



Women on Farms Project (WFP)

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### ACCIDENT AT THE FAURE CROSSING

The accident at the railway crossing in Faure that resulted in the death of 18 farm workers yesterday is a tragic event by any standards. In some cases as many as 3 people from the same family was involved in the accident.

Women on Farms have a long history of working in this area and will undoubtedly be around Klappmuts to help long after media attention has shifted elsewhere. For this reason we want to make use of the media focus to make the following point clearly: tragic as this event may be, it is no isolated incident and is located in a landscape which sees a daily attack on the human dignity of close to 6 million people we call the South African farm worker community.

In this particular instance it may have been an accident attributable to failed truck mechanics or railway signaling system. But it is no accident that all the workers on the back of that fatal truck yesterday were casual/seasonal farm workers without contracts as per the requirements of our law. Nor is it an accident that 12 of the 18 who perished in the accident were women in a context where farm labour is rapidly being casualised and feminised as a cost saving strategy by farmers.

It is also no accident that the workers were all "contracted" through a labour broker and that farmers are increasingly making use of labour brokers as mechanism to abscond from their legal obligations towards workers. Today as much as 25% of the agricultural labour force is sourced in this manner. Casual workers "contracted" in this manner usually do not receive:

- § Written work contracts stipulating the conditions and term of employment
- § Women often get paid less than men for doing the same work
- § Minimum wages as prescribed by the Sectoral Determination for Farm Workers (R50 per day)
- § Protective clothing when working with pesticides
- § Non-wage benefits such as leave (sick, annual or maternity)

Tragic as this event may be, let us not get lost in our mourning the deaths of the Klappmuts workers without committing to do everything we can to change the system which cost them their lives. This accident was no accident at all. Just like the scourge of evictions now sweeping the farm lands, this accident was a mere indicator of the everyday struggles farm workers face during the course of any given days work.

As long as the livelihoods of farm worker remain in the hands of farmers who refuse to accept a new South Africa, these "accidents" will remain our daily reality. As long as more than 95% of agricultural land remains in the hands of white farmers and land redistribution fails to fundamentally challenge the old apartheid style land ownership patterns, these violations will play themselves out in its many forms.

For further information, please contact Fatima Shabodien (Director: Women on Farms Project, Stellenbosch) on 072 7955 857 or (021) 887 2960/1/2

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