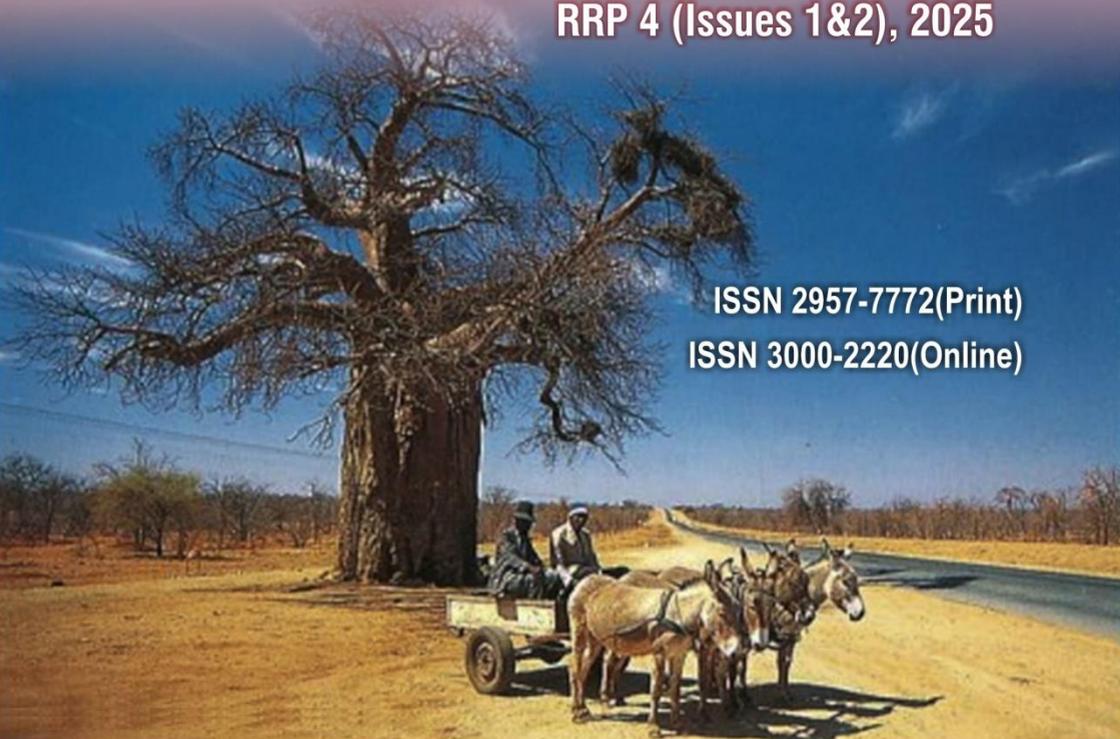




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About the Journal

JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis* is to provide a forum for disaster risk mitigation, adaptation and preparedness.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers, economists, among others whose focus is that of rural resilience.

JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

Review of Rural Resilience Praxis

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SCOPE AND FOCUS

As much as the urban territory is increasing by each day, the rural economy, especially in many developing countries, still retains a great proportion of the extractive and accommodation industry. Retaining some space as rural remains critical given the sectors role in providing ecosystem services to both wildlife and humanity. In this light, rural resilience as practice beckons for critical studies especially in the face of the ever-threatening extreme weather events and climate change that then impact on the livelihoods and lifestyles of the rural communities. *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis* (RRRP) comes in as a platform for critical engagement by scholars, practitioners and leaders as they seek to debate and proffer solutions of the rural sector and trying to champion the philosophy of the right to be rural. The issue of conviviality between the different constituencies of the sectors, compiled with the competing challenges of improving rural spaces while also making the conservation and preservation debates matter is the hallmark of this platform of criticality. The journal is produced bi-annually.

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A total number of words: 5000-7000 words and set in 12-point font size width with 1.5 line spacing.

Language: British/UK English

Title: must capture the gist and scope of the article

Names of authors: beginning with the first name and ending with the surname

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Abstract: must be 200 words

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Body: Where the authors are more than three, use *et al.*,

Italicise *et al.*, *ibid.*, words that are not English, not names of people or organisations, etc. When you use several authors confirming the same point, state the point and bracket them in one bracket and in ascending order of dates and alphabetically separated by semi-colon e.g. (Falkenmark, 1989, 1990; Reddy, 2002; Dagdeviren and Robertson, 2011; Jacobsen *et al.*, 2012).

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Rural Land Policy: Case Comparisons of Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana

MIRACLE P MABVUNDWI¹ AND ANDREW HWITITI²

Abstract

Rural land policy is crucial in shaping agricultural productivity, food security, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. The article conducts a comparative analysis of rural land policies in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana, examining their distinct historical, social and economic contexts. Ethiopia's state-centric land tenure system, Lesotho's leasehold approach and Botswana's decentralised tribal land management offer diverse frameworks for understanding land governance. By employing a comparative approach and integrating the Evolutionary Theory, the article explores the impact of different land tenure systems on agricultural productivity, tenure security and access to credit. The analysis reveals tenure security as a core objective across all three countries, with varied effectiveness in land reforms. Ethiopia's large-scale state interventions, Lesotho's systematic land regularisation and Botswana's rural diversification highlight distinct policy outcomes. Key findings emphasise context-specific solutions, participatory governance and integrating customary and statutory systems. The study emphasises the critical role of women in land management and addressing gender disparities in land rights to enhance socio-economic development. In light of climate change and globalisation, the article advocates for climate-resilient agricultural practices and rural diversification to mitigate external impacts. Insights gathered offer valuable lessons for policy-makers, scholars and development practitioners aiming to enhance land tenure security, promote sustainable land use and improve rural livelihoods in Africa. This study contributes to the broader discourse on land governance and rural development through cross-country learning and adapting best practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Rural land policy is crucial for shaping global livelihoods by influencing agricultural productivity, food security, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability (Xie, Sun and Song, 2024). Despite extensive research on rural land policies in African countries, there is a lack of comparative studies examining their impact on developmental outcomes across varied socio-economic and historical contexts. Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana offer distinct cases with differing land governance approaches, emphasising the need for a comparative analysis of their policies and outcomes. Africa's rural land policies reflect diverse historical, socio-economic and institutional contexts. Ethiopia's centralised state land tenure system contrasts with Lesotho's leasehold system, tied to livestock farming and Botswana's decentralised tribal land administration model, which emphasises traditional governance (Chitonge, 2022; Harvey, 2022). These variations highlight the importance of understanding how governance frameworks influence rural development outcomes. This study aims to compare the land policy frameworks in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana to analyse their impact on agricultural productivity, poverty reduction and food security. Drawing from foundational research (Collier, 2011; Hungwe, 2014; Scoones, 2025), it investigates governance frameworks and policy implementations, addressing key questions about tenure systems, challenges and successes.

By exploring land policy outcomes in these countries, the research contributes to understanding land governance and rural development in Africa. Insights are provided for enhancing tenure security, sustainable land use and rural livelihoods through context-specific solutions and cross-country learning. The article is structured into five sections: a literature review, methodology, case studies, findings and a conclusion offering actionable recommendations for improved governance.

THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

This study is grounded in the Evolutionary Theory, which observes how land tenure systems evolve dynamically in response to changing social, economic

and environmental pressures (North, 1990; Platteau, 1996). The framework emphasises path dependence, where historical legacies, political transitions and demographic shifts constrain future options and shape land policies. Applied to Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana, it explores the progression of land reforms, revealing how colonial legacies and political dynamics influence policy successes and challenges. Hoff and Stiglitz (2004) highlight the adaptation (or lack thereof) of these systems to contemporary challenges like climate change, globalisation and population pressures. The study also employs a comparative approach, systematically analysing rural land policy impacts in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana. This method, informed by scholars such as Tarrow (1996), Geddes (2003), Collier (2011), Chitonge and Harvey (2022) and Ramezani and Homayoon (2023), examines diverse governance systems — state ownership, leasehold, tribal land management — and their effects on agricultural productivity, poverty reduction and sustainable land use. Policy interventions like land titling, redistribution and community-based management, are assessed for their effectiveness in achieving equitable access and tenure security. The comparative analysis identifies best practices and lessons transferable to other developing countries, carefully accounting for contextual factors and avoiding selection bias (Mandhu and Mushingi, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural land policies are critical instruments in shaping the socio-economic landscape of rural communities, influencing land tenure security, agricultural productivity and rural development. These policies aim to ensure equitable access to land, promote sustainable land use practices and drive economic growth, particularly in regions where land-related governance significantly impacts livelihoods. Central to these policies is the emphasis on securing land tenure rights and fostering inclusive development. As highlighted by the European Policy Research Centre (2019), coordinated governance arrangements are essential for effective policy implementation. In the context of rural land policies, this entails harmonising land-related regulations and administrative frameworks across sectors to address the unique socio-economic and geographic challenges of rural communities. Adopting a territorial approach, which integrates rural development policies across

governance levels, ensures cohesive strategies that align with sustainable rural development objectives.

Participatory land governance further strengthens the effectiveness and legitimacy of rural land policies by actively engaging local communities in decision-making processes. Ramezani and Nooraie (2023) argue that participatory land-use planning fosters inclusivity, incorporating the perspectives of marginalised groups and indigenous communities, often excluded from traditional governance systems. Such approaches not only tailor policies to the specific needs of rural populations, but also foster a sense of ownership, building trust and transparency between governments and communities. Johnson (2022) emphasises this point, highlighting that participatory governance reduces conflicts and enhances the sustainability of land tenure systems. Smith *et al.* (2023) provide empirical evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa, where participatory initiatives have improved agricultural productivity and land use practices, demonstrating the tangible benefits of community-driven policy frameworks.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN RURAL LAND POLICY

Technological advancements have revolutionised rural land administration, enabling more precise and efficient land management practices. Geographic information systems (GIS) have become indispensable tools in mapping and monitoring land use, allowing policy-makers to visualise land-related data and make informed decisions. These systems aid in identifying patterns of land distribution, ownership and resource allocation, reducing conflicts and fostering equitable development. For instance, GIS has been instrumental in creating digital land records which enhance transparency and accessibility for both authorities and rural communities. Remote sensing technologies complement GIS by providing real-time monitoring capabilities. Brown and Miller (2023) illustrate how satellite imagery has facilitated the identification of degraded lands, enabling targeted interventions for rehabilitation. Such technologies are particularly vital in rural contexts, where on-the-ground monitoring resources are often limited. By integrating GIS and remote sensing into land policy frameworks, rural communities benefit from improved governance, efficient resource management and sustainable development practices.

REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH ON RURAL LAND POLICIES IN AFRICA

The research on rural land policies in Africa is robust and varied, illustrating the continent's intricate socio-economic and political landscapes. Recent studies have concentrated on assessing the efficacy of land policies in fostering equitable growth and resilience amid challenges such as climate change, population growth and urban sprawl. A comprehensive analysis by the World Bank (2020) highlights several key policy responses essential to addressing these challenges. These include reforms aimed at securing land tenure, promoting sustainable agricultural practices and integrating land-use planning with environmental conservation efforts. The report emphasises the necessity of participatory governance in land policy formulation, ensuring that the voices of marginalised rural communities are heard and considered.

In South Africa and Zimbabwe, land reform has been a pivotal aspect of rural development policies. A study by the University of Johannesburg (2024) delves into the impacts of these reforms on rural development, shedding light on the structural differences between the two countries. South Africa's land reform programme, characterised by its market-based approach, contrasts sharply with Zimbabwe's more radical land redistribution policies. This divergence has led to varying outcomes in terms of economic empowerment, agricultural productivity and social equity. Additionally, Munro (2021) emphasises the role of customary land tenure systems in African rural land policies. The study explores how integrating customary practices with formal land administration can enhance tenure security and local governance. This approach has been particularly effective in countries like Ghana and Kenya, where customary land rights are recognised alongside statutory laws.

The importance of addressing gender disparities in land ownership and access is another critical theme in the literature. Doss *et al.* (2022) highlight that women often face significant barriers to land rights due to socio-cultural norms and legal constraints. Policies aimed at improving women's land tenure security are shown to have positive impacts on household welfare, agricultural productivity and overall rural development. Finally, technological advancements are playing a transformative role in land policy implementation. The use of GIS and remote sensing technology has enhanced land mapping and management, facilitating better decision-making processes. According to

Brown and Miller (2023), these technologies provide accurate data that support efficient land use planning and monitoring, crucial for sustainable development.

ANALYSIS OF KEY THEMES AND DEBATES IN RURAL LAND POLICY

Rural land policy debates centre around tenure security, land rights and their role in socio-economic development. Tenure security is vital for rural land governance, impacting investment, stability and sustainable land use. Policies like land titling and recognising customary land rights, foster equitable resource access and socio-economic growth (Adams and Megersa, 2021; Okoth-Ogendo, 2021). Promoting land rights for women and marginalised groups empower communities and enhances resilience (Kariuki and Wekesa, 2022). Land, as a productive asset, drives agricultural activities and livelihoods, linking rural poverty alleviation to national economic growth. Policies integrating equitable land distribution, sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation create broad socio-economic benefits (International Land Coalition, 2012; Krantz, 2019). Sustainable livelihoods approaches emphasise interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions, supporting growth and resilience against climate change and urban expansion (Ellis and Biggs, 2001; ; Adams and Megersa, 2021).

Historical contexts, such as colonial legacies, influence rural governance. Colonial expropriations disrupted tenure systems, perpetuating inequities that demand resolution for sustainable development (Chigbu *et al.*, 2020). Customary tenure systems, combining traditional practices with statutory laws, enhance governance, tenure security and resource stewardship, as seen in Uganda and Tanzania (Okoth-Ogendo, 2021; Mwangi *et al.*, 2020). Technological advancements, like GIS and remote sensing, improve land administration and decision-making, while participatory governance ensures policies align with rural community needs (Mwangi *et al.*, 2020; Kariuki and Wekesa, 2022). These innovations support sustainability and adaptability in facing modern challenges (Adams and Megersa, 2021).

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's rural land policies have evolved to address land tenure security, agricultural productivity and rural development. Key policies include the 1975

Land Reform Policy, the Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation (No. 456/2005), and the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP). These policies aim to balance social equity, economic growth and sustainable land management. The 1975 Land Reform Policy abolished private land ownership, nationalised rural land and provided equitable access for smallholder farmers. However, it faced challenges like reduced tenure security and limited agricultural investment (Alemu, 2012; Desalegn, 2020). The 2005 proclamation introduced usufruct rights to improve tenure security but faced issues with inconsistent implementation and exclusion of marginalised groups (Deininger and Jin, 2006). The GTP, implemented in 2010, integrated land governance into Ethiopia's development strategy. Despite economic gains, it raised concerns over rural displacement and erosion of traditional land rights (Alemu, 2012; Gebremedhin, 2023). Alemu (2012) emphasises that large-scale land acquisitions brought investment, but caused displacement and restricted access to resources. Balancing equity and productivity remains crucial (Gebreselassie, 2006). Institutional inefficiencies in rural land governance, including weak capacity and limited community engagement, hinder reforms (IRHSR, 2017). Berhanu and Nega (2023) reveal regional tenure disparities, while Berhane (2022) advocates for balancing public and private ownership models. Wondimagegn (2020) stresses safeguarding traditional land rights to avoid rural disempowerment. Ethiopia's policies highlight efforts to address inequities and boost productivity, while facing challenges in displacement, inefficiencies and regional disparities. These lessons offer insights into land governance and rural transformation in Africa.

LESOTHO

Lesotho's rural land policies have undergone significant reforms to enhance tenure security, equitable land access and rural development. Key policies include the Land Act of 1979, the Land Policy of 2011 and the Lesotho Land Administration Authority Act of 2010, which collectively modernise land governance and support rural livelihoods. The 1979 Land Act formalised tenure by introducing leaseholds, replacing some customary practices, but faced criticism for marginalising traditional systems and increasing tenure insecurity (Daemane, 2012). The 2011 Land Policy sought to harmonise statutory and customary tenure systems, encouraging community participation

and sustainable management (Political Economy, 2018). The 2010 Lesotho Land Administration Authority Act streamlined land registration processes but struggled with accessibility and capacity challenges (MCC, 2020).

Policy evaluations highlight positive impacts like improved tenure security and reduced land disputes, though transparency and community engagement require strengthening (*ibid.*). Political Economy (2018) emphasises equitable land access for sustainable agriculture and poverty reduction. Leduca *et al.* (2018) advocate for inclusive policies prioritising empowerment and gender equity, while Pule and Thabane (2019) stress reforms to mitigate tenure insecurity and promote sustainable practices. Mokoena *et al.* (2021) emphasise the role of GIS and remote sensing in climate-resilient land governance.

Gender-sensitive approaches remain vital, with Dube *et al.* (2022) addressing disparities in land ownership to enhance household welfare and rural livelihoods. Overall, Lesotho's land policies reflect progress in balancing governance, community participation and technological advancements, while highlighting challenges like inequitable access, inefficiencies and gender disparities. Insights from Lesotho offer valuable perspectives for comparative analysis of land policies in Ethiopia and Botswana.

BOTSWANA

Botswana's rural land policy has evolved significantly, shaped by historical, socio-political and economic contexts. Key policies, including the Tribal Land Act of 1968 and the Botswana National Land Policy of 2015, alongside initiatives like the Land Administration and Management Project (LAMP) and the Integrated Land Information System, reflect efforts to enhance tenure security, equitable land access and rural transformation. The 1968 Tribal Land Act decentralised land administration by creating land boards to manage tribal land and integrate customary and statutory systems (Adams *et al.*, 2002). While it promoted transparency and equitable land distribution, challenges such as conflicts between systems and inefficiencies persist (Molebatsi, 2021). The 2015 National Land Policy built on this, addressing sustainable land use and tenure security while enabling rural households to access credit. Yet, issues like urbanisation and climate change, remain problematic (Hope, 2020;

Kalabamu, 2021). Technological advancements, such as GIS and remote sensing through LAMP and the Integrated Land Information System, have modernised land administration, improving decision-making and sustainable planning (Zorkin, Raphaka and Nilsson, 2017; Mokoena *et al.*, 2021). Gender equity is an emerging focus, with studies highlighting barriers for women in land ownership and the need for reforms to strengthen their rights (Dube *et al.*, 2022).

Botswana's rural land policies support sustainable agriculture, diversified livelihoods and poverty reduction. Harmonising customary and statutory systems and addressing climate risks are essential for sustainable development (Political Economy, 2018; SARPN, 2002). While progress has been made, challenges like gender disparities, bureaucratic inefficiencies and climate-related risks remain pressing. These insights contribute to comparative analyses of rural land policies in Ethiopia and Lesotho, emphasising governance, equity and rural transformation.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

The analysis of rural land policies in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana reveals critical themes essential for understanding land governance dynamics. Ethiopia's state ownership model ensures land access for smallholder farmers but restricts its use as collateral, limiting investments (Chitonge and Harvey, 2022)). Lesotho's leasehold system combines customary and statutory elements, enabling credit access through land collateral, though implementation challenges persist in rural areas (Liu *et al.*, 2023). Botswana's decentralised tribal land management promotes community participation but faces disparities in allocation and limited formalisation of land rights, affecting credit and large-scale investments (Chitonge, 2022). These systems profoundly shape agricultural productivity, food security and poverty reduction.

Ethiopia's Rural Land Certification Programme enhances tenure security and investments in regions like Amhara and Oromia, but faces criticism for displacement caused by villagisation in Gambela (Chitonge and Harvey (2022)). Lesotho's land regularisation under the Land Act of 2010, succeeds in urban areas like Maseru, but struggles in rural highlands (Millennium

Challenge Corporation, 2022). Botswana's reforms, such as land leasing under the Tribal Land Act, promote rural diversification, but highlight inequities in land allocation and access for marginalised groups (Chitonge, 2022).

Using a comparative approach and the Evolutionary Theory, the study examines historical changes and socio-economic pressures shaping land policies. It emphasises the interplay of traditional practices and modern reforms, emphasising adaptability and innovation in governance systems. Gender disparities in land rights remain critical, with the study stressing reforms to enhance women's roles in agriculture and socio-economic development (Dube *et al.*, 2022). Climate change and globalisation influence rural land policies, necessitating climate-resilient practices and rural diversification to address these challenges (Mwangi *et al.*, 2020; Kariuki and Wekesa, 2022). Best practices include context-specific strategies, participatory governance, integrating customary and statutory systems and strengthening local institutions for successful land reforms (Xie, Sun and Song, 2024).

CASE STUDIES

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's rural land policy framework is governed by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution, which states that all land is owned by the state and the people have only usufruct rights (USAID, 2004). This means that while individuals can use the land, they do not have the right to sell or transfer ownership (Deininger *et al.*, 2007). The land policy aims to ensure equitable access to land and promote sustainable agricultural practices. One of the key policies in Ethiopia is the land certification programme, initiated in the late 1990s. This programme aimed to increase tenure security by providing certificates to over 20 million plots (Alemu, 2011). The first-level certification programme has been recognised as one of the most successful low-cost land registration programmes in Africa (*ibid.*). The second-level certification programme further strengthened tenure security by providing more detailed documentation (Persha *et al.*, 2017). Another significant initiative is the redistribution and consolidation of farmland. The government established the Federal Land Bank to facilitate the redistribution of land and improve productivity. This initiative aims to ensure equitable

access to land and promote agricultural development (Alemu, 2011). Despite these efforts, Ethiopia's land policy faces several challenges. Implementation issues, such as lack of resources, inadequate training and corruption, have hindered the effectiveness of the land certification programme (Bezabih and Goshu, 2022).

Additionally, the rise in large-scale land acquisitions by foreign investors has led to concerns about displacement of local communities and environmental degradation (Alemu, 2011). However, there have been notable successes as well. The land certification programme has significantly increased tenure security for rural households, leading to greater investment in land and improved agricultural productivity (Persha *et al.*, 2017). The programme has also contributed to the empowerment of women by providing them with legal recognition of their land rights (Gorfu, 2022). All in all, Ethiopia's rural land policy has made significant strides in improving tenure security and promoting agricultural development. However, challenges such as implementation issues and large-scale land acquisitions, need to be addressed to ensure sustainable rural development. Given these insights, this research analysis suggests that Ethiopia's rural land policy requires a balanced approach that continues to strengthen land tenure security, while mitigating the adverse impacts of large-scale land acquisitions. Policy recommendations should include enhancing institutional capacity, promoting transparency and accountability and fostering inclusive community participation in land governance processes. Furthermore, there is need to integrate sustainable agricultural practices and environmental conservation measures to ensure long-term rural development.

LESOTHO

Lesotho's rural land policy framework is governed primarily by the Land Act of 2010, which replaced the Land Act of 1979. This framework aims to create an environment favourable to agricultural development and economic investment (Political Economy, 2018). Under this policy, the land tenure system operates on leasehold terms of 31 years, with the state acting as the trustee of the land (Millennium Challenge Corporation, 2022). This structure is designed to ensure equitable access to land, while promoting its efficient use for productive purposes.

Key policies and initiatives include land reform and tenure security. The introduction of the Land Act of 2010 marked a significant shift in Lesotho's approach to land governance. This Act was pivotal in addressing tenure insecurity and enabling rural land to be used as collateral for financing. By reducing the partnership interest required for foreign enterprises to acquire land from 51% to 20%, the Act aimed to attract foreign investment and stimulate economic development in rural areas (Leduka, Ntaote and Takalimane, 2019).

Another key initiative in Lesotho's land policy is the establishment of the Land Administration Authority (LAA). The LAA was created to streamline land administration procedures and support systematic land regularisation, which has been crucial in reducing transaction times and increasing tenure security. This initiative has been particularly beneficial for female-headed households, who have historically faced greater challenges in securing land rights (Millennium Challenge Corporation, 2022).

In addition to the initiative, was systematic land regularization. It focused on reducing land conflicts and improving tenure security. By implementing systematic land registration processes, the government aimed to ensure clear and legally recognised land rights for all citizens (Leduka *et al.*, 2019).

Despite these progressive reforms, Lesotho's rural land policy faces several challenges. The customary land tenure system, governed by the 1903 Law of Lerotoli, continues to play a significant role in land allocation. This dual system often leads to conflicts and inefficiencies in land management, as customary practices can clash with statutory regulations (Daemane, 2012). Additionally, rural communities still face significant barriers in accessing credit, even with land as collateral, due to the lack of formal financial institutions and high-interest rates on loans (Millennium Challenge Corporation, 2022). However, there have been notable successes. The Land Act of 2010 and the establishment of the LAA have significantly increased tenure security, leading to greater investment in land and improved agricultural productivity. These reforms have also empowered women by providing legal recognition of their land rights, which has contributed to gender equality and social development (*ibid.*). Furthermore, policy and

institutional reforms have activated credit markets and increased land transactions, creating a more favourable environment for economic investment (Political Economy, 2018).

In conclusion, Lesotho's rural land policy has made significant strides in improving tenure security, empowering women and attracting economic investment. However, addressing challenges, such as customary land tenure practices, access to credit and the need for further market liberalisation is crucial for ensuring sustainable rural development and improving the livelihoods of Lesotho's rural communities. Future policies should focus on integrating customary and statutory land tenure systems, promoting community participation in land governance and leveraging technological advancements to enhance land administration.

BOTSWANA

Botswana's rural land policy framework is characterised by a decentralised approach to land administration, primarily driven by the Tribal Land Act of 1968, which established land boards responsible for managing and allocating tribal land (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Environment, 2002). This system aims to ensure equitable access to land and resources for all citizens.

The Tribal Land Act plays a crucial role in Botswana's rural land administration by vesting land management in land boards, both at main and subordinate levels, to facilitate local administration (Frimpong, 1986). Another significant policy is the leasing of land for agricultural and other purposes, which promotes economic activities and sustainable land use (Government of Botswana, n.d.). Furthermore, rural transformation initiatives aim to diversify rural livelihoods and reduce dependency on agriculture by creating alternative income streams and enhancing resilience to external shocks such as climate change (Political Economy, 2018).

Despite the decentralised approach, inequality in land distribution persists, with privileged access to land and resources often being restricted to a small elite (Political Economy, 2018). Climate change also presents a significant challenge, as unpredictable weather patterns threaten agricultural-based rural livelihoods, necessitating diversified income streams (Ministry of Lands,

Housing and Environment, 2002). Additionally, bureaucratic bottlenecks, though decentralisation aims to improve efficiency, can still impede effective land distribution and utilization (Frimpong, 1986).

Botswana's rural development policies have contributed to a substantial reduction in poverty, decreasing from 30% in 2002 to 18% in 2016, demonstrating progress in improving rural livelihoods (Political Economy, 2018). The country has experienced significant economic growth, averaging 9% between 1966 and 1999, which has supported rural development initiatives and poverty reduction efforts (Ministry of Lands, Housing and Environment, 2002). Moreover, Botswana's stable democracy has facilitated the implementation of rural land policies and initiatives, contributing to overall economic and social development (Frimpong, 1986).

In recent years, Botswana has continued to focus on improving land governance and administration. The Land Administration and Management Project (LAMP) and the Land Administration and Management System (LAMS) have been implemented to enhance the efficiency and transparency of land management processes, and these initiatives aim to provide secure land tenure, support land markets and facilitate land reform (African Development Bank, 2018). Additionally, the Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis (BIDPA) has been actively involved in reviewing land tenure policies and providing recommendations for policy reforms (Landmäteriet, 2014).

Furthermore, Botswana has made significant progress in better land management through the development and implementation of an integrated electronic Land Information System (Zorkin, Raphaka and Nilsson, 2017). This system aims to streamline land administration processes and improve data accuracy, ultimately contributing to more efficient land governance (*ibid.*).

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

While each country pursues distinct approaches to land governance, common objectives emerge: enhancing tenure security, promoting agricultural productivity and fostering equitable access to land resources.

Ethiopia's socialist-leaning framework emphasises state ownership with usufruct rights for individuals. This approach, while aiming for equitable distribution, has faced challenges related to implementation, corruption and the displacement of local communities due to large-scale land acquisitions. In contrast, Lesotho's leasehold system, while recognising state trusteeship, has grappled with the complexities arising from a dual land tenure system (customary and statutory). This dualism often leads to conflicts and hinders efficient land administration. Botswana, with its decentralised tribal land management system, has achieved significant economic growth but faces challenges related to inequality in land distribution and the impact of climate change on rural livelihoods.

The following are the key differences noticed in three case studies:

Land Tenure Systems: Ethiopia's state ownership model contrasts sharply with Lesotho's leasehold system and Botswana's decentralised tribal land management. This divergence in tenure systems has significant implications for land use, investment and access to credit.

Policy Focus: Ethiopia's focus on land redistribution and large-scale state interventions differs from Lesotho's emphasis on land reform and tenure security and Botswana's focus on decentralised management and rural diversification.

Implementation Challenges: While all countries face implementation challenges, the specific nature of these challenges varies. Ethiopia grapples with corruption and the impacts of large-scale land acquisitions. Lesotho struggles with the complexities of integrating customary and statutory land laws. Botswana faces challenges related to ensuring equitable access within the framework of tribal land management.

However, there are key similarities which have been identified in these three case studies:

Tenure Security as a Core Objective: All three countries recognise the critical importance of secure land rights for agricultural development, investment and poverty reduction.

Challenges of Implementing Reforms: All countries face challenges in effectively implementing land reforms, including bureaucratic hurdles, lack of resources and resistance to change.

The Role of Women in Land Management: All countries have recognised the crucial role of women in land management and agriculture. However, significant disparities persist in access to and control over land resources, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address gender inequalities in land ownership and inheritance.

Impact of External Factors: All countries are significantly impacted by external factors, particularly climate change. Climate change-induced droughts, floods and unpredictable weather patterns threaten agricultural production and livelihoods, necessitating the development of climate-resilient land use practices and the diversification of rural livelihoods.

Given all these differences and similarities, there are lessons learned from these three cases which, by understanding the complexities of rural land policy of these regions, policy-makers, practitioners and researchers can work together to develop and implement policies that promote sustainable, equitable and prosperous rural development.

- *Importance of Context-Specific Approaches:* Successful land policy reforms require a nuanced understanding of the specific socio-economic, cultural and environmental contexts of each country.
- *Need for Participatory Approaches:* Meaningful community participation in land governance is crucial for ensuring the legitimacy, effectiveness and sustainability of land reforms.
- *Strengthening Local Institutions:* Building the capacity of local institutions, such as land boards and community-based organisations, is essential for effective land management and administration.
- *Addressing Gender Inequalities:* Ensuring women's equal access to and control over land resources is critical for gender equity, food security and rural development.
- *Integrating Customary and Statutory Systems:* Where applicable, finding ways to integrate customary land tenure practices with

modern legal frameworks, can enhance legitimacy and improve land administration.

- *Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change*: Integrating climate change considerations into land use planning and promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices are essential for long-term sustainability.

This comparative analysis highlights the complex challenges of rural land policies and the varied strategies employed by Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana. Despite unique challenges, all three prioritise tenure security, equitable access and sustainable land use. By sharing experiences and best practices, these countries can refine their policies, tackle emerging issues and advance equitable, sustainable rural development.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

This study provides a comparative analysis of rural land policies in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Botswana, showcasing how governance frameworks shape agricultural productivity, poverty reduction, food security and rural development. Each country's approach reflects its socio-economic, historical and institutional contexts: Ethiopia's state-centric system emphasises equitable distribution, but lacks market flexibility; Lesotho's leasehold framework improves tenure security and credit access, but struggles with harmonising customary and statutory systems; and Botswana's decentralised tribal land governance fosters community participation, but faces unequal land distribution and climate-related challenges.

Shared priorities across these countries include tenure security, equitable land access and sustainable land use, which are critical for promoting agricultural growth, socio-economic equity and rural transformation. However, challenges like bureaucratic inefficiencies, gender disparities and resource constraints persist. External factors such as climate change and globalisation further emphasise the need for climate-resilient practices and technological integration, including GIS and remote sensing. This study highlights the importance of adaptive governance, integrating customary and statutory frameworks and fostering participatory land reform. These insights contribute to the discourse on rural land governance, offering valuable lessons for

addressing emerging challenges and achieving sustainable, equitable rural development.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

1. *Integrated Land Management Systems:* Future research should prioritise systems that harmonise customary and statutory tenure practices. This integration enhances tenure security, streamlines administrative efficiency and supports sustainable development.
2. *Community Participation:* Policies must emphasise inclusive decision-making processes involving local communities to ensure legitimacy and sustainability of land reforms. Active participation fosters trust, tailored solutions and effectiveness in governance.
3. *Addressing Gender Inequality:* Strengthening women's land rights and promoting their active involvement in land management is vital for gender equity, food security and rural development. Reducing disparities empowers communities and enhances overall development.
4. *Climate-Resilient Practices:* Developing strategies to integrate climate change considerations into land use planning and promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices are essential for long-term sustainability. Future research should explore innovative approaches to mitigate climate change impacts on rural livelihoods.
5. *Technological Advancements:* Future policies should harness technologies like GIS and remote sensing to enhance land mapping, monitoring and management. These advancements support data-driven decision-making, streamline land administration and improve governance efficiency.
6. *Strengthening Local Institutions:* Empowering local institutions, including land boards and community-based organisations (CBOs), is vital for effective land management. Policies should focus on equipping these institutions with the necessary skills, resources and authority to promote sustainable land governance and administration.

By addressing these future directions, policy-makers, practitioners and researchers can develop and implement policies that promote sustainable, equitable and prosperous rural development in Africa.

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