

LAND REFORM: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

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ABSTRACT

Land reform has been a significant part of the South African agricultural agenda since 1994 with the creation of a national Department of Land Affairs to oversee and drive this process. While much has happened in the intervening years, some might argue that in many instances the results have been far from positive. The political current that winds its way through the land redistribution process has not helped matters. Using two different examples of land reform initiatives from the Western Cape and the Free State, a brief overview of how land reform has been implemented since 1996 is provided. Both cases involve aspects of the role played by agricultural support agencies, including Department of Land Affairs officials, extension, research and non-government organisations. The purpose of the discussion is to look at what can be learned from these cases, including their similarities and dissimilarities, and in light of this knowledge consider how we can possibly proceed towards land reform for agricultural development. Ultimately land reform and specifically the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development programme of the Department of Land Affairs must seek to ensure the appropriate identification of beneficiaries and land. Research, extension and the new national and provincial directorates of farmer settlement must ensure that the appropriate agricultural support services are available that will result in agricultural development. The land reform process and agricultural development will only be successful if the goals and objectives are realistic. The lessons from these cases provide us with some guidance for the way forward.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1994 the National Departments of Agriculture and Land Affairs, in conjunction with their provincial and regional offices, are tasked with ensuring that equitable and effective measures are taken to reduce existing imbalances regarding access to land. Three umbrella programmes were set up to achieve this: 1) land redistribution, 2) land restitution and 3) land tenure reform. In 2000, concerns with how the land redistribution process was being implemented and the progress it was making led to the development and adoption of the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development Programme (LRAD). It is a sub-programme of the land redistribution programme; while replacing its predecessor, the Settlement/Land Acquisition

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Grant (SLAG), by providing grants to successful applicants it also provides support services to applicants and beneficiaries. The collective aim of land reform is to redistribute approximately 30% of the country's commercial agricultural land over a fifteen-year period (DLA, 2002). This paper discusses two agricultural land reform projects that were initiated in 1996 and 1998 in the Western Cape and the Free State provinces respectively, prior to the conceptualisation of the LRAD Programme. They provide useful cases from which those tasked with implementing this programme can benefit.

2. THREE TYPES OF AGRICULTURE

The 1987 Brundtland Commission identified three types of agriculture which are important to any agricultural development programme and any meaningful discussion on agricultural land reform: 1) industrial agriculture, 2) green revolution agriculture and 3) resource-poor agriculture (WCED, 1987). They are immediately identified by the resources they use, their immediate environment, the complexity of their systems and the scale of their operations.

- (i) *Industrial agriculture* is predominantly found in Europe and North America, but there are enclaves in the Third World. Large-scale agriculture practised in South Africa prior to the eighties and in some parts of South America are Third World examples. This type is characterised by highly capitalised infrastructure and machinery, large-scale farming units, reliance on high volumes of external inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides, and in certain parts of the world is heavily dependent on government subsidies.
- (ii) *Green revolution agriculture* is found in optimal environmental regions in the Third World. These areas are either well irrigated or receive reliable and sufficient rainfall. Farms are both large and small in scale and rely on high-yielding crop varieties with corresponding high external inputs. Examples include parts of Latin America and North Africa, and the vast irrigated plains and deltas of South, Southeast and East Asia (Chambers *et al*, 1989). Both industrial and green revolution agriculture employ fairly simple farming systems, often involving the planting of single crops (monocropping) on large fields. Uniform environments are sought out and these agricultural types are relatively low-risk in comparison to resource-poor agriculture. However, it is not unusual for farmers in green revolution areas to diversify their agricultural activities, although they tend to place major emphasis on monocropping.

- (iii) *Resource-poor agriculture* is identified with marginal or unfavourable areas that are almost exclusively rain-fed, often characterised by an undulating terrain with fragile or poor soils. The farming lands are very diverse and include drylands, wetlands, highlands, remote areas, forests, mountains and hill slopes, grasslands, swamps and semi-desert areas. Examples include most of sub-Saharan Africa, upland areas in South East Asia and Latin America and the Deccan Plateau in India (Chambers *et al*, 1989). This type of agriculture is characterised by **complex** farming systems, **diverse** in its environments and is exceptionally **risk-prone**.

3. CASE STUDY ONE: FREE STATE PROJECT

3.1 Project initiation

In 1998 the local municipality, the local agricultural extension officials and some local commercial farmers conceptualised a project that would introduce commercial wine grape production to local disadvantaged community members with the idea being that eventually the beneficiaries would each own two to three hectare production units. The local cellar agreed to purchase the harvests as it currently requires more grapes than local large-scale commercial farmers can produce.

3.2 Profile of farmers

The project initiators identified ten local male residents by means of a self-selection process. A few had some previous farming experience but only one had any long-term viticulture experience. Initially the farmers were not expected to contribute anything more than their labour to the project. They were all unemployed and none had regular access to transport. Only three of them receive a monthly pension or disability grant and all ten of them rely on the income derived by other members of their household and that which they might derive from the occasional part-time employment. In the latter case there is a necessary trade-off between time spent on the project activities and time spent on earning an income for sustaining their livelihood.

3.3 Land ownership

After discussions between the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Land Affairs and the local municipality, approximately three hectares of land was identified between the town and the local township. In August 1998 some soil preparation was done and based on the project finances, vines were only

planted on 1.5 hectares. During 1999 the municipality informed the local extension officer that the farmers had property rights to the three hectares, despite no contracts or transfer deeds being signed. However, in 2000 the Department of Land Affairs informed the extension officials that the land was Agricultural Credit Board Land, which is currently held by the National Department of Agriculture (NDA). At present the ownership of this land is unclear but as transfer has not taken place it still seems to be vested in the NDA.

3.4 Type of agriculture

The type of agricultural system implemented here closely resembles the green revolution approach. However, there was only one harvest from the original 1.5 ha vineyard. This occurred in February 2000 and each of the ten members received about R100.00. This was the only income the project obtained from the vineyards from inception until the present, yet the farmers continue to participate in the project. Farmers have no income of their own to contribute towards the inputs required for this type of farming and no provision had been made for this in the form of project funding. During the year and a half of the Agricultural Research Council's involvement, the ARC provided the necessary inputs but these were usually only enough for the 1 ha demonstration plot which they established with the farmers in August 2000. Water, which is a necessity of the green revolution type, was also not available in sufficient quantities despite the proximity of an adequate irrigation scheme.

3.5 Support from stakeholders

The local extension officer provided the farmers with some knowledge on wine grape cultivation. When he left the area in early 2000 the farmers obtained technical knowledge and support from one or two local commercial farmers and the cellar master from the local wine cellar. At the start of the project the Department of Agriculture purchased infrastructure, such as trellises and micro-jet irrigation, including an electric irrigation pump. Money was obtained from the European Union Community Project Fund to purchase these materials, along with a small quantity of chemical fertilisers and sprays. Arrangements were made that the local municipality would pay for the electricity consumption and allow the free use of excess municipal water. This was the only source of free water available since 1998 until the present and access is irregular. While water from various irrigation schemes is available, it is costly and the project and beneficiaries cannot afford it.

In 2000 ARC Infruitec-Nietvoorbij (ARC), the Land Development Unit (LDU) and the Development Company of the South African Wine Industries Trust (DEVCO) became involved in the project. DEVCO provided the funding to enable the ARC to conduct wine grape production training and for LDU to carry out social and business development. The ARC established another two hectares of vines but when the extent of the water problem was realised only one hectare was cultivated and used as a demonstration plot for training purposes. In March 2002 all these activities were stopped when DEVCO discontinued the funding. Internal constraints prevented the ARC from continuing the training.

3.6 Long-term constraints

- (i) *Lack of water:* During an assessment of the project in 2002 insufficient water was identified as a problem that had never been resolved since the inception of the project. Despite this a further two hectares were established in the form of a demonstration plot in 2000. During the assessment it was noted that the small irrigation dam was never filled to capacity and often stood empty for periods of up to three weeks during the summer. Department of Agriculture officials tried unsuccessfully to rectify the situation. They had told the farmers to submit applications to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) for a water grant. However, the farmers lacked the capacity to do this and the transport to get to the offices of the local DWAF representative. During 2002 the district municipality appointed an official to oversee issues relating to emerging farmer development projects but contact with this person also proved unsatisfactory. According to specialists involved in the assessment, the water supply is inadequate for even one hectare of grapes. This raises the question as to why the project was started before the water situation was addressed, as sufficient water is vital for the development of high quality grapes. According to specialists, the vines are stunted but it is likely that the planned harvests in 2001, 2002 and 2003 could have taken place if the farmers had access to sufficient water. Irrigation water would have alleviated the dry conditions that destroyed the harvests of 2001 and 2002. It could also have prevented the harvest failure in 2003, a result of severe frost in September 2002 and a very dry season during the summer of 2002/2003.
- (ii) *Lack of implements:* Due to a lack of their own and project derived income, the farmers do not have money for implements. DEVCO funds were used to purchase an extra irrigation pump, storage tank and two

pairs of secateurs. The farmers borrowed hoes, spades, rakes and forks from neighbours and friends in the township. Often they were observed sharing one spade or fork. The need to obtain an alternative source of income resulted in at least three of the seven active farmers not working in the vineyards for weeks at a time. If arranged, some of the other farmers would try to assist with their vines once they had finished their own allocated rows².

- (iii) *Lack of infrastructure:* Neither of the two vineyards, which are about 150m apart, is fenced. Roaming animals, horses and sheep, were observed eating the vines during two consecutive visits to the project in 2002. In 2000 a donor had offered to sponsor a fence to cordon off the main enclosure from the township grazing land but nobody followed up on this issue. Farmers report not having the infrastructure and contact details to do so. The irrigation dam is unlined and leaks while the irrigation furrows to the dam are virtually non-existent and clogged with grass and weeds restricting water flow and resulting in water loss. Despite the importance of sufficient water for wine grape cultivation this system was never improved.
- (iv) *Fragmented support:* Assistance from the various stakeholders has waxed and waned and very seldom did they get together as a group to discuss the project. Consequently, assistance was sporadic and constrained with the result that serious problems were never resolved and that project implementation was ineffective. A lack of transparency resulted in project members questioning the use of funds as they have not seen records of transactions and expenses were not discussed with them. This suggests that empowerment of the beneficiaries has not been actively pursued. Ownership of the land is vague and transfer has not taken place. Farmers are unable to use land as collateral for a bank loan if the need arises.

3.7 Means of overcoming constraints

The farmers have not been able to overcome the constraints identified above. However, after three years they attempted to overcome their immediate problem of food insecurity by establishing a vegetable garden. The project did

² *Due to the fact that some farmers were almost always away doing other work the project members decided that each person must be allocated a number of rows of vines for which he is responsible. When a farmer needs another member to assist him he must organise this himself. This strategy was used to avoid non-participant members from attempting to obtain the benefits of the projected harvests.*

not cater for the farmers' immediate needs. In an attempt to produce food for household consumption the farmers had planted about 400m² of vegetables on land adjacent to the vineyards and occasionally planted vegetables in some of the rows of the older vineyard. This activity was seriously curtailed due to a lack of funds for seeds, insufficient water and the farmers' belief that they might not be allowed to do this as the project was a grape project.

3.8 Assessment

Monocropping agricultural activities, based on the green revolution farming model, require high volumes of external inputs and this type of activity should only be implemented when the farmers involved have the necessary resources to carry out such an activity. If they do not possess these, as in this case, then the project needs to be designed and implemented so that they can acquire them. Given that a number of stakeholders were willing to provide some of the resources it is likely that the appointment of a strong and capable project manager, to coordinate the project and the stakeholders, could have greatly reduced the affects of the lack of access to finances and ensured that participants had access to the promised resources. Even if this is in place it is necessary that the project budget includes some form of bridging capital until a significant profit is obtained so that the farmers are actually able to remain involved in the project. Otherwise they will need to seek alternative sources of livelihood, resulting in their spending less time on the project activities. At no time during the preceding five years were the farmers encouraged to take ownership of the project in any real sense.

4. CASE STUDY TWO: WESTERN CAPE PROJECT

4.1 Project initiation

In 1996 the Southern Cape Land Committee, a local non-government organisation, organised thirty local residents (28 males and 2 females) into a farmers' association to apply for a grant in order to purchase a 100 hectare farm adjacent to their village for the purpose of local agricultural development. The Department of Land Affairs (DLA) approved the grant and the farm was purchased in 1999. The balance of the grant was used to purchase a tractor, irrigation pump and some mechanised implements. Local people have always been engaged in some form of farming activity and most farmers own hand and animal traction implements. During the next three years the Provincial Department of Agriculture donated some mechanised implements to the association in line with the farmer settlement mechanisation centre programme.

4.2 Profile of farmers

Of the twelve currently active farmers, two are pensioners and three derive their sole income from farming. The remaining seven is all employed on a full-time basis and use their farming activities to obtain an additional source of livelihood. The farmers attempt to sell the bulk of their crops and livestock and can be considered to be commercially focused despite having some problems with local markets. These farmers have access to transport and most have their own motor vehicles. All the farmers have previous farming experience, predominantly with vegetable farming, either from working on their own household plots or from working for local commercial farmers.

4.3 Land ownership

By 2000 the farmers' association trust had taken transfer of the farm and the farmers decided that they were going to farm individually instead of communally. The farm land was sub-divided and each farmer obtained slightly less than two hectares of farm land³. The remaining land, some of which is mountainous and unusable for farming, was designated as Trust Land and managed by the Trust. Very little of this land is actually used although farmers are now considering options to develop it.

4.4 Type of agriculture

After transfer the farmers spent the next three years preparing their soil and experimenting with various crops. By 2002 twelve of the farmers had established their farming systems and are actively farming on approximately twenty hectares of land. In the intervening years a few of the other farmers attempted various agricultural systems. While some of these now use their land for natural grazing purposes, others have hired it out to the more active farmers. Crops grown include various vegetables, dry beans, maize, oats for fodder and also some experimentation with Proteas and Honeybush. Only in the case of oats and some potato production is monocropping practised. With the other crops the practice is to divide the farming unit into a number of areas in which different crops are planted simultaneously or similar crops are planted at periodic intervals. This is based on the need to derive a livelihood from farming throughout the year and to maximise the output from the small

³ *During 1996 some of the members had been involved in a communal project and had realised that communal farming was fraught with ownership and responsibility problems. To avoid this they decided that each farmer must have his/her own unit but that association implements and resources would be shared. Transfer of the individual units is pending.*

farming units. Livestock include dairy cattle and pigs. Based on their limited resources and experience the farmers have diverse crops and have developed systems that closely resemble a mixture of green revolution and resource-poor types of agriculture. The proportion of each type depends on their proximity to irrigation water (see 4.6).

4.5 Support from stakeholders

While the local extension officer provides limited services to the farmers at their request, he has largely left them to design their own systems and to make their own decisions. He has assisted them with training in various technologies and has organised some mechanised implements for them. Most of the farmers have alternative employment and are able to pay for the various inputs that they require. However, they have kept these to a minimum and the bulk of their expenses are on labour and the use of implements. The ARC became involved with this project in 2000 when farmers expressed an interest in experimenting with Honeybush cultivation. After working with the farmers for a year it became clear that there were two serious problems affecting local agricultural practices: (i) access to water, and (ii) significant presence of root-knot nematodes.

4.6 Long-term constraints

- (i) *Access to water.* When the farm was purchased it came with water rights and a dam. However, the farm is U-shaped and the water is only available to the farmers on one side of the U as no infrastructure exists to transport it to the other side of the farm. Farmers on the other side have constructed a small irrigation dam and pump water from a neighbour's dam. However, they have no regular access to this supply and most crops must rely on dryland cultivation practices. Consequently, farmers tend to plant crops that can survive under such conditions.
- (ii) *Root-knot nematodes.* ARC Researchers noticed evidence of possible root-knot nematode infestation in some of the farming units. In 2002 a survey was done on most of the farming units and parts of the Trust Land. The conclusion was that the presence of the root knot nematodes was considered to be a significant problem and that farmers' agricultural practices seem to increase the problem which will get out of hand if not addressed soon. However, the application of a solution is far from simple. (1) Fumigation is an option, but (a) it is expensive and beyond the means of all the farmers, and (b) it is an inorganic activity and therefore

an undesirable solution. (2) The farmers can plant alternative crops and practise crop rotation which is known to reduce the nematode population but this can also prove costly for the farmers as they would need to change their crops and find a market or use for the new crops. Similarly, such crops might not grow favourably under local conditions.

- (iii) *Mechanisation.* Farmers only make full use of mechanised implements occasionally. An assessment of the mechanisation centre commissioned by the Western Cape Provincial Department of Agriculture during 2002 indicated that due to the costs associated with mechanised implements the farmers mainly used these implements for activities where they were really necessary, such as ploughing large tracts of hard soil (Hart, 2002). The rest of the time the farmers make use of animal traction and labour to carry out similar activities because the associated costs are less and the implements are more suitable to small-scale production.
- (iv) *Service provision.* A lack of coordination of service provision has resulted in some problems. Farmers often make use of incorrect inputs due to a lack of knowledge or undue influence by local suppliers. Some farmers receive support but others do not because they are not part of the local farmers' association which was set-up to purchase the land. Similarly farmers are not helped with identifying problems until these become serious because the relevant stakeholders are not informed of the possible problems by the farmers or by other stakeholders.

4.7 Means of overcoming constraints

- (i) *Access to water.* At present there is still no immediate solution to this problem. Farmers have tended to rely on crops that can survive by means of dryland cultivation and minimal irrigation. It is argued that the DLA grant should have included a provision for infrastructure that would allow the transportation of water from one side of the farm to the other. Regular irrigation would ensure a higher crop yield, greater crop diversification and the possibility of producing higher value crops. Although the local extension official is looking into the possibility of acquiring the land on which the neighbouring dam is situated the water problem remains unresolved and will soon become a major constraint to local agriculture development.
- (ii) *Root-knot nematodes.* The survey results indicated that the problem existed prior to the purchasing of the farm and it would have been better if the stakeholders involved in the establishment of this project

had done a soil survey, concentrating on soil borne pests and diseases, prior finalising the purchase of the farm. Recommendations could then have been made as to which practical steps to take and crops to plant in order to solve any evident soil problems.

- (iii) *Mechanisation.* Although input costs restricted farmers from maximising the use of the mechanised implements they had regular access to these for basic ploughing when required. As most had alternative employment they had an income which they used to pay for their access to the implements. The farmers only use the mechanised implements when really necessary and still make use of animal traction which is more affordable, although time consuming in comparison to mechanisation. Advice on animal traction would be beneficial if farmers are interested.
- (iv) *Service provision.* Farmers were able to identify which activities they could carry out and which were appropriate to local circumstances by means of their past experience and own experimentation over a three year period, i.e. they farmed in relation to their access to resources and finances and designed their farming units accordingly. They farmed individually but were part of an association and therefore had access to limited organisation and communal resources. This organisation provided some coordination over access to the scarce resources that are locally available, specifically implements. There was a strong relationship of trust between the farmers and the extension officer. Farmers had the ability to make decisions and the resources to implement them. The extension services accepted this. Some constraints in this project were due to the fact that the input of specialists was not sought during the planning of the project resulting in the identification of serious problems after implementation. This makes the solutions costly and difficult to implement.

4.8 Assessment

Based on their experience and access to resources, farmers were able to develop farming systems that could best fit in with their local circumstances and meet their immediate needs. Organisation, membership of the Trust and the fact that they have sufficient resources has enabled them to coordinate activities and obtain some of the extra resources they require. A profile of the farmers was not carefully analysed at project conceptualisation. Careful analysis might provide some information as to why less than half the beneficiaries are actively farming at present. We should also bear in mind that

in terms of the available SLAG redistribution system a specific number of beneficiaries was needed to purchase a farm of this size so not all might have been interested in farming at present. However, the current number of active beneficiaries, just under half of the original grant applicants, does not detract from the success in which land reform has been carried in this village.

5. CONCLUSION

The cases illustrate a number of issues that are vital to the successful implementation of the LRAD programme and also private land reform projects in the future.

- The type of agriculture that is to be adopted must coincide with the availability of local resources and the environment. Where the necessary inputs are scarce the project must make provision for this and ensure that subsequent access to these is sustainable.
- Planning must be done in conjunction with the beneficiaries. In fact the design and approval process should not be rushed if problems are to be prevented in the long-term, rather it must be more carefully done and include the necessary specialists in conjunction with local input.
- Farmers must design their own agricultural systems based on their needs, skills and resources with the support of officials and stakeholders. Stakeholders must not dictate the system required.
- Where project beneficiaries do not have sufficient funding LRAD must ensure that funding is available to the project to ensure its success; continued participation of the beneficiaries is not enough.
- Sustained commitment of stakeholders is as important as that of the beneficiaries. Terminating funding during a project and prior to any assessment has serious negative affects; especially if the success of the project relies on this funding.
- The beneficiaries immediate concern seems to be with food security and then for commercialisation of their produce. This is probably directly related to their existing standard of living and availability of other livelihood sources. The emphasis on these two concerns will differ from individual to individual and needs to be determined.

- Strong coordination is required if a number of stakeholders are involved in an integrated development project.
- Transparency and a good relationship amongst stakeholders and farmers are important to sustainability.
- Local officials need the necessary skills to support the projects both before and after approval and when they do not have these skills they must have access to funding in order to purchase these skills.
- High numbers of farmers and proposed large-scale projects are not necessarily desirable. What is important is the ability to get access to and make sustainable use of agricultural land for agricultural purposes, be they food security, commercial production or both.

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