

How collaboration can drive land reform success in the next decade

While opinions vary on the shortcomings of the land reform programme in South Africa, Peter Setou, chief executive of the Vumelana Advisory Fund, says that, arguably, the government could have made significant progress towards its transformation agenda if it had vigorously implemented its various policies and relevant land-related legislation on the land reform programme.



Peter Setou, chief executive of the Vumelana Advisory Fund

“There should be a major overhaul of the land management information and systems as well as timely support interventions at a point when the land is transferred to ensure its productive use. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to bring resolution to the nearly 7,000 land claims still outstanding, as noted by the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, and the government needs to embark on an initiative aimed at identifying and distributing farms to young Black individuals with aspirations of becoming commercial farmers,” says Setou.

Nearly three decades after the first democratic elections in 1994, the government has spent over R56bn towards buying land for restitution efforts, according to the ministry's replies to questions in parliament. This year, Treasury further allocated an additional R12.5bn for the Land Restitution Programme and land reform.

Failure of policy implementation

Arguably, says Setou, the inadequacy of the land reform programme has not been due to financial constraints, as billions of funds have been allocated to it. Instead, the failure of policy implementation and provision of post-settlement support has been the primary cause.

In the book *Land Matters*, Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi contends that the lack of political will among the government to execute the land reform programme according to the Constitution has also contributed to its shortcomings.

During his department's 2015/16 Budget Vote, former minister of rural development and land reform Gugile Nkwinti proclaimed that "the litmus test to all policies is whether they are redistributive in character". He further asserted that it would be impossible for a democratic, developmental state to rapidly reverse the effects of colonialism and apartheid without deliberately engaging in the redistribution of resources and means of production.



Common measuring instruments needed to assess the success of land reform in SA

Peter Setou 23 Mar 2023



Identifying impactful measures

"Moving forward into the next decade, the discourse must shift towards identifying impactful measures for land redistribution, restitution, and tenure reform. Through this process, the government can effectively integrate and maintain economic progress while promoting a more inclusive society," highlights Setou.

According to the Vumelana Advisory Fund, land reform beneficiaries have the potential to drive rural development by utilising agricultural farms as well as supporting eco-tourism opportunities within restored land as vehicles of job creation, economic growth, and wealth creation.

Says Setou: "The success of the land reform programme will hinge on how effectively the government can assist previously disadvantaged communities, including small-scale farmers in transitioning to commercial farming. Furthermore, it will be determined by the government's ability to provide adequate support for post-settlement activities for beneficiaries of land reform across the different projects in farming, eco-tourism, and conservation among others, and ensuring that the millions of hectares of land that have been redistributed to date are put to productive use."



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Addressing challenges faced by CPAs

Furthermore, Setou emphasises the significance of identifying and addressing challenges faced by Communal Property Associations (CPAs) by providing them with the required support, as well as promoting partnerships with the private sector as this is a quicker way through which the current challenges can be addressed in the short to medium term. These measures are crucial for economic development and if rolled out at scale, would play a significant role in boosting productivity of restituted land in the next decade.

Furthermore, he says, implementing the recommendations made in 2018 by the high-level panel that was appointed by

President Cyril Ramaphosa will be critical in driving a successful land reform programme. Some of these recommendations include decisively dealing with corruption in the system, implementing effective conflict resolution mechanisms among beneficiary communities, addressing state capacity challenges to implement its programmes, improving coordination among departments involved in supporting beneficiaries of land reform to ensure better use of resources, providing post-settlement support, and establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for land reform interventions.

Strengthening of tenure rights of people living on communal land, including the ability to use restored land as collateral for credit, will improve access to finance and significantly reshape the land reform landscape, he says.

"The land reform programme should not merely be a process of distribution and redistribution of land, but should be supported through greater access to finance, infrastructure, and markets for emerging farmers and small-scale producers," notes Setou.



Private sector's role in supporting land reform beneficiaries' adoption of good governance practices

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Address systemic failures

In addition, he says, the government should seek to address systemic failures in land reform by improving coordination between different government departments to provide greater support to land reform beneficiaries in a more integrated manner.

"These recommendations and the implementation of other models that have proven successful in the land reform programme, among them joint ventures approaches and partnerships between beneficiaries and private investors, should be implemented at scale to promote a more just and equitable land reform programme in South Africa, where communities have equal access to economic benefits derived from land ownership," concludes Setou.

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