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Linking Land and Food Security in Africa: a focus on Southern Africa

1.0 Introduction

This paper explores the link between land reforms, food security and sustainable livelihoods in Africa, with a particular focus on southern Africa. Specifically, it traces the critical issues that link land and food security for the most vulnerable sections of the population. At the core of the under-development and poverty debate is the role of agriculture in ensuring food self-sufficiency and poverty alleviation for the predominantly rural communities. The debate is largely dominated by concerns of equitable distribution of land among different races and ethnic groups, social classes and among men and women. The various arguments generally conclude that land is at the centre of rural livelihoods.

At the global level, a general consensus emerging is that a new approach to development must of necessity focus on sustainable food security, poverty reduction and environmental security. There is no longer need to debate the fact that agriculture in Africa is the foundation on which sustainable development must be based. The debate should be on how to move from extensive low productivity to intensive high productivity agriculture as a pre-requisite for food security. Another important issue being raised by various analysts is why should food security in Africa always be about arable land. This paper builds on these debates and further calls for a broad-based approach in addressing food security and sustainable livelihood issues in Africa.

2.0 The Importance of Land

The importance of land in southern Africa cannot be over-emphasised. The Zambian Land Policy Document boldly declares, “Land is the biggest asset and forms the basis for all human survival in terms of social and economic development”. More than 60% of the population in countries like Angola, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe reside in the rural areas while in Lesotho, Madagascar and Malawi the percentage is more than 70%. Only South Africa and Seychelles have more than half of their population living in the urban areas. Thus in the majority of the cases, food security at the household level is attained through direct production from the land, and hence access to land becomes key for the livelihoods of the people. The majority of national land policies allude to the importance of land for national food security. The historical linkages between rural and urban populations through remittances in both directions are increasingly becoming tilted in favour of urban citizens as rural populations supply more and more food direct to their urban relations.

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In this context, the development of rural areas and the continued survival of the majority of urban populations rely on agricultural production.

From a production point of view the following conditions are critical precursors to attainment of food security at the national, community and household levels:

- ◆ Access to good quality-land,
- ◆ Secure land rights over the land,
- ◆ Efficient agricultural production,
- ◆ Appropriate land utilisation rates, and responsive land administration structures.

A very vital but often forgotten aspect of the land-food security nexus is food processing and food conservation. Agrarian reforms have the tendency of addressing the need for improving agricultural production only, and thereby missing the opportunity of investing in the development of post-harvest technologies, which are critical for the attainment of food security.

Agrarian reforms in most countries in the region have not prioritised the development of post-harvest technology as a strategy of enhancing food security at the household level as well as adding value to agricultural products.¹ Current efforts towards the improvement of rural livelihoods are concentrated on the production side such as the accessing of land, distribution of seed packs, development of drought tolerant crops, provision of fertilisers etc. Yet the bulk of the population live in rural areas where storage, processing and marketing facilities are grossly inadequate. This inadequacy leads to food loss and lowered food security, which become critical during drought periods. Even at times of gluts, development of better post-harvest technology enables rural households to improve the shelf life of their food crops for later consumption, which might be in the drought period. Alternatively, the scale of surplus generates additional income to the households. In this case, processing not only adds value, but it can also ensure food security at lean times such as drought periods. The main problems that have to be addressed relate to the following:

1. Lack of direct linkages between agrarian reforms and the development of post harvest technologies
2. Lack of comprehensive research and extension programs in post-harvest technology, in particular in crop production, storage and processing.
3. Lack of credit facilities for the purchase of hardware and production of raw materials.

¹ Post harvest technology refers to the techniques involved in the harvesting processing, storage, preparation, consumption or marketing of crop products.

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4. Lack of training in entrepreneurial skills among the local communities, in particular the women, in areas such as crop preservation, storage and processing.
5. Poor market infrastructure for agricultural commodities in the rural areas.
6. Poor quality or inappropriate hardware or lack of maintenance for the already acquired post-harvest technology.

If land reforms are expected to make meaningful contribution to food security, they have to be implemented as total development packages that include, inter-alia, and the development of appropriate post-harvest technologies.

Food security has been defined by the International Conference on Nutrition held in Rome in 1992 as 'access by all people at all times to the food needed for a healthy life'. There are three main important aspects in the discourse on food security; these include availability of adequate food supplies in relation to quantity, and quality and variety; maintaining stability in the flow of food supplies and a secure access to the available food supplies.

Food security is important at the regional (southern Africa), national and household levels. Given the high unemployment rates in southern Africa, food security at household for the rural populations and a significant percentage of the urban population is attained through agricultural production. In urban communities food is accessed mainly through the markets although urban agriculture and food remittances from rural areas are emerging as important food supply lines. The agricultural sector is also the major source of employment in the region. For instance in 1990, Angola, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia had more than 70% of its workforce in the agricultural sector. The exceptions were South Africa (14%), Cape Verde (31%), Botswana (46%), Swaziland (39%) and Mauritius (17%). These statistics confirm the importance of land and agriculture in the attainment of food security.

Food security in southern Africa also needs to be discussed in a sustainable livelihoods approach. In this respect, access to land is viewed in the broader sense of accessing land for agricultural production, for social security and economic empowerment. For example, southern Africa is well endowed with minerals yet in most cases rural communities do not benefit from the direct exploitation of these resources. A country like South Africa that allows communities to access benefits from minerals being exploited on their land is the exceptions rather than the norm. The discourse on land and food security should therefore be broadened to include access to all other key resources found on the land such as water, minerals, wildlife etc. This calls for a review of relevant

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legislation and policies. Thus experiences in Community Based Natural Resource Management Projects that seek to increase communities' access to wildlife resources and other forest products deserve to be given more credence in the land and food security debate.

2.1 Strategies for attaining food security

Most countries have continued to rely on the importation of cereals as a strategy of enhancing national food security (table 1). Between the periods 1990-1999, all countries imported cereals whilst countries like Angola, Mozambique and Namibia never exported any cereals at all. For lack of vision and strict adherence to policies (e.g. Zimbabwe), several of the countries export most of their maize only to import later in the year when stocks have depleted. This obviously increases the cost of making food available given the shortage of foreign currency and the weak status of most currencies against the US Dollar. Direct commodity exchange is not an option that has been followed by governments in the region yet it has a lot of potential

Table 1: Import and Exports of Cereals in Southern Africa (1990-1999)

Country	Average	Average	Average	Average
	Exports(Mt)	Imports(Mt)	Exports(Mt)	Imports(Mt)
	1990-1994	1990-1994	1995-1999	1995-1999
Mauritius	12833	226434.6	32388.4	258351.4
Seychelles	1.6	12257	0.4	14980.6
Madagascar	20139.6	119401	5171.2	134987.8
Zimbabwe	562466.4	450859.2	401840	265424
Botswana	3881.4	128746.8	3041.8	150244
Malawi	6505.8	378096.8	5557.6	264841.4
Mozambique	0	665690	0	446064.8
Angola	0	355778.8	0	452679.6
Namibia	0	129364	0	177104.2
South Africa	1529907	2157655	1515896	1730908
Swaziland	30	77641.8	1953.4	56625
Zambia	5171.8	267204.4	656	196077.6

Source: decoded and compiled from <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/stats/stat2.asp>

2.2 Causes of Food Insecurity

A combination of factors contributes to the state of food insecurity in the region. A fundamental cause is policy failure in terms of skewed trading systems, poor marketing, production incentives, access to productive land etc. Low

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productivity and recurrent droughts and floods have led to food insecurity in the sub-region. Firstly, the relative decline of agricultural production for domestic food and industrial requirements, vis-à-vis the growing needs in relation to demographic changes (population growth and urban relocation of vast segments). This led to increased food insecurity and impoverishment. Secondly, the increasing cost of food for the majority of the poor and the concentration of consumption among the relatively wealthier and better endowed countries, regions and social groups. Thirdly, the continued relative or proportionate decline in food production vis-à-vis production for exports and even for local agro-industrial activities, as a result of concentrated allocation of resources towards raw materials exports and because of the de-industrialisation. Fourthly, the declining returns or earnings from agricultural exports as a result of declining terms of trade and the protection of western markets have contributed to the poor performance of African agriculture. This has reduced African earnings from agriculture and constrained foreign currency and incomes (ibid).

The HIV Aids pandemic has also added another dimension to the food security problems; especially at the household level where it has removed able-bodied household members from production while at the same time the sick drain the little family resources available (human, financial). Thus data available indicates that a combination of poor economic policy, water scarcity, changing climate, incessant natural disasters, deteriorating soils and a burgeoning population have all contributed to food insecurity. Thus the land food security result is only a component of the broader issues that affect food security.

The gravity of food insecurity varies between countries (see also table 2) and within localities in specific countries. An important feature is that food insecurity is acute during periods of drought.

Table 2; The Extent of the Food Crisis in selected countries in Southern Africa (September 2002 to March 2003)

Country	%Pop. In need of Food Aid	Malnutrition in Children Under Five (%)	
		Wasting	Stunting
Lesotho	34	7.5	34.7
Malawi	31	6	49
Mozambique	3	5.5	43.8
Swaziland	28	2.2	40.0
Zambia	28	4.4	39.9
Zimbabwe	52	7.3	49.3

Source: SADC-FANR 2002a, 2002b.

Just to reiterate, the linkages between land and food security are couched within the land access, tenure security, agricultural productivity and sustainable natural

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resource management debate and this provides the context within which this paper has been developed.

3.0 The Land Question and Food Security

The legacy of the oppressive and racially based policies of colonial governments is still reflected in the inequitable land distribution patterns in southern Africa. For example, the extremely skewed land tenure are excessive in South Africa where white South Africans, who make up only 5% of the population, own almost 87% of the land (Moyo, 2000a). The mean amount of land held per person in South Africa is slightly more than one hectare for blacks and 1570 hectares for whites. Until very recently, approximately 4500 white commercial farmers in Zimbabwe controlled 31% of the country's land under freehold tenure or about 42% of the agricultural land, while 1.2 million families subsist on 41% of the country's area (ibid.). In Namibia, some 4000 white settler freeholders own 6400 farms with an average size of 5700 hectares each. On the other hand, communal farming covers 34 million hectares and supports 140 000 families (or about 50% of the population). In Malawi, mainly settlers of South African origin who produce the main exportables of that country occupy most of the land. In the 1920s, the decision by colonial authorities to issue legal titles to land resulted in the expansion of estate agriculture. Land alienation, through the grouping of freehold and leasehold titles, was most extensive in the southern region of Malawi where tea and tobacco estates were developed (ibid.). The situation is however different in Botswana where the state controls 96% of the land with 25% owned by the state and 71% being controlled through the tribal land boards. The contest in Botswana is around land owned by the state and land leased to diamond mining concessions with little regard of the security of minority tribal groups. Such land distribution dynamics shape the land and food security issues in the respective countries.

Given the importance of the rural sector in attaining food security and reducing poverty, it is surprising that the land question has not been on the mainstream agenda of SADC. The key land questions facing the SADC member states relate primarily to issues of distribution, utilization, tenure, land administration and adjudication. The nature and degree of the problem vary in each state depending on history, culture and political considerations. In general, SADC member countries face two distinct but interrelated sets of land issues: (a) imbalances in patterns of land ownership in the former settler colonial countries, notably South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia; and (b) issues related to tenure and land utilization in the formerly colonial (but non-settler) countries such as Botswana, Zambia and Malawi (Moyo 2000b). In the former, the key policy challenges pertain to efforts to reform existing inequities in ownership through policies of

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acquisition and redistribution. In the latter group of countries, the key questions relate to tenurial security, land administration, and the use of land in alternative (non-agricultural) sectors (ibid.).

Problems associated with land redistribution are derived largely from inequitable and limited access due to past colonial patterns of unequal ownership and the costly and cumbersome processes associated with the predominantly market redistribution processes. Issues of land utilization take on many forms. These include sustainable use of land resources, not only for agriculture but also in other competitive uses such as housing, industrial development and/or natural preserves. In some SADC member states, efficient utilization of land is undermined by excessive regulations, or in some cases, the lack of a clear and transparent legal framework (Moyo, 2000b). In some communities, existing land laws discriminate against customary forms of tenure, thereby limiting access of minority groups. The combined effect of these factors is increasing insecurity in tenure, which in turn hamper productivity and impede the flow of domestic and external investments.

In some of the member states, ineffective land administration is due primarily to the weak capacity of government agencies responsible for the reform processes. Many land departments lack a critical mass of qualified and experienced staff to provide proper technical leadership of land redistribution activities. Also, many land administrative processes are often government-driven, with little participation of national civil society institutions. This has hampered the performance of land reforms in several countries.

Efforts aimed at effective adjudication of land disputes are also hampered by the weak capacity of the judiciary. Lengthy court processes often result in delays in effecting compensation and restitution (Shivjy et al., 1998). In the former settler colonial countries of Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, racially based land ownership patterns have led to discriminatory land use policies and practices, and land tenure laws. Attempts to change these patterns have led to negative political and economic consequences. Notwithstanding, it is clear that there could be improved welfare if inefficient land use, especially among large-scale farmers could be addressed, tenure of security improved and access to land expanded to landless segments of the population.

The over-centralised and state control of communal or traditional land tenure and land-use regulation is a major problem in southern Africa (ibid.). Customary tenure regimes are in most cases not protected by statutory regulations because of the desire by governments to control communal land management systems.

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The contradiction between official land policy provisions and interpretations of custom vis-à-vis real life practices of customary tenure are a source of an emerging complex and competing range of demands for land tenure reform.

Recent dramatic attempts at land tenure reforms in the region include the land commission and policies evolving in Tanzania, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Swaziland, Namibia and Mozambique. These land policy trends provide clear evidence that the development strategies of structural adjustment programmes have encouraged alienation of land for foreign investment and the local elites leading to increased poverty among the people (Moyo, 1995). Land remains a major source of livelihood for most of the people in the region and will continue to be so, until the industrial and service sectors provide alternative opportunities for survival.

Inequitable access to land in southern Africa is a major constraint on poverty eradication because, for rural households, land is a natural resource for the reproduction of future generations (Moyo, 1998a). In addition to its value for agricultural purposes to realise subsistence production and cash income, land also provides basic household needs such as wood-fuel, medicines, housing material and game meat. High population densities in areas that include southern Malawi, the communal lands of Zimbabwe and Swaziland and former bantustans in South Africa and Namibia contribute to growing poverty. Given the unequal landholding patterns, rural poverty is found in all ecological zones in the region. Generally, the Human Poverty Index tends to increase from wetter to drier zones, especially where access to resources such as land and water is limited (Moyo, 1998a).

In most countries within the region, the land question reflects extreme imbalances of land ownership on the basis of race and class, as well as increased foreign control. Even in those countries such as Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana where historical legacy of racially based settler control of land had not dominated colonial struggles, increased foreign and black elite control of prime agricultural and tourist sites has emerged (Moyo and Tevera, 2000). The new wave of movement into various southern African countries by white South African and Zimbabwean large farmers and by European settlers during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the new land alienations by trans-national mining and tourist companies in the 1990s, have exacerbated the racial and foreign dimension of land concentration, even among non-settler post colonial states

3.1 Land, Livelihoods and Food Security Nexus

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Conflicts over land and other natural resources are a major threat to rural livelihoods. The history of liberation struggles in southern Africa is rooted in the land question. In the post-independence period, conflicts over land have not subsided. For the past two years, for instance, land occupations on Zimbabwe's large scale commercial farms have been one of the most visible forms of conflicts (see Moyo 1995; Moyo, 2000; Marongwe, 2002). However, over the last 15 years, land occupations have been experienced in urban and peri-urban areas in South Africa and in isolated public and private estates in various countries. Conflicts have the ultimate effect of reducing developmental efforts while in the worst situations they destroy community livelihoods. The history of the development of illegal settlements is essentially a livelihood based land conflict. Thus communities have also devised their own strategies of improving their livelihoods.

A major populist aspect of the emerging perspectives on land acquisition under market-led land reforms is that it should be community driven. In a market driven land reform such as in South Africa, communities are expected to develop local land reform plans, identifying the demand for potential supply and pricing of land (Deininger, 1998). The communities are expected to self-select the beneficiaries and to negotiate the purchase of such lands and, using partial land purchase grants and private credit, they buy and utilise the land (ibid.). However, rural communities still remain the least equipped to deal with the market and this has implications on the attainment of household food security.

Given the importance of the rural sector in attaining food security and reducing poverty, there is recognition by SADC policy makers that a vibrant agriculture and rural sector underpinned by land reform will provide the catalyst for improving living standards in member states. In this context, while strategies adopted by member states to promote growth and reduce poverty have, to a large extent, been pro-rural, implementation of these programs has been hampered by the lack of capacity and financial resources and a critical mass of experts to effectively tackle existing complex problems as well as emerging new ones.

4.0 Food Security and Macro-economic Policies

The macro-policy environment plays a key role in food security issues in southern Africa. Food security in the region is threatened by the increased drive towards export-based production (Moyo, 2000) while the continued decline of

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regional currencies² against major trading currencies has increased the cost of food imports. Declining terms of trade for major export commodities against increasing food import cost and increasing import of manufactured goods has been the major cause of current imbalances and reduced internal capacities to invest in production and social welfare.

The structural adjustment programmes adopted by the developing countries at the prescription of the IMF and World Bank have forced governments to adopt market liberalization policy reforms. Yet such programmes did not provide funding for financing land reforms and even changed the role of government in agricultural production and food security to that of facilitator rather than guarantor of food security as in the past. Mugwara (2002:8) argues furthermore, “Withdrawal of government support and services removed vital links and further marginalized the small farmer from agricultural production and markets. This left the small farmers more vulnerable to the increasing man-made and natural disasters (bad economic policy, conflict, cyclones, floods, droughts). Each shock therefore reinforced and made recovery chances more difficult and remote”.

The continued increase in external debts (which was exacerbated by structural adjustment programmes) means that quite a significant proportion of the national budgets has been channelled toward debt repayment. As individual governments continue to borrow, their capacity to finance land reforms from their own resources also declines. The growth of external debts (worsened by depreciation of regional currencies) has also meant less and less money being made available to other efforts aimed at improving food security.

The land reform debate has been held more at the macro-level of aggregate land transfers, rather than in terms of the demands, needs and expression at the community or household level. Where demand for and pressure on land can easily be identified at site level, with local fights over land such as in squatting, poaching and fence cutting, the associated attempts to achieve household sustainability are rarely directly extrapolated into a broader discussion on land policy reform (Moyo, 2000b).

5.0 Steps toward improving Food Security

² For the period between 1980-1996, all regional currencies have experienced a decline against the US\$ with the Botswana pula experiencing the least decline. The Mozambican and Zambian currencies were trading at 32.4 and 0.8 to one 1US\$ in 1980 respectively but by 1996, they were trading at 11293 and 1203 to the US\$ respectively (World Bank, 1997).

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Much of this paper has been argued that food insecurity in southern Africa arises as a result of a multiple of factors which include: inequitable land tenure systems; poor economic policy; water scarcity; changing climate; incessant natural disasters; deteriorating soils; a burgeoning population and the inability of communities to access other natural resources because of prohibitive policies and legislation. The task of increasing food security requires measures that address each of these problems. In the context of this paper, some of the critical strategies required in improving food security include the following:

- Improving access to land by the majority of the black populations which is supported by appropriate tenure policies (secure tenure, adequate and appropriate conflict management processes, appropriate land use practices)
- Improving agricultural production through expansion of cropping area by opening up virgin land and irrigation, increasing the cropping intensity or the proportion of cropping area in relation to other agricultural uses, and intensifying agricultural productivity through improved farming systems, inputs and varieties (Mugwara 2002).
- Embarking on policy and legislative reviews that ensure improved access to natural resources (land, forests, wildlife, water and fisheries and mineral) by the majority of rural populations.
- Investing in the development of strategies that encourage on-farm processing of food for the purposes of adding value to products and increasing the storage life of food.

6.0 Concluding Remarks

This paper has argued that in the southern African context, land is key to all sustainable livelihoods and food security debate. The majority of poor rural populations depend on the physical environment, particularly on the common property resources. This then highlights the importance of land tenure issues in sustainable livelihoods debates and as such land and its allied resources need to be held by communities under secure rights. The dominant perception is that tinkering with property rights negatively affects the investment climate due to uncertainty among investors regarding property rights and the declining collateral value of land. Inequitable access to land resources and the underlying imbalances in income distribution undermines the development of rural livelihoods in the region and the attainment of food security. Accordingly, land reform must expand the livelihood opportunities of communities through

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various strategies like diversification, secure land rights, expanding production etc. Measures meant to improve agricultural productivity and the development of appropriate post-harvest technologies need to be prioritised. Needless to say, more investment is required in irrigation development as food insecurity shoots to the pick during drought years.

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Annex1: Land Area and Population in Southern Africa

Country	Land Area (000) 1 ha	Pop. (1995) (Millions)	Urban Pop. as % of total (1995)	Pop. Density/per 1000 ha
Angola	126 670	10.8	32.2	82
Botswana	56 673	1.5	30.8	25
Lesotho	3 035	2.0	23.1	640
Madagascar	58 154	13.7	27.1	238
Malawi	9 408	9.8	13.5	1118
Mozambique	78 409	16.2	34.2	193
Namibia	82 329	1.5	37.4	18
Seychelles	-	0.1	65.1	-
South Africa	122 104	41.5	50.8	325
Tanzania	88 359	29.6	24.4	317
Zambia	74 339	9.0	43.1	120
Zimbabwe	38 685	11.0	32.1	278
Mauritius	203	1.1	40.6	5 374
Swaziland	1 720	0.9	31.2	470

Source: Compiled from World Bank 1997