

## **The Context of Smallholder Farming in South Africa: Towards a Livelihood Asset Building Framework**

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**ABSTRACT** The need to support smallholder farmers by governments in developing countries has taken centre stage globally. In this regard, the South African Government's New Growth Plan puts agriculture, particularly the development and support of new smallholder farmers as an important area for development that could impact positively on poverty alleviation and household food security. In this paper, the researchers critically analyse the context of smallholder farming in South Africa, dynamics of market access and challenges facing smallholder farmers' agency. Analysis denotes how institutional dynamics related to socio-economic conditions of the farmers; the policy landscape and agro-climatic zones where farmers are located in South Africa are not well-g geared towards positioning smallholder farmers for meaningful participation in the market. Furthermore, the historical marginalization of smallholder farming is explored to illicit challenges of the duality of farming in South Africa which is characterised by a well-developed commercial farming sector and a poorly developed smallholder sector. The paper proposes an asset-building approach linked to social-protection and institutional readiness as a basis for enhancing market access and farmer agency in order to address poverty and inequality in South Africa.