing informalization coupled with limited job opportunities for low skilled workers has resulted in a situation where labour brokers play a pivotal role in managing migration and employment in the agricultural sector.



Protest act during strike

Labour broking can be characterized as a triangular employment relation, where the worker usually works



directly for a farmer, or many different farmers, but is legally employed by the broker. This relatively complex setup makes it much harder for the worker to access basic labour law services. In case of unfair dismissals or other kinds of mistreatment the confusion around who is liable will in many instances make any kind of compensation far-fetched. A parallel system of labour broking has also emerged on some farms that facilitate migration and employment, most often operating outside of the legal perimeter, resulting in poor working conditions, exploitation and no protection whatsoever.

The labour broker is furthermore in control of where and when the worker has employment. That means the broker will sometimes keep workers out of the farms for periods of times, often as punishment for some misdemeanour such as asking a critical question or claiming benefits. Labour broking also leads to highly divided workplaces. On a single farm there may be several different legal employers with which workers are required to bargain, making workers' organization and collaboration more difficult.

To make matters worse there are frequent reports that labour brokers are abusing their position of power by forcing migrant worker women into providing sexual favours. The broker will use his ability to keep the women from working for a period of time to pressure the already desperate migrant women.

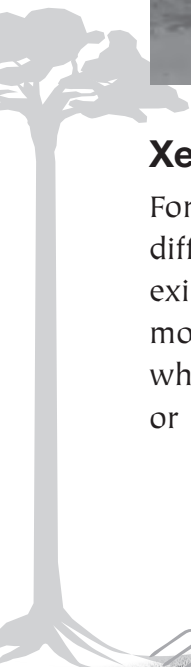


As reported by Oxfam in 2013, human trafficking is also an issue that migrant women face, turning them into sex objects in exchange for work. Often there is a labour broker involved, bringing women to South Africa from countries such as Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Mozambique. The labour broker acts as the go-between: Men negotiating the 'price tag' on these women. It is not for anything that labour broking has been called a modern form of slavery.



Xenophobia is rife

For some labour migrants in South Africa life is made further difficult by the occasionally aggressive xenophobia that exists in this country. Research shows that xenophobia is more often experienced by migrants who work in areas where they have limited shared ethnicity, history, culture or language. These areas are very prone to tensions in



the local communities, and while xenophobic attacks are relatively frequent and very abominable, it is furthermore an issue that xenophobic discrimination extends to the work place, where a clear hierarchy can be detected between both permanent and seasonal workers as well as local and foreign workers. Wage disparities are commonplace, just like there are major differences in access to social benefits.

What about the law?

South Africa does have progressive labour legislation in place, prescribing decent work conditions and wages. However, the legislation is not nearly adequately implemented or enforced, and there are numerous loopholes for employers to exploit. The Department of Labour, which should be monitoring this, is under-resourced. Many workers and unions have repeatedly reported that the labour inspectors engage mainly with management, thus never facing the workers who are subject to the management's decisions. The weak enforcement mechanisms of the current labour law means that it is essentially the employers who have the power to determine conditions on the farms – and slave labour is probably the cheapest form of labour.

Migrant farm workers and this book

Migrant farm workers in South Africa are extremely marginalized. They are constantly exposed to abuse and



exploitation, xenophobia and high levels of job insecurity. Especially as irregular migrants people have very limited ways of addressing the injustice without risking their safety and livelihood. Most migrant workers we have been in contact with in the making of this book have declined to give their name for fear of repercussions. Yet, their stories are important to tell, as they represent the silently oppressed. Therefore, migrant workers' stories are represented in this book through a series of short stories and quotes extracted from conversations and interviews, telling of the challenges migrant farm workers face on a regular basis.



ANDY AMBROSE

My name is Andries Ambrose and I am 41 years old. I want to start with the time when I still lived in the family home.

*“The farmer
wants to punish
me for exercising
my rights”*

I was at primary school when it all began. In the afternoons, when I came home from school I had to tend to the sheep. There was never any time for me to do my school homework. One day, I got home and started cleaning the house, when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned around and the farm owner stood there. He told me that if I didn't go tend the sheep now he would *moer* [beat] me. His name was P.T.. That farmer was a very bad person. On big days he would always make the farm workers drunk, and he would beat them. He always had

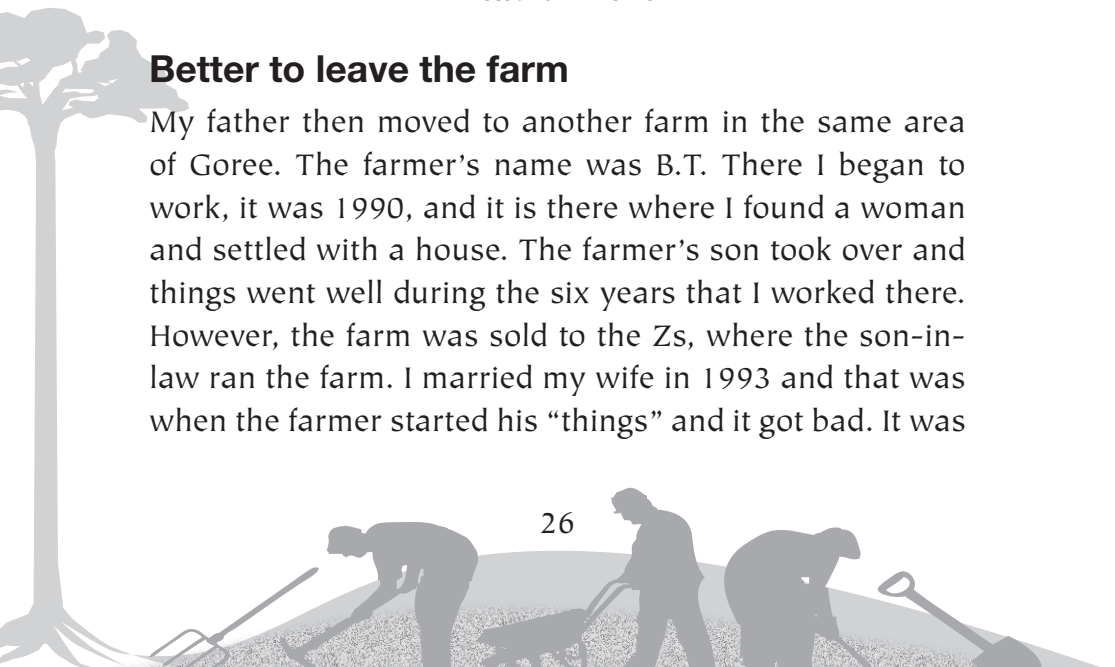
two dogs if you wanted to run away. On that farm people always moved at night because the farmer was so rude. My father stayed there for five years, I was 15 years old.



Evicted farm worker

Better to leave the farm

My father then moved to another farm in the same area of Goree. The farmer's name was B.T. There I began to work, it was 1990, and it is there where I found a woman and settled with a house. The farmer's son took over and things went well during the six years that I worked there. However, the farm was sold to the Zs, where the son-in-law ran the farm. I married my wife in 1993 and that was when the farmer started his "things" and it got bad. It was



like being on school and at this farm I was basically the farm manager. I carried keys. In those year I would still drink, and during the weekends if people wanted to fight with me I dared not retaliate.

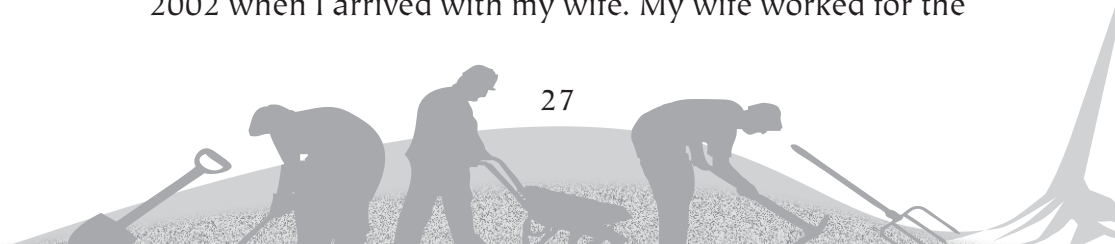
One weekend somebody injured my arm and I could not go to work on the Monday. On that day, after eating time, the farmer requested that my wife and I come and see him. It was here that we started to argue, and my wife advised me that we should rather return home. I worked there six years, and he later came and spoke to me again, and I told him that maybe it was best that we left the farm.

Don't break anything!

I moved again, this time to farmer K.P.T. Things were even worse there. My wife's sister and brother came to visit during their vacation and that was also not good. I was only there a few months and had to leave there too. After that I went to the Overberg and worked there for six years. I worked there as a *trekker* [drove the tractor]. One day a part of the tractor broke, and when I informed the farmer he chased me from the farm. He said that I mustn't come break his stuff, and that I should take my things and leave. I looked for work for a short time but could not find work anywhere.

He, too, wanted a livable wage

It was then that I decided to come to Vinkrivier. It was 2002 when I arrived with my wife. My wife worked for the



farmer D.S, at RH. Farm for three years before he fired her. At this place we got a Christmas box, transport and could ask for loans from the farmer. When it rained, the farmer always provided transport. I earned R6.50 per hour, but we didn't all earn the same and after a while we started to speak about it. When we spoke to the farmer, he said that he, too, wanted a liveable wage.



We decided to join CSAAWU [the farm worker union: Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural, Allied Workers Union]. On the morning of the 19th December the farmer asked us who would continue with the union. He said that it was fine and that he would give the papers to the union. We participated in the farm worker strike in November, December and January 2013. On the 8th January 2013 the farmer sms'd us to our cell phones to tell us to meet at 7h00 where we would usually start work at 6h30. When we arrived he called us together to inform us that we would be immediately dismissed with no pay. We were not to be anywhere on the farm. We returned home and called the trade union immediately. While we were at home he would come with papers for us to sign and on the 17th January 2013 he fired us.

Punishing me for exercising my rights

The union sent my case to the CCMA [Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration], where the farmer decided that he would not re-hire the leaders, but I was one of the men that could return. We decided that we would not return if the farmer refused to re-hire the leaders.

I have been at home for 10 months and cannot find work anywhere. When we do find work then it is stopped by the farmer. I think the farmer wants to punish me for exercising my rights, for fighting for a living wage so that I can see to the needs of my children.

At the moment things are very bad with me and my family. The farmer used an eviction order against me and I have no other place to stay. I have been to court three times already, where the magistrate was very arrogant with me. My situation is dire. I am thankful to TCOE and the other organisations that helped us with food and other needs. It is also very difficult to get a lawyer to represent me. I boycott the products [wine and fruit], so that the farmer can also see what it means to struggle.



SARAH JONAS

I am Sarah Jonas and I am 38 years old. I was born in the Ny Valley and went to school there until standard eight. When I was 15 years old I had to leave school to work, because there was no money to go further. My parents then left the farm and I had to live by other people. I had to work, but all the money I made had to pay for my accommodation. I had nothing for myself.

“We struggle, but we will not stop fighting for our rights”

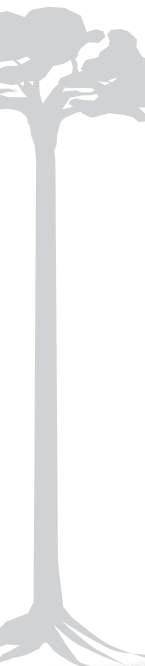
We couldn't earn so little for such hard work

At 19 years old I met Daniel Jonas. It was in 1995. We stayed in the Nuy Valley for two years, and my eldest son was born there – Jerome. I now had to take him out of school because of our situation. From there we moved to Ladysmith.

It was 2000. We worked by farmer M. in a shop, where we had to pack all day. We had a fall-out with the farmer about an increase in wages. We couldn't earn so little for such hard work, especially since everything was so expensive.



In 2005 we returned to Nuy Valley where our other two children were born, Natalie and Leoni. We worked for



farmer F.R. He, however, sold the farm, and we had to once again work for the corporate farms. Things were a struggle there. We had to be up earlier to cut grapes. The farmers have to make light off their pickups so that we can see how to cut the grapes. We earned R42 per day. We were not happy there anymore and joined the trade union. The farmers then chased us away from the farm. My husband then had to take casual work to keep the family going.

Disabled by the work, but cheated out of payment

In 2006 he began work for farmer D.S. He was then a water man. I also worked and in 2009 I started getting sick from the work and was taken to hospital. The doctors in Robertson did tests, but could find nothing wrong with me. I walked to Fission, but they, too, could find nothing wrong. After that, the doctors operated on my hand and referred me to Cape Town, where they found out that I had arthritis.

I gave the farmer a letter from the doctors saying that I could no longer work. He gave me a form to take to manpower [human resources]. I went every month, but eventually, when I had to sign for my money the people there told me that the farmer said I had resigned myself. The farmer denied it when I asked him about it, and said that there are people saying that I had already received

my money, but I had not received anything. I returned with no money. I visited the doctor every month and they decided to declare me disabled.

The police stand with the farmers

In 2012 we heard about the trade union and decided to join. The men on the farm also decided to join the strike, even though they had never been on strike before. That was on the 7th January 2013. The farmer said he didn't want to see them on the farm again and that if he saw them he would *skiet* them *vrek* [shoot them]. The men on the farm then went to the police station and laid a charge against the farmer, but nothing happened with that case, because the police stand with the farmers.



Zolani, protest

Afterwards, on the 17th January, the farmer started firing people. They are now at least 10 months at home. What

happens is that when they look for other work, then the farmer will call the next farmer to say that he must not give them a job.

What does he [the farmer] think about our children? How must we live and send our children to school without food? I had to take my 17-year-old son out of school because there is no money to pay for the hostel. The hostel charges R930 per quarter. Where do I get so much money if the farmer has fired us?

We struggle, but we will not stop fighting for our rights

We struggle, but we will not stop fighting for our rights. We are only asking for R150 per day and our perks, so that I can give my children a better life, and send my son back to school. It is my dream, because I did not have the privilege to study further, but I want that for my children. *GENOEG IS GENOEG!* [Enough is enough!]

I ask that you, my brothers and sisters outside the country, help so that I can once more put my children back into school. I ask that you boycott the wine and fruit of the farmer. I want them to feel what it is to struggle. I don't think they know. But please help us, and TCOE and the other organisations, because it is just you who care about us farm workers.

“We have been here in South Africa for 11 months. We came here together. We came because we had no jobs in Lesotho. It took one day. We took a bus and then we crossed the river. You have no passports, so you have to do it. It is very difficult. We came to Nqkubela, because we have friends who stay here. At first we stayed with them, now we both have our own house. It was not easy to get a job, but we go around to people and ask them. And it is not easy because they have people who have worked there for a long time. But we got work by L., a labour broker. We like it there, but it is hard. We don’t have a choice, because we need a job. We have worked here since January. It is mostly Lesotho workers here. In the morning we go there, then we eat breakfast before we go to work. Lunch is 12 o’clock, then we return back half past five. It’s a long day. In the work we remove the fruit from the trees. Peaches, mostly. They taught us how to do it – we took a long time, but we tried. We don’t have work permits, but we are trying to get it. They didn’t ask for it in this job. We earn different wages [R1099 and R856 a week, respectively], because I work harder than her. It’s about how much, how fast you work. You count the trees, one tree is one rand”.

– YOUNG WOMEN FROM LESOTHO ABOUT COMING TO SOUTH AFRICA TO WORK.

ANDY JOHANNES

My name is Andy Johannes. I am 36. I live with my family - my wife and two kids. My one child is turning four and the other one is now two years old.

“They control people, it’s like they are leading a dog”

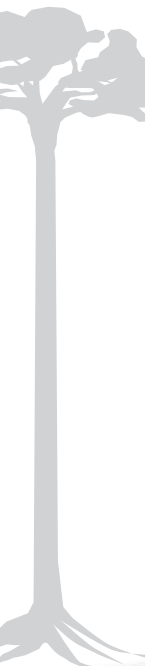
We live on the farm ADF. That’s where I started and for most of my years I’ve been working there.

I came here in the year 2000 and I started working. When I came here there was nothing, only three blocks of plums and then, as I grew up, me and him [the farmer], we started producing on the farm. By now there is a big packhouse where he packs his fruit. Now he’s working with over 200 people during harvest time, but most of the people are from Lesotho or from Zimbabwe, and now they are struggling because

he can't work with those people anymore, because they don't have work permits.



There's very bad things happening on the farm. When I came here I saw the houses of the people. They were in a very bad condition. After three years I told the farmer: "We can't live like this, and we have to make sure that there are some changes". This change is not for us, it's



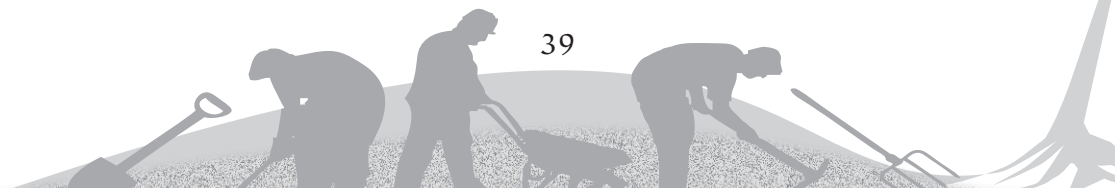
for our children, they are also living in these bad houses. And then he started telling me everything about how he's going to farm the farm.

The water makes a layer of mud

I've got a little daughter in my house and, like now, it's very difficult when it gets dark. We are using candles and the candles don't make a big light. So it's very difficult. The water we are using is from the canal. We don't know when there is a dead thing in the water, but we are drinking that dirty water. The water is so dirty you can't drink it. When you boil it it makes a layer of mud.

I went to him and I confronted him and asked: "What are you going to do now, because we can't live like this anymore". But then he told me, you see there is the grass you feed for the horses

and the sheep, and he says I must make sure that in one month we need to produce 250 or 200 of those bales. Then he's going to put in electricity, he's going to build the houses a bit, make renovations. But he just put in electricity and for that first year he gave us paint - after that it was still the same. I was a water guy on the farm, I installed the water and so I do the plumbing. We started making these 10.000 liter tanks and filled water from the dam into the tanks and we circulated it and it went into the houses. But he doesn't use these houses. Everytime we asked him about the water he said: "No, I don't drink

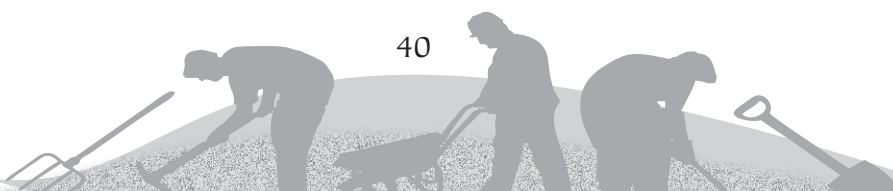
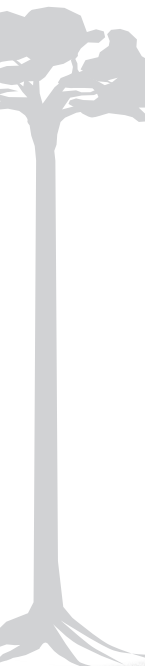


the water, I just use the water for bath and I buy my water in town or I go and fetch some water in town”. And it’s an old situation and all the stories just come with another story, another story.



New shack in Robertson

The children on the farm I’m staying on, they can’t go to school because there is no transport for them. When they go to the boss he says: “No, it’s not my fault, it is not my problem. I don’t care. My children are everyday in school”. But if the children are walking around, then he is asking



questions: “Why are those children not in school?”. No, there is no transport. “No, you can’t do that, I’m going to call the police to take them away, because you are not looking after your kids!”. But he wants the parents to be in the job.

It’s a very difficult situation, but we are coping. The union is also assisting me with a lot of things, because I’ve become wiser since I got into the union. I didn’t have many things to say about my rights and all those things. But after that when I confronted him and I told him: “No, we also have rights”, he said: “Ohh, you are now clever? Ok, you will see, one day you will shoot yourself in the foot!”.

It was very bad, and when you see the kids on the farm, there is no safety - there is no grass or anything. When the parents are in work the kids are just playing around there, and so we ask him: “What are you going to do, are you going to make a plan?” He says: “No, then the women must stay in home so they can look after your kids. I don’t have a problem, my wife can sit at home and watch after my children”.

Money trouble

And the money, that was a real issue. When I first came here, the men were paid R115 and the women R95, so I start with the wages of a woman, and had to work myself up. For a week you got R95 but you had to work from six to half past five. That was in 2000.



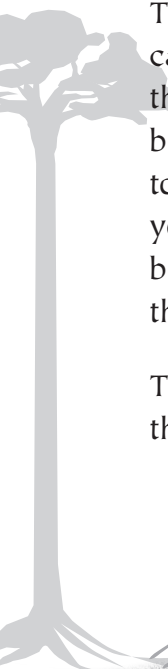
In 2004 I left the farm and went to Cape Town for nine months. When I came back the farmer said: “You mustn’t think that the money you got there in Cape Town that you are going to get it here, too. Because I can’t pay you that much”.

They increased the wage now by, I think, R13. But this year they didn’t get increases, because the bosses were saying, when the people were talking about wanting more money: “Go to Zuma. Zuma must go for it. No no no, I don’t have money, I want to plant this hectar, or two hectar. You must go, you can come next year, then we’ll see if we can do something about the money”. When it comes it’s just a five rand per day or so - they don’t give the people the R150 either. Some of them are getting and some are not.

They give nothing away

They give nothing away. You can’t even pick a fruit... We call it *meevallers* [windfalls], those that we pick up from the ground. You can’t eat it. They want them all in the bins - they want it to go to Langeberg or Ashton Canning to make jam or sauces. When you are in a vineyard and you eat some of those grapes they are packing, all hell breaks loose. Maybe the whole weeks pay is taken, but they want their money. You can’t just eat.

There is another farm where they produce cabbage. But the people can’t take that cabbage. They can go and take



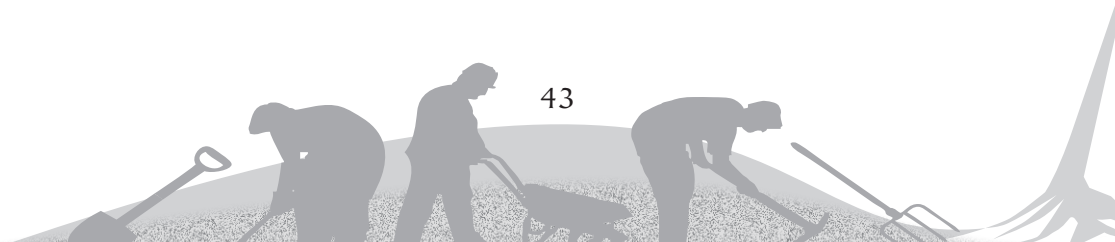
it when it's rotten. Then you must clean it, wash it, then you can make some food.

It's very nasty on the farm. They don't care about us. We are just there to make them rich.

Always working

In the summertime they used to make the hours longer, from six to six, but there was a time when people would work from six to eight in the evening. Then we told the farmer: "No, that's not right. When you go home, you just go and sit, you eat, everything is ready. But we must go and make some fire to cook food, because not everyone has an electric stove or two hotplates. We must go outside and make a fire." He says: "OK, if you don't want that, then the women can go and you men you must work later then".

And during holidays I was helping on other farms just to earn money, because when we go on holiday, the money is so little, you can't provide for your family during the whole holiday, you must go and work. But they stopped that now because they said by the time you come to your work the people are moaning: "Ohh I'm tired, my back is sore". So they said [the farmers to each other] "You don't give another guys' workers work, they mustn't work." Now you have to go to the labour broker when you want to work during your holiday.



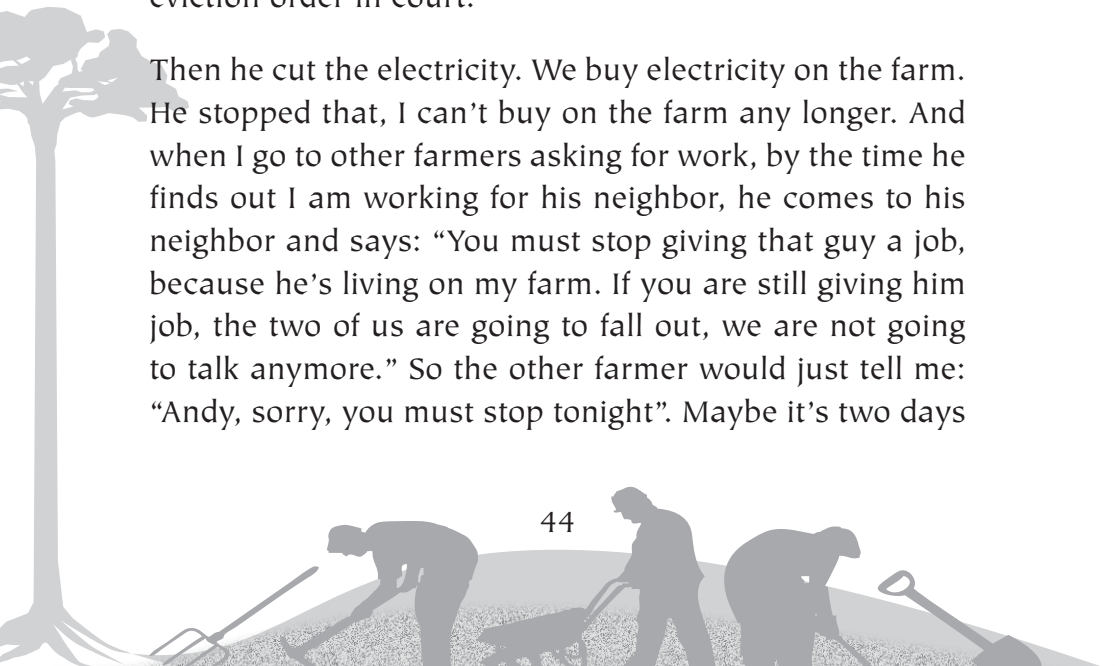
Joining the union

In 2007, me and some other guys got the pamphlet of the union. The two guys, they were youngsters, and were at school here in Robertson, they brought me the pamphlet and said: “These are the right people you must talk to”. I contacted Karel and Trevor [from the union], and they came and talked to us. We showed them the conditions on the farm, and when we started negotiating, the farmer just changed. Once, he liked me very much. We are the same age and have done a lot of things together, and so he would talk openly with me. But after that, things began to change.

In 2012, that was when the farm workers decided to strike.

After that, things just became a big argument. He chased me away, and the other guy who was with me in the union. He chased us away in 2015. Now I am facing an eviction order in court.

Then he cut the electricity. We buy electricity on the farm. He stopped that, I can't buy on the farm any longer. And when I go to other farmers asking for work, by the time he finds out I am working for his neighbor, he comes to his neighbor and says: “You must stop giving that guy a job, because he's living on my farm. If you are still giving him job, the two of us are going to fall out, we are not going to talk anymore.” So the other farmer would just tell me: “Andy, sorry, you must stop tonight”. Maybe it's two days



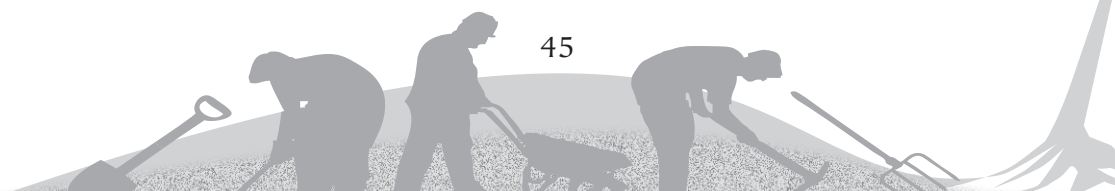
I work or one day, then I must stop and leave and I must go and struggle again for work.

Stronger against the boers

I started recruiting on all the other farms there in APF. I told the people there: “We must join the union so we can be stronger against these boers. There’s only four white farmers in the area there, but they control a lot of us, we are more than 100 people in that area.”

The union has made a lot of difference on the farms. There were some farms where workers were paying rent, but when CSAAWU came in, we stopped the rent. Now they [the farmers] don’t want to speak directly with you. There is always a spy who is telling them we had a meeting. They pay those guys for the information. They control people, it’s like they are leading a dog.

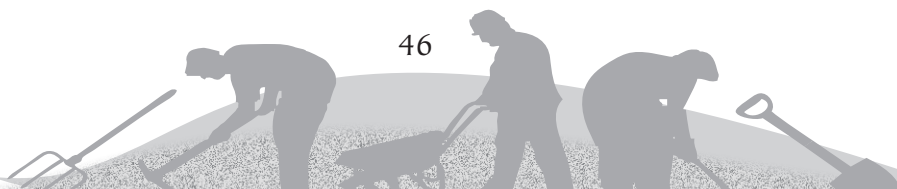
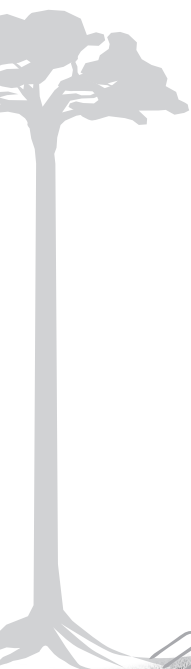
We’ve started a new method there in APF. When we go there and you see the gates are closed, we have our bikes, then we go on to the other side of the farm where they can’t see us coming. But there is always one, maybe for instance it’s a driver, or a tractor driver or a lorry driver. He’s got more benefits than the normal workers on the farm. Then when he sees us here, when they see the bicycles come, he goes to the farmer. Then he [the farmer] comes driving around to see us and wants to know what we are doing there. We would say “no, we’re just coming to visit a friend.” But he will still tell us we must go.



The same situation for many years

You can hear sometimes old farm workers, who are much older than me, when you talk to them about the union they come and tell you their story. Now you think back to the time you started and how long these guys have been working on the farm. It's very bad. And they are still treating the people that way. They are still getting away with it. There is no farm that is treating workers well. If you go there you can see maybe the houses are a bit clean and painted. But that is just the outside. When you go inside, you will see. When you look up, you see the roof is open or windows are broken, but the house is painted pretty on the outside, for their guests to see.

More people [from abroad] must come and see how it is here in South Africa, especially on the farms. They must look on the farms, at those who are exporting the fruit to the overseas. They should look and see how it is.



DANIEL SAMBO

When I started working I earned R1 a day. That was in 1981 when I was 14 years old. I had to help my mother, as she was the only breadwinner in the house. My younger brother and sister were still at school, so I had to help put food on the table. My other brothers and sisters had already moved out of the house.

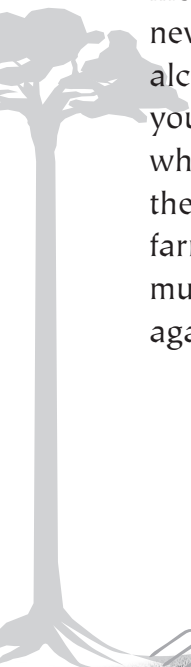
“We will stand together and fight”

When I was 21 years old I got married. I have two sons – one works and the other is still in primary school. After I was married I went away for a few years, where I worked on another farm in Montague Valley. I returned and have been working on the farm for 16 years. I came back because I knew this farm from when I was young, and I worked for more wages.



Paid in alcohol

The years have flown by since 1981 and the increase in salary was always about 5%, not really money to talk about. You can't keep your child in high school with that money, you can't pay the hostel, because the money was never really enough. The farm owners would pay us in alcohol on the evening we should have been paid. First you get alcohol and then your pay, so that you don't know what your two week pay is because you stay drunk. All the money that you worked so hard to earn stays with the farm owner. On Mondays when you go to work then you must first buy your family food at the farm shop, and then again take your alcohol, and then go work.



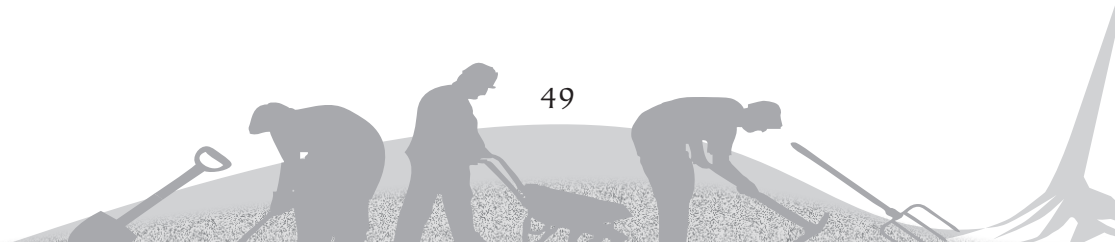
The eyes of the farm workers have been opened

Life was bitter during the apartheid years, until President Nelson Mandela brought about change when he was released from prison. Salaries were adapted, better housing, and a better life for the farm workers. Now we also have rights, not like in years before when we were not allowed to speak. We became smarter and smarter every day, especially since we discovered that there is a trade union that is there to help workers. There were different unions to stand by the workers. I decided to join a union, to help, and it was successful.

I learned many things, especially what to do and what your rights are on the farm, because the farm owners will never inform the farm workers about laws that affect them. For them [the farmers] it is better if you remain 'dumb', because then they can do with you whatever they want. But the eyes of the farm workers have been opened, and their brains have started to work. Now that there is a trade union the farm owners are unhappy, because everything that was kept secret is now known to the workers.

We are still handled like slaves

Farm workers were part of strike action that started on the 13th November 2012. The farm owners seemed satisfied, but suddenly in January 2013 many layoffs happened, and I was one of those that had been fired. Many things happened from this. Farm owners banned



us from emptying our houses. They even got court orders to get us out; many times we had to appear in court. Everywhere we worked, paths had been closed off to us and the owner was behind all this stuff. The farm owners didn't care that our children were going hungry and that they couldn't attend school.

On the farm we live like prisoners because the farmer decides if we can come or go. We are still handled like slaves on the farms of South Africa, especially on farm RH. where I worked.

We ask our brothers and sisters for solidarity, so that I can also have a better life for me and my family. Help us to eradicate the poverty on the farms of South Africa. Boycott the wine and fruit from South African farmers because slavery continues, it exists on South African farms. I plead and beg with tears in my eyes, help me out of the misery that I am in. Do it for our children because we have no future for them.

We will stand together and fight.

THE JORDAAN FAMILY

They didn't even give their condolences!

ISAK:

My father had been living on the farm for more than thirty years and worked at the farm until he got sick. We came to the farm when I was a little boy and my sister was still a baby. My mother died, and only a few months later my father died, too. We didn't think we would no longer be allowed to live on the farm. But just some days after my father died, someone from the farm came to us in a car. They said we had to move out immediately. They evicted us. They didn't even give their condolences!

Isak, Lilly and their three year old child had a home at the WFN farm. They lived also with Isak's parents and sister.

Overheard in court

ISAK:

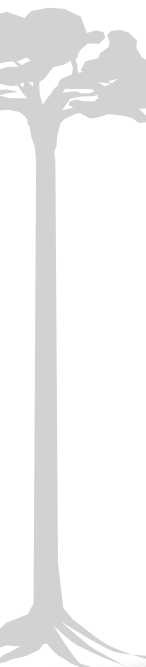
There was a case in court. But they didn't let us speak. We couldn't get a lawyer. I remember that during the court proceedings on the eviction, the farm owner and his family and lawyers sat in the magistrate's office, while me and my family waited outside until they had finished talking. Only then were we called in. It was even the farm owner himself who called us in, not someone from the court.



Farm eviction

LILLY:

We hardly had a chance to speak in court. It was mostly the farmer's wife and the foreman who talked. The judge at one point told us that he didn't want to wait any longer for us to get a lawyer, we should just empty the house.



Since the eviction notice came they - the management - harrassed us. They would threaten us and pressure us about moving, even though I was not well at the time.

ISAK:

I even had a letter from the clinic that I presented in court, but the judge told me it wasn't his fault my wife was sick; we still had to leave the farm.

Home and garden gone

LILLY:

On the day of the eviction, I was sitting outside of the house with my neighbor when a car with a trailer drove up to the house. Isak was not at home - he works under a labour broker on many different farms. I didn't know what was going on - I thought maybe they had just come to pick up something from the farm. But then the person from the car went into our house and started taking pictures, and then carried all of the things and furniture out of the house and put it on the trailer, and put it along the road. I went with them, and when I came back, our home was being bulldozed all the way to the ground. Later we found out that the furniture had been given to some other workers on the farm. We had a piece of land by our house on the farm, where we could plant some crops. After that, we were not allowed to come back to the farm to harvest the crops we planted. The farm owner didn't even compensate us for that.

At the mercy of other people

ISAK:

After we were evicted, we stayed along the road for some days. Then we went to live with my sister, until she evicted us, too. She just put our things outside the house – she didn't tell us why. Now we live in Nqkubela. We live in the house of a friend. On farm WFN the house was very bad. It had holes in the wall. There was no toilet and we had to get water from outside. We had to pay for electricity by the farmer at R50 a week. We asked the farmer to make improvements, but he said he would have to take out the amount from my father's payslip.

LILLY:

But we were happier at the farm. At least there we had our own house, now we are at the mercy of other people. Many times we don't have anything to eat. My husband sometimes can only work two or three days a week. And I have a child that needs to eat!

NIEL APPOLLIS

I lived in Cape Town and we were seven children in the house. Life carried along until we all had to go to school – we were all at one school, but in different classes. My father’s name is Abram and my mother’s name is Maria. Our family lived together very well, it was healthy, and nothing much happened during that time since I was born.

“We are still struggling”



However, when I was 10 years my mother heard that my father had gone to prison. We asked our mother why he was in prison, and she told us that it was for murder. She told us that he received a sentence of 15 years, and that we would have to continue alone, without a father. So my mother had to struggle with us.

My mother didn't stay long in Cape Town. After five years she moved with us to our eldest brother in Rawsonville. It was 1980 when we went to live in Rawsonville. My mother put us, the other six children, into school in Rawsonville. From that year onwards I attended school until 1985. At that stage I had to leave school, not because I wanted to, but because we were struggling. I seem to be jumping the gun here in terms of the years, but will tell that story now.

When we came to Rawsonville life became very difficult, because when my father was released from prison he didn't drink, but as the months and years passed, my brothers and sisters and I had a tough time when my father began drinking. He was rude with my mother and us, but we got through it until I got to that age.

The baby looked just like me

I will now tell my story. I was 13 years old when I started to work, and pay attention to girls. When I was 14 years old I went to work in Paarl and lived by other people, who also had children. These children also had a tough

time with their father, but I will only talk about my own struggles here.

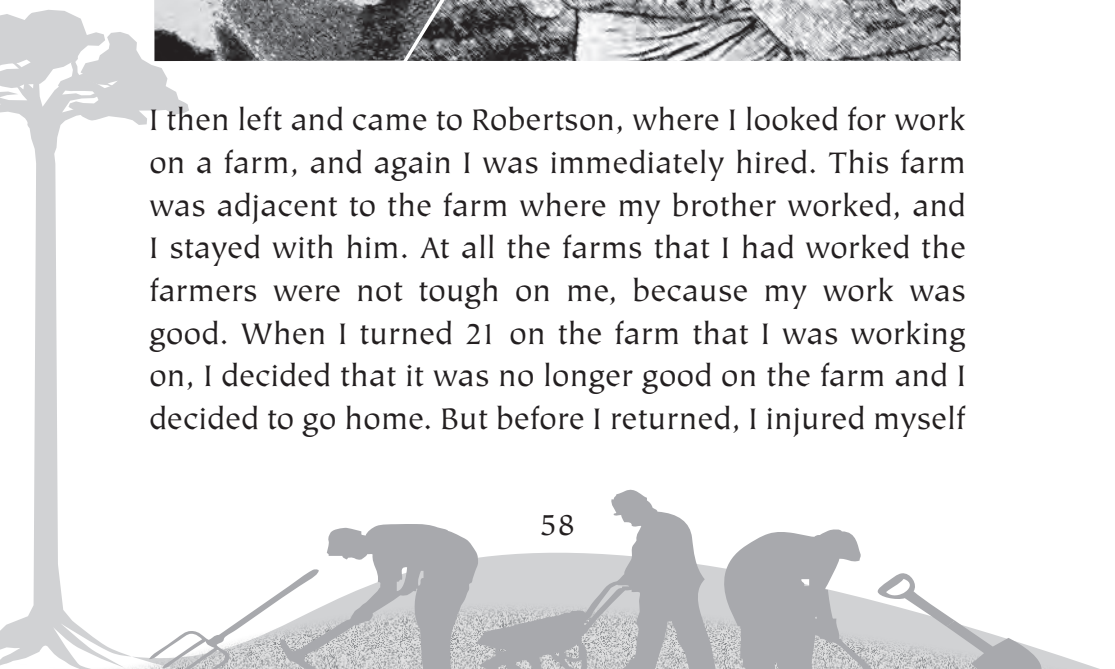
I stayed in Paarl until I was 15 years old, and just before I really wanted to return home, a message came with the *uncle* I stayed with. He told me that my mother said I must come home, because the girlfriend that I had was carrying my child. I told the *uncle* that it was not my child, because I didn't want to believe it. This was my first job that I had on the farm. I worked on the farm, but my thoughts were with the girl that said she was carrying my child. Later in the year, while I was still 15 years old, I decided to return home. But the *uncle* didn't want me to return home during that time of the year. It was the 6th month of me being 15, but I decided to "walk away" from them. When I got home the girl that had carried my child was with the baby at the house. I immediately went to see if it was my child, and I could not argue that it wasn't, because the baby looked just like me.

The mother and I did not live together, but I gave her money and bought things for the baby because it was my child. After I had given her all the money that I walked away with, I decided to look for work on the farm. The farmer hired me immediately. The girl left that weekend to her parents' home, but I didn't forget about my child. I continued to give even though she did not stay with me, because I was the father.

When I turned 16 my parents moved to another farm in Rawsonville called Farm B. I continued to work on the farm that my parents used to work at, and remained there until I was 17 years old.



I then left and came to Robertson, where I looked for work on a farm, and again I was immediately hired. This farm was adjacent to the farm where my brother worked, and I stayed with him. At all the farms that I had worked the farmers were not tough on me, because my work was good. When I turned 21 on the farm that I was working on, I decided that it was no longer good on the farm and I decided to go home. But before I returned, I injured myself



and needed to spend a week in hospital due to my back issues. After a week I returned home to my mother. I still had pain, though, and laid at home where my mother helped me return to health.

It was still apartheid on the farm

When I turned 22 I met another girlfriend. Her name was Mynie. That was in 1994. We were madly in love with each other. When I returned to health my father asked the farmer for a job for me and the response was positive. So come Monday, I started working on the farm.

One month after I started working there, my partner and I got a room on the farm. We lived together. This farmer was not like the other farmers I had worked for. During those times it was still apartheid on the farm.

My life was also not that good. My partner drank a lot, and I drank too, but not like she did. My partner drank, and when she was drunk she would look for trouble with me and other people. I decided then to move away from our two families, so that things might be better for the two of us. I worked there for three years, and in 1997 I looked for work on another farm. It didn't take long before I found work.

I persevered until a change came

My first child was born in 1995 and my second was born on the farm I now worked at. The farm I stayed at was

farm P. This farmer was better than the other one. If you asked, he gave. In 1999 I married my wife.



In 2001 I decided to go away to look for other work. In 2002 I found work on another farm in Goundiniweg called farm J. – and in 2002 my third child was born. We stayed there and the other people started complaining, but I didn't know at that time that there were people who could help farm workers. I persevered until a change came. Us workers discussed our situation with the farmer, but he didn't bother himself with us.

I then decided to find other work with my wife and children. That's when I came to Robertson again. I got



work there in 2009. On the farm, where my third child was born, I worked for five years. I worked well on this farm in the beginning. But then I saw it was going the same way as on the previous farm. That is when I decided to join a trade union, because the money was very little, the housing was bad, the water was dirty and the work was not as it should be.

When I joined a union the farmer took away all my rights, and when the strike happened most of the workers joined in. We went on strike for two weeks.

This farmer fired me because i fought for the workers

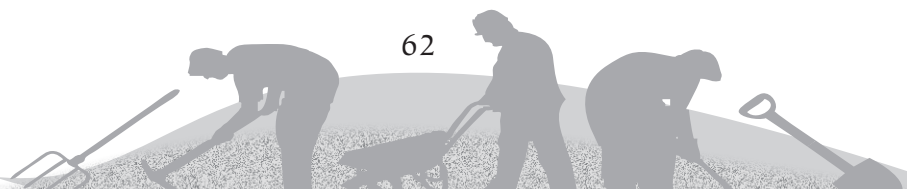
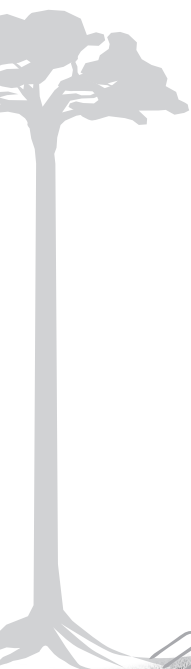
When I went back to work, the farmer called me in to fill in a form. I told him that I refused to sign the form. He then laid a charge against me with the police because I was part of the strike. On the 11th March 2013 the farmer fired me because I was part of the strike. Now that I am no longer working on the farm many people come to me to complain, because the farmer is taking their houses, energy, savings, transport, loans and in the end they have nothing left of their wages.

I worked for farmer G. for five years. This farmer fired me because I fought for the workers. I am now eight months without work and there is no income. If I get work, then the farmer that I used to work for closes all paths for me by other farmers – this is why I can't find work.

We are still struggling

I know that we will win this struggle if workers stand together. Now that I have been fired I am no longer good enough for my wife, because she says that she has never had a man that fights against the farm owners like this. My wife is a heavy drinker, and when she is drunk I must stay out of her way. I thought about leaving the union, I thought it is not worth my while, but that means that I give the farmer the right to do as he pleases. This is why I choose to stay with the union, because that is where I got my rights. Now I, too, can encourage the other workers to join the union. The strike was tough on us, and we are still struggling.

This is all about my life. Here in five pages.



DENECO DUBE

This was the first strike ever in the Le Chasseur district near Robertson. I was scared, but I had to be strong. The strike was exciting because it was the first time that farm workers became aware of their own power. When the strike began, the farm owners fled to their houses. We realised the literal meaning of “majority rule”; we were the majority, and the bosses the minority.

At our farm, the bosses brought an interdict against the union to stop the strike. They tried to declare the strike illegal and hold our union responsible for any financial losses. We were very frustrated since our rights were taken away from us. How could the farmers want to decide on our behalf? It was our decision to strike. We informed the

Deneco Dube grew up on a farm, and later became a farm worker himself. When the farm worker strike broke out in 2012 he assumed a position as a popular leader, and has ever since fought for the dignity and justice of rural people. Here, he tells of the farm worker strike from his perspective.

farmers that an interdict would not stop us. We could not allow ourselves to be intimidated.

Those who opposed us were well prepared

We went from farm to farm to fetch workers to join the strike. We blocked roads with burning tyres and debris. The police joined forces with the farmers. Those who opposed us were well prepared. We knew they would try and arrest our leaders so as to demobilise us. So they arrested them and they were denied bail.



We had to think of strategies on how to handle the police. We threatened the police, warning them that if they shot one bullet in our direction, we'll burn down the farms. We told them that if they intimidated us in the streets,

then we'll take the strike to the farms. Two workers were injured by police in our area. One was shot in the back and another in the arm. They didn't go to a doctor because they were afraid the police might find them. The police had threatened that they'd come during the night to shoot us. And they did follow us one night, but we ran to a nearby house of a farm worker and asked for help. The worker sheltered us in the house. We have learnt to move around and not stay in one place. If they police block us and corner us, then we move the strike protest somewhere else and set up burning blockades.

Be proud of achievements

Every farm I visit, the workers tell me that I am responsible for changes on the farm, and that they can see these changes. Elderly farm workers tell me that they would never have believed such changes would ever happen on their farm. I tell them that it is not because of me; that I couldn't achieve any of this on my own. It is our power, our collective power, that brought about the changes. We must be proud of this. If we united more farms and continued to stand together, we would've achieved even more. We must be proud of what we achieved.

We have been abused by the farmers for too long, but we won't walk that same path again. If we must die, then we will die knowing it was for the future of the rural poor. We must collectively resolve that we are now in the middle of the fight and that we cannot turn around until we have won.

“I have only heard about this, for me it has never occurred. There is someone I know that this happened to. This one lady was proposed to by the foreman for a sexual favour. When she refused she was then not given a chance to come back on the farm the following week. She couldn't do anything about it”.

— FARM WORKER FROM LESOTHO ABOUT THE FREQUENT REPORTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND HARRASSMENT FROM LABOUR BROKERS TOWARDS MIGRANT WOMEN.

“I paid R1000 to get the job. Last year I was dismissed because I don't have a work permit. I make R550 a week. It is not enough to support my family as a widow. Working on farms is difficult and you do not know how much you can earn. I was paid for picking peaches R12 per day and in the tomato farm I got R90. Working hours are long with no benefits; when my job ended I left with nothing”.

— 41-YEAR OLD WOMAN FROM LESOTHO

CHARNE PAULSEN

I was born in Calvina and lived in the town. My mother worked and my father was not very involved. He worked at the prison here. My childhood years were good... And not so good. We were very poor. I couldn't complete my schooling because my parents could not afford it. We were nine people in a two-bedroom house. My mother was also raising her sister's two children.

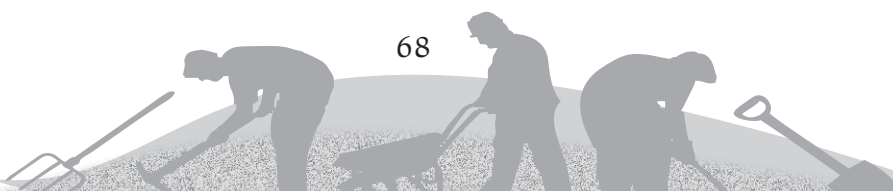
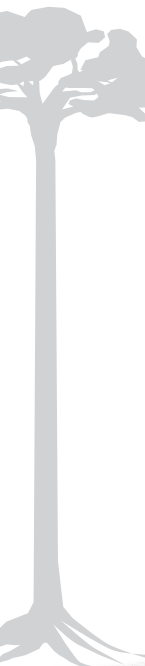
"I dream of a better life for women on farms"

A child that had to look after other children

At the age of 14, I moved to Cape Town to work as a child-minder. My time spent in Cape Town was very lonely because I was still a child that had to look after other children. After a time, I moved to

Woodstock to also look after children. I earned R350. Later I lived at my aunt's where I worked at a crèche, cooking food and doing other chores. I earned R200.

I then met a friend from the R. farm. I would visit the place with my friend and decided to stay. My parents still lived in Calvinia. I then met George Meton and together we became farm workers.



I dream of a better life for women on farms

I had a daughter. George abused me and he used drugs and alcohol. That is why I left that relationship. I then met Dovan Grootboom – we weren't married but lived together. For a short while I didn't work on the farm. Meanwhile, my partner was fired as a result of the strike. It was very hard to stay afloat. I really want my daughter to have her dreams become a reality. As women farm workers we can't get rights. Our worth is less and we pay for the houses we live in. The contract is in Dovan's name, and if anything was to happen to him then I don't have rights to stay in the house.

Women on farms have no security and we are dependent on our men when it comes to right-to-housing. Many of the older women live alone because the farmer doesn't want other people living by them, not even their children. I dream of a better life for women on farms.

“He chased us away in 2015. Now I am facing an eviction order in court”.

“He would always make the farm workers drunk, and he would beat them”.

“When we arrived he called us together to inform us that we would be dismissed with no pay”.

“I think the farmer wants to punish me for exercising my rights, for fighting for a living wage so that I can see to the needs of my children”.

We couldn't earn so little for such hard work, especially since everything was so expensive”.

“We don't know when there is a dead thing in the water, but we are drinking that dirty water”.

“The children on the farm I'm staying on, they can't go to school because there is no transport for them”.

“It's very nasty on the farm. They don't care about us. We are just there to make them rich”.

“There's only four white farmers in the area there, but they control a lot of us, we are more than 100 people in that area”.

ABRAHAM ADAMS

My name is Abraham Adams. I live in the informal settlement in Nqkubela. We are four people living in a shack. None of us are working or in school. The children were in school, but I didn't have money, so they dropped out. Now they are just sitting here.

"I was just told to walk out with my family"

I had been staying on a farm for 15 years, but then there was a dispute between me and the farmer, and I was evicted from the farm. I was born on that farm and grew up there. And then I worked there for 15 years. I was dismissed and evicted from the farm without any compensation. I was just told to walk out with my family.

What happened was that I was expected to work in very poor and bad conditions,



so I said something to the farmer. I told him I was unhappy, and then I was dismissed and evicted.

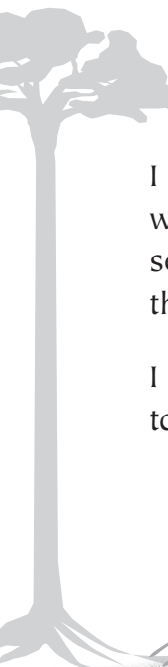
More and more evictions

After that I moved to the SF farm. There I was also evicted after a while because of a dispute about working conditions. I did my work according to the agreement I had with the farmer, but the farmer was still not satisfied with how I was conducting my work, so I was evicted.



I worked and stayed on the SF farm for two years. When we were evicted from there, we moved into this informal settlement with an agreement that we were going to rent this shack from someone else.

I am unemployed, there's no food, and so I cannot afford to pay the rent. The owners of the schack have moved out



to work on the farm. Now they are also being evicted from the farm, so they want to evict us from the shack. We are soon going to be homeless. From here I don't know where to move to.

I would wish for a house

You see the young boy here; when we were residing on SF farm his mother drank poison – pesticides – and passed away. And then he became an orphan, so we took him in as our child. He is supposed to be at school, but he doesn't have any documents such as his birth certificate, and he cannot enter school without that.

If I had a wish, I would wish for a house. My wife is suffering from asthma. The condition in the shack is not fit enough for her to live in. She doesn't sleep at night because of her chest problem. We were at the doctor and they gave her a pump. But this place is bad for her.

“Things were a struggle there. We had to be up earlier to cut grapes. The farmers have to make light off their pickups so that we can see how to cut the grapes. We earned R42 per day”.

“Eventually, when I had to sign for my money the people there told me that the farmer said I had resigned myself”.

“What happens is that when they look for other work, then the farmer will call the next farmer to say that he must not give them a job”.

“When I started working I earned R1 a day. That was in 1981 when I was 14 years old”.

“First you get alcohol and then your pay, so that you don’t know what your two week pay is because you stay drunk”.

“How must we live and send our children to school without food? I had to take my 17-year-old son out of school because there is no money to pay for the hostel”.

“I want them to feel what it is to struggle. I don’t think they know”.

“We can’t live like this, and we have to make sure that there are some changes”.

DANIEL JONAS

In 1988 I was 15 years old when I started to work. I was in standard two. I earned R5 and my father earned R11.50. My father worked on farm B. in Ladysmith. My father passed away in 2003 and we were forced to move from the farm. We were eight people.

*“Today we know
our rights”*

I earned peanuts

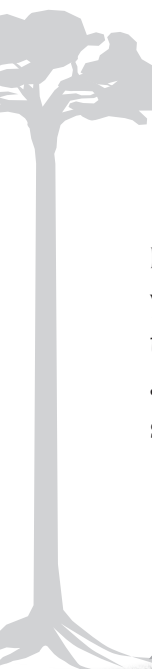
In 1994 I came to Worcester where I stayed on the W. farm. Here, we fell out with the farmer about money. Then I went to farm N., B.B.’s farm, where I did regular work. It was here that I met Sarah. She was also a farm worker.

I asked my father if we could come. We rented a four-bedroom house in Ladysmith where we stayed and got

married. In Ladysmith I worked by farmer M. He asked that I help with the ostriches, but he said later that the ostriches do not make enough money. He then built a shop. Here we argued about the type of work and the work contract. I earned peanuts for the type of work I was doing. And he chased me around a lot, and this is why we had an argument, and I left.



I then moved back to Nuy Valley. I worked here for four years (Willow Creek area). The farm was sold in 2005 to a company. In 2006 we moved to farm R., Vink Rivier area. I worked there for seven years as a *besporing* man. I started working here for R69 per day. My wife and I both



worked on the farm. Our three children were at school and did well.

We have no privileges on the farm

In 2012 the farm worker strike broke out, and one of my colleagues decided to participate because we wanted better wages and a better working environment. I was one of the leaders in the strike.

The farm worker strike was necessary because farm workers grew tired of having to struggle. Many of us don't know our rights and our situation is very bad. The houses we live in is in a very bad condition. We start working at 5h30 or 6h30. On days when it rains we have to work in the rain. We have no privileges on the farm. The privileges that we did have have been taken away. When we informed the farmer that we will be participating in the strike for a living wage, he said that he also wants a living wage.

Intimidation and violence

During the strike there was intimidation by the farmers and the police. Violence was used by the police to intimidate the farm workers. As of January we have been locked out of the farms – whether for 1 day, 1 week, 1 month or 1 year. We have been without work for more than 10 months. We can't get other work because the farmer has black-listed us. It is going very badly with us

now, without food. I had to take my 17-year-old son out of school because I could no longer afford to keep him at school. If it was not for the trade union, I don't know what would have happened to us.

As a result of the union, today we know our rights, and we realize the importance of self-organization and to belong to an organization. The farmers don't want people to know their rights. If you speak about your rights, then you are threatened with eviction.

Magistrate not sympathetic to farm workers

Presently, I have appeared twice in court with regard to eviction. The magistrates are not very sympathetic to us farm workers. It is very difficult finding representation in court because it is very expensive and we cannot afford it. Our union, Mawubuye and TCOE stand with us, though, and fight with us so that the evictions are not honoured.

Today I ask for your help and solidarity so that the voices of farm workers can be heard. We also ask that you don't buy South African wine and fruit. The wine and fruit is the blood of the farm workers. We want to build a future for our children so that they do not become farm workers, so that they live their dreams.