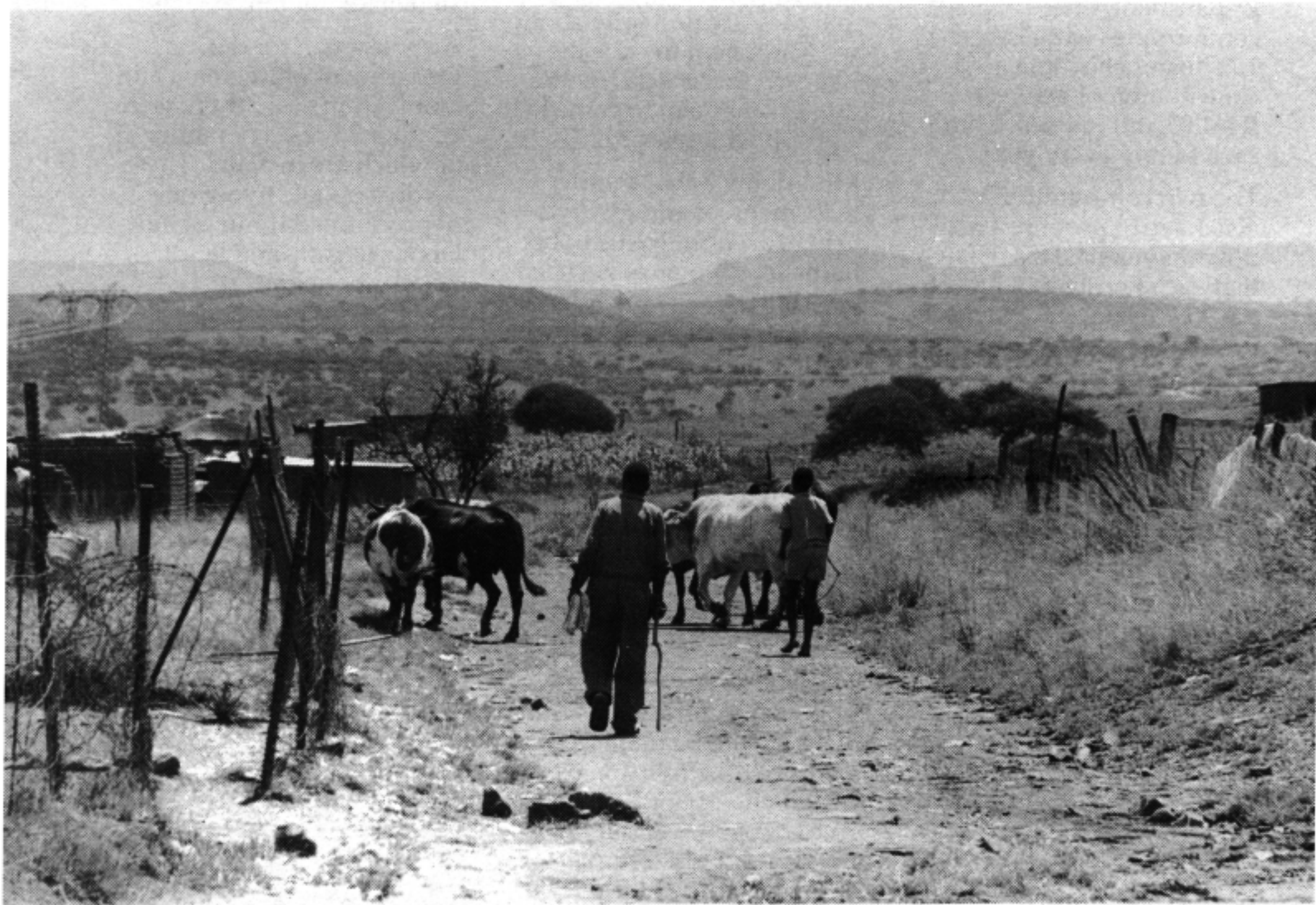


# Cornfields and Tembalihle finalise land purchase



**A** LONG, winding, dusty dirt road that dips and bumps over streams and potholes. Cattle grazing lazily in the sun. Houses clustered along narrow throughways. This is Cornfields. It's also

Tembalihle and many other rural settlements in Natal, give or take a few minor differences. Places where nothing seems to happen and little seems to change. But beneath the simple rural trappings people are writing

a new future for themselves. The black freehold communities of Cornfields and Tembalihle in Estcourt, Natal, recently scored a breakthrough in their efforts to get access to more productive land. They did

this through persuading the Department of Regional and Land Affairs to give them an 80% grant to buy 8 500 hectares of privately owned land adjoining their existing landholdings.

Both communities were reprieved from removal in 1990, after a long struggle. Their land rights were then secure, but they needed more land for grazing, collecting wood and for thatching grass.

In terms of their financial agreement with the Department, the communities will also get a 15% loan, which means a contribution of between R441.93 and R304.67 from each family every year.

The two communities will also have to provide a 5% downpayment. This means that each family will have to pay between R469.15 and R322.73.

The day of the formal signing of the financial agreement saw the Cornfields community turned out in its best for a celebration befitting the end of a difficult struggle.

Mrs Nesta Shemba, a tenant at Cornfields, said the land acquisition deal meant that, for the first time, her family would own land. In their discussions about how the purchase of the extra land would happen, tenants and landowners in Cornfields agreed that everybody living in the community should be able to contribute equally to the amount the community must pay.

"I was born in Cornfields and my parents have been staying here since at least 1949. They have always been tenants. Now that I own land, I will be free to collect wood and to cultivate," Shemba said.

The community has elected a 15 person trust to manage the extra land they have acquired. The trust comprises different interest groups in the community, such as, youth, women, tenants and landowners.

Referring to the inclusion of women, Mr Emmanuel Mbhele, a member of the trust and also the chairman of the Cornfields Residents' Association, said: "There is talk of a new South Africa. Women must also be included in our structures. If they find there is something that they are unhappy about we want them to raise the issues in the structures. We don't want them to come in a group with placards."

Mrs Alzina Xaba, another trust member added: "There's a need for us to be in the trust because we need our rights. We want to have the same rights to the land as men."

The trust members said they knew they would need a lot of training to effectively help the community to manage the land, but they were confident that the lives of the people of Cornfields would improve as a result of the purchase.

The Cornfields and Tembalihle land acquisition is the first to be finalised in terms of the Provision Of Certain Land For Settlement Act 126 of 1993 and it does not contradict proposals for a future land redistribution programme.

In its Reconstruction and Development Programme, the ANC proposed that beneficiaries of land redistribution should contribute towards the cost of land.

And the World Bank has proposed a matching grant scheme to help disadvantaged people get

access to agricultural land. The Bank has proposed that the state provide a grant of 30%, a loan of 50% and that beneficiaries pay 20% towards the cost of the land.

Issues which a new government will have to consider will be the amount of the grant portion and the criteria for beneficiaries to qualify for assistance.

The Cornfields and Tembalihle purchase of about 8 500 hectares of land cost about R6 million, of which the state has paid almost R5 million.

A spokesman for the Department of Regional and Land Affairs said there were another 76 cases pending, 35 of which are in Natal. These involve people living on deproclaimed mining land, labour tenants and landless people, he said.

The state had budgeted R27 million for the land acquisition programme for the 1994/1995 financial year.