



INSTITUTE FOR POVERTY, LAND AND AGRARIAN STUDIES (PLAAS)

Farm Workers' Living and Working Conditions

Workshop Report

Workshop held on 19 September 2013 at the School of Government, University of the Western Cape

Workshop report: Farmworkers' living and working conditions

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) has, with the support of the Atlantic Philanthropies through its Rural Research and Information Networking Project, engaged in supporting identified information needs of civil society organisations (CSOs) towards progressive change. The project concentrates on creating dialogues between CSOs and researchers on relevant research agendas, support and promoting a spirit of co-operation.

The 'Farm Worker's Living and Working Conditions' Workshop was held on 19 September 2013 at the School of Government, University of Western Cape. It brought together over 30 participants from the farm worker and researcher fraternity to consider the critical questions that are framing the debates on farm workers.

Purpose

As part of the on-going work under the Rural Research and Information Networking Project, PLAAS hosted a workshop on farm workers' living and working conditions. The living and working conditions of farm workers' has attracted political attention from both the government and the agricultural industry, especially after the contributory farm workers' protest towards the end of 2012. This workshop gave insights on the different issues that affect farm workers such as insecure tenure, dwindling employment opportunities, farm consolidation, the impact of the agro-processing sector and access to service delivery. The workshop offered CSOs and researchers an opportunity to articulate and understand the dynamics around farm workers living and working conditions.

Objectives

- To exchange insights, experiences, perspectives and information about shifts and emerging trends relating to farm workers' and farm dwellers' living and working conditions.
- To deepen the understanding of what makes farm workers and farm dwellers particularly vulnerable (what's happening and anticipate what could happen).
- Take this back to our respective areas of work.

Methodology

The workshop was facilitated by Rebecca Freeth from REOS Partners. Reos is a social innovation consultancy that addresses complex, high-stakes challenges towards helping stakeholders to work together on challenges such as employment, health, food, energy, the environment, security, and peace. Reos partner with governments, businesses, and CSOs.

The morning was divided into short inputs from civil society and researchers that led the issue-based group conversations during the workshop. Small group discussions were held during the afternoon session. Language preferences were assessed at the beginning of the workshop and proceeded mainly in Afrikaans with English translation where it was needed.

The presentation sessions were followed with buzz activity of two-person conversations (participants were asked to engage with different participants throughout the day). These buzz conversations were informed by new insights, new thinking and new considerations.

2. SESSION 1: OPENING REMARKS

Prof Andries Du Toit welcomed all the participants and explained the purpose of the workshop. In outlining PLAAS's approach to the farm worker question, the context of the past 15 years and the deepened interest in farm labour and their living and working conditions was also explained. PLAAS research conducted over the years has focussed on the challenges and possible solutions of farm workers' living and working conditions. However, the development sector's donors have in the past five years retreated from South Africa and reduced their efforts in supporting research and policy interactions on farm workers and dwellers. Hence research in this regard had been de-prioritised and left the sector out of touch with the current realities of farm workers. Therefore, PLAAS identified that a need exists to have more conversations with farm workers and CSOs to learn what the challenges are and to share research insights that PLAAS has gathered over the years around the broader political economies of rural development, traditional authorities, land reform and poverty and what shifts are occurring and their effects on; among others, farm workers.

PLAAS is interested in what is currently happening on farms. Since the farm worker protest there had been some fundamental changes in labour relations and the reorganisation of management practices on farms and it is clear that more significant shifts are imminent (i.e. mechanisation). Nonetheless, the traditional trade unions had been caught off guard, as were many analysts, and do not understand the wider global agricultural and agro-processing shifts and their implications for the future of farm workers.

This workshop, it was explained, is firstly to hear insights from farm workers, their representatives and CSOs on what is currently happening on the ground. Secondly, the workshop aims to share research insights from the research consortium appointed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to do a fact finding of the living and working conditions of farm workers, identify the broader trends and 'bigger picture' of local agriculture. He identified the consortium which includes, PLAAS, LIMA, the Labour and Enterprise Policy Research Group at University of Cape Town, the Research Cluster for Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction at the University of Free State and an independent researcher.

Workshop guiding questions

The workshop commenced with an introductory and expectation setting activity. The facilitator emphasised the foundational ground rules which were followed by introductions by all participants. Participants were asked as part of their introductions to indicate what category they represent (i.e. farm worker, farm dweller, farm worker forum, CSO, student or researcher). The participants were informed of the workshop process which highlighted guiding thoughts and questions for consideration. These included consideration of why we attended the workshop (the experiences and different views that inform our understanding); what we heard from each other and short inputs from civil society and researchers (i.e. what's new or different and challenges what we know); what inputs and contributions during the workshop meant for all the different categories represented and what to take back to the workplace after the workshop. All participants were encouraged to speak and to listen well and closely. The inputs throughout the morning were meant to inform topics based on what had been heard and what participants wanted to discuss. In support of intense listening some of the responses from participant were:

- *That what is understood is not always right*
- *To focus*
- *To be patient to accommodate all views*
- *Short and succinct inputs (no longer than 10-15 minutes)*
- *Differences are honestly and clearly articulated even if there are no agreements*
- *To do short summaries during translations (Afrikaans-English) throughout the day in the way*

3. SESSION 2: CSO INPUTS

The first input was presented by Bettie Fortuin (a farm worker involved in programmes facilitated by Women on Farms Project) and the second input was by Estelle Katumba of Sikhula Sonke (a trade union organising seasonal workers).

Why workers strike and what is happening after the strikes

The reasons why farm workers decided to engage in protest was that they couldn't afford living on the wages they earned. Farm workers do intensive manual labour and are critical to the export of produce. After the strike the hardships for workers deepened. From the workers' perspective employers have become more arrogant since the protests but from the employers' perspective the wage increase was too sudden. Hence, in an effort to adjust to a relatively dramatic increase in wage bills employers made fundamental and unilateral changes to workers' conditions of employment which is not compliant with legislation. Some of the changes involve workers on full time weekly rates being unilaterally changed to piece labour rates which depend on the output workers can deliver per day/week. Older persons in particular are disadvantaged as older workers cannot keep up with younger workers who are more productive. In addition there have been threats of mechanisation by the farmers which means job losses for farm workers.

Working hours have unilaterally increased as workers continue to work 8-9 hours (at R75-R80), however, all breaks are now reduced and deducted from the workers' hours which leave workers with reduced take home wages. The work week has been shortened from a 5-day work week with provisions for overtime to 2-3 days per week and overtime work has been taken away or structured differently. All other household expenditure for farm workers has been increased significantly or has now been added, for items such as rent (up to R105 for both) for housing and persons living but not working on farms (i.e. children and parents), electricity and transport costs (where it is provided). Some houses are not up to the standards set out in labour legislation. Workers also have to now pay doctors and medical services expenses. Employers also now charge for maintenance on houses. The difficulty is that farmers are now calculating all benefits as cost to company. Many benefits have been taken away and are now unavailable without costs. This has been done without discussions with farm workers relating to the changes in basic conditions of service and thus to their income and tenancy and work related costs.

Workers also complain that now instead of being paid weekly, they are paid fortnightly which is not convenient for all workers especially when their incomes are very low to start with. Thus, the actual wages of workers have not increased — instead, in some cases they have decreased and workers are either in the same or worse off position than before the protests. All of these shifts are corresponding to employers' claims that they are unable to remunerate the new minimum wage of R105.

There are serious issues of distrust between workers and employers. Workers have been told that farmers have applied for exemption; however there is uncertainty on the side of workers on whether exemptions were granted and they do not trust employers' claims of indemnity. Some efforts had been made to find out whether employers were successful in exemption but no information is shared with workers from government's side especially the Department of Labour which remains a barrier to access to information. Workers do not know who to trust. Sikhula Sonke indicated there are only two farms out of the total farms that they have organised that were granted exemption which allow those employers 8 months to adjust their financial situation to make the shifts to the R105 wage expense.

The shifts have also deepened the vulnerability of women workers, especially single women, who are in a worse position than before. The increase in wages is being used as a justification for changing their conditions of employment, tenure security and withholding benefits that were previously available.

There are progressive farmers, who recognise that their workers are suffering, and have returned to the old system of free and/or reduced costs for worker benefits. However there is a general feeling that government and trade unions have failed farm workers.

Some employers have now agreed to establish worker committees with farm workers to address basic issues like wage negotiations and benefits on a farm by farm basis. For trade unions it is more difficult to organise workers and to lead negotiations for better wages beyond R105 as access to farm workers is problematic. The indication was given that farms in the post-protest sensitive areas such as De Doorns, Grabouw, Rawsonville, Citrusdal and Ceres are particularly difficult territories in current wage negotiations, as employers are resistant to negotiate and/or engagement with trade unions.

The abovementioned shifts have made the wage increase to R105 mostly an empty victory as farm workers are no better off than before and do not currently experience improved labour and living conditions.

4. SESSION 3: EXPLORING CSO INPUTS

Following from the CSO inputs, participants had the following questions and comments:

Little clarity on employers' exemption from the payment of the minimum wage

- Farm workers reported that after the new minimum wage was promulgated many farmers made efforts to force farm workers to sign blank papers in support for their exemption.
- Farm workers complained about lack of clarity on the process under which exemptions are taking place between employers and the Department of Labour and it's not a three-way process that includes workers. Farm workers have been forced by farmers to sign support for exemption applications which have rolled back the agreements and gains of the R105 wage and negatively affected their livelihoods and security of tenure depends. Concerns have been raised by CSOs and trade unions regarding possible collusion among farmers around the exemption application process. This is a critical advocacy opportunity for farm workers to be involved in. Questions that arise include what the criteria for exemptions should be, how they are assessed and the role of workers in the process.
- There is also lack of transparency regarding periods of exemption for those farmers that have been exempted. The Department of Labour do not monitor the exemption period or

the implementation of the minimum wages, hence employers do not have to adhere to legislation or exemption agreements.

- There is a question regarding the legal basis for exemptions in the agriculture sector as there is no precedent for it in other sectors. If not permitted this presents grounds for a legal challenge against exemptions.

Farm workers are visible and want to be seen and heard

- The farm worker protest was not only to hit back at employers regarding low wages and poor working conditions but also to force the public to hear the voices of farm workers and to notice their struggle. Farm workers wanted to force the public to become aware that farm workers cannot live on R79 per day which leads to dire conditions under which they have to live. The protests also gave farm workers, who are very isolated; the opportunity to recognise many other farm workers endure similar struggles for recognition of rights and a decent living.
- Government and the agricultural sector do not listen to farm workers. The 2010 Vulnerable Worker Summit presented an opportunity to address many of the issues that compounded the protests but many of the resolutions were not operationalized by government. Moreover, AgriSA, resisted addressing the issues, walked out of the summit and effectively distanced itself from the outcomes of the 2010 summit.

Denial of basic services

- There are many issues that had not been raised such as farm workers that are living without basic services 20 years into democracy. Many farm workers do not have access to water and basic sanitation. Similarly, there are many farm worker families that do have access to basic services but the quality of water and sanitation is poor.
- Farm workers should live independent from employers to access basic services from government. Government must make land available for housing for farm workers.

Weak condition of employment

- Farmers are now unilaterally changing the conditions of employment of farm workers without consultation with them. However, the Labour Relations Act is a weak remedy for workers that are not unionised or organised who want to use it to protect their rights.
- Workers are worse off than before the strikes. Social benefits and basic services (for farm workers that stay on farms) should not be regarded by employers as a sense of goodwill or kindness. They should be regarded as part of the basic conditions of employment. Particularly, as workers are geographically isolated from accessing these social benefits and basic services from the state and local government struggles to provide basic services on private land. There are farmers that consider that the fair treatment of workers is a good employment practice that could benefit their businesses. Many farmers are defensive and short-sighted and do not consider the benefits of good employment practices. This is a question of better leadership in the sector both by farmers and trade unions to address these issues. No amount of labour legislation will address all the challenges unless there is a better deal for farm workers from employers.
- Foreign workers are favoured by farmers instead of local workers, as foreign workers are less demanding of better wages and working conditions. The wider social impact is that local workers are left unemployed and need to migrate elsewhere for farm labour and the competition for housing on farms is intensifying.
- A new development is that there is a reconsideration of the formalised labour relationships by employers with some 'softening' and bringing back the 'human aspects' and generosity of free and reduced costs of benefits. These are important small but necessary measures in the transformation of employers' mentality and approaches to their workers which could potentially help rebuild relationships between workers and employers.

Farm worker organisation

- After the protests has the organisation of workers remained intact?
- Farmers control processes of consultation and negotiations. For these to be meaningful for workers, they will need to be informed in terms of access to information and research findings relevant to their issues. The protests gave rise to new forms of engagement in an effort to overhaul employer created formal and informal rules and eliminate the employer biased nature of consultations and negotiations. In a negotiations meeting on the farm workers' strike; between employers, a farm worker focused CSO and farm workers' trade union; the traditional power deferential to the advantage of employers was addressed by workers as they entered the negotiations on an more equal basis (i.e. the workers entered the negotiation with an economist, a lawyer and a supportive NGO). In this negotiation the strategy to 'come as prepared and represented as the employers' empowered the worker representatives to challenge the common issues that prevented them to negotiate from a strong position such as language barriers (i.e. the use of English instead of Afrikaans or vice versa), financial complexity and the ability of employer power structures to subjectively (in their own favour) persuade or negotiate (often using intimidatory tactics) with farm workers. In this context, it is essential to support unions better represent workers in meetings and discussions with employers and their representatives.
- In order to build different relationships in rural communities the organisation of all forms of workers is important and should be approached as a central matter. There is a need to address the marginalisation and weakness of organisation among migrant and seasonal workers, and to consider new forms of organisation through inclusion in fora, meetings and discussions regarding their wages, living and working conditions.

Farm worker re-imagination

- Beyond the hurt and the anger what is the end and the imagination of farm workers? Can farm work provide a better life? Or is the demand for land and other work opportunities for farm workers articulated well enough?

5. SESSION 4: RESEARCHERS' VOICES

These presentations assisted to contextualise from literature sources the current trends shaping the experiences of farm workers in terms of their wages, living and working conditions.

The socio economic conditions of farm workers and farm dwellers

Doreen Atkinson

The [presentation](#) highlighted the complexity of the interrelated socio-economic context of farm worker conditions (i.e. housing and settlements, basic services, education and training, gender, social networks and relationships, income generating activities, savings and financial assets, governance). The issues that were highlighted vary throughout the farming areas and sectors in South Africa and are affected by numerous different conditions. Similarly these conditions are influenced by the dynamics and the structural position of permanent employees and seasonal workers and on-farm or off-farm dwellers respectively. It was highlighted that in future it is likely (as is currently the case) that permanent workers will enjoy more benefits compared to seasonal/contract workers. This is likely to be reflected in wage inequality and the quality of, and access to housing.

The presenter mentioned additional key issues such as:

- whether workers are indispensable (could they easily be replaced)
- what is their skills level (what kind of training ensures retention)
- the profit margins of commercial agriculture (the survival of the fittest)

- municipal services (the non-delivery of services to farms)
- government policies (good intentions but unintended consequences as a result of not understanding how agricultural economies work).

In conclusion in using an example of agriculture in the United States of America the presenter highlighted that unlike in South Africa, the international tendency is cooperation between all stakeholders in the sector to work together to promote the well-being of the entire agriculture sector which is facilitated by the Department of Agriculture. This includes support to NGOs to provide farm worker training, skills retention approaches for farm workers with scarce skills, assistance to seasonal workers to graduate out of agriculture into other sectors, provision of state housing for seasonal workers and development of off-farm housing for permanent workers (i.e. the state taking responsibility for services, which is part of their mandate). This ensures the sustainability of the agricultural sector in America. In South Africa there is a vacuum in this regard as employers are burdened with state functions such as the provision of education, transportation and basic services to farm dwellers.

The regulatory framework that governs the relationship and circumstances between farm workers, farm dwellers and farm owners

Jan Theron

The presentation discussed the different laws, regulations and policies that have an impact on farms. There was a focus on the effect of legislative regulation on the relationship between farmers, farm dwellers, farm workers (permanent, seasonal, migrant, permanent, local and foreign) and labour contractors (companies that provide or place teams of workers on farms). It is undesirable to only have laws emanating from above (i.e. top down state approach); there should also be other forms of regulation (i.e. collective agreements, codes of conducts, etc.).

The importance of the Constitution in the context of farms has been highlighted and not all labour legislation applies to all people that live on a farm. Labour legislation applies to workers that are employed. A significant point that was raised was labour legislation works best for workers that are permanently and full-time employed. Labour legislation does not work well for seasonal workers (i.e. workers are not always employed during the next season and this can be influenced by many aspects). Farm dwellers alternatively are protected by tenure legislation (ESTA) but the legislation and its implementation appears problematic. ESTA lacks proper enforcement and is thus meaningless as it does not provide the protection it was intended to provide to farm dwellers. One example of lack of enforcement is the unilateral changes to workers employment contracts that followed particularly after the sectoral determination. Thus, top-down regulation by the state will not solve problems if there is nothing from below to hold employers accountable. There is a need for greater organisation among farm workers to give effect to labour legislation, general practices; such as representation, to enable collective bargaining. The state cannot unilaterally take decisions that should rather be negotiated between workers and employers such as the sectoral determination of agriculture.

Examining the underlying and structural problems that exist within the agricultural sector

Margareet Visser

The presentation looked at the past (before 1994) and current shifts that have emerged in agriculture and that impacted on and continue to impact on the sector as a whole. This includes the creation of cooperatives, the Land Bank and the Agricultural Credit Board as some of the vehicles that were used to provide particular resource and production benefits, subsidies and capital loans as well as market support for farmers which significantly protected and supported

farmers. The marketing boards were a very powerful player and could negotiate effectively on behalf of farmers in South Africa with export markets.

The Apartheid state gradually reduced these benefits and in 1994 the new ANC government introduced agricultural deregulations, market liberalisation and labour legislation. Since then South African farmers reduced in numbers, became more market-orientated, consolidated land, mechanised, reduced their labour force and changed the management of farms. At the same time supermarkets' power increased substantially and they became more dominant as price makers which placed farmers as price-takers (without the safeguard of the cooperatives), under enormous pressure. These shifts which impacted on farmers had direct impacts on different categories of farm workers. These shifts led to three levels of challenges

- a. the increase of powers of supermarkets,
- b. the fragmentation and reorganisation of farmers following the retreating of marketing boards, and
- c. the fragmentation of workers.

In conclusion it was emphasised that there is a need to consider this challenge and look at what is required to initiate a mutual cooperation between farmers and farm workers to join forces against supermarkets towards lobbying better price conditions and arrangements with supermarkets that will release the pressure on farmers as these pressures are generally passed on to the workers.

As an illustration of the structure of power and of cooperation it was raised that are also advocacy strategies that do not require the presence of legislation. It was explained how prices and profits are structured along the value chain and indicated supermarkets at the top of the value chain capture the major share of the profit, while farmers at the bottom of the value chain; collect the least. He shared a story of a conference held 20 years ago in Stellenbosch before the introduction of labour legislation. At this conference a visiting Mexican worker presented a short input which looked at their dire situation as workers on tomato farms which forced them to organise and develop strategies to influence farmers. They followed the money that finances processors and supermarkets. This led to a tripartite agreement (without the state) between the financiers (banks), farmers and farm workers to negotiate a better price for farmers, better wages and better benefits for farm workers.

The nature and root cause of evictions and the manner in which this is being dealt with by farm owners

Jeanette Clarke

The presentation discussed:

- What do we know about farm evictions? (How many, when, where?)
- What are the causes/drivers of evictions, and the impacts? (Why?)

Since the 1970s, there has been a steady movement off farms and timber plantations mainly as a result of voluntary movement to urban areas with the breakdown of influx controls, also involuntary as a result of job shedding due to modernisation (mechanisation, larger farm size) and deliberate policies to phase out housing and tenancy on farms and plantations.

The Social Surveys/Nkuzi study in 2005 was the only large-scale national survey that assessed evictions since 1994 and found that more evictions occurred since 1994 than before 1994 with a steady increase of evictions up to 2004. Evicted workers had very little knowledge of their tenure rights and with low levels of education had difficulties in securing jobs elsewhere (i.e. out of agriculture). The only other studies were conducted in Limpopo which indicated evictions are on-going and more recently a study in the Cape Winelands District Municipality in 2010 argued

that very little evictions have occurred on the sample of 50 farms and that it may be that by that time most workers had already been evicted.

Evictions are devastating for farm workers and are exacerbated by no available housing and access to land. ESTA seems ineffective in stopping evictions. There are views that ESTA led to the increase of evictions but this is disputed among stakeholders.

In conclusion it was indicated there is broad agreement from literature for holistic solutions. Solutions need to be tailored to specific circumstances in different areas/ farms, suit people's needs, consider on and off-farm secure housing and secure livelihoods that are underwritten by social justice.

Demographics of farmers, farm workers and farm dwellers

Stuart Ferrer

The [presentation](#) considered the 2002 and 2007 Census of Agriculture, the 2011 Population Census (Stats SA) results and the labour force surveys and looked at:

- an overview of the agricultural sector
- the demographics of farms, farm workers and farm dwellers

For the purpose of the ILO study the focus was mainly on commercial agriculture which employs most farm workers. Headline issues highlighted included clarifying the definition of farmers. There has been a shift in the racial representation of farmers in the last 20 years, for instance, in the sugar cane industry there are 25,000 small scale black commercial farmers; similarly land reform dynamics have allowed new entrants into agriculture (e.g. more use of labour contractors among land reform beneficiaries in the sugar cane industry as a result of not having all the production resources). It may be of interest to investigate if that has had an impact on the relationship between farmers and farm workers and if so, how?

Contractors and labour brokers (56% of farm workers are hired indirectly in the forestry industry) have an indirect link between farmers and farm workers, reducing the bargaining power of the workers with farmers. Labour contractors have very small profit margins resulting in limited leverage for farm workers on wages.

Labour substitution has increased as a result of increased mechanisation (e.g. weed one ha of sugarcane land with eight people with hoes in one day or one person with a knap sack with R600 worth of chemicals). At a particular wage rate it becomes cheaper to use one person instead of eight. Hence as relative prices change the labour as a proportion of costs are increasingly becoming a consideration for farmers. The general trend has therefore been a dramatic reduction of farm labour both in the permanent and seasonal labour force. At the same time there had been a shift in wages between skilled and permanent workers and low-skilled and often seasonal workers.

In conclusion the definition of farm dwellers has changed:

- not all farm dwellers work on farms
- not all workers live on farms
- not all workers who live on farms are farm dwellers? (Del Grande, 2006)

A different viewpoint suggested that there is not a consistent trend in evictions and it was suggested that around the time when new legislation had been introduced or when there was uncertainty in the sector, evictions had been more evident. While there is a tendency to narrowly look at the immediate impacts of events in the agriculture sector (as is often the case with evictions), research has shown it takes about six years for the impacts of evictions to be evident. Therefore the impact on demographics subsequent to the protests may only manifest later.

6. SESSION 5: KEY EMERGING ISSUES

Participants raised the following key issues:

- Within the definition of farmers and farm workers there are different categorisations.
- The past and present dynamics affecting the relationship between farmers and farm workers, including issues of intention and trust, given the history of inequality and exploitation.
- Government policies and legislation.
- The role of research, who is it for, who does it speak to and who is producing it?
- There are large-scale political realignments on the issue of farm workers' rights which reflects wider shifts in land reform and related legislation, and policies which carry populist rhetoric but also conservative changes to laws and policies such as the Land Tenure on Commercial Farms Policy adopted in July 2013 and Strengthening the Rights of People who Work on Farms (farm worker gets 10% of the land not in the business (merely a voluntary requirement) and an amendment of ESTA (which includes the transfer of funds to farm owners to compensate for services to farm workers).
- The absence of a coherent picture such as the one in the USA where there is a tripartite arrangement between the state, organised agriculture and labour developing a shared vision of what rural areas should look like and acting from that common vision. The reason for this in South Africa is the antagonism and lack of trust between farm workers, government and trade unions on one side and farmers on the other hand. Coupled to this is the farmers' short-sightedness and sectoral parochialism. What is missing is trust and cooperation between the state, farmers and farm workers. Are social partnerships sufficiently and strategically discussed given that the economic environment is such that mechanisation and labour shedding is inevitable? In this context the following need to be considered:
 - A solution to addressing the plight of farm workers requires a joint approach between employers, trade unions; local, provincial and national government; the wider industry and all other relevant stakeholders.
 - Billions have been invested in land reform and the benefits for farm workers do not match this investment.
 - The current status of agriculture cannot be considered in full without bearing in mind the past sector policies and the impacts thereof. However, all the shifts and labour legislation did not bring better changes for farm workers hence there is a sense that there is a continuation of what happened in the past. Farmers were highly subsidised in the past
 - The weak levels of trade union organisations and worker representation underlies many problems in the agricultural sector, particularly relating to farm workers' living and working conditions.

7. SESSION 7: LESSONS FROM FARMWORKER STRIKES

The TCOE emphasised that conversations on the protests were not sufficiently underpinned as part of the start of the workshop. The presentation discussed the lessons we can learn from the protests. Examples were given of how the preparation of the strike led to the organisation of workers. She emphasised that the emergence of a younger generation of farm workers with a higher level of education and access to technology (e.g. cell phones) supported agency among farm workers. Off-farm seasonal and migrant workers (for instance, they live off-farm in many cases) who have a different relationship with the farmers have played an important role during the protests and were the driving force behind the uprising of farm workers.

The political climate (particularly following the Marikana event) helped to mobilise the consciousness of people who live in towns and assisted with the imagination for a better life for

farm workers. The strike was unique because there was no one for the farm workers to negotiate with. Farmers refused to negotiate or to speak to protesters and unions. Government and farmers were absent. The protests were disbanded due to the intervention of the police.

Following the protests the Commission for Conflict Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) was called in Robertson to mediate subsequent negotiations in a meeting with 50–60 farmers on the one side and farm workers on the other. The imbalances were starkly visible: on the one side many double-cab vans drove up and parked alongside jeeps, a number of sleek cars and the newest variety of SUVs. These were the farmers, their consultants and their lawyers who arrived for the meeting. While in contrast, the shop stewards arrived on the back of trucks. This was a very unequal meeting as the workers and representatives did not have the capacity and the information to enter into negotiations on an equal basis. Researchers must take note of these inequalities, particularly the importance of research in empowering farm workers and their organisations.

Farm workers are far behind in their development because they are still dealing with basic issues such as illiteracy 20 years into our democracy and while an imagination of a new countryside is necessary, many farm workers are unable to dream what another countryside should look like. This is a very unique section of the workforce which requires new forms of organisation to empower citizens to act in an acknowledged way. There was no support from buyers or any supporting consumer action in this protest. These are the connections that will extend the recognition of the plight of workers.

Unions generally are weak financially and resource poor, thus, the strike would not have been possible if it was not for the NGOs which formed the farm worker coalition.

8. SESSION 8: GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Group 1: Organisation and voice of farm workers /dwellers

Group participants indicated that:

- there needs to be greater cooperation between farm worker coalitions, awetuc and others about strategies on the organisation of farm workers;
- there is a need for autonomous committees on each farm, representing workers and dwellers;
- there must also be committees off-farm, dealing with labour and community issues; and
- there must be a coordinating structure that brings together all the committees in an area.

Group 2: Training/skilling and career prospects of farm workers AND the dreams of farm workers

Four out of the five non-research participants in the workshop were women. Women felt life on farms doesn't allow space for dreams. Workers felt they do not earn enough to enable their dreams, to further studies or to create a better future for their children. They do not want their children to work on farms because farm workers are undervalued and underpaid. However, some of the workers like the essence of farm work but not the conditions of work. Women had different dreams for their children. Many farm children have or are now completing high school. Women appreciate the free courses that some organisations offer to improve their employability. Among women there is a strong culture of saving particularly to provide for their children's education and some supported their children through college and university with their own savings.

Group 3: New policies and amendments to ESTA and farm workers in relation to the land question and agrarian transformation

The group participants agreed that there is a power imbalance in respect of access to land. Land needs to be redistributed and alternative land and tenure policies are needed to address farm workers' tenure security.

9. SESSION 9: CONCLUSION

Some of the key issues that were raised in the concluding session included:

- The situation in agriculture has changed significantly — more conversations are needed to understand what the current realities are and to learn from each other.
- Leadership in the sector and from government needs urgent attention.
- A tripartite (including government, organised agriculture and labour representation) could and should be considered to address some of the structural issues in the agricultural sector: what can be done to support greater solidarity between workers, farmers and the state?
- Alternative responses to agrarian transformation should be considered at local levels, driven by local conditions.
- Relationships between farm worker committees and farm workers, NGOs and researchers must lead to engagement around what people want.
- What research questions could lead supportive research to help farm workers?
- Engagement on farm worker issues is a long-term engagement on various aspects such as land needs, basic services, labour relations and worker issues.
- What are the levers that should be turned to unlock positive shifts for farm workers?
- There are many conversations about the challenges of farm workers but very few solutions.
- What if farmers do not adjust their positions and what if the rural areas depopulate? Not all challenges of farm workers may have solutions...
- What is the possibility of a similar conversation with farm workers, CSO and organised agriculture and consideration around these issues?

There is the need for convening more such shared conversations between farm workers, CSO and researchers. PLAAS will consider this. In addition there will be a process from the ILO research and other meeting/s will be convened to reflect on the process and the research report will enable further dialogue with this and potentially a larger group of participants

Participants were thanked for their participation and the workshop ended.

APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANTS LIST

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