

Mdukatshani Rural Development Project (MRDP)

The MRDP was developed by and falls within the Church Agriculture Project (CAP).

A brief history highlights the evolution of this project over the years, and puts in context the current proposal. The following thumbnail sketch is extracted from the recent compilation of CAP's history by Chizuko Sato¹, that gives a full account of this complex story.

CAP was established in March 1965 at the Maria Ratschitz Mission farm near Wasbank in northern Natal, under the management of Neil Alcock. In 1975 CAP moved its operations to a degraded 2,500 ha farm (named by staff Mdukatshani, "the place of lost grasses") in the Weenen district. The farms boundary adjoined the Msinga district of the then homeland of KwaZulu.

CAP's main farming project was planned as an environmentally friendly cattle co-op, which would involve rehabilitation of the land. A large emphasis was put on building trust between CAP and the local people in Msinga in order "to grow grass, and to teach others to grow grass" with them. However by 1977 CAP projects had gradually changed in response to what they were encountering. The projects now involved:

- Drawing local people into subsistence agriculture through their weekly agricultural course (lectures and demonstrations); and offering loans to smallholders who completed the course.
- Starting a vegetable garden project for women on Mdukatshani;
- Allowing local people to graze their own cattle on the farm in return for their labour for veld rehabilitation.
- A school was set up for children.
- Community water projects were pursued to provide water for irrigation.

The progress of community projects was slow. One reason was that work was disrupted as men disappeared to look for work; some only long enough to earn a bag of mealie meal. Another difficulty lay in the intricate nature of the landholding system in KwaZulu. Deeper involvements with the local community led to CAP's staff being confronted with all sorts of problems local people faced. These ranged from assisting old people to get pensions, to arranging lifts for critically injured people to the hospital, to calling police to report incidents of shooting. This welfare work was not part of CAP's plans, but it could not ignore these calls upon it.

During 1979 CAP began to be approached by several different groups of evicted labour tenants who had nowhere to go. The revival of massive removals of labour tenants in Weenen district at this time was caused by the change in government's attitude towards the enforcement of the law against labour tenancy, which it began to pursue with vigour. Alerted to the significance of problem, CAP became instrumental in enlisting wider support for evicted farm residents, through active organising, lobbying and advocacy.

¹ *"From opposition against removals to a quest for land reform: forced removals, land NGOs and community politics in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, c.1950-2000"*, forthcoming Ph.D thesis, University of Oxford. Chizuko Sato.

A serious drought in the early 1980s coincided with the mass removals from farms, bringing hardship and increasing racial tensions. In order to mitigate the devastating effects of the drought CAP became involved in distribution of mealie meal supplied by the Red Cross. Initially CAP distributed drought relief food in the form of free hand-outs to families in need. However, after experiencing problems in categorising the poor, instead of giving away food CAP organised new community projects and provided people with mealie meal in exchange for labour. CAP developed bone exchange projects; where it swapped mealie meal for bones. These were burnt and milled into bonemeal, which was used as a stock lick and phosphate fertilizer.

As racial tensions worsened an increasing number of victims of arbitrary and merciless conduct by white farmers asked for legal help from CAP, which began to be handled by the Legal Resource Centre in Durban from late 1981. CAP not only sought support for victims but also played an active role in convening meetings to seek to mediate the intensifying racial tensions.

The eighties were an intensely difficult time, as along with the forces described above there was also increasing conflict in Msinga itself. Neil Alcock now also found himself acting as a mediator in a series of bloody "wars" between Zulu factions, which eventually cost him his life in 1983.

Uncertainty was created through the planned implementation of a betterment scheme and resultant removals of an estimated 20,000 people in CAP's neighbourhood in order to create "buffer zone" between white farms and KwaZulu. CAP decided to shift to a renewed focus on reclamation work on the farm Mdukatshani itself at the beginning of 1985. The farm began to show fruits the rehabilitation efforts. During this time the general local security conditions deteriorated. Several CAP vehicles were stolen, and CAP had to be helped by the armed police guard on its payday. Local white farmers continued to suffer from stock theft, and even the tribal authority became victim of theft. Intermittently through the following five years conflict impacted on CAP's staff and local people and therefore on the work CAP did.

In 1986 CAP had a serious funding crisis and faced closing down the organisation, as its traditional donors changed their priorities. After active efforts CAP succeeded in finding grants for reclamation work, communal garden, bones and acacia pods exchange, communal goats herd, natural resource management of the farm, training for staff, and legal aid and welfare.

In 1989 CAP split into three different project activity lines, each of which ran its own account, and this continues today. The three activities were:

- Handcraft. This has developed into the current successful profit-making bead export program involving 150 women. Creina Alcock manages the program.
- Welfare. Activities are mediated when welfare programs come to the area. It therefore has no continuous activities and at the moment no specific project is underway.
- Land reform. In 1989 a land reform movement was activated which lobbied for land reform that would benefit local black communities. This has evolved into the MRDP.

The political change of 1994 led to the new land reform law, policy and programmes. CAP, along with all NGOs, had to find its way into a new set of roles and relationships. The work CAP had been involved in with regard to land put it in a strong position to contribute to the new policy and to assist local communities to benefit from the programmes.

In 1999 Misereor began funding the activities of the MRDP. After facilitating successful land reform for the communities it was helping, MRDP became more involved with the challenge of land use possibilities. In 2001 it started focusing on land reform management and "post land reform activities". In July of 2001 a first evaluation took place, which was able to give MRDP important recommendations for future work. The project has been working to implement these new proposals since 2002. In May 2004 another evaluation took place, and the outcomes of that have been considered in developing this proposal, along with the inputs from the MRDP Advisory Committee and the consultants Misereor has provided through 2001/2004.

The project has clearly evolved in response to the needs of the communities it works with and the changing context. The MRDP should thus be seen within the context of its history and the changes (change in CAP, in the Msinga area, and South Africa more broadly) that have shaped it. The MRDP draws strongly on its experience, knowledge and relationships, while seeking to learn from new inputs and what others' experiences have to offer.

The Msinga area: social political economic

General information

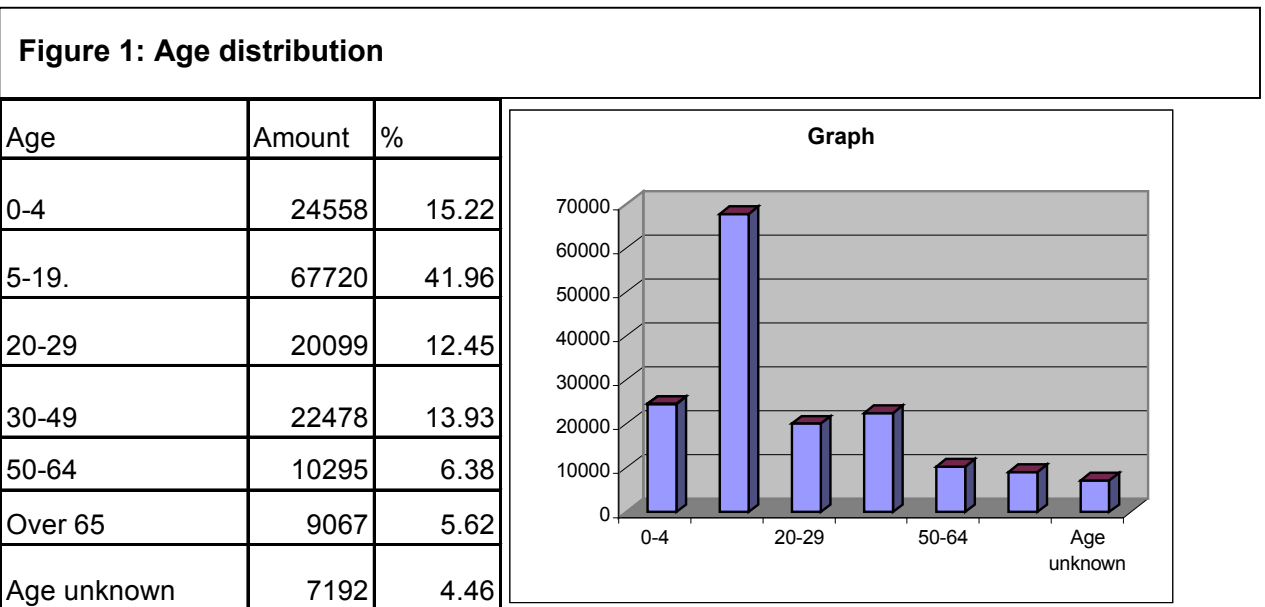
The MRDP works in the broad area called **Msinga**. Msinga encompasses the areas of Colenso, Weenen and Thukela Ferry. It lies within the Uthukela and Mzinyathi District Municipalities. The area is a two-hour drive from provincial capital of Pietermaritzburg. It is a traditional, rural area (99% of its population live in rural areas) that falls under the jurisdiction of traditional authorities. Some 99 % of the population is African and speaks Zulu.

It is still the most traditional area in South Africa with most women still wearing the traditional leather skirts and robes and all men carry sticks when they leave the home. Polygamy is still widely practiced and families are large and often uneducated. Homes are still the round thatched huts with mud walls.

The area is notorious for its violence and lawlessness and the area has always been a migrant labour area with the men working in faraway cities and coming back twice a year to see their wives and children.

Politically Weenen/Msinga has always been conservative and the Zulu Nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party still holds sway in the area. The Traditional Authorities in the form of tribal chiefs still control and conserve much of the lifestyle in the area and local disputes and issues are adjudicated and settled in tribal courthouses that overlap with the state legal system.

Population dynamics



Source :Census 1996

The Age Distribution Profile of Msinga mirrors the National Age Distribution Profile, with 42% of the population being between the ages of 5 and 20. This implies large families, a high demand on services and a young population.

Population Stability is indicated by the fact that approximately 64% of the people have been resident in the area for ten years or more, and 31% of the people have lived in the area for between 1 and 9 years.

The gender distribution is 54.24% female and 45.76% male. This gives a male and female ratio of 1:1.2.,and confirms the provincial trend that a higher proportion of women than men are found in the rural areas.

HIV Aids

In view of an increasing rate of HIV/AIDS in the province, population growth rate within the next 5 years to 25 years is expected to be negligible. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry which designs its water schemes to meet the demand over a period of 25 years already works on a projected zero population growth rate.

The highest prevalence of HIV infections is observed among pregnant women in the age group of 25 to 29 years (42,60 %). Women are infected at a younger age compared to their male counterparts.

Income and employment

Households generally have multiple sources of income comprising a mixture of small-scale production of crops and livestock for consumption and sale, labour for large-scale agriculture, some limited other work, such as running taxis and migrant work in places such as Johannesburg. Welfare and social support grants from the government are an important source of income for many households, and older members of the community often support whole families. There is also much illegal activity relying on the relative inaccessibility and poor policing, that range from car hijacking to gun running. The most common illegal money spinner though is the growing and selling of marijuana (*cannabis sativa indica*). Almost half of the households in Msinga have an income less than R18 000 per annum. This reflects a very high level of poverty.

Due to the youthful population of Msinga, approximately 46% of the population is not economically active. According to the Msinga Sub-regional Plan, about 39% of the population is within the economically active age group. In 1991, only 37% of the 39% of people in the economically active age group was employed. This means that ±40000 members (63%) of the economically active population were unemployed. Members of the employed population are employed in a variety of occupations: 22.98% are involved in “elementary” activities, 21.86% are in unspecified jobs and 20.92% are professionals.

Agriculture

Farming contributes 18% of the income for the area, through the cultivation of maize and vegetables on irrigated plots along the Thukela River. Informal agricultural activities are practiced in areas adjoining the irrigation schemes. Trade and commerce, mainly in Pomeroy, Tugela Ferry and Keates Drift, account for 11% of economic activity. Manufacturing and construction account for 10% of the economic activity. These figures indicate low levels of productive economic activity.

Msinga is situated in a dry zone with 600-700 mm rainfall on average and 10 -20 days of frost, it also has very high summer temperatures of up to 44 degrees centigrade.

The area has a range of different locations, and villages differ in their proximity to water, their access to grazing land and their endowment with cropland. Thus one finds farms where livestock can range freely, with little signs of cropping; settlements where the systems are agro-pastoral with important dryland cropping areas nearby; and areas where crops can be grown under irrigation. Some farmers have access to furrow fed irrigation land (from the Thukela river). Commercial farms have an important indirect influence, because many of the farmers were or are descendants of labour tenants. Marketing and services for most farmers are extremely limited.

The farmers that MRDP works with on the irrigated plots are experiencing problems in that soil no longer responds to the high input of chemicals and artificial fertilizers, and the productivity of their harvests is decreasing. The costs of production are higher than the profit the farmers make from selling produce in the market.

Livestock

A study conducted in 2003² gives some insight into livestock in Msinga. Livestock have multiple functions. Common species are cattle, goats, chicken and dogs; with sheep, pigs, donkeys, geese and turkeys playing a role, which differ according to area.

Cattle are regarded by most people as the most important livestock species, although not all people do keep cattle. Cattle are used for draught, *lobola* (bride price), cultural slaughter, hides that are used for traditional clothes, meat and sales. There are clear-cut lines with respect to livestock management responsibilities between genders. Cattle and goats are the responsibility of men, chicken a typical women's animal, although men may "have their names" (i.e. own) chicken, which they may get in return for making and fixing an axe-handle. A distinction is made between indigenous chicken and so-called commercial chicken (broilers). Commercial chickens are men's animals (although women may feed them). In Msinga a woman is supposedly not allowed to enter the cattle kraal (only older women may get a special status to do so).

In the Msinga study 2 households had less than 10 head of cattle, 5 households between 10 and 20 head and 5 more than 30. The biggest cattle holding encountered was a farmer who kept 73 head of cattle. According to commercial farmers 100 head of beef cattle or probably 20 dairy cows are needed to earn a living exclusively from cattle. African farmers answered that you should have 20 before you can sell and not deplete the herd. Thus, few if any of the farmers interviewed can rely exclusively on cattle.

Education and literacy

Currently more than 68% of the population is illiterate. The majority of illiterate people are female. This is due to the prevalence of females in the population and the custom of not educating girls. Tertiary education facilities are not provided in the area. The department of education does not provide accommodation for teachers. As a result, many good teachers are attracted to urban areas and to schools that do provide them with accommodation.

² See more detail in "Meat, ploughs and culture, a study of indigenous livestock management in rural KwaZulu –Natal, South Africa", Wolfgang Bayer et al, 2003.