
From the RDP to the NDP: A critical appraisal of the developmental state, land reform, and rural development in South Africa

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Abstract

After decades of neoliberal rule in which market forces held pre-eminence in shaping development, there has in recent years been a resurgence of an activist developmental state in promoting economic development and tackling poverty and inequality. This article explores the resurgence of developmental state thinking in South Africa. Specifically, the article critically appraises the functioning of the post-apartheid state as it relates to land reform and rural development and argues that a weak bureaucracy and a policy fixation on the neoliberal willing buyer, willing seller policy framework militates against the promotion of a thorough-going land reform and rural development programme to promote rural livelihoods. We argue that South Africa needs a developmental state that will construct a skilled and competent bureaucracy, a centralised planning agency with the power to coordinate and ensure that government departments work together, and that will actively intervene in the economy to meet developmental objectives.

Introduction

Since the birth of democracy in 1994, the post-apartheid state has struggled to substantially address the deep socio-economic legacies of the apartheid era. While progress has been made in addressing the apartheid legacy, poverty, inequality, and unemployment remain stubbornly high. In light of the extreme socio-economic cleavages experienced by the majority Black population, the ANC-led government saw an interventionist or a developmental state as the vehicle through which to transform the economy, create jobs, and provide long denied needs, including land and housing.

The South African debate on the character that the post-apartheid state should assume has traversed the social democratic Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) which propogated an activist role for the state to intervene in the economy, engender economic growth, and redistribute wealth. By contrast, the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) programme, implemented in 1996, gave prominence to market forces in setting the development agenda. In 2011, the government-appointed National Planning Commission (NPC) released the National Development Plan (NDP), which commits the nation to 'building a capable state' that will eradicate poverty and create 11 million, including 1 million rural jobs, by 2030 (NPC 2011). In this paper, we will critically assess the RDP and GEAR, and appraise whether the NDP's

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