**Four Stories About Food Sovereignty**

**Region: South Africa**

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**Introduction**

Food sovereignty in South Africa has not been as fiercely adopted in policies and legislation compared to other developing countries (Siebert, 2019). This is due to the countries' history of oppression, dislocation of culture, and dispossession (Siebert, 2019). Issues in the food system in post-apartheid South Africa are being exacerbated by the climate crisis. This report will examine how food sovereignty has attempted to manifest itself in a top down, neoliberal, racialized system such as South Africa. This report will draw upon academic sources and NGO websites to produce an overview of the current state of the climate crisis and food sovereignty ty in post-apartheid South Africa. Dimensions of gender and government policies affecting the food system will be provided to supplement the primary research questions. The preliminary research produced through this report has found that post-apartheid South Africa maintains a highly racially divided agricultural system that supports white male farmers and neoliberal beliefs of productivity and marketization, at the expense of environmental degradation and land redistribution.

**South Africa’s Food System**

*Contemporary Agriculture*

South Africa has a total land area of 122 million hectares, and this territory spans across seven climatic regions ranging from Mediterranean to subtropical to semi-desert (Bernstein, 2013). A total of 14% of South Africa is potentially arable, with one fifth having high agricultural potential (DEA, 2018). Despite having a variable climate that supports a wide range of agricultural uses, the majority of agricultural land is concentrated into the hands of a select few. There are 2.87 million agricultural households whose primary income is derived from the production of agricultural goods, 2.62 of these are black households (Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam, 2017). 40,000 of these households are white commercial farmers who account for 70% of food produced in South Africa (Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam, 2017). Farms vary in size, predominantly based on race. In 1994 white farmers owned an average plot size of 1,570 hectares, compared to the 1.3 hectares owned by black farmers (Hoeks et al., 2014). This is translated into white farms accounting for 85.8 million hectares of agricultural land in South Africa (Bernstein, 2013). The majority of commercial farms are livestock (66.8%), the remaining 33.2% of commercial farms are either crop, specialized horticulture, or mixed operations (Tibesigwa et al., 2017). Sugarcane, beef, chicken, grapes and dairy are the most common agricultural products in South Africa (Tibesigwa et al., 2017). In 2000, agricultural products represented 10% of the total value of exports (Tibesigwa et al., 2017). The agricultural sector contributes roughly 3% towards the country’s GDP and represents 10% of formal employment (Tibesigwa et al., 2015).

*Traditional Agriculture*

Traditional agriculture in South Africa is more difficult to track and quantify due to the apartheid era (Merwe et al., 2016). Apartheid displaced the native black population in a concerted effort to weaken their cultural ties (Siebert, 2019). The black population was forced out of their traditional territories and crammed into urban centres or rural arid territories, to support the development of the country (Siebert, 2019). This fragmented the traditional food system by dislocating communities from their traditional territory and resources (Merwe et al., 2016). Production and consumption of traditional foods have rapidly declined over time, with only 52% of South African households incorporating traditional foods into their diet (Merwe et al., 2016). Foods once marked as traditional have either been commercialized or the historic importance of traditional foods has been lost (Merwe et al., 2016).

**Climate Crisis**

The African continent is seen as the region that will be most negatively impacted by the climate crisis (Altieri and Nicholls, 2013; Bryan et al., 2009). Severe climate changes coupled with the current state of economies will destabilize the region. Agriculture remains a prominent economic force across the continent and is the sector that will be most affected by climate change (Bryan et al., 2009). Marginal changes to the agricultural sector’s ability to support rural populations and economies will result in a drastic increase in civil conflict, the spread of disease, and hunger (Bryan et al., 2009; Tibesigwa et al., 2017; Leck and Simon, 2018; Cock, 2016).

*Temperature*

South Africa has one of the world’s highest levels of emissions per capita, at 10.3|tCO2 per person, well above the global average of 6.3|t (Leck and Simon, 2018). However, these numbers are considerably skewed by industries such as mining and coal, and the upper class minority (Leck and Simon, 2018). The South African government has adopted certain initiatives and programmes aimed at reducing pollution; these programmes are tracking pollution, information gathering schemes, and efficient development (Altieri and Nicholls, 2013). South African climate scientists argue that these programmes do not fully address the crisis and disadvantage the black rural populations; with most financial support and incentives being given to large corporations or commercial sectors (Leck and Simon, 2018). South Africa is predicted to warm by 1.2 °C in 2020, 2.4 °C in 2050 and roughly 4.2 °C by 2080 (Tibesigwa et al., 2017). This sustained increase in national average temperatures will have a severe impact on ecosystems and significantly impact South Africa’s uneven distribution of water.

*Water*

Due to the multiple climate zones in South Africa, there is an uneven distribution and access to surface water. As of the year 2000, South Africa had a total reliable surface water supply of 13,226 million m3 (Blignaut et al., 2009). In the same year, the country used 13,041 million m3 (Blignaut et al., 2009). Agriculture utilized 65% of the country’s available surface water (Blignaut et al., 2009). The projections for the rise in South Africa’s average temperature will have a severe impact on precipitation, the primary source of surface water. By the year 2020, annual precipitation is expected to have declined by 5.4%, followed by another decrease of 6.3% by 2050, and 9.5% in 2080 (Tibesigwa et al., 2017). This decrease will destabilize the agricultural industry in South Africa, primarily smallholder farmers (Blignaut et al., 2009). Yields from rain-fed agriculture are expected to reduce by 50% by the year 2020 (Wlokas, 2017). The ability for smallholder farms to adapt to these scenarios are hindered by the policies adopted by the South African government that relate to land and water.

**Policies on Agriculture, Land, and Water**

Apartheid and post-apartheid policies are recognized as having constructed the current food system within South Africa, the climate crisis, and the struggles smallholder farmers currently face (Blignaut et al., 2009; Bernstein, 2013; Greenberg, 2015; Marcatelli, 2018;Bassey, 2018; Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam, 2017; Siebert, 2019). Based on the size of this report, this section will outline only a few policies in South Africa that pertain to agriculture, land, and accessibility.

* **GATT (1993):** The signing of GATT’s Agreement on Agriculture removed tariffs and reduced state support to producers (Greenberg, 2015). In 1990, state support was at 13.7%, by 1997 it was at 2.7%; as of 2011 it has risen to 5% (Greenberg, 2015).
* **Co-operatives Amendment Act (1993):** Agricultural co-ops owned a significant number of assets in the supply chain, ranging from production to distribution (Greenberg, 2015). The co-op amendment act allowed co-ops to privatize, which allowed mergers with corporations outside of South Africa; 90% of co-ops absorbed other co-ops or merged with private corporations (Greenberg, 2015).
* **Marketing of Agricultural Products Act (1996):** Control boards in South Africa were state regulated organizations that monitored the quality of sectors such as meat and grains, as well as promoted research and development (Greenberg, 2015). This act dissolved the control boards and handed their roles and assets over to private commodity associations who represented the private sector of each agricultural commodity (Greenberg, 2015).
* **Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) (1996):** LRAD was introduced to develop a black commercial agricultural sector (Greenberg, 2015). Smallholder farms were later incorporated into the process and focus of the programme. This was because of an initiative promoted by the World Bank to make smallholder farms competitive enough to compete on open markets (Greenberg, 2015). The goal was to commercialize smallholder farms to a point that they could compete on the open market without waiting for them to scale up in size (Greenberg, 2015).
* **National Water Act (1998):** Distinctions between private and public water were abolished and the resource was placed under administrative authority of the government (Marcatelli, 2018). ‘Water rights’ was replaced with the phrase 'entitlements to water use’ (Marcatelli, 2018). There are four categories for water use: ELU’s, household/domestic, general authorizations, and licenses (Marcatelli, 2018). ELU’s maintain land owners property rights that grant them unregulated water use for their farming operations (Marcatelli, 2018). This decision was made because of the significant contribution white farmers make to the country’s economic growth (Marcatelli, 2018). Paid licenses are the most common form of access to water for black smallholder farmers (Marcatelli, 2018).

**Food Sovereignty in a Climate Crisis**

*Foreign Intervention*

As the climate crisis worsens, the image of Africa as a hunger struck and impoverished place will encourage foreign intervention, with the goal of increasing neoliberal practices of trade and marketization (Bassey, 2018). Since democratization, South Africa has addressed socio economic issues through neoliberal trade agreements, and the idea of an efficient and productive commercial agricultural sector. This has encouraged foreign intervention through a number of forms, including industrial agricultural technology exchanges (Bassey, 2018). An example of this is genetically modified crops. The need for climate smart technology that also addresses hunger has prompted multinational corporations to begin to brand GMOs as a one step solution (Bassey, 2018). However, these crops are rooted in the idea of efficient monocultures that thrive in monolithic food systems that do not incorporate a multitude of traditional diets, cultures, or small-scale diversified operations (Bassey, 2018). The introduction of GMOs into the agricultural landscape has entrenched the idea that large commercial farming operations are both economically viable and sustainable. This forces small diversified farms to adopt commercial practices of mass produced monocultural food to be competitive in the South African market, or receive state support (Bassey, 2018).

*White Ownership of Land and Water*

Control over water and land in post apartheid South Africa still reflects that of the era of segragation and discrimination (Siebert, 2019). Since the Constitution of 1996, policies and legislative actions regarding land and water ownership, are Constitutional safeguards that support the economic elite in South Africa (Marcatelli, 2018). The policies that have supported the white commercial farmers have been in tandem with the idea that large-scale commercial agriculture is essential for food security in South Africa; if smallholder farmers are to exist, it will be to intersect with large-scale commercial operations (Greenberg, 2015). The climate crisis has strengthened the argument that large commercial farms are the only ones capable of combating the crisis and being able to feed the population. Land reform has been a key element of post-apartheid policies, but the substance within these policies have only supported the continued domination of white farmers (Siebert, 2019). Previous governments have committed to redistribute 30% of commercial farmland back to the native population by the year 1999, however, by 2010, less than 5% had been redistributed through the initiated programmes (Bernstein, 2013). The Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture also identifies “the poor performance of land reform in terms of agricultural growth, self-employment and employment is primarily attributed to the highly inadequate participation of beneficiaries in identifying, planning and implementation of the farms and the investments” (Mahlati et al., 2019, pg. 50). The top-down approach of government in relation to land reform has lead “to the absence, late arrival or poor quality of the postsettlement support, and the capacity problems in the key institutions” that directly support or are involved in agricultural land reform (Mahlati et al., 2019, pg. 50). The precedent set by the South African government through their policies, highlights their intention when addressing the climate crisis and the food system. Future policy initiatives will mirror the ones already adopted, which will safeguard white farmers and promote the commercial agricultural sector over the traditional. As the climate crisis progresses, land and water rights will be consolidated even more into the hands of white farmers, in an effort to maintain economic viability. This has made food sovereignty less viable as a movement due to the lack of access to the resources necessary for smallholder farmers to thrive and social movements to succeed.

*Gender and Farming*

Women make up 61% of all individuals involved in agriculture in South Africa (Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam, 2017), with 60% of small farms being operated by women (Cock, 2016). Due to traditional systems of hierarchy, economic opportunity, and apartheid, black women in South Africa are at a greater disadvantage when dealing with the climate crisis (DEA, 2018). In rural South Africa, women’s roles typically include household water supply, procurement of energy, and food production (DEA, 2018). Women cultivate the land while men often work in the cities or tend to cattle (Ncgoya and Kumarakulasingam, 2017). Small scale farming is deemed women’s work as it is seen as not as profitable compared to other specialized agricultural goods (Ngcoya and Kumarakulasingam, 2017). The work women are doing is not recognized as equal or even considered labour in tribal governments. In terms of access to land, women face a significant barrier. Through land redistribution programmes, women on average receive 20.4 hectares of land compared to men who receive 91.5 hectares (Hoeks et al., 2014). Only 12% of recipients were female-headed households (Hoeks et al., 2014). This numbers reflect the growing interest of the South African government in developing rural communities. To obtain access to rural communities headed by Tribal Authorities, governments have opted to allocate further powers to the Tribal authorities or through grant programmes (Hoeks et al., 2014). These Tribal Authorities typically only recognize male headed households, and focus their efforts on obtaining land for men or local economic elites (Hoeks et al., 2014). This puts women in a conflicting position. Women are placed between supporting cultural practices that are limiting their autonomy, or attempting to enter into the land ownership contest, but based on gendered ideas of farming, will not see the same success as their male counterparts. Gender has put women into a category in which they already have less access to government support based on their size of their farming operation, tied with the fact that traditional authorities consolidate efforts in supporting the men of the community and advancing personal economic interests. The advisory panel report on land reform and agriculture, appointed by the President of South Africa provides a stark figure that women make up 23% of land redistribution programme beneficiaries, despite women being responsible for the majority of the agricultural sector work (Mahlati et al., 2019). The policies of the South African government have not just supported white commercial farmers, but white male farmers. State support for small-scale farming has already disadvantaged the black population, but with traditional systems in rural communities, women are isolated from even the most minimal opportunities to access land and water; “patriarchy has stamped out land rights and tenure for women who are also compromised not only legally but through systemic unequal power relations in rural communities” (Mahlati et al., 2019, pg. 40). These few examples highlight how women continue to be the shock absorbers of food crisis and climate change in South Africa, with little to no support for them (Cock, 2016).

**Community Response to the Climate Crisis and Food Sovereignty**

*Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE)*

TCOE is a South African organization that was established in 1983 and primarily focuses its work in rural communities (TCOE, n.d.). TCOE’s prioritizes the importance of building community nurseries, to aid in recovering traditional and indigenous seeds to support smallholder farms, in a countermovement against multinational corporations and fertilizer companies (Cock, 2016). Since 2008, food sovereignty, climate change, and the empowerment of women, have been the focus of their organizations mandate (TCOE, n.d.). Their projects range from grass root leadership development, educating smallholder farms on climate smart farming that strengthens food sovereignty, and policy advocacy at the national level (TCOE, n.d.). There is little to no information pertaining to particular initiatives that TCOE has undertaken and seen through to success. However, their website does articulate that there is a disjoint between many organizations, civilians, and levels of government when attempting to address food sovereignty, which has hampered their efforts (TCOE, n.d.).

*Surplus People Project (SPP)*

SPP is a South African organization established in the 1980’s (SPP, n.d.). SPP was formed in response to the removal programmes of the apartheid era government, and worked to draw attention and support to the issue of forced land removals, as well as mobilize communities against these programmes (SPP, n.d.). Post-apartheid, SPP shifted its focus to supporting cumminties struggles for food sovereignty, land ownership, and alternatives to dominant modes of production (SPP, n.d.). Compared to TCOE, SPP has a detailed list outlining their achievements, which range from mobilization of communities to acquire 400,000 hectares of farmland, research for local communities seeking food production alternatives, and assisting rural communities in gaining access to land and water through the contemporary government programmes (SPP, n.d.). To this day SPP’s efforts focus primarily on grass root mobilization that is specific to each community, despite the fact that they work throughout the entire country and have collaborated with other peasant movements such as Via Campesina (SPP, n.d.).

**Conclusion**

Food sovereignty in South Africa provides an example of how the policies of dispossession, discrimination, and segregation during the apartheid era have exacerbated the climate crisis and produced a fragmented peasant social movement. As the climate crisis progresses in South Africa, greater problems for food sovereignty to take root will emerge. The South African government following democratization had opted to focus on neoliberal programmes of production and consolidation in the agricultural sector. These programmes have maintained the same levels of exclusion that existed during apartheid, with majority control and economic success being maintained by white commercial farmers. With a worsening climate crisis, the South African government has set a precedent that supports the commercialization and marketization of agriculture as the primary mode of mitigating the effects of the crisis. Future attempts by grassroots and national organizations in South Africa at promoting food sovereignty must tackle the fragmented state of the population. Gender, water, and land are highlighted in this report as areas of white neoliberal control that have hampered attempts at food sovereignty and will be the battlegrounds for future debates about redistribution, equality and equity, and climate sensitive resource use.

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