



PRESS RELEASE

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**CONFRONTING THE BANTUSTAN ENDEMIC IN THE FACE OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC
RURAL SOUTH AFRICA IS IN CRISIS!**

The government's enforcement of a national lockdown without any integrated plan for rural South Africa (save for minimising the risk of urban-rural transmissions by limiting movement), has vindicated our position as an organisation that the spatial compartmentalization of the country into so called 'homelands' was not undone with the arrival of a democratic dispensation in 1994. The social and economic disruption caused by the 21 day national lockdown will soon become apparent among millions of impoverished and downtrodden rural masses. Missing from the conversation, action and activism surrounding COVID-19 has been due consideration for rural narratives, which are critical for social and political solidarity.

On the 24th of March, President Ramaphosa announced that he would begin the process of ensuring that the national effort to combat and contain the virus is 'inclusive and enjoys the support of all stakeholder groups' and cited that traditional authorities would be part of this consultation. This, to the exclusion of the leaders of rural movements and organizations on the ground, who have been largely responsible for coordinating community led responses to crises past and present, including food insecurity, primary healthcare for the ill and elderly, the collapse of rural municipalities, and violation of rights in land by traditional authorities, etc. This is the same leadership and organizing which has ensured the survival of our communities in the face of minimal structural and other support. It is therefore no small coincidence that 10 days into the lockdown, there is still no plan for our communities. We remain quite simply, ill-prepared to fend for ourselves, to no fault of our own. Our health system is incapable of delivering us from the impending wrath of COVID-19: we do not have enough facilities, and those that exist are sparsely located. We have a very limited number of doctors, are subjected to painfully long queues, and there is a lack of basic resources in our hospitals. We cannot over state the importance of mitigating the potential negative impact in the face of a pandemic and thus, all efforts must be strengthened to prepare our communities. And so, although South Africa's confirmed figures remain relatively low, the arrival of the virus in rural areas could signal untold devastation. This, we argue, is a direct consequence of the maintenance of colonial borders and the relegation of rural SA citizens as inferior subjects in post-democratic South Africa: the Bantustan endemic.

Gross underdevelopment, (including poor planning at the level of national policy for land restitution, rural democracy and local governance) has meant that 18 million people living in South Africa continue to be denied meaningful opportunities to engage with broader society as

social-economic actors in their own right, 26 years on. The Bantustans endemic is further compounded by the State's legitimization of a bi-lateral system of governance that applies exclusively to rural citizens. Unlike the rest of South Africa therefore, our citizenship exists merely as a legal fact. The arrogance with which the State expresses its disregard for rural citizens was demonstrated once more, with the passing of the Bantustans bills (which signalled a reiteration of Apartheid colonial law) despite fierce resistance and opposition by the people in their masses. Doing so confirmed our existing fears and suspicions: we are both separate *and* unequal.

We must rightfully condemn, and hold to account the South African government for rendering us, rural people, our families and communities vulnerable and largely unprepared to anticipate and prepare for future crises. A future which has now arrived in the form of the novel COVID-19 virus. A future where already strained social and economic conditions can only worsen. The government's lack of adequate planning, and accounting of rural South Africa will continue to have devastating consequences for families and the communities from which they come. The ARD calls on the government to devise and implement without any further delay, province and regional specific plans which account for their unique contexts, which are at the same time, capable of mitigating against a healthcare backlog; food insecurity; access to water and sanitation; and potential layoffs for farmworkers and other precarious labor. We are also calling for a rolling out of a coordinated communications strategy across the board which is supported by intensive preventative campaigning for education and awareness around COVID-19 for our communities. Lastly, we are calling for state directed provision and distribution of essential goods and services during this time.

As the ARD, we will be monitoring the situation closely whilst continuing to work together with our partners to ensure that strong networks of care and solidarity with the most vulnerable, including the elderly are able to be maintained. We wish to reiterate our pleas to South African media, civil society and ordinary citizens, now more than ever for social and political solidarity; to stand with the overwhelming masses of the poor and most vulnerable, including rural citizens.

The Alliance for Rural Democracy is a collective of civil society organizations and community groupings championing rural democracy and restorative land justice. For more information about the ARD contact the office of the National Coordinator, Constance Mogale or visit www.allianceforruraldemocracy.org

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