



# HOW MENTORING SHOULD WORK

Cois Harman's assistance to developing farmer **GK Gasekoma** is a case study in mentoring. His procedure should be compulsory in any project involving taxpayers' money. **Chris Nel** reports.

**G**overnment ineptitude, delays and disappointment. For years, these characterised the farming experience of GK Gasekoma, a land reform recipient in North West. Then a dedicated farmer-mentor set about putting GK on the road to success. The way in which he did this is an object lesson in mentoring skills and good teamwork.

## A SLOW START

In October 2008, GK became the recipient of the land restitution farms Bruintjiesfontein and Klein Quaggablatt, near Reivilo in the North West. Together, these cover 1 233ha.

GK started receiving the assistance of a government-appointed mentor. But years passed with little progress, and finally, dissatisfied with the result, GK approached Cois Harman of Agri Start to become his mentor. Cois visited him on his

farms several times and discovered numerous infrastructure problems.

Poorly planned camp infrastructure was one. The fencing had many basic flaws, one being that the straining posts had been erected without angle supports. This caused the entire fence to sag badly after the first rain. In addition, there were no passages between adjoining camps so that workers could move the cattle efficiently between camps and to the kraal for processing.

Cois decided to accept the challenge. He began by discussing GK's needs with him, and gave him several ideas. He then rewrote the business plan in consultation with GK. After this, they obtained quotations for equipment and cattle.

Finally, Cois presented the business plan and quotations to the department of agriculture for final approval. More than two years

**ABOVE:** GK Gasekoma's beef enterprise is based on high-quality Braunvieh cattle. His son, Clement (above), is developing into a proficient cattleman. PHOTOS: JAN VAN ZYL, URI

passed with no sign of funds. Eventually, the money was paid out at the end of May 2014. By this time, however, most of the items had increased in price.

Not to be deterred, Cois used the prices quoted on the original business plan in his negotiations to get the equipment and material cheaper or at least closer to the original estimates. Real progress could now begin.

## BUSINESS MODEL

Development work on the farms included constructing a cattle handling facility, building a dam and erecting fences and passages. All this was based on a business model where suitably equipped and skilled contractors would do the work.

Cois discussed the model in detail with GK. He (Cois) would act as a consultant and would train GK and his workers to do everything that required no external contractor. This meant that GK would

take full responsibility for all farming activities, with Cois guiding him through the process. The aim was to help GK and his workers gain the skills they needed to run the farm independently.

## THE MENTOR REWROTE THE BUSINESS PLAN

Cois temporarily transferred one of his own farm workers, Gilbert Legoba, to GK's workforce to train the workers and supervise the development work. Gilbert had experience in many aspects: welding, constructing facilities and buildings, erecting fencing, and cattle management.

GK appointed four other workers, including his son, Clement, and Cois and Gilbert set about training these men in construction and maintenance tasks. These included calculating, measuring, levelling,





Solar water heating systems on housing avoids the cost of installing, and then paying for, electricity.

## FAST FACTS

- After problems with a government-appointed mentor, GK Gasekoma asked Cois Harman of Agri Start for help.
- Cois rewrote GK's business plan, designed fencing infrastructure and helped GK and his team gain skills to run the farm.



setting out measurements, angle grinder cutting and welding – all crucial skills needed when building the kraal and planting the fence support poles. They also taught them the essentials of working with cattle, including basic veterinary management.

Cois designed the layout of the kraal, fences and other infrastructure in consultation with GK, and it was planned to complete the basic infrastructure in four months. GK and Clement motivated their workforce effectively and the team worked well. Father and son gained considerable management experience and insight during this time, as well as learning valuable skills.

Apart from a number of licks, veterinary medicines and vaccines, all inputs were purchased according to the business plan, enabling most of the planned work to be completed within the four months.

The finishing touches to the kraal were made according to Cois's requirements, and the

kraal was painted with rust-preventive paint.

### A BRIEF SETBACK

The original plan included a tractor trailer. Just as the development entered its final stages, the department informed Cois and GK that paying for it was no longer possible "due to the budget". Without a trailer, GK could not transport materials for infrastructure.

"We calculated that if we had to hire a contractor to transport this material, we'd spend a lot more," recalls Cois.

"So we decided to buy a proper Vetsak tractor trailer to bring in sand and stone from an adjoining farm, and cement and bricks from Reivilo. This saved money instead of enriching somebody else. Without the trailer, a tractor on a cattle farm is a waste."

Cois had managed to save some money by careful buying on certain items – without sacrificing quality – and this paid for the trailer.

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### TOP LEFT:

From left: Dittro Kgomanyane (project office, Department of Land Reform and Rural Development), Gilbert Legoba, GK Gasekoma, Imran Mirza (Land Reform Office, North West), Clement Gasekoma and Edward Moreeng (skilled worker)

### ABOVE:

An awning prevents rain from spoiling the feed. COURTESY OF COIS HARMAN

### ABOVE RIGHT:

Much infrastructure was not up to standard. For example, the straining posts in the corners of camps lacked angle supports. COURTESY OF COIS HARMAN



Good material storage and management sets the tone for a sound and disciplined farm infrastructure development programme. COURTESY OF COIS HARMAN







**ABOVE:** A livestock operation in a semi-arid environment is impossible without good water infrastructures. COURTESY OF COIS HARMAN, AGRI START

**ABOVE LEFT:** A tractor performs numerous tasks on a farm. COURTESY OF COIS HARMAN, AGRI START

#### ← PROBLEMS – 'N BOER MAAK 'N PLAN

Several challenges, including problems with payment, threatened to delay the project at the start. These were all overcome through flexibility and determination. After getting approval to begin, Cois and GK tried to buy equipment and supplies. But Suid Wes Landbou would not accept their cheque as GK was not a member yet. So they used the membership number of a friend of Cois until GK could register.

lines had to cross rocky terrain. They were forced to rent a jackhammer to bore holes into the rock for the posts, delaying progress still further.

#### THE FUTURE

"We managed to give GK the opportunity to develop his farm by himself in co-operation with his workers," says Cois. "I had the opportunity to guide him to do things simply and effectively. In the process, he developed the skills needed to sustain his venture into the future.

#### 'GK DEVELOPED THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE NEEDED TO SUSTAIN HIS VENTURE INTO THE FUTURE'

The second difficulty was that GK had to wait 15 days for the cheque to be cleared before accessing the money. Interim measures had to be arranged to enable him to proceed with the work. After this, they had to wait another 15 working days to collect their purchases.

It was then discovered that one of the fence

The workers are now well-trained and skilful."

Cois stresses that GK remained in control. "He was exposed to negotiations and learnt to manage everything on his farm. By the end of September 2014, most of the development work was completed and two workers, now skilled,

## A model in accountability

Cois Harman meticulously kept records of every step of the project. This enabled him to quickly respond to any query and furnish documentary proof, a degree of accountability that should be mandatory in every project involving taxpayers' money. The records included the following:

- Recap project progress by Cois Harman from Afri Start, mentor of GK Gasekoma on his farms Brintjiesfontein and Klein Quaggablatt, 2014;
- Quarterly expenditure report;
- Labour report;
- IDs of workers;
- Report on cheques used;
- FNB bank statements;
- Quotations for cattle invoices and cheques paid;
- Quotations for Toyota bakkie, invoice and cheque paid;
- Quotations for generator, welder, grinder, working equipment for farm, invoice and cheque paid;
- Quotations for tractor, invoice and cheque paid;
- Salaries of workers, running needs and equipment for farm, invoices and cheques paid;
- Mentor payments and inputs for farm, invoices and payments;
- Quotations for fencing material, invoice and cheque paid;
- Quotations for trailer, invoice and cheque paid;
- Quotations for drinking and lick troughs, invoice and cheque paid;
- Invoice for tractor trailer and cheque paid;
- Quotations for scale crate neck clamp, invoice and cheque paid;
- Quotations for licks, invoice and cheques paid;
- Quotations for dam, invoice and cheque paid;
- Quotations for gates, invoice and cheque paid;
- Photos as proof of work done on the farm attached on CD.



**ABOVE:** On GK's farm, numbered ear tags attest to a good record-keeping system.

have moved on to work for another farmer."

In retrospect, Cois regrets that they did some things without discussing them with the department.

"These include buying the tractor trailer, giving him the opportunity to run his monthly expenses and buying the basic inputs and requisites for the farm. We also arranged to insure his bakkie and cattle trailer

in case of an accident, and for SASRIA damage.

"His cattle handling infrastructure is of a standard that will make things easy for any cattleman, and the farm is more farmer-friendly. In time, he should be able to sustain his operation with only two skilled workers."

• Phone GK Gasekoma on 072 388 8107 or Cois Harman on 083 265 6210. ■FW