

ANOTHER COUNTRYSIDE? POLICY OPTIONS FOR LAND AND AGRARIAN REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICA

Ruth Hall (ed.)

Cape Town: University of the Western Cape
2009
264 pages
Illustrated
ISBN 978-0-620-4377-8

This study titled *Another countryside? Policy options for land and agrarian reform in South Africa*, edited by Ruth Hall, is significant given the challenges around diminishing global resources, including those affecting food security. Land reform does not only affect food security but also the maintenance of food production levels, development of small businesses, residential settlement and social cohesion. The focus on South Africa's land and agrarian policies is relevant at a time when land issues have taken centre stage in public and private debates in South Africa. There are wide-ranging security implications for South Africa if the process of land reform is mismanaged. This study is a timeous one. Hall, as editor, contributes to some of the eleven chapters. The author is well versed in land issues in South Africa and her work focuses on the interests, actors and discourses which have shaped land reform processes in South Africa. As a background to this book, it would help to read the 2010 study undertaken by Hall under the title *The politics of land reform in post-apartheid South Africa, 1990–2004: A shifting terrain of power, actors and discourses*.

This compilation is the result of an appeal by Thoko Didiza, the Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs under the Mbeki, administration to outline the progress of and problems facing the land reform process. One particular response came from the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), which resulted in this publication.

<p><i>Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies</i>, Vol 41, Nr 2, 2013, pp. 155-158. doi : 10.5787/41-2-1074</p>

The introduction to the study serves as a research problem framed around the fundamental issues or challenges related to land reform during the period 1994–2008. Of

these issues, three are noticeable: unattainable targets, a lack of comprehensive strategies to achieve set targets, and a general disregard by policy makers for the quality of outcomes. By implication the work also point toward a lack of policy feedback evaluation and long term planning.

The mismatch between policy intentions and practical outcomes is evident in the percentage of land transferred more than 14 years after the initiation of the project. The 1994 election manifesto of the African National Congress envisaged the transfer of 30% of white-owned agricultural land to black South Africans within five years. By 2008, only about 4% of land had been transferred through all aspects of land reform combined. Land reform, according to this study, has three distinct features restitution, redistribution and tenure reform.

Restitution refers to processes which address 'land claims' for those who had been denied the rights during the colonial and then apartheid era, while redistribution is related to reallocating commercial farm lands, a process that is market-driven as advocated by the World Bank and commonly referred to as the 'willing buyer, willing seller' approach. Tenure reform seeks to address challenges, in particular insecure rights to land, facing people from the former Bantustans. In all three aspects, proposed strategies failed to achieve intended outcomes. The approach advocated by World Bank, an approach adopted by South Africa, is excessively dependent on markets with minimum state intervention, and has resulted in prolonged processes, which do not benefit buyers or the national economy. The objective of land reform should not be the mere transfer of land from one owner to another; it should be driven by rectifying colonial and apartheid practices through mechanisms which enhance improved livelihoods, increased production, higher rates of employment and consistent economic growth.

The study attempted to reframe the entire land reform process in a manner that is characterised by achievable objectives, which not only benefit all involved but also encourages national economic growth. The text outlines existing practices, investigates the strengths and weaknesses of these practices and then recommends alternate options.

Part one discusses foundational questions about land reform covering the rationale behind the process, the intended targets of the process and the outcomes that the process should produce. The importance of economic growth, the development of rural areas and the use of land are highlighted here. An important issue raised is that land reform projects are limited because grants are too small. In

order to rectify this, area-based planning has to be a participatory project and it should be undertaken within a wider vision for agrarian reform. Land reform must be coordinated at various policy levels, including macroeconomic policy, trade policy, agricultural policy and local economic development and planning for land use at farm level. In addition, land reform must move beyond the system advocated by the World Bank, which is characterised by an over-dependence on markets. In this regard, it is suggested that the state play a more interventionist and proactive role since dependence on markets alone stunts the progress of the process. Land reform should not only target land but should also target the marginalised. It is the uneducated and ill-informed who most require access to land, yet it is the educated and informed, even in post-apartheid South Africa, who seem to be accessing rights to land. In addition, up until the writing of this book, the focus of land reform policies has been on state-owned lands, yet more than 80% of land in South Africa is privately owned. In order to rectify inequalities and encourage economic growth, it is suggested that state initiatives turn their focus towards privately owned land. It is further suggested that lands be utilised appropriately. Underutilised land appears to be a norm once transfers have occurred – a recurring phenomenon when land reforms are unplanned and poorly executed; the policy in this regard not only affecting the economy but also the issue of access to and availability of food.

Part two of the work covers the economic and political considerations related to and affecting land reform. Noted in this part is that there has been a general decline in employment in agriculture since the beginning of the land reform process. State support, in particular state subsidies, must be increased to rectify this trend. Although agriculture contributes 4% towards the gross domestic product GDP, a re-examination of the potential contribution towards the economy needs to be undertaken. One of the most disturbing issues brought out in this section is that land reform appears to benefit a limited number of farming elites and contradicts the initial aims of land reform. Even more disturbing, according to the contributors, is that the current process appears to be undertaken arbitrarily, with the intention to gain political mileage instead of benefiting the marginalised or encouraging maximal use of land. To address this issue, it is imperative that marginalised sections of the population play a participative role in policy making and implementation.

Part three of the book discusses the alternative policy. The outstanding factor is the need for South Africa to formulate land and agrarian reform, which includes smallholder farming as a major element. The authors argue that alternate strategies should not only aim at increased production but should also seek to

increase numbers of livelihoods from the land presently in the commercial farm sector.

From a security studies perspective, this book stands out because it demonstrates the far-reaching security implications of the land reform process. The link between land reform and national security is evident in all three parts. Economic, political, societal, environmental and sometimes even military repercussions of a mismanaged land reform process are touched upon. This book should be compulsory reading for all those with an interest in how the process is unfolding in South Africa. The book is well structured from a theoretical point of view. There does however appear to be a lack of information regarding the practice of land reform processes in other Third World countries. This is not however a weakness since the contributors were requested to review and analyse the land reform process in South Africa from a policy perspective. The book is highly recommended.

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