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Race, gender, class and land reform: a case study approach on the land reform for agricultural development (LRAD) sub-programme

Madletyana, Philani

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ABSTRACT

The racial discrimination under colonialism and apartheid culminated to the dispossession of black people from their land, and to unequal land distribution between black and white people. Territorial segregation during this period was not only about the displacement of black people from their land and their deprivation to equal access to land compared to their white counterparts, it was also about economic deprivation, eradication of subsistence agriculture and the transformation of blacks into wage labourers (Hall, 2004; Walker, 2008).The post-apartheid land reform process was initiated to redress the injustices and inequalities of the past. It took a market-driven approach to blend the objectives of land reform with those of national reconciliation and maintenance of food security (DLA, 1997).

The land reform process took a form of restoring land to its original owners who were forcefully removed from it after June 1913 or compensation if land could not be restored. It was also aimed at securing tenure rights for farm workers, labour tenants, farm dwellers and people residing in communal areas. The aims of the third part of the land reform programme was to redistribute 30% of commercial farms in white hands to black people with the view of redressing racial disparities in landholding. As early as in the initial stages of the development of South Africa's land policy in the early 1990s, scholars and civil society groups warned about the ineffectiveness of the market to deliver on land reform objectives.

This paper adopts a case study approach to study the South African land reform process in relation to the notion of empowerment. It focuses on the Land Reform for Agricultural Development (LRAD) sub-programme by looking at the intersection between race, gender and class. Bambanani Fruits (Pty) Ltd, an LRAD project based in the Gauteng province is used as a case study. This is an LRAD Equity Scheme project, meaning that its beneficiaries (who are former workers on the farm) acquired an LRAD grant to purchase equity shares to be co-owners of the project. Bambanani Fruits is a successful project considering its productivity and access to the market. This paper investigates how much LRAD beneficiaries are part of this success i.e. whether they have agency, whether they feel a sense of ownership and control of the project, and the extent at which they take part in decision making in the project. This task is carried out through the application of Kabeer's (1999) instrumentalist model of measuring empowerment. Kabeer states that empowerment is measured by looking at three aspects, namely; resources, agency and achievement. Kabeer's model is applied to the data which was collected through various means including in depth interviews with Bambanani LRAD beneficiaries and land officials from the province, document analysis and review of existing scholarly work on land reform.

It is well documented that South Africa's land reform process has been very slow in delivering to its objectives, and departmental reports used in this paper also confirm this assertion. The research results reveal that even though more land was transferred under LRAD, the sub-programme also encountered some of the challenges and hindrances faced by its predecessor Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG). It faced budgetary constraints, complexities of the land market such as price restrictions and resistance by land owners to cede land, and so on.

Generally, it was found that LRAD tended to entrench race, gender and class disparities in landholding.

At Bambanani, I discovered that LRAD has affected beneficiaries differently. The sub-programme has stratified these beneficiaries into competing class factions. Divergent interests have emerged to distort the actual meaning of empowerment. I have labelled this tension a 'dichotomous factionalism'. The struggle and conflict is caught up between beneficiaries themselves, and their disunity has left the hegemony of the farm's management unchallenged. I argue that, their empowerment is firstly condemned from within and this internal condemnation limits their negotiating power with the management. Secondly, their empowerment is curtailed by the farm's management in such as way that it sometimes uses its majority shares to justify unilateral decision making. According to Kabeer, empowerment ought to encompass egalitarian decision making. Respondents have reported this is not always being the case at Bambanani.

One group of participants complained about how things have remained the same on the farm despite the acquisition of LRAD shares to co-own the farm. Another group which is mostly comprised by trust members argued that things have changed for the better compared to the period prior to the attainment of these equity shares. In doing so, this group blames the discontent group for the lack of commitment to the project and for being after money over the interest of the project. The discontent group has also complained that the trust is not representing their interests to the management, and whenever they lay complaints there are often threats of expulsion.

Apart from the above mentioned conflict of interests amongst Bambanani beneficiaries, positive elements were also discovered where beneficiaries agreed on some areas of dissatisfaction. I have labelled this a *Collective Discontent Spectacle*. The plight of beneficiaries is caused by the lack of adequate exposure to the business side of the farm's operation and the lack of delivery on houses which were promised to them by the management as part of the shareholding package. Having considered the Bambanani case and other literature on LRAD, I concluded that LRAD has failed to fulfil empowerment requirements as per Kabeer's model.

Keywords:

South Africa, LRAD, land reform, agrarian reform, intersectionality, empowerment, "willing-buyer, willing-seller", bifurcated agrarian system, agrarian inequality, agrarian- egalitarianism.