



Land use and rural livelihoods: Have they been enhanced through land reform?

Maura Andrew, Charlie Shackleton and Andrew Ainslie

It is often assumed that transferring land to rural households will provide people with valuable assets that can be productively used to enhance their livelihoods. Unfortunately, few rural people or land reform beneficiaries are perceived to be using land productively because they do not engage in significant commercial production for the market. Transferring land to subsistence users is therefore seen as a waste of resources. However, an examination of land use in communal areas and amongst land reform beneficiaries indicates that resource-poor rural people do use land productively and resourcefully, but the constraints to production and participation in agricultural markets they encounter limit their livelihoods to survivalist mode. Land reform can enhance rural livelihoods beyond this survivalist mode if it is integrated into a broader rural development programme aimed at providing subsistence land users with the support they need to overcome the constraints to production, and to connect them to the markets.

South African agriculture is often characterised as a duality: commercial farming on privately owned land vs. subsistence farming in communal areas. Subsistence uses of land have historically been viewed as wasteful and economically unproductive in comparison to commercial production systems. It is not surprising therefore that proposals to redistribute land to subsistence producers are often viewed with disdain. Such views inform recent land reform policy shifts such as the Land Reform for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme which are aimed at enhancing 'commercial' agricultural production for the market rather than subsistence production. There is also an emphasis on 'full-time' farming on larger portions of land to generate substantial agricultural incomes.

These dualistic stereotypes are inaccurate and misleading. 'Commercial' and 'subsistence' agriculture combine factors of production in very different ways in order to achieve very different objectives – cash profit in the former case, and household food supply in the latter. A further challenge to the stereotype is that many small-scale producers in communal areas are currently involved in production for the market as well as for their own subsistence needs. There are numerous historical examples of this phenomenon.

Subsistence land uses are not wasteful, destructive or economically unproductive. There is considerable evidence that land-based livelihoods have been significantly undervalued. This is not to say that there is no room for improvement. Most poor rural households encounter considerable constraints on production that limit their land-based livelihoods to a survivalist level. The challenge for South Africa's land and agrarian reform programme is to assist farmers to overcome constraints to production in order to enhance land-based livelihoods amongst the poor majority beyond the survivalist level, while simultaneously facilitating commercial production for the market.

Recent research from throughout South Africa suggests that this dualistic characterisation of agriculture should be replaced by a 'continuum of farmers' approach that recognises a broad range of large and small scale, full-time and part-time, commercial and subsistence farmers. Support for this new approach comes from the wide variety of productive uses of land and natural resources amongst residents of communal areas and land reform beneficiaries, and the significant value of these uses. This *Policy brief* considers the constraints to land-based livelihoods in general and amongst

land reform beneficiaries in particular. It concludes with some policy recommendations.

Land-based livelihoods

The vast majority of residents of South Africa's communal areas derive their livelihoods from a variety of on-farm and off-farm sources. Off-farm sources include wages, remittances from migrants and commuters, income from informal economic activities and state welfare grants. On-farm sources include crop and livestock production and the harvesting and processing of natural resources. Land and natural resources provide rural households with a wide range of non-monetary goods and services, such as food security, income, water, fuel, medicine, shelter and transport, the value of which is difficult to calculate in monetary terms. These land-based livelihoods are critical to the survival and health of rural households, particularly those of the very poor. In addition to providing for the basic needs of rural households, secure access to land plays a vital role in reducing vulnerability.

Crop production

The production of food crops has been an important livelihood activity for African households in South Africa's homelands, particularly those located in the eastern half of the country where the climate is conducive to rainfed cultivation. In these mixed farming areas, a high proportion of households are involved in crop production along with a variety of other livelihood activities. Maize intercropped with other food crops and vegetables are produced on small plots mostly for home consumption. Levels of production are not sufficient to meet the subsistence needs of rural households, necessitating the purchase of maize and other basic foods. Production for the market is low, but there are some regional variations ranging from almost no market production in the former homelands of the Eastern Cape, to significant commercial production amongst small-scale sugar cane and timber growers in KwaZulu-Natal and larger scale maize sharecroppers in Ditsobotla (in the former Bophuthatswana) (Andrew et al. 2003). It is also clear that the size of arable holdings available to rural households has declined over time due to population growth and lack of access to new lands. In areas where population densities are high, there are significant numbers of households without access

to arable land other than a small home garden. There is also evidence that the total area of land under cultivation has been declining, particularly in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. However, studies have shown that rural households have gradually shifted to more intensive cultivation of smaller plots due to a complex interaction of market access problems, resource constraints (financial, labour and technology), land degradation and high risks that together have encouraged farmers to abandon arable fields (Andrew et al. 2003).

The contribution that crop production makes to rural livelihoods is difficult to ascertain. Until the 1990s most rural household surveys found that the sale of crops amounted to less than 10% of household income. However, more recent studies suggest that the contribution of agriculture to rural livelihoods has been underestimated and indicate a contribution in the region of 15–28% (Shackleton et al. 2001). A study of farmers in KaNgwane indicates that even these estimates may be too low, and that average figures that lump non-farming, crop farming and livestock farming households together under-estimate the importance of crop production as a livelihood option in most rural households, particularly the poorest ones (Makhura et al. 1998). Nonetheless, these values do not account for the value of produce consumed by the household.

Livestock farming

Livestock has historically been a key element in the pre-colonial economies and livelihoods of African people in southern Africa and has remained so throughout the colonial and apartheid eras. The range of livestock farmed today includes cattle, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, pigs, chickens, geese, turkeys, pigeons, rabbits and ducks. Historically, larger forms of livestock traditionally tended by men, such as cattle, have been given far more attention than the small livestock tended by women, such as poultry (Andrew et al. 2003).

Rural people have a wide range of reasons for holding the types of animals they do, and these are subject to change over time. These include: cash from sales, a form of employment, milk for home consumption, for funeral purposes, as a form of investment, inherited the livestock, slaughter for feasts/ home consumption, for paying bride-wealth, for sale of hides and skins, have land suitable for cattle farming, to help others, for cow dung and for draught/ transport purposes. The relative ranking of these varies from place to place and between households.

The historical records of national livestock numbers indicate that, although absolute numbers have remained stable, the per capita numbers of cattle, sheep and goats have fallen by almost two thirds between 1924 and 1974 as the human population has grown (Lahiff 1997 quoting Knight & Lenta 1980:161). However, the ownership of livestock is not equally distributed and appears to have become increasingly unequal over time. For example, the proportion of households in the Ciskei which own cattle has dropped from around 71% in 1948 to 30% in 2000 (Ainslie 2002). Similar historical trends are evident elsewhere.

Adams et al. (2000) have estimated the economic contribution of livestock in the communal areas at R1 200 per household per annum and the aggregate value of this sector at R2.88 billion per annum. This 'invisible capital' makes a significant contribution to people's livelihoods (Cousins 1999).

Harvesting/ processing natural resources

Most rural households in South Africa's communal areas regularly use, buy or sell natural resources harvested in communal areas. Nearly all rural households use wild spinaches, fuelwood, wooden utensils, grass hand-brushes, edible fruits and twig hand-brushes,

and a large proportion make use of edible insects, wood for fences or kraals, medicinal plants, bushmeat, wild honey, and reeds for weaving. For any particular resource, such as fuelwood or weaving fibres, several species are used. Communities in the rangelands of north-eastern South Africa frequently use more than 200 plant species. Fewer appear to be used in the south-eastern regions, perhaps paralleling spatial changes in relative biodiversity in the landscape. Individual households typically use dozens of species. For example, a single household in the Bushbuckridge lowveld may use as many as 20 edible fruit species, 21 edible herb species and the same number of species for fuelwood. Individual traditional healers work with hundreds of different plant species, and rural households may use up to two dozen species during self-medication for a range of minor ailments or charms (Shackleton et al. 2001).

These resources are extracted from home gardens and fields or lands further afield. More specialised resources, such as some medicinal plants, weaving fibres, durable housing poles and the like, are only found in certain parts of the landscape around the village. Knowledge of these resource areas is important for a household to obtain optimal benefits from the surrounding environments. Some resources are only harvested at particular times of the year (like fruit trees, thatch grass and medicinal bulbs), whereas others are available all year round (like fuelwood). People collect seasonal resources and process and/or store them for use later in the year when supply is diminished (Shackleton et al. 2001).

There are marked disparities in the use and dependency on natural resources between wealthy and poor households. The poor are more dependent upon the goods and services provided by natural resources in their surrounding environment. Greater proportions of poor households sell natural resources to generate cash income than is the case with wealthier households. For many, this has become a full-time occupation. For others it provides supplementary income for specific items such as school fees, funeral costs, school stationery and uniforms. This commercialisation increases resource demand and undermines local authority regulations regarding resource use (Shackleton et al. 2001).

The value of the consumption and sale of natural resources to poor people's livelihoods is often ignored or underestimated, perpetuating the notion that most communal areas are economically unproductive. However, recent calculations of the annual gross values of natural resource products consumed (that is, excluding trade) per rural household in seven different communal areas scattered throughout the former homelands varied from R2 300 to R7 200 with a mean of R3 154 per household (Shackleton et al. 2001). This constitutes a direct cost saving to the households, thereby easing rural poverty. The environment currently provides medicine, energy, shelter and income opportunities to poor people. Were these resources to diminish, the state would be faced with having to make additional financial provision for medical services, energy, shelter and grants. The value of these goods and services amount to approximately R950 per hectare in communal areas (Shackleton & Mander 2000), which compares favourably with financial returns from commercial farming land use in adjacent areas, but contributes to the welfare of a far greater proportion of households.

Thus, overall, access to natural resources is pivotal for rural livelihoods, in terms of the supply of resources for everyday needs, a safety net in times of hardship, and maintenance of cultural ties with ancestors and the environment, all of which simultaneously represent a cost saving to the state.

Constraints to land-based livelihoods

Although land-based livelihoods based on cultivation, livestock and natural resources provide a very valuable and significant contribution to rural livelihoods, in most instances these livelihoods are 'survivalist' in nature. Poverty is widespread, and rural

households remain vulnerable to natural and socio-economic shocks such as droughts, floods, fire, theft, death, disease, price fluctuations and the loss of jobs and welfare grants. All three types of land-based livelihoods are constrained by a combination of population pressures and land shortages, resource constraints (labour, tools, skills, finances and livestock), input and output market problems (a combination of price, institutional and infrastructure problems), institutional problems linked to land tenure and administration that exacerbate degradation processes and increase the risks of losses, and natural disasters (Andrew et al. 2003).

The land reform programme

The use of newly acquired or restored land by resource-poor land reform beneficiaries tends to follow the land use practices of resource-poor people in South Africa's communal areas (Andrew et al. 2003). These land uses include individual residential sites, communal grazing for individually or collectively-owned livestock, small-scale low-input cultivation for self provisioning (and sometimes some for sale) and the use of natural resources for household basic needs. Households do not generally subsist off the land entirely, but use it to supplement off-farm incomes. This seems to be the case for the whole spectrum of land reform beneficiaries from labour tenants and ex-farm workers to people coming from communal areas.

The land acquired through land reform is often insufficient to meet the needs of such groups, particularly with regard to grazing land for livestock. In the Msinga area of KwaZulu-Natal, the land acquired by one group of beneficiaries was not sufficient to provide adequate grazing for even half of the livestock owned by the beneficiaries. In some instances, the land acquired has not been suitable for rainfed cultivation or had very limited potential for such use. Consequently, most beneficiaries have not been able to access sufficient land for cultivation. It is also unclear whether land reform beneficiaries have been able to access land that has an adequate variety of key resources areas that allow them to harvest a wide variety of natural resources. Department of Land Affairs 'quality of life' reports indicate that, in many rural land reform projects, no production is happening, and some beneficiaries are worse off than before (May et al. 2000). This suggests that the contributions to the livelihoods of the poor have been minimal. It is not clear that land reform has enhanced livelihoods beyond the survival level. Inadequate land and a lack of sufficient support after the land has been transferred have been cited as the major reasons for the very limited benefits accruing to land reform beneficiaries to date.

In order to cope with the risks of relocation, some land reform beneficiaries do not abandon their previous land and resources to settle on redistributed land, they continue to make use of both sets of resources, distributing labour and other inputs between the two. This is evident among people from communal areas who have acquired land neighbouring their existing land or land more distant from their current place of residence, as well as ex-farm workers living in towns who have acquired farms some distance from town. The process of settling on newly acquired land is long and difficult, and beneficiaries continue to depend on the availability of housing, infrastructure and basic services in their existing residential areas. Because most beneficiaries are poor and there is little infrastructure on the farms, it will take them many years to gradually accumulate the resources to build houses and develop the other basic services to make it possible to move onto these farms. This trend provides another indication that the land and support services made available to land reform beneficiaries do not meet their livelihood needs, forcing them to continue to rely on resources in their areas of origin (Andrew et al. 2003).

The use of land to produce for the market appears to feature prominently only in land reform projects where NGOs or government agencies have provided effective support or where partnerships with the private sector have been developed. There are some cases where NGOs are providing beneficiaries with assistance to produce crops in communal gardens that are then used to generate income for the project or to repay loans, or where corporations have supported small-scale producers with investments of information, finance, inputs, skills and support services in return for contracts to supply their produce. This highlights the potential for the expansion and growth in agricultural production for self-provisioning and the market amongst a wide variety of land reform beneficiaries, but only if substantial investments are made to provide farmers with the support services and access to markets that they need.

Rather than building on existing practices and institutions, land reform projects often impose unfamiliar proposals and new responsibilities and institutions on large groups of beneficiaries with diverse interests and meagre resources. It is not surprising therefore that even the most cohesive and well-organised groups encounter significant difficulties and conflicts that often result in the group avoiding unpopular or potentially conflictual decisions, or adopting 'risk minimizing decisions and strategies' (Hornby et al. 2001). The range of experiences, skills, incomes, resources, education levels and orientations make it difficult for groups to reach consensus or make decisions that accommodate different needs within communities. These difficulties are greatly exacerbated when the beneficiaries live and work in different locations without sufficient communication and transport networks, as is often the case. Decision-making processes are further constrained by a range of institutional problems such as overlapping jurisdictions between different types of authorities, and conflicts between existing authorities such as traditional leaders and new institutions such as municipalities. These are evident in KwaZulu-Natal. Given these institutional problems, implementing the land use management legislation and enhancing management capacity in communal areas and amongst land reform beneficiaries has, and will not, be easy. Attempts to regulate land use through national legislation or project-level regulations are likely to flounder unless a) these build upon rather than seek to override the land use practices of poor people, and b) public resources are invested in building institutions with the legitimacy and capacity to manage land.

Conclusions and recommendations

Given the importance of land-based livelihoods amongst rural residents, the redistribution of land would be expected to enhance land-based livelihoods amongst beneficiaries. However, rural people face severe obstacles to production in the communal areas and, with the possible exception of land area, will face more or less the same constraints in any new settlement. Action is therefore required to address all the constraints to production and the entire context of risks and opportunities that structure the 'subsistence' economy. Land use does not necessarily change just because people have more land. More land will also not guarantee that rural livelihoods are enhanced beyond a survivalist mode. If poverty alleviation is a national objective, land reform must aim to do more than promote subsistence. It must provide opportunities for rural households to improve and diversify their livelihood options and, in particular, enhance the contribution that land-based activities and resources make to household incomes. To achieve this, rural people need more land and more tenure security, but also more support services and effective access to markets. The current land reform programme has focused narrowly on land redistribution. It cannot meet the broader needs unless it becomes part of a much broader economic,

social and political rural development programme. It is important to recognise that land reform is necessary but is not a sufficient condition for rural development.

Relying on the private sector or NGOs to meet these needs has worked in specific cases, but these actors cannot meet the scale of demand or provide the broad range of services that is needed. While support activities provided by non-state agencies should be encouraged, there is a critical need for much greater strategically-directed state support to develop and expand markets and support services for small-scale and emergent producers. Policy measures aimed at rural development that could enhance land-based livelihoods beyond a survivalist level are set out below.

1. The land reform programme should not be limited to serving the wealthier elite with interests in large-scale commercial farming, it should recognise the high value of land-based livelihoods for self-provisioning and small-scale income generation and provide support for these.
2. The different needs within rural communities need to be recognised and efforts made to ensure that the most marginal groups are successful in accessing the support that they need.
3. Higher priority attention should be paid to how beneficiaries are going to produce a sustainable income from land they acquire.
4. Land redistribution initiatives must be designed to allow people to practice diverse livelihood options aimed at improving security and reducing vulnerability.
5. The scale of land redistribution should be substantially increased to allow more people (including the poorest groups) to access sufficient agricultural land.
6. The state should adopt a more co-ordinated and interventionist approach to land acquisition that selects land on the basis of its agricultural potential, the availability of a variety of key resource areas, and proximity to markets and basic infrastructure.
7. Legislation aimed at providing greater security of tenure for residents of communal areas must be developed and implemented as a means of facilitating the growth of leasing and sharecropping arrangements.
8. Settlement planning processes should facilitate the intensification of cultivation in homestead gardens. This may require giving beneficiaries a choice of types of residential sites that range in size and location, with access to services.
9. Animal husbandry and veterinary services should be expanded to promote people's access to livestock and to improve their existing systems of animal production.
10. Greater support should be provided for the development of legitimate local land use management institutions that seek to build upon, rather than override, the land-use practices of poor people.
11. Aspirant black commercial livestock farmers in the reserves should be targeted for resettlement in order to relieve some of the pressure on grazing resources in the reserve areas.
12. A livestock marketing programme should be initiated to strengthen local capacity to manage viable rural livestock and commodity markets.
13. Considerable public investment should be put into developing the institutional capacity (including private sector capacity) to deliver the inputs, outlets and support services needed by rural households to enhance rural livelihoods beyond the survivalist level, so that they can begin to expand production for the market.
14. The private sector and commercial traders should be given incentives and assistance to expand market opportunities for rural households and land reform beneficiaries.

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Acknowledgements

The valuable editorial comments and advice of Ruth Hall and Peter Jacobs of PLAAS are gratefully acknowledged.

Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies

School of Government, University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa
Tel: +27 21 959 3733; Fax: +27 21 959 3732
E-mail: plaas@uwc.ac.za; Website: www.uwc.ac.za/plaas

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