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*RURAL LIVELIHOODS, INSTITUTIONS AND
VULNERABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICA*

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Rural Livelihoods, Institutions and Vulnerability in South Africa*

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Drawing on a case study from North West Province, this paper examines how, and why, rural livelihoods have changed in one of the former bantustans over the past four decades. It focuses on the nature and extent of processes of differentiation and the resources that have been critical in such processes. It examines the major risks different kinds of people face in their efforts to construct and reconstruct livelihoods and their responses to these risks. The sources of these risks include institutions governing resource access and contract enforcement, together with labour and commodity markets. Responses have often taken the form of livelihood diversification, between activities and across space, putting a premium on access to information and social networks, as well as to the State. Others have responded to risk by clustering around a person with a regular income. Policy interventions to promote poverty reduction must combine support for the generation of livelihoods with institutional reform to reduce vulnerability to risk.

Introduction

This paper discusses the impact of local institutions and institutional change on people's efforts to construct livelihoods in the former 'bantustan' of Bophuthatswana. Most of the poorest South Africans live in the now re-incorporated bantustans. Black South Africans have been deliberately excluded from access to land, capital, employment and education. But there are important differences between these regions and within them. While many people lack land, others have land but not the means to work it. For large numbers of people, the most pressing need is for employment. People also put together livelihoods in diverse ways. There are regions which offer at least some of their population the possibility to make a living locally. In others,

* This research is part of a collaborative project with Colin Murray and Rachel Slater of the Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester, *Multiple Livelihoods and Social Change*, funded by the UK Department for International Development. The project involves comparative research on multiple livelihoods and social differentiation in Qwaqwa and North West Province. I should like to thank Ben Mosiane and Nancy Moilwa, of the University of the North West, who assisted me in my field research, and staff at the North West Province Department of Land Affairs.

people depend mainly on resources coming from urban areas in the form of wages, remittances and pensions or on seasonal labour on white farms. Settlements range from closely settled rural slums to widely dispersed communities of farmers and pastoralists. Rural populations are also highly stratified, with income and asset distribution skewed by class, gender, ethnic identity or date of arrival. This stratification is bound up with inequalities of voice and power.

I carried out research in Madibogo and the neighbouring settlement of Madibogopan, which lie about 90km south west of Mafikeng in the Central District of North West Province. Major themes were household differentiation and changing livelihoods in the years stretching from the beginning of the large-scale influx of population in the late 1960s and 1970s to the present. There are, therefore, several stories to tell. One concerns the efforts of people who moved off white farms to reconstruct their livelihoods. Another concerns the impact of recession and growing unemployment in the South African labour market on a migrant labour reserve. A third concerns responses to the institutional changes that have been brought about in the locality since its reincorporation into South Africa in 1994. Differentiation is a central feature of all these processes.

The Regional Context

Bophuthatswana, which gained nominal 'independence' in 1977, under the Presidency of Lucas Mangope, was formed from 'Tribal' land, administered as African reserves under the authority of chiefs. To this was added land acquired by the South African Development Trust from white farmers. Supposedly an independent Tswana 'nation', Bophuthatswana remained closely controlled by the South African State and highly dependent on it, financially and politically.

Mangope's regime was based on personal rule and held together by patronage and corruption. Jobs, land and trading licences were pieces of patronage distributed in ways that aimed to maintain political support.¹ Potential opposition was repressed and intimidated and the ANC was banned. For these reasons civil society barely existed, a legacy which has made it difficult to develop more participatory political institutions since 1994.² Local government was vested in the Chieftaincy, as was the case in the other bantustans. Chiefs were appointed by the Bophuthatswana government. While some Chiefs were popularly considered legitimate, others were thought to be little more than stooges. Local politics revolved around resource access and service delivery.

In 1994, Bophuthatswana was reincorporated into South Africa, in the new North West Province, with a Provincial Assembly and administration based in Mafikeng. Institutional transformation in the Province has been slow and difficult. Local government restructuring has aimed at providing local councils that are both financially viable and democratically accountable. In North West, restructuring has involved the creation of a single-tier of local government in rural areas. Five Transitional District Councils provide services. The scale of their needs for development expenditures far outruns their capacity to raise revenue.³ Poorly trained, and poorly motivated staff, skills shortages, overstaffing and inadequate monitoring

¹ M. Lawrence and A. Manson, ' "The Dog of the Boers": The Rise and Fall of Mangope in Bophuthatswana' , *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20,3 (1994), pp. 447-61; J. Seiler, 'Bophuthatswana: a State of Politics' in J. Seiler (ed.) *Transforming Mangope's Bophuthatswana: Towards Democracy in North West Province* (Johannesburg: Daily Mail and Guardian, 1999), available at http://www.mg.co.za/mg/projects/bop/ch_one.html.

² Seiler, *ibid.*

³ C. Pycroft, 'Integrated Development Planning and Rural Local Government in South Africa', *Third World Planning Review*, 22,1 (February, 2000), pp.87-102; C. Pycroft, 'Democracy and Delivery: the Rationalization of Local Government in South Africa', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 66,1 (March, 2000), pp.143-159. For a discussion of the shortcomings of South African institutions charged with poverty-reduction, see L. Bornstein, 'Institutional Context' in J. May (ed.) *Poverty and Inequality in South Africa: Meeting the Challenge* (Cape Town: David Philip and London and New York: Zed, 2000).

reduce the ability of local councils to make effective use of their resources. Additionally, the Transitional District Councils cover areas which are so large and populations which are so dispersed that they appear remote to their electorates.⁴ The tasks facing local government have been made even greater by stagnation in the national economy. In 1999, the national Government estimated that unemployment stood at 36.2 per cent nationally, while 42.0 per cent of economically active people living in North West Province were unemployed. The equivalent figure for rural Africans in the Province was 48.0 per cent.⁵ Job losses have been accompanied by a marked shift towards more casualised forms of employment. The impact of this on people's ability to form and sustain relationships, keep a household together, indeed, make any long-term plans, has been devastating.

Madibogo and Madibogopan

Madibogo and Madibogopan are both longstanding settlements. Madibogo has been the seat of the Chief of the Barolong boo Ratlou boo Seitshiro since the establishment of the boundary between the Transvaal and British Bechuanaland in 1881.⁶ Like many other settlements in the region, these villages experienced a massive inflow of people in the 1960s and 1970s. Africans were forcibly relocated from urban areas and 'black

⁴ Pycroft, 'Democracy and Delivery'.

⁵ Statistics South Africa, *October Household Survey 1999*, Tables 2.2.1 and 2.2, available at <http://www.statssa.gov.za>. Note that these data are based on an 'expanded definition' of unemployment, which includes respondents who stated that they were unemployed, but who had not actively looked for work in the previous four weeks. The 'official definition', which counts only those unemployed who had sought work in the previous four weeks, produces unemployment estimates of 23.5 per cent for the economically active population of North West as a whole and 26.0 per cent for economically active rural Africans. Some of the poorest people in Madibogo were those without the resources needed to look actively for work, suggesting that the 'expanded definition' is a better measure of unemployment in rural areas.

⁶ Madibogopan is a much smaller village lying about 5km from Madibogo, similar to it in composition of population. Except where differences between the two settlements are relevant, later references to Madibogo cover both villages.

spot' settlements in white farming areas.⁷ Thousands of workers living on white commercial farms were squeezed off them by the pressures of agricultural restructuring.

From the 1950s onwards, white commercial farmers increased the capital intensity of their production, with the support of cheap credit and subsidies from the State.⁸ Farmers no longer relied on their tenants' cattle for ploughing, as tractors replaced oxen, while they replaced human labour with machines. The overall demand for farm labour fell, while farmers also replaced permanent workers with seasonal, casual labour. An estimated 500,000 'full-time' farm workers left the sector between 1960 and 1971.⁹ The large majority of these people moved to the bantustans. Subsequent changes in agricultural policy regimes also led to labour shedding. Crop and credit subsidies were reduced in the 1980s, squeezing out many marginal farmers and encouraging shifts away from maize production to less intensive forms of land use. In the 1990s, liberalisation of agricultural marketing and withdrawal of state assistance led many commercial farmers to diversify into livestock grazing, agro-tourism and part-time farming. Such changes may well represent overall efficiency gains, but they have led to further, substantial job losses.¹⁰

The population of Madibogo village increased from an estimated 2000 in the mid-1950s to around 20,000 in the early 1980s.¹¹ Many in this inflow were ex-

⁷ Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa. Volume 5: The Transvaal*, (Cape Town: Surplus People Project, Pietermaritzburg: c/o AFRA, 1983).

⁸ Schirmer, S, 'Policy visions and historical realities: land reform in the context of recent agricultural developments' *African Studies*, 59,1(Jul 2000), pp.143-167.

⁹ J. Nattrass, *The South African Economy: Its Growth and Change* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Schirmer, 'Policy Visions and Historical Realities'.

¹¹ Breutz, a Government anthropologist who surveyed the area in the mid-1950s, estimated that Madibogo then had a population of about 2000 and that there were 1,800-2000 people in Madibogopan. In 1983, the Surplus People Project estimated that there were 20,000 people living in Madibogo, while the 1991 Bophuthatswana Census recorded a population of 22,000. The 1996 Population Census recorded 26,327 people in Madibogo and 6817 in Madibogopan (P.-L. Breutz, *The Tribes of Mafeking District*, Department of Native Affairs, Ethnological Publications No. 32 (Pretoria: Government

farmworkers from the Transvaal, Free State and Northern Cape. Most had little room for manoeuvre, though some could exercise choice over when to leave, or where to settle. The railway station made Madibogo relatively accessible for people migrating for work. The land looked fertile enough for farming and there were white farms nearby where people might find work in the weeding and harvest seasons.

Madibogo lies beyond daily commuting distance to any of the major centres of employment in North West Province. The village has a few services. There is a post office, a petrol station and several primary and secondary schools, but it has no permanent clinic, while the nearest hospital is over 50km away. It is better served for transport than many other settlements in Central District, however. As well as the railway station, the tarred road from Setlagole to Delareyville runs along the edge of the village, while the main road through the village is tarred. The roads in Madibogopan are in much poorer condition. Like all settlements in this region, however, Madibogo suffers from the poor road network connecting the towns in the Province with each other and with the major centres of industry and commerce in Gauteng Province.

There is an acute shortage of arable and grazing land. Most people who arrived in Madibogo in the last thirty years were allocated a house site, but no rights over arable land. The acute shortage of land has also restricted access amongst longstanding residents. On most of the house sites, there is little space for growing crops or keeping livestock. Many people who do have rights over arable land lease their land to both black and white farmers, receiving a payment of anything between one in three and one in ten bags of grain.

Printer, 1955); Surplus People Project, *Forced Removals in South Africa*, Vol. 5; Republic of Bophuthatswana, *1991 Population Census* (Mmabatho: Central Statistical Service, 1993); Republic of South Africa, *Population Census* (1996). Available at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/> Informants' accounts

African farmers have been growing crops commercially in this area for well over a century.¹² Many have been able to produce on a substantial scale, sharecropping several hundred hectares. Most commercial sharecroppers produce maize using tractors, planters, trailers and threshing machines bought secondhand from white farmers.¹³

However, the large majority of people had to look elsewhere for the resources they needed to reconstruct their livelihoods. Labour migration from Madibogo is mostly long distance and the large majority of migrants go to Johannesburg, to other industrial towns in Gauteng and Free State Provinces and to the Rustenburg and Klerksdorp areas in North West Province. The majority of women migrants from Madibogo appear to be domestic workers. In the 1970s and 1980s, male migrants worked on the mines, in the construction industry or did factory work. From the late 1980s onwards, a substantial proportion of these jobs disappeared, as employment in the non-agricultural sectors of the national economy declined steeply. The people who once held these jobs have had to move into more casualised forms of work ('piece jobs'). Periods of job search have become longer and more costly and this is changing patterns of movement. Older people, who have now retired to Madibogo, often spent long periods in one place, with the same employer. Younger migrants have to be more mobile, moving in search of work from town to town in North West Province and Gauteng and often returning home for months or years at a time. Young people in this position find it difficult to acquire the resources needed to form or sustain households.

chimed with these figures, suggesting that most of the population increase took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹² J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: the Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Vol. 2 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹³ G. Stacey, 'The Origin and Development of Commercial Farmers in the Ditsobotla and Molopo Regions of Bophuthatswana', (M.Sc. (Agric.) thesis, University of Pretoria, 1992). Stacey identified a group of commercial farmers selling more than ten tons of maize per annum to local depots, of whom he surveyed a hundred.

Some remain living with parents after marriage, others foster their children with relatives. Financial pressures may lead to marital breakdown. For all these reasons, households vary considerably in terms of both their composition and their stability over time.

Madibogo lies close to the white commercial farming districts of Delareyville, Vryburg and Lichtenburg. The commercial farming sector is an important source of local employment and offers some of the poorest people a degree of food security. Most of this employment is seasonal work on white farms, though some local black farmers also employ both permanent and seasonal workers. The 505 farms in Delareyville District alone probably employ about 30,000 seasonal workers.¹⁴ Wages are low (c.R200 for a month's work) and the informants who are involved in seasonal farm work come from the poorest group in my sample. People doing this work stressed the importance of the wages they receive in kind – commonly, 25x60kg sacks of maize at the end of the harvest. However, the commercial farming sector generates few non-farm rural incomes. Some women do seasonal crop processing. But there are few other linkages between the farm sector and the rest of the local economy, since production is highly capital intensive, while agricultural inputs and marketing are largely controlled by a few, powerful co-operatives.¹⁵ Apart from farm work, there is little local employment. A few people work in shops, in the schools and in the Tribal Office. There is also some work available in the building trade, while some of the better-off households employ domestic workers.

The most important sources of income are remittances and pensions. 58 per cent of the 40 households whose members I interviewed in 1999 were receiving

¹⁴ E. Francis, *Making a Living: Changing Livelihoods in Rural Africa* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.39.

¹⁵ N. Amin and H. Bernstein, 'The Role of Agricultural Co-operatives in Agricultural and Rural Development' (Johannesburg: Land and Agriculture Policy Centre, 1996), typescript.

remittances and 38 per cent were receiving pensions. But only the oldest people entirely depend on receiving money directly from these sources. Others try to construct locally-generated forms of livelihood. Younger people try to tap into flows of money coming in from outside through small-scale trading, or by providing services such as house building. These activities seem to have little capacity for generating income growth, however, as will be discussed later in the paper.

Research methods

I carried out forty-one life history interviews with people in forty different households in the villages of Madibogo and Madibogopan and with farmers on nearby state land at Geysdorp between March and June 1999.¹⁶ I used a unified interview framework that included questions about contemporary livelihoods and interviews lasted around two hours. I aimed to capture diversities in livelihoods, resource access and income levels, rather than to construct a statistically representative sample. I also conducted interviews dealing with the local and regional institutional context with Paramount Chief Phoi at Madibogo, the chief at Madibogopan, their headmen, local councillors, other local political activists, members of local community-based organisations (CBOs), officials in the Central District Council, the provincial Departments of Land Affairs, Agriculture and Local Government and Planning, and the National African Farmers' Union.¹⁷

Differentiation and Livelihoods

¹⁶ I interviewed husband and wife together in seven cases.

¹⁷ In line with the policy of consolidating former RSA and bantustan districts into a unified local government structure, Ditsobotla District became part of the new Central District in 1996. Central District Council has jurisdiction over the old magisterial districts of Marico, Lichtenburg, Coligny and

Differentiation

Poverty is widespread in Madibogo, but there are also substantial differences between households concerning access to land and livestock, to wage incomes and remittances and to welfare payments. Four different categories of household were identifiable, ranging from the relatively wealthy to those with no regular source of income. These categories were positions, which households might move between, rather than fixed groups. Positions were shaped by processes associated with the formation and development of households, together with longer-term processes of accumulation and loss of assets. Given the project's focus on differentiation, the small category of commercial farmers and businesspeople was deliberately overrepresented, in order to study the various routes through which they have acquired resources. This group of five households, Category 1, were in a distinctive position, in terms of the great difference between their income levels and livelihood strategies and those of the large majority of people. Two had leased farms on state land in the Geysdorp area; one, a headmaster, jointly inherited a farm of 450ha with his five siblings; one owned two shops and ran a small farm; another combined sharecropping with a small transport business. Their incomes were all well over R50,000 a year. Lucas Sentsho was the most successful person in this category.

Lucas Rammui Sentsho *was born in Krugersdorp in 1936. His father farmed about 30ha at Rietvlei, on land occupied by a group of families. Lucas remembered that his father had fourteen oxen, a span, and about ten cows, as well as some goats. As the mine of South Roodepoort expanded, however, it began to undermine the soil at Rietvlei, forcing people to abandon farming and move away to townships in the area.*

Delareyville in the former Transvaal Province, and Molopo, Ditsobotla and Lehurutshe in former

“Our fathers moved to the townships and left the grannies on the farm. Now it’s just a sea of shacks where I was born.” Lucas’ father worked on the surface at several mines, but the work gave him asthma. He found a job at a broom and brush factory and worked there from 1947 to 1973, when he retired.

Lucas was the oldest of nine children and the only one to matriculate from school. His found his first job in 1953 at a music publishers, Gallo Africa, where he worked as a wage clerk. He married in 1958. In 1962, Lucas became a lay minister and he then decided to become an Anglican priest, joining the Church in 1964. He had always been an altar boy, his grandfather was a catechist, his father was a churchwarden and his mother was “very strict, very strong religiously”. “Priests were my role models”. Mr Gallo, his employer, who was very religious, also influenced him. After three years of training in a seminary, he was ordained. His first posting was Mohalakeng, in Randfontein. He spent 1970-71 in Sharpeville and 1972-92 in Wolmaransstad. In 1985, his wife died, leaving him with three children. He later married a widow, Olvah, with four children of her own.

In 1974, Lucas began farming with one of his neighbours in Wolmaransstad, Andrew Mothebe, whose wife had been at school with him. Andrew’s aunt at Boons had some land and Andrew ploughed the land for her in 1972 and 1973. At the end of 1973, Andrew began to lease a farm at Ramatlabama, which lies north of Mafikeng, close to the border with Botswana. This land had been acquired by the South African Development Trust, with the intention of making it available to the people of Botshabelo, a community from Ventersdorp, who were scheduled for forced removal to Bophuthatswana. In the meantime, the SADT leased the land out. Andrew approached Lucas, suggesting that Lucas help him to buy diesel in exchange for

grain. They did this for three years, until the people of Botshabelo were moved onto the land. Andrew and Lucas then were transferred to SADT land at Geysdorp. The eighteen farms at Geysdorp were earmarked for people due to be removed from Motlatla village, near Koster.

Lucas paid for the farming operation and a cousin of Andrew's managed everything. In 1982, Andrew's cousin left and Lucas acquired his own farm. After the cessation of forced removals, the Geysdorp farmers were given annual leases. However, in October 1992, they were given new contracts for seven years. Mangope was about to make Lucas a Governor in Ditsobotla (senior official in charge of the District) when the Bophuthatswana regime was overthrown and Bophuthatswana was reincorporated into South Africa.

Lucas grew maize, sunflower and groundnuts on the Geysdorp farm. Lucas sold his maize and sunflowers to Noordweskooperasie while he sold his groundnuts to a private dealer. He grew the groundnuts on a contract basis. The profit was about R150,000, over 120ha (1.2 tonnes per ha). In 1999, he also planted 70ha of maize and 65ha of sunflower. Sunflower paid about R1,200 per tonne, and the yield was 0.8 tonnes per ha. Maize usually yielded 1.5 tonnes per ha and he expected to get R800 per tonne.

Lucas belonged to NAMPO, the national maize growers' organisation. Andrew Mothebe and he were amongst the first black farmers to attend the NAMPO Congress. NAMPO had lobbied the Department of Land Affairs in favour of the Geysdorp farmers to be given a purchase option on the farms they were leasing. In 1999, the DLA confirmed that Lucas would be given a purchase option on the 342.6 ha farm.¹⁸ The property included a large, well-maintained farmhouse. There was plenty of farm

equipment and both Lucas and Olvah, a schoolteacher, drove Mercedes Benzes. “We hear that the Barolong people have claimed this land, but DLA people say the claim has come too late.”

Lucas’s son Steven, born in 1958, had a degree from the University of Zululand and worked in management in a mine at Odendaalsrus. Helen, born in 1962, a teacher, was studying at the University of Potchefstroom. Laurence, born 1965, had once been a teacher, but was now an insurance broker with Old Mutual. Two of Olvah’s daughters were housewives, another daughter was a teacher. Her son did not complete matric and worked for his sister’s partner in his security firm.¹⁹

This interest of this story lies not only in its picaresque details about a farming vicar and his Mercedes Benzes, but also in the wider processes it reflects. The early part of his family history echoes wider black middle-class experience in twentieth-century South Africa. In other colonised societies in Africa, some people with relatively substantial holdings of land and cattle in the early part of the century passed their advantages onto later generations. They used their earnings from farming to pay school fees and pave their children’s way into the ranks of clerks and school teachers. Their grandchildren belong to the professional middle-class today, although this process has sometimes been stalled, or reversed within families.²⁰ In Lucas’ family, as for so many black South Africans, this process was much more fragile, halted by the (in this case literal) undermining of black farming and extremely limited opportunities to gain a secondary education and find better-paid work. Lucas was the only child in his family to complete secondary school and get a white-collar job. But his parents

¹⁸ DLA is charged to sell-off state land and some leaseholders have been offered the option of purchase.

¹⁹ Interview with Lucas Rammui Sentsho, Geysdorp, 28.5.99.

²⁰ Francis, *Making a Living*.

did pass on a strong commitment to the Church which led him to change profession in the 1960s and get a tertiary education.

The later parts of Lucas' story underline the importance of social networks, information and access to the state in processes of upward mobility during the last thirty years. His social networks gained him a business partner and access to information about available land. His good relationships with the politically powerful in Bophuthatswana are likely to have helped his application to lease land at Geysdorp. His contacts in NAMPO lobbied the new Government on his behalf.

While the 1994 transition may have first appeared as a threat to Lucas' position, it soon seemed more like an opportunity, as Lucas looked set to buy his farm. This part of the story looks more like accumulation in many other parts of Africa, where access to the state has been critically important.

Lucas' story underlines the importance of flexibility and responsiveness to new opportunities in the livelihood strategies of the successful. In this story, the changing political economy of South Africa since the 1960s presents itself as a series of trapezes to be negotiated.

Routine white-collar work ⇒ Tertiary education ⇒ Low-paid professional job ⇒ Agricultural land and capital ⇒ University education and better-paid professional jobs for one's children.

Lucas was the most successful of the Geysdorp farmers and was in a different position from the other relatively successful people interviewed. The others had access to less land and did not have such good political access. They also faced recurring financial problems and produced much less. In these respects they were more typical of black commercial farmers in the rest of the Ditsobotla area in Central District.

These other Category 1 households all combined farming with wage employment or running a small business. Other people had put all of their resources and energy into farming, but they were not the most prosperous farmers. Part-time farmers could draw on wages and business profits for their farming operation, rather than having to rely on high-interest loans. Success in this strategy depended on the ability to mobilise family and kinship networks between sectors and across space. Children and dependent relatives may be called on to manage investments. Such a strategy may spread risk, but it raises problems of labour supervision. Relatives may refuse to be deployed in this way. If they do, it can be difficult to discipline them. Multiple livelihoods are a rational response to uncertainty, but there are costs in terms of productivity. One of the reasons why Lucas Sentsho was able to farm at a distance was that he had special authority over his workers. “The people working on the farm were my parishioners and there were many eyes on the farm.”²¹ Additionally, diversification demands time spent in acquiring information about new opportunities. Many farmers had accumulated large debts and their finances were precarious. The Government now intends to make potential commercial farmers, rather than the rural poor, the chief beneficiaries of its land redistribution programme. The experience of farmers in Madibogo makes this strategy look unlikely to succeed without a great deal of financial support.

Category 2 consisted of sixteen households, receiving two pensions (R1060 per month) and/or regular and substantial remittances (ranging from R200 to R800 per month) or a regular income from trading. The households of Buci Tshabalala and his daughter-in-law, Lydia, were managing from month to month, but lacked the resources needed to improve their livelihoods.

²¹ Interview with Lucas Rammui Sentsho, Geysdorp, 28.5.99.

Buci Windvoel Tshabalala was born on the farm Skoonspruit, near Bothaville, in the Free State, in 1921. His family originally came from Swaziland and had settled at Skoonspruit, where Buci's father used his oxen to work the land of the farmer, Jan Kaaselman, in exchange for four pieces of land to plant for himself. Buci's earliest memories of his father's herd come from the second half of the 1920s, when he had a span of fourteen oxen, together with three or four milking cows. Later on, during the Second World War, the family moved to a farm owned by Kaaselman's son, where they lived until the move to Madibogo. There was no grazing land available for them on this farm and some of the cattle died because of the overcrowding. The family had to rely on the farmer to lend them cattle to make up a full span when they needed to plough.

In 1942, Koos Leuw, who owned a nearby farm, Dornboom, but lived on another farm at Theunissen, asked Buci to move onto Dornboom and tend the cattle he had grazing there, while the rest of the family stayed behind on Kaaselman's son's land. In 1945, Koos Leuw sold Dornboom to D.J. Marée. Koos Leeuw recommended Buci to Marée and so he remained there, driving lorries and tractors and taking Marée's children to school. On this farm, he had no access to grazing land and, hence, no cattle. He finally left Dornboom in 1967/8, after conflict with Marée's son. The younger man had grown up under Buci and now he thought that Buci had too much authority, and thought he was the main person in the farm. "Now he said he should no longer be told what to do. He would bring his own people." Buci moved to Driehoek, a neighbouring farm owned by H.G.G. Reinecke, where he stayed for four years, again working as a driver. Buci was paid one pound per month, together with some payment in produce.

Buci moved to Madibogo in 1973, after he was burned by a threshing machine on Reinecke's farm. He gave two reasons for leaving. One was that the accident left him unable to overpower Reinecke when they fought. The other was Reinecke's behaviour to him after the accident. Reinecke was reluctant to take Buci to hospital. When Buci finally received treatment, Reinecke refused to pay for it. "The hospital staff wrote some notes to take to Reinecke. He went mad." Buci felt hurt and realised that he had been working for a long time for nothing. He told Reinecke, "I've been talking about going to Madibogo. Now I'm going." He also took the papers relating to the hospital treatment to a magistrate, who told him to leave the documents with him. He went back to the magistrate each year until 1977, but Reinecke continued to refuse to accept responsibility for payment.

Buci took nothing with him to Madibogo. After putting up a shack [he has since built a brick house], he returned to the Free State to see another farmer, a man with whom he had grown up. This farmer asked him, "How are you living? What can you do to make a living? I've got a tractor, a planter, a van and a plough. Buy these things." The van, no longer roadworthy, still stood outside Buci's house. Buci paid for all this with some money he had saved up from bridewealth he had received when his children married. Since his savings did not cover the cost, he also paid an amount monthly.

Buci did not receive any farmland and so he began sharecropping, making an agreement with one person each season. "I had serious problems. I would come to an agreement with one person. Then a second person would turn up demanding a share of the crop. They were obviously colluding. When the dispute was taken to the Chief, he would say 'This person is the second owner.' I would just pay the money. I realised that it was because I was an outsider." This suspicion was confirmed when

Buci moved his house. “People would say, ‘What is he doing here? This is a farming area. You can’t put thieves into a farming area.’” So he had to move.

When Buci arrived, his only other source of livelihood was a few goats. When interviewed, he had pigs, geese, chickens and a donkey. He would have liked to get into business, but he could not get a licence. “During Bop, there were even more problems. My children had South African identity documents and they didn’t want a Bop document. It would make it difficult for them to get a job.” He last did sharecropping in 1983. “I was fed up after all the earlier problems with sharecropping. I just lived by praying for people. They paid me [meaning that he may be a traditional healer]”. He had been receiving a pension since 1989. Buci and his wife, Meriam, appeared to be managing and employed a woman to do domestic work for them.

They had eight children, four of whom died. Two of them, Martha, the eldest (born in 1951), and Sarah (born in 1956), were living in QwaQwa. Neither of them had been to school, because they had been required to do domestic work for the farmer. Martha’s husband worked in a mine at Welkom, while she sold food at a taxi rank. Buci and Meriam had not seen her for two years and she never sent them money. Sarah was not married – “Marriage is now much less common”. One of her two children died in the winter of 1999. Esau, born in 1953, was in Johannesburg, and had been unemployed for three years [his wife, Letitia, relates their story below]. Isaac, born in 1961, lived in Bothaville and had been without work for seven years. Before then he worked with Esau, as a driver. He had a wife and four children and Buci sent them money from his pension.²²

²² Interview with Buci Windvoel Tshabalala, Madibogo, 26.3.99.

Letitia Makemoele Tshabalala, Esau's wife, was born at Bultfontein, in the Free State, in 1954. She did farm work and married Esau, who was working on a farm nearby, when she was twenty. They moved to Madibogo when Buci Tshabalala decided to take the family there. "When we arrived, Madibogo was very beautiful. The rain was still good and the yards were bigger than now. We would get maize for the chickens and for eating from around the yard. In the place where we first stayed the yards were big, but we were relocated." The yards in this area were split in 1981.

When they first arrived, Esau moved to Lichtenburg and worked for the Railway Company, while Letitia stayed behind with his parents. She and Esau had their own shack. After three years, Esau moved to Zeerust to work as a driver in a small mine. He moved from Lichtenburg because the pay was low – R35 a week. He did this job for about four years and then moved to a mine in Carletonville, for the same reason. He didn't stay in Carletonville long. After working as a driver for a construction company in Roodepoort for about six years, he moved to a gas company in Krugersdorp. "He's not a patient man. Like his father, he does not like being confronted." Finally, he found a job with a steel company in Krugersdorp, where he stayed for eight years, until his truck was hijacked and he was shot. He went back to work for a while, but left after conflict arose. Now he relied on piece jobs.

When Esau still had a regular job, Letitia would visit him and she also found work herself. For example, when he worked for the gas company she worked in Johannesburg for three years. Then she came home. Since 1996, she had been working for NWK, sorting groundnuts after the harvest. In Johannesburg, she was a domestic worker and they lived at her employer's home. She left because their family

*was growing and she could see that her mother-in-law could not cope with looking after all of the children.*²³

This story, running across three generations, encapsulates some of most common upheavals in the experience of rural dwellers on the Highveld. Buci perceived his father as being in a different position from himself. “My father was not quite working for the farmer. He was planting with the farmer. The farmer gave him a piece of land and he also planted for the farmer.” Buci’s own position involved no such independence, though he clearly felt proud of the trust placed in him by Koos Leuw and D.J. Marée. Buci’s father struck contracts with white farmers, using his own livestock, equipment and family labour to work the land. The younger man brought only his labour power to the relationship. This transition from sharecropping to wage labour happened slowly and unevenly across the Highveld in the first half of the last century, as white farmers moved to intensify their land use.²⁴

The violence and intimacy bound up with paternalism in farm life run through the story and mark its turning points.²⁵ The conflict with Marée’s son epitomises such relationships, in which the white man felt the need to assert himself in the face of the African’s age and authority. In the final conflict with Reinecke, Buci’s pride was wounded when Reinecke refused to fulfil his obligations, though the relationship had clearly also long been stormy. Buci’s exit was precipitated by this quarrel, but the conflict had its roots in the structurally weak position of farm workers in an agricultural sector where production was rapidly becoming more capital intensive. Buci had been considering the move to Madibogo for a long time.

²³ Interview with Letitia Makemoele Tshabalala, Madibogo, 30.3.99.

²⁴ T. Keegan, *Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987); C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine. The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894-1985* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986)

Once there, Buci tried to set himself up as a sharecropper, but his status as an outsider made it impossible to enforce contracts, because he lacked the support of the Chief. Additionally, the Bophuthatswana State explicitly discriminated against non-Tswana, denying them trading licences. Buci's story also underlines the tensions that existed, and continue to exist, between newcomers and longstanding residents. As the population of Madibogo continued to grow, housing plots were subdivided, preventing the family from growing crops at all. Meriam and Buci were coping, but only because of their pensions.

Buci was a member of the Siyaya Communal Property Association, which has applied to DLA for land through the Redistribution Programme. His knowledge of farming and managerial experience would be invaluable to such a group, though his age would make it difficult for him to do more than give advice. Buci's children's livelihoods were much more precarious than his. Reliance on casual work, frequent movement in search of work, difficulties in forming and sustaining households and vulnerability to violence were common themes in life histories from this generation.

The equalising of the state pension received by black and white South Africans (which was R530 per month in 1999) has made a major impact on rural livelihoods, weakening the link between old age and extreme poverty. Now the poorest people are prime-age adults without a regular wage or remittance income, living in households in which nobody is receiving a pension. They may lack marketable skills, they may have too many dependants to be able to work, or they may be too poor to look for work, because of the costs of job search.

While the link between old age and poverty has weakened, other processes linked with the formation, maintenance and dissolution of households, by giving rise to

²⁵ Compare C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*.

points of decision, transition and strain, can push people into poverty. For this reason, looking for developmental-cycle related processes is useful, not least because doing so forces us to distinguish these from other processes which stem from contingencies or from structural changes in the environment.²⁶ However, it is also important to be aware of the fact, long observed in Southern Africa, that conjugal, nuclear households should not be regarded as either universal, or a norm which people necessarily aspire to achieve.²⁷ Domestic relationships are often fluid and may be based on parent-child, sibling, or other relationships.

New households often form gradually, as husband and wife begin to provide for themselves and live apart from their parents-in-law, building their own house and finding and preparing their own supply of food. This means that household formation is a process dependent on there being resources available to cement a stable relationship and meet the costs of setting up a household. If these resources are lacking, young people may not be able to form a household. Buci's explanation of Sarah's position reflects these processes.

Category 3 consists of households with lower, but still regular incomes, such as one pension of R530, or small amounts of remittances (thirteen households). They were in a different position from people who depended solely on casual work (mainly farm labouring). Households with low, but predictable incomes could boost them by using some of their regular income to engage in small-scale trading. This was more

²⁶ Rahman and Hossain, writing about Bangladesh, argue that the vulnerability of the poor can be understood in terms of a set of 'downward mobility pressures', namely: structural factors within the economy; crisis factors such as household contingencies and natural disaster and life-cycle factors, particularly the proportions of economically active and dependent persons in a household. H.Z Rahman, and M. Hossain (eds.) *Re-thinking Rural Poverty: a Case for Bangladesh*. Analysis of Poverty Trends Project (Dhaka: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 1992), draft, cited in D. Hulme and P. Mosley, *Finance Against Poverty*, Vol.1 (London: Routledge, 1996).

²⁷ I. Schapera, *Married Life in an African Tribe* (London: Faber, 1940); C. Murray, *Families Divided: the Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); W. Izzard, 'Migrants and Mothers: Case Studies from Botswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 11,2

the case for prime-age adults than it was for the elderly. Category 4, households with irregular incomes (six households) were unable to do this. They were also extremely vulnerable to the impact of contingencies.

Rebecca Tsitsalala Mogorosi did not know her age, but was probably in her late 50s.

Neither she nor her husband, Johannes Lesolle, had identity documents. Rebecca was Batswana, a Mokoatsi, and her family came from the Free State. Johannes was born near Vryburg and his father came from Lesotho. Rebecca's father's father lived at Tlakameng, in Ganyesa, in what was then the Northern Cape, and worked on a number of different farms. Her father also moved from farm to farm. She was born on Weltervrede farm, near Delareyville. Rebecca never went to school. Life on the farms was "just all right". The family decided to come to Madibogopan "for a rest" when the owner of the farm they were living on died.

Rebecca and Johannes did seasonal work on white farms nearby until three years previously, when Johannes went blind. They were collected by lorries and would sleep at the silos, coming home only on Saturdays. "It was all right. I was still very young and I got used to it". Rebecca would be paid R10 per day, plus food. During the harvest, she would stay away for four months, while in the weeding season, she would go for two weeks and come back at weekends. At other times, she remained at home, doing domestic work. Rebecca did not work on the farms permanently because "I didn't like it. I never liked working on the farms. Other people told me that the white farmers treated people badly. They didn't pay properly and they didn't like the worker's children walking around the fields."

(1985), pp. 258-80; I. Niehaus, 'Disharmonious Spouses and Harmonious Siblings', *African Studies*, 53,1 (1994), pp. 115-35.

Rebecca had thought of going to look for work in Johannesburg, but she felt that she had to stay at home to look after Johannes. Johannes and she were unaware that he was entitled to a disability benefit and they did not know how to get the identity documents they would need to claim the benefit, as “the Chief is unfriendly.”

Rebecca and Johannes depended on their twenty-three year old daughter, Anna, to provide for them. Anna had been doing farm work since she was sixteen. When the family was interviewed, she was at home, waiting for the harvesting period to begin. In April, she harvested peanuts and brought home R200. The household managed to buy most things except mielie meal. They still had some mielies that Anna brought after harvesting the previous August. When she went to harvest, they paid her 25 x 60kg bags, which were stored at the silos in Geysdorp. One sack would last for two months. In the months when Anna did not work, they had no money and had to subsist on mielie meal. Johannes’ mother, who received a pension, occasionally gave them money.

Rebecca and Johannes had four other children. Meshack, born in 1969, did not go to school and had been in Johannesburg since 1987. He started by doing contract work, in construction. In 1990 he got a job as a security guard. Since 1992, he had been working as a taxi driver. Before he married, in 1995, he used to send money at the end of the month, but he had not done so since. Sana, born in 1970, went to Johannesburg in 1989 and was a domestic worker. She was unmarried, but had a child who was living with Rebecca and Johannes. Sana sent them money and brought groceries when she visited. “She may send nothing for two or three months and then, in the fourth month, bring groceries and at least R100”. Joseph was born in 1973. He, too, did not go to school and went to Johannesburg in 1989. He made poles for

*house building. Before he married in 1993, he used to send them money, but no longer did so. Evaline, born in 1983, was at home, doing Standard Three.*²⁸

Rebecca and Johannes lacked the skills needed to seek work outside the farming sector, but they also preferred having their own base in Madibogopan to living permanently under the authority of white farmers. Their story shows that rural households value seasonal work on commercial farms because it offers food security, albeit at a very basic level. But this story also underlines how vulnerable such a livelihood is to the effects of illness. Lack of information about social security entitlements and the household's marginal position within the community prevented them from getting access to welfare payments. The critical difference between this household and the elder Tshabalalas was their lack of access to the state, which made them entirely dependent on their children's willingness to contribute money and labour.

Lucas Sentsho was chosen in order to demonstrate the depth of differentiation and to underline the importance of access to information, networks and the state for the small minority of households which benefited most both from the bantustan government's policies and from the new dispensation. The Tshabalalas' experiences were much more common. The limited income data that exist for the region underline the importance of transfer payments in rural livelihoods.²⁹ Remittances and pensions play a central position in the reproduction of large numbers of rural households. It is, by definition, difficult to tell whether large numbers of households share Rebecca and Johannes' problem of lack of access to welfare payments. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is not uncommon.

²⁸ Interview with Rebecca Tsitsalala Mogorosi, Madibogopan, 18.5.99.

Resources, risks and responses

The most critical resource for rural households was a regular income, especially from employment, remittances or a pension. Other resources could substitute for these, but were less reliable. Apart from pensions, none of the sources of livelihood available could be considered secure. Farmers and livestock holders faced severe ecological risks in this area, which is close to being semi-arid. They also faced fluctuating crop and livestock prices, input prices and interest rates. We have also seen how some people wishing to farm have faced problems in gaining access to land and enforcing sharecropping contracts. Farmers, traders and livestock holders faced problems in monitoring labour. Other local sources of livelihood were risky. Commodity markets were quickly saturated and traders were vulnerable to theft. Most waged work available locally was casual and insecure. Migrants might not remit. Access to social welfare resources might depend on successful negotiation of patronage relations. Some risks were co-variant, increasing their impact on the local economy. Most local wage employment was in the agricultural sector, amplifying the effects of poor weather on incomes. Many households whose major income source was remittances had been affected by the shortage of waged work in the urban labour market, making it more likely that people they might approach for loans and gifts to tide them over were in the same position.

Much current thinking about livelihoods rests on an implicit assumption that people follow livelihood strategies, using the assets at their disposal in ways that are shaped by the institutional context. This assumption begs the question of how appropriate it is to conceptualise what people are doing in terms of ‘strategising’,

²⁹ Francis, *Making a Living*, p.37.

rather than reacting to systems of power, or situations of crisis.³⁰ Some have more resources, and more room for manoeuvre. Others face severe restrictions, though even then their actions cannot simply be read off from their circumstances. Moreover, insofar as they are able to follow strategies in constructing livelihoods, their goals are likely to vary. Grown and Sebstad suggest that the goal of the poorest groups is survival; that the goal of people whose basic survival is assured may shift to security and that people who have achieved basic security may pursue growth.³¹ They argue that the shift from survival to security is marked by a diversification of the livelihoods mix. The shift to growth may be characterised by a concentration of investments on higher-return but riskier commercial enterprises. However, very poor people may have to rely on a mix of activities, precisely because returns from each activity are so unreliable. In Madibogo, this applies to people living in households with no access to welfare payments. The more prosperous households (Categories 1 and 2) and the poorest households (Category 4) in Madibogo depended on diversified livelihoods. Lucas Sentsho combined farming with his wife's salary from teaching. The Mogorosi family depended on agricultural labouring, occasional remittances and gifts. These patterns fit with Ellis' suggestion that diversification is bimodal, with very poor households diversifying to survive and the most prosperous households diversifying to accumulate resources.³² Multiple livelihoods make risk spreading easier.³³ One way

³⁰ C. Rakodi, 'Women's Work or Household Strategies?', *Environment and Urbanization*, 3,2 (1991), p. 39, cited in J. Beall and N. Kanji, 'Households, Livelihoods and Urban Poverty', Background Paper for ESCOR-commissioned research on Urban Development: Urban Governance, Partnership and Poverty (1998), draft manuscript.

³¹ C. A. Grown and J. Sebstad, 'Introduction: Toward a Wider Perspective on Women's Employment', *World Development*, 17.7 (1989), pp. 937-52.

³² F. Ellis, *Rural Livelihoods and Diversity in Developing Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³³ Strictly speaking, most of the insecurities people face in Madibogo are the results of uncertainty, rather than risk. Risk occurs where all the possible outcomes of a course of action are known in advance and where their probabilities are known. Uncertainty occurs where these probabilities are unknown. In practice, people have to make a judgement about the probabilities of different outcomes, so the distinction is less clear-cut than it may first seem.

of doing this is to spread people across space, dispersing household members, but usually maintaining a core adult or group in the rural base.

Other people clustered themselves, or their children, around someone, most commonly a pensioner, with a regular income. This was the pattern amongst some of the households in Category 3, who were mostly pensioners, with a low but reliable income. Other pensioners, like Buci and Meriam Tshabalala, lived in a small household and survived on their pensions.

Diversification and clustering are both difficult to sustain. Diversification puts a premium on flexibility, on access to information and on investment in social networks. These attributes are far from being substitutes for labour, skills, capital and access to the state, but they do make it possible to survive. When they are joined with these resources, as in the case of Lucas Sentsho, the household can prosper. Children and dependent relatives may be called on to manage investments, though this strategy is difficult to sustain. Problems of mobilising, motivating and supervising labour were recurring themes in the life histories of people diversifying for growth.

Clustering around a regular income was often associated with complex households. Some consisted of siblings, others of people looking after their siblings' children, pensioners looking after grandchildren, or living with their unemployed adult children and their offspring.³⁴ Many of these households had come about through marital breakdown, or from unemployed young adults' inability to set up households on their own. Complex households faced several challenges. For older people, the most common of these was the challenge of maintaining their authority over and getting access to the wage incomes and labour power of the next generation.

³⁴ Residential complexity and instability have been found in many other rural areas in South Africa. See, for example, A. Spiegel, 'Dispersing Dependents: a Response to the Exigencies of Labour Migration in Rural Transkei', in J. Eades (ed.) *Migrants, Workers and the Social Order* (London and New York: Tavistock, 1987).

People who fostered children needed to negotiate the delicate issue of how they would be supported when their parents sent little or no money for their upkeep, as seemed to happen quite often.

The most vulnerable households were those without access to a secure source of income and which were not able to follow a strategy allowing them to lessen uncertainty through constructing multiple livelihoods or clustering. This might be because of disability or ill health, or inability to leave children unattended. Other vulnerabilities appeared to stem from contingencies (illness, death, a quarrel in the family), but often had structural origins in poverty and insecurity.

Institutions, vulnerability and livelihoods

Institutions are ‘the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction.’³⁵ They are the ‘people and the patterns of regular, repetitive interactions among them that transform inputs into outputs.’³⁶ The term denotes both formal institutions, such the national and local state, rules governing property rights, businesses, churches and schools, and informal institutions, such as kinship networks, rules governing sharecropping agreements, *stokvels* (rotating savings-and-credit groups) and other forms of informal credit. Many institutions are very durable, ‘whatever other factors may affect their form, institutions have inertia and “robustness”.’³⁷ In rural South Africa, the institutions of sharecropping and labour tenancy have persisted for more than a century since the earliest efforts by the State to eradicate them.

³⁵ D. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.1.

³⁶ E. Ostrom, L. Schroeder and S. Wynne, *Institutional Incentives and Sustainable Development*, (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993), p. 6.

³⁷ R. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) p. 8.

Formal institutions are also shaped by informal practices governing resource access and use. These include discriminatory practices governed by patronage relations and other power inequalities. In South Africa, however, power inequalities shaping State institutions, property rights, labour and commodity markets and other institutions that govern resource access and use have also been formalised, explicit and stark. In the South African countryside, most formal institutions and many informal institutions have long operated so as to create insecurity for the vast majority of the population. Some informal institutions, such as sharecropping, have been shaped by the need to lessen these insecurities, though they may themselves be sources of insecurity.

The institutional framework governing natural resource management - land tenure systems, farming and grazing management practices, conservation measures - has done little in the past to enhance farmers' capacity to respond to ecological uncertainty and in many ways has intensified its effects.³⁸ Maize mono-cropping is a common practice, despite its unsuitability for an area bordering on the semi-arid.³⁹ Many other formal and informal institutions act in such a way as to generate or reinforce vulnerability to risk.

Some of the most important institutions shaping livelihoods in this area are those governing land access (particularly the land market, the Department of Land Affairs and the Tribal Authority) and enforcing property rights and contracts; capital and commodity markets; the labour market and institutions governing access to social welfare (in which the Tribal Authority also plays an important role). The legacy of

³⁸ See C. Twyman 'Policy Frameworks and Contexts II: review of natural resource (and natural resource related) policy in Southern Africa', draft working paper for PANRUSA, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield (1999) for a detailed analysis of these issues.

³⁹ Farmers who are sharecropping are expected grow mostly maize on the land they cultivate, since landholders wish to be paid in maize, the staple food crop. In contrast, Rev. Sentsho has been able to diversify production on the land he is renting from the State.

apartheid lies not only in deep inequalities in access to land, capital and skills, but also in access to information, to the state's welfare resources, to law enforcement measures and mechanisms for equitable dispute settlement. There are also inequalities within Madibogo on all these counts. Public institutions reinforce the difficulties relative newcomers face in gaining access to resources and enforcing contracts. Moreover, in this 'community', where most people have come from somewhere else, social networks are constructed only with difficulty and there are high levels of distrust.

Local Government and Traditional Authorities

People moving into Madibogo from white farms needed to secure a base and reconstruct their livelihoods. They needed to acquire a house site and, they hoped, land for grazing and growing crops. They also needed identity documents in order to enter into labour contracts and get a pension and, after 'Independence', these had to be Bophuthatswana identity documents. Access to all these resources lay through the Chief. The Chiefs' power over land allocation and their rights to raise revenue, as well as their position as conduits for access to identity documents, made access to the resources incomers needed to construct livelihoods contingent on acceptance of chiefly authority. It reinforced the salience of Barolong identity in local politics. It also made people with other social identities vulnerable to exclusion from resources, as we saw in the case of the Mogorosi family, who lacked identity documents because of the chief's hostility. Institutions governing resource access weakened the claims incomers could make on local resources, particularly the villages' arable land, which had already been allocated to longstanding residents.

Some incomers to Madibogo are Setswana-speakers, others speak Sesotho or Xhosa. Diversities in identities and historical experiences are still important. They underlie a latent political tension in both villages between those with a strong sense of themselves as the original inhabitants and people who are seen as incomers. These tensions were exacerbated by the Bophuthatswana Government's discriminatory approach to non-Tswana people living in the bantustan. The Tshabalala family's story illustrates the problems non-Tswana experienced in securing access to a housing plot, enforcing contracts and obtaining a trading licence.

The new Transitional Rural Council (TRC) has been divided into five zones. Each zone elects one councillor to the TRC and each village has an elected Village Committee, chaired by the Councillor. These structures do not have independent revenue-raising powers, but they are charged with collecting payments for services, such as water. New local government institutions sit uneasily alongside the Barolong boo Ratlou Tribal Authority. In the late 1990s, there was great uncertainty surrounding the long-term future of Chiefly authority and it appeared for a time as though the role of Traditional Authorities would be scaled down in favour of democratic local government. However, imminent Government policy changes over land tenure and land reform will strengthen Traditional Authorities' power over land allocation, by vesting it in the hands of Chiefs. Such a policy is likely to bolster the importance of identity in resource access at the local level in the former bantustans. The more general vast inequalities in land access look likely to remain largely untouched. Rural households will continue to face vulnerabilities resulting from lack of access to land. Differentiation around identity and access to the state will be sustained. Inequalities in access to land may be paralleled by continued inequalities in access to resources for which the Traditional Authorities are currently the gatekeeper.

These still include contract enforcement in sharecropping agreements and access to identity documents (needed to claim pensions and other social welfare payments). Sustaining the role of identity in access to local political institutions is likely to have the further effect of maintaining the currently low level of trust in Madibogo.

At the feedback meeting for this research project held in Madibogo in April 2000, which was attended by over eighty people, we raised the question of whether lack of trust is a problem in Madibogo. Most of the groups agreed that it is a significant problem and the remedy they suggested - “everything should be governed by a constitution” - revealed their sense that government at the local level has been characterised by arbitrariness. Local institutional failure, especially lack of accountability and legitimacy in local government institutions, generates severe collective action problems around management of natural resources and local economic development.⁴⁰ However, one usually unrecognised benefit of land reform which delivers to the poor is that it gives them ‘voice’ in other local institutions.⁴¹ Institutional reform in local government alone cannot solve collective action problems or generate trust.

Markets

Rural commodity markets in South Africa were racially based, highly concentrated and heavily administered before 1994. Inequalities in agricultural markets were racially based. Despite the liberalisation of agricultural marketing in the 1990s, these inequalities are still very much in place. Black commercial farmers like Lucas

⁴⁰ P. Bardhan, P., ‘The Nature of Institutional Impediments to Economic Development’ in M. Olson and S. Kähkönen (eds.) *A Not-So-Dismal Science: a Broader View of Economies and Societies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ *ibid.*

Sentsho are exceptional.⁴² They have gained a one-off benefit from the bantustan state at a time when land was available for leasing. Only a tiny number of aspiring farmers can hope to acquire land on the open market. Only through state intervention can an attempt be made to foster a class of black commercial farmers. Previous experience in this region suggests that such attempts are not likely to succeed.⁴³

Rural commodity markets in the bantustan were also highly regulated. Traders required a licence, an important piece of patronage for the Mangope regime. Since these restrictions were removed, many people have moved into retailing, opening small shops or running ‘tuckshops’ in their homes. Investments in small-scale trading and other enterprises often fail. The South African retailing sector is highly concentrated in comparison with other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and retailers find it hard to compete on price with supermarkets in nearby small towns. The infrastructure which does exist (good roads compared with other rural areas in Africa) makes it relatively easy to travel elsewhere to buy goods and services. It is also difficult for local producers of goods and services to compete on quality. Profits from small-scale income-generating activities are competed away, as the markets for most of the goods and services they provide seem to be saturated. Sales are highly dependent on monthly inflows of pension money. There are other obstacles to business development. Access to formal-sector finance is a recurrent constraint. As for informal credit, many people commented that *stokvels* are less common than in the past. This may be a reflection of low levels of trust and social capital in the area. The group discussions also identified crime as a major barrier to business development

⁴² Some of the farmers I interviewed claimed that they still faced discrimination in their dealings with co-operatives. Racism has moved from being a formal institution to an informal one in the South African agricultural sector, but it still displays “robustness”.

⁴³ See Francis, *Making a Living*, for an account of attempts to create a class of commercial farmers from above in former Bophuthatswana. E. Francis, and G. Williams, ‘The Land Question’, *Canadian*

and called for an improvement in policing. All this puts a high premium on sources of income that are based on kin relations, or which come from sources where contracts stand a better chance of being enforced. Those with capital to spare are more likely to invest it elsewhere. Most people in Madibogo therefore face many of the disadvantages of living in a village environment without having the potential advantages conferred by access to farmland and participation in a face-to-face community.

Access to employment depends crucially on the level and structure of labour demand nationally and locally, together with access to education and returns to investment in education. It also depends on access to information networks and patronage, both of which are highly unequal. Some job-seekers reported relying on kinship networks in urban areas for accommodation, information and help in finding work. Others lacked this network of support.

Informal institutions

People rely on kinship relations and other social networks for information about job availability and help with accommodation in town, as well as 'loans' that are actually gifts, or help with childcare. Child fostering is one of the most important practices linking relatives in rural and urban areas. In theory, the fosterers gain some claims on the people whose children they care for, though, in practice, remittances may be only intermittent. 'Kinship' cannot be assumed to be an infinitely available shock absorber.

Much less is known about other informal institutions that have been constructed within rural areas and linking rural areas with towns and cities and the 'hidden

Journal of African Studies, 27,3 (1993), pp. 380-403, discusses the shortcomings of the Kenyan land reform programme in this respect and the implications of this experience for South Africa.

livelihoods' they may sustain.⁴⁴ Such informal institutions include patron-client relations, social networks arising from membership of Churches and other organisations, 'gangs' and criminal networks (organising around livestock theft, for example).

Conclusion

The major problem people in this region face is the riskiness of their environment, in terms of climate, economy and social relationships. We have seen examples of households which have dealt with this highly risky environment successfully, but these are a small minority. It is doubtful whether, in such an environment, a significantly large number of households could emulate them. While the national Government retains a large degree of goodwill, it must be aware that failure to address the institutions that generate insecurity would have serious consequences for its rural support. The strategies people follow are not the result of conservatism or unwillingness to experiment. Rural households are resourceful and flexible, and the strategies they follow are sensible responses to risk. Multiple livelihoods should not be uncritically celebrated. They are a response to a highly risky environment, their construction and maintenance often depends on a degree of flexibility and access to information which some people lack and on the negotiation of social relationships spread over space. They may not be sustainable in contexts where many in the younger generation are finding it difficult to form households in the first place. Despite these caveats, they are the most common response to unemployment and poverty in the former bantustans, as well as shaping the activities of farmers and

⁴⁴ T. Allen, 'From "Informal Sectors" to "Real Economies": Changing Conceptions of Africa's Hidden Livelihoods', *Contemporary Politics*, 4,4 (1998) pp. 357-73.

entrepreneurs. The combination of high national unemployment and a dearth of locally-generated livelihoods make support for the generation of more livelihoods locally critically important. The discussion of the links between institutions, livelihoods and vulnerability points to the need to combine support for the generation of livelihoods with institutional reform to reduce vulnerability to risk.