

EMERGING FARMERS

Developing a farmer information package: a success story

After many years of water allocation reform, emerging farmers are still lagging behind as far as equity and access to water resources is concerned, and their participation in water user associations is still limited or passive. Recent collaboration between researchers and the water sector aimed to improve this situation in the Breede-Gouritz catchment management area. Article by Dr Bongani Ncube of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).



In 2013, the Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency (BGCMA), the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC) signed a memorandum of agreement (MOA). The main objective of the agreement was to develop and implement joint research and capacity building programmes based on the BGCMA research and training needs.

Under the auspices of the MOA a project was conceived jointly by CPUT and BGCMA. At the end of 2013 CPUT was awarded a Water Research Commission (WRC) funded project (**K5/2310**) entitled 'Approaches for Emerging Farmer Participation in Water Resource Management: The Case of the Breede-Gouritz

Catchment Management Agency (BGCMA), Western Cape'. Dr Bongani Ncube was the project leader. The project ran from 2014-2017, but activities continued until the end of 2019.

The main objectives of the research were to assess the progress in accessing water by small-scale and emerging farmers, challenges faced by the farmers in participating in water resource management, to explore the opportunities for engaging the farmers in water allocation processes. The research focused on the whole CMA, with detailed consultation with farmers in the Barrydale area and emerging farmers from Hex River Valley Water User Association.

There were huge differences between emerging farmers who were water user association (WUA) members and those who were non-members. None of the 34 members of Barrydale small-scale farmers were part of a water user association, and this was true most of the smallholder farmers.

Water user association members had access to land and water, and they actively participated in the water allocation processes, while non-members farmed on small pieces of insecure leased land (maximum 12 hectares). Water user association members were represented at all levels including in the BGCMA board, and they had access to grants and subsidies. Non-WUA members had limited access to irrigation water, and they had access to few grants. They also shared infrastructure and were mostly passive participants in water related issues.

At the CMA level the water allocation reform process also faced huge challenges, namely

- The slow implementation of the BGCMA water allocation reform strategy. The process faced human capacity limitations/shortages which limited effective implement of the strategy.
- The water use registration and licensing process was also faced with human capacity limits. The licensing process took much longer than expected, and the coordination of the process was also a challenge. In addition, the BGCMA is a water scarce CMA and, in many cases, there was no water to allocate.
- The verification and validation process was took much longer than anticipated due to funding limitations as well as the need to use appropriate methods.

During the course of the project, results were presented to water-related institutions that worked with or supported emerging and smallholder farmers. A workshop was organised in October 2015 to share some of the initial findings of the project. In attendance were the BGCMA, the Department of Water and Sanitation and Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA).

There was a realisation at the workshop that support to the emerging and smallholder farmers was uncoordinated, complicated and ineffective. The institutions decided that there was need for a bigger consultation where all institutions that supported smallholder farmers could discuss the way forward.

Further consultation also continued with the farmers who identified priority issues that they felt needed to be addressed urgently. These were:

- Shortage of water for productive use (agriculture)
- Lack of information e.g. the licensing process
- Lack of funding (access to grants and start-up programs)
- Land shortage (lease agreements were too short)
- Lack of participation in water user associations

Through further meetings and dialogues, the institutions committed to finding solutions to some of the identified challenges. The institutions worked around three questions: 1) What is the problem with the current farmer support systems? 2) Do we need to develop a process for engaging emerging farmers? 3) Do we need a coordination institute or forum?

Plan of action

There was realisation that it would take time to address land and water issues due to the different policies and mandates of the institutions. However, the information gap could be addressed immediately since all institutions had information on their activities and sources of support.

During the CPUT/UWC/BGCMA Water Seminar in March 2016 the institutions and farmer representatives came up with a plan of action and agreed on the following activities:

1. Develop a comprehensive information package, including information from all institutions
2. Combined workshop to refine the package
3. Plan for a roadshow to pilot the package in Barrydale in November 2016
4. Develop a free website to house the package for continuous use

All the institutions committed to send the farmer support information by the end of June 2016. At the end of August 2016, a combined workshop was held to refine the package as planned. A comprehensive information package was therefore compiled. Participating institutions included, the BGCMA, Department of Water & Sanitation: Berg-Olifants Proto CMA, Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Department of Rural Development & Land Reform, and the African Farmers Association of South Africa.

CPUT played the project leadership, coordination and facilitation role. The institutions then agreed to test the package through a pilot roadshow in Barrydale in November 2016. Draft copies of the package were printed by the BGCMA for distribution during the pilot roadshow. There was a good turnout of about 62 farmers and institution representatives. Farmers expressed gratitude that they could now access the officers from the institutions and access information without travelling long distances.

Seeing the huge success of the pilot roadshow the BGCMA decided to set aside funding to reach out to all the small-scale and emerging farmers in the catchment management area. The approach of the roadshows changed from presentations into information cafes led by the different institutions, with farmers moving from one café to the next.

An issue log of problems raised by the farmers was compiled by each institution during the roadshows for follow-up. Follow up meetings were also organised to assess progress in addressing the issues raised during the roadshows. By the end of 2018 a total of 11 roadshows and report back meetings had been held in almost all the BGCMA mandated areas.

A commitment was made by the BGCMA to host and regularly update the information package through their website. The Water Research Commission committed to fund the development of the website and translation of the package from English into Afrikaans and IsiXhosa. The website is freely accessible and it can also be accessed via the mobile phones. The package is also downloadable in the three Western Cape languages. For the farmers who do not have smartphones the

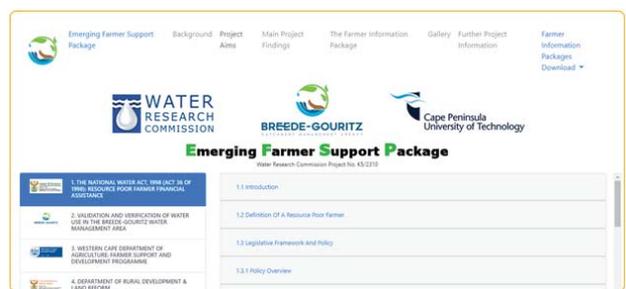
package has been printed into hardcopies for free distribution via the participating institutions.

Launch of the website

The website was officially launched by the institutions and representative farmers on the 12 November 2019.



BGCMA website landing page showing the link to the Farmer Support Package



Front page of the Farmer Support Package

The launch of website was a great achievement and a dream come true for both the CPUT researchers, the BGCMA and collaborating institutions. When the project started in 2014 there was a lot of mistrust between the smallholder farmers and the BGCMA, but through dialogue over the project years the BGCMA and the other water institutions and have become go-to places for help for the smallholder farmers.

During the the launch it was however clear that this work cannot be complete until all smallholder farmers have been reached and have access to water. It was recognised that the Extension Officer remains a crucial on the ground link with all farmers. The Western Cape Department of Agriculture officials requested that presentation by be made at one of their strategic meetings so that more extension officers could participate and be able to work with other institutions in their areas. The Berg-Olifants Proto-CMA officials also made commitment to start roadshows in their area in early 2020. The need to engage municipalities was also emphasised.

Lessons learnt

The project facilitated engagement and partnership building between BGCMA and other water related institutions that support smallholder farmers in the in the Western Cape Province

CPUT benefits from this project include research capacity development and student bursaries. Three female research

assistants were trained and two of them have completed Masters degrees through funding from the project. In 2017 Dr Ncube won the Water Research Commission (WRC) Knowledge Tree Award in the 'Empowerment of Communities' Category, a recognition of the impact of the project on both the smallholder farmers and institutions.

Access to water is still a huge challenge at the farm level. The farmer support package is providing access to information, but there is need for solid commitment and engagement at higher policy level. There are different types of smallholder farmers with different needs, therefore, support systems cannot be one-size fits all.



BGCMA information Café with smallholder farmers from Ceres, October 2018.

For more details:

- Website link: <http://www.breedegouritzcma.co.za/EFSP/index.html>
- Final Report: <http://www.wrc.org.za/mdocs-posts/2310-1-17-2/2310-1-17-3/>
- Article: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pce.2018.05.012>