

“All is withered and burnt”: the Algemene Armesorg Kommissie of the Dutch Reformed Church’s drought alleviation work in the Ring of Clanwilliam circa 1923–1929

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Abstract

In the years 1923-1929 the Clanwilliam Ring of the Dutch Reformed Church was struck by a drought that left the area’s traditionally rural and agricultural population struggling with issues of food security, unemployment, and bankruptcy. Occurring in the early 20th century, the still nascent Union government was unwilling to dedicate the resources to direct food assistance schemes under flawed sociological reasoning and lacked the institutional capacity necessary to provide direct alleviation for the impacts of the drought. Consequently, the Dutch Reformed Church became the main overseer of food provision and charitable relief efforts among stricken communities through its *Algemene Armesorg Kommissie*. Local *Dominees*, *deacons* and elders of the church bodies in the arid Karoo acted as a grass roots organization in the monitoring and distribution of assistance (primarily through clothing and food donations) for local communities. This article focuses on the social and political realities that led to the Dutch Reformed Church playing a central role in combating the impact of the 1923–1929 drought in the ring of Clanwilliam. The study made use of archival primary sources mostly from the Dutch Reformed Church Archive in Stellenbosch, with additional sources from the Western Cape Archival Repository System and the National Archive of South Africa. Secondary research sources such as published journal articles and books, as well as unpublished dissertations were used to contextualize primary information and to add previous studies’ discussions on the topic. The study proves that the church, through its well-organized *Algemene Armesorg Kommissie* charity wing, acted as a much-needed intermediary often organizing and distributing

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donations of food, clothing and money from donors in other congregations to drought-stricken areas in a time when the government could not or would not provide such assistance.

Keywords

Drought; NG Kerk; Clanwilliam; vulnerability; Diens van Barmhartigheid

Introduction

To commemorate the two-hundred-year anniversary of the first sitting of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa's (hereafter DRC) first general Synod in 1824, this paper will discuss the impact that Church assistance had in combatting the effects of drought in the early 20th century. This topic has some relevance to the modern day, when one considers the recent drought of 2015–2020 that left much of the Northern, Western and Eastern Cape reeling from water shortages and the severe losses suffered by the agricultural sector.² In response to the 2015 to 2020 drought the DRC Synods of the Western Cape and Northern Cape played significant roles in assisting with drought relief for affected communities over the period.³ These efforts herald back to the drought relief efforts of the Church's *Algemene Armesorg Kommissie*⁴ (hereafter AAK) to assist the drought stricken congregations of the Karoo in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵ Consequently, it is important to note that these events are part of a long history of Church assistance to drought-stricken communities and can thus provide us with a more nuanced understanding of the central role of the DRC in its congregations' lives.

2 F. Mare, Y. T. Bahta & W. Van Niekerk, "The impact of drought on commercial livestock farmers in South Africa"; *Development in Practice* 28, no.7 (2018): 885; N. Letsoalo, I. Samuels, C. Cupido, K. Ntombela, A. Finca, J. Foster, J. Tjelele, R. Knight., "Coping and adapting to drought in semi-arid Karoo rangelands: Key lessons from livestock farmers", *Journal of Arid Environments* 219 (2023): 1.

3 Jacobie. M. Helena, Geld stroom in vir droogtefonds, *Kerkbode*, 28 January 2020. [Online]. Available: christians.co.za; Neels Jackson, Byna R3m droogtehulp kom uit NG Kerk, *Kerkbode*, 16 March 2016. [Online]. Available: christians.co.za

4 It is important to note that there are multiple spellings of this word.

5 Anon, "In Holland oorstromings ... maar by ons ... knellende droogtes", *Kerkbode*, 17 February 1960, pp. 272–274.

It is important to contextualise that the issue of poverty among the white population of South Africa had been a growing problem in the public consciousness since the 1880s but is commonly seen to have reached its peak by the 1920s and 1930s.⁶ Bottomley illustrates how by the 1910s increasing reports of a growing poor white problem in South Africa led to increasing concerns of how poor whites threatened South African societies inherent racial hierarchy.⁷ Poor whites offered their greatest threat through the mass migration of white farmers from the rural areas to cities and towns in search of work. The newly elected National Party, with its mostly agrarian voting base, fresh from an electoral victory in 1924 against the more economically liberal South African Party adopted a policy of “keeping farmers on the land” and implemented a series of programmes to combat rural white poverty. Mostly through incentivising white farmers with subsidisation schemes, cheap credit and protectionist policies.⁸

The DRC would become a significant role-player in attempts to combat the issue of poor whiteism as one of the largest non-state providers of social assistance and due to its strong ties to the growing poor white population who came mostly from the Church’s own ranks.⁹ Consequently, the Congress of 1893 marked a significant change in the Church’s approach to poverty relief, expanding its reach to adults while pushing for a more strategic policy of social upliftment through labour colonies and improved

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- 6 Bundy argues that although poor whiteism became more prevalent from the 1890s, impoverished whites had existed before that period in the Cape Colony. Making up groups such as the landless rural poor, low skilled wage earners and other low-income earners. See C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism”, in W. Beinart. P. Delius and S. Trapido (eds.), *Putting Plow to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in South Africa, 1850–1930* (Johannesburg, 1986), 103–104.
 - 7 E. Bottomley “Transnational governmentality and the ‘poor white’ in early twentieth century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography* 54 (2016): 77–78; J. Seeking, “Not a single white person should be allowed to go under: swart gevaar and the origins of South Africa’s welfare state, 1924–1929”, *The Journal of African History* 48, no. 3 (2007): 381–384.
 - 8 H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: A biography of a people* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), 335–339.
 - 9 *Union of South Africa, Report of the Department of Social Welfare for the Financial Years 1937–1939* (Cape Town Cape Times Limited, 1940), 15–16; L.L.N. Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N.G. Kerk in Suid Afrika (1928–1953)* (Paarl: Paarlse Drukpers, 1956), 141–143.

child education.¹⁰ An effort to create a more organised and formal poverty alleviation policy to combat the growing poor white problem was developed at the 1916 Cradock Congress on poor whiteism, with a strong focus on increasing state spending on education and employment.¹¹ The adoption of a new policy from the Cradock Congress was left to the Church's established poverty alleviation organ known as the AAK. Founded in 1915 the commission would only come to play a more active role in poverty relief with the drought of the 1920s under the leadership of its first secretary A.D. Lückhoff.¹² The AAK often working directly with or for the South African state to provide services the state was unwilling to provide such as direct household assistance.¹³ This article aims to explain how the Dutch Reformed Church, through its AAK, acted as a critical intermediary to cross the gap between the government and drought-stricken communities in the Ring of Clanwilliam, primarily as an organizer and distributor of aid.

10 Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N.G. Kerk in Suid Afrika*, 144–145.

11 The 1916 congress gave the church an official definition for what a poor white was an estimate of how many poor whites there were in the country and mapped out how the church would combat poor whiteism in the future. See R. Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the poor white problem in the wake of the first Carnegie Report (1932): some church-historical and theological observations", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37, no. 2 (2011):4–5; Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N. G. Kerk in Suid Afrika*, 154–162.

12 W.E. van Wyk, *Die Bediening van Dr. A.D. Lückhoff As Armsorgsekreteraris van die Nederduitse Kerk, Met Speciale Verwysing na die Noordweste 1916–1943*, Ongepubliseerde MA-verhandeling (Universiteit Stellenbosch, 1986), 90–92.

13 The AAK secretary was responsible for overseeing the distribution of aid to the separate smaller Algemene Armsorg Kommissies of the different Rings from the funds collected by the Synod. See W. van der Merwe, "Diens van barmhartigheid of diakonaat hoe belangrik is 'n naam?", *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 44, no. 1 (2023):2–3; Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N. G. Kerk in Suid Afrika*, 143; Van Wyk, *Die Bediening van Dr. AD Lückhoff as Armsorgsekreteraris van die Ned. Geref. Kerk, met Speciale Verwysing na die Noordweste 1916-1943*, 62–63.

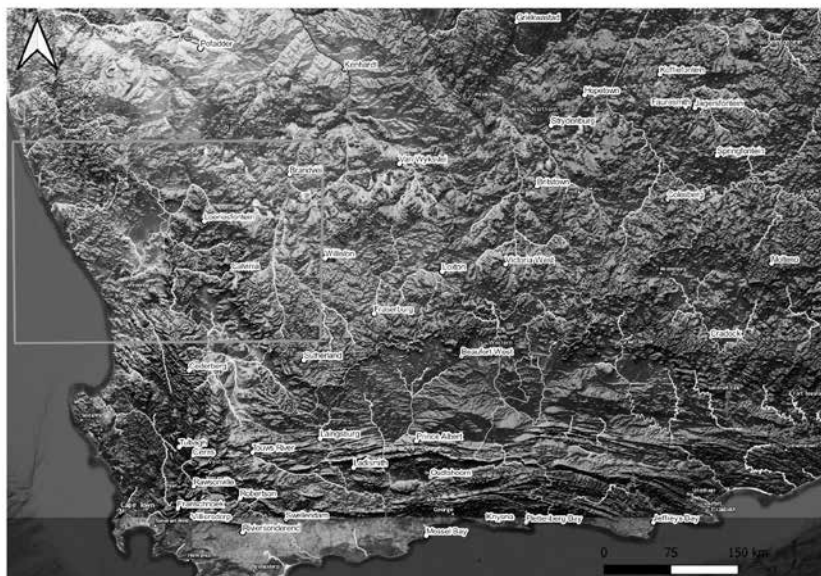


Figure 1: Map of Area of Study illustrating some towns, rivers, and topography.¹⁴

The area of study corresponds with the former area of the Ring of Clanwilliam, as it existed before 1935, when the Ring was divided with the creation of the Ring of Calvinia. This area encompassed congregations across the semi-arid Karoo such as: Brandvlei, Calvinia, Clanwilliam, Garies, Loeriesfontein, Nuwerus, Nieuwoudtville, Vanrhynsdorp and Loeriesfontein (see Figure 1 which highlights the study area). A Ring refers to an ecclesiastical organization in the tradition of the reformed Church whereby Church congregations near one another co-ordinate their activities and funds through regular meetings of pastors and Church elders beneath the larger authority of the Synodal structure.¹⁵

The Karoo is a semi-arid water scarce environment with an annual rainfall ranging between 100mm and 350mm. However, annual rainfall in the

14 Map made using QGIS software by the author.

15 A. Celliers, “Die Ring: In diens van onderlinge sorg”, *Acta Theologica* 31, no.2 (2011): 1–9.

region has a high variability and frequently fluctuates.¹⁶ Devoid of any perennial water sources outside of the Olifants River, farmers in the region historically relied on seasonal rainfall and underground water sources to support dryland farming of field crops and largescale sheep and goat farming. The *trekboere* (Afrikaans name for pastoralist farmers) that settled in the region in the mid-18th century learnt to survive its frequent droughts by adopting the migratory routes and habits of the indigenous Khoi San communities.¹⁷ Farmers soon came to rely on a seasonal migratory route that carried their large flocks between the mountainous winter rainfall region of the Bokkeveld and Cederberg mountains to the plains of the summer rainfall region around Springbok, Kenhardt, Williston and even as far east as Carnarvon and Upington.¹⁸ From 1923 to 1929, growing land alienation through enclosure which increased rents and decreased access to common use land, frequent price fluctuations for sheep and wool products, continuous drought and poor education led to the region's white population becoming one of the poorest in South Africa, susceptible to both food shortages and unemployment.¹⁹ Consequently, the onset of drought conditions from 1924 to 1929 and the start of the Great Depression in 1929 dealt a severe blow to the populace of the region.²⁰

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- 16 S. Grab, "A 19th century hydroclimate chronology for the semi-arid Karoo, South Africa: Droughts and dry periods in perspective", *A Journal of Arid Environments* 219 (2003), 2; J. Booysen, & D.L. Rowsell, "The drought problem in the karoo areas", *Proceedings of the Annual Congresses of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa* 18, no.1 (1983), 44.
 - 17 Khoi San refers to the various indigenous cultures that had previously inhabited the Cape before European colonisation that had shared similar linguistic and cultural traits that had relied on a mixture of pastoralist and hunter gatherer lifestyles to survive. See N. Penn, *The Northern Cape Frontier Zone, 1700–c.1815* (Unpublished PhD, University of Cape Town, 1995), 171–175.
 - 18 J. Barrow, *An Account of travels into the interior of Southern Africa in the years 1797 and 1798* (United States of America: Johnson reprint company, 1968), 403; G. McCall Theal, *Belangrijke Historische Dokumenten over Zuid Afrika, Deel 3, Union of South Africa* (London: Clowes, 1911), 354–360.
 - 19 P.W. de Villiers Kotzé, *Namakwaland: 'n sosiologiese studie van 'n geïsoleerde gemeenskap* (Ongepubliseerde doktorsale tesis, Universiteit Stellenbosch, 1942), 279.
 - 20 P.J. van der Merwe, *Trek studies oor die mobiliteit van die pioniersbevolking aan die Kaap* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1945), 276; J.F.W. Grosskopf, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission. Part I: Economic Report: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1932), 124.

Within South African historiography on the poor white problem there exists a lack of a social history of ‘ordinary white people’ as argued by Neil Roos.²¹ Histories of white South Africans have often failed to view this racial group as being made up of separate subgroups which have their own agency. Instead, studies on white South Africans, in particular poor whites, have tended to be grouped together into a larger racial monolith with other white subgroups.²² An example of this can be seen in the lack of research carried out on the *trekboer* population of the Northwestern Cape. With most research on the lives and experiences of poor whites originating from postgraduate studies written by Afrikaans academics in the mid-20th century. These studies have however been rarely referenced due to language barriers.²³

Before the 1980s paradigms in South African history did not support the creation of more in-depth discussions in published histories as researchers’ focus was more frequently on the question of South Africa’s existence as a racialised state and the development of oppressive legislation and exploitation.²⁴ The growth of a ground up style historical tradition based on concepts from E.P. Thompson and his “poverty of theory” approach which required historians to move away from ideological interpretations of sources and to better embrace histories from marginalised peoples.²⁵ The rise in the 1980s of the revisionist school of history brought change to the study of the poor white position by creating a new wave of research into the poor white problem which gave agency to its participants while also critically examining their relationship to the state and power.²⁶

21 N. Roos, “South African history and subaltern historiography: Ideas for radical history of white folk”, *International Review of Social History* 16 (2016): 119–120.

22 *Ibid.*

23 R. Gordon, “The enigma of the trekboer”, in: L. Lenggenhager, M. Akawa, G. Miescher, R. Nghitevelekwa, & N.I. Sinthumule, (eds.), *The Lower !Grab Orange River: Pasts and Presents of a Southern Africa Border Region* (Bielefeld: Global Studies, 2023), 83–84.

24 Roos, “South African history and subaltern historiography,” 122–125.

25 The revisionist school of history which developed in the 1980s tended towards focusing on African communities who had previously been marginalised by studies among South African authors. See P. Delius, “E.P. Thompson, “Social History and South African Historiography, 1970–90”, *Journal of African History* 58, no. 1 (2017): 3–10.

26 Roos, “South African history and subaltern historiography,” 122–125; This is best seen in Robert Morrell’s collection of essays on the poor white problem. See R. Morrell,

Before the arrival of bottom up style studies most of the histories of white communities had originated from the Afrikaner nationalist school of thought or *Volksgeskiedenis*. often in the form of localised Church and community histories based on non-critical and triumphalist primary narratives with little interpretation or critical engagement of said sources.²⁷ The new bottom-up style social histories were more focused on regional and urban poor whites such as Van Onselen and Kricklers work on the Witwatersrand or Bundys research on the development of the poor white problem in the 19th century.²⁸

Within South African historiography the role of the DRC in combating the poor white problem has been a topic of frequently discussion.²⁹ Historical studies on Church-led poverty relief programmes have often been generalised in their focus by discussing Church policy from the late 19th century taking examples from across the Cape Colony or South Africa.³⁰ South African research therefore lacks a localised understanding of how church relief programmes were implemented, how they related to the Church's relationship with its congregants and the effectiveness of these measures on its congregants.³¹ This article aims to build on a

White but poor: essays on the history of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880–1940 (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992).

- 27 As used by Grundlingh this refers to as 'people's history' which largely focused on political events mostly in a vein of supporting Afrikaner nationalist ideas and concepts often placing Afrikaner historians in conflict with social history which requires more focus on divisions such as class, race or gender. See A. Grundlingh, "Pitfalls of a profession: Afrikaner historians and the notion of an "objective-scientific" approach in perspective", in J. Jansen, & C. Walters. (eds.), *Fault lines a primer on race science and society* (Stellenbosch, Sun Media, 2020), 93–95.
- 28 C. van Onselen, *Studies in the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1982); J. Krickler, *The Rand Revolt: The 1922 insurrection and racial killings in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 2005)
- 29 Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the poor white problem."
- 30 N. Ross, "Work colonies and South African historiography", *Social History* 36, no. 1 (2011): 54-76; S. E. Duff, "Saving the child to save the nation: Poverty, whiteness and childhood in the Cape Colony, C. 1870–1895." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, No. 2 (2011): 229-245.
- 31 One study that preforms a similar task is Standers doctoral research piece which discussed the central role of the DRC in co-operation with the state in combating drought events in the district of Oudtshoorn. See O.P.J. Stander, *Die voorkoms van wit armoede in Oudtshoorn tussen 1914–1937* (Ongepubliseerde PhD-proefskrif, Universiteit van Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch, 2017).

historiographical understanding of the Churches' role in poverty alleviation by observing its efforts to alleviate the impacts of the drought of 1924-1929 in the Ring of Clanwilliam, particularly through a more micro-historical analysis of the population.

The article employs the vast and diverse records of the DRCA as primary sources. Records ranging from letters sent from individuals affected by the drought to correspondence between the Church and government provide ample and wide-ranging information on the impacts of drought events and the Churches' role in combating these problems. To support or augment the evidence found in the DRCA, the essay also uses records of the National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA) as well as the Standard Bank Archive of South Africa (hereafter SBA).

A rural populace vulnerable to the impacts of drought

The farming population of the Ring of Clanwilliam was for much of its existence a small and isolated community separated by large arid expanses between farms and the few scattered small towns. Travel across the area could often be an arduous process due to the great distances and poor quality of roads, meaning that most households would only travel to nearby towns a handful of times a year for shopping, sale of produce and to attend Communion. Most of the population relied on sheep and wheat farming not only for an income but also for subsistence, as the households' larders were mostly filled by the farmer's own produce. In many households it was a frequent occurrence for farmers to butcher one of their sheep or goats for meat while portions of the wheat harvest were kept for food, feed and to plant in the next year, this portion retained often being referred to as *bloedkoring* (blood corn).³² The diet of rural farmers had come to reflect the reality of their climate as hardy sheep and goats as well as wheat were the only reliable produce most farms could provide in such an arid environment while vegetable gardens were rarely part of the average diet

32 De Villiers Kotzé, *Namakwaland 'n sosiologiese studie van 'n geïsoleerde gemeenskap*, 308–309.

due to fluctuating rainfall and the non-sedentary nature of poorer farmer's existence.³³

Most of the rural population by the 1920s and 1930s made their living either as farm owners or tenant farmers who rented land from large landowners or the state. Among the farming population in the districts of Calvinia, Clanwilliam and Vanrhynsdorp (the area of study) in 1941, 48% were noted to be farm owners, 33 percent were land renters and the remaining 19% made their living as farm labourers or *bywoners*.³⁴ Annual incomes among farming households varied between £100 and £200 while tenant farmers and bywoners often earned between £50 and £100.³⁵ It is also important to note that in many of these poorer households the entire family were occupied with agricultural production as wives and children often participated in herding and harvesting either on the farm or for a wage.³⁶ Most farming households in the region spent up to 20 percent of their income, the largest amount of annual expenditure, to secure food products that could not be procured from farming such as sugar and coffee. During periods of drought household expenditure on food increased to 30% to replace food stores that otherwise would have been locally produced.³⁷ In many cases farmers came to rely heavily on credit from local storekeepers often providing repayment in lieu of cash with their agricultural produce in a system often referred to as the *ruilhandel-sisteem*.³⁸ This system diminished households' actual incomes often leaving them heavily indebted to the point that many lost

33 De Villiers Kotzé, *Namakwaland 'n sosiologiese studie van 'n geïsoleerde gemeenskap*, 309–315; R.W. Wilcocks, *The poor white problem in South Africa: Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part 2 Psychological Report* (Stellenbosch: Pro-Ecclesia, 1932), xv; A.D. Lückhoff, “Die nood in Namakwaland”, *De Kerkbode*, 17 December 1924, p. 1672.

34 Bywoners were a type of sharecropper who often occupied land owned by friends or family on a more informal basis than renters, often paying landowners in crops or services.

35 UG. 28:45, Union of South Africa census of Europeans 6th May 1941. Report on structure and income of families, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1945, p. 9.

36 J.R. Albertyn & M.E. Rothman, *The poor white problem in South Africa: Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part 5 Sociological Report* (Stellenbosch: Pro-Ecclesia, Stellenbosch, 1932), 174–177.

37 De Villiers Kotzé, *Namakwaland 'n sosiologiese studie van 'n geïsoleerde gemeenskap*, 299–304.

38 *Ruilhandel-sisteem* translates from Afrikaans as goods exchange system. See NG Kerk Argief, K-DIV 1590, Vorm F: Diens van Barmhartigheid, Gemeentes N-Pi, 1922–1943; Vorm Z Namaqualand, 1922–1943, Geldlike verslag 1932–1933.

ownerships of their stock and land perpetuating the larger poor white problem.³⁹

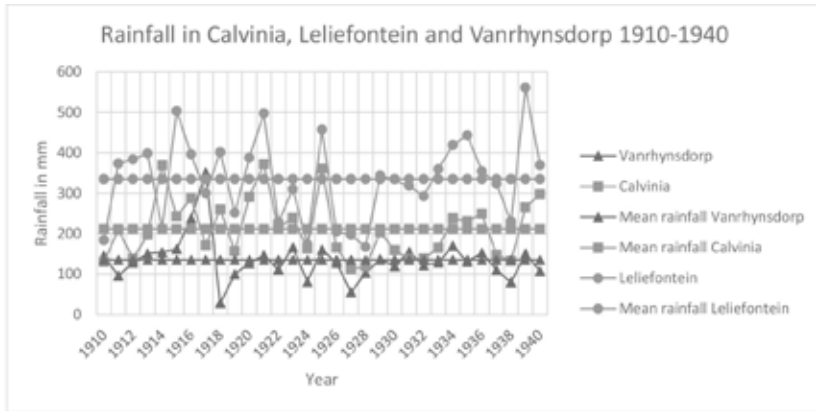


Figure 2: Rainfall in Calvinia, Leliefontein and Vanrhynsdorp with drought periods circled, c. 1910-1940.⁴⁰

The reliance on livestock farming for meat and wool which was supplemented by winter field crops such as wheat, rye and barley meant that the onset of drought conditions from 1923 left rural households with few options to resist the losses suffered.⁴¹ Pre-existing vulnerabilities in farming households meant that even a short period of drought led to farmers experiencing both decreased annual incomes and food shortages. Below average rainfall led to decreased amounts of surface and ground water which caused poor harvests as plants withered without enough water

39 NASA, Department of Justice (Hereafter JUS), File, 508, Ref, 5405/29, Springbok Magistrate appointment as commissioner to control emergency relief works Namaqualand & Vanrhynsdorp, Report on economic conditions in Namaqualand, Report sent by Magistrate of Namaqualand to C. H. Cousins Esq. Secretary of Labour, 21 January 1929; G. 56;12, Union of South Africa, *Annual report of the Department of Justice*, 1912, 69–70; NGKA, KR 246, Ring, 1933, Ring van Calvinia, Speciale Sitting 11 Nov 1932 to 28 September 1933.

40 Map made using data procured from the SAWS (South African Weather Service).

41 Standard Bank Archives (Hereafter STBA), Inspection Report (Hereafter INSP), 1/1/281, Van Rhynsdorp 1906–1928, Inspection report on the Vanrhynsdorp branch, 12 December 1906; STBA, INSP, 1/1/281, Van Rhynsdorp 1906–1928, Inspection report on the Vanrhynsdorp branch, 9 March 1917; STBA, INSP, 1/1/198, Calvinia 1906–1928, Inspection report on the Calvinia branch, 27th December 1906.

leaving rural households with little wheat for the next year and decreased livestock numbers as sheep lost condition and died from hunger or thirst without sufficient grazing.⁴² As can be seen in Figure 2, the rainfall stations at Calvinia, Leliefontein and Vanrhynsdorp recorded dry years in 1918, 1919, 1922, 1924, 1927, 1928, 1930, 1932 and 1934.⁴³ This trend can be seen reflected in Figure 3 where the lowest wheat crop production years were 1920, 1925, 1927, 1928 and 1935. The then secretary of the AAK Ds. A.D. Lückhoff described the impact of the drought on the area during his tour of the Karoo in 1925 so: “On this long journey there has been nothing to gladden the eye so far as the veld is concerned, all is withered and burnt, tragic, an unending horizon of hopeless wilderness”.⁴⁴

Figure 4 illustrates the losses of sheep and goats in the two districts, which reached their peak in 1923 to 1924 and 1927 to 1928. The situation was only worsened when in 1929 the onset of the global depression caused prices for wool and livestock to fall and disrupting any efforts by farming households to take advantage of better rainfall that year to begin rebuilding their flocks.⁴⁵

42 For many tenant farmers and *bywoners* the impacts of drought were only exacerbated by their lack of capital necessary for the creation of boreholes or purchasing of feed necessary to alleviate the impacts of drought. See NASA, LDB, Vol, 2327, File, 3435, Distress in Namaqualand, 1928–1934: Report by Divisional Inspector, Distress in Namaqualand, 1 June 1928.

43 These dry years correspond to those of M. Roulaud and Y. Richard in their own research over the entirety of South Africa. See M. Roulaud & Y. Richard, “Intensity and spatial extension of drought in South Africa at different time scales”, *Water SA*, 29, no. 4 (2003): 499–500.

44 Own translation from original Afrikaans. See NG Kerk Argief, KS 1745, Noodlenigings Korrespondensie Algemeene, 1925–1929: Letter from Ds. A.D. Lückhoff to Provincial Administrator of Cape Province, 14 February 1925.

45 STBA, INSP, 1/1/310, Calvinia 1931, Inspection report on the Calvinia branch, 2nd September 1931; STBA, INSP, 1/1/337, Calvinia 1934, Inspection report on the Calvinia branch, 5th May 1934; A. Minnaar, “The Great Depression 1929–1934: Adverse exchange rates and the South African wool farmer”, *South African Journal of Economic History*, 5, 1, 1990, pp. 34–35.

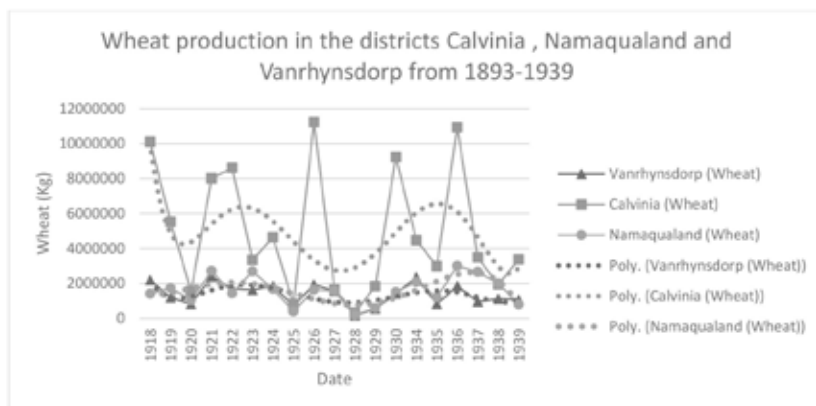


Figure 3: Wheat production in the districts Calvinia, Namaqualand and Vanrhynsdorp from 1918-1939.⁴⁶

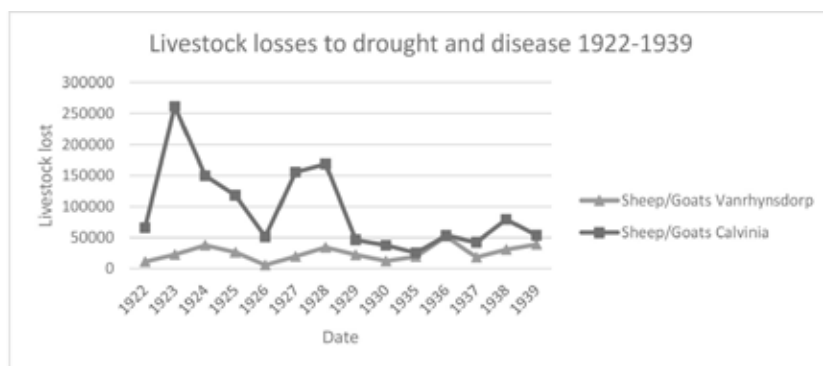


Figure 4: Livestock losses to drought and disease in the districts Calvinia and Vanrhynsdorp 1922-1939.⁴⁷

The consequences of drought from 1924 to 1928 were devastating for the population of the region as farming households suffered significant losses in their annual produce and number of livestock. As a consequence, households by early 1924 and again in 1927 began to report food shortages

46 Data was collected from the annual agricultural census 1918–1939.

47 Data was collected from the annual agricultural census 1922–1939.

not only from the poor harvest but also from the lack of employment as many farmers began to lay off workers.⁴⁸ Food shortages were exacerbated by the reality that most farming households were already heavily indebted to local shop keepers and were unable to take more credit to procure necessary supplies.⁴⁹ In response to these conditions many farmers responded through the traditional trek system and moved their livestock east and north towards the Orange River and southern South West Africa (today Namibia) or south towards the banks of the Olifants River in hopes of finding grazing and better living conditions. Many pastoral farmers responded to the drought through migration towards the Olifants River in the process overrunning the nearby congregations of Vanrhynsdorp and Clanwilliam which had to supply the families with assistance.⁵⁰ The impacts of food shortages and a general fall in living conditions were felt worst by the already vulnerable in society, mostly mothers with children and the elderly who were left behind as bread winners departed for the trek veld or relief works, leaving families without any food or means of gainful employment.⁵¹

48 A.H. Barnard, “Droogte en gebrek”, *De Kerkbode*, 12 January 1927; Ds. A.D. Lückhoff, “Ver en gou gery: Die droogte”, *De Kerkbode*, 16 February 1927, p. 240; NGKA, KS 1665, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, Gemeentes Korrespondensie A-V, 1926–1950: Memo besoek van Ds. Souts en Lückhoff na die Noordweste, 28 Maart 1928; Anon, Mense Verhonger in Droogtestreekte, *Het Noord Western*, 28 February 1928, p. 2; C. J. Meyer, “Die droogte gebreek”, *De Kerkbode*, 25 April 1928, p. 618.

49 Secretary of the Provincial Administrator (Hereafter PAS), Vol, 3/141, File, R120/68/108, Namaqualand relief distress fund sale of wheat on credit to Van Rhynsdorp, 1925–1946: Petition from Vanrhynsdorp farmers to the Private Secretary of the Provincial Administrator, 7/12/1927.

50 G. J. van Zyl, “Die droogte in die Noordweste”, *De Kerkbode*, 21 March 1928, p. 405; W.L. Steenkamp, Brandvlei, *Die Kerkbode*, 25 May 1927, p. 729; NGKA, KS 1746, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Gemeentes A-P, 1927–1928, Namakwaland, From H to the Algemene Armsorg Komitee, 17/ 2/ 27; NGKA, KS 1746, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Gemeentes A-P, 1927–1928, Nieuwoudtville, Letter from J. D. De Kock to Ds A.D. Lückhoff, 2 September 1928; NGKA, Collection Korrespondensie Diverse (hereafter K-DIV) 1832, Godsdienst verslagen 1914–1916: Verslag van den staat van den godsdienst in die gemeente Van Rhynsdorp, In de gemeente Gelezen 25 September 1916; NGKA, K-Div 1593, Vorm F: Diens van Barmhartigheid, Gemeentes V-Y, 1922–1943: Vorm Z: Van Rhynsdorp, 1922–23.

51 NGKA, KS 1745, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Algemeene, 1925–1929: Letter from M. Nieuwoudt to Ds. A.D. Lückhoff, 21/11/1927; NGKA, KS 1747, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Gemeentes q-z, Rampfondse Korrespondensie 1927–1928, 1969–1971: Letter from H. J. Dippenaar to Ds. A.D. Lückhoff, 26/7/1928; NGKA, KS 1746, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Gemeentes A-P,

The importance of the Dutch Reformed Church in the rural society of the Ring of Clanwilliam

In the wake of the *Trekboers*' dispersal across the Cape Colonies boundaries in the late 18th and early 19th centuries ministers in the newly settled towns found themselves surrounded by vast areas of thinly populated country.⁵² Among the rural inhabitants of South Africa religion played a significant role in their lives. The Church permeated the rural household through *huisgodsdiens* (household worship), an integral part of a household's show of faith where the male head of the household led both family and servants in prayer and singing of psalms.⁵³ By the 1860s a Christian revival saw increasing demand for Church presence in worship among the more rural areas which led to the popularisation of *Bidstonden* in outlying regions to spare rural households the lengthy journey into town to attend ceremonies and illustrating the strong desire from congregants to be closer to the Church.⁵⁴ Although Churches were often located in nearby towns, life in towns (and the entire district) often centered on the Church both physically and metaphorically.⁵⁵ Church services, particularly major events on the Church calendar such as communion, were important in the social lives of rural residents as Church events doubled as gathering places to do business and hold festivals for otherwise socially isolated communities.⁵⁶ Whilst

1927–1928, Nieuwoudtville, Letter from J. D. De Kock to Ds A.D. Lückhoff, 2 September 1928.

52 A. Moorrees, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika 1652–1873* (Kaapstad: S. A. Bybelvereniging, 1937), 481–487.

53 A. Moorrees, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika 1652–1873*, 521.

54 *Bidstonden* sometimes referred to as *Buitenwykbidstonden* were often set up on farms in outlying areas located at some distance from the central church congregation. *Bidstonden* were used as gathering places for congregants that could not make the annual journey to the central town. This measure was implemented to deal with the reality that the more rural congregants struggled to attend services in town due to both poverty and lack of transportation, issues often exacerbated during times of drought making it difficult for members to attend sermons as many had trekked far afield. See T.N. Hanekom, *Ons Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk: Gedenkboek by ons derde eeufees 1952* (Kaapstad: N. G Kerk uitgewers, 1952), 218–219; F.P.M. Brandvlei, *Die Kerkbode*, 7 May 1924, p. 381; H.P. Nieuwoudtville, *Die Kerkbode*, 22 October 1924, pp. 1411–1412.

55 T.N. Hanekom, *Ons Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk: Gedenkboek by ons derde eeufees 1952*, p. 362.

56 A. Moorrees, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika 1652–1873*, pp. 521–526.

most ministers were also government officials who had the power to sign marriage, death and other legally binding certificates. Powers which would remain with ministers after 1910 as many DRC ministers were official justices of the peace.⁵⁷

Church authority lay vested on a local level with the minister and council of the Church. The minister was responsible for performing services, sacraments and overseeing the general spiritual well-being of the congregation while the administration of the Church lay with the Church council.⁵⁸ Ministers also held official power in rural society as respect from the congregation to their position meant they were frequently elected to serve on local district councils such as school boards due to ministers' better first-hand knowledge of the general conditions in a district from frequent travels. This innate ground level understanding gave their opinions significant weight.⁵⁹ The Church council also had the power to enforce its own rules on members through the ability to censor members found to have broken the Church laws.⁶⁰ Church power was only further bolstered by the reality that education in the rural areas was directly controlled by the Church council, which financed and organised local Afrikaans schools, giving the Church significant say in the curriculum and employment policy.⁶¹ By the 20th century Church authority was guided by the strong political links between the Church clergy and the Afrikaner nationalist movement which many ministers and Church members openly supported.

57 J. Jooste, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk en die 1933 droogte*, pp. 10–20.

58 Administrative tasks connected to the running of the church were usually seen to by the church council, which was made up of church elders and deacons, it was also a frequent occurrence that deacons would often oversee religious ceremonies in the absence of the minister. See J. Jooste, “Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk en die 1933 droogte”, pp. 12–20.

59 The DRC generally required that any ministers who wished to stand for election after 1930 had to first stand down from their church position as the church was required to remain neutral in political matters, although there appeared to be more leeway for non-political party affiliated positions. See T.N. Hanekom, *Ons Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk: Gedenkboek by ons derde eeufees 1952* (Kaapstad, N. G Kerk uitgewers, 1952), 227–228; J.P. Jooste, *Die Geskiedenis van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrika 1859–1959* (Potchefstroom, 1959), 261–266.

60 J. Jooste, *Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk en die 1933 droogte*, 10–20.

61 T.N. Hanekom, *Ons Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk: Gedenkboek by ons derde eeufees 1952*, 363–367; P.F. Greyling, *Die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk en Armsorg* (Kaapstad: Naasionale pers beperk, 1939), 25–29.

This made nationalist goals a vocal point of the Church's efforts through education and *armesorg* programmes.⁶²

The role of the Church in drought alleviation efforts

Assistance to drought-stricken areas from the Union government was focused on aiding farmers. State resources were therefore targeted towards programmes such as the Drought Distress Relief Acts of 1924 and 1927, meant mainly for farmers impacted by drought to purchase stock to replace losses and provide additional funding for emergency relief works.⁶³ The government refused to extend drought assistance funding to cover household expenditures for food stuffs as it was argued that such direct assistance would amount to 'hand outs' encouraging drought-stricken farmers to continue expecting government subsidisation.⁶⁴ *Noodleniging* (emergency assistance) was generally viewed by the government as a temporary programme used in times of extreme distress or natural disaster to supplement primary incomes and could be halted immediately once the government viewed the situation to have stabilized.⁶⁵ The government instead preferred to support relief work programmes such as local government funded road and railway construction projects that provided a weekly wage and food supplies. Such programmes, however, tended to be biased in favour of married men. Women were negatively affected by

62 H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: A biography of a people* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), 385–386.

63 *South African Government Gazette Extraordinary*, No 1383, Act No. 16 of 1924, *Droogte Noodleniging Wet*, 8th of April 1924. Over the drought period government expenditure for emergency relief amounted to £97,959 of which £53,500 was used to fund relief works. See Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N. G. Kerk in Suid Afrika*, 293.

64 Funding for relief works in 1924 had amounted to a loan of £10,000 from the national Department of Labour, which was subdivided between the districts Calvinia, Vanrhynsdorp and Namaqualand who had to pay off these loans after the drought had ended. The provision of funding for relief works as a loan hamstrung relief efforts as financially poorer districts could not afford sufficient credit needed to run long term or large-scale relief work. See NASA, ARB, Vol, 582, File, B506/2, Relief works Northwestern Cape Province Namaqualand Vanrhynsdorp Calvinia, 1924–1925: Letter from Provincial Administrator to the Secretary of Labour, 30/10/1924; WCARS, 4/VRD, Vol, 1/1/1/3, Van Rhynsdorp District Council Minute Book, 1913 Jan-1925 March: Special District Council Meeting, 22 August 1924.

65 Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N. G. Kerk in Suid Afrika*, 290–291.

this as they were often left for months on farms and in towns with familial dependents such as children and the elderly but no way of receiving funds for basic needs until local men had returned with their wages.⁶⁶

Food relief fell under the auspices of the Cape Provincial Administrators Fund from 1924 to 1925 and 1927 to 1928, eventually being halted in mid-1928 due to a lack of funding.⁶⁷ Although the relief fund was a private initiative of the Provincial Administrator it was funded by a mixture of private donations, funds allocated from the provincial budget £5,000 and some £5,000 donated from the Department of Labour.⁶⁸ The fund operated in close cooperation with the AAK as they both targeted the same area and population group of middle to low-income households.⁶⁹ Consequently, the fund relied on local magistrates and Church councils to collect information on the destitute and oversee distribution of assistance. The initial onset of drought conditions in the Karoo area led almost immediately to increased interest from the AAK who began raising funds, food and clothing through donations in preparation to provide assistance to stricken communities.⁷⁰ One of the committees first acts was to provide some £300 from the collected donations to the Administrators Fund which had begun operations in January of 1924.⁷¹ From the beginning of the

66 NASA, ARB, Vol, 582, File, B506/2, Relief Works North western Cape Province Namaqualand Vanrhynsdorp Calvinia, 1924–1925: Report to the Cape Provincial Administrator and Executive Committee, 8 December 1924; NASA, LDB, File, 2412, Vol, R3643, Rehabilitation of the Farming Industry in the North Western Cape, 1929–1933: Report on Drought stricken areas, 21/2/29.

67 Funding for the AAK's drought relief efforts were mostly sourced through donations from congregations and the public following a publicity campaign via major newspapers such as *Die Burger* and *Die Kerkbode*. See; Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N. G. Kerk in Suid Afrika*, 293.

68 The concept of a private Provincial Administrators relief fund being created in times of emergency was clearly stated in the constitution of 1910, effectively removing the responsibility from national government. See WCARS, Provincial Administration Roads (Hereafter PAR), Vol, 115, File, P41, Relief works by local bodies general, 1927–1930: Letter from Provincial Secretary to the Magistrates of the Cape Province, 15 June 1927; *Union of South Africa, Report of the Department of Social Welfare for the Financial Years 1937–1939* (Cape Town: Cape Times Limited, 1940), 1–15.

69 NGKA, KS 1745, Noodlenigings Korrespondensie Algemeene, 1925–1929: Letter from Ds. A.D. Lückhoff to Provincial Administrator of Cape Province, 14 February 1925.

70 Anon., De nood in Namakwaland, *Die Kerkbode*, 10 December 1924, p. 1630.

71 NGKA, KS 1651, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, 1916–1932, AAK Notule, 1921–1932, Vergadering gehou in Kaapstad, 13 Augustus 1924.

drought in 1924 the AAK and Administrators Fund were closely linked and played a major role in drought alleviation efforts throughout the region. The DRC crucially assisted with the management and distribution of the Administrator's Fund through their network of Churches, often bolstering its own relief rations to congregations.⁷²

The DRC's specific relief was mainly overseen by the AAK, which relied on donations from congregations, either in food, clothing, or cash, which was then distributed via a sub-commission within the Church Rings to impoverished congregants. Food relief mainly took the form of raw grain that the recipients often had to mill themselves. Clothing was either bought or collected second-hand for distribution by an AAK sub-commission to congregations in need of assistance, often using the local district magistrate to oversee distribution efforts.⁷³ The AAK by March of 1924 operated in tandem with the Provincial Administrator's Fund a task made simpler by Ds. Lückhoff.⁷⁴ Lückhoff had become secretary of the AAK in 1920 having spent some years before 1924 as a representative on the Cape Provincial legislature campaigning for improvements to education in the outlying districts, consequently Lückhoff had strong ties to both organisations and understood how they operated.⁷⁵ He would serve simultaneously as a member on the Administrator Funds board and as secretary of the AAK from 1924 to 1928. Lückhoff would frequently include the Provincial

72 A.D. Lückhoff, "Die nood in die Karoo", *De Kerkbode*, 20 June 1927, p. 917; Anon., "Die versorging van die noodlydendes", *De Kerkbode*, 29 June 1927, p. 914.

73 Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N. G. Kerk in Suid Afrika*, 292; NG Kerk Argief, KS 1745, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Algemeene, 1925–1929: Letter from Ds. A.D. Lückhoff to Provincial Administrator of Cape Province, 14 February 1925.

74 Ds. Lückhoff had been a member of the AAK since its inception in 1915, becoming its first secretary in 1924. Lückhoff came from a family of clergy men and had served the women and children of a concentration camp in the Free State during the South African War before becoming a prominent reformer of education in the Namakwaland region over the 1900s. Lückhoff was responsible for the creation of the first church boarding houses for children in the region in 1908 becoming an outspoken proponent of solutions to the poor white problem as a member of the Cape Provincial legislature while being secretary of the AAK. See P.F. Greyling, *Die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk en Armsorg*, 62–67; W.E. van Wyk, *Die Bediening van Dr. A.D. Lückhoff as Armsorgsekreteraris van die Nederduitse Kerk, Met Speciale Verwysing na die Noordweste 1916–1943*, 1–5.

75 W.E. van Wyk, *Die Bediening van Dr. A.D. Lückhoff as Armsorgsekreteraris van die Nederduitse Kerk, Met Speciale Verwysing na die Noordweste 1916–1943*, 50–53.

Administrator in his reports on the progress of relief efforts and acted as a go between for the Administrator, the AAK, and people in the stricken areas.⁷⁶ The AAK therefore often assisted the Fund or referenced truly desperate cases directly to the Administrators Fund.⁷⁷

The year 1927 heralded the gradual worsening of the drought situation in the country following a short reprieve in 1925, conditions would continue to deteriorate until it reached a peak in 1928. During this period the AAK made great efforts in providing food and clothes to the Vanrhynsdorp, Calvinia, Namaqualand and 22 other drought affected congregations in the Cape. The Church provided food stuff in addition to coordinating the delivery of metric tons worth of wheat and maize sent directly from farmers in non-affected districts to the drought affected congregations, amounting to a total sum of £10,000 by 1928.⁷⁸

Both the Administrators Fund and AAK efforts had come to focus on the most vulnerable groups in drought affected areas such as female headed households, children and the elderly, who could not benefit directly from the main relief efforts from the state.⁷⁹ In Calvinia the local distress committee who oversaw relief efforts for the Nieuwoudtville, Loeriesfontein and

76 NG Kerk Argief, KS 1745, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Algemeene, 1925–1929: Letter from Ds. A.D. Lückhoff to Provincial Administrator of Cape Province, 14 February 1925; W.E. van Wyk, *Die Bediening van Dr. A.D. Lückhoff as Armsorgsekreteraris van die Nederduitse Kerk, Met Spesiale Verwysing na die Noordweste 1916–1943*, 51–52.

77 A.D. Lückhoff, “Die nood in die Karoo”, *De Kerkbode*, 20 June 1927, p. 917; Anon., “Die versorging van die noodlydendes”, *De Kerkbode*, 29 June 1927, p. 914; Anon., “Die nood van die droogte”, *De Kerkbode*, 7 March 1928, pp. 334–335.

78 NGKA, KS 1651, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, 1916–1932, AAK Notule, 1921–1932, Vergadering gehou in Kaapstad, 17 & 18 August 1927.

79 NGKA, KS 1747, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, Noodlenings Korrespondensie Gemeentes q-z, Rampfondse Korrespondensie, 1927–1928: Letter from Magistrate of Van Rhynsdorp to the Provincial Administrator, 8 October 1928; A 1929 report from the Secretary to the Department of Labour noted that in many cases food aid went mostly to female headed households in or near towns. Since most of the men of working age had left to search of employment on nearby government works and when they were present, male heads of households regularly refused food donations for the family. To the result that many women would retrieve food only once their husbands had left the home. See NASA, LDB, File, 2412, Vol, R3643, Rehabilitation of the Farming Industry in the Northwestern Cape, 1929–1933: Report on Drought stricken areas, 21/2/29.

Brandvlei congregations noted that they oversaw constant assistance to 500 adults and 600 children who relied on regular food provision by 1928.⁸⁰

One example of the relief efforts carried out by the AAK relief fund was in the community of Nuwerus that had suffered greatly when the drought struck. The account from a C.J. Meyer who was a deacon in the Nuwerus congregation indicated that were it not for the AAK food rations sent out to the impoverished households, many would certainly have starved as there had been no successful harvest since 1926 (the letter was written in 1928).⁸¹ However, as was commonplace in food relief during this disaster period, the food delivered was rarely enough to meet the demand and distributors were often forced to ration the food. Restrictions to food supplies caused by dwindling stores and donations forced the Church to further ration food to 50 lbs (22,6 kg) of flour per adult per month, while children received 25 lbs (11,3 kg).⁸² The supply shortages led to desperation amongst people, especially in 1928 when a meagre 20 bags of flour were received and shared among 36 families with a total of 127 adults and 60 children. The situation was further worsened by the lack of nutritional supplements and variety to the families' diets (including meat and/or vegetables), which led to severe signs of weight loss and malnutrition.⁸³

Fund shortages and decreasing donations from mid-1928 eventually forced both the AAK and Administrators Fund to reduce the amount of flour being distributed per adult from 80 lbs to 40 lbs. This amount was deemed insufficient to feed the needs of large *trekboer* families and according to the magistrate of Vanrhynsdorp's reports, resulted in significant distress

80 Editor, Help die noodlydendes, *Het Noordwestern*, 15 March 1928, p. 4.

81 C.J. Meyer, "Die droogte gebreek", *De Kerkbode*, 25 April 1928, p. 618.

82 *Ibid.*,

83 Although Meyer may have been somewhat excessive in some aspects of his retelling to try and draw more donations for the fund there is evidence that by mid-1928 decreasing quantities of food were being delivered to households which posed a threat to their wellbeing. In Calvinia the local distress committee would argue in 1928 that without constant food deliveries from either the fund or the church till the harvest had returned multiple households were facing extreme food insecurity. See C.J. Meyer, "Die droogte gebreek", *De Kerkbode*, 25 April 1928, p. 618; Editor, Help die noodlydendes, *Het Noordwestern*, 15 March 1928, p. 4.

among the recipients.⁸⁴ The secretary to the Department of Labour who witnessed the situation in 1929 would later state that “the diet is reacting on the children who have a bloodless appearance” when discussing the impacts of the uncertain food security in the region.⁸⁵

The DRC had focused on aiding school going children long before the first drought occurred in the mid-19th century, with the goal of combating the problem of white poverty to the extent that by 1891 the DRC owned most of the Cape Colonies public school infrastructure.⁸⁶ By the 1910s government policy had moved towards increased state assistance through direct subsidisation of schools and children from low-income households. State subsidisation was slow to show results in the rural regions of the country, particularly in the Ring of Clanwilliam, where the trekboer lifestyle of families and years of neglect had left some 900 school children not attending school.⁸⁷ Faced with the difficulties of such a large and isolated area with its nomadic population Ds. Lückhoff would be one of the first to develop the concept of *armkoshuise*, where children from poor rural families could be boarded in towns to attend school.⁸⁸

Consequently, when the drought of 1924 broke out the Church’s extensive network of boarding school dormitories across the Karoo provided the means to help feed and house many children who otherwise would

84 NGKA, KS 1747, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, Noodlenig Korrespondensie Gemeentes q-z, Rampsfondse Korrespondensie, 1927–1928: Letter from Magistrate of Van Rhynsdorp to the administrator of the relief fund, 8 October 1928.

85 NASA, LDB, File, 2412, Vol, R3643, Rehabilitation of the Farming Industry in the Northwestern Cape, 1929–1933: Report on Drought stricken areas, 21/2/29.

86 Greyling provides an in-depth discussion of the development of church policy on Afrikaans education for lower income learners over the 19th and 20th century. See P.F. Greyling, *Die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk en Armsorg*, Nasionale Pers Beperk, Kaapstad, 1939, p. 53.

87 P.F. Greyling, *Die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk en Armsorg* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1939), 62–63.

88 By 1916 the DRC was directly responsible for 168 such boarding houses with the Church spending £400,000 to purchase property and furniture while the government provided students with subsidies to provide free education to an amount of £158,000. See P.F. Greyling, *Die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk en Armsorg*, 109–111; W.E. van Wyk, *Die Bediening van Dr. A.D. Lückhoff as Armsorgsekreteraris van die Nederduitse Kerk*, 24–28.

have gone hungry.⁸⁹ In Loeriesfontein and Brandvlei, many farmers had trekked with their stock in search of better grazing and children were left in boarding houses for nearly a full year. In other cases, children had been sent to boarding schools since their parents could no longer afford to feed them at home and it was hoped that the Church would be better able to care for them.⁹⁰ Boarding houses rapidly became distribution centers in the Namaqualand district with some 450 children being fed through the boarding house system by the AAK.⁹¹

Even with these efforts it was noted by the AAK secretary Ds. A.D. Lückhoff that the drought had simply not ended and that the number of people requiring food aid especially in the Ring of Clanwilliam had only increased by 1928. The AAK was thus forced by circumstances to become more selective in which cases required assistance.⁹² The experiences of 1928 to 1929 would force the AAK to conclude that more effective measures to combat drought would have to be taken over in future by the national government who had the budgetary capacity to cover such expenses.⁹³ Further encouraging calls from the AAK included the creation of more widespread social welfare initiatives such as a national pension scheme and the creation of a Department of Social Welfare. To accomplish this the church used the 1934 Kimberly *Volkskongress*⁹⁴ to create the framework

89 Greyling, *Die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk en Armsorg*, 114–115.

90 NGKA, KS 1746, Noodlenigings Korrespondensie Gemeentes A-P, 1927–1928, Nieuwoudtville, Letter from J.D. De Kock to Ds A.D. Lückhoff, 2 September 1928.

91 Handelingen van de vijf-en-twintigste vergadering van de Synode van de Ned. Geref. Kerk in Zuid Afrika, Gehouden te Kaapstad, op Donderdag, 16 Oktober 1924 (Kaapstad: Naasionale pers beperk, Kaapstad, 1924), 85.

92 The vagueness of this statement is likely because there was never a scientific categorisation of people that required aid, instead it was left to local committees to decide who qualified for aid. The problems with this system were highlighted by complaints regarding food aid not being delivered to certain out of the way parts of the drought-stricken areas which were received by the Secretary to the Department of Labour in 1929. See NGKA, KS 1651, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, 1916–1932, AAK Notule, 1921–1932, Vergadering gehou in Kaapstad, 15 & 16 February 1928; NASA, LDB, File, 2412, Vol, R3643, Rehabilitation of the Farming Industry in the Northwestern Cape, 1929–1933: Report on Drought stricken areas, 21/2/29.

93 NGKA, KS 1651, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, 1916–1932, AAK Notule, 1921–1932, Vergadering gehou in Kaapstad, 15 & 16 February 1928.

94 A ‘People’s Congress’ was a convention which brought members of the DRC, national government, high-ranking politicians, and intellectuals together to discuss major

for a more cohesive social policy which would support a larger series of social welfare programs to combat the poor white problem such as old age pensions and recommendations of a possible health scheme.⁹⁵

Noodleniging (emergency relief) assistance such as food and clothing donations were reactionary short-term measures, and nothing was done to deal with the excessive losses in the agricultural sector of the North western Cape or the causes for why the population was vulnerable to drought. In this situation the responsibility solely fell on the national governments' Drought Relief Acts of 1924 and 1927 to aid farmers in restocking their farms and returning crop production to former efficiencies. Yet, most farmers did not qualify for these forms of assistance, or they struggled under the debt such policies forced them to adopt, which lead to the AAK creating its own restocking scheme on a smaller scale, focusing primarily on the North western Cape region from 1927 to 1929.⁹⁶

The AAK's scheme focused more on smaller scale farmers who were not landowners and consequently could not participate in the Drought Relief Acts.⁹⁷ The scheme supplied impoverished small-scale landowners with livestock through a lease system, which eventually allowed the farmers to buy the livestock from the church once sufficient financial recovery was achieved. However, the districts of Vanrhynsdorp and Namaqualand were not considered under this scheme, most likely due to the persistent drought conditions in the region which threatened the viability of such efforts.⁹⁸

issues facing Afrikaner society. See Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the poor white problem," 5.

95 Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the poor white problem," 9–14; The Carnegie Commission had in its first report of 1929 called for the provision of social welfare programmes such as old age pensions from the state and its findings had been rapidly taken up by the DRC's AAK. See J. Seekings, "Not a single white person should be allowed to go under: swart gevaar and the origins of South Africa's welfare state, 1924–1929", *The Journal of African History* 48 no. 3 (2007), 378.

96 Anon., "De droogte en zijn nood", *De Kerkbode*, 29 June 1927, 912–913.

97 Anon., "De droogte en zijn nood", *De Kerkbode*, 29 June 1927, 912–913. The government had tried operating a similar programme in 1924 under the name 'the pagterboer scheme' which had mostly been limited to the Transvaal and Free State provinces and its success was dubious. See U.G. 22–26, *Report of the central council of the Land and Agricultural Bank of South Africa and financial returns for the year ended 31st December 1925* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1926), 11–12.

98 NGKA, KS 1657, Sinnodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmhartigheid, Korrespondensie Aanteelvec-kommissie, 1928–1934: Estimation of the losses in each congregation

Calvinia and Namaqualand regions did, however, receive livestock by early 1929 as improvements in rainfall conditions made it possible to send stock (around 1537 sheep with another 900 expected⁹⁹) with the AAK's Notules claiming that 29 applicants had received 53 sheep each.¹⁰⁰ By 1932 the commission had received £2,200 in rents paid by farmers to the church for livestock mainly as part of a security measure to stop creditors from collecting the provided livestock almost immediately.¹⁰¹ The commission deemed the scheme a success, noting that it had assisted many of the poorest farmers in rebuilding their flocks and in some cases once more becoming financially stable in the aftermath of the drought.¹⁰²

Conclusion

The AAK's success should be observed in terms of short- and long-term impacts. In the short term the AAK succeeded in providing food relief with multiple reports noting the important role that the AAK's food provision and the livestock scheme played in immediate relief provision. Considered that *noodleniging* work, such as food relief programmes, were always viewed as temporary and reactionary the short-term success of food relief delivery is difficult to argue against, even if it lacked secure sources of funding which meant that the food program was often short lived. Ds. Lückhoff illustrated the fact that private relief as provided by the AAK could never replace the national government. Leading the AAK and larger DRC to support the research of the Carnegie Commission and encourage the implementation of the commissions' suggestions by the government through the *Volkskongress* of 1934. Lückhoff was also aware that poverty was a central cause of vulnerability in the rural population and after 1928 the AAK would become a major supporter for the creation of state

and the number of livestock required by each, No date.

99 NGKA, KS 1651, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmartigheid, 1916–1932, AAK Notule, 1921–1932, Vergadering gehou in Kaapstad, 26 & 30 March 1930.

100 NGKA, KS 1651, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmartigheid, 1916–1932, AAK Notule, 1921–1932, Vergadering gehou in Kaapstad, 20 & 21 March 1929.

101 L.L.N. Botha, *Die Maatskaplike Sorg van die N. G. Kerk in Suid Afrika (1928–1953)*, p. 293.

102 NGKA, KS 1651, Sinodale Kommissie vir Diens van Barmartigheid, 1916–1932, AAK Notule, 1921–1932, Vergadering gehou in Kaapstad, 20 & 21 March 1929.

led poverty reduction measures, particularly in response to the economic trauma of the Great Depression.

This article illustrates the important role that the DRC played in the region as a central co-ordinator of relief assistance to its congregations during a period when the South African government was unwilling to aid local communities and households directly. The AAK of the Cape Synod was able to connect vulnerable drought affected communities to a wider financial support network and to organise the delivery of relief packages to communities while also co-ordinated with the State to encourage intervention from the government relief schemes. This study builds on South African historiographical understanding of the poor white problem through improving our understanding of the AAK's role in the daily lives of its congregants and as part of the larger poor white problem in the 20th century.

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