

Story sheet 2 – Patient

Our partner **AFRA** first started supporting **Emmanuel Mbele (63)** and his neighbours in the 1980s, resisting plans to relocate them to a 'black area'. After the end of apartheid, AFRA helped the community to make a successful claim for land. Now they have unrestricted access to water, firewood and grass for thatching, and their cattle can graze freely without being impounded by local landowners.



Emmanuel says about the previous landowner: 'We had a very bad relationship. They stopped us from accessing resources and they impounded our livestock.'

'AFRA's support was all about providing information,' says Emmanuel. 'They told us that people can't just be evicted without their consent. We knew we didn't want to move but we know we needed help so we went looking for people who could search through the laws and find out if it was legal.'

'We decided we weren't moving, we were staying here, but we really struggled for survival when we were left here. Then AFRA told us about the land reform programme. They brought people from Pretoria to tell us about how we could claim the neighbouring farms. There were four farms. They were going to be made into a game reserve, an extension of the reserve nearby.'

'Today AFRA has helped us go one step further. We have clinics and some parts have electricity. We have water, even though we have problems with the supply. Like I've said they've done plenty, but the most important and fundamental thing was helping us acquire the new farms, because that's the beginning of everything.'

'Without AFRA, we would probably have given in to the removals. AFRA helped us stay. A few community members heard about AFRA and approached them. They came and told us that there was a way, and then the people lived in hope. We're in poverty-stricken times and your relationship with the land is your source of survival. With land you can farm, you can sustain yourself and your family and not ever have to go and work elsewhere.'

'Land means freedom. You can't be free to do what you want on another person's land. Knowing it's yours you want to invest in it and make it better. To be a whole person you need to graze where you want and build your home where you want. But also people are not trained enough so it hasn't all worked out well. Look at all this land and look at it going to waste. Nothing is happening here. You can't just take over a farm. You have to be taught how to run it.'

'We were in a situation where we were insecure and threatened. Now we have a sense of freedom. AFRA helped us get a sense of freedom.'

'We need to move forward now so that our children can benefit too. We need to manage this property well so that it is ready for the generations to come.'

Sermon notes

Leviticus 26:1-13

The book of Exodus begins with the story of the Israelites' slavery in Egypt, and the drama of the plagues. This is followed by their exciting escape, the pursuit by Pharaoh's army, the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the army under its waves. The Israelites had been promised a land of their own but their escape from Egypt was immediately followed by 40 years of wandering in the desert. The rest of the events in Exodus and all the events in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy take place during this waiting time, and it is not until the start of the book of Joshua that the Israelites finally reach their new home. They are given many rules about how to live their lives during this period, and they had to learn – though didn't always show – great patience. God promised that he would stay with them through the waiting time and would bless them in a time yet to come – but not yet.

The story from South Africa overleaf is also about waiting. Apartheid ended in 1994 but many people have still not seen the benefits they hoped its ending would bring. Some people would say that justice should have come a long time ago, but the reality is that it hasn't yet come for everyone. Legal cases about land ownership, such as the one Emmanuel describes, sometimes take decades, and the people involved have to show great patience.

There is something we can learn here about faith and perseverance. Are there things your church longs and hopes for, that have not yet come? Christian Aid has worked for an end to poverty for 60 years but it, too, has not yet come. The work our partners have done during those 60 years has made a huge difference to millions of people, but the day they long for, when poverty is no more, has not yet come. Christian Aid, too, needs to keep to heart God's words about standing alongside them during the waiting time and about the blessings that are yet to come.

Prayers

O God, you promise a world
where those who now weep shall laugh;
those who are hungry shall feast;
those who are poor now, and excluded,
shall have your kingdom for their own.
I want this world too.
I renounce despair.
I will act for change.
I choose to be included
in your great feast of life.
Amen

(Janet Morley, Christian Aid)

Fundraising ideas

- Emmanuel's story is about growing food on the land. Why not hold a harvest supper in your church, using local produce to celebrate all the land provides, asking for donations for the appeal, in exchange for tickets. As an alternative, you could use recipes from South Africa (there are many sources on the internet – search for 'South Africa recipe').
- You could also include fairly traded products from South Africa in your meal, such as wine (if appropriate in your church), dried fruit snacks (as an appetiser), raisins (as an ingredient) or yoghurt or chocolate raisins at the end of the meal. All these products are available from Traidcraft. (You could even serve chocolate raisins in your South African bowl!)
- An issue raised by Emmanuel in the story overleaf is how for some people, being given the land back is not enough, and they are having to learn the farming skills which have been lost to their families while they have moved away from self-supporting farming. You could link this story to a 'Promises auction', where people in your church or community auction lessons in sharing their skills in support of the appeal. For example, the church organist could offer a lesson on the church organ to people who have only ever played the piano; a keen gardener could offer a lesson in spotting weeds or growing vegetables; a hairdresser could offer a lesson in trimming your own children's hair.

Children's church

- The story on this sheet from South Africa is about people wanting land to grow their own food. Almost all the children could grow something themselves, to remind them of this story. They don't even need a garden – for example a green pepper plant will grow from a seed in a pot on a windowsill. Teachers could help the children to plant something to take home and grow and then bring in to show everyone in a few months' time.
- Your group could give thanks for the children's homes and gardens by making a display of their pictures on the branches of a drawing of a big tree.
- Any sort of food is popular with children's groups, so find an excuse to share some South African fair trade chocolate or yoghurt raisins with them!

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