

Decent shelter for Aussenkehr residents

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Aussenkehr

The Agriculture Business Development Agency (Agribusdev) has taken the initiative to provide decent shelter for its employees at Aussenkehr, where most grape workers live in reed houses and make do without proper ablution and sanitation facilities.

The agency, which is responsible for overseeing the development and management of government's green scheme projects, is currently constructing 52 single units, five two-bedroom houses and 10 duets. Construction work is to be completed by next year.

The houses will each have a living room, kitchen, toilet and shower.

The farm manager of Agribusdev's Orange River Irrigation Project (ORIP), Simon Akwenye, said the agency invested millions of dollars to give its employees, who have for long lived in reed houses, a proper place they can call home.

Akwenye indicated that the value of the money spent on the project is irrelevant, saying what is important is that workers are housed decently.

"I'm proud of what Agribusdev has done, and as long as we spending it on our employees who are the backbone of the company then it's worth it," he said.

The houses will be handed over to workers by June next year.

Although commendable, this housing development remains just a drop in the ocean, as many grape workers live in reed houses, without toilets and electricity.

Akwenye pointed out that the fact that the land is privately owned makes it complicated for companies to build houses for their workers, saying companies have to negotiate with the landlord for any development to take place.

"I think this is the main stumbling block and if it wasn't for this, many companies would have had housing provision for their employees long ago," he said.

Director of Silverlands Vineyards (Pty) Ltd, Andre Vermaak, who has been working at the farm for the past 16 years, echoed Akwenye, saying it was difficult in the past as all land was privately owned, but companies are now ready after about 644 hectares were donated to government by Dusan Vasiljevic, the owner of the farm, in 2011.

"I can't just build houses there and after a year the landlord says thank you for the houses and I end up losing my investment," he said of the past situation.

Despite this donation, progress to develop the area has been at a snail's pace, and the lack of water is now said to be the main stumbling block.

Vermaak enthused that grape companies are ready but emphasised that the lack of water to start construction remains a problem, adding that the companies can't do anything until Namwater is able to supply water to the areas where houses are to be built.

"That's the only delay - all the companies are committed to the housing and as soon as that is sorted we will start with construction," he said.