

Claimants make their land work

The Moyeni and Nkanini communities, which were left impoverished for decades, find success after democratic dispensation



Analysis

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TWO KwaZulu-Natal communities that claimed, successfully, back their dispossessed land, have proved that land claimants are able to eke out a decent living for their families from restitution projects by strictly abiding to good management principles and a high work ethic.

The Moyeni community in the south coast and the Nkanini community in the Ilembe district in Stanger of KwaZulu-Natal had their land forcibly taken away by the colonialist apartheid government after 1913 so they could make way for white settlers to farm on the properties.

The two communities lost, at two different times, more than 9 000ha.

The loss of their land catapulted the two communities into unbridled poverty.

Their dire socio-economic situation was salvaged by the advent of a democratic dispensation in 1994 which saw a new government coming in which ushered in the restitution programme in order to restore grabbed land back to its rightful owners in tandem with the prescripts of the Constitution and the Restitution Act.

The restitution programme legalises the purchase of the dispossessed land from the new owners by the government who would subsequently hand it back to the claimants if the land claimants opted for the restoration of their original land.

Both communities lodged their land claims before the December 31, 1998, cut-off date for submission of land claims.

They have both chosen to have their original land restored to them by the government.

The government had, through the Restitution of Land Rights Commission in the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, initiated the land claims process once the land claims were successful.

The two land claims were approved in 2013 and 2015 respectively.

Subsequently, the government spent R141 368 323 to acquire the dispossessed land of the Moyeni and Nkanini communities in the south coast and in Stanger.

The Moyeni community opted for the Sakhekahle Community Trust as a management vehicle to drive their farming business.

The trust has since acted in accordance with the connotation of its name, Sakhekahle, which means let us rebuild our community in an orderly fashion.

The proud chairperson of the trust, Timothy Sibisi, attributes the community success to "wise management style" of their trust.

He said the Moyeni land claimants were mainly driven by a spirit of success and a desire for the development of the country's economy.

Their aim was to develop their farming



LAND OF PLENTY: The two communities that had their land taken away after the 1913 Land Act came into power say that land restitution has allowed them to escape the cycle of poverty. PICTURE:ISTOCK

operations to greater height levels as a legacy that would benefit posterity as well.

Such a situation would prevent future generations from being subjected to the same socio-economic abyss their parents suffered when they lost their land, Sibisi said.

The 24 families of the Moyeni community have 1 420ha which they use to grow sugarcane, grow timber and to grow macadamia nuts, all of which are marketed domestically and internationally.

Their farming operations have generated 136 jobs for the land claim beneficiaries and local community members.

Sibisi also attributes their success to the assistance given by the government which provided their trust with the working capital and also to the skills their management and workers acquired from their mentor.

A proud Sibisi confirmed that their restitution project has driven the frontiers of poverty away from the Moyeni community.

The Sakhekahle Community Trust has been so successful that it has been able to budget money for bursaries for the education of their children up to tertiary level.

The Nkanini restitution project, which has a massive 8 000ha of restored land to benefi-

ciaries, is one of the most productive projects which has immensely helped change the lives of the beneficiaries by providing them with jobs, food security, skills development for the youth and bursaries for the children to get education.

During an interview, a CPA member, Solomon Gumede, said the late inkosi TV Gumede had on May 14, 1997, lodged a land claim to all 210 properties where the Qwabe/Nkanini community was forcibly removed by the previous government.

The community had opted for the restoration of their land so they could continue the

commercial agriculture that was done by the previous land owners.

The Nkanini land claim has 184 households and 1 104 beneficiaries.

Gumede cited the use of qualified agriculture people to oversee their agriculture production as a key to their success.

One of their two production managers has a PhD in agriculture while the other manager is a qualified agriculture extension officer with 30 years of work experience.

He said their restored land was being used to grow sugarcane, bananas, macadamia nuts and flowers, which are marketed locally and overseas.

Youths with matrics are trained by a qualified agriculturist in sugarcane production.

The project has a staff complement of more than 500 workers.

A proud Gumede said their project is a member of the Sugar Association of South Africa and is supplying flowers to diverse outlets like Woolworths chain stores.

"The restoration of the land to black people has restored the dignity and the culture of the indigenous people," Gumede declared.

The Nkanini community has so far received about half of their claimed land.

"The community was anxious to get back the land portion that has the research station so it can develop new cultivars of crops and flowers.

This northern KwaZulu-Natal project is managed by a nine-member communal property association (CPA) with the local traditional leader being the chairperson.

The Nkanini project has also benefited from the R25m post-settlement support finance from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform and from another R8m from the Department of Agriculture.

Both the Moyeni and the Nkanini restitution projects have highlighted the negative effects of the recent drought to their crop production

The success stories of the Moyeni and the Nkanini communities have debunked the myth that indigenous people are unable to make productive use of their restored land through the restitution programme.

The land claimants only need material and technical support which the Department of Rural Development has since rolled out in 2010 as their recapitalisation and development project, where emerging farmers are mentored and empowered with skills and supported with finance for a period of five years so they are able to stand on their own feet and able to contribute to the national gross domestic product like their commercial counterparts.

The other lesson learnt from the restitution projects study was that successful projects are characterised by harmony among beneficiaries. In some projects where feuding and strife was the order of the day, the projects have collapsed.

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