March 2015
The WRC operates in terms of the Water Research Act (Act 34 of 1971) and its mandate is to support water research and development as well as the building of a sustainable water research capacity in South Africa.

POLICY BRIEF

Water reform and land reform

Improving the alignment of land reform and water reform initiatives

A completed Water Research Commission (WRC) project makes valuable input to improve South Africa's land reform and water allocation reform initiatives.

Background

South Africa has a 'dual economy' agricultural sector; consisting of large-scale mechanised commercial farmers at one extreme and small-scale, resource poor subsistence farmers at the other. Since 1994, Government has been implementing its land and water reform policy aimed at alleviating the political and economic inequalities that are a legacy of South Africa's past.

Challenges of land reform

One of the major challenges associated with land reform has been to minimize productivity losses during the process and thus avoid food security risks to the country. Beneficiaries of the land reform process have struggled to maintain the comparatively high productivity levels of commercial agriculture.

Consequently, several support programmes have been rolled out to support productivity-related challenges in the agricultural sector. However, insufficient attention seems to have been paid to addressing the challenges related to effective water utilization in agriculture.

Water allocation reform

In parallel to the land reform process, the water allocation reform (WAR) process has also been underway. WAR aims to provide water for subsistence farming or for sustaining basic livelihoods, and to start a development path of commercial and competitive water use in support of broad-based black economic empowerment.

Compulsory licensing is a key part of the WAR programme and allows for water currently allocated to users to be re-allocated to historically disadvantaged individuals. All commercial water users must now register their water use and will have to apply for a water use licence.

Aligning land reform and water allocation reform

The alignment of these two processes has, however, not run smoothly. There is still a weak link between land reform, agricultural support and water resource provision despite several trans-sectoral programmes that are in place. In South Africa, many land reform programmes have failed because of water not being available for production.

Guidance on water conservation in food value chains

Three guidebooks have also been produced as part of this project. The first, *Guidebook for emerging farmers in the Maruleng municipal area* (**Report No. TT 607/1/14**) deals with how emerging farmers may benefit from a better understanding of what conservation is and why it is important to practice water conservation, among others. The second *Guidebook for extension officers in the Maruleng municipal area* (**Report No. TT 607/2/14**) summarises key water allocation and land reform programmes in South Africa, and reflects on the successes and challenges of implementing water allocation reform. The third, *Guidebook on different types of emerging farmers and the everyday challenges they face: Insights for policy advisors* (**Report No. TT 607/3/14**) discusses the finding of the project that might be applicable to policy-makers.

In an attempt to engage with the need to improve the alignment of water and land reform initiatives, the WRC conceptualised a research project lead by the CSIR over four years. Several key messages emerged from the project.

Key message 1: Not all beneficiaries of the land reform process aspire to be farmers

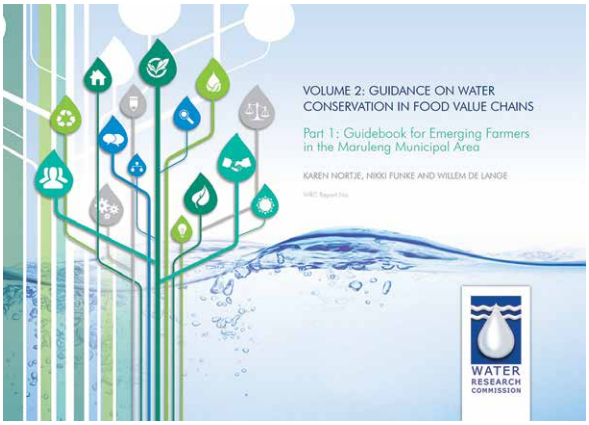
The research revealed the existence of a diversity of contexts, objectives and aspirations across the range of individuals that have benefited from the land reform process. As a result, different support strategies are needed for different types of beneficiaries.

It should be noted that given that support programmes related to WAR and land reform aim to change human behaviour (e.g. improve water conservation) the design phase of such programmes should systematically account for the culture, norms and traditions of target groupings within the target community within which this behaviour change is supposed to occur.

Strong evidence was found of individual entrepreneurs with commercial aspirations who have the ability to do insightful planning and are determined to be self-reliant and financially sustainable. However, these individuals were in the minority.

Key message 2: There is ambiguity of key terms

This was one of the biggest problems that the project team identified, and it was clear that emerging farmers, extension officers and policy-makers often have different interpretations of the same term – with disastrous results. This is also a major theme that was addressed in the guidebooks developed as part of this project, and ties in with the need for emerging farmers to use their water as effectively and efficiently as possible – not only to maintain their position in existing food value chains, but also to migrate to new food value chains.



For the purposes of this research, effective water use was interpreted as 'doing the right thing' to conserve water i.e. making use of the right kind of irrigation and agricultural practices for the specific kind of farming activities that beneficiaries are engaged in in order to use as little water as possible.

'Water efficiency', on the other hand, is interpreted as 'doing things the correct way' i.e. if a farmer is using a specific kind of irrigation or agricultural technique, they need to make sure that they are applying the technique correctly and that water is not wasted when they do so.

The guidebook for emerging farmers looks at why water conservation is important, how farmers can know if they are practicing water conservation, how they can become better at water conservation and how they can share their knowledge about water conservation with other farmers.

Key message 3: Emerging farmers face numerous challenges to progress along the food value chain

Many farmers, for example, do not have record keeping systems, and therefore find it difficult to estimate how much water they use and whether they practice water conservation. Financial resources are also a big problem, with many farmers not being able to source the capital to invest in farming implements and irrigation infrastructure.

Finally, many of the emerging farmers do not have the know-how and experience to run a farm and express the need for mentors and/or sustainable strategic partnerships relationships.

The challenges listed above are often the reason why farmers find themselves 'stuck' in a particular position within a food value chain and are not easily able to migrate to another.

Lastly, this research has highlighted that much still needs to be done to align land reform and water allocation reform. This has also been clear from the project's case study area, where water allocation reform has not been nearly as prominent or influential as the land reform process.

In fact, water allocation reform has for the most part been on-existent, with the majority of beneficiaries not having any knowledge of water allocation reform processes in their area.

Conclusion

The research has shown the importance of thinking 'out of the box' when it comes to the future of South Africa's land reform and water allocation reform processes. It is critical to be aware of the fact that not all land reform beneficiaries are the same nor want the same things, and that beneficiaries are individuals with varying interests and ambitions.

Further reading:
To order the report, ***An investigation of water conservation in food value chains by beneficiaries of water allocation reform and land reform programmes in South Africa*** (**Report No. 1958/1/14**) contact Publications at Tel: (012) 330-0340, Email: orders@wrc.org.za or Visit: www.wrc.org.za to download a free copy.