

ECO-FRIENDLY EMPOWERMENT

A conundrum which saw an 18-hectare farm unable to be fully utilised by the owners, the Fair Valley Farm Workers' Association, was resolved in an innovative way. The land has been leveraged through a partnership with a black-owned consortium that will see its value increase significantly in the form of an energy-efficient eco-village, incorporating environmentally friendly concepts.

The purchase of the land in 1997 was funded partially by the Department of Land Affairs' grants and a grant made available by the Fairview Trust. Over the ensuing years, several attempts were made to develop the land by the Fair Valley Association with its current 42 families as members, to no avail.

Then, in 2002, the Fair Valley Association built eight small houses on the farm, from the money they made from sales of their wine, launched under the Fairvalley label in 1998. The label project relied on the available skills of the workers and the logo, with its two hands and the slogan 'The hands that work the soil feed the soul', says it all. The maiden Chenin Blanc sold out quickly to a large UK wine importer and, today, this successful business venture sees the Fairvalley range exported to Denmark, Finland, Japan, the UK and the USA.

They were, however, never able to properly re-zone and subdivide the land to achieve their ultimate objective: to be individual property owners. In 2007, a new thinking process was initiated by Fairview's owner, Charles Back, with his appointment of a new project driver, Ori Ilan. Rather than

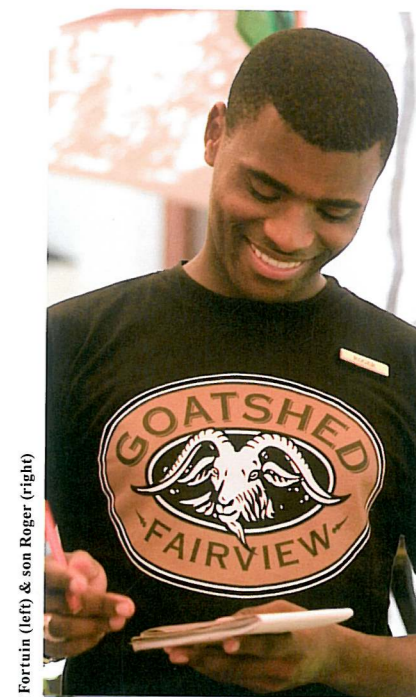
looking at building 40-something homes for the beneficiaries only, they needed to look at a full-scale development, to optimise the commercial value of the land.

The idea manifested rapidly: On 9 November 2007, the Fair Valley Association's Executive Committee passed a resolution to fully adopt the EcoVillage rationale for their land; the Committee approved the Initial Development Framework as its official plan on 26 November 2007; and, in March 2008, a groundbreaking agreement was signed between the Fair Valley Association and Kagiso Urban Management, which is a subsidiary of Kagiso Property Holdings, to develop the land based on the development framework adopted by the association.

The core of the agreement is that the association contributes the land and, in return, their beneficiaries get houses at no extra cost. The project has three tenets: socio-economical empowerment and skills development; financial viability and business principals to be applied; sustainability, energy efficiency and ecological friendly methods and techniques to be utilised.

The development framework allows for some 450 residential units and 20 000 square metres of commercial and light industries to be built on the land. The FairValley Development Company, established between the partners, strives to use alternative eco-friendly building materials; a grey water system was designed to save water consumption, and solar energy and other energy-efficient techniques will be employed – all depending on cost-effective considerations closer to the implementation.

"The real challenge is to provide training and skills, and to create new opportunities within existing organisations. That's more important than a few wine farms with their own labels. Just transferring land is not going to change lives." – *Charles Back*



Tommy Fortuin (left) & son Roger (right)

