

# The Socioeconomics of subsistence farmers

Tim Hart

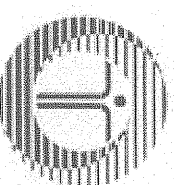
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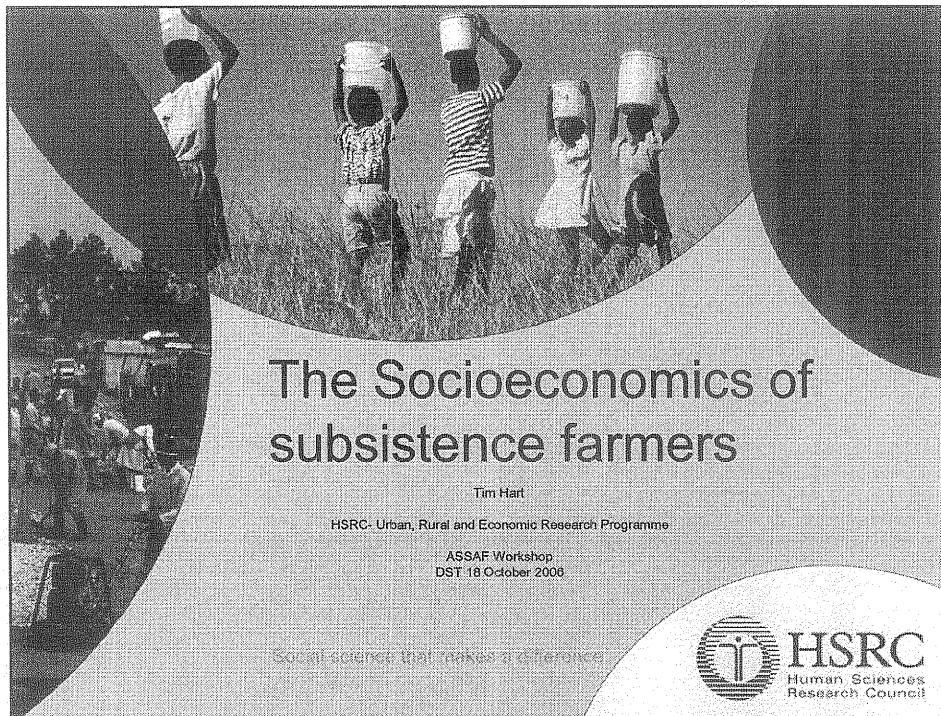
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## Overview

- Introduction
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- Natural Resource Use
- Other Socioeconomic Factors
- History
- Agricultural Development
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- Local Knowledge
- Conclusion

## Introduction

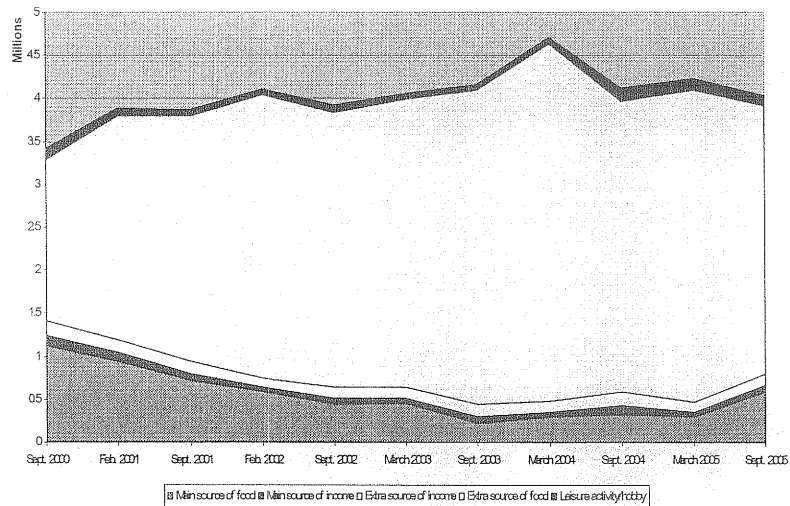
- We lack representative countrywide statistics.
- From case studies we can get a general picture of farmers situated somewhere on three axes – size, purpose and access to resources.
- However, there are probably no “subsistence” farmers or farming households in South Africa in the true sense of the word!
- Agriculture commonly supplements the household food supply allowing cash to be spent on other goods and services.
- Bi-annual LFS provides some interesting data about reasons that HH pursue agriculture

## Labour Force Survey

Survey	As a main source of food for the household		As an extra source of income	As an extra source of food for the household	As a leisure activity or hobby
2000,Sept	33%		5%	55%	4%
2001,Feb	24%		4%	67%	3%
2001,Sept	19%		4%	73%	2%
2002,Feb	14%		3%	80%	2%
2002,Sept	11%		3%	81%	2%
2003,March	11%		3%	82%	2%
2003,Sept	5%		4%	87%	2%
2004,March	6%		3%	88%	2%
2004,Sept	8%		4%	82%	4%
2005, March	7%		3%	85%	3%
2005,Sept	15%		3%	77%	3%

N = 3.4mill to 4.8mill

## Labour Force Survey



## Labour Force Survey

- This indicates that very few and agrarian households rely on agriculture as a main source of income and food.
- More than three quarters of those surveyed rely on agriculture as an extra source of food.
- The implication is that few can be called subsistence farmers i.e. satisfying household needs through agriculture.

## Natural Resource Use

- Use of the local natural resource base:
  - Harvesting wild plants and animals for food
  - Harvesting same for medicinal purposes
  - Harvesting wood/grasses for fuel, housing, implements, fencing and sales
  - Brick-making
  - Agricultural activities of varying scales

## Socioeconomic Factors

- Despite popular assumptions and persistence of “dichotomy syndrome” agrarian households are deeply embedded into the national economy.
- To this end they rely on other forms of livelihoods for income to survive:
  - Migrant Labour
  - Remittances from family in other areas
  - Social grants and pensions
  - Local wage employment - often influenced by national and international markets
  - Purchase and reselling of goods from other areas and countries



## History

- In South Africa during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century we had many profitable and sustainable agricultural areas.
- The former Transkei and other “homelands” were evidence of this – some produced large surpluses.
- Their agricultural output sustained the European markets both locally and internationally.
- They also had their own local markets and economic networks.
- What has happened?
- Lesotho is another example – providing resources and agricultural produce to SA throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> C.
- But now classified as a LDC with the World Bank labelling it a peasant or traditional economy.
- However there is nothing traditional about the current economy.

## History

- Evidence indicates that interaction with (rather than exclusion from) the global economy produced current situation.
- Nature of interaction is important
- Contributing factors to status quo
  - Colonialism and Imperialism
  - Govt Policies
  - Overpopulation
  - Erosion and expropriation of land
  - Climate change
  - Declining interest in Agriculture
  - HIV/AIDS
  - Education of research and extension personnel

## Agricultural Development

- Current approach to AD largely influenced by the input-output model.
- Assumption – economic and social development can be externally induced.
- Inputs are externally derived, locally unavailable and expensive.
- “Silver Bullet” Technology is rejected, adapted or adopted.
- Little success even with new technologies – often only qualified.
- They are context insensitive.

## Agricultural Development

- Cognisance not taken of diversity in:
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Agro-ecological Zones
  - Politics
  - Farmers’ individual motivations
- Context is seldom considered and farmers often seen to be making ill-informed decisions by those who do not understand their circumstances.
- The social science methodologies offer a number of contributions to understanding context and assisting agricultural development.

## Social Science Contributions

- Small and large-scale surveys can provide us with an overview of micro and macro trends.
- Such surveys when combined with panel studies can illustrate longitudinal trends over time.
- Surveys provide us with a picture of **WHAT** is happening.
- But not necessarily **WHY**!

## Social Science Contributions

- More qualitative studies can provide us with more detailed picture at the micro-level.
- A better understanding of why certain trends are emerging, persisting or changing.
- Such studies are more in-depth, providing us with a richer picture of the local or micro situation.
- They place diversity in context providing clearer pictures to outsiders
- Often providing the **WHY** and **HOW** to explain the **WHAT**.



## Social Science Contributions

- During recent decades social scientists have tended to collaborate with natural scientists in agricultural research and development programmes.
- They use their methods and tools to complement those of the natural sciences.
- Activities include diagnostic studies, monitoring and evaluation and implementation research.
- Predominantly qualitative work

## Participatory Methods

Go to the people  
Live among them  
Plan with them  
Work with them  
Start with what they know  
Build on what they have  
Teach by showing  
Learn by doing

(James Yen – Founder of IIRR 1920s)

## Participatory Methods

- Realisation that sustainable development needs bottom up approach and local participation.
- In agriculture a number of approaches
  - RRA, PRA, PLA, etc.
- In recent years PTD and PID have become important for optimising agricultural research.

## Local Knowledge

- Participation realised Local Knowledge is a valuable resource.
- Awareness and understanding provides:
  - Context sensitivity
  - Awareness of local resource-based low-external input technology
  - Production of cost-effective locally appropriate technology
  - Alternatives to “silver bullet” technology
  - Awareness of farmers as innovators – not passive recipients of technology

## Conclusion

- Correct application of social science methodologies in collaboration with natural sciences can:
  - Increase our understanding of agrarian households
  - Bring about appropriate technology development – local and NARS
  - Identify trends of households' on- and off-farm livelihood activities
  - Illustrate micro and macro contexts
  - Identify longitudinal changes and their cause
  - Encourage participation and knowledge sharing

## Conclusion

- Collaboration and integration with natural science initiatives is vital to sustainable development in agriculture and in other sectors of developing countries.

Thank you