



Reforming the land:

agrarian reform projects missing pro-poor target

South Africa's agrarian reform programme has been criticised on a number of fronts: for its overall design, its implementation and the lack of sustained and coherent post-settlement support. Generally speaking, institutional dynamics among beneficiaries and various government institutions have contributed to the large number of dysfunctional agrarian reform projects in the country, writes *Charles Nhemachena*.

The South Africa agrarian reform programme covers the areas of land reform, land restitution and land tenure reform. To understand whether agrarian reform has a role to play in poverty reduction in South Africa, the HSRC conducted a study of the broader programme and some of its outcomes. Aside from this key focus, the study also explored strategies to enhance the contribution of land reform to improving the livelihoods of beneficiaries and thereby reducing poverty.

Study outline

The study was based on purpose-built household surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews designed to collect information from land reform beneficiaries (with and without programmed agricultural development support) and other role players. The primary data was collected from two districts within each of the three case study provinces: North West (Dr Ruth Segomotso Mompoti and Ngaka Modiri Molema), KwaZulu-Natal (Zululand and uThukela) and the Western Cape (West Coast and Eden/Karoo).

To allow for comparative analysis at district level, the final realised sample across the three provinces included 301 land reform farm households, with highly uneven response rates across the six districts.

The institutional issues of agrarian reforms in South Africa are discussed at three different levels: national, project/household and civil society.

Drawing on primary data collected in the three case study provinces of North West, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, we interrogated how institutional arrangements and dynamics could have facilitated and/or hindered contributions of the agrarian reform to the overall goal of poverty reduction.

The institutional arrangements of land reform in post-apartheid South Africa have been characterised by fragmented service delivery.

Fragmented service delivery

The institutional arrangements of land reform in post-apartheid South Africa have been characterised by fragmented service delivery within the national, provincial and district tiers of government. Criticism has been levelled against the various departments for a lack of clear institutional roles and responsibilities in particular. For example, post-settlement support for agrarian reform programmes and projects has been marred by the general lack of co-ordination and communication between key government departments.

Agricultural support programmes implemented by provincial departments of agriculture do exist, but these programmes appear to suffer from under-funding, poor planning and generalised ineffectiveness. In addition, the performance of agrarian reform has been adversely impacted by a lack of external support for collective landholding institutions, such as communal property associations (CPAs) and trusts.

A lack of clear institutional direction between the various departments has led to the duplication of roles and responsibilities and sometimes, infighting between the departments.

Generally, the CPAs have not been a resounding success. While in some instances they provided the community with legal personae and therefore a basis upon which to manage their land in accordance with corporate procedures, the CPA process as a whole was perceived as being imposed and foreign. Two main types of constitutions were adopted for agrarian reform projects: representing the entire group/trust (with the names of all the beneficiaries on the title deed); and representing the management committee (with the names of all the management committee members on the title deed). In most cases, the actual beneficiaries/management committees present on the agrarian reform projects were different from the representative entity.

Findings from qualitative interviews with key informants (mainly government officials from national, provincial and district offices) showed that agrarian reform in South Africa has not performed to expectations. It has suffered from a lack of clear institutional direction between the various departments, which has led to the duplication of roles and responsibilities in some cases and sometimes, infighting between the departments. There were no clearly defined institutional mechanisms for project monitoring and evaluation, partly due to the lack of qualified personnel within government.

Findings at project level

Democratic processes were generally followed in constitution development and implementation, leadership selection and general decision making. About 66% of the respondents reported that their constitutions were thoroughly discussed and understood by all members before implementation; however, only 51% in North West reported that this was the case.

A total of 74% reported that leadership committees were always elected in properly constituted meetings. Also, about 65% reported that group decisions took place according to the rules defined in the constitution. Farms with access to agricultural development support were expected to follow democratic principles in their decision making, while getting support in itself could reflect the institutional arrangements of the groups. Those who were more organised had better

chances of getting support compared to those with no organised institutional structures.

More than 75% of the farms operated with trusts and CPAs. Key informants explained that the CPAs and trusts faced a number of administrative challenges that hindered productive use of land. One of the issues reported was the lack of technical capacity to productively run the land reform projects on the part of the CPAs.

Conflicts and group dynamics were key institutional issues at the project level. About 31% of the respondents indicated that they had never experienced internal conflicts about their land reform projects. About 62% reported that they had always resolved conflicts about their land reform project, and 23% reported that the issues were not always resolved. Government was reported to have failed to manage the conflicts among beneficiaries.

A remarkable institutional issue reported was the timing of the disbursement of resources for farmers to plan and engage in production activities. Key informants at district level reported that sometimes, due to the differences in the financial years between national government and the district, there were issues of late disbursements of funds and other resources.

Agrarian reform still faces a number of institutional issues that need to be addressed to ensure the process contributes to poverty reduction and improved livelihoods of the beneficiaries.

Conclusion

The results showed that agrarian reform still faced a number of institutional issues that needed to be addressed to ensure the process contributed to poverty reduction and improved livelihoods of the beneficiaries. For example, although there was a general trend at the national level to engage various government departments in agrarian reform programmes such as with the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP), results showed that more needed to be done for this to be more effective. At the project level, institutional dynamics were found to contribute to dysfunctional and unproductive land reform projects.

Generally, institutional arrangements and dynamics have a significant bearing on the running and productive use of agrarian reform projects. Policy reforms that aim to improve institutional arrangements and dynamics at various levels (national, project/household and civil society) would have significant positive impacts in getting land reform beneficiaries to productively use the land. This would have further wider benefits to the communities and the economy at large. ■

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