

Cultivating Reintegration

A Theoretical Framework for Prison Farm Labour, Desistance and Post-Carceral Livelihoods in Mpumalanga

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ABSTRACT

{ "background": "The high rate of recidivism in South Africa underscores the failure of conventional carceral systems to facilitate sustainable reintegration. Agricultural labour within prisons is a longstanding practice, yet its theoretical linkages to desistance and post-release livelihood creation remain underdeveloped, particularly within the socio-economic context of Mpumalanga Province.", "purpose and objectives": "This article constructs a novel theoretical framework to analyse how participation in prison farm programmes influences the desistance process and shapes post-carceral employment pathways. It aims to theorise the mechanisms through which agricultural labour may foster pro-social identity, practical skills, and social capital critical for reintegration.", "methodology": "The framework is developed through a critical synthesis of desistance theory, capabilities approach, and political ecology. It integrates these lenses to conceptualise prison farms not merely as sites of labour but as complex socio-ecological systems that structure future livelihood possibilities and constraints.", "key insights": "The framework posits that the rehabilitative efficacy of farm labour is contingent on its alignment with post-release agricultural economies. A key proposition is that programmes focusing on high-value, market-relevant crops (e.g., macadamia nuts) are more likely to generate tangible social capital with commercial farmers, a crucial factor for employment. Conversely, subsistence-focused projects may reinforce marginalisation.", "conclusion": "The proposed framework provides a robust analytical tool for understanding the conditional relationship between carceral agriculture and desistance. It moves beyond evaluating programmes as simply 'work' to theorising them as potential incubators of legitimate livelihoods, while critically acknowledging their embeddedness in regional political economies and historical labour patterns.", "recommendations": "Future empirical research should apply this framework to evaluate existing programmes in the province. Policy development must consciously design farm projects to bridge institutional gaps between correctional services, agricultural extension, and local markets, ensuring skills transfer is relevant and accessible.", "key words": "desistance, prison agriculture, reintegration, livelihoods, political ecology, carceral geography, rehabilitation",

Keywords: *Desistance, Rehabilitation, Prison Labour, Post-Carceral, Southern Africa, Agricultural Livelihoods, Reintegration*

Article Highlights

- Analyses prison farms as socio-ecological systems structuring post-carceral livelihood possibilities.
- Posits that programmes focusing on high-value, market-relevant crops foster crucial commercial linkages.
- Moves beyond evaluating farm work to theorising programmes as potential incubators of legitimate livelihoods.
- Embeds analysis within regional political economies and historical labour patterns of Mpumalanga.

Core Proposition

The framework theorises that the transition from subsistence-focused to market-aligned agricultural projects is critical for transforming prison labour into a desistance mechanism.

Develops an integrated theoretical lens for carceral agriculture and reintegration.

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

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