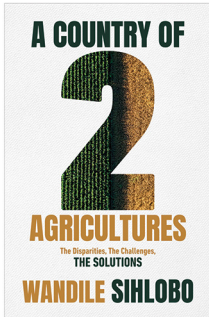




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A country of two agricultures:  
The disparities, the challenges,  
and the solutions



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# How can we build a more inclusive South African agriculture?

The dualism of the South African agriculture is a symbol of colonial policies, particularly those of the apartheid regime which was preoccupied with perpetuating a separate development across racial lines. Even in the post-apartheid-era, this separate development is still the distinguishing feature of South African agriculture. While a lot has been written about this dualism since Lipton's<sup>1</sup> contribution in 1977, Sihlobo brings a fresh and a detailed perspective to this issue. What is also refreshing is that his approach takes this discussion to ordinary people who are not necessarily scholars.

As in his first book *Finding Common Ground, Equity and Agriculture*<sup>2</sup>, he uses articles that he has published in popular public media platforms – such as *Business Day*, *Daily Maverick*, and *The Conversation* – to develop his argument in *A Country of Two Agricultures*. As such, the book is not a hardcore scientific or academic book, but rather an enjoyable and informative collection of essays which are refreshing to read and add hope about developments within South African agriculture. This approach was intentional, as the author claims in the book's preface, to have a wider impact extending beyond academia.

The book is divided into 12 parts (chapters). The first half of the book is mostly devoted to telling the story of the growth of South African agriculture and what hinders growth for black farmers (the disparities), while the second half proposes solutions to grow the sector inclusively.

In the first part, Sihlobo starts by narrating a story of a black commercial farmer in Bronkhorstspruit – an example to which he frequently refers in the rest of the book. In the second part, Sihlobo talks about how, from 2001/2002, South African agriculture has thrived; he attributes this growth to good policy, mainly deregulation of South African agriculture, and the adoption of technology. A concern he raises, which is probably shared with most citizens, is that this growth is one-sided, resembling separate development. For example, Greyling et al.<sup>3</sup> examined the performance of the South African agricultural sector from 1994 to 2013 and found that smallholders contributed a mere 5% to the sector.

Growth in the agricultural sector, especially in smallholder agriculture, has been the key focus of national policies. For example, the National Growth Path, the National Development Plan (NDP) and the recent Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan. Thus, Sihlobo's argument is in line with key national priorities and is concerned with development policy, growth and practice. These are necessary considerations in a country with high rates of unemployment and poverty as a result of under-development, especially in the former homelands in which many smallholders are situated.<sup>4</sup> For example, analysis by Kwenda et al.<sup>5</sup> shows that, on average, former homeland areas have higher levels of unemployment (33%) relative to non-former-homeland areas (24%).

While Sihlobo<sup>2</sup> attributes the lack of growth from smallholder agriculture to several factors, the key factors he emphasises are the failures of government to implement policies and governance within local municipalities to build and maintain infrastructure. This issue of policy–practice gaps has recently been emphasised<sup>6</sup>, with a focus on land redistribution. The latter is an angle which has been an oversight of many development practitioners in explaining the endurance of the dualism within South African agriculture.

In the fourth part of the book, Sihlobo talks about the political economy of South African agriculture, and shows the divisions within South African agriculture caused mainly by the lack of trust, lack of a common vision and lack of public–private partnerships, which he believes are necessary to achieve inclusive growth. He blames the government for not levelling the playing field, resulting in a lack of trust from the private sector. Indeed, division is an enemy of success within the sector, as Sihlobo explains it; he makes an example of farmer organisations that are built along racial lines. Zantsi et al.<sup>7</sup> argued similarly, emphasising the fact that the envisaged unified agricultural sector in which farmers compete on equal terms<sup>8</sup> could be difficult to achieve because the process disadvantages black farmers who are low on expertise and lack participation in value chains.

In part nine, a part that will interest development practitioners, the author revisits the NDP's target of creating one million jobs in agriculture and agro-processing. Here Sihlobo first deconstructs from where the one million jobs were envisaged to come. He reminds the readers that these jobs were conditional, subject to implementation of the set of issues highlighted in the NDP, such as redistribution of land to suitable beneficiaries with tradeable leases or titles and access to finance, all of which have hardly been successfully implemented.<sup>4,9</sup> He shows that, despite the poor implementation, some targets have been met in certain sub-sectors, like horticulture.

The author concludes his book with the crucial issue of agricultural finance, which is also the key to growing the sector. In summary, this is an informative book for both academics and development practitioners, as well as ordinary citizens who care about development.

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