

Roosboom and Charlestown get back their land



Increasing violence at Ezakheni has made resettlement of the Roosboom community an urgent task.

THE communities of Roosboom and Charlestown have finally won back the land from which they were forcibly removed through apartheid land policies and laws. This was announced on December 11 1992 at a press conference called by the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA). Members of both communities were overjoyed to hear the news, and celebrations are being planned. However, both communities now face the challenge of ensuring that the land they have won back is developed according to their needs.

Roosboom

Most of the Roosboom community who were

forcibly removed, settled in Ezakheni, a township near Ladysmith. People were never happy in Ezakheni and since 1992 Ezakheni has experienced increasing violence. Little wonder then that when Roosboom was officially returned, members of the community quickly began moving back to escape the violence. This latest development has made planning for the resettlement of people and the development of Roosboom a difficult but urgent issue.

On January 14 1993, the Roosboom Board of Overseers (the body which had coordinated community efforts to get back the land) met to identify the main issues which the community needs to address and how

these should be tackled. They asked AFRA to convene a meeting of all possible organisations and agents who would have a role to play in Roosboom.

This meeting will hopefully establish land allocation and settlement procedures. This will involve restoring title deeds to landowners. At the moment there is little clarification from the government about how or when this will take place. In the meantime, the Roosboom community will be identifying and confirming former landowners or heirs. It is also not clear which government body will take responsibility for development in Roosboom. The Natal Provincial administration (NPA) is said



The community has started to rebuild the school at Roosboom.

to be responsible, but it is not clear which section of the NPA will do so. The community hopes that a meeting of all possible players will help to clarify and speed up implementation of these issues.

A difficult question which faces the community is how to settle tenants and people who lived in Roosboom but who did not have title deeds. The meeting felt that this should be dealt with through strengthening community organisation and through development planning.

In terms of strengthening community organisation, short term goals include drawing up a constitution for the Roosboom Board of Overseers, which will act as a civic organisation and setting up a conflict resolution committee. In the long term, the community wants to develop institutions which will be able to manage affairs in the area.

Around development planning, the community has identified the need to complete the land capability study and for this to be mapped. There must also be a process of building community consensus around a development

vision for Roosboom, identifying needs and priorities and physical planning for area. In the short term, a school needs to be built and provided with water. The school which did exist at Roosboom was destroyed during forced removal of the community. In the medium term, the community will have to get funding sources for projects and programmes and ensure that infrastructure, services and facilities are developed.

The community has also identified the need for Roosboom to be involved in monitoring violence in Ezakheni and to participate in local dispute resolution structures.

Charlestown

The Charlestown community faces similar challenges to that of the Roosboom community. Currently, they are preparing to have a meeting with the Development Services Board and the Natal Provincial Administration, the government bodies which administer Charlestown. At that meeting they will be discussing the return of their title deeds and development of Charlestown.

Concern over ACLA's land claims announcement

OUT of the nine cases on which the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA) advised the state president, only two communities who suffered forced removal got back their land - Roosboom and Charlestown. The Ga-Mampuru community from the eastern Transvaal had their claim turned down because the land no longer belonged to the state. In terms of its objects, ACLA is only able to consider state land. According to ACLA, the state president directed it to investigate the possibility of other state land being identified and made available to the Ga-Mampuru. In response to ACLA's announcement, the Transvaal Rual Action Committee (TRAC), an affiliate of the National Land Committee (NLC), questioned the government's refusal to reverse its sale of the Ga-Mampuru's land. "The issue of restoration does not only concern getting back farming land, it also concerns people's historic connection to particular pieces of land. Just as the government used to compensate black farmers when removing them, they should negotiate fair compensation for the white farmers who were the beneficiaries of apartheid forced removal," TRAC said.

And the Thornhill community of the Queenstown District remained in the dark about the fate of their claim. Although ACLA made it clear that a decision was reached, this decision was not disclosed. The NLC office said such secrecy would only create anxiety and tension among people in the area and that the peculiar statement around the Thornhill community's land claim emphasised the need for ACLA's reports to be made public and for the state president to give reasons for his decisions.