



Promoting Rural Development

1. Introduction

Rural development is becoming more and more important to the social stability and economic development of the country. As a result, rural communities are receiving increasing attention from various stakeholders such as government, civil society, NGOs and academics. This attention not only sheds light on the conditions under which the rural population survives, but also informs policy interventions and initiatives that aim to improve those conditions. Not every initiative or policy is successful, but genuine attempts have been made by all these stakeholders to influence the development of rural communities.

This briefing paper will attempt to provide an overview of critical interventions in the areas of land reform, education, and unemployment in rural districts, and will also look at proposals being made by civil society, NGOs and academics.

2. Land Reform as a Strategy for Rural Development

"Land is integrally linked to our way of life in Africa. Without it, our people are destined to live in undesirable conditions. Land and means of production are the basic necessities to ensuring that we find effective means of developing our rural communities."

Gugile Nkwinti, Minister of Rural Development & Land Reform

In 2007 the ANC passed a resolution at its national conference to improve social cohesion and speed up development of rural communities. The primary strategy was based on the distribution of land as a unifying and

developmental initiative that would build more economically and socially egalitarian communities. The resolution thus became an important instrument of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform's mandate of addressing the existing systems and patterns of land ownership and control.¹

But what is land reform? One of South Africa's leading academic units dealing with land issues defines it as follows:

Land reform is defined as a set of policies and frameworks which govern secure access to and use of land, and which seek to restructure inequitable, socially inefficient and unsustainable existing land relations. It includes the redistribution of land or land rights, as well as reform of the institutional arrangements under which people exercise already-existing land rights. Historically in South Africa, land reform includes land distribution, land restitution and tenure reform.²

In 2009 the government published the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP), which sought to create an integrated programme for rural development, land reform and agrarian change. The CRDP is based on three phases that include: (1) meeting basic human needs; (2) large-scale infrastructure development; and (3) establishing rural industrial and financial sectors which are driven by small, medium and micro-enterprises and village markets. The CRDP has been implemented in 21 sites throughout South Africa, and will be rolled out to 160 sites by 2014.³

The CRDP also includes steps to intensify and speed up the process of land reform. The target is

to distribute 30% of white-owned agricultural land to black owners, as well as to provide the necessary technical skills and financial resources to increase productivity on the allocated land. It is believed that this will create sustainable livelihoods and increased job-opportunities in rural areas. The CRDP also aims to expand the agrarian reform programme to promote agricultural co-operatives and improve market access for small farmers. Lastly, it is intended to promote land ownership, strengthen the partnership between government and traditional leaders, improve the living conditions of farm dwellers, and use the Expanded Public Works Programme for local job creation.⁴

The Department has also published a Green Paper on Land Reform, which will be the ultimate guide for the achievement of government's land objectives. This Green Paper has evoked much criticism from civil society groups as well as private stakeholders because, they argue, it has failed to address certain key issues. For example, according to some academics, land reform should play an important role in reversing the current social and economic underdevelopment of rural areas, over and above simply restoring land to those who were unfairly disposed of it under the old regime; and, in addition, it should be based on promoting inclusive growth. In order to do this, policy makers should have a firm understanding of how the poor became marginalized, how the skewed development of the rural economy happened, and what should be done to effectively address these issues.⁵

One such strategy is based on the potential of the smallholder-farmer. According to Greenberg, there are about 240 000 black, small-scale farmers supporting up to a million dependants, and between 2 million and 4 million farmers who produce food for household consumption needs. This creates a good foundation to help smallholder-farmers establish larger local markets or have access to the larger-scale, export-orientated models.⁶

However, these smallholder-farmers still need much more private and government support to make full use of the opportunities available to them. Established farmers, whether they are black or white, could help those entering the sector by providing expertise and resources and by sharing markets. Government, on the other hand, must set the framework and provide the necessary infrastructure for new farmers' economic development. This means that support

systems based on a wide range of knowledge, technical skills and finances must play an increasingly important role if government's land reform policies are to succeed.⁷

This idea – that knowledge and skills constitute a kind of property – has been noted in Catholic Social Teaching:

"In our time, in particular, there exists another form of ownership which is becoming no less important than land: the possession of know-how, technology and skill."

Centesimus Annus 32, Pope John Paul II

Furthermore, land reform policies should look at the relationship between the farming and non-farming communities and make sure that the real needs, skills and abilities of people living and working on agricultural land are understood; rather than trying to impose methods that could have a negative influence on food security for the country. It is also important to understand that one set of land reform policies will not be able to address the concerns of all, and that policies should be flexible enough to create multiple solutions for different groups under various circumstances.⁸

Agricultural growth can be fostered only under a system in which property rights are protected, and where land-reform takes place under the principle of inclusive growth, where everyone benefits from the process. Thus, laws and policies should aim to create a win-win situation where farm-dwellers and -workers and farm-owners enjoy viable and sustainable solutions, and where the pace of settlement of claims is accelerated.⁹

3. Interventions in Education

"Rural per-se is not the problem. The human resources and the infrastructure are the challenges."

Angie Motshekga: Minister of Basic Education

According to the Constitution, every citizen has the right to a decent education. The reality, however, is that not everyone receives the same benefits under the country's current education system, and that rural communities suffer worst in this regard. Needs assessments on education in rural South Africa have shown that many areas commonly experience a lack of necessary resources such as text-books and technological equipment, and have to make do with poor

school infrastructure. This, combined with other social and economic issues, creates environments where most rural children's educational performances are poorer than their counterparts in urban areas.

The minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, is of the opinion that the key to better performing rural schools lies in a combined commitment from all stakeholders (government, the private sector and civil society) to the educational development of such areas. In the past, these partnerships have produced good results; for example, the collaboration between the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Education and Training (DET) developed a curriculum that prepares university teachers to teach in rural primary schools. Private-sector donations to underprivileged schools, as well as mentoring and support from well-resourced schools to under-resourced ones have also been critical to the delivery of quality education in rural areas.¹⁰

However, the DBE is aware of the known shortcomings associated with some of the collaborations. Some projects with the private sector were unsuccessful because of a lack of ongoing support. *"For example, a donation of 20 computers will not resolve the ICT issue in a school, unless the school has access to the internet, the necessary technical skills to maintain the computers and the necessary teaching skills to use these computers appropriately."* Thus, the DBE is aiming to improve its relationship with all stakeholders concerning rural development in order to facilitate better co-ordinated efforts in addressing the various education concerns.¹¹

The Department's strategy to achieve quality education in rural schools is therefore based on multiple initiatives that include, (a) support for the cognitive development of pre-grade R children; (b) an increased uptake of grade Rs; (c) an improvement in learning literacy and numeracy in the foundation phase; (d) a focus on the right combination of languages to be learned in schools; and (e) the provision of more support for multi-grade schools.

A multi-grade school is one where teachers educate different grades in one classroom. These schools are fairly common in rural areas, and require teachers to be skilled in performing multiple tasks: for example, while one group is working on assignments, the teacher is free to teach another group in the same room. The DBE

has recognised the importance of these schools, and places emphasis on developing infrastructure, teacher training and incentives, and a curriculum designed to enhance learning and teaching in the multi-grade context.

Steps are in place to connect rural schools to the internet and to develop a suitable classroom environment for multi-grade teaching. In order to enhance the skills of teachers, the Department has entered into a partnership with the Centre for Multi-grade Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology to train teachers nationally in coping with multiple grades in one classroom. A customised curriculum will be adopted that is relevant for this context, and a rural incentive will be provided to attract teachers to rural areas. It is envisaged that these initiatives will not just bridge the gap between rural and urban children's level of achievement, but will produce good leadership and management in rural schools.

However, some critical voices feel that government must do even more to improve teaching and learning in rural South Africa. The Democratic Alliance (DA) has made it clear in its policy framework that the government should not just look to partnerships and infrastructural development, but should also reward schools which perform better than others, based on set criteria. One such reward may be granting successful schools more independence to manage their own affairs, such as staffing, discipline and timetables. Schools which do not meet the criteria should undergo teacher and principal training, teacher appointment reviews, and management audits, and be placed in a mentoring programme to enhance their performance.¹²

4. Job-creation in Rural Areas

Job creation, especially for the large numbers of unemployed youth, is one of the country's primary concerns. Major strategies and policies aimed at tackling it include the idea of a youth wage subsidy, the Expanded Public Works Programme, skills-development, the CRDP, entrepreneurship-training, and the more recent job-seeker's grant, proposed by the ANC at its national policy conference in June 2012. All these policies are geared to enhance young people's access to the labour-market, but each of them tends to meet with criticism and resistance from various sectors.

The following are brief descriptions of the main policies and the major criticisms they attract.

4.1. The youth wage subsidy and the job-seeker's grant

The youth wage subsidy, proposed in 2009, aims to provide job opportunities for school- and university graduates by paying businesses to hire unemployed youth. It is believed that the subsidy, paid to businesses, will lower the cost of hiring unskilled and inexperienced workers. It will be paid to complying businesses in the form of a tax credit, and will be available to employers of people between the ages of 18–29 with salaries below R60 000 per year. Government has set aside R5-billion for the implementation of this initiative, but it has met with increasing resistance from labour unions. They argue that the subsidy will cause older workers to lose their jobs, as young people will be hired to replace them. Labour unions also feel that the initiative will simply be a hand-out to businesses and that it will create distortions in the labour market.¹³

Union resistance has meant that the youth wage subsidy has been tied up in the National Economic, Development and Labour Council (Nedlac), and led the ANC to officially reject it at its national policy conference. A new policy was adopted to provide financial people seeking employment with a 'job-seeker's grant'. This is a new concept which works on the premise of providing young people with much-needed cash to allow them to actively search for work. Critics believe this will simply incentivise joblessness, and that it would be more effective if it were combined with the youth wage subsidy.¹⁴

4.2. The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the CRDP

The EPWP is an initiative aimed at creating work for unemployed people through offering them work in various infrastructure development projects. This is an important platform for unemployed people to gain skills and work experience, while simultaneously improving the infrastructure of the country. However, research suggests that the programme has not been as effective as planned in poverty alleviation because it has failed to target groups with the highest unemployment rates. In addition, in most cases it provides only temporary work, and employees return to unemployment after a project has been completed. There is also a strong belief that the programme should develop

better and more incentivised partnerships between government and the private sector in order to enhance both labour absorption and skills training. Thus, it is argued, the EPWP should not be focused so much on alleviating poverty, but rather on providing individuals with new sets of skills which will enhance their chances of gaining work in the formal sector.¹⁵

The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) is tightly linked to the EPWP, as it also concerns itself with infrastructural development in the various sites where it is currently being implemented. The CRDP aims to involve communities, the government, and the private sector to work together in developing specified rural sites. In 2010 the CRDP piloted a job-creation and skills training model where one person per household, at each CRDP site, was employed and trained for a period of two years. This allows communities to play a central role in the development of their own areas by being part of the process of erecting houses, community halls, multipurpose centres, schools, clinics and other infrastructural projects.¹⁶

4.3. Entrepreneurships

Entrepreneurship is a vital tool for social and economic development, and various state and para-state bodies provide much-needed support for the establishment and growth of new and existing entrepreneurs. However, there is a general feeling that more needs to be done to develop this sector because it has great potential to create new employment opportunities for many unemployed people. Ideas range from creating a more flexible labour market based on international best-practices, business skill development initiatives, making regulations more business-friendly, as well as enabling easier access to capital in order to start and grow small businesses. It is argued that such measures would have a positive influence on the growth and development of small and medium enterprises and thus help to absorb large numbers of unemployed people. And nowhere is this more urgent than in the rural areas, where there is a combination of high unemployment and a shortage of entrepreneurial skills and opportunities.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that government has made significant strides in addressing some of the major problems

facing rural communities in the country; various policies, strategies, programmes and initiatives are being implemented to improve the lives of people. However, it is also clear that there exists major room for improvement and that persistent shortcomings need to be addressed, if these interventions are to succeed.

Rural communities and all other stakeholders should continue to inform, criticise and hold leaders accountable for the development of the rural nation.

Randall Adams
Contract Researcher

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² Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS), 2011: "Comments on the Green Paper on land reform," Submission to the Department for Rural Development and Land Reform. (*This Comment was submitted to the Department for Rural Development and Land Reform on 25 November 2011. It is signed by researchers of the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies*)

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⁴ Nkwinti, G., 2010: "A case for rapid change and a reviewed land tenure system," <<http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=123854>> (2 May 2012)

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¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Democratic Alliance., 2012: "MDU-DA – Creating economic opportunities for all," Economic policy document. <http://www.da.org.za/our_policies.htm?action=view-policy&policy=613> (23 June 2012)

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