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Organiizing informal workers for decent work: the case of the agricultural sector in South Africa

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of **Master of Arts in Industrial Sociology (Globalisation and Labour Policy)** in University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in other university.



YAKUBU IDDRISU

23rd March 2011

Dedication

To: All vulnerable workers in South Africa and in the world, who are reeling under the pressures of unjust economic systems.

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List of Acronyms

AFRA	Association for Rural Advancement
AgriSA	Agriculture South Africa (formerly, South Africa Agricultural Union)
ANC	African National Congress
BCEA	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
COSATU	Congress of South African Trades Unions
CRLS	Centre for Rural Legal Studies
DoA	Department of Agriculture
DA	Democratic Alliance
DoL	Department of Labour
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
DLA	Department of Labour
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
ECARP	Eastern Cape Agricultural Research Programme
ESTA	Extension of Security of Tenure Act 62 of 1997
FAWU	Food and Allied Workers Union
FO	Farmers' Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LCC	Legal Claims Court
LRAD	Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development Programme
LTA	Land Reform (Labour Tenure) Act 3 of 1996
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

NKUZI	Nkuzi Development Association
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PLAAS	Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies
RLT	Rural Legal Trust
SA	South Africa
SAAPAWU	South African Agricultural Plantation and Allied Workers Union
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SAHRC	South Africa Human Rights Commission
SCLC	Southern Cape Land Committee
SD	Sectoral Determination
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
SS	Sikhula Sonke
SLAG	Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
TRAC	Transvaal Rural Action Committee
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund
WFP	Women on Farms Project
WSF	World Social Forum

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Abstract

This report focused on *organising informal workers for decent work, the case of the agricultural sector in South Africa.* It recognizes that the future of the working class unions hinges on their ability to effectively organise the informal workers, more so in the African context, given the global rise in various forms of non-standard employment, including the informalisation of labour. Since the agricultural sector in South Africa is faced with extremely low organisation, especially among seasonal, casual and migrant farm workers, organising of this category could be strategic for union revitalisation and ensure decent work. The research sought answers to the question of *what the drivers and barriers to organising the informal workers in the agricultural sector in South Africa are*. It considered specifically *what social and economic factors, and policy framework affect organising informal workers in the agricultural sector*, and *in what ways this category of workers could be organised to ensure decent work*. A case study design focusing on the trade union, social movements and land rights organising among farm workers in South Africa was employed. Data was gathered through *documents, interviews* with farm workers, organisers and key informants and *observation*, from July to September, 2010.

The study isolated key social factors such as the *paternalistic farmer-farm worker relationship, limited access to social services* and *social interaction due to spatially distant location of the farms and the workers*, as the major barriers to organizing them. However, issues of gender, housing and migrant labour on the farms were the key social factor drivers for organizing among farm workers. Prevailing economic factors such as, *poor working conditions, low wages and poor remuneration, land* and *the extremely low state of unionization* were identified as major drivers for organizing informal workers on the farms. Also, the availability of legislation and policies in the post-apartheid state such as, the *new labour relations act, the extension of security of tenure act, the basic conditions of*

employment act and *the sectoral determination,* were established as key instruments addressing the inequities associated with the informalities in the agricultural sector in South Africa.

The study concludes that, although availability of the policy frameworks is a necessary condition for organising through their facilitation of stakeholder engagements, it is not a sufficient condition without awareness and compliance for the realisation of decent work. Arguing that the extremely low organising among farm workers in South Africa contributes to the decent work deficit, and that effective organising would result in decent work and improved living standards among them, the study established that the most effective organising strategy for the farm workers is one that works with them as social beings, including their entire conditions and not only restricted to employment related, as witnessed with the traditional trade unions. The emerging social movement organising through farm and area committees with structures strongly rooted at the level of farms, encompassing all who live and work on farms, are strategies that ought to be encouraged.