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EXPERIENCES OF THE AFRICAN ALLIANCE SUB-REGIONAL FARMERS ORGANISATION

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1. Overview and Rise of National African Farmers Union of South Africa (NAFU SA)

The History of South Africa is bi-polar, marked and couched within more than three hundred years of racial exploitation and inequalities of resource distribution in all sphere of human socio-economic well being. This inequality is sharp in terms of significant land segregation and land dispossession of black people. Since the coming to power of the democratic government, there has been slow progress to address the pressing concern of the majority of black people as neo-liberal policies have taken centre stage and widened the gap of the have's and have not's; the majority of the have not's are black farmers; and the poorest amongst this category are the emerging farmers and the landless. Even after 13 years of democracy, the status quo of emerging farmers and the landless has not changed much. The rising demand to have this situation changed gave rise to National African Farmers Union of South Africa (NAFU SA).

2. History of Agriculture Unions in South Africa

Unions are not new to South African Landscape, for example the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) was formed as a national representative body as early as 1904, and prior to this farmers had been organized at local and provincial levels and also into cooperatives, it is documented that the first cooperative was established in 1892. According to ODA (1995), SAAU had considerable success in securing for commercial farmers preferential terms of trade, subsidies, and protection from external competition. By contrast, until 1991, when the National African Farmers' Union (NAFU SA), was formed, there was no national-level organization to represent emerging farmers. Although such farmers were often involved in garden clubs at the local level, there were no higher-level bodies to represent their interests to outsiders or facilitate an exchange of information. Indeed, the only reasonably effective structures for small farmers that existed prior to NAFU SA were those supported by the sugar industry in KwaZulu Natal. Therefore, NAFU SA has had to compete in an Arena, where white Unions have had over 300 years of support and sufficient funding for their organisations and operations, a great contrast with NAFU SA. NAFU SA has faced a lot of challenges; notably, the lack of financial support, especially in its early formative years and limited

capacity to forge ahead to re-dress past inequality which are deep-rooted in the history of the nation. Yet despite the challenges, the Union has grown as an important player in Agriculture in the Country However, NAFU SA has faced a lot of challenges; notably, the lack of financial support especially in its early formative years and limited capacity to forge ahead to re-dress past inequality which are deep-rooted in the history of the nation.

3. Objective of NAFU SA

NAFU SA stands as the voice of emerging farmer, and the landless in agriculture development in South Africa. The broader aims of NAFU SA are:

- To lobby for policy reforms aimed at leveling the field in all agricultural matters with particular reference to land acquisition, agricultural funding, market access and public policy;
- To lobby for the provision of appropriate services e.g. extension, marketing and credit to members;
- To identify, quantify and address the needs of members;
- To facilitate the provision of training;
- To empower women and young people so as to enable them to participate fully in farming activities.

3. The National African Farmers Union of South Africa (NAFU SA) present experiences

In recent years, with the strengthening NAFU SA, the growing demands from emerging farmers to readdress a number of challenges notable; inequitable distribution of land, lack of financing, technology and skills gap. Other realities are; the momentum in need for change especially with the slow pace of land reforms has led to national discontent in many quarters. Other problems have been social ills manifesting in all manner like crime, HIV/AIDS, violence and many others. Members of NAFU SA sees these manifestations as seeds that would grow to impact on the overall agriculture sector development. There is also a realisation that a repositioning and re-organisation of the union is required to address the growing demands from the emerging farmers.

The presented challenges are vast for NAFU to have a strong policy and research units, farmer support and the organisation would require new strategies and assessment of its alliances, and creating new alliance in a need address the ever growing farmer demands, needs, energy, and to harness the growing advocacy and lobby power of the emerging farmer union.

4. Repositioning and re-organisation of NAFU SA

To date, NAFU SA membership has grown exponentially; to over 400,000 members throughout the nine provinces of the country (this is still considered modest estimates pending the registry underway to re-register members). With this ever growing membership, organised around provincial nodes in all the nine provinces of the country, the organisation is now emerging as a central cog in agricultural transformation of South Africa. This rapid growth, coupled with emerging national and global challenges in agriculture policy and practice is placing new challenges and demands on the country and the organisation.

From its inception, the organisation has worked hard to create an arena to give voice and expression to its members. This has also brought about the need to streamline support services and to create stronger local nodes of the organisation. Though challenged by inadequate funding to staff its operations and contribute to overall implementation of the black farmer's agenda, the organisation has forged ahead to be the mouth piece of black farmer empowerment and the vehicle to assist transform the agriculture sector in South Africa. Yet NAFU SA still has to be accountable to its members and carry the voice of being the pacifier, negotiator, fact finder in a bid for accountability to its constituency.

NAFU SA understands that agriculture in South Africa is an important part of the economy. It is seen as means to address past injustices; this being, entry of black farmers in this sector, equitable land distribution, the avenue to accelerate rural development and agriculture is also a significant contributor to the economy. Though this is less than 4% to GDP, it still accounts for 10% of total reported employment.

Agriculture in South Africa is well-diversified with field crops, livestock and horticulture the main sectors. Wine and fruit production have hasten the most dynamic development in the past ten years with a large share of total output exported, mainly to Europe.

Furthermore, Policy changes since 1990 has seen substantial macroeconomic and social reforms implemented, these include deregulation of the marketing of agricultural products; abolishing certain tax concessions favoring the sector; reductions in budgetary expenditure on the sector; land reform; and trade policy reform. Even with significant increase in commercial export the agriculture conditions are still not favourable for the majority of South Africans, especially emerging farmers in most regions of the country due to poor land quality, highly variable climatic conditions and scarce water, especially in former homeland where most Black farmers operate from. Further, despite progress made since 1994, around policy implementation for example, the slow pace of land reform has put a dark cloud on government efforts to reform the sector. The developments still illustrates that though commercial farming sector still co-exists with a large number of subsistence(communal) farms, the continued dualistic nature of the sector of the country's landscape perpetuate the racial divide in allocation of resources and services creating a national impasse on these and other matters.

Noted in recent months is a growing uneasy and restlessness in NAFU SA constituency around the country on a number of socio-political and economic concerns; firstly, it is the slow pace of land reform and secondly the associated political development which members feel will eventually impact on the future stability of agriculture sector and the Nation.

4. Experiences of NAFU SA in Alliance Building

The Experiences of NAFU SA as an organisation can be characterized into 4 main phases in its institutional development; these phases are: Phase 1, which is institutional building, phase 2; marked by building strategic alliances and assessment of its position of the institutional – Phase 3 and 4 seem to be happening simultaneously, which are

professionalizing the organisation as well as institutional assessment (re-positioning & re-organisation). The phases are not well demarcated in practices and blur into each other, or merge.



Figure 1: Phase of NAFU SA experiences in institutional Building

Phase 1; Institutional Building:

The history of NAFU SA illustrates the experiences in African alliance and organizational building. As the President of NAFU SA illustrated in his presentation to the Executive committee, that from inception, the path NAFU has travelled one cannot tell if it is circular, straight or zigzag, however, the journey and experiences learnt toward achieving the goal he claimed has depended on a number of factors – most importantly he outlines key principles in the growth of NAFU SA, which he stated have been having:

- A committed cadre
- A clear vision
- A participatory process

Though they have been many problems, the greatest challenge he has had to deal with has been power struggles characterized with inception phases of organizational building. As the President of NAFU SA stated that; “from its inception the approach that NAFU SA took was characterized by lobby and advocacy. The Union during this period was small and fluid in nature and wanted to create a membership base, gain legitimacy within the country as well as spread its vision within the provinces and nation. It is clear that this phase did not involve a very larger team but a small team that pushed the vision and was commitment. The institution it seems never worked in a structured manner until later in the inception phase. It is clear that NAFU SA was very successful in this phase and helped propel its place in agriculture development in South Africa, and agriculture politics, though NAFU SA, remains vocal that it is a non-political entity, but there only for the commercialization of emerging farmers.

Phase 2 & 3 – Development of Strategic alliances:

During the first phase, its players were significant in putting NAFU on the map of South Africa agriculture development agenda, yet as member ship begun to rise within its nodes in the provinces there was need to put some structure into place to support the growth and also develop institutional policies to operationalise the federal system that was proposed. This was also the period when leadership in South Africa wanted to see a more united voice in agriculture development in the country. Through a presidential initiative NAFU SA had to be part of the South African Strategic Framework for Agriculture Development. NAFU SA entered a landmark alliance of intention for unity for agriculture for the 2 major union’s camps (Black and white).

Other alliances too had to be pursued with other institutions and agricultural associations. This period has also been characterized by call from members for more practice interventions by the organisation and the need to see implementable projects and programmes. This has put added strain on a thinly staffed central office as well as provincial nodes to account to its members in tangible benefits of belonging to the union.

In order to provide quality farmer support, the organisation is re-organizing itself to expand in terms of staff and create portfolio that attend to farmer needs. For example there is a need for research and policy development that gives NAFU, the legitimacy to voice out the demands and needs of its members; also farmer support programme needs some Extensionist approach to attend to the growing member demands. All this is happening in the midst of growing demand in the sector for NAFU to be part of all activities that are happening as a key stakeholder. With lack of support from government from its inception, it is an ever growing challenge for the Union.

Phase 4 – Re-visioning

As membership rose too quickly the union had a lot of people on board some not even farmers but looking for opportunities without a clear vision of why the union was formed. This has given rise to a number of leadership challenges for the organisation and it is clear a re-visioning and structural change may be necessary to address these emerging issues. In summary the table below summarizes the phases of development of NAFU SA.

Phases	Key activities /character of institution
Phase 1: Inception/Formation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vision/mission etc Assemble of loose organisation Creation of Key decision making structure Approach mainly - Lobby/advocacy assessment of other unions strengths and weaknesses
Phase 2: Organisation Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy development/ institution/nodes etc strategic alliance formation (who will assist your agenda) Re-positioning/ restructuring/ assessment professionalization begins/ identify innovation assessment
Phase 3: Professionalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionalization continues / training capacity of decision makers/ staff assessment
Phase 4: Standard Formation/ assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionalization continues / global institution Real full scale assessment

5. Conclusion

The path that NAFU SA has travelled has made the union emerged as a key role player in country agricultural agenda. The exponential growth in member may be attributed to the fact that NAFU SA offers a union that gives hope for many black farmers that expected a lot of change after 1994, demise of apartheid. It could also be attributed to the weakening of local civic movements in the country and NAFU SA has also been the most vocal voice on issue of Land and land dispossession and therefore offers hope to other groups, for example, the landless movement. Significant too is that NAFU also has been instrumental in bridging the relation between government and the Unions, especially the White Farmers Union and the government.

Yet Organisation Reality, of this ever growing union with little support from government is the need for resources, in terms if financing, and the need for skilled staff capacity to move organisation forward. The growth of organisation has also brought about issues of how to communicate effective messages to all members and keep update of activities within the federal structure it has created. Because of the nature of its formation the organisation is top heavy and this needs to be re-structured to a structure that supports new farmer demands. The future for NAFU is full of challenges, yet the union has hope for emerging farmers of South Africa and is calling for Unity of the white and Black unions to have one body that call farmers in South Africa, neither “Black nor white farmer”, but farmers of South Africa.

