

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND LEARNING NETWORK (LOGOSUL)
Department of Local Government and Housing, Northern Cape

Project:

LINKING IDP'S TO MUNICIPAL BUDGETS

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Task Team 4:

Service Delivery to Farming Areas

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SUMMARY

1. Kareeberg Municipality (KM) statistics (all estimates):
 - Average size of farm 5 000ha;
 - 300 farms;
 - 200 active farmers; total farmer pop. 1000
 - 300 farmworker households; total farmworker pop. 1 500;
 - 100 farms unoccupied but used;
 - 15 000 sq. km of rateable farmland;
 - 1 700km of road mostly gravel in bad state;
 - steep decline in farm population since 1996, but rural population now stable;
 - little activity in property market.
2. Almost entirely given over to sheep farming:
 - wool price up 75% over past 12 months;
 - carrying capacity of average farm 600 producing ewes valued at R360 000;
 - farms fetch about R1-million
3. Carnarvon-Vosburg-Britstown road to be tarred but isolation remains a problem. Telephone system is primitive. Farm lands remain virtually undocumented and unresearched. Almost all data is guesswork.
4. Kareeberg launched a farming needs assessment, but encountered non-co-operation from the farmers due to their security concerns. The assessment was then downscaled. Currently the Municipality is working on its relationship with farmers; healthy dialogue going
5. Municipality committed to clearing sanitation, water and electricity backlog: budgeted R500 000 for next four years; works on IDP backlog of 500; true figure may be much lower; announced subsidy scheme; poor response; municipality open to suggestion once backlog cleared and better idea of needs
6. Farmers deeply concerned about state of roads and termination of mobile clinic service. Also security (though good), bad telecomms and maladministration at clinics.
7. Farmworkers have need for transport, safe havens for kids at town schools, help with documentation for welfare subsidies, ID's, pensions etc; being exploited by banks; HIV/AIDS and TB prevalent; only one farmschool in entire municipality
8. Farmers will not pay rates; cannot see what they'd get for them; fear they are being milked to prop up local government; KM disagrees – farmers make extensive use of urban facilities; KM shares clerk with farmers' associations;
9. KM working on engaging farmers – looks promising; farmer *ex officio* on Council?; farmers have lost all political representation; co-operation of farmers vital for access to farmworkers and for development

10. Huge confusion re allocation of powers and functions, and new concept of municipality; cannot plan or budget properly; applies across the board
11. Possible massive under-recovery of DC levies; average of R150 per month paid by farms, which could realistically be doubled. Many farmers not registered. No cognisance of rising turnovers. No audits or spot checks performed.
12. Rough calculations – KM could easily raise R1.5-million in rural rates; rural rates could work to farmers benefit – leverage over municipality; relief in that cost can be passed on and is tax deductible; no reason why farmers should be treated any differently to urban households or normal businesses; dramatic effect on rural development of rural rates; but if used to subsidise bad debt will spark boycotts.
13. Much that KM could do for farmers and farm workers (symbiotic relationship); need for lobbying and trouble-shooting; emphasis on getting things done
14. Concept of Development Officer (DO) introduced; will be department head; qualities of – shift in ethos from reactive to proactive; proper selection vital; must be non-political post and performance driven; emphasis on delivery of `soft` services and facilitation not capital outlays and hard infrastructure
15. Three junior Development Officers for KM mooted. Ideal training field. SETA funding?
16. Rough calculations showing function will be affordable (could even be totally self-sustaining) despite some upfront capital outlays; how DO can avert expensive mistakes and unnecessary expenditure; possibilities for exciting donor interest; how DO will add value for farmers; DO as donor matchmaker
17. Professional fundraiser for District Municipality on commission basis mooted; KM struggles to access funds it knows are available; must package needs
18. Bleak outlook for Northern Cape roads; KM voluntarily to intervene strategically
19. Urgent need for internet access for farmers - need to liaise with Telkom
20. Overall argument is, notwithstanding potential for steep rise in revenues, that emphasis shifts from deployment of finances to deployment of *the right sort of staff*. No amount of money will unlock development potential. People, not money, make it happen.

Municipal Service Delivery to Farmlands - Kareeberg Municipality

This selective survey of Kareeberg Municipality is intended to provide points of departure from which the possibilities for municipal service delivery to farming districts in the Northern Cape may be explored.

Background

Kareeberg Municipality consists of the three towns of Vanwyksvlei, Vosburg and Carnarvon, and their associated farming hinterland. The three towns form an inverted, roughly equilateral, triangle with Vosburg in the east and Carnarvon, much the biggest of the three towns, in the extreme south and very near the Municipality's southern boundary. The farming districts correspond more or less with the area which, in the past, went to make up the Kareeberg Transitional Rural Council (TRC). It is the farmlands of Kareeberg with which this study will be primarily concerned.

Kareeberg Municipality falls within the jurisdiction of the Karoo District Council but it is important to note that roughly the western two thirds of the Municipality, as it is currently delineated, fell within the old Hantam District Council. The eastern portion, that centred on Vosburg, was always within the Bo-Karoo District Council and has therefore not had to adjust to an unfamiliar administration.

While both Vanwyksvlei and Vosburg are situated fairly comfortably within the Municipal boundaries this is less so the case with the main centre, Carnarvon, where there exists some dislocation with regard to what is popularly regarded as being the Carnarvon district. This latter refers, in many people's minds, to the NGK¹ ward (*wyk*) but many congregation members, and members of the Carnarvon Farmers' Associations (the *Boerevereniging* and the Carnarvon *Boereunie*), now find themselves assigned to the neighbouring Ubuntu Municipality with its headquarters well to the east in Victoria West. The act of redemarcation that cut across the integrity of this district could be regarded by affected parties as an administrative form of forced removal, by sleight of hand, and raises issues of identity which will be touched upon later in this report. For the moment though it should be noted that there are 'sense of ownership and belonging' implications here that could impact negatively on Ubuntu's efforts to bring all its members on board.

The area is almost entirely given over to sheep farming although there has been some movement towards game farming in recent years. The urban-rural divide is far less pronounced in Kareeberg than in many other municipalities (as in Frances Baard District Municipality, for example). Almost everyone in Carnarvon seems to have some connection with the farms and this has had the effect of giving Kareeberg a head start in the field of delivery to farming communities.

Guest farms are not a prominent feature of the area and only a handful could be identified. One of these, Jagersberg, has an advertisement that has caught many a person's eye, and as it is perhaps revealing of the farming districts as a whole it is repeated here:

"No stress, no strain, no hassles, no hijacks, no taxman, no pollution, no politicians, no internet, no M-net, no cell phones, no noise, no nonsense, nothing but pure karoo beauty."

The theme is one of isolation with all its associated advantages but these are expressed as negations of the concomitants of 'progress' – not the sort of context in which one might expect a 'developmental mindset' to flourish.

¹ Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk.

The Municipality works on a figure of 312 farms. This number is provisional and was derived by counting all the farms on a chart reflecting the new boundaries. It seems to tally with what little can be gleaned from other sources. In the calculations which will feature later in this report, and for the sake of simplicity, the number of farms will be set at 300.

The total area of the municipality is *estimated* in its IDP to be 17 689 square kilometers. It is indicative of the paucity of demographic data relating to Kareeberg that the researchers were unable to confirm this estimate via recourse to Stats SA or the Demarcation Board's websites but it looks to be accurate.

The average size of a farm is stated to be roughly 5 000 ha. This is an important variable which will figure prominently in calculations touching on potential revenue income and the levying of municipal rates. Three hundred farms at an average size of 5 000 ha. yields a total of 15 000 square kilometers of farmland (85% of the total surface area) which, as a rule of thumb for purposes of calculation, seems reasonable.

Anecdotal evidence is unanimous that many farms are completely uninhabited, but the farmers deny this, perhaps fearful that 'uninhabited' will be equated with 'unutilised', and mindful of events in Zimbabwe and the dangers of having squatters move on to one's property. It is estimated that roughly one in three farms is lying empty but that none of these is actually unused. There are presumably many absentee landlords who rent their farms out (*veeposte*) for grazing.

There is little migration either in or out of the area and it is said that farms rarely come onto the market. Those that do tend to be sold fairly easily, often to farmers moving from other parts of the country where farming has become too dangerous. Thus it is that the security factor adds appreciably to the value of Kareeberg farms where farm attacks are relatively unknown. It is to be expected that farmers who have moved into the area on account of deteriorating conditions elsewhere would contribute to a heightened emphasis being placed on safety and security.

Although there are farmers who own more than one farm they tend to prefer to obscure this fact and to regard their farms as one unit. The norm however is one farm per farmer and thus it is estimated that Kareeberg Municipality encompasses approximately 200 farmer households actually resident on the farms.

It is reported that over the past six years there has been a steep decline in the number of farmworker families living on the farms. This is ascribed to legislation such as the Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA), new labour laws and so forth. A number of farmers prefer, where feasible, to reside in the towns and to travel out daily with their farmworkers who now live in the towns as well. This lends credence to the assertion that many of the farms are no longer inhabited but the fact of its being the case is not widely advertised for fear that it should encourage stock theft.

The depopulation of the farms has far-reaching ramifications for municipal service delivery but it is thought to have stabilised now. Whereas in the past a farmer might have had two to three farmworker households attached to him this is believed to have dropped to between one and two households. Two hundred resident farmers, at 1.5 farmworker households each, yields 300 farmworker households in total, thus an

average of one farmworker household per farm. The trend then has been towards increasing isolation of an already isolated community. The more isolated a constituency, the less cost-effective it becomes to render services to them as will become evident later.

The average size of a farmworker household actually living on the farm is estimated to be about five (including the aged). This would yield a sum total of roughly 1 500 men, women and children. There is also a nomadic community of sheep-shearers (*karretjiemense*) and fence-menders who move from farm to farm throughout the Northern Cape. The size of this community is unknown but cannot be too significant insofar as Kareeberg itself is concerned.

An estimated 200 farmworker households have drifted off the farms and into the towns in the past six years. The backlog for the provision of acceptable sanitation, water and housing is estimated to be 500 households for IDP planning purposes but, taking the foregoing into consideration, this figure looks to be based on 1996 Census data and the possibility must exist that a figure of 300 would be nearer the mark.

Carnarvon is linked to Vanwyksvlei and Vosburg by main roads of uncertain and variable condition. The link between Vanwyksvlei and Vosburg is a secondary road. The roads are often impassable to light sedan vehicles, especially after rains. Vosburg is looking forward to the day when the road connecting it with Britstown will finally be tarred, after years of frustration caused by poorly implemented road-building projects. Of major importance for the region will be the mooted tarring of the road linking Carnarvon and Vosburg. These developments all leave Vanwyksvlei out in the cold and it is by far the most difficult to reach, and therefore the most isolated.

The overcoming of isolation, and issues of access, are key to unlocking the development potential of Kareeberg Municipality's farming community and serve as recurrent themes in this report.

Municipal Efforts to Engage the Farming Community

Not unrelated to the foregoing section, and mindful of the new role it is being called upon to play vis-à-vis the farming areas, the Kareeberg Municipality has taken the initiative in trying to bring the farming community on board. It has invested quite some effort in this.

An excellent example of its efforts is that the Municipal credit-controller works half-day for the Carnarvon *Boerevereeniging* and *Boereunie*, providing secretarial support. Although the salary for this latter function is in fact subsidised by the District Council such a linkage indicates a level of political maturity and trust on the part of both the Municipality and the farmers that must be the envy of many other municipalities.

While relations between the two parties may sometimes be strained, they can at least agree to differ and continue talking to one another. This dialogue is crucially important especially in view of the fact that the farmers are now virtually unrepresented at the political level. Under the old TRC's the farmers still had a measure of political say and the TRC chairmen had seats on the District Council. At the moment, despite the fact that the farmers pay 51% of the District Council levies, there is only one farmer on a Council

of 17 members. The Kareeberg Municipal Council has seven members (DA 4 – ANC 3) but none of these is a farmer (or indeed a farmworker). There is no ward committee for the farmlands.

The Municipality went to special lengths to keep the farmers' associations informed of developments that might have an impact on them but found that most of what it had posted out had gone unheeded, or was not understood, and that it was necessary to explain things all over again at meetings - right from scratch. It seems that farmers typically do not respond to written communications and it has been suggested that it might be an idea to give the chairman of the *Boereunie* some sort of ex-officio status on the Municipal Council. While this individual would not be able to vote, he would be able to contribute the farmers' point of view and would in turn be in a position to relay Council policy and thinking to his own constituency. Such a gesture would surely be appreciated and might go a long way towards instilling a sense of 'ownership' of the Municipality in the farming community. As it is, members of the public are of course free to attend Council meetings but they cannot participate in the debates.

Whether this accommodating approach is one that would find favour with other municipal councils is open to doubt but such a statesmanlike gesture, assuming it to be possible, might pay handsome dividends in winning farmers' co-operation. As things stand at present though, the most powerful economic constituency in the Northern Cape has been rather dealt out of the political game, and it will cause widespread resentment if their revenue is used to subsidise urban dwellers' non-payment of services.

But whatever the case, and even if farmers and councils are unable to find each other politically, it is essential that farmers and municipalities engage with each other on a business footing of enlightened mutual self-interest if municipal delivery to farming areas is not to be stillborn or serve as a new battleground for recrimination and grandstanding.

Problems of Data Collection

Planning that is informed by reliable, verifiable data has the best chance of succeeding whereas planning that is based on deficient inputs becomes a hit and miss affair that is almost guaranteed to fail. Kareeberg Municipality is well aware of this and is making determined efforts to fill the vast knowledge gap that characterises its farming districts at present. In the process of this exercise though, a prior precondition has made its presence felt, namely the co-operation of those from whom the information is sought. And this in turn, it has emerged, depends on the nature of the relationship that exists between the farmers and the municipality.

Kareeberg engaged the services of a private consultancy to perform a needs assessment which, it was hoped, would provide a solid base upon which to plan for an ambitious elimination of the sanitation, water and electricity provision backlogs known to exist among the farmworker community. This information had never been gathered by the Hantam District Council and the Kareeberg Municipality found itself having to plan for services for what was, to all intents and purposes, a *terra incognita*.

A three-page questionnaire was designed which would have fulfilled all the Municipality's information requirements. Questions covered issues of water provision; housing; sanitation; refuse disposal; household hygiene; electricity provision; disaster

management (ie. a skills inventory); and additional economic activities. As no register of farmers exists, the Municipality used the local telephone directory to find farmers' addresses, to mail out the questionnaire.

Unfortunately the response was very poor with the majority of farmers ignoring the questionnaire altogether or else returning it incompletely filled in. A meeting was held between the Farmers' Union, the consultant and the Municipality to thrash out the issue. This meeting became quite heated and a stand-off developed between the Municipality and the farmers. It should be noted that farmers' associations, while they serve as invaluable points of contact, are not necessarily truly representative of the farmer constituency as a whole and may have their own agendas. For one thing the association's boundaries are unlikely to coincide neatly with the new municipalities' boundaries, and for another it is estimated that approximately one in three farmers does not belong to any association.

It appears that the farmers' standpoint was that the questionnaire was unnecessarily comprehensive and detailed and that a fully completed questionnaire could, in the wrong hands, be used to plan a successful assault on a farm and was an unwarranted intrusion into farmers' private affairs. The consultant proposed a compromise which was that farmers need only divulge information they felt comfortable about revealing. This information would typically be of a more general nature than that required by the questionnaire. For instance a farmer might admit to a need but need not quantify that need until such times as the likelihood of fulfillment appeared on the horizon. Farmers agreed to state how many individuals households consisted of but were loathe to reveal their ages or sex. While the compromise thus arrived at is not ideal (farmers might choose to conceal information for considerations other than those of security for instance) it is nevertheless a start and should form the basis upon which a relationship of mutual trust can be built up between the farming community and the Municipality.

As of the time of writing the needs assessment is still underway. While on the surface it may appear to have had an unpromising beginning the main thing is that *developmentally orientated dialogue* has been initiated between the Municipality and the farmers. This is a very considerable achievement and is a milestone that *must* be arrived at if any meaningful development is to take place on the Northern Cape's farms.

Important lessons which may be extrapolated to other municipalities who have not yet begun this process are:

- Farmers are best approached personally (or, failing this, telephonically) and do not respond well to paperwork or documentation. This point was made by several respondents.
- Farmers define themselves as *not* being answerable to a municipality and it may take many years before the new dispensation achieves the change in mindset that might prompt farmers to comply with instructions emanating from a municipal source.
- Farms are private ground and farmers will construe any form of information gathering as prying unless they fully understand the reasons for which the data is being sought and trust the data gatherer not to misuse this information.

- Farmers place a very high premium on their security – not only in the obvious sense but also because this has a direct bearing on the market value of their farms.
- Events in Zimbabwe, and ill-considered utterances locally and from Namibia, have led to a highly-charged atmosphere in South African agricultural circles – one in which an excess of emotion can all too easily carry the day.
- By and large the farmer community is willing to listen to reason but it responds very negatively to being threatened or to having its co-operation extorted from it. As a first resort it would be infinitely preferable for the farmer community to be courted by municipalities as opposed to being forcibly coerced into co-operating. Farmers are in any event deeply suspicious of the designs of the new municipalities and it is the farmworker who is likely to suffer the most if the relationship between farmer and municipality is one of strife and mutual antagonism. It is difficult to see that any meaningful service delivery to farmworkers could take place without the goodwill of the farmers on whose land they reside.
- Win-win solutions are possible but there will have to be negotiation and give-and-take from both sides.

Needs from the Kareeberg Municipality's Perspective

The Municipality is committed to eliminating the infrastructural backlog (sanitation, water and electricity) for farmworkers before undertaking any less traditional approaches to service delivery to the farming community. It is to this end that it commissioned the needs assessment and has budgeted for R500 000 a year to be spent on rural development of a capital nature for the next four years. This amounts to 6.5% of its current budget of R7.7-million. The R500 000 represents a portion of an inter-governmental grant. R200 000 of this will be spent on farm security (10 radios at R20 000 each). As already stated the full extent of the backlog has still to be determined and may prove to be rather less than has been planned for.

This amount will be partially accounted for in the allocation of subsidies to farmers as incentives to get them to bring their workers' environment up to RDP standards. In February the Municipality announced a series of subsidies (per house) as follows: R500 for water; R500 for sanitation; R1 000 for electricity; R1 500 for radios. These subsidies apply over and above those provided by the Karoo District Council ie. a farmer could apply to both sources.

The response thus far has been disappointing. Despite assurances to the contrary many farmers see the subsidises as the thin edge of the wedge which the State will use as leverage to interfere in the business of the farm. This response might have been anticipated as it was the initial reaction to the Bo-Karoo District Council's introduction of a sanitation subsidy as well (during 1998-2000) Bo-Karoo's experience was that, after a slow start, over time the fears of many farmers were allayed. The programme gradually acquired a satisfactory momentum.

Another factor at play is that it is rumoured that when municipal rates are introduced, improvements will be taken into account and by this means the municipalities will recover from the farmers whatever has been paid out in subsidies. Thus a VIP toilet may result in an additional R5 per month in rates. The likelihood of this happening must be remote in the extreme. The cost of performing valuations at that level of detail would be prohibitive.

The Municipality plans further meetings with the farmers to try and reassure them that their subsidies do not have 'strings attached'. The amount of the individual subsidies is open for review and they may be adjusted once the patterns of demand become clearer. The effect of the double subsidy for sanitation (subsidies by District and Local Municipalities) is that the cost of a VIP toilet to a farmer should be zero if the labour is supplied by the farm workers. Electricity provision is another matter. Several farmers use their own generators and the subsidy is unlikely to go far in meeting the costs of providing electricity to farm worker households. As far as can be estimated the provision of safe water to households, within RDP strictures, may already be in place on most farms. All water is sourced from boreholes.

As a token gesture in the direction of what might be called 'soft services' the Municipality has retained the services of a consultant at R4 000 a month to liaise with the *Vroue Landbou Unie* to initiate literacy and needlework courses on the farms. The *VLU* is reportedly very eager to get involved and it is no doubt wise of the Municipality to capitalise on this enthusiasm.

The re-introduction of mobile clinics is generally regarded as out of the question, come what may. The client population has declined, the roads have worsened, costs have rocketed – all of these militate against the service ever being re-instated in Kareeberg.

There is a settlement of smallholdings (generally no bigger than an acre) called Skietfontein (a private farm) that has always been regarded as rural though its problems are in fact urban. The exact population is unknown. No rates have ever been levied on this area. It is reportedly well provided for in terms of water and sanitation but not electricity. The inhabitants were offered solar-powered electricity but refused this demanding Escom power instead. The Council is not prepared to countenance this as it would be far too expensive. There would almost certainly exist a need for social services to this somewhat anomalous community.

There are any number of ways in which municipalities could provide services to farming districts (this report will explore some of these in a later section) and the Municipality is keeping an open mind on the issue. For the moment however it prefers to focus on its immediate priorities. On the one hand it still has no clarity on what its functions will be in the future and on the other it has no clear idea of how these mandates will be funded. It is anticipated that some sort of rural rates will be introduced in 2006 which may dramatically alter the delivery landscape. Until such times as this happens the Municipality has made provision to provide basic infrastructure..

The Municipality, now that the farms fall within its ambit, is presumably competent to pass by-laws specifying certain minimum standards of sanitation and housing for the farm workers, should it so wish, from a public health point of view. This might have the

effect of boosting the number of applications for the subsidies although it might have other less desirable consequences such as further layoffs.

Needs from the Farmers' Perspective

The farmers unhesitatingly identified roads and health as being the main problems facing the farming communities. By health is meant not so much the health of the farmworkers (although the farmers are well aware of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and TB) as the dysfunctional state of health delivery. The termination of the mobile clinic service is a particularly sore point.

Both of these issue areas must be understood in the light of previous circumstances which no longer prevail. The farming community was arguably disproportionately well served in both respects in the past and the current level of service is in such marked contrast with what went before that it is condemned out of hand.

Farmers complain that the roads are in a deplorable condition and say, with some justice, that this is the biggest factor inhibiting any kind of progress in the region. This will be dealt with in fuller detail in a later section, where it will be argued that, although road maintenance is not a Category B Municipality responsibility (and almost certainly never will be), there is nonetheless a contribution which local municipalities might make.

The mobile clinic service was one highly valued by both farmers and farmworkers and its gradual demise (for complex reasons which are beyond the scope of this study) has been the cause of intense dissatisfaction. Farmers complain of having to transport workers long distances to clinics where the waiting times are endless and where, more often than not, the stock of medicines is either totally inappropriate or inadequate. Workers have to come for injections, or treatment for which appointments have been made in advance, only to find when they get to the clinic that the ampoules have not arrived, the staff don't have any record of them, the clinic is closed etc. etc. The list of gripes is a depressing one and the farmers have difficulty in understanding why a service which is treated as such a budgetary priority has come to deteriorate so markedly.

As already mentioned, farm security is a constant preoccupation. Although the area's record is good in this regard, farmers are concerned to keep it that way.

There is great concern about the poor quality of telecommunications. Telephone outages are frequent and the community still has to rely on an antiquated manual system that does not even support fax machines. The internet is still only a dream and farmers complain, quite rightly, that they are put at a competitive disadvantage by not having access to the internet and e-mail. The potentials offered by modern telecommunications for rural development have not begun to be explored in Northern Cape local government circles and this too will be discussed later as an area where an enterprising municipality might make a difference.

There is only one farm school in the whole of the Kareeberg and farmers expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of proper boarding facilities for learners in the towns. The impression gained was that this problem is so acute that very many of the children do not in fact attend school. Although the Department of Education is thought to be toying

with the idea of creating hostels there is unfortunately some apprehension about the management of hostels being entrusted to the Department.

Farmers were concerned about the recent move by banks to levy penalties on savings accounts with small balances. It was reported that some pensioners and farmworkers had gone to the banks to draw money only to find that what little they had had been eaten up by bank charges. The banks apparently also charge exorbitant sums to cash cheques.

Farm workers experience enormous problems negotiating the intricacies of applying for pensions, child maintenance grants, and ID books. Farmers, who at the best of times are averse to bureaucracy, report considerable frustration in having to assist with such matters. Here again the municipality may be able to provide assistance in future.

Needs from the Farm workers' Perspective

The experience in the Free State has been that a simple polling of farm workers to assess their needs is pointless because so much work first has to be done to bring them to the stage where they regard themselves as entitled to articulate any needs at all. A farm worker who has never enjoyed adequate sanitation facilities, or water at the turn of a tap, is also, for example, unlikely to experience the lack of these as needs. It is only after prolonged 'life skills training' that farm workers can begin to talk intelligibly about what is important to them in terms of services. In the light of this no farm workers were interviewed as part of this survey.

That said, it has been found in the Free State that farm workers place a high premium on mobility and are often frustrated by their inability to reach shops, attend funerals and weddings, visit relatives, go to church, get their children to school, and so on. The difficulties with which young people are faced in meeting a variety of potential marriage partners reportedly leads to an unhealthy degree of intermarriage.

The Victoria West – Carnarvon – Williston train line is no longer functional although even if it were it would not appreciably lessen the problem.

Some farmers, especially those within striking distance of the towns, go to special lengths to transport their workers to sportsgrounds or to social occasions, or to organise church services, but many do not and farmers cannot be expected to function as taxi drivers or to allow their vehicles to be used as such.

Loss-making municipal transport is a difficult issue, all the more so in a region like the Kareeberg where roads are bad and distances great, but here again the fact that an ideal solution looks to be out of reach does not mean that there is *nothing* can be done.

Municipal Services Already Supplied by Kareeberg

The farmers' argument is that seeing as they receive no services from the municipality why should they pay them anything? The Municipality on the other hand would argue that they do in fact benefit from the towns and that for this they ought to make a contribution.

While the Municipality is the biggest single employer in Kareeberg it is the agricultural sector that provides the most employment opportunities and that can legitimately be regarded as Kareeberg's main economic sector. Municipalities have always relied on their business sectors to carry them as the relationship between them is a symbiotic one. The business sector needs the municipality to provide a context within which it can do business and the municipality needs the business sector to fund it so that it can continue providing that context.

It is true that municipalities do not provide farmers with direct services such as refuse removal or sewerage but there are numerous other services that municipalities perform that make a town what it is, and for which there is no direct charge, but which may be funded by rates levied on the townsfolk.

Prime examples are the roads within the town itself which have to be maintained, the traffic signs, the municipality acting as a tourism information centre, the maintenance of the cemeteries, library services, municipal swimming baths, and municipal offices doubling as paypoints for motor licences. The municipality is charged with providing the environment in which may be found courts, clinics, hospitals, post offices, banks, police stations, farmers co-ops, garages and any number of facilities all of which are used by the farming community and without which it would find itself extremely inconvenienced.

The fact is that it is in the farming communities' best interests that their small towns do not 'go to the wall' but to flourish.

Kareeberg Municipality has made the first gesture of good faith with its capital infrastructure programme for rural development, which is of course in addition to the 'hidden' services detailed above, and the feeling in many quarters is that it is time that the farming community reciprocated by taking on some of the financial burden borne by the towns' ratepayers.

Stumbling Blocks to Progress

The research revealed two areas of intense confusion and uncertainty each of which needs to be addressed before municipalities can move forward with service delivery to their hinterlands.

(a) Powers and functions

The first is the long delayed allocation of powers and functions. The fact is that until municipalities know what they're supposed to be doing in the future they cannot plan properly. Rumours abound and it is not unheard of to have senior officials flatly contradicting one another as to who is currently responsible for what or who will be responsible for what.

A prime example is to be found in the field of sanitation. Sanitation provision is not merely a matter of installing a toilet. Education in the use of the toilet, personal hygiene, follow up, and inspection of the completed structure itself are all part of the 'package'.

The cost of these `soft' services may way outstrip the actual cost of the toilet itself if one takes distance travelled, time spent, number of visits, and so forth, into account.

A municipality that budgets, say, R1 700 for a VIP toilet may be making a grave miscalculation if it is held accountable for a properly managed project from start to finish. It was believed though that municipalities would be responsible for overseeing the actual supply and installation of the toilet whereas District Councils would take responsibility for the associated advocacy, *bewusmaking*, monitoring etc.

Unless there is clarity about powers and functions, municipalities cannot estimate what resources (human, financial, transport etc.) they need to provide for to meet their sanitation backlogs.

Radical restructuring of the responsibility for roads (and a reclassification process) is also rumoured but officials remain tight-lipped and refuse to be drawn into speculation other than to say that it is highly unlikely that this function will be devolved to Category B level except possibly insofar as the municipalities are already responsible for the roads within the towns.

Whatever the case, a situation in which uncertainty, rumour and speculation abound is not one conducive to sound management, not to mention the effect on staff morale. It is difficult to engage with municipalities on what they *might* do in the future when they do not even know what they *should* do. The District Council refuses to speculate on future functions until it has official guidance and direction.

(b) *Jurisdictions*

The second area of widespread confusion arises out of the new understanding of the concept of a `municipality' itself. It indicates major issues of local conceptions of identity.

Again and again one finds oneself talking at cross-purposes with interviewees when using the word `municipality'. Local people tend to refer to the old municipal boundaries (the towns). This occurs right across the spectrum of officials, even where the official understanding of how the word `municipality' is going to be used has been explained at the outset.

Conversely an interviewee may wish specifically to refer to the old boundaries² and unless they pointedly clarify how they mean `municipality' to be understood one is once again led astray. The new notion of `municipality' is conceptualised as a mini-District Council. People see a municipality not as a dispersed conglomeration of towns but as a discrete entity with a locus which is the municipal offices. Less sophisticated persons see `the municipality' not as an abstract entity in some researcher's conceptual universe but as an actual structure – the place where they go to pay their accounts. If even senior personnel are struggling to come to terms with the new nomenclature one can only imagine what a humble resident of Vosburg, who may never have been to Carnarvon in his or her life, makes of it all.

² As in the statement: "Municipalities are responsible for the upkeep of all the roads within their boundaries".

People are disinclined to pay money over to institutions to which they feel they do not belong. It remains to be seen how municipalities are going to instill a sense of belonging in their farming constituents – the more so because these people's sense of identity is precisely predicated on the fact that they *do not* belong to a municipality.

Farmers' Attitude Towards Rural Rates

Municipalities will in the future levy some form of rates on agricultural land. What is still unclear is when this will happen, how the rate will be calculated, how much discretion will be allowed to local authorities in setting the rate, and so on. Rural rates is a vast topic and its pros and cons have been energetically debated in South Africa for many years now. It is not within the scope of this report to enter into this debate other than to suggest some options available to municipalities.

Informal studies in the Free State have revealed that, whereas many farmers may vociferously oppose a rural rate when in the company of their peers, in private they often admit the justice of such a move and are even open to seeing how it could work to their long term advantage. Farmers are not necessarily opposed to being saddled with such a levy *per se*, but they are unanimous in that the revenue should not be used to buttress up inefficiencies in municipal credit control in the towns. The slightest hint that they are being milked to shore up what many regard as a failed system of local government, and many municipalities should prepare themselves for a torrid time collecting these monies. It follows then that municipalities with a reasonable payment culture are likely to find it easier to levy and collect rates on farmland. Conversely, failure to bring defaulters to heel is likely to provoke a similar level of delinquency amongst farmers.

As things stand in Kareeberg at present though, the farming community does not see its way clear to paying any sort of rural rates. The municipality's expectation is that it will be given very little leeway in the matter and that it is an issue that is effectively out of its hands.

Financial Impact on Municipality of Rural Rates

As already stated the municipality anticipates that it will be instructed to levy this rate as of 2006. Whether it will be nominal or punitive, a flat rate or a rate based on turnover, profit, valuations, type of farming engaged in, size of farm – none of these is known. Neither does the municipality know with any certainty in what respects it might be able to exercise discretion although it does expect there will be certain minimum and maximum levels prescribed.

By the year 2006, if the R2-million budgeted for rural development has been judiciously applied, the current water, electricity and sanitation provision backlog should have been by and large cleared. Given that road maintenance is unlikely to be devolved to Category B municipalities the question that arises is what could the municipality spend money on to promote the wellbeing of its farming constituency? To some degree the answer to this must depend on how much the municipality can reasonably expect to collect by way of the new tax.

Before suggesting ways in which municipalities might add value for the farming community it might be useful to estimate how much they could reasonably hope to collect.

(a) *District Municipality's levies*

The Karoo District Municipality's levy income from farmers amounts to R3.6-million per annum. This represents 51% of the Council's total levy income and it is estimated that the average annual levy paid per farm is roughly R1 800pa or R150 per month. The following are key considerations:

- it is thought that 20% of farmers are still not registered with the DM (although the percentage may well be higher)
- it is widely believed that understatement of turnover (the primary component of the formula on which the levy is based) is commonplace – perhaps by as much as 50%
- the DM budgets for future levy income using the rate of inflation applied to what was collected the previous year and takes no cognisance of factors such as product prices³
- no spot checks are performed to verify the accuracy of returns.

It is not difficult to see that, with not too much effort, the District Municipality might easily double its levy income from the farming sector. Considering the levels of service expected by the farming community from the DM, an average monthly payment of R150 per month per farm seems quite unrealistic. Were the estimated 20% of farmers still unregistered brought to book, and were turnover realistically stated, the average payment per farm per month should rise to about R240, and this quite apart from any turnover increases as a result of rising wool prices and the like. This is still hardly a crippling burden.

Kareeberg is estimated to contain roughly a tenth of the farmers falling within the Karoo DM's sphere of operations. If the Council could collect what is its due from the farmers (say R7.2- million pa), and if Kareeberg may be taken as representative of the whole when it comes to understatement of turnover and unregistered farmers, then an *extra* R360 000 pa (200 farmers x 0.8 x R1 800pa x 1.25) could be raised from Kareeberg without difficulty.

The maintenance of roads will be looked at in more detail presently but considering that the DM's total annual budget for roads is in the region of R12-million an extra R360 000, if applied solely to Kareeberg's roads, could go a long way to making the farmers (and the municipality) a good deal happier. Kareeberg has about 1 600 km of gravel roads and it costs about R250 all told (i.e. including overheads) to scrape one kilometer of road. R360 000 then, if applied to the scraping of gravel roads, translates into 1 440km of road that can be scraped every year. This is *over and above* what is being done at the moment. One wonders how much individual farmers might save themselves every year

³ The wool price has risen by 75% during 2001-2.

in vehicle maintenance, and by how much the area's `GNP' might rise, if all the gravel roads were scraped more frequently than at present.⁴

Insofar as rural rates are concerned though we may conclude:

- that farmers are not overly burdened by DM levies at present
- that a rate levied by the municipality need not entail the abolition of the levy
- that the farming community bears some responsibility for the DM's financial shortfalls
- much more could be achieved if everyone played by the rules
- that it can be *self-defeating*, and in the long run more costly, *not* to contribute to agencies such as District and Local municipalities whose business it is to pave the way for its citizenry to prosper, to provide the necessary preconditions and the kind of environment in which *the generation of wealth becomes viable*. This is to say that a measure of financial sacrifice can set a positive multiplier effect in motion which transforms that sacrifice into an *investment*. One has only to look at the costs of doing business in countries where there is no institutional infrastructure (and consequently no infrastructure of any sort) to see that this is so.

However, it should be noted that there is some doubt at national level about the future of the District Municipal levy system. If the levy is abolished, it would provide even stronger arguments for a rural municipal rate.

(b) *Municipal rates*

In 1996 an informal survey conducted one-on-one in the eastern Free State revealed that farmers would not object unduly to paying an annual rate of R1 per hectare. It is granted that the farms in the eastern Free State are smaller than Kareeberg's and that due to the different type of farming practised the yield per hectare is almost certainly considerably higher than can be achieved by a sheep farmer. Offset against these objections, though, must be the fact that R1 was worth a good deal more in 1996 than it is now and that it was the intention of the survey to arrive at a purely nominal level of rates.

Would an annual rate of R1 per hectare for the farms in Kareeberg be achievable? If the average size per farm is 5 000 ha. this would translate into R 5 000 pa per farm ie. a gross of R1.5-million per year for the municipality given 300 farms. Five thousand rand per annum is R416 per month.

It is stated that some farmers do not even make a return of R1 pa per ha. This is very difficult to credit. A 5 000 ha. farm should be worth around a million rand and can apparently carry 600 producing ewes at a cost of R600 each ie. R360 000 worth of stock. If one takes improvements into account a farmer must be working with assets totalling around R1.5-million. A return of less than R5 000 on R1.5-million of assets

⁴ It would of course be naïve to believe that a boost in levy income would neatly be applied to road maintenance. These are oversimplified calculations, and are intended for illustrative purposes.

suggests that something is seriously wrong or else that some very creative accounting is being employed.

Of course a farmer may be highly geared (in terms of debt) or may have years in which he realises a book loss but the same applies to any business or to any urban household. If a middle class family living in a R400 000 house in Bloemfontein can pay R400 a month in rates alone (and consider themselves lucky in comparison with their Gauteng counterparts) then it is difficult to see why the average Kareeberg farmer could not afford R416 per month.

The average Kareeberg farmer also has two important advantages over the middle-class rate-paying urban household. He can:

- write the amount off against his taxable income which in most cases (using the company rate or an average personal marginal rate of 35%) would entail a reduction of R1 750 against the R5 000 yielding an annual cost of just R3 250 or R270 per month.
- pass on the cost to the urban household in the form of higher prices.⁵

The fact is that if rural rates is introduced, at the end of the day it will not be the farmer who pays it but the consumer of his product. What the farmer will *gain* though is a moral claim on the municipality to provide him with services of some kind. The Municipality will incur a sense of obligation towards the farmers – something which strictly speaking it does not have at present as it receives no money from the farmers.

Provision may also be made for farmers to get rebates during times of drought or other disasters. It must also be borne in mind that if a farmer's income is genuinely so low that he cannot afford to pay the rate, there is, ironically, nothing to prevent him from applying to be classified as an indigent and thus eligible for equitable share support!⁶ However, then the onus to demonstrate an inability to pay, would be passed to the farmers.

What of the absentee landlords?

It is calculated that were the equivalent of a 5 000 ha. farm to be rented out at the erstwhile going rate for municipal commonage it would fetch between R90 000 and R120 000 per annum. It is not known what rentals are paid on grazing lands in Kareeberg but it is assumed that R90 000pa (or R7 500 a month) is a conservative estimate. Any landlord in an urban area who rented out a house for R7 500 a month would consider himself fortunate indeed to be paying rates as low as R416 per month. The absentee landlord will of course simply increase his rental to R8 000 a month and the lessee will in effect pay the tax which will, in turn, be passed on to the consumer and accounted for as higher input costs.

A monthly rate of R416 to the Municipality and a monthly R240 levy to the District Council makes a total of R656 a month (or the equivalent of just over one producing ewe). The effect of this on the recipients of the monies will be dramatic as will presently

⁵ However, farmers would argue that they face increasingly stiff international competition, and therefore upward pressure on prices is not feasible.

⁶ This stems from the fact that indigent subsidies are not determined on the basis of households *assets*, but their *monthly income*.

be demonstrated. This effect will not be confined to the Council and the Municipality though but could lead (as will also be demonstrated) to the farmer's being able to grow his business. The farmer's actual cost of R656 will be borne, indirectly, by the taxman and the urban consumer but what he gets for his R656 should enable him to boost his operations.

It must be stressed that the calculations advanced here are "ideal types". Reality is never so simple that juggling with numbers can encapsulate it. There may be price resistance from consumers or a rates boycott by farmers. A rural rate would be inflationary and farmers are as affected by inflation as anyone else. The wool price may collapse; bust follows boom; and a rural rate might be the "straw that breaks the camel's back" for some farmers. But the fact remains that these are contingencies which any business has to contend with and which do not earn it any exemption from having to pay its way for the sake of the collective good.

In the light of the foregoing, then it is submitted that the Kareeberg Municipality could reasonably expect to collect R1.5-million a year in rural rates and that, paradoxically enough, the imposition of a rural rate could constitute a *positive gain* for the farming community - *depending on how it is spent*. Far from it being the case that the rural areas would be called upon to subsidise the urban areas, the net effect of a rural rate could be that the urban areas begin to subsidise the rural areas!⁷

Thus the stage will be set for meaningful development in the farming areas.

Services that a Municipality Could Provide to Farmers

In the light of there being no finances with which to embark on innovative programmes of delivery at present and the uncertainty surrounding the allocation of powers and functions, and given that a considerable backlog of basics still needs to be put in place, the suggestions put forward here are meant to apply only once the inflows from a rural rate have begun. Most of these suggestions will be costed in a later section.

From the perspective of most city-dwellers, the *platteland* is characterised by a mixture of passivity and fatalism that is most debilitating.⁸ The *platteland* tends to be *reactive* instead of *proactive*. People typically wait for someone else to come along and provide something, or else are content to be fobbed off with excuses for shoddy service that no self-respecting city-dweller would ever take lying down. There seems to exist a culture of 'learned helplessness' which may have its roots in historic disempowerment. Of course these are gross generalizations, and it must be stressed that these observations were in no way inspired by Kareeberg which has, to the contrary, shown itself to be a refreshingly proactive municipality.

What seems to be at issue though is the taking of responsibility for one's own circumstances. What this would entail for a municipality is that, while it may not be

⁷ Because farmers would then have a much stronger moral and political claim to municipal services.

⁸ An Afrikaans author of note, who himself lives on the platteland, once remarked to the present writer that if the platteland was dying, it was only because it deserved to!

technically or formally responsible for some or other deficiency (in the sense, say, that the repair of a bad road is not its responsibility), it voluntarily takes upon itself the responsibility for seeing that the deficiency gets attended to the relevant Government or non-Government agency.

What is being suggested here amounts to *lobbying* and trouble-shooting – it is a form of consumer activism in a way. It is a fact of life that ‘squeaky wheels get the grease’. What the farming communities need is someone who will squeak *in the right places* on their behalf. Someone who will make things happen.

There are three important examples of potential interventions: (a) road maintenance, (b) telephony, e-mail and internet; and (c) information dissemination.

(a) *Road maintenance*

Roads are the dominant issue in Kareeberg and because one’s experience of them is so immediate (unlike, say, stormwater drain reticulation) they, more than any other factor, serve to inform peoples’ perceptions of their environment. This is very much more so the case when the roads are as neglected as they are in Carnarvon’s hinterland.

It would be futile to devise elaborate plans for municipal delivery to farming districts and to ignore the fact that good roads are the precondition for any of these plans to be implemented. National policy has hitherto been astoundingly short-sighted in this regard.

During the five years between 1996 and 2001, the 1996 national allocation for the Dept of Transport was slashed by a third (and thus by more than half in real terms). For the upcoming bookyear it is planned to spend 54% *less* on roads than was spent in 1996 and this in nominal terms ie. discounting inflation. Only 40% of this expenditure will be allocated to gravel roads. *One-fiftieth* (ie. 2%) of this hopelessly inadequate sum will be allocated to the Northern Cape. The results of this misguided set of priorities are there for all to see in the Northern Cape. Even Namibia spends 600% more on its gravel roads per km than does (or should one say ‘can’?) the Northern Cape.⁹

It is within this context that ‘developmental local government’ is supposed to occur.

The Karoo District Municipality maintains all Kareeberg’s roads (except those within the towns and those actually on the farmers’ lands) on an agency basis for the provincial Department of Transport. Its total budget is just under R12-million. This sum will increase by 4% for the next bookyear. There is no amount budgeted for Kareeberg as such – budgeting is for the whole District Municipal area. As of 1998 routine maintenance no longer included the resurfacing of gravel roads. Special application has to be made for funds for this and the chances of approval are remote. Farmers complain of roads having been scraped to the point where the underlying rocks are being churned up – in other words the road is becoming a track. To rebuild a road which has been neglected to the point of ruin is a much more expensive undertaking than simply to maintain that road.

⁹ Interview, District Municipal official.

If resurfacing is omitted from the maintenance cycle then in a sense scraping becomes counter productive because the point will come where scraping destroys the very road it is meant to maintain.

Another potentially damaging 'rule of thumb' employed is that the fewer the vehicles that use a road, the less the funds that are allocated to maintain it. The effect of the latter is that the deterioration of the road accelerates. This in turn has the effect that even fewer vehicles use the road and so even less money is allocated to it. The logical end result of such a cycle should be obvious – no road left at all. The converse ie. the more a road is used the more money is allocated to its preservation, must also have the end result, over time, that scarcely any roads will be left in the country. Efforts ought also to be made to wean traffic *off* the main thoroughfares by providing acceptable alternatives.

Kareeberg itself has roughly 1 700 km of road. The surfaced roads (120km) are in good condition. The 1 600km of gravel roads are not. Of this 1 600km, 700km are classified as gravel main roads and 900km as gravel divisional roads. The provincial department regards its tarred roads as its chief asset the maintenance of which must be prioritised. For a region such as Kareeberg which has so little tarred road (and which to add insult to injury is used to bypass it) this is cold comfort.

Although the gravel road from Carnarvon to Prieska was reported to be in good condition at the time of writing this is not the rule. Many roads, it is claimed, have not been scraped for years unless it is by the local farmers at their own cost. The old TRC's arranged for a number of scrapers of the towing sort to be bought and made available to farmers and these assets are now in the care of the various Farmers' associations.

While the District Council appreciates the help it gets from farmers in scraping the roads, it is not an ideal situation. A road, like a chain, is only as good as its weakest link. A perfect 100km road is useless if a 1m wide donga traverses it. Farmers only scrape portions of a road which can lead to an overall patchwork effect if not everyone does likewise and to the same standard. There is a further problem. Scraping a road is something of an art to those who know what they're doing. This is why it might be a good idea for the Municipality to offer to send interested parties on road-scraping courses.

Kareeberg Municipality can however look forward to the day when the Vosburg-Britstown connection is tarred after which the Vosburg-Carnarvon road will be next. These improvements should have a pronounced multiplier effect on the eastern portion of Municipality and bring much-needed relief to Vosburg (which has already seen its post office close down) and to Carnarvon.

The District Council does what it can within the financial constraints placed upon it but Kareeberg is ill-served by its roads. Apart possibly from 4x4 off-road enthusiasts, travellers derive little confidence from hearing locals describe such and such a road as "*die doodspad*". If tourists are subjected to negative experiences on a district's roads those are the stories they carry home with them – not the glowing accounts of pristine Karoo beauty they might otherwise have related at the dinner table.

Kareeberg ought to serve as a very useful short-cut for travellers going to and from Namaqualand and the Western Cape and indeed it does to a certain category of vehicle – large trucks and lorries. Especially after rains these churn up the mud so that the roads

become impassable to normal traffic. This type of through-traffic also does little to boost the local economy, and also contributes to driving off the more affluent type of tourist.

The fact that most travellers prefer to skirt around Kareeberg via Loxton and Victoria-West (and in the process incur over 100km of extra driving distance) is a stark indication of the negative effect on a region of having roads with a bad reputation.

Isolated communities like those at Vanwyksvlei and Swartkop (just beyond the north-west border of the Municipality) face the very real prospect of falling off the face of the map. Towns that are accessible will tend to get attention.¹⁰

Good roads are surely *integral* to development. In short, isolation begets neglect and this begets a vicious downward spiral that is almost impossible to reverse once it has a community in its grip.

Until Government rethinks its policy regarding rural roads, Kareeberg must fend for itself. What a determined DO might do is so to badger the authorities with applications for resurfacing grants so that these needs get entered onto Departmental priority lists. Any refusals could also be used to bring the plight of the district to the attention of the world's donor community.

As a gravel road reportedly costs roughly R250 per km to scrape Kareeberg might want to consider using the income from its rural rates for this purpose. The cost would be around R400 000 pa but in all fairness it should be partially subsidised by the District Council. The farmers would presumably feel much more favourably disposed towards a rural rate if they could see it being put to use in this fashion.

Whatever the case furious lobbying and a good deal of innovation is going to be needed before much progress can be made in the Kareeberg hinterland.

(b) *Telephony – the impact of telephones, e-mail and the internet*

Kareeberg farmers appear to believe that they will *never* get their manual exchange upgraded to an automatic one. The excuse given by Telkom is that it is run as a business and that it is simply not cost-effective to do so. If farmers want direct dialing or e-mail, then they must meet the full costs of providing the infrastructure themselves which may run into tens of thousands of rand. This is quite unacceptable and is completely at odds with the 'Vision' and 'values' Telkom parades on its 'Company Profile' website page.

As a monopoly service provider, built up with taxpayers' money, and supposedly committed to rural upliftment it is incumbent upon Telkom to find an affordable solution for the farming community. There are many children who could benefit from distance education, there is a potential community of at least 200 internet users waiting for a service – the positive multiplier effect of their being provided with the service is

¹⁰ Already it is known that Swartkop was selected as a case study, and subsequently dropped, from a major research programme because no one could be quite sure they would actually get there.

incalculable but it would be very great. These multiplier effects are always far more pronounced in rural than in urban areas. Why should Kareebergers be denied access to the global village, or condemned to years of slow atrophy trapped on the wrong side of the digital divide?

A 1999 DBSA report¹¹ highlighted the fact that the Northern Cape Provincial Government had been particularly negligent in failing to see that any requirements for telephony in the province featured on Telkom's priority list. It is precisely this kind of institutional inertia which a municipality, taking responsibility for whatever does, or does not, happen in its area, can set out to combat. Just as a householder may not be the responsible party to unblock a drain in her backyard but takes responsibility for seeing that it gets done, so too must a municipality look after its backyard.

The Telkom affair is the kind of ball somebody needs to run with and to create such a fuss about that Telkom will be only too pleased to oblige. Telephone lines must be repaired expeditiously. If customers are paying for a 24-hour service, and outages impact on their business and compromise their security, then somebody needs to get the technicians, out of bed if need be, to attend to the lines that are down.

The potential benefits to the farming community should hardly require elaboration here. Suffice it to say that those who are marooned on the wrong side of the digital divide will progressively find themselves doomed to irrelevance. The world will carry on without them.

According to an agricultural economist,

The South African farmer is today a world player in a world market. The opportunities to make money from farming are clearly ten times better than they were a couple of years ago¹²

Kareeberg's farmers must ask themselves to what degree they too are 'world players in a world market' and if not, why not.

It is not known whether Telkom's excuse for not upgrading the Kareeberg farmers' telephone lines – that it would not be 'cost-effective' to do so - is an official one or whether this is the received wisdom but it must not be accepted with complacency.

The trans-continental railroad that opened up America was also not very cost-effective to begin with but men of vision and faith made it happen and the rest is history. 'Cost-effective' can be a deceptive catchphrase. "Cost-effective over what time horizon?" is the question must be asked. If it's the current bookyear that is meant then the excuse must be rejected. If short term expedients of cost-effectiveness are going to be the criteria against which development initiatives are measured then municipal delivery to farmworkers can never get off the ground.

¹¹ T. Stilwell and D. Atkinson, "Rural Roads and Telecommunications: Institutional Requirements for Sustainable Development", Development Bank of Southern Africa, 1999.

¹² Ernst Janovsky, quoted in the *Landbou Weekblad*, 23 September 2002.

Telkom, as a monopoly operator owned by the State, should not be let off the hook so easily. Does it subscribe to the State's developmental ethos or does it not? These are the questions which a DO must take up with Telkom with vigour.

While farmers countrywide are dealing in agricultural futures on the SAFEX exchange, shopping around for competitive prices, having leisure goods delivered to their nearest post office, setting up deals with overseas counterparts, advertising hunting packages worldwide, accessing the latest developments in animal husbandry, and generally boosting their profits, Kareeberg's farmers cannot even send a fax without having to drive to the nearest town. This simply will not do. An acceptable solution has to be found.

An e-mail network would also offer the Municipality hitherto undreamt of possibilities in communicating with its farming constituency. A website forum board could be maintained for open dialogue purposes, inventories of medical supplies on the farms kept, payments could be effected online... in short a cyber-community could be established that would go a long way towards establishing the cohesiveness that the new municipalities lack at present and that it may be an uphill battle to achieve.

The Municipality should see to it that service, instead of being something that is talked about, is actually delivered. The telecommunications issue can be extrapolated to a whole host of other spheres (roads, welfare, health, policing spring to mind) and the possibilities need not be explored here. The point is that a municipality, by being proactive, could add value for farmers in a numerous different ways.

That municipalities are in no position to tackle such matters at the moment goes without saying. What is being advanced here can only be contemplated once rural rate revenues are an accomplished fact. What applies to the farmers applies no less to the farm workers, and by assisting the workers the municipality would in effect be providing another service to the farmers.

(c) Information distribution and marketing

Another service which the Municipality could offer, with inputs from the farming community, would be an online map of road conditions. The home pages of other municipalities, both local and abroad, should be studied for ideas as to what is possible. Farmers could advertise home-industry type products (and perhaps artefacts made by farmworkers) on the municipal website for supply by mail order.

Services that a Municipality Could Provide to Farmworkers

Any brainstorming session will produce ideas for service delivery to farmworkers by the hundreds. Some are listed here purely by way of example:

- Host workshops aimed at sounding out the farming community's needs
- Provide each farm's workers with two mules and a donkey cart.
- Acquire cheap second-hand bicycles that farmworkers can buy for a nominal fee

- Provide each farm with an emergency medical kit (these cost about R500 each)
- Initiate literacy classes, needlework classes, woodwork classes etc.
- Subsidise farmworkers (and indeed farmers) to attend roadscraping courses
- Engage NGO's who provide life-skills training
- Take on the banks who are allegedly guilty of extortionate practices. Shame them into reconsidering their attitude.
- Help farmworkers with negotiating bureaucracy. This is a critical function. Workers are by and large illiterate and do not have access to the fax machines that officials often insist must be used as the channel of communication. Even if they did they could not afford the charges. Workers are hugely disadvantaged by often not being able to claim what is their due (pensions, child maintenance etc.) and by not even being aware of what is their due. They are totally dependent on the help of people with first world skills in this regard. Most workers do not even possess an instrument with which to write. Farmers too, struggle to cope with the red tape officialdom demands and there is a crying need for simple administrative support.
- Provide a Citizens Advice Bureau
- Facilitate links with Legal Aid or other NGOs
- Health education, basic hygiene education, checking that immunizations are performed.
- Safe havens for farm worker children attending schools in the towns.
- See that road signs are put up where accidents tend to occur.
- Mediate in disputes
- Helping the clinics with their administration and with the fundamentals of stock procurement, e.g. not waiting until supplies are exhausted before reordering

One could go on indefinitely. Some municipalities will never see their way clear to providing certain of these services and it would be pointless to prescribe this or that as each municipality must tailor its own `package' of goods. What *can* be prescribed however is that the municipality resource itself so as to put service delivery to farm workers very firmly on the agenda.

Once again the emphasis is not so much on capital expenditure as it is on the funding of the Municipality to provide strategic and focused interventions. It is a question of the correct kind of staffing.

The Concept of `The Development Officer'

It is foreseen that the role of the municipality in the farming areas will, once the infrastructural backlog has been cleared, not be that of a provider of `hard' goods or traditional services so much as that of a facilitator and lobbyist. It is proposed that the position of Development Officer be created to give effect to this.

The personal attributes of the Development Officer (DO) are critically important.

- Such a person should live within the community so as to be permanently available to the community.

- The DO will not regard her functions ¹³as circumscribed by a detailed job description but will actively seek out new ways to promote the quality of farming livelihoods and lifestyles. She will be a proactive trouble-shooter, a self-starter, ever on the alert for ways to get involved.
- The DO should also, over time, build up a profile of each and every farm that the municipality can use for planning and research purposes. This would incorporate the sort of information that the present needs assessment is concerned with and it must be kept as current as possible.
- The DO will need to win the trust of both farmers and farm workers and resist the intense co-option pressures which will be brought to bear by various interest groups. Hers is *not* a political post or a comfortable sinecure.
- The DO should be passionate about rural development to the degree that it becomes a virtual obsession. What is needed is a results orientated go-getter and not a clock-watcher.
- The DO will be somebody who anticipates and forestalls problems before they arise, someone who 'makes a plan' and who gets things done. She will need to be assertive but scrupulously fair and even-handed with all comers.
- The DO's mission is to make a visible, palpable difference within her area of operations. To this end she will be in constant liaison with the farmers, their workers, and their families, as well as every conceivable public functionary, government department, and so forth. In essence she will write her own job description which will be dictated by her ambitions and aspirations for her municipality.
- She will need to be fully computer literate and be able to write reports and proposals, and to compile and monitor budgets. She should keep herself fully briefed on developments in other municipalities, pending legislation, funding opportunities, Council matters, current affairs and so forth and be able to interact with ease with all manner of people in all manner of settings.
- In essence the DO will be something of a missionary, a person with a sense of vocation, who through hard work wins the respect of the community. She will become the gatekeeper to the farming community, and through extensive travel have an intimate knowledge of the area.
- Although the DO's primary motivation should not be monetary reward she will occupy a very senior position in the municipal hierarchy and have a considerable degree of executive authority. The position must come with a degree of power and budgetary discretion. She should report directly to the CEO as a departmental head in her own right.

¹³ The use of the feminine gender here is only to indicate that the position is well-suited to a woman but it could of course be equally competently filled by a man. In smaller municipalities the DO might serve the towns as well.

- Such a person will thrive on being in the thick of things and will not be one who 'passes the buck'. She will regard everything within her sphere of operations as being her domain. Although a natural diplomat, if she has to interfere to get things done she will interfere.

Such dynamic, dedicated people are not as rare as might be thought but they have hitherto not really found their niche within the local government sector. The DO might have a couple of junior DO's reporting to her, depending on the workload, and the relationship between them would be that of mentor and learner. Another model is that of the "outreach worker"¹⁴, to make ongoing contact with community members.

In the case of Kareeberg it is felt that a DO with a junior staff member should be based in Carnarvon and that there should be junior staff based in each of Vosburg and Vanwyksvlei. These DO's need not draw any hard and fast distinction between assuming responsibility for these towns and their surrounding farmlands.

The senior DO needs to be an experienced person with a proven track record but the juniors could perhaps be graduates wishing to acquire valuable experience in the field. This is a function calls for the right sort of *person* and there are not necessarily any 'right' formal qualifications for it.

If the DO's are newcomers to the area so much the better – they will bring a fresh perspective with them and be much less susceptible to being co-opted.

Cost to the Municipality of the DO Function

Kareeberg's salary and wages bill makes up 52% of its total budget of R7.7-million and it is concerned that this is well above the recommended 35%. It is generally acknowledged however (even if not formally so) that smaller municipalities, especially those who become truly "developmental" in their approach, will be doing well if they hold their salary bill around the 45% mark so the position is not as dire as the Municipality might think it to be.

The proposed four DO's need not be introduced all at once but can be phased in, as and when they can be afforded and once the senior DO has paved the way for them. The possibility exists though that the three junior posts could be funded by a donor agency and the ability to arrange for this will be the sort of competency one would expect of the senior DO. (Other fund-raising possibilities will be discussed in due course).

The selection of the senior DO must be made with the utmost care as the municipality's new service delivery programme will stand or fall by this individual. There must be a fairly lengthy probation period (say 12 months) and the Municipality will have to be ruthless about immediately ridding itself of any incumbent who is not up to scratch. It is suggested that the DO herself perform the selection of the juniors once she has come through the probation period and proved that she is equal to the demands of the position.

¹⁴ Which is frequently employed in the United States.

The costings that will be done here assume one senior DO plus three juniors not sponsored to any extent by an outside agency. This is thus the “maximum level of expenditure scenario” for the Municipality. As already intimated, the junior DO’s should ideally be funded from outside sources (a SETA, foreign universities, DFID, USAID, local corporations, are just a few of the possibilities) as the Municipality will in effect be providing them with a hands-on training experience many would jump at. The possibility of attracting voluntary, unpaid foreign graduates is another that can be considered although their lack of Afrikaans would be a severe handicap in the Northern Cape.

Only the senior DO will become a full-fledged member of the municipal staff. The juniors should be assignees or retained on a contract basis. Thus the municipal staff ought to increase by just one person. (However, if the “outreach worker” model is employed, then there may be additional municipal staff on the payroll).

The funds available for the DO function will be drawn from the income generated by the rates on farms. It will be recalled that it was estimated that this amount could easily reach about R1.5-million p.a.. This is based on an annual rate of R5 000 per farm being collected.

These prognoses are, however, academic in this context as the DO function is not to spend or absorb the Municipality’s income but hopefully to increase it by drawing down funds already earmarked for many of the functions it is to perform. Whether the Municipality brings in R500 000 or R4.5-million with a land tax the nett effect over time might be that the DO department pays its own way. This is unlikely to happen initially though and certain start-up costs will have to be incurred.

Each of the three DO nodes will need a sturdy bakkie for the roads; a computer with a normal suite of Microsoft software and hardware features, a printer, a modem plus Internet access and a telephone connection; a fax machine; consumables for the office equipment and possibly some sort of office space. Most of this might be sourced from donors but assuming it is not, the cost should be roughly:

3 x used 1-ton bakkies @ R120 000	R360 000
3 fax/photocopy machines @ R2 000	6 000
3 fully configured computers plus peripherals @ R18 000	54 000
TOTAL	R 420 000

To acquire these assets then would entail an upfront capital cost of around R420 000. As already stated though a ‘big bang’ approach is not envisaged and if this cost is incurred over three years it would amount to some R140 000 pa. Of course if someone wished to use their own vehicle and claim a travel allowance that alternative should be considered. The only proviso must be that the vehicle is equal to tackling the roads in all weathers.

There is no reason why the DO’s should not work primarily from home but each might, depending on their home set up, prefer to have the use of a municipal office for a day or two a week to receive the public. If this is not available inexpensive, very basic, premises could be rented. The chief operating costs will be travel and telephone expenses. The telephone will be used extensively and many of these calls will be long distance. There should be some recovery for fax transmissions performed as a public service or else the system is likely to be abused. E-mail should be used wherever feasible as it is much

cheaper. DO's who have a cellphone should perhaps also receive an allowance for this. At a rough guess telephone costs ought not to exceed R60 000pa at most (R2 000 pm for the Carnarvon node and R 1 500 pm for each of the remote nodes).

Once all the nodes are in place mileage should not exceed about 40 000km pa for each node making a total of 120 000km per year. Costed at R1.50 per km this yields R180 000 pa.

The senior DO's salary must not exceed that of the Municipality's CEO but should be good enough to attract quality candidates. A package of R180 000pa is suggested with each of the three juniors earning R60 000pa.

The table below represents the DO function phased in over a period of four years (after the senior DO's first probationary year one junior is added every year for the next three years) at present rand values and with no allowances made for increases or inflation. The remote nodes of Vosburg and Vanwyksvlei only come into operation in the third and fourth years:

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009
Salaries	180 000	240 000	300 000	360 000
Capital costs	140 000	Nil	140 000	140 000
Telephone	24 000	24 000	42 000	60 000
Travel	60 000	60 000	120 000	180 000
TOTALS	404 000	324 000	602 000	740 000

Over four years this yields a grand total of R2 070 000. From the fifth year (ie. 2010) the capital cost would fall away and the yearly total would stabilise at R600 000 which is comfortably within the R1.5-million that should accrue from the new rates system. All sorts of ways could be found to reduce these costs or to fund them from elsewhere.

It must also be borne in mind that the DO's are not *dedicated* to the farming areas. About two-thirds of their time would in fact be devoted to the three towns – the old municipalities.

Quite apart from the outside funding which the DO function will make it its business to attract, considerable savings may be achieved for the municipality arising out of the DO's proactive, trouble-shooting role.

A fictitious example with its roots in actuality, and one that plays itself out again and again in South Africa, will suffice (see text box).

Text box: The role of a Development Officer in a rural sanitation project

A sanitation project is launched and a large capital sum is given to a sanitation committee to administer for the building of 200 VIP toilets. Ten local builders are engaged and each sets to work on building the toilets. After a time complaints begin to surface and it is evident that something has gone wrong. Project supervision had been delegated to the sanitation committee but the members of this committee melted away as each had priority for his or her own toilet and, once this was built, they lost interest in the project. An inspection reveals that the lump sum of R300 000 has been exhausted and that only half of the 200 toilets have been built. Not only that, but it further emerges that not one of the toilets has been built to specification and that most will have to be rebuilt. The reason for this is that no specifications were ever issued in the first instance and the builders were expected to copy a demonstration toilet that had been built some distance away near a sports stadium.

A competent DO would know that there are numerous manuals written for emergent builders on how to build a VIP toilet compiled by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. He or she would arrange that each builder received a copy which she would then have workshopped with them. The DO would also know that project management by inexperienced committee is a recipe for disaster, and so forth.

In short then, the livewire DO would have saved the unfortunate municipality R300 000 plus R50 000 rebuilding costs, not to mention the image and reputation of dry sanitation.

The DO's 'stitch in time saves nine' approach, if applied to the maintenance of water pumps and sewerage works would also amply repay their salaries. Large amounts of money are spent, totally needlessly, repairing equipment which, had it been routinely maintained as it ought to be, would never have broken down in the first place.

These examples can be multiplied endlessly.

How the DO could Add Value for the Farmer

It was claimed earlier, on the basis of the sample rural rate calculation, that the farmers' costs could be made good even were they not passed on to the consumer. The amount that the typical farmer may be out of pocket as a result of the rural rate is calculated at R5 000 pa less 35% tax deduction = R3 250 divided by 12 = R270 per month.

Ways in which farmers would benefit materially from the DO function are far too numerous to go into here in any detail. A random selection might include:

- Greater productivity on the farm due to hygiene training and life skills courses for the workers as well as alcohol abuse counselling
- Healthier workers mean fewer journeys to the clinic

- Farmers would be relieved of much of the administrative load which they undertake on their workers' behalf, resulting in savings in time, travel and telephone costs. The DO could also assist with service contracts, business plans, injuries on the job, official documents, etc.
- A good DO function should be able to ensure that the small towns of Vosburg and Vanwyksvlei continue to exist. If these towns implode¹⁵ many farmers would find themselves seriously compromised financially.
- In time the DO should be able to arrange that some of the burden of attending to workers' transport requirements is assumed by the Municipality
- A good DO can fulfill a matchmaking function between needs and donors and can package an area's liabilities such that they become a positive asset – a magnet for donor funds.

But these general considerations all pale in comparison with the prosperity which could overtake the region if it could end its isolation, attract more passers-through, more foreign tourists, and begin to market itself properly. For this to happen the two communications networks of roads and telecommunications need thorough revitalisation.

The spin-offs attached to each of these will be dealt with presently but any DO function worth its salt will make a crusade of the communications issue – it is the *sine qua non* for development to occur, the key to progress. For one thing, land values should increase appreciably, way outstripping the effects of a rural rate. There is a precedent for this in the Free State where one or two small initiatives led to more initiatives, and a domino effect was set in motion that saw local land values boom.

This requires a catalyst – a skilled and innovative Development Officer.

A Note on Fundraising Possibilities

The Kareeberg Municipality has applied for Lotto funds for various projects (such as a creche) but has never received so much as an acknowledgement. The CEO complains, with justification, that they often hear of funds being made available for projects, but are given no clue as to how to access them. On the other hand, officials from Pretoria respond with incredulity when informed that the constant refrain on the *platteland* is that there is no money to do the things that seem so urgently required. They insist that the money *is* available but it does not get applied for or, if it is allocated, it goes largely unspent.

It is this kind of systemic mismatch and dysfunctionality that the DO will apply his or her mind to sorting out.

There are also potential donor projects which need to be implemented over a wider terrain. To confine this to the Kareeberg Municipality is unlikely to have much appeal for a large donor agency but a proposal for it to be implemented throughout the province, or

¹⁵ As has happened with numerous towns, e.g. Rouxville in the Free State.

the Karoo District Municipality, would probably be seen as much more attractive and viable. This is to say that Kareeberg does not have the 'critical mass' successfully to access funding in many instances.

Donor agencies often complain that they cannot find suitable projects on which to spend the funds they are allocated or that they do not receive sufficiently well-motivated and coherent proposals.

It is suggested then that Kareeberg motivate for the appointment of a professional fundraiser (one well acquainted with the sorts of foreign donors who tend to support local government initiatives) at District Municipal level. This individual could perhaps be paid a very low retainer but would be incentivised by a commission on funds actually obtained. This would potentially be a very lucrative assignment although if the fundraiser does not deliver the goods fairly rapidly then a replacement must be sought.

The incumbent should be a sophisticated 'operator' well able to package a district's needs such that donors are attracted by the possibilities. This person need not be resident in the area but might, more appropriately, be situated in Pretoria. The fundraiser should be in close contact with DO's throughout the region and should meet regularly with them to strategise.