

Vulnerability to poverty of South African farm worker households and the impact of migration

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Coping with changing framework conditions

The Krom-Antonies catchment is situated about 160 km north of Cape Town. The rural area is characterised by a lack of basic infrastructure and services, a dominant agricultural sector and a variety of social issues (domestic violence, alcohol abuse). In the past twenty years the growing patterns as well as the patterns of ownership have changed significantly due to changes in the agricultural market. While some of the long established family-farms were able to adapt, other farms fight for survival or are actually not in use anymore. These pervasive changes also affect the farm workers who are connected to their farms by a complex, and often paternalistic system of formal and informal services. Poverty seems to be a distinctive feature in many households (HHs) and migration a common strategy.

Aim of the study

To gain a better understanding of the poverty situation of farm worker HHs
To learn more about migration and the impact it has the HHs

Approach

Since the forward looking concept of vulnerability offers crucial advantages towards a contemporary poverty analysis it builds one scientific basis of the study. For obtaining a detailed insight into the HHs situation, the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) was used as the main tool. Additionally, the analysis of social nets and migrant biographies helped to gain a better understanding of migration in the HHs. Since livelihoods change in a dynamic way, new as well as long-term changes in the political, societal, cultural and environmental framework conditions were included in the analysis. For the data collection qualitative and quantitative methods were used. The survey is based on:

- 80 HH interviews on 9 farms
- 16 keyperson interviews (the headmaster of the local elementary school, a representative of the workers union, a local nurse and a labour broker)
- 1 focus group discussion

Based on the life centre of the interviewees and the expected length of stay on the farm, three different groups of HHs were analysed in detail:
the permanent residents,
the seasonal residents (in connection to their HHs of origin) and
the temporary residents (who stay longer on the farm like seasonal HHs but don't have the same status as permanent residents)

The results

Although there is a tendency towards high or low vulnerability to poverty on the different farms, the pure condition of the farm or its formal and informal setup are not sufficient to deduce the vulnerability of the particular HHs from it. On the other hand the condition of the farm, as the main supplier of essential services, and the relationship between farmers and workers, have big impacts on the HHs, particularly those that are not able to (partly) substitute lacking services by migrating to other farms.



Figure 1: The Krom-Antonies-Valley from SW-NE



Figure 2: An old farm house, just recently returned to use



Figure 3: Children playing with schnapps bottles



Figure 4: Two different farm worker households on the same farm

Permanent households

Vulnerability ranges from medium to very high within the permanent HHs. The lack of chances for diversifying the HH income, a low total income and high indebtedness are common features within many HHs. This often goes along with low education (esp. less job specialisation) and few physical and natural assets. In contrast to that, most of the HHs show a very high social capital and seem to be extensively connected with other HHs within and beyond the valley. This connectedness and the extensive use of social grants help the HHs to overcome the most severe shocks and stresses.

Assets-Assessment for permanent households	Assessment	Chances	Constraints
Human Capital	+ Rel. low dependency ratio + Good health status - few household members that cannot contribute to the income + All children go to school - Low secondary education	+ Theoretically free education- and health services for income poor HHs	- Insufficient education/training infrastructure in place - High school dropout rate - Lack of health services in place - Alcoholism and (domestic) violence
Social Capital	+ Most households deeply rooted in the study area- great exchange of money and material goods + Nearly 50% of the households are member of a church or the sports club + Mutual help between neighbors	+ Social ties offer new chances for farm independent income opportunities	- Few organizations in place - Few opportunities to articulate problems on most farm
Natural capital	- Entitlements to natural resources limited ... + ... but gardening, fishing, hunting and the collection of natural goods are possible on some farms + Livestock ownership in some households + Access to non-saleable agricultural goods on some farms	+ The marketing of natural goods offers income opportunities + Good access to agricultural resources (fertilizers, tools etc.)	- Lack of water and land within the valley (s.a. disputes between the farmers) - Lacking support by some farmers/farm managers - Few opportunities to sell agricultural goods
Physical capital	+ Most households equipped with electricity and sanitary facilities + Most households own a mobile phone or a TV +/- Quality of the accommodation ranges from good to very bad - Very bad transportation infrastructure - Bad security infrastructure		
Financial capital	+ Several credit sources + Social grants + On medium term a lot of jobs seem to be safe - Few income sources outside the farm - Generally low income levels - High indebtedness	+ Secure farm jobs offer possibilities for additional income sources + Easy available loans allow productive investments	- Low income prevents from big investments - Bad connection to markets

Figure 5: Vulnerability assessment of the permanent households*

*Note: The colours represent the personal assessment of different household assets from good (green) via medium (yellow) to bad (red). The total HH vulnerability is the sum of the assets and the livelihood strategies derived from them. Two colours in one box represent the observed range in the HH.

Temporary households

Within the temporary HHs the vulnerability to poverty is mostly medium. The unsecure and unequal status on the farm and the lack of social integration in place might prevent the HHs from building secure livelihoods. HHs from foreign countries are more vulnerable because of the temporary residency status and the lacking access to some state services.

Assets-Assessment for temporary households	Assessment (two colours represent the range in the HHs)	Chances	Constraints
Human Capital	+ No HH members that cannot contribute to the HH income + Good education + No dependent HH members	+ Right for asylum seekers to the same basic health services and basic primary education as South African Citizens (Refugee Act 1998)	- Insufficient education/training infrastructure in place - Lack of health services in place - Alcoholism
Social Capital	+ Migrant networks and close connection among themselves + Rudimentary social ties in place (partnership with local inhabitants, membership in the sports club/church) - Most respondents barely rooted in place - Close relatives live mostly far away	+ Mobility because of relatives in other parts of South Africa – less dependent on local employment	- Large distances to the relatives - Unknown length of stay on the farm prevents integration in the valley
Natural capital	+ Access to non-saleable agricultural goods on some farms - Entitlements to natural resources strictly limited - no livestock	+ Rural background of many temporary households implies knowledge in agriculture and animal husbandry	- Unknown length of stay on the farm prevents from investments - no infrastructure for temporary households (esp. land)
Physical capital	+ Accommodations in good shape + Accommodations well equipped with electricity, water and sanitary facilities + Communication is not a problem - Few personal belongings - Bad transport/security infrastructure		- Little space in the accommodations prevents from acquiring household items
Financial capital	+ Normally all household members working + Several credit sources + No household below the poverty line +/- Social grants for refugees (not asylum seekers – Social Assistance Act 2012) - High food/alcohol expenses - No bonuses - Normally only one income source	+ Limited investments in producer goods possible + Easy available loans offer productive investments	- Relatives need to be supported – No free disposal of money

Figure 6: Vulnerability assessment of the temporary households*

Seasonal households

Most of the seasonal HHs are highly vulnerable to poverty. Among others the bad and fluctuating financial capitals (including less job opportunities) as well as bad living conditions prevent the HHs from building sustainable livelihoods.

Assets-Assessment for seasonal households	Assessment (two colours represent the range in the HH)	Chances	Constraints
Human Capital	+ Good access to primary educational and health institutions in the towns + Low rate of HH-members that cannot contribute to the income because of a disease/injury + Low dependency ratio +/- Good primary education of some migrants, bad secondary education in total	+ Theoretically free education- and health services for income poor HH	- Alcoholism and domestic violence
Social Capital	+ Good connections to relatives in the home villages/on the farms - Low connectedness to organisations and clubs		
Natural capital	+ Access to non-saleable agricultural goods on some farms - Limited access to natural resources in the urban surrounding		- Little access to natural resources limits the opportunities in the towns
Physical capital	+ Good transport infrastructure in the towns + Most HH are close to markets + Good equipment with electricity in most HH - Mostly no subsidies for water, electricity, rent etc. - Partly bad equipment with mobile phones, fridges etc.	+ Housing projects by the municipality offer cheap opportunities for income-poor HHs...	- ... but the waiting lists for these houses are very long
Financial capital	+ Several credit sources + Social grants - Few income sources - Often unstable income sources (Daily work, seasonal work) - Low income - Indebtedness	+ Easy available loans offer productive investments	- Few job opportunities in the municipality and in many other rural places in South Africa - Low income prevents from big investments

Figure 7: Vulnerability assessment of the sasonal households*

Why do they leave the farms?

Migration in the permanent HHs is mostly a rural-rural one within small geographical areas. The statistics imply that migration may not be a constant phenomenon in the permanent HHs but it's common that individual members migrate if the circumstances make it possible or even necessary. However, the search for new income sources was not the only reason for the HHs to migrate and changing framework conditions for the residents, the withdrawal of individual services (mostly in connection with arguments with the farmer) and personal reasons are also of importance.

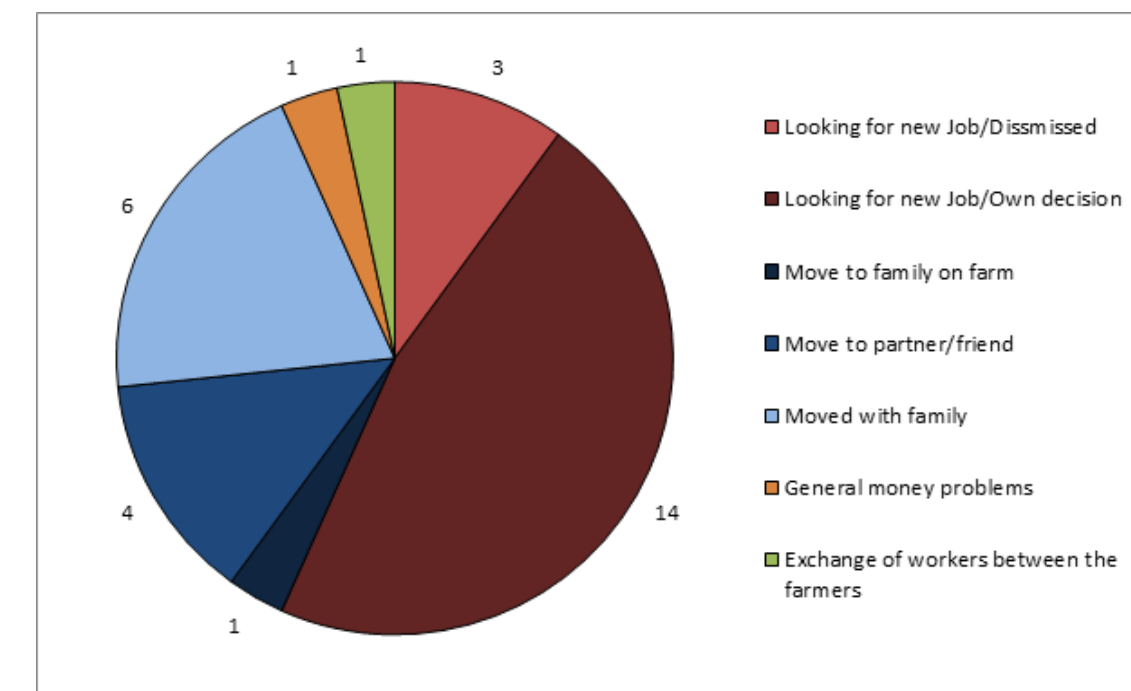


Figure 8: Reasons for the migration of permanent households to the current farm



Figure 9: Seasonal workers leaving the farm with their labour broker (right side)

The effects of migration

The empirical findings show, that migration might have a positive impact on the permanent HHs. Especially vulnerable HHs often stayed on the farm for many years and were completely dependent on it, while those HHs which were able to find other income sources outside the farm were way better off. However, not only money but also services which played an important role.

However, the effects on vulnerability don't need to be positive in all cases. So in some cases a deterioration of the living condition was accepted when moving from one farm to another. Beside the voluntary- also some cases of forced migration could be observed.

For the non-permanent HHs migration plays an important role for securing the livelihoods especially when other livelihood strategies fail. Beside the financial aspects, the temporary migration secures accommodation and services (like transportation). The long-term effect of seasonal migration on the vulnerability of the HHs as a whole, however, seems to be low in most of the cases. Apart from the low remittances which could not be saved, the seasonal employment never led to a long-term employment on the farms. As stated by a local farmer 40-60% of the seasonal workers return in the following season

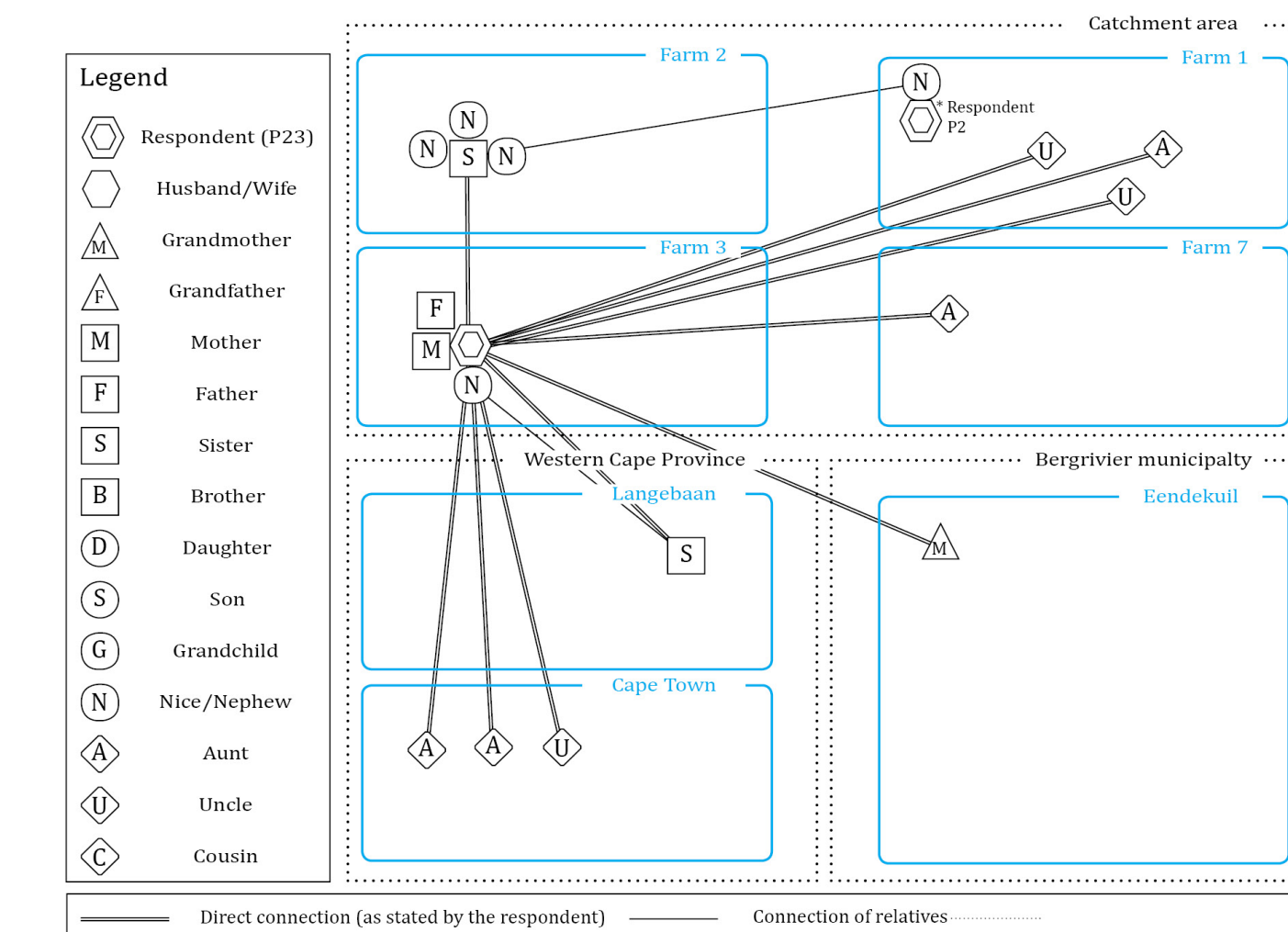


Figure 10: Kinship ties of a permanent household with a local and regional focus

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