

A new role for AFRA

from resistance to reconstruction

WHEN AFRA was formed in 1979, it was positioned in an opposition role to the former government and its policy of forced removals. AFRA's main role then was to assist communities in rural Natal to resist removals, and to draw public attention to the nature and extent of forced removals. AFRA developed a range of services which included monitoring, research, publicity and lobbying, legal support, community mobilisation and organisation to carry out this work.

After 1990, the organisation began to re-define its role and started to transform itself from a short-term crisis and resistance organisation to a long-term advocacy and development NGO, in preparation for post-apartheid land reform and rural reconstruction.

From 1992 to 1994, AFRA's work was divided into land claims, labour tenancy rights and freehold community development and planning. All three elements were linked to the macro strategy of national policy advocacy and lobbying on land and rural development issues. AFRA's operational area was narrowed from the

whole of rural Natal to the midlands and north-western regions of the province.

With several land claiming communities and the National Land Committee (of which it is an affiliate), AFRA played an important role in advancing the struggle for land claims. After at first explicitly refusing to restore land to victims of forced removals, the former government was forced to address the issue partially. After the former government established the Commission on Land Allocation, AFRA worked intensively with six communities to advance their claims through the Commission. Of the six communities, three were successful and one was partially successful in getting their land back. The others are pending. One community which fell outside of the provisions of the Commission took the matter to court, but failed.

At the same time AFRA assisted communities with a regionally and nationally coordinated campaign to put land claims visibly on the national agenda, to expose the limitations of the former government's policies and institutions dealing with land claims, and to shape

and influence policy formulation on land claims.

The soon to be passed Restitution of Land Rights Act brings the era of forced removals to a final close. Although the Act has limitations, it nevertheless marks the first tangible step to compensate victims of apartheid forced removal policy and as such will be an important facet of the reconstruction and development programme.

AFRA's rich past experience and its carefully designed future goals, strategies and structures provide a solid basis for positioning the organisation as an implementing partner with the new government and rural community institutions to meet the land reform component of the RDP in KwaZulu-Natal.

At the same time, as an independent rural service organisation, we reserve for ourselves the right to monitor and critique the policies and practices of the government's land reform programme when the interests of marginal rural people are threatened.