

## LABORIE DIALOGUE INITIATIVE SEEKS NEW DEAL FOR FARM WORKER HOUSING

A report commissioned by the Laborie Dialogue Initiative (LDI) provides a gloomy review of current factors influencing provision of housing, services and tenure security for agricultural workers “who remain a poorly served and largely neglected constituency”. The report seeks to contribute to a new conversation about a new deal for farm workers.

According to the report housing, services and tenure security remain closely interlinked and in the absence of effective government policy leave agricultural workers vulnerable and at risk of human rights injustices. Governmental departments with the responsibilities to protect agricultural workers’ rights and improve their living conditions, lack agreed strategy and common programmes. This persistent policy vacuum in combination with economic trends, have created a high risk socio-economic environment which is compounded by the following factors:

- Growers are forced to cut costs and reduce dependence on labour through mechanisation, externalisation (moving workers off-farm) and ‘casualisation’ (the altering of working practices so that regular workers are re-employed on a short-term basis).
- SARS tax rebates and interest rate discounts offered by the Land Bank to encourage growers to invest in housing and social services have been withdrawn - without any viable alternative being put in place.
- The failure of the Farm Resident Housing Assistance Programme coupled with uncertainties over land reform policies have led to an increase in the number of households being displaced off-farms.
- Once off-farm these households become the responsibility of the already stretched municipalities. Research indicates that a significant number of farm workers are not registered on the municipal housing demand data base. And even if they were, the waiting lists are long.
- The side-effect is the expansion of poorly serviced informal settlements on the outskirts of small towns, increased poverty, and more people who are reliant on social grants and seasonal work.
- Enormous social tension is created where municipalities provide emergency housing for evicted or displaced farm workers, as town residents who have been on waiting lists for years accuse agri workers of ‘jumping the queue’.

### **What to do?**

The LDI report makes the following recommendations:

- The strengthening of intergovernmental relations and the meaningful engagement of organised labour, worker formations, agriculture and civil society on matters affecting farm workers.
- The joint formulation of practical alternatives to overhaul current farm worker housing and services policy, and provide tax rebates and rates relief for investment in off-farm housing options - which provide long term tenure security.
- The mandatory inclusion of farm worker housing and access to services within the housing chapter of municipal integrated development plans.
- The piloting of public private partnership options for the provision of off-farm worker housing with secure tenure.
- The review of ESTA Section 4 provisions and proposed tenure grants in the ESTA Amendment Act\* as a source of housing finance which could also address suitable alternative accommodation and provision of on-farm retirement housing.

The LDI report concludes that a champion is needed to drive creative ways to expand agricultural social investment programmes and enable alternative service delivery models.

In this regard the report reviews the history of the Rural Foundation (established in the 1980s and disbanded in the late 1990's) which some analysts regard as contributing to a "golden age of service delivery on farms". While acknowledging that the Foundation had its flaws, the report asks whether it is not time to reimagine a 21<sup>st</sup> century version with substantial industry investment, active union and worker involvement, NGO and state support. Such an initiative could help generate the energy to break the policy gridlock and to plan and implement practical programmes to help restore the citizenship rights and dignity of farm workers.

- \* Read the full article here:  
<https://winelandsfarmworkers.net/2017/03/16/wanted-a-new-deal-for-farmworkers/>

### **ESTA fast facts**

A Policy for the Settlement of Farm Workers in the Western Cape was prepared and gazetted in 2000 to promote the vision that all farm workers "must be able to be settled permanently" and to create "on the farm" and "off the farm" settlement options including agri-villages and agri-suburbs. The policy envisaged "the option of subdividing the farm unit which will facilitate settlement with the accompanying right of ownership". It also envisaged that these settlements would be financed by the Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA) Section 4 subsidies. This section of

ESTA continues to remain largely unimplemented and despite the binding requirement in law to provide subsidies, very few have been awarded in terms of the Act.

### **About the Laborie Dialogue Initiative**

The LDI was formed in 2015 when a MoU was signed between HORTGRO, VinPro, the Food and Allied Workers' Union (FAWU) with the aim to tackle sensitive labour and rural issues and improve labour relations. The MoU confirmed the parties' commitment to six focus areas of development identified in the Fruit Industry Social Compact (FISC) and Wine 2020 Vision:

- Economic development
- Social development and upliftment
- Human resource development
- Market access, development and trade promotion
- Knowledge management and information systems
- Technical research, transfer and intelligence