

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROACTIVE LAND ACQUISITION STRATEGY ON BENEFICIARIES IN MAHIKENG, SOUTH AFRICA

Joseph Awoamim Yacim¹; Benita G. Zulch¹; Boitshoko Grace Merafe², Paradza Partson^{3*}

¹ Department of Quantity Surveying and Construction Management, University of the Free State, 205 Nelson Mandela Drive, Park West, Bloemfontein, South Africa; (JAY) e-mail: joseph.yacim@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-0651-3360; (BGZ) e-mail: ZulchBG@ufs.ac.za, ORCID: 0000-0001-8777-2510

² Department of Construction Economics, University of Pretoria, cnr Lynnwood Road and Roper Street, Hatfield, South Africa; e-mail: bgmerafe@gmail.com

³ School of Construction Economics and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue Braamfontein, Johannesburg, South Africa; e-mail: partson.paradza@wits.ac.za, ORCID: 0000-0001-5289-3179

* Corresponding author

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: land reform; Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy; property ownership; land beneficiaries; South Africa</p> <p>JEL Classification: Q15</p>	<p>The Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS) was introduced to purchase land from white farmers and redistribute it to disadvantaged black farmers. Laudable as the scheme was in redressing historical injustice for marginalized people, the reality on the ground is a complicated story where ongoing socioeconomic difficulties may compromise the intended benefits. Thus, this study aimed to evaluate the roles of the Department of Rural Development (DRD) in PLAS and assess the extent to which the beneficiaries of the scheme have used farmland with appreciable yields to enhance their social and economic wellbeing. A qualitative research approach with a case study design was employed to collect relevant data from the literature, public authorities and PLAS beneficiaries. The study revealed that the PLAS scheme unlocked land access for black populations, increased farm produce, alleviated hunger, created jobs, reduced poverty, promoted local economic development, and improved living standards despite minor glitches. The glitches included persistent paternalistic governance structures, poor economic empowerment and inadequate support services. Thus, it was concluded that PLAS beneficiaries could assist in achieving food security given the right environment and support. The study recommended that the government should scale up efforts to facilitate land access for disadvantaged groups and support them through increased awareness, training, and financial assistance. Future studies might consider using cost-benefit analysis to measure the relative cost in monetary terms from the scheme's inception and compare it with the benefits of the PLAS scheme.</p>
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1. Introduction

Land reform ensures government access to land for the public interest and equitable distribution, restitution, and adequate tenurial arrangements (Ako, 2009; Avhafunani et al., 2017; Zantse et al., 2021). Several countries have implemented land reform programmes to address land ownership imbalances. In particular, Nigeria faced challenges in acquiring land for public purposes, a fragmented land tenure system across northern and southern regions, unbridled land

speculation, and land crises among communities before the enactment of the Land Use Decree, No. 6 of 1978, now under CAP L5 LFN, 2004. Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) was implemented to redress land ownership imbalances caused by biased legal frameworks created by the 1898 Native Reserves Order in Council (Shaw, 2003; Njaya & Mazuru, 2010; Pilosof, 2012; Paradza et al., 2021; Zulch et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of these programmes in promoting sustainable development

remains controversial.

Similarly, the South African unsavoury apartheid system has been criticised for long-standing deprivation and inequalities, particularly among the black population (Valente, 2009; Amoah & Tyekala, 2021). To address these issues, the 1913 Native Land Act and 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, which restricted black South Africans to only 13% of the country's land, were abrogated after independence in 1994. Thus, the skewed legal frameworks have been repurposed to address injustices and racial discrimination. Accordingly, land reform in the country was implemented using three policy instruments: (1) land restitution, (2) land redistribution, and (3) land tenure reform (Antwi & Oladele, 2013; Avhafunani et al., 2017). Of these three instruments, land redistribution is particularly significant as it was expected to significantly benefit a larger percentage of the disadvantaged population (Lahiff, 2007; Mukarati et al., 2020).

The policy's journey, marked by four amendments and adjustments, including the (1) Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG), (2) Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) I, (3) Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) II and (4) PLAS, is a testament to its commitment to social justice (DLA, 1997, 2006; Avhafunani et al., 2017). These changes were necessitated by challenges such as large groups vying for limited grants, extended delivery times, and unviable projects (DLA, 2006). The PLAS, which aimed to promote land distribution for rural development and economic growth, faced several setbacks and challenges during its implementation (DLA, 2006). Thus, equitable access to land, especially by the disadvantaged black population, became impaired due to elite capture. This has remained a significant challenge in South Africa, attributed to a lack of institutional capacity, poor implementation processes, and corruption (Kirsten et al., 2023).

The 2019 Agricultural Research Council (ARC) research revealed, among other challenges, that the government's overbearing involvement in land reform was unnecessary (Gandidzanwa et al., 2021). Rather than transferring land ownership to beneficiaries, the state retains ownership while providing access to land for agricultural purposes. This system mirrors colonial and apartheid-era land policies, raising concerns about continuing paternalistic relations between the government and land beneficiaries. Thus, it has been argued that PLAS, in its current form, lacks the transformative potential initially envisioned by land reform advocates, as it perpetuates the same structures

of control rather than promoting genuine empowerment and self-determination among beneficiaries (Lahiff & Guo, 2014; Kepe & Hall, 2018). That said, given that there are few beneficiaries despite the observable flaws, socioeconomic assessments of the PLAS are crucial for assessing its effectiveness, equity, and sustainability. Accordingly, the assessment should be to unravel how beneficiaries have fared over time. Therefore, whatever outcome (positive or negative) should either motivate the South African government to acquire more land and widen the scope of beneficiaries or return to the decision-making table for a wholesome policy.

Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the socioeconomic implications of the PLAS scheme for the beneficiaries in Mahikeng? In other words, have the few PLAS black beneficiary farmers been able to make the best use of the land given to them with appreciable yields? (2) To what extent have the roles of the DRD influenced the livelihood of the disadvantaged population under the PLAS? The choice of Mahikeng for this study was predicated on the fact that the socioeconomic conditions faced by beneficiaries in Mahikeng may differ significantly from those in other regions, providing an opportunity for nuanced comparisons. Studies examining the impacts of land redistribution across different areas of South Africa, such as the Greater Kokstad Municipality (Amoah & Tyekela, 2021), reveal diverse experiences shaped by geographical and socio-political contexts. Thus, Mahikeng's unique profile could enhance understanding of localised responses to land acquisition strategies and their overall success in alleviating poverty and promoting socioeconomic development. Additionally, previous studies have influenced discussions on the socioeconomic well-being of beneficiaries in countries like Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, and Australia (De Villiers, 2003; Yirsaw Alemu, 2013; Moyo, 2013; Paradza et al., 2021; Zulch et al., 2022; Yacim et al., 2022). These studies have focused on the adequacy, consistency, and appropriateness of compensation given to displaced people.

While the contributions of Amoah & Tyekela (2021) were well noted, other South African studies, especially Antwi & Oladele (2013), World Bank (2014), Avhafunani et al. (2017), Malatji (2017), Zantsi (2019), Zantsi & Nengovhela (2022), were also noted. However, gaps arising from differences in socio-cultural and economic contexts and the focus on specific land reform instruments like the PLAS scheme, which may limit the generalizability of their findings, need to be addressed.

Thus, this study aimed to evaluate the contributions of the DRD to assist PLAS beneficiaries in utilising their farmland to enhance their social and economic well-being in Mahikeng, South Africa.

2. Theoretical framework

Implementing the PLAS, the main subject under consideration is guided by theories of (1) elite capture, (2) paternalism, (3) nexus planning, and (4) historical injustices. The framework(s) underscores the correlation among various sectors and the need for logical approaches to address complex land reform issues. Additionally, understanding is intended to provide information and is the key to engaging landowners, users and other participants. Thus, the need to evaluate existing land ownership policies to prevent the perpetuation of past injustices became an essential condition. Entrenched inequality and conflict of interests pervade the implementation of the PLAS programme in South Africa (Rugege, 2004). This has led to empathy and a lack of faith in the scheme by a larger percentage of the underprivileged black population (Levy et al., 2021).

2.1. The Elite Capture Theory

The elite capture theory explains how individuals or groups with excessive power and resources utilise them to dominate programmes designed to redistribute wealth or resources, effectively diverting benefits from the intended recipients. In land redistribution programmes like South Africa's PLAS, elite capture has become a significant concern affecting equity and efficacy within the land redistribution framework. Rigon (2014) articulates that when elites dominate land allocation decisions, this can significantly exclude underprivileged beneficiaries, often exasperating existing inequalities. The proponents of elite capture theory, including Dasgupta and Beard (2007) and Platteau et al (2014) in Indonesia, You (2014) in Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan, Lucas (2016) in Indonesia, and Brewis et al. (2021) in the USA, have conducted significant studies. These studies underscore how local elites dominate decision-making, undermining well-conceived policies designed to benefit the generality of the people. As seen in Platteau et al. (2014), the disheartening scenario reveals how the elites exploit their positions to propose projects, fully aware that the donor lacks knowledge about the communities' needs, all for their own advantage.

Local elites' capture of land redistribution processes is conspicuous in regions where policies designed to empower marginalised communities are taken over,

allowing elites to consolidate power further. Relative to PLAS, the theory reveals that within the same section of the black South African population, the affluent group is favoured over the underprivileged black population. This has raised serious concerns about the perpetuation of inequality and the neglect of the needs of impoverished communities. Hall & Kepe (2020) provide important insights into these in South Africa. They reveal how elites successfully navigate state policies to secure land and resources meant for disadvantaged communities, thereby reinforcing inequities rather than addressing them. Their analysis reflects broader patterns of elite capture that persist both in South Africa and globally. Thus, in many South African provinces, the intended purpose of the PLAS scheme, designed to reach more persons, was affected because the successful (elite) black farmers have disproportionately benefited from land allocations, making it difficult to correct the historical imbalances up to this point (Mtero et al., 2023). This situation echoes the findings of Hall and Kepe (2017) and Kepe and Hall (2020), which indicate that elite interests have subverted public policy mechanisms designed to promote equity in land reform.

How land is redistributed to a small group of wealthy beneficiaries among the black population often exacerbates existing inequalities and contradicts the primary objectives of PLAS, which, among others, are to help lower-income communities gain equitable access to land. This creates a significant barrier for poor and marginalised groups that are unable to compete with the resources of more established individuals, resulting in frustration with the policy's intended impact on socioeconomic upliftment. The study by Mtero et al. (2023) highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to land reform in South Africa.

2.2. The Paternalism Theory

Paternalism in the context of PLAS refers to a governance approach in which the government authorities make decisions on behalf of beneficiaries, often undermining their agency and autonomy. The South African government's execution of PLAS has been characterised by top-down decision-making processes that limit beneficiaries' involvement in managing and shaping land development initiatives (Mtero et al., 2023). This paternalistic approach is unidirectional, as it stifles the potential for individual empowerment, advancement, and community-driven development, reinforcing dependency rather than

enabling beneficiaries to become active agents in their economic progress. Again, this dynamism could lead to disenchantment from the process, as beneficiaries may feel disenfranchised from decisions concerning their land and livelihoods, ultimately affecting the potential socioeconomic benefits envisioned by PLAS (Hall & Kepe, 2020). The regimented and tailor-based operations of this theory limit the entrepreneurial abilities of beneficiaries and thus might be the bane of productivity in some redistributed farmlands in South Africa. With the unsavoury apartheid history of the country, this theory could be viewed as a follow-up mechanism to the legacy (Koot, 2023).

2.3. The Nexus Planning Theory

Nexus planning recognises the interface between land, water, and social infrastructure in achieving sustainable development. In the case of PLAS, effective nexus planning is crucial to ensure that land acquisition translates into productive agricultural practices and social upliftment. While the first two theories focused on the fundamentals of human rights as related to access to land, this theory is concerned with productivity or the optimal use of land to achieve maximum productivity. Accordingly, the current implementation of the PLAS appears fragmented, as it fails to integrate necessary resources for beneficiaries, such as technical support, credit access, and market opportunities. Suppose the planning processes do not consider these interdependencies for the proper functioning of the systems. As recorded in previous studies, this will negatively impact the scheme's objective (Amoah & Tyekela, 2021; Zantsi, 2019; Zantsi & Nengovhela, 2022). Consequently, land acquisition or redistribution without effective utilisation breeds poor agricultural yield or return on investment. Thus, the scheme perpetuated poverty rather than alleviating it, as it aimed to achieve. Therefore, the findings of Lanz et al. (2018) in the Volta Region, Ghana, support this critique, indicating that when poor planning takes center stage, the intended agricultural benefits of redesigned land use can be severely compromised.

2.4. The Historical Injustices

The legacy of historical injustices courtesy of the apartheid in South Africa manifests itself in different spheres of the country. Two noteworthy spheres included political and social landscapes characterised by unsavoury human rights records. The land ownership and governance strata directly relate to this paradigm. Unfortunately, despite changes in the political landscape, the apartheid legacy persists. The

segregationist policies of the apartheid era have left indelible socioeconomic challenges, with more people within the disadvantaged stratum chasing limited productive land even after the PLAS was implemented. Thus, these land acquisition and redistribution complexities continue to reflect the power dynamics established during apartheid (Lanz et al., 2018). Historical narratives from multiple stakeholders suggest that many beneficiaries continue to struggle against colonial legacies that limit their agency and economic prospects (James, 2000). Therefore, the inability to thoroughly address these injustices through a series of policy frameworks, including the PLAS scheme, led to the marginalisation of the intended beneficiaries, thus perpetuating cycles of poverty and disempowerment rather than achieving lasting equity.

The underpinned theories in this study call for solemn reflections and understudy. This is because the success of any policy, such as the PLAS, designed to empower citizens, especially those from disadvantaged strata, is directly tied to its historical context. Thus, neglecting history begets building on faulty foundations (Walter, 2014).

3. Literature Review

Understanding the various dimensions of land acquisition techniques, particularly in the context of planning, is crucial for informed decision-making. Nhamo et al. (2022) suggest that sustainable land reform requires food, water, and land security considerations. Land reform programmes are crucial for breaking the cycle of imbalances and agitations, as they can lead to positive change and break the dominance of one group. Galbraith's 1951 position on land reform remains a timeless historical insight that is relevant today. It highlights that if a particular landholding group dominates a country's government, the disadvantaged group may remain with less. This is the case in many undeveloped countries with similar land tenure systems, such as South Africa (Cotula et al., 2004; Moyo, 2005). In Zimbabwe, the land reform programme aimed to provide land to disadvantaged Indigenous Zimbabweans, but it was criticised for confiscating land without considering economic and sociopolitical implications (Sachikonye, 2005; Paradza et al., 2021; Zulch et al., 2022; Yacim et al., 2022).

Zulch et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of governments handling land reform cautiously to avoid economic drawbacks and crises. In Algeria, the Kabyles faced decades of subjugation and exclusion, even after independence. The country implemented land reforms to establish state authority and expand agricultural

boundaries. The 1980s saw a second wave of land reform, led by liberal leaders, which restored private farms but did not fully privatise colonised lands. This period also saw the introduction of the 'land development' policy, the dissolution of large public domains, and the state's 2008 affirmation of sovereignty over public agricultural land. The contributions of liberal leaders to the second wave of land reform are an essential aspect of the political dynamics and decision-making processes that shaped the reform and its potential benefits for evolving agricultural policies and sovereignty (Colonna, 1987; Goodman, 2003). Land reform in Nepal demonstrated significant potential benefits of land redistribution, as it has not only enhanced the income status of low-income earners but also had a promising impact on lowering poverty levels (Adhikari, 2008). In contrast, Adenuga et al. (2021) analyse the benefits of long-term land leasing in commercial farming, focusing on industrialised and developing countries.

In Botswana, land reform aimed to improve access to land, increase agricultural productivity, and promote economic development through communal land tenure, leasehold, and freehold titles. Despite progress, limited resources and ownership disputes persist (Kalabamu, 2019). Kalabamu (2011) reports that Botswana's land reform has enhanced economic development and improved agricultural productivity. However, it faces land resource limitations and ownership disputes (Winters, 2014). The primary objective is maintaining a beneficiary percentage below 50% due to land scarcity. While the piecemeal approach is beneficial, sustained efforts could correct age-long imbalances. Botswana's stable political environment has facilitated the implementation of land reform policies. On the other hand, Indonesia's government has implemented a highly successful agrarian land redistribution reform and empowerment scheme, a testament to what can be achieved in reducing land conflict and improving income status (Sadyohutomo, 2018).

Namibia's land reform came after South Africa's independence in the 1990s. It was executed to address historical land inequalities and promote rural development (Mthembu, 2019). The process involves expropriation and voluntary sales, with the government providing infrastructure and technical support for community resettlement (Behr et al., 2018). The process has successfully promoted sustainable development and reduced conflicts; however, additional funding and technical capacity were needed (Mudau et al., 2018).

Some view it as a success, resulting in improved rural development, increased agricultural production, and reduced land conflicts (Behr et al., 2018). As previously noted, land redistribution reform in South Africa has faced challenges, including funding shortages, limited technical capacity, and slow implementation. Similar findings were made from Taiwan's land reform programme in the 1950s and 1960s, whereby Duan's (2015) study provides valuable insights.

However, persistent enforcement of large-scale farming in South Africa has led to inconsistent findings on land redistribution reform (Rusenga, 2022). Indonesia's study by Sadyohutomo (2018) highlights government support for beneficiary farmers, but only in some cases, as seen in South Africa. Previous studies in South Africa have focused on the implications of land reform on employment growth, poverty reduction, income distribution, agricultural output, and financial and technical constraints for the few beneficiaries (Makombe, 2018; Malatji, 2019; Zantsi, 2019; Amoah & Tyekela, 2021; Zantsi & Nengovhela, 2022). The research conducted in three districts in Ngaka Modiri Molema, Dr Ruth Segotmosi Mompoti, and Dr Kenneth Kaunda reveals the need for effective land reform strategies to maximise land use. Studies have shown both negative and positive impacts on beneficiaries, including poor farm practices, low food security, and insufficient funding (Antwi & Oladele, 2013; Malatji, 2017; Kirsten et al., 2016).

One primary theme that emerges within the context of PLAS is the transformation of tenure security among beneficiaries and its resultant socioeconomic impacts. A study by Zulch et al. (2023) indicates that beneficiaries actively engage in farm management by acquiring essential farming skills, which may enhance their agricultural productivity and overall livelihoods. Improved tenurial security, a crucial determinant in land-based investments, has been shown to promote positive economic outcomes for beneficiaries, as evidenced by findings regarding tenure security in studies from other contexts, including Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe (Zikhali, 2010; Moreda, 2018; Alban Singirankabo & Willem Ertsen, 2020; Edeh et al., 2022). However, considerable challenges persist, especially regarding the adequacy of support services and investment in essential infrastructure. These are often cited as significant hindrances to achieving desired socioeconomic outcomes within land reform initiatives (Lahiff & Li, 2012).

The effectiveness of PLAS has been questioned in the context of elite capture and state neglect, where

wealthier individuals disproportionately benefit from land redistribution efforts. Research conducted by Hall and Kepe (2020) reveals how the current approach can perpetuate existing inequalities rather than alleviate them, resulting in a situation where the benefits of land reform are not equitably distributed among the intended groups. This elite capture phenomenon often sidelines vulnerable populations who lack the necessary resources or connections to fully utilise the opportunities presented by land reform initiatives (Mtero et al., 2023). Furthermore, the agricultural model promoted by PLAS has faced criticism for being unsuitable for the majority of beneficiaries, many of whom lack the skills and resources required to operate in a market-driven agricultural landscape designed primarily for large-scale operations. Rusenga (2019 and 2020) points out that PLAS tends to favour large-scale agribusinesses, undermining the beneficiaries' ability to cultivate and market their produce successfully. As a result, many land reform beneficiaries struggle with capital-intensive production methods that do not align with their existing skills or farming practices, potentially leading to dependency and limited socio-economic mobility (Mtero et al., 2023).

In broader socioeconomic terms, the literature shows the potential for land reform to contribute

positively to poverty alleviation and food security. Aliber and Cousins (2012) argue that successful land reform should aim to rectify the historical injustices of land dispossession while enhancing the quality of life for beneficiaries of the PLAS Scheme. However, the reality often diverges from these goals, as many beneficiaries continue to face significant challenges related to unemployment, food insecurity, and inadequate access to markets and support networks (Netshipale et al., 2017; Chamberlain & Anseeuw, 2018). While institutional and governance challenges persist, as evidenced in the foregoing studies, a study in Mahikeng, a municipality with enormous potential for farming practice, to show limited achievements/successes of the scheme is necessary to generalise findings.

4. Materials and methods

The study uses qualitative and desktop research approaches, with a case study design for semi-structured interviews. A case study of PLAS in Mahikeng, South Africa, was used. This scheme was initiated in 2011 and was implemented countrywide, as shown in Figure 1.

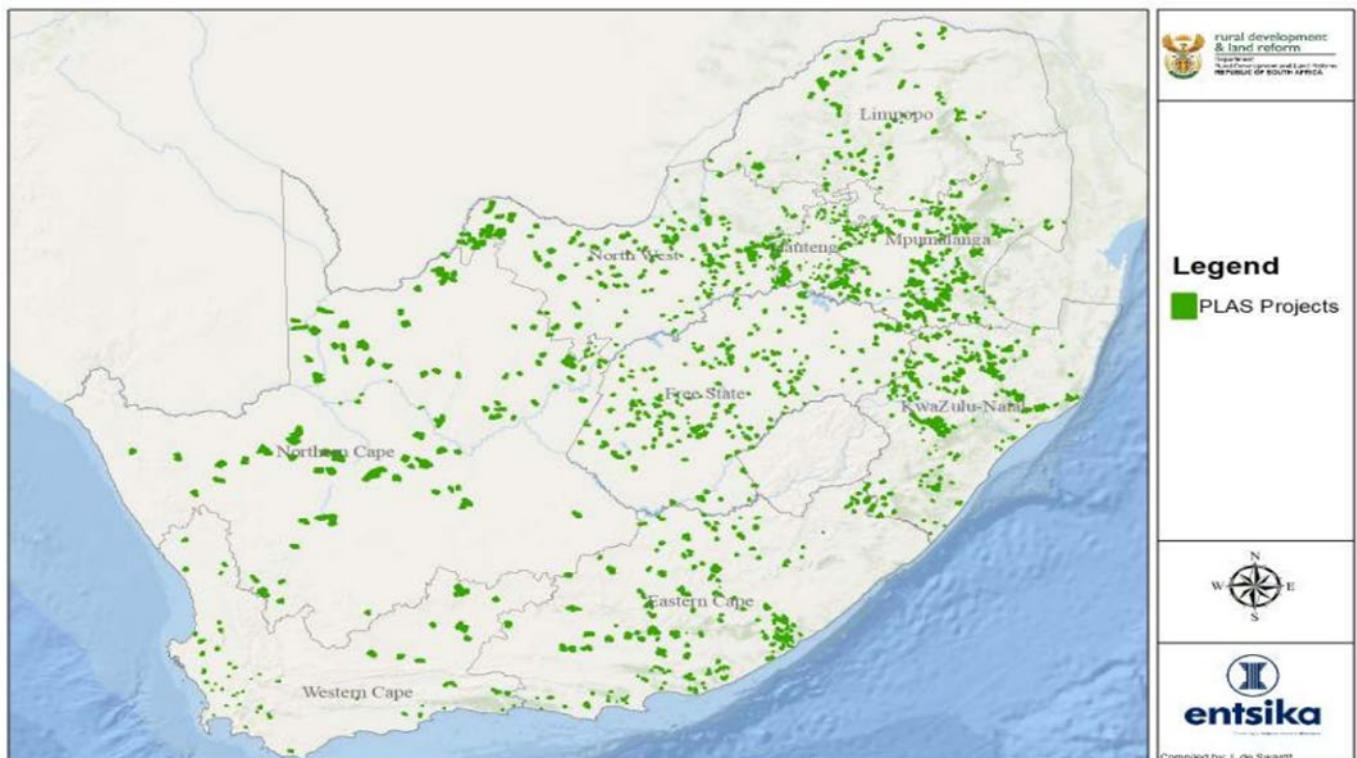


Fig. 1: Distribution of PLAS Projects in South Africa. *Source:* Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (2019: pp. 23).

PLAS was adopted in July 2006 as one of South Africa’s land reform programmes meant to achieve proactive land acquisition by the state and make it accessible to previously disadvantaged citizens (Department of Land Affairs, 2006; Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2011; 2015; 2019; Agricultural Research Council, 2019). It must be noted that PLAS farms are owned by the state, with beneficiaries having use rights provided by leases (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2011; Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, 024). PLAS farms vary in land use and size, as shown in Table 1.

What is notable in Table 1 is that even though PLAS farms are distributed across the country, a sizable

number (24700) were not suitable for farming. Furthermore, the Agricultural Research Council (2019) pointed out that 17% of all PLAS farms were constrained by size, 68% were water-limited, and 60% showed signs of natural resource degradation. Given this fact, assessing the extent to which PLAS beneficiaries have utilised their farmland to enhance their social and economic well-being was necessary. When choosing the case study, the authors considered the provinces that produced the highest maize, the cereal food in South Africa. As shown in Figure 2, the North West and Free State provinces are leading in grain production, a notable staple food consumed throughout the country.

Table 1

Sizes and use of PLAS farms by province

Province	Farm area	Dryland	Irrigable	Rangeland	Intensive	Unsuitable	Productive
Eastern Cape	232479	9054	5291	215994	52	2018	230391
Free State	203253	46159	3365	149117	119	4289	198761
Gauteng	44912	17920	2457	23138	350	950	43865
Kwazulu-Nata	153030	22278	9469	116029	78	5169	147853
Limpopo	92739	8965	2149	81155	119	409	92389
Mpumalanga	242356	62214	5470	170786	139	3694	238608
North West	240925	31028	2990	206035	105	883	240158
Northern Cape	571122	52	581	567829	0	2730	568462
Western Cape	77770	3859	7663	61667	8	4559	73197
Total	1858587	201531	39434	1591750	969	24700	1833684

Source: Agricultural Research Council (2019: pp .44).

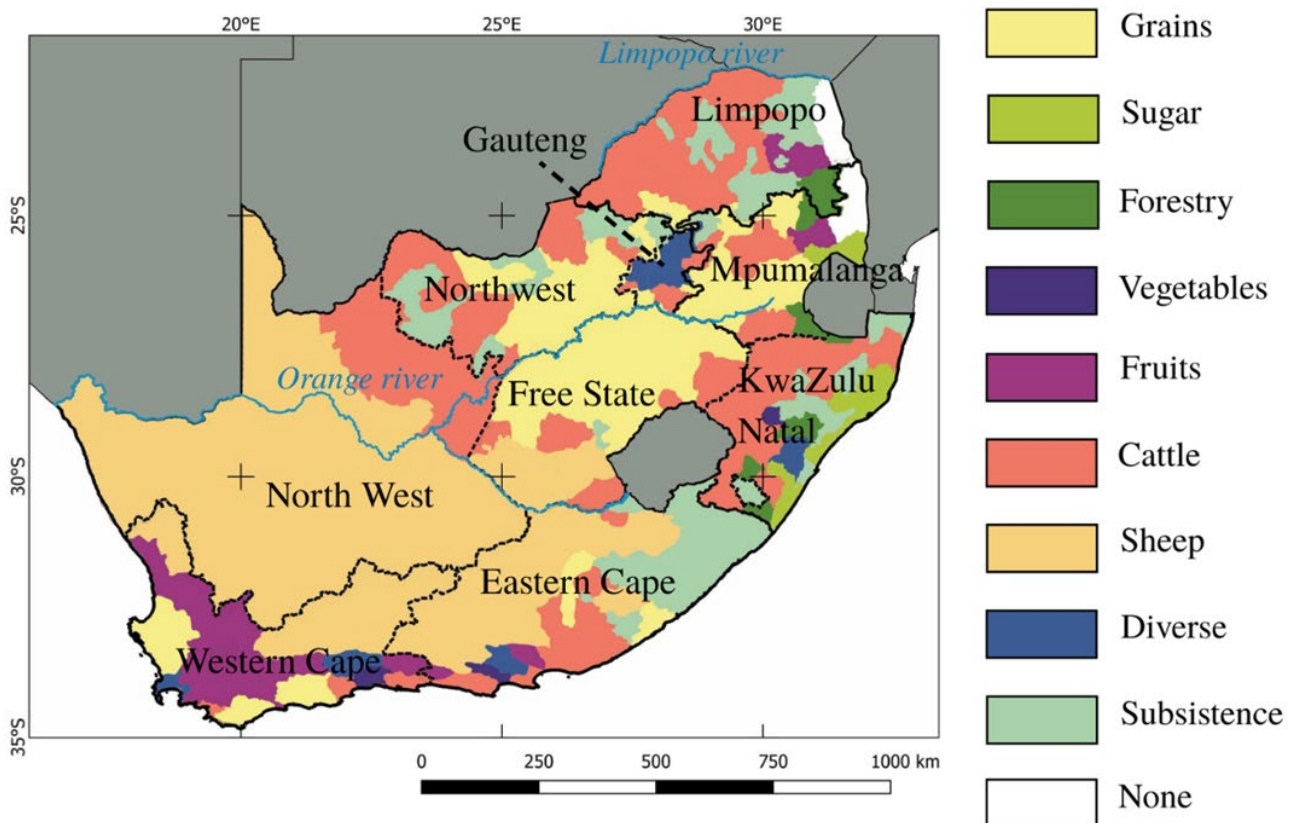


Fig. 2. The Agricultural Map of South Africa. Source: Waldner et al (2017, pp. 04).

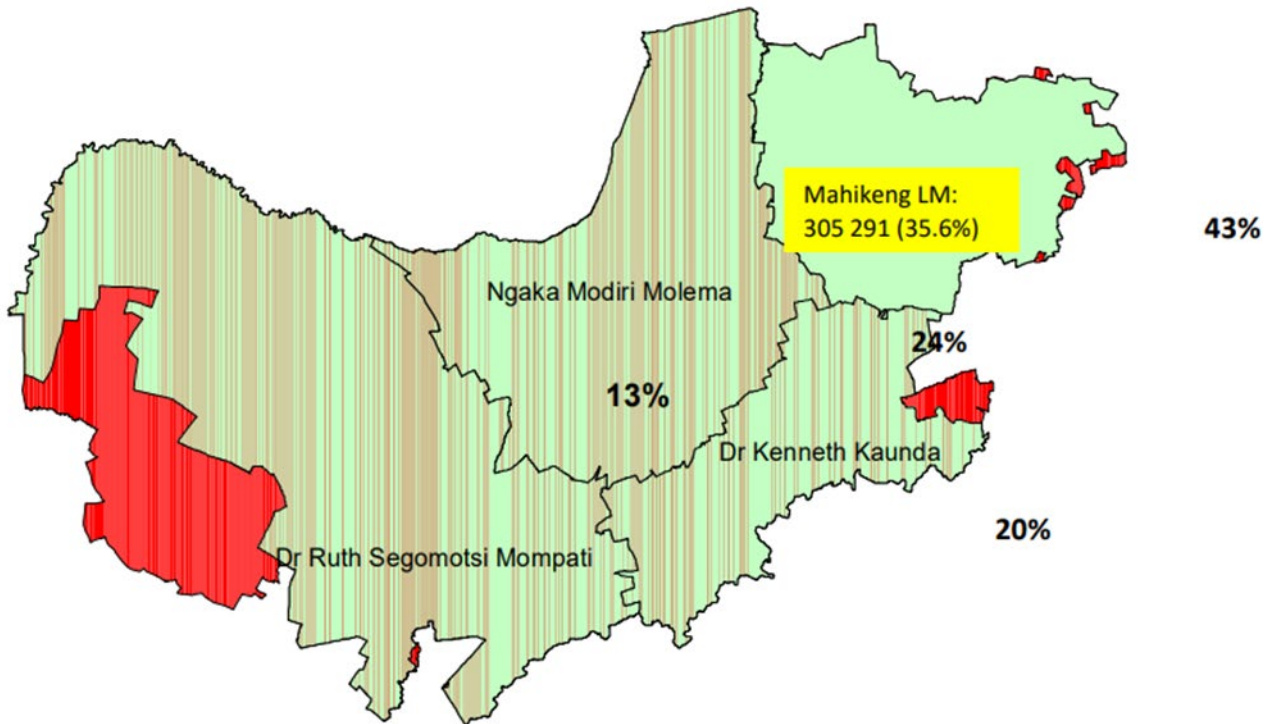


Fig. 3: The Map of Mahikeng. *Source:* Mahikeng Local Municipality (2022).

The authors decided to purposefully select a case study from the North West province because it had slightly more PLAS farms than the Free State province (refer to Table 1). Mahikeng, formally Mafikeng, the provincial capital of the North West (Mahikeng Local Municipality, 2022), was chosen on the basis that, besides the constraints highlighted before, it is prone to climate change-induced disasters like droughts and heatwaves (Setshedi & Modirwa, 2020). Furthermore, the study area is justified due to the negative influence of apartheid on-farm practices among the black population and the slow implementation of the PLAS scheme, which aims to improve agricultural practices despite the negative impact on the local population. Figure 3 shows the map of Mahikeng.

Mahikeng, a predominantly rural area with a history of land dispossession and agrarian struggles, serves as a microcosm of the broader socioeconomic dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa. Mahikeng, a local municipality in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District, is primarily engaged in agricultural practices, with 84,239 households and 20,483 farming families, according to the 2011 census.

The study area's economic activity is primarily agricultural, with 59,726 employed and 33,167 unemployed (StatsSA, 2016). The participants of the study included a total of 10 key informants who were requested to participate in the semi-structured interviews. Five (5) participants were selected from the

Department of Rural Development (DRD) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (now Ministry of Land Reform and Rural Development). In contrast, five (5) were selected from the eighteen (18) PLAS land reform projects within the local municipality. These participants were chosen because they handle the land reform processes in the Mahikeng municipality. Of the five participants from DRD, two were selected from the strategic land acquisition division, as these are people responsible for buying land under the PLAS land redistribution scheme. Another two participants were selected from Property Management, as these are officials responsible for managing state land. Another official from the Restitution component was selected to have a mixture of opinions from the other relevant directorates.

The remaining five participants were selected from the public (18 PLAS farm projects). There were 18 farm projects under the scheme in Mahikeng – 3 of these represented their farms, while 2 of these (PA1 and PA2) represented their farms and those of another twelve (12) beneficiaries (see Table 1). Therefore, the participants' views, which were representative of themselves and 12 others, were paramount in comprehending the challenges encountered in implementing the PLAS scheme. A thematic analytical technique, supported by Atlas-ti software (Version 22), was utilised to dissect the data. Previous studies on the PLAS scheme had a limited number of beneficiaries due

to implementation challenges. The scheme's advancement has been slower than expected, primarily due to resistance from landowners, high land costs, inadequate budget allocation, complex application processes, bureaucratic hurdles, and poor beneficiary selection (Lahiff, 2007; Sebola, 2018; Zantse et al., 2021).

South Africa's democratic government set a goal to redistribute 24.5 million hectares of white-owned agricultural land to previously disadvantaged communities by 2014. By 2009, the government had acquired 6.7 million hectares, achieving 26% of the target. Between 1994 and 2013, 4,813 farms were transferred to black communities, benefiting 230 886 people (Binswanger-Mkhize, 2014). Williams (1996), Jacobs et al. (2003), and Lahiff (2007) report that the target to redistribute 30% of land owned by white people was not realised, and unfortunately, this is still the case as recorded in successive studies. These included Ranwedzi (2013), with six beneficiaries in the Mogale City local municipality in Gauteng Province; with 97 beneficiaries for Dr Kenneth Kaunda District, North-West Province; Avhafunani et al. (2017), with 23 beneficiaries for Waterberg District in Limpopo Province; and Malatji (2017), with 18 beneficiaries for Mopani District in Limpopo Province.

The interview session was meticulously captured by recording it with an audio tape. The researchers transcribed the recorded data into readable notes to ensure the research participants' responses were well understood. This was done through thematic analysis, which involved grouping responses by the participants according to a subject group. Afterwards, the transcribed data was attributed to each research question to know the direction of their responses. Furthermore, to maintain the confidentiality of respondents, codes were used to reflect participants in this study. All 10 participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study, resulting in a 100% response rate. However, due to the emergence of COVID-19 and to comply with the rules specified by the South African Government, some interviews were conducted online (WhatsApp messages, SMS, emails, and phone calls). Throughout the study, we unwaveringly adhered to the highest standards of ethics and integrity, ensuring the confidentiality and respect of all research participants.

5. Results

This section presents results that are in line with the study's goals. The section is divided into two (2), including (1) the implication of land redistribution on the socioeconomic life of the beneficiaries and (2) the

role of DRD in the implementation of PLAS.

Table 2 presents the participants and their pseudonyms (codes). The desktop survey involved searching for literature that captures the PLAS scheme's implications for the previously disadvantaged population.

Table 2

Participants of the study	
Participant codes	Designation
PA1	Landowner
PA2	Landowner
PA3	Landowner
PA4	Landowner
PA5	Landowner
PA6	DRD Strategic Land Acquisition
PA7	DRD Strategic Land Acquisition
PA8	DRD Property Management
PA9	DRD Property Management
PA10	DRD Land Restitution

Source: own study.

5.1. Impacts of land redistribution on the livelihoods of Mahikeng farmers

The participants were asked how the land redistribution scheme affects their livelihoods; the participants concurred that the impacts of land redistribution in Mahikeng led to an increase in farm produce, contribution to the food chain, alleviation of hunger, job creation, reduction of poverty, changing land access for blacks, local economic development, reduction of inequality and the improvement of the standard of living. Some of the excerpts from the participants were as follows:

PA1 said, *"In the area of Mahikeng, farmers are limited by the land size, which is very small. This limits farmers, especially those in livestock farming. You will need a substantial piece of land to produce, but having benefited from a farm through Land redistribution, my agricultural produce has increased. The respondent (PA1) also stated, "In my case, I operated a 150-hectare family-owned dryland farm in Gelukspan, Mafikeng." Thus, further saying, "I moved to hire more land around the area and at my peak I was working 1000 ha of mostly belonging to relatives and other communal".*

The result shows that the land size granted to farmers in Mahikeng varies relative to whether the purpose is for commercial or subsistence practice. Again, it differs based on the nature of local land, availability and the departmental policies. A typical plot of small size ranges from 1 to 10 hectares in Mahikeng, while larger plots are more than the above figures.

Again, relative to the size of farmland, a respondent (PA3) noted that:

"... I operated in a Trust land of about 45ha and I had to hire more land from others to increase my production."

The result above was a testament to improvement/growth in agribusiness within the locality for some black farmers. Again, respondents were asked to ascertain the productivity of their farmland in terms of agricultural yields. Even though, it was not possible to determine the accurate yield before the PLAS, because the land was then in white farmers ownership (who are not target of this research), studies have shown that the white farmers were better placed because of their knowledge of modern farming practice coupled with availability of modern farm implements (Schirmer, 2015 and Akinola, 2019). Accordingly, the result, as captured by PA2, shows that the black farms are not worse off in some cases:

"We contribute to the food chain in the area as we are trying to make a living through meat production. We have established vegetable crops on the farm, which we sell in the local area."

The productivity of some farms, according to a respondent, PA3, has shown that their socio-economic status has improved, leading to employment opportunities for the inhabitants, as follows:

"I do not know if anyone feels the impact, and I will be surprised if an average person in the area does, but for those who have a direct interest and are beneficiaries of the programme, I will say job creation because personally, I have employed 15 full-time people I guess this contributes to the 3million target sets in the NDP 2030, and as a sign to job creation, people can feed their families, educate their children and in-general, improve their standard of living."

Additionally, in line with farm productivity, a respondent, PA4, reports that:

"These farms were in operation before being acquired by the government, and economic activity continues in the local area. Therefore, farms after the PLAS allocation remain operational but with less productivity. Again, though limited in scope, the farm productivity marginally contributes to the local GDP because farm operators will naturally procure goods and services locally."

The allocation of land under the PLAS is procedural. Once the land is purchased, the government allocates it to deserving beneficiaries (individuals or groups), in this case, those within the historically disadvantaged stratum. The allocation process ensures recipients have the capacity and intent to use the land productively. Sometimes, a consortium of individuals forming a group would vie for larger land parcels to be effectively managed and utilized. The size of land allocated can vary based on the productive capacity needed, the type of farming, and the beneficiaries' specific circumstances. Allocations often target favorable land for both crop production and livestock farming.

Furthermore, when asked to know the impact of the PLAS on the level of black participation in the farming practice, a respondent, PA5, affirms that:

"Impact is the perception of progress in the right direction in changing land pattern and access. As more black people are on farms relative to where we were prior to 1994, albeit at a snail's pace, the optics of it all are of political significance, and I hope that the government could appreciate that and build on that momentum as all these impacts are in line with the policy objective on the Redistribution of land."

A follow-up question was asked to determine if the long-term lease assists in sourcing funding from the government and financial institutions. The participants affirmed that the long-term contract had assisted them in sourcing funding from the government, financial institutions, and banks. In contrast, few participants report that the long-term lease agreement has never helped them to source funding. Some of the excerpts from the participants were as follows:

PA1 said, *"I am hopeful that it can assist; although I have not utilised it to source finance, I am comfortable with the contract in the hope that I will be able to utilise it"*.

PA2 said, *"I will say it does not; the long-term lease contract is not beneficial to me in securing funding from any financial institution"*.

PA3 affirmed, *"Yes, I have been able to use the contract for borrowing in companies like Agri-businesses"*.

PA4 said, *"It is still difficult because the banks refuse to assist farmers without a title deed, even if it is on a long-term basis. As a result, we can only use the lease contract to borrow for production inputs like seeds, fertilisers, and diesel at institutions like the Agri-businesses"*.

Table 3 summarises the desktop survey results. This presents divergent views across studies in South Africa.

While some studies show that the PLAS enhances the socioeconomic well-being of beneficiaries, others do not share such persuasion because of poor

governmental support. Again, results show that few beneficiaries have a strong economic base and thus can make productive use of the land.

Table 3

Analysis of PLAS Beneficiaries in South Africa		
Author(s)	Province	Findings
Makhubele et al. (2022)	Limpopo	Beneficiaries' socioeconomic well-being rises with farm productivity, emphasising the crucial need to match recipients' socioeconomic requirements with the goals of land restitution.
Tjale et al. (2020); Tjale et al. (2020)	Waterberg District, Limpopo	Government intervention is the basis for farm productivity. Therefore, agricultural yields rise when the government steps in and injects funds.
Shiba (2023)	Eastern Cape	Boost agricultural output on land reform initiatives since RECAP's formation. RECAP assistance helped land reform beneficiaries acquire technical skills.
Mbandlwa (2023)	A collection of secondary data across all South African provinces.	Several black farmers who were allocated farmland were not trained nor knowledgeable in modern farm practice, thus unable to sustain the farm and meet their set targets.
Rusenga (2022)	Limpopo	Alongside large-scale agriculture, alternative land uses were implemented, improving the livelihoods of the beneficiaries.
Mtero et al. (2023)	Eastern Cape, Free State, Kwazulu-Natal, North-West and Western Cape.	Contrary to the scheme's objectives, wealthy beneficiaries deemed capable of participating in large-scale commercial farming were preferred. As a result, within the black farmers stratum, more farms were transferred to the well-off commercial farmers than to other blacks who are not well-off. Thus, the gaps persist resulting in public skepticism about the success of the land redistribution programme due to elite capture in South Africa.
Masemola (2021)	Emalahleni Municipality, Mpumalanga	PLAS farms are larger and thus have more productive land than LRAD farms. The government gave active farms marginal support.
Malatji (2017)	Limpopo	Lack of government assistance impacted agricultural productivity. The PLAS system did not harm previous landowners because they were not forced to sell their land. Therefore, few lands could be purchased if insufficient funding was allocated for the plan.
Hall & Kepe (2020); Kepe & Hall (2018)	Eastern Cape	The government's lease status has not benefited the socioeconomic situation of disadvantaged black farmers. Black entrepreneurs who can raise additional farm finance and are first in line for state support under the Recapitalisation and Development Programme also profit.
Zantsi et al. (2021)	Eastern Cape, Kwazulu Natal and Limpopo	There is a marginal difference in livestock farmers but a significant difference in crop production. This implies that black farmers will do well in farm practices with an enabling environment.

Source: own study.

Most studies on land redistribution under the PLAS unanimously agree that previously advantaged white farmers were compensated during purchase under the "willing-seller, willing-buyer" principle (Fraser, 2008; Chikozho et al., 2019), within the limited available financial resources. Thus, one of the challenges of the PLAS, which lead to the slow pace of implementation was poor budgetary allocations on the part of the government (Rugenge, 2020). This implies that if there is insufficient money for land purchase, nobody's land will be purchased, contrary to the letters of the redistribution laws. Regarding direct statistics, estimates indicate that significant portions of the land intended for redistribution remain untransformed or underutilized. Approximately 5 million hectares of land were transferred against the government's target of redistributing about 25 million hectares by 2014 (Mbatha, 2017). This shows that only about 20% of the land was transferred to the black population, thus a far cry from the intended target. The shortfall highlights structural and operational challenges within the land reform process, including policy uncertainty and

inadequate support for beneficiaries, which limit the effective transformation of land ownership among the general black populace (Lahiff & Guo, 2014).

5.2. The departmental roles and responsibilities in the PLAS implementation

This section explored two things: (1) reports of beneficiaries of the PLAS scheme and (2) DRD's roles and responsibilities in the PLAS implementation. First, the reports of PLAS indicate a slow pace of land accessibility by beneficiaries in the local municipality, similar to findings in Antwi and Oladele (2013), as well as Avhafunani et al. (2017). The result was based on the responses received from respondent PA6 when asked to unravel the number of beneficiaries of the PLAS scheme in the study locations.

"We cannot safely give an accurate number of people who applied for land through the PLAS scheme, and this is a grey area from DRD's side. The question raises a fundamental concern, as adequate systems and tools should be implemented, not just locally but

nationally, to measure the number of people who applied relative to those who benefited.

Initially, DRD established a database system where people interested in the land were captured and recorded. However, this created many problems as the public widely understood the database to be on a waiting list and was later obliterated. This needed to be in line with the provisions of the state land lease and disposal policy.

Information on the total number of applicants is based on assumptions on recent applications received for one farm relative to the size of farms already acquired through the PLAS scheme. For example, a farm targeting a commercial farmer will attract just over 100 applicants, which will then be allocated and leased to one recipient, and a farm targeting females or youth would draw around 80 applicants."

Again, the participants (government officials) were asked to express their opinions on their roles and responsibilities in PLAS implementation. Their responses affirmed that the departmental roles in the PLAS implementation include assisting with the production inputs, interviewing and allocating farms, empowering disabled farmers, facilitating rural development, marketing the farmers' produce, equitable distribution of land and monitoring projects. Some of the excerpts of the participants were as follows:

PA2 said, "I have not seen much in terms of the DRD's role and responsibility, except with the processes of interviewing and allocating farms, but I have not been assisted with anything from the Department in my case".

PA6 said, "It increases the production output towards food security, increases the number of emerging farmers within the municipality, and contributes to rural areas within the municipality by facilitating Comprehensive Rural Development."

PA7 affirmed, "DRD assists with production inputs, and there are projects that have been supported through its partnership with local Agri-businesses".

PA8 said, "Their role is to monitor the allocated projects and evaluate whether the farmers are using the farms in line with the provisions of PLAS".

PA9 said, "Their role is to assist farmers in marketing their products, provide financial support to projects, and advise where necessary."

Another follow-up inquiry was made to determine if DRD achieved its objectives in performing its roles and obligations in the PLAS implementation. The results showed that the Department has completed its

functions and obligations. The participants further concurred that DRD could improve on the current strategies aimed at achieving its obligations. Some of the excerpts from the participants were as follows:

PA6 said, "It will be unfair to say no; it is not so that I will give a qualified yes".

PA7 Confirmed, "The current system has improved, although some argued it was elitist. Does DRD allocate to a poor granny burdening her with Eskom bills, salaries, rent, rates and taxes, maintenance that she was not accustomed to, or overwhelm them even if they had the money?"

PA8 Said, "DRD has appointed a service provider for a term of five years that assists farmers with advisory and coaching services, but the process is very long, so if we could work directly with this department, maybe things will improve because now the service provider assumes the role of the middleman".

Another follow-up question was how DRD can improve its PLAS implementation services. The results showed that this department should assist small-scale farmers, embark on regular monitoring and evaluation, provide training, and support production. The following were the excerpts obtained in the interview process,

PA2 said, "Farmers should also receive training; training is essential because of the ever-changing environment in agriculture, so we need to learn more from what we think we know."

PA3 said, " DRD needs to encourage people to farm independently. I am not against mentoring and coaching by white farmers. However, the process must be structured, objectives and key milestones must be articulated, and results must be clearly articulated because the farms remain cash-flush for the white farmers."

PA6 said, " DRD should be supportive rather than restrictive and include transition mechanisms in their strategy."

PA7 affirmed, "DRD should conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of the project because of the service provider's delays."

PA9 said, " DRD requires a transitional team that will conduct a proper assessment when a person gets allocated a farm into the infrastructure, soil tests, production inputs and come up with a proper gap analysis report to the person allocated and take out immediate action to help in funding to help in people who have never managed a farm."

PA10 said, " DRD should try to improve and assist small-scale farmers with small start-up packages of

animals for cattle farmers, and even crop farmers should also be assisted with start-up packages."

6. Discussion

According to Hull et al. (2019), land redistribution involves moving ownership or control of the property from one group or person to another, usually to encourage a more equitable allocation of land or correct historical injustices. According to Akinola (2018), there are numerous ways to redistribute land, including land reform initiatives, expropriation, and voluntary land sales. However, the implementation of land redistribution policies must be fair and transparent, with the necessary protections and balances in place to protect the rights and interests of all stakeholders, regardless of the precise role that the government plays (Akinola, 2020).

Additionally, the government must consider land redistribution's potential economic, social, and environmental effects and work to ensure the decision supports all welfare (Hull et al., 2019). Findings obtained in the empirical study confirmed that the impacts of land redistribution in Mahikeng include an increase in farm produce, contribution to the food chain, alleviation of hunger, job creation, reduction of poverty, changing land access for blacks, local economic development, reduction of inequality and improvement of the standard of living. The findings concur with those of Antwi & Oladele (2013) and Clements et al. (2021), who affirm that the impact of land redistribution on citizens includes increasing access to land and promoting more equitable distribution of land ownership.

In addition, land redistribution may require the government to make significant investments in infrastructure, education, and other services to support the transition to new landowners (Hull et al., 2019). Due to the advantages of the redistribution process, the empirical findings affirm that long-term contracts have assisted the beneficiaries in sourcing funding from the government and financial institutions. At the same time, few participants concurred that the long-term lease agreement has never helped them to source funding from any source. Thus, despite the intervening years being the basis for this research, the outcomes were like those of Antwi & Oladele (2013). Even though the scheme implementation is slower, considering the number of beneficiaries and applicants, the benefits are gradually being savored in South Africa.

Moreover, the study of Mbandlwa (2023) reports that lack of inadequate training on farming practice has

affected productivity in some cases. According to Schirmer (2015) and Akinola (2019), there are evidence to suggest that when these farmlands were in white ownership, productivity was higher in comparison to the black farmers, especially, the non-elitist blacks because of the advances or utilization of high technology in farm practice. Towing the line of the elite capture theory, we categorize the black population into two including the elitist blacks and non-elitist blacks. While the elitist blacks were well favored and hijacked the lands in choice location because they have the wherewithal, the non-elitist black lack basic knowledge of modern agriculture practice.

This again buttresses earlier evidence indicating that most of the black population did not achieve landownership or significant economic benefits from policies like PLAS. Systemic barriers and socio-economic challenges historically associated with land dispossession impede equitable ownership and substantial gains from land reform (Sihlangu & Odeku, 2021). Despite the intention behind initiatives like PLAS to empower impoverished and landless Black South Africans, the reality has been far less inclusive, leaving many still marginalized in terms of land ownership.

Concerning the departmental roles in the PLAS implementation process, participants confirm that the duties of the DRD in the PLAS implementation include assisting with the production inputs, interviewing and allocation of farms, empowering disabled farmers, facilitating rural development, marketing the farmers' produce, equitable distribution of land and monitoring of projects. In the view of Clements et al. (2021), the government's role in the land redistribution process includes providing technical assistance, facilitating acquisition and transfer, providing financial assistance, engaging with the community, monitoring and evaluating, making policies and addressing disputes.

In an empirical study, the participants affirmed that DRD achieves its roles and obligations. The participants further concurred that this department could progress towards achieving its commitments. Regarding the recommendations, the participants recommended that DRD assist small-scale farmers, embark on regular monitoring and evaluation, provide training, and support production. These conform to the findings of Kepe & Hall (2018), Musakwa (2018) and Adamopoulos and Restuccia (2020), who argued that DRD should enhance the general management of the redistribution process to ensure that citizens maximize the gains of democracy.

7. Conclusions

This study explores the impact of land redistribution on the livelihoods of the PLAS beneficiaries in Mahikeng. The study adopted a desktop research and qualitative method with a case study design. Accordingly, two research objectives guided this study, including (1) determining the impacts of land redistribution on the livelihoods of Mahikeng municipality and (2) establishing DRD's roles and responsibilities in the PLAS implementation. Findings from the study revealed that the impacts of land redistribution included an increase in farm produce leading to a contribution to the food chain and alleviation of hunger/poverty, job creation, changing land access for the black populations, local economic development, reduction of inequality and the improvement of the standard of living. The study confirms that DRD's roles and responsibilities in the PLAS implementation include assisting with the production inputs, interviewing and allocating farms, empowering disabled farmers, facilitating rural development, strategies for marketing the farmers' produce, equitable land distribution, and monitoring of projects. Regrettably, despite its laudable contributions, the ratio of beneficiaries of the PLAS program to the number of applicants is still a concern.

The following recommendations could help based on the findings made in this study. First, it is crucial that all central government departments involved in the reform process, including DRD, clearly understand the purpose and goals of the land redistribution process. This will help guide decision-making and ensure the process is transparent and accountable. They should make clear decisions about who will benefit from land redistribution based on a clear set of criteria, such as landlessness, poverty, or marginalized status. Land redistribution can be complex and controversial, so engaging with various stakeholders, including government officials, community leaders, and civil society organizations, is essential. Furthermore, a successful land redistribution process requires careful planning and coordination. This may involve surveying and mapping land, developing infrastructure, and supporting new landowners. In the process, the departments should monitor and evaluate the land redistribution process to ensure that it meets its goals and objectives and identify any challenges or areas for improvement.

The departments should assist in producing inputs, interviewing and allocating farms, empowering disabled farmers, facilitating rural development, marketing the farmers' produce, equitable distribution

of land and monitoring projects. The departments should also assist small-scale farmers, embark on regular monitoring and evaluation, provide training, and support production. The beneficiaries should familiarize themselves with the terms and conditions of landownership and any obligations or responsibilities they may have. They should develop a land use plan to help them make informed decisions about land use and prioritize their goals. This may involve identifying potential sources of income, such as farming or forestry, or developing a plan for conservation or recreation. They should also seek support and technical assistance, including land management training or access to financial or marketing resources. In addition, the beneficiaries should ensure they engage with neighbors and other community members to build support and cooperation. This includes obtaining permission from DRD before improving the infrastructure in their farms, assessing the reproductive value of the farm, piping the farm, maintaining the infrastructure, and making boreholes and dams. Finally, they should seek legal assistance when necessary to protect their rights.

Future studies might consider using cost-benefit analysis to measure the relative cost in monetary terms from the scheme's inception in 2006 to the research date and compare it with the benefits of the PLAS scheme. Using a balance sheet could bring out the successes or failures of the scheme so that the results could assist the S.A. government in its future decision-making. Additionally, future research could expand the study to nine South African provinces for more generalized findings.

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