

## SPP UPDATE

13 September 2018

### IN PURSUIT OF AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION IN THE INDUSTRIAL FORESTRY SECTOR – WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE

Evidence suggests that SPP's lobbying interventions through targeting forestry authorities are having a positive impact in addressing continued inequality and marginalisation of black workers' tenurial arrangements in plantation forestry villages. We are observing that the Department of Public Works (DoPW) and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) are engaging vulnerable forestry dwellers and communities on the transfer of state land and offering economic opportunities through community forestry respectively.



SPP initiated a forestry programme during 2008 on the basis of requests from tenure insecure and livelihoods-challenged forestry dwellers. Since this period, SPP and forestry community-based organisations engaged government departments and a range of role players - *i.e.* private forestry companies, local government institutions, conservation agencies – in addressing social, tenure and income



inequalities that black worker experienced through restructuring and privatisation of the forestry sector.

The thirteen forestry villages that SPP supports in the Western Cape were initially worker villages that housed workers in the industrial forestry sector. During the 1960s and 70s workers were sourced from surrounding farms to provide labour in the establishment and management of tree plantations (predominantly *pinus* tree species) as well as fire protection in remote locations. Being farm workers / dwellers at the time - not owning their own land and houses – they were attracted to the newly established forestry villages where employment, housing and services were provided by government.

After twenty years into a democratic dispensation, residents in state forestry villages continue to face unemployment, are tenure insecure, experience poverty while some continue to receive eviction notices. There had been



instances where residents were hospitalised because of food shortages and malnutrition. Since residents do not own the houses that are not being maintained by government, these become dilapidated and a fire hazard. The provision of service delivery such as water, sewage, road, and electricity and community safety had also been degrading over time.

During SPP interventions, we engaged government institutions at different levels – locally, provincially and nationally - to acknowledge and rectify the dire situation residents are facing. Our interventions explored transformative mechanisms, *i.e.* land redistribution without any success as this particular land reform model only suits “beneficiaries” that wish to access farmland for productive purposes. Programme staff and communities did not have an alternative but to visit one department after the other without having any success and without government entities offering being a leading and coordinating entity.

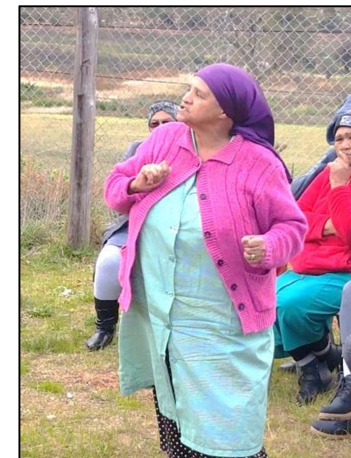
We believe that our engagement with government has reached a turning point and cause to celebrate:

- The DoPW is currently in a process of approaching forestry villagers, consulting them on options for formal village establishment, *i.e.* transfer of land and services to communities in relation to objectives sustainable settlements. All the forestry villages that experience tenure insecurity are being targeted. This would be a dream come true for many – owning a house, a garden, a plot of their own had been a long sought after dream for many men and women.
- Since workers had been perceived a resource for work in the past, there is now movement towards restoring the dignity of those that had been historically marginalised through processes of transformation. Acquiring tenure security is but one element of achieving household livelihoods. The DAFF is also coming to the table as the forest authority contributed primarily to the marginalisation of black workers and their dependants. As land is becoming available through the exit of plantation forestry due to ecological concerns, forest neighbouring communities – that had been historically marginalised – can now engage in community forestry activities. This process is still new and we still have to explore the extent of these opportunities: are activities only limited to non-timer forest products (NTFP) such as honey, harvesting of indigenous vegetation, etc., or can these opportunities enable significant local economic development.



Given this scenario, there appears to be a range of challenges which communities have to consider:

- The commercial sector is now competing with impoverished forestry communities to “get a slice of the cake” given the myriad of land and economic opportunities presented by these shifts. These include the re-establishment of plantations, natural resource management enterprises, eco-tourism, etc.
- In anticipation of these opportunities, forestry communities are required to establish business entities to engage in economic land-use operations.
- Neighbouring communities have to cluster and collaborate around economic enterprises where available land overlaps
- One of the major challenges facing the programme and communities currently, is information and capacity in community organisation development to ensure these opportunities do materialise.
- Communities are poorly organised in anticipation of these processes.



SPP therefore has to review its existing strategy given the victories and current trends in the industrial forestry sector. We have to a large extent built the organisational capacity of local community organisations. This involved awareness raising (restructuring in the forestry sector; gender awareness and power dynamics, agro-ecology and agro-forestry); facilitation in tenure reform and sustainable production; stakeholders analysis and liaison, training in leadership and decision making, setting up PME systems; etc.). Our target had generally been the Forestry Community Forum and its affiliate members from the 13 villages. We therefore have to re-orientate our focus more towards land transfer and administration and economic development through community forestry.

One of the programme added successes had been the development of confidence and vision of community leaders, especially women that are taking initiative.