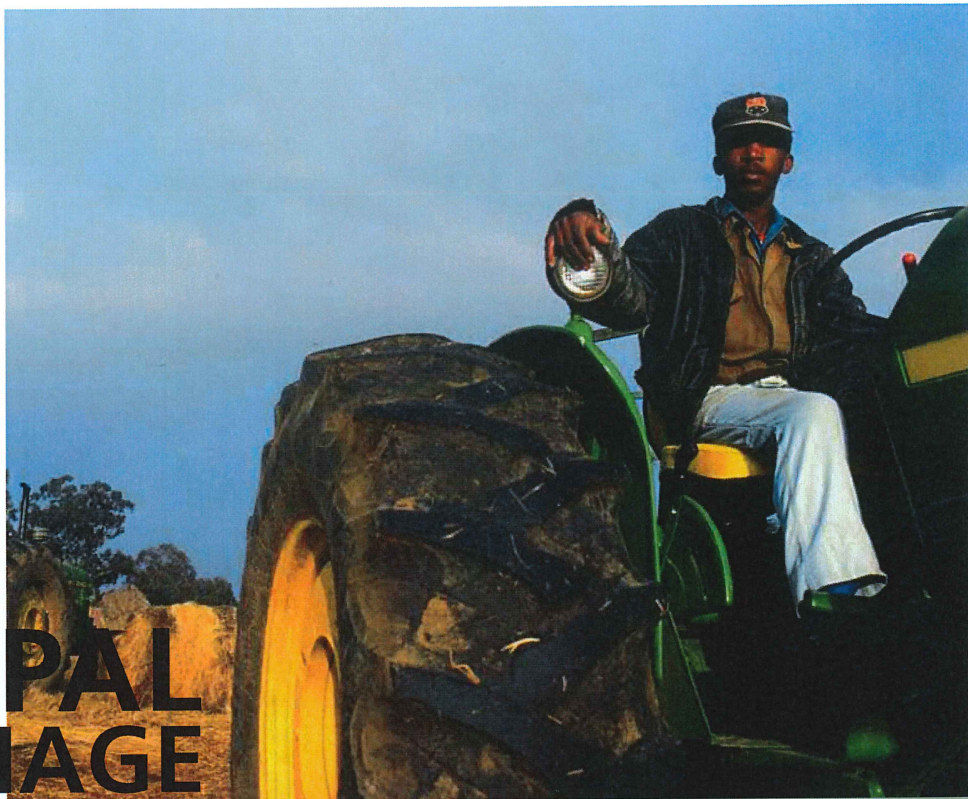


Commonage land in the Free State presents municipalities with a paradox – they are expected to use this land to help poorer citizens become emerging farmers but their efforts are frustrated by limited staff, finance and expertise.

An HSRC survey on the use and management of commonage in the Free State established that while municipalities make this land available to emerging farmers, the municipalities by themselves cannot help this sector to develop. National Government departments such as Labour, Agriculture, Local Government and Housing, and Environmental Affairs and Tourism should have a definite role.

# MUNICIPAL COMMONAGE

A resource for emerging farmers? By Ntobeko Buso



Sustainable commonage management should be the joint task of municipalities, the relevant government departments, non-governmental organisations, commonage users and civil society. Such collaboration is the prerequisite for commonage to assume its rightful role in improving citizens' standard of living.

The research, based on surveys and interviews in 20 Free State municipalities, revealed that amalgamation of various towns has resulted in some large-scale municipal ownership of land. Commonage varies from one municipality to the other, from Maluti-a-Phofung (Butchers Camp, Kestel, Phuthaditjhaba, Tshiame) which has only 83 hectares, to Moqhaka (Steynsrus, Kroonstad) which has 7 173 hectares, and Kopanong (Philippolis, Springfontein, Reddersburg, Edenburg, Fauresmith, Gariep Dam, Trompsburg, Jagersfontein) with 29 701 hectares. Municipal commonage totals about 112 795 hectares in the Free State.

Most users of commonage are from lower-income groups and farm livestock – cattle, sheep, horses, goats and ostriches. They hope their stock will grow and enable them to generate income from selling their surplus. Commonage is also used by middle-income groups, such as teachers, policemen and clergy, who farm livestock to supplement their income.

Some users keep stock with no intention of becoming commercial farmers. For others, commercial farming is the goal. This difference in purpose results in conflict over how to develop the farming potential of this land.

Municipalities, assisted by Government departments, should develop clear policies and guidelines on who should use commonage, and how it should be used. However, municipalities lack qualified personnel and funds to administer and manage this land. They need officials with an agricultural background to handle this responsibility effectively.

A possible solution is apparent: commercial farmers could be of great assistance by serving as mentors. They could also help emerging farmers identify markets for their produce and stock. Already, at Philippolis in the Southern Free State, emerging goat farmers co-operate with a commercial farmer who transports their goats to the market in Kimberley.

But it can be an unequal relationship. In municipalities such as Mantsopa and Tswelopele, small-scale farmers and a commercial farmer work together in the commonage to plough fields. Because the machinery belongs to the commercial farmer, he gets 85% of the produce and 15% goes to emerging farmers. The emerging farmers battle to generate enough income, and they

want more funding from Government to become self-sustainable.

Good working relations between commercial and emerging farmers could ease the burden on Government departments and the municipality. There is clearly a need for a formal arrangement to use the expertise of commercial farmers for the benefit of emerging farmers. It would be in the interest of stakeholders to work out terms of compensation for commercial farmers who assist emerging farmers.

Another concern for municipalities is maintenance of infrastructure. Most commonage has windmills, dams, fences, troughs, enclosures and the like in place. However, the survey revealed a problem with maintenance, lack of repairs, vandalism and theft. There are unclear lines of responsibility and some municipalities carry the total responsibility for maintenance, while others delegate it to users.

In many municipalities, commonage is the single most important developmental resource. There is an urgent need to develop policies and programmes to assist municipalities and emerging farmers to maximise their returns from this land in ways that are environmentally and financially sustainable. •

The full paper is available at [www.hsrc.ac.za](http://www.hsrc.ac.za), or e-mail [media@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:media@hsrc.ac.za)

Mr Ntobeko Buso is a Researcher in the Democracy and Governance (D&G) Research Programme.

# HSRC review

www.hsrc.ac.za **1** VOLUME No. 04 NOV 2003

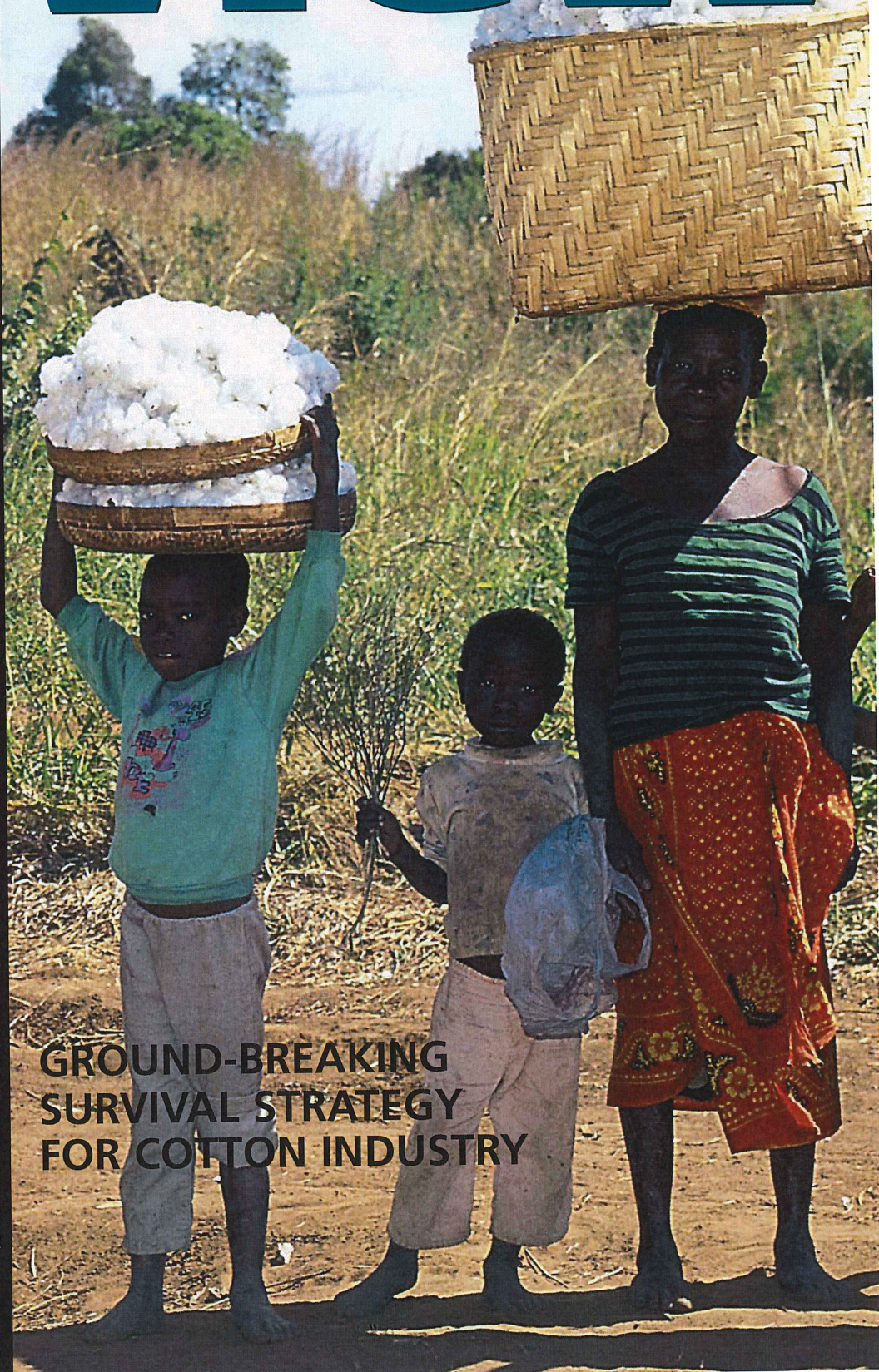
# review



Human Sciences Research Council

## IN THIS ISSUE

- PAGE 1 – 2 NEWS ROUNDUP
- PAGE 3 SURVIVAL STRATEGY FOR COTTON INDUSTRY
- PAGE 4 SCHOOL INTEGRATION
- PAGE 5 COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
- PAGE 6 – 7 RACE AND REDRESS
- PAGE 8 – 9 GOVERNMENT CAN PUT SOUTH AFRICANS TO WORK
- PAGE 10 HIV/AIDS SPENDING
- PAGE 11 MUNICIPAL COMMONAGE
- PAGE 12 – 13 PROFILE: PROFESSOR WILMOT JAMES
- PAGE 13 NEW BOOKS: WHAT HOLDS US TOGETHER



**GROUND-BREAKING  
SURVIVAL STRATEGY  
FOR COTTON INDUSTRY**