RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Decolonising South African Agriculture – Bringing Dignity Back to Small-Scale Farming

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Abstract

Decolonisation should include not only political independence, but also the return of factors of production to the formerly colonised people so that they can use them to participate meaningfully in the economy, facilitating their economic emancipation from former colonial rulers. This not only involves putting the factors of production back into the hands of the colonised but also empowering them to generate wealth. Hence, the re-balancing of the agricultural landscape to actively include small-scale agriculture is part of the decolonisation process. Returning viability and dignity to small-scale farming entails reconnecting people to the land. Therefore, African investments in agriculture need to be focused on small-scale farming so that income inequality and poverty can be alleviated. The paper proposes that the promotion of small-scale agriculture change achieves both the objectives of reversing the impact of colonialism and restoring dignity to Black farming, as well as providing quality employment within local communities. The paper does not suggest that every farm must be small-scale, but that every small-scale farm be given an equal opportunity to produce and contribute to the economy as these farms can provide business opportunities for marginalised groups, namely the youth and women. Hence, the question remains - Where does one acquire the resources and expertise to kick-start the recalibrating of agricultural production on a small-scale? The answer lies in a mixture of finance and business skills from firms through Corporate Social Investment that creates partnerships, both public and private, that sow the seeds of small-scale success.

Keywords: *decolonisation; factors of production; small-scale farming; corporate social investment; agricultural Entrepreneur*

Introduction

Decolonisation at the basic level "involves gaining independence from colonial powers, a process that visibly manifests through the colonisers' withdrawal from the colonies, as well as the undoing of political and economic domination of the former colonies by the colonizers'" (Eze, 2015). Moreover, Eze (2015) argues that the goal of decolonisation should include making it feasible for the formerly colonised people to return to their authentic selves. If one were to look at South Africa before colonisation, the African population was involved in agriculture to provide the necessary food, materials for survival and trade. Basically, small-scale communal farming units on communally owned land used the mixed farming approach of crops and livestock. Lipton (1993) noted that before the 1913 Land Act, the production differential between white and black farmers was small, until African farmers were moved to 13% of the land. This Land Act basically reserved 87% of the land for large-scale white commercial farming while 'squashing' the rest of the population onto 13% of the land. This made African farming unsustainable, resulting in rural areas facing grinding poverty due to a lack of land and population pressure. As Davis (2011) noted, land reform followed the Junker approach which basically ensured that for survivability,

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labor had to migrate to the urban mining and industrial towns in order to earn a living and support families back in the rural areas.

Consequently, cut-off from the land that used to provide for them, Africans became wage earners and were not allowed to return to their authentic selves where the land provided not only food but also agricultural production for generating wealth. Therefore, part of the decolonisation agenda would be to not only return the land, but also to provide the means for using that land to develop wealth. However, this has not transpired and as a result, there has been a general de-agrarianisation in rural areas. Additionally, the reason remains the same whether in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape or KwaZulu-Natal. Mabhena's (2012) reasons for this phenomenon in the Eastern Cape include the flight of human capital from rural to urban areas. One only needs to look at the distribution of real annual mean and median expenditure between rural and urban areas to get a sense of the disparity in living standards between them. In 2015, urban annual expenditure was R40 290 compared to rural expenditure of R11 658. In fact, one could approximate roughly that the mean expenditure in urban areas was three times that in the rural areas. The median paints a less drastic picture of urban expenditure only being twice that of rural areas. Urban centres provide for a better standard of living, income generation, the possibility of employment and access to social services, contributing to the current rapid rural-urban migration pattern.

As a result of historic under-investment and being reduced to subsistence-activity, farming is not seen as an entrepreneurial way of life for the youth of today and has been viewed as a job for elders and the uneducated. Furthermore, social grants given to rural households have also slowed down agricultural activity in communal areas (Mabhena, 2012). Mabhena (2012:1) concludes that ''the bare grounds of many communal areas are a strong indicator that the majority of rural dwellers have abandoned agriculture as a means of livelihood. This is due to the migration of the able-bodied people to urban centres; failure of the new dispensation to provide sound policies on agricultural development; and discouragement in the form of social grants''. Mlambo (2018) affirms that the pattern of rural-urban migration is becoming more prevalent, draining the rural areas of skilled and innovative people. This leaves behind a reduced rural labour force, resulting in the under-utilisation of resources which further prolongs the cycle of poverty and under-development. In addition, poorly defined and insecure rights to resources in rural areas put constraints on development. Therefore, land reform that gives tenure security and access to resources is critical, especially for the women who dominate rural social structures (Cousins, 2005).

Restoring agriculture as a viable entrepreneurial activity in the rural areas provides the opportunity to restore dignity and financial viability to small-scale farming. An opportunity exists to change the rural landscape from the harsh cycle of poverty and remittance dependency that fuels rural-urban migration, thereby reversing the impact of the 1913 Land Act, which was the chief destroyer of African agriculture.

So, Why Small-Scale Agriculture?

The 2008 World Development Report places agriculture at the centre for development, with emphasis on small-scale agricultural development (World Bank, 2007). It develops a strong case for large-scale investments in agriculture by government and international institutions, while showing small-scale agriculture as an effective path for rural poverty alleviation. "An increase in agricultural labour productivity is three times more likely to raise the incomes of the poorest than non-agricultural productivity increases" (World Bank, 2007:39). The reasoning behind the World Development Bank Report for prioritising small-scale agriculture is that it is the most effective in achieving both equity and efficiency in the sector (Aliber and Hall, 2012). Furthermore, the 'inverse size – productivity relationship' shows that when small-scale farmers are more productive than large-scale commercial farms when there is an equitable distribution of resources.

The essence of the World Development Bank Report (2003) is that smallholder farming remains the most common form of organisation in agriculture, even in industrial countries. Furthermore, according to the World Development Bank Report (2003), smallholder farming is superior to large-scale farming but still is characterised as inefficient and backward. Kutya (2012) highlights the value of small-scale agriculture in that provides more than just income as it also acts as a source of household food security. In addition, small-scale farming is more ecologically friendly with fewer emissions, with permaculturalists and others claiming that small-scale agriculture is far more productive than commercial agriculture in terms of total output from the piece of land (Kutya, 2012). Unfortunately, the playing fields between large-scale and small-scale farming are not even. They face many obstacles that prevent them from reaping the benefits of being more productive, being able to profit from agricultural output and be included in value added production (Aliber and Hall, 2012). Kutya (2012:1) stated that small-scale farming is declining due to several reasons and a few factors, such as:

- limited technical and financial support
- Indifference amongst the youth towards farming
- Government policies that are in most cases not area-specific and
- Reliance on other livelihood sources such as formal employment and social grants.

Yet if one looks at the role and output on a global scale, one sees the importance of small-scale farmers. ''Smallholder units, with less than five hectares of agricultural land per farming household, account for a significant portion of global production of many crops, contributing more than 80% of global rice production, 75% of the global production of groundnuts and oil palm, nearly 60% of the global production of millet and cassava, and more than 40% of the production of cotton and sugarcane" (Samberg, Gerber, and Ramankutty *et al.,* 2016: 5). According to Samberg, Gerber, and Ramankutty *et al.* (2016) smallholder farms are on average is less than 5 hectares and are exposed to several crucial challenges like having access to productive resources and advisory services. Despite those challenges, they remain as the driving force of many African economies and their potential remains untapped (Nwanze, 2011). "Small farms produce about 80% of the food consumed in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite their role and importance to household food security, the productivity of smallholder farmers is quite low and as a result, poverty amongst the African smallholder farming populations is high" (Kamara, Conteh and Rhodes *et al.,* 2019: 14045).

Kamara, Conteh and Rhodes *et al.* (2019) provide a summary of key constraints being face by smallholder farms, namely:

i. Inadequate capital assets: natural (land access and land tenure security), physical (processing and storage facilities, farm machinery, irrigation equipment and others), financial (credit facilities, collateral) and human (unskilled labour)
ii. Poor market linkages: low bargaining power, poor access to market information, and selling their products at market gate prices
iii. Under-developed rural infrastructure: road networks, transportation, communication, education, health, irrigation, and safety nets
iv. Climate change

If Africa wishes to attain sustainable economic development, then there needs to be significant investment in small-scale agriculture to harness their potential for efficient agricultural production and achieving poverty alleviation.

The South African Context

Even though this is a relatively small share of the total Gross Domestic Product, the primary agriculture is an important sector in the South African economy. Moreover, agriculture remains a significant provider of employment, especially in the rural areas, and is a major earner of foreign exchange (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2019: 1). Agriculture's prominent, indirect role in the economy is a function of backward and forward linkages to other sectors. Purchases of goods such as fertilisers, chemicals and implements form backward linkages with the manufacturing sector, while forward linkages are established through supplying raw materials to the manufacturing industry.

Furthermore, Agriculture, according to the 2030 National Development Plan, has the potential to create close to 1 million new jobs by 2030 if the correct agrarian and land reforms take place (National Development Plan 2030). However, to understand the complexities of the South African agricultural sector acknowledge the existence of two agricultures: larger scale commercial white farmers who generate wealth from agricultural production on the one hand and under-resourced African subsistence small-scale agriculture. "Whether or not investments in African agriculture can generate quality employment at scale, avoid dispossessing local people of their land, promote diversified and sustainable livelihoods, and catalyse more vibrant local economies depends on what farming model is pursued" (Hall, Scoones and Tsikata, 2017: 515).

The development of small-scale farming in rural areas offers an opportunity for a diversification of income streams of households away from a reliance on social grants and remittances. With the correct agrarian reform, small-scale farming could be part of the solution to alleviate the poverty seen in the rural areas. According to Aliber and Hall (2012), in the context of South Africa's high unemployment problem and under-utilisation of land in rural areas, the agricultural approach should focus on small-scale farming in order to maximise the creation of livelihoods, and should develop those already engaged in small-scale farming, as well as creating new entrants.

Appetite for Agriculture – The Example of KwaZulu-Natal Agriculture

The agricultural sector is of key strategic importance in our Province. As a primary sector, agriculture contributes about 4.4% to provincial Growth Value Add. KwaZulu-Natal produces almost 30% of national agricultural output and hence contributes significantly towards creating formal and informal employment, while providing food security in South Africa (Mthembu, 2018). As KwaZulu-Natal is South Africa's best-watered province, it has a larger area of high-quality agricultural land than any other province, and it is the national leader in several agricultural products. Even though KwaZulu-Natal covers such a small portion of South Africa's land area, a significant percentage of the country's small-scale farmers are based here. Looking at the Household Survey 2018 prepared by Statistics South Africa in relation to KwaZulu Natal gives one insight into the nature of agricultural activity in the province. Only 14.8% of South African households were involved in some sort of agricultural production activities during the reference period and, more specifically, only 18% of households surveyed in KwaZulu Natal were involved in agriculture.

Below are percentage distributions by province. The provinces are Western Cape (WC), Eastern Cape (EC), Northern Cape (NC), Free State (FS), KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), North West (NW), Gauteng Province (GP), Mpumalanga Province (MP), Limpopo Province (LP), and

Table 1: Percentage distribution of the main reasons for agricultural activity by province, 2018

Percentage Distribution by Province	WC	EC	NC	FS	KZN	NW	GP	MP	LP	RSA
Main source of Income	9.1	2.6	9.7	3.4	1.3	8.0	2.7	2.9	1.9	2.7
Extra Source of income	1.6	3.9	24.9	4.6	3.7	25.4	5.8	5.5	7.6	6.3
Leisure Activity	41.4	7.9	8.1	2.4	9.7	7.4	13.9	5.5	0.9	7.0
Main source of food for Household	2.4	7.0	7.8	11.0	13.8	8.2	17.7	9.3	0.9	8.4
Extra source of food	45.5	7.8	49.4	78.7	71.5	50.9	59.9	76.8	88.7	75.6

(Statistics South Africa, 2019)

In looking at Table 2 above on the percentage distribution of the main reasons for agricultural activity by provinces, 2018, KwaZulu Natal (KZN) despite being a fertile agricultural province shows that only 1.3% indicated their main source of income to be from agriculture and 3.7% as extra income. Furthermore, 71.5% mentioned that it was an extra food source. However, this must be clarified by the fact of the households that were involved in agriculture, 10.1% cultivated farmland while 90.3% created backyard gardens. Additionally, there is there is an interest in the agricultural sector for supplementing household food but not as a commercial enterprise. This includes urban and rural small-scale production. Furthermore, the nature of agricultural production activities in percentages per province shows that KZN is above the national average for livestock, poultry and grains and food crops, but below in terms of fruit and vegetables, and fodder grazing. The lack of any meaningful production in terms of industrial crops is concerning as these could result in the development of downstream beneficiation in the non-agricultural sector, thus providing further employment opportunities.

Table 3: Nature of agricultural production activities in percentages per province, 2018

Production Activity by Province	**WC**	**EC**	**NC**	**FS**	**KZN**	**NW**	**GP**	**MP**	**LP**	**SA**
Livestock	7.7	79.4	64.7	21.5	65.9	82.9	4.8	33.8	33.0	48.7
Poultry	4.6	65.5	28.5	14.1	49.9	62.7	7.4	25.7	20.0	36.6
Grains and Food crops	4.6	55.7	1.2	18.6	61.3	5.6	2.8	55.6	73.0	50.6
Industrial Crops	0	0.1	0.0	0	0.5	0	0.4	0.2	03	0.3
Fruit and Vegetables	84.7	50.2	34.4	90.3	22.9	21.0	85.2	68.1	59.9	53.3
Fodder grazing	2.8	1.0	0.9	2.4	0.4	0	5.3	1.1	1.1	1.3

(Statistics South Africa, 2019)

Where to Now?

KZN has the water and soil resources that lend themselves to agricultural production, yet there is deep poverty in the rural areas. The question remains: how does one break the inertia that prevents the rural population from meaningful participation in agriculture as a viable entrepreneurial activity? South Africa has the land and people, so what needs to happen to encourage the development of small-scale agriculture? Part of the answer lies in finding creative combinations between small-scale producers and companies. This could be done by leveraging Corporate Social Investment (CSI) to connect small-scale producers with companies. They can connect in two ways: one being directly involved, like under Sappi Grow, or through non-profit organisations (NPOs) or Development Agencies like Zenzele Itereleng (ZI). It needs to be remembered that the plan is about creating Agricultural Entrepreneurs who require the normal array of business skills, starting at the base -getting production going, which involves reversing the process of de-agrarianisation and getting production going in rural areas. Then next phase would be the diversification of production, and then finally entering the value chain of agricultural production.

The value of CSI projects is not only in their potential to bring funding to small-scale farming initiatives, but also teaching the wider array of skills from marketing to technological and financial management. These soft skills are needed to create agile Agricultural Entrepreneurs who can participate not only in production but in the whole value chain as well. In addition, the CSI projects are not profit-driven but rather developmental, with the goal of creating sustainable solutions. In South Africa in 2020, CSI expenditure was R10.7 billion. This represents a 4.9% nominal and a 1.2% real increase from the R10.2 billion estimated spend in 2019. Food Security and Agriculture only captured 7% of this funding, with only 33% of that going to small-scale farming (Trialogue, 2020). A concerted effort needs to be made to attract more of the CSI budget as building small-scale agriculture will empower the youth and women in rural communities with economic opportunities, thereby enabling them to break the poverty cycle that the rural areas of SA are locked in whilst also relieving urban-rural migration.

Direct Company Involvement

Such a program is the Sappi[2] Grow project which started out as a Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiative, turning subsistence farmers into small-scale timber producers, and which has now scaled in terms of production to become a reliable source of timber production. This project started as part of CSI program to develop disadvantaged communities which has long resonated with the Sappi philosophy (Sappi, 2015). Project Grow (Sappi, 2015) started from small beginnings of only three farmers in 1983 in northern KwaZulu-Natal and provided a way for Sappi to support small-scale rural farmers who had access to between 1ha and 20ha of land suitable for planting trees. The project started to take off with small-scale subsistence farming after the first harvest in 1990, when people could see the benefits. Since 1983, almost 10,000 farmers have benefited from Project Grow and over 100 small and medium businesses have been established by community members, generating more than 1,100 jobs. To date, more than R800million has been paid to the growers for the more than 2million tons of timber that they have delivered to Sappi. Presently, these growers provide Sappi with about 11% of its annual hardwood intake (by volume). The project operates as follows:

- Community engagement where they first seek the blessing of the local chief and senior community members: They then hold community discussions in order to tell them about the proposed project. They then invite individuals in the community to come forward if they are interested in becoming growers under the scheme.
- After communities or individuals have selected land for growing eucalyptus trees, site assessments are conducted to ensure that plantings do not take place in environmentally sensitive areas and that planted areas are economically sustainable.
- Sappi then provides the growers with sponsored seedlings grown by Sappi nurseries to ensure only the best available quality genetic material suitable for the growing conditions.
- Qualified extension officers are employed by Sappi, who provide technical advice to growers regarding preparing, fertilising, and planting, as well as weed control and the preparation of firebreaks.
- Certain entrepreneurial skills such as negotiating with contractors and handling money matters are also offered to assist growers.
- At harvesting time, Sappi buys the timber from the growers and pays them a market-related price (Sappi, 2015: 10).

Under the Project Grow scheme, the farmers do not own the lands that they plant but are granted rights to community-owned land for plots. Moreover, around 80% of the workforce are women. Furthermore, there is ongoing communication and engagement with the communities, ensuring that issues are addressed as they arise in a collaborative way by the company and the community (SA Forestry, 2018). Project Grow is no longer a CSI project but has changed. Whereas Project Grow focused solely on the growers, Sappi Khulisa focuses on the whole value-chain, including growers and the contractors that service them. In addition, Sappi Khulisa hopes to secure and increase this supply, as well as help turn these small-scale growers and their contractors into more self-reliant, sustainable timber businesses in the process. Part of Sappi Khulisa is to diversify the small –scale timber producers through partnering with other institutions, such as Cedara Agricultural College, to provide the growers with the tools to expand their farming activities so that they can have additional sources of income. This is crucial for timber farmers who must wait seven or eight years between timber harvests for a return on their investment (SA Forestry, 2018).

[2]Sappi is an international pulp and paper company and the second largest private forest owner in South Africa. It manages 260,000 ha of plantations or 18% of the country's total, with a further 40,000 ha of plantations in Swaziland.

Indirect Company Involvement

For example, the partnership with development agency Zenzele Itereleng (ZI) and food producer Tiger Brands with technical assistance from Leading Edge Farming created the Baphuduhucwana Production Incubator (BPI) scheme in North-West province in 2019, which harvested 3,000 tonnes of wheat this season, netting about R12 million (African News Agency, 2019: 1). The partnership has provided funding, training, and mentorship to the group of black smallholder farmers who formed themselves into a cooperative to create a commercial farm unit using communal land (African News Agency, 2019). The ZI partnership with BPI provides a revolving funding facility which aims to support the development of black commercial farmers. This allows for the funding of input costs for farming, allowing them to grow the required crops. Tiger Brands then purchases these crops under contractual arrangement and the income generated is then used to repay the revolving funding facility. These repaid funds are then made available for the next season (African News Agency, 2019).

Both examples are for what is termed 'out-grower schemes', where farmers are contracted to produce output that has a guaranteed market and paid market prices, thereby assuring the farmers of their income. Such outgrower schemes undertaken in Africa have provided for improved livelihoods and accumulation of wealth and assets for example in Ghana but in Kenya the benefits were limited improving livelihoods and autonomy of poor women without accumulation (Hall, Scoones and Tsikata, 2017). In Zimbabwe, from tobacco contract farming, there is evidence of significant accumulation amongst 67% of the households in for example building homes, buying solar panels, cellphones, and cattle (Scoones, Mavedzenge, Murimbarimba and Sukume, 2016). As a start, this might be a way to get production going, but it must not become an exploitative practice of securing cheap supplies of agricultural goods below market prices. Hence, a path needs to open not only into production but diversified production – a mixed farming approach to ensure income streams for small-scale farmers. This means trees for Sappi, wheat for Tiger Brands and perhaps livestock on the side.

However, for this to manifest, there needs to be land and agrarian reform to bring sustenance and longevity to this endeavor. The goal is to put Africans back on the Land, living off it and accumulating wealth by being involved in agricultural entrepreneurship.

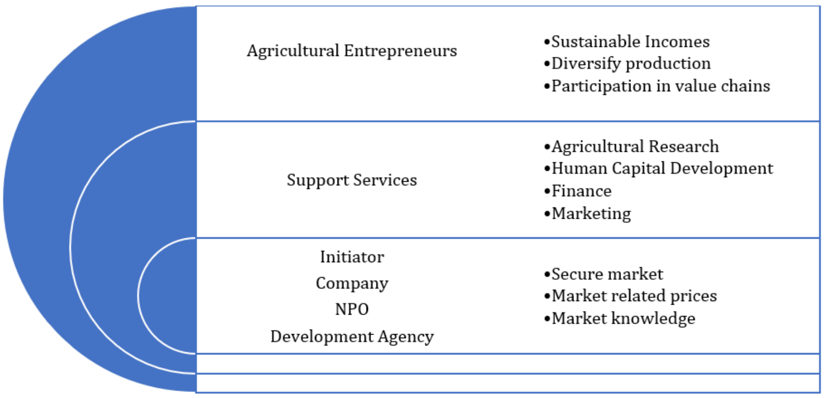

Figure 1: Model of small-scale success (Author's design)

Davis (2019) developed a model for success from looking at literature and the experiences of successful initiatives in South Africa. In the ecosystem for a model of Small-Scale Success, the first phase starts with an Initiator, for example undertaking a company or NPO or development agency or a mixture of all three in the agriculture field. The role of the Initiator acts as the go-between between small-scale farmers and the market, thereby closing the loop. The key function of Initiator brings market information on agricultural products that can be produced profitably and sustainably for small-scale farmers so that they are aware of the opportunity. The degree of uptake will depend on reducing the risks to small-scale farmers and seeing them through the first cycle of production. This will require extensive community engagement and long-term commitment to the project. Once the community of small-scale producers has been secured, then the second phase is the development of agricultural research and extension services for small-scale farmers. This part of the model focuses on building the basket of skills that small-scale farmers have at their disposal. In addition, both agricultural skills of planting and harvesting are complemented by the financial skills of management, with the aim of creating agricultural entrepreneurs. In addition, small-scale farmers need access to liquidity to buy agricultural inputs, which can be provided by providing access to finance based on the future sales of agricultural output (Kuyuta, 2012). This then feeds into the third phase, which is the development of agricultural entrepreneurs who are earning a sustainable income. These agricultural entrepreneurs now have the capacity to earn an income from farming while acquiring business knowledge. As with the Sappi project, the agricultural entrepreneur might start with timber and later diversify into other areas of agricultural production.

Conclusion

More initiators like Sappi and Baphuduhucwana Production Incubator are required so that conditions can be created for the development of agricultural small-scale farmers. The intervention by Sappi has allowed for the development of sustainable small-scale timber production. Perhaps as part of government policy they should incentivise more companies in the agro-industrial space to become Initiators and secure part of their production from small-scale producers in a similar way to Sappi. This approach could help with the provision of agricultural support services that are desperately needed by small-scale farmers if they are to be placed on an even playing field with large-scale commercial producers. This model also alleviates the pressure on government to be the sole provider of extension and agricultural research. Furthermore, the market for the produce is secured in partnership with the company, so government does not have to search for markets for the produce. This leaves government with the role of facilitator for agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation, and in securing tenure reforms that provide security for potential small-scale farmers.

If rural livelihoods are to change in a meaningful way, South Africa needs more people owning and operating agricultural concerns, rather than them being dependent on farm work where wages are low. This means taking the current subsistence small-scale producers and turning them into successful agricultural entrepreneurs, thereby profiting from agriculture. Perhaps then the country can begin to reverse the continued de-agrarianisation of the rural landscape. As people return to being able, by factors of production such as land being given back into the hands of the people and providing the business skills to take back farming as an entrepreneurial route from being initially producers to becoming involved in the value-added supply chain, then decolonisation is being reversed as people are drawn into economic activity within an inclusive economy. Not all the solutions presented are without their problems, but they represent opportunities for a start. CSI projects need to focus on permanent solutions to ensure the sustainability which agriculture development through small-scale production can provide. It is an opportunity not only for agro- industrial firms to get involved but also all types of firms that can bring research and business skills to the sector to a make it successful. At present, 7% of the total CSI budget is allocated to agriculture, of which Small-Scale agriculture gets 33% (Trailogue, 2020). It needs to rise to 50% of the CSI budget, of which small-scale agriculture gets 100%, if the country is to reverse de-agrarianisation and build a sustainable sector.

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