



IN THE SHADOW OF POLICY: Everyday Practices in South African Land Agrarian Reform

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for International Co-operation, the case studies were developed in the masters' dissertations of South African students with links to the University of the Western Cape or Rhodes University who attended Wageningen University in the Netherlands. Both South African universities (along with the University of Fort Hare) have a proud history of research on rural and agricultural development, with some of their key academics providing the more theoretical inputs to the collection.

Most chapters combine a discussion of specific dimensions of the complex process of land reform with case study reports (focusing on the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape provinces). It is here that the value and uniqueness of the publication lies: the exploration of down-to-earth challenges in the context of life stories and daily activities.

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agricultural development, but also in covering a wide range of specific issues. These include community farms, cattle raising, irrigation, agriculture, and homestead farming. Amazing insights are revealed concerning agricultural consultants (who draw up more or less useless "business plans" to support applicants), young people's apparent lack of interest in farming, the continued discrimination against female farmers, and questions concerning agro-entrepreneurs.

Through these chapters, we are reminded of the complex interactions of social, cultural, technical, managerial and economic factors, forces and environments, which make the outcome of reforms so unpredictable and successes so difficult to achieve. Although some of the studies indicate successful land-reform processes, the collection leaves the reader with quite a pessimistic view. This raises two critical challenges.

Firstly, how can the designers and practitioners of land-reform policies (ranging from parliamentarians and department officials to fieldworkers and consultants) be made to really read, digest and apply the lessons from these grassroots cases? How can they be helped to understand those interactions? Secondly, how can the implementation of land reform processes be adjusted – gradually, systematically, and with increasing coverage – to have a lasting positive effect on African involvement in farming?

Maybe the only disappointment with this book is that those questions have not been addressed in a practical way.

Two sharply contrasting views about African agricultural development confront us almost every day. On the one hand, Africa has a large potential for increased agricultural output, due to vast areas of un(der)utilised land (in a world where such land becomes scarce on all other continents). On the other, the realisation of dismally low levels of agricultural output in present production systems across the continent. In South Africa, this challenge is further sharpened in the sphere of "land reform", the reallocation of land originally owned by black people, taken away by whites in the apartheid era, and now to be returned as a basis for black agricultural development. The evidence from implemented land-reform schemes creates little optimism, with blame placed variously on government departments, legislation, the alleged lack of black entrepreneurship, and other one-dimensional factors. Naturally, this leads to polarised debates and no easy recipes for action.

This collection of 20 chapters, appropriately called *In the Shadow of Policy*, is a fascinating attempt to get deeper into the dilemmas around land reform and current agricultural involvement by black South Africans. The book's origin is itself very interesting. Co-funded by the Netherlands University Foundation