

The Impact of De-agrarianisation on the Socio-economic Well-being of Rural Inhabitants in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The aim of the present research paper was to examine the impact of de-agrarianisation on the socio-economic well-being of the rural population in South Africa. The data for the present research was procured from a larger study that was conducted in Msobomvu Community, a rural area in the Eastern Cape. Further, the data was collected using an interview guide and structured questionnaires. The findings show that inhabitants in this rural area face numerous socio-economic challenges which all manifest from the sharp decrease in agricultural activities. These findings indicate that the process of de-agrarianisation is a recurring challenge which has crippled the attempts to enforce a stable food security at household level. The decrease of people who involve themselves in agricultural activities has led to quite a number of effects which include dependency on government support, increased crime rate, health problems, poverty and threats to food security at household level. It is, therefore, recommended that policies that are in line with boosting agriculture should be enforced and at the same time the government should increase funding for agricultural projects so as to motivate people into agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

De-agrarianisation is a global, regional and communal recurring challenge affecting many livelihoods especially in the developing nations which bear the brunt of western colonialism. It is a glaring concern affecting many nations in the developing world and South Africa is not an exception. Bryceson (1996) explored that the de-agrarianisation is viewed as a process of economic activity re-orientation, occupational adjustment and spatial re-alignment of human settlement away from strictly agrarian patterns. The history of South Africa is mired in race intermingling and class conflict since the arrival of the White settlers in the country in the 15th century (McKendrick 1987). Prior to this, people relied on agriculture for their survival and to take care of those who were less fortunate with much emphasis on the family. However, with the arrival of the settler farmers, this trend was disrupted. This process was driven by restrictions on access to land in South Africa, a scenario that

came with colonialism. These developments brought about the displacement of the local people into reserves where the soil fertility did not support efficient agricultural activities.

Besides, during this era of colonialism, peasant agriculture, with its subsistence orientation and relatively low yields, was discouraged in favour of agro-industrial production also known as commercial farming (Baiphethi and Jacobs 2009). Commercial and cash crop farming forced people to move away from their homes to work on the farms. Decades of government discrimination and manipulation clearly succeeded in forcing the black African populace into a position of dependence on the European capitalism, entrenching their position as a servile proletariat (Pickles and Wood 1992). However, there are numerous reasons why de-agrarianisation is still happening in the rural Eastern Cape, chief among them is the flight of human capital to the urban centres, leaving the aged and the sick in rural areas (Mabhena 2011). The flight of human capital to the towns and cities has been compounded by the lack of employment opportunities and income generating related activities in rural areas (Mabhena 2011). Further, farming has not been engrained in the way of life of the youth of today and has been viewed as a job of elders and the uneducated.

Chitonge (2013) viewed that the issue of agriculture being a sector on secular decline has been invoked in various ways to support as a

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way to support the argument that there is little prospect for viable livelihoods in subsistence farming. Clara and Du Toit (2007) are of the view that even after independence the government did not take significant steps towards promoting subsistence farming but in actual fact they promoted dependency by focusing on giving people grants (Tanga and Gutura 2013a; Tanga and Gutura 2013b; Tanga and Gutura 2014c; Tanga 2008) which is working as a disincentive to work. It has been suggested that increased access to social grants provides poor households with alternative income which in turn reduces the pressure to embark on subsistence agriculture (Chitonge 2013).

The fact that agricultural production is no longer given the value that it should carry, in and around rural communities, is on its own a problem that carries explanations to why the social and economic status of most rural communities in South Africa are undergoing a process of retrogression. In this consideration, the present research seeks to examine the causes and the socio-economic impacts of de-agrarianisation in rural communities in South Africa. The research, therefore, acts as an advocacy platform to advocate for policy environment that will be helpful in addressing de-agrarianisation in rural areas.

Overview of Literature Review

Agricultural production plays a crucial role in the sustaining and development of human social and economic welfare (Manona 1999; Chitonge 2013). It is the functional base for industry and many life sectors depend on it for existence and continuity. In that regard, the decline in agricultural productivity grounds uncertainty in most areas of production and service provision (whether public or private) and this generally cause a lot of challenges on the socio-economic well-being of the mass, more specifically on the underprivileged groups in society (Manona 1999). The process of de-agrarianization in South Africa has caused a lot of changes on the social and economic structures of most rural communities and this has raised a lot of concerns in many people.

Causes of De-agrarianisation

Undeniably, factors that have led to a sharp decline in agricultural activities are numerous

and these have struck the Eastern Cape amongst other provinces in South Africa. The Apartheid system being chief amongst other factors (Plaatje 2002). During the apartheid system the reduction in agricultural activities was exacerbated by the Natives Land Act No. 27 of 1913 which disenfranchised Black people from owning or renting land outside the reserves (Plaatje 2002). The adoption of apartheid as a state policy after 1948, made the situation for the black Africans to move from bad to worse with policies favouring the minority group. The apartheid government perpetuated the view that the homelands were labour reservoirs, but simultaneously overlaid this notion with separate development ideology (African Encyclopedia 2010). These reserves played a contributory factor in the decline in farming as the peasant farmers were robbed of their land. However, Koch (2011) postulates that this sharp decline in agricultural activities further led to the gradual loss of the importance of subsistence agriculture, wealth, and entrepreneurial skills and even the experience. This necessitated the massive urbanization that occurred as a result of this measure as people seek to find an alternative way of survival.

Chapman and Tripp (2004) commented that, despite the importance of agriculture to the rural households, people are searching for diverse opportunities to increase and stabilise their income. This has left the rural dwellers not solely dependent on agriculture. Ellis-Jones (1991) quoted in Mtero (2012) states that the decline of agriculture in Eastern Cape has portrayed agriculture, especially cropping, as hopelessly, unproductive and failing to meet even the 'subsistence needs' of rural households. In addition of salt to injury, the climatic variations and social support grants have contributed immensely to the sharp turn down in agricultural activities in the country. As Misselhorn et al. (2012) postulates that not only does climate change threaten food security, but it has unpleasant effects on human activities that determine food production, supply and management leading to a situation whereby the resource poor suffering the most from chronic poverty. The social support scheme as represented by the social grant did not help the situation any better but, it has created a dependency syndrome in people who are no longer interested in farming to sustain their own lives. However, Clara and Du Toit (2007: 5) note that, 'agriculture production has declined

because of the state support in form of pensions and grants has made rural people lazy.’

Socio-economic Impacts of De-agrarianisation

However, succinctly the process of de-agrarianisation has led to a number of socio-economic impacts which include poverty on the livelihoods of rural folks. Bryceson and Van der Laan (1994) point out that when people in rural areas are less involved in agricultural activities, there are increasing levels of poverty. Further, unemployment has become rampant as a result of the reduction in agricultural activities. Manona (1999) also insisted on the fact that when people distance themselves from tilling the land, social and economic needs increase whereas supply will be limited. In this view, many people will seek to meet their needs through searching for employment in towns and this causes a lot of pressure on the national economy. Moreover, poor nutrition increases due to the unavailability of healthy food and also causing a threat to health. Manona (1999: 76) investigated that “the potential of the land in terms of agriculture is now under-utilised leading rural people to depend largely on purchased food, not on what they can produce.” Emphatically, findings derived from the research conducted in Ongeluk-snek villages by Mtero (2012) also stress the point that the respondents often remarked that they do not have the power and resources to use in their fields. Thus, the people have tended to prefer resources at their disposal to meet their immediate needs like buying maize meal as opposed to buying maize seed for planting.

Theoretical Framework

The present research is anchored on economic theory of the labour market which suggests that grants may undermine labour force participation by reducing the opportunity cost of not working. This economic theory holds that living in a household with a member who is receiving social grants is correlated with a higher success rate in finding employment. It further holds that individuals in households receiving social grants have increased both their labour force participation and employment rates faster than those who live in households that do not receive the social grant (Posel et al. 2004). This theory further suggests that when people re-

ceive free transfers at regular intervals they tend to be reluctant to look for a job especially if the value of the job is almost the same with the free transfer (Devereux and Solomon 2006; Tanga and Gutura 2013a; Tanga and Gutura 2014b). The economic theory suggests that people who receive free transfers will be discouraged from seeking work especially when the value of the transfer is close to the income that the recipient could expect to earn from the paid employment if he or she had one (Tanga and Gutura 2014c).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a methodological triangulation in data collection through the use of structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews with rural inhabitants from Msobomvu community, a rural village in the Eastern Cape Province. Msobomvu community was chosen because of its having poverty stricken people and the dependency of most of them on social grants with little or no farming. Msobomvu is a village in Nkonkobe municipality and located in ward 12 with approximately 1836 households (Integrated Development Plan - IDP 2012). As stated earlier, data were collected using questionnaires which were administered to the rural dwellers and in-depth interviews were conducted with the community leaders. The questionnaires and interview guides were typed in English but data was collected using the local language, Xhosa by the researchers. Two samples were used in this study. The first set consisted of 100 respondents within the community who were selected to be part of the sample using stratified random sampling technique. The second set consisted of 10 participants, who were purposively selected respectively for the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present research are presented according to quantitative and qualitative data collected. The presentation is mixed with the discussion in the light of the current literature.

Quantitative Findings

The demographic characteristics, agricultural activities as well as income sources are presented and analysed.

Demographic Details of the Respondents

The ages of the respondents mostly ranged between 19 years old and above; indicating that they were all matured individuals. Of all the respondents, sixty-five percent possess primary education, thirty percent had acquired secondary education and only five percent of the total participants had completed tertiary education. This demographic data revealed an overwhelming situation which explained to some extent why agricultural production continues to decline. Evidence from the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (2012) reveals that Msobomvu Community generally has a large number of females than males and the age distribution revealed that most of them are old-aged with a smaller number of the middle and productive age. The findings confirmed this as sixty percent of the respondents were females and forty percent were males. Keeping the history of South Africa in mind, this trend is not surprising because many able bodied men continue to migrate into towns in search of employment and better living conditions there by, leaving the rural areas occupied mostly by young people and the elderly (McKeendrick 1987). This migration trend has also impacted the community of Msobomvu negatively, as many of its inhabitants are now left food insecure.

Agricultural Activities

A greater number of the respondents do not practice any form of agricultural activity as they depend on buying everything for life sustenance. According to Table 1, thirty-five percent of the population was into farming, twenty percent in poultry and ten percent involved in animal husbandry. Conversely, thirty-five percent of the population was not involved in farming and at the same time unemployed but relying mainly on the grants for sustenance.

Tables 1: Agricultural activities

<i>Types of agricultural practices</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Farming	35
Animal husbandry	10
Poultry	20
Non-farming	35
Total	100

Much has been written about people not graduating from social grants while some girls intentionally get children in order to access child support grant (Tanga and Gutura 2013a). This has created what many researchers have described as dependency syndrome (Gutura and Tanga 2014a; Tanga and Gutura 2013c). Hebinck et al. (2011: 229) indicated that "... many experts continue to view agricultural development as best realised in commercial farming, highly commoditized forms of agriculture that are seen as superior to and more advanced than forms of production hinging on substantially lower degrees of commoditisation. Non-commercial agriculture is often ... equated with subsistence farming and is seen as marginally linked to the markets, and thus holding no future." It is most likely from the findings to postulate that the people in Msobomvu have lost hope when it comes to this subsistence farming, but the measures they are using to replace agriculture are not effective to take the people out of poverty.

Household Main Source of Income

The findings revealed that those who depended on formal income (salaries or wages) constitute fifteen percent of the total respondents and those who depended on social grants had the highest percentage (forty-five percent) and other informal sources of income made up thirty-five percent. This distribution of income sources can be seen in Table 2. Out of all the respondents, only five percent indicated agriculture as a main source of income and this reveals that agricultural production has already lost its significance.

The forty-five percent of the respondents who depended on social grant as their major source of income can best be explained through the economic theory. This theory suggests that when people receive free transfers at regular intervals they tend to be reluctant to look for a job

Table 2: Types of income sources for

<i>Types of income sources</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Formal income	15
Social grants	45
Agriculture	5
Other	35
Total	100

especially if the value of the job is almost the same with the free transfer (Devereux and Solomon 2006; Tanga and Gutura 2013a; Gutura and Tanga 2014b).

Although, there are still agricultural practices in the community, observations revealed that these activities are now on very small scales and in many households extinct. The remnant agricultural practices are largely for subsistence purposes and only a few carry out surplus farming for the sake of generating income to support their families. This outlines the fact that agricultural production is no longer given the value that it used to carry and this has not only led to the socio-economic challenges but this has made life dull and less enjoyable. The observations revealed that the people of Msobomvu are struggling to break the chain of food poverty in their households.

Qualitative Findings

Themes emanating from qualitative data on the period before de-agrarianisation are examined hereof. Two themes which are discussed here emerged from the findings and include: little socio-economic problems vis-à-vis life style prior to de-agrarianisation and social grants, urban migration and lack of employment are the causes of de-agrarianisation in rural areas.

Theme 1: Little Socio-economic Problems vis-à-vis Life Style Prior De-agrarianisation

Participants were asked about the life style people had prior to de-agrarianisation and six participants could provide extensive information in line with this phenomenon. This particular information was obtained from the elderly people of the community who stated that:

Before the colonial era people relied on agriculture as one of their survival strategies which is a situation that is different nowadays... the government was not issuing out the grant and the people had to till the land.

Further, they are well equipped with the comprehensive knowledge of what used to happen in the past before the de-agrarianisation process came into play. Four of the participants provided information based on what they were told. Hence, the era when agriculture was still dominant in the livelihood of the people was described by many participants as the period when

they encountered little socio-economic problems. One of the four participants postulated that:

People before the colonial era were faced with little socio-economic problems as they had to rely on subsistence agriculture a trend that people are no longer interested in today...

The in-depth interviews with the key informants established that during the agricultural period, households were food secure and the populace were not suffering; consequently, the issue of food security was never compromised. This is in support of the notion by Mabhena (2011) as he stated that agriculture was widely supported by the homeland administrations (Ciskei and Transkei) in an endeavour to promote food security at the household level as well as within its territories. Besides, all the in-depth interview participants were of the view that agriculture used to be crucial in the livelihood of many families as well as to the economy of the country. One of the in-depth interview participants highlighted that prior to de-agrarianisation processes, agriculture was central in many families' livelihood. This participant stated that:

Farming was not regarded as only for old people as it is seen nowadays by the young people who no longer want to be identified within agricultural activities. Back then people were food secure but they relied on their agricultural produce from their fields.

Theme 2: Social Grants, Urban Migration and Lack of Employment Are the Causes of De-agrarianisation in Rural Areas

There are a number of factors that have led to the decrease of agricultural activities in Msobomvu Community. Six participants that were interviewed alluded to the fact that the government support grants played a pivotal role in the decrease of agricultural activities. One of the six participants expressed the view that:

People now rely on the governmental grant for survival and the youths see no need to be involved in agricultural practices.

Most of these governmental grants come in the form of child support grants, disability grant and old age pension. It has been argued that most of the beneficiaries of these grants view it as a source of income and they develop this reluctance to work on the land (Tanga and

Gutura 2013b). Further, findings indicated that the child support grant in particular was being manipulated by the younger ladies who view it as an income generating project amongst other things bearing more “fatherless” children in the belief that they will be registered for child support grant. One of the elderly women in the community lamented that:

These children are now having so many children and even though they get the grant they push the burden to the grandparents while using the grant for their own benefit.

Further, it is also noted that the old age pension has also been used as a support scheme for the whole family to the extent that those who are still young and able-bodied are reluctant to work in the fields or to seek employment somewhere to compliment income for the family. A participant in the study stated that:

My children have migrated to Cape Town but they have left their own children who I am now trying to support with my own grant as they are not sending anything home.

However, threats to poverty remain as none of these grants is having a sufficient capacity to maintain its beneficiaries let alone the whole family (Tanga 2007; Tanga and Tangwe 2014).

Urbanization and people’s perception that agriculture is for the aged and the uneducated have contributed earnestly to the decline in agriculture. In addition, findings point out that of the ten key informants who participated, two alluded to the fact that de-agrarianisation has been necessitated by the massive relocation of mostly the younger generation into towns and cities in search of employment, leaving the aged and disabled who cannot cope well with the physical requirements of rural agriculture. One of these two key informants mentioned that:

I have been left with my grandchildren and the parents to these children have gone to work in Cape Town.

Mabhena (2011) views the flight of human capital to the towns and cities as compounded by the lack of employment opportunities and income generating related activities in rural areas. Urban migration was stated by the majority of participants as a reason for the decline in agricultural production. Seven participants mentioned the cash economy as another factor which contributed to de-agrarianisation. Out of these seven participants, one stated that:

The cash economy has made people believe that the only way to earn a decent living is to find employment in urban areas or on commercial farms and not to be involved in subsistence agriculture.

The three young adults interviewed who were finishing school in Msobomvu community expressed the need to migrate to town in search of better opportunities. One of them said that “once I finish school, I want to look for employment in town” Chapman and Tripp (2004) explored that, despite the importance of agriculture people are now looking for diverse opportunities so as to boost incomes. This display that agriculture is no longer seen as a major source to boost one’s income; instead alternative sources of income are now dis-incentivising people to engage in agriculture.

It is also imperative to mention that unfavorable weather conditions are another factor that was mentioned by four participants as a contributing factor of de-agrarianisation in Msobomvu community. Four of the key informants highlighted that the area has been receiving erratic rainfall for the past decade or so. One of them postulated that:

The unpredictable rainfall in this area has led to consistent crop failure and subsequently caused people lose faith in the agricultural activities.

It was observed that there is a lot of land which is lying idle and the participants upon being asked alluded to the fact that the owners have abandoned it because it was not producing enough output or else they have left for town to find employment. Further, lack of support for the small holder farmers was also mentioned by four participants as a factor that is leading to a decrease in agricultural activities. One of them stated that, “the government is not supporting us with the tools or funding our agricultural projects.” Since most of the residents of Msobomvu community are not employed, they cannot afford to acquire farm equipments, fertilizers and seeds. Seven of the participants specifically the elderly complained that the government was not forthcoming with the much needed support to the small holder farmers which has led agriculture to be ineffective. One of them stated during the interview that:

The government is supporting the small holder farmers with farm implements such that we have lost hope in small holder farming.

Besides, the absence of irrigation facilities has put the final nail in the coffin of Msobomvu agricultural activities. This is so because as highlighted before the area is drought prone and without supplementary water supply thus, agriculture is massively compromised. High crime rates within and around the community is another challenge that was indicated by the participants. This has become a common practice by the youths who have little to occupy their time and seek to meet their needs and wants through unlawful means. The participants indicated that there is high unemployment in the community and many resort to informal means of survival leading to criminal activities. One of them stated that:

Our own children within the community are stealing from us because there is nothing that keeps them occupied.

Immorality has thus become a widespread concern that is difficult to control. For this reason, the prevalence of HIV and AIDS is no surprise as interplay of causal factors contributes to this challenge and the de-agrarianization process in Msobomvu community.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of conclusions that have been drawn from the findings. Firstly, agricultural activities have significantly dwindled, threatening the food security of many households in Msobomvu community. Furthermore, a number of factors have been noted which contributed to this phenomenon chief among them, being the issue of grants that the government of South Africa is dishing out to its citizens, namely; the elderly grant, child grant and disability grants. In as much as the government's intentions are noble, the beneficiaries are taking advantage of this facility and are not doing anything else to compliment government efforts which has created dependency syndrome. Generally, community development is subdued in this community because of the downward trend of agriculture which used to support community development initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have led to some recommendations. The government needs to redress the issues of poverty from a national level

putting more emphasis on agriculture as the major source of people's income as this will help to eradicate poverty. The South African government has to support measures that are in line with re-agrarianisation in the country. This will also help to raise the country's Gross Domestic Product. More policies that support subsistence farming should be put in place so as to encourage independence amongst the people, at the same time discouraging dependency on the state welfare. There is a need to increase the productivity of smallholder farmers so as to ensure their food security. This can be attained by motivating the farmers to sustainable intensification of production thus using advanced inputs. The government should partner with the NGO's in the implementation of agricultural strategies so as to improve the well-being of people in the rural communities. This is a crucial move because non-governmental organizations have always been in closer contact with the people, especially with the marginalized groups and areas in society.

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