

Review

A review of the poverty and food security issues in South Africa: Is agriculture the solution?

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Poverty and high levels of food insecurity have been some of the biggest problems facing the nation of South Africa since the early days of democracy. Whilst the black majority hoped for a more improved economy after the country's first democratic elections, the legacy of apartheid laws has made the reality to be a different story. Yes, it is true that the nation has continued to grow over the last decade but only the minority has enjoyed this growth at the expense of the majority. This paper attempts to review the situation in South Africa (SA) through discussing food insecurity and the different faces of poverty faced by the citizens of this rainbow nation. This paper covers a number of concepts, which include the concept of food security, poverty, their definitions and application in South Africa's context. Poverty situation and their indicators in South Africa were also discussed. The paper advocates for the development of small-scale agricultural system in rural areas, provision of financial support and commercialization of the farm produce as the means to reduce poverty, achieve food security and decimate the high rate of unemployment in South Africa.

Key words: Poverty, food security, smallholder agriculture, rural development.

INTRODUCTION

Food security

Food security is part of section 27 of the constitutional rights in South Africa (SA) (Department of Agriculture, 2002). Concerning these rights, the SA constitution states that, "every citizen has the right to have access to sufficient food and water, and that the state must, by legislation and other measures, within its available resources, avail to progressive realization of the right to sufficient food." The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1994 identified food security as a priority policy objective. As a result, the government reprioritized public spending to focus on the food security conditions of the historically disadvantaged people. In terms of definition, the concept of food security has many interpretations. For instance, at the 1974 World Food Summit, it was defined by the United Nations (1975) as "the availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices." This definition has been refined and re-refined over the years in an attempt to come up with a more common and comprehensive one that

encompasses all aspects of food security. For the purposes of this paper, the definition used was postulated by FAO (2002). It regards food security at individual, household, national, regional and global levels as being achieved when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. This definition was partly constructed from the earlier works of Campbell (1991) who insists that the acquisition of "sufficient food" in defining food security should be through socially accepted means such as purchasing without having to beg, rely on charity or steal. If anyone does not have access to such socially accepted norms with which to acquire the right quantity and quality of food at the right times, then, they are thus, considered as food insecure.

In short, all these definitions encompass just three main aspects which Latham (1997) documented as food availability, food access and food adequacy. The aspect of food availability means that the food required has to be available at the right time and in right quantities and quality. Therefore, food availability, though crucial in ensuring food security, does not guarantee it as this food

should also be adequate both in quantity and quality. One of the most vital objectives of being food secure is to lead a healthy life. With this in mind, Latham (1997) holds the view that not only should food be available in correct quantities and quality when needed but its supply should be consistent in order to sustain a healthy life in terms of ensuring proper growth, resistance or recovery from disease, pregnancy, lactation and or physical work. This means that the means used to acquire this food should be always available so that the required quality and quantities of food can be accessed at any given time, from anywhere.

The Department of Agriculture (2002) acknowledges the importance of these three aforementioned aspects of food security but stresses that these should exist within a certain food production system in order to achieve food security effectively and efficiently. This food system should have the capacity to produce, store, distribute and if necessary, import sufficient food to meet the basic food needs of the people. It should also be robust enough to reduce vulnerability to market fluctuations and political pressures, together with minimal seasonal, cyclical and other variations in access to food.

Poverty

According to the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII) (2007), poverty is a greatly contested concept as defining and measuring what is unacceptable in a society means a lot about the way we as humans would like things to be. In defining poverty though, consensus has been around including issues such as having access to a far wider range of resources than those necessary to ensure mere survival. These different resources are needed in order to promote social solidity and comprehensiveness which are inherent in the right to human dignity. Unlike food security which is limited only to having the right type of food in correct quality and quantities, poverty encompasses other important basic human needs such as safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. Shinns and Lyne (2004) regard these goods and services as essential to human well-being. To define the concept of poverty formally, Frye (2005) suggests this be done in two ways, namely, in absolute and relative terms.

Absolute poverty: To understand poverty in absolute terms, Frye (2005) proposes that reference be made to a "certain quantitative measure" which is used to distinguish the poor from the non-poor. Thus, the ability to purchase the minimal quantity of basic goods and services required for human survival should be used to distinguish the poverty status of different individuals in absolute terms (Frye, 2005). The fact that the concept is defined by measuring individuals' purchasing power means that income is a strong factor to be considered when ranking the absolute poverty status of people.

Anyone whose income is below a certain level or threshold is regarded as poor.

The Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 regards absolute poverty as a characteristic that defines most poor countries (SPII, 2007). Its existence in a community can be identified through the severe deprivation of basic human needs such as food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, education and information. Thus, it goes beyond lack of income to buy the minimum required food basket. From the social point of view, the United Nations (UN) (2009) says it manifests itself through hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, limited or lack of access to education and other basic services, increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life.

Relative poverty: A more formal definition of poverty should embrace more than just financial issues. Townsend (1979) elaborates and states that it should also emphasize the individuals' involvement and participation in the societies they live in. With this in mind, Townsend (1979) formally defines relative poverty as a situation that exists when individuals, families and groups in the population "lack the resources to obtain the types of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary or at least widely encouraged or approved, in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from the ordinary living patterns, customs and activities". Put in a different way, relative poverty attempts to understand inequality in terms of distributions of resources in a society (Frye, 2005). Unlike absolute poverty that measures the number of households that are unable to afford certain basic goods and services, this concept seeks to measure the extent to which financial resources of these households fall below an average income threshold for the economy. Thus, one's poverty status is measured against other people within the same society hence; the concept argues that an individual is poor when he/she is very much worse off than other people in their society.

Chronic poverty: This type of poverty encompasses both relative and absolute poverty. Instead of focusing on what actually results in poverty, chronic poverty is about the duration of that period of deprivation. Aliber (2001) describes it as a situation whereby people continue to live under circumstances of deprivation for a very long period of time, without any means with which to support themselves. Thus, under chronic poverty, the most important thing to consider is the duration of this state of "lack" more than what actually caused it. Mathole (2005) agrees with Aliber (2001) in that the household or

individual's inability to sustain themselves through difficult times due to factors like lack of opportunities shows the existence of chronic poverty.

A REVIEW OF THE POVERTY SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to the World Bank (2001), the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region has about 250 million people living in dire poverty. This translates to around 45% of the region's total population. Moikowa (2004) writes that the continent of Africa has the highest number of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), with 32 of the world's 48 least developed countries found in the continent. The majority of the poor in these LDCs live on less than \$2 a day and another handful on less than \$1 a day (World Bank, 2002). As a consequence, eight out of every 100 infants do not live to see their fifth birthday. Furthermore, nine of every 100 boys and 14 of every 100 girls who reach school age do not attend school (World Bank, 2002).

South Africa's poverty situation is not different in any way. Whatever type of poverty is studied, the fact remains that despite South Africa's abundance of resources, the skewed distribution of these resources has meant that the majority of the citizens are still deprived of their fair share of them. For this reason, it is not surprising that the poverty levels in SA have continued to rise even as the country continues to develop. As May (2000) puts it, the experience of South Africans is either that of outright poverty or of continued vulnerability to becoming poor.

At the present moment, there are so many South Africans in need of basic resources such as food, proper shelter and sanitation, clean water and health care facilities etc. The greatest wealth of the nation remains in the hands of the minority. Even with the attainment of democracy, racial segregation is still not a thing of the past. Literature from Mathole (2005) also points out that the most disadvantaged racial group in South Africa seems to be the black community, with 61% of its population classified as poor. This is followed by the coloureds (38%), Asians (5%) and Whites only contribute 1% towards the nation's poor population. Due to such a skewed distribution of the nation's wealth, Mathole (2005) thus, considers SA as a country with two countries, one being a Third World and the other is a First World. The most common notion is that the prevailing socio-economic situation in the country is a direct result of the past, the fruit of a historical harvest (Voster, 1991). Be that as it may, Mathole (2005) insists that the legacy of apartheid should not be taken to imply that the citizens of the country are nothing but just prisoners of their past. Instead, they have a vision that they should work towards accomplishing but without forgetting their past. Democracy has paved way for the previously

disadvantaged to be recognized in their respective communities and live better lives than before. Even though development policies have not accomplished a complete reversal of the legacy of apartheid, the SA government has tried to make "a better life for all" by making everyone equal and with equal resources regardless of skin colour. What should be noted though, is that poverty is not only based on race but other social characteristics such as gender. Oettle et al. (1998) provides evidence that the most affected households are those headed by females, especially, in the deepest corners of rural areas. It is true that male-headed households also carry the burden of poverty but women-headed ones suffer it the most for various reasons. This means that development initiatives and policies should also be implemented with women in mind to have a greater impact particularly in the rural areas whose most households are female-headed.

Symptoms of poverty in the South African context

In SA, poverty manifests itself in a number of ways. The first of these are the low income levels that poor people have. Other symptoms include the poor housing facilities, high infant mortality rates, high unemployment rates and poor health facilities etc.

Low income levels

Leibbrandt et al. (2010) maintain that poverty levels in SA have remained very high despite increases in the real income levels of people within different races in the country. Blacks have also benefited from these increases even though the increases have not been enough to get them out of poverty. To understand how income is distributed amongst different households in each of South Africa's Provinces, Statistics SA (2006) carried out a General Household Survey (GHS) in 2005. The results showed the existence of big provincial variations, with the more urbanized provinces having relatively low proportions of their populations living below the ultra poverty line. The poorest provinces were found to be those with large rural populations and little access to employment opportunities. Limpopo exhibits the most poverty-stricken profiles, followed by the Eastern Cape (Statistics SA, 2006). The Western Cape Province has the highest number of households with formally employed heads in spite of having nearly one in every five children (18%) living in very poor households in terms of earned income.

In the year 2002 alone, Woolard (2002) claims that eight of the 42 million people in the country were surviving on less than one US dollar (US\$1) per day.

During the same period, another 18 million people survived on US\$2 per day. This is consistent with the

Table 1. Number of adult and child beneficiaries of social grants from 2004 July, 2006.

Grant type	Number of adult recipients	Number of child recipients
Old age pension	2 162,990	---
War veterans grant	2,624	---
Disability grant	1 356,937	---
Grant in aid	28,441	---
Child support grant	---	7 410,760
Foster child grant	---	351,702
Care dependency grant	---	92,853
Total	3 550,992	7 855,315

Department of Social Development (2006).

World Bank's (2002) estimates of the extent of poverty in LDCs. Even though millions of people in SA are still poor twelve years into the new millennium, the government's social security system should be applauded for its huge contribution towards ameliorating poverty. This system offers grants to those that are too old, too young, too disabled or busy caring for disabled dependants to work for an income. The grants are in the form of cash transfers to a substantial percentage of the population and they are meant to help the beneficiaries with poverty alleviation. As such, the grants have become a major non-employment source of income and livelihood for most poor South Africans.

According to the Department of Social Development (2006), South Africa's social security system benefits at least 25% of the entire country's population each month (Table 1). It is therefore not surprising that the budget for the social security system provided for grant allocations of R57,7 billion in 2006/2007, R62,6 billion in 2007/2008 and R68,3 billion in 2008/2009 (Department of Social Development, 2006). Reports on the Intergovernmental Fiscal Review by the National Treasury (2005) further highlight that 88.5% of social development spending went to social assistance grants in 2004/2005. By the end of July 2006, the social grant beneficiaries were presented (Table 1). Table 1 show that children were the biggest beneficiaries of this grant system between 2004 and July 2006. However, other grant categories such as the old age pension, though not meant for children, are also used to assist the children by their recipients (Department of Social Development, 2006). Through these grants, the government is trying to get its people out of deeper poverty. Even though this has been achieved to a certain extent, it should be realized that these grants do not help all the poor. According to the Department of Social Development (2006), the reason behind this, is that only individuals with certain characteristics qualify. Thus, the system excludes those that are physically well but too poor and unable to get employment. Furthermore, the limited size of the government's coffers means that the amount given to each beneficiary, especially for the child support grant, is too small to contribute much towards a

better life.

Nevertheless, the social grants have become the greatest source of income for the majority of rural households in SA. Their role has surpassed that of smallholder agriculture by far. This is according to the findings by Fraser et al. (2003), Monde et al. (2005) and Van Averbeke and Hebinck (2007). White and Killick (2001) blame this behaviour of turning away from agriculture and towards social grants for income on the poor natural resources and high transaction costs in remote areas where physical infrastructure and services are inadequate. Consequently, these factors lead to low agricultural production which in turn promotes poverty in these rural areas. The majority of rural dwellers therefore tend to rely on social grants for their income and cultivate small pieces of land just to produce enough only for domestic consumption.

Low levels of health

A nation's health levels can be used to assess its poverty status. Health indicators that can be used to assess poverty are (i) Infant mortality rate and (ii) life expectancy.

High infant mortality rates

The prevailing low levels of health in most rural areas are another symptom of poverty. With the vast amount of resources in SA, one would expect the nation's health system to be first class but the reality is a nightmare to most citizens. The scars of the poor health system, especially, the rural areas can be seen through analyzing the Infant Mortality Rates (IMR) and the Under-five Mortality Rate (U5MR). Nannan and Hall (2010) define IMR as the probability of babies dying within their first year of life while U5MR is an overall measure of child mortality that usually encompasses the probability of dying during infancy, between ages 1 to 4 years and overall before the 5th birthday. These two measures of infant mortality are estimated per 1000 live births during

Table 2. IMR and U5MR for all SA provinces between 1988 and 1997 (N/1000).

Province	Infant mortality rate – 1988-1997 (N/1000)	Under-five mortality – 1988-1997 (N/1000)
Eastern Cape	61	81
Free State	53	72
Gauteng	36	45
Kwa-Zulu Natal	52	75
Limpopo	37	52
Mpumalanga	47	64
North West	42	56
Northern Cape	42	56
Western Cape	30	39
National average	45	59

Department of Health (1998).

the same year. Nannan and Hall (2010) recognized that both IMR and U5MR are the most widely used indicators of health status and socio-economic development because they reflect not only the child mortality levels but also the health status of the broader population. For this reason, the Department of Health (1998) used these two approaches to review the health levels for each of the nine provinces of SA between 1988 and 1997 as shown in Table 2.

The highest IMR (61) and U5MR (81) were observed in the Eastern Cape Province during the period studied. This was followed by the Free State with IMR and U5MR of 53 and 72 per every 1000 births respectively (Table 2). The lowest mortality rates in the country were in the Western Cape Province. While WHO's "Health for All" has a target of a maximum of 50 deaths per 1000 births, South Africa's IMR's average stood at 45 deaths for every thousand children born whereas the death rate for kids below the age of five was 59. However, in spite of this result, this figure hides the variations between population groups according to socio-economic status or region (Bradshaw et al., 2003). In fact, as stated by Bradshaw et al. (2003), this study does not give any details pertaining to the causes of mortality.

Despite an estimated decrease in the SA's IMR to 22.45 deaths/1000 population, the rate still remains very high especially, when compared with other developed countries like Japan whose IMR is 2.79 deaths/1000 live births. Although, HIV/AIDS is blamed for the death of at least 40% of children under the age of five in SA, the role of poverty should be acknowledged too. Murray and Lopez (1996) rated the top twenty specific causes of death in South African children under the age of five years in 2000. Poverty-related causes included in this list were low birth weight (11.2%), diarrheal diseases (10.2%), protein-energy malnutrition (4.3%) and neonatal infections (2.8%). Using these findings by Murray and Lopez (1996), Bradshaw et al. (2003) concludes that apart from the HIV/AIDS pandemic, most of the other

causes of death of infants are associated with poor socio-economic conditions such as the lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation, a problem prevalent in the Eastern Cape.

Low life expectancy

Life expectancy is an average estimate of the number of years citizens of a certain country are expected to live, taking all their socio-economic conditions into consideration. The number of years lived by people in different countries tends to differ. In 2009, the CIA World Fact book ranked South Africa as number 208 in the entire world in terms of the average life expectancy of its citizens that are expected to live an average of 48 years and 10 months. Women live longer than their male counterparts by 12 months. This was lower than the estimated global average of 66.57 years at birth (64.52 years for males and 68.76 years for females) for 2009 (CIA World Fact book, 2009). It was also very low especially when compared to the life expectancy of other developed nations like Japan, Canada, Singapore, France, Sweden, just to mention but a few, whose life expectancy remains at least at an average of 80 years.

South Africa is not the only country with a life expectancy below 50 years. Findings from the CIA World Fact book (2009) show that other African countries that are worse than SA include Swaziland, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, the Central African Republic, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. HIV/AIDS has been labeled as the greatest threat to high life expectancy levels in all these SSA countries. Of South Africa's nine provinces, those with the highest HIV prevalence rates also had the lowest life expectancy - Free State and Mpumalanga, both at 47 years followed by KwaZulu-Natal at 43 years. The leading causes of death were tuberculosis (TB), influenza and pneumonia, all common opportunistic infections

associated with HIV/AIDS.

Poor standards of housing

The housing crisis in South Africa has reached extreme levels with Statistics SA (2004) estimating that there were 1.376 million people living as squatters in 2004. One might say this is extreme but Hemson and O'Donovan (2005) are convinced that the worst is yet to come. One might say this is extreme but Hemson and O'Donovan (2005) argued that the worst is yet to come. These predictions by Hemson and O'Donovan (2005) have proven not to be so unrealistic after all as the number of slum buildings increased between 2004 and 2008 from 1.376 to 2.4 million. The city of Cape Town is one of the most affected areas in terms of housing problems as indicated by its 144 informal settlements. The Cape Times Newspaper (2007) has evidence that the majority of the inhabitants of these informal settlements in the city are the young, unemployed and poor. Indications are that this situation keeps getting worse by the day, with the housing backlog expected to reach 460 000 by 2020 (Cape Times Newspaper, 2007). According to May et al. (1995) and WHO (1997), most of these informal settlements are not only over-populated but have neither hygienic sanitation nor safe drinking water. WHO (1997) further states that such dwellings are also deficient in electricity, ventilation, food preparation and storage. Inadequate access to these resources brings rise to a range of health risks including diarrheal and respiratory diseases. Woolard (2002) reveals that by year 1999, the population in SA without clean drinking water and adequate sanitation was 47 and 38% respectively.

High illiteracy rates

The level of education amongst a nation's citizens is one way of determining that particular country's poverty status. In SA, Aitchison and Harley (2004) observed during the 2001 census that 18% of people aged between 20 years and older had no formal education at all. During the same period, 16% had only gone as far as primary education (grade one to six). In real terms, this translates to 4 567 497 and 4 083 752 people with no education at all and those with only primary education, respectively (Aitchison and Harley, 2004). This tells that at least a third of the nation's population could be regarded as illiterate, with Limpopo and Western Cape being the provinces with the highest and lowest levels of adult illiteracy, respectively.

High unemployment rates

Barker (1999) defines an unemployed person as an able-bodied person who is without work, is available to work

and therefore is seeking work. Factors such as lack of proper education and skills, low labour absorption rates by industries and change of seasons (seasonal unemployment) can be pointed as causes of high unemployment rates in most developing countries. However, this view goes against that of Harris and Todaro (1970) and Harris and Sabot (1982) who had earlier on argued that unemployment in most developing countries is voluntary. If this is the case, then its cure can be downgraded as a policy concern (Kingdon and Knight, 2001). To challenge Harris and Todaro (1970) and Harris and Sabot's (1982) stance on 'voluntary unemployment', Clark and Oswald (1994) assessed the factors behind unemployment by analyzing the utility levels of the jobless. Their findings were that unemployed persons in various countries have much lower levels of happiness or wellbeing than those in work. Consequently, the conclusion drawn is that unemployment is involuntary. This suggests that the greatest levels of poverty are mostly amongst the unemployed in South Africa. Snower and De La Dehesa (1997) thus remain convinced that large-scale unemployment in South Africa is responsible for poverty and inequality as it erodes human capital and also creates social and economic tensions. For the period of 1998, Kingdon and Knight (2001) documented that South Africa's unemployment rate was officially measured at 39%. By year 2009, the rate had dropped to 24.9% due to economic growth which later resulted in an increase in employment opportunities particularly in the formal sector. Major contributing industries were private households which comprised mainly of domestic workers (137 000 jobs) and the personal services (132 000 jobs). However, the recent global economic slump has made it difficult for industries to increase their labour absorption rate. As a result, there is still a great need for the unemployment problem to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Perhaps, this could be the entry point that the government, agricultural economists and other stakeholders can utilize to push for smallholder agricultural development to create employment and alleviate rural poverty. Furthermore, taking the agriculture route can also ease the pressure created in urban centres by the influx of rural migrants in search of formal employment as their source of livelihood.

ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN ADDRESSING POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY

South Africa is self-sufficient in food production (Machete, 2004; McLachlan and Kuzwayo, 1997). However, this self-sufficiency is only at national and not household level as shown by statistics from the National Treasury (2003) and confirmed by Terreblanche (2002). These two sources maintain that about 14 million people in the country are vulnerable to food insecurity whilst another 43% of households suffer from poverty. The impact of this problem is the major characteristic of people living in

rural areas, particularly, in the former homelands. Baiphethi and Jacobs (2009) and FAO (2004) provide evidence that not only do the former homelands have the majority (65%) of South Africa's poor but also 78% of those likely to be chronically poor dwell in such corners of the nation. With such high numbers of the poor staying in the rural areas, development economists have debated a lot on how to tackle this problem but without any consensus being reached. Eicher (1994) regards both middle and smallholder agriculture as a positive force in 'getting agriculture moving'. The same sentiment is shared by the likes of Lopez (2002) and Machete (2004) who also advocate for the use of agriculture as the main tool with which to tackle rural poverty. Mwaniki (2005) also argues that the key lies in increasing the agricultural profitability of smallholder farmers and creating rural off-farm employment opportunities. The inclusion of off-farm employment in addressing poverty is based on the notion that food insecurity in Africa is directly correlated with poverty hence it is necessary to not only alleviate poverty but also create wealth for the target population (Mwaniki, 2005). However, not every development economist is happy with this approach of using agriculture as the main avenue out of poverty. Nonetheless, the importance of smallholder agriculture in developing countries has been acknowledged globally.

Machete (2004) writes that in an attempt to find how best to use smallholder agriculture to drive rural development, two schools of thought have emerged. The first school of thought based its argument on the statistics published by the National Treasury (2003) that the majority of South African citizens, just like in many other developing countries, are poor and dwell in the rural areas. For this reason, this school of thought is of the opinion that since most of these rural poor are already involved in agricultural production or agriculture-related activities, investing in agriculture is the most effective way to reduce poverty. Thus, primary focus and investment should be directed towards developing the smallholder agricultural sector than anything else. To lobby for the support of this approach to rural development, advocates of this school used Kenya's example, as cited in Lele and Agarwal (1989) where smallholder farmers with farms of less than two hectares increased their share of national agricultural production from four percent (4%) in 1965 to 49% in 1985 after getting proper government support. In Zimbabwe, smallholder farmers tripled their maize production between 1980 and 1987 due to the launch of a government programme to boost maize and cotton production and development of hybrid maize varieties.

According to Eicher (1994), these farmers in Zimbabwe also managed to increase their share of the national marketable maize surplus from ten percent (10%) in 1980 to 40% in 1987, an improvement that made them to be referred to as "Africa's green revolution success story".

Whilst assistance is vital to developing the sector, aid should be geared towards the sustainability of the

agricultural systems. In order to achieve this, farmers should be trained on commercialization of their farm produce in order to maximize profits. In this way, the agricultural sector will become attractive to the unemployed. Once smallholder farmers become commercial, they tend to become more labour-productive there by creating enhanced chances of getting better financial returns for their efforts. However, even though Fan and Connie (2005) support this notion, they believed that in order to increase labour productivity, and therefore farmer's income, there should be either an increase in the land productivity or an improvement in the land to labour ratio. Dyer (1997) and Havnevik and Skarstein (1997) further uphold the view that this inverse relationship between farm size and labour productivity is only in the short term as further increases in farm size in the long run against a small labour force renders smallholders less efficient. As a result, for smallholders to become commercial and efficient in their operations, there should be a balance between the land resources available vis-à-vis the quantity of labour available to work on that particular land. Failure to strike this balance will result in the over- or under-employment of resources which in turn shows inefficiency.

Other indirect benefits of this initiative of commercializing smallholders include a reduction in rural-urban migration, while the rate of unemployment reduces drastically. Apart from the employment advantages expected to emanate from improving the sector, Delgado (1998) holds the view that smallholder agriculture is simply too important to human welfare and political stability in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). For this reason, it should neither be ignored nor treated as just another small adjusting sector of a market economy.

The second school of thought on rural development focuses on the provision of social services and other non-agricultural activities (Mwaniki, 2005; Orr and Orr, 2002; Ellis, 1998, 1999). The school believes that it is important for the rural folks to have gardens and farms especially, for purposes of household food production but non-farm enterprises should also be established to help in income generation (Machete, 2004; Mwaniki, 2005). Some of the non-farm income sources include old-age pensions, remittances, wages and family businesses. Other non-farm enterprises identified by Mahajan and Gupta (2011) include trading, agro-processing, manufacturing, crafting and construction. According to DFID (2002), some of these rural non-farm sectors are crucial in economic growth, rural development and poverty alleviation in that they act as growth engines in their own right by supplying urban, rather than rural, demand. In other words, instead of competing with urban enterprises, they actually complement them and thrive on increased urban connectivity. The DFID (2002) further accepts that having such secondary sectors in the rural communities could also provide cheap and effective goods and services thereby adding value to farm commodities. A good

example of value addition comes in the form of agro-processing which gives more value to agricultural output whose prices have always been regarded as very low when compared to those of products from other sectors such as the manufacturing sector (FAO, 2004).

In other words, the second school recognizes and acknowledges the importance of smallholder agriculture in fighting poverty but goes further to advocate for the supporting of other sectors that could run parallel and complement the agricultural sector. According to Haggblade et al. (1989), the growth of the small farms also stimulates the growth of business activities created through forward and backward linkages which in turn generates economic growth through production and consumption linkages. Van Zyl et al. (1996) share the same view as Haggblade et al. (1989) that the demand for production inputs from other sectors could be stimulated if there are gains in output resulting from investments in any given sector of the economy. If this happens, then it creates what is known as backward linkages. Backward linkages also exist if the farming households use the income they obtain from selling their produce to purchase more farming inputs (investment) or even spend it on other items that have nothing to do with agriculture at all (expenditure), such as television sets, private cars and furniture etc (Estudillo and Otsuka, 1999). By doing so, they support the manufacturing sector through their agricultural income. Dorosh and Haggblade (1993) highlight that the initial output gains also raise incomes and consequently, spur consumer demand for other goods and services (forward linkages). This means that there are some non-farm sectors that rely on agricultural produce for their survival (Estudillo and Otsuka, 1999). Thus, the agricultural sector, smallholder sector included, provides other sectors with raw materials and a market.

The two schools of thought seem to be both centered on agriculture. The first school is clear on its support for using the smallholder sector as the vehicle with which to drive rural South Africans out of poverty. As for the second school, one could actually conclude that even though it advocates for alternative income sources that are non-agricultural, it is also partly dependent on the success of the smallholder agricultural sector for the backward and forward linkages. Therefore, regardless of which school of thought one opts to support, the fact remains that agriculture will always have a critical role to play in poverty alleviation and rural development be it directly or indirectly.

As part of interrogating the different ways through which agriculture could be used to ameliorate rural poverty, one topic that has been greatly debated amongst development and agricultural economists is the inverse relationship between farm size and efficiency. The big question this debate has been trying to answer is whether smaller farms are more efficient than commercial ones. If they are, then, perhaps agricultural investment should

focus towards smallholders at the expense of their large-scale counterparts because of the former's efficient use of limited resources. General findings from the likes of Byerlee and De Janvry (2009) and Ngqangweni et al. (2001) suggest that smallholders can produce efficiently even when they are subjected to opportunity cost scenarios similar to their better-resourced commercial counterparts. This is usually the case with smallholder farmers that have turned commercial in their operation by producing for marketing purposes and not entirely home consumption. The Guardian (2012) attributes such efficiency to the fact that the opportunity costs for their land and labour are relatively low thereby making smallholders competitive food producers. In addition to producing enough food, smallholders also represent an emerging market opportunity for local and international agribusiness alike. All this suggests that smallholder agriculture could be as much of a solution to household food security as it is to providing efficient use of scarce resources.

In a country like SA where land for large-scale farming is very scarce, small-scale farmers can play a vital role in providing food for the nation without demanding too much of this scarce resource. This is because they are very efficient in terms of production per hectare due to their small farm sizes (Carter, 1994; Berry and Cline, 1979; Bharadwaj, 1974). Vietnam is a good example where smallholder agriculture has enhanced the food security situation since 1979. According to Pinda (2008), the country of Vietnam was a very food-deficit country and relied heavily on imports. However, through the development of its smallholder sector, the nation has since become a major food exporter and it is now the second largest rice exporter in the world. Furthermore, by 2007 the poverty rate had dropped to below 15%, compared to 58% in 1979 (Pinda, 2008).

However, the SA case is different. Baiphethi and Jacobs (2009) estimate that in South Africa, at least four million people engage in smallholder agriculture. Over the past few years, the main reason for farming has emerged as the need to supplement food rather than use farming as the main source of food in rural areas (Baiphethi and Jacobs, 2009). This conclusion is consistent with the situation in the Eastern Cape Province where Monde (2003) reports agriculture's contribution towards household income to be very unpretentious. According to Aliber (2005), on the average, smallholder agriculture contributes 15% of the total household income in SA, but for the poorest quintile the contribution is estimated at 35%.

All together, the high number of people trapped in the poverty circle in the rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has created an urgent need to find ways to improve smallholder agriculture in order to improve food security at household level. As a solution, Peacock (2004) recommends more investment in the smallholder agricultural sector. However, he also recognizes that

whilst paying much attention to liberalizing markets and creating macro-economic stability in order to stimulate demand for and prices of agricultural products has dominated the past few years, such policies are necessary but not sufficient. As such, Peacock (2004) further proposes the introduction of farmer-led initiatives as another solution. With these initiatives having been introduced, African governments need to increase their financial contributions to help the resource-poor farmers cultivate their land. In the opinion of Peacock (2004), governments also need to cooperate with NGOs to encourage farmer-led initiatives, work with African other governments to make the case for investment in smallholder agriculture and to lobby for farmers to be involved in the policy-making process. However, if this is to work, there should be a clear policy framework laid down to guide the stakeholders on the proper ways to assist the smallholder sector. This policy framework should be specific to the agriculture sector and allow for a harmonious working relationship between the farmers and both the public and private sectors.

Andriessi et al. (2007) uphold the view that any form of intervention in the sector should focus on at least one or more of the following; (1) increasing agricultural productivity, (2) enhancing access to resources and services, (3) getting competitive markets and (4) creating support institutions for smallholder farmers, particularly those based in the rural areas. In achieving increased yields, effort must be made to ensure that such improvements are sustainable and not at the expense of other natural resources. Therefore, Andriessi et al. (2007) are in favour of intensive research and development (R and D) programmes with the results being used as a starting point to inform the intended intervention policies. In consequence, as much as interventions are needed, they should be based on R and D findings and not the personal ambitions or desires of the interveners. In carrying out these R and D programmes, Andriessi et al. (2007) have suggested that priority should be given to integrated soil management practices, rain-water harvesting, high quality seeds, post-harvest management, mechanization, processing and value-chain management. Since all these requires level of expertise rarely possessed by the rural smallholder farmers, capacity building is very important to make sure that they are introduced to the farmers in a way that will be understandable (Andriessi et al., 2007).

SYNOPSIS

The paper has highlighted a number of critical issues pertaining to poverty and food security in SA and other developing countries. It reviewed the different definitions of the term food security as proposed by different individuals or organizations. A critical discussion of the food security and poverty levels in SA was made,

including the symptoms of the latter. However, the most sensible conclusion that one can draw based on the discussion made above is that poverty (or food insecurity) is a phenomenon that is going to be around for years to come, especially, with the ever-increasing global population coupled with land degradation, deforestation and global warming. Whilst efforts are being made by various governments or organizations to respond to the UN's MDG of halving poverty by year 2014, it is going to take a lot more than what is currently being done. At the same time, it is widely agreed that if proper interventions are put in place, smallholder farmers can contribute to a vibrant rural sector, where locally-produced products and services meet growing local demand. This, in turn, can spur sustainable off-farm employment growth in services, agro-processing and small-scale manufacturing. Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go if food insecurity is to be tackled using smallholder agricultural approach. The type of intervention needed in the smallholder sector is not easy to isolate due to the existence of various factors that affect the sector such as the skills levels, illiteracy and financial institutions etc. As such, formulating the "best" piece of intervention that will allow the smallholder sector to deliver what large businesses require, and in turn to encourage businesses to adapt their models to be inclusive and supportive of small-scale agricultural producers will take a while and also a number of different attempts. With poverty having so many faces, enabling the rural population to produce their own food is a good strategy but on its own, it is not enough to completely eradicate this problem. As such, the SA government has already embarked on a number of other poverty alleviation strategies such as cash transfers, provision of health care, education, housing, and basic services (water, electricity, sanitation). Regarding agriculture, it has also tried to stimulate the performance of the sector by introducing a few programmes like the Massive Food Programme in the Eastern Cape, the revitalization of irrigation schemes, supporting of farmer cooperatives, Farmer Support Programmes (FSPs), etc.

In conclusion, one might ask how then can improving the agricultural sector help ameliorate the different faces of poverty and also meet the different MDGs set by the UN. The answer is in the revitalization of the smallholder agricultural sector to improve the lives of the rural poor thereby relieving some pressure from the government when it comes to issues such as the extent of social grants, high unemployment and poverty levels and malnutrition problems etc. The fact that most of the food insecurity and poverty problems are experienced mostly in the rural areas of SA where the majority of the country's population is found means that agriculture, especially smallholder agriculture can be the correct remedy for these problems. This is because the sector promotes food security and enhances rural livelihoods at household level first where improvements are needed.

Once the household needs have been met, then the agricultural sector's effects can trickle down to the rest of the country. One could therefore say that the arguments raised by the two schools of thought regarding dealing with poverty are very valid. Policy developers, development economists, the government and all other role-players should find roles that suit their resources and abilities within the two schools. This is to say that as others concentrate on boosting the productivity of the smallholder farmers, others could perhaps focus on how to stimulate the forward and backward linkages so that there is synergy between the sector and other critical sectors. Focus will be on agriculture together with all the complementing sectors to achieve fast and overall success.

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