

# Farm evictions

Some faces behind the figures

On the next pages are some moving photos by veteran photographer **Jurgen Schadeberg** which highlight the condition of farmworkers in South Africa. **Teresa Yates** from Social Surveys gives these photos a context.

**J**urgen Schadeberg writes in the introduction to his photographic book, *Voices from the Land*, that “this book and the accompanying touring photographic exhibition, which is about the lives of farmworkers, their plight, their problems, their hopes and fears, has been on my mind for many years.

Schadeberg, sometimes known as ‘The Father of South African Photography’, has a career that spans 55 years. In 1952 he travelled to Bethel with journalist Henry Nxumalo and exposed the horrific conditions under which farm dwellers lived. His photographs with Nxumalo’s text covered eight pages in *Drum* magazine.

More than 50 years later Schadeberg travelled again to South

African farms this time all over the country. Collaborating with his wife Claudia, Marc Wegerif from Nkuzi Development Association, Stuart Wilson from the Wits Centre for Applied Legal Studies, and a number of distinguished writers he provides a graphic depiction of life on South African farms. Schadeberg’s observation that “many farmworkers are still living in unacceptable conditions and many are being evicted from their birth place,” is borne out by the photos and stories (see over).

This observation is supported by findings from the national survey on farm evictions. The results, published in 2005 by Nkuzi and Social Surveys, were startling. Nearly 1.7 million people were evicted from 1984 to 2004. In total only 1% of evictions followed a legal process.

Women and children, the most vulnerable in our society, bore the brunt of evictions. Almost half (49%) were children when they were evicted. In total 77% of evictees were women and children. These results are in part a reflection of the population demographics of South Africa, but they also reflect the direct relationship between employment and tenure rights as landowners and the courts fail to recognise women and children as having independent tenure rights.

While the majority of main breadwinners in farm households

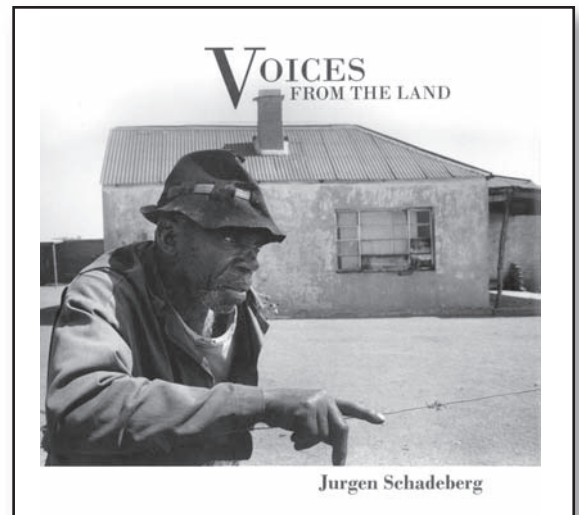
were men (77%) the loss of employment and tenure rights of the male head, almost always resulted in the eviction of the entire family. Thus poor households are faced with the added shock of being torn away from their land, homes and social networks.

The problems of the land reform programme, were highlighted at the National Land Summit, convened by the Ministry of Land Affairs and attended by more than 1 000 delegates in July 2005. Amongst the resolutions adopted were:

- A moratorium on all evictions until new legislation and programmes are in place to defend farm dwellers.
- Separate tenure rights from labour arrangements – dismissal should not lead to a person losing their home; and
- Government must acquire land, using expropriation where necessary, for the creation of sustainable settlements for farm dwellers.

To date none of these resolutions has been implemented. Farm dwellers remain insecure and vulnerable in their jobs and homes and evictions carry on a pace.

The Schadeberg photographs stand as a stark reminder that behind the statistics are the lives of people torn apart and pieced back together through constant struggle. **LB**





## Siphwe Ngomane

Farm dwellers often rely on civil society organisations to assist them with enforcing their rights and to protect them against better-resourced landowners. Tireless advocate, Siphwe Ngomane was coordinator of the Nkuzi farm eviction project in Gauteng. Here he intervenes on behalf of Mr Twala, a long-term farm occupier who was threatened with eviction. Siphwe's intervention resulted in the landowner restoring Mr Twala's water supply and repairing a fence allowing Mr Twala's cattle to graze in a defined area. Mr Twala remains on the farm, with insecure tenure. Sadly, Siphwe passed away in March this year, leaving behind his wife and three small children, his passion and commitment to the fight for justice and equality will be greatly missed.

## September Boya

The Boya family was threatened with illegal eviction when the farm they were living on was to be converted to a game farm. Intervention from Nkuzi resulted in the Boya family receiving assistance to relocate to Hammanskraal and R20 000 compensation to set up a new home. Change in farming activities, often conversion to game farming, was responsible for 3% of household evictions.



## Jacob Molefe

After living and working on a farm in Fochville for 25 years, Jacob Molefe was told to sell his cattle and threatened with eviction. Not wanting to sell his cattle and with no alternative Jacob precariously takes his animals to the side of a busy road to graze. While many evictees have the skills and desire to re-settle on productive land, very few have the opportunity. The vast majority of evictee households lost their cattle and other livestock and only 9% reported keeping some cattle after their evictions.

## Piet and Grace Buffel



At the time Piet and Grace Buffel were evicted from an olive and citrus farm in Hartswater, he, aged 67, was paid R150 per month for maintenance of the irrigation system and she, 56, was paid R30 per week for picking olives. When Piet developed asthma and bronchitis and could no longer work, they were told to leave the farm. The landowner gave them R2 010 and dumped them in an informal settlement. They had to squeeze their life's belongings that once filled a four-roomed brick house that had electricity and an outside tap, into a one-roomed shack that is used as their living, sleeping and cooking space. They do not have access to their own water or toilet.

## Aletta Platjies

Not all farm dweller stories are bad. The Oak Valley Farm in Elgin sets an example of how respecting the rights of farm dwellers to earn a living wage, to decent housing and working conditions creates a win-win situation for owners and workers. Aletta Platjies was the first woman supervisor on the farm. She uses her position to advocate for continued respect for the human rights of her fellow workers and occupiers.



## Benjamin Parsons and Rachel Paulse



Benjamin and Rachel live in abject poverty on a wine estate in the Western Cape. Rachel works 12 hours a day and earns R120 per week. She has lived and worked on the farm for more than five years. Rachel and the other four members of her family live in one room, with stained walls, a broken ceiling, and cracked floors. Perhaps the surroundings would feel somewhat less bleak if they were not surrounded by the opulence of the Franschhoek Valley, where world class wine is produced for the local and international market. The Western Cape has more farmworkers than any other province in South Africa. They reside on some of the wealthiest estates in the country, yet are routinely victims of human rights abuses, violations of labour and health regulations and engulfed in alcohol abuse through the continued use of the tot system.

## Francis Davis

This photo of Francis Davis, who is from a farm in the Western Cape, has been seen by thousands of people in South Africa and abroad. The photo was chosen for the cover of the publication *Still Searching for Security*. At the time the photo was taken in March 2005 Francis was 14 years old and unable to continue with her education and ultimately left home to live and work on a farm. When Social Surveys and Nkuzi offered to assist her to continue studying she declined stating that she did not see the purpose of doing so.



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*The publication of the full findings of the eviction survey "Still Searching for Security: the reality of farm dweller evictions in South Africa" is available from Nkuzi Development Association or Social Surveys. A summary of the survey findings can be downloaded from the Nkuzi website: [www.nkuzi.org.za](http://www.nkuzi.org.za). Jurgen Schadeberg's book, "Voices from the Land" is available from select book sellers - for details of where to buy it contact: [schadebe@iafrica.com](mailto:schadebe@iafrica.com). Both projects received support from Atlantic Philanthropies.*