

# LOCATING POLICIES IN THE DAILY PRACTICES OF THE LAND REFORM BENEFICIARIES: A CASE OF TWO LAND REFORM FARMS (MIGHTY AND WHALES) IN THE NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE

Malebogo Phetlhu

PO Box 249, George 6530. Tel: 044 803 3711. Fax: 044 803 3709. Cell: 078 329 0120.

E-mail: [malebogop@elsenburg.com](mailto:malebogop@elsenburg.com)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Despite intensive and vast research on the issues surrounding Land Reform in South Africa, little is known about “what is happening on the Land Reform farms” and what the perceptions of the Land Reform beneficiaries are about the programme land reform (LRAD). A range of studies have argued that land is not a simple, one-dimensional asset (Shipton and Goheen, 1992). According to Anderson (1999), land is not only used for production purposes and survival, but also plays a role in gaining control over other land users and owners (Anderson, 1999).

Land reform (redistribution, restitution and land tenure reform) plays a role in the (re)defining of social and personal identities and power relations (Berry, 1989). Land thus needs to be understood as having multiple and potential contrasting meanings such as; political, cultural, social, religious and economic.

Ownership over land is in this way embedded in complex relations of power as well associated with wealth, status and meaning. This means that land reform is not an easy linear process, but rather a complex and conflictive process (Moyo and Hall, 2007).

The critical issues regarding land reform can be grouped in two categories. One relates to the way land reform is designed: state and market led. A second category of issues pertain to the multiple meanings of land. The critique on market and state led land reform (Borras, 2003) is that it is supply driven which often introduces economic inefficiencies as not the ‘best’ farmers become targeted as new owners. It is on the basis of these different arguments that land reform needs to be seen as a complex process, rather than as the straightforward implementation of policies.

## 2. CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to provide an answer to the question “what is happening on the land reform farms in South Africa”. This rather general question is in my view legitimate as there are not many studies that provide detailed everyday life accounts and analyses of land reform experiences. James (2007) and Van Leynseele and Hebinck (2008) are among the few exceptions that give a detailed accounts of land reform experiences. Most other studies, reports and articles are rather teleological, that is largely explaining land reform from the views and expectations of the authors and researchers or from the policy documents that have laid down the criteria for assessing the outcomes.

By formulating and answering this more general question I aim to bring about an understanding of; what happens on Land reform projects based on accounts of different actors who engage with other social actors (notably the land reform beneficiaries, but also extension agents, consultants, and so on) to work towards a “common goal” of improving their livelihoods and contributing towards the economic development. Such an analysis aims to show how the social actors re-define and re-shape the land reform policy through their interaction and involvement in the land reform projects (McGee, 2004; Long 2004).

Similar to James (2007) and Hebinck & van Leynseele (2008) my argument is that land reform poses a set of questions that cannot be answered with reference to political economy or neo-liberal frameworks of analysis. What is missing is an analysis of land reform that locates land

reform in the context of every day practices of the land reform beneficiaries. This led me to centre my analytical framework and methodology on a number of principles or perspectives.

1. Land reform projects are made up of different people (beneficiaries) who are expected by the “policies” to work towards a common goal of improving their livelihoods and ultimately reducing poverty and levels of unemployment. Land reform is thus best understood as an organized or planned intervention; an intervention that aims to reach goals set by government and society. In South Africa this amounts to a mixture of poverty alleviation, human rights and a fair distribution of land (and other assets) to undo the injustices of the past. This is laid down in the so-called RDP programme accepted by the first democratically elected government in 1994.
2. Secondly, Policies are not linearly interpreted and implemented. Outcomes of policies are rather diverse, complex, multi-dimensional and sometimes even conflictive and contradictory.
3. Third: Land reform may thus have expected but also unexpected consequences. This implies that land reform may create social space for change in many different ways and forms.
4. I have adopted an actor oriented approach to understanding land reform as this enables me examine how social actors who are local and external to specific arenas encounter one another and develop strategies to cope with changing circumstances. The social actors I encountered, the so-called land reform beneficiaries, are interlocked in struggles over “resources, meanings and institutional legitimacy and control” (Long 2004). The advantage of such an approach is that its concepts are “grounded in the everyday life experiences and understanding” of actors, despite their social standing.

Land reform can thus best be understood if looked at in a non linear way and in the context wherein it takes place. There is therefore a need to look at the different factors that define land reform and not only the neoliberal and political economic perspective. There is therefore a need to integrate into these views (neoliberal and political economy) the actors through which this program has to be achieved, hence the actor oriented approach of analysis. There is also a need to have a good understanding of the policies which are set to govern these actors in their involvement in land reform to see how effective they are in meeting the needs of these actors. Next to these it is important to realize that all these take place in spaces and can therefore have multiple meanings which goes beyond the extremist views that looks at land reform only in a linear way.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Methodologically my approach hinges on identifying who the key actors are that play a role in the land reform projects, and it also examines how and where they interact in order to make land reform work. The analysis of the dynamics of land reform is situated in everyday lives of the social actors involved. The logical consequence of this approach was twofold. One was that a case study approach was required and the second one is that the focus was on collecting social actors' views and accounts of their experiences with land reform. The research was done in an area around Kuruman which is one of the towns of the Northern Cape Province. The farms selected for the study were picked purposely because of the limited number of land reform farms in the Kuruman area.

### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The original question, ‘What is happening on the land reform projects in Kuruman remains an important one but can now be rephrased into questions like: what categories of social actors are relevant for the understating of land reform dynamics at Mighty and Wales? How do land reform’s beneficiaries interact and where?’

## 4.1 Sub Questions

- What happens when the land reform beneficiaries interact?
- How do the land reform beneficiaries interpret the land reform policy?
- How do the beneficiaries pursue their goals in the land reform projects?
- What new meanings do the beneficiaries bring in to the policy?

Purposive sampling was used to select the informants, because there was a need to know from the different categories of beneficiaries why they are doing what they do and to also find out from the extension officers about the background of these projects. During the interviews unstructured and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Questions were posed to any beneficiary who was found on the farm. The aim behind this was to get information on what different beneficiaries' experiences were on the farm.

Interviews were done only with individuals and not in a group as it allowed convenience in terms of following up on stories. The inactive members and those who had quit the project were followed upon, in their homes. Snow ball sampling (Bernard, 2006) was used, for the members that had quit the project or were inactive. According to Bernard (2006) this method is useful when trying to find out "who people know" especially in small populations, which is in this case the beneficiaries of Mighty farm. This sampling method was therefore used in locating the other members that I could not find on my own.

Observation was used as another method of collecting data. This method involved attending meetings with the beneficiaries, spending time on the farms with beneficiaries while at work, and to also generally observing what was going on in the farms. Observation was useful in confirming the information that was gathered through interviews with the beneficiaries. The land reform policy and the available project's constitution were consulted to get more information on the goals and objectives of the land reform policy and those of the beneficiaries of land reform.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study took an ethnographic approach on two Land reform farms in the Northern Cape Province; observing and recording how the beneficiaries of the two farms perceive and implement land reform policies, and how they develop strategies to make "sense" out of these policies. An analysis of this study brings to the fore the beneficiaries' interpretation of "what land reform is," and how it can be beneficial for them. Studying the Mighty and Wales land reform projects brings forth the evidence that land reform is a conflictive and ambiguous programme, which aims to reach a lot of objectives by government policy.

However, these objectives by government policy makers fall short of looking at the reality of the everyday experiences of the beneficiaries of the land reform project. The ambiguity and conflictive elements of this programme is shown by the beneficiaries who despite the clearly stipulated policy objective still bring in their own meaning and understanding, into the land reform programme. The study shows that this understanding does not agree with government execution policy to a large degree. The conclusion of the study is that, the use of neo-liberal framework does not wholly identify the deeper social driving factors that influence the interpretation of Land reform Policies. There is therefore a need to concentrate on these studies, so that ethnographic issues may be incorporated into the land reform policies.

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