

Transforming Labour Reserves in South Africa: Asymmetries in the New Agrarian Policy

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Abstract:

This paper provides an analysis of the draft Comprehensive Rural Development Programme of the South African government. It focuses on agrarian transformation, a component of the programme. It asks whether the potential exists within communal areas that can be tapped into to unlock and be translated into tangible benefits for the relatively large populations in such areas. Such a question is necessary, it is argued, to allow for an analysis of the agrarian structural fissures and cleavages emanating from colonialism and apartheid.

Keywords: *Rural development, communal areas, agrarian policy, land redistribution,*

Introduction

A central feature of the emerging strategy of the South African government on rural development is its almost exclusive focus on the communal areas, or 'former homelands', as they are commonly known¹. This focus is premised on the assumption that it is in these areas that envisaged development will take place. These rural areas are seen as having some intrinsic capacity to provide the basis for a thoroughgoing agrarian transformation process that should lead not only to the eradication of poverty but to 'vibrant and sustainable' communities characterised by high employment, reasonable incomes and decent living standards. These regions were established as labour reserves and have a history of centuries of land dispossession, forced proletarianisation, and social and economic marginalisation. They have barely seen changes since 1994; instead, there has been a deepening decline and the generalised pauperisation of households and communities.

Over the past 16 years, ineffective government service delivery coupled with a degree of administrative ineptitude, have served to accentuate the trend of marginalisation and peripheralisation of these regions and their populations from the national economy. Social development has largely been held in abeyance and, auspiciously perhaps, the role previously played by migrant workers' remittances of helping many households to keep hunger at bay has been replaced by the ubiquitous social grants. These regions have over the past two decades, also undergone a perverse type of 'transformation', from reproducers and exporters of cheap labour to the country's metropolises, to reproducers and exporters of both labour and poverty, whilst also moving inexorably from a degree of subsistence to virtual stagnation.

The continuation of the torturous and convulsed history of the communal areas has been demonstrated most starkly within the context of the political and bureaucratic 'discourse' and practice on 'service delivery' and national spatial and economic planning under the neo-liberal economic and social development policy that has been pursued by the government since 1996. In particular, neo-liberal macro-economic policy imposed additional strain, limitations and caveats to the economic development of these regions, as policy continued to be dominated by overtly urban-biased imperatives and choices. A fundamental shift in direction and focus seemed imminent when the government led by Jacob Zuma took office in May 2009, taking as its point of departure the resolutions on rural development and agrarian transformation adopted by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) at its National Conference held in Polokwane in 2007, and promising an end to the isolation of the communal areas in social and economic development policy. The promise of a more inclusive and focused approach, as well as commitment of

¹ My preference for the term 'communal areas' derives from the lack of a more positive designation of these regions in most of the literature, as the appellation 'former' seems to imply a somewhat incomplete and tentative identity for these areas.

resources for rural development, should be seen in a positive light.

However, the critical question that then arises is whether sufficient potential exists within the communal areas that can be unlocked and translated into tangible benefits for their relatively large populations, solely on the basis of inwardly facing strategies and initiatives. Interrogating the problem in this way invariably calls for an approach that locates such an analysis within the context of the fundamental historical and structural fissures and cleavages emanating from colonialism and apartheid, that have resulted in the present division of the country between prosperous 'white' rural South Africa and the present pockets of rural poverty inhabited largely by Africans. In short, unless the question of redistribution of land is located squarely within agrarian transformation policy, the activities that the emergent policy framework confines to the communal areas will at best restore these territories to a position closer to subsistence production and not to self-sufficiency or prosperity.

Within the context of the theme of a 'third transition', particularly on whether the Zuma administration represents a new approach to rural development and agrarian transformation that was not characteristic of both those of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, it then becomes necessary to explore the question of whether the 'new' rural development and agrarian transformation policy represents continuity of the approach pursued under Mandela/Mbeki, that was underpinned and constrained by neo-liberalism. This invariably necessitates an analysis of the policy framework introduced by the Zuma administration in juxtaposition to the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP) that was initiated and implemented during the Mbeki years. The paper raises the following additional questions: What informs the apparent belief in some kind of 'intrinsic' capacity and dynamism for the communal areas, within the limits of the natural resources at their disposal, particularly land, to be in a position to be propelled to a higher level of development? In this context, what is actually 'new' about the new policy perspective, and what differentiates it from the colonial practice of the 'development of native areas' or the 'development of bantu or black areas' under apartheid? Whilst recognising the fact that the service delivery efforts of the South African government in rural environments have been hamstrung by a number of factors at the practical level, a major concern of this paper is therefore the seemingly overwhelming evidence pointing to a range of additional *de ja vu* effects. These include the phenomenon of a well-intentioned policy and programme being bedevilled by the all-too-familiar challenges of under-resourcing, low programme implementation capacity, poor co-ordination, ineffectual stakeholder mobilisation and participation, and generally poor leadership. The analysis then brings into focus the question of political commitment to and prioritisation of rural development within the overall context of development policy in South Africa, with particular reference to the question: why is something so fundamental in dealing with widespread poverty and underdevelopment not enjoying sustained commitment of the necessary resources from the government,

beyond formal policy positions?

In tackling these questions and issues, the paper highlights, as a major element of its argument, a marked asymmetry between the emergent policy perspective and practical realities in the communal areas. This is done through a detailed analysis of the draft Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) and to a lesser extent the Rural Development Strategy of the Eastern Cape Province (ECRDS). The paper elucidates most of its central arguments on the basis of relevant historical material relating to the Transkei region in the Eastern Cape Province, and within this region contemporary data on Mhlontlo local municipal area. The conceptual, analytical as well as practical policy issues have been dealt with in a previous work on the subject of the emergent rural development and agrarian transformation policy regime in South Africa (Mayende, 2010). Whilst these policies cover issues related to rural development in a broad sense, including social and economic infrastructure, provision of basic municipal services, and non-agricultural productive activities, this paper focuses on the agrarian transformation component.

A brief historical sketch of agrarian regression in a labour reserve: the former Transkei

Because of a number of its unique features, the former Transkei homeland provides a good example of a territory established as a labour reserve and presently caught up in the vortex of the struggle for genuine development. This is not least because in its long history, in which the folly of the interlude into bogus 'independence' marked a particularly low point, the territory degenerated to a level of exhibiting the most extreme indices of underdevelopment in the country. It was also a major site of periodic and often protracted episodes of resistance to colonialism and the struggle against apartheid, in the process spawning many of those who assumed leading positions. Annexed into the Cape Colony incrementally from 1879 to 1894, the territory had its first experience of land dispossession from the time of the Frontier Wars, which spanned the period 1834 to 1853. Large tracks of land that were occupied by Africans in areas such as today's Queenstown, Indwe, Dordrecht, Kammastone, Aliwal North, Elliot, Maclear, Ugie, Barkly East, Kokstad, Matatiele, Umzimkhulu, Stutterheim, were annexed for the purpose of white settlement, with the Africans losing virtually all the fertile land they had, and ending up being crammed within a relatively small geographic area. Notwithstanding these vicissitudes, the Transkei experienced a relatively brief period of 'peasantisation', coupled with a degree of commercialisation, when some inhabitants of the Transkei reserve produced and sold grain and livestock to the then expanding mercantile colonial economy from the early 1870s to the early years of the twentieth century (Bundy, 1988: 65-101). During this period, many 'progressive farmers' emerged

among the African population in areas such as Cofimvaba, Xalanga, Cala, Middledrift, and Herschel, a process which underscored the role of peasantisation in giving rise to stratification (Bundy, 1988: 93-95).

The decline and eventual elimination of peasant commercial and subsistence production occurred as the result of a continued process of land expropriations by white settlers, which was exacerbated by natural disasters as well as lack of a reliable market for agricultural produce, as the colonial and apartheid governments blocked access by African peasant producers while protecting white farmers through favourable legislation, credit and subsidies (Southall, 1982: 75). This situation was worsened by the deleterious effects of the 1913 Native Land Act and subsequent apartheid 'group areas' legislation in terms of which many families holding freehold title in areas such as Griqualand East (otherwise known as Mount Currie District), Elliot, Indwe, Maclear and Lady Frere (particularly the tracts of land called the Guba Farms) were 'cleared' from these 'black spots' when they were identified for white settlement. This resulted in increasing numbers of men being forced to leave their homes and seek work in return for extremely low wages as the demand for mine and industrial labour increased, "and the turn of events introduced a cycle which led eventually to social degeneracy and decay" (*ibid*: 71-72). Other victims of forced removals were those who were deemed excess to labour requirements on white owned farms in the wake of the 1913 Native Land Act which, *inter alia*, abolished 'squatting' and sharecropping in many parts of the country, with only those who were labour tenants being allowed to farm on white-owned land (*cf.* Feinstein, 2005: 44). Rapid increases in the population relative to the land area, sharp decreases in the sizes of the available family agricultural plots, overstocking, and impoverishment, followed, resulting in many formerly surplus-producing households regressing to the level of subsistence, and eventually sub-subsistence production. These processes resulted in the numbers of wage labourers increasing exponentially.

A peculiar feature of the system in operation at the time was its dualistic character, where "it did not suit the dominant capital interests that the African population should become wholly proletarianised nor that he should become completely separated from the land, for the profitable operation of the mines (in particular) necessitated indirect subsidisation of reserve agriculture, just as the imperative of cost-minimisation made the mining industry reliant upon the migratory labour system" (Southall, *op. cit.*: 75). In other words, "wages could be fixed at the level of subsistence for the individual worker, where it could be presumed that, to some extent, his dependants were supported by agricultural production in the reserves" (*ibid*).

The labour migrant system thus became a defining feature of the political economy of the Transkei as a labour reserve, starting from its period as a native reserve, through its 'independence' adventure, and to the present era of democracy. Whilst the Transkei had been the largest 'exporter' of labour to the mines, by the 1970s contributing over 50 per cent of the "economically active male labour force were annually recruited for work

in the Republic" (ibid: 210), this trend began to decline from the mid-1980s onwards. For example,

"[M]ineworkers from the Transkei made up 22 per cent of the work force in 1991 compared with 27 per cent in 1985, and ... during this period people from the Transkei lost 7 500 jobs a year. It is also notable that while the decrease in the total work force was almost 18 per cent over the 6 year period, the drop in the number of Transkeians working on the mines was just over 35 per cent" (Land and Agriculture Policy Centre, 1995: 28).

This decline in labour recruitment proceeded apace with a decrease in the number of families that received remittances.

Another important theme in the history of the labour reserve relates to the implementation of the so-called 'betterment' scheme (also euphemistically called 'rehabilitation'), which was introduced in the 1930s but implemented more aggressively and comprehensively after the Nationalist government took power in 1948. As set out in the report of the Tomlinson Commission of 1955, the 'betterment' scheme sought to 'respond effectively' to the by then widespread phenomena of insufficient agricultural land, increased pressure on the land, over-population, overstocking, and soil erosion, essentially through the re-creation of the African peasantry. The main idea was to divide the reserve population into "two classes, one wholly engaged in peasant farming and the other wholly dependent upon wage employment", with the land being divided into 'economic' farm units (varying in size according to region but averaging about 52 morgen), which would provide for the adequate support of the full-time farmers and their dependants, while those for whom such provision could not be made should be ultimately removed to urban locations within the reserves, lose their rights to land and be found alternative employment as wage labourers" (Southall, 1982: 224). The removal off the land would involve about half the reserve population (ibid; Platzky and Walker (1985: 45). Although this particular recommendation by Tomlinson was rejected by the authorities, when it was implemented the 'betterment' scheme also took the form of a 'villagisation' programme, whereby many people were removed, in many instances forcibly, from their traditional dwellings to new concentrated settlements called 'locations'. The scheme's most unpopular feature was the culling of livestock, whilst erection of contours and measures aimed at controlling soil erosion, and fencing proved to be futile in an environment characterised by declining access to land and other productive assets, as well as inadequate state funding. The Tomlinson Commission's recommendations were met with widespread resistance in the 1960s in areas such as Sekhukhuniland, and within the Transkei particularly in Pondoland, where the protests took the form of open and sustained revolt that also targeted the Bantu Authorities Act, whose primary objective was to incorporate traditional authorities into the colonial administrative system and force the chiefs to play an active role in ensuring participation

in the 'betterment' schemes'.

Agricultural production continued its downward slide to a point where, by the 1960s, arable and livestock production generally did not meet the subsistence needs of the majority of households. Ellis-Jones (1991: 2-3) highlights research findings that showed that in the 1980s, on average the allotments measured less than 2 hectares, with the yields of maize averaging less than 0.5 tonnes per hectare, and inability of most rural households to feed themselves, "let alone provide any surplus for sale". Bembridge (1984: 11) also presents figures that show that average annual household income was R1,173, of which cash income was as high as 90 per cent, which "suggests that the average Transkei farmer is a consumer of agricultural produce, and not a producer". The factors that explain this situation are several and complex, such as lack of access to farming inputs, declining productivity because of inability to adopt sound agricultural practices, absence of credit facilities, a general lack of draught power, suitable implements and tools, and active erosion and severe depletion of the soil in many areas. Thus, in the 1980s, 69 per cent of households lived below the poverty line, while 92 per cent of crop-growing farmers were found to be cultivating farming units that were unviable in terms of subsistence level requirements, with the return to labour being "abysmally low" (ibid). On the other hand, an analysis of cattle-herd ownership "revealed that most farmers (78%) owned fewer than eight livestock units, which is the minimum number considered necessary for the primary needs of survival and subsistence" (ibid: 19). Because of the extremely small sizes of the plots of arable land available to households in the Transkei in the 1980s "in most families, production [was] insufficient to provide even subsistence requirements and remittances from migrant family members are used to purchase staple foods (particularly maize and wheat), which are imported from white farm areas" (Porter and Howard-Phillips, 1997: 187). A document presenting the results of the study published in 1991 states that "only one tenth of food purchased by Transkeian households [was] from local production" (Transkei Department of Agriculture and Forestry, 1991: 3). Most tellingly, the document states that "only some 60 per cent of households now have access to arable land", with many allotments measuring less than 2 hectares, and only about 50 per cent of households having cattle on "the commonage grazing" (ibid: 9).

Ironically, but perhaps also not surprisingly, 'betterment' or 'rehabilitation' continued to be the main approach to agricultural 'development' efforts during the territory's 'independence' period (1976-1994). Within this period, a 'new' approach was adopted in 1981 and implemented under the auspices of the then newly established Transkei Agricultural Corporation (TRACOR), which essentially sought to promote 'serious' and 'progressive' producers of both crops and livestock, but predictably also met with little success because of the highly constrained and limiting environment within which it was implemented. Unsurprisingly, rather than addressing the fundamental causes of low levels of agricultural production within the territory, the official attitude, dating

back to the days of the Tomlinson Commission, through the 'independence' period, to current times, has been to blame the producers of being 'inefficient', 'lazy to work for themselves', 'conservative', 'unmotivated', and 'content with a subsistence existence' and therefore impervious to attempts at assisting them to achieve higher levels of production.

The current situation as illustrated by Mhlontlo Local Municipality

Mhlontlo Local Municipality (hereafter 'Mhlontlo LM') is one of seven local municipalities that form part of OR Tambo District Municipality (hereafter 'OR Tambo DM'), which is situated in the south-eastern part of the Eastern Cape Province. Two major towns, Tsolo and Qumbu (although relatively small in both demographic and economic terms), serve as the centres of commerce and the focal points of a largely retail economy. The physical characteristics of the area are more or less similar to most of the Transkei region in terms of soil quality, climate, erratic rainfall patterns, and availability of water sources, with the exception being its southernmost part of the territory (also known as Pondoland), which has more fertile soils and a more reliable seasonal rainfall pattern. Demographically, the area also fits into the general pattern of overcrowding, high infant mortality rates and high rates of migration to towns and cities. In August 2009 Mhlontlo LM was chosen by the Eastern Cape provincial government as the pilot site for the implementation of the government's new rural development programme. A year earlier the municipality had entered into a partnership around rural development with Walter Sisulu University (WSU) in terms of which the latter assists in areas such as research, capacity building, and mobilisation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), women's groups, research institutions such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), potential funders such as the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), and the locally-based Tsolo Institute of Agriculture and Rural Development.

According to Mhlontlo LM's Integrated Development Plan (IDP), the area has a population of 197 723 (of whom 99 per cent are Africans), has poverty levels "above 78 per cent ... [with] "the majority of the people ... dependent on social grants", and "the whole Municipality is experiencing a serious backlog in electricity" (Mhlontlo LM, 2008: 20-21; 24). The Eastern Cape Provincial Growth and Development Programme document (Eastern Cape Government, 2004: 37-41), shows a range of additional depressing indices in relation OR Tambo DM for 2001, of which Mhlontlo DM is part. The region is lagging far behind others within the province in terms of household poverty, which is as high as 82.0 per cent, against a provincial aggregate of 67.4 per cent, the proportion of households having access to basic services is 16.6 per cent against a provincial aggregate of 43.3 per cent, unemployment is at 87.4 per cent against a provincial aggregate of 44.7 per cent, and a national figure of 38.6 per cent, and the

literacy rate is only 49.1 per cent of the population, compared to a provincial aggregate of 63.5 per cent (*ibid*).

Rural-urban migration levels continue to be high, with 51.4 households having members who have migrated, 86.98 per cent of households have no wage income, whilst only 24.41 per cent received remittances from members working elsewhere². This suggests the increasingly diminishing importance of remittances as a reliable source of household income, compared to the high of 75 per cent that they reached in the 1960s in 1970s. Significantly, oscillatory migration has largely been diminishing since the 1990s, with increasing numbers of those who migrate opting to base themselves permanently in the towns or cities.

On average, as extrapolated from data on land ownership, the average size of an arable agricultural plot in Mhlontlo LM is 1.5 hectares. The distribution of cattle ownership is also low, with only 38.38 per cent of households owning cattle, while 36.13 per cent own sheep, and 25.75 per cent own goats. Among the 65 per cent of the households who engage in agricultural production on a regular basis, the distribution of production after a good rainfall year is as follows: 51 per cent produce only 1-10 bags of 50 kg each, 5.8 per cent produce 11-20, whilst only 3 per cent produce between 21 and 50 bags. In a bad rainfall year, the harvest diminishes to 47.4 per cent for the majority households who produce from 1-10 50 kg bags of maize, with 48.1 per cent not harvesting anything, and those harvesting anywhere from 11-50 bags being a negligible 0.3 per cent to 2.0 per cent.

The Comprehensive Rural development Programme in Context³

The draft policy document (hereafter 'the CRDP document')⁴ issued in January 2010 by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRLR), states: "The principles of agrarian transformation and rural development are premised on the resolutions taken at the 52nd Conference of the African National Congress held at Polokwane, Limpopo Province in 2007" (SA Government, DRDLR, 2009: 6). Billed as the precursor to a White Paper on Agrarian Transformation and Land Reform, what already exists on paper is clearly indicative of the thinking, orientation and direction that inform the DRLR's policy positions. Although the resolutions of the ANC's

2 These figures are derived from a socio-economic baseline survey conducted in October 2009 by the author at eight villages situated within Mhlontlo municipal area.

3 The analysis provided in this section focuses on two documents, namely the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme Framework, dated 28 July 2009, and issued by the Ministry of Rural Development and Land Reform.

4 The use of the term 'comprehensive' is unique to South Africa as most countries usually use 'integrated' to designate the policies which seek to address the full range of economic, environmental, socio-political issues and challenges that confront their countries within the context of rural poverty and underdevelopment. Nevertheless, it would appear from the undertakings being made that the SA approach carries a similar meaningful as its more familiar counterpart.

Polokwane conference emphatically called for 'agrarian change' to be approached "with a view to supporting subsistence food production, expanding the role and productivity of modern smallholder farming and maintaining a vibrant and competitive agricultural sector" (ANC 2007), the CRDP document focuses almost exclusively on subsistence producers largely resident in the communal areas.

The intention of focusing on the communal areas is captured succinctly in the words uttered by Zuma on 17 August 2009 on the occasion of the launch of the official national pilot site for the incipient rural development programme at Muyexe Village in Giyani in Limpopo Province. During his speech, Zuma unequivocally stated: "The former homeland areas will become a central focus of the rural development programme". He added that the "comprehensive rural development programme" (CRDP), will aim primarily at the stimulation of agricultural production, "with a view to contributing to food security" in the communal areas, anchored upon more meaningful support to "emerging farmers" with, among other things, inputs and loans. The programme will also seek to "improve the delivery of services including education, health, housing, water, sanitation and energy". Skills development and training will also be provided, through revived agricultural colleges, which "will be turned into centres of excellence", whilst Further Education Colleges situated in rural areas will be strengthened. Rural towns, which will be designated as "vibrant service nodes", will be transformed into "service centres of rural economies".

As the CRDP document states, a key objective of the policy is to facilitate the establishment of 'vibrant' and 'sustainable' communities. The major characteristics of the former are, among other things, innovation, indigenous knowledge systems, and preservation and transfer of knowledge. The latter would be characterised by access to productive assets; high work ethic; adaptability to change and modern technology, economic activity, especially among youth and women, effective leadership, and increased savings and investment (*ibid*: 9-10). The document defines the CRDP as "a cross-cutting and comprehensive rural development programme [that] encompasses three distinct components, namely agrarian transformation, rural development and land reform". Poverty and food insecurity are identified as key targets of the policy, whilst its strategic objectives include "more inclusive economic growth, decent work and sustainable livelihoods". The policy also calls for more effective provision of economic and social infrastructure and sustainable resource management and use – which are essential requirements to "bridge the false dichotomy between the urban and rural space". The document makes the additional undertaking "to empower vulnerable groups (women, youth, unemployed, people living with HIV/AIDS, people living with disabilities, child-headed households, and older persons)" (*ibid*: 9), which is a common feature of the government's social development programmes. The rural development strategy is also underpinned by the objective of 'equitable development', which is "about using the principle of fairness" (*ibid*: 11).

From a methodological point of view, the document highlights the decision to use the 'piloting' method in terms of which the pilot project for laying the foundation for the CRDP Muyexe Village in Greater Giyani, Limpopo Province. The "initial approach to be followed in the pilot projects is the War-Room-on Poverty and Poverty Campaign approach"⁵, which "utilises household and community profiling methods to create base line information about the community's and household's interests/development needs which is then used towards planning, project and intervention development, and programme designs" (*ibid*: 11-12). Furthermore, the document claims that "the key lessons emerging from the pilots have in turn provided some guiding principles for the rollout of the implementation of the CRDP, such as that the DRDLR will "act as an initiator, facilitator, co-ordinator and catalyst in rural development interventions" (*ibid*). However, given some of the inherent methodological deficiencies of 'pilot studies', such as the fact that the work that is carried out within the pilot takes place under ideal conditions and is a concentrated effort characterised by the disproportionate deployment of resources, quite often the findings of such studies are not replicated when the programme is implemented in the rest of the country. For example, it is highly unlikely that the 'success' associated with the 231 houses that have been built at the Muyexe Village pilot mentioned by President Zuma in his State of the Nation Address of 11 February 2010 (Zuma, 2010: 13) will be replicated in the 160 wards (villages) within Limpopo Province by 2014 as indicated in the same speech, not to mention the hundreds of other villages across the country. These shortcomings thus amplify the need for policy formulation processes to be based on reliable social research methods that are capable of producing scientific and measurable data which can be generalised to wider populations.

Another major shortcoming of the CRDP document is that it offers no analysis of relevant economic issues and therefore fails to present an economic model that shows how agrarian transformation is to contribute towards the improvement of the lives and conditions of agricultural producers, rural populations and regions in general, and to their integration into the national economy. Rather than provide a definition of its understanding of agrarian transformation the document simply enumerates a number of activities such as; "establishment of business initiatives, rural agro-industries, co-operatives, cultural initiatives and vibrant local market"; "empowerment of rural

5 In 2008, the Presidency established a so-called 'War Room on Poverty' which was established in the Presidency under Thabo Mbeki as announced by him in his state of the Nation Address of 8 February 2008 as one of the 'Apex Priorities' for his government. He said: "... in the spirit of Business Unusual, government intends this year to intensify the campaign to identify specific households and individuals in dire need and to put in place interventions that will help, in the intervening period, to alleviate their plight. For this, we will require a National War Room on poverty bringing together departments such as Social Development, Provincial and Local Government, Trade and Industry, Agriculture and Land Affairs, Public works and Health as well as local administrations, which will work with [NGOs] and business to identify the interventions required in specific households and implement them as a matter of urgency".

communities to become self-reliant and able to take charge of their destiny”; “increased production and sustainable use of natural resources’ such as livestock and crops”; “strengthening rural livelihoods for vibrant local economic development, as well as “use of appropriate technologies, modern approaches and indigenous knowledge systems”. It is expected that these activities will result in “food security, dignity and improved quality of life for each rural household” (*ibid*: 13–14). The CRDP therefore fails to locate agrarian transformation within both a social and an economic development framework, and to place land redistribution squarely at its centre. An attempt to provide a definition of agrarian transformation that embraces both the social and economic aspects is as follows:

“Agrarian transformation ... refers to measures aimed at achieving equity through the redistribution of land for the primary purpose of transforming, re-organising and enhancing the agricultural production process. It also refers to a process of changing the relations of production and class configurations in the countryside, and engendering of a more comprehensive and demographically representative spread in the distribution of benefits from the agrarian economy.” (Mayende, *op. cit.* : 58).

On the basis of this approach, the model on agrarian transformation that is required within the context of addressing the challenges posed by the labour reserve should thus be characterised by four fundamental and incremental levels of impact at the individual household, regional and national levels, which correspond to decent employment, food and income self-sufficiency, prosperity and development, and not merely to subsistence. These levels are: to create *employment* and provide suitable conditions for raising an adequate *income*, to enable the beneficiaries to produce a *surplus* and make a profit, to integrate the beneficiaries into the wider national economy as producers of goods and services, and as contributors to the national fiscus as taxpayers; and to deepen and broaden the benefits of this development process through agrarian transformation laying the foundation for the development of downstream industries in agro-processing, manufacturing, transportation, equipment maintenance, and more effective promotion of service industries such as tourism (*ibid*: 68).

Quite correctly, the CRDP document identifies social mobilisation, which should occur through the establishment of “savings clubs and co-operatives for economic activities, wealth creation and productive use of assets”, as one of the key areas of intervention (DRDLR, *op. cit.*: 14). The articulation and proper location of the role of local government, provincial government and Traditional Councils (established in terms of the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act, 41 of 2003), as well as the participation of non-governmental organisations, are all simply mentioned without any analysis or explanation of how precisely these entities are expected to participate in agrarian transformation. The precise role of traditional

authorities in development remains rather murky, a situation that is compounded by a track record in this regard that is not particularly positive, as before 1994 these institutions were “not regarded as being effective development agencies and are not well regarded by the rural people” (Transkei Department of Agriculture and Forestry, *op. cit.*: 9). This problem continues to persist in contemporary times, and is compounded by lack of clarity on the roles of traditional authorities *vis-à-vis* those of that of local authorities.

With regard to land reform, the CRDP document simply regurgitates plans that have been in existence for at least the past five years, such as acceleration of the pace of land redistribution to meet the 10-year old target of redistributing 30 per cent of white owned agricultural land. The same applies to the programme’s objective of securing the land rights and improving the living conditions of labour tenants, farm workers and farm dwellers, implementation of the Communal Land Rights Act (CLaRA), so as to address issues related to the present chaotic state of land administration and widespread tenure insecurity in the communal areas. Yet the dominant system of tenure that presently obtains in the communal areas is that which is controlled by the institution of traditional leadership, and which has its antecedents in the pre-colonial and pre-capitalist times, and is premised upon the application of one-family-one plot principle and the principle of primogeniture in inheritance.

Similar observations may be made with regard to the call for increasing the pace of settlement of outstanding restitution claims. Whilst acknowledging “the crucial role that access to land and ownership of land plays in the livelihood strategies of people (and particularly rural people) and in the development of the rural economy” and observing that “broadening access to land and securing the land rights that people currently have is central to these initiatives”, the CRDP document, does not explain how the existing land reform programme would articulate with the agrarian transformation programme that is envisaged for the communal areas. This is a major lacuna which leaves virtually unaddressed the issue of where the necessary additional land will come from and how will it be acquired. However, the unpleasant reality is that the ‘equitable share’ of each household to that land on average is only 1.5 hectares (in some cases as low as 0.5 hectares or at best 2 hectares) and the unutilised land constitutes holdings already allocated to households, or commonage grazing areas that are not utilised because of dwindling livestock numbers. Thus, at best the ‘new’ agrarian transformation policy will result in a degree of supplementation of the subsistence needs of the majority of rural households.

Another major gap in the strategy documents relates to the question of the availability of labour under present conditions of high migration among young people. It is merely assumed that in general the majority of rural households have the necessary labour resources that are required for the purpose of ensuring increased levels of production that are envisaged. In actual fact, as a general trend that has been underway since the 1960s, the stream of migration by young people to the urban areas continues unabated

and has actually increased apace, with those that remain within the villages being largely unemployed and spending most of their time idle.

The assumptions that are being made about the possibility of increased production in the communal areas therefore have very little, if any, realistic prospects of being translated into success and the objectives that have been put forward are attainable except at the lowest level of subsistence production. In actual fact, the small land sizes, which are the result of the interplay of a complex nexus of historical factors, have created a situation where the majority of rural households are mired in sub-subsistence production and require cash income to supplement their food and other requirements. Moreover, as much as 20 per cent of the land in these areas is hardly arable, as a result of its poor agro-ecological condition, while as much as 30 per cent of the rural households in these areas actually do not have arable land. Women in particular are the most adversely affected by this situation and represent the largest group among the landless, as they have fallen victim to patriarchal inheritance norms, particularly the application of the principle of primogeniture, which has ensured that they are denied access to inheritance in favour of their oldest male siblings.

What practical alternatives are therefore available that can be pursued? In this regard it is proposed that as a starting point a strategy should be devised that would begin with the identification of households and individuals, which should include women, young people and people with disabilities, that are interested in and demonstrate potential to succeed in agricultural production as commercial smallholders. The next step should be to identify suitable land outside the communal areas that could be sub-divided and redistributed to a fairly large group in individual allotments of between 20 and 80 hectares. This would invariably involve a resettlement process that would contribute in no small measure towards the decongestion of the presently densely populated communal areas. For obvious reasons, the costs of land acquisition and the re-settlement programme would be covered by the state, and under these circumstances it would make better sense if the allocated land would be held under a leasehold system, with the state being the sole title holder. Indeed, re-settlement is an integral part of agrarian transformation and has been a central feature of similar processes in countries as diverse as Brazil and Zimbabwe (*Cf.* Moyo, 1999; Moyo and Yeros, 2005). This approach, we believe, is what could generate employment creation for a large number of rural households, whilst also producing employment and business spin-offs for non-producers in the form of downstream industries for agro-processing, transport, tourism and other economic opportunities such as the establishment of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Such a process would also result, for the first time, in the genuine integration of the 'white' and 'black' rural populations and contribute towards breaking the seams that presently divide the country's rural landscape into the binary opposites of rural areas for Africans that are poor and marginalised and those for whites that are prosperous and well-served. The commercial agricultural sector would thus be restructured in such a way that it would

consist of surplus producers operating at various levels. The obverse of the situation sketched above, of pursuing the futile option of 'agrarian transformation' within the communal areas as set out in the CRDP document, would simply reinforce the *status quo* of underdevelopment in the communal areas, with the planned interventions amounting to no more than the mere embellishment of the labour reserve.⁶

The obvious fact that the CRDP will be implemented in all nine provinces of South Africa should under normal circumstances elicit no particular concerns. However, there is presently a considerable amount of confusion around roles and responsibilities at the national and provincial levels, as well as with regard to other important issues such as the allocation of budgets. This situation can be illustrated through an analysis of the national-provincial relationship within the context of current efforts by the Eastern Cape provincial government to formulate and implement its own rural development strategy. The document entitled *Eastern Cape Rural Development Strategy*, issued in January 2010 in the name of the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (ECDARD), also moves from similar premises as the national strategy, albeit providing more detailed analysis of regional and sub-regional issues. Its strategic objectives are set out in the form of six pillars, which are: land reform, agrarian transformation and food security, non-farm rural economy, infrastructure, social and human development, and enabling environment. Whilst the strategic objectives set out in the RDS document with regard to land reform are a rehashing of the existing objectives set at the national level, a unique feature of the document is its identification of the "implementation of the Betterment Redress Programme" as a priority for the victims of betterment removals (ECDARD, 2010: 23). The betterment claims were initially rejected as not qualifying for restitution under the Restitution of Land Rights Act, 22 of 1994, but since 2001 these claims have been given recognition and are being processed.

As the result of the existence of two different policy documents and strategies, a degree of confusion is already being manifested at the level of implementation, where it is not clear as to which sphere of government is primarily responsible for the pilot being implemented at Mhlontlo LM. Directives on specific activities associated with the pilot are obviously emanating from the national government, which has put in place the necessary management structures and set out procedures to be followed in the implementation of the provincial pilot. The pilot, which is modelled around its national pilot being implemented at the village of Muyexe in Giyani, is actually being run by the national department, with the roles of provincial officials at best being supportive, or at worst being unclear. On the other hand, the ECDARD is in the process of putting in place its own implementation structures and systems that exclude the national department.

⁶ The political factors that preclude the government from confronting head-on the issue of acquiring land outside the communal areas in the white commercial farming districts speedily and on a large scale, chief among which is the Constitutional property clause, and which have left it with only the option of the expensive and voluntary willing-buyer, willing-seller system in Mayende (2010: 55; 60-62).

This state of confusion is even more pronounced when taking into account the issue of the allocation of budgets for agrarian transformation between the national and provincial spheres. In this regard, the CRDP document highlights the fact that, given the allocation for the 2009/10 financial year, in which R500 million of the allocation for land reform has been shifted to rural development, this means that 2.4 million hectares instead of 8.1 million will be delivered by 2011. The document then predictably states that “additional resources are critically needed to finance the CRDP in its entirety” (DRLR, *op. cit.*: 26). It is clear when taking into account the budgetary requirements for land reform, that the trend of inadequate budgeting for activities associated with the rural sector is set to continue. This is demonstrated by the fact that rural development has been allocated in the budget tabled by the Minister of finance on 17 February 2010 (National Treasury, 2010: 661) only R256.2 million for the 2010/11 financial year, which will increase to R293.3 million in 2011/12 and remain at that figure in 2012/13. This is notwithstanding the fact that the restitution and other land reform programmes (which include redistribution, tenure reform and the administration of state land) have allocations of R1.5 billion and R4 billion respectively for the 2010/11 financial year, which are expected to increase to R2 billion and R4.7 billion in 2011/12 and R2.1 billion and R4.9 billion in 2012/13.

The issue of budgetary constraints is also highlighted at the provincial level, with the RDS document noting the ECDARD “receives less than 3 per cent of the provincial budget”, which heightens the need for additional funding (ECDARD, *op. cit.*: 47). This reflects the perennial problem of silo budgeting and lack of clarity with regard to mandates and ‘competencies’ at the different spheres of government. This can be seen in the fact that the budget for land reform is allocated at national level because, constitutionally, that is where the competency for the programme rests, while rural development is supposed to be a national as well as a provincial competency. Given the fact the bulk of the funding for rural development has been allocated to the national level, it should therefore follow that the management of all levels of implementation of the programme will be carried out by the national level.

From a governance and management perspective, the CRDP document projects the progressive notions of “inter-departmental collaboration”, co-ordination and project management at all three spheres of government, as well as stakeholder management. Innovative ideas around the management of implementation processes include the establishment of a Technical Committee and a Strategic/Management Unit would serve as the management and administrative nerve centre of the entire rural development programme, a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system as well as a Council of Stakeholders (COS) that will be made up of organisations as diverse as NGOs, faith based organisations, trade unions and traditional leaders (CRDP, *op. cit.*: 23). The RDS also provides for the establishment of a stakeholder forum at the provincial level, and

it also assigns a role to higher education and research institutions, which “pertains to research and development, innovation, and product development, education and training” (ECDARD, *op. cit.*: 48-9). A rural development agency is also envisaged, whose character and roles are described briefly as follows:

“A dedicated Rural Development Agency will be established, which would serve to support the mandate of the newly established Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in discharging its responsibility. It is envisaged that the primary role of the RDA will be catalytic, with emphasis on planning, research and project packaging, facilitation, project management, and implementation of priority programmes. The agency will be given the necessary legislated authority to carry out this work” (ECDARD, *op. cit.*: 44).

This agency will be expected to “amass specialist skills to ensure effective implementation of the RDS”, whilst “there will be an advisory platform of academics, researchers and experts to support the functions of ECDARD and the agency. Whilst government departments and public entities will also be expected to play a key role, “local government will be the key implementing agent of the RDS, and the success of the strategy rests on the functionality of rural local government”.

What then, is new about these policy propositions of the Zuma administration and do they really represent a ‘third transition’ from the strategies and positions adopted and pursued under Mandela and Mbeki? The question of transition in relation to rural development is an awkward one because, in spite of the formal policy pronouncements of both the Mandela and Mbeki administrations, these postulations were hardly ever translated into concrete action. A related feature of the marginal position of rural development is that it has never enjoyed the allocation of significant resources. During Mandela’s tenure the document entitled ‘Rural Development Strategy of the Reconstruction and Development Programme’, which was finalised in 1995 under the auspices of the then Department of Land Affairs (DLA, 1995), does not seem to have been given any serious consideration by the government and it was definitely not taken further as official policy. In essence, this document spelt out the objectives of rural development in more or less similar terms as the CRDP⁷. Defining rural development as “everybody’s business in rural areas”, the document identifies, among others, the following objectives: raising of incomes, especially for the poor, increasing access to services in rural areas, such as water and sanitation, health services and schooling, increasing production, both agricultural and entrepreneurial, and creating greater equality in the use of resources in the rural areas (DLA, 1995: 3).

With the introduction of the neo-liberal ‘development’ and macroeconomic agenda pursued by the Mbeki government in 1996 under the aegis of the Growth,

⁷ Although not offering a comprehensive analysis of the RDP rural development policy document here, these key points suffice to demonstrate the trend of continuity between the two programmes and periods.

Redistribution and Accelerated Reconstruction (GEAR) policy, the RDP was cast aside almost in its entirety, including the rural development policy referred to above.⁸ When rural development re-emerged in 2001 in the form of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP), it soon became clear that it had come about as an afterthought and had not been conceptualised and formulated as a central element of development strategy and policy. The ISRDP was adopted by the Cabinet in 2000 and was subsequently announced by Mbeki in his State of the Nation Address to Parliament in February 2001 (Mbeki 2001). The programme would be implemented in 21 rural nodal areas, while the Urban Renewal Programme (URP), which was announced simultaneously with the ISRDP, would be implemented in eight.

The roll out of the ISRDP on a nationwide scale was also preceded by a piloting exercise that was carried out within nine nodes that were identified for the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP).⁹ The 'lessons' that were derived from this process led to a decision to encourage groups of producers to pool their resources and engage in collective production methods in mostly agricultural projects, many of which were small piggeries, chicken farms and vegetable gardens. In practice, however, the ISRDP turned out to be neither integrated, nor sustainable, nor was it in any real sense a rural development programme. Moreover, the programme lacked the necessary funding from the outset and this continued to be the case for the next eight years of its existence before the current Zuma-led government took office. Lacking a clear definition of what it understood rural development to mean, the ISRDP became a programme for any activity that occurred in the rural areas. Thus, there was no clarity as to whether the programme sought to promote the development of a vibrant rural economy characterised by productive agricultural and small business enterprises, or it was simply aimed at promoting subsistence activities.

To illustrate its lack of detailed formulation and absence of a research basis, many ISRDP projects lacked integration. This was demonstrated in many instances where, for example, a large number of agricultural projects had no reliable water supply, veterinary support, nor access to markets. Moreover, the programme's group-based approach failed as in many instances the groups disbanded, with individual members withdrawing because of lack of concrete material benefit. The programme had such a minimal effect on rural communities and populations that the horrifying indices of poverty, social marginalisation and underdevelopment actually became worse, rather than improve,

⁸ *GEAR sought to achieve economic growth, job creation and development through strict monetary policies, including targeting a low inflation rate, reduction of expenditure by the state (euphemistically referred to as greater fiscal discipline), sale of state assets, and restriction of wage and salary increases. Other elements of this strategy included the establishment of an "outward-oriented" (i.e. export-led) industrial economy, maintenance of a low budget deficit, introduction of tax reforms to enhance the country's global competitiveness, attraction of foreign direct investment, reduction of the government's debt in relation to GDP, and provision of training to increase the economy's productivity.*

⁹ *A more detailed analysis of the ISRDP is provided in Mayende (op. cit.: 56-8).*

during the entire eight years of its existence. The ISRDP was therefore a clear example of the failure of the 'trickle down' effect envisaged under GEAR to materialise.

When examined in juxtaposition, the CRDP and ISRDP reveal a trend of continuity rather than transition. Whilst the jury is still out on the question of whether the CRDP will have a more positive impact on rural communities and populations than the ISRDP, the uncanny similarities between the two programmes should be cause for concern as they suggest that the former is positioned on a familiar trajectory. Firstly, they are both focused on the communal areas, as attested to by the fact that the majority of the ISRDP's nodes are situated within these areas. Secondly, they both move from a premise of seeing rural development and agrarian transformation as a matter of subsistence rather than being driven by income generation through surplus production. They also share the common feature of being shorn of any economic content, so that they do not provide any basis for the integration of the envisaged transformed rural areas into the national economy. Moreover, both programmes do not locate land acquisition and redistribution centrally within the context of agrarian transformation or agricultural development.

It is significant to note that a detailed analysis of the resolutions of the ANC's Polokwane conference on rural development and agrarian transformation reveals the shortcomings highlighted in the preceding paragraph (Mayende, *op. cit.*: 63-70) and there is therefore no need to present a similar analysis here. Suffice it to say again that the CRDP reflects the essential features of these resolutions and takes them as its point of departure. The similarity among the key policy thrusts of these resolutions and the CRDP that they have spawned and the approaches to rural development that were adopted by the Mandela and Mbeki administrations, signify and amplify the trend of continuity rather than a third transition. Thus, it is quite clear that the issue of placing rural development high up on the agenda of the present administration is therefore more a matter of emphasis than differences in substance. The trend of continuity is thus also demonstrated in the form of lack of political will to tackle head-on the fundamental issues that hinder the effective implementation of a wide-ranging agrarian transformation programme in South Africa. A case in point in this regard is the continuing state of paralysis that has characterised the land reform programme since 1994, and which emanates from the Constitutional property clause that effectively closes off meaningful land redistribution on an acceptable scale.¹⁰

Conclusion: traversing a road well travelled?

This paper has presented as its main argument the view that the 'new' agrarian transformation strategy of the Zuma administration, which forms an important part

¹⁰ *This point is also dealt with at length in Mayende (2010: 70) and does not merit much further elaboration in this paper.*

of its Comprehensive Rural Development Programme, rests on the precarious and unsustainable basis of seeking to transform the former labour reserves through inward looking approaches. The paper has also provided a critical analysis of the tendency to eschew the obvious and necessary fact that the destruction wrought onto the communal areas during the lengthy period of colonial and apartheid domination has left these areas shorn of any reasonable capacity to embark upon a meaningful agrarian transformation process, let alone a green revolution. This has been shown through the historical sketch that has been provided of the processes leading to agrarian regression that was central to the establishment of the labour reserve, using the example of the former Transkei in this regard. The highlights of this history include the devastating impact of land dispossession and the deceptiveness and futility of colonial and apartheid era 'efforts' at 'betterment' and 'rehabilitation', and the long period of virtual marginalisation and neglect of the communal areas for the entire twentieth century. This process is reflected in severe indices of socio-economic deprivation and poverty, such as average land sizes of 1.5 per cent, unemployment rates in some areas as high as 87 per cent, continuing high rates of migration to the urban areas, and widespread dependence on social welfare grants.

Under these conditions, whilst it is important to ensure that agrarian transformation policy enables households to reach an acceptable degree of food security, which in turn would make a significant contribution towards poverty reduction, it is unrealistic to expect a strategy that is confined to the promotion of subsistence production within the communal areas to unleash a generalised process of economic development. Obviously, this situation calls for not only a massive infusion of resources to reverse this trend, but a more decisive approach to agrarian transformation that embraces the need for additional land to be acquired outside the communal areas. In this regard, the approach that would make sense and have the hoped for impact from an economic and social development point of view, would be to identify from within the population of the communal areas a fairly large group constituting a critical mass of potential smallholders who would then be re-settled on prime agricultural land situated in the 'white' commercial farming districts. Participation in such a programme would have to be based on a set of qualification criteria, which include availability of labour.

Within the analytical context of whether the Zuma administration's approach to rural development represents a 'third transition' from the Mandela and Mbeki periods, the paper has highlighted factors that point more towards continuity than change in substance. The theme of continuity is demonstrated poignantly through a brief analysis of the rural development strategy that was formulated under the auspices of the RDP under Mandela, and a more detailed analysis of the ISRDP, which was devised and implemented during the Mbeki years. An interesting picture of continuity emerges most clearly when the ISRDP is analysed in juxtaposition to the CRDP. Whilst the promised dismantling of the GEAR foundations of macroeconomic and development policy and its replacement with a more redistributive strategy that places the 'developmental state'

at the centre of the process of change is still awaited, the all-too-familiar challenges, particularly lack of adequate funding and institutional capacity constraints, are beginning to emerge.

Another area of concern relates to the range of other complex and contentious issues that are left unaddressed in the CRDP, such as the prevailing land tenure and inheritance systems, and the role of elected local government *vis-à-vis* traditional institutions, yet they represent potential threats to the smooth implementation of an agrarian transformation programme. On the positive side, the paper has noted the undertakings that have been made around mechanisms such as monitoring and evaluation, as well as stakeholder mobilisation, which includes harnessing research and academic institutions. On the basis of the foregoing, it is inconceivable how the interventions and solutions presented by the CRDP, which are asymmetrical to the realities of the agrarian question in the communal areas, could be translated into tangible benefits for the rural communities in the form of increased production beyond subsistence. An enduring effect of these limitations is to reinforce the *status quo* that is characterised by the binary opposites of prosperous 'white' and underdeveloped 'black' rural areas, which also has the effect of confining policy to these extremes. As a result of this limited room for manoeuvre, the more positive proposals in the CRDP, particularly those dealing with co-ordination of programme implementation, stakeholder mobilisation, and co-operative organisation, lose their significance. It should therefore be a cause for concern that what is reflected in the 'new' policy framework on rural development and agrarian transformation in South Africa seems to point more towards the embellishment of the labour reserve rather than its eradication together with its various inequities.

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