

Sustainable rural development and socio-economic upliftment of marginalised communities in South Africa

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Abstract: This conceptual paper looks at current issues faced in rural development and especially unsustainable socio-economic advancement and makes arguments and suggestions to mitigate the impending worsening of the situation, towards the socio-economic upliftment of rural communities. It is critical to reflect and focus on rural communities and people in their everyday lives and how they enjoy their human rights. It is argued that the government and the private sector, and all their stakeholders should actively seek viable solutions to the many complex challenges that rural communities face. Land is a basic livelihood asset, and many people have no land of their own and neither do they have finance to buy land. It is also the case that rural areas are undergoing changes in their structures. In addition, the needs, economic activities, population up-skilling and policies on rural development all require greater urgent consideration. Against this background, some land distribution initiatives for agricultural endeavours are briefly discussed but they cannot be the primary solution to a myriad of rural community challenges. This calls for far more strategic thinking by all involved and multi-sector inputs and strategic partnerships and commitment are essential to support and empower rural people. The formulation of suitable governmental and private sector strategies for rural communities to assume control of their future and also that of subsequent generations of rural dwellers is vital and it has particular resonance in the entire SADC region. The status quo would be too disastrous to contemplate as the rural population increases in Southern Africa. A fully integrated rural development plan is in the making but is not yet significantly improving the output of people and the needed physical resources in rural areas towards sustainability are to an extent still lacking and such issues need to be urgently addressed. To mollify the tensions arising from rural poverty and gross inequality.

Keywords: Rurality; sustainability; private sector; public sector; development; empowerment

Introduction

It is evident that many poor people in the world are living in rural communities. Many of these people work in the agriculture sector and more especially in farming. It is undoubtedly the case that in South Africa a very poor quality of life is pushing people from rural communities towards cities where they seek employment and improvement in their social economic status, and this is replicated in many countries globally. It is critically important that rural areas become sustainable for the communities that inhabit them, and there is thus a large array of rural development tactics used in different countries (Van Assche, & Hornidge, 2015). In South Africa, where there is a high incidence of poverty, and with many people engaged in agriculture in rural areas, the advantages of transforming the structure of economic endeavours cannot be overstated.

An inclusive, equitable and prosperous society can only be realised if all individuals in rural or urban settings are empowered and supported by both the public and private sector stakeholders. Schwab (2018) asserts that there is a need to create at least 1.5 billion new jobs or livelihoods by 2050 and this is against a backdrop of population growth and rapid technological change. This drive will include urban as well as rural communities and solutions need to be adopted to address challenges faced by especially the latter. We need to develop a mindset that considers all citizens and things that impact on them as individuals as well as their communities. Finding solutions to the challenges that rural communities face requires that the government, businesses and individuals, make suitable strategic decisions as to how to tackle urgent and complex challenges, some of which have been in the making for many decades. There is an increasing body of literature on rural non-agricultural employment in the developing nations and this bears

testimony to the significance of this source of livelihood generation from both developmental and structural transformation perspectives (Sackey, 2018; Micevska & Rahut, 2008).

At the outset we set out to clarify terms that we are using in this paper. When we speak of rural development, we are referring to the process of improving the quality of life and thus also the economic well-being of people residing in rural areas that are mainly relatively isolated and sparsely populated.

Rural areas in South Africa are areas that are disadvantaged by a lack of access to ordinary public services including inter alia water and sanitation, poorly maintained road infrastructure. They tend to have tribal authorities. These tribal authorities constitute a crucial part of “the modern political landscape as any legislature or local council (Logan, 2013). Although, these traditional courts have the jurisdiction to hear all cases. They are not allowed to listen to the cases of a serious nature such as murder, robbery, and rape. There tends to be minimal corruption, given the number of local people presiding over a case. They are generally without a formal local authority. Rural communities are mainly sparsely populated with less density of population than towns or cities. The populations of rural communities also tend to be homogenous relating to culture, customs and even language. While the primary occupation is based on agricultural aspects, resources for effective agriculture are lacking and many migrate to towns or cities in search of a better life. Such migrations can be stopped when services are provided. For example, Dinkelman (2011) states that when rural electrification infrastructure provision was increased in South Africa, there was a positive impact on employment as many women left their home production enterprises and took the opportunity to develop microenterprises in rural areas.

In 2021, more than 67.85 percent of South Africa's total population lived in urban areas and cities, consequently a substantial percentage of 32.15% reside in rural communities (see Statista online at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/455931/urbanization-in-south-africa/>). Rural development has conventionally revolved around the notion of the exploitation of available land-intensive natural resources including inter alia, agriculture but there is certainly a dire need for rural communities to view development from a broader vantage point with diverse development goals. It is generally the case that education, some entrepreneurial activities, physical and social infrastructure all have a critically vital role to play in the desire to develop rural communities and make them sustainable (Rowley, 1996).

Dire poverty in these areas blocks adequate development and there is mass unemployment as well as a very weak economic base in most rural communities. Since the days of the abhorred apartheid policies there has been an unequal distribution of resources and very poor infrastructure in especially rural areas. Infrastructural development is very poor and basic needs such as food water shelter and sanitation have for the most part not been adequately provided, and rural development has been lethargic. This is indeed ironic given that there is abundant land and a wide range of natural resources in rural areas. In addition, the average income of rural dwellers remains substantially lower in rural areas as opposed to towns and cities (Madzivhandila, 2014). Endemic poverty needs to be urgently combatted. To combat the unemployment that exists in rural communities the public and private sectors need to be involved. Even though there have been some improvements in service delivery as meted out by the state, particularly in water provision, health provision, education and roads there remain delays specifically public health, telecommunications provision, and general assistance and benefits for rural communities. The Ministry of Rural Development and Land Reform has certainly assisted in creating some jobs and reducing poverty in its efforts to improve the lot of villages in rural areas. It has also provided food and still endeavours to invigorate the economies in rural outlying areas, but far more is needed.

Rural communities find themselves having very poor land usage ability and they generally also have depleted resources which makes them vulnerable from a socio-economic vantage point (Van Schalkwyk, 2015; Natrass, 1985). Rural development should thus find ways to improve the lives of rural community life and the participation of rural people should be non-negotiable in this endeavour if there needs are to be met. For rural development to be sustainable, the inputs of locals is immensely important (Pellisery, 2012). Sustainable employment opportunities are desperately required along with apposite healthcare provision (Desai & Potter, 2002). It was stated as early as 1986 that there was a lack of financial support as well as technological lags and rural development in South Africa had fallen seriously short of moderate opportunities due to burgeoning population growth and the changing relationships between the land and the population (Tapson 1986), and this scenario persists thus requiring greater effort on the part of stakeholders such as the public and private sectors. The massive influx of people from rural areas to cities is indicative of the urgent need to adequately develop rural areas and make them self-sustaining communities (Department of Land Affairs, 1997). There is a perception that rural development should still revolve around the issue of agriculture and land available as the primary drivers for rural development to occur. There should also be consideration for non-

agriculturally driven livelihood opportunities given that there are very few rural subsistence production units thus necessitating an optimal solution including specialisation and diversification aid to non-agricultural opportunities (Ward & Brown, 2009; Madzivhandila, 2014). A steady shift from agriculture to non-agricultural work is one of the characteristics of structural transformation and development.

Land Issues

Sustainable development in rural communities undoubtedly requires the participation of the locals as well as the public and private sectors (Van Schalkwyk, 2015). South Africa also requires meaningful land reform including the restitution and redistribution and reform in tenure issues. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP, 1994) which was a socio-economic policy framework implemented by the African National Congress (ANC) government 1994, has provided guidelines and principles to drive the process of developing an effective land reform policy and programme that is workable but pressing problems persist (Lodge, 2003). The RDP tackled issues such as the redistribution of land, land restitution and then tenure reform. While much has been achieved in policy development and land reforms since 1994 there are still many challenges plaguing especially rural communities in South Africa (Aliber & Cousins, 2013). Rural development generally refers to the acceleration of agricultural activities as the main weapon against food insecurity. Agriculture can also develop as small agricultural plots of land are made efficient for farming activities to be undertaken for the income generation (Madzivhandila, 2014). Rural development does of course mean this and far more. By transforming agricultural production practices the benefits from higher productivity, food security, and improvements in standards of living will ultimately pave the way for a reallocation of rural labour out of the agricultural sector and into non-farm employment activities (Sackey, 2018). The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 is a chief policy document of the South African government drafted in August 2012 by the National Planning Commission, which was a specially appointed ministerial body which was first constituted in 2009 by the then President, Jacob Zuma. The NDP is aimed at eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030. The NDP stated that 'agriculture has the potential to create close to 1 million new [rural] jobs by 2030' and that 'Land reform' has a crucial role to play in opening the 'potential for a dynamic, growing and employment-creating agricultural sector' (NPC 2011, 219 and 226). The NDP thus declared that it pursued a plan to further the objectives of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). But decades down the line rural development policies are still problematic as argued by Sender (2012). Local communities have diverse needs and while they may have natural resources they need to be able to have a strong measure of social structure and be relatively prosperous economically. This is so that the needs of future generations can be satisfactorily met as stated by Natrass way back in 1985. This aligns with the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: "Our common future" (Brundtland report, 1987).

A key to food security is the availability of productive employment prospects based on needed land reform, as well as upskilling and jobs programmes for rural communities. Rural areas as well as urban areas desperately need affordable and efficient and safe public transport as well as better facilities.

The standards of housing and water provision, healthcare improvements and the success of the land reform policies and agricultural reforms have not been as effective as anticipated. Health services tend to be disjointed, wasteful and ineffectual, and it is generally the case that resources are for the most part managed badly and poorly supplied. The situation in rural areas is particularly bad. Historically unsound land policies have created a situation where we find landlessness, homelessness, dire poverty and growing insecurity. The burden of poverty is placed especially on black women who are victims of gender bias and have very poor access to needed resources and scant chance of finding apposite employment. Consequently, children also suffer due to malnutrition and mortality is high in children. There has been inefficient urban and rural land use and a generally fragmented system of administering land (Lahiff & Cousins, 2005; Hall, 2007). Essentially the huge injustices of the apartheid policies which dispossessed people of land need to be redressed as equitable distribution of land ownership is vital. Land reform will help to reduce poverty and bolster economic growth and more importantly, provide a sense of security of tenure for those inhabiting it. Land Management initiatives must be promoted to support the sustainable use of land towards needed rural development. It is usually the case in many rural areas that a traditional authority has major land holdings and this exacerbates the disparities in land and resources. Thus, someone owning a small herd of cattle may find that they need to pay a local authority for the use of some grazing land. This is why communities must be stimulated to actively contribute to debates on land in their areas (Aliber & Cousins, 2013). Commercial agriculture has declined as the key source of livelihood sustainability in the rural areas, and yet about 2 million households still practise small scale farming (Stats SA, 2013). The non-farming/agriculture sector in rural areas is in ways similar to that of countries such as Bangladesh and includes relatively fairly paid employment in health and education sector jobs, but also has very low earning jobs including those relating to unskilled labour and self-employment initiatives (Deichmann et al., 2009).

The enabling factors for rural development are still a work in progress. It seems that food security has been the primary concern of government but socio-economic needs invariably necessitate a lot more than only access to food (Madzivhandila, 2014) and communities in rural settings need development to be maintained on an ongoing basis with impacts and outcomes that are meaningful (Elliot, 2013). Portney (2001) asserts that: "A sustainable community can be anything from a small neighbourhood to a group of people who share some interests, to a programme operated by a governmental or non-governmental organization, to a rather localised ecosystem, to a multistate region encompassing numerous ecosystems". Another problem arises for rural dwellers employed in urban settings, in that their transportation costs to work and back home are often financially draining and poverty is only minimally impacted. Rural employees are additionally losing jobs in areas that are less skill intensive and lower paid for example as farming and forestry and even as production workers, basic service occupations and general labourers (Bhorat, & Hodge, 1999). Rural non-farm employment has been largely theorised to comprise of both secondary and tertiary sector activities that are allied to the manufacturing and services sectors (Atamanov & Van den Berg, 2012).

Current and past initiatives towards sustainable communities

The preliminary rural policy for South Africa was within the agenda of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). However the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) programme which was implemented in 1996 forms the underpinning for an effective rural strategy. The 1997 White Paper on South African Land Policy of the Department of Land Affairs also has an important role in that it speaks to relevant issues such as land reform and the RDP, the strategic goals and also the vision of the land policy and three elements that are crucial to consider including redistribution, land restitution and land tenure reform. Numerous acts have been promulgated and are now in place. There is no doubt that land reform can do much to address unemployment in rural areas and elsewhere. There is a responsibility on the part of the government to restore land rights and settle land claims while also addressing land tenure issues. The Constitution of South Africa guarantees that:

25(6) A person or community whose tenure of land is legally insecure as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practises is entitled to the extent provided by an Act of Parliament, either to tenure which is legally secure, all too comparable redress.

25(9) Parliament must enact the legislation referred to in subsection (6).

In terms of the White Paper, the design of appropriate mechanisms to implement land use control measures at the local level and in rural areas is its priority focus of the development and Planning Commission for which provision was made in the Development Facilitation Act. 67 of 1995, which was the initial major post-apartheid planning legislation, but this was repealed. It was intended to present extraordinary measures to facilitate and hasten the implementation of reconstruction and development programmes and projects in relation to land. It was replaced by the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013.

The Act intends to provide a framework for spatial planning and land use management in the Republic and to specify the relationship between the spatial planning and the land use management system and other kinds of planning. It is also intended to provide for the inclusive, developmental, equitable and efficient spatial planning at the different spheres of government and to provide a framework for the monitoring, coordination and review of the spatial planning and land use management system. It is also called upon to provide a framework for policies, principles, norms and standards for spatial development planning and land use management and to especially address past spatial and regulatory imbalances. It is to strive for and promote greater consistency and uniformity in the application procedures and decision-making by authorities responsible for land use decisions and development applications while providing for the establishment, functions and operations of Municipal Planning Tribunals that can effect the facilitation and enforcement of land use and development measures (Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act 16 of 2013).

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) has also been a very important initiative that supported rural development with a stress on the human factor. The RDP was intended to be an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework aimed at mobilising all people and the country's resources toward the final eradication of apartheid and the forging of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future (ANC, 1994). The approach adopted in the RDP to developing and implementing policy was distinctive in South Africa's history. Irrespective of race or sex, or whether people are rural or urban, wealthy or impoverished, the idea is to allow the people of South Africa to shape their own future together and it requires active involvement and empowerment (Adelzadeh & Padayachee, 1994). It was faced

with many challenges, for example most rural households tend to rely on wage employment as the main source of income generation. Hall et al. (2013) suggested why there is a changing role of rural wage employment in household livelihood strategies. Food insecurity is generally prevalent across urban as well as the rural areas, but worst food insecurity is in the rural areas of the former bantustans created under apartheid (Altman, Hart and Jacobs 2009). Many rural households depend on wage employment as the primary source of income based on structural influences and many rural households depend on social grants handed out to them (James, 2007).

“Food insecurity in South Africa is prevalent across urban (especially in informal settlements) and rural areas, but the breadth and depth of household food insecurity is worse in the rural parts of the former bantustans (Altman, Hart and Jacobs 2009). Fewer rural households self-reported experiences of hunger in 2012 than in 2002: those ‘without hunger’ in the 12 months prior to the survey increased from 3.2 million to 3.6 million households, in 2002 and 2012 respectively” (Jacobs & Hart, 2015).

In its efforts to stimulate rural development, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) has been authorized to initiate, facilitate, coordinate, catalyse and implement an integrated rural development programme, linked to the necessity to create vibrant, equitable and sustainable rural communities (Rural Development, 2023). It thus deals with a range of issues including reform, access to land use, management and transformation of land relations and other matters associated with the hopes and lifestyles of those who live on the land and who depend on it for their livelihoods.

Its strategic goals support and drive initiatives to inter alia:

- foster effective land reform and land restitution programmes;
- implement sustainable agrarian reform through increased access to and productive use of land;
- ensure spatial equity through effective land planning and administration;
- reform the policy, legislative and institutional environment;
- improve food production and access to affordable and diverse food;
- improve rural services to support sustainable rural livelihoods;
- improve access to sustainable employment and skills development;
- improve institutional arrangements for effective cooperative governance, stakeholder participation and service excellence.

The DRDLR is steadfastly committed to safeguarding that South Africans in rural areas enjoy the same advantages as those in urban areas when it comes to issues of human rights and basic dignity as are guaranteed by the Constitution (Rural Development, 2023). The department’s is additionally tasked with amongst other duties, the rolling out the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) of 2009 to all rural municipalities. Through its initiatives it seeks to help to diminish the extent of poverty by establishing vibrant, equitable and sustainable rural communities. And to this end strives to forge partnerships with all sectors of society and relevant stakeholders. Agrarian transformation is also one of its core responsibilities, as it seeks social cohesion and access to human and social capital. Unfortunately the CRDP in no way states how the approach taken on and its regulation align with the global sustainable development agenda. Consequently, there is still a great deal of work to be performed before the many challenges now faced can be tackled effectively based on the Constitution and the frameworks which regulate rural development policy and progress.

Increasing numbers of rural households now have access to state-subsidised housing and land-reform grants but far more is needed. Poverty remains the primary problem for South Africa's people, and it affects millions of people and many live in the rural areas. Roughly 17 million people are enduring under the Minimum Living Level in South Africa, and it is estimated that 11 million live in rural communities (ANC, 1994). Thus, the core objective of our RDP is to improve the quality of life of all South Africans, and more so the impoverished in rural areas. Especially the vulnerable groups such as farm workers, women, the elderly and the youth were to be targets of support and large-scale employment as well as growing rural incomes levels were targets. The RDP also sought to encourage using parcels of land for agricultural, and other productive or residential drives. Land redistribution and restitution was an objective for those who lost land due to the apartheid system. A million low-cost houses were constructed over five years for low-income households’ and many were in rural areas but issues such as tenure still persist (ANC, 1994).

Critically important is the need for educational institutions, especially those in rural areas, to provide the skills needed for rural development. It is maintained that there are five principles that should be considered in a strategy seeking to promote rural development. These include a strategy which considers that rural situations may vary considerably; supporting the notion of creating diversified livelihoods for households; investment in infrastructure; provision of human capital as well as multi occupational and multi locational households (Ashley & Maxwell, 2001). In addition, the use of sustainable energy sources including solar power is essential for education to proceed unhindered. Strategies for urban and rural development need to be considered alongside the RDP to safeguard that the genuine needs of rural communities are fairly attended to (James, 2007). Long-term development and sustainability of rural areas is imperative (Van Schalkwyk, 2015). and this should include the construction of low-income housing near employment prospects. The RDP prioritised the reduction of poverty and inequality by means of revitalizing economic growth and human resource development.

Local authorities have an important role to play in strategizing for sustainable communities (Van Schalkwyk, 2015). Agenda 21 advocates the role of local authorities in supporting sustainable development because the majority of the problems are found in local activities and therefore local authorities need to participate in order to have any meaningful progress towards sustainable development. It is after all the local authorities who "...construct, operate and maintain economic, social, and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and sub national environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing, and responding to the public to promote sustainable development" (United Nations, 1992). The government has acknowledged that it needs to continue to play an active and leading role in the process of land reform, and it must drive sustainable transformation in the social and economic relations and more especially needs to provide for the goals of growth and development in the hard-pressed rural economy (ANC, 2008).

The Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS) of 2000 incorporated some valuable notions which are also partly under consideration and actionable, including inter alia:

- To increase investment in physical infrastructure and delivery of social services in rural areas.
- To enhance rural economic development and improve income generating opportunities.
- To consolidate democratic governance and redistribution in rural areas.
- To ensure gender equity and especially women empowerment.
- To facilitate a partnership between government, civil society and donor institutions in rural development process.

It was evident from the ISRDS that women as heads of households were the most disadvantaged in rural areas., This persists today that the level of incomes at these areas are generally still below the minimum subsistence level. Literacy and education have improved but are still not at acceptable levels and many other problems that existed persist (Roseland, 2000).

Cabinet accepted the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) on 12 August 2009, and this was intended to be aimed at enabling rural people to take control of their own lives, with state support. The programme was intended to tackle rural poverty effectively through the best possible use and management of natural resources by means of a carefully planned and integrated agrarian transformation as well as deliberate investment in economic and social infrastructure development including road maintenance to benefit rural communities. Even with this initiative there are still numerous Rural District Municipalities (RDMs) with substantial infrastructure bottlenecks and minimal levels of human-development indicators suggesting that greater public funding is essential if any form of sustainable development is to be realised. The redistribution of the agricultural land must be pursued while improving food security of the rural poor is critical. There should be greater initiatives to create business opportunities for rural dwellers and while from 2009–2014 the government directly invested roughly R2.3 billion in rural development, much more is needed if there is to be a truly equitable social transformation. The inequalities prevalent in rural areas are still growing.

The Legislative ambit of the DRDLR

It is evident that where there is a poor distribution of land this generally contributes to low incomes, greater poverty and a poor distribution of income, which can be aligned with inter alia poor infrastructural development, sub-standard health and educational service provision and the lack of basic needs such as water provision and

electrification. A number of Acts of Parliament support the work of the DRDLR. Only five of these are highlighted below:

- The Spatial and Land Use Management Act, 2013 (Act 16 of 2013) seeks to bridge the racial divide in spatial terms and transform the settlement patterns that put a considerable burden on public resources (Rural Development, 2023).
- The Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994 (Act 22 of 1994) – this deals with the restitution of rights in land to persons or communities that were dispossessed of such rights post 19 June 1913. The Act allows for a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and the Land Claims Court, to allow the Minister to procure, purchase and even expropriate land or rights in land for the purpose of restitution (Rural Development, 2023).
- The Provision of Land and Assistance Act, 1993 (Act 126 of 1993) provides for the designation of certain land, the regulation of the subdivision of such land and the settlement of persons thereon (Rural Development, 2023).
- The Communal Property Associations Act, 1996 (Act 28 of 1996) empowers communities to form juristic persons, to be known as communal property associations, to acquire, hold and manage property on basis agreed to by members of a community in terms of a written constitution (Rural Development, 2023).
- The Transformation of Certain Rural Areas Act, 1998 (Act 94 of 1998) provides for the transfer of certain land to municipalities and certain other legal entities, as well as for the removal of restrictions on the alienation of land (Rural Development, 2023).

Despite such legal support, there is still a dire need for workable policies that can strongly support rural communities in terms of job creation and community enhancement (Hall, 2004; 2008; Machethe, 2008). The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme is geared towards supporting rural communities to assume at least some control of their lives and fight poverty by using land resources optimally. This entails a transformative stance and investments into rural areas. What is done in this regard needs to conform with the rules and guidelines as set out by the Constitution of South Africa. The government must not be too centralized in their administration of rural land and related issues. Policies to promote effective land reforms will undoubtedly confront numerous obstacles, but the fight must continue.

The Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) was given numerous role such as developing agricultural value chains, and provide agricultural inputs while monitoring production and consumption in the agriculture sector, and also in enabling inclusive rural development. By 2021, the outlook on agriculture was encouraging and some employment was created. However, the local authorities in rural communities need to play their part and do all within the ambit of their power to improve the quality of life, social, economic situations and the infrastructural milieu, and support government in its efforts to drive the notion of sustainable rural communities and natural environments. The DALRRD's has an all-inclusive land agrarian strategy geared towards more effective land reform and administration. This is at least a positive take away, nonetheless South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa accepted that the country's land reform programme is taking too long to address the question of land ownership inequality and many challenges still hamper South Africa's land reform programme development.

Levin and Weiner (1996:93) noted that: "Colonial land dispossession and apartheid forced removals lie at the heart of the repressive regime which the national liberation movement sought to overthrow. A decisive transformation of land and agrarian relations is thus intimately bound up with the construction of a new democratic order in south Africa". The longstanding expectations of the rural communities are yet to be met. The 2009 Development Indicators of the Presidency clearly demonstrate that rural underdevelopment has not been adequately addressed and that far more needs to be done to bring a semblance of stability to rural communities and improve the quality of life (The Presidency, 2009).

President Ramaphosa announced the creation of a body Land Reform and Agricultural Development Agency in his state of the nation address in 2021. The idea was that this would lead to coordination of land issues using current sources of material and other forms of assistance from the commercial agricultural sector. In terms of this body, the accountability of redistributive land reform would lie with district-level land committees. These would be responsible for designing locally based solutions shaped on the leading farming enterprises while reflecting on an area's community and social dynamics (Kirsten & Sihlobo, 2021).

This agency would assume the role for land acquisition and redistribution and place the responsibility on the shoulders of those who have benefited from the previous regime. At district levels "...farmers, communities, agribusinesses and other private sector role players would craft local solutions within a framework managed by the agency. Local District Land and Agricultural Development committees would be established within a particular area... This structure could then elect a chairperson and invite six other members (agribusinesses, banks, community and so on) to join. The local

committee would have to consult with all stakeholders in the area and register as a non-profit company with a memorandum of incorporation, a budget, and a board of directors” (Kirsten & Sihlobo, 2021).

Recommendations

In whatever is undertaken in the role of rural development, transparency must be insured so that unscrupulous and opportunistic activities can be mitigated. In addition, solid public-private partnerships are needed to provide a mechanism to support the government as it drives and fosters the efficacy of its rural development policy. Government must adopt an integrated approach for rural development and better co-ordinate its many agencies and other bodies as it formulates and implements its rural policy. It is essential that its policies are not seen to be inconsistent, and that they do in fact ultimately come together in a rational strategy.

It may be prudent to consider using bottom-up approaches that involve associations of rural community and other stakeholders in rural development initiatives. Thus bottom-up rural development could be considered in what are termed micro-regions, where local authorities are tasked with achieving desired common rural development goals. Partnerships should be forged between rural communities, the local authorities, and also the private sectors in close proximity to rural areas.

Based on the aforesaid, rural communities should be supported by government towards enhanced capacity in a range of ways including:

1. Demonstrating respect for them and providing them with a sense of identity.
2. Engaging with them as key stakeholders with an important voice that needs to be heard.
3. Better co-ordination between government departments for effective rural development and capacity building in rural areas.
4. Support to build and manage local partnerships and build relationships which enhance skills development in rural communities.
5. Empowering women and other vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities or living with HIV/Aids.
6. Focussing on poverty alleviation and food security through agricultural production.
7. Providing basic sanitation and a constant water supply.
8. Increasing production through mentoring and the development of livestock farming.
9. Developing a rural transport system that is safe and efficient.
10. Focussing on land rights for agricultural and agrarian reforms as well as economic development based on the Comprehensive Rural Development Strategy.
11. Providing reasonable land tenure and suitable basic housing.
12. Providing courses and financial support for those who are desirous of obtaining useful skills in order to establish entrepreneurial ventures that could benefit their community.
13. Promoting sustainable resource management.
14. Providing employment.
15. Obtaining private and public sector support for rural development.
16. Providing more schools and clinics for rural dwellers to attend.

Conclusions

The paper draws on equity and justice for rural communities as its theoretical framework and the perennial theme running through the work is the States good intention but ultimately non-performance in the important need to develop rural communities to make them sustainable. The workable design and execution of an integrated rural policy necessitates changes in intra-governmental relations and also between the private and public sectors and of course the rural communities concerned.

Thus, we argue that it is important for rural communities to become far more respected and productive than what they currently are. We contend that the huge inequalities and the associated poverty tend to lead to much discontent which does not bode well for a developing nation. We re-affirm that the South African government needs to be more effective in providing improved education and health facilities, water and sanitation and power provision and especially in addressing and solving vexing land issues. Land is certainly only one (but the main) potential source of income for rural communities, consequently access to other types of jobs for rural inhabitants is also imperative.

Numerous issues derive from the body of knowledge adduced in this important discourse. Deep inequalities are still in evidence in South African society and its rural communities three decades on from the true democratisation of the

country. Rural community well-being remains a serious challenge and there is a pressing need for effective transformation to occur if the lot of rural communities is going to be at all truly improved. There is still far too much stress on farming activities that are low paying and not enough infrastructure provision in the form of clinics, roads, electricity and very few opportunities exist in non-farming activities. What is required urgently if there is to be efficacy in how rural communities are uplifted is a stable partnership between stakeholders including the public and private sectors and local communities including their indigenous tribal courts. Reforms are needed in order to prevent negative sentiments increasing that could destabilise areas. There are likely to be large social gains emanating from successful land and other related reforms.

Income distribution in the South African economy and especially in the rural sector is contingent on the equitable distribution of land by ownership. The social and economic welfare of the poor, at-risk people and their well-being is essential. Thus, the restructuring of the system of delivery via a carefully planned actionable strategy to drive the rural economy is of the utmost importance. The development of judiciously thought-out rural labour intensive economic activities that can bolster rural incomes is paramount. As a primary requirement, rural households must be provided with clean water and sanitation and electricity. However, the latter is mega challenge given the electricity provision challenges faced by the country in general, including urban areas. Due to people in rural areas lacking access to electricity and modern fuels, many tend to rely primarily on human and animal power for any mechanical tasks, including agricultural activities and conveyance, and on the direct combustion bioenergy from wood, crop residues and even dung, for activities that need heating or illumination. Given that electricity provision to rural populations is unlikely to be through grid extension, standalone solar systems should be considered as a viable and sustainable option. We suggest that the state still has a significant role to play as it seeks to address the plight of rural communities and needs to do so as a matter of urgency.

Necessary infrastructural and other support initiatives are in dire need and should be provided to rural communities as they require much support to play an important role in our society. Sadly, they still face challenges related to demographic shifts, unsatisfactory labour force development, poor access to needed capital, financial resources to meet the living requirements of a person's family, infrastructural problems such as electricity and water provision, road maintenance, health facilities and quality health care and insurance, additional schools, literacy challenges, land use and tenure thereof, transportation deficiencies, and general environment and community sustainability.

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