

A LOST GENERATION: FARMERS ON TRIBAL LAND

by
Petrus J D du Toit

SUMMARY

For the past two centuries, farmers on tribal land have been subjected to external forces that are designed to destroy their capability to become independent farmers.

An in-depth study of three thousand farmers on tribal land from 1999 to 2002 shows that their place as farmers are as unstable today as ever before.

These farmers and their communities form, however, a pocket of excellence. A strategy is, therefore, designed to recognise their excellence and make them self-reliant. Surety of land tenure is at the core of the strategy.

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Previously, it was argued that the SA economy was a dual economy, both a modern and a subsistence economy. These two distinct economies existed side by side, but with little linkage between the two.

It is the thesis of this paper that today there can be no distinction between farming on tribal land (subsistence economy) and farming on land with a freehold title (modern/commercial agriculture). The latter is seen to be part of the so-called modern economy, and although there is a difference in economic size, the economic nature of these two types of farming are similar.

As soon as one has overcome this hurdle in perception, the similarities between the two forms of farming become clear. It then follows that this part of the economy, farming on tribal land, is more than able to bring its share to the table - in job creation, production and income generation.

Attention is given in this paper to the factors of production relevant in farming on tribal land. The nature of these factors and the importance thereof for the farmers are addressed as well as the various constraints to the optimum utilisation of these factors of production.

Various scenarios are sketched on how these problems can be addressed. A number of options are available for future action. In conclusion the paper discusses a strategy that would enable the farmers to utilise the full potential of their tribal land.

Only then will the 'lost generation' be found.

This paper is based on an in-depth study³ in qualitative terms of about three thousand farmers staying in various communities⁴ in Western Tembuland, Eastern Province over a

¹ Paper read at the Biennial Conference of the Economic Society of South Africa: Africa's Millennium: trade, investment & economic growth.

² Economist and farmer. Director of Self-Reliant Farmers CC, PO Box 241, Hopetown 8750. Also at PO Box 185, Ncora 5403. E-mail address: pjddutoit@webmail.co.za

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³ The team consisted of Dr. Peet du Toit, Messrs Mani Rigala and Mondli Ngulube, Mess Noncedo Ngulube, Novotile Khuleka and Nozolile Matyesini.

⁴ Emalahleni (Lady Frere): Cacadu, Cumakala, Lower Agnes, Lupapase, MaQhashu, Mkapusi, Mtseko, Mt. Arthur, Ngqandu, Ngqoko, Swartwater.

Engcobo: All Saints, Bojane, Elucwecwe, Gubenxa, Lalahlangubo, Nkwenkwezi.

Intsika Yethu (Cofimvaba): Askeaton, Bhanti, Lanti, Lower Ncora, Lower Seplan, Mbaxa, Ncora Dairy Farmers, Rwantsana, Tsakana.

Umtata: Baziya Mission

four year period from 1999 to 2002. This study was done in close collaboration with the leaders of the farming communities, their local authorities and the tribal chiefs. The local Departments of Agriculture and Land Affairs were also consulted on a continuous basis. A quantitative study of four hundred of these farmers was also completed.

The findings of this paper pertain to this study area alone. It cannot, therefore, be superimposed on other areas without any further study and consultations.

1. DESCRIPTION OF FARMING ON TRIBAL LAND

This description is based on data obtained from four hundred farmers⁵ in six administrative areas of Western Transkei who applied for land reform. The actual survey included 342 of these farmers. (See Table 1) Apart from this quantitative survey in-depth discussions were held with the leaders and community members of twenty seven administrative areas, including the six areas already mentioned. In total three thousand farmers were contacted in this manner as well as numerous other community members who could only be described as onlookers to the process.

The farmers who were included in the survey indicated that they either owned or leased land and were willing to go ahead with the upgrading of their land tenure. The survey did not, therefore, include every household in a specific administrative area. A direct comparison with data from the Population Census, 2001 for the respective areas was not possible. Data⁶ was, however, obtained for three places, which included the six administrative areas in the Farmers' Survey.

An analysis of the population census data for the three places (Mhlonlto, Gqutyini and Jumba) showed the following:

- Children up to the age of 14 years comprised forty four per cent of the total population;
- The sixty per cent of the heads of households were females and forty per cent males;
- The median of the size of households was four persons per household;
- The median of the annual income per household amounted to R7200.00;
- Only six per cent of the persons between the ages of 15 and 65 were employed; and
- Agriculture as an industry accounted for three per cent of the persons who were employed.

⁵ The survey was part of a contract on the implications for land reform in these areas. It was done on behalf of the Provincial Office, Eastern Province of the Department of Land Affairs. It was done during April to August 2002. The areas were Bojane, Elucwecwe, Gubenxa, Lahlangubo, Qumanco-Fama (this community withdrew from the process due to opposition from their resident chief) and MaQhashu. The survey analysis is based on the data for five areas excluding those for Bojane.

⁶ Statistics SA: Population Census 2001. Data for places Mhlonlto (District Emalahleni (Lady Frere)), Gqutyini and Jumba (both in District Engcobo).

Table 1: Western Tembuland: Farmers' Survey, 2002: Gender distribution

Administrative Area	Male	Female	Total in application	Farmers in survey
Bojane	21	15	36	0
Elucwecwe	42	26	68	64
Gubenxa	118	60	178	164
Lahlangubo	32	15	47	46
Qumanco-Fama	16	37	53	49
MaQhashu	12	5	17	19
Total	241	158	399	342
Total (%)	60	40		

A comparison between the Farmers' Survey, 2002 and the data for the three places from the Population Census, 2001 showed the following (See Tables 1 and 2):

- More farmers indicated in the Farmers' Survey that they were farmers than the three per cent of those employed according to the Population Census. Most probably this was due to those who wanted to take up farming as part of the land tenure upgrading process.
- Forty per cent of the farmers in the Farmers' Survey were females against sixty per cent of the heads of households in the Population Census.
- The size of the households in the Farmers' Survey were considerable larger than for those in the Population Survey, ranging from 8 to 12 persons per household;
- The median age of the farmers (head of household) in the Farmers' Survey ranged from 51 to 66 years.
- The median⁷ annual cash income per farmer (household) in the Farmers' Survey ranged from R1440 in Qumanco-Fama to R7440 in Elucwecwe. The farmers in Qumanco-Fama do not have land of their own, but lease land (2 hectares each) from their local chief.

These farmers are poor. Both the Farmers' Survey, 2002 and the Population Census, 2001 tell the same story. Their median annual income according to both sources amounted to about R7200. In the case of the Farmers' Survey their annual income excluded income from their farming activities.

Their low income, and the size of their households, made it important for them to concentrate on their farming activities.

⁷ The range of statistics included a number of "zero's". In order to calculate the median of a range of statistics, these "zero's" were each considered separately. This was done throughout the analysis.

Table 2: *Western Tembuland: Farmers' Survey, 2002: Households' size, age, children and income*

Administrative Area	Size of household	Age of household head	Children as % of household	Annual cash income of household (R)
<u>Elucwecwe</u> : median	12	63	44	7440
highest value	21	85		96000
lowest value	3	22		0
<u>Gubenxa</u> : median	9	58	51	6300
highest value	29	90		24000
lowest value	2	21		0
<u>Lahlangubo</u> : median	8	66	63	6830
highest value	19	82		43920
lowest value	2	32		0
<u>MaQhashu</u> : median	10	52	39	7440
highest value	28	81		-
lowest value	4	39		0
<u>Qumanco-Fama</u> : median	8	51	63	1440
highest value	24	87		-
lowest value	2	20		0

The farmers of the Farmers' Survey supplemented their income from their farming activities. (See Table 3) Most of them owned arable land with the median size of their land varying from two to four morgen per farmer. They had also access to grazing land. This they used for their cattle (median number ranging from nil to eight head of cattle) and sheep (median number from five to twenty seven per farmer). They owned also other livestock such as goats, pigs and chickens.

Table 3: *Western Tembuland: Farmers' Survey, 2002: Farming assets of farmers*

Administrative Area	Arable land (morgen)	Cattle (number)	Sheep (number)
<u>Elucwecwe</u> : median	4	8	10
highest value	17	98	193
lowest value	2	0	0
<u>Gubenxa</u> : median	5	6	18
highest value	47	89	323
lowest value	2	0	0
<u>Lahlangubo</u> : median	3	6	27
highest value	13	113	250
lowest value	2	0	0
<u>MaQhashu</u> : median	3	0	5
highest value	6	29	186
lowest value	2	0	0
<u>Qumanco-Fama</u> : median	2	0	5
highest value	2	64	245
lowest value	2	0	0

The farmers aimed to utilise these assets more productively and in a sustainable manner. In Table 4 some indication is given of how they used technology. The use of hybrid seeds varied from 14 per cent of the farmers in Qumanco-Fama to 91 per cent in the case of Lahlangubo. The use of fertilisers were quite common under the farmers, although the extent of application had not been measured.

An estimate of the agriculture income, apart from the cash income earned by farmers from other sources, was made. (See Table 4) According to this estimate the median of their annual agriculture income varied from R1350 to R5500 per farmer. Their agriculture income were important to them as the size thereof ranged from 39 and 94 per cent of their cash income.

The variation in size of arable land owned by the farmers differed between the various administrative areas: no difference in the case of Qumanco-Fama (everyone leased two hectares) to Gubenxa where the biggest plot was nine times larger than the median. There was also a considerable variation in the number of cattle and/or sheep owned by the various farmers. All of these factors as well as management factors not included in the survey culminated in big differences in the agriculture income of farmers. In one area up to R200000 was earned from agriculture in one year. (See Table 4) The variation in farm income was an indication of the performances of individual farmers.

Table 4: Western Tembuland: Farmers Survey, 2002: Use of technology and annual agriculture income per farmer

Administrative Area	Use of hybrid seeds (% of farmers planting maize/beans)	Use of fertilisers (% of farmers planting maize/beans)	Annual agriculture income (Rand)	Agriculture income (% of cash income)
<u>Elucwecwe</u> : median	31	100	3300	44
highest value			201250	
lowest value			0	
<u>Gubenxa</u> : median	18	99	3225	51
highest value			15750	
lowest value			0	
<u>Lahlangubo</u> : median	91	100	5500	80
highest value			49050	
lowest value			0	
<u>MaQhashu</u> : median	36	50	2821	39
highest value			29232	
lowest value			0	
<u>Qumanco-Fama</u> : median	14	95	1350	94
highest value			24000	
lowest value			0	

2. GROUND RULES

It is the vision of every farmer to feed, clothe and educate his or her family. For this he uses all the resources to his disposal - be it social grants, remittances, savings or produce from the land. Agriculture is definitely an important part of this vision as shown by the Farmers' Survey.

These very strong economic need underlies the thesis that farmers on tribal land are as much inclined towards commercial agriculture activity than those farmers on freehold land. To both types of farmers the purpose of farming is the same - to produce food for his family and to sell the surplus production in order to serve the other needs of his family.

The farmer on tribal land uses his factors of production in a similar manner. There is, however, a big difference in the risks in farming, scale of farming and input intensity which then results in lower yields.

The farmer on tribal land farms usually owns his land, which he inherited from his forefathers. In most instances the ownership of such land can be traced back for more than one to two centuries. This applies to both the arable land and residential plots. With regard to grazing land the farmer has only a right of usage to the commonage of a specific

community where he stays.

Ownership of the arable land as well as grazing rights are in general undisputed and respected by his fellow farmers. However, the legal ownership of the land, arable and grazing land as well as residential plots, resides with the State.

In the study area many of the plots of land are surveyed, but - and this is where it differs from freehold land - are not registered with the Deeds Office under the Deeds Registries Act. In addition to the surveyed plots, the so-called "quitrent plots", there are also identifiable tracts of land where the proof of ownership is a "Permission to Occupy (PTO)". The land under the PTO's are not surveyed, but can nevertheless be identified in an informal manner.

The ownership of a farmer's land is imbedded in the collective knowledge of his community. In contrast the ownership of farm held under freehold is based on a surveyed plan and deed of transfer as registered with the Deeds Office.

The concept of a freehold title is not unknown to the farmers on tribal land. Many of them, their relatives and neighbours, own property under freehold title in the towns and cities of South Africa.

What is important to these farmers are that they would like to farm in terms of a similar legal state as their counterparts who farm on land with freehold title. This will enable them to formalise their present activities: farming on their own farms and/or leasing plots from other farmers. It will also give them security regarding their investments in farming. Over the long term it will enable those farmers who are more productive than others to expand their farming operations on a more secure footing.

It is the view of most of the farmers in the study area that they do not need more arable land. They are, however, in need of more security of tenure in order to utilise and upgrade their land in a less risky environment.

There are, of course, other persons not included in the Farmers' Survey who may want to farm seriously. They cannot get any arable land because there is no free land left and yet there are hectares of unused arable land, the "owners" of which either cannot afford to use it or are away in our cities pursuing other occupations.

The farmers in the survey do need more grazing for their livestock. Again, as the grazing area itself is finite, they rather need more security of tenure to underpin their investment in upgrading the grazing.

A major threat to farmers' grazing land is the continuous usurping of the grazing area for residential purposes. Not only is the size of the grazing area decreased by the use of the land for residential plots, but more grazing rights are also given to these new residents.

The local chief usually bases the land price for residential purposes on an arbitrary decision. Unfortunately, the money thus paid is not remotely earmarked for upgrading the now decreased grazing area. The newcomers are flocking to the rural areas on account of the low "price" for land, no or very negligible fees for services and the opportunity to attain grazing

rights. In contrast, they could also settle in a nearby properly administered town, but with a higher price for stands and cost related tariffs for services.

However, in the end the residents in rural areas needs to be provided with services such as water, sanitation and electricity. Due to unplanned and scattered location of these residences, services to these plots will cost more than to provide it in properly planned and concentrated residential areas in towns.

Again, what farmers need are planning control over their farming land under the same legislation that control land use activities of those farms registered under freehold title.

The constitution of South Africa is sacred to the farmers on tribal land. For the first time in their life are they considered as proper citizens of their land. It embodies the values that they have treasured for centuries: integrity, honesty, ethics and individualism. These values underpin the institutional make-up of the economy, for example individual ownership, contracts and work ethics.

The institutions and values of tribal farmers will form the cornerstone of further institutional developments along this road. These developments may include the introduction of freehold title, banking and marketing arrangements similar to what are already in place for the rest of agriculture in South Africa.

Part of the constitutional development in the rural areas is the advent of municipal councils. These councils look after the development of their rural constituents, including agriculture. Those councillors responsible for rural wards have the interests of the farmers at heart and can play a major part in guiding the farmers on their development road.

Entrepreneurship under tribal farmers is alive and well. The already mentioned values for growing entrepreneurship are in place. There is, however, a tendency to measure entrepreneurship according to the rows of tractors on a farm instead of looking at his achievements within his own environment. Furthermore, the very lively linkages between farming and other sectors have produced many entrepreneurs who are now applying their vision and skills in agriculture.

It is important that entrepreneurship in farming should be recognised as one of the necessary conditions for a healthy agriculture. The dictum:

“Grow farmers, not products.”

forms the core of this philosophy. If the farmers are nurtured, they themselves will grow the maize or beans or raise their cattle.

In many instances the agriculture policy of the day shows no confidence in the entrepreneurial ability of farmers and concentrates on production. This policy undermines the building of a viable farming community.

3. CONSTRAINTS

One of the most important constraints to the optimum utilisation of these beneficial factors of production is a blanket approach to the land issue. This means that the land issue may only be tackled if all the farmers on tribal land in South Africa are ready for freehold title of land. Because land is such an emotional issue and the tribal chiefs are perceived to be so strongly entrenched in this issue, progress may come slowly if at all the farmers are required to unite under this one “blanket”.

New legislation for the land rights of tribal farmers needs to take the customs of thousands of farmers, communities and tribal authorities into consideration. These customs have been developed over centuries and differ from area to area. The development of ideal legislation for this issue is, therefore, very slow.

As a response to these constraints the farmers in the study area of Western Tembuland have obtained consensus in their specific areas about the need for freehold title for their land. This has been achieved through a thorough process of consultation with fellow farmers, their municipal councils and tribal councils. The consensus is based on the will of the farmers to farm and the mutual respect between them and their fellow community members. Their farm leaders, democratic elected councillors as well as their hereditary tribal chiefs have a common understanding of the importance of agriculture to the well-being of their children. The exceptional leadership qualities of these communities do not need to wait for the “blanket” to encompass everyone in the tribal areas of South Africa. They are willing to show the way forward.

Fortunately, legislation is in place, the Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act (IPILRA), Act 31 of 1996, that may enable these communities to upgrade their land tenure. This “interim” piece of legislation will in future be superseded by more encompassing legislation. For the time being it is sufficient for the legal needs of the communities in question.

The perception that tribal farmers have very few, if any, entrepreneurial abilities proves to be a big stumbling block in their agricultural development. In addition, success is very often measured according to the volume of products produced instead of the number of viable farmers developed. Government channels its funding, into “big” projects with a notion that:

“Big is beautiful.”

And in order to sustain these projects lots of capital and management, both scarce resources, are needed. This is based on another fallacy:

“Management/government know best.”

Unfortunately, as soon as the money runs out and the management collapses, the project is added to the long list of failures.

In many instances these projects price their products on incorrect cost analyses. In this way many a private farmer is ruined. He happens to produce the same products, but has to pay

market prices for his inputs and cannot compete with the wrongly priced products from government-funded projects.

A different approach is to trust the farmers. This is based on the dictums:

“Small is beautiful.”
and
“Grow farmers, not products.”

The people in power-position’s only real function should be to observe what is happening in the rural areas and strengthen the activities of these farmers. The farmers have a better grasp of their abilities and resources and market. They, the farmers, will in turn produce the agricultural products.

Not only are the farmers overlooked, but in addition their own organisations are also neglected. These farmer organisations are usually not affiliated to provincial and national organisations and, therefore, not seen to exist. However, these grass roots organisations are powerful tools for upgrading agriculture and its institutions. The leaders have proved their worth in their communities and are respected by fellow farmers.

Again, agriculture development cannot go forward unless the farmers’ own institutions are involved. In fact, with the necessary training and support they can do the upgrading of agriculture themselves.

Another constraint is the lack of technological transfer. The technical strength and morale of the extension service of government are at a very low level. Most farmers have little confidence in this service. A similar situation exists in commercial agriculture. In the latter instance technological transfer is mainly driven by the farmers’ organisations, the private sector and the farmers, who are themselves highly trained. Again, the same model could be made applicable to the farmers on tribal land.

4. POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

The future development of the farmers on tribal land may develop according to different scenarios. A look at a few possibilities gives one a better understanding about which strategy would prove the most successful.

(a) Scenario I: Status quo maintained

According to this scenario the legal issues on land will most probably be treated as follows:

- The legal status of agriculture land to remain as tribal land with the State as the ultimate owner of the land. The insecurity of this informal arrangement will hamper those farmers that want to increase their farm productivity. It will also refrain other farmers from starting.
- The unhindered expansion of residential areas on agricultural land to continue. Although the various municipalities have been given jurisdiction over the rural areas they have

limited procedures to control this urban sprawl in the rural areas.

- The price of land in rural areas to remain undetermined. The investment of farmers in agriculture are, therefore, unsecured and cannot be recouped when such farmers want to leave agriculture. By and large this state of affairs is detrimental to investment in agriculture.

Farming in the rural areas will continue to stagnate. Most probably this will then, wrongly, be ascribed to lethargy under farmers and their leaders. A quick fix to this problem is to turn to big projects under “proper” management. A high amount of persuading goes into convincing local communities that these projects will work to their benefit, and there are indeed many jobs that are created by these projects.

However, after a few years accountants are called upon to determine the sustainability of the projects. Most often it is a negative answer - as has happened before in South Africa - and the projects are then scrapped. Unfortunately the solution to these failures is to use different managers and more money producing other projects, but with the same results.

(b) Scenario II: Farmer Renaissance: Farmers on tribal land treated no different than other farmers

During the last two centuries farmers on tribal land were subjected to numerous external forces designed to destroy their capability to become independent farmers. Various support mechanisms were put in place in favour of farmers who had access to land with freehold title and were outside the “reserves”. Simultaneously numerous government measures strengthened the power of the tribal chiefs vis a vis those farmers on the land.

However, the farmers on tribal land want to stem this tide of lethargy themselves. They expect to be treated no different than their counterparts, the so-called commercial farmers. For a start the farmers need surety of tenure; their land also to be surveyed and registered with the Deeds’ Office as their fellow farmers. This will give them the decision making power to start their own renaissance.

Present measures to uplift the farmers on tribal land tend to overlook these farmers’ perception of the factors of production available to them such as land, labour and capital. Land is still owned by the state as trustee for the farmers, their communities and tribal leaders. Labour is seen to be cheap and untrained and is organised by imported managers. Capital is also considered to be insignificant, negligible and unproductive for the main part, ignored. Capital expenditure in agriculture is accordingly focused by the government on a few large projects and/or specific elements (tractors, etc.) needed in farming.

Contrary to these perceptions, every farmer has a very clear understanding of the ownership of his or her piece of land and manage it accordingly. Most farmers are also appropriately skilled for their farming tasks and can manage those tasks themselves. Furthermore, even though the farmers have very little capital available, this capital, even if only one cow, may provide a farming family with vitally needed products such as milk. The scale of their capital goods is in relation to the needs and skills available by farmers. These capital goods can form a basis for increasing their productivity in farming.

The most important fallacy regarding this lost generation of farmers is that they can only be organised from the top down: either via their tribal chiefs or via managers in charge of large projects. An alternative approach is to assist farmers and their own organisations to become self-reliant, individually and jointly, in all the different facets of farming.

According to Scenario II farmers need to be empowered to be self-reliant in farming. This will be the key to bringing the “lost generation of farmers” into the main stream of the economy. These farmers will then, both as individuals and jointly, provide an impetus to economic growth in their region.

5. OPTIONS AVAILABLE

A number of options are available for future action if the *Farmer Renaissance Scenario* is taken seriously.

There is consensus amongst the inhabitants of the communities included in the Western Tembuland Farming Study regarding upgrading of land tenure. However, only a limited number of these inhabitants have come forward and are willing to have their land being upgraded. The rest of their communities see these farmers as the pioneers who will show the way for the rest to follow in years to come.

Effectively this means that the upgrading of the land tenure system has to be approached systematically. Only the land tenure of those farmers who are willing should be upgraded at present. They are committed to land tenure upgrading and will show the way the the rest of the farmers in a community.

Upgrading of land tenure will be an ongoing task for many years to come. It needs a firm and committed basis that is rooted in the communities involved. The local municipalities fit this task description and will bring continuity and accountability to the tenure system.

The upgrading of land tenure in tribal areas needs specialised legislation. Eventually the “Land Rights Bill” is intended to fill this gap, but it is at present undergoing a process of consultation and will not be promulgated in the near future. Fortunately, legislation is in place, the Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act (IPILRA), Act 31 of 1996. This legislation enables these communities to start the process of upgrading their land tenure immediately.

This is the option that will propel the Farmer Renaissance on its way. It will also provide a working model that will assist in the consultations around the “Land Rights Bill”.

6. STRATEGY

A successful strategy needs to utilise the full potential of farmers on tribal land. Such a strategy revolves around the legal status of land, entrepreneurship and institutional

development.

Certain criteria has to be met, and the proposed strategy will focus on the following:

Legal status of land:

- The legal status of the land is upgraded to freehold title.
- The arable land is surveyed and registered in the name of specific farmers.
- The grazing land is surveyed and registered in the name of a legal entity under control of the farmers.
- The residential land and public spaces are surveyed and registered in the name of a legal entity under the control of the community.
- The local municipality plays a major role in organising the legal status of the land and maintaining it.

Entrepreneurship

“Grow farmers, not products.”

- The activities of farmers are strengthened.
- Their abilities, resources (including the physical infrastructure and communication) and markets are improved.
- They, the farmers, will in turn produce the agricultural products.

Institutional development:

- Those organisations of farmers that developed from grass roots receive ample recognition. They are then better equipped to take on the task of actively leading their farmers.
- One of their main tasks will be to promote technology transfer. This will happen in close collaboration with the private sector.
- The local municipalities play an active role in the development of the farmers.
- The Department of Agriculture play a major role in supporting the farmers’ organisations.

For many years farmers have been dreaming about accomplishing what their forefathers achieved, to feed and educate their sons and daughters. They also want to farm in the same manner as their counterparts on land secured by freehold title.

The above-mentioned changes in the legal status of their land and the perception of their identity as farmers, are necessary steps that will release the latent energy of these farmers. The will-power and entrepreneurial talent of the farmers, together with their natural resources, will then be sufficient for them to grow as farmers. Only then will they be able to feed their children and educate them as well.

Indeed, the Farmers’ Survey noted how individual farmers succeeded regardless of all the

obstacles they encountered in farming. They formed already a pocket of excellence and could form the starting point for the Farmer Renaissance.

We propose that this strategy be applied in the communities who are part of the Western Tembuland Farmers' Study. It may be possible to adapt the strategy for the purpose of applying it to the farmers in other areas as well.

This "lost generation" of farmers will be found.