

Land

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## **A strategy for managing drought in South Africa**

(Draft position paper for circulation and comment within the ANC)

### **South African drought strategy in the past**

1. Up to now, the drought policy of the RSA government has been to protect the productive capacity of the large scale farmers. Very little has been done to assist people in the bantustans who are affected by drought. Even after the severe drought of 1991/92, Rand 3.5 billion was provided to help large farmers, of which R 130 million was provided for agriculture and employment projects in the bantustans. Another Rand 440 million was available from the Department of National Health and Population Development in the programme called the National Nutrition and Social Development Programme - but that was NOT drought relief. It was a fund set aside for poverty relief after the imposition of VAT in 1991. The allocation was not raised in 1992 after it had become clear that a bad drought was affecting Southern Africa, and that many more rural people would be in poverty.
2. There have been two major affects of the government's biased drought strategy. Firstly, there has been no attempt to deal with the increasing poverty in the bantustans. This poverty was largely created by apartheid policies, so it is not surprising that the government did not feel the need to take measures to reduce poverty. This poverty makes people vulnerable to the effects of drought, for it is the poor who cannot obtain food if their crops fail, or if they lose farm work. It is also the poor who find it most difficult if there are water shortages or if their water sources fail completely. In order to help rural people who will be affected by droughts again in the future, we have to work to improve their incomes and make the incomes more secure. That will require overall rural development in the long term, in order to improve the employment and productivity of the rural poor. In the short term we will have to improve the relief programmes available to the poor if they are affected by drought (or any other misfortune). But we must also be very careful that the short term relief programmes contribute to ongoing rural development, instead of working against it.
3. Secondly, large farmers have known that they would receive help from the government if there was a drought, so they have done little to make sure that they farm in a sustainable manner. The effect of this is that farmers have taken risks with the land, for instance by planting unsuitable crops or failing to destock, knowing they would be paid out if the weather was poor. This has had led to over cultivation of the land, leading to degradation. In order to make sure that farmers use the land in a sustainable manner, it is essential that these drought subsidies to large scale commercial farmers are stopped.

## Water problems

4. We estimate that 12 million South Africans in rural areas without operative water supplies. Many of those people have had increasing difficulties obtaining adequate access to water in recent years, particularly during the drought. These problems were created by the water policies in South Africa and in the bantustans. In South Africa the farmers are permitted to withdraw as much water as they like from boreholes without paying for it, even though water is more scarce than land in South Africa. They therefore deplete underground water, and this reduces the subsurface water needed by others over wide areas. This has reduced water available to villages in neighbouring bantustans. Another problem has been the very poor maintenance of water resources and equipment in the Bantustans by the various Departments of Water Affairs. Maintenance of equipment and training of water technicians has not rated high in the priorities of bantustan authorities. The result has been perpetual crisis management in place of proper planning. Crisis management (such as taking water to villages in tankers) is much more expensive than setting up and maintaining proper supplies.
5. The problem is made worse in two ways. Firstly, the South African Department of Water Affairs is mainly concerned to provide water to the cities. High levels of public funds have been used on dams and infrastructure so that water can be drawn from as far as the Free State, Natal, and soon Lesotho to the PWV, even if the people who live and have livestock in those areas have no access to water. Very few resources have been spent on meeting the needs of rural people. Secondly, there has been very little attempt to monitor the situation in villages whose water resources have dried up. Because the Drought Forum was not able to get information on where the major problems were in 1992, they had to spend several months doing surveys before they could start providing relief to the worst areas. In at least one Bantustan, the government claimed there were no problems when there were villages with so little water they would have been called disaster areas by international disaster experts.
6. The ANC considers access by all people to minimum levels of clean water as a basic right.. It is essential that the government develop a comprehensive policy on water rights and pricing, and develops management of river catchments as a whole, including the areas now run under so-called independent governments (ie, bantustans). The Department of Water Affairs must improve its monitoring system so that it can respond to losses in water sources during droughts.

## What needs to be done

1. First, it must be recognised that many of the effects of the drought on rural people in South Africa have been man-made by the apartheid government.. There will always be periodic droughts, but with proper management of water supplies, and well orientated development efforts aimed to increase productive employment and reduce poverty, the vulnerability of people in the country to the effects of drought can be greatly reduced. Then with well designed monitoring and appropriate relief services, we can make sure that those people who are still affected can be easily found and assisted. The African National Congress is committed to sustainable rural development to alleviate poverty and the vulnerability of the rural population. The ANC is also committed to develop coherent water policies that are based on the right of all people to a minimum level of secure and clean water in all years.
2. Drought is common in South Africa. We should plan for drought relief as a part of our normal relief planning, not as something exceptional. The programmes we have to help people deal with drought should be normal programmes that we can expand when necessary, not something special that has to be put in place - at great expense - every time a drought comes. We must put in systems to help us know who is being affected by drought, and whether they need assistance - but that is not exceptional, we always need such information so that we may assist the very poor and hungry all the time. And finally, we must not allow ourselves to continue to be deceived into providing subsidies to farmers who should have done their planning in such a way as to be able to manage if drought comes.

### a      **An Early Warning System for Food and Water Security**

3. It is essential that a system be set up (similar to the ones in Botswana, Zimbabwe, etc) to monitor regularly:
  - the effects of adverse weather (drought, floods) and other factors (locusts, crop diseases, animal diseases) on farm production - **especially** on the farm production and incomes of small farmers. (There is no system for assessing crop and livestock condition in the bantustans at present, or their effects on the incomes of small- holders.)
  - the extent of poverty around the country: where it is worst, and where people, especially children, are malnourished, and how these are being affected by drought, and other factors, like recession and lay-offs in the mining sector.
  - water needs in all parts of the country.
4. It is not difficult to set up such a system. Much of the information that is

required is already being collected but not widely utilised. Other information, like nutrition conditions and water needs, are absolute basic requirements for proper planning in the Departments of Health and Water Affairs, and it is disgraceful that such information is not already being collected. An ANC government will need such information as it sets about correcting the injustices of apartheid planning. The advantage of on-going monitoring of all the data together is that it helps to identify accurately the vulnerable households and how they are being affected, so that relief programmes can be brought in quickly to the right people when they are necessary.

#### **b     Appropriate relief programmes**

5. Drought affects the incomes of people who lose crops or livestock, or who work on other farms. All of them may suffer from temporary loss of income, and some may permanently lose their total income and employment. For all people, these are much more serious in the current economic recession than before, because they are very unlikely to find other employment. It is very important to assist them quickly so that they do not have to sell their assets, such as livestock, which will make it harder for them to recover after the drought.
6. If the very poor lose income, they may have to reduce their food consumption. For this reason, many people think that giving them food is a good idea. However, for many reasons it does not work well, as the South African government found out this year, when they admitted that the National Nutrition and Social Development Programme (NNSDP) did not work. The poor need more than food. But if food is provided, they must get access to it. Since everyone wants more food, food relief usually leads to corruption, and to other, less needy people, getting most of the food. This means that food relief is usually *badly targeted*. Another problem is that most of the very poor are in rural areas, and without an early warning system, it is difficult to know where they are. This year most of the NNSDP food went to people in urban areas, where levels of poverty are much smaller. Food relief also leads to dependency, for it never The final problem with food relief is that if it is provided in remote areas, people will buy less food in the stores, which may go bankrupt. Yet those stores are needed for the proper recovery of those areas after the drought.
7. Rather than food, it is much better to provide jobs and incomes to the poor, both those people who are face a temporary loss of income until the next drought, and those who have lost their jobs. Until the recovery of the economy, which may take some years, the best way to do this is with public works programmes. Let the people build roads and schools and many other types of infrastructure that are in short supply in the bantustans, countryside and townships, and let them spend the money they earn to feed and clothe and house themselves. There was a public works programme for whites in South

Africa for 12 years around the 1930s, and it had the effect of helping to eliminate white poverty. Now we must use this technique to help lift the black masses out of poverty. People can build roads and infrastructure that will enhance rural development, and they can learn useful skills while they are doing it. Thus public works will not only provide relief, they will also contribute to reconstruction and development.

8. There is one difficult issue with public works programmes which we must face squarely. Our comrades in COSATU have spent many years justly fighting for a *living wage* for all employees. But on public works programmes it is necessary to provide a *relief wage*, which is lower than a living wage. Only by paying a lower wage can we be sure that the wages go to the poor, for they are the only ones who will want to work at that wage. That way the relief can be well targeted to those who need it most, unlike with food parcels. We must be very clear when people are working on relief programmes, and when they are working in proper employment, when we must continue to argue for living wages and security of employment.
9. In addition to public works programmes, we must provide special relief to the people who are most vulnerable to food shortages: young children and pregnant and lactating women, all of whom can be permanently damaged if they are not well nourished. But this should not be a special programme. It is essential that the state take proper responsibility for *primary health care* through clinics and hospitals, and that the vulnerable groups are monitored regularly with a national nutrition surveillance system, which is an important aspect of primary health care in most countries, but which does not yet exist in South Africa. Then if these people are found to need assistance, they should receive it automatically in any year.

**c Other issues**

10. On the commercial farms, it is essential that farm workers are provided with security of employment, including compensation for loss of work. The ANC has developed comprehensive guidelines for the employment of farm workers, and COSATU is fighting to improve the rights of farm workers. All this will help to protect farm workers and their families during drought.
11. The powerful South African lobby of large scale commercial farmers will no doubt continue to argue for subsidies during drought to protect "productive assets". These arguments should be treated sceptically. The use of drought subsidies has contributed to inappropriate farm practices in many areas, paid by the state, and disastrous for the environment. Farmers must be forced to farm more judiciously and without massive cost to the state, and this requires removal of all subsidies, except in the most exceptional circumstances (such as some assistance after exceptional flood). But at the same time, an ANC government will be committed to supplying all farmers with the best possible

advice on the use of their land according to the seasonal weather forecasts, in order to improve their decision-making capacity through each season. Rainfall is the most important determinant of farm productivity in South Africa, and we must assist all farmers to make the best use of their land each year, according to the likely rainfall in each area. In addition, small farmers (or anyone else) must be able to have access to public works programmes if their incomes have been lost due to harvest failure, in order to assist their recovery.

12. Finally, the ANC is a participant in, and supports the efforts of, the Consultative Forum on Drought and Rural Development, and all its regional forums. This organisation was set up to try to co-ordinate and improve drought relief after the drought in 1991/92. Now it works to improve coordination, especially at regional level, of efforts around nutrition and relief, rural employment issues, water provision and agricultural policy. The forums try to make this a participant process, by allowing people to come together to work on these issues in order to promote sustainable development that will reduce the vulnerability of households to the droughts that will come in future.