

## **Agricultural education and land reform – the case of Namibia**

*Within the land reform programme in Namibia, about six million hectares of white-owned land has so far been re-allocated to previously disadvantaged Namibians. But emerging farmers in Namibia have a huge competency gap regarding crucial farming practices and technologies. The objective of the Emerging Commercial Farmers' Support Programme (ECFSP), initiated by the two Namibian Farmers Unions, is to promote agricultural education and assist emerging farmers in introducing improved farming technologies.*

Since Independence in 1990, the Government of Namibia has been implementing a land reform programme consisting of four components namely redistribution of white-owned commercial farm land acquired by the state to small scale farmers; the Affirmative Action Loan Scheme, which provides 'previously disadvantaged Namibians' with subsidised loans to buy white commercial farms; the development of unutilised communal land for agricultural purposes; and tenure reform in communal areas, providing for more secure customary land tenure and long-term leaseholds. The main objectives of the programme include redressing the injustices of the past; enhancing the welfare of the people through improved productivity; creating employment through farming and other income generating activities; promoting sustainable economic development; alleviating human and livestock pressures in communal areas;

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and developing clear policies and administrative structures for land allocation and management in non-freehold (communal) areas. Up to now, about six million hectares of white-owned land has changed hands to previously disadvantaged Namibians, and the government's goal is to have 15 million hectares transferred by 2020.

Making the transition from communal-tenure areas to managing land in the freehold tenure areas involves an abrupt change in terms of the farm business environment and farm management practices. Newly emerging farmers are expected to operate their farms as profitable businesses. This means optimising outputs and maximising incomes in a sustainable manner. These farmers have to achieve this in a market environment in which profit margins are tight at the best of times. Considering other constraints such as insufficient start-up capital and breeding stock, inadequate access to operating credit, not enough farm equipment, poorly maintained farm infrastructure, and insufficient access to information and knowledge, as well as natural risks such as drought and disease, the challenge is indeed big.

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### *Training needs of emerging farmers*

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A study by the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia in 2005 revealed that large competence gaps exist regarding crucial farming practices and technologies. Between 22 and 52 percent of farmers indicated that their knowledge of technical farming topics like livestock breeding, breed characteristics, livestock health, livestock marketing and financial management is poor to very poor. Between 47 and 82 percent of farmers were of the opinion that their skills regarding motor mechanics, basic tractor and implement maintenance, welding, construction, maintenance of water infrastructure, fence-making and basic electricity works are poor to very poor.

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### *The Emerging Commercial Farmers Support Programme*

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In support of government efforts, the two agricultural Unions in Namibia, the Namibia National Farmers' Union (NNFU), which mainly caters for communal farmers, and the Namibia Agricultural Union (NAU), mainly representing white established farmers, initiated the Emerging Commercial Farmers Support Programme (ECFSP) with financial assistance from the European Commission through the Ninth European Development Fund (EDF 9). This programme has as overall goal to enhance the livelihoods of emerging commercial farmers through higher productivity and income generated from their farms. To achieve this, several components are implemented (see Box):

#### **Different components of the ECFSP**

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- Farmers and information days
- Topic-related short courses
- On the ground mentoring
- Production of farming manuals
- Organisational and institutional support

**Farmers and information days are very popular amongst emerging farmers.** These days are organised in cooperation with established commercial farmers and facilitate the direct exchange of knowledge and experience between established and emerging farmers. Up to now, 44 of these farmers' days have been held, reaching almost 2,400 farmers. The impact of these farmers' days is, however, limited. It is usually a one-day event where various topics are addressed. This makes provision for awareness creation about new technologies and for networking between established and emerging farmers, but is too short to provide the farmer with in-depth knowledge and skills to apply the technology.

**Topic related short courses** go one step further and expose the farmer to more in-depth knowledge and skills regarding certain technologies or practices. These training courses usually stretch over several days and take place away from the farms, most of the time at centrally situated training venues. Although farmers get a deeper understanding of the technology, most of the times they still struggle to implement the newly gained knowledge. To date a total of 45 training courses have been conducted, reaching just over 1,200 farmers.

**On-farm mentoring** is the third component and provides for regular visits by well-experienced and qualified mentors to emerging farmers on their farms. Mentoring is a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences. It is a helpful relationship based on mutual trust and respect. A mentor is a guide who can help a person to find the right direction and who can help him/her to develop solutions to achieve their goals and objectives.

***The skill that separates an excellent mentor from a good one is the ability to inspire mentees to gain sufficient confidence to test new approaches and technologies.***

The ECFSP has appointed ten mentors. They are all commercial farmers with many years of experience in technical farming practices under difficult conditions. Apart from having superior knowledge and experience in farming practices, a good mentor is also somebody who is respected by the mentee; can listen carefully and can reflect on what has been said; is interested and prepared to invest time in the mentee; is a good sounding board for the mentee to bounce ideas off; is knowledgeable and open and willing to share experiences; is able to challenge the *status quo* and offer advice; is able to encourage and be critical in a positive way; and can be trusted with confidential information. In just over one year, these mentors have reached in excess of 1,100 farmers on their respective farms on a regular basis.

**Farming manuals.** The ECFSP has embarked upon a comprehensive process of producing topic related farming manuals that are practical and easily understood. The manuals include topics like large and small stock production, rangeland management, crop production, financial management, farm mechanics, animal health and labour management. The production of manuals is a costly exercise, mainly because all these manuals are required to be made available in local vernacular languages, to increase accessibility to knowledge.

**Institutional support.** Emerging farmers are supported to organise themselves at different levels in order to put the specific needs of their members on the national agenda. Emerging farmers felt that neither the NAU, nor the NNFU, could really cater for their very specific situation and decided to form the Namibia Emerging Commercial Farmers' Forum (NECFF). The vision of this forum is to create an agricultural environment that is conducive to full participation and sustainable production of all emerging commercial farm-



Photo: Kruger

*A mentor discussing the finer points of small stock farming with farmers.*

## Zusammenfassung

Innerhalb des Landreformprogramms in Namibia wurden bisher etwa sechs Millionen Hektar Land, das vorher in weißer Hand war, an ehemals benachteiligte Namibier übergeben. Diese Neubauern in Namibia haben jedoch ein riesiges Wissensdefizit in Bezug auf grundlegende Praktiken und Techniken des Landbaus. Ziel des „Emerging Commercial Farmers' Support Programme (ECFSP)“, das von den beiden namibischen Bauernverbänden ins Leben gerufen wurde, ist die Förderung der landwirtschaftlichen Ausbildung und die Unterstützung der neuen Landbesitzer bei der Einführung verbesserter Techniken der Landbewirtschaftung. Das ECFSP befasst sich mit einer Vielzahl von Tätigkeiten des bäuerlichen Alltags, bietet themenspezifische Kurzlehrgänge, Leitfäden für landwirtschaftliche Erzeuger sowie institutionelle Unterstützung und praxisorientierte Beratung. Eine

Kombination dieser Hilfsmittel erscheint sinnvoller als ein oder zwei gezielte Aktionen. Zu bedenken ist auch, dass zwar das „Capacity Building“ überaus wichtig ist, die angebotenen Leistungspakete aber auch weitere Komponenten wie den Zugang zu Krediten, den geeigneten politischen Rahmen, die Pflege der Infrastruktur und den Zugang zu den Märkten beinhalten sollten.

## Resumen

Dentro del programa de reforma agraria en Namibia, hasta ahora se han reasignado unos seis millones de hectáreas de tierras antes en manos de propietarios blancos a la población namibia antes desfavorecida. Pero estos agricultores emergentes de Namibia carecen casi por completo de la competencia necesaria en prácticas y tecnologías agrícolas esenciales. El objetivo del Programa de Apoyo a Agricultores Comerciales Emergentes (ECFSP por su sigla en inglés),

iniciado por dos sindicatos de agricultores namibios, consiste en promover la educación agrícola y apoyar a los agricultores emergentes en la introducción de tecnologías agrícolas mejoradas. El ECFSP se centra en una diversidad de actividades como la organización de “días del agricultor” y de cursos cortos relacionados con temas específicos, la elaboración de manuales para productores, el apoyo institucional y un programa de tutoría directa y muy relacionado con la práctica. Se otorga marcada preferencia a una combinación de estas actividades en lugar de la selección de sólo una o dos alternativas específicas. También es importante recordar que – si bien el desarrollo de capacidades reviste crucial importancia – los paquetes de apoyo deberían incluir otros componentes como el acceso al crédito, un entorno político favorable, el mantenimiento de la infraestructura y el acceso a los mercados.

ers in the country. The ECFSP is currently supporting NECF with capacity building with regard to aspects like functioning of a farmer's organisation; the roles of the different office bearers; budgeting; planning and project proposal writing. The major purpose is to get these farmers independent from outside financial support as soon as possible.

## Conclusions

Emerging farmers in Namibia have a huge competency gap regarding crucial farming practices and technologies. Most of these farmers come from communal areas with little or no experience regarding commercial farming practices. Enhancing the competence of these farmers include changing levels of knowledge,

fostering the necessary practical skills to properly implement the knowledge, and changing the attitudes of farmers towards commer-

cial farming in a sustainable manner. Against the background of government's goal of transferring large tracks of currently white-owned farms to previously disadvantaged Namibians, this is a mammoth task that requires the cooperation of different stakeholders, both public and private.

To be effective, agricultural education should go all the way from awareness raising to intensive training and be followed up by practical backstopping and support on the farm. Agricultural education should follow a holistic approach that focuses on both technical and organisational aspects of farming. Education and training alone is, however, not sufficient. Other crucial aspects that should form part of a comprehensive post settlement support package include increased access to affordable credit and production inputs; secure tenure on resettlement farms; access to proper markets; and a strong organisation to represent farmers at different levels. In order to achieve this, all stakeholders from both the private and public sectors are needed.



Photo: Krüger

*A group of farm workers receiving training in windmill maintenance.*

## Improvement of the curriculum for agriculture in African schools

Agriculture is the backbone of most African countries contributing over 50 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP) and providing employment to over 70 percent of workforce. African governments and education policy makers have not given sufficient emphasis to agriculture even as over 50 percent of the youth leaving primary and secondary schools (that don't continue with further education) end up in rural areas unprepared for a career as farmers. Many of them find it hard to eke a livelihood as small scale farmers and end up in urban areas in search of employment thereby worsening the unemployment situation and a good number find themselves in crime and other vices. In Kenya agriculture is taught in a myriad of many sciences in primary and in secondary school, it is treated as a junior science and only weak students are encouraged to sit for it. Teachers for agriculture are poorly equipped and it is not included in the programme "Strengthening Mathematics And Sciences in Secondary School Education (SMASSE)." Meanwhile the rural areas remain starved of vital labour and youthful creativity. The Network for Ecofarming in Africa (NECOFA) in cooperation with Slow Food Central Rift Convivium, supported by Capacity Building International (InWEnt) and Friends of Kenya Schools and Wildlife (FKSW) are engaged in lobbying the government for policies aimed at preparing the youth for a livelihood as conscious food producers and for a sustainable management of biodiversity. We are campaigning for deliberate action to have sustainable agriculture integrated in school curricula at all levels. At the local level we have initiated 11 model school garden projects in primary schools aimed at "Inculcating positive values on food, agricul-

ture and environment in growing youth". Youth that become farmers to practice sustainable food production; those that pursue other careers to consciously select their food and to respect the role of food producers and of biodiversity. The initiative works to

- provide hands-on experience in food production and other livelihood skills;
- make schools demonstration and bulk-ing centers (for planting materials) for the community;
- have the youth replicate their activities at home and supplement the school feeding programmes.

The initiative also compliments learning of other subjects like mathematics through measuring plant placement and spacing; other sciences through learning about plant life cycles; language through writing step by step instructions on planting the garden for a take home brochure; history through choice of traditional food products; fine arts through use of garden plants to learn about colour and texture and health through recipes and making salads after harvesting vegetables. By participating in food fairs and agricultural shows they show-case their activities and teach other students, teachers, parents

and community and whet their leadership skills. Experience (in 3 years) has shown that youth involved in the programme have also performed very well in national examinations.

To spice up the initiative and make it more interesting for the youth we have incorporated exchange visits, fibers arts training and computer/internet skills. In Kenya the initiative is currently in the highland Molo district and semi-arid Baringo district with intention to scale up to other schools and districts.

The initiative is branded 4-K in which the K's explain its commitment i.e. K- Kuungana (coming together), K-Kufanya (to do), K-Kusaidia (to assist), K-Kenya (our motherland). In each of the current 11 schools in the project we have between 30 and 50 students participating that include boys and girls. Two teachers volunteer to patron each 4-K club.

Our inspiration and motivation is from the understanding that the current generation is managing and utilising land on 'lease' from the youth and future generations and that investing in the youth is investing in sustainability and posterity.

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*School children participate in tree planting for environmental conservation.*

*Photo: Muhunyu*