

## ABSTRACT

The relationship between farmers and farm workers in South Africa is one steeped in controversy, yet this area of study has received little attention. Agrarian history in South Africa is topical especially when considering the interaction between farmers (predominantly white) and farm workers (almost entirely black) in a capitalist economy. Farm workers current social and economic situation is a product of colonialism, segregationist and apartheid policies, as well as capitalist development and post-apartheid development strategy.

This study hence analyses the social cohesion within the commercial farming community, placed against the backdrop of the Land Reform Programme – tenure reform. The social relations and labour are highly shaped by the capitalist mode of production and through the control of capital. Total institutions, domestic governance, and paternalism, impedes successful tenure reform. The study reveals a mutual cohesion between farmer and their employees based on a variety of reasons ranging from mutual understanding, good communication, good working relationship, and treating such other fairly. Nonetheless, this does not mean that farm workers are not being maltreated as other studies on farm relations have shown. Without a doubt, land reform particularly tenure reform has clearly tested the patience of farmers.

The study further acknowledges that the current land reform programme (especially tenure reform) is deficient, and has not benefited those for whom it was intended. Despite the legislation that have been passed in order to protect the rights of those living on farms, and to secure the labour right of those who work on them, there has been little improvement in securing tenure rights as well as the poverty level of many farm dwellers. Successful implementations of recent interventions to tenure security are the preconditions necessary for the broader land reform programme to reduce poverty levels among farm workers. Hence, securing tenure rights for farm workers must therefore be tied to programmes which aim to reduce poverty level among farm dwellers in general. Tenure reform by itself cannot alleviate rural poverty unless the government take a decisive action to stimulate the rural economy.

Equally, farm dwellers (including farm workers and labour tenants) have felt the harshest consequence of the crises facing post-apartheid South Africa's agriculture sector. This historical process has left its legacy in post-apartheid South Africa, characterised not only by

a bimodal agricultural system but also by an unequal relation within (white) commercial farms where farm workers and labour tenants are faced with the harshest reality of poverty in the mist of agrarian wealth. This study therefore explores the disputed labour regime in the farming sector – the mechanisation and casualization of farm labour, as well as farm consolidation, both leading to a drop in rural/farm employment as an immediate consequence; and low unionisation of farm workers.