

THE MANDELA INITIATIVE

Dialogue and action to overcome poverty and inequality



Theme: Rural Economy and Land Reform

Action Dialogue on Opportunities, Constraints and Innovative Approaches in Small-scale Agriculture in South Africa (6 – 8 August 2014)

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1. What were the major issues addressed at the workshop in relation to structural poverty and persistent, deep inequalities, in small-scale agriculture?

Small-scale agriculture is identified by government and researchers as a potentially key focus on efforts to reduce poverty and inequality in the South African countryside. However, government policies to date have not led to either significant increases in output or enhancement of the livelihoods of many household members by black, smallholder farmers located in communal areas, on private land, or in land reform projects. Yet many non-governmental projects report success in achieving these objectives in particular contexts, through the piloting of innovative approaches that usually benefit only a limited number of such farmers. Practitioners and researchers often appear to understand the opportunities and constraints facing smallholder farmers in fundamentally different ways to government officials, and the development paradigms informing local-level project design and implementation are often very different to those of policy makers. The aim of this action dialogue was to enable better communication between practitioners, researchers and policy makers. Insights from support for a range of production systems were offered: fresh vegetables from both irrigation schemes and homestead plots, flowers, cattle and goats.

About this brief

This brief was commissioned by the Mandela Initiative to help inform a synthesis report on its work since the 2012 national conference, *Strategies to Overcome Poverty and Inequality*, organised by the University of Cape Town. The MI provides a multi-sectoral platform to investigate and develop strategies to overcome poverty and reduce inequality in South Africa. While the Nelson Mandela Foundation is a key partner, the Initiative has relied on collaborations between academics and researchers, government, business leaders, civil society, the church and unions.

The synthesis report serves as a framework for reporting on the work of the MI at a national gathering on 12 – 14 February 2018 at the University of Cape Town. The MI *Think Tank* has identified the objectives for the gathering as:

- to anchor the contributions of the MI within an analysis of the current South African political and economic context;
- to share the recommendations emanating from the MI-related work streams at a policy/strategic level to advance the goal of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality;
- to critically engage with the potential impact of the recommendations on eliminating structural poverty and inequality; and
- to discuss ways of promoting popular conversations and debate about what needs to be done to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, beyond the MI.

The synthesis report aims to assist participants to prepare for the national gathering. The report drew on findings from the sectoral research projects of Think Tank members; the MI's *Action Dialogues*; a report on an MI *Community of Practice workshop* with research chairs from different universities to identify cross-cutting themes emerging from the MI's *research programme*; and the work programmes of others who have expressed an interest in contributing to the goals of the MI.

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THE MANDELA INITIATIVE

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2. What are the main reasons for the persistence of the deep inequalities and poverty in the rural economy?

The problems facing black small-scale farmers in South Africa include: (a) government has tended to sacrifice core functions and systems, not least extension services, in favour of 'projects', but few seem to work; a tiny fraction of households get assistance, and of those that do, few benefit significantly; (b) the more extreme version of 'projectism' is the Massive Food Programme and similar, where government uses contractors to farm on people's behalf; (c) land redistribution has not contributed to the creation of new opportunities for smallholders, because government is not interested in subdividing farms; (d) government pays lip-service to monitoring and evaluation (M&E), but sets ambitious targets for itself and then fudges the numbers when it struggles to meet those targets; it does not have a proper apparatus or method for assessing progress; (e) insufficient provision of infrastructure, adapted to the needs of small-scale farmers in communal areas and land reform; (f) agriculture as a sector has not been adequately supported by government (e.g. tariffs were lowered to levels far below the WTO-bound tariffs, and useful forms of farmer support other than marketing boards were all swept away post-1994); (g) none of the piecemeal attempts at support for black farmers have come close to replacing those offered to white commercial farmers in the past; (h) the performance of smallholder schemes had been well below expectations, partly due to lack of effective institutions for the enforcement of the payment of electricity or diesel on pumped schemes and maintenance of water distribution systems; (i) land tenure systems on smallholder irrigation schemes inhibit the development of vibrant land exchange markets; (j) support services on irrigation schemes are weak; (k) smallholder producers are diverse and socially differentiated and display a wide variety of production objectives, farming scales, farming systems and kinds of market orientation; yet policies are based on assumptions that 'one size fits all'; (l) there are no clear policies for different groups of farmers; (m) support services such as financial aid tend to create dependencies; (n) non-governmental projects do not complement those of government, but display similar weaknesses, e.g. they lack strong M&E systems and neglect to build relationships between farmers and other stakeholders (private sector or government); (o) curricula at universities and other higher education institutions neglect new technologies and approaches to farming (e.g. climate-smart agriculture); academic researchers have neglected analysis of the structure of South African agriculture as a whole; (p) there is insufficient research relevant to different types of farmers; the dominant model remains commercial farming.

3. What do you recommend should be done at a macro policy/strategic level to deal with the major issues you have identified?

Government should focus on revitalising extension services and systems of farmer support rather than spending large amounts on 'projects'. Extension officers must receive better training. Scaling up small, non-governmental approaches that work should aim to transform the way that government farmer support programmes operate. Government must provide integrated, multi-departmental support that includes technical and financial aspects and must support the emergence of climate-smart agriculture. Government statistics on agriculture are poor and must be improved. Some data can be collected by extension officers (e.g. stock books with information about sale of stock, dipping, herd size etc).

Systematic farmer support must incorporate the following: market access; access to inputs; programmes to support human capital development; technology development and transfer systems

THE MANDELA INITIATIVE

Dialogue and action to overcome poverty and inequality



that adapt technologies to local circumstances; an institutional framework that supports access to inputs, market access, biosafety, research and development, social services for farm workers; physical infrastructure, including roads, railways and ports, water and electricity access for farm workers, and access to irrigation; smart subsidies support as part of a job creation strategy.

Government also needs to secure the land and water rights of small-scale farmers, including within irrigation schemes. Policies must be differentiated and flexible, suitable for different types of farmers, and allow farmers to move between types over time. Subsistence-oriented smallholders have very different needs to market-oriented smallholders, who are themselves differentiated by the types of value chain, loose or tight, that they participate in.

Non-governmental practitioners should aim to play complementary roles, identifying weaknesses or gaps within government and trying to fill those gaps. They should also aim to complement one another. Their key role is to introduce innovative ideas. They can also facilitate network development, connecting farmers to the services that are available, as well as collaborative networks and partnerships for sustainable interventions. Pilot projects allow government to learn from success and failure, and should plan for transition and upscaling. Practitioners should focus on using existing local institutions as platforms for implementation.

Researchers should publish their findings in accessible forms, and aim to create productive tensions between government and practitioners. They must work towards revising curricula at higher education institutions and to improve the capacity of extension officers. They can provide crucial evidence able to influence government policies – e.g. with regard to land redistribution. Research is needed on different farmer categories taking into account spatial diversity across the country. There is an urgent need to explore what interventions work and why, and why they fail.

4. What do you think the potential impact of the recommendations will be on eliminating structural poverty and reducing inequality?

Improved relationships between key role players such as policy makers, non-governmental organisations and researchers have the potential to stimulate government departments into becoming 'learning organisations'. They can help feed insights from considerable bodies of experience outside of government, as well as from high quality research and scholarship in universities, directly into policy-making processes. This will help policies to focus more effectively on the actual constraints and opportunities of black small-scale farmers in South Africa.

For more information on the Mandela Initiative:

