

INTEGRATING FOOD SECURITY WITH LAND REFORM: A MORE EFFECTIVE POLICY FOR SOUTH AFRICA

THEMBELA KEPE AND DANIELLE TESSARO

KEY POINTS

- South Africa needs a new food security policy that is integrated with its land reform program.
- Food security and land reform policies should respect, and be based on, a broader understanding of dynamic land use practices in poor rural areas.
- A stronger governance regime is required around land deals between semi-private business interests and rural residents to better protect the land rights of the rural poor.

INTRODUCTION

Food security is broadly defined as households' access at all times to adequate, safe and nutritious food for a healthy and productive life. Whether or not individuals and households are entirely self-sufficient in food production (see Devereux and Maxwell, 2001), achieving food security requires secure access to, and control over, land resources.

Two clauses of the post-apartheid Constitution¹ are critically important to food security in the country: Section 27 guarantees food security and poverty reduction, and Section 25 promises land reform that entitles those who have historically been deprived of property "as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices" access to this invaluable resource. These two clauses of the constitution often have

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¹ See *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996.

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a complicated relationship, giving rise to policy challenges. How should the South African government ensure that its efforts to promote agriculture as a food security measure do not exacerbate the land tenure rights of the rural poor that were already weakened under apartheid?

Answering this question necessitates the recognition that land reform in South Africa has not progressed as well as expected. Less than 10 percent of South Africa’s land has been redistributed since 1994 (Kleinbooi, 2011) and the small efforts toward land reform have not necessarily yielded improved livelihoods for the beneficiaries. As nearly 40 percent of South Africa’s residents live in rural areas (National Planning Commission, 2011) and rural areas account for 70 percent of the country’s poor population (Aliber, 2003; Kepe, 2009), land reform is a critical issue for improving the livelihoods and prospects of South African citizens.

This policy brief draws on a case study of the South African government’s attempt to revitalize the rural economy, particularly in the Eastern Cape province, through smallholder agriculture.² It discusses how food security policies among the poor have historically been incompatible with land use activities and land rights in South Africa’s Bantustans,³ and closes with policy recommendations that deal with the relationship between land reform and food security, the need to understand broader land use plans of the rural poor and the need to pay attention to the vulnerability of villagers when they enter deals with outside business interests.

2 Smallholder is used here rather loosely to include the variety of people engaged in some form of agriculture who are limited by the amount of land they use, the amount of time they devote to farming, the amount of capital they invest in the enterprise and what they do with the produce. In other words, a farmer is still a smallholder, whether working the land full-time or not, selling or consuming all, or some of what is produced. The only precondition to smallholding is that something limits their full engagement in agriculture. See Cousins (2010) for a further discussion.

3 Bantustans are reserves created under apartheid for black South Africans.

The case study was based on semi-structured interviews with 10 villagers from Mqwangqwini Village No. 2 and 10 from Lujizweni Village No. 5 in Ngqeleni. Sampling was purposive: subjects that were either participating in an agricultural scheme or had elected not to, and were willing to be interviewed, were targeted. In addition, six key informants were interviewed, including two government employees (one from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and another employee from Eastern Cape Parks); three service providers in agriculture (a consultant and two employees of agriculture development agencies) and a community development worker. Data analysis entailed organizing the data into themes and, where appropriate, recording the frequency of particular responses to common questions about why the development agencies' offer to revive agriculture was rejected (Mqwangqwini), why it was accepted and the challenges that came along with either choice (Lujizweni).

FOOD SECURITY AND SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

While South Africa is considered food secure at the national level, it is food insecure at the household level (Baiphethi and Jacobs, 2009; du Toit, 2011). For over three decades, South Africa has advanced a variety of food security policies, each assigning a different emphasis to the role that smallholder agriculture can play in addressing the problem of food insecurity. These food security policies — all organized by government departments dealing solely with agriculture — do not have clear guidelines on how food security projects based on smallholder agriculture should align with land and agrarian reform projects in the former Bantustans.

There is a long history, in the former reserves, of government attempts to implement food security projects through agricultural development or farmer support strategies. In

such cases, as in the Eastern Cape province, quasi-private companies, including Ntinga and AsgiSA Eastern Cape, were, and still are, formed and tasked with implementing these projects. Such companies approach rural landowners who are judged to not be using it optimally. They offer inputs (e.g. fertilizer, seeds and pesticides), advice and management, but in return, expect a share of the harvest or require the project beneficiaries to pay for some of the costs after harvest. The success of these projects has been mixed, at best: increased yields have been reported, but many project participants are withdrawing after only a few years.

Interviews in two villages in the Eastern Cape province revealed several issues relating to land reform. Some villagers, for instance, chose to leave their fields fallow, rather than participating in the food security projects. This was a clear indication that the villagers were skeptical of outsiders having control or management responsibility over their land, a wariness that can be linked to the history of land dispossessions that affected black South Africans under apartheid. In cases where villagers initially participated in the projects, they later lost interest or became skeptical of the project's objectives, believing that the real objective was to steal their land. The implementation of agencies' policies to promote a maize monoculture, for instance, meant that participants were unable to make decisions about intercropping maize, beans and pumpkin.

The information gathered from our interviews with the villagers also suggests that, in addition to these consumption-related uses, and irrespective of its condition and current use, land carries a significance exceeding its value as a natural resource used solely for consumption or shelter; land is, for some, a form of identity. Another — though not entirely unexpected — revelation from the interviews was that the government's social welfare grants contribute to a culture where people lose interest in working their fields, whether or not the food security project was in operation. It

was made clear, in the interviews, that government grants sometimes did not make it worthwhile for them to invest their time cultivating fields.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the post-apartheid government should be commended for its efforts to design poverty reduction policies, including a focus on food security for all South Africans, there are key issues that still need to be addressed. Top among these issues is tackling the long history of ineffective food security policies as they relate to the poorest of the poor who live in rural areas. Not only are the current policy guidelines difficult to implement, they lack compatibility with other crucial policies, such as land tenure reform. In order to achieve a robust and effective food security policy, the following actions are recommended to the government of South Africa:

- **Create a new food security policy informed by wide consultations and in cooperation with the land reform process.** A review of the history of food security policy in South Africa reveals a clear lack of concern for land issues in areas where land reform is taking place or where land rights remain unclear. In particular, the Bantustan residents' land rights have been marginalized for decades, yet food security policies to date have not explicitly offered strategies for dealing with this insecure land tenure. The case study of the implementation of food security projects in the Eastern Cape province presented here provides an example of how rural people have historically felt about land rights and their relationship with government. After consulting widely (including the rural poor, political leaders and other stakeholders), a green paper and a white paper should both be released, addressing the ways that food security relates to the land reform

process, especially in securing land tenure rights for rural people in the former Bantustans.

- **Broaden the understanding of the various uses for land.** The presence of fallow land in an area does not necessarily mean "wasted" land, as it often is perceived from a commercial agriculture point of view. While land is a basic livelihood asset from which multiple and diverse ways of life may be derived (and may, and often will, be used for cropping, grazing or collecting a range of natural resources), its value can be much broader, for instance as a form of identity. A broader conceptualization of land can enrich the understanding of the link between rural land and food security in South Africa, providing insights for the land reform program, as well as multiple and diverse livelihood strategies for the beneficiaries of land reform.
- **Implement land tenure reform prior to development interventions.** Land tenure reform in the former Bantustans, which has gone through many planning phases, revisions and complications, will be a prerequisite for any successful development intervention in these rural areas. Ten years after the post-apartheid government came to power, land tenure reform legislation was passed, but after litigation by concerned citizens, the *Communal Land Rights Act* (2004) was withdrawn. A new green paper on land was published in 2011, but it received criticism for its lack of clarity and outright avoidance on many critical issues in need of attention. The government of South Africa should complete this process and enact comprehensive land tenure reform to provide the proper foundation for development interventions.
- **Strengthen governance on land deals between the private sector and rural inhabitants.** There are serious concerns over land deals between the private sector or quasi-private agencies and the interests of locals.

Often, the interests of the rural poor and illiterate are not appropriately represented during the negotiation and approval process for land deals. Contracts may be poorly understood, and on occasion, the principle of justice, which is the flagship principle of the post-apartheid government, is in jeopardy of violation. Private and quasi-private companies, for example, often subcontract their work in land deals. In such cases, while the company or agency that has the primary deal to implement food security projects may respect the principle of justice, their subcontractors may go unmonitored and may violate these principles. When it comes to the governance of land deals, it is not enough for the government to act only in the cases of violations; policies must be put in place to protect the vulnerable, particularly the rural poor.

CONCLUSION

Based on this study's review of food security policies, it is clear that the South African government takes the issue of food security seriously, but the policy processes related to food security currently stop short of workable strategies for the most difficult situations, particularly in the former Bantustans. In this case study, admittedly a narrow one, it was discovered that villagers have a strong mistrust of outsiders gaining any control over their land. The rural poor appeared to be prepared to sacrifice some potential food security benefits in order to protect their land from possible appropriation. These policy recommendations, if implemented, will ensure a more effective and inclusive food security policy that respects the Bantustan residents' traditional land rights.

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