



The end of the African peasant? From investment funds and finance value-chains to peasant related questions

by Ward Anseeuw, Antoine Ducastel and Jean-Jacques Gabas

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1. Beyond land, the renewed interest in agricultural production

The last couple of years have been characterized by a "rediscovery" of agriculture as a sector for strategic activity. This sector had been gradually relegated both in the public policy agenda for whom the myths of an essentially urban growth and provision of agricultural produce at moderate cost contributed to maintain this chronic indifference, as well as in private investors' strategies discouraged by the low financial margins and the risks inherent to this activity¹.

In 2008, the food crisis aroused renewed interest in agriculture of these various actors. On one hand, the national and international authorities presently recognize the urgency of the agricultural situation in the developing countries. In 2009, at Aquila, US\$20 billion were promised by the G8 members to fight the hunger². However, these promises are yet to be materialized as the decline of public aid to development (PAD) focusing on agriculture engaged in since the 1980s continues³. (Re)-putting the agricultural question on the political agenda by governments and development agencies thus only represented a discursive "revolution". On the other hand, this crisis has resulted in an awakening of the private sector, and more particularly financial market Actors. The structural evolutions and the projections regarding the agricultural sector (increase of population, increased pressures on natural resources, dietary changes and energy tendencies) conjugated to the effects of the food price crisis of 2008 (questioning the myth of permanent low costs of food commodities) are pushing investors towards agricultural activities⁴. Perceptions have changed: henceforth, this sector presents interesting financial returns on investment perspectives. The financial crisis of 2009 strengthened this dynamic. Confronted to the uncertainties affecting financial assets (in particular those of the American treasury), investors use the farming sector as a refuge value.

As such, increased foreign direct investments (FDI) into agriculture and a multiplication of investment projects on the African continent can be observed. In 2008, FDI into the African continent reached US\$87,6 billion (i.e. 27 % higher than the previous year), of

¹ OCDE (2010). Afrique: Priorité à l'agriculture. Paris, OCDE, www.oecd.org/agriculture.

² OXFAM (2010). D'un G8 à l'autre : suivi des engagements de l'Aquila sur la sécurité alimentaire. Paris, OXFAM-France, Note d'information, 24 juin 2010.

³ OCDE (2009). Measuring aid to agriculture. Paris, OECD-DAC, November 2009, www.oecd.org/dac/stats/agriculture.

⁴ Anseeuw, W. (forthcoming). Commercial Pressures on Land. Afrique Contemporaine.

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which a third (i.e. US\$27 billion) towards the mining and agricultural industries in Sub-Saharan African countries⁵.

Regarding the nature of these investments, two categories can be distinguished. Those aiming directly at natural resources, particularly land. This category, often qualified as "land grabbing" is characterized by investors, public or private, national or foreign, acquiring land for agricultural purposes. This phenomena is presently the object of extensive scientific analyses⁶. If a wide panel of objectives stimulates these acquisitions⁷, the investors endeavor to develop their activities along the production chain, in particular focusing on the primary production activities. According to Cotula⁸, a reversal of the risk/profit relationship appears within the production chain. If primary production concentrated until now the main part of the risks with profits returning to downstream and particularly upstream actors, the increase of agricultural prices tends henceforth to invert this tendency.

However, it seems that this phenomenon represents only the top of the iceberg of wider dynamics. Indeed, the land acquisition phenomenon diverts attention from a dynamics of control over the agricultural production. This dynamic of "production grabbing", the one which interests us more particularly in this paper, is characterized by certain actors controlling, partially or totally, directly or indirectly, the process of agricultural production. This category of investors is foreign to the traditional farming sector: it concerns financial actors, commercial banks, investment funds, aiming at diversifying their portfolio. By virtue of the dominant anticipations, they perceive the agricultural sector as an investment for the future, as such engaging in "Malthusian oriented speculation". These processes are not totally new: for example, in Argentina, pension funds invest in agriculture to benefit from its guaranteed and regular returns⁹ or in certain agricultural sub-sectors, such as the banana one, where certain dominant actors control the various segments of the value-chain. This being said, the motivations of the actors, the scale of the phenomenon and the significance of the geographical areas concerned represent the peculiarity of the current trend¹⁰.

⁵ UNCTAD (2009). Rapport sur l'investissement dans le monde: sociétés transnationales, production agricole et développement en 2009. New York et Geneve, UNCTAD, Rapport – Vue d'ensemble, 69p.

⁶ Cf. Cotula, L., Vermeulen, S., Leonard, R., Keeley, J. (2009). Land grab or development opportunity? Agricultural investment and international land deals in Africa. London/Rome, IIED/FAO/IFAD, research report, 130p.; World Bank (2010). Rising Global Interest in farmland. Can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits ? Washington, WB, Research report, 194p.; ILC (à paraître). Commercial pressures on land. Rome, ILC, synthesis report ; etc.

⁷ Anseeuw, W. (2010). Large Scale Land Acquisitions in Southern Africa: Characteristics, Perspectives and Regulation. Johannesburg, SACAU 2010 Policy Conference "Land in Southern Africa - Key issues for farmers", 29-30 March 2010.

⁸ Cotula, L. & Vermeulen, S. (2009). Deal or no deal: the outlook for agricultural land investment in Africa. *International Affairs*, Vol.85, No 6, p.1233–1247.

⁹ Neveu, A. (2001). *Financer l'agriculture. Quels systèmes bancaires pour quelles agricultures ?*. Paris, Ed. Charles Léopold Mayer.

¹⁰ Anseeuw, W (forthcoming). Commercial Pressures on Land. Rome, ILC, Programme synthesis report.

In order to better understand these restructurings, this article details several new production and investment models developed in South Africa. If this country distinguishes itself by specific land and rural structures, a legacy of the previous regimes power relations, it seems to 'pioneer' the previously mentioned dynamics. Indeed, in parallel to land reform introduced after 1994, the successive governments implemented liberalization and deregulation policies in the agricultural sector. The State controlled institutions (i.e. agricultural and marketing boards) were dismantled and various support subsidies cancelled¹¹. Henceforth, the orientation and the regulation of the agricultural activity are orchestrated through market mechanisms¹². In the 1990s, the South African farming sector was characterized by significant restructurings, marked by the development of non-state institutions reframing the market, in particular the futures market for agricultural commodities (SAFEX)¹³. Today, the South African farming sector is thus one of the most deregulated, but also one of the most structured, offering a range of instruments of risk management to the investors. In the international context of the "revival" of agricultural investment, this country represents a convenient base for financial experiments. The countries' land resources and its role as a regional power also stimulate the interest of the investors for this market.

As such, South Africa, as laboratory of new agricultural and investment practices, constitutes a heuristics case-study to illustrate the current international dynamics. Nevertheless, due to its historic trajectory, the country is distinguished itself by its specific economic, social and political structure. The evolutions and the transformations detailed in this article, do aim at excessive generalizations, nor to be transposed into the other national spaces. It is rather a question of contributing and of enriching the current debate on new agricultural dynamics, through the analysis of a series of practical case-studies.

The second section detailed hereafter presents the vector, that of the finance value-chain, through which the current agricultural production and financing restructurings are established. The third section is dedicated to detailed presentation of these new production and investment models, specific - at the moment - to South Africa. Finally, before concluding in the fifth section, the fourth presents several reflections related to the structural changes affecting Africa's agricultural economies.

2. The finance value-chain and the total integration of the production by macro-actors

The global agricultural sector undergoes presently a profound restructuring. The agricultural exception, which had been questioned when the sector integrated the GATT negotiations, is buried once and for all. New actors, carriers of references and outside experiences, have made their appearance in the sector. Through their interactions with the

¹¹ Vink, N. & Kirsten, J. (2000). Deregulation of agricultural marketing in South Africa: Lessons learned. Sandton, The Free Market Foundation, Monograph 25.

¹² Borras, S. (2003). Questioning Market-Led Agrarian Reform: Experiences from Brazil, Colombia and South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, Vol.3, No3, p.367-394.

¹³ But also private norms, rules and instruments.

sector's "traditional" are born new modes of action, investment and production. As such, a new agricultural development paradigm tends today to impose itself¹⁴, which has repercussions manifesting itself both at national and international levels.

The objective of the models is to attract private investors towards the agricultural sector. The finance value-chain is the vector through which this capital inflow is channeled. "The finance value-chain structures investments which are proposed throughout the value-chain. The Financial services are often combined with marketing activities and possibly technical support"¹⁵ (Figure 1). The approach is not new, and several agricultural export sub-sectors (such as coffee, cotton, etc.) are already structured according to this model. However, these last years, this financial strategy knew a wider distribution, as well geographical as at the level of the concerned value-chains (eg. cereal).

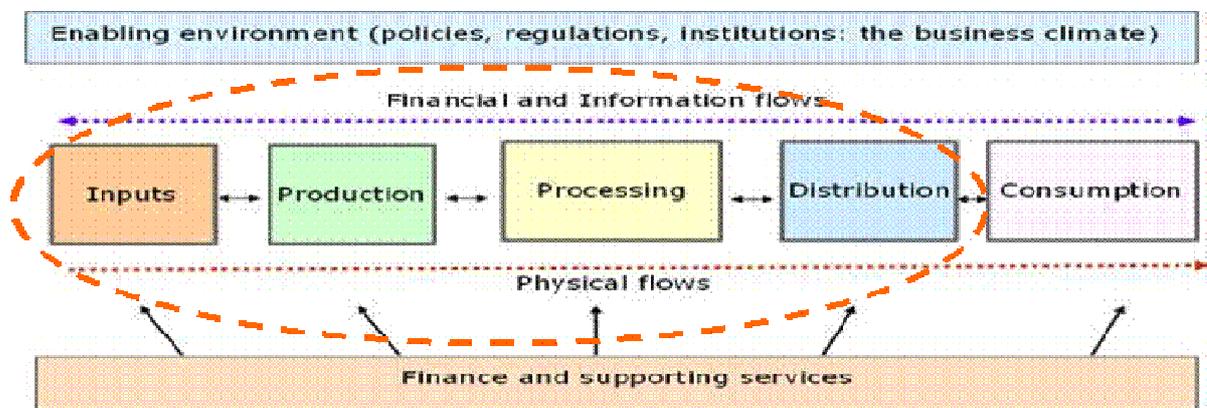


Figure 1: The finance value-chain and the advanced integration of value-chains

This increasing control over the agricultural productive cycle, in particular over the primary production, is established through a strengthened vertical integration. Downstream (including financing) and downstream (up to the distribution and commercialization) undergo an ever-increasing concentration process to the advantage of some macro-actors. By means of partnerships, of contractualization, etc., these dominant actors widen their control over the productive cycle in its entirety. This approach also aims at limiting the risks inherent to the agricultural activity. Thanks to the circulation capital and information flows, transactions costs are reduced and the risks limited. Although cases down and upstream integration by monopolistic agricultural production companies exist (cf Cargill, Monsanto, etc.), an integration process occurs, including of the agricultural production, initiated from outside of the agricultural sector, in particular by financial actors.

1. New models of agricultural financing and production

¹⁴ De Janvry, A. (2009). Agriculture for Development: new paradigm and option for success. *Agricultural Economics*, Vol.41, Issue supplement s1, p.17-36.

¹⁵ Devèze, J.C. (2008). *Défis Agricoles Africains*. Paris, Karthala-AFD.

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If a first common characteristic is the total integration of the different sector segments, the second is the interest of new types of actors (already or not at all involved down and upstream in the agricultural sector) in primary production. Various models according to the established organization (contracts, production outsourcing, etc.) and the actors involved (banks, intermediaries, investment fund). Without claiming to be exhaustive, three models are detailed in this article: bank integration, engineering companies' engagement and investment funds.

** Bank integration within agricultural value-chains*

Banks are traditional partners within the agricultural and agro-industrial sectors, which they finance through a "classic" form characterized by a loan granted and secured through collateral, generally land. In the context of greater perspectives of financial returns, banks tend presently to strengthen their control and their participation along the agricultural value-chains. This banking integration is essentially established through the contractualization of the various parties, in particular the producers (Figure 2).

Concerning their relations with the producers, a new risk management strategy occurs. Instead of using the land as collateral, it is the production which covers the granted loan. This evolution must be put in context with the increase of input costs compared to the value the land. In general, the latter is not sufficient as collateral to cover the farmers' expenses. As such, the bank supplies the necessary liquidities in exchange for the rights over their future harvest. This contract is negotiated between both parties at the beginning of the productive cycle, in other words, even before seeds are sown. The farmer has lost the ownership of his/hers production.

The contract stipulates the type, the volume and the quality of the production, defined according to farm characteristics (size, soil quality, etc.), and the purchase price of the produce. This purchase price is calculated according to market evolutions projections. The producer thus has a fixed income defined in advance, namely the amount of the production less the granted loan and the interests. In case of surplus or of shortage compared to the agreed upon volume and to the quality fixed, the farmer will be credited or debited of the corresponding amount. As such, the risk of production is transformed into performance risk, which is entirely born by the farmer.

A multi-risk insurance, engaged in through the bank, covers the producer against all natural risks inherent to the agricultural activity (flood, fire), from the beginning of the cycle. Since the bank contractualizes with several farmers geographically scattered, it limits its production risks and it benefits from important economies of scale with insurance companies. The bank also limits the risks related to price fluctuation. Indeed, it takes care of the commercialization management and price coverage through the futures market (i.e. SAFEX's futures market in the South African case).

During the productive cycle, the bank and the insurance company are monitoring the production (mainly through agricultural engineers, employed by the banks, but also by satellite). At the end of the harvest, the farmer delivers his/hers production to SAFEX certified silo, which guarantees the ownership of a volume at a specific quality to the

bank. Commercialization, done by the bank, is organized mainly through the financial market.

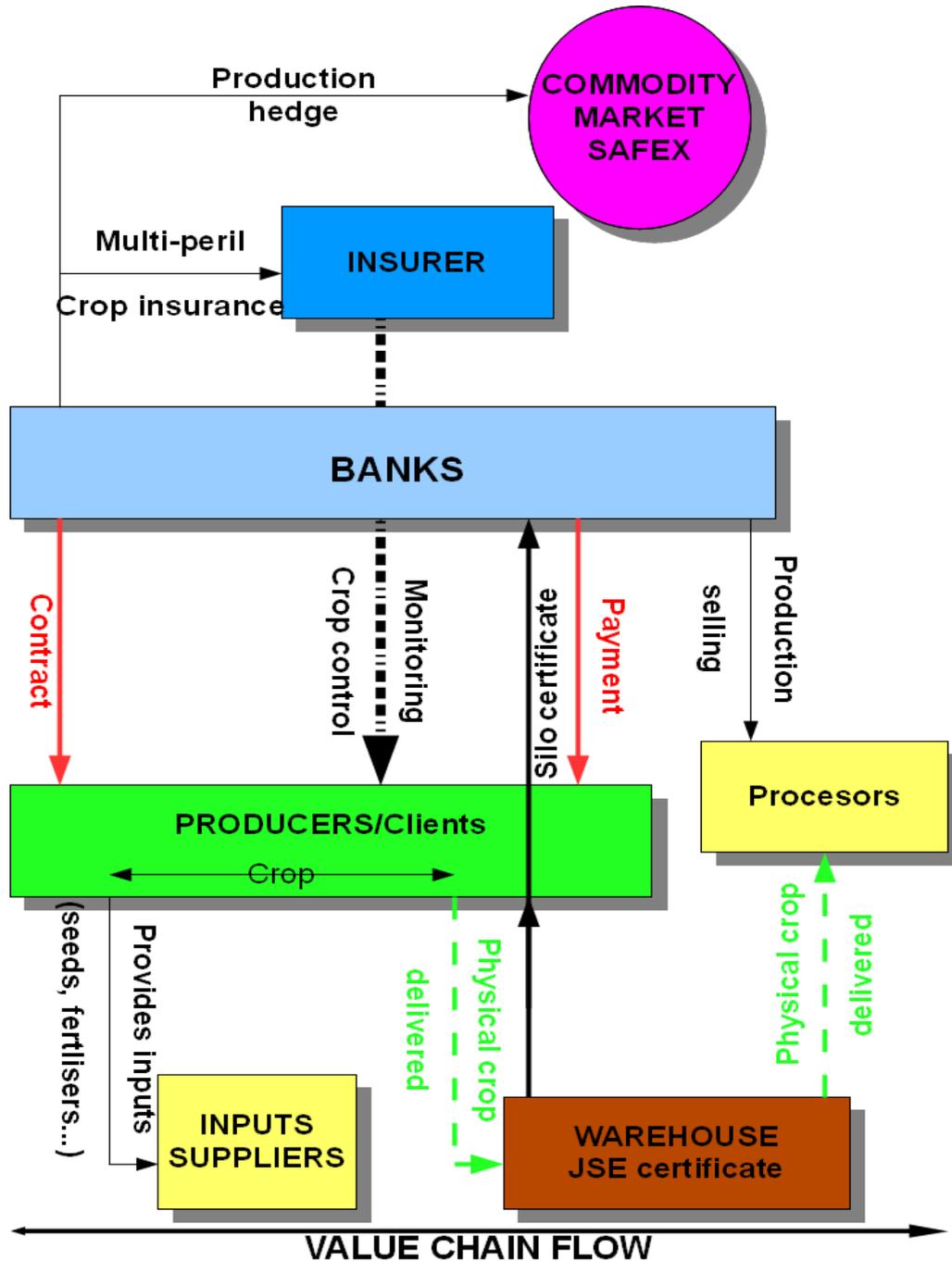


Figure 2: Direct bank integration into agricultural value-chains

Source: Ducastel, 2010.

It is estimated that about 30 to 40 % of the South Africa's annual cereal production is controlled through the framework of these models. Indeed, the three main commercial

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banks engaged in such models (ABSA, Standard Chartered and RMB) declare detaining each approximately 13 % of the production (rarely more again to limit risk). These banks presently diversify their agricultural activities towards horticulture, animal production and the other agricultural sub-sectors.

* The agricultural engineering companies model

Sector integration can also be established through intermediaries, mainly agricultural engineering companies. The aim of these companies is to centralize all the farmer-oriented services (input supply, technical support, commercialization) within the same entity. It thus proposes to the producers a contractual arrangement representing in all-in-one integral solution.

In the large majority of the cases, there is no transfer or acquisition of land. The producer rents out his land to the management company. Production objectives are set in a contract, as well as the production specifications and the corresponding remuneration for the producer. The producer has often no insights into the decision-making regarding the operations. In exchange, the company supplies directly inputs to the producers and guarantees the sale price through the acquisition of positions on the futures market. During the production cycle, the company monitors closely the operations. Engineers are sent out, operations are overseen through powerful satellite systems and the production accounts of the producer are kept under observation. After the harvest, the company is in charge of the marketing of the production over which it solely retains the rights. Once the production sold, the management company reimburses the loan granted by a financial institution (Figure 3).

Within the framework of this model, the financial relations are also restructured, or are even non-existent for the producer. The relations are between the bank and the associated company and are defined within the framework of a contract which stipulates that the intermediate company is both the guarantor of the seasonal loan and the responsible of the production. The bank supplies thus the necessary liquidities and multi-peril insurances not to the farmer but to the intermediary.

The added-value of such a model compared to the previous one seems is the agricultural specialization of the management company and the proximity relations between the latter and the main actors of the sector. The company makes its profit through its high technological contribution to the agricultural operations, the economies of scale related to input purchase, insurances, etc. and through advanced risk management. As such, the bank engaged in this circuit delegates all the risks, price as well as production risks, to the intermediate company. This company, on its side, uses several several risk management instruments. Firstly, it uses agricultural futures markets (SAFEX as well as Chicago) to guarantee the sales price and covers production risks through natural risks insurances. Secondly, besides the selection of producers according to their experience, previous results and farm characteristics, the company - through direct presence on the field - tends to reduce the risks related to the volume and to the quality of the production. Finally, these companies tend to lead a double strategy of diversification. On one hand, at

the geographical level, as in the previous model, they engage contracts with farms in different geographical zones; on the other hand, they develop their activities within several agricultural sub-sectors. If cereal production represents their primary target, they do not hesitate to commit in fresh produce production, biofuels or livestock.

It is at this stage difficult to estimate the extent of this model. The best established agricultural engineering company in South Africa is Farmsecure – a company without preliminary experience in the farming sector, created in 2004 with the objective of engulfing small and medium-sized enterprises, controls 700 farm structures in South Africa, representing about 8 % of the nation’s annual cereal production. Other companies seem to structure and establish themselves rapidly.

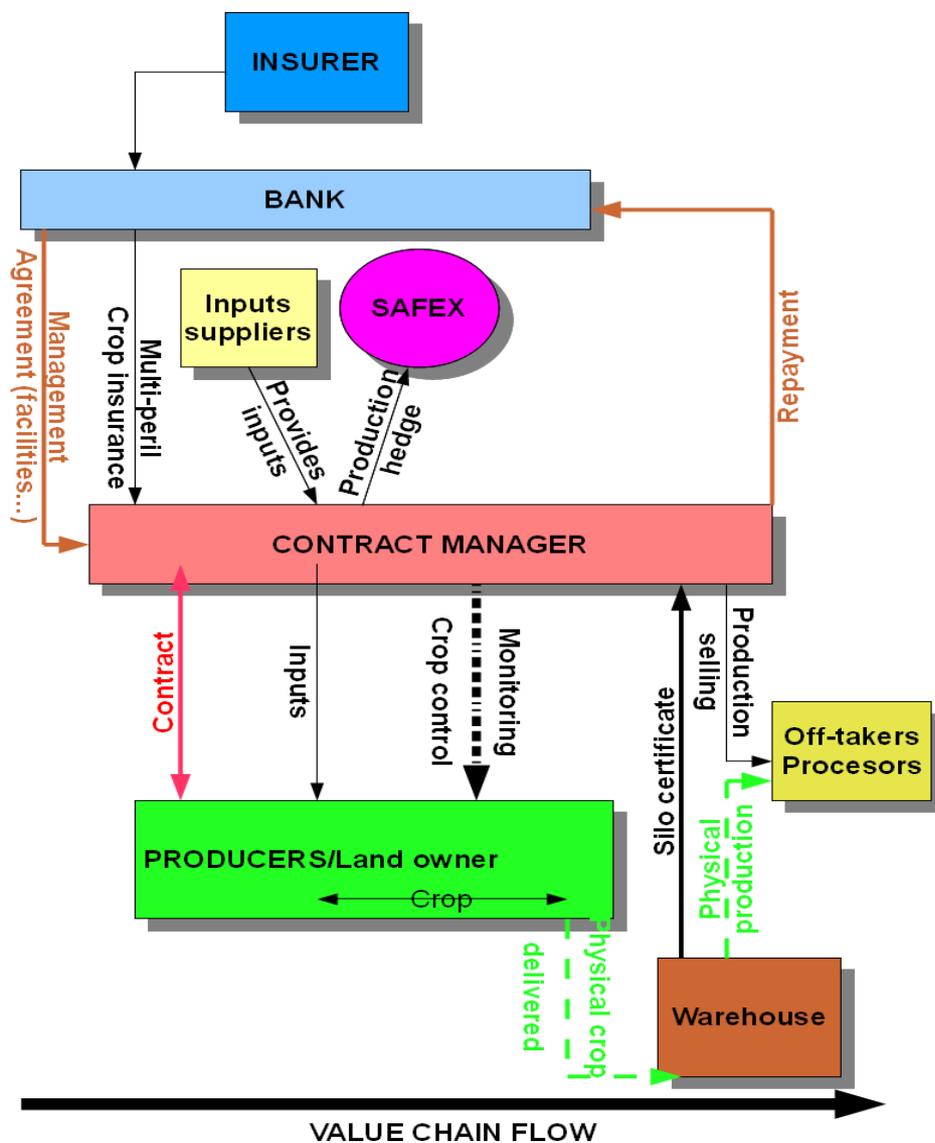


Figure 3 : The agricultural engineering model

Source: Ducastel, 2010.

** The investments funds*

Since 2008, the South African farming sector is also marked by the proliferation of investment funds specially dedicated to agriculture. The profile of these funds and the investors who contribute to them varies: commercial banks, institutional investors (pension funds), public actors (development agencies), etc. For the greater part, it concerns actors external to the sector. The management of these funds is generally entrusted to agricultural companies which have local experience and networks.

According to the expectations of these investors (profitability, funds' cycle) and of their anticipations of the future, these funds adopt various strategies. Not all target the same assets, nor adopt the same management of these assets. As such, certain funds specialize on land acquisition as, for example, Emvest and African/South African Agricultural Fund. In that case, these structures aim at acquiring, under purchase or long term lease agreement, farmlands with agricultural potential. Within this category of investment funds dedicated to the land, one can distinguish those which undertake directly the production on these farms from those which are outsourcing it. The first category focuses on an increase of productivity, through the use of high technology in particular, and on a rise of food commodity prices. The second group, leasing out land to farmers who are in charge of its development and production, speculate on the rise of land prices, and thus on the rent they'll perceive. Two types of speculation thus support this dynamic: the one directly related to land prices, the other one related to agricultural commodity prices.

Certain actors looking to invest in the agricultural sector consider the direct land acquisition strategy, with or without control over the production, as too risky. In that case, equity funds constitute an alternative. This last one has the objective to acquire equity shares into an agricultural or agro-industrial company. The risk is limited since capital is not placed in less rigid and socially less sensitive assets such as land. The agricultural company receiving these funds enjoys significant capital inflows which enabling it to develop its activities. Although this financing model is less costly for the receiving agricultural company, compared to the loan-based system, it in turn cedes parts of its autonomy to the investor.

As is the case with the funds dedicated to land acquisitions, these investment funds in shares lead to various strategies guided by the predictions to which they adhere, and especially by the expectations of their investors. For example, "fixed-term funds", those who have a life expectancy generally between 10 to 15 years (although can be shorter), guarantee high returns in the short-term to their customers. They favor initiatives and activities offering fast and high returns for a minimal investment. On the other hand, the funds with no closing date adopt strategies based on the longer (sometimes longest) term with guaranteed and regular returns.

It was noticed that presently on-going investment funds tend to privilege shares within already profitable and competitive companies. These last ones benefit from additional capital inflow to strengthen their position. As such, these increasing massive

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interventions of investment funds will strengthen the positions of already dominant actors in the agricultural sector, to the detriment of the others. According to the amount of shares acquired, allowing a majority or minority position, the investment fund will have different rights regarding the management of the company's activities. Again, here, different strategies occur. Zeder, for example, for risks reduction reasons and since it does not want to get involved in the production strategy and management, aims only at minority positions (between 20 and 34 % of the shares). On the contrary, Agri-Vie – an apparently more aggressive investor - tends to control all the activities of its subsidiaries by imposing its own management model (cf. Table 1).

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Table 1 : Examples of investment funds specialized in agricultural initiatives in South Africa					
Investment fund (date of establishment)	Fond owner	Origin of capital	Capitalization amount	Investment capital	Activity area
Emvest (2008)	Emergent Asset Management (UK-based investment fund, specialized in emergent markets) & Russel Stone Group (SA agro-business)			-Land acquisition with direct engagement in production, transformation and commercialization -Several agricultural sub-sectors	Southern Africa
South African agricultural fund & African Agricultural Fund (2010)	Old mutual (SA financial institution)	European and SA life insurance companies and pension funds	R3 billion (Approx 300 million Euros)	Speculative land acquisition (no direct control over agricultural production)	Southern Africa
Zeder (2006)	PSG (SA group dedicated to financial services)			-Minority position (between 20 et 34%) with agri-businesses -No direct implications regarding production but with managerial inference -Downstream and upstream activities	South Africa
Agri-Vie (2008)	Sanlam (SA insurance company)	Pension funds, Private foundations (Kellogs), Public institutions (Industrial Development Corporation)	R700 million (70 million Euros)	-Majority position in agri-businesses (cereals, livestock, horticulture...) -Direct control over production Priority given primary production	Africa
African Agricultural fund (2009)	French development Agency (AFD) (?)	AFD, AfDB, AGRA, IFAD, West African Dev Bank	US\$150 million	-Intégralité de la chaîne de production agricole primary (production, transformation, infrastructures...) -Towards commercial agriculture (80% of capital) and family-based agriculture (20%)	Africa
TransFarm Africa (2011)	NEPAD business foundation	Private foundations (Hewlett)	US\$20 million	Strategy not developed yet	Africa
Fund of the Rand Merchant Bank (RMB – SA commercial bank)	RMB	Own funds		-Priority to transformation and commercialization agri-businesses - Shares of minimum 25% -Land acquisition (30 000ha in SA) -Management and direct implications for the company's activities -Cereal and sugar cane	Africa

Source: Ducastel, 2010.

Within this investors' group, it is frequent to identify public institutions such as national or international/inter-governmental development agencies, as well as foundations dedicated to development. Often, a very same entity is thus guided simultaneously by a commercial orientation and a developmental determination, indicating the increasing confusion between the promotion of development and promotion of the private investment.

The extent of these investments is unknown, especially since several funds were only recently established and have yet to develop their implementation strategy (it is the case of the TransFarm Africa fund).

4) Reflections regarding agriculture and the peasant

This description of the state of macro-actor engagement in South Africa's agriculture, based on the investment and production models presently being established, highlights several trends and brings to the fore a number of questions.

*** *Financiarization and corporization of agriculture***

First of all, the models show that new actors appear on the South African agricultural scene. Indeed, originating from industrial or financial sectors, engaging as entrepreneurs, investors or even as pure speculators, the suppliers of these capitals seem more and more exogenous to the agricultural sector. Besides financing, these actors bring along renewed business logics, modes of actions and regulations, stemming from other activity sectors. As such, a "corporization" of the sector" is taking place which is translated by the redefinition of the borders of the agricultural sector. The increasing role of banks and investment funds, for example, seems to lead to a "financiarization" of the sector. Indeed, since the last couple of years, agricultural speculation knew an unprecedented boom. If, previously, speculation was an internal and short-term phenomenon, it is henceforth adopting long-term strategies, led by actors external to the sector¹⁶. As such, within the framework of the futures markets exchanges (SAFEX in South Africa), a decreasing number of contracts result in an effective delivery. This trend is similar to speculative mechanisms in other sectors, real estate in particular.

The South African agricultural sector is presently also characterized by an industrialization process, or rather a "corporization" process. It is not mechanization *per se* which constitutes the specificity of such dynamic but rather the transformation of the production structures and their interactions. Increasingly, the the agricultural value-chain tends to be controlled by one dominant actor. The control over various segments along this chain is established either through direct acquisition, or by contractualization of the actors. Although in South Africa, banks and certain former cooperatives represent these dominant type of actors, other models engaging different macro-actors occur elsewhere

¹⁶ *Op. Cit.*, S Dubois, 2010.

(eg. Uruguay¹⁷). The organization of the agricultural production tends towards a strongly integrated structure, comparable to Taylorist industrial chains, in which the most risky segments are outsourced towards intermediaries who support the costs and the risks.

This double - financierisation and corporisation - process of the agricultural sector, leads to a new regime which is characterized by the dominion of a few large international food-business groups¹⁸, and could lead to the marginalization of the majority of the African farmers due to biased power relations and to confrontation with models of significantly higher productivity¹⁹.

* *Concentration et dualisation within the sector*

These evolutions tend to strengthen the dualisation of South Africa's agricultural structure. Whereas the macro-actors of the food-processing industry see their dominant positions strengthened, entire fractions of the (rural) South African society are excluded from these dynamics. Indeed, the selection process operated collectively by banks and insurance companies excludes the small farmers, as well as the emergent ones (land reform beneficiaries). As the selection criteria are farm size (not less than 500ha under production at ABSA, for example), solvency, past experiences of/with the farmer; only commercial producers already well-established into commercial circuits are eligible. The entry barriers (capital, control over flows, respect of standards, etc.) are increasingly strenuous, limiting possibilities for the majority of the producers and leading to amplified concentration. The evolution of primary production segment seems to follow downstream (fertilizers, seeds, inputs) and upstream ones (processing, marketing), which are already characterized by a limited number of actors controlling these markets at national²⁰ or international²¹ level.

Two groups of actors seem to benefit particularly from the agricultural restructuring. First of all, the commercial banks and the insurance companies, which, by controlling directly an increasing part of the primary production and by imposing their selection criteria to the producers, turn into the regulators of the sector. By integrating the entire value-chain and by centralizing the information flows, they anticipate the evolution of these markets in particular the prices, act as arbitrators of these markets²² and seem to be capable of influencing the prices in their favour by speculating on the increase or decline according to the anticipations. Secondly, other beneficiaries of the evolution of the production structures are the agricultural intermediaries. Indeed, the financial institutions intending to invest in the agricultural sector do increasingly depend on the services of agricultural

¹⁷ Analysis de cadenas basadas en la produccion de granos de secano para la definicion de lineamientos de políticas específicas en Uruguay, FAO, 2009.

¹⁸ Huggins, C. (2011). Commercial pressure on land in its historical perspective. Rome, ILC, Commercial Pressures on Land, Research report, 46p.

¹⁹ Losch B. *et al* (2010). Structural Dimensions of Liberalization on Agriculture and Rural Development. A Cross-Regional Analysis on Rural Change. Washington, The World Bank, Synthesis Report of the Ruralstruc program, final Draft, June 2010.

²⁰ Greenberg, S. (2010). Status report on land and agricultural policy in South Africa. Cape Town, PLAAS, Research Report No40, 62p.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, S. Dubois, 2010..

²² ABSA Bank is the « cleaning house » on SAFEX.

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engineering companies. Both managers of the field operations and of the financial transactions, these companies are capturing an increasing part of the margins generated by through the agricultural activity.

** Speculation and foreign powers*

The control over the agricultural production by few macro-actors, who represent in many cases foreign capital, raises not only the problem of the concentration and the dualisation of the sector, it also draws the attention on the need to analyzed this phenomenon within the framework of the strategies of these actors. Indeed, the strong volatility of agricultural prices strengthened by the removal of stabilization mechanisms according to a context of regulation of the sector by the market facilitates economic agents' direct involvement and control over agricultural regulation mechanisms. On one hand, speculation strengthens profit-oriented strategies, to the detriment of food safety concerns in the countries where the effective production takes place. On the other hand, as foreign economic powers control an increasing part of the production, it also emphasizes food sovereignty issues within these countries in a context of amplified liberalization. Producing countries' food safety and sovereignty are thus at stake.

Indeed, as noted by the special Rapporteur on the right to food²³, a significant part of the volatility and the rise in prices can be explained by the emergence of speculation, and an essential role is attributed to the engagement on the markets of powerful institutional investors (investment funds, pension funds, commercial banks). The latter are often foreign and generally little, even not, interested in objectives of stabilization, food safety and food sovereignty. If this price volatility of agricultural commodities and the strategies of speculation raise problems related to the implementation of development programs, they also emphasize questions regarding the regulation of the agricultural and financial sectors and regulatory frameworks in a large number of domains including the functioning of the futures markets and foreign trade. It also leads to consideration related to national policies, the development of the sector-based and financial strategies, and regional integration.

** Proletarianisation and pauperization of the agricultural society*

Even though the emergence of these new production models generate numerous economic related uncertainties, these new evolutions are socially the most concerning. Indeed, one of the common characteristics of these innovations seems to be the increasingly marginal position of the producers and farm workers.

The incorporation process of family-based producers by macro-actors is detrimental for former. Both parties have diverse financial, social and cultural resources leading to biased relationships²⁴, which seem to exceed the traditionally cleavages within the South African

²³ “Spéculation agricole et flambée des prix alimentaires. Réguler pour réduire les risques de volatilité”, note d’information du Rapporteur spécial sur le droit à l’alimentation, septembre 2010.

²⁴ Borras, 2008.

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agricultural sector. Land owners find themselves incorporated within production chains, in which they represent only an isolated element and on which they have no decision-making or orientation power. Generally, the technical capital used, characterized by ever-increasing costs, does not belong to them, but is made available by the management company. This situation creates a dependency for the farmers, since they become unable to withdraw from these production relations, without losing their access to the necessary finances and inputs. The granted funds are short-term, often linked to the production cycles, and correspond to amounts calculated according to the production of particular quantities. As such, allocated funds do not allow additional productive investments and seems to condemn the producer to renew his/her seasonal commitment year after year. Although they are land owners, their situation is increasingly similar to that of proletarianized agricultural employees or of service providers.

These transformations have not only implications for the producer as an economic agent, but also, and especially, as a social actor. This "corporisation" perturbs social relationships and traditional features characterizing South Africa's agricultural and rural environments. The family unit constituted, until today, the basic structure around which was organized agricultural production, as well in the former-homelands as on the white commercial farms. The transfer of autonomous family enterprises into the integration within an entrepreneurial structure modifies necessarily the relations with the agricultural activity *per se*. In addition, beyond the producers and landowners, farm workers also see their situation degrading. The recourse to agricultural technologies requiring low, often seasonal, labour, results in the maintenance of the precariousness of the working conditions²⁵.

* South Africa, *an agricultural laboratory for the continent?*

Several elements indicate that these investment and production models expand on the continent. On one hand, South African agricultural and agro-industrial companies are conquering new markets. As such, Farmsecure is already present in eighteen African countries and aspires to pursue its expansion, in particular towards western Africa; the South African banks are also increasingly present on the continent (Standard Bank has operations in fourteen countries and is particularly emphasizing agriculture; RMB is acquiring share in African banks to re-orientate their activities); and, since a few months, several large-scale land acquisition projects were announced by South African companies/organizations in African countries (eg. AgriSA in RDC²⁶). On the other hand, other international (RaboBank is already engaged in agriculture in about ten countries, prospection of Chinese banks through South African companies occur) and African companies/initiatives (a Kenyan investment fund is present in several East African countries) are developing their activities on similar models.

If investment conditions are not as opportune and well-structured as in South Africa, measures are developed to adapt them to the local conditions. For example, investments

²⁵ Anseeuw (2007). The South African Paradox...

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, Anseeuw, 2010.

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in the local production of inputs are being realized, to facilitate the development of a financing model without transfer of assets, in order to limit the risks in production environments less conducive than South Africa, or still the development of prototypes of silos easily transportable and adapted to various climatic conditions in the countries where such infrastructure is lacking.

5) Conclusion

The South African farming sector is presently characterized by important restructurings, related to the recent agricultural and financial crises and characterized by the financierisation and "corporisation" of agriculture. It leads to a concentration in the hands of a few traditionally non-agricultural macro-actors, as well as to a new process of "agricultural proletarianization ", transforming family farmers into rent-seekers and/or agricultural workers on their own lands.

In the absence of alternative successful investment and production models, this conception of agricultural development centered on macro-actors becomes the reference paradigm. If it is presently the case for South Africa in particular, the model seems to be exported to the rest of the continent. It is, indeed, adopted by the public development agencies (NEPAD, AfDB, etc.) and exported by these macro-actors within the framework of their economic expansion. As such, they tend to import their models and their vision of agricultural development.

These transformations are the bases of the present agricultural development tensions: the debate between small-scale agriculture and the large mechanized operations, the opposition between speculative investment and food security, or the questions related to the promotion of foreign investment and food sovereignty. They particularly underline the lack of reflections and debates around the implications of these transformations regarding national and international development policies and trajectories, whether agricultural or not, for these developing countries in search of alternatives.