

Diagnostic research to determine the reasons for failure of land reform projects

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1. Introduction

The National Development Plan (NDP) bases land reform on principles that are anchored on providing enabling environments for rapid transfer of agricultural land to black beneficiaries without distorting land markets or business confidence in the agri-business sector; ensuring sustainable production of transferred land and human capabilities; establishing monitoring institutions to protect land markets from opportunism, corruption and speculation; aligning land-transfer targets with fiscal and economic realities, and offering white commercial farmers and organised bodies the opportunity to significantly contribute to the success of black farmers through mentorships, chain integration, preferential procurement and meaningful skills development. The NDP positions land reform as a lever for unlocking the potential for a dynamic, growing and employment-creating agricultural sector.

South Africa's Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) sub-programme focuses on two distinct parts that deal with agricultural land redistribution and operate according to different financial mechanisms, target groups, and delivery systems. The distinct parts focus on 1) transfer of agricultural land to specific individuals or groups; and 2) commonage projects that aim to improve access to municipal and tribal land primarily for grazing purposes¹.

The Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, 2019 report asserts that insecure tenure wanes investment in production and propose secure tenure as an important catalyst for intensifying agricultural production. In terms of agriculture, the report proposes prioritising the alignment of land reform with agrarian reform, food security, and broader economic development and advocates for the support of all farming models that are geared towards achieving food security, increased production and export-led growth². Li et al. (2023) argue that land acquisition for agricultural purposes can help combat poverty, food insecurity and promote economic progress, hence serves as a crucial instrument for the survival of, especially, rural based communities³.

1.1 Problem statement

The Presidential Advisory Panel report, 2019 asserts that new approaches and rural land tenure models that are developed ought to “advance sustainable economic development of rural communities in a manner that will intensify successful agricultural production and food security”. Despite this assertion, the South African Government has not adequately yielded the envisaged outcomes after acquiring land under various land reform programmes since 1994 as some of the land acquired for food production such as the land reform projects like Zebediela, and the Magoebaskloof tea plantations have not been adequately used for commercial food production.

¹ https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/land-redistribution-agricultural-development.pdf

² https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201907/panelreportlandreform_1.pdf

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10807767/pdf/pone.0296332.pdf>

1.2 Purpose of the synthesis

It is, therefore essential to synthesise information to identify successes and failures experienced in the agricultural and land reform programmes, and draw lessons and utilise the insight of the review to provide recommendations and guide how future reforms and policies can improve outcomes.

2. Methodology

The rapid reviewing method will be used for these projects⁴. The Rapid Review (RR) method draws its guidelines from systematic review methods. It is a modified version of systematic reviews that maintains critical aspects of the systematic reviewing process to improve transparency and trustworthiness. The RR method has been adopted because of the understanding of the policy environment that the DPME works in and the urgent need for credible evidence to inform policy and decision making. RR methodologies are therefore, practical and responsive instruments that can help bridge the policy and research gap by synthesizing relevant evidence, and respond to policy questions to inform decision-making timely, while maintaining credibility and technical quality (Haby, Chapman, Clark, Barreto, Reveiz, & Lavis, 2016).

... A rapid review is a type of systematic review in which components of the systematic review process are simplified, omitted or made more efficient in order to produce information in a shorter period of time, preferably with minimal impact on quality. Further, they involve a close relationship with the end-user and are conducted with the needs of the decision-maker in mind (Haby et al.2016, p.8).

The Rapid Review method was adopted because it is pragmatic and a more efficient approach that provides a summary of the best available evidence and help decision making timely⁵. The agricultural and land reform questions are critical areas of concerns in the country. The proposed synthesis drew evidence from previous studies conducted mainly in the public sector. A number of documents and reports were shared by the sector experts within the DPME. These documents were identified by the sector within the DPME that focuses on Agriculture and Land Reform and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). Reports with specific land reform projects were accessed from Ex Community Property Association Act, DALRRD, CRLR, PLAAS (Ruth hall, and Ben Cousins) and DALRRD and provincial departments.

The table below provides a summary description of the documents that were shared for the synthesis. It provides the objective of the report or document and the colours depict the extent to which the document content was aligned with the synthesis questions.

⁴ Khan, K.S., Kunz, R., Kleijnen, J. & Antes, G. (2003). Five steps to conducting a systematic review. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 96, pp. 118-121

⁵ <https://ebm.bmj.com/content/28/6/412>

Table 1: Summary description of the reports and documents synthesized

Name of document	Summary objectives/ purpose of the document/report	Relevancy to the synthesis
1. Consolidated FSPU Report Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, RSA (July, 2022). Overall report of the visits to 18 farmers production support units, at least one per province from December 2021 to June 2022.	The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) as part of the integrated monitoring process, the DPME undertook FPSU sites' performances validation exercise on the interventions, outcomes and impacts that are part of MTSF 2019-2024. These visits are aimed at validating the FPSUs' interventions to economic and spatial transformation outcomes and impacts.	
2. Farmers Production Support Units Monitoring (March, 2024)	Presentation of the Farmers Production Support Units Monitoring	
3. Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, RSA (March, 2023). Wetland / Landcare Sites Visit Report	The overall objective of the visit was to monitor the implementation of the degraded lands rehabilitation as per Revised MTSF 2019-2024 Priority 5 (Rural Economy and Environment) outcomes, interventions and targets. It was further to ascertain the value for money for interventions.	
4. Rural Infrastructure Development (RID) Desktop study, June 2024	The objective of this study is to determine how rural development can happen in an effective, efficient and economical way, if the mandate to develop Rural areas belongs to all three spheres of Government and within all Departments	
5. Deka, B., et al. (2020). Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme. National Treasury: Economic Services cluster	Given the quantum of resources devoted to rural infrastructure, it is important to evaluate the impact of these interventions against the set objectives. It is also critical to ensure the proper measurement of performance to properly analyse the effectiveness of spend.	
6. Human Sciences Research Council (July, 2006). Rural municipality case studies: Land reform, farm employment and livelihoods. Summary of research reports supported with funding from the National Treasury, USAID, and the Human Sciences Research Council	The objective of the current research project is to clarify the economic case for redistributive land reform. This is motivated by the perception that, notwithstanding progress in respect of land reform delivery and certain aspects of policy development, land reform is making little economic impact at the level of communities or indeed the country. And yet, the need for land reform appears as great as ever.	
7. The rural economy transformation model: one district, One agri-park/every	A Draft policy framework	

municipality a CRDP site, Draft policy framework version I		
8. Wiggins, S. (n.d.). Agricultural and rural development reconsidered: A guide to issues and debates. Overseas Development Institute	This report sets out the shifts in thinking, debate and approaches on agricultural development over recent decades. It charts the way in which these have come full circle, from the primacy of agriculture as central to rural development in the 1960s, to dwindling investment in the 1980s, and onward to its renewed presence on today's national development agendas.	
9. Genesis (February, 2014). Implementation Evaluation of the Restitution Programme. Final evaluation report by Genesis	The purpose of this evaluation is to assess whether the Restitution Programme has been implemented efficiently and effectively, and to identify how the Programme can be improved for the next phase of restitution.	
10. The rural economy transformation model: One district, one agri-park/every municipality a CRDP site. Draft policy framework, version I	This report sets out the shifts in thinking, debate and approaches on agricultural development over recent decades. It charts the way in which these have come full circle, from the primacy of agriculture as central to rural development in the 1960s, to dwindling investment in the 1980s, and onward to its renewed presence on today's national development agendas.	
11. SALGA (2022). National rural development strategy	The Rural Development Strategy focuses on providing local governments with a framework for supporting rural development within their areas. The study outlines the overall concept of rural development before providing a framework for local governments on how to approach and support rural development within their respective areas.	
12. Rural Infrastructure Development (RID) Desktop study, June 2024	The objective of this study is to determine how rural development can happen in an effective, efficient and economical way, if the mandate to develop Rural areas belongs to all three spheres of Government and within all Departments	
13. Outcome 7 close out report 2014-2019 Q3 and Q4 - Rural economy - priority two and five midterm review 2024. (June 2019 to March 2024)	The report will provide insight into the into the progress made by the government and the people of South Africa in relation to the implementation of the NDP 2030, as implemented through the MTSF 2019-2024. The focus of this report is on the midpoint of the electoral cycle 2019-2024, December 2021, and should reflect on the key challenges that continue to confront government and society, and most importantly, on the key action that should	Mid-term review with relevant content

	be implemented during the remainder of the term of office of government.	
14. Hemson, D., Meyer, M. & Maphunye, K. (January, 2004).	The strategy implicit within the document is to extend the bounds of existing policy by arguing that additional resources have to be made available to meet both the MDG and the standards set out in the RDP and (among other things) that democratic participation and an accent on the development of the organizations of civil society has to be part of rural transformation.	
15. Qobo, M. (August, 2021). AAMP plan progress status summary: Agriculture & Agro processing Master Plan Status Update	A presentation providing a comprehensive status update of the AAMP development and coordination and explaining the next steps and timeline to finalize the AAMP plan	
16. Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP)	A 5-page document providing a summary of the comprehensive rural development programme and plans	
17. DG cluster FPSU improvement plan	A progress report on the implementation of improvement plan on the Farmer Production Support Units (FPSU) approach to rural economic infrastructure development	A memo routed to the DG cluster
18. Integrated sector monitoring DALRD NT May 2024 JES	Workshop presentation of the integrated sector monitoring framework	Presentation with relevant content
19. Integrated-rural-development-sector-strategy-2023	A rural development-sector-strategy	
20. Invest-Rural-Master-Plan-20-May-2021	A Rural-Master-Plan	
21. Jacobs - sustainable rural development: employment and household farming. Human Science Research Council (HSRC-EPD), EDD Conference- 31 May 2011	A 7-page summary with graphs on rural development	
22. Jacobs - Value chains to drive rural development	HSRC Review with a topic on Value chains to drive rural development	

For this phase of the synthesis, the RKM team relied solely on the documents shared by the sector experts. In the second phase of the project, sourcing of information will be guided by the search criteria, research questions and aims of the rapid reviews.

2.1 Proposed questions for the rapid review

- What has contributed to the success and failure of land reform programmes to contribute towards agricultural production and food security?
- What have been the main contributors to the success and failure of the specific projects that have been identified by the DALRRD?
 - Which components of these projects are challenging, and why?
 - What structural issues have been identified that make these projects not attain their objectives?
 - What components have been found to contribute to the success of these programmes and why?
 - What are the legislative impediments towards the success of the land reform programme?
- What case studies can be drawn to provide examples of the successful land reform programmes that have contributed towards agricultural production and food security?
 - What lessons can be drawn from these experiences?
- What pillars of success have been identified from the land reform projects?
- What legislative or operation procedures can be adapted or changed to improve project successes?

2.2 Limitations of the study

The synthesis report was only based on the documents noted in the table above, and as illustrated in the table, most of the documents were not relevant in responding to the posed synthesis questions. Almost all the documents were grey literature and from the public sector. It was also noted that most of the documents and studies were not able to provide insight on what makes agricultural and land reform projects work or succeed but they tended to provide insight on the successes of the programmes and challenges than on what makes them work.

To bridge this gap, the second phase of the synthesis will focus more on identifying what makes agricultural and land reform projects successful or work and draw on case studies that provide examples of programmes that have contributed towards agricultural production and food security. The second phase will also draw on studies not only from SA but also other countries, especially in African countries – both formal and grey literature.

3. Strengths of the land reform programmes

The land restitution process in South Africa has achieved notable successes, particularly in fulfilling its core mandate of restoring land rights and providing compensation to dispossessed communities. Some of the key achievements of the programme are the establishment of a structured legal process managed by the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR). This process has facilitated the restoration of land ownership to numerous communities, offering a measure of justice and reconciliation. Moreover, the CRLR's consistent presence throughout the settlement process has helped build trust among claimants, as evidenced in specific cases like the Vusi Oakford settlement in KwaZulu-Natal, where the CRLR played a central role in resolving community disputes over land use and ownership post settlement.

The Land Restitution Programme in South Africa has achieved significant progress in several areas, contributing to the restoration of land rights and supporting rural development. A major success is the notable progress in settling a substantial number of restitution claims. This effort has played a crucial role in addressing historical inequities by returning land to dispossessed communities, thus contributing to social justice and reconciliation (Genesis Analytics, February 2014). The success in processing claims has been pivotal in making land restitution a viable means of addressing past injustices.

Furthermore, the development of strategic frameworks like the "One District, One Agri-Park" model and the establishment of Farmer Production Support Units (FPSUs) has been central to promoting rural economic development. These frameworks aim to create a more integrated agricultural system, which is essential for sustaining land restitution outcomes. By focusing on regional agricultural hubs, these initiatives seek to enhance local production, support smallholder farmers, and strengthen the agricultural value chain, thus fostering long-term economic growth in rural areas (Draft Policy Framework, n.d.).

The evaluation of land reform initiatives has also highlighted the importance of improved data management, effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, and stronger stakeholder coordination. This recognition represents a positive step toward addressing structural challenges within the land reform process, enabling a more transparent and efficient system for handling restitution claims (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024). It underscores the progress in understanding and addressing key issues that impact the efficacy of land restitution and rural development efforts.

The economic potential of initiatives like the FPSUs has also been recognized. FPSUs have the capacity to significantly contribute to economic growth by reducing poverty, addressing inequality, and creating job opportunities. While the impact of FPSUs on employment, investment, and production have not been fully realised, their role in driving rural economic development is promising.

Some FPSUs have already been successfully established, providing a foundation for agricultural production and support services in rural areas. This progress demonstrates the potential of such initiatives to become key components of the agricultural economy, supporting local farmers through improved infrastructure and access to resources. Additionally, the procurement of equipment for these FPSUs marks another step forward, offering the potential to boost productivity and enhance the overall agricultural capacity of rural communities. If these resources are utilized effectively, they can significantly contribute to improving local farming practices and increasing output.

In conclusion, the successes of the land reform programme in establishing the necessary infrastructure and the Land Restitution Programme in settling claims, developing strategic frameworks, and establishing FPSUs highlight the progress made in addressing historical injustices and promoting rural development. These achievements, coupled with a recognition of the structural challenges that remain, provide a solid foundation for the continued evolution of land reform policies in South Africa. Addressing the gaps in data management, stakeholder coordination, and effective use of resources is crucial for sustaining these gains and achieving long-term economic and social benefits for the country.

4. Challenges of the Land Reform Programme

The rural economy in South Africa is undergoing significant transformation through various initiatives aimed at revitalizing agricultural production and land reform. However, challenges within the sector continue to undermine these efforts, particularly the growing inequality, displacement of farm dwellers, and exclusion of small and new producers from formal markets (Draft Policy Framework, n.d.). Despite the existence of active land markets, the potential for redistributive land reform to promote broader economic development remains untapped (HSRC, 2006).

The challenges that have hampered the effectiveness of the Land Reform Programme and the Farmer Production Support Units (FPSUs) are significant and multifaceted and deeply rooted in operational, structural, and governance issues that have limited their effectiveness in driving agrarian transformation and rural economic development. Despite substantial investment from the government across national, provincial, and local spheres, the performance of FPSUs has not met expectations (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023). The Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) 2006 report on rural municipalities highlights the complexities of SA's land reform, particularly in farm employment, livelihoods, and redistribution. It illustrates that despite some progress in land redistribution, there is little evidence of the economic impact at the community or national level (HSRC, 2006).

Communal Property Associations (CPAs) are critical stakeholders in land reform programmes but the majority of CPAs are struggling due to aging leadership as the general demographic in CPAs is over 50, indicating a generational gap and lack of younger leadership to drive these associations forward. Many CPAs have become dysfunctional, and lack government support, which have contributed to the

deterioration of these institutions. CPAs suffer from mismanagement, corruption, and internal factionalism, which have led to the failure of various land reform programs, and negatively impacted productivity and success of land reform efforts (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024).

One core issue affecting land reform outcomes is the lack of coordination, poorly defined roles and responsibilities among the various government departments involved in supporting land reform initiative. This is compounded by the absence of formal agreements like Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) and Service Level Agreements (SLAs), which have resulted in inefficient resource allocation, poor planning and minimal accountability for the outcomes (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023). The Midterm Review (June 2019 – March 2024) asserts that the silos within departments in the agricultural and rural development sectors have led to inefficient resource allocation, duplication of efforts, and failure to implement environmental licenses and master plans effectively.

Additional insights from the Wetland/Landcare Sites Visit Report (March 2023) by the DPME underscore the lack of collaboration at local and district levels. The absence of participation from municipalities and the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) highlights the broader challenge of non-collaboration between different spheres of government, especially in community-based projects, and is indicative of the systemic and pervasive governance issues that undermines the success of rural infrastructure programmes (DPME, March 2023). In one instance, the lack of participation from district and local leadership led to severe setbacks in wetland and landcare projects, with vandalism, community infighting and theft further undermining the sustainability of these initiatives.

Similar sentiments were elicited in the restitution programme regarding insufficient collaboration between key stakeholders—such as the Deeds Office, Surveyor General, and local government, which delay processes like land verification, claimant research, and legal approvals. The absence of formalized relationships and coordination between these agencies and the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) results in lengthy delays and inefficiencies and has negative effects on the post-transfer phase, where inadequate support undermines the sustainability of land transferred to claimants. Handover of claims to post-settlement support is often uncoordinated and delayed, and therefore disrupts productive land use and diminishes long-term development prospects. While some support is provided for land restoration, financial compensation claimants receive little to no financial education or decision-making support, which increases the risk that compensation will be misused or wasted (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

Private sector involvement is minimal, therefore funding constraints and community infighting compound the challenges, preventing the completion of vital projects and creating uncertainty and unemployment concerns among beneficiaries once the project ends (DPME, March 2023). There is,

therefore a clear need for rethinking policy to better align with the realities of rural livelihoods and the economic challenges faced by beneficiaries. The HSRC (2006) report asserts that until land reform is viewed as a tool for providing access to land for low-income households, not just for transforming beneficiaries into commercial farmers, its impact will remain limited.

Governance issues are pervasive, with weak internal controls, poor leadership within community-based cooperatives, and conflict among community members contribute to the underperformance of the FPSUs. The leadership of FPSUs and associated cooperatives often lack the necessary training in financial management, conflict resolution, and business administration, leading to further inefficiencies. In the restitution programme, inadequate training, high staff turnover, poor performance management systems, and weak institutional knowledge stifle the programme. Frequent disruptions from non-restitution-related tasks, such as ministerial requests or community conflict resolution divert staff from their core mandate (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

Poor governance, coupled with inadequate monitoring and institutionalization of FPSU operations, has resulted in non-productive infrastructure and missed opportunities for agrarian transformation (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023). Moreover, the lack of alignment between FPSUs into broader rural development plans and broader economic and spatial planning efforts have limited the program's ability to drive local economic development. The lack of alignment and integration into local government development plans and insufficient community involvement has resulted in vandalism, theft, and poor infrastructure management (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023). Infrastructure challenges, such as the absence of processing plants and inadequate water resources, have further hindered the potential for job creation and value-added initiatives.

These, therefore underscore the need for better governance, collaboration, alignment and integration across government spheres, and a need to address policy ambiguities to create an investment-friendly environment (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023).

The FPSU programme has also fostered a dependency culture among beneficiaries, with farmers relying heavily on government support and showing little meaningful initiative to contribute to the upkeep of FPSU facilities. This has created bottlenecks, restricting new entrants into the system and impeding the broader objective of effectively distributing land and supporting economic development (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023). Further compounding the issue is the limited participation of national experts in key areas such as economics, engineering, and cooperative management, leading to a lack of strategic oversight and development at FPSU sites (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023).

Another major challenge is the underutilization and the maintenance of assets and infrastructure. Despite significant government investments, many FPSUs struggle from low productivity due to poorly

managed resources, underutilized equipment and land, leading to wasted government investments. There is little incentive or accountability for farmers to manage the equipment properly, as demonstrated by instances of equipment loss, delayed returns, and a general lack of maintenance. This inefficiency is exacerbated by the absence of proper asset registers, maintenance plans, and usage logs, which prevent proper tracking of equipment, further undermining sustainability and productivity of FPSUs (DPME, July 2022; DPME, March 2023).

As highlighted in a 2024 comparative study on rural infrastructure development, while Agri-parks, Agri-hubs, and FPSUs are critical to rural development, they are not fully aligned with broader national interests and strategies such as the Agricultural and Agro-processing Master Plan (AAMP) and Operation Phakisa. They, therefore lead to duplication of efforts and exacerbation of these inefficiencies, resulting in missed opportunities for rural economic development (Deka et al., 2020; DPME, July 2022).

Deka et al. (2020) identified the lack of accountability and transparency in the expenditure and implementation of the Land Reform Program, the Farmer Production Support Units (FPSUs) and Agri-parks as the major obstacles. The report argues that the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, and Rural Development (DALRRD) has been stretched and its capacity to manage and execute large-scale programmes is severely limited. Reports, such as those from the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP), raise concerns about the lack of technical and engineering expertise within the department, leading to mismanagement of funds and incomplete or misaligned projects. For example, despite an expenditure of R3.8 billion over a five-year period (2015/2016 – 2019/2020), National Treasury has observed that many Agri-parks have not provided value for money, with some projects either uncompleted or built in areas where they are not needed (Deka et al., 2020).

The inconsistent tracking and reporting of expenditure over multiple financial years have further hindered any meaningful evaluation of these projects. Without proper financial data, it has been difficult to assess whether these projects have met their intended outcomes. Additionally, the non-financial data that the department does provide is often insufficient for a comprehensive impact analysis. As a result, projects such as Agri-parks and FPSUs often fail to meet their targets, with no clear way to measure their effects on rural communities, employment, and economic output.

Key insights from the HSRC (2006) report illustrates discrepancies between land reform projects and their intended outcomes. For instance, in a specific rural municipality, the number of land reform projects varies between 33 and 69, reflecting inconsistencies in record-keeping by the Provincial Department of Agriculture. Many of these projects consist of “bailouts,” with farmers using land reform grants to pay off existing debts, further obscuring their developmental value. Of the recorded projects, several have failed, and some have been liquidated, pointing to systemic weaknesses in support and policy alignment. The limited success of the “114 farmers” within the municipality—those

who have been assisted in land reform initiatives—shows that while some demonstrate resilience and growth, the overall economic integration into commercial farming remains minimal (HSRC, 2006).

According to the CASP review, the program's wide scope allows it to spend on anything that could plausibly be seen as "developmental" without any clear indicators of how this spending benefits households and communities (Deka et al., 2020). This broad mandate, combined with ineffective performance indicators, makes it nearly impossible to determine whether these programmes have had any tangible impact on rural economic development.

The Restitution Programme in South Africa, as reported in the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR) Annual Report for 2012/13, seeks to restore land rights or provide alternative equitable redress to claimants. The strategic goal of the Programme is to achieve restitution within the framework of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) baseline allocation. However, the evaluation of the Programme's success has been hindered by a range of inconsistencies related to performance measurement, particularly concerning the number of claims settled, finalized, and outstanding, and arising from shifts in definitions, reporting practices, and claim management strategies (Genesis Analytics, February 2014). From 1994 until 2006, a claim was defined as "settled" when land rights were restored. However, after 2006, the CRLR began counting the number of claim forms lodged instead of focusing on land rights restoration. This shift in definition altered how claims were reported and made it difficult to compare performance across different time periods (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

Another factor complicating performance measurement is the exclusion of urban claims from public reporting since 2006, due to a directive from the Minister of Land Affairs. Although these urban claims continued to be settled, they were not reflected in public statistics. Moreover, the CRLR began phasing claim settlements between 2006 and 2009, considering a claim as settled if at least one phase was completed. This practice changed in 2009, when a claim was counted as settled only once all phases of a project were finalized. These adjustments in how claims were defined and counted make it difficult to establish a clear, consistent measure of success (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

A major complication in assessing the performance of the restitution programme relates to unresolved claims that are considered technically "settled," even if they are not finalized because of flawed claimant verification or difficulties in tracing claimants. These discrepancies indicate that the number of claims settled is not a reliable indicator of the programme's success, as it does not account for whether claimants have received formal restitution or equitable redress. One of the key shortcomings is the inconsistent and overly simplistic measure of success used by the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR), which focuses primarily on the number of claims settled without considering the quality of these settlements or the legal, social, and economic outcomes they produce (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

In addition to definitional changes, post-settlement disputes have caused claims that were once considered settled to be retracted and reprocessed. For example, claims settled between 2006 and 2009 were sometimes withdrawn and replaced with new approvals in 2012/13 under Section 42D of the Restitution of Land Rights Act. Furthermore, some projects were moved between provinces due to boundary demarcations, and statistical records on claims settled were amended after initial approval dates. These factors, combined with discrepancies in data, have made it challenging to create an accurate picture of the restitution programme's performance and therefore, hinder consistent measurement and planning (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

The absence of intermediate output measurements makes it difficult to track the progress of claims at different stages in the process and therefore hampers the ability to identify problem areas timely, budget effectively, and allocate resources efficiently. Poor quality research and verification processes were identified as one of the most significant barriers to efficient claim settlement. Incomplete or inaccurate research often leads to claims being sent back for revision, and causes costly delays, unnecessary court referrals, and conflicts among claimants. Legal integrity of the process is compromised by not tracking outputs like research completion, claimant verification, and land transfer approvals (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

The lack of reliable data and measurable outcomes extends to the broader rural development mandate, which is so expansive that it becomes challenging to hold the department accountable for any specific results (Deka et al., 2020). The absence of accountability for missed outcomes and unachieved impacts has stalled progress toward achieving key government objectives and commitments outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP) and State of the Nation Address (SONA) (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024).

Critical barriers to the restitution programme's efficiency is the absence of a robust Management Information Systems (MIS) and clear, standardized operating procedures. The current paper-based system is inefficient, lacks transparency, and makes it difficult to track claims through their various stages. Without an integrated electronic system, there is no reliable way to ensure accountability, track performance, or manage staff effectively. As a result, claims often become stagnant, and the system becomes vulnerable to inefficiencies, duplication of effort, and poor-quality outputs, and leads to frustration because of poor communication during the settlement process and the time taken to resolve claims as well as a lack of awareness of the various stages in the restitution process.

Even though the National Land Acquisition Committee (NLAC) was established to facilitate the post-settlement support for claimants, support is seen as coming too late in the process because there is a lack of continuity between the teams involved in the initial restitution process and those providing post-settlement support, which result in inefficiencies (Genesis Analytics, February 2014). The goals of post-settlement support often do not align with those of the Rural Enterprise and Industrial

Development (REID) teams, creating gaps in accountability. This misalignment means that other entities like the Regional Management Support Offices (RMSO) become involved in activities not initially within their scope (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

The HSRC (2006) report underscores the larger systemic issues in the land reform programme – from inconsistent government policies and limited funding, to weak integration with broader economic development strategies. It highlights how ongoing evictions and the lack of access to land negatively affects municipalities' efforts to improve housing and services. It argues that without a clearer model that reconciles land prices, grant systems, and the needs of rural beneficiaries, the land reform programme will continue to struggle in promoting sustainable livelihoods and economic inclusion.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The need for land reform remains pressing due to declining agricultural employment, a critical source of rural livelihoods (HSRC, 2006).

The Land Reform Program, Farmer Production Support Units (FPSUs), and other rural infrastructure initiatives face critical challenges, including poor governance, inefficient resource use, and inadequate stakeholder coordination. These structural weaknesses have hindered their effectiveness, with key issues such as mismanagement, underutilization of resources, and a lack of strategic planning leading to underperformance (DPME, March 2023). As a result, these initiatives have struggled to deliver on their goals of rural economic development and agrarian transformation.

The evaluation of the Restitution Programme further highlights these challenges, pointing to inefficiencies like inconsistent data management, unclear operating procedures, and financial bottlenecks. Such issues have led to delays, cost overruns, and compromised legal processes, obscuring the true extent of the Programme's achievements (Genesis Analytics, February 2014). Without addressing these deficiencies through significant reforms, the long-term sustainability and impact of these programmes will remain doubtful. Effective reform measures include stronger intergovernmental collaboration, clearer role definitions, and enhanced integration with broader national economic plans (DPME, March 2023).

In addition, the lack of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system for these programmes has hampered progress. Reliance on quantitative success indicators, such as the number of claims settled, does not capture the qualitative dimensions that affect programme integrity and outcomes. A more robust approach is needed—one that balances quantitative and qualitative measures to track progress, ensure accountability, and optimize the use of resources. A more accurate indicator of success would be to measure the number of claims finalized, meaning those that are both settled and financially closed, which would provide a more realistic and transparent assessment of progress in restoring land rights and providing equitable redress to claimants. Targets for claim resolution should also be based

on the actual capacity of the CRLR to settle claims, rather than being driven by political considerations or arbitrary timeframes (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

By implementing structured data management systems, focusing on realistic targets, and providing post-settlement support for beneficiaries, the potential for meaningful rural development can be realized. Without a thorough re-evaluation of key performance indicators, a more coordinated governance structure, and clearer accountability mechanisms, these programmes are unlikely to achieve their intended outcomes of rural economic development and agrarian transformation.

Persistent challenges such as mismanagement in CPAs, declining agricultural investments, and poor sector coordination must be addressed to realize the goals of rural development. By aligning government efforts, improving support for land reform beneficiaries, and focusing on outcomes rather than processes, the rural economy can make meaningful contributions to South Africa's growth and development trajectory (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024).

In summary, while the Restitution Programme has made significant strides in settling claims, the issues related to data inconsistencies, financial commitments, and definitional ambiguities have obscured the true extent of its achievements. A lack of clear operating procedures, inefficient data management systems, and poor human resource practices have led to widespread delays, cost overruns, and challenges to legal processes in many land reform programmes (Genesis Analytics, February 2014). Many of the restitution settlements remain incomplete in terms of financial closure, legal compliance, and claimant satisfaction. Moving forward, the implementation of structured data management systems, transparent reporting practices, and realistic targets will be essential to enhancing the effectiveness of the programme and ensuring that its strategic objectives are met (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

To address these persistent challenges and enhance the performance of the rural economy, the following recommendations are proposed:

- I. **Improve governance, administration and management:** Develop policies for governance and operational issues, including standard operating procedures (SOPs) and clarify roles and responsibilities for all personnel and stakeholders involved to ensure accountability and effective operations communication systems and appoint a site oversee for daily operations to improve adherence to improvement plans, and manage basic maintenance.
 - Review and document the restitution process through a detailed SOP manual, covering every stage from claim lodgement to settlement and distribute it widely and supported by training to ensure uniform application across all claims - Deviations from SOPs should require formal authorization.
 - Establish land reform projects (i.e. AgriParks) in regions with proven agricultural potential to ensure efficient use of resources and use a phased approach to help develop a successful model before broader implementation.

- Develop comprehensive improvement plans for underperforming programmes (i.e. FPSUs), and tailor solutions to the specific needs and context than a standardized approach.
 - Prioritize the settlement of outstanding claims before addressing new claims, ensuring that the process is methodical and efficient.
2. **Revise land reform policies:** Revise and streamline land reform policies to provide greater clarity and consistency, restore investor confidence in the agricultural sector and encourage capital investment in machinery and infrastructure (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024).
3. **Strengthen cooperative development, coordination and integration:** Support the formation of cooperatives that can aggregate production, reduce costs, and improve bargaining power for small producers (Draft Policy Framework, n.d.). Ensure that all government departments and social partners, from local to national levels, including local communities, traditional leadership and local councillors collaborate more effectively in planning, aligning resources and interventions and executing land reform programmes to ensure all needs and perspectives are considered.
- The Presidential Coordination Council and the Inter-Ministerial Committee on land reform should drive a coordinated approach to rural development, ensuring that all relevant departments are fulfilling their roles.
 - Strengthen coordination through structures like the District Development Model (DDM) to optimize the use of public resources and funds, improve the execution and monitoring of rural development programs and minimize redundancies and positively impact people's lives (DPME, March 2023; Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024). Proper engagement can help mitigate risks like dissatisfaction, misalignment, and resistance to change.
 - Hold workshops with relevant departments (DALRRD, SALGA, COGTA) to align strategies and leverage the infrastructure of the Comprehensive Rural Development Program (CRDP) to ensure efficient planning and improve resource allocation for better outcomes.
 - Ensure the institutionalization of Farmer Production Support Units (FPSUs) across different government levels for better integration and support.
 - Encourage the involvement of young people in agriculture through specialized training programmes and community engagement initiatives to build a new generation of farmers and ensure a sustainable agricultural workforce.
 - Address structural barriers that limit women's participation in land reform and agriculture, and ensure equitable access to opportunities and support.

4. **Clarify roles and improve accountability:** Clarify roles and responsibilities within land reform programmes to enhance accountability and ensure that all stakeholders understand their roles in programme implementation and hold relevant stakeholders accountable for the non-delivery of key projects, such as FPSUs, Agri-Hubs, and agro-processing facilities. Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that non-achievement of outcomes is addressed (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024). Improved management information systems (MIS) can help enhance tracking and accountability, and strengthen interagency coordination (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).
 - Consolidate various management information systems into a single, web-based MIS to track and manage the restitution process and enable real-time monitoring, document management, and performance oversight, and providing clarity on responsibilities at each stage.
 - Clearly define the CRLR's role as limited to the legal process of managing restitution claims, with a clear starting and ending point to prevent it from being drawn into post-settlement issues and improve internal communication about these roles and processes across departments and to the public.
5. **Address Land Ownership and Security Issues:** Resolve land ownership issues and conclude land claims to prevent conflicts within CPAs (Communal Property Associations) and ensure stable operations.
 - Ensure security of tenure for FPSU beneficiaries to encourage long-term investment and commitment to the success of the FPSU.
6. **Increase access to finance and land:** Facilitate small and emerging farmers integration into the agricultural economy and improve their access to affordable financing options and land, particularly through streamlined land reform initiatives that address historical inequalities (Draft Policy Framework, n.d.).
7. **Provide post settlement support and build beneficiary capacity:** Enhance support for land reform beneficiaries through targeted capacity-building efforts, ensuring they can successfully manage and utilize the resources provided and provide post-settlement support for all claimants, particularly those receiving financial compensation to ensure long-term success and sustainability of the programme (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).
 - Prioritize the development of a clear post-settlement support strategy to provide structured assistance to smallholder producers
 - Integrate post-settlement support earlier in the restitution process between the teams involved in the initial restitution process and those providing post-settlement support to ensure teams are familiar with the claims, the claimants, and the specific needs for ongoing support (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).

- Ensure that all approved land reform projects receive post-settlement support and secure water rights, critical for their sustainability.
 - Deliver fit-for-purpose training for farmers, covering production, marketing, cultivation practices, basic equipment maintenance, and operational management, and support
8. Align post-settlement support with the agroclimatic potential of the area and base support measures on thorough analyses, such as soil and economic potential.
9. **Enhance training and capacity building:** Invest in training government personnel, particularly those working at the local level, to better understand and implement agricultural and rural development initiatives and ensure effective implementation and oversight of rural development programmes (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024).
- With the support of agricultural economists and extension officers, train farmer and cooperative to develop viable business plans to support decision-making and guide farmers and cooperatives on the use of resources and procured equipment and services.
 - Provide training on budget management in alignment with the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) to strengthen the financial capacity of provincial offices.
- **Enhance rural infrastructure:**
10. **Efficient resource utilization, infrastructure maintenance and the integration of environmental sustainability:** develop a maintenance plan as part of the FPSU's exit strategy to ensure sustainable operations after government support ends and ensure that agricultural and rural development strategies are environmentally sustainable, with a focus on conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable resource management (Draft Policy Framework, n.d.).
- Invest in transportation, storage, irrigation, and market facilities to improve access to national and global markets and strengthen the value chains for rural producers (Draft Policy Framework, n.d.).
 - Develop **functional models** that will ensure optimal use of equipment, resources and infrastructure in line with farmers' needs and establish **clear plans for securing procured equipment** to prevent loss or damage.
 - Implement asset registers, utility logs, and maintenance records to track equipment use, ensure efficient operation, and enhance accountability.

11. **Promote agro-processing and value-add:** Promote the development of agro-processing facilities within Agri-Parks to add value to raw agricultural products, create jobs and stimulate local economies (Draft Policy Framework, n.d.).
- Focus on interventions that contribute to reducing unemployment, addressing inequalities, and alleviating poverty through integrated efforts beyond just land reform.
12. **Focus on impact reporting:** Shift the focus from reporting on activities and processes to outcome-based reporting by measuring real changes in people's lives and actual socioeconomic impact on rural communities. This will require developing more robust key performance indicators (KPIs) to track the socioeconomic impact of rural development programmes (Midterm Review, June 2019 – March 2024).
- Develop a robust data management system and a comprehensive monitoring system that track and measure intermediate outputs and both quantitative and qualitative indicators that assess the integrity of the claim settlement process, the sustainability of land use and claimants' satisfaction. Reliance on quantitative measures fails to reflect the deeper, qualitative issues that undermine the integrity and impact of the restitution programme (Genesis Analytics, February 2014).
 - Develop an integrated monitoring framework to coordinate the reporting of progress and align efforts across departments.
 - Develop specific performance indicators covering aspects like research quality, adherence to procedures, and settlement outcomes and link performance management with the MIS to enhance accountability and track progress against targets
 - Provide comprehensive employment, investment, and production reports for each programme (i.e. FPSU) to assess impact, return on investment, and alignment with NDP 2030 goals.
13. **Duplicate best practices** from successful FPSUs to those that are struggling, ensuring consistent quality and operational standards across all sites.
14. **Develop a theory of change:** utilise the insight from this report and other relevant material to develop a Theory of Change (ToC) to guide agricultural and land reform programmes

It is posited that a land reform programme that promotes sustainable livelihoods and economic inclusion will require a clearer model that reconciles land prices, grant systems, and the needs of rural beneficiaries. The HSRC (2006) report also assert for a land reform programme that is perceived as a tool for providing access to land for low-income households, not just for transforming beneficiaries into commercial farmers to yield improved outcomes.

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Approval of the Progress Report



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