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The Expropriation of Agricultural Land: Understanding its Effects on Food Security and Economic Growth in South Africa

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Abstract

The current debate about the expropriation of agricultural land was triggered after the unsuccessfulness of the willing buyer, willing seller approach to allocating land among the previously dispossessed South Africans. The willing buyer, willing seller policy targeted allocating 30 percent of the land to the poor (mostly black people); however, this has not been achieved. Therefore, expropriation of agricultural land was suggested to solve the racial inequalities in land ownership. Despite the fact that there are studies conducted that focus on land expropriation without compensation and food security, there is less attention given to how the expropriation of agricultural land can affect food

security and the economic growth of South Africa. This work relies heavily on secondary sources to gather pertinent data. It performs a comprehensive textual study of the literature related to the expropriation of agricultural land. The paper argues that the expropriation of productive agricultural land might have a detrimental impact on South Africa's food security and economic growth. The land expropriation can affect productive agricultural land since agricultural production will decline, food prices will hike, and the majority of people will lose their jobs. Moreover, the allocation of land to South Africans who lack experience in farming can also be dangerous for the economy and food security.

Keywords: *Expropriation of Agricultural-Land, Food security, Economic development, South Africa.*

Introduction

In recent decades, South Africa has seen increased poverty, food insecurity, and economic decline. The study conducted by Mubecua and Mlambo (2021) reveals that the challenges of inequality, high poverty levels, food insecurity, and the decline of the economy were exacerbated when the apartheid government passed laws that promoted racial segregation. For instance, the Natives Land Act of 1913 permitted white people to have more access to land than other South African races (Indians, Coloured, and Blacks). In 1994, there was a transition from apartheid to democracy. The post-1994 government was expected to address the land question with the aim of fighting rising poverty, food insecurity, and the decline of the economy. The democratic government prioritised the land reform programmes because most relied-on farming for their survival. Hence, there were policies and programmes formulated to implement and address the land question in South Africa. For instance, the land reform programmes (land redistribution, restitution, and tenure) as well as the April 1997 White Paper on South African Land Policy are some of the policy provisions. Moreover, the government also formulated the willing buyer, willing seller policy. According to Kennedy and Qayyum (2023), the target of the willing buyer-willing seller was not successful since it was unable to distribute 30 percent of the land as it was targeted in 2014. The failure of the democratic government to redistribute land equally led to the formation of the land expropriation without compensation approach.

There has been an ongoing debate about the concept of land expropriation without compensation, just like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) intended to push for a state's ownership of land which

can be viewed as socialism; however, the ruling party (the African National Congress) in parliament has completely rejected this (Mubecua and Mlambo, 2021). There are studies conducted that focus on land expropriation without compensation but not on the expropriation of agricultural land, food security, or economic growth. For example, Mvunyiswa (2021) focused on realising land reform through expropriation: an analysis of the just and equitable compensation requirement. Lubbe and du Plessis's (2021) study deals with compensation for expropriation in South Africa and international law: the leeway and the limits. Furthermore, Joshua, Alex, Lee, Eva, Decide and Lucky (2021) conducted a study that aimed at legality of Expropriating Land without Compensation in South Africa: A Regional and International Law Perspective. Lubbe and du Plessis (2021) and Alax et al. (2021) provide a legal point of view on whether the expropriation of land is in line with international and national law. Despite the contribution of these studies, the effect of land expropriation without compensation (especially, agricultural land) and its effect on food security and economic growth have received less attention. In general, most rural South Africans rely on farming to generate their livelihood. Therefore, this study intends to contribute to determining what effect land expropriation without compensation (especially agricultural land) can have on food security and economic growth. Furthermore, it is important to note that in South Africa, land plays a critical role in development through the agricultural sector, as it contributes to ensuring food security, employment, and economic growth. The battle for long-term economic growth and food security could be either won or lost in the agricultural sector (Sertoglu, Ugural, and Bekun, 2017). Attaining economic growth and food security through the agricultural sector largely depends on the availability of agricultural land. Without proper land governance, the agricultural sector cannot achieve economic prosperity and food security. Drawing from countries' experiences like Zimbabwe and Mexico, if land reform (LEWC) is not carefully strategised, the country could suffer higher levels of food insecurity, unemployment, and economic shrinkage. Except for the study's introduction, this work starts by discussing the history of LEWC. The paper goes further to discuss expropriation of agricultural land, food security, economic growth and development, and land expropriation without compensation. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are provided.

Methods and Materials

In terms of research methodology, the study used secondary data to collect relevant data on the expropriation of agricultural land with the aim of understanding its effects on food security and economic growth. The study used relevant published works from books, journals, newspapers, as well as published and unpublished articles such as dissertations and thesis together with credible and reliable online sources of applicable organisations dealing with land reform, land expropriation, food security, and economic growth. The data retrieved was subjected to comprehensive qualitative analysis through the use of content analysis. In its definition, Neuendorf (2002) argues that content analysis is a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that identifies and summarises message content. Furthermore, content analysis refers to the analysis of books, brochures, written documents, transcripts, news reports, conference reports, and visual media. As a result, it makes use of acute reflection and analysis of secondary data collection.

History of Land Expropriation without Compensation

The present discussion focuses on land expropriation during and after the apartheid era. The origin of land expropriation in South Africa can be traced to June 1913, when the Native Land Act was passed. The Native Land Act established a framework for the ultimate division of the country between a relatively prosperous white core and a ring of progressively impoverished black reserves on the periphery. Since then, land questions have dominated the socio-political and economic environments of South Africa (Akinola, 2020). Similarly, Mubecua and Mbatha (2021) believe that land expropriation in South Africa emerged in the early 1910, when the Union of South African Government came to power. The Union of South African Government of General Louis Botha and General Jan Smuts passed laws (like the 1913 Land Act) that promoted land expropriation. Kahn (2013) states that between 1910 and 1924 the government continued with its modernisation programme, which laid the groundwork for the establishment of the future Apartheid Development State. One of the elements of the Apartheid Development State is the establishment of the South African Railways and Ports, established in 1916, and the establishment of the Electricity Supply Board, in 1923.

Following the end of apartheid in 1994, the South African government implemented various land reform programmes to address

the historical injustices of the South African land (Mubecua, Mbatha, Mpanza, and Tembe, 2020). As indicated before, these programmes included land redistribution, restitution, and tenure, all of which were later deemed ineffective in addressing historical injustices. Some of the fundamental causes of the failure of these programmes were the lack of a "willing seller" and a "willing buyer". Most whites were not willing to sell the land to willing buyers, and those who were willing to sell did so at a high price to make it expensive for some buyers (Lahiff, 2007; Dlamini, 2014). Land protests and riots became a common feature of post-apartheid South African politics, posing an important source of tension in the country between settlers and black natives (Akinola, 2020). In South African parliament, although there have been organisations that campaigned for land expropriation to be implemented, the EFF (political party) spearheaded the LEWC (Friedman, 2018; Vorster, 2019; Akinola, 2020). The EFF has been at the forefront of the project to amend Section 25 of the South African Constitution to support the expropriation of agricultural land. As indicated before, the EFF holds the view that the land should be owned by the state (Kaunda and Kaunda, 2019). However, in 2018 December, the Joint Constitutional Review Committee of both Houses—the Assembly and the National Council of Provinces—decided to vote against the amendment of Section 25 of the South African Constitution. However, the legislature established a newly reconstituted committee to undertake community hearings and to report back by March 31, 2020, on the proposed constitutional modifications that would allow for LEWC. Even today, the South African government has not approved the amendment of Section 25 of the Constitution, which will permit the implementation of land expropriation.

Having understood the history of South African land reforms and how they have changed since the Native Land Act of 1913 to recently, it is evident that South African land is still in the hands of the minority (the majority of whom are Whites). Therefore, land activists and political parties still continue to campaign for equality in land ownership. For that reason, this paper focuses on understanding the possible impact of land expropriation on food security and the economic growth of the country. The following section intends to discuss the expropriation of agricultural land and its possible effect on food security.

Expropriation of agricultural land and food security

This section is divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the lack of land for agricultural practices and food security. The second, section of the paper focuses on what might be the effect of the expropriation of agricultural land on food security.

Lack of land as a cause of food insecurity

In the past, African countries relied mostly on farming for their livelihood. Therefore, land dispossession and apartheid had a negative impact on food security amongst Africans who relied on farming for the generation of food. According to Jili and Masuku (2021), apartheid's denial of access to land had affected the food security of the South African population (particularly the black majority). This is because land is the most valuable resource and the cornerstone of social and economic progress for all humans (Moyo, 2007). In 1994, South Africa got freedom, and this brought hope to the majority of people who were previously oppressed by the Apartheid government. As a result, there were many expectations for addressing the land questions in South Africa, which was believed to be an engine for food security and ensuring economic growth (Ncube and Kang'ethe, 2015). The willing buyer, willing seller policy was debated and, fortunately, approved by the democratic government. Despite its approval, the policy failed to successfully allocate land equally amongst South Africans. The lack of land for farming has been related to the main causes of poverty and food security in South Africa.

Moyo (2007) goes on to say that access to land is crucial for people's ability to support their livelihoods and that food security is accomplished through direct production from the land. Likewise, Toulmin and Quan (2000) believe that access to land and the security of land rights are of utmost importance in the fight against food insecurity. The land is a fundamental source of sustenance and income generation in rural areas. Land is people's primary kind of natural capital to generate food and support their livelihoods in rural areas. For women and impoverished households, collecting fruits, leaves, and wood from public lands is a significant regular source of income. With the use of suitable tenure rules, Moyo (2007) has proposed some crucial measures to increase food security by enhancing the majority of the black population's access to land. Increasing cropping intensity, or the proportion of cropped area to all other agricultural uses, expanding cropping areas by opening up virgin

land and irrigation, and intensifying agricultural productivity through improved farming systems and inputs are additional strategies that have been suggested (Jili and Masuku, 2021). Despite the effort of the South African government to address this challenge, the issue of food insecurity still continues to be a daily concern, and this concern is caused by the disproportion of ownership towards land, as Whites continue to own approximately 87% of land and about 90% of agribusiness is still conquered by a white minority (Atuahene, 2011). These companies dominate the agricultural value chain in South Africa, including large food retailers, farm technology and machinery makers, animal feeds, seeds, and fertiliser manufacturers. As the population continues to grow, food security is one of the most problematic issues confronting global society, including South Africa (Mamabolo and Sebola, 2021). South Africa's population has increased dramatically over the past decade, approximately 15.5%, and it is estimated that by 2035 it will reach more than 80 million (Hlomendlini and Makgolane, 2017). This means that more food will be required to feed the growing population. Food security is defined as existing as soon as all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." Food security has four dimensions, namely: food availability, accessibility, utilisation, and stability (Cafiero, Viviani, and Nord, 2018). Scholars (Masuku, Mthembu, & Mlambo, 2023; Masuku & Shadrack, 2023) have agreed that South Africa is food secure at the national level, while at the household level it is food insecure; hence, the majority of households still struggle to have access to food.

Effect of land expropriation on food security

Among the few beneficiaries who benefited from the willing buyer, willing seller policy, the majority of them have failed to use the land they benefited from productively (Zantsi and Nengovhela, 2022). Therefore, this raises doubts about taking land from a productive farmer to a less or non-productive farmer because it might affect food security. Hlomendlini and Makgolane (2017) hold the same view that the agricultural sector plays a critical role in ensuring food security. The 'sector's production capacity will need to be increased to prevent food demand from exceeding domestic supply (Hlomendlini and Makgolane, 2017). However, land availability as well as the productivity of land are the challenges that hinder the sector from ensuring that there is enough food for the increasing population. Therefore, expropriating productive

agricultural land could pose a big threat to food productivity for the future production cycle, and it could be worse than the recent climate change affecting the sector. Learning from other countries' land expropriation experiences, there is convincing evidence that the expropriation of productive agricultural land affects food security and increases poverty levels.

Mexico

In Mexico, the history of land is noticeable by the legacy of land concentration, where a small percentage owns a certain portion of the arable land. The land reform in Mexico was initiated with the aim of solving such an inequality in land ownership. Despite the fact that policies addressing inequalities have always aligned with helping marginalised communities, the outcomes have not always aligned (Holley-Kline, 2022). In Mexico, under the land reform programme, they expropriated huge farms and allocated approximately 2.3 million to the landless Mexicans (Hertford, 1971). The expropriation is targeted to take a huge landholder and allocate it to small farmers, and these farmers do not have the necessary skills to ensure that they achieve success in their farming. Except that the shift of land from large landholders to small farmers is made to empower local communities the process has challenges like corruption, inefficiencies, and a lack of support from the government system. Moreover, the smallholder farmers don't have enough resources to finance themselves, and the expertise is also not there; therefore, this has been the problem in Mexico and it affects food production. The expropriation of land affected agricultural practices, which led to a decline in productivity (Assies and Duhau, 2008).

Tanzania

In Tanzania, the government implemented the land reform programme (Ujamaa programmes) that encourages villagisation (allocating land to villagers). The implementation of the villagisation initiative was accompanied by a significant food crisis in 1974 and 1975. Food crop production for domestic consumption as well as export crop production for foreign exchange earnings both dropped sharply (Lawi, 2007). Furthermore, Chuhila (2019) states that it was unfortunate that all the attempts to increase productivity through villagisation failed. According to Mkonda and He (2018), the villagisation programme in Tanzania affected agricultural growth, which is also having a direct impact on food

security and the livelihoods of the people. This affected the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country, for instance, from 2000 to 2009, the agricultural contribution to GDP fell from 29 to 25 percent. Likewise, nutrition also fell from 25 to 23.5 percent in the same time frame.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe was the biggest producer of tea and tobacco, but the implementation of the Fast-Track Land Reform (FTLR) changed all that since the country is now the worst country with high poverty and economic shrinkage. Such examples indicate that if expropriation of agricultural land is not strategically implemented, the sustainability of the agricultural sector could be compromised, bringing about the devastation of livelihoods.

Therefore, considering the expropriation of agricultural land, which intends to seize productive farmland could increase transaction costs for agriculturalists and input suppliers; it could also destroy, destruct the supply side of food and agricultural inputs (Mpejane, 2019). Additionally, the expropriation of agricultural land would transfer productive land that was efficiently used by white farmers to primarily black farmers, who may require years to create excess agricultural production goods for exports (Mpejane, 2019). It was indicated above that most of the land that has been redistributed is currently unproductive; some has been used for building houses and other un-agriculturally related things. Grimm (2020) confirms that nearly 90% of the reclaimed agricultural land is now utterly unusable. This could be seen as a debunking of the argument that giving back the land might improve their food security and fight unemployment in the country. Boshoff, Sihlobo, and Ntombela (2018) state that if the South African government continues to implement LEWC through its current incarnation without substantially altering its policy to hold expropriation of agricultural land recipients accountable for the maintenance of their newly acquired agricultural land, it's indeed likely that the trend of once economically viable agricultural land falling into dilapidation and decrepitude would then continue, impoverishing and disenfranchising many South Africans. Coetzee (2018) states that South Africa is the most food-secure country on the African continent, yet officials fear that implementing expropriation of agricultural land may cause the population to go hungry. It appears that the parties proposing the execution of this programme are unaware that land reform would not generate jobs, poverty relief, or food security if the land is not used to

produce the intended commodity. Boshoff (2018) states that if the expropriation of agricultural land is implemented, agricultural productivity, and hence food availability and affordability in the country, may likely suffer as a result. Such an outcome might be undesirable, given that South Africa currently has household food insecurity.

Although the current debate about land expropriation in South Africa is mostly provoked by addressing the same challenges of the food crisis, poverty, and unemployment, land activists and policymakers who advocate for the LEWC in South Africa hold the view that lack of land access is the main cause of the problem. However, this paper provided evidence of a country that tried to implement a similar land reform programme, but it was never a success. Furthermore, the paper has given an example of how countries like Mexico, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe resulted in food crises through similar programmes, and most of these countries have never recovered from them. In addition, unfortunately, poor people will be the ones to suffer, and South Africa should learn from this. In the section below, the paper continues to argue that despite the negative effects that the expropriation of agricultural land might have on food security, food crises, and poverty, the economy of South Africa is more likely to be affected if the expropriation of agricultural land programme is implemented.

Economic Growth and Development; Land Expropriation without Compensation

South Africa's economy has recently faced challenges, including slow economic growth, high unemployment, and current declines in sub-investment. Political instability poses a significant threat to our economy, and the expropriation of agricultural land could hurt an already struggling economy. In South Africa, agriculture is the rock layer of economic growth, development, and poverty eradication (Nkondo, 2021; Xaba, 2021). Agriculture is regarded as the engine and panacea for economic prosperity. Agriculture contributes approximately 2.5% of the GDP. However, the upstream (compost, seeds, feed, animal, and plant health sectors) and downstream (food processing, distribution, transport and storage, trading industries) food chains are included; this contributes approximately 7% of GDP, making it a significant element of the whole economy (Boshoff, Sihlobo, and Ntombela, 2018). The implementation of expropriation of agricultural land could result in a prolonged period in which there is no net new investment in agriculture, and this would mean that there would be no growth in agricultural output and no

growth in the agroindustry sector. This is because commercial farmers, regardless of ethnicity, who have not (yet) been expropriated are highly unlikely to begin new investments, and new farmers would not have the necessary means to invest.

The lack of investment in agriculture could increase food prices, and that might hurt the impoverished, who devote a large portion of their earnings to food rather than better-off individuals, and the country could suffer from an increase in poverty and hunger, and the economy might shrink (Hlomendlini and Makgolane, 2017). Therefore, the government needs to consider productive agricultural land without compensation because this might delay the effort of the government to attain sustainable development goals by 2030, which include poverty eradication, zero hunger, and ensuring vibrant economic growth (Cousins, 2021). The LEWC might result in a lack of investment in agriculture, and this could mean that South Africa will need to import the majority of commodities abroad, and they will have to let go of the foreign exchange to pay for the raw materials that go into the production of the food we eat.

Many countries (Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Ethiopia) that have expropriated land and neglected productive agricultural land suffer from high food insecurity, unemployment, and shrinking economies. In most countries, especially developing countries like South Africa, the agricultural business employs more people than other industries. The primary agricultural sector employs around 5% of employees in South Africa. For every R1 million in capital invested, the food-processing business is regarded as the most labour-intensive component of its industrial sector (Boshoff, Sihlobo, and Ntombela, 2018). Land and agriculture play a fundamental role, especially in the growth of employment, which can happen only if there is a growth in agricultural investment. Therefore, the study argues that the expropriation of productive agricultural land might lead to a decline in agricultural employment and a decline in agricultural economic contribution (Van Niekerk, 2021).

Expropriating agricultural land without compensation and letting the government be the custodian of it means that productive farmers will have to stop producing. What about the people who work on those farms and the contribution those farms make both to food provision and to the economy? This could be similar to Zimbabwe's situation if South Africa does not protect the agricultural sector. Losing experienced farmers could affect the agricultural sector badly because more investors

will pull out, which could negatively impact the country's economy (Admasu *et al.*, 2019).

Van Niekerk (2021) states that the implications for general economic prices, among the most substantial threats of any form of LEWC. The contemporary economy is essentially founded on the financial structures of different playmakers and associated risk profiles, and this structure offers the necessary yield to compensate for the risks involved, providing a direct relationship to pricing. Expropriation's spill-over effects would consequently be seen throughout all areas of the economy, not just agriculture. If the government changes one set of prices, other prices must adjust to allow the market to reach a new equilibrium. The majority of assets are linked to land, for example, houses might decrease in value because the majority can afford to buy land (Coetzee, 2018).

Further, the other concerning thing about LEWC is that the majority of farms in South Africa are heavily in debt, and farms in debt are linked to the actual land through title deeds that have already been used to secure loans (Sihlobo and Kapuya, 2018; Cousins, 2021). The farming debt in 2016 was approximately R437.8 billion, and this is about 34% of the agricultural debt, including farm assets. Therefore, if the government also expropriates those farms, how is the government going to deal with this heavily indebted land? The fact of the matter is that land belongs to the bank, and it is their compensation that will be paid by the government. Moreover, some farmers have assets on their farms. Therefore, how would the law cater for the assets on the farms and improvements made on the land? Because there are lots of investments made on farms, how are farmers going to be able to get their investment back? (Hoops, 2019; Xaba, 2021). This suggests that if LEWC is enforced in South Africa, farmers will face a tremendous debt that they will be unable to repay. If the government pays, what impact is that going to have on the economy of the country?

Conclusions and recommendations

Apartheid's legacy, with its disparities shaped by individualistic drives for personal gain, is still profoundly embedded in South Africa's land story. Every political discourse on land, including land expropriation without compensation, appears to be based on contemporary neoliberal economic discourse. However, unthoughtful expropriation of productive agricultural land could cause a huge problem in the agricultural sector and further extend to other sectors. Before the government implements expropriation, it is important to consider various angles. The article's

findings show that the expropriation of productive agricultural land might have a detrimental impact on South Africa's food security and economic growth. If productive agricultural land is expropriated, agricultural production will decline, food prices will hike, and the majority of people will lose their jobs, which means incomes will shrink and a decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected. South Africa's unemployment status keeps increasing year by year. Moreover, the findings show that most farms are in debt, which means banks own them. Thus, begging the following questions: What is going to happen? Is the government going to compensate the banks? Further, most farms have heavy equipment at their disposal, which means this will happen because that equipment belongs to the farmers. Lastly, there are people (investors) who invested their money in those farms. What is going to happen to their investment? Are they going to be compensated? These are concerns that the South African government should be prepared to answer. For this reason, this article recommends that people must first be trained agriculturally before they are given agriculturally productive land, and there must be a contractual agreement stating that they will produce on this land. Finally, the article recommends that investors, banks, and the owners of equipment on the farms be compensated.

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