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Poverty, civil society and patronage:

A study of two farmers'
associations in North
West province

Malachia Mathoho and Tobias Schmitz

Research assistant and senior researcher, CPS

Centre for Policy Studies

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Centre for Policy Studies
Construction House
130 Sivewright Ave
New Doornfontein 2094
Johannesburg, South Africa

P O Box 16488
Doornfontein 2028
Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel (011) 402-4308
Fax (011) 402-7755
e-mail: admin@cps.org.za

www.cps.org.za

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Introduction

This paper tells the story of two farmers' associations in the former 'homeland' of Bophuthatswana, currently South Africa's North West province. More specifically, it examines their current status in relation to the broader national project of democratic deepening in South Africa. The paper is part of a series of six case studies intended to assess the impact of foreign political aid to civil society organisations (CSOS) on their organisational capacity, internal accountability, and political efficacy. In order to assess this it was necessary to first ascertain the extent to which the CSOS being studied are contributing to a deepening of South Africa's new democracy; the effects of foreign political aid to these organisations can only be assessed in this context.

Therefore, as a first step, this paper examines the contribution of these farmers' organisations to a deepening of democracy in their areas. This was unpacked as follows: the democratisation of state and society, one of the six foundations of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), is a gradual process that goes beyond the achievement of formal delegative representative democracy, in several ways. First, it involves an attempt to replace periodic accountability via elections with ongoing accountability via continuous interchanges between the state and civil society. Second, it involves an attempt to move away from the standardised policy menus of political parties to proactive, 'unpacked', issue-based debate and engagement. The agendas of political parties consist of manifestos that group issues together, so that those who are not party members cannot accept or reject them individually. CSOS, however, engage with the government on an issue-by-issue basis and are not bound by this packaging. Third, the process involves CSOS providing a bulwark against the 'hollowing out' of participatory mechanisms in situations where knowledge and expertise are used to exclude the public from particular arenas of decision-making.

The process of democratic consolidation can thus contain a range of scenarios. At the one extreme there is shallow, delegative democracy, in which civil society provides input into governance only once in every four to five years via an election process involving a passive choice from a menu of parties and representatives. In this case, party manifestos are packages of policies on issues that cannot be negotiated separately. At the other extreme there is deep, ongoing, issue-based, participatory governance based on interactions between CSOS and the state.

Individual, case-study-based assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of CSOS provide a means of evaluating the process of democratic deepening. Examining the internal dynamics of each organisation casts some light on the way in which CSOS interact with the state, their internal accountability, and their capacity to interact both with the state and their members. It also provides pointers to the kinds of interventions required to further consolidate democracy.

As a second step, the paper seeks to ascertain the effects of foreign political aid to CSOS on their role of deepening democracy. Within the study as a whole, the farmers' organisations were chosen to particularly test the hypothesis that some grass-roots asso-

ciations may play an important role in deepening democracy, but do not have sufficient funding to do so effectively. The access of farmers to development resources is a key issue for both associations studied, but until now it has precisely been a lack of funding that has hampered the achievement of their objectives. This does not mean, though, that blanket access to funding for grass-roots organisations would strengthen democracy. To the extent that funding grass-roots organisations increases the diversity of perspectives in the democratic system, this does indeed strengthen democracy. However, there are CSOS that are exclusive, not transparent, and not accountable to their members. Funding these organisations may increase the diversity of perspectives in the public debate, but does not foster democratic practice within CSOS themselves.

Conceptual framework

At the outset, it should be stated that the concept of ‘entitlements’ as used in this paper is used by different academic groupings to denote two different things. It is important to highlight these differences, because both connotations are relevant to this paper. In civil society theory, the concept of entitlement refers to a right conferred upon one on the basis of a set of rational criteria: pensioners are entitled to pensions, citizens older than 18 are entitled to vote, etc. In open and democratic societies, individuals have entitlements that are inalienable. In closed and undemocratic societies, subjects’ entitlements can be removed by their rulers; thus entitlements are inseparably related to democracy. In rural development theory, however, entitlements are not necessarily related to the nature of the state. They have a much more economic connotation, and refer to ownership relations or to control over resources for essentially productive purposes. Thus in rural development theory one can refer to communal land title bestowed upon a subject by a chief as an ‘entitlement’, even if the chief could in theory withdraw that entitlement. This is not possible in civil society theory, because an entitlement is inherently inalienable. In this paper the term ‘entitlement’ has the connotation borrowed from rural development theory, although it is recognised that this may need to be revised in order to avoid such confusion in future.

Against this background, it is in relation to access to productive resources that the two farmers’ organisations discussed here interact with the state. This is also the dimension on which they differ fundamentally from one another, and this has a bearing on their organisational capacity, internal accountability, and political efficacy. Therefore, the relationships between access to resources and democratic deepening need to be conceptualised before proceeding to the empirical section of this paper.

A central point of departure for this study is the idea that democracy enables debates about the allocation of various kinds of resources in society. It provides a partial antidote to systems of elite control in which economic, political and cultural resources are deployed in the service of a narrow set of interests. At one level, CSOS can claim against the state for the redistribution of resources in favour of the less privileged. Secondly, democracies are ideally characterised by voluntary (horizontal) forms of association among *citizens*, as opposed to clientelism, which is characterised by non-voluntary (vertical) forms

of association which relegate the recipients to the position of *subjects*. Thus democracy can counter power relations in society that are based on unequal access to resources. The two farmers' organisations studied both claim against the state to ensure that it devotes more resources to the rural poor – but one is less horizontal and voluntary than the other. It will be argued that the differences in land ownership between the two associations is a key determinant of the differences in their internal accountability, organisational capacity, and political efficacy.

In T H Marshall's perspective, there is an inherent tension between citizenship and the class system. Citizenship implies equality, among other things through universal suffrage and the free choice of political decision-makers and/or political parties. The class system, on the other hand, generates inequality. Once the underprivileged gain access to equal citizenship, much of the subject matter of democratic interchange involves the efforts of the less privileged to gain enhanced access to key resources.¹

Thus, via democratic procedures, all forms of elite domination from cultural hegemony to economic exclusion can be the subject of claim-making and contestation by groups in civil society. Lower economic strata engage with the state in respect of the provision of *entitlements*, and by so doing contribute to the deepening of democracy. They do so in the social realm of citizenship, extending the idea of equality into the arena of welfare rights.

A complicating factor emerges when there is a plurality of conceptions of entitlements by CSOS. Conceptions of equality are directly related to conceptions of entitlements: to land, education, welfare, etc. However, in many societies there are parallel legal systems which enshrine competing and sometimes contradictory conceptions of entitlements. For instance, some may believe that the right to allocate water is vested in the state, while others may believe it is vested in the local chief. Where the latter group musters resources to provide an institutional conduit for the expression of ideas on entitlements not expressed in the formal political system, it is equally deepening democracy. But this only deepens democracy in the sense of providing a diversity of ideas on entitlements, as mentioned above. Also, it only deepens democracy in cases where these ideas are expressed within the formal political system.

Both the farmers' organisations studied do interact with the state and therefore contribute to democracy, even if one of the two does not necessarily recognise the legitimacy of the state. Firstly, the mere fact that this organisation contributes to an increase in the diversity of ideas expressed via the political system strengthens democracy. An organisation may interact with the state over the advancement of its own interests while not recognising the legitimacy of this state. Secondly, democracy is deepened by the fact that both organisations provide citizens with alternative vehicles (to the state) for the representation of issues, and entitles them to a *choice* between these vehicles and various parts of the state apparatus when taking a position on these issues. Given that the two farmers' organisations being studied are in the same area, farmers could in theory choose which

¹ T H Marshall, *Class, citizenship and social development*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, x-xiii.

one to join. Overall, though, their effectiveness in deepening democracy revolves around their organisational capacity (human and capital resources), internal accountability (members' entitlements), and political efficacy (political resources). As will be seen below, the two organisations differ strongly in their internal accountability and political efficacy.

In a democracy such as South Africa's it can be expected that the entitlement claims of the poorer strata of a population focus on key resources from which they are excluded. These are assets such as access to land and water, health and nutrition, education, buffers against adversity, and access to the centres of power and policy formulation. Such claims are made from a diverse base of world views and understandings of entitlements, which contribute to plurality but may also be fundamentally different and mutually exclusive.

In other words, entitlements such as property rights or the rights to free health care are always the subject of contestation, rooted in differing world views. Thus, while the state may attempt to lay down the basic parameters for action within a democratic framework, these rules cannot go uncontested. Although the state may take a position on entitlements such as land rights, and act to protect those entitlements, no entitlements can go entirely unchallenged. They are bound up with perceptions of legitimacy (of ownership, of cultural practices and of a political system), so that one's world view fundamentally affects one's perception of them. Also, one's view of entitlements may be directly affected by what one stands to gain or lose from the existing system. Discourse on entitlements may thus be strategically informed. The multitude of entitlement systems available leads Dietz to state that:

Claims may be based on a variety of legal systems, sometimes operating at the same time in the same area. In many societies different sets of entitlement rules compete: state laws (often a body of laws that is in itself full of contradictions), religious laws or laws governed by deeply entrenched moral codes, and indigenous laws.²

In South Africa, many world views coexist simultaneously, each related to a particular set of customs and views on entitlement. Thus traditional views on entitlements may coexist with 'modern' views, and the assertion of the primacy of one set of beliefs in respect of entitlements is the point of departure for entry into the arena of democratic contest.

In our view, this approach provides some analytical leverage over the case study under review. On the one hand, the study involves a group of poor farmers located in an area in which traditional authority and values were not only asserted but artificially maintained and articulated to the interests of the 'homelands' system. These traditional authority structures maintained a different set of entitlement relations to those of the modern state. As a result, a central subject of current interchanges between traditional authorities and the state is the topic of entitlements. In the realm in which traditional authorities hold

² Ton Dietz, *Entitlements to natural resources. contours of political environmental geography*, Utrecht: International Books, 1996, p 43.

sway over entitlements to productive resources such as land and water, forms of association emerge that are less voluntary and more subject to patronage and power relations than in situations where it is the democratic state that holds sway over such entitlements. The remnants of this historical (traditional) domain are being hollowed out by a modern democratic state and by civil society groupings that hold radically different views on the entitlement process. This is the arena of democratic deepening in this case study.

Research questions

A key contextualising question in this case study was: to what extent do CSOS build and foster democracy in South Africa? This begs the question of what kind of democracy is being built and fostered. As may be gleaned from the introduction, the research identifies three central variables: the organisational capacity, internal accountability, and political efficacy of the CSOS being examined. The better or higher these are, the more the CSOS are deemed to contribute to democratic deepening.

The central question driving the broader project to which this study contributes, is: what impact does foreign political aid have on the organisational capacity, internal accountability, and political efficacy of CSOS? This question can only be answered if the extent to which CSOS build and foster democracy in South Africa is ascertained. In the case of the rural grass-roots organisations we studied, the explicit intention in selecting them was that they should be unassisted by external sources and should therefore be entirely self-supporting. In practice, no institution is entirely divorced from society, and there are flows of resources between the institution and its surroundings. The autonomy of these organisations from outside agents is therefore a matter of degree, not an absolute. But none of the institutions surrounding the farmers' associations provides foreign political aid as envisaged by the terms of reference of this study. The research question here revolves around survival strategies: how do the two associations survive, and how does their institutional environment help or hinder them to do so?

Because this paper was intended to reveal the counterfactual, it does not directly address questions around the impact of foreign political aid to CSOS. But, from the material below, it will become clear that if the intention of foreign political aid is to foster democracy in South Africa, attention should be paid to the fact that many forms of association in rural South Africa may not be voluntary, nor may development institutions be internally accountable. This is because rural civil society was, for so many years, locked into the patronage structures of traditional authorities aligned to the apartheid government. This paper argues that the kind of access citizens have to key resources such as land has an impact on the internal accountability, organisational capacity, and political efficacy of organisations, as such access is either mediated through traditional authority structures or the democratic state. Therefore, if donors wish to invest in rural CSOS as a means of strengthening democracy, it is important to take entitlement relationships into account, as doing so can make the difference between strengthening democracy and strengthening patronage relations inherited from the past.

Finally, a caveat must be raised in respect of the data gathered for this paper. Although the research centred on institutions whose aim is to reduce rural poverty, the questions posed by researchers did not probe gender issues. We acknowledge that this is a serious omission, because poverty in South Africa primarily affects females in the sense that the majority of the rural poor are women (or those living in female-headed households). Given the above shortcoming, we are unable to comment on the extent to which the two farmers' associations represent the specific interests of their female members.

Setting the scene: the operating environment of the farmers' associations

Both the farmers' organisations – the Balemirui Farmers' Association (BFA) and the Moretele Farmers' Association (MFA) – lie in the Makapan chiefdom in North West. To the urban outsider it is not immediately obvious where Makapanstad is, as the road is not well signposted, and what signs there are, are old and faded. It lies some 50 kilometres to the north west of Pretoria, in the south eastern corner of a portion of the former 'homeland' of Bophuthatswana to the east of the Crocodile River. It is in the Moretele 1 district, to the north east of the Odi area containing Winterveld, Mabopane, and Garankuwa. The area used to fall under the Eastern District Transitional Council, but, following the re-demarcation of local government areas, it now falls under the Rustenburg District Council.

Geographically, Makapanstad is part and parcel of an apartheid-era human dumping zone. Although farming is practised here, it does not conform to the stereotype of a rural area in which agricultural production is the predominant source of livelihood, vegetation predominates the landscape, and settlement is sparse. Most adults are unemployed, and many of those who have work belong to the migrant urban proletariat rather than a local farming community. Incomes are low: 67 per cent of the population of the ex-homeland area earns less than R 300 a month.³ There is little vegetation in this corner of the region - most of the bush and farmland lies to the west. This particular corner is extremely densely settled (typical population densities in the former 'homelands' are about 300 per square kilometre, the authors had no data on local densities)⁴, and it lies close to Pretoria. Presumably, following the forced removals of the apartheid era, people tried to settle as closely as they legally could to centres of employment such as Pretoria.

Housing is of reasonable quality, and many households visible from the road have yard taps, which are one level of service above the bare minimum. The available infrastructure generally confirms the area's image of being a cut above the former Ciskei, Transkei, or Venda. The large number of half-filled buses and taxis cruising slowly through the area seems to indicate that most of the work opportunities are outside the area, and that after the morning rush hour there are few pickings to be had in terms of

³ See SALDRU, Key indicators of poverty in South Africa, Pretoria: Ministry in the Office of the President, RDP Programme, 1995, pp 8, 11.

⁴ See Shackleton, Shackleton and Cousins, *The economic value of land and natural resources to rural livelihoods*, Pretoria: CSIR, 1999.

transport from the remaining population. The settlements bear names such as Een-pondstad and Kopabatho, and the history of these names indicates the circumstances under which people lived in the homelands under apartheid: Een-pondstad (One-pound-town) is a settlement where one could obtain a residential stand by paying the local chief one pound. The name shows how the absence of private land ownership in the Tswana chiefdoms of old was transformed into a semblance of a land purchasing system in the 'homelands' as settlement density increased. Kopabatho ('ask for people') is a settlement where a white farmer would come in his bakkie, asking the chief for labour for his land. This name shows how the 'homelands' served as reserves of cheap labour for nearby white enterprises.

Embedded in this locality are the struggles of local farmers, expressed through farmers' associations, for the strengthening of their land-based livelihoods. Thus local, agrarian, CSOS are potential vehicles for mediating farmers' livelihood strategies. In turn, betterment struggles of farmers mediated via their farmers' associations take place in an area in which the dictatorship and patronage of old have begun to give way to an embryonic local democracy. The removal of key elements of the regime of Lucas Mangope, Bophuthatswana's president under apartheid,⁵ and the absorption of its administration into the line functions of national and provincial government have created some room for manoeuvre for CSOS. In the apartheid past, traditional leadership was the local institution on which the homeland administration rested; it was co-opted and coerced into compliance with the Mangope regime. John Seiler mentions these mechanisms by which most chiefs in Bophuthatswana were co-opted into acquiescence:

Any potential open opposition was pre-empted by a combination of factors, including the ever-present fear of arrest and even torture. The immediate incentives (and the risk of losing them) were substantial, and included:

- for a large portion of the chiefs, a parliamentary seat with the pay and other benefits that accompanied it;
- the placement of projects in their communities;
- the control of land allocation and the resultant tendency for chiefs to monopolise for their personal use the best land without consultation with their elders;
- a share in the widespread corruption that accompanied all contracts (the purchase of school books, for example) and all projects in their communities.⁶

To a large extent, therefore, traditional leadership was an extension of the 'homeland' government. When, after 1994, the Bophuthatswana administration was absorbed into provincial and national government, this relationship was severed, and the Mangope regime replaced by elected local and provincial governments. Traditional authority was

⁵ In the first instance this involved the removal of key security and intelligence staff and the issuing of severance packages for the homeland's 23 influential secretaries. See John Seiler (ed), *Transforming Mangope's Bophuthatswana: towards democracy in the North West Province*, Johannesburg, Daily Mail & Guardian, 1999, chapter 7.

⁶ Seiler, *Transforming Mangope's Bophuthatswana ...*, chapter 1.

thus significantly weakened, but this did not mean that it disappeared: South Africa's new dispensation specifically created room for the continued existence of traditional authority, and the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) was party to the negotiations on the new constitution. For the moment, traditional leaders continue to play an important role in civil society, especially in the rural areas, although their precise role in the new political dispensation may not be very clear. In the area of our research, the chief had occupied a position in Mangope's cabinet. This chief died and was succeeded by his brother. Although people in some areas in Bophuthatswana resisted Mangope, Makapanstad was clearly closely allied to the regime.

It is now possible for CSOS to mobilise around and give expression to issues in a manner that would not have been possible under the Mangope regime. However, its power structures extended beyond formal government and into institutions such as traditional leadership, and as a result the area is still fraught with the authoritarian culture and politics of the apartheid era. For example, most of the traditional leaders in the area also served as such under apartheid. Presently, CSOS are chipping at the edges of this system to roll back the legacy of apartheid, but these struggles are stunted in a number of ways. The national programme of delivery has a strong urban focus (for example, the Municipal Infrastructure Programme has been running for years on a substantial annual budget, while its rural counterpart, the Rural Infrastructure Programme, has never got off the ground). Furthermore, land and land tenure reform are progressing slowly, local government is weak, and the precise role to be played by traditional authorities in the new democracy still has to be defined. To a large extent, CSOS in rural areas must go it alone, unaided by donors, the various tiers of government, or urban experts.

Local institutions

The farmers' associations studied exist in a broader institutional and political landscape in which the National African Farmers' Union (NAFU); various agricultural extension and marketing services, such as AGRICOR; the Noord Transvaalse Koöperasie (NTK); traditional authorities, and national, provincial, district and local government appear to be the most important. The associations' fortunes and misfortunes are intimately connected to their relations with this network of actors. This network, which was established during the apartheid era, has itself been subject to change, and as a result the historically established channels for expressing farmers' interests have changed also. The main argument that will be advanced here is that a mistrust of apartheid-era farmer support institutions among local state agencies, and a state policy of austerity, combine to weaken the opportunities of the farmers in question. Support institutions that provided real resources to farmers in 'homeland' areas, albeit to an elite, were weakened through a cutback on subsidies. These cutbacks were based in part on the association of these institutions with apartheid, and in part on the political drive for cost-recovery in service delivery that was ushered in with the government's macroeconomic growth, employment and redistribution (GEAR) strategy.

In some ways the situation is similar to that in Zimbabwe in the late 1980s, when structural adjustment programmes imposed by the World Bank and IMF enforced a roll-back of the state. This created a crisis in many of that state's more developmental outreach institutions, as a result of which CSOS had to move forward into the vacuum left behind by the state; they had to abandon their 'add-on' functions and move into areas where they were providing direct relief. Similarly, in the area researched, whatever support for farmers existed under apartheid was withdrawn as a result of the cutbacks on state subsidies to support institutions, and the introduction of a policy of basic needs delivery based on cost-recovery. The key difference with Zimbabwe is that, under apartheid, a small and elite group of farmers received state support of some kind, whereas in Zimbabwe farmer support was mass-based. However, the end result is that while some land in Zimbabwe has been handed over to farmers – as in the case of one of the farmers' associations studied here – many key agricultural support institutions no longer provide support farmers in the way they did under apartheid.

As a result, the farmers have had to go it alone. As one farmer in the area stated: 'Nowadays, everything must come from our own pockets.'. The current status of these support institutions will be examined to demonstrate the systematic nature of the collapse of direct relations with the state.

The first institution in question is AGRICOR, the agency that provided farming extension services in the former Bophuthatswana. M, chairperson of the MFA, stated in an interview that he had been one of AGRICOR's founder members in 1978, and had remained a member until it was phased out in 1994 following allegations of corruption. He was involved in disbanding the organisation as well as in replacing it with AGRISERVE. Neither organisation is now functioning; in fact, MFA executive members declare that, whatever the BFA claims, AGRICOR no longer exists. Instead, there are sporadic and entirely voluntary support services offered by institutions such as MEDUNSA (a medical research institution), Onderstepoort (a veterinary research institution, and the Agricultural Research Council. There is therefore a lack of structured extension services in the area.

AGRICOR, whose services have in theory been taken over by the national department of land and agriculture affairs, was part of a late apartheid development in which 'white' South Africa provided 'development aid' to its poor homeland 'neighbours' via institutions such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA). It was a part of the 'hearts and minds' strategy during the P W Botha era, in response to a view that South Africa was being subjected to a 'total onslaught' by communist and African nationalist forces. The political response from Pretoria was to launch a programme for economic development whereby South Africa was seen to invest resources in the upliftment of the homelands via the DBSA. Thus apartheid had two faces: on the one hand there was a repressive arm, which engineered forced removals to the homelands, suppressed revolt, and arrested leaders of the liberation movements. On the other, there was a development arm which attempted to win the black population away from communism by investing in infrastructure and service development.

AGRICOR was part of this strategy, intended to keep people in the homelands by assisting with agricultural development. It provided educational and sometimes financial sup-

port to farmers in the area studied, and had provided the Makapanstad Farmer's Association with the financial means to fence off its 400-hectare plot of land. It functioned as a parastatal, but carried out most of the tasks that would normally be associated with a ministry of agriculture. AGRICOR received subsidies from Pretoria which were withdrawn in 1994, as most of the functions of the parastatal were absorbed into the provincial department of agriculture. For instance, AGRICOR previously offered loans to farmers via AGRIBANK, cheap access to farming inputs such as seed and fertiliser, and, in the case of state farms, provided the heavy machinery and implements (eg tractors and ploughs) needed for farming. Now that most of the functions of the parastatal have been transferred to the department of agriculture, AGRICOR's sole remaining function is to administer the department's budget for SMME financing. Thus those developing group projects in the field of crop farming, stock farming, poultry, etc can apply for loans from AGRICOR/AGRIBANK.

A second key organisation providing farmer support is the Nasionale Transvaalse Koöperasie (NTK). While AGRICOR supported agriculture on the input side via farmer training, NTK provided the marketing. NTK had 92 offtake points in remote areas of the former Transvaal and later also in its adjacent homelands. It offered farmers guaranteed minimum prices for their produce, and received state subsidies in order to sustain this. However, in June this year the Land Bank applied for the NTK to be liquidated, alleging that it owed the bank some R282 million. The NTK had previously been subsidised by the government, and had played a role in supporting white agriculture during apartheid. However, its extension into homelands areas enabled some black farmers to enter the highly regulated market for agricultural produce. The slide of the rand in the 1980s made it difficult for the NTK to continue supporting prices, and when the government cut back on subsidies it became deeply indebted to the Land Bank.

A third organisation of some importance to farmers in the area is the Magalies Water Board, previously the North West Water Supply Authority (NWWSA). In a similar vein to the NTK story, previous water supplies to farmers are now no longer functional due to a cutback in state subsidies. In the past, the NWWSA, which was subsidised by the Bophuthatswana administration, maintained stock watering boreholes on state farms free of charge, and also provided free domestic water supplies in some areas. With the advent of democracy, development initiatives were predicated on cost recovery, and state subsidies to homeland water boards were phased out. The water boards' supply areas were re-demarcated to maximise cost recovery and the ability to cross-subsidise internally. As a result, the NWWSA shrank while the Magalies Water Board expanded. Water boards were also rationalised; the Magalies Water Board stopped maintaining boreholes and began to devote its energies exclusively to domestic water supplies.

Both the BFA and MFA bemoan the disappearance of these organisations because they offered resources in a resource-starved area, even if they were connected to the apartheid regime. Farmers in the area feel that since 1994 they have had to go it alone, and that everything they do must come from their own pockets. Their boreholes are no longer functioning, they no longer receive training, they can no longer access tractors and other farm equipment, and their produce is no longer bought at guaranteed prices. Many of

their advocacy efforts are focused on the revival of these basic services which provide an essential enabling environment for their material advancement.

Differences between the associations

As a precautionary measure, the identities of individuals interviewed on the activities of the two farmers' associations have not been revealed.

The two associations differ in several respects, the most important being the type of land to which they have access. In the case of the BFA, communal land under the jurisdiction of the local chief was allocated to the association for development purposes. Usually this kind of land is used for communal grazing and is open to all in the community who own stock, but in this case some land was set aside for (agrarian) development purposes to be determined by the BFA. By contrast, most of the land now controlled by the MFA previously belonged to the state, but was allocated to the MFA by the department of land affairs after the 1994 elections.

Their immediate institutional environment also differs. The MFA is affiliated to the NAFU, while the BFA has links with traditional authority structures in the area.

As will be explained in greater detail below, the type of land and institutional environment of the two organisations strongly influence their organisational capacity, internal accountability, and political efficacy. This is because one is linked to the patronage networks of traditional authority, and the other to the more democratic procedures in the NAFU for advancing disempowered rural entrepreneurs.

The BFA was selected for study on the basis of media reports which indicated that it was surviving despite a lack of external support.⁷ Assuming that this organisation was authentically grass-roots-based, it was thought that it could shed some light on the behaviour of CSOS at the lowest level of aggregation. However, in the course of our research we discovered that there were two farmers' associations in the area contending for members, and that the MFA consistently invited BFA members to its meetings but that the latter rarely attended. We therefore broadened the scope of our analysis to these two associations: civil society appeared to be more divided than we first imagined. Their organisational dynamics are described below.

The Balemirui Farmers' Association (BFA)

The BFA officially has a 12-person executive, comprising eight men and four women. In the course of our interviews, however, we repeatedly spoke to only four members of the executive, and were left with the impression that they lead the organisation in practice. According to its executive, the BFA represents some 170 people in and around Makapanstad.

The primary aims of the BFA are to create jobs and eradicate hunger via agricultural production. The association was formed in 1994, prompted by an insistence on the part of

⁷ Between a river and a reservoir but no water and no reply, *Land and Rural Digest*, September/October 1999.

AGRICOR that farmers would only be assisted if they created an association. It therefore seems to have been the prospect of receiving assistance that led to the creation of the BFA, rather than a set of commonly felt goals which the members of the organisation underwrote. Having stated this, combating poverty through self-help is clearly a key aspect of the association: at least some of the land available to it (it was difficult to establish precisely how much) has been set aside to enhance the livelihoods of poor residents of Mapakanstad. Members of the association work a collective plot of land for the production of vegetables which are sold or directly consumed (see below). As has been described earlier in greater detail, AGRICOR used to provide extension support to farmers in the apartheid area. In the case of the BFA, this included a donation of RDP funds for fencing material. This apparently occurred before AGRICOR was restructured, and the funds were approved by local RDP fora during the transition period. Curiously, therefore, the funds were approved by an RDP forum but still channelled through an undemocratic apartheid era institution.

Although the BFA formally registered with AGRICOR in 1994, the organisation went back further than this. On our first visit to the area, its executive often referred to events prior to 1994, such as easier access to tractors.

Membership reportedly fluctuates, and the incomes of the association's members are clearly highly diverse. While some farmers whom we met were ill-clad and rolled cigarettes with newspaper, for instance, one member of the executive claimed to own 4 000 head of cattle in the Kalahari desert. With regard to the fluctuating membership, D M, the association's chairperson, stated that people in reduced circumstances were generally hesitant to come forward and seek help, but that it was precisely the poor and unemployed whom the association was trying to assist by creating agricultural jobs. He further claimed that many more people would probably come forward and join the organisation if it had more resources, such as water, tractors, and ploughs.

In some ways, though, the BFA has access to extensive resources. In a letter dated February 1996, the local tribal authority gave it access to no less than 500 hectares of communal land in the Makapanstad area, on the basis that it would not interfere with grazing rights. The 'title deed' via which the chief authorised this mentions that the land was previously used for communal grazing. The land had been inspected by an agricultural officer, who had declared that it could be converted to arable crop land and used by subsistence farmers of the BFA⁸. By comparison, it was claimed by the executive that 3 hectares of land had recently delivered 4,5 tonnes of maize; in other words, one hectare can produce a harvest of some 1,5 tonnes of maize under rain-fed conditions. Hypothetically, therefore, if the entire piece of land was cultivated, it could potentially produce some 750 tonnes of maize per harvest, or an average of 4,4 tonnes per member. However, the full potential of the land cannot be realised because of a lack of access to a dependable source of water, and a lack of farming machinery and implements.

Most of the 500 hectares is open bush and not used for farming, although it does harbour back-up natural resources such as wild pigs, which are caught to make biltong. Es-

⁸ Makapanstad Tribal Authority, Title deed to Makapanstad Farmers' Organisation, 1996.

entially, the land performs three functions which match an institutional subdivision within the BFA into a vegetable farming, crop farming, and stock farming group.

The vegetable farming group has access to 4 hectares of land, of which 2 hectares are cultivated. This plot is situated a mere 550 metres from the Apies River, but the association has not managed to buy the pipes needed to pump water from the river. The plot is worked by previously unemployed men and women, and produces spinach, carrots, chillies, and cabbages for market. Members of the executive say the proceeds are reinvested in the organisation. As we were discouraged from talking to members, it is not clear how this reinvestment takes place, or how the vegetable plot generates benefits for members. The plot is currently illegally irrigated from a borehole meant to provide drinking water at one corner of the field; the farmers have been told that this water has been purified and chlorinated, so that if they continue to irrigate with it the fields will be poisoned in five years. The furrows through which the water is channelled are a shiny mud-red colour, different from the rest of the soil, which already indicates some level of poisoning. The plot is fenced off with fencing obtained from AGRICOR, but the many women who worked the fields complained of the high prevalence of crop theft in the area: they would like to install barbed security fencing.

The stock farming group has access to some 4,5 hectares of grazing land some 2 kilometres from the river. A visit to this area, which is far from the vegetable plot, revealed a kraal with some 20 healthy calves, most of which appeared to be Brahmans or two other European breeds. The calves had just been inoculated. Next to the kraal a spray dip was under construction whereby a pump was to shower the cattle with insecticide when driven through a narrow funnel. This was inoperative due to a lack of funds and water. The farmers had placed drinking troughs close to the kraal, which were replenished with water collected from the river with a bakkie. The farmers hoped to construct a reservoir, filled by a pump from the river, to feed and spray the cattle. Again, water was the main factor constraining their development plans.

The crop farming group has access to 84 hectares of cleared and fenced land⁹; when we visited the area most of it was under maize, although there were also patches of watermelons and gems. The land had been cleared by only four people, and clearly represented a huge amount of wealth, but lay in the middle of a large plot of open bush. It is some 11 kilometres from the river, and again, if irrigated, could produce far more. As will be explained below, there is a strange discrepancy between the large numbers of people working the 2 hectare vegetable plot and the four who worked the 85 hectare plot; the land allocated to the BFA by the chief appeared to be unequally distributed among its members.

The above discussion shows that the farmers have a lot of land at their disposal. However, because of the collapse of the 'homelands' institutions that supported farmers, and because of slow agricultural and water policy development, their production is constrained by a lack of access to water, tractors, ploughs, and credit. They have repeatedly submitted applications for access to water to the office of the Magalies Water Board in

⁹ AGRICOR sponsored this fencing exercise.

the nearby town of Temba; however, they have never received a response. In addition, they say, some applications have been lost by changes of staff, so that they have had to return to square one.

Patronage and power relations among BFA members

During our visits to the fields our original view of the BFA as a developmental institution became ever more compromised by a number of events. These served to question whether the BFA is actually primarily a self-help, anti-poverty, association.

Firstly, we found it rather strange that the large tracts of land at the disposal of the farmers had done so little to improve their situation. The farmers have access to 500 hectares – under normal circumstances, this could satisfactorily feed the 170 people said to be members. But, as we explain below, we began to suspect that the land was not subdivided equally among BFA members, as it was among members of the MFA. We found it difficult to reconcile the obvious poverty of some BFA members with the resources at its disposal. A common problem with communal land tenure is that it is not accepted by the Land Bank as collateral for loans, thus denying its farmers access to new technologies; but even given more traditional production methods it appeared as though the land was underutilised. Much of the BFA land lay fallow, or was still virgin bush. By contrast, a far larger proportion of MFA land was in productive use, perhaps suggesting that different types of tenure can lead to different outcomes in personal investment. According to an official at the provincial department of agriculture in Mmabatho, there is a ‘general reluctance ... to make medium- to long-term capital investments under communal tenure systems. A lack of private ownership of property, coupled to the predominant free rider culture among rural communities, is well documented and has largely been cited as a disincentive for investment in this type of land’¹⁰.

Secondly, during our first visit to the BFA, we dropped most members who had attended our first meeting off at the vegetable fields. We were then taken on a tour of the stock farm and crop farm by three members of the executive who were clearly in control of the association. From this point on we saw no villagers tilling lands, only empty fields. We were told that this land was tilled by four members of the executive. It struck us as rather strange that villagers were cultivating vegetables while the stock farm had no one present. At a later meeting (in Johannesburg on 13 June 2000, the owner of a local supermarket, M, said the executive preferred the land to be controlled by just four people because if the whole community got involved things would be ‘chaotic’. M has close ties with the executive and was explaining matters on its behalf, with which its members concurred, as they were present. This ‘leadership’ role of the executive was thus the rationale for the degree of concentration of control over land.

At our first meeting we had asked the women to comment on how their lives had improved since joining the BFA. One woman hesitated, and the question was answered on their behalf by a member of the executive, who later told us that we should not ask young and inexperienced people questions but rather put questions to him. All of this confirmed

¹⁰ Personal correspondence, 24 April 2001.

our growing view that the BFA was in fact controlled by a small group with little internal accountability to its members. In fact, we began to suspect that the distribution of land within the association was highly skewed in favour of the executive.

Thirdly, when we expressed our amazement at the maize fields stretching as far as the eye could see, one of the three-person executive, T T, claimed he owned 4 000¹¹ head of cattle in the Kalahari desert in Botswana. If true, this claim seemed rather out of kilter with a cash-strapped and resource-poor organisation for farmer advancement. It seemed unlikely that someone with 4 000 (or even substantially fewer) head of cattle could not afford to buy a tractor or irrigation pumps and pipes. Furthermore, while we stand to be corrected, given our limited knowledge of cattle, the three breeds of calf at the stock ranch seemed to be thoroughbred, and if so were worth more than one would expect in the case of an embattled poor farmers' organisation.

Fourthly, by the end of our first day at the BFA we were taken to a supermarket where it appeared that the three-person team accompanying us had very good relations with the local entrepreneur, whom they said was very wealthy. They were obviously on good terms with this man, and, together with the claimed ownership of 4 000 head of cattle by T T, these relationships seemed bracket the executive of the BFA with the rural elite rather than the poor. Perhaps most importantly, one of the researchers and authors of this paper was offered a plot of 5 hectares if we could access government officials and bring water to the area. The executive expressed its distrust of government officials, and banked on using our 'contacts' in government as a means of accessing water, in return for which we would also receive favours such as the allocation of land. We were also told that, should we come again in the summer, we could load our bakkies full of maize. After returning to Johannesburg we were visited by the supermarket owner, M, and the BFA's chairperson, D M. They believed so strongly that we could be of some help to them that they had travelled 140 kilometres to our offices to 'prepare the way for the chief', whom they said wished to speak to us. During our first visit to them we had taken a participatory observer approach, wanting to avoid bothering them with questions, leaving, and not being heard of again: we had offered to respond to their providing us with information by helping them in any way we could, for example by processing applications to the government and/or donors. Their visit to Johannesburg gave us the impression that they thought we had 'contacts' in government who could give them what they needed. They spent the greater part of an afternoon telling us that they were frustrated by the formal channels of application to government, and wanted something faster. Clearly they thought we could provide this, and were very disappointed when we indicated a commitment to the rule of law rather than to relations based on influence.

Fifth, they referred to the elected local council as a 'nuisance'. Why, if the BFA is a development organisation, should they have a problem with a newly elected council and not divulge the reasons to us? Our first meeting was held in the courtroom of the Makapanstad tribal authority, and the BFA's chair, D M, mentioned that he was close to the

¹¹ According to an official of the department of agriculture in Mmabatho, this claim should be taken with a pinch of salt, as it would require some 40 000 hectares of grazing to support such a herd.

chief. He also mentioned that two of the men at the meeting represented the traditional authority. This indicates close relations between the BFA and the traditional leadership, a relationship further underlined by the allocation to it of such a large tract of land by the chieftain. However, this relationship with the chief is restricted, as land is his only deliverable, with all other farming inputs needing to be accessed via the state or the market. In order to properly harness its resources, the BFA needs to interact to some degree with the state. However, the state (theoretically) operates according to set procedures rather than systems of patronage, and until now this has frustrated the BFA.

Reflecting on these contradictions, a picture emerged of a rural elite, based on close historical links with traditional authorities, retaining a hold over and influencing local developmental aspirations. There is little or no evidence that the intended beneficiaries of the BFA project actually have access to more than 4 of the allocated 500 hectares. Furthermore, T T spoke of women in the project, saying ‘we control them’, and stating that women cultivated a mere 2 hectares of maize. And, on his visit to Johannesburg, the supermarket owner, M, mentioned that they did not want more than four people to control the land.

The 500 hectares controlled by the BFA in itself represents a significant resource, capable of producing 750 tonnes of maize per harvest¹² if fully developed, which strikes a discord with the professed poverty of the organisation. The offer of farmland in return for water harked back to the patronage relations developed during the Mangope regime, and raised questions about the extent to which democracy has in fact reached Makapanstad: the tribal authority clearly wields power over key factors in planning, such as land ownership and zoning, and if rural politics do indeed have such a strong pork-barrel component, transparency and accountability have yet to conquer much territory in the area.

By way of contrast, we decided to investigate the MFA. Our interest in it had been provoked because, once the chair of the BFA got wind of the fact that we were in contact with the MFA, he lost all interest in us and never contacted us again.

The Moretele Farmers’ Association (MFA)

The intention behind our third visit was to meet representatives of the MFA, an organisation with which the BFA has loose ties. We believed the MFA to be more internally democratic and transparent than the BFA, firstly because its representative, K S, had said on the phone that it was they affiliated to the NAFU. Secondly, the appointment had to be confirmed as K S said she had to consult the committee. Lastly, the BFA would not have permitted women to speak on its behalf. We met K S at a shebeen in Temba, and she took us to the home of the MFA chair, M, a large and luxurious building, giving us an impression that was later confirmed that he was a man of considerable standing and influence.

¹² Generally, however, a host of factors militate against such yields being achieved under rain-fed conditions. The BFA lacks key inputs such as tractors, which severely limits its productive potential.

Institutional characteristics

The NAFU is called a union at national and provincial level, below which it comprises associations that form the interface for interaction with individual farmers, and are affiliated to the provincial unions. The MFA is one such association, comprising about 125 farmers and a ten-person executive. In terms of land restitution legislation, state land can be handed over to tillers only if they are registered as a communal property association via which collective land title can be held. The MFA is such an association, and it is required by law to be bound by a constitution, although state monitoring of the organisation's accountability to its members may be weak in practice. In the case of the MFA, its leaders meet members once a month to discuss issues relating to access to land, finances, contacts with the state, and potential donors. It appears as though members generally join the organisation because of poverty: on asking why members had joined, we were told that a lack of jobs had forced people to turn to agriculture. Also, the fact that state land was being turned over to citizens created an impetus for people to join the organisation. However, these are not the only reasons for joining: for instance, the secretary of the organisation mentioned that she had a genuine interest in agriculture and that she had joined out of interest.

Members pay the MFA R200 a year, used to cover the leaders' expenses in running the organisation. These expenditures are presented to the members once a year, indicating internal transparency at least on finances. Externally, the MFA also emphasises transparency in its dealings: for instance we were encouraged to confirm their statements and allegations on access to water, farm implements, and extension services by visiting other organisations and putting questions to the Magalies Water Board or the Agricultural Development Corporation. We were also invited to attend one of their monthly meetings.¹³ Crucially different from the situation in Makapanstad is the fact that the farmers occupy allotments of state (rather than traditional communal) land. The members each occupy a 50 hectare plot, which was parcelled off from the original grant of 1 500 hectares issued to the MFA by the department of agriculture. Farmers' activities range from purely commercial to purely subsistence.

Land resources

The MFA has access to roughly three times as much land as the BFA; most of this a former state farm. However, it appears as if control over this land is less concentrated than in the case of the BFA, and that its benefits are therefore more evenly distributed. During the apartheid era a large state farm of 1 500 hectares in the Makapanstad area, called Warmbaths Farm, was operated as a 'demonstration farm'. This meant that state resources were channelled to it to demonstrate the kinds of gains in productivity that could be achieved by applying scientific farming methods and 'green revolution' techniques such as the use of high-yield seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides. However, workers employed on this farm

¹³ We did not do so as we knew that some members of the BFA would be invited to attend, and the BFA had expressed its displeasure at our meetings with the MFA.

were not trained in using these methods, but merely used as labourers. The farm was well capitalised and had several storage sheds, two boreholes, many ploughs and other implements, and access to tractors and trailers from AGRICOR. It originally produced peanuts, which were supplied to a neighbouring peanut butter factory. It thus had a ready outlet for its produce. But production ceased after Bophuthatswana had collapsed, and the land was allocated to the MFA by the new government via the department of agriculture.

The MFA subdivided the farm into plots of 50 hectares, which it considers to be just big enough to allow individual commercial farmers to eke out a living. Rather than pooling the land and sharing the crops, as in the case of the BFA's vegetable project, each farmer is currently working his or her own plot and planting a variety of crops, among which mealies and sunflower seeds appear to be the most popular. During our visits we observed groups of farmers and farm labourers working a series of physically distinct plots. One of the MFA's leaders showed us her plot, which was no larger than those of other members. Thus in the case of the MFA we were able to witness some equality in the subdivision of land, whereas in the case of the BFA it is still not clear who controls which part of the land. In summary, the MFA has considerable land at its disposal, shared equally among its members. However, as indicated below, agricultural development is hampered by factors other than land.

Obstacles to development

The association has identified two key obstacles to increased productivity in the area: a lack of water, and a lack of tractors. But these two factors are embedded in a constellation of other constraints.

First and foremost among these is a lack of water for irrigation and stock watering. The farm has a number of boreholes that could be used in theory, but are inoperative. They were originally provided by the department of agriculture and maintained by the Bophuthatswana Water Supply Authority (BWSA). However, in the transitional period after 1994, the BWSA became the NWWSA, and its state subsidies were cut back while its supply area was reduced in favour of the Magalies Water Board. Thus the Magalies Water Board took over maintenance of the stock watering boreholes as a temporary measure (this constituted part of its expansion into the territory of the NWWSA). Because of policy shifts in the department of water affairs and forestry, a new emphasis was placed on water boards providing drinking water and sanitation rather than water for productive purposes. Thus, in October 1999, Magalies Water stopped maintaining boreholes. This has concerned the association. In the MFA's opinion it was lucky in 1999, as the rains were good, otherwise the farmers would be in a far more serious situation than they are today.

The state, for its part, says boreholes should be maintained by communities themselves. In response to a query, an official of the provincial department of agriculture has written: 'Before the advent of the new dispensation, the Bophuthatswana Water Supply Authority had started with a programme of handing over water supply facilities to communities for them to take over ownership and responsibility for the maintenance. In doing so, they first trained selected members of the community on the maintenance of these

facilities, and the community would then take over these facilities and their maintenance. This programme was experiencing a lot of frustration because communities were failing to do these things for themselves, even just purchasing the diesel for the engines.'¹⁴

The lack of water on the land farmed by MFA members is therefore related to problems surrounding the rehabilitation of existing boreholes, responsibility for which has been passed from the state to farmers.

To our surprise, the executive of the MFA referred to 23 inoperative tractors we had seen during our previous visit to the area. On that occasion, BFA officials had taken us to see the tractors at the Agricultural Development Centre (ADC) offices at TEMBA, a local depot of the former AGRICOR agricultural extension services. Both organisations complained of relatively new tractors wasting away in the sun, with flat tyres and missing batteries and alternators, when they could be used to benefit the community. However, MFA officials claim they have the right to use the tractors as it was they who reclaimed them from their hiding place (see below) and brought them to the area. Since then, they say, everybody (including the BFA) is trying to claim them. The BFA, on the other hand, also sees great benefit in accessing the tractors, and has regularly appealed (unsuccessfully) to ADC staff for permission to use them.

The tractors have a curious history: under the homeland government, they were used at Warmbaths Farm. Along with what the MFA claims was a plethora of ploughs and other implements, the tractors serviced a project taking up 4 000 hectares. This apparently involved training young farmers as part of a resettlement scheme, and was managed by AGRICOR. In 1994 the scheme collapsed and, according to the MFA, the tractors were 'hidden' on private properties. The MFA's claim to fame is that it 'investigated' the matter, found the tractors, and returned them to the ADC offices in the hope that they could be used by local farmers' associations. Now that the tractors have been wrested from obscurity and are a tangible resource, competing claims are being made against the state in the form of the ADC to restore them to the broader farming community. However, according to MFA officials, agricultural support in the area has collapsed, and nothing is being done with the tractors. The MFA openly engages the state on these kinds of issues: it has requested an appointment with an MEC in Mmabatho since February 2000, but have not yet received a response. On one occasion it even took the premier of North West province, Popo Molefe, to see the tractors. It is currently planning a march through the area to draw attention to its case.

The state version of the tractor story is somewhat different, in that the tractors were allegedly never stolen but stored by the state pending the reallocation of ex-Bophuthatswana assets to farmer support systems. In reply to a query, an official of the provincial department of agriculture has written: 'While the delay in processing the disposal of the redundant Warmbaths tractors is acknowledged, there is need to avoid misrepresentation of facts. This process had indeed long started before the MFA woke up to the fact of their existence. These tractors were, for that matter, never "hidden" but prop-

¹⁴ Personal correspondence, 24 April 2001.

erly and procedurally stored pending the finalisation of policy on their dispersal and the completion of the restructuring process within the department.¹⁵

Another major constraint mentioned by farmers is a lack of security of tenure. Most or all members of this association have received state land, but the title deeds, which they refer to as 'list contracts', have not yet been issued. Land scarcity is widely regarded as a problem. Given the history of land allocation in South Africa, which led to some 50 per cent of the population being forced to live on 13 per cent of the land, the reallocation of state land inside former homeland areas is not sufficient in itself to still the hunger for land in those areas. The association's feeling is that it is the duty of the state to buy commercial land and allocate this to farmers. The attendance at meetings seems to be related to perceptions that the state will deliver something meaningful. Members of the executive say attendance is highest when the delivery of land or other resources is imminent, and bemoan the low attendance when delivery seems further off.

As regards crime, members of the executive said there was a high incidence of stock theft in the area. Six head of sheep had been stolen and slaughtered in the week preceding our interview, and the chairperson of the organisation has lost 15 head of cattle in 2000. Local police were ineffective in dealing with these crimes.

In sharp contrast to attitudes in the BFA, MFA executive members said traditional leaders were 'totally useless', and only served their own interests. Furthermore, the chiefs controlled huge tracts of land that were lying unused. One example given was that of Mathibestad, where, they said, land had been cleared but was still lying fallow.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at two farmers' organisations, their organisational capacity, their internal accountability, and their political efficacy. The evidence gathered until now seems to suggest that both have some organisational capacity in terms of the land and human resources at their disposal. However, they differ substantially in terms of how they have put these resources to use.

It seems they differ markedly in their internal accountability and transparency. These differences can be largely attributed to the different realms in which they are rooted. The BFA has strong ties with traditional leadership, and utilises traditional land. It is suspicious of the new government, and tried to prevent researchers for this project from accessing its members. It does not have a constitution, and its affairs are controlled by a small elite. The MFA has weaker links with traditional leaders, and interacts with the state from a position of critical loyalty. The land resources that underpin the association have been allocated to it by the state rather than by traditional authorities, and its interactions with the state are ongoing and open. It does not denounce the new government, but bemoans its current policies.

¹⁵ Personal correspondence, 24 April 2001.

There could therefore be a strong link between forms of land entitlements and civil society advocacy in South Africa. This is not to make the determinist argument that any group that derives its land from traditional authorities is necessarily undemocratic. It also does not mean that any group that receives land from the state is necessarily democratic. It is only to argue that, although weakened, the power of traditional authorities, which tended to act undemocratically in the past, still depends largely on their hold over access to land. The MFA, on the other hand, has obtained its access to land via legal procedures available to many poor South Africans who wish to farm.

In terms of political efficacy, the two organisations also differ fundamentally. The BFA is rooted in traditional leadership structures based on personal influence and patronage, and only engage with the state if it believes there is no alternative. It attempts to use the resources at its disposal to enhance its position, but in a manner that entrenches relations of patronage and dependence, as evinced by the offer of land made to us in return for access to water. The MFA, on the other hand, represents underprivileged farmers in engagements with state structures up to the national level, and engages actively and openly with the media and politicians in staking a claim on titles to land, tractors, and agricultural services. Both organisations are hampered by the urban bias of development policy in South Africa, and neither has made much progress in regaining access to the resources offered during apartheid – but the MFA is certainly more effectively than the BFA in dealing with the government.

In terms of strengthening democracy, the BFA could be depicted as an organisation that wishes to prolong the existence of dependence and patronage, whereas the MFA wishes to advance transparency, equality, and the material conditions of all its members. The MFA gives its members a platform from which they can express their ideas and engage with the state. In the MFA they have an institution that is transparent and responsive to their needs, encouraging democratic practice in an area that was previously highly undemocratic. Citizenship is enhanced, also because the MFA does not prevent its members from participating in the activities of other organisations, such as the local community policing forum.

We thus conclude that, if donors wish to invest in rural CSOS as a means of strengthening democracy, it is important to take entitlement relationships into account, as doing so can make the difference between strengthening democracy and strengthening patronage relations inherited from the past. Encouraging democratically controlled access to basic resources such as land is a necessary condition for strengthening democracy, but it is not a sufficient condition. New forms of patronage may emerge, and these also need to be monitored. In general, grass-roots civil society in South Africa is still being transformed, and many aspects of the power relationships prevalent during the previous regime still remain.

Democracy cannot be created overnight; this study shows that grass roots struggles for strengthening democracy exist and need external support. However, such support is crippled by a mutual blindness between grass-roots organisations, which have little or no information about donor programmes, and donor agencies, which cannot effectively monitor the activities of remote grass-roots organisations. In this sense, the use of inter-

mediary organisations such as the NAFU that can communicate with both parties seems to be unavoidable. However, the use of funding criteria, such as land entitlement patterns which are likely to induce the emergence of transparent institutions, may strengthen democracy in the long term.

Lastly, as noted earlier, the data gathered did not provide for thorough gender analysis. Having said this, the leadership of the two organisations was predominantly male, although the MFA does have a female secretary. Furthermore, both organisations do have substantial female memberships, and therefore women are not adequately represented in the leadership of either organisation. Beyond this general statement, it is not possible to reach conclusions on gender issues. However, this does not mean that such issues do not exist: on the contrary, because most of the rural poor and rural farmers in South Africa are women, it can be expected that they are an important constituency in such farmers' associations.