



Theme: Rural Economy and Land Reform

Action Dialogue: Communal Area Agriculture and Rural Development in South Africa (September, 2015)¹

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1. What were the major issues addressed at the workshop in relation to structural poverty and persistent, deep inequalities in communal area agriculture?

The workshop focused on what can be done to enhancing homestead food production systems in communal areas to increase rural income and food supply in the former Bantustans where the deepest poverty is located. The value of communal land and its resources, including livestock, cropping and ecosystem services, is commonly underestimated, with their full social, cultural and economic values not adequately taken into account. We need to find ways to enhance these values and the various contributions they make to livelihoods and well-being.

2. What are the main reasons for the persistence of the deep inequalities and poverty in the communal area agriculture?

Crop production in communal areas has long been in decline. Reasons for the decline include: the legacy of betterment planning; high input costs and risks involved in field cultivation versus the low returns; issues regarding access to and control of arable land; the retreat of labour from agriculture towards wage labour; and the withdrawal of child and youth labour from

About this brief

This brief was commissioned by the Mandela Initiative to help inform a synthesis report on its work since the 2012 national conference, *Strategies to Overcome Poverty and Inequality*, organised by the University of Cape Town. The MI provides a multi-sectoral platform to investigate and develop strategies to overcome poverty and reduce inequality in South Africa. While the Nelson Mandela Foundation is a key partner, the Initiative has relied on collaborations between academics and researchers, government, business leaders, civil society, the church and unions.

The synthesis report serves as a framework for reporting on the work of the MI at a national gathering on 12 – 14 February 2018 at the University of Cape Town. The MI *Think Tank* has identified the objectives for the gathering as:

- to anchor the contributions of the MI within an analysis of the current South African political and economic context;
- to share the recommendations emanating from the MI-related work streams at a policy/strategic level to advance the goal of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality;
- to critically engage with the potential impact of the recommendations on eliminating structural poverty and inequality; and
- to discuss ways of promoting popular conversations and debate about what needs to be done to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, beyond the MI.

The synthesis report aims to assist participants to prepare for the national gathering. The report drew on findings from the sectoral research projects of Think Tank members; the MI's *Action Dialogues*; a report on an MI *Community of Practice workshop* with research chairs from different universities to identify cross-cutting themes emerging from the MI's *research programme*; and the work programmes of others who have expressed an interest in contributing to the goals of the MI.

¹ The Donald Woods Foundation facilitated the workshop at the Hobeni Training Centre, in cooperation with the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape.

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agriculture due to significantly higher enrolments in school. Two types of families currently grow field crops: (1) the wealthy, who are able to hire in labour; and (2) people who are very poor but cultivate as a survival strategy. People in-between these extremes generally cultivate homestead gardens, but not fields.

Rural households now depend heavily on social grants, and remittances have declined due to increasing unemployment. Money from grants does not support the local economy and local producers much, but is spent in major supermarket chains that line the streets of small towns. Government has spent large sums in attempts to improve levels of production through programmes like Siyazondla and the Massive Food Production Programme, but these have not been very effective.

The livestock economy has declined as much as cropping, but the distribution of cattle has become highly unequal, in part because members of the urban, black middle class are investing in cattle in their rural homes. This is less true of small livestock such as goats, sheep and poultry.

In many cases interventions to revive agriculture in the former homelands have failed because they are not rooted in the local context and fail to understand the underlying complexities and challenges faced by smallholders. Often, they attempt to impose conventional models of commercial farming on smallholders. Examples include: betterment planning and villagisation; the Massive Food Production Programme; the Community Works Programme; Agriparks; cooperatives; strategic partnerships; the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP); local infrastructure projects; tenure reform in communal areas; and revitalising irrigation schemes in communal areas.

3. What do you recommend should be done at a macro policy/strategic level to deal with the major issues you have identified?

Considerable dynamism now exists in relation to homestead gardens. The link between arable agriculture production and livestock rearing was also noted as significant. These can be built upon in renewed efforts at increasing productivity, outputs and incomes.

Crucial to the success of interventions will be to develop appropriate conceptions of rural development (that avoid the 'urbanisation' of rural areas or 'peasant and shopping mall' approaches); the use of participatory approaches that involve social learning and community ownership; building effective institutional frameworks, social cohesion, and partnerships with existing programmes; providing training for farmers and ensuring effective extension services; offering low-cost and appropriate technologies and markets for smallholders, including niche crops, and small livestock that are easier for women to own; developing technologies and approaches that conserve natural resources (water is especially important) and supporting livelihoods through the collection of natural resources; and working with useful typologies of different kinds of farmers, rather than cannot assuming homogeneity, taking account of both class and gender.

Community members can also benefit through establishing related enterprises, to service homestead gardens as well as diversify livelihoods. These include: establishing greenhouse and seedling enterprises which can supply the home gardens; local fencing businesses; establishing agro-forestry on crop or pasture land and linking it to bee-keeping; packing enterprises; and establishing linkages

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between homestead gardens and livestock projects, e.g. by growing beans and using the stover for livestock. Unemployed youth could be targeted.

Access to markets for surplus produce is important. Experience suggests not relying on only a single market. Other options include supplying the School Nutrition Programme; connecting with existing entrepreneurs such as bakkie traders who supply informal markets; and building on the experience of those smallholders who supply Boxer and Spar stores in efforts to expand access the formal market

4. What do you think the potential impact of the recommendations will be on eliminating structural poverty and reducing inequality?

Homestead-based agriculture in the deep rural areas of the former Bantustans has significant potential to support enhanced livelihoods, and help reduce poverty and inequality in general. However, realism is required in relation to how small-scale agriculture is conceived and how programmes are planned and implemented. 'Realism' means that that we should understand current farming systems, their constraints, opportunities and underlying dynamics of change, before we begin to plan major interventions. National and provincial programmes for supporting communal area agriculture are an urgent need, and such programmes should consider making these homestead gardens and small livestock production systems their primary focus.

Communal area farmers are far from homogeneous, with significant socio-economic differentiation in relation to gendered divisions of labour and ownership, as well as differences in relation to livelihood strategies, homestead assets, access to capital, and orientation to markets. Programmes to support agriculture need to pay careful attention to such differences, and to carefully design interventions for specific target groups.

Technologies aimed at improving the productivity of communal area agricultural systems need to be tailored to fit local realities. Extension and training materials should be designed that effectively communicate and disseminate these technologies. Climate-smart production technologies such as water harvesting are a priority, and can play a key role in homestead food production. Agricultural interventions can be usefully linked to education and health services, as in supporting homestead food production to enhance nutrition, and integrating agriculture into science education.

For more information on the Mandela Initiative:

