

Fieldwork Report

Dates of Travel: 5th August 2016 – 12th August 2016

Project title:

Understanding Land and Water Sector Reforms in the Context of Smallholder Irrigation and Food Security in the Limpopo River Basin, South Africa

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1. Introduction

This Report is intended to provide feedback regarding the fieldwork trip that I undertook in Limpopo Province from 5th– 12th August 2016). The fieldwork was done in Bela Bela, Groblersdal, Molemole, and Tzaneen areas. This is a continuation of a project funded by the NRF Annual Grant for Y-rated Researchers in South Africa. The project is nearing completion and a substantial amount of data has already been gathered for analysis and write-up. It is anticipated that some of the results from this study will be presented at the Annual WATERNET Symposium in Gaborone, October 2016.

2. Background to the study and field trip

Since 1996, South Africa has been implementing wide-ranging reforms in the land and water sectors. This study assesses and documents the challenges and opportunities facing 'emerging' farmers who are some of the main beneficiaries of the land and water reform programs. The study contributes directly to the quest for better agricultural productivity by analysing factors that constrain or enhance productivity of farming schemes established under the land redistribution program in the Limpopo Basin. The study will also identify the support requirements for improving the productivity of emerging farmers in the province. A better understanding of the opportunities and constraints facing implementation of the reform programs will help to clarify why the reform processes fail to achieve systematic outcomes and enable the formulation of interventions that counter poor implementation. Knowledge generated through this research project will inform and build the capacity of stakeholders and decision-makers in the water and land sectors to improve the reform implementation processes and outcomes.

3. Goals and objectives of the study

The broad goal of the study is to generate knowledge that contributes to the transformation of the rural economy and enhance food security and livelihoods in South Africa.

3.1 Specific Objectives:

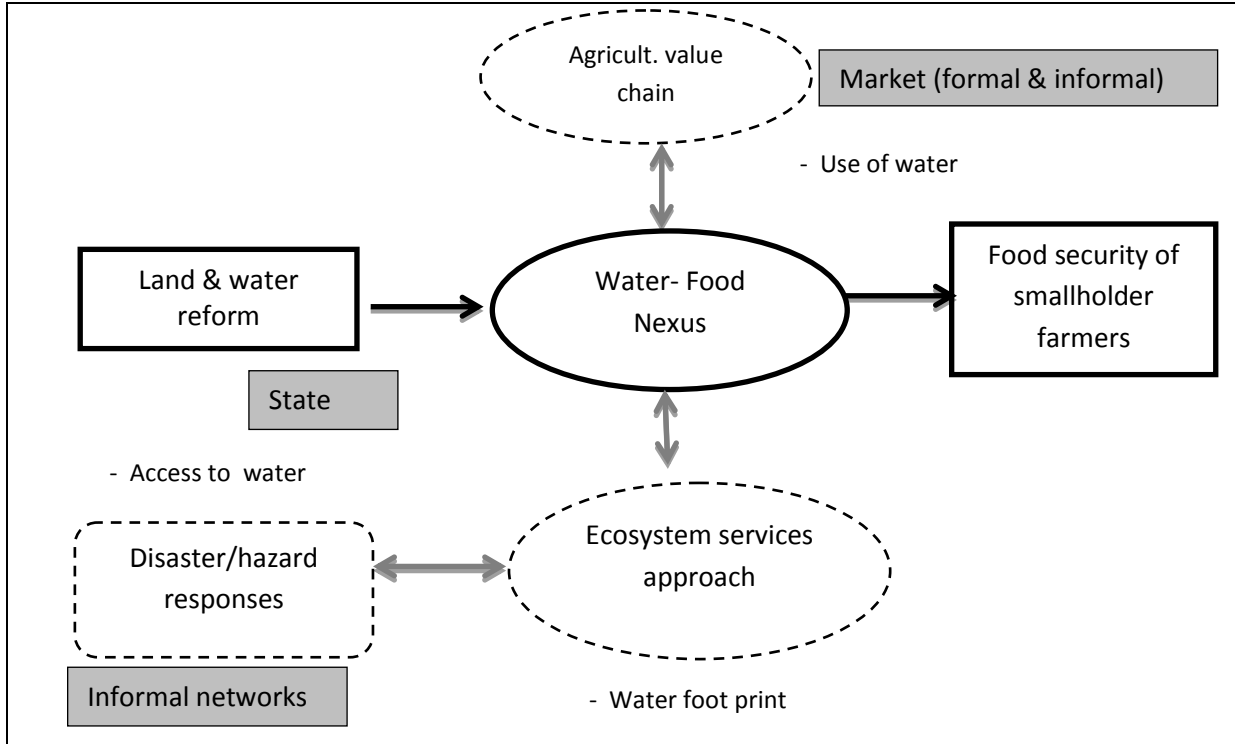
- (i) To scope and identify related research projects that are or have been active in the Limpopo Province and synthesize relevant lessons emerging therefrom;
- (ii) To interrogate and document the key changes evident in the water and land reforms and their implications for small scale irrigation in the Limpopo Province;
- (iii) To review the available data on the performance of selected land reform schemes in the Limpopo Province, with special attention to operation, management, and socio-economic performance;
- (iv) Based on the results from the above activities, synthesize information and recommend strategic policy and institutional steps necessary for strengthening the performance of emerging water and land reform schemes in the Limpopo Province and the rest of the country.

4. Research framework

The study applies the farming systems research (FSR) theoretical framework. The primary aim of FSR is to increase the overall production on the farm taking into account the opportunities and constraints imposed by various determinants on the existing farming system. It is participatory and involves cycles of observation, diagnosis, action and evaluation (Spedding, 1994). The farmer and the farm itself are the central units of focus and analysis in the research process. It adopts a holistic approach which considers the dynamics of bio-

physical, environmental and socio-economic aspects of farming and water use. In this study, the researcher uses participatory approaches to get a comprehensive overview of the water use, farming systems, and productivity of farms allocated to the emerging black commercial farmers in the Limpopo Province. This includes participatory identification of potential solutions to enable the development of appropriate and relevant options for addressing key challenges experienced.

Figure 1 - Summary of the conceptual framework



5. Reporting on the fieldwork

In close collaboration with agricultural extension workers in Bela Bela, Tzaneen, Molemole, Sekororo, and Groblersdal, as well as colleagues at the University of Limpopo, a number of farms were selected for detailed study. In August 2016, visits to the selected study sites (smallholder resettlement farms) were done to enable the researcher to hold discussions with the farmers and other stakeholders. Face-to-face interviews with the farmers and other key stakeholders in the sector were used to increase understanding and knowledge regarding the overall reform landscape as well as the specific challenges and opportunities facing each of the farmers. The template in figure 2 outlines the kind of data that the researcher was focusing on during discussions with the farmers.

Figure 2 - Template for data collection (profiling of selected farms)

SECTION 1:

- Name of Farm;
- Name of Farm Owner;
- Detailed narration of how the farm was acquired – All the steps followed until ownership or lease was given to the current owner;
- What were the specific challenges faced during this process by the Farmer who eventually acquired the farm;

- Details of the main Farming activities that were done by the previous farmer who left;
- Information about previous farmer's levels of production, if it is available e.g. what crops were grown by the previous farmer? Did he keep any livestock on the farm? If yes, which ones and how many? Amount of crops produced per hectare by the previous farmer?

SECTION 2:

- Detailed narration of the type of farming activities and crops grown throughout the year by the current farmer (s), including any seasonal cropping;
- Levels of production e.g. Tones produced per hectare (if the information is available);
- Any livestock? Which ones and how many?
- Any specific challenges and problems faced during the production process by the Farmer who now owns/ uses the farm;
- Source (s) of water for domestic use?
- Source (s) of water for commercial use?
- Does the farmer own any water rights/ permits/ license (s)?
- Detailed narration of the procedure followed in acquiring the water license/ permit
- Detailed narration of any challenges faced in getting access to water and obtaining a permit/ license (s).

SECTION 3:

- Detailed narration of overall farming system used by current owner
- Detailed narration of post-harvest opportunities and constraints faced by the farmer: i.e.
 - access to credit and farming inputs;
 - access to water;
 - access to irrigation equipment;
 - access to markets;
 - availability of safe storage of the harvested crops; etc.

SECTION 4:

- Detailed narration of potential solutions to the challenges and opportunities observed on each farm.
- Detailed narration of the types of support that the farmers require from government and other development agencies after acquiring the farm.

5.1 List of Farms visited by the researcher

Ditlou le Dinare Farm	Bela Bela
Macheke Family Project	Bela Bela
Dinaletsana Women's Project	Bela Bela
Moragomo Cooperative	Bela Bela
Moselane Cooperative	Bela Bela

Moretele cpa	Bela Bela
Witpenskloof 40JS porton 02	Groblersdal
Witpenskloof 40JS porton 03	Groblersdal
Moloto malega	Groblersdal
Ruanaga Merino	Groblersdal
Zebediela citrus estate	Tzaneen
Charles Boyes	Tzaneen
La Boheme	Tzaneen
Geluksfontein	Tzaneen
Grovedale 239-KT R/E-Portion 5	Maruleng
Grovedale 239-KT R/E-Portion 39	Maruleng
Combrow 163 LS Portion 1	Molemole
Combrow 163 LS Portion 2	Molemole
Combrow 163 LS Portion 3	Molemole
Combrow 163 LS Portion 4	Molemole

6. Preliminary fieldwork observations

Consistent with findings and commentary from various experts who have done research in the sector, the reform program has yielded mixed results, with at least 50% of the farms visited by the researcher that were established as part of the land reform program either underperforming or not functioning at all.

This demonstrates that such reforms do not always lead to the systematic outcomes originally envisaged.

One of the key factors that may explain the poor performance of the farms relates to the intersection of water and land reforms that seems to not have been sufficiently addressed by the relevant government departments. As a result, access to water for the new farmers is not guaranteed and in fact, many of them now do not have access to water for irrigation.

There are a number of other challenges that act as serious barriers to productivity. These include limitations in access to finance for inputs, lack of farming knowledge, limited access to agricultural extension services and markets.

In essence, the 'new' farmers face several technical and institutional challenges that hinder their agricultural production activities.

Thus, the performance and impact of agricultural schemes established as part of the land reform process will continue to be a subject of intense scrutiny and debate across the country in the foreseeable future. Their contribution to food security and transformation of the rural economy remains in question.

Evidence from primary data gathered in the field demonstrates that the failure of the reforms to realize systematic outcomes suggests the presence of systemic and structural barriers to reform that must be dealt with before substantial success may be realized.

While the socio-economic and political rationale for the reforms is well articulated and understood, it seems as if there is a general lack of knowledge on how to effectively translate some of the objectives into specific programs of action on the ground that would significantly transform the South African rural economy.

It is now clear that a wide-ranging programme of land and water reform is a necessary but not sufficient condition for rural economic transformation and resolution of deep-seated inequities in the ownership of the means of production.

More attention needs to be paid to implementation challenges and opportunities faced by the farmers on the ground.