

How Critical is Government Commitment and Support for a Successful Implementation of Land Reform Program? A Review of Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy in South Africa

TL Malatji

University of Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract: The South African government has introduced a series of land reform programs to balance the injustices of the past, improve land use efficiency, and to ensure that the land that is allocated to the disadvantaged people is used effectively. Land reform program has generated a mixture of impacts and socio-economic consequences in South Africa. The study was conducted in the Mopani District of Limpopo Province. Data was collected through interviews in a Focus group discussion and Key informants' interviews. This article argues that the land reform program can only work if the government can provide support to the beneficiaries. The South African government should spend money on the development of the emerging black farmers so that they can be able to participate and compete in the market with the commercial farmers. Without assistance from the government, the emerging farmers under Proactive land acquisition strategy are likely to fail because of lack of resources, training, lack of access to information and market. This paper reviews the South African land reform program Proactive land acquisition strategy and the role that the government can play to ensure a successful land reform in the country. The South African government should make land reform a number one priority.

Keywords: AgriSETA, Bureaucracy, Local government, Monitoring and evaluation, Rural development

1. Introduction

Government have a significant role and responsibility to provide the necessary support to the black emerging farmers with funding, training and management or business skills; however, it remains fragile to say the least (Sebola; 2018:2). South African black emerging farmers are struggling because of finance and other support to be able to run their farming businesses. This has a negative impact on land usage under program (PLAS). The success of emerging black farmers is compromised by a lack of financial resources to buy equipment which is required for agriculture activities, lack of technical support and insufficient training. It is imperative that Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) should consider providing training before the commencement of the project so that the beneficiaries are aware of the tasks ahead of them (Kariuki, 2004:40). The beneficiaries of land reform are experiencing plentiful problems when it comes to access to services such as credits/loan, training, extension advice, transport and ploughing services, and veterinary services, as well as input and produce markets (Lahiff, 2007:190).

Those who received training are of the view that the training was inadequate and in most cases, not

available when required. This lack of integrated training of beneficiaries is seen as a contributing factor to the projects perceived as high risk in terms of their viability and management expertise required to manage a farming business successfully. The majority of these emerging farmers do not have the management experience and managing a massive amount of funds and run a farm business without training is a huge responsibility. Government officials are unable to monitor and support the beneficiaries' farming activities. It is crucial that the government should provide prospective farmers with access to land and be able to offer all form of support for production inputs and technical advisory services (Kariuki, 2004:40). Malatji (2018) posits that this is the strategy that was introduced by the South African government to try and accelerate the land reform program, it was adopted in 2006, and it is the current policy that is being implemented for land distribution for to promote emerging black farmers (Sebola, 2018).

2. Land Reform Programmes in South Africa

The government of South Africa decided to adopt the land reform policy, and the aim was to redress the injustices of the past. While the land reform

policy was adopted, it also meant to foster national reconciliation and stability, underpinning economic growth, to improve household welfare, and alleviate poverty (Deninger, 1998). Large numbers of beneficiaries in South Africa are of the view that efficient agricultural production is only possible on a large farm. It is the responsibility of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform and provincial government to see to it that land reform becomes a reality, and they should also determine how and where the complementary services are provided (Deninger, 1998). This is the land which was unjustly taken from black people by the minority white farmers, and it should be used for improving the livelihood of the local people (McCusker, 2004)

According to Groenewald (2004), for the government to be able to deal with the problem of threat of food security, there is a severe need for agricultural development, and that will assist in terms of improving agricultural produce and ensuring that previously disadvantaged people have access to land and provided with some agricultural skills. So when formulating land policy, evidence plays a critical role but it is also essential that the government consider the following for an effective policy formulation: proper planning, infrastructure, training and education, support to the potential farmers, as well as the involvement of private and public bodies (Groenewald, 2004). According to McCusker (2004), the reform in South Africa was divided into different programmes, which are as follows:

- **Restitution** – the restitution programme was specifically designed to restore the land to the people who lost it through racial discrimination legislation and practice.
- **Redistribution** – Redistribution was very critical in the sense that it has to provide land to the previously disadvantaged poor community for the residential as well as productive purpose so that the poor people can improve their livelihood and also contribute to rural development.
- **Land tenure reform** – the tenure programme was established to look at the land rights issue.
- **Willing buyer willing seller** – government buy the land only if the seller is willing to sell.
- **SLAG** – Settlement Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG), it used to be the primary mechanism

for land redistribution up until 1999 when it was replaced by the then LRAD. This is how the programme was implemented; the State would provide a standard subsidy of R16000,00 per household to be used for acquisition of land. The amount was too small to procure the land and use it effectively.

- **LRAD** – Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development. The LRAD programme was implanted, and the grant allows for previously disadvantaged group or black South African citizens to access land precisely for agricultural purposes. The grant was accessed on an individual basis, per sliding scale from a minimum of R20 000 to a maximum of R100 000, but that depends on the participants' contribution. The farmers had to use the money to cover expenses such as land acquisition, land improvements, agricultural infrastructure investments, capital assets, short-term agricultural inputs and lease options (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2001).

It is fundamentally important to note that the land reform process focuses its attention to certain areas which are, restitution, land tenure reform and land redistribution. With restitution the South African government use to reimburse individuals who have been forcefully removed from their ancestral land. The idea failed and as a result of that, the government realised that the aim and objectives will be unachievable and this lead to the introduction of the redistribution policy with secure land. The aim of the redistribution program was to foster an improved livelihoods and quality of life for previously disadvantaged individuals. However, the initiative of enabling communities to acquire commercial farms did not yield any positive outcomes. People have been waiting in vain and are still waiting with no success but a lot of empty promises from government.

The South African government under the leadership of the ANC, after 1994 at the dawn of democracy saw the need and the importance of land restitution for the purpose of rural transformation and community development. Unfortunately, it is not everybody who lost the land during apartheid regime who was ready to acquire the land. Black South Africans who lost their land/properties needed their ancestral land back for different reasons. Majority of them aimed to utilise land for agricultural production,

subsistence or commercial farming, some wanted it for settlement or for non-agricultural initiatives. Government did not do enough to give people the land back and that frustrated many communities. It is not easy to participate in the domestic or local economy if you do not have land. Under restitution and redistribution black people had hopes that they will finally get their lost land back with the assistance from government, but their dreams did not come to pass.

Land tenure reform is a system of recognising people's right to own land and therefore control of the land. The challenge here was that blacks did not have any land of their own because the land they were promised still belonged to the whites (minorities).

In South Africa redistribution happens to be the most important component of land reform. Initially, land was bought from its owners under the (willing buyer) by the government (willing seller) who are the farmers, and reallocate to the previously disadvantaged communities, in order to maintain public confidence in the land market and also to ensure that the land purchased and redistributed to the beneficiaries is effectively used. At some stage under the WBWS, the government failed to procure the land as per plan and that is where black South Africans started to lose hope on the government of the day. Sometimes those who call themselves owners of land were not willing to sell their land to the government and only sell when the offer is good. The white farmers took advantage of the policy and saw an opportunity to milk the state, their prices kept escalating and made it very problematic for state to procure the land. Willing buyer willing seller was one of the weakest policy because there were whites' people who had land but not for agriculture or farming but because they saw a loophole in government and wanted to make money, they sold the land to government and government spent millions of money for land that is not suitable for agriculture. This caused serious problems because the beneficiaries felt like government is punishing them by giving them land that is not good for agriculture.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 is advocating the idea of equitable share of land. In terms of Section 25(5), the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures within its available resources to foster conditions which enable citizens to gain access to land. South African

government has failed to provide land as per the constitution. Perhaps there is a need to change or amend the constitution or take land without compensation since the state fail to prioritise. LRAD which replaced SLAG, aimed at developing blacks through agriculture. The only challenge was the implementation because the subsidy was too little, and the emerging farmers could not use the money for production and other farming equipment or develop farming infrastructure. Nevertheless, majority of the poor beneficiaries decided to pool their subsidies and applied for loans so that they can be able to farm, some did not even qualify for the loans and that frustrated them and that is the reason why they stopped farming. The reality is that if the program was meant to develop the historically disadvantaged people, there is a concern about the government's inability to increase the subsidy. There was a need for government to adjust the subsidy high to enable the emerging farmers to realise financial stability and to enable them to use the land effectively. To this end, the government is not committed to take land back to the people who were disposed through the Land Act of 1913. Land reform will never be a success unless there is government intervention pertaining to the land crisis. This programme failed due to lack of commitments and prioritisation in government.

2.1 PLAS, State-Driven (Controlled by the Government)

Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy is a land reform programme which was adopted in 2006. This is currently the available policy programme which is meant for land distribution to promote black emerging farmers in South Africa. According to this strategy, State procure the land and identify the beneficiaries in a lease agreement, in this case, beneficiaries are provided with land, and they must use it effectively so that they can pay the lease amount to the department. Emerging farmers can use the land for production while paying the lease amount as agreed. The beneficiaries are now allowed to lease the land for more than ten years and can even buy such land from the government (Sebola, 2018:5). During the apartheid era, the government used the land as a way of economic and social oppression of black South Africans and land became a central issue and that is why the land question remains critical in South Africa today (Dlamini, 2014). Dlamini further notes that land reform is a necessary condition in South Africa if the country wants to have

a harmonious society. It is essential for the poor or previously disadvantaged people to have access to land and use it effectively to reduce poverty and unemployment.

The majority of emerging farmers under the PLAS programme are not in full production, and there are those who are not producing at all as a result of lack of support from the departments concerned, lack of training and finance. The South African agricultural economy has little or no room for the emerging Black farmers (Chikazunga & Paradza 2012). According to Henning (2010), PLAS and its implementation process are expected to contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic status of the emerging farmers, employment and equity. According to Kloppers (2012), it should also be noted that until the beneficiaries are selected to acquire the land, the Department of Land Affairs must ensure that the land identified is suitable for farming. According to the strategy, if you are a beneficiary and acquire the land, and you do not use it, the department has full authority to take the land back (Kloppers, 2012). It is essential that the farmers are equipped with skills so that they can diversify and concentrate also on other farming activities rather than seasonal production. Skills development plays a vital role in the successful functioning of a farm.

Henning (2010) states that PLAS should be implemented at the local or district level, and must be included in the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process. Cousins (2013) further indicates that the State purchase the land or farms and allocate them to the identified beneficiaries based on 3-5 years' leasehold agreement and later on the lessee will then be offered the opportunity to purchase the farm. The emerging farmers are black South Africans, and they are defined in the following categories:

- They should be small scale farmers who are farming for a living and also selling their agricultural produce at the local market.
- Emerging farmers who are already in farming but on a small scale, but are constrained by land and as well as other resources.

In the local municipality of Ermelo in Gert-Sibande District, for example, the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) was applied to acquire land, mostly

for labour tenants as a way of empowering them (Hall, 2003). According to Kgosiemang and Oladele (2012) in Mkhondo municipality, farmers agree that participation in agricultural programmes will enhance access to land as currently, subsistence farmers can access land through PLAS. The potential farmers under this municipality have access to lease state land and that enable them to continue with their agricultural activities within the leased portion of land. The farmers complain about a shortage of extension officers in the Department Rural Development and Land Reform, and that affect their farming activities, some staff members are under qualified and are unable to render services to the community.

2.2 The Role of Land in Rural Livelihood

According to Chitonge (2013), the role of land reform in South Africa is not only directed in agriculture in general but also on promoting rural livelihood more. It is expected that land reform in rural areas will improve the rural economy and create employment opportunity for the rural unemployed community members. Some of the community members in rural areas are faced with social and economic challenges. In his study, Chitonge (2013) demonstrates that South African land reform has been associated with failure and a decline in agricultural production. In some parts of the rural areas of South Africa, the majority of households are using their land to produce different crops and livestock products for home consumption and sale in order to generate income. Tao *et al.* (2010) demonstrate that in China, the local government leases land to commercial users for the sake of local economic development. When commercial users use the land, they generate more taxes for local governments. This means that the local government is in charge of the local land, and that contributes to the local economic growth.

According to Chitonge (2013) land reform in South Africa has the potential to make some significant improvement in the rural income and employment. Most of the beneficiaries of land reform rely heavily on social grants. Chitonge (2013) points out that the majority of the beneficiaries, more particularly in the rural areas, do not have that aspiration and the capacity to produce at a commercial scale. Most of them are only producing for their household consumption rather than for commercial reasons (Chitonge 2013).

3. Methods and Materials

According to Saunders, Fernandes and Kosnes (2009) research methodology is regarded as a theory of how a research study should be undertaken, it involves the study design and the methods that are used for data collection and data analysis, it also helps to understand why such a study has been undertaken and how the research problem is defined (Malatji, 2017). Relevant oral data was collected employing qualitative research method. The study was conducted in Mopani district municipality, and the researcher used census sampling method to collect data from the emerging farmers or beneficiaries, and purposive sampling was used to select officials from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. Data was collected in a Focus group discussion and individual interviews.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform and the Limpopo Department of Agriculture

The Key Informants were asked about the role and responsibilities of the respective departments in the implementation of the PLAS strategy. The whole responsibility of the strategy is in the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. The role of the department is to make sure that the strategy is implemented by way of acquiring and redistributing the farms or land and managing the farms in the form of a lease contract. The Key informants from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform indicated that they get support from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture.

The Key informants from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture reported that their role starts once a farm has been allocated to a farmer. The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform also invites the Limpopo Department of Agriculture officials during interviews of PLAS applicants because they are experts in the field of agriculture. The Limpopo Department of Agriculture also offers technical support in terms of advising what needs to be done for a farm to function well. However, The Limpopo Department of Agriculture cannot continue with its responsibilities until the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform has provided the

necessary approval. The findings can be linked to the views of Zhang and Donaldson (2010) and Tian and Ma (2009) who report that in China the local government is the one which has the responsibility of land reform. In South Africa, the approach is different from that of China. The local government in China is not only responsible for the land lease, but farmers are given more support, and this might be the reason why Chinese farmers are doing better.

3.2 Government Support in Cash or Kind

When coming to the issue of government support, one farmer highlighted that when she received the farm, it was no longer a going concern, and it did not have any equipment. She further indicated that she did not receive any form of assistance from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture except that they brought visitors who came to do exposure on some of their produce. The emerging farmers are of the view that the department officials use them to compile their reports; this was after one field worker from Limpopo Department of Agriculture brought a green book to her to sign to report. She recalls:

"Only to lease the farm, that is how they assisted me, but it was misleading because I am struggling with this farm on my own. I was expecting help from them, like money. I appreciate and acknowledge the lease, but I am losing more money; negative outweighs the positive contributions".

Overall, the respondents indicate that they did not receive any assistance from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. It was a challenge for some of the beneficiaries especially those who are in crop farming because when the officials come to the farm for support, they will bring a small number of fertilisers which do not even cover half of the hectares of land. This is not the kind of support the emerging farmers expected from the department. The emerging farmers will then divert their household money which they are supposed to use to support their families to buy more and extra fertilisers which will cover all the hectares; some will even loan money from their neighbours. This is a clear indication that the government is failing to provide the necessary support either in cash or in kind to the emerging black farmers. As a result of financial constraints experienced by the emerging farmers, their projects fail, and this is an indication that the program is not effective. It is apparent that the current lack of government support in this regard has

the potential to compromise the actualisation of the project's specific goals. A respondent reported that the Limpopo Department of Agriculture officials "will call and ask you how far are you with spring programme because they can help you also with loose products, they call when they do not know where to take the products, so they give you in order to clear their storeroom. This way, they will throw the products at you." Another respondent reported:

"Agriculture officials promise many things, but nothing is done. Last time they came and asked me what problems I have, and I told them that I have a water shortage, and nothing has been done".

One respondent stated that since he took over the farm, he is still waiting to be recapped and that he has waited for too long. According to some of the respondents, they received assistance from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, but they are not happy because the kind of assistance they received was not what they expected. A respondent mentioned that out of 100% the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform assisted him with 2%. The respondent mentioned that:

"they do not negotiate with you; they give you whatever they want to give you, and it will be up to you to decide if you take it or not".

3.3 Identification of Beneficiaries

The respondent from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform mentioned that the process of identification of beneficiaries is complicated in the sense that daily the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform is confronted by people who need land for farming. This situation is the single most important about challenges of farming land needs, and subsequently, the department often ends up having a high volume of demand with a minimal supply of land. The annual budget is not sufficient to acquire the land that is available at the market value in order to allocate for the people that are in need. The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform is experiencing a huge backlog with a database of more than 4500 people that have made applications for accessing agricultural land while the allocated budget to proactively acquire land can usually afford to buy less than 26 farms per year. In other words, the demand for agricultural land is high, whereas the supply of resources to acquire land is often low.

3.4 Training Offered to the Emerging Farmers

The Key informants from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform indicated that the programme of PLAS requires that there should be a partnership between the emerging farmers and skilled people and companies who can transfer to the emerging farmers the necessary agricultural technical skills and business skills. The respondent mentioned that they also work with the Limpopo Department of Agriculture, which assists in skills training for the farmers. It was further eluded that Agricultural Sector Education Training and Authority (AgriSETA) on the ground assist with skills development. There are diverse support programmes that farmers can tap into if they want to develop their skills set like management skills, land care and other farming related skills. South African government should ensure that the emerging farmers are provided with the training required so that they can be able to continue with their farming activities. Insufficient training to the farmers contributes to their failure, and this also leads to the failure of the strategy. It is of crucial importance that the emerging farmers are equipped with skills; the government should provide and arrange those training. Majority of beneficiaries of PLAS did not receive any form of training; some received training but not sufficient.

3.5 Monitoring and Evaluation

The Key informants from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform state that they set target annually and five-year targets. It is part of the plan to achieve the targets, and they are supposed to get monthly reports on activities on the farms belonging to the emerging farmers. There are project officers who are required to visit the farms to inspect the farm activities. This respondent further indicated:

"We also expect the beneficiaries to send the reports as and when we need them".

The Key informants from the Limpopo Department of Agriculture mentioned that they do Monitoring and make follow-ups to check on the progress after providing farmers with technical advice. The engineers also make follow-ups after the setting up of infrastructure. However, some of the emerging farmers are not farming since they got the land in 2010/2012 and never received funding from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, so they do not send reports because there

is no production on their farms. The government does not have resources, and that is why some of the emerging farmers are still without funds, so they end up not using their land. These findings are in agreement with the views of Tian & Ma (2009) that the government should ensure that there is adequate supervision of land use. However, from the farmer's sentiments, it appears as if there is inadequate supervision of the emerging farmers. Farmers reported that they take up to six months without being visited by the officials. According to the Key informants from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, there is a need for performing impact assessment of the PLAS programme. However, currently, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform carries out the impact assessment. For objectivity purposes, this is an activity that should be outsourced.

3.6 Bureaucracy in Government and its Effect on the Implementation of PLAS Programme

The Key informants from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform mentioned that there are many committees that each transaction (farm purchase) must go through. Before a property can be acquired, it must be presented to at least six committees in government. There are six structures/committees chaired by the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform for every piece of land the department wants to acquire. Because of the inefficient operation of the various committees, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform ends up taking periods as long as six months to acquire a property, yet the acquisition time could be much shorter, say maybe two months. This is because some committee sittings are postponed for various reasons, for instance, if the chairperson is absent, the meeting can be postponed to the following month. Therefore, some departmental systems and requirements seem to work against that ability of the PLAS programme to achieve its objectives. This is some of the reasons why the program is not effective; there are so many things involved before the procurement can take place. Imagine a procurement that is supposed to take only three months can take about six months or more. The Key informants from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform mentioned that it might be much better if the department can consider centralising (Pretoria office) and the decision-making process for land acquisition to enable the achievement of the targets.

3.7 Success or Failure of the Strategy

The Key informants from the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform reported that the process of PLAS is moving at a slow pace. According to the respondents, contributing factors to the slow pace of the PLAS program are the bureaucracy in the departments concerned, and the sellers always inflate the prices of their properties. The sellers are taking advantage of the loophole which exists in government, knowing that the government is desperate to achieve the target, which allows sellers to take advantage of the system. One respondent stated:

"One can argue that the State is failing to get its priorities correct. If you know what your priority is, you will focus on it as government, but if you want to focus on everything, you end up not achieving anything at all and only to find that you have wasted resources".

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The beneficiaries of Proactive land acquisition strategy find it challenging to succeed in their farming business because of lack of support from the government. All that is needed for land reform to be a success in South Africa is if the government provide all the necessary support to the black emerging farmers. Emerging farmers lack resources to enable them to maintain their farming enterprises. The South African government should provide not only funding but training and technical support to the emerging farmers. There are those emerging farmers who produce, but the majority of the products produced by these farmers is sold to informal markets with low market value, and this is one of the contributing factors to their failure. The emerging farmers suffer from a lack of market information owing to a lack of communication, tools and support services from the government or officials from the departments concerned. When the emerging farmers are provided with all the support needed, they will be able to create jobs for the local people and contribute to the local economy and assist with food security threats in the country.

The overall success of these projects under PLAS is compromised by the lack of financial resources to buy equipment which is required for agricultural activities. South African government should spend money to develop and support the emerging farmers if the country is serious about land reform, and

this will help emerging farmers to be a commercial farmer. Land should be in the hands of government and farmers lease the land. The emerging farmers are not provided with the necessary training in farming and business management. Several promises were made by the government to train the farmers, but this has yet to be implemented. Usually, these farmers find it very difficult to sustain their farms because of the lack of required farming skills. It is recommended that the government provide the farmers with farming and management skills for a successful implementation of the strategy. The government should prioritise land reform and ensure that the emerging farmers especially those who are in crop farming have access to water, they should be assisted to secure finances so that they can be able to farm and use the land productively. Without funding, emerging farmers will always find it challenging to migrate to commercial farmers.

To be able to farm, farmers must have starting capital and use it for production. Many farmers do not have sufficient capital; they always require government support for grants so they can use the land, a situation which is untenable or unsustainable. It is recommended that the State provide capital to the emerging farmers and monitor how the fund is spent. It is recommended that instead of buying more land for the previously disadvantaged people and failing to sustain them, the government should buy fewer lands and make sure that it supports the few beneficiaries up until they are economically viable before going further and acquiring more land. It is recommended that there should be an effective monitoring or supervision process by the State after handing over the farms to the rightful beneficiaries. Because the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform find it difficult to monitor and evaluate itself, it is recommended that there should be an outside organisation that could monitor and evaluate the department.

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