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An action learning platform of civil society organizations that supports local community struggles in land and agrarian reform. Through action research, campaigns, and building active citizenry, Tshintsha Amakhaya seeks to enhance rural people’s capacity to secure and realize their livelihoods and rights, and to promote alternative models of land tenure and agricultural production for household food security and national food sovereignty.

Tshintsha Amakhaya
Working together for rural change
Working together for rural change

Ten civil society organizations form the Tshintsha Amakhaya alliance: the Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA), Border Rural Committee (BRC), Farmer Support Group (FSG), Legal Resources Centre (LRC), Nkuzi Development Association, Southern Cape Land Committee (SCLC), Surplus People Project (SPP), Transkei Land Services Organization (TRALSO), Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), and Women on Farmers Project (WFP)

The different backgrounds and histories of the partners form an interesting mix of development practitioners, who are passionate about their work, and with an openness to engage with each other and create synergies to make a difference in society.

Some partners have strong roots in agriculture, with a track record in sustainable smallholder agriculture and rural livelihoods. Yet, the majority of partners are grounded in land and labour struggles to defend the rights of the rural and urban poor. It is this merging of agendas of agricultural and land CSO’s, who have largely occupied separate spaces, that brings added value.

Thus, rather than a network, Tshintsha Amakhaya is foremost a strategy to strengthen civil society and to accelerate agrarian and land reform. Through action research the TA partners – involving CSOs and their constituencies – generate an agenda for joint action, movement building, and lobbying & advocacy.

Building a dynamic and transformative movement

Partners are spread out across South Africa and work in the Provinces of the Western Cape, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo (see map). They work in rural and peri-urban settings with different constituencies such as farm dwellers, farm workers, restitution communities, farmers/land users on municipal commonage, and under traditional/community land tenure.

As with any multiple stakeholder initiative, participating CSOs hold different views of what TA means to them, what its aims are, and what its modus operandi should be. For some, TA is a platform for sharing and learning among partner organizations and their constituencies, while others place more emphasis on building social movements, lobbying for policy change, or being the CSO voice.

What the partners share is a frustration with the lack of effective and appropriate Government services for smallholder farmers/natural resource users, and an alternative vision for agrarian and land reform that will bring a lasting improvement to people’s livelihoods.

The collaborative process in Tshintsha Amakhaya involves three iterative stages of action learning: starting with phase 1 Baseline research to understand rural realities, followed by phase 2 Implementation and advocacy of alternative forms and arrangements for land and agrarian transformation; and concluded with phase 3 Reflection on impact.

Action-oriented research for development

In selected community sites, partners are conducting research to develop a baseline of livelihoods, land and labour rights, and access to resources and services. They will use these baselines to monitor change and impact of interventions developed in collaboration with community members.

TA partners say the research has brought them closer to their constituencies. Their work has become more systematic and rigorous, and their knowledge base is enhanced. And, the sharing and learning among partner organizations has brought unity of purpose.

Tshintsha Amakhaya