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Linking water and land policies for the revitalisation of small holder agriculture in South Africa

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Context: In South Africa (SA) both land and water institutions have and are still undergoing reform measures with the advent of democracy, equity and promote rural development. However, despite the apparent inter linkages of land and water in rural livelihoods and agricultural development, the implementation of such reforms has been done separately.

Question: Would articulating the two reforms lead to improved opportunities to addressing equity and promoting rural development in present South Africa?

Method: Fieldwork conducted on communal land in two small scale irrigation schemes (SIS) - Nzhelele and Thabina, and resettled private land in Tzaneen area.
-Detailed structured questionnaires (41 farmers on SIS and 20 farmers on private land), observations, key informant interviews and informal discussions.
-Descriptive statistical analysis: Productivity at plot and community level, fallow land and land transfers – as main variables, and the (potential) impact of land and/or water reform on the latter.

Water Reform:
Water reform advocates for the registration and licensing of all non domestic water use. Water should be governed in a decentralised manner where new institutions (Water User Associations (WUA) and Catchment Management Agencies (CMA) are established to encourage user participation in decision making, efficiency and equity in water use.

Land Reform:
In the framework of South Africa's land reform, through its restitution/redistribution programmes, people got access to Private land (in CPA, trust or CC form) or communal land will be restructured, probably privatised, with the implementation of the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 (CLARA)

Results: Overall low productivity and low land use

- 30% of communal land and 39% private land lay fallow
- 44% of communal farmers and 90% of resettled farmers do not fully utilise their land
- Grain productivity averages ZAR12833/ha/year (gross)
- Vegetable productivity averages ZAR24473/ha/year (gross)
- Land productivity is over 65% below average
- Lack of water has hampered production: 85% of farmers have inadequate water supply
- High cost of inputs, lack of market access and low return on agricultural investment
- Land insecurity and refusal to lease lands
- Very low farm incomes have resulted in farmers pursuing multiple livelihoods

Results: Water, land, water-land and agrarian institutional constraints

Lack of coherence between land and water reform programmes

ALSO

Constrained Implementation of the (water and land) policies individually, leads to lack of water and inadequate tenure system

- Despite water reform, there are still no water rights nor improved water supply
- Communal farmers feel insecure on current tenure and refuse to lease land (Land is valued as safety net, not as a productive asset - 76% in favour of privatising land, but only 23% willing to lease after privatisation)

AND

Lack of broader policy measures, regarding market access, input provision, financial services, adapted to a multiple livelihoods environment

Conclusion:

1. Lack of effective implementation of water reform and land reform remains an obstacle, constraining to enhance rural livelihoods and agricultural development
2. The separate implementation of water and land reform is indeed an obstacle for development for small scale and emerging farmers. Linking them is a necessity but it is not sufficient.
3. To effectively promote rural development water-land-reform should be linked together AND to broader agrarian reforms, considering support services, market access and the overall rural multiple livelihoods in SA.