

PLAAS ANNUAL REPORT

2020





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University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, Cape Town, South Africa

Tel: +27 (0)21 959 3733

Email: info@plaas.org.za

Website: www.plaas.org.za

Compiled by: Mark Paterson and PLAAS Staff

Copy editing: Tanya Goodman • **Design and layout:** Design for development • **Images:** Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies • **Communications:** Andile Cele • **Writer:** Mark Paterson • **Contributors:** Andries du Toit, Mafa Hara, Moenieba Isaacs, Ruth Hall, Phillan Zamchiya, Farai Mtero, Cyriaque Hakizimana, Nkanyiso Gumede, Katlego Ramantsima and Bahihah Mohamed.



About PLAAS

We do research, policy engagement, and teaching and training about the causes and implications of chronic poverty and structural inequality in Southern Africa, with a particular emphasis on the key role played by access to land and natural resources.

Our work focuses not only on the central role of access to land, water and other resources in the production of food and agriculture, but also on all the ways equitable access

is significant for poor people's livelihoods: for farming; for non-farm livelihoods; as a place to stay; and as a site of belonging, family life, community membership and political participation.

We use our research to guide policy, galvanise public debate and inform activists and organisers, and as the basis for vibrant and multidisciplinary postgraduate teaching and training.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We had to think on our feet and respond in the moment.

In our previous Annual Report, I remarked that 2019 seemed to be a year of the gathering storm. Little did we know what was coming.

As we looked forward to 2020, we knew that it was going to be a significant year. For one thing, PLAAS was entering its 25th year – a marker of organisational resilience and maturity. For another, Ben Cousins, who had founded PLAAS and who had continued to play a key part in its direction and leadership – even after he stepped down as Director and took up the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies – was due to retire. Prof Ruth Hall, who had until then led our work on land reform in South Africa and “land grabs” elsewhere on the continent, was getting ready to step into his shoes. Ursula Arends, who had ably held the administrative reins, was stepping down after almost 20 years, as was our financial manager, Trevor Reddy: their roles were to be taken over by a single Finance and Operations Manager. So, change was afoot.

At the same time, we knew (or thought we knew) that the world around us was heading into deeper turmoil. The politics of landlessness, inequality and resource grabs that defines our agenda was continuing to intensify in the context of an increasingly unstable multi-polar world. And new issues were forcing their way onto our agenda: climate change, for one – and also the ongoing political disaster of a surge of right-wing and racist politics on the world stage, which was increasingly constraining the space for democratic political deliberation.

What we did not anticipate was how all these challenges would be transformed, recontextualised and intensified by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated regulatory responses to the outbreak. The crisis placed major obstacles in the way of our everyday functioning and the implementation of our research, teaching and policy engagement activities; it also raised urgent new political, economic and strategic questions.

We had to think on our feet and respond in the moment. Pursuing our existing research and teaching agenda under the new conditions would not be appropriate; rather, we needed to confront and question the politics of the pandemic and the lockdown that had been implemented by the government in response, and we had to investigate the implications of the developing crisis for the nature of agro-food change. Like everyone else, we had to reinvent our ways of working, on the fly, and we had to reconceptualise our research agenda. This was no mean feat for a donor-funded organisation with major responsibilities in terms of existing project deliverables. To this end, we reimagined activities and outputs; reinterpreted project plans to make them “Covid appropriate”; raised new funds under tight deadlines; and often invested significant amounts of unfunded time to ensure that new priorities could receive attention.

In the event, we were able to direct our resources to respond effectively to the demands of the moment. We adapted efficiently to the rigours of operating under lockdown conditions, setting in motion new routines and practices to support students and colleagues and to ensure organisational

cohesion. Our postgraduate programme moved online without a hitch, and students kept making good progress even during difficult conditions. Late in the year, our new Finance and Operations Manager, Bahihah Mohamed, joined us, and hit the ground running, to lead our support staff team to a strong finish. As elsewhere, our staff and students faced great stress and sometimes grievous losses; but they responded to these challenges with solidarity, courage, compassion and focus. Meanwhile, as we responded to the personal harm caused by the pandemic, we also moved to engage powerfully and trenchantly with the new political economy of the Covid-19 crisis, putting PLAAS at the forefront of debates about social justice and change in the agro-food system during the time of coronavirus.

None of this would have been possible without the adaptability, hard work, and integrity of my colleagues. A crucial role was played by Proffs Ruth Hall and Moenieba Isaacs in their engagement around our Covid-19 work and in tending the flame of our partnership with the Network of Excellence in Land Governance in Africa (NELGA). Without their visionary leadership, political passion and boundless energy, PLAAS would not have been able to flourish in 2020 as it did. In addition, Moenieba stewarded our work on marine resources and blue justice, while Ruth ensured that the SARChI programme continued to go from strength to strength.

Dr Farai Mtero indefatigably headed up our work on land reform and equitable change; Dr Phillan Zamchiya continued to demonstrate his leadership ability in helming a challenging regional project on women’s land rights and privatisation; Prof Mafa Hara brought our projects on inland fisheries to a successful

close and continued to lead our work with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) on climate change adaptation. Cyriaque Hakizimana led our work on agricultural policy in Africa with aplomb and boundless energy.

Our younger researchers – Nkanyiso Gumede, Katlego Ramantsima and Refiloe Joala – worked tirelessly in their projects and participated selflessly in our community engagement and webinar programmes. Carla Henry was, as always, a stalwart and source of strength in the administration of our teaching programme, while Joy van Dieman and Donovan Delpaul ably kept the administrative wheels turning. Esté Beerwinkel performed the challenging role of communications officer with great diligence, humour and an unflagging attention to detail. One sad loss, in addition to the departure of Ursula and Trevor, was the resignation of Bangi Malama from our support staff team: her quiet but formidable presence will be missed.

All in all, PLAAS’s track record during 2020 is testimony not only to my colleagues’ resilience, but also to their ability to remain engaged with our political and social environment, and to respond compassionately and with solidarity to the needs of those around them.

As we look back on 2020, what is striking is our position of great privilege, of good fortune, and of responsibility. Tough as our year was, we are aware that everything we do is in the service of the cause of justice, equality and democracy in Southern Africa, and in the service of the lives and livelihoods of the millions of poor and landless people in the region. In the past year, it is they who have suffered, and, as we look forward, it is their future that is at stake. ■

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Professor Andries du Toit is the Director of PLAAS. He has a PhD in Comparative Studies from the University of Essex, and his training is in political theory and discourse analysis. At present, Prof du Toit’s work focuses on developing a critical understanding of post-apartheid biopolitics in the context of de-agrarianisation and large-scale economic marginalisation. His key interest lies in the implications of entrenched poverty and structural inequality for the forms of governmental deliberation, policy knowledge and political community that are possible in the South African political context. In general, his concern is to understand the implications of the challenges that are posed for policy discourse and governmental reason by the present tide of populist and anti-liberal discourses.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Donor-funded projects 2020



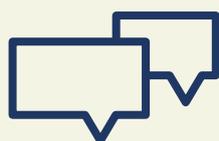
- 4 Journal articles
- 2 Books
- 9 Book chapters
- 2 Research reports
- 5 Policy briefs



- 34 Media articles, blogs, op-eds and opinion pieces
- 1 Podcasts (6 episodes on agrarian politics)
- 52 Presentations at conferences, workshops and seminars:
- 44 Policy engagement
- 65 Media interviews



- 8 Land rights, tenure and governance
- 11 Farming and food systems
- 8 Fisheries and marine resources
- 2 Teaching, training and capacity building



Events convened:

- 1 seminar
- 1 conference
- 52 webinars
- 8 workshops



Other:

- 1 ThreadReader app
- 1 documentary film

PLAAS online engagement



	2018-2019	2019-2020
Webpage views	8 077 (New website since April 2019)	6 534
Facebook likes	3 160	3 598
Twitter followers	8 864	10 000
YouTube views	853	40 087
YouTube subscribers	191	817

THE QUEST FOR GENUINELY DEMOCRATIC LAND REFORM

Land reform rose to the top of the political agenda in South Africa in 2018, when President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed a special panel to consider and produce recommendations on the issue. The panel was mandated to identify and address the factors that had hindered the process, and to produce recommendations to ensure the promotion of broader access to land.

Research conducted by a dedicated team at PLAAS under the leadership of Dr Farai Mtero found that the dominant notion of what constituted “success” in land reform at this time was quite limited. It was largely shaped by a “productionist” perspective, which emphasised commercial agriculture at the expense of other legitimate land uses, and which privileged inappropriate models of “tight” value chain integration unsuitable to the needs of small farmers and most rural households.

Meanwhile, notions of societal justice, genuine equity of access and the centrality of land to systems of social production and informal welfare were largely ignored in the policy debate. Accordingly, the aims of land redistribution drifted away from what was needed – land for poor people for livelihoods and tenure security – towards “elite capture” by a small group of medium-size farmers and their corporate partners.

Dr Mtero and his colleagues, Katlego Ramantsima and Nkanyiso Gumede, found that the policymaking biases, which were marginalising the interests of the poor, the landless, and communal-area and smallholder farmers, were also crowding out the possibility of developing other criteria for how land could and should be accessed and by whom. “While undertaking the project, we realised that there was no clear consensus on what constituted an equitable, pro-poor land reform in South Africa,” said Dr Mtero.

The team saw this period of renewed national focus on land reform as an opportune moment to explore and produce alternative proposals in support of a progressive and pro-poor approach. So, a follow-up project on “Equitable access to land for social justice”

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Photo credit: Jeremy Graham / Alamy Stock Photo

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was established to support public debate and social dialogue on the underlying political question: What is the purpose of land reform and whose interests should it serve?

Deploying a combination of fieldwork and public engagement efforts, the three-year project is examining how policymakers, officials, beneficiaries and society as a whole frame the notion of “success” in land reform. In particular, it is reaching out to grassroots stakeholders in order to identify their interests and, thus, produce a genuinely democratic vision of how such reform may be enacted. “The aim is to produce spaces in which key actors in land and other sectors can engage in critical conversations about the fundamental purpose of land reform in South Africa and the role of land reform in development and societal transformation,” said Dr Mtero.

A further concern of the project, which ends in late 2022, has been to shift attention away from a narrow focus on how land should be acquired by the state for re-allocation. The debate on expropriation – that is, the mechanisms that may be adopted for the compulsory acquisition of land – has come to dominate the political discourse since Ramaphosa’s presidential panel produced its recommendations.

“We are trying to broaden the discussion beyond the idea of land acquisition and to say that there is much more to land reform,” said Dr Mtero. In this regard, he cited the need to implement appropriate legislation to give effect to the Constitution’s pledge to broaden access to land, as expressed in Section 25. “We are still relying on the Provision of Land and Assistance Act of 1993, which is quite ineffective.”

Katlego Ramantsima affirmed the point. “Achieving equitable access to land as directed under the Constitution has been a challenge for the state, with the result that rural households have limited access to productive land, while in the cities there is growing informality and poverty,” she said. “For women, whose land rights are particularly fragile, access to land provides a sense of security, empowerment, belonging and dignity.”

In an effort to address such concerns, the project has convened stakeholders from

Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, North West and KwaZulu-Natal to discuss the constraints on equitable access to land for more marginalised beneficiaries and how these may be overcome by securing land tenure rights and developing a progressive land redistribution bill, as well as through releasing appropriate state land. The stakeholders, who have been engaged through a range of outreach and research activities, including webinars, dialogues and interviews, have included community members and activists from organisations such as the Alliance for Rural Democracy, the Land Access Movement of South Africa, the Association for Rural Advancement, Qina Mbokodo, the Border Rural Committee, Vulamasango Singene, Ntinga Ntaba kaNdoda, the Inner City Federation, the Tshwane Leadership Foundation, Naledi Commonage, Ndifuna Ukwazi, the Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education and the Socio-Economic Rights Institute.

The stakeholders have considered how land reform efforts may be leveraged to create jobs; the importance of gender equity in the use of and control over land; and the need to provide working class and poor communities in the cities with properly serviced land for housing that is close to economic opportunities, social amenities and transport hubs. “Basically, the emphasis is that land reform should go beyond just enabling access for agriculture. It should also extend to provision of land for other needs as expressed by the landless,” said Nkanyiso Gumedede.

In this regard, the broad democratic goal of the project has been to identify land needs among the rural and urban poor, including where these converge, and to build consensus and a coalition for change among these groups, in support of their interests. “It is about helping to forge a class coalition among those who are marginalised and excluded from policy processes – and on the basis of that coalition, trying to engage and influence the policymakers, and highlighting the significance of a pro-poor land reform,” said Dr Mtero. “In other words, the aim is to ensure that the policy and its implementation is shaped by an actual rather than merely rhetorical commitment to equity in land reform.”



Dr Farai Mtero is a senior researcher and supervisor at PLAAS, with a PhD in public administration (land and agrarian studies) from the University of the Western Cape. A graduate of Fort Hare and Rhodes universities, he has published widely on issues relating to land and the economy in South Africa, including to class formation and relations, rural livelihoods, de-agrarianisation, mining, and the economic and productivity impacts of tenure rights. He currently teaches postgraduate courses on The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Reform in Southern Africa, and The Economics of Farming and Food Systems.



Katlego Ramantsima is a researcher at PLAAS with a master's degree in development theory and policy from the University of the Witwatersrand. She has previously investigated issues of rural poverty and legally insecure systems of customary tenure under traditional authorities, and now focuses on the connections between land redistribution and poverty and inequality in South Africa.



Nkanyiso Gumede is a researcher at PLAAS with a master's degree in agriculture from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. At PLAAS, he has helped to produce a report, "Elite capture in land redistribution in South Africa", and has also conducted research into the impacts of agricultural investment in communal areas on land rights and livelihoods.

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DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE INFORMAL FOOD SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to new research produced by PLAAS, small-scale farmers, fishers and traders in South Africa have suffered huge business losses under Covid-19, which has deprived poor consumers of a crucial source of cheap, nutritious food. Conversely, large, corporate food producers and retailers have reaped the profits.

The finding emerged from a research project coordinated by PLAAS to interrogate how the pandemic has affected the political economy of food systems in Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa. The multi-country research project on “The impacts of Covid-19 responses on the political economy of African food systems” was launched in October 2020 after PLAAS and partner organisations in Ghana and Tanzania identified a need for action research to document the impacts of the pandemic and the lockdown regulations.

Funded by Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to the tune of R9 million, the one-year study paid particular attention to the impacts of Covid-19 crisis on women and marginalised livelihoods in the three countries. The study found that the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis and the responses to it had been particularly severe in South Africa, which has one of the most corporatised food systems on the continent. Specifically, it pointed to growing profits among corporate South African food producers and retailers, as hikes in food prices outstripped general inflation during the pandemic.

The research found that official regulations introduced in South Africa, in response to the Covid-19 outbreak under a state of disaster

declared in March 2020, had facilitated a system of licensing that enabled large-scale and formal sector producers, traders and retailers to carry on doing business, but stopped street and bakkie traders from selling food; prevented fishers from setting out to sea and selling their catches at fair prices; and blocked access to markets for small-scale farmers. Although operations were allowed to resume some weeks later, lost incomes permanently damaged businesses. Meanwhile, large supermarkets and major food firms thrived, reporting strong growth in sales and rising profit margins, as food prices rose significantly above the rate of core inflation.

For the poor, the effects of this have been damaging. The unemployed and those on lower incomes have been forced to spend an increasing proportion of their meagre budgets on food. In response to the heightened austerity, many of these households cut the amount and quality of the food they were buying, with worrying nutritional implications – particularly for children who are likely to become stunted as a result. “Under Covid-19, it has become quite evident that increased production and profits in the food system can be accompanied by greater food insecurity and hunger,” said Prof Ruth Hall who, together with Prof Moenieba Isaacs, led the PLAAS research team for this project. “The state of disaster was clearly more disastrous for some than others.”

The research found that the Covid-19 regulations introduced by the government affected different parts of the food system unevenly. For example, although the supply and sale of food was declared an “essential service” and exempted from certain lockdown regulations, the reality was that vast sections of the informal sector were closed down under the new rules. This resulted in enormous, unintended consequences in the form of unsellable surpluses, food wastage and lost incomes among the country’s 2.5 million small-scale farmers, 80 000 small-scale fishers and fish processors, and 750 000 street traders selling food.

Traders who sold extensively to poor consumers – worst hit by income losses during the pandemic – struggled; as did farmers and fishers who had previously focused on niche high-value hospitality and export markets,

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which now collapsed. Black farmers, many of whom are hindered by a lack of capital and fair access to markets, as well as insecure land rights, faced increased input costs; transport, labour and input disruptions; and reduced market demand. In the absence of sufficient or timely government support, some stopped production, many retrenched workers, and others were forced deep into debt. They generally failed to benefit from the increased food prices or exports from which larger agribusiness players profited.

In another sector of the food system, artisanal fishers, already facing stiff competition with large firms over a threatened natural resource base, also found themselves ill equipped to cope with the new pressures brought by Covid-19. Restrictions on travel and accommodation prevented them from travelling to fishing grounds in good time to set out to sea; and an export ban meant that fishers on the West Coast lost out on the market for their most valuable species. At the same time, large companies with extensive refrigeration and packing facilities were able to buy up fish at low prices and store them until the markets improved and they could sell the catches to consumers at a higher price.

This pattern of large corporate stakeholders protecting their profit margins at the expense of primary producers and consumers during

the state of disaster was repeated across the food system, indicating the crucial importance of supporting the small-scale food producers and traders who underpin the informal economy in South Africa. For example, PLAAS's research found that street traders, sourcing food from municipal markets and directly from farmers, could sell fresh produce at prices far below supermarket prices and create more livelihoods for low-income people in the process, including in the areas of employment-intensive production and processing, and in the transport and retail sectors. Similarly, artisanal fishers and local fish processors and traders play a key role in coastal communities, creating livelihoods and ensuring a supply of high protein seafood at the local level.

Accordingly, and in order to address the kinds of problems faced by the small-scale farmers, fishers and traders during the pandemic, researchers engaged in the IDRC-funded project have recommended that the government should focus its policymaking efforts on ensuring that the domestic food system actually produces what United Nations (UN) High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition has described as the two most important outputs of such systems: the right to food; and improved livelihoods, especially for those in the food system.



GLOBAL AGENDA FOR THE MARINE ECONOMY MUST BE SHAPED BY 'BLUE JUSTICE'

A raft of "blue economy" and "blue growth" initiatives have been promoted and undertaken by national governments and international institutions in the past few years, with the European Union (EU); the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN); the World Bank; and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) all producing key policy documents on the topic. In essence, the idea is that the oceans need to be opened to new frontier opportunities for mining, shipping, spatial development, large-scale aquaculture and industrial fishing, elite tourism and protected areas – all within a market-orientated framework.

Working with big conservation non-profit organisations, regional bodies including the African Union (AU), and philanthropic institutions, the international bodies advocating the "blue economy" agenda argue that it is aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – in particular SDG 14, which aims to foster benevolent exploitation of the oceans, seas and marine resources. They contend that adoption of blue economy initiatives can promote human rights, in addition to supporting economic growth, job creation and food security. However, this fails to acknowledge how the benefits of the free-market model proposed for this version of the blue economy are skewed towards elite and corporate interests at the expense of local communities that depend on small-scale fishing.

In response, PLAAS has led the development of an alternative idea of "blue justice" for small-scale fisheries (SSF). The aim of the new approach is to "critically examine the political, economic and ecological processes of blue economy development initiatives," explained Prof Moenieba Isaacs, PLAAS's Academic

Coordinator and regional coordinator and founding member of a global partnership for the future of SSF called, paradoxically, Too Big To Ignore (TBTI).

The blue justice concept promoted by PLAAS, which is enacted through participatory action research, acknowledges the historical rights of small-scale fishing communities, as traditional users, to marine and inland resources and coastal spaces. The concept recognises the need for SSF to have equity, access, participation and rights within the blue economy. It further acknowledges the importance of fishing as a source of food and livelihoods and its role in the production of cultural forms and identity.

Adopting a political economy and social justice perspective, the approach seeks to unpack how issues of class, race, caste, culture and gender shape and enable the exploitation envisaged under the mainstream view of a blue economy. It examines the implications of blue-economy initiatives in specific local, national and regional contexts; addressing, for example, the precise nature of the deals being struck to control marine territories and resources and the roles that domestic elites and governments may play as partners, intermediaries and beneficiaries in these.

Blue justice analysis has also sought to unpick the politics and interests shaping the blue-economy agenda at the international level. So, for example, it notes that the human rights perspective promoted by the SDGs that everyone is equal is problematic – given the great actual disparities in terms of income, wealth and access to influence among communities and interests across the world – and can be readily manipulated by those in power to serve their own interests.

Similarly, the blue justice approach criticises the proponents of the blue economy agenda for taking advantage of the concept of sustainable conservation of natural resources, leveraging an "ecological crisis" narrative to distract the populace from the implementation of free-market policies of questionable public value. Thus, potential opposition to the blue-economy agenda is disarmed and conservation becomes a tool to advance accumulation.

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As part of its work in supporting the development of blue-justice theory and practice over the past year, PLAAS played a leading role in coordinating a series of five international webinars, bringing together African, Latin American, European and North American academics and civil-society activists. The virtual meetings explored how the blue justice concept may be implemented more widely, and also analysed the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to fishers' efforts to produce and support livelihoods and the role of social movements in supporting them.

South Africa has been a key site in the evolution of the concept of blue justice on a continent where 90% of fish harvesting is conducted by small-scale or artisanal fishers. In an out-of-court settlement reached in 2007, academics, activists, fishery representatives and the national government came together and developed a new SSF policy for the country, promoting a gender-equitable, collective system protecting tenure rights and local value-chains and food supply.

The South African campaign laid the foundations of a collaboration among PLAAS, the Masifundise Development Trust and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) to incorporate social justice principles into fisheries guidelines being developed at the international level. The result was the "Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security" produced by the FAO and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2012 and the "Voluntary Guidelines for

Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication" produced by the FAO in 2014.

However, although the guidelines gained some political traction, mobilising advocacy and raising awareness of the plight of SSF, as well as endorsing fishers' rights to food, national governments proved reluctant to implement them. Indeed, even as SSF communities struggled for recognition, the discourse of the blue economy started to take hold.

Meanwhile, at the international level, the fish harvest remains dominated by the Global North. A relatively small number of wealthy countries land more than 70% of the value of the catch from the high seas. In addition, about 86% of fishery subsidies are distributed among large-scale fishing boats. As well as promoting overfishing and taking the fish out of the mouths of future generations, such subsidies further impede equitable distribution of the economic benefits of fishing.

The exploitation and commodification of maritime and inland water resources by large firms with the support of political elites runs contrary to the approach adopted by small-scale fishers for whom fishing is a way of life. Within these communities, people's interaction with the ocean has sustained livelihoods and shaped a culture of resilience and solidarity among members of specific communities and their neighbours. In this regard, SSF activism proposes a holistic, community-based narrative for appreciating people's relationship with the ocean, which should prioritise the right to access food and livelihoods in a fair way.



Prof Moenieba Isaacs is Academic Coordinator for PLAAS. Her research focus is on understanding the social and political processes of fisheries reform in South Africa, with a particular emphasis on the interests of small-scale fisheries. She is the regional coordinator and founding member of a global partnership for the future of small-scale fisheries, called Too Big To Ignore (TBTI), at which she is leading the campaign for blue justice for small-scale fishers. She has previously worked on the role of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition with the UN Committee on World Food Security's High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition.



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TOWARDS A MORE EQUITABLE MANAGEMENT OF AQUATIC RESOURCES

Pressures on the management of natural resources to address the needs of the poor have mounted since the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020. Existing challenges produced by climate change and inequitable developmental priorities under the present global, neoliberal economic system have been exacerbated by national and international responses to the pandemic, leading to the loss of jobs and livelihoods.

In Southern Africa, where wildlife and natural resource-based tourism is important for most national economies, official bans on travel, which resulted in a drastic fall in the number of international visitors, as well as the closure of hotels and restaurants under

national lockdowns undermined tourism- and hospitality-based revenues and caused increasing unemployment in the tourism sector. The loss of jobs in the formal economy meant that the poor, unemployed and marginalised were increasingly forced to rely on harvesting natural resources for their livelihoods and sustenance, which has led to greater pressure on these resources. For example, poaching in national parks and nature reserves, mainly to put food on the table, has reportedly increased.

Against this background, PLAAS has undertaken several projects on the impacts of, and responses to, mounting pressure on natural resources, with a focus on the needs of marginalised populations. In particular, the programme has sought to address the issues of adaptation to climate change, conflict over marine resources, and the potential benefits of inland fisheries for rural livelihoods. In all of this, the focus has been on issues of human-based resource management, and tenure and inequality of access to resources, as well as the kinds of rights that may be expressed in relation to such access.

Three main projects have recently been undertaken under the theme of natural resource management:

1. A project titled "Implementation of selected climate change adaptation measures in fishery and aquaculture in South Africa", which is funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) through the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN), has held workshops to strengthen financial and design skills among coastal women, helping them to develop new sources of income. The project has also promoted new ways of using catches, for example, by processing anchovies for consumption.
2. Research on appropriate forms of conflict management has been conducted as part of a continent-wide programme titled "Mapping marine resource conflicts across Africa: Patterns, drivers and solutions for coastal communities (MARICA)". The programme aims to produce a systematic, multi-scale assessment of spatial patterns and key drivers of conflicts linked to marine resources across sub-Saharan Africa – in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa. By analysing factors that include the condition of resources, levels and kinds of dependence on them, and population densities, the programme aims to produce a clearer understanding of which management tools may be most useful for dealing with conflicts in different contexts.
3. As part of a project titled "Towards enhancing contributions of inland fisheries to rural livelihoods: An empirical assessment of freshwater fish stocks, fisheries potential, market value chains, governance and co-management arrangements", research has been conducted into the use of public dams and reservoirs to support the livelihoods of nearby rural and marginalised communities. The research explored how small-scale and recreational fishing, and water sports and tourism may be deployed at the reservoirs created by public dams to produce economic opportunities for poor communities in these areas. To this end, it investigated methodologies for assessing fish stocks; existing and potential market value chains; and institutional arrangements for sustainable utilisation of the water and other resources stored and produced at these facilities. A key goal was to find ways of formalising inland small-scale fishing and integrating local marginalised communities into recreational fishing and tourism value chains at the public dams.



Prof Mafaniso Hara joined PLAAS in 2000. He has more than 30 years' experience working as a social scientist, during which he has focused on rural fishing communities in both inland and coastal contexts. His current research interests are in integrated resource governance, conflicts linked to marine resources, ecosystem services from public dams, and climate change adaption in Southern Africa. His work has particularly focused on looking at social issues affecting fisheries and communities dependent on natural resources. Since joining PLAAS, he has coordinated a variety of regional collaborative research projects on the governance of fisheries and the commons.

DOES FORMAL TENURE REALLY STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS?

Much has been written on how land-based investments by multinational firms have exacerbated tenure insecurity among the rural poor – and especially among women – but this is not the only important process affecting land rights in Africa.

Much has been written on how land-based investments by multinational firms have exacerbated tenure insecurity among the rural poor – and especially among women – but this is not the only important process affecting land rights in Africa. Another major development has been the drive to register the rights in land of those living under customary tenure, which in sub-Saharan Africa accounts for about 90% of land holders.

Customary tenure refers to a set of unwritten, traditional and socially acceptable rules about how to use and allocate land and natural resources. Most African tenure systems include individual rights for residential and arable lands, and collectively held rights for forest and grazing land. Such land is usually governed under the authority of traditional leadership, families or clans.

However, donors, international financial institutions, free-market economists and some African feminist lawyers argue that land rights are insecure under the customary system, compared with those granted under the system of statutory tenure, which provides a framework of written legal rules and offers proof of land ownership in the form of title deeds or state leaseholds. “As a result, a number of civil society organisations and policymakers have advocated for the formalisation of customary land rights. The campaign seeks to secure formal rights for poor communities – especially women – to prevent them from losing their land,” said Dr Phillan Zamchiya, who is the principal investigator for a new project led by PLAAS interrogating how the privatisation of customary land may affect women.

This activism has a background of widespread efforts to formalise customary land rights. Between 1990 and 2017 there were 32 new land laws enacted across sub-Saharan Africa,

as national policies increasingly focused on reforming rights to customary land. These laws have ranged from the 1995 Land Act in Zambia to Mozambique’s 1997 Land Law. Most of the reforms allow for the surveying of boundaries; registration and documentation; and the leasing, transfer and sale of customary land. However, these legal efforts have raised important new questions. How does such formalisation protect land rights for rural women of different ages, socio-economic positions and marital status? What are the implications of these efforts for land policy more generally?

To try and answer some of these questions, in July 2020 PLAAS, in cooperation with the Austrian Development Agency, launched a three-year action research project titled “*Privatisation of customary land and implications for women’s land tenure security and livelihoods in Southern Africa*”. The project is being implemented in partnership with civil society organisations in four countries: Livangingo in Mozambique; Nkuzi Development Association in South Africa; Platform for Youth and Community Development (PYCD) in Zimbabwe; and the Zambia Land Alliance, together with rural women’s movements.

The project builds on a previous three-year programme titled “Land and water rights in Southern Africa: Entrenching global and regional policy frameworks’ project”. This research found that a combination of, at times, quite subtle local processes is at play in reconfiguring land rights, land uses and livelihoods – and that therefore the problem cannot be understood properly without adopting a holistic approach.

Southern Africa was chosen as the domain for the new project on the basis that it features dual land tenure systems – that is, systems of statutory land tenure that are administered by officials of the state using the law, alongside customary land tenure regimes administered mainly by traditional leaders using cultural practices. “The study of such dual-track systems and their effect on agrarian relations can produce a comprehensive understanding of the differentiated impacts of these dispensations on women,” said Dr Zamchiya.

In the inception phase, the project produced a gender-sensitive research design framework

and policy and communications tools for civil society, researchers and beneficiaries. In line with the initiative's action-research, a virtual training workshop was held, which was attended by 33 participants, including 18 women, from across the region. The research design for the project was developed at this meeting and study sites were identified. "We then developed gender sensitive research instruments that were adapted for the different study countries," said Dr Zamchiya.

At the same time, the project produced a comprehensive training module aimed at enhancing the capacity of civil society organisations working to support women's land rights in Southern Africa. The module, titled "Southern Africa training module on women's land rights in Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe", produced in English and Portuguese, formed the basis of a community training for 35 rural women in Chipinge district, Zimbabwe, in December 2020.

In addition, a blended training workshop on high-level policy engagement and communication tools was held in Johannesburg. Furthermore, a database of 30 civil society organisations across the four countries was compiled in preparation for the project's advocacy efforts. "Having designed the tools for the project, the

next step is to examine the main drivers of privatisation of customary land tenure; the extent of privatisation; and the features and characteristics of the new tenure regimes being established," said Dr Zamchiya.

The envisaged outcome is that rural women, policymakers and civil society organisations in Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe are supported with the requisite capacity, evidence and platforms to promote relevant policy formulation and implementation. "The idea is the policies being developed and implemented should be based on local practices and livelihoods realities, as opposed to normative and often ill-founded perceptions of the kinds of tenure systems that are in place or should be in place," said Dr Zamchiya.

To leverage its impact, the project intends to target a diverse range of influential stakeholders. These include key policymakers in SADC, (AU) and the African Land Policy Centre (ALPC). The project will target policymakers in national governments in the four countries under study, traditional leaders, and civil society organisations – especially those representing rural women – as well as the land rights holders and users themselves. "The key beneficiaries, though, will be the women who occupy and eke out their livelihoods on customary land," said Dr Zamchiya.

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– Dr Zamchiya.



Refiloe Joala is a researcher and PhD candidate at PLAAS and her primary research focus includes the political economy of agro-food systems reform and agrarian change in Southern Africa. Refiloe led a joint action-research project in partnership with civil society organisations in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia looking at agro-food food systems change and the right to food. Refiloe is also member of the Young African Researchers in Agriculture (YARA) Network.



Dr Phillan Zamchiya is a senior researcher at PLAAS. He is the regional coordinator of a new project on the privatisation of customary land and women's land rights in Southern Africa. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in International Development from the University of Oxford and an MPhil in Land and Agrarian Studies from the University of the Western Cape. He has worked extensively with civil society organisations in Zimbabwe, and has been a victim of state engineered attacks there.





Farewell to Ben Cousins, founder of PLAAS and inaugural SARChI Chair Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING IS REQUIRED TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS

...research shows that domestication and implementation of these land rights mechanisms vary across countries and have received little political support on the ground.

Although African women comprise most of the agricultural workforce on the continent, many of them do not hold independent land rights. They struggle to access land and face the risk of dispossession. In response to this challenge, resolutions and frameworks aiming to secure equitable land rights for women have been adopted at international and continental levels and most African states have agreed to policy resolutions to ensure a fairer deal for women.

However, research shows that domestication and implementation of these land rights mechanisms vary across countries and have received little political support on the ground. For example, under Covid-19, women have remained vulnerable to losing their land to male relatives, companies and governments. In addition, most rural women remain unaware of progressive gender tools that have been developed at an international level.

Accordingly, in 2019, PLAAS launched a three-year research, training and advocacy initiative on “Women’s land rights for inclusive development and growth in Africa” with Oxfam’s Pan Africa Programme, and the Plateforme Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d’Afrique Centrale (PROPAC) – a regional platform of farmers’ organisations in Central Africa, which operates in partnership with the International Land Coalition (ILC).

The project interrogated the extent to which national governments have agreed to, and implemented the provision of, women’s land rights under continental and international charters produced by the African Union

(AU) and the United Nations (UN); as well as whether and how women’s land rights have been recognised and implemented through legislation, protocols and policy in seven countries: Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Togo. It scored these states on how effective they have been in implementing provisions on women’s land rights. In addition, it produced a tool quantifying their effectiveness, which was made available to women on the ground, including through empowerment programmes instituted at grassroots level. The tool was accompanied by training with the goal of fostering evidence-based campaigning for women’s land rights and to support the implementation of such rights.

The research undertaken by project teams in Southern, West and Eastern Africa considered the factors that had impeded or fostered the implementation of women’s land rights in the seven countries being studied. It investigated whether there were capacity constraints preventing implementation on the ground. It researched struggles around legal pluralism, in which women confront the limitations of formalised state-driven and market-driven processes for controlling land, as well as struggles around customary practices. It analysed the relative virtues and drawbacks of collective and individual forms of land rights for securing women’s control over land in the context of patriarchal systems and legacies.

The research also sought to analyse the positive impacts and limitations of efforts to advocate for women’s land rights in Africa at the intergovernmental level in the context of the norms produced by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agreed by the UN in 1995; and the Kilimanjaro Initiative of 2016, when African women converged in a mass civil-society mobilisation at the foot of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania and a delegation climbed the continent’s highest mountain to symbolically place the issue at the top of the continent’s rights agenda. In addition, the study considered the impacts of a campaign launched in 2016 by the AU Commission, UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), with the stated goal of ensuring that 30% of documented land on the continent be allocated to African women by 2025.

The research also interrogated what forms of campaigning may work best to produce more effective implementation of women's land rights, acknowledging the limits of the effectiveness of intergovernmental lobbying, and the challenge of ensuring the accountability of advocacy efforts to civil society activism at the grassroots. The project further sought to lay the ground for future engagement with national government and AU officials to address some of the political issues raised by its findings.

In general, the research found that the constitutional and legal provisions for equal land rights for women and men were quite adequate in the seven countries under study, particularly in Kenya and South Africa, although there was room for improvement in Cameroon and Mozambique. However, implementation fell short in all the countries surveyed. In addition, it was found that officially sanctioned customary practices often contradicted statutory provisions safeguarding women's rights. These findings confirmed the view that, although national governments are relatively quick to sign charters under pressure at intergovernmental forums, they are slower to convert these into national frameworks and even less willing to translate them into operable laws and practices.

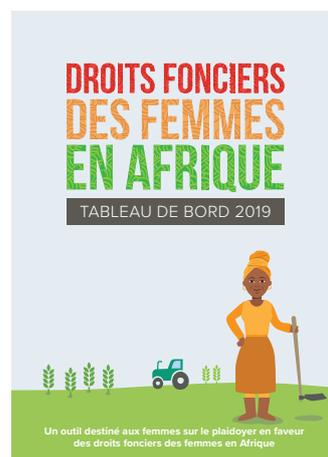
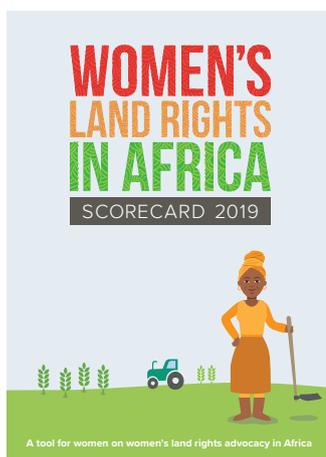
The research also found that the quest for equitable land rights has continued to be impeded under legal pluralism by biased, parochial, patriarchal interpretations of customary practices historically promoted through oppressive models of governance such as colonialism and apartheid; as well as

by state- and market-driven processes of land privatisation and formalisation that reinforce inequitable, gender-based forms of control over land.

The research further found that, on a continent where 90% of land is still held under various kinds of informal or customary tenure, it is important to look beyond changing statutes to reforming the customs and informal practices that shape the ownership and use of the vast majority of land on the continent – many of which are the subject of contestation. The point is that women don't own rights in a vacuum; they are a part of collectives, of families. In this context, the AU goal to ensure that women hold 30% of documented land rights emanates from a limiting paradigm – as if individualised rights could provide security, given the many social forms of tenure under informal and customary systems. There are also situations, such as in relation to rights to rangeland, in which individual titling is useless. Accordingly, many civil society organisations, including those seeking to defend poor landholders from large-scale corporate grabbing, have argued that communities can better protect their interests through collective titling.

The research concluded that, in general, it is important to consider which forms of tenure can in reality secure women's land rights most effectively, on a case-by-case basis. Accordingly, the study recommended that alternative people-driven approaches toward securing land rights, whether in the statutory or customary spheres, should be established, instead of the top-down bureaucratic ones that have usually failed in Africa.

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THE SARCHI CHAIR IN POVERTY, LAND AND AGRARIAN STUDIES

Prof Ruth Hall has succeeded Ben Cousins as holder of the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, with a five-year programme of research centred on three themes:

1. The political economy of redistributive land reforms;
2. Land commodification, land governance and changing agro-food systems; and
3. Agrarian question of labour, crises of social reproduction and fragmented "classes of labour".

After agreeing on a budget for the SARChI Chair with the funding body, the National Research Foundation (NRF), in June 2020, Prof Hall oversaw the launch of an ambitious three-pronged programme in support of the three fields of study. The programme:

- Established a number of online projects to strengthen the links between activism and research and to help produce a new generation of scholars in the Global South;
- Recruited 10 new post-graduate students to join the SARChI cohort; and
- Sought to foster greater academic engagement among the students and researchers at PLAAS.

Having established a SARChI webpage, a series of "agrarian politics" podcasts was launched under the new programme, to help disseminate relevant academic research in an accessible way to postgraduate students and leading activists in social movements. The aim of the series, which has aired five podcasts

to date, was also to enable activist leaders to communicate their perspectives, strategies and efforts to academic researchers.

The podcasts were launched in July 2020 as a collaboration between Prof Hall and her new Postdoctoral Fellow funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, Mozambican scholar Boaventura Monjane, who has a background in decolonial theory, agrarian movements and journalism. The first episode featured an interview with Ben Cousins, founder and first Director of PLAAS.

A second online initiative, which was implemented from July to November 2020, entailed mentoring more than 60 young scholars from across the Global South, so that they could contribute articles to the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (JPS), which is the leading publication in the field. Collaborating with the journal's editor, Prof Saturnino "Jun" Borrás of the International Institute of Social Studies in the Hague, Prof Hall helped to convene a "Writeshop in critical agrarian studies and scholar-activism". "The purpose of the initiative was to strengthen scholarship in our field in the Global South," said Prof Hall. Adapting to Covid-19 conditions, instead of attending a one-week event in Beijing, China, as had been originally scheduled, the 62 postdoctoral graduates who were chosen from about 350 applicants participated in a series of online lectures and writing workshops and were mentored over a period of more than three months.

Meanwhile, recruitment of a new cohort of postgraduate students started as soon as NRF approval for the new SARChI's Chair's budget was secured, and Prof Hall's secondment was confirmed. After advertising the opportunity widely, 10 scholars were chosen from among about 150 applicants by a selection committee consisting of Prof Horman Chitonge from the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT), as well as leading academics at PLAAS itself: Prof Moenieba Isaacs, Prof Hall, Dr Farai Mtero, Emmanuel Sulle and Boaventura Monjane.

In choosing the successful applicants, the selection committee was forced to address new eligibility criteria for SARChI scholars, which set an upper age limit of 30 years for MPhil candidates and 32 years for PhD candidates. "These rules are of great concern," said Prof

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In choosing the successful applicants, the selection committee was forced to address new eligibility criteria for SARCHI scholars, which set an upper age limit of 30 years for MPhil candidates and 32 years for PhD candidates.

Hall. "They contradict the commitment to supporting black South African women, given that most of this group have been unable to proceed directly to PhD level by this age; while some may have spent years as leading activists prior to moving to this level of postgraduate study." In response, the selection committee chose their preferred candidates, regardless of age, and wrote motivations for those who were outside the age range, including a 49-year-old activist. These were submitted to, and accepted by, the NRF.

The selection committee was also required to address the issue of nationality under NRF rules, which prioritise South Africans for SARCHI scholarships. Most of the applicants were non-South Africans; and, at postdoctoral level, six of the seven shortlisted candidates were Zimbabwean (and five of these were men).

In general, the committee prioritised South Africans for the scholarships, referring the strongest non-South African candidates to PLAAS's German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) scholarships instead. In terms of gender, the committee was pleased to be able to secure five women and five men among the 10 new SARCHI scholars, although it found that there were no appointable women at the postdoctoral level.

The postdoctoral fellows appointed by the committee were Dr George Mudimu, who has a PhD in Development Studies from the China Agricultural University in Zimbabwe; and fellow Zimbabwean Dr Arnold Chamunogwa, who has a DPhil in Development Studies from the University of Oxford.

The successful PhD applicants were Katlego Ramantsima, who is a PLAAS researcher with an MCom in Development Theory and Policy from the University of the Witwatersrand; Shane Phiri, who has an MPhil in Development Studies from Rhodes University; Nduduzo Majozi, who has an MPhil in Development Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal; and Sithandiwe Yeni, who has an MPhil in Land and Agrarian Studies from PLAAS.

The MPhil candidates were Constance Mogale, national coordinator of the Alliance for Rural Democracy and a postgraduate student under PLAAS's recognition-of-prior-learning stream; Ashley Fischhoff who has an honours degree

in Justice and Transformation from UCT; Tetelo Maila, who has an honours degree in Development Management from the University of South Africa (UNISA); and Siennen Molepo, who researches land claims with Khanya-AICDD (the African Institute for Community Driven Development).

The cohort of 10 new students joins an existing team of six PhD students already being supervised by Prof Hall: PLAAS researchers Emmanuel Sulle, Cyriaque Hakizimana and Refiloe Joala, as well as Loveness Msofi from Malawi and Odenda Lumumba from Kenya.

To support the postgraduate cohort in their studies, Prof Hall has established a semi-structured joint MPhil and PhD programme, which entails an intensive reading programme and six hours of contact per week, during which time the students present and discuss a set number of journal articles. Deploying Zoom, a Google Drive for sharing materials and a dedicated WhatsApp group, the engagement has continued under Covid-19 conditions, although some delays were experienced in providing students with laptops through the university's procurement process.

Prof Hall has also sought to deliver on a promise to prioritise intellectual engagement among researchers and students within PLAAS as part of her work as SARCHI Chair. To this end, she has established a PLAAS Theory Reading Group, at which researchers, PhD students and postdoctoral graduates come together every fortnight to discuss a democratically selected journal article. She has also instituted a series of internal PLAAS seminars at which completing PhD students and postdoctoral graduates present their work, to elicit critical engagement. This programme is being evaluated as it proceeds.

Meanwhile, under Covid-19, Prof Hall has dedicated much of her time to connecting the ongoing research programme with the pandemic and the responses to it. She established a Food Working Group in the C19 People's Coalition and co-convened a People's Assembly to respond to a mounting food crisis in South Africa during the pandemic and to offer economic policy alternatives for a just response to Covid-19. She further helped to launch a study into the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on African food systems.



Prof Ruth Hall holds the SARChI Chair in Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies, which is located at PLAAS and funded by the National Research Foundation. She holds a DPhil in Politics from the University of Oxford, where she previously obtained an MPhil in Development Studies. Her first two degrees were from the University of Cape Town. Prof Hall has published extensively on land reform, tenure and governance in Africa, with a focus on transnational land investments. She convenes a continent-wide accredited short course for land professionals, activists and officials on “The Political Economy of Land Governance in Africa”.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, YARA initiated a small-grants programme, awarding 15 small grants of \$1,500 each, to gain real-time insights into the impacts of Covid-19...

The Young African Researchers in Agriculture (YARA) network, which was established in 2014 with the support of the African Union (AU), has stepped up its quest to secure the future of knowledge production on rural development in Africa. In pursuit of this goal, YARA recently conducted on-the-ground research into the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on local food systems across the continent. It also convened training to facilitate intergenerational cross-fertilisation of research expertise, to address the agrarian question in contemporary Africa.

In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, YARA initiated a small-grants programme, awarding 15 small grants of \$1,500 each, to gain real-time insights into the impacts of Covid-19 and the various responses to it among rural communities in Cameroon, Cape Verde, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project, which aimed to analyse the implications of the crisis for African food systems and agriculture, unearthed the politics of the impacts of, and responses to, the pandemic, and explored alternative views of future agrarian development in the wake of Covid-19 for small-scale farmers and traders.

The programme considered five main themes:

- How the outbreak has affected agricultural production in relation to issues of labour and access to land and inputs; and the

extent to which government lockdowns have affected outputs and the gender and generational aspects of production;

- How the outbreak has affected the marketing of agricultural commodities and the accessibility and affordability of food;
- How the outbreak has affected the movement of people and goods between urban centres and rural areas;
- How lockdowns have affected rural people's access to public services, including health care and veterinary and agricultural extension services; and
- How people have strategised to cope with the shocks produced by the pandemic, including their organisation and production of new support mechanisms; the institutions that have been involved; and whether particular tensions, conflicts and exclusions have arisen as a result.

In 2020, YARA also conducted training on "The agrarian question in contemporary Africa" at which, to broaden their horizons, 15 young African scholars engaged with four seasoned academics in the agrarian sector. The programme aimed to facilitate international and intergenerational cross-fertilisation of expertise and experience, to support the production of leading-edge research and to inform the academic and political discourse on agrarian issues. The initiative was conceived and implemented to support the development of a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the current processes of change occurring on the continent, and to equip a new cohort of African scholars with the collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches required to respond effectively to ways in which the agrarian and rural landscapes on the continent are being transformed.



Cyriaque Hakizimana is a researcher and PhD candidate at PLAAS, where he is also coordinating YARA. His academic training is in approaches to poverty reduction and his research interest is in agricultural development within the broader field of agrarian transformation. Mr Hakizimana is currently leading the Southern African hub of the Agricultural Policy Research in Africa (APRA) programme, which considers how different ways of commercialising agriculture can have an impact on rural poverty, women's and girl's empowerment, and food and nutrition security in sub-Saharan Africa.

THE POSTGRADUATE PIPELINE

Under Covid-19, PLAAS deployed online platforms and established a blended learning methodology to implement its postgraduate teaching programme. Although several challenges arose, including how to accommodate students who were effectively displaced under pandemic travel restrictions, a combination of pedagogic creativity and great administrative effort ensured that the postgraduate students in PLAAS's care continued to flourish and excel.

Postgraduate diploma

Having registered 20 students for PLAAS's postgraduate diploma, and with the course having started, face-to-face sessions and lectures were suspended from 16 March 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic spread across South Africa and a national state of disaster and lockdown were declared.

After a pause, during which arrangements were made to move the programme online, further lectures and sessions were held via platforms such as iKamva and Zoom. At the same time, academics and administrators met with the students twice a week, to address their needs and ensure that the academic programme was successfully implemented. In the event, the course was completed by the middle of August.

Throughout this period, the course lecturers sought creative ways in which to engage with their students, to compensate for the lack of in-person contact and to make the most effective use of the online media at their disposal. Fifteen students received postgraduate diplomas at the end of the course.

Research students

Fourteen new master's degree and PhD research students were registered for 2020; and one PhD and one MPhil student completed their studies and were set to graduate at the end of the year. The successful students were Ashley Naidoo who completed his PhD on "Ocean governance

in South Africa: Policy and implementation" under the supervision of Prof Mafaniso Hara; and Raesibe Mothapo, who garnered an MPhil cum laude for his thesis on "Analysis of public policy compliance in the current provision of water and sanitation: A case study of Lepelle Nkumpi Municipality, Limpopo Province" under the supervision of Prof Gregory Ruiters.

Individual supervision, conducted via email and the Skype, WhatsApp and Zoom platforms, was complemented by larger online sessions that brought together the whole cohort, to offer the students a sense of belonging and shared experiences, provide group feedback and integrate the research being undertaken more effectively. Online sessions enabled staff and students to get to know each other and to introduce the topics being researched and decide how and where these may best be located within PLAAS's overall research agenda. In addition, in theory sessions, held twice a week from the end of September 2020, academic supervisors helped students to develop their concept notes into fully fledged research proposals.

In its efforts to offer a truly supportive pedagogic approach, PLAAS also sought to address the challenge presented by academic writing. Writing can be quite an isolated and isolating process that can overwhelm senior students. In response, PLAAS Director, Prof Andries Du Toit, presented a session on the challenges of writing, in which he invited students to consider their own thought processes and how these could be expressed, to deconstruct the challenge of writing. In addition, students participated in interactive group sessions, at which they sought to identify their pedagogic and writing challenges and needs, so that PLAAS supervisors could create a framework of learning to address these, including through the establishment of peer-learning mechanisms.

Practical efforts to support the research students under Covid-19 also included successful lobbying to find places at university residences for two students whose efforts to complete their theses were severely disrupted after they found themselves displaced during the national lockdown, imposed from March 2020.

PLAAS also sought to address the challenge presented by academic writing.

The numbers of the postgraduate cohort rose significantly in 2020, with the addition of six new PhD students and eight new master's degree students, bringing the total to 29 PhD students and 19 MPhil students. The cohort was overseen by six supervisors.

DAAD scholarships

PLAAS also oversees master's degree and PhD students under a programme titled "Strengthening land governance in

Africa", which it has run since 2018, with support from the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) programme. In 2020, PLAAS was able to provide 11 German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) scholarships under the programme – four for master's degrees and seven for PhDs – and awarded an MPhil during the course of the year to one of these scholars, Augustine Fosu, who has now embarked on a PhD under the same initiative. ■



PLAAS SUPPORT STAFF – 2020 (JAN – MAY)

The orderly start to the year, with detailed work plans and a bulging organisational calendar, was soon disrupted in the most unexpected and distressing manner. An ominous virus, which initially seemed to be a “Chinese problem”, rapidly extended its deadly tentacles around the globe, forcing countries into lockdown mode. When South Africa entered its initial 21-day lockdown on 26 March, PLAAS support staff joined the nation in shifting gear – social distancing and working from home. Several rounds of student protest action on campus in previous years had served as a curtain-raiser, preparing all academic and support staff to set up fully functioning home offices, and remain connected with colleagues while working remotely.

However, new challenges emerged. Our student assistant, **Emmanuel Ogbuabo**, faced an accommodation crisis when the student residences shut down at short notice. Together with our other student assistant, **Farren Sefela** their jobs were in jeopardy. Equally precarious were the front-of-house jobs, notably **Babongile Malama’s** reception and communications functions, and our office assistant and cleaner, **Janine Baartman**. **Joy van Dieman** saw her area of events and travel management grind to a halt. It was evident that drastic times called for drastic measures. The former ‘office-based’ staff were redeployed, while being upskilled, to work alongside other support staff – **Esté Beerwinkel** in communications; **Carla Henry**

in postgraduate student administration; and **Donovan Delpaul** in finances. Regular check-ins via new online platforms served to hold the fragile threads together, while supporting the academic functions of the organisation.

A key component of the organisational restructuring, was the proposed merging of the positions of Administrative Manager and Financial Manager, to be finalised by the end of May. **Ursula Arends** served her final post-retirement contract, concluding more than two decades at PLAAS, while **Trevor Reddy’s** contract terminated at the same time, after seven years of service to the organisation.

The tenacity, exemplary work ethic, and unwavering commitment of support staff kept PLAAS afloat. In addition, ongoing organisational support – especially from academic staff – eased the burden of coping with a new lived reality during a dreadful pandemic. The challenges of working from home included childcare and home-schooling; job transitioning; acquiring new skills; meeting deadlines; keeping families safe and healthy; and working remotely, in isolation, and mindful of colleagues in need of support.

The second half of 2020 saw a further transformation of the support function at PLAAS, with the appointment of a new Finance and Operations Manager, **Bahihah Mohamed**, who relocated to Cape Town in September, after 11 years in a similar

The training offered by PLAAS as part of the NELGA network provides an overview of pre-colonial and colonial histories in Africa.

position at the University of the Witwatersrand. Another change in the support team was the resignation of **Babongile Malama** in November, after serving PLAAS for nine years. A student assistant, **Farren Sefela**, completed her master's degree at UWC, also marking the end of an era.

The pandemic continued to negatively affect the lives of staff, as many families, friends and loved ones became infected or even succumbed to the deadly virus. Although the year closed with a lot of uncertainty around the pandemic, staff continued to push forward, dealing with the new norm of working from home. ■

PLAAS is grateful for more than 20 years of dedication and service from Ursula Arends, who retired this year.



NETWORK OF EXCELLENCE IN LAND GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

By the end of 2020, about 95 land professionals across 26 countries had participated in an interdisciplinary five-day course on the “Political economy of land governance in Africa”, convened by PLAAS. The training, offered as part of broader continental efforts to strengthen land governance in Africa through higher education, was organised and provided by PLAAS in its capacity as a “technical node” within a pan-continental Network of Excellence on Land Governance in Africa (NELGA), which features university hubs in North, West, Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. PLAAS was incorporated into this influential network, which is supported by the African Union (AU), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Land Policy Centre (ALPC), and the African Development Bank (AfDB), in recognition of its outstanding contribution in promoting a more democratic vision of land use on the continent.

Against a backdrop of mounting land grabs, dispossession of local communities and rapacious exploitation of natural resources, PLAAS supplemented the short course training, which had to be paused at the height of the pandemic, with a series of webinars co-hosted by NELGA in 2020. These virtual

meetings leveraged the expertise of PLAAS’s ever-expanding network of alumni, many of whom occupy senior positions in government, academia and civil society, to produce research insights and evidence in support of more effective policymaking on crucial issues. The topics addressed by the webinars included: the struggle for the commons in Africa; land rights in the time of coronavirus; legal pluralism and women’s land rights; and African food security.

Meanwhile, the short-course training continued to encourage a critical, questioning approach to dominant, free-market oriented and nationalist policies for land use in post-independence Africa. “The training allowed us to question assumptions,” said Bernardus Swartbooi, former Deputy Minister of Land in Namibia and an alumnus of the short course. “It helped practitioners to realise that the current set-up of wealthy landowners and poor people on the land is not actually a ‘normal’ arrangement and to reflect on the tools that enable us to imagine a new dispensation around land.”

The training offered by PLAAS as part of the NELGA network provides an overview of pre-colonial and colonial histories in Africa. The impacts of colonial systems of

...short-course training continued to encourage a critical, questioning approach to dominant, free-market oriented and nationalist policies for land use in post-independence Africa.

With demand for the training far outstripping capacity – about 1 300 applications were received for the 95 spots that had been provided by the end of 2020.

economic exploitation in relation to trade, mineral extraction and white-settler land grabs constitute a particular focus of the course, particularly given the continuing damage wrought by the legacies of these systems. “After the colonial conquest of Africa, a bifurcated system of land tenure was created: one that legally recognised property, issuing land titles for the few who would be citizens, alongside another massive, customary system for most of the population. The inequalities of this dualism continue to be reproduced,” said Prof Ruth Hall who, with Prof Moenieba Isaacs, helped to forge the course and leads its implementation at PLAAS.

The training also features modules on land reform law and policy; rural and urban land administration; large-scale acquisitions of land; guidelines for national, continental and global land policies; agricultural commercialisation; natural resource access and management; and the impacts of land commodification on young people. The course, which is formally accredited by the University of the Western Cape (UWC), has been adapted to regional contexts in Eastern, West and Southern Africa and has been held in Zanzibar, Ghana and South Africa.

With demand for the training far outstripping capacity – about 1 300 applications were received for the 95 spots that had been provided by the end of 2020 – NELGA is now planning to coordinate with PLAAS to produce and offer training modules that address specific conditions in North Africa, francophone West Africa, Central Africa and the Horn of Africa. Meanwhile, to expand capacity to cater to demand within a limited budget, and to address the restrictions on meeting in person under Covid-19, the course has been adapted to leverage online learning methods.

Established as part of a continental drive to promote land use as a tool to foster development, the course seeks to enhance both scholarly and practical approaches to improving land governance in Africa. Recognising a lack of capacity among universities to help governments create and

implement sustainable policies in this field, the African Land Policy Centre established NELGA to enhance training opportunities and curricula on land governance in Africa, and to bring together scholars working in this area, with the goal of producing more informed, effective research on land issues.

PLAAS’s tradition as an activist producer of engaged research made it an ideal partner for the new network, according to Prof Isaacs. In this regard, a crucial component of the training is a field visit, during which the students are required to engage with community members, and after which they are required to write a report. “We need to produce relevant knowledge in terms of where local communities actually come from and their realities,” Prof Isaacs said. The approach, which aligns PLAAS’s practices with those proposed by advocates of decolonialised knowledge more broadly, entails recognition of the complex ways in which local populations use and appreciate land.

The late Zimbabwean scholar-activist Sam Moyo, who was one of the driving forces behind the initiative, and veteran Tanzanian legal scholar and political economist Issa Shivji have emphasised the importance of understanding the value of land holistically, in line with how local communities experience and use this resource, to produce sustainable, inclusive land and broader economic reforms.

Accordingly, the training held by PLAAS with NELGA seeks to engage a full range of stakeholders from civil society, the public and private sectors, and academia, to consider the different kinds of value that land has – for example, as a spiritual and cultural, as well as material, asset – and to integrate such complex understandings into policymaking and implementation.

The PLAAS training has, according to Joan Kagwanja, chief of the ALPC, “changed ways of thinking”. It has also produced real impacts. For example, a judge from Ethiopia was so influenced by a lecture on women’s land rights that was delivered as part of the course that he decided to change how inheritances would be distributed for women. ■

FINANCES

Financial Overview			
Income and Expenditure 2019/2020			
		2019	2020
INCOME	Notes	20 704 574.46	24 914 357.39
Austrian Development Agency (ADA)	1	110 674.77	3 699 090.00
Black Sash	1	394 000.00	
Claude Leon Foundation	1	750 000.00	500 000.00
DAAD	1	381 622.23	
Embassy of Ireland	1	149 838.00	
Embassy of The Netherlands	1	165 838.00	
Embassy of Switzerland	1	95 652.17	
European Union	1	134 782.61	
Future Agricultures Organisation (FAO)	1	419 578.00	1 203 193.00
Institute of Development Studies (IDS)	1	367 071.51	205 650.18
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)	1		8 547 568.00
Millennium Trust	1	700 000.00	
Norsk Institute for Vassforskning (NIVA)	1	35 669.98	714 413.29
Open Society Foundation	1	2 284 666.32	0.00
Oppenheimer Foundation	1		617 000.00
OXFAM	1	1 102 970.00	1 026 302.18
Raith Foundation	1	100 000.00	
Rosa Luxemburg Foundation	1	0.00	
SA Government -National Research Foundation Chair	2	4 385 697.07	3 441 729.18
SA Government -Water Research Council	1	305 000.00	602 173.91
Sundry Small Grants	1	503 043.00	
Standard Bank	1	500 000.00	500 000.00
TIA (Technology Innovation Agency)	1	125 000.00	
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA)	1	3 685 629.56	1 754 586.23
University of the Western Cape - Operational Support	3	128 689.03	84 325.41
University of the Western Cape - Staffing Support	3	3 793 529.92	1 951 958.68
Other Income (Recovery of overhead and other expenses)	1	85 622.29	66 367.33
EXPENDITURE		25 935 090.81	18 559 688.79
Personnel Costs (including UWC Staffing Permanent staff)	1, 2, 3	12 873 913.19	11 799 603.10
Operational Costs	1, 2, 3	518 954.95	215 521.02
Organisational Support	1	131 307.00	131 307.00
Equipment and Rental	1, 3	198 089.74	450 000.63
Research Costs (Service Level Agreements to Partners)	1, 2	4 609 818.98	2 113 257.04
NRF Research Costs	2	1 544 512.95	1 250 000.00
Teaching and Training (Bursaries for Post Graduate Program+ consultants)	1/3	2 336 947.35	1 800 000.00
Dissemination (including Communications)	1	661 828.60	400 000.00
Travel and Accommodation (includes Events and Research Assistants)	1	3 059 718.05	400 000.00

Notes

Note 1: PLAAS Income in the form of Research Grants. The income is generally received in advance and expenses occur as per contractual guidelines and deliverables.

Note 2: Includes NRF Chair and NRF Research Grant expenditure for the period.

Note 3: UWC income equals expenditure (as part of the Institutional subsidy).



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