

Project Title	AgriChurch Initiative
Organisation Name	Fohloza Foundation
Address	85 Central Street Houghton Johannesburg
Website	Fohloza.org



BACKGROUND

Land has a central place in the history of the church. In the missionary history of Southern Africa and indeed globally the acquisition of land for the establishment of mission stations has been a key method of evangelisation. As a result, the church became the owner of relatively large tracts of land in the rural and urban areas. Land acquisition took place through various means including purchase and grants from chiefs and/or colonial authorities. These mission stations would be places that not only provide places of worship but also other social activities like hospitals, schools and farms and other projects.¹

¹ Expressions of community sentiments with regard to church land at SACC conference in 1992, in Gillan D.S. (Ed.), Church Land and Poverty, SACC, NLC, SSP, CLP, Braamfontein, 1998, p. 1 - 5 2



THE PROBLEM

Most of these missions were funded by Europe based communities and organisations which meant that for a solid period these projects were sustainable. These missions employed villagers and always had an educational component to them. Over the years the funding that was provided has run dry and many churches and missions are now left with vast tracts of land which are no longer in use. Those that are in use are not all being used for example there are schools which have unused land etc.

The same challenges of food security, agricultural participation and agricultural education that many communities had in the past have not changed instead other complexities like the high unemployment rate and the inability to access education and training have deepened this challenge. Another component is that many churches might not know what to do with the fertile land they occupy because their primary mission or the reason for existence has been evangelisation.

In addition to this, the historical economic activity of South Africa has been such that the desire for employment has meant that people have had to move to cities. This has led to less people participating or even considering remaining in the rural areas in pursuit of an agriculture orientated career. This has meant that there has been a consistent neglect of rural areas and most development has been in the economic hubs which are cities.

PROJECT SUMMARY

To begin this work, there is a need that all stakeholders in the sector be engaged. Working with Agricultural economist Wandile Sihlobo in partnership with the Fohloza Foundation several consultative conversations have taken place. Organisations like AgriSA and the South African Council of Churches were identified as possible key stakeholders that might assist in the setting up of this project. A meeting was held between the SACC and AgriSA in July 2024 where it was agreed that both the SACC and AgriSA, who are both membership-based organisations would engage their membership to see if there would be interest in such a programme. There is an agreement by most stakeholders that agriculture is not only vital for South Africa's economy, but also the sustainability of rural communities, and there is a growing recognition of the sector's potential to contribute to the growth of the rural economy, job creation, and national food security. The consultation phase for the SACC and AgriSA is meant to cover two important components:

Gillan D.S. (Ed.), Church Land and Poverty, SACC, NLC, SSP, CLP, Braamfontein, 1998, p. 1 - 53
Bruwer E, "The Church and Land Reform: The case of the Dutch Reformed Church", Paper presented at
Church and Land conference, Stellenbosch University, 1996 4
Land and Rural Digest, "A knotty moral issue: church and land", Vol.1, No.3, October /November 1998

- Is the Church, especially those churches that have land suitable for farming, interested to partner with the agricultural sector in developing (or even leasing) the land for agricultural purposes?
- Is the business sector interested to work with churches through formal agreements to kickstart the programme and invest resources to this end?

For this reason, the AgriChurch Initiative is envisaged to work in three main areas:

1. Church land as a catalyst for community farming for the benefit of the community
2. The church and participation in the business of agriculture
3. Church land as training places for agriculture.

TARGET AREA AND BENEFICIARIES

This initiative is aimed at all churches that have land which is suitable for agriculture. It is aimed for leaders of churches Leaders (Reverends, Pastors etc.), Leaders of Fraternal, Leaders of Ecumenical Bodies, Leadership boards and finance committees, farming cooperatives and community-based farmers, councillors and other local leaders, leaders from the Department of Agriculture, the business community and community leaders. It is envisaged that a pilot approach will have to be employed for the approach to be adequately tested and adjusted. This can take place anywhere in the country because member churches exist all over the country and beyond.

APPROACH AND METHOD

During the engagements with possible partners and funding agencies the question of method and approach was discussed although in an informal manner. Organisations that come onboard might have to consider forming a non-profit organisation or vehicle to address the ownership and governance structure including accessing the benefits that come with being a Non-profit entity. This will assist in accessing funding for agriculture, training and food security agencies so that this work does not draw excessively from the other programmes that partners are engaged in. This conversation is ongoing and should, after the stakeholder engagements, reach finality and begin implementation in the new year.

The Fohloza Foundation

The Fohloza Foundation is a South African based Trust constituted for the support and empowerment of widows (spouses) and children of deceased ministers of the Gospel, and other such families or persons in distress, and for the development and training of Christian ministers of religion and other persons working in the in the religious environment. One of the key objectives is to eradicate poverty through the physical support programme which provides food and other support for over one hundred families. In addition, to capacitate ministers of the Gospel so that they are equipped holistically as individuals and for ministry.