



Farmworker Voices

Report to FEPA
March -September 2021

The ravages of Covid 19: Looting & Corruption

by Anghenick 'Barnes' Jonas - Chairperson

Our government responded to the Covid 19 pandemic saying it was about protecting basic rights, especially the right to health. But in the face of widespread reports of police and army brutality, in the face of 450,000 arrests, starvation and the collapse of our education and health systems, was our rights really protected?

In July 2021 we were rocked by violence and looting in KwaZulu-Natal and parts of Gauteng. It highlighted the extreme living conditions of South Africans that have slowly and steadily plummeted. Our government and the ruling party paralyzed by the former President Jacob Zuma's kleptocracy, fake nationalism and factional infighting.

But there is HOPE! We have seen the spirit of solidarity and community in the face of a total breakdown of law and order. We have witnessed extraordinary acts of civic engagement by individuals and businesses.

Let's take hands
and mobilise
to protect and defend
our democracy.



Community Activators - Giving Voice to Community Issues

A vibrant group of 20 volunteers from four towns came together to direct their passions to better livelihoods within their communities.

This pilot programme operates in Murraysburg, Nelspoort, LeeuGamka and Prins Albert. The CAs will be trained in various methodologies to become skilled to engage with the local communities and generate content and information that will inform and mobilise citizens to engage.

They will also receive training in participatory research methodologies, to provide basic support for eviction matters, unfair labour practices. Through developing an extensive referral system, the Community Activators (CAs) will engage government services. The referral network will also include engagement with other service providers and Faith-based organisations and Non-governmental organisations.

The partnership with Workers World Media Production (WWMP) to help CAs write stories to be reproduced on the various social media and community radio platforms.

Don't hesitate, Vaccinate!

Murraysburg CAs checkin with their community

The vaccine roll-out in South Africa was a three phased programme and started off beginning of 2021 with vaccination of 1.25m healthcare workers. Several vaccines were selected for approval. The Pfizer, a two-dosage vaccine was used in the big cities and the Johnson-Johnson a single dosage in the rural areas. The studies on effectiveness of the various vaccines are ongoing.

In Murraysburg, our Community Activators (CAs) were interested to assess the awareness of the vaccine programme. We conducted our survey at end of Phase 2 that targeted persons 60years and older.

Rural communities started off with lots of questions and fears. We heard many myths and people shared that many had very little knowledge about the vaccines. We noted that some women said that they have to ask their husband's permission before vaccinate.

As the vaccine campaign took off - we saw farmers bring bakkie-loads of farm workers in to be vaccinated. The local mobile clinic also went to farms where the elderly and those unable to leave received their vaccination.

Twelve people were interviewed. In some instances the employers helped to register the older people on the government Covid site. No-one reported being charged for help with registration. The younger people knew about the vaccination drive



"I am scared - I don't know what's in the vaccine and what is the side-effects!"



Nathania Dokter (regs) besig met onderhoud



Statistics for Central Karoo District as at 17 Sept 2021
60yr+: 4771 35yr: 4632

18yr: 3240

Farm women - coping in the pandemic

Reflections by Martha Klein

Covid 19 and the subsequent lockdown in our country had devastating consequences for us. No-one could foresee how distressing this would turn out to be nor the long-term impact on the cycle of poverty for us poor families.

We have been anxious and anxiety-filled since March 2020 as many, on our farms, have chronic illnesses and are high-risk to contract Covid.

The farmer did not allow us to leave the farm. Women could not attend the local clinic for chronic medicines, discuss female health issues, buy specific sanitary goods or do grocery shopping to fit our shrinking budget and diet. Electricity costs rose exorbitantly and meat from the farm butchery skyrocketed.

We noted the skewness of the restrictions on off/on-farm movement when the farmer allowed builders onto the farm. And then their foreman tested positive and died a few days later. This set off a full-on panic amongst us.



WASH HANDS & SANITIZE

KEEP A SAFE DISTANCE & WEAR A MASK

Arme mense het min keuses en om gesond te bly, is 'n groot uitdaging.

The growing line of the feeding scheme

Zane Neewat, CA in Prince Albert

Poverty is seen in the long queue growing at the local feeding scheme.

In conversation with young children, they speak openly about how often they go to bed hungry and there is no food at home as their parents are unemployed. Many households only source of income is the social grants from government - be this old-age pension, childcare or the social relief grant.

In the absence of meaningful employment, the government grant is what keeps families going.

The feeding scheme is organised by the Prince Albert primary school and the Vrisgewaagd farm community.

A 120 children are fed per day - although the initial focus was children from farms, this now include everyone in need of a meal.



According to Mr Jaco Festus of the Department of Social Development, Prince Albert is a high risk community due to the high unemployment rate and the majority of people with low education levels and low-skilled.

"We are uplifted when we see the happy faces of the children at the feeding scheme. Through the feeding scheme we create awareness of the challenge we have in our community."

Teacher

SCHOOL LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

The struggle for quality education in LeeuGamka

by LeeuGamka CAs

LeeuGamka, one of the smaller municipalities in the Central Karoo district municipality - have a total of 637 learners of which 26 are learners with various disabilities.

Almost all the children but one have a learning disability. We wanted to know what the LeeuGamka Primary School is doing to ensure that learners with special needs are receiving an education that allows them to reach their full potential.

At the primary school the learners with disabilities are very active in the vegetable garden, they get cooking lessons and does work work. The practical subjects and activities helps them to actively participate in school life.

The local early childhood centre, Amenity Creche has 5 learners with various disabilities.

Parents have shared their concern that currently the educational system in LeeuGamka is insufficient to address the specialised needs of learners with learning disabilities. Being in the mainstream school is good but many of the children experience bullying and teasing and very little support from the teachers.

Three expert bodies of the United Nations have called on South Africa to give urgent attention to the lack of equal access to quality education for children and young people with disabilities.



"SA has not delivered on its promises to guarantee inclusive education for children with disabilities!"

Human Rights Watch, 2019



Primary healthcare service: cut-back amid a Pandemic

Nelspoort CAs

Covid19 placed a spotlight on our fragile health system. In Nelspoort during the hard lockdown - the only nursing sister resigned. The Department of Health (DoH) introduced a 2-day primary healthcare service. Now people book an appointment to see the sister and the doctor, who comes on a Thursday. Coming, 50kms from Beaufort West, they arrive mid-morning at 10am. Only a limited number of patients can be attended. Those who are sick and unable to see the doctor or the sister have to wait another week or incur huge expense of transport and cost of seeing a private doctor in Beaufort West.

The further indignity of this healthcare service leads to a list of names being posted on the shop wall and the day on which people have to queue at side of road opposite the school hostel to get their medication.

How healthy is the community when the schools have been on intermittent schedules for more than a year?

Thereby limiting access to the school feeding programme. We have seen a significant increase in under-employment, as short term and casual employment on farms are limited. Families and households are struggling to make ends meet. Now is the time that the community need a health care system that address the risk of malnutrition and mental healthcare.

The community must petition the DoH to have the system changed



PARALEGALS IN ACTION

Challenging Labour exploitation and unlawful Evictions

Social Relief Grant - Across the four towns - the Community Activators (CAs) and board members of CKFCA have helped hundreds of unemployed individuals to register for the SRG of R350 per month. In Prince Albert alone, 200 people from Prince Albert, Klaarstroom and surrounding farms were assisted by the CAs between March and September 2021. Many people do not have access to a smartphone or have data.

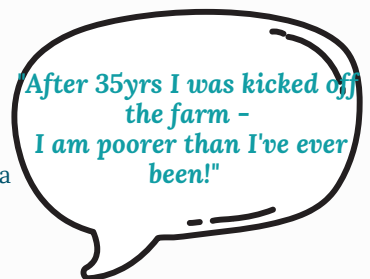
The CAs provided valuable advice to members of the community and farm workers. These ranged from unfair labour practices, workers needing information about their labour rights and threatened evictions.



Marius Hanse is the lead paralegal and a CA in Prince Albert.

Some of the cases involved unfair dismissal cases and subsequent evictions.

A case of medical boarding of a worker with 20years service was successfully negotiated.



Over the next few months we are working on a case management system that will help us to follow up on matters. All CAs will be introduced to the case management system and the monthly reports on advice and referrals.

Building Local Capacity

Our AGM & Area Committees

The AGM was held on 1 May 2021 coinciding with International Workers Day. The CKFCA has been formally established 10years ago.

The 2020/2021 years have been and continues to be disrupted by Covid. The pandemic have brought into sharp focus the inequalities in our society. In the Central Karoo the lack of adequate infrastructure have played havoc with our ability to meet and plan our work virtually. Most areas where members are located have bad signals, this together with rolling black-outs or load shedding (forced electricity supply stoppages by ESKOM), high cost of data and inadequate smart devices, created numerous challenges for implementation and support to workers.

Through securing funds from Hlanganisa and FEPA - the CKFCA reached more than 100 families with food parcels , provided masks and hand sanitisers.

Networking for Change

Building Solidarity and Support

Agro-ecological Farming - Anghenick Jonas (chairperson) Some key issues from this engagement - Working with the environment is important. People using old methods of farming which is not harmful and environmental friendly. It is cheap and sustainable . Small pieces of land are used, without having to buy expensive fertilizer. People can produce their own food on small scale. CKFCA will promote this approach to growing food. The Karoo is a water dry area. CKFCA to approach Dept. Agriculture for water tanks.

We were successful in reaching more than 5000 people in the six towns through our COVID safety and awareness programme.

Our tasks are many and we have to work harder to strengthen the CKFCA leadership in all our towns. Active boardmembers provide support and give guidance to the Community Activators.

Our Focus going forward: Social Justice and Human Rights

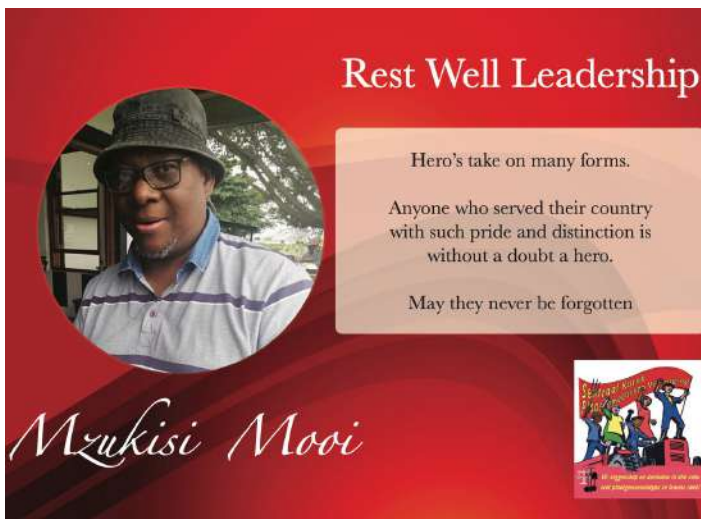
Reflection on 10 Years

- Farm workers continue to be exploited and fear intimidation.
- Workers and dwellers do not report farmers who violate their rights as they are too scared they might lose their jobs.
- In 2018 we secured a place to start our computer training in Laingsburg. We trained 10 young people.
- In all the towns within the Central Karoo - we wanted to establish food gardens - run by local unemployed youth. Availability of land has been a big challenge - securing commonage from the local community or land from the farmer.

Workers World Media Production

The partnership with WWMP have been ongoing for several years. This year there will be a concerted focus on conducting interviews and writing for publication via social media platforms. Our objective is that the issues the Community Activators focus on are raised on a wider platform as a call for action.

Our fallen Leader



The spear has fallen but the shield is in our hands, we will continue to run the race with your spirit to fight for justice and upliftment for the most vulnerable people in society.