Chapter 5

Rural Development and the Struggle for Land Reform in Post–Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates the paradox of land reform programme and its quest to address challenges faced by the rural population in post-apartheid South Africa. Land reform was institutionalized in 1994 with the primary intention to redress the injustices caused by colonial-apartheid land dispossession. Despite the land reform’s mandate to restore dignity through land tenure, restitution, and land redistribution, the rural population are among the most underdeveloped, disadvantaged, and deprived of the basic services. Failure to address these fundamental issues holistically has made the land reform programme a mockery to those residing in the rural and peripheral areas. The reality is that the rural population depends on land for their livelihoods, food security, and agriculture, and without productive land, these already vulnerable people are further pushed to abject poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. The chapter is based on secondary information obtained from books and book chapters, accredited journals, and government documentation.

INTRODUCTION

World-wide, rural population is trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. Rural poverty is prevalent in the developing countries where the ‘myth of development’ (Grillo, 1997) is underpinned by dominant development
discourses and approaches. The imposition of Western models and approaches undermined the indigenous forms of securing livelihoods by the rural poor (Hopper, 2012). Peripheral areas were often laboratories for experimenting with capitalist models development which became a vehicle for exploiting rural raw materials and cheap labor (Rithken, 1997). The most people affected by poverty and inequality are those found in Africa compared those in the East-Asian nations (Seekings, 2019). Africa’s political fragmentation, economic decline due to rigid policies, resource renting and unequal public spending render the continent vulnerable (Severino & Ray, 2011). The persistence of these socio-economic challenges together with uneven delivery of services put rural people in a precarious situation (Republic of South Africa, 2014). Material conditions under which rural people live on are reflective of deprivation with over-reliance on agriculture and other natural resources for their livelihoods.

In South Africa challenged faced by rural dwellers could be attributed to the apartheid policies which relate millions of black South Africans into overcrowded and impoverished reserves, homelands and townships (ANC, 1994). Land reform was institutionalized in 1994 with the primary intention to redress the injustices caused by colonial-apartheid land dispossession. Despite the land reform’s mandate to restore dignity through land tenure, restitution and land redistribution, the rural population are among the most underdeveloped, disadvantaged and deprived of the basic services. Hendricks (2001, pp. 283-284) identifies five major issues in land reform and rural development such as 1) the gross inequality in the distribution of land between blacks and whites, 2) the alienation of land by white settlers resulted in the racially based territorial segregation, 3) the lack of security of tenure, 4) land laws in the post-1994 period duplicate apartheid legislation and finally 5) how land inequality could be undone. Failure to address these fundamental issues holistically has made land reform program a mockery to those residing in the rural peripheral areas. The reality is that the rural population’s dependent on land for their livelihoods, food security, and agriculture, without productive land, these already vulnerable people are further push to abject poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. Above the 1997 Rural Development Framework, the government introduced the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) with a clear vision “creating vibrant, equitable, sustainable rural communities and food security for all”. There is no single definition for rural development, however all the definitions point to a common understanding. Rural development is a strategy aimed at improving the economic life, quality life, health, environment, infrastructure and housing for the rural population (van der Ploeg, 1998, USDA, 2006). For the government to create vibrant, equitable and sustainable rural communities, CRDP proposed a three-pronged strategy based on a coordinated and integrated broad-based agrarian transformation; rural development infrastructure, and an improved land reform programme. Central
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