Human Science Perspectives on Sustainable Agriculture

Claudious Chikozho (PhD)
Human Sciences Research Council
Pretoria, South Africa

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Outline

1. Introduction
2. Issues influencing research themes, paradigms & methodologies
3. Ongoing Studies
4. Key Findings
5. Suggested future research themes
INTRODUCTION

• Human Science Perspectives on sustainable agric. emphasize food security & rural socio-economic transformation (tracing value chains to the mkt);
• Seeks to address poverty, hunger, malnutrition & societal inequalities through higher levels of productivity (e.g. rural & urban divide in access to income & econ opportunities);
• Challenging the theoretical foundations on which rural transformation is based (theorising);
• Seeking to inform policy & practice;
• An Africa-wide comparative focus.
Main research themes & paradigms

• Impacts/ legacy of apartheid & colonialism determine the current rural condition in RSA & other African countries;
• Spatial planning which left many communities congested in poor agro-ecological zones;
• Poorly-resourced households & communities (subsistence agric);
• Africa missing the green revolution – why & how best to remedy the situation?
Main methodologies

• Rapid assessments – social surveys;
• Action research & participatory diagnostic studies (usually mixing social science & bio-physical methodologies);
• Field trials - Agric extension-oriented;
• Direct observation: spending time on the selected farms & interacting with the farmers;
• A significant shift towards systems thinking & analytical approaches (requires one to think from a multidisciplinary perspective).
Ongoing Studies

- Land redistribution to address historical inequities — successes & failures (best-practices);
- Opportunities for agric. intensification in rain-fed subsistence farming, irrigated & conservation agric;
- Augmenting available limited water resources (droughts & mid-season dry spells) through water harvesting (including catchment wide impacts);
- Impacts of climate change on production & household socio-econ conditions, esp for rain-fed agric;
- **Cross-cutting** — policies, institutions, gender dimensions, support systems (effective governance/enabling env).
Key Findings

- Barriers & opportunities for access to or ownership of land & water must be addressed;
- Effective support systems are needed for land & water devt & use in RSA & elsewhere (higher agric prod. levels).
- Need to address both land & water resource degradation (Env. science experts needed);
- Need to improve access to water & use by the farmers;
- Analysis of policies, institutions, gender & support systems at national & local levels essential - determine agric performance & sustainability.
Future research themes

1. Opportunities for improving access to land & water – appropriateness of redistribution models tried out; RWH; in-situ soil moisture & fertility conservation;

2. Sustainable land mgt to enhance agric productivity;

3. Adaptation to climate change – farming systems innovation (climate smart agric);

4. Farming systems intensification in light of limited land availability;

5. Access to transboundary water resources – implications for basin-wide governance.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

c.chikozho@gmail.com