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# *Drought, Relief And Rural Communities*

*Special Report no. 9*

**Association For Rural Advancement  
(AFRA)**

**Drought, Relief And Rural Communities**

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## Foreword

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# Foreword

The Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) has run a Drought Project since October 1992. The project's primary focus was to monitor drought conditions in the AFRA's operational area and to assist communities to access relief through providing them with relevant information and helping them to submit proposals to relief agencies.

In attempting to do this, it became clear that the effects of drought on rural black communities was not a well understood phenomenon. We also found that relief strategies were informed more by economic, agricultural and meteorological criteria than social ones.

This Special Report aims to contribute to the development of a more appropriate drought management strategy, especially with regard to rural communities. In attempting to make this contribution, the Report examines the factors involved in redefining drought and drought relief perspectives in relation to rural communities.

However, the range of factors involved and the scarcity of useful information on them, dictate that this is merely an introduction. The complexities and implications arising from the introduction of these factors into drought management in South Africa should be explored on an on-going basis.

Because of the scarcity of relevant information about the effects of drought on black rural communities in South Africa, this Report has relied on AFRA's limited monitoring of such communities. Some information was also gathered through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods.

There were also difficulties in getting information about relief schemes and their operations as most relief agencies were reluctant to release this information. As a result, almost all the relief related information in this Special Report was obtained from publications and reports of the National Consultative Forum on Drought.



**The recent drought has been referred to as the worst in South Africa in this century. The effects of the drought have worsened the crises which rural communities already faced as a result of apartheid injustices and neglect.**

## Part 1

# Impact of the drought

**T**HE current drought situation in South Africa has been referred to as the worst this century. Most people refer to the situation as a disaster and the effects of the drought are being felt by all sectors and groups.

Historically, droughts in South Africa were seen as freak natural events, each separate from the other. The increasing understanding of the world's weather patterns, especially the El Nino phenomenon, tends to favour the view that certain regions of the world, Southern Africa included, are prone to predictable, cyclical drought. The 1992/3 drought seems to confirm the view that drought is a recurrent, cyclical and endemic feature of Southern African life.

This approach to drought, as a fact of Southern African life, has helped to question past responses to drought. Traditional responses, based on short term considerations, have shown themselves to be wholly inadequate and inappropriate. Billions of rands were spent in the past on responses to drought. Yet, South Africa remains extremely vulnerable to the disastrous consequences of drought.

The social system generated by apartheid has further complicated and reduced the possibilities of an effective response to drought. Two separate realities confronts South Africa. The one reality is of an industrialised well-resourced economy, with formal urban settlements and services, employment and considerable access to political power. In this reality droughts have meant minor inconveniences, such as water restrictions. The other reality is a situation of abject poverty. It is this reality that an increasing segment of South African society faces. The poor are concentrated in the rural areas with little or no basic services, low levels of employment and economic production and no political power. For the poor, droughts have threatened the basic possibilities for

survival. These basic survival needs are neglected in the broader process of South African life, and likewise in the response to drought.

## What is drought?

There is consensus that drought has to do with a shortage of rainfall, resulting in a situation where the normal activities of society are severely disrupted. But there are differences about which of these activities are most seriously affected and which are the most important ones for society. This lack of a generally acceptable definition of drought is seen as one of the most serious obstacles in dealing with drought crises effectively.

The earliest recorded drought disaster is that which occurred in 200 BC in China. Since then, all the world's regions have experienced the disastrous effects of drought at one time or another. Despite this, drought remains a poorly understood phenomenon to this day.

In earlier times, people tended to settle in river valleys where there was abundant water and the most common disasters were floods. Consequently, more attention and concern was directed at dealing with floods than droughts. This was because floods were more sudden and their damage more visible. In some cultures, droughts were seen as acts of God.

In modern times, aspirations for higher standards of living and the steady increase in world population increased the demand for industrial products, food, raw materials, energy and consequently the demand for water. Drought is seen as a problem because the supply of water fluctuates and this affects the ability of society to meet its increasing needs.

With the emergence of towns and cities, water supplies became less dependent on natural forces. This gave rise to the view that drought no longer affects people directly but that its worst effect is on agriculture. This is a narrow understanding of the modern world as an industrial reality. The fact that the overwhelming majority of people in the world live in rural areas, is ignored.

From an industrialised perspective, the areas of drought response that are most important are the agricultural ones. Elaborate and expensive experiments are done on drought-resistant plants, while the majority of the world's population is without safe water. This normally desperate situation is transformed into an emergency situation with the advent of serious drought conditions.

There is growing recognition that the most serious consequences of drought are those that affect people directly. The precarious survival of the poor and the consequences of disasters for their survival have been increasingly highlighted. The recent Ethiopian

drought and famine relief initiatives have contributed greatly in this regard.

### **Meteorological definitions of drought**

These are the most prevalent definitions of drought. Drought is defined as periods of dryness, and measured by the degree of dryness and the duration of the dry period.

These factors differ in different regions. Accordingly, there is not one standard by which a drought can be measured or identified.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Definition of drought</b>
Libya	annual rainfall is less than 180mm
Britain	15 days with less than 0,25mm of rain every day
USA	nationally, less than 2,5mm of rain in 49 hours
Bali	6 days without rain

### **Agricultural definitions of drought**

These relate meteorological drought to the impact of dry periods on agriculture. This often has to do with the amount of water necessary for plants and the lack of adequate soil water resulting from drought.

### **Hydrological definitions of drought**

These definitions relate the existence of dry conditions to the effect on surface and sub-surface water resources.

### **Sociological definitions of drought**

The above definitions of drought have, historically, been used to describe the impact of drought and what responses were thought necessary. The most striking omission from these definitions is that of humans, their situations and crises.

Increasingly, the disaster of drought has become less significant in its effect on the industrialised First World. With extensive water supply systems effectively distributing water for domestic and other uses, industrialised societies are less vulnerable to dry periods. The areas of activity which are most affected in these countries have been agriculture and water resources management (dams, for

example). It is scientists from these countries who have done most of the studies on drought. In these studies, these scientists have used first world factors to characterise the nature and impact of drought.

The disastrous effects of drought on the marginalised and poor inhabitants of the "Third World" have become more stark and serious. There is a growing realisation that this effect of drought is by far the most serious challenge because it directly threatens the basic survival of more than half the world's population. A new definition of drought as a human disaster emerged, particularly after the 1972 Sahelian drought. It is now being suggested that drought only occurs in relation to people, their use of resources and their needs.

The treatment of drought as a short term crisis has given rise to narrow definitions of droughts. These definitions are mainly agricultural and hydrological. This has been a dangerous development as more effort and resources have traditionally gone to addressing the problems of agriculture, than to the crisis faced by human beings. People have suffered malnutrition, cholera and even death while more and more drought resistant plants are being developed for commercial agriculture.

### **Complicating factors in dealing with drought**

In addition to the problem of lack of understanding of the exact nature of droughts, the following factors make it difficult to understand and relate to drought.

**Drought is a "creeping phenomenon"**

Unlike other disasters, there is no clear start or end to drought. Accurate predictions of their onset or end are difficult.

**Drought is not site-specific**

While floods and other disasters affect specific areas or sites, drought effects could be felt over an entire country or sub-continent.

**Drought severity is difficult to determine**

Many factors need to be taken into account before drought severity can be measured. Even then, the longer term effects of drought on society, economy and environment are impossible to quantify.

**Drought impacts linger for years**

While a drought may take place in a year or season, its impact on society may linger for years. This is unlike other disasters which are often sudden and cataclysmic.

Drought is regarded as a temporary situation

Drought is considered transient and is not taken seriously after the first rains return.

## **The physical impact of drought**

Under normal circumstances, the demand for water should easily be met by water supply. Rainfall and evaporation levels are sufficiently balanced to ensure a hydrological balance. There is no lack of water and the needs of agriculture, livestock, industry and the human population could be met. The differing degrees of difficulty in meeting these needs in different regions of the world is determined more by social arrangements and resources than by the natural forces.

Under drought conditions, changes in weather patterns reduce the level of rainfall, while social factors affect the quality of soil.

Urbanisation, overgrazing, deforestation and farming reduce water retention of the soil. Consequently, the topsoil erodes and water tables are reduced. Food production and drinking water are reduced and the survival of humans is threatened. The environment is placed under greater stress, with severe long term implications.

## **Environmental effects of drought**

The resources available to support human life in the environment become diminished by drought. This effect is not restricted to the short term but often implies permanent long term damage. Drought has the following effect on the environment:

- cloud cover is reduced
- daytime temperatures are increased
- evaporation rates are increased
- dust and sandstorms occur
- soil productivity is decreased
- water resources are decreased
- water quality is reduced
- death and disease among animals is increased

## **The implications of changes in the environment**

### **Water**

Water makes up 60% of the human body and is essential for human survival. Plant and animal life are equally dependent on water.

Water of high quality for these purposes is already scarce.

Despite oceans covering most of the earth's surface, only 3% of the world's water is fresh. Of this 75% is frozen at the poles. More than 2 billion people, worldwide, suffer chronic water shortages.

According to UNICEF, water-borne diseases kill 25 000 people daily, with an estimated 12.4 million people dying annually as a result of dirty water and unsanitary living conditions.

The drought effect of lowering of water tables makes accessibility to water particularly difficult for communities with no formal water supply systems. After the drought in the early 1980's, water tables became so low in Ethiopia that wells had to be up to 40 metres deep.

Drought, through its contribution to decreased water resources and quality, compounds water related crises. So we could expect death and disease statistics for regions plagued by drought to far exceed international averages. An added problem is that these effects of drought often linger and, in the long term, could become permanent.

### **Soil**

Every year 20 million tons of soil is lost through soil erosion. This is equivalent to the capacity needed for producing 12 million tons of grain. The loss of this soil and its productive possibilities deepens the food crisis which about 700 million people face daily. Drought conditions contribute greatly to soil loss through increasing desertification. The general degradation of soil quality and hot winds, dust and sandstorms, which generally accompany drought creates ideal conditions for soil erosion. The lack of rain dries the soil and makes it prone to wind erosion.

In 1911, the US Department of Agriculture estimated that wind moved 770 million tons of soil in the United States. This represented, at that time, more than twice the estimated discharge of sediment from the Mississippi River.

Since the 1970s, windblown dust from the drought stricken lands of the Sahara region of Africa has travelled on high altitude winds across the Atlantic Ocean. It is estimated that this phenomenon has caused the blockage of 15% of the sunlight reaching the tropical Atlantic. Dust in the skies of the Barbados Islands, thousands of kilometres from the Sahel, increased by 300% during this period.

As drought occurs year by year, soil surface layers deteriorate. This increases the soils "blowability". The winds that accompany drought erode these layers of soil. The heavy rains and floods which often follow droughts, worsens soil erosion. This exacerbates the crisis of adequate food production.

How drought affects water and soil has implications for broader crises in society. The irreversibility of permanent drought damage effectively reduces possibilities of addressing food and water crises.

## **The social impact of drought**

Natural events, such as droughts, become disasters only when they affect society and social processes. An earthquake occurring in an uninhabited area or the daily volcanic activity on the ocean floor are simple facts of nature. Only when they impact on the lives of people can they be considered disasters. It should therefore follow that disasters should be investigated and defined according to their human consequences rather than their origins.

Drought, like other natural disasters, helps to strip away facades and reveal inherent weaknesses of society. While natural disasters occur world-wide, their impact is determined by the capacity of different communities to cope with the resulting destruction. In 1971 an earthquake, measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale, struck San Fernando in California. San Fernando, with a population of more than 7 million, suffered only minor damage and 58 deaths. Two years later, in Nicaragua, an earthquake, measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale, killed 6 000 people and reduced a city to rubble.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the potential for disasters is related to the cycle of poverty in developing countries. The poorest members of a community tend to suffer the most severe effects of a natural disaster. The poor exist on the margin of subsistence and lack the reserves to cope with the serious disruption that disasters bring.

### **Drought, disasters and poverty**

At the core of poverty lies the lack of resources or the problematic distribution of resources. The poor are increasingly forced to settle on land that is marginal and unproductive and lacking in basic infrastructure. Physical and economic safety is low in these areas. Attempts to survive off these lands contribute to their deterioration and permanent damage. Droughts and other disasters ravage these damaged lands and increase poverty.

The lack of basic infrastructure places poor people throughout the world in the situation of negotiating their survival with natural forces. When natural forces upset the precarious balance between people's needs and the resources available to them, disasters inevitably result. And the poor cannot absorb the effects of these.

The world economy and the interests of the powerful First World determines the distribution of world resources. The structural location of the poor in society in general is characterised by political insignificance and economic powerlessness. This is most evident at the level of nutrition. It is estimated that one out of three people in the "Third World" do not have enough to eat for an active working life. This is despite the world grain production being sufficient to feed every human being with 3 600 calories a day, well above the required minimum of 2 400 calories a day. Most of this grain

production is directed towards beef production. And the First World consumes 80% of this beef.

In developing countries this economic and political insignificance of the poor is reinforced by political elites and world-market orientated economic activity.

### **Drought, apartheid and poverty**

South Africa's white minority enjoys access to the country's natural resources, economic processes, political system and wealth. South Africa's physical and social infrastructure has been geared to serve the economic and political interests of this grouping. Through social engineering, most of South Africa's land resources, water reserves and capital has been reserved for the exclusive use of white agricultural and industrial sectors. The result is an industrial urban concentration with extensive infrastructure and resources and a commercial rural agricultural sector with white farms constituting 80% of the land area.

Legislation aimed at securing these interests have seen the settlement of black people in urban townships, reserves and bantustans. Extensive removal and resettlement strategies were used to settle people in a way which would allow agriculture and industry's labour needs to be met with the minimum of social spending. Today the result is large concentrations of black people in densely populated bantustans, urban townships and reserves with smaller settlements of black people on white-owned farms and black-owned freehold areas.

In the bantustans are characterised by high population densities, unproductive land, high rates of unemployment and low levels of income, people exist on the margin of survival. Basic infrastructure is virtually non-existent and people are very vulnerable to disruptions in the environment.

The situation in black freehold areas is similar. Although population densities are lower and land could be of higher quality, people in freehold areas are also denied access to basic capital for agriculture. In these freehold areas people engage mainly in subsistence farming. These low agricultural yields threaten food security and malnutrition becomes rife. The lack of basic infrastructure implies poor water supply systems and reliance on natural sources. The absence of basic health facilities compounds problems that arise from poor nutrition and unsafe water.

At present, these marginalised communities lack the political capacity to alter their situation and the possibility of breaking the poverty cycle are therefore diminished.

South Africa has experienced droughts consistently during this century. These were defined according to meteorological and agricultural definitions of drought. In the assessment of their

impacts and in the development of responses, the needs and problems of the marginalised communities were ignored. Since 1921, white farmers have had access to extensive relief measures to mitigate the impact of droughts on the agricultural sector of the economy.

## **Access to natural resources**

About 102.8 million hectares of the land area of South Africa is used for agriculture and forestry. This represents 84% of the total land mass of the country. This resource was reserved for the exclusive use of white agriculture. Short term profit has dictated that maximum benefit is derived from this resource in the short term with little, and often no, regard for long term consequences.

In a World Survey of Soils, conducted in 1939, the following indictment of South Africa's land usage was made, "A national catastrophe, due to soil erosion, is perhaps more imminent in the Union of South Africa than in any other country".

This situation was allowed to persist, despite legislation. In the 1960s the loss of scarce top soil was about 400 million tons a year.

White farmers' poor farming methods is cited as cause of this appalling abuse of land resources. These methods have included over-stocking and ploughing of marginal land. A study of farmers in the Cape midlands and eastern Karoo showed over-stocking of between 27-36%. The Black Sash estimated that farmers in this region had overstocked their land by as many as 3 million sheep. It is estimated that the country is becoming desert in this region at the rate of 2.6km a year. In 1992 the President's Council found that 55% of South Africa was threatened by desertification.

White agriculture has enjoyed unbridled access to South Africa's other scarce resource, water. Just less than about 14% of South Africa's land is considered arable, and farmers have used water for irrigation extensively. Irrigation methods have been grossly inefficient, with only a small amount of water that reaches the fields benefitting the crops. The use of irrigation has been encouraged and water rights for this practice have been protected by legislation.

Drought conditions have threatened the economic survival of this sector of the South African economy. In its analysis of soil deterioration, the Presidents Council said that the serious financial problems farmers faced led to them overexploiting the soil. The drought has deepened the financial crisis in agriculture with decreased yields and complete crop losses. This will cause greater attempts from farmers to exploit land and water resources.

About 44% of South Africa's population is concentrated in the homelands. The homelands comprise only 14% of South Africa's surface area. Through the apartheid policy of forced resettlement,

the homelands have become densely populated environmental tragedies.

The population density of the homelands has exceeded the carrying capacity of the land for agricultural purposes. As far back as 1954, the government-appointed Tomlinson Commission calculated that the Msinga District, for example, could carry only 2 100 families and 17 400 cattle adequately. By 1980, after years of environmental degradation, the area was estimated to have 14 000 extended families and 72 600 cattle.

This pattern is reproduced in other reserves in the homelands. In the Orange Free State, the rural population density was 9 people per square km in 1980. In the nearby homeland of Qwa-Qwa official figures revealed a density of 298 people per square km.

With the absence of local job opportunities and pensions and other incomes at low levels, the ability to practise some form of agriculture becomes the only survival option for people. The result is desperate intensity of cultivation which permanently destroys the capacity of the land. Where land is appropriate for agriculture, it is often under-used because of a lack of basic capital. Agricultural yields are therefore generally low and farmers in bantustans are caught in a vicious cycle of a deteriorating environment and deepening poverty.

The situation of rural communities outside the homelands is similar to the above. These communities have struggled to secure tenure over land. Even communities with legal and historical rights to land, have had to live with the threat of forced removal. This influenced the way in which land was used. The absence of agricultural support, through credit, loans or extension, prevented the few communities with secure tenure from becoming agriculturally successful. Inappropriate land use and desperate agricultural measures have resulted in situations not dissimilar from the homelands.

The drought has deepened the agricultural and water crisis facing black rural communities. The effect of the drought on the soil and water resources of these communities has been to worsen an already serious situation. The implications of this increased degradation are permanent damage and irreversibility.

### **Root causes of the current drought**

In its document, "Root Cause and Relief Restraint Report", the National Consultative Forum on Drought (NCFD), identified the following root causes:

#### **Apartheid policy**

The primary root cause of drought disaster in the country has been the policies of the South African government over the past decades.

These policies have spawned a bureaucracy that makes drought relief strategies an almost impossible task. The bureaucratic configuration created by apartheid policies include:

- 3 houses of parliament
- 10 homeland governments
- 52 departments in the above which may be dealing with drought
- 4 Provincial departments
- Numerous Joint Services Boards and Joint Coordinating Committees

These structures have served as conduits for state assistance. The state has, as a result, not intervened directly in the drought relief efforts.

### **Underdevelopment**

Foreign engineers have consistently pointed to the systematic under-development of communities as a root cause of the present disaster. The development of communities has been referred to as a "litany of failure to provide basic services, support and community engagement."

### **Lack of maintenance**

In the past there were investments in water supply systems to communities. These systems would have helped to lessen the effects of drought on communities. Most systems are inoperative, because of a lack of basic maintenance. Communities could have ensured that the systems were maintained if they had been trained to do so. Past developments in communities have excluded community involvement and have proved to be unsustainable.

## **The general impact of the drought**

The disastrous effect that drought has had on other sectors and activities within South African society, impinge on the crisis facing rural communities.

With about 5 million South Africans directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture, the effect of drought on this sector is not restricted to problems for farmers. The South African Reserve Bank estimated that 50 000 jobs would be lost in the agricultural sector, with a further 20 000 in related sectors and that about 250 000 people would be affected. The Development Bank of South Africa estimated that 70 000 jobs would be lost in the Northern Transvaal alone, with a country-wide total of about 100 000 jobs. Several factors were seen as contributing to this job-loss.

## Production losses

Crop	1990/1 Tonnes	1991/2 Tonnes	Loss (%)
dry beans	100	27	73
grain sorghum	240	95	60
soya beans	124	68	46
sunflower seeds	589	173	71
white maize	3180	985	69
yellow maize	4016	1448	64

The production of most major agricultural products showed drastic reductions as a result of the drought. Maize production, by some estimates, was expected to be around 17% of the normal average crop. Wool production was expected to be the lowest since 1924. Estimated losses in summer crops are given above.

## Debts and sequestrations

With input costs of farmers rising faster than income, the financial situation of farmers has deteriorated. Total agricultural debt was expected to exceed R20 billion by the end of 1992. According to the South African Agricultural Union 3 000 farmers had become bankrupt since 1985 and 7 000 farmers were facing sequestration because of the drought, according to the Land Bank.

## Food price inflation

According to the agricultural adviser of First National Bank, Mr Frans Venter, shortages caused by the drought were expected to lead to a doubling of fruit and vegetable prices. He said that the importation of basic foodstuff, like maize and wheat, at higher prices had a domino effect on other food prices.

These increases impact harder on rural communities where subsistence farming has failed and more people are being forced to depend on purchased food. With decreased income and increased rural unemployment, increased food prices contribute to the deepening of the food security crisis in rural communities.

## Unemployment

With the economy in a generally recessionary mode the effect of the drought was more pronounced. The ripple effect of drought conditions on the economy decreased employment possibilities. With rural communities dependent on migrant labour for income,

the implications of lower employment levels in the mining and manufacturing sectors are severe.

## Impact on rural communities

Aspects/Activity	Drought effect	Possible consequences
crops	reduced crops, total crop failure	reduced income, food shortage, reliance on shops, unemployment, eviction
livestock	weakened, diseased, death	reduced health, food shortage, sales, slaughter, reduced income
water	reduction, contamination, absence	human diseases, human death, livestock diseases and deaths, crop failure and loss, migrations
health	diseases, deaths	epidemics, deaths, school closures, medical expenses, travel costs
employment	lay-offs, evictions	loss of income, food shortage, increased unemployment, crime, alcoholism, migrations
food prices	increased	food shortage
tenure	evictions, closure of farms	homelessness, migrations
grazing	reduced	livestock weakening and death, livestock sales and slaughter, impounding, conflict
fuel	reduced	disruption of domestic activities, conflict

The 1992/3 drought has been severe for South Africa. But, despite its severity, it is regarded as less disastrous than the drought of 1982/3 when the El Nino phenomenon was more pronounced and wreaked damages conservatively estimated at \$8.65 billion, worldwide. It is conceivable that communities suffered greater hardships during the previous drought than the present one. But because of their institutional neglect these communities' drought

related crises have not featured prominently. The main features of the institutional neglect that they suffered were:

- lack of access to productive land
- lack of access to safe water
- lack of basic infrastructure
- lack of basic capital
- lack of access to political power
- lack of employment opportunities
- lack of adequate agricultural yields
- inadequate nutrition
- poor health facilities

Black rural communities have suffered the above to varying degrees, depending on the extent to which apartheid social engineering affected them.

The consequences of the effects of the drought have serious implications for rural communities and will touch all facets of community life. In general, poverty will deepen and worsen. The interaction between degraded physical resources, reduced subsistence agriculture and reduced food security could only be cyclical. Communities will thus be caught in the vicious cycle of poverty, similar to that in the bantustans. Malnutrition and starvation will increase and health status may deteriorate.

Adequate and appropriate responses are urgently needed to address the situation in rural areas. Problems which the drought created are not new, but the heightening of existing crises in the community. These crises are rooted in the state of underdevelopment and neglect of these communities.

The implication is that strategies should focus on the fundamental problems in communities, rather than drought-specific ones. Since these fundamental problems relate to underdevelopment and poverty, the most appropriate drought response would be development and poverty relief strategies. Emphasis within these strategies should be on community empowerment and capacity building.

Appropriate responses should also address rural community access to power. The most that present state structures can offer the process of drought responses, is funding. New structures which include community based structures, non-government organisations (NGOs) and other legitimate organisations, should be explored.

The impact of the drought on rural communities also has implications for the broader society and economy. The crisis in the rural areas has already caused massive migrations of people into the urban areas. These migrations have been to secure the basic necessities of employment, water, food and shelter. Increased urbanisation of rural people will exacerbate the problems of

informal settlements, homelessness, unemployment, crime and violence.

## **Case studies**

AFRA monitored the effect of the drought on communities in the Natal Midlands. These communities are mainly freehold communities but one labour tenant community and one re-occupying community were included in these assessments. The effect of the drought on farmworkers was investigated by the Farmworkers Research and Resource Project in the Northern Free State and Western Transvaal. These assessments will be used as case studies to show the effect of the drought on communities, within their particular contexts.

### **Freehold communities**

These communities have been the "living contradiction of apartheid theory". While it was a stated objective of the apartheid grand design to remove all black people from white South Africa, black people continued to live on and own land in South Africa. Some of these communities have owned significant tracts of land since the end of the last century. While the state wanted to remove these people, the logistics of achieving this proved to be beyond the state's capacity. So some communities escaped the trauma of forced removal.

But the state exacted a price from communities for clinging to the land. Freehold communities were under constant threat of removal and were denied basic infrastructure and other social services. Most communities had built their own schools, clinics and other essentials.

The main economic activity was to have been agriculture. But the lack of basic capital precluded this possibility. With the lack of proper agricultural methods and training, the land use within communities was inappropriate. Agricultural yields were low and insufficient to support people. Able bodied persons from freehold communities were forced into migrant labour arrangements, depriving the community of its human resources.

The insecurity of tenure contributed significantly to the reluctance of people to commit to long term development of their communities. Water supply systems, where they existed, were rudimentary and people relied on unprotected springs and rivers for water. Land use suffered from a lack of long term perspective and soil degradation, through erosion, occurred.

State departments limited their involvement in these communities and denied responsibility for these areas. Communities were left to their own devices to provide essentials for themselves.

### Case study: Stoffelton, Natal

Stoffelton is an area of about 250 square kilometres that lies between Himeville and Bulwer in the Impendle District. Between 12 000 and 13 000 people live there. Neither the central government, provincial authorities nor the KwaZulu government provides services to the area.

Men migrate to Underberg farms and Durban and Johannesburg to work. Agricultural activity includes cultivation of maize, beans, potatoes, pumpkins, rearing of cattle and goats. There are no state extension services and no access to credit facilities.

There is no health facility in the area. A mobile clinic visits the community every month. People rely on unprotected springs and rivers for water as there is no water supply system. Schools in the area have all been built by people themselves.

The community was threatened with incorporation into KwaZulu but, through the Stoffelton Advancement Committee (SAC), the community was able to resist this. The SAC still exists.

The 1992/3 drought was the severest drought ever experienced in Stoffelton. Springs that had had water for more than half a century stopped flowing. Available water sources got polluted before they dried up. Illnesses related to polluted water affected both adults and children. There was a total crop failure and food had to be bought at increased prices. Livestock weakened and died. The land was severely eroded.

Activity/Aspect	Normal situation	Drought
crops	plant maize, beans, potatoes, pumpkin	total crop loss
livestock	rear cattle, goats	widespread death and disease
water	from springs, rivers	sources dry, needed emergency supply
health	normal illnesses	bilharzia, dysentery affect children and adults
housing	grow thatch to build new houses, repair snow damage	no new houses or repairs
food	grow in fields	buy from shops
prices	normal increases	sharp rise: potatoes R16 - R25 & mielie meal R60 - R95
transport	normal busfares	1 fare for person, 1 fare for goods
Land quality	normal	severe erosion, duststorms

Visiting engineers, working through the NCFD, have reportedly said that the drought was not only avoidable but predictable. In the case of Stoffelton, this is clearly discernible. The authorities' neglect of the area resulted in severe underdevelopment. The use of water and soil resources was unplanned and the effects of the drought are directly related to this lack of planning. This situation arises from the status of Stoffelton as a freehold area.

The problematic nature of the community's status is more clearly seen in the process leading to supplying Stoffelton with emergency water. Despite being without water, the community refrained from requesting assistance from any of the local authorities. According to the community this was because these authorities had consistently denied all responsibility for the area.

It then became necessary for AFRA to negotiate this relief. Even then, it took a three day visit to the areas around Stoffelton and ten subsequent phone calls before relief materialised. Complex negotiations were necessary before different state departments accepted different responsibilities in the simple tankering of water to the area. Two months passed before the first consignment of tankered water actually reached the community in January 1993. The community had been without water since August 1992. This was the experience of a well organised freehold community. The situation in a freehold community without community structures is a frightening prospect.

### **Reoccupying communities**

Two communities who were forcibly removed have had their land restored. These communities were previously freehold but were considered inimical to the apartheid design. Despite having an established infrastructure in the form of housing stock, schools and water supply systems, these communities were bulldozed out of their areas. The infrastructure was destroyed and the community was paid insignificant compensation.

With these communities, the disaster of drought coincides with the community's restructuring itself, physically, socially and organisationally. The additional drought crisis, complicates this process.

### **Case study: Roosboom, Natal**

The Roosboom community was the first "black spot" to be removed in the Ladysmith area of Natal. The community had enjoyed freehold rights since the early 1900s. Although their actual removal happened in 1975, people were told in 1965 that they should not build or make improvements to their homes. By 1976 about 7 000 people were completely removed from their land. The compensation paid to the community was considered grossly inadequate. The community had, as part of its infrastructure, an

extensive water supply system with two pumping stations supplying water to 10 standpipes in each street.

The Ladysmith Farmers Association were the prime movers for the community's forced removal. They cited fencing, stray cattle, soil erosion, veld fires and vindictiveness as some of the main reasons for having the community removed. In addition, they considered the community's settlement near the national highway as a source of "racial tension" and damaging to the image of Ladysmith, especially regarding tourists.

The community began the re-occupying their land, following announcements in February 1990 that apartheid land legislation would be revised. Despite community attempts to negotiate the return of formal transfer of their land before reoccupation, this did not take place. An announcement of the return of Roosboom to its rightful owners was only made in December 1992.

Roosboom has had all its previous infrastructure destroyed. The water system has been reduced to rubble. Schools and churches were demolished. Local white farmers used the Roosboom land for grazing and it has been severely eroded.

Aspect	Drought effect
crops	no crops planted
livestock	cattle & goats sold
water	springs slowed, water bought from drivers of state tankers
health	children got diarrhoea
landquality	erosion - land overgrazed by white farmers when community was removed
education	school got contaminated water from river, closure of school considered, pupils hungry

With the rubble of the extensive water supply system that used to serve the community before its removal still visible, the community experiences severe problems with the lack of a water supply.

Schools were considering closure as the pupils were getting sick and were weak from hunger. The community had to bribe state tanker drivers for assistance with water.

In February 1993 AFRA asked the Joint Coordinating Committee in the area for urgent assistance with water to the community. Four months have passed and the authorities are still deciding which one of them is responsible for this emergency supply. Meanwhile, the community continues to pay for an unofficial water supply.

This would not have happened if the community had not been forcibly removed from the area. In a further gesture of insensitivity,

the government is now demanding that the community pay back the compensation it received when the bulldozers flattened the area.

### **Labour tenants**

The labour tenant system emerged in South Africa in the 19th century. It evolved as the result of the labour shortage experienced by white farmers who were unable to farm competitively as large scale commercial farmers, unable to compete with homestead peasant producers and market gardeners, and unable to pay a wage attractive enough to lure African people away from the land, or away from short-term migrancy to the mines and other urban employment.

By the turn of the century there were a variety of forms of tenancy on white-owned farmland. These ranged from straightforward payment of rent, through sharecropping arrangements, to payment in labour or combinations of these. Often the white owners lived on commercial farms elsewhere and kept their tenants on labour farms which served, in effect, as private labour pools. Amongst these forms of tenancy, labour tenancy was to prove the most prevalent and persistent. Some of the labour tenant communities currently struggling for security of tenure, have been labour tenants for well over a century.

More than ten years after the ban of 1980, labour tenancy is still very much in existence in a number of rural districts of Natal and Transvaal, and to some extent the Orange Free State. The conditions under which labour tenants are forced to work are often harsh but they often feel a sense of attachment to the land they occupy, having lived there for generations. In the Northern Natal and South Eastern Transvaal, labour tenancy is still common, despite the eviction and removal of about 1 000 000 people into bantustans.

Labour tenants face the constant threat of eviction and have very little protection in the law against this. Further strain is placed on this relationship when the tenants agricultural activities become threatening to the farmer.

Drought conditions cause tension in this way. The resources on farms become depleted and the farmers become protective over these resources. Tenants and farmers become increasingly engaged over this contesting of resources. An example of this is the decreasing resource of grazing. Farmers attempt to exercise greater control over tenant livestock. Water supply is often withheld from tenants as a punitive measure.

### **Case study: Ncunjane, Natal**

These labour tenants were employed by a sugar cane farmer and housed on a "labour farm" near the town of Weenen. The arrangement was that in exchange for this right to occupy the land,

the tenants would work for 6 months on the farmer's farm in New Hanover. The ownership of the farm changed hands and the tenants were not called on to work. The new farmer told the tenants that the farm had been sold to him and that he expected them to pay him rent and to limit their livestock numbers. He also expected the tenants to pay grazing fees for the livestock they would be allowed to keep.

The tenants said they were refused water after a while because the farmer felt that they were keeping more goats than agreed. A bitter, and often violent, conflict between the new owner and the tenants followed. During this time, 13 families received eviction notices and the homesteads of eight families were burnt. After threatened court action and huge legal costs on both sides, the two parties eventually negotiated a very tenuous agreement which allowed the tenants to remain on the farm under certain conditions.

The above case study shows how the precarious situation of labour tenants is further pressurised by the onset of drought. The probabilities of eviction increase in the context of drought and the relationship between farmers and tenants becomes more tense as they contest scarce resources. Without adequate legal protection, labour tenants are faced with drought-induced pressure from farmers, in addition to direct depletion of their own resources.

Aspect	Drought effects
crops	subsistence farming stopped
livestock	cattle died, some with calves
water	access to water was denied and cattle had to be driven 30km daily to a river
income	people had to sell cattle and goats
grazing	decreased drastically

### **Farmworkers**

All sectors of South African agriculture, except the deciduous fruit industry, showed record production shortfalls because of the drought. The maize industry, for example, harvested only 17% of its normal average crop. With this crisis in agriculture, farmworkers are bearing the brunt of a bad season's farming. There have been reports of widespread lay-offs of farmworkers and often these have been accompanied by evictions. In turn, such evictions have been implemented without prior notice, it has been reported. Regarding wages, farmworker wages have generally not been increased or farmworkers have suffered a reduction in rations, as a result of the drought. Farmworkers' livestock has also been the first to be slaughtered or sold and access to grazing has been reduced. Prices

of goods at farm shops have soared and education for farmworkers' children has become unaffordable.

## Conclusion

Apartheid has ensured that the poor in South Africa struggle for survival under harsh living conditions. They have emerged from this past as an economically marginalised and politically powerless sector of South African society. Conditions of abject poverty confront them in their daily lives. Inadequate water supply systems, unproductive land and the lack of basic infrastructure make the majority of South Africa's rural population the most vulnerable to the effects of disasters, such as drought. Recognising this is essential for any drought management strategy in the future.

The historical underdevelopment of these communities means that it is a priority to provide them with basic essential services. No effective drought management strategy can be effected without a rudimentary infrastructure. In addition, the provision of such services should draw on community participation to enhance institutional capacity in these communities.

These steps are essentially achieved through a comprehensive rural development strategy with a long-term time-frame, given the scope and depth of rural problems. A drought management strategy should take current underdevelopment as a given, in the interim and should therefore have emergency relief as its core.



**Growing awareness that drought is a cyclical and consistent feature of South African life creates possibilities for more appropriate and effective strategies to deal with drought crisis.**

## Part 2

# Responses to the drought

The growing awareness of drought as a cyclical and consistent feature of South African life and the political changes that are taking place in the South Africa at the moment, create the possibilities for more appropriate and effective strategies in response to drought crises. The present drought crisis and responses to it provide valuable insights and lessons in this regard.

### Key factors in appropriate disaster response

The present drought crisis in South Africa highlights the need to approach droughts as recurrent social disasters. As such, responses should emphasise appropriate disaster relief procedures and their impacts on society.

### Phases of a disaster

Disaster specialists have attempted to classify the time periods of disasters. While these are based on disasters that are sudden and cataclysmic, the phases can be adapted to dealing with drought crises. Phases of a disaster include:

- Emergency Phase. During this phase actions aimed at saving lives are necessary. In drought disasters, the emergency supply of food and water is undertaken in this phase.
- Rehabilitation Phase. Actions necessary to help the community return to normal, are undertaken. Limited intervention from outside communities are most useful during this phase. Assistance in the form of cash, credit and employment creation are the most appropriate types of aid.

- Reconstruction Phase. During this phase the re-ordering of the community and the physical environment takes place. Agriculture returns to normal.

The identification of phases of disasters helps to determine the kinds of interventions that are necessary. These phases are best determined by what is happening in the disaster-affected communities. Relief must be appropriate to the phase that the community is in.

With drought disasters these phases are much longer and emergency phase could last for years. The other essential difference between droughts and other disasters is drought's predictability. Some regions in the world are distinctly drought-prone. If this is recognised, long term strategies for disaster preparedness in communities can, and must be, be implemented.

## **General principles of disaster response**

Poor strategies employed in response to disasters have severe implications for affected communities and often result in a second disaster. A popular conception of disaster assistance is that it is humanitarian assistance. It is generally believed that such assistance is above question since it aims at "helping". However, a wide range of issues with serious implications should be considered, including: the effects of assistance on the coping mechanisms of communities, the nature of the relief agency/ community relationship, the economic impact of relief and the effect of relief on communities.

## **Effects of assistance on coping mechanisms**

Agencies that intervene in disaster situations are often blinded to the longer-term implications of their actions. In responding to urgent short-term emergency needs, they fail to explore and identify what had been happening within the community before the disaster. As outsiders, they are not familiar with how the community works.

Communities, especially those that are marginalised, have coping mechanisms that enable them to survive the "normal" crises they face on a day to day level. This feature is most useful in a community's attempts to deal effectively with the crisis of a natural disaster. If relief agencies do not understand the role played by these coping devices in communities, their relief programmes could damage or significantly reduce the effectiveness of a community's in-built ability to cope.

Intervention of relief agencies can have the following damaging effects:

- Relief can undermine the authority and prestige of local leaders and organisations. If local organisations and leaders are not involved, their leadership status in the community diminishes.

Outside resources from relief agencies create an alternative to local resources.

- The expectation of aid can delay and diminish efforts from within the community to handle the crisis.
- The confidence in local coping mechanisms can be undermined. Firstly, local organisations with limited resources can come to be seen as ineffective. Secondly, these organisations are judged by the standard of the intervening relief agency.
- Intervening relief agencies can reinforce the status quo and patterns of underdevelopment. Their efforts can obscure political realities and transfer power away from local organisations trying to effect change, to those seeking political control over communities.
- Dependency on outside agencies can destroy the development efforts of local organisations. Communities affected by disasters are usually in a situation of underdevelopment. Development of these communities can be undermined if their local coping mechanisms are displaced or have their influence reduced. Relief operations may do this by adopting short-term emergency approaches that ignore the significance of what existed in the community before the disaster.

### **The nature of the relief agency/community relationship**

This relationship determines the success of the relief program and the long term impact of relief on society. This relationship also has implications for broader community development issues.

The fundamental question that arises in this relationship is that of accountability. Relief agencies may adopt a paternalistic attitude, where communities are seen as passive recipients of relief rather than active participants. Consequently, communities are not regarded as deserving of accountability. This approach contains dangers that the interests of relief agencies will be considered above those of the communities.

Communities could see their exclusion from the determining relief dynamics as their inability to deal with their own issues. The feeling of hopelessness is heightened and community confidence in making decisions is undermined.

### **The economic impact of relief**

Relief programs are essentially economic systems superimposed on a community in crisis. When droughts and other disasters strike, a community's economic system is also affected. If a community is to return to normal, these systems have to be restored as quickly as possible.

Relief programmes intervene at the time that these existing economic relations in a community are disrupted. Food relief, for

example, provided in a crisis replaces local agricultural product. This dependency on external food resources could delay the restoration of local agriculture to pre-disaster levels.

Emergency relief should be viewed as meeting fundamental human needs in the emergency period only. Agricultural recovery and job creation, as in the case of drought, are essentially questions of economic revival and depend on swift restoration of the community's existing economic systems.

### **The effect of relief on the community's development process**

A serious problem with relief programmes has been the effect of setting back a community's long-term development process. This represents a serious loss of opportunity to use disasters to resolve basic problems. Development issues which intervening agencies often ignore include:

- The need to facilitate cooperative actions. Different experiences have shown that if a community is to develop socially and economically, it must reach a sophisticated level of cooperative action. Many relief programmes reduce this possibility.
- Participation in decision making. Relief agencies often offer communities pre-determined plans, often developed without the full participation of the community. This undermines the community's self-confidence in decision making and is a further obstacle to development.
- Dependency relationships. The dependency of marginalised communities on institutions and resources beyond their control, is a major contributor to their underdevelopment. Relief agencies and their programmes often maintain and increase these dependencies.
- Political reform. Intervention often ignores the fundamental problems in a society. This contributes to an exacerbation of the pre-disaster situation and diminishes the potential for political reform.
- Fostering unrealistic expectations. Relief programmes often lead to unrealistic expectations. The provision of "free" relief resources leads to an expectation of this continuing beyond the disaster. The provision of disaster relief is integrally related to the development of the communities involved and relief should be provided in a developmental manner. If this does not happen, progress towards development of communities can be set back or wiped out.

## Lessons learnt in disaster response

Several lessons have been learnt from international involvement in relief programmes and research into how these worked. These lessons include:

1. Relief should be conducted within the context of development.
2. How communities receive aid is more important than the actual aid received.
3. The community should actively participate in relief operations, and most times know more about how it should be done than do outsiders.
4. Relief programmes, if properly executed, can provide a strong stimulus for positive changes.
5. The role of relief agencies is to support activities that local organisations cannot carry out themselves.
6. Disaster aid may hinder the community's own efforts to better prepare for a recurrence of the disaster.
7. Relief efforts may obscure underlying political realities.
8. Re-establishing the local economy and job security is usually more important to disaster-stricken communities than material assistance.

## Current drought response in South Africa

The South African government has long recognised that a cycle of wet and dry years is a well-established feature of the South African climate. Historically, droughts were seen as regular and temporary disruptions to the South African economy. Drought response strategies have been based on this view and have concentrated on mitigating the impact of drought on the industrial and commercial agricultural sectors. Billions of rands were spent to secure water supplies to major metropolitan and industrial areas. The Tugela-Vaal and Lesotho Highlands schemes, for example, guarantee water supply to the PWV region even if no rains fall for 18 months.

In stark contrast to this, the plight of the economically marginalised rural communities during drought is desperate. Through institutional neglect, dispossession and the creation of homelands, these communities experience extreme poverty and under-development. Although these communities are the most vulnerable to drought disasters, there is no strategy for lessening the effects of drought on them.

## **Restraints on relief**

A report by the National Consultative Forum on Drought (NCFD) identified the following restraints on drought relief activity in the South Africa:

### **The South African government**

The report identified the primary restraint on relief activity as the government's failure to fulfil its obligations to its citizens. It found that, although the state controlled most of South Africa's major resources, bureaucracy and disproportionate allocation of funds, resulted in very little of these resources being used for real assistance on the ground. Further, very little was allocated to black rural people.

### **Obstruction and lack of support**

The NCFD was set up to coordinate relief activities. Its work has been consistently obstructed by different structures in the apartheid bureaucracy. The NCFD and its Task Forces were denied access to areas of the country and had information withheld from them.

### **Irregularities**

Apartheid has provided an undemocratic environment where corruption went unchallenged, particularly on issues related to poorer communities. Irregularities have included:

- The theft of borehole pumps installed in communities. Only people with expertise and tools could have removed the pumps.
- Contractors unnecessarily drilling for boreholes. The contractors who were paid a set rate per meter drilled, whether or not they found water. Contracts were also concluded at exorbitant rates and private contractors used government rigs.
- Consultants have long established relationships with officials and have benefitted from emphasising large surface water schemes instead of groundwater ones.

### **Patronage**

Systems of patronage and political differences have ensured the development of certain communities over others.

## **State relief funding**

The current drought has affected the most vulnerable communities in the rural areas more than other sectors of South African society. These impoverished communities, with their lack of accumulated reserves, need intervention more than any other sector.

Nevertheless, the white commercial agricultural sector received most drought relief spending.

In May 1992 the state announced that besides the R350 million allocated in the agricultural budget for drought relief, it had allocated another R3.8 billion for financial assistance to farmers. Although R4.2 billion was referred to as drought relief, R2.4 billion was to pay loan guarantees to cooperatives and R1.8 billion was available for drought relief, solely.

### **State allocations: drought relief 1992/3**

Source: National Consultative Forum on Drought

<b>Programme</b>	<b>1992/3 Allocation R-million</b>	<b>% Allocation</b>
assistance to white farmers	1093,6	64,25
assistance to industries	20	1,18
assistance to water supply task force	2	0,12
assistance to Nutritional Development Programme	440	25,85
assistance to self-governing territories	130	7,64
not allocated	16,4	0,96
<b>Total</b>	<b>1702</b>	<b>100</b>

	<b>Black</b>	<b>White</b>
population (rural)	15 million (93%)	1,2 million (7%)
land availability	13%	87%
drought allocation	R200 million	R844 million
drought allocation (per capita)	R13	R703

This pattern of drought relief allocations accords with the historical approach to drought relief in South Africa. Marginalised communities with the greatest need receive the least assistance, despite their survival depending on state intervention.

The expenditure on water supply for human consumption in the homelands (home to 44% of South Africa's people) shows more clearly where the state's priorities lie. The South African Government's contribution to the critical water relief efforts in the homelands only takes the form of equipment and personnel to the

Water Supply Task Force. This is valued at R2 million. The total budget for the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry is R389 million. While R2 million of this budget is being used to provide water to impoverished people in the homelands, but R6 million was allocated for animal water consumption in the commercial agricultural sector.

Further illustrations of this inequity are demonstrated by the following examples of who benefits more from the state's drought relief programme.

sequestered married farmer	R2000 per month
dismissed farmworker	R150 per month
recipients in the Nutritional Development Programme	R480 per year
farmer in carry over debt scheme (with farm more than 1000 hectares)	R375000
farmer receiving interest subsidy	R38250 per year

The state remains committed to assistance to commercial agriculture during drought periods. This assistance is at the expense of the majority of South Africa's people whose needs are for basic services and infrastructure. The current drought allocations were made after pronouncements that apartheid had been abandoned. This is not reflected in the state's handling of the drought crisis. Most of South Africa's people will have to survive this disaster without assistance from the present government.

### **State drought relief at local and regional levels**

Various state structures are involved at local and regional level in drought relief. These include Provincial Administrations, Homeland Governments, Joint Services Boards and Joint Coordinating Committees. Significant proportions of the budgets of these organisations were re-directed from their normal functions to fund drought relief work. Serious problems have emerged in the implementation of these drought relief activities. These include:

- inadequate funding
- rigid geographic jurisdictions
- poor coordination
- lack of personnel
- lack of drought relief experience
- poorly publicised relief measures
- lack of legitimacy
- poor community relations
- rigid "top-down" procedures

The absence of a common national approach to relief has implied that most state structures at local and regional level have had to adhoc through the process of drought relief. Many are dealing with rural communities' needs for the first time. With limited resources and a poor understanding of communities, serious problems confront these structures. The negotiation of geographic boundaries and jurisdictions between the newly created JSBs and other state structures has hampered relief work. The inability of structures to effectively coordinate their work has resulted in delays and duplication.

The lack of accountability of these structures to communities is the most serious problem. The absence of meaningful community representation on any of these structures creates the dangers of community exclusion from the processes of drought relief and the adoption of traditional "top-down" approaches.

The lack of a developmental approach to relief is prevalent amongst these structures. The danger of relief disasters is great and past mistakes are being repeated. There is a distinct antipathy to NGOs.

## **Drought response through NGOs**

### **The Independent Development Trust**

The Independent Development Trust (IDT) has added a new dimension to drought response in South Africa. The IDT, set up with funds from government and the private sector, attempted to take on development and relief responsibilities as an independent and politically neutral agency. While many people still regard it as a government attempt to "de-politicise" development, the IDT emerged as a significant actor in drought relief.

The IDT's Relief Development Programme had an allocation of R100 million for drought relief work. By December 1992, only half of this allocation was approved for projects, nationally.

The intervention of the IDT in drought relief represents the most significant injection of funds, so far, to address the problems of marginalised communities. Through its funding of the National Consultative Forum, the IDT has contributed to the creation of more appropriate drought relief structures and processes. Its own drought relief programme, the Relief Development Programme, has allowed communities access to an allocation of R100 million. This probably represents the most significant direct allocation of drought relief to marginalised communities. The inability of the IDT to dispose of its small budget (in relation to the needs) is attributable, to an extent, to the lack of community capacity to implement extensive relief projects. And this relates to the desperate conditions in these communities.

Communities, deprived of opportunities and funding to assume responsibility for their development in the past, are now being

called on to assume substantial responsibilities. This situation demonstrates the difficulties in coming to terms with the poor state of communities affected by past apartheid policies. The inappropriateness of small scale endeavours, like the IDT RDP, in dealing with a situation that needs the commitment of state resources, personnel and policy, is clearly evident.

Initially, the approach the IDT RDP adopted to capacity issues, was problematic. This programme tried to distinguish its relief initiatives from the broader development challenges facing communities. It refused to fund capacity building processes in communities. The inability of rural communities to plan and implement programmes through the RDP has highlighted capacity problems and the IDT has started to respond to this challenge.

Further problems with the IDT's operation include the channelling of most of its funds through state, parastatal, private sector and conservation bodies. Most of these structures have dubious pasts and some have been directly involved in the implementation of apartheid policies. In the Natal region only 30% of IDT RDP funds were allocated through NGOs and community structures.

#### **IDT Allocation (as at 2 December 1992)**

<b>Area</b>	<b>No. projects</b>	<b>Value of projects</b>	<b>No. work days</b>	<b>People affected</b>
national programme	15	R7476935	38740	250000
Natal/ KwaZulu	63	R13111 718	423685	425765
Western Transvaal	96	R7983150	846514	4100
Northern Transvaal	91	R17596508	1082838	2420
Kangwane	3	R290 594	27000	20000
Border/ Ciskei/ Transkei	62	R4 369 500	198056	2400
N. Cape/ Qwa Qwa	70	R3 429 848	213337	1262
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>R54258253</b>	<b>2830170</b>	<b>705947</b>

## The National Consultative Forum on Drought

In June 1992, 68 organisations helped launch the National Consultative Forum on Drought (NCFD) to coordinate a response to the drought crisis in the country. This initiative represents the broadest grouping of forces in the history of drought response in the country. The objectives that the NCFD set itself were to ensure that relief reaches the worst affected sectors and to promote the cause of the rural poor.

The work of the NCFD relied upon the cooperation of all the forces participating. These forces ranged from the government to its political opponents.

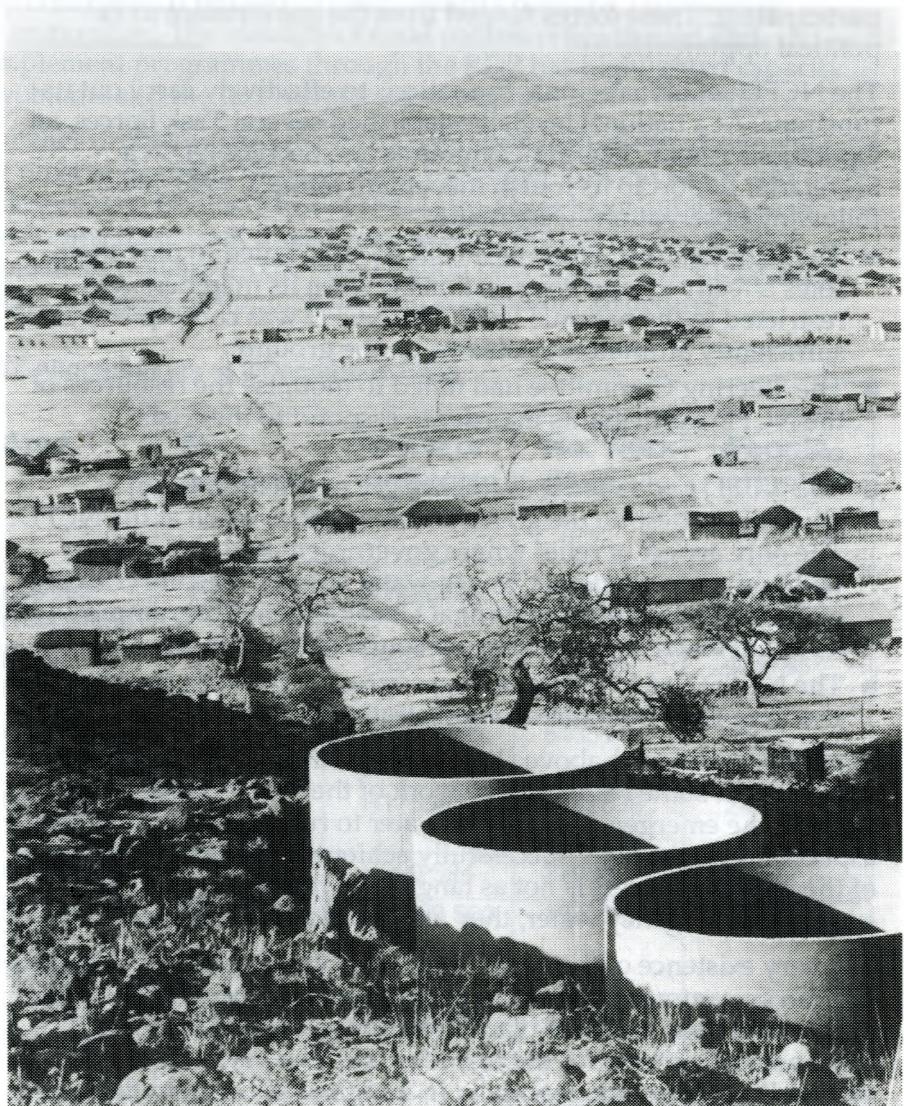
The NCFD set up 6 regional formations to effectively carry out its functions. At a national level, it established several Task Forces, an Operations Room, Steering Committee and Secretariat. In a Secretariat Report to its fourth meeting in January 1993, the following observations were made:

- The regional formations of the NCFD had failed to play their roles effectively and cooperation between its members was restricted to the national level. The NCFD was consequently not sufficiently attuned to problems on the ground.
- The Steering Committee had failed to mobilise the resources of the NCFD participants in order to respond to the crisis concretely.
- The NCFD had failed to influence government drought allocations, despite the government's participation at the NCFD. The only aspect of relief where government had showed any willingness to cooperate was in water supply. Despite criticism of the government's Nutritional Development Programme and its aid to black farmworkers, no concrete changes resulted.
- The NCFD had to evaluate the progress of its work to contribute to a long term national drought strategy.

Notwithstanding the above shortcomings, the NCFD has been successful in some respects. The work of the Water Supply Task Force in the emergency supply of water to rural communities is one aspect of drought relief successfully achieved. While the remainder of the NCFD's success is not as tangible as those related to the supply of emergency water, they are significant, nonetheless.

The very existence of the NCFD is proof of the inability of the South African government to fulfil its obligations to its people. The plight of the rural poor has been placed on the agenda of a drought management process for the first time and ideas for a future policy on handling droughts, especially in marginalised communities, was promoted by the NCFD. The issues of early warning systems, capacity building and poverty strategies have emerged from the NCFD process and are invaluable contributions to a future drought management strategy.

It was ambitious to expect the government to change its drought policy because of pressure from the NCFD. The government retains control over a powerful bureaucracy and resources while the NCFD lacks these. The failure of the government's major political opponents to tackle the issues facing rural communities in general, and drought specifically, has ensured that the government remains the most powerful force in the NCFD. This is more the failure of those political forces than it is of the NCFD.



**Drought is a recurrent, but avoidable, disaster that most affects the poorest of the poor. New drought relief strategies should base themselves on this view.**

## Part 3

# Conclusion

**I**n its substance, the current drought response is no different from the traditional approaches to drought adopted in South Africa. State allocations for drought relief still benefit the privileged strata of South Africa. The motive for this relief remains the mitigation of drought impact on the economy. The neglect that rural communities have suffered in the social process of South African life, have ensured that they remain the most vulnerable and affected by the drought crisis and they were largely ignored in the allocation of drought relief measures.

In its process, especially through the NCFD, the current drought response has shown the failures of past approaches. It has forced thinking about and formulation of new, more appropriate approaches to drought. Poverty has also emerged as an unavoidable priority. Inherent in the current new thinking is the view that drought is a recurrent, but avoidable, disaster that plagues the poorest of the poor. New drought relief strategies should base themselves on this view.

## Future of the NCFD

It is AFRA's view that the NCFD has been the most significant and relevant vehicle for Drought Relief in the history of drought efforts in South Africa. With its emphasis on rural communities and their problems, the NCFD has contributed to the movement towards handling drought as a social, rather than an agricultural and economic, crisis. The NCFD coordinated the efforts of a range of organisations to provide drought relief to impoverished communities. Given the experiences and insights gained in its efforts, the NCF should continue to exist and contribute to developing a more appropriate drought management strategy.

In terms of its focus, we welcome that the NCFD views drought issues as part of the broader poverty related issues in the country. We are concerned however that in its efforts to focus on poverty and rural development, generally, the issue of drought could be neglected. We believe that with its experience and insight into drought related issues, these issues should remain the primary focus of the NCFD. The NCFD is well-located to facilitate the development of an appropriate and relevant drought management strategy.

The emphasis on regionalisation within the NCFD is also useful. Differing regional dynamics need region-specific programmes and foci. Local NGOs and CBOs can also play more effective roles and communities can, and should, be drawn into the process of drought management.

It is our view that the regional formations of the NCFD should link to regional economic and development forums which would have coordinate development initiatives regionally. Sub-structures to deal with rural issues should be established with all the relevant players. The RCF should locate itself, as a drought-specific rural coordinating structure, within broader rural formations under the relevant economic and development forums.

Community involvement in the RCF should be addressed as a priority. With broader forums, the RCF should investigate ways in which contact and networking can be facilitated at local and regional levels. Information on the conditions within communities should begin to be collected in order to prioritise drought prone areas for relief work and to identify target areas for capacity building programmes.

The capacity of the RCF, itself, should be improved. Personnel with specific responsibilities for water resource management, nutritional, job-creation, training, information and capacity building, should be employed. Fieldworkers should be employed and deployed at grassroots level to assist with information gathering, capacity building and networking.

## **Aspects/Foci**

The NCFD and the RCF should take responsibility for drought relief during the current drought and developing more appropriate longer term strategies.

### **Drought relief during the current drought**

The severest consequences of the present drought will only be experienced by communities during the coming winter. No clear commitments to a winter drought relief programme seem to exist. The NCFD and RCF should concentrate efforts on lobbying for and setting up a programme for providing relief during the winter. The

aspects of food security, water supply, health and fodder should be addressed.

### **Developing more appropriate longer term strategies**

Drawing on the experience of the current drought efforts, more appropriate strategies should be investigated at two levels: appropriate relief programmes and procedures and broader drought management strategy. These strategies, where they have been relatively successful (as in India) have consisted of preventive measures and curative measures.

#### **Preventive measures**

##### **Institutional arrangements**

A permanent drought-specific forum should be maintained. This forum needs to take responsibility, at local, regional and national level, for monitoring and early warning, the development of appropriate technologies and approaches in agriculture and water management, training and education, capacity building and co-ordination of drought relief efforts. The structure should incorporate state, NGO and community structures. The present NCFD is well-positioned to develop into this kind of institution.

##### **Weather watch groups**

Specialised groups entrusted with the responsibility of monitoring weather patterns should be established at national and regional levels. These groups should monitor rainfall patterns and identify possible drought periods.

##### **Water management**

Extensive water management systems need to be developed. These should include effective water-shed management education, exploitation of ground water, availability of boring rigs and other equipment, water quality education and maintenance of water supply systems.

##### **Food security**

An appropriate strategy to ensure food security, especially to the poor, needs to be developed. Linked to early warning systems, this strategy should address the manner in which food is produced and distributed. International lessons, particularly those linking nutrition to health and care, should be heeded. Further, the issue of income for the rural poor needs be addressed through a more effective social security system. The accessibility to land, credit and extension should be assured to marginalised communities.

##### **Compensatory measures**

In drought-prone areas, where soils are shallow and poor in natural productivity, appropriate technological advances should be developed and experimented with. Agricultural production during non-drought periods must be improved.