

# **REBUILDING AFRICAN PEASANTRIES: INALIENABILITY OF LAND RIGHTS AND COLLECTIVE FOOD SOVEREIGNTY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA\***

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## **Peasantries and Agrarian Transformation**

Fifty years after Africa's decolonisation, following the unravelling Apartheid-inspired settler colonialism in Southern Africa, the bulk of the African continent's peasants persistently face a crisis of basic social reproduction, manifested in inadequate access to food and chronic malnutrition, diminishing incomes from farming, pastoralism and related marginalised (but diversified 'livelihoods') survival strategies.

Colonial and post-independence Africa failed to resolve the three classic agrarian questions, which constitute key elements of democratisation and national (integrated) development, namely: improving agricultural productivity (Mafeje, 2003), towards improving the supplies of wage foods; providing raw materials for basic industrial and employment development (Patnaik, 2008); and promoting accumulation from below. This failure obtains either in the semi-industrialised peripheral states (such as South Africa, with its racially discriminatory agrarian transition of accumulation from above), in the putatively 'successful' peasant-based agrarian economies (e.g., Kenya and Malawi), or in the fragile Sahelian pastoral regions. Variations in the mode of African colonisation imposed three different strategies of agrarian surplus extraction and accumulations that, while presenting different subregional specificities, have all resulted in the failure to resolve their agrarian questions.

This failed agrarian transition is the consequence of two centuries of land alienation and the super-exploitation of agrarian labour (on large farming estates and the mines), which was

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\* *Chapter 3: Africa*, in HERRERA Rémy and LAU Kin Chi (eds.), *The Struggle for Food Sovereignty – Alternative Development and the Renewal of Peasant Societies Today*, Pluto Press, London, July 2015.

historically most extensive in Southern Africa, as well as in non-settler Africa by the systemic exploitation of peasantries' labour through intensive extraction of surplus from their production and through their mal-integration by colonialism and post-independence rule into the unequal world capitalist trade regime. The key result until the 2000s has been the underdevelopment of Africa's agrarian production systems, through the subordination and super-exploitation of agrarian labour and consumers by monopoly capital. During the 1990s, SAPs intensified Africa's agricultural extroversion and unequal extraction of surplus value, including through a second diffuse and low-intensity wave of land concentration, and expansion of food imports and food-aid dependency. More recently there has been a more pervasive effort to extensively dispossess the peasantry in non-settler Africa and the periphery of settler Africa, of their best lands and water resources, as well as to exploit their labour, as direct workers, 'outgrowers' and 'contracted farmers', by diverse foreign land grabbing 'investors'.

These agrarian accumulation strategies essentially undermine the social value of peasant production, based as it is on self-employed family labour and family lands, with the purpose of providing foods and other products primarily for auto-consumption. Indeed, poor peasants have been the most resilient in maintaining food production, even during the SAPs and various world commodity price crises, and even though their production has been inadequate (Mafeje, 2003) to sustain growing consumption needs. Peasant families mobilise family and other kinship labour, nurture biological (seed) and other local resources, and adopt new crops and technologies, especially locally adapted ones, to expand low energy-intensive agricultural production for their social reproduction, rather than for over-consumption in western markets. The landless workers and peasantry have sought social reproduction in spite of the withdrawal by the neoliberal state's support to peasant farming and social welfare, and despite the persistence of unfavourable terms of trade. Their alleged technological 'backwardness' is driven by neoliberal policies, which disproportionately transfer the cost of inputs relative to commodity prices to them, and reduces their realised incomes in the absence of state subsidies and protection.

The failure of the African agricultural reforms to prioritise the development needs of its vast peasantries, whose production systems are globally the most backward and have resulted in the highest levels of food insecurity, is ironically now presented as a justification for the land grabbing deals sanctioned by African states and local capitalists. This further marginalises the peasantries, fuelling fresh political and resource conflicts over the new agrarian questions that land alienation imposes, and the sustainability of the ongoing polarisation of agrarian accumulation from 'above' at the behest of oligopolic financialised capital.

## **Primitive Accumulation by Dispossession in Africa: General Trends**

### ***Colonial capitalism: Land dispossession and peasant incorporation and accumulation***

Africa of the labour reserves (Amin, 1973) or 'settler Africa' (mainly in South Africa, Rhodesia, Namibia, Kenya, Algeria, etc.) had by the 1960s witnessed the first African wave of extensive land grabbing by European settlers. Settler colonial states created 'large-scale commercial farming' (LSCF) systems based on private property rights, assigned mainly to individual family operated farms spatially segregated from the black African Communal Areas, including some 'enclaves' of agro-industrial estates heavily subsidised by the state. African peasants' land dispossession by the British South Africa Company and others led to widespread displacement and landlessness, which ensured the super-exploitation of cheap labour (compelled economically and otherwise), while destroying the peasant economies. Settler estates were also created in the Lusophone territories (Mozambique and Angola), and on a smaller scale in various migrant labour 'sending' states (e.g., Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique). While these developments did not lead to the complete dispossession of peasant lands, such dispossession was so extensive as to undermine the peasantry (almost completely in South Africa), and it led to the creation of a migrant labour system across the region. This resulted not in 'enclavity' but a functional dualism that subjugated labour and repressed peasant farming.

Accumulation from above through land dispossession and displacement of the peasantry, and through economic and extra-economic coercion of labour in former settler-colonial countries, epitomised the first wave of alienation in Southern Africa, from the eighteenth century until mid-1900. Given a veneer of legality by the British Crown, European land settlement led to monopolistic control over national water resources and public infrastructural investments, buttressed by the dominant white settler ideology and state-society relations defined by the policies of private property rights and racially discriminatory investments favouring the LSCF, while undermining the remaining peasants through discriminatory commodity markets. This shifted the production of food from peasants towards wage-food commodities dominated by large farmers supported by state marketing boards and European merchants. This mode of accumulation and political rule of the Southern African state, including its institutions of taxation and the social security systems, were racially discriminatory, undemocratic and repressive, while placing the burden of social reproduction on labour and the peasantries in a subsidy on capital.

In ‘non-settler Africa’, two broad land alienation histories prevailed through an indirect mode of colonial rule (Amin, 1973; Mamdani, 1996). In ‘Africa of the Concessions’ (largely Central Africa), land alienation by European trading and mining companies led to the creation of a few significant enclaves formed around agricultural plantations, with rudimentary agro-processing facilities, as well as mining enclaves. The mode of primitive accumulation entailed raw material plunder and limited infrastructural investments. The pedigree of resistance to this enclave dispossession is well documented.

Elsewhere, in Africa of the ‘economy *de traite*’ (Amin, 1973), which evolved from two centuries of European mercantilism, there were widespread African resistances to Lord Lugard’s attempts to alienate land (Mamdani, 1996). This led to pervasive growth of ‘petty (agricultural) commodity production’, among differentiated peasantries (Bernstein, 2002) or ‘small cultivators’ (Mafeje, 2003). Quite critically, this mode of colonisation also entailed institutionalised labour migration (albeit not backed by land alienation), including the incorporation of migrant farmers, from northern territories of West Africa into the coastal and forest regions’ economies. This led to the creation of diverse peasantries, including independent lineage producers, farming labour tenancies and various forms of sharecropping arrangements (Amanor, 2008). Smaller-scale agricultural estate enclaves (palm oil) also emerged in various countries therein. Moreover, the pockets of semi-feudal agrarian structures persisted (e.g., Northern Nigeria and Ethiopia) and/or were created under colonial rule (e.g., Uganda). This colonisation pattern brought diversity to Africa’s agrarian transition in relation to land alienation, its agrarian structures and patterns of accumulation.

### ***Post-independence developmentalism, neoliberalism and re-institutionalised primitive accumulation***

In general, from the 1960s, post-independence governments halted the pace of land alienation, and initiated either the nationalisations of alienated lands or created new leasehold land tenure systems on such restricted estates. This restricted foreign landownership and also slowed down the commodification of agricultural lands by restricting the freehold private property regime that was being pushed by the colonial rulers. These governments also abolished the exploitative labour regimes by rescinding rural head and other farming taxes, and by reversing the institutionalised labour migration systems. Armed struggles in Kenya, Mozambique and Angola culminated in substantial but inadequate land redistribution.

Independent states sought to promote ‘expanded reproduction’ among the peasantry, using state marketing boards and inputs support programmes, although they tended to extract substantial shares of the agrarian surpluses purportedly for various national ‘development’ schemes. After independence, the dual objective of agrarian reforms in the different African countries were to enable local state accumulation from agricultural surplus values, and through the deepening of the extroverted integration of African agriculture, to expand export cropping to increase forex revenues for the expansion of import substitution industrialisation (ISI) processes.

The ‘modernisation’ of agriculture was from the 1970s largely pursued through bimodal farming strategies, which sought to nurture middle and larger-scale capitalist agricultural production systems, at the expense of the peasantries, while promoting a degree of increased productivity among peasants, and directing their produce towards state marketing boards, which were intended to develop national infrastructure and invest industries. Even the national agrarian capitalists were, however, subordinated to the extraction of surplus value by transnational corporations (TNC agribusinesses), which were protected by the centralised state marketing regulation. Up to the 1970s, various African states attempted to establish a few new large-scale farming (cropping and ranching) estates, largely through state corporations, and a few individual African capitalist farmers, building mostly on nationalised colonial agricultural estates (Tanzania and Malawi), land redistribution (Kenya) and in some cases on lands newly alienated from land under customary tenures (Botswana, Malawi, etc.). Surplus extraction continued to be at the expense of the super-exploitation of African peasantries (Shivji, 2009), and through the cheap labour provided to large estates.

After being admonished by the World Bank (through the Berg Report, 1981) for failed agricultural experiments, agrarian policy bias (largely urban bias), the putative inefficiencies of state interventions (trade protectionism, state marketing regulations and participation through commodity boards) and inefficient state farming (Mkandawire and Saludo, 1999), the state retreated from subsidising agriculture.

The state agricultural estates were gradually dismantled and privatised. From the 1990s numerous domestic capitalist farming elites procured or ‘grabbed’ middle-sized farmlands, while a few foreign capitalist farmers and corporations established large farms in some African countries (e.g., South Africans in Mozambique and South Africa), putatively in pursuit of expanding (traditional and) non-traditional exports. Countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia were now concessioning off peasant lands, reversing earlier land nationalisations, while Botswana, which after independence had redistributed some of its few white-owned

LSCFs, was expanding its large-scale ranching by dispossessing pastoralists of their land and water resources. This second wave of land alienation led to land dispossession and the displacement of significant numbers of peasant families, albeit in scattered and smaller enclaves, compared to the first colonial wave of 'land grabbing' in settler Africa. This process was popularly resisted albeit unsuccessfully, including through armed rebellion, given the feeble response of the burgeoning national 'civil societies' (Moyo, 2008; Moyo and Yeros, 2005).

The narrow pre-occupation of Africa's agrarian reforms with mainstream voluntaristic approaches, which condemn the small 'farmers' for being 'traditional subsistence' farmers, despite their struggles to enhance their food self-sufficiency, was based on the presumed efficiency of the larger, 'commercial' farmers. The latter were considered more prone to 'modernised' farming and presumed to be more capable of leading agricultural transformation in Africa (Mafeje, 2003), despite their historical dependence on subsidised imported farm technologies (machinery, equipment, seeds, fertilisers and agro-chemical), and their focus on the export of agricultural raw materials, whose terms of trade were declining. This led to disarticulated mal-development and increasing dependence on food imports and aid.

Most agricultural transformation initiatives in Africa since the 1980s were, therefore, based on atomistic projects comprising incoherent neoliberal welfarist palliatives which, while failing to resolve the African food crisis and agricultural productivity, promoted accumulation from above on a very narrow social and radical geographic basis. Rather than enhancing the participation of the majority of small African producers, agrarian reforms mainly sought commodity marketing and land tenure reforms, which led to deeper integration into the global food system and prepared the ground for the current land grabbing.

During the 1990s, the commodification of land through the appropriation of land held under customary tenure systems and its conversion into private property expanded African land markets, but largely in newer 'enclaves'. The orthodox view was that the absence of clear tradable landed property rights limits 'tenure security' and constitutes a barrier to agricultural investment and food security. African countries pursued land tenure reforms as part of the package of deregulating domestic markets and investment policies, and trade liberalisation. African land tenure systems, wrongly characterised as 'communal', insecure and 'unbankable', continue to be identified as an underlying obstacle to agricultural development or investment into technologies which intensify productivity. Allegedly, the systems undermine 'individual' incentives and restrict the mobilisation of agricultural finance. Some African land reforms attempted to address this question through formalising and individuating land tenures (titling),

establishing larger-scale (commercial) farmers and, more recently, through initiatives to ‘decentralise’ the ‘governance’ of land. Although problems of tenure insecurity abound at the local level, the land tenure-investment thesis never found empirical grounding (Migot-Adholla, 1994), and these tenure reforms mostly collapsed. By 2004, many African countries had reformed National Land Policies, with homogenous legal and administrative postures that enhance land transactions (Manji, 2006; UNECA, 2004).

Unequal land distribution was generally conceived as a problem of former settler colonies (Mafeje, 1999), although the concentration of landholdings was growing elsewhere in Africa (Moyo, 2008). Land concentration emerged over time, through incremental state expropriations of land, ‘formal’, and ‘informal land markets’, based on processes of internal and local social differentiation. Landownership inequities began to reflect class, gender and ethnoregional cleavages, as well as other social identities, which the states in crisis either failed to mediate or encouraged. Local agrarian and power differentiation emerged as class transformations broadened the base of local elites seeking to amass larger landholdings, creating growing land ‘scarcity’ and landlessness.

Access to land remains a problem for millions of poor rural and urban dwellers, whose basic consumption needs derive from agriculture (Amanor, 2008; Kanyinga, 2000; Kanyongolo, 2005). Restricted access to land by small producers is thus one of the key obstacles to expanded agricultural productivity and social reproduction. Until the mid-1990s, these processes represented neither large-scale land alienation processes nor widespread landlessness or full proletarianisation (outside of Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia), but a socially significant and diffuse structure of land concentration and the marginalisation of substantial sections of the peasantry. This land alienation process has gained political significance and fuels high-profile land conflicts.

In settler Africa, which includes large parts of countries in Southern Africa, extensive land expropriation and the systematic regulation of migrant labour, through organised recruitment and peasant taxation, initiated a proletarianisation process. This was done not only in the core settler economies (Arrighi, 1973), which eventually amounted more to semi-proletarianisation (Moyo and Yeros, 2005; Sibanda, 1988), but also in the eight neighbouring countries that constituted its regional periphery. Large estate farming schemes and institutionalised labour migration systems, involving semi-proletarianisation, undermined the land rights and social reproduction capacities of labour, while subsidising capital’s labour costs. The multiple social costs of expanding large-scale and plantation farming, besides land

alienation, included depressed labour and income regimes, malnutrition and the marginalisation of the urban poor and peasants.

Independence in former settler states from 1980 compromised social transformation and eschewed mechanisms for the equitable redistribution of wealth, incomes and landed property, since social changes was left to the markets and protected by ‘the rule of law’. After independence, land redistribution in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa was minimalist, such that foreign-owned farming estates even expanded, in the second wave of land alienation under neoliberal SAPs from the 1990s.

Continued mal-integration into the unequal relations of the world capitalist system, including through unequal trade relations, thus entrenched domestic inequities and a crisis of peasant social reproduction (Amin, 1974). The recent volatility of and increases in the global food and inputs prices have only deepened the impoverished millions of African peasants through dispossession of the agrarian surplus generated by family labour, including the super-exploitation of women and children.

### *Crisis of capitalism, capitalist land grabbing and the resurgence of estate and contract farming*

A major reaction of capital to the recent ‘food price crisis’ has been a new scramble for land in Africa, mainly to produce food and biofuels for export, using the large estate production model (Moyo, 2008). At least five million hectares have been concessioned in over 20 African countries to foreign ‘investors’ (Cotula, Vermeulen, Leonard and Keeley, 2009; Thompson, 2008; Tabb, 2008; Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2008). The large-scale land acquisitions through leasing and outright purchases by foreign capital in various African countries have escalated during the 2000s (GRAIN, 2009), with the explicit or tacit approval of governments and sections of the elite particularly (Alden, 2008). It represents a third wave of land alienation in all the African regions, creating numerous enclaves of large plantations or estate farming, frequently alongside perimetric ‘buffer zones’ of ‘co-opted’ small ‘outgrowers’.

A new scramble over African lands for agriculture, mining and natural resources extraction, entailing a growing east-west-south rivalry to gain footholds on the entire continent, is predicted (Moyo and Yeros, forthcoming). The land investors hail from as far afield as the United States and various European countries to China, South Korea, the Gulf States and Brazil (GRAIN, 2008; Petras, 2008). This trend raises concerns not only about the extent of land



alienation and concentration, but also suggests the intensified subordination of the continent's peasantry and labour by monopoly capital during the present crisis.

Indeed, most of the former settler African countries in Southern Africa have encountered this as a 'third wave' of large-scale foreign land acquisitions, or 'grabbing', and 'investments' in agriculture, in a process which builds upon its already substantively privatised land tenure regimes, already based on racially skewed landownership and extensive social exclusion. The critical difference is that it is mainly previously alienated large-scale farmlands – owned by private and public corporations and individual white LSCFs – that are being sold and/or leased out to additional foreign 'investors'. The agrarian accumulation model continues to be based on an outward looking agricultural strategy – except in the case of Zimbabwe, which is veering towards internal markets, food sovereignty and autonomous development.

Social movements warn of a spectre of extensive dispossession and displacement of small farm producers and pastoralists (GRAIN, 2009), although some 'civil society' technocracies consider these investments as holding developmental 'opportunities' and argue that the potential threat of dispossession can be mediated through internationally supervised guidelines on 'best practices'.

Some attribute these land acquisitions to a benign search for 'food security' among countries destabilised by the global food price crisis, which peaked around 2005, and putatively to the 'attraction of investment funds' to agriculture's profitability (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2009); while others glorify the 'green motives' of such capital exports in search of presumably clean fuels. It is also claimed that these foreign investments are an opportunity to reverse the stagnation of agricultural productivity and food insecurity in Africa (Cotula et al., 2009; the World Bank, 2008), and that they are necessary to reorient Africa's growth trajectory and to save the 'bottom billion' (Collier, 2007). Yet, land alienation in favour of agribusiness is primarily extroverted towards the production of new exports, such as biofuel, foodgrains, timber and tourism, which alongside the mining concessions is at the expense of the needs of existing social networks of poor and middle peasant households. These discourses eschew alternate endogenous agrarian reforms towards accumulation from below.

The current land grabbing is also justified by putative claims that there is abundant and unutilised land and natural resources, which is presumed to have no (formal) owners (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2009). Such land alienation builds upon long-standing colonial era attempts to 'reform' agricultural lands and natural resources tenure systems by establishing 'private property rights' and 'land markets', which are considered the sine qua non of agricultural investment. Indeed, the neoliberal land policy reforms unleashed during the 1990s (Manji,

2006) had resuscitated the commodification agenda and laid the legal and political basis for the current wave of land alienation.

This recent food ‘supply problem’ is thus being addressed through expanding agribusiness food production activities,<sup>1</sup> including area expansion in the South and the displacement of small food producers. These processes further divert even more financial and related resources away from small producers (Patnaik, 2008; Tabb, 2008). Most ‘international financial and food-aid institutions’ seek increased aid monies to lend to the food crisis ridden and riots-stricken poor countries for grain imports, as well as to finance more food aid. This would increase imports from the West, alongside cash transfers to the poor to buy food from abroad and from local surplus areas (e.g., South Africa). Rather than mobilise financial aid and truly concessional loans to support small farmers to increase food production in the South, this strategy would augment and refinance agribusiness’ dominance over food production and entrench the intensive capital-energy-food system. In this case, consumers in the SADC region remain captive food and inputs price ‘takers’, and provide malnourished, cheap labour to the regions’ ‘enclaves’. This represents a form of mal-integration into a dysfunctional global food system, based on the ‘over-consumption’ of fossil fuel energy and speculative behaviour, which undermines the ‘universal right to food’.

### **Under-Development of Agrarian Production Forces**

The structural distortion of Africa’s agrarian system since its independence is a socially constructed process that has been exacerbated by neoliberal policy regimes, which have undermined agricultural production structures and led to low levels of agricultural productivity. This trajectory did not arise from an intrinsic ‘backwardness’ of the scientific/technological and cultural property regimes of small producers, nor due to any unique ‘physical’ constraints (e.g., tropical soils and landlockedness) facing Africa. It was not the ‘inappropriateness’ of the available productivity enhancing technologies or absence of appropriate land tenure systems that led Africa to be bypassed by some technologies. It was the reversal of agricultural and wider interventionist policies under structural adjustment, and the ‘fiscal crises’ they suffered that halted the growth of peasant productivity (Patnaik, 2008).

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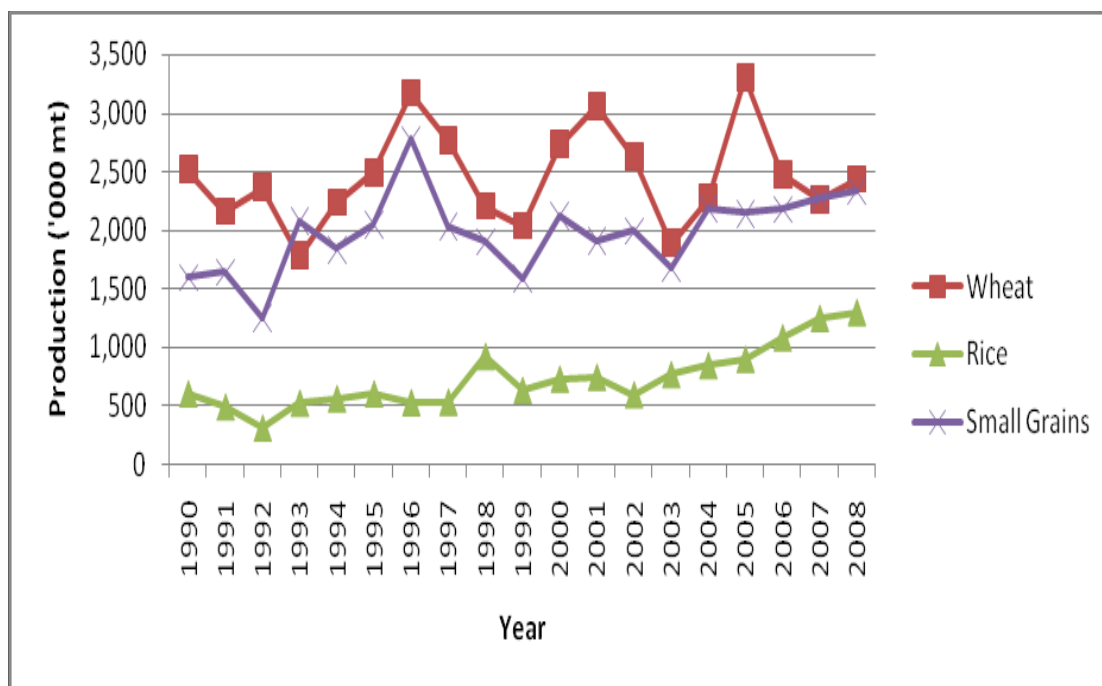
<sup>1</sup> Tabb (2008) outlines how over 440 million hectares of allegedly underutilized land in Brazil (100 million hectares), Venezuela, Guyana and Peru (80 million hectares), the former USSR (40 million hectares) and in Africa (120 million hectares) are being eyed by offshore agribusiness ventures.

The absolute growth of agricultural production in Africa – including the SADC region – has been rising positively since the 1950s, albeit at a slow pace compared to trends in Asia (Figure 3.1). Maize output volumes peaked in 1981, and then again around 1996–97, only to experience numerous major dips during the 2001–2006 period. South Africa is a net surplus cereal producer, except during 2006 and 2007 when its harvests were estimated at around 7 million tonnes (compared to 11 million tonnes in the 2004–2005 season), reflecting fluctuations of up to 36 per cent due to reduced areas planted and yields related to drought. Only half of the SADC countries have produced wheat since the 1995–96 season, South Africa being the main producer (peaking at 2.8 million tonnes in 1996–97 and dropping to about 1.5 million tonnes in 2003–2004). The next largest producer was Zimbabwe, which peaked only once at 320,000 tonnes in 1999–2000, to decline by 75 per cent to 80,000 tonnes in 2005–2006.

However, the long-run per capita production of cereals and maize has been declining since the mid-1970s (Figure 3.2). Per capita cereal production on average ranged from 140 kg per person during the 1980s to an average 60 kg and 85 kg per person in 1992 and 1995 respectively. This decline was most pronounced in maize production from 180 kg per person in 1982 to 85 kg per person in the early 2000s.

**Figure 3.1: Cereal Production in the SADC Region**

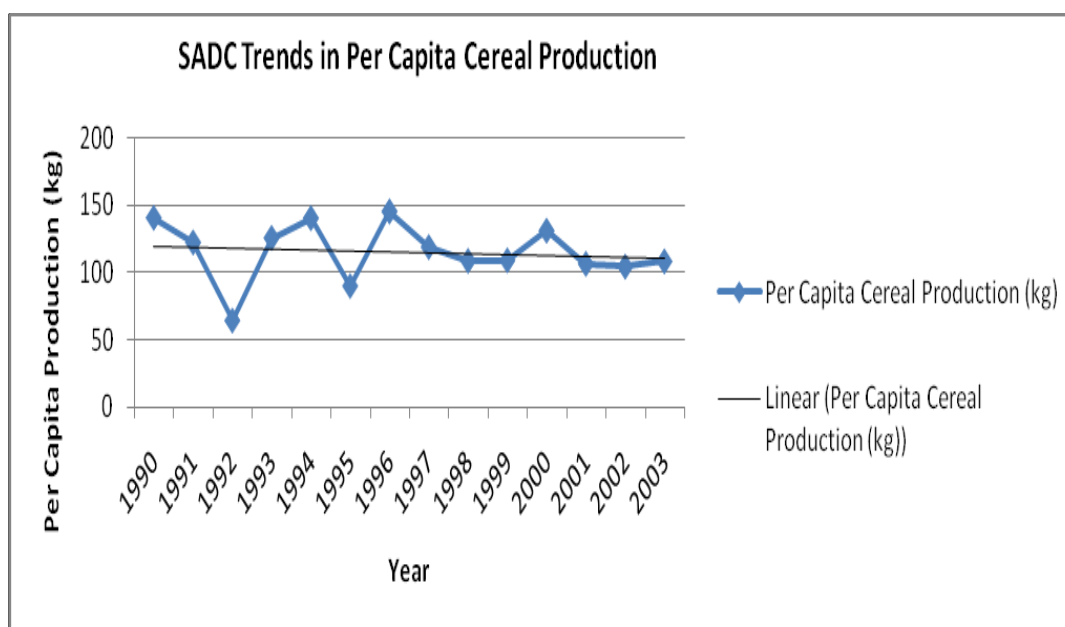
*(in tonnes)*



Source: Based on SADC data.

The production of protein-rich and high-value foods (including meats, oils and fats, milk and pulses), which mainly targets middle to higher-class markets, except in the case of pulses, is largely located in the more developed enclaves of the Southern African region. Most (about 50 per cent) of the socially differentiated small farmers do not own any livestock, but the majority produces a modicum of pulses and vegetables for their own consumption and to sell locally. The region is both an exporter of high-value beef and an importer of lower-value meats.

**Figure 3.2: SADC Per Capita Cereal Production**



*Source:* Based on SADC data.

The ‘backwardness’ of African peasants’ agricultural practices and technological stagnation tends to be atomistically identified as the primary source of Africa’s agricultural productivity decline. While the technological deficit is an empirical fact, it is the cause of it that is in dispute: is it endogenous factors, such as peasant behavior, or the wider systemic effects of mal-integration into the world capitalist system? The decline in the SADC region’s per capita food production was a consequence of both limited land by small producers and various on-farm production constraints, including the exploitative input and output markets and unequal trade. Low levels of state investments to support small farmers, who face extreme weather volatility, played a critical part.

The deceleration of agricultural technological transformation, through reduced per capita utilisation of inputs (improved seed, fertiliser, etc.) have constrained land and labour productivity, particularly among small producers. Fertiliser utilisation, in terms of kilograms

used per hectare of arable and permanently cropped land, is also low compared to other continents. South Africa, Zimbabwe and Malawi are the relatively higher users of fertiliser, at 49 kg/ha, 30 kg/ha and 23 kg/ha, respectively. This is followed by Tanzania at 13 kg/ha and Zambia, which uses a little less, while the rest use 5kg/ha or much less. The use of pesticide in SADC countries also varies greatly (World Bank, 2008). The level of agricultural tractorisation in the SADC region is relatively low – high in Seychelles, Swaziland and Botswana, but lower in D.R. of Congo – compared to other continents. Ox-drawn traction and hand-and-hoe ploughing and weeding dominate farming practices.

In Malawi and Zambia, productivity grew from increased use of improved seeds and fertilisers and the expansion of large-scale farming (involving Zimbabwean immigrants); and in Angola due to post-war stabilisation and increased oil revenues. Their yields are still relatively lower than in South Africa. Subsidised financial (credit) markets for small producers' inputs are scarce. Dependence on costly imported fertilisers has instead increased, while new technologies are not adequately generated locally because of limited public and private investments and global agribusiness controls. As farm margins decline, especially for small producers, incomes and investment also fall, extending the cycle of low productivity. Although weather volatility has led to frequent harvest failures, efforts to invest into irrigation to mitigate this are shallow, as the proportion of irrigated cropped land ranges from 31 per cent (in Madagascar) to 2 per cent (in Tanzania).

The slow rate of transformation of the productive forces within agriculture is exemplified by the low levels of land yields, or productivity, and their rate of growth. The average level of cereal yields in the SADC region is about 30 per cent below the averages in Asia and Latin America (World Bank, 2008). Livestock productivity trends are also low. In Africa as a whole, between 1971 and 1997, the relationship between the growth of areas cropped to main staple crops and the growth rate of their yields was suboptimal in terms of net productivity growth.<sup>2</sup>

Low intensity input use in African peasant agriculture is consistent with its broader patterns of weak economic growth and development, epitomised by food insecurity, which underlies the high incidence of poverty (Dorward and al., 2009). Preferential support to large farms and exports led to uneven development reflecting the unequal political power and economic strength of the peasants vis-à-vis large farmers and the corporate capitalist sector, within the bimodal agrarian structures promoted by neoliberalism.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, the area under maize grew at 1 per cent per year, while the yield in tonnage per hectare grew at 1.9 per cent. The cropped areas of sorghum and millet grew at 0.4 and 0.6 per cent per year, respectively, while their yields grew at 2.0 and 1.5 per cent per year, respectively.

The anti-developmental stance of African neoliberal policies undermined the capacity of the small producers and the state to deepen technological transformation, while SAP policies led to income deflation, through wage repression and reduced public expenditure, particularly in rural areas (to below 5 per cent of their budgets), and the raising of food and farm input prices relative to wages (Patnaik, 2008). Indeed, the state retreated from financing credit, marketing infrastructure, subsidised inputs and support for technology generation and extension, as well as from financing of non-agricultural props for agricultural production and consumption, such as rural development and social welfare (consumption) transfers to the poor, as prescribed by international financial institutions (IFIs). The inadequacy of public investments into rural and agricultural infrastructures, such as irrigation and rural transport facilities, bulk food storage facilities and ancillary services like electricity, placed a critical constraint on the capacity of peasants to expand the production of and access to food. This alongside trade liberalisation reduced the purchasing power of the poor and restricted multipliers, such as employment and incomes, leading to repressed local demand for peasant produce and farm inputs.

### ***Deepening peasant commodity production under agribusiness monopoly***

The persistent strategy during the current crisis of capitalism and agrarian accumulation remains to deepen the incorporation of African peasantries into the global agricultural exports chain, alongside the aforementioned land grabbing. The recent philanthropic initiatives for the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) purports, for instance, to support the agricultural productivity growth of ‘small farmers’, through the scientific generation of improved seeds in 16 African food crops, to improve marketing through access to inputs and to expand their access to private credit and ‘agro-dealers’. This strategy is embedded into capital’s technological and commodity monopolies, including the monopolistic generation of hybrid and GM seed technologies, rather than their mass generation at fair cost by and for small producers. This market-led strategy of promoting peasant productivity cannot reverse the systemic sources of agrarian de-accumulation, given the limited state capacities to regulate agrarian capital and reverse unequal agrarian trade relations, while supporting small farmers’ production systems. Instead, absent the state, this new ‘peasant-friendly’ market-based green revolution deepens the peasantries’ subordination to the global agribusiness oligopolies.

Given that the absolute amounts of land suitable for cultivation and grazing is limited,<sup>3</sup> and that prime lands are increasingly captured by transnational and domestic elites, peasant agricultural production and pastoralism are squeezed by internal population growth and externally led displacements, which force more small producers to produce on physically marginal land areas, while large farming estates monopolise fertile land and water resources. Pressure on agricultural land has resulted in rapid soil exhaustion, which exacerbates the decline of yields, overgrazed grasslands and high rates of deforestation (UNEP, 2002). Incessant droughts and floods, which the state has been unable to mitigate, and the increased siltation of rivers undermine the wider ecosystems and degrade biodiversity, alongside the effects of monocultural farming systems. This further undermines the livelihoods of small producers while land shortages, low labour productivity and basic consumption fuel high intensity conflicts over land and natural resources, albeit in varying degrees, in different parts of the continent.

It has also become evident that ecological imperialism and the effects of ‘North’ driven climate change agenda are increasingly marshalled against agrarian development from below. The introduction of ‘carbon trading’ measures through aid, which seek to reserve more African land and biodiversity for external forces, tend to further displace peasant socioeconomic processes. Indeed, climate change could limit the size of maize growing areas in the SADC region (Wahenga, 2007), and the region’s preparedness for the anticipated effects is limited. The ‘adaptations’ may entail the relocation of peasants to areas with the agroecological potential to produce food, the possibility of construction of new infrastructures, and technologies adapted to reducing growing seasons in some areas and their increase elsewhere in relation to water losses and gains. This indicates that the peasantry will continue to be marginalised in the future, as public investments in their agrarian livelihoods remain limited.

The mal-integration of SADC’s agrarian production structures and inputs will continue to be driven through South African capital and its brokerage of the expropriations of land and minerals in the region by foreign capital towards an export-oriented agenda, which entrenches imperial extraction of surpluses, uneven agrarian and rural development and inequitable industrialisation, leading to the persistence of the present foreign food dependence regime and various class- and identity-based conflicts. Seed and fertiliser production and supply are monopolised by a few transnational producers located mainly in South Africa, while fertiliser

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<sup>3</sup> Zambia and Mozambique have extensive areas of potentially arable land that is underutilized, while countries such as Malawi and Mauritius have extreme degrees of land shortage, with low per capita levels of arable land (UNECA, 2004).

imports from distant markets are on the rise, despite the availability of local raw materials to produce these. Similarly, output markets and trade patterns show a greater reliance on external markets dominated by large TNCs, through the ('sub-imperial') hegemony of South African intermediaries (farmers, capital and state enterprises). Meanwhile SADC regional economic underdevelopment has led to intensified out-migration to South African enclaves while peasant farming systems are undermined by cheap food imports from South Africa, Brazil, Europe and Australia.

## **Unequal Trade, Demand Compression and Agrarian Crisis under Neoliberalism**

### ***The recent global food price crisis and the agrarian crisis***

Mainstream debates on Africa's alleged failed agrarian transition or its 'agricultural' and 'food crisis' have tended to focus narrowly on the presumed physiocratic limitations, land tenure deficiencies and the putative technological backwardness of peasant producers as the sources of failure rather than on the neglect of the effects of land alienation, the super-exploitation of labour and unequal trade relations, in restricting domestic agrarian accumulation and extroversion which underlies food production deficits. The effects of unequal trade on agricultural and industrial development in Africa up to the 1970s have been well documented (Amin, 1974), while the evolving internal class relations and alliances with capital associated with unequal exchange and the mechanisms of surplus value extraction entailed have been noted (Shivji, 2009). The longer-term historical process of the mode of extraction economies and industries, through colonial state transfers of resources from the South, and the illogical attempts to argue that 'comparative advantage' determines agrarian development, have also been well exposed (Patnaik, 2003 and 2011). Little research has been undertaken to show how the adoption of neoliberal policies from the 1990s have entrenched agrarian crisis through unequal trade relations in Southern Africa.

Trade liberalisation, imports competition and speculative capital flows destroyed various productive activities (industrial and agricultural) in the SADC region, while increasing the production and import of elite consumer goods at the expense of locally produced 'traditional' goods. This led to further 'de-industrialisation' and net unemployment in the region. Meanwhile, income deflation arose from a secular shift in terms of trade against petty producers of primary commodities (especially of peasants' food and export crops), through monopoly capitals' pricing practices, and in relation to their oligarchic control of agricultural commodity



markets. African farmers had in general already been exposed to ‘global competition’ from heavily subsidised farmers from the North (Action Aid, 2007) and exports were subjected to punitive non-tariff barriers (Ng and Yeats, 1996). The net result of structural adjustment was wage recession and income deflation, leading to the compression of domestic agricultural demand during the 1990s. This was exacerbated in the 2000s by the ‘global food crisis’.

The global food system, which is a deeply integrated and ‘oligopolistic’ agro-industrial complex, had for long survived a real terms decline in food prices, based on subsidised food ‘over-production’ in the ‘West’ (Tabb, 2008), amidst repressed food consumption and production in the ‘South’ (Patnaik, 2003). The recent real increase in terms of oil price has triggered the shifts in the uses of food (agro-fuels) and its prices and in the uses of land. Continued trade protectionism, subsidised exports and imposed structural adjustments that are propped up by the food-aid system, were key representations of production in the South.

The rate of increase in the prices of foodgrains, edible oil and livestock products, particularly between 2006 and 2008, was the most dramatic upward surge experienced over the last 30 years, given that in real (US\$) terms food prices had been on the decline.<sup>4</sup> Some argued that the price increases reflected a mismatch of global supply and demand due to: increased grain consumption in Asia; the reduction of ‘western’ grain stocks owing to weather-induced harvest failures; the rise of farm inputs costs induced by oil price escalation (Ghosh, 2008); the diversion of grain utilisation to agro-fuel production (Mitchell, 2008; von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2009); and commodity speculation (Wahenga, 2007; Tabb, 2008). Chauvinistic analysts attempted to distribute national responsibility for inducing price increases (Patnaik, 2008), by arguing that Asian overconsumption of grain was the problem. Others argued that since prices more than doubled because of the rising cost of oil, the OPEC countries were to blame, while agro-fuel production subsidies were used to distract the USA and EU from their larger culpability for the crisis of capitalism and its effect on food supplies. The restrictions on the export of rice and wheat by countries like Thailand, Vietnam, India, Russia and Argentina was also blamed, albeit after the increase in prices.

The use of food for agro-fuel production and oil-related increases in the prices of farm inputs, however, were central to the food price escalation (Ghosh, 2008), as these accounted for 85 per cent of the increases, despite them being proximate causes of the price escalation. The

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<sup>4</sup> Traded food prices increased by 130 per cent from January 2002 to mid-2008, and by 50 per cent from January 2007 to June 2008. Grains showed the earliest and highest price increase from 2005, although the global grain crop harvest of 2004–2005 was 10 per cent larger than in the previous three years and about 9 per cent higher than the 2005–2006 harvest. The prices of fats and oils increased in mid-2006, although the 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 season had recorded (13 per cent increase) high oilseed harvests.

agro-fuels production process is influenced by the ‘political pressures’ and ‘security’ concerns of the western energy industry, capital funds, the science and technology industry and the aid system, reflecting ‘high levels of rent-seeking strategies’ led by professional lobbies and think tanks (von Braun and Meinzen-Dick, 2009), as well as the so-called bureaucratic stasis and warped incentives that drive aid officials (Bird et al., 2002). The underlying driver, however, was finance capitals’ oil and commodity speculation activities (Ghosh, 2008; Tabb, 2008), including futures’ pricing of commodities (oil, food and others), irrespective of the trend in their actual physical supply and consumption. Wider systemic mechanisms drove the underproduction of food in the South and the related food price increases, given that the global food system is embedded in financial and commodity markets.

Indeed, the recent export of capital to Africa for the exploitation of agricultural land, water, minerals and other natural resources reflects the escalation of capitals’ speculative tendency to accumulate by dispossession, in the wake of the collapse of the housing, energy and derivative financial markets. The effects of the ‘long’ crises of the oligopolistic capitalist system (Ghosh, 2008; Moyo, 2008; Patnaik, 2008; Tabb, 2008) has been to undermine the African peasantry and agriculture in general, and the depression of social and food consumption. This trend can only be reversed by national and regional policies that seek food sovereignty including by protecting land rights, access to water and control over biodiversity resources in favour of the peasantry to prevent further dispossession.

### ***The SADC region’s food crisis and South African capital’s hegemony***

The decline in food production since the 1990s and the recent food price ‘crisis’ in the SADC region also reflects the systemic extraction of surplus by the oligopolic agrarian capital during neoliberalism, through the subregional architecture of agribusiness centred in South Africa, rather than the intrinsic weaknesses of small farmers in relation to large-scale capitalist farming. Consumers of imported foods and farm inputs in the SADC region have been captive ‘price takers’ of food produced in the South African and global food markets because South Africa plays a pivotal role in shaping the SADC food system through its transmission of food producer and consumer prices, defined by ‘tree’ agricultural markets related to South African pricing on a world ‘party’ basis. Food prices are unrelated to the region’s own real costs of peasant-based production and the levels of incomes (i.e., effective demand). These trends constitute ‘oligopolistic’ price formation processes, related to the subsidies and protection

provided to the dominant global food exporters, alongside the control of food supply by South African capital to the SADC region suffering from food deficit.

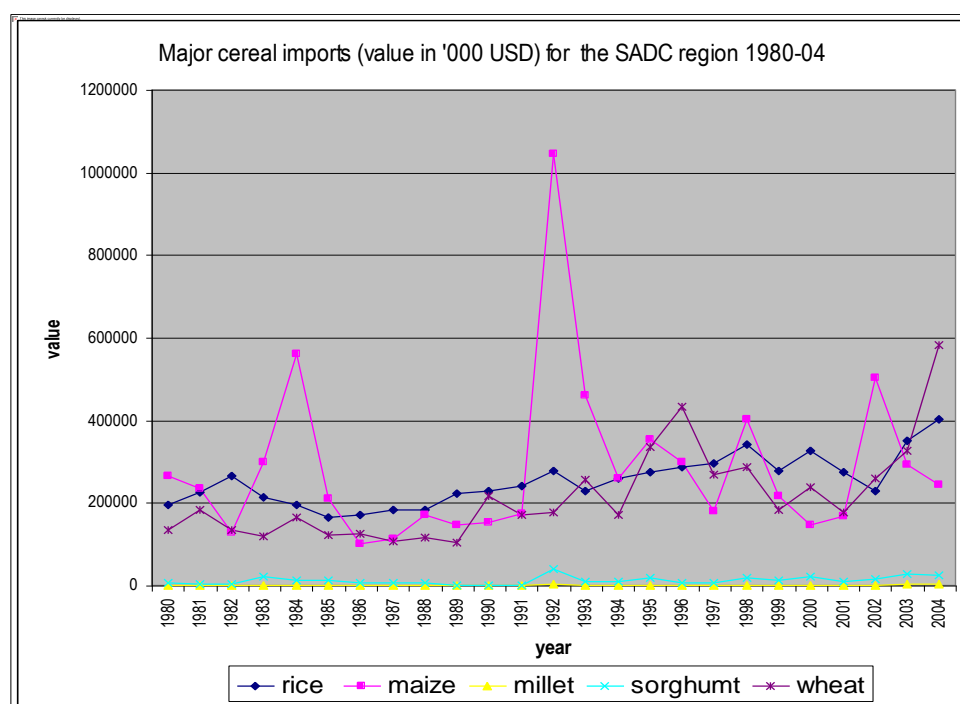
The region's failure to produce its basic food requirements, due to the compression of demand arising from income deflationary SAPs (Patnaik, 2008), means that the unequal regional food trade regime and food import dependence shapes the SADC region's agrarian system, including underinvestments in domestic food production. Since 1985, the extraversion of agriculture in the SADC region has been reinforced by the increased export of raw agricultural materials, despite their declining terms of trade and food imports. For instance, in 2006–2007 and 2008–2009 (non-drought seasons) the total estimated commercial cereal imports into the SADC region amounted to 1.22 million tonnes, against expected food-aid deliveries of 0.22 million tonnes and exports of 0.2 million tonnes, leaving a cereal deficit of minus 2.63 million tonnes. This import cost surpassed the US\$ 1 billion mark during 2001 and 2003 (a drought period) and has since been rising by nominal US\$ terms.

Food import dependence varies among countries. Botswana imports 77 per cent of its cereal consumption requirements. Angola, Mozambique and DRC have for long been high 'food-production-deficit' countries, importing over 50 per cent of their cereal consumption requirements (Glantz et al., 2007, citing Von Braun and Polino, 1990). Tanzania, Swaziland, Malawi and Zambia are 'relatively minor food-importing-and-occasional-exporter' countries, importing between 13 and 50 per cent of their cereal requirements, depending on frequent climate-induced 'harvest failures'. Since 2003, Zimbabwe has imported between 30 and 60 per cent of its cereal consumption requirements. The relative cost of food imports has been growing, placing greater pressure on the limited foreign currency resources of most SADC countries and diverting resources from other social and economic investments, including improving agricultural productivity.

Food-aid deliveries to the SADC region increased sharply from 2001 until 2007, when they returned to the 1998 levels. Between 2001 and 2003, US\$ 1 billion had been provided (i.e., an average of \$250 million per year). The proportion of the population requiring food aid (during 2001 and 2003) varied widely: 48 per cent in Zimbabwe and Zambia, 32 per cent in Malawi and Lesotho and 29 per cent in Mozambique. Food aid and import dependency means that food prices within the SADC region are influenced by the vagaries of global markets as well as by intra-SADC trade.

Yet, between 1995 and 2006, the share of agricultural exports in the SADC region's total exports averaged 23 per cent (UNCTAD, 2008), while agricultural imports averaged 31 per cent. Excluding data on South Africa and the extreme drought years, the share of agricultural

**Figure 3.3: Major SADC Cereal Imports**



Source: Based on SADC data.

and food imports and exports rises much higher in most of the countries. In terms of the agricultural trade balance (e.g., during 2004–2005, a non-drought year), 7 out of the 14 SADC countries imported much more (in US dollars) than they exported. However, 9 countries imported more food than they exported. This indicates that a significant share of national resources has been diverted to agricultural exports, while large amounts are spent on food imports. Beverages (coffee and tea) and spices dominate the exports, followed by sugar, vegetables, fruits and cereals. Imports are predominantly cereals, dairy products and meat preparations, indicating that although these main exports bring in US dollars, the production of high-value foods has unfortunately been delegated to the rest of the world. A few countries lead the exports, while most are heavily food import dependent.

While overall trade between SADC countries is low, food trade is dominated by South Africa. Five Southern African Customs Union (SACU) countries import over 70 per cent of their food requirements from South Africa, while the other countries intermittently import large amounts of grain (and larger amounts of dairy products and other minor foods) from South Africa and the rest of the world. South Africa, even under apartheid, has always been the dominant grain exporter. Recently, Malawi and Zambia have been exporting significant amounts of maize. Grain supply in these three countries has tended to influence regional food

price formation, by repressing maize prices when they have enough to export to the region, and vice versa. The time and costs of transporting traded goods (including food) within or among SADC countries, due to limited transport infrastructure investments, has been a key constraint to both balanced regional integration and collective approaches to addressing the region's agrarian (food) production and food access deficits, particularly during extreme droughts.

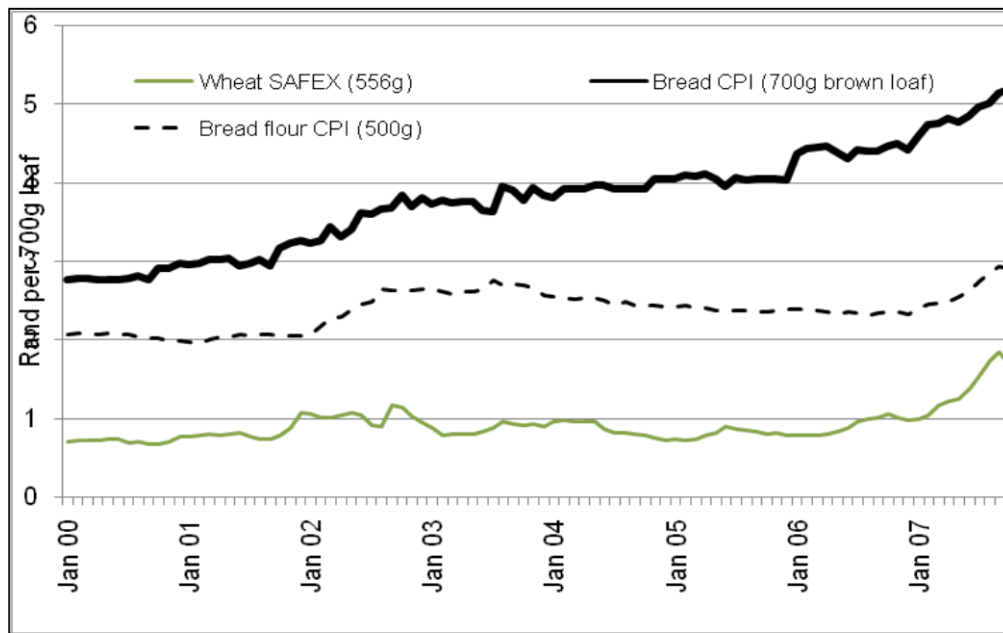
Food price formation and trade in the SADC region involves the transmission of global prices in food and farm inputs through South African pricing processes, since the uneven and erratic structure of regional food production and marketing within the region enables South African agribusinesses to dominate regional food markets (see Figure 3.4). Indeed, recent increases in food prices in the SADC region were inordinately influenced by the global food and energy crisis (Figure 3.3), in spite of the fact that its food consumers and its predominantly small producers are among the lowest users of farm inputs and related energy resources.

SADC food prices have risen rapidly, albeit not exactly in the same way as in the global trade markets. South African bread prices increased substantially, although wheat (producer) prices moved at a much slower pace. This suggests that South African food processors (agribusinesses) were taking the lion's share of the price increases. Since South Africa is the dominant supplier of food and farm inputs in the SADC region, its system of price formation of agricultural commodity and inputs are likely to influence prices in the SADC region, largely because these prices of food and farm inputs tend to be parity priced.

Thus, South Africa is both a transmitter of global prices and a sub-hegemonic pacesetter of food prices in the SADC region. Its food prices rise or fall in some sympathy with global trends as well as with the volatile regional food production balances occasioned by frequent droughts.

South African food producer price hikes since 2001 initially acted independently of global food prices by increasing sharply during the extreme drought-induced foodgrain deficit in SADC (between 2001 and 2003), and due to speculation on the rand in 2002 (Roberts, 2008). Only later, from the 2004 and 2005 seasons, did the prices follow the dramatic global food price hikes. This was possible because the entire share of the SADC region in global grain output is low, while South Africa's share in the SADC market is dominant. The latest South African maize price increases cannot only be attributed to a domestic supply and demand mismatch, but also to the effects of global prices and the frequent SADC region's maize production deficits, including some degree of food imports into South Africa.

**Figure 3.4: Wheat, Flour and Bread Prices**



Source: SAGIS and SAFEX (cited by Roberts, 2008).

South Africa is also bedeviled by global financial speculation on its stock exchange and financial markets. Moreover, there have recently been allegations of collusive price-fixing by the ‘oligopolistic agro-industrial corporations’ in South Africa, including on basic foods such as maize and basic inputs such as fertiliser (Roberts, 2008). These agrarian price trends are undergirded by South Africa’s neoliberal economic policies, whose wider ramifications have been to repress the own-food-production capacities of small producers. Indeed, some NGO food security technocracies (Wahenga, 2007) uncritically accept the prevailing logic of the world’s grain trade being dominated by the United States and the European Union, and the transmission of this food regime through South Africa’s subregional hegemony. They argue that national food security can be more ‘efficiently’ achieved through freer food trade (largely from South Africa), rather than through national state interventions in agriculture, despite their conceding the negative effects of the recent diversion of foodgrain exports to agro-fuel production. Yet, while the SADC region’s share of global food production is below 2 per cent, it has increasingly become a net food importer. Moreover, the recent SADC Free Trade Area, which only allows for the protection of some ‘sensitive’ agricultural products (15 per cent), is not accompanied by ‘developmental’ support for small farm producers and technology generation. A regional food sovereignty strategy, which avoids the displacement of local food production and control of the agrarian distribution system, is effectively constrained by this open regionalism.

## **Under-Consumption of Food and Increased Poverty**

Neoliberal debate on the causes of food insecurity in the SADC region mostly focused on ‘internal’ factors, including the inadequate implementation of SAPs and the ineffectiveness of state interventions in agriculture due to the neo-patrimonial political system (Bird et al., 2002). During the 1980s, the reigning ‘national food self-sufficiency’ policies focused on raising domestic capacities to produce virtually all national food requirements and supply them at stable prices, since food imports were perceived as both economic and national security risks. National food reserve stocks were kept to stabilise prices and supplies, especially to combat droughts. It was assumed that adequate national food production would translate into availability and access at the household levels, including among the poor. Food self-sufficiency, however, was hardly achieved in most SADC countries at that time (except, at times, in South Africa and Zimbabwe), and even when there were grain surpluses, these could be ‘sitting’ among the malnourished, as continues to be the case today, even where food ‘surpluses’ are exported (e.g., in South Africa, Zambia and Malawi).

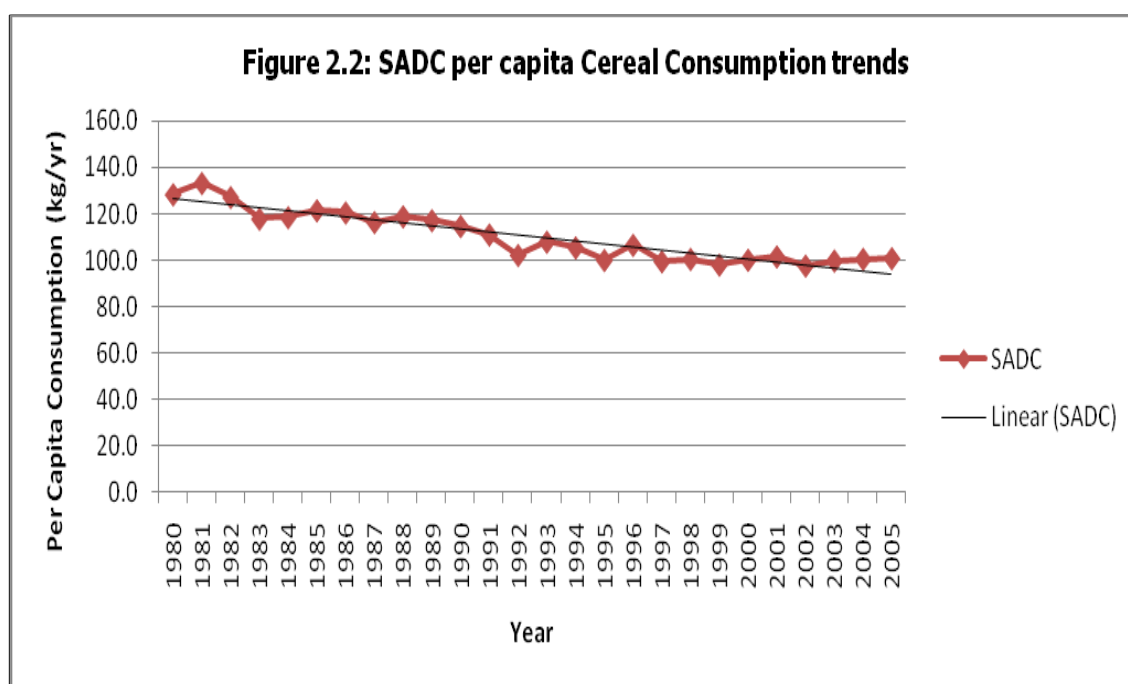
From the 1990s, when SAPs were adopted in practically all the SADC countries and state interventions were rolled back, the neoliberal ‘food security’ policy framework entailed two competing aspects: national and household food security. What distinguished the ‘food security’ approach from the self-sufficiency approach was that the former claimed to be ‘accommodative’ of wider processes of national and household food supply and access processes (Kalibwani, 2005). Countries were extolled to produce their own food only if they could do so efficiently and they were not allowed to spend on storing food. Otherwise, they were encouraged to import food as and when needed, given that this was considered more effective for a number of countries that were deemed to only have a ‘comparative’ change in producing traditional and new exports. For households the proposed focus was to ensure that the rural and urban poor establish diverse means of securing incomes or cash (‘livelihoods’) to procure food, while only encouraging the capable farmers to produce their own food and sale surpluses to ‘net food buyers’. Imports were considered less costly to the fiscus and price competitive although this bloated government indebtedness. Keeping grain reserves at accumulating costs was considered ‘irrational’, and monies were to be kept aside to procure the required food, leading many countries to drain their public grain reserves.

In the event, the failure of neoliberal agricultural policies and the wider global structural impediments to achieve adequate food production in the SADC region led to escalating food insecurity instead. The availability of adequate food at the national level was partially achieved

in some countries, except during severe droughts, while household ‘access’ to food was left to the market, and a few ‘vulnerable’ social groups were provided ‘targeted’ food aid. Export-oriented agricultural policies in increasingly liberalised economies and the removal of food production subsidies put paid to ‘household food security’. Expectedly, large-scale and ‘better-off’ small farmers dominated the production and sale of domestic food initially and later shifted to agricultural exports. National food imports increased, while the poor hardly improved their access to food, given the deflation of incomes and losses of jobs. Household access to the available food varied depending on class-based income inequalities (Mkandawire and Matlosa, 1993).

During the drought years, ‘just in time’ food imports were encouraged, including from neighbouring South Africa, and the rest of the world. Only recently have Malawi and Zambia exported maize, backing the Bretton Woods’ advice by subsidising peasants.

**Figure 3.5: SADC Per Capita Cereal Consumption Trends**



Source: Based on Earth Trends data.

Consequently, SADC countries face chronic food insecurities, especially among the poor, and food production remains inadequate. Frequent cereal deficits from domestic regional production in the SADC region are common, while food price stability has been volatile. The annual volume of cereals (maize, small grains, wheat and rice) required by the 250 million people of the SADC region in 2008 was estimated at just under 30.5 million tonnes. The average



level of cereal consumption per capita in the SADC region ranged from a peak of 127 kg per person in 1981 to 112 kg per person in 1999, reflecting underconsumption in terms of minimum calorific requirements per person. Annual per capita consumption has declined by an average of about 15 kg per person, even though annual population growth rates declined from an average of about 3 per cent between 1980 and 1990 to an average of 2 per cent thereafter. However, the steepest rate of decline in per capita consumption was more closely associated with the 1991–92 drought year, followed by persistently low per capita consumption for 12 years. Some projections of calorific consumption in sub-Saharan Africa (Rosegrant, 2008), which assumes expanded global production of agro-fuels, suggests that intake could decrease by 8 per cent due to cuts in household food expenditures.

The consumption and production of high-value foods (meat, milk products and pulses) is relatively low. But per capita consumption of higher-cost protein-rich foods varies remarkably, with countries such as Malawi, DRC and Mozambique being at the extremely low end of the scale compared to South Africa. Intra-country class-based inequalities in access to high-protein foods are even more pronounced than access to staple foods. Chronic vulnerability to food insecurity is common, particularly among peasant populations dependent on rain-fed agriculture.

This underconsumption has resulted in a complex food and social crisis, wherein the relative unavailability and high cost of food has affected millions of people, for decades. This was intensified by the 2001–2003 droughts and the global food price rise since then. The debilitating health and social effects of reduced consumption (calorific intakes) or changes in consumption behaviour (e.g., switching the types of food consumed and reducing the number of meals) have been long drawn. The absolute numbers of malnourished people between 1979 and 2003 in the SADC region have ranged from 18 million to 38 million at various points in time. Family assets have got eroded, resulting in weak resilience and failing livelihoods. Morbidity and mortality have also risen because of increased vulnerability to water-borne diseases (such as malaria, cholera and diarrhoea).

Apparently, these vulnerabilities persist because state ‘interventions are poorly targeted and not addressing the main constraints or shocks of communities...’ and programmes are poorly coordinated (health, education, HIV and AIDS, water and sanitation), while power-related trade imbalances (against the poor) and inappropriate policies (‘which discourage trade and free markets’) are a problem (Fews Net, various years). The systemic contradictions of the global food regime are not considered the problem.

The SADC region's agrarian crisis primarily concerns inadequate food consumption by its urban and rural working peoples due to insufficient and extroverted agricultural production and unequal agricultural trade, which emanate from mal-integration into speculative global food and farm inputs capital markets. This aberration is conveyed through the sub-hegemonic dominance of South African capital – which relies on malnourished cheap labour from the SADC region – based on the concentration of wealth and land (including natural resources and minerals) among racial and class minorities. International agribusiness dominates the SADC region's agricultural (inputs and outputs) and food markets through its subordinate branches of capital stationed in South Africa and the large farmers there.

Were the SADC region's food policies, especially fiscal support to agriculture and trade protection, tailored towards the food production and consumption needs of small farmers in order to achieve collective food sovereignty and equitable regional development, the food consumption crisis would have been averted. New concepts and visions of food sovereignty, in the context of an increasingly hostile global economy, have been proposed by social movements seeking to transcend neoliberal concepts of market-led food security, although dominant global civil society alliances stick to liberal reformist notions of improving marginal rural livelihoods. In the SADC region, only a few social movements espouse the food sovereignty concept, while only the Zimbabwean and Malawian states have dramatically confronted the neoliberal agrarian framework, albeit within the wider hegemonic constraints imposed by neoliberal policies.

### **Agrarian Resistances Subordinated to Neoliberalism**

It took protracted armed struggles to repossess land in North Africa, Kenya and in the former Lusophone states, while the nationalisation of some of the dispossessed land followed independence in the former protectorates such as Tanzania and Zambia. While the nationalist project from the 1960s to the 1970s halted land alienation and the super-exploitation of the peasantries to some extent, SAPs reintroduced this trajectory as well as primitive accumulation. The reversal of foreign and minority settler domination of land in Southern Africa only began in Zimbabwe from 2000 onwards, given that market-based land reforms were a failure in Southern Africa. Instead, the liberalised agricultural policies and land tenure, including constitutional reforms initiated in Africa from the 1990s, created the conditions for the second wave of land alienation and intensified marginalisation of the peasantry incorporated by capital and prepared the ground for the recent land grabs.

The dominant responses to the recent food crises have tended to reinforce the incorporation of the peasantry into volatile global markets, extending land alienation and increasing import dependence. The expansion of South Africa-based capital into the SADC regions' food system has deepened and now spans the supermarketisation of food distribution retail monopolies, involving European capital penetration as well as the increased prices of foods and farm inputs, and new brokerage role played by white farmers from South Africa and Zimbabwe in negotiating and managing land concessions for the production of food, sugar and agro-fuels for export by large agribusiness from the west, east and south, under oligopoly capitalist structures.

Radical responses to land alienation, the food crisis and the demise of the peasantry in Africa, which are not donor-driven, are few, while social movement activism has generally been ineffective. Popular responses, particularly regarding resistances to the inequitable grabbing of land, including popular land occupations and other forms of struggle for access to resources, while mostly isolated and localised, have gained patchy momentum), given their repression by the African state.

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) implemented in Zimbabwe from 2000 onwards, which led to extensive redistribution of Zimbabwe's agricultural land and the socialisation of property rights is one instance of radicalised agrarian reform, although one within the structural and institutional constraints imposed by neoliberalism. It expropriated large farmlands owned by over 3,000 white farmers and 20 large foreign-owned estates, and allocated the land free of charge mainly to about 150,000 poor, non-landed beneficiary families from within the peasantry and urban working peoples. Simultaneously, it also provided land to over 20,000 black 'middle-class' and 'elite' beneficiaries, while retaining some of the core lands of the agro-industrial sugar estates and wildlife conservancies. Meanwhile, the state expanded its estate farmlands from 18 to 24 and resurrected farming by the state corporation. About 20 per cent of such state farms are now joint agro-industrial ventures with foreign capital from the east combined with domestic state and private capital. Over 95 per cent of Zimbabwe's agricultural land is now state-owned and is mostly provided through land-user grants to peasants and leases to now middle-scale 'commercial' farms, while a few farms remain under freehold land rights. Most beneficiaries perceive their land tenure to be secure, with only 5 per cent having experienced evictions. Many of them are investing in the land, although some of the new middle farmers and finance capital call for private property rights in order to attract 'investment'.

Undoubtedly, fewer than expected former farm workers gained land, although in general, rural labour has been relatively freed from the monopoly of the few large farm employers. In addition, the retention of the retrogressive practice of 'compound farm labour tenancy' now faces resistance from agricultural workers. Land reform has integrated the previously divided territorial authority and spatial economic barriers that desegregated peasant land from the former LSCF areas, leading to greater flow of peoples, goods and services between them. The extension of hereditary local authority into the redistributed land areas has the potentially retrogressive implication of reinforcing patriarchal relations that undermine women's land and labour rights. A key regressive feature of the disproportionate representation of middle-class and elite beneficiaries is that some of them, including those with multiple plots, argue for even larger land allocations and call for freehold property rights, while a few sublet their land to former large farmers. The consequence is a new inter-class inequality in the control of public resources and influence over agrarian policies.

In a comparative context, however, the redistribution has significantly altered property relations in terms of the relative distribution of land and the socialisation of property rights. This has created the prospect for progressive agrarian change if socially just and developmental agrarian policies, such as food sovereignty, are affected. Already, agrarian change entails the broadening of the food production base and increasing productivity among small- and medium-scale farmers compared to their previous level. However, these remain low largely due to the shortages of fertilisers, irrigation facilities and draft power. Such shortages arise from reduced domestic agro-industrial inputs supply capacities and forex constraints on imports, partly due to Zimbabwe's international isolation. The inputs shortages and new inequalities in access to agricultural inputs, public subsidies and the limited available finance have mostly affected the peasantry. While foodgrains production remains underfinanced, the recent return of agrarian merchant capital to subcontract tobacco, sugar and cotton production has reintroduced a degree of obsession with export-oriented farming.

New alliances of multi-racial domestic and foreign capital now dominate the restructured agrarian inputs and outputs markets, increasingly managed through exploitative subcontractual relations, while exposing the new farmers to unfair international terms of trade. The prices realised by the mostly small producers of maize, cotton and some oilseeds are below world prices. Current state and donor inputs support to smaller producers is minimalist and provides little agricultural machinery and infrastructural investment, largely because it does not support the recovery of domestic agro-inputs industries. Private contract farming and commodity merchants dominate agrarian markets because of the reduced fiscal capacity of the state in a

‘dollarised’ economic policy framework and the so-called ‘illiquidity’ of the financial sector, ostensibly due to the ‘absence of investor confidence’. China has expanded the financing basis of the agrarian reform to fill the financing gap left by runaway European capital, but financial allocations to farming and agro-industry remain inadequate.

The Zimbabwean experience suggests that even under neoliberalism, the potential for extensive land reform in support of the peasantry exists, especially where land concentration grievances related to minority racial and foreign dominance are challenged by a radicalised nationalist coalition, which involves peasant movements. However, the cross-class nationalist coalition still operates within neoliberal policies structures, and these soon introduce agrarian distributional biases, including those purveyed through class, ethnic and gender cleavages, reflecting a hierarchical class and patriarchal political power structure. Moreover, since capital was not totally ousted by Zimbabwe’s land reform, and autonomous sources of agrarian financing are limited, internal class contradictions have enabled (the politically unaccountable) international capital to reconstitute unequal agrarian relations, using liberal domestic markets tied to the unequal global trade regime.

The Malawi case, on the other hand, represents a radical nationalist state attempt to bring about agrarian reforms in the face of the recent food crisis. It has entailed a protracted effort by the state to subsidise peasant production inputs since the 2003 drought. This has led to a substantial increase in maize productivity, the realisation of national food self-sufficiency as well as some regional maize exports, despite the fact that sections of the poor continue to face inadequate access to food and malnutrition. The Malawi experience moreover implies providing subsidies to commercial fertiliser imports dominated by oligopolic agribusiness, which has indeed deepened the incorporation of peasants into agribusiness monopolies that control agricultural inputs. The ‘success’ has also allowed for the continued growth of export-oriented farming among the middle-sized farmers and foreign-owned estates.

The bimodal agrarian strategy followed in Malawi, however, suggests that the peasantry can be revived based on state interventions against the will of the international financial institutions’ conditionalities, when the executive and a parliamentary coalition are in favour of the peasantry’s social reproduction and effectively challenge key elements of donor aid under a neoliberal regime. Nonetheless, in both the Zimbabwe and Malawi cases the retention of the wider neoliberal policy framework limits the prospects of food sovereignty, let alone the advancement of a more articulated and sustainable development model independent of monopoly capital.

## **The Alternatives: Collective Food Sovereignty and Inalienable Land Rights**

Extensive malnourishment and food-related poverty in Southern Africa points to the failure of the entire region to resolve its fundamental agrarian question of enhancing the social reproduction of its majority peasantries. The basic agrarian production forces are underdeveloped and per capita food production has been declining, except in a few food-secure enclaves, mainly in South Africa's agro-industrial, mining and commercial farm nodes. This trajectory of disarticulated development, unequal trade relations and uneven regional development reflects the political (and policy) preoccupation with narrow middle- and upper-class consumer and export markets, at the expense of the majority poor, under the direction of monopoly agribusiness and finance capital. The recent global food price crisis merely exposed the historical deficiencies of the extractive agricultural production and distribution food system based on oligopolic financialised capital in the SADC region, as elsewhere in Africa. This process is integral to the exploitative logic of the unequal 'global' food system and the crisis of capitalism. Recent attempts to 'bail out' this inequitable global food production system, through new land grabbing and new aid conditionalities that seek to further subordinate the peasantry, can only continue the depression of food production in the South.

It cannot be expected that capitalism, specifically the interests of agribusiness and financial capital, would spontaneously promote increased African food productivity in order to enhance food security and livelihoods, by supporting the technological requirements of small producers, unless capital is compelled to do so by state intervention and popular pressure. Instead, a 'western' agricultural technological and markets path dependence, which submerges local knowledge and technologies, through the unequal extraction of surpluses and deflationary policies, continues to be deep-rooted. Now foreign capital and domestic elites pursue a 'final push' to universalise the commodification of land and its alienation by expanding contract-farming relations with the peasants, towards reinforcing accumulation by the dispossession and displacement of peasantries, at the expense of food sovereignty and social reproduction.

The alternative we propose supports civilisation, prioritises food sovereignty and the sustainable use of resources by autonomous small producers. It includes a democracy that is inclusive and substantive, and is based on social progress. Alternative developmental approaches to agrarian transformation will require different policy choices, regarding the agricultural commodities to be produced for social gains, the (re)distribution of the means of food production (particularly of land, inputs seeds and water) and increased social investments required to sustain systemic rural development. A focus on enhancing the human resources of

the peasantries is key to restructuring the food system, through endogenous research, enhanced consumer trade protection and farmer's movements, as well as influencing agrarian policy-making and programme implementation.

The SADC states ought to pursue more holistic agrarian reforms, which reverse the decline of domestic food production and food insecurity, including exposure to external shocks and increased dependency. Such an alternative cannot only be national in focus. It has to counter the current market-based functional approach to regional integration followed by the SADC region and instead build a regional industrial (and agrarian) policy framework that systematically reverses the opening up of the region (through trade and monetary 'harmonisation') to greater (mal)integration into the global economy. The autonomous generation of sustainable agricultural technologies and increased domestic supply of the inputs focused on domestic food and local industries are essential to reduce dependence on volatile external agricultural commodity and financial markets. This requires a reorientation of the SADC region's agricultural policy towards collective strategies for food sovereignty, based upon collective agricultural development initiatives.

Addressing the agrarian question in the SADC region could benefit from thoroughgoing land redistribution to small producers and the regional integration of the economies, using inward-looking strategies that build on a variety of complementarities and solidarity, including the promotion of a regional agricultural inputs and outputs markets and equitable industrialisation. The creation of state-backed sustainable food production systems and reserves to combat productivity shortfalls and drought vulnerability is critical. Stimulating regional production of key imports (grains, beef, milk products, etc.), in a process that reduces the export of raw value and increases regional employment, labour productivity and incomes, and thus expands the aggregate regional markets (possibly restraining migration), is a pre-requisite for food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty requires policies that defend the inalienable land rights of small producers and are built upon a socially and economically progressive development of the peasant, with substantive democracy and social progress.