

Harnessing land reform to generate youth employment

According to the Vumelana Advisory Fund, government and the private sector need to work in concert to develop and implement strategies that are anchored around harnessing the land reform programme to generate employment opportunities, particularly for the growing number of unemployed youth.



Peter Setou, chief executive of the Vumelana Advisory Fund

Along with land redistribution, an equally enough focus should be dedicated to developing practical models of supporting beneficiary communities to enable them to use the land productively and in a sustainable manner, says Peter Setou, chief executive of the fund.

“The formation of small-scale farming co-operatives is one of the feasible avenues that can be explored for creating employment in peri-urban and rural areas. Co-operatives have a long history in South Africa and this model has a proven track record of being a sustainable source of income and food security. However, small-scale farming requires support in the form of capital, irrigation support, facilitating the private ownership of land, skills development, access to farming implements and markets to sell produce,” says Setou.

Covid-19 dealt blow to small-scale farmers

He points out that the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has dealt a blow to small-scale farmers who have the least resources to mitigate against the far-reaching impact of the nationwide lockdown. Citing the findings of the [BeyondCovid Business Survey](#), Setou says the future prospects of the country’s small and micro-farming community looks bleak as only 13% of the country’s up-and-coming farmers have managed to bounce back to pre-pandemic levels.

The study found that while 63% of commercial-scale farmers are back to their pre-pandemic operational levels, only 13% of South Africa’s up-and-coming farmers have managed to bounce back.

The study further found that the hard lockdown deprived small-scale farmers of their primary market and source of revenue, which is mainly sidewalk food stalls, fresh produce markets, corner shops, other SMMEs and NGOs which were compelled to close shop during the hard lockdown.

"Many beneficiary communities who do small-scale farming lack the financial resources to offset the impact of Covid-19, and they don't have the requisite capital to venture into commercial farming. Small-scale production has served as an entry point for many communities into the fields of agriculture and food production. Denying these small-scale farmers the support they require to become sustainable and scale up their operations will sound a death-knell to emerging farmers, which in turn undermines the land reform programme," says Setou.

He adds that he is encouraged by the R1.2bn Covid-19 disaster fund intervention that the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development announced last year to assist small-scale farmers.



Land reform: Importance of exploring, understanding various models to fast-track pace in 2021

14 Jan 2021



Critical role of small-scale farmers

Setou points out that small-scale farmers have a critically important role to play to meet the evolving future food demands of a growing and increasingly rich and urbanised population.

Citing the findings of research group Springer Link, Setou says more than 80% (475 million) of the world's farms operate on less than two hectares of land and although these farms account for only 12% of the world's farmland, they provide an estimated 80% of the food produced in Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa.

"Small-scale farmers play a key role in the food security equation and their contribution to the rural economy is without a doubt immense. In the South African context, where women and young people bear the brunt of poverty and unemployment, small-scale farming can be a catalyst that can drive job creation and entrepreneurship opportunities our country sorely needs," says Setou.

Lack of state support a major impediment

The Vumelana Advisory Services Fund is of the view that in addition to government support, a number of barriers needs to be removed in order for small-scale farming to gain traction. Lack of state support was highlighted as a major impediment for productive small-scale farming, particularly in a province like Limpopo which has a chronic problem of erratic climatic conditions and water scarcity.

According to Setou, there is a need to implement area-based planning and match the available land to the needs of the youth. "This requires local municipalities to play a lead role and integrate land reform into the integrated development plans (IDP). Beneficiary selection committees are key in ensuring a youth-driven participatory and consultative land redistribution programme for small-scale farming to become sustainable," he says.



Why land reform requires partnerships, affordable finance, stakeholder buy-in

25 May 2021



Developmental agency Rethink Africa has explored how the financial services sector and the private sector should be responding to the challenge of savings and wealth amongst ordinary South Africans, in particular the poor, Black majority.

Working in partnership with Ekurhuleni Environmental Organisation, the agency initiated a community-based programme called Sebenza Umhlaba Campaign (meaning "work the land" in isiZulu) aimed at raising awareness and education about climate change and hunger and fostering the participation of community members, including youth in leveraging the

potential of land as an income-generating resource.

Skills development

At the heart of this campaign was imparting local farming skills and showcasing how working the land productively can help to fight hunger and to mitigate the negative impact of climate change.

“Through these programmes we have been able to impart much-needed skills to young people to enable them to make a sustainable living. Moreover, we have managed to show tangible benefits of how the land can be used in a sustainable manner to address some of the pressing socio-economic challenges facing our country,” says Nompumelelo Melaphi, director of Rethink Africa.

The Vumelana Advisory Fund is of the view that the private sector needs to see itself as an important roleplayer that can ensure the success of the land reform programme through engagement with all the relevant stakeholders by availing its expertise. Working with beneficiary communities, the private sector has an opportunity to forge joint ventures and initiate commercially viable initiatives by empowering these communities with much-needed expertise such as access to infrastructure, agronomic inputs, technology and technical expertise, capital and markets.



Nompumelelo Melaphi, director of Rethink Africa

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