

# Difficult roads leading to beautiful destinations? Articulating land Reform's contribution to rural livelihoods in the Limpopo Province,

## South Africa

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### Abstract

A key objective of the land reforms in South Africa was for the process to lead to the emergence of a cohort of black small-scale commercial farmers who would realize substantive agricultural production levels through irrigation and actively contribute to the local and national agricultural value chains. The available evidence suggests that this objective has been difficult to attain and the contribution of land reform to livelihoods of the beneficiaries has been negligible in the Limpopo province. This study deployed qualitative research methodologies to gather both secondary and empirical data that enabled analysis of the extent to which the land reform program has contributed to the livelihoods of small-scale emerging farmers in the surroundings of Bela-Bela Municipal Area, Limpopo Province. The study found out that financial resources are a big challenge, with most of the farmers being unable to raise the capital needed to invest in the farming enterprise. In addition, most of the ‘*emerging farmers*’ do not have the know-how and experience needed to run a commercial farm. Overall, the study enabled us to conclude that the land reform projects have not only had limited impact on the livelihoods of the majority of the beneficiaries, instead, the reforms have left the country-side facing a real risk of increasing food insecurity. This suggests that a wide-ranging programme of land reform is a necessary but not sufficient condition for meaningful transformation of the livelihoods of the households involved. More groundwork still needs to be done by government and other development agencies to ensure availability of proper post-land transfer support systems for the emerging farmers.

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**Keywords:** Land reform; Irrigation; Food-security; Support-systems; Livelihoods

## 1 Introduction

Despite more than two decades of implementation, land reform in South Africa remains a hotly contested terrain that is beset with numerous challenges and uncertainties. One of the main goals of the programme was to transfer land from the predominantly white commercial farmers to a cohort of black small-scale commercial farmers who would productively utilize the farms using irrigation and actively contribute to the local and national agricultural value-chains (Anseeuw and Mathebula, 2008). However, since the mid-1990s when the reforms were introduced, South Africa has struggled to attain the main performance targets set for the reform program and its contribution to the livelihoods of the targeted beneficiaries remains debatable (Mngxitama, 2006; Ntsebeza, 2007; Mpehle, 2012). The land reform process in the country is constituted by three main pillars, namely, restitution, redistribution, and tenure reform.

The main objective of the *restitution* pillar is to return land or provide compensation to black communities who were dispossessed of their land by the apartheid regime. In this regard, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides that persons or communities who were dispossessed of property after 19 June 1913 as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices are entitled to restoration of that property or to equitable redress. The *redistribution* pillar seeks to transfer land from white commercial farmers to blacks who have no land or have inadequate access to land, thereby increasing black ownership of commercial farming land in rural areas. This is provided for in Section 25(5) of the South African Constitution, which states that “the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to foster conditions which enable citizens to gain access to land on an equitable basis.” The *tenure reform* pillar seeks to improve the tenure security of former commercial farming workers who have remained on the land that has been redistributed.

In this paper, main focus is on the performance of the land redistribution pillar even though where necessary, reference is made to the other two pillars, mainly because the land redistribution pillar is the one that is expected to contribute directly to improved commercial agricultural production of the beneficiaries of land reform in the short-term. It is also important to point out that most evaluations of the success of the land reform programme have mainly been centred on the actual volumes of land transferred from the predominantly white commercial farm owners to the previously disadvantaged black small-scale farmers (who are also referred to as ‘emerging farmers’). For instance, 26 million hectares (30%) of commercial farm land was targeted for transfer to blacks by 2014 (Turner, 2001). Achievement of this target has been given prime importance and has thus continued to pervade most assessments of progress in this domain. While this makes sense in the context of the prevailing historical inequities in ownership of the means of production, it does not sufficiently address the aspirations for transformation of the emerging farmers’ livelihoods.

In the paper we argue that the emphasis on transfer of land in volumetric terms seems to have somehow made most analysts ignore the importance of the production dimensions of the transferred land. As a result, much less attention has been paid to the actual use of the land for productive purposes by the beneficiaries of the land redistribution programme once the transfers are done. As a result, the actual impacts of the land reforms on rural livelihoods have not been widely documented. This suggests that there is need to go beyond assessment of quantitative figures associated with amount of land transferred from whites to blacks and begin to articulate the significance of the main challenges and opportunities the emerging farmers face in using the land for productive purposes. In this paper, we seek to develop a narrative that enables analysts to identify the potency or limitations of existing land reform support systems for socio-economic transformation of the livelihoods of the emerging farmers. Such an articulation serves as a pointed reminder that even though the land redistribution question in South Africa has been at the cutting edge of the national development debate since 1994, it remains pertinent today (Kepe and Tessaro, 2014).

In essence, this study sought to generate empirical data that reveals the socio-economic impacts of the reforms on the livelihoods of the beneficiaries who got land through the land redistribution pillar of the reform programme. In the paper, we do not purport to exhaust all the possible socio-economic outcomes of land reform as they exhibit themselves in the Limpopo Province. Indeed, that is neither possible nor desirable within the confines of a single academic paper. What we seek to do is to zero-in on those aspects that appear vital to the improved understanding of how best land reform can meaningfully contribute to rural livelihoods and equitable socio-economic transformation in South Africa, in a context where deliberate attempts are made by the post-apartheid state to redress historical imbalances in the ownership of the means of production. The paper is intended to bring sharper focus to bear on the theoretical foundations on which land reform in the country is based and also to inform the agenda of practitioners and scholars who grapple continuously with the task of defining the appropriate support systems required to sufficiently enable the emerging farmers’ to better utilize the farms that were allocated to them.

## 2 Background

Land reform in South Africa, as it has been conceived in public policy proclamations, seems to be deeply informed by theories of agrarian reform and the transformation of rural livelihoods. Indeed, the idea of agrarian reform has been a central tenet of the South African government policy since the end of apartheid in 1994 (Umhlaba, 2010). For instance, in the ruling African National Congress Polokwane position paper on land reform (1996), agrarian reform is conceived as the (re) establishment of small-scale, family-owned and operated farms that are able to sustain livelihoods and also meet the country’s need for food and agricultural exports. In this interpretation, land reform is oriented towards an agrarian socialism, with farming offering marginalized communities and households a means to become self-sufficient (Cardno Agrisystems Limited, 2008; Hall, 2010). The Land Reform Policy Discussion Document of 2012 states that land reform is located within and informed by South Africa’s Comprehensive Rural Development Programme, which is in turn hinged on coordinated and integrated broad-based agrarian transformation, an improved land reform programme, and strategic investments in economic and social infrastructure that will benefit entire rural communities (Umhlaba, 2010).

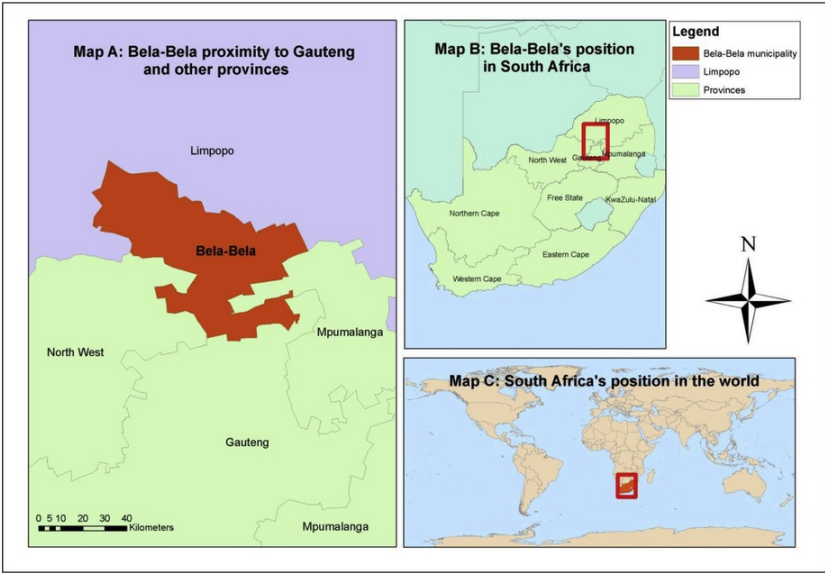
South Africa’s National Development Plan 2030 has also assigned smallholder agriculture a substantive role in driving development in rural areas and improving the livelihoods of at least 370 000 people, specifically in the separate-developed areas known as the former homelands (NPC, 2012). Any interrogation of rural livelihoods in the South African context should also take into account the now well-known fact that poverty is much more widespread in the rural areas than it is in urban areas (Kepe and Tessaro, 2014). For instance, it is estimated that at least 70% of the people categorized as the poorest in the country live in the rural areas (ibid). Therefore, discourses on land reform and agrarian transformation in the country are also located within a broader theoretical space that is directly related to the need to improve the livelihoods of emerging black small-scale commercial farmers in poor rural area contexts.

Various assessments done in the past have painted a depressing picture regarding the realities of the socio-economic performance of the land reform programme. For example, studies by Hall (2007, 2009; 2010) concluded that most of the emerging farmers who took ownership of the redistributed farms have not been able to maintain the previous levels of agricultural production and translate this into meaningful livelihoods. About 70% of the farms taken over by black people have failed (Economist, 2009; Kleinbooi, 2010). This is mainly due to the lack of support the South African government gives to the farmers (Atuahene, 2011). The record of failures frequently painted by analysts suggests that although necessary, land reform in South Africa will only be effective if embedded within a broader programme of systematically restructuring the agrarian rural economy. This paper analyzes factors that constrain or enhance the reform process and the production levels of small scale irrigation farmers in areas surrounding Bela-Bela municipality. The paper re-opens the debate on the fundamentals of historical redress and transformation of rural livelihoods in South Africa.

# 3 Description of study sites

## 3.1 The Limpopo Province

The Limpopo Province is approximately 123 910 km<sup>2</sup> in size and its population has grown over the years to about 5.4 million people (see [Stats SA, 2012](#)). Roughly 84% of the province may be categorized as rural. For many years, the province itself has been considered as the second poorest in the country (after Eastern Cape Province), with 89% of the population living in rural areas ([Lahiff et al., 2008](#)). It is estimated that 63% of the province's total land area (roughly 7.5 million hectares) is owned by white commercial farmers ([Stats SA, 1998](#)). The province is constituted by five district municipalities, namely Capricorn, Mopani, Sekhukhune, Vhembe, and Waterberg. Three main land-use categories are identifiable in the province, that is, land under commercial agricultural use; rural areas that are home to millions of smallholder farmers practising rainfed agriculture in the former homeland areas; and land under conservation which is home to wildlife species (national parks). Smallholder farmers normally use state-owned land (including land allocated to individuals under customary use rights), parastatal farms and small size freehold farms ([Cardno Agrisystems Limited, 2008](#)). [Fig. 1](#) shows the broad land-use categories in the province.



**Fig. 1** Location of Bela-Bela municipal AreaSource

[CSIR, 2010](#).

The land-use categories dominant in the province reflect a historical process of systematic dispossession of land from the local black communities and concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few white commercial farmers. As shown in [Table 1](#), commercial farm land occupies at least 64% of the total land area available in the province while nature conservation areas and former homeland areas respectively occupy about 13% and 23% respectively. From a spatial analytical lens, the productive potential and commercial value of farming land varies considerably across the three main land-use categories and regions. As a result, the prevailing land use patterns are more or less an accurate reflection of the available land use opportunities and potential. Overall, the economy of the province is mainly based on agriculture even though mining and tourism also contribute a considerable portion of the local economy. Our study was carried out in Bela-Bela Municipal area. It was selected due to the prevalence of land reform schemes in the area, ease of accessibility, and recognized potential for successful commercial agriculture due to its biophysical realities. It therefore, provides a good opportunity for beneficiaries of land reform to be quite productive and improve their livelihoods.

**Table 1** Broad Land-use categories in Limpopo Province (in hectares).

District	Commercial Farm Land	Nature Conservation Areas	Former Homeland Areas	Total Land Area
Waterberg	4, 643 880	365 217	430 097	5 439 194
Capricon	835 967	92 339	862 949	1 791 255
Sekhukhune	676 273	18 737	666 581	1 361 591
Vhembe	1 423 330	145 883	712 112	2 281 325
Mopani	1 815 195	1268 545	635 435	3 719 175
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9 394 645</b> (64%)	<b>1 890 721</b> (13%)	<b>3 307 174</b> (23%)	<b>14 592 540</b>

Source: Cardno Agrisystems Limited (2008).

### 3.2 Bela-Bela municipal area

Bela-Bela Municipal area is part of the Waterberg District. It is situated in the south-western part of the Waterberg District, which forms part of the Limpopo Province. It borders with Modimolle Municipality to the north and Thabazimbi to the west. The municipality shares common borders with Mpumalanga Province to the south east, Gauteng to the south and North-West Province to the south west (Heetderks, 2015). The approximate total area of the municipal area is 4000 km<sup>2</sup>. The most important economic clusters within the municipality include tourism, agriculture, and mining. These key drivers have always made the municipality one of the largest contributors to the GDP of the Waterberg District. Being approximately 100 km from Pretoria and 170 km from Johannesburg, Bela-Bela is relatively close to the major cities of Gauteng and directly linked through the National (N1) Route (See Fig. 1).

This spatial linkage with Gauteng has provided the opportunity for Bela-Bela to develop into a (weekend) holiday destination and a location for major private investments (Bela-Bela Municipality, 2013). Bela-Bela municipality may also be considered as a nodal point for the surrounding rural and commercial farming areas that provides opportunities for forward and backward linkages based on agricultural value-chains. These value-chains also extend as far as Johannesburg and Pretoria. Thus, a comparative advantage in agriculture exists and the sector already contributes significantly to the economy of the Waterberg District and that of Gauteng at large.

The area has fertile soils and a relatively warm winter, which presents opportunities for the cultivation of high value crops such as vegetables, flowers, and herbs throughout the year (Heetderks, 2015). The area also has significant underground water reserves that enable supplementary irrigation when the rains are not consistent. About 36.4% of the formally employed people in the area were accommodated in the agricultural sector before the land reforms but this has since declined to as low as 7%. Now the largest employment sector with 28% of the area's workforce is the trade, catering and accommodation sector, which includes contributions by a large number of popular tourist destinations (Bela-Bela Local Municipality, 2013). Other key sectors significant to the Bela-Bela economy include community, social and personal services (16%); construction (18%); public services (12%); and (10%) in finance, insurance, real estate and business services (Heetderks, 2015). Although the contribution of agriculture to employment has decreased significantly over time, it still plays an important role in the area since some large-scale commercial farms are still present in the area. There are about 50 land reform projects that one may find within the municipal boundaries of Bela-Bela and its surroundings. Most of the land reform farms are situated near the settlements of Pienaarsrivier, Radium, and Rust de Winter.

### 4 Study methodology and methods

In this paper, small-scale farms emerging from the land redistribution process in the Bela-Bela area are used as case studies that demonstrate the efficacy and utility of the reform process. Special focus was placed on describing the processes and systems that enable the emerging farmers to access the resources they need for irrigated agricultural production and the outcomes arising therefrom. We also had a particular interest on the perceptions of the land redistribution beneficiaries themselves. Through the assistance of district level Department of Agriculture Officials, the Researchers were able to obtain the land reform database for Limpopo Province as well as getting access to the specific study sites. An examination of the database provided us with a general overview of the land redistribution terrain in these areas. It also enabled us to pinpoint the location of beneficiaries of the reforms whom we could approach for detailed study.

Empirical data gathering was conducted from September 2014 to July 2016. To fully understand the various settings and processes guiding access to reform support systems and resource allocation strategies, the Researchers spent time on the selected farming schemes and interacted with the farmers involved as well as with other residents located in the study sites. Out of 50 identified farmers (obtained from the land reform database for the Limpopo Province), 40 farmers were eventually covered during the study (80% of the population). An additional 10 key informant interviews were conducted with officials from the department of rural development and agriculture and other researchers who have done work in this domain in the Limpopo Province. Unstructured interview guides were used to conduct detailed discussions with the farmers and the other stakeholders.

The selected farmers were requested to describe in detail how the farm was acquired, all the steps followed until full ownership or lease was given to the current owner and the specific challenges faced during this process. They were also requested for a detailed narration of the type of farming activities and crops they grow throughout the year, including any seasonal cropping; levels of production, for example, tones produced per hectare (if the

information is available); details of any livestock being reared, including types and numbers; specific challenges and problems faced during the production process; sources of water for domestic and commercial use on the farm (including water rights/permits/licenses obtained); process and challenges faced in getting access to water; and the types of support that the farmers already obtained or still require from government and other development agencies after acquiring the farm. We categorized the main constraints faced according to low, medium and high severity. A high percentage under the “*low*” column would reflect that the particular aspect in question is not a major challenge. On the other hand, a high percentage under the “*high*” column reflects that the aspect in question is a major challenge which the farmers considered quite severe in terms of its impact on their production processes.

Based on our engagement with and inputs from key players in the sector, we identified and developed our own criteria for a typically successful emerging farmer that we applied in the assessment of the farms. These are as follows:

- (i) The farm is occupied and running as a single commercial agriculture entity;
- (ii) The farm is producing agricultural products for commercial purposes rather than just for subsistence purposes;
- (iii) Beneficiaries are actually benefiting from stocks and flows of food and income;
- (iv) The farm owners are currently practising irrigated agriculture with access to water assured;
- (v) The farmers are able to access all required inputs on time when they need them;
- (vi) The farmers' levels of agricultural production are relatively reasonable compared to previous owner's levels of production (if information is available);
- (vii) The farmers exhibit confidence in the farming venture and have clear plans in place to sustain the venture;
- (viii) Overall, there are observable or tangible livelihood changes arising from access to land by the farmers.

By addressing all these components, we ended up interrogating empirical and theoretical ground common to socio-economic transformation of households and those agricultural production aspects that are core to the land reform programme. We captured the views of beneficiaries and stakeholders as they explained what they thought actually happened or should have happened to enable more efficient implementation of the reforms and enhance the agricultural production of the emerging farmers. Data analysis was mainly qualitative and based on the main thematic areas of focus under consideration.

## 5 Study findings

When using the criteria for success of the land reform farms applied in this study, the picture presented in [Table 2](#) indicates that there are many cases of outright failure i.e. attempted use of land but no significant production or benefits gained (47.5%). About 22.5% of the sampled schemes demonstrated some success, with the land being used and some significant benefits being gained by the household concerned.

**Table 2** The status of small scale commercial farming land reform schemes in Bela-Bela.

Land utilization	Number	%
Attempted use of land but no significant production (no benefits gained)	19	47.5
Land partly used & partly leased out (no significant benefits gained)	2	5
Land being used (some benefits gained)	9	22.5
Land partly used & partly leased out (some benefits gained)	8	20
Land used as a joint venture	2	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>

There are cases (20%) where the land is partially used and partially leased out leading to some benefits being gained by the household concerned. However, leasing was not part of the initial expectations when the reforms were initiated. There are also a few cases where the emerging farmers have formed joint ventures with the previous white commercial farmers (5%). These ventures performed quite well when using our criteria for success.

An examination of the Limpopo Province's land reform data-base revealed that most of the emerging farms in Bela-Bela are between 20 and 80 ha in size. Those that are producing something do so on a relatively small scale (usually vegetables and livestock) while the majority are either struggling to survive or lying idle and not functioning at all. While detailed calculations of actual farm productivity in terms of crop yields and economic profitability (income) were not carried out during this study, overall, the impact of the reforms on household livelihoods is highly likely to be very limited since a substantial number of the schemes were either lying idle or only partially utilized.

The government certainly invested large amounts of money when they bought the farms which were costing in the range of usd\$70 000 to \$150 000 each. More money was also invested through the farm recapitalisation and Development support programme (averaging 25% of the farm price) and continuing assistance. The recapitalization and development initiative mainly focuses on human capacity development, infrastructure development, and provision of operational inputs on schemes in distress and newly acquired through the land reform redistribution, restitution and other programmes since 1994. Despite this intervention, most of the small-scale commercial farming beneficiaries of the land reform programme that we sampled still lack capacity to practice commercial farming in a sustainable manner. There was no evidence that the beneficiaries have been capacitated in this regard. [Table 3](#) shows the main farm produce among the 40 emerging farms we visited in Bela-Bela.

**Table 3** Main farm produce in Bela-Bela.

Product	Number of farmers producing the product	Percentage
Vegetables	30	75
Maize	20	50
Sunflower	15	37.5
Groundnuts	16	40
Cattle	34	85
Goats	32	80
Sheep	6	15
Broilers (chicken)	26	65
Layers (chicken)	9	22.5
Pigs	3	7.5

n = 40.

The table shows that cattle, goats, vegetables and chicken are the main products being produced by the emerging farmers. For instance, more than 80% of the farmers we visited were rearing livestock such as cattle and goats while 75% produced vegetables. However, due to the diversity of the farmers and their capabilities, there is a whole range of other commodities such as sheep, groundnuts and sunflower that are also produced by different farmers even though these are in much smaller quantities.

In [Table 4](#), findings about the main constraints facing the emerging farmers and levels of severity associated with those constraints are presented. 82.5% of the farmers cited lack of funding as the biggest challenge facing them (82.5%). They also placed it under the ‘high’ level of severity category. Lack of farming knowledge was considered the second biggest challenge by at least 77.5% of the sampled farmers. The farmers also categorized it under high level of severity.

**Table 4** Main constraints for the emerging farmers and levels of severity faced.

Constraint	Low (%)	Medium (%)	High (%)
Access to water	10 (25)	10 (25)	20 (50)
Lack of funding	2 (5)	5 (12.5)	33 (82.5)
	6		

Lack of farming knowledge	3 (7.5)	6 (15)	31 (77.5)
Extension support services	22 (55)	8 (20)	10 (25)
Farm infrastructure	11 (27.5)	12 (30)	17 (42.5)
Electricity costs	7 (17.5)	3 (7.5)	30 (75)
Farming inputs	8 (20)	9 (22.5)	23 (57.5)
Farming machinery & implements	6 (15)	11 (27.5)	23 (57.5)
Labour	30 (75)	3 (7.5)	7 (17.5)
Fencing	4 (10)	12 (30)	24 (60)
Markets	17 (42.5)	5 (12.5)	18 (45)
Roads	25 (62.5)	8 (20)	7 (17.5)
Post-harvest storage	12 (30)	12 (30)	16 (45)
Transport	18 (45)	10 (25)	12 (30)

n = 40.

Costs of electricity came a close third at 75% and was also placed within the high level of severity bracket. Under the low levels of severity bracket, access to labour (75%), extension services (55%) and roads (62.4%) were cited most as not posing any serious constraints to the emerging farmers. These findings suggest that policy makers and practitioners should pay more attention to challenges associated with lack of funding, capacity development and energy supply for the emerging farmers.

At a more general level of analysis, it was clear that the emerging farmers come from very diverse backgrounds and very few of them had any previous experience of running a commercial farm (if we exclude previous farm workers). Thus, most of the farmers lack education on agricultural production and basic administration skills. It was also clear that most of them do not have any capital to inject into the farming enterprise. While a business plan was a pre-requisite for one to acquire a farm, most of the plans were produced by hired consultants who did not provide post-acquisition support to enable meaningful application of the plan and turn it into a viable enterprise. Thus, most of the emerging farmers have been depending a lot on inputs and technical assistance from the department of agriculture to survive, thereby creating a lasting dependency syndrome. However, the government cannot provide continuous and infinite financial support. Discussions with the farmers also revealed that there are some cases where the grants provided were used for other purposes such as paying for school fees rather than being ploughed back into the farming enterprise. This reduces the resources available for farming.

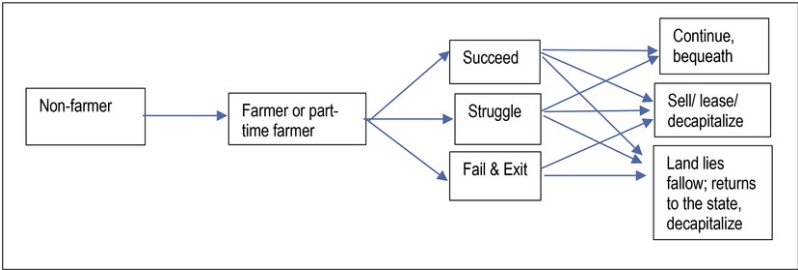
Leasing of some of the redistributed farms to white commercial farmers who are better-prepared for the enterprise has been on the increase. In the process, the land goes back under white ownership and control, with blacks being employed as farm workers. Those farms categorized as communal property associations (CPA) co-owned by groups of people or communities have also had mixed results. In Bela-Bela, we identified 12 CPAs but at least half of them are dysfunctional or not operational due to many institutional challenges associated with difficulties that arise in contexts where collective action is required. For instance, some CPA members brought their own cattle onto the CPA property without consulting others or adhering to the development plan in place leading to overstocking and overgrazing. In addition, for various reasons, some of the CPA Boards do not function effectively leading to mismanagement, poor leadership, lack of community cohesion, individuals prioritizing their own interests, and unsustainable exploitation of the available natural resources.

## 6 Discussion

Findings from the study reveal that most of the farms redistributed have been struggling financially. Some are faced with huge debts, limited access to finance and markets, poor or decaying infrastructure, lack of adequate support from government, conflicts within the CPA projects, limited knowledge of farming, as well as a host of other challenges. Most of the emerging farmers are rearing livestock (mostly cattle and goats) and poultry (Chicken). The main crops produced are for subsistence consumption rather than for sale due to limitations faced in various respects (including lack of access to water and high costs of electricity). Due to the lack of water for irrigation, the farmers end up planting smaller areas than they would have wanted to and their yields are thus, significantly low. Although several support programmes have been rolled out to support the reform process and boost agricultural production among the emerging farmers, these have not been adequate.

Findings of this study also suggest that one needs to recognize the fact that not all of the emerging farmers are the same. Indeed they are individuals with varying interests and ambitions. These are important nuances that

need to be analyzed and articulated as the land reform process unfolds. For instance, some of the farmers seemed to have objectives that are not necessarily the same as those of government. They focus more on feeding their families and maintaining their livelihoods (subsistence) rather than pursuing purely commercial farming objectives and profit-making. It is also clear that financial resources are a big challenge, with most of the farmers not being able to get the capital needed to invest in farming implements and irrigation infrastructure. In addition, many of the emerging farmers do not have the know-how and experience needed to run a commercial farm and thus, the mentorship programme might make a difference in this regard. The typology of the pathways followed by the farmers summarizes the end results of the reform process (see Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2** Emerging typology of pathways followed by the farmers

Source: Adapted from Cousins (2011).

It is also important to acknowledge that centuries of domination and discrimination may not be reversed over a few decades. The apartheid period did not provide the majority of blacks with the platforms needed for them to advance their knowledge and skills in commercial farming and therefore, it cannot be expected that they will suddenly become irrigated farming experts within a short space of time. Challenges and constraints experienced on land redistribution schemes in Bela-Bela and other places in the country since 1994 are testimony to this. A holistic farming systems approach to land reform and agrarian change seems absolutely necessary and appropriate in addressing the challenges and opportunities evident in this terrain.

## 7 Conclusion

This paper has explored the challenges that emerging farmers face and the impact of the land redistribution (or lack thereof) on the socio-economic transformation of the livelihoods of the beneficiaries. In a sense, land reform has reduced the country's food security and left the country-side more vulnerable to food insecurity than in the past. Therefore, the need to ensure that the performance of emerging farmers enables South Africa to attain high levels of production and maintain national food security is a priority. While land reform is about unlocking opportunities for the poor to improve their livelihoods, its success cannot be taken for granted in Bela-Bela and other parts of the country. Through extensive analysis of a large number of land reform projects, we have been able to reach the conclusion that in their current form, the majority of the land redistribution schemes have not significantly contributed to improvements in the livelihoods of the households involved, neither have they transformed the rural socio-economic status in a systematic and predictable way. Results of our assessments in Bela-Bela illustrate the limits of current programmes and policies to meaningfully support emerging black farmers. Indeed, there are too many cases in which the farming schemes established as part of the land reform process are either underperforming or not functioning at all.

From the foregoing, it is also becoming increasingly clear that while the socio-economic and political rationale for the land reforms is well articulated in public policy, there is a general lack of knowledge about how to effectively translate some of the objectives into specific programmes of action on the ground that would significantly transform rural livelihoods. As a result, the performance and impact of land reform schemes continue to be a subject of intense scrutiny while the reform process itself is still a hotly contested issue across the country. The big challenge is to come up with options for dealing with the structural constraints that continue to hinder the growth of a viable small-scale commercial farming sector in the country as part of the broad basket of land reform interventions. It is now also clear that a wide-ranging programme of land reform is a necessary but not sufficient condition for rural socio-economic transformation and resolution of deep-seated inequities in the ownership of the means of production in South Africa. More groundwork still needs to be done by government and other development agencies to ensure the success of the emerging farmers and the land reforms in general.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

The following is the supplementary data to this article:

[Multimedia Component 1](#)

**Data Profile**

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**Highlights**

- Key objectives of the Land reform in South Africa have not been attained.
  - The ‘emerging’ farmers lack knowledge and capital for commercial farming.
  - Post land transfer support from government has been inadequate.
  - The reforms have left the country-side facing a real risk of worsening food insecurity.
  - Targeted support is needed to capacitate the farmers financially and knowledge-wise.
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