

**Land Reform and Poverty Alleviation:  
Experiences from Namibia**

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## **1. Land reform and poverty alleviation**

Redistributive land reform in Namibia is widely regarded as a prerequisite for successful rural development, and hence, poverty alleviation. It is significant, however, that neither the *Poverty Reduction Strategy for Namibia*, which was approved by Cabinet in 1998, nor the *National Poverty Reduction Action Programme 2001-2005* which is based on it, deal with the issue of land reform and poverty reduction. On the contrary, these documents leave the distinct impression that little can be expected from land redistribution in terms of poverty alleviation in the long term. According to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, 'the agricultural base is too weak to offer a sustainable basis for prosperity'. It foresees that in 'a quarter century from now, the large majority of the country's inhabitants...are likely to have moved into urban centres...' (RoN 1998a :5). A World Bank study on poverty reduction concluded that the opportunities for developing cultivation on redistributed freehold farmland seemed limited and could at best achieve a 'one-time gain for poverty reduction' in those few areas where cultivation was possible on land presently farmed by extensive methods (World Bank 1997: 12).

The very Cabinet which approved the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* in 1998 was quoted as having decided at the First Cabinet Retreat in December 2000 that 'without achieving a breakthrough in the land reform programme, the fight against poverty would not succeed'. In the same breath, it was reported that members of the Cabinet had agreed 'unanimously...that land reform is an imperative if Namibia is to maintain its peace and political and national and racial harmony' (New Era 22.12.2000-1.1.2001).

Finally, the *National Land Policy* states unequivocally that 'Government policy will at all times seek to secure and promote the interests of the poor' (RoN 1998b: 1).

The brief discussion above suggests that politicians and civil servants may have different perceptions about the importance of land reform in poverty alleviation programmes, and more specifically, what redistributive land reform in particular can achieve in terms of poverty reduction.

## **2. Land Reform since Independence**

Despite these different expectations regarding land reform, Namibia started its land reform programme in 1990 with the acquisition of freehold farms. Progress was slow. Until the mid-1990s, less than 20 freehold farms had been purchased for redistribution. However, with the implementation of the first National Development Plan covering the period 1995/5-1999/00, government committed N\$ 20 million per year for the purchase of commercial farms for the five year planning period (Werner 1999: 316-317). Another N\$ 100 million has been committed by Cabinet for land purchases during the second plan period (2001-2005), amounting to N\$ 20 million per year (Pohamba 2001: 6).

While these financial commitments accelerated the acquisition of freehold farms considerably, the pace of redistributive land reform is still too slow for many Namibians. Records obtained from the Ministry of Lands Resettlement and Rehabilitation show that by May 2001 a total of 97 farms had been acquired by government since 1990. It is not clear whether or not this figure includes 57 farms and portions of farms that were transferred by the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation in 1999 (RoN 2001: 3). In early 2001 the total area available for redistribution in the freehold farming sector amounted to 568,821 hectares.

The total number of people resettled since 1990 amounts to 6,661 families. Of these only 30% or 1,964 families were settled on freehold land acquired by government for redistribution. The latter category of settlers consists of 1,160 families who were allocated a portion of land on one of the 66 farms which have been allocated so far, as well as 804 families who are members of resettlement projects in freehold farming areas. Altogether 5,501 families have been settled on resettlement projects. Of these 4,697 or 85% were accommodated in resettlement projects on non-freehold land.

In addition, 300 farmers have been granted loans by Agribank to buy freehold farmland under the Affirmative Action Loan Scheme since its inception in 1992. The money advanced in this way amounts to approximately N\$ 190 million.

No tenure reform has taken place so far. In the absence of legislation to protect the rights of people who enjoy customary tenure rights, wealthy businesspeople and politicians have enclosed large tracts of communal grazing land for individual use. Indications are that this is increasing the pressure on grazing areas, as dry season grazing is either drastically reduced, or no longer accessible as a result of fences. This is likely to further marginalize many small farmers who are already finding it impossible to subsist on agriculture alone.

### **3. Thinking on land reform before Independence**

Systematic deliberations on the land question started in the latter half of the 1970s. This was not only a matter of concern to the liberation movement SWAPO. Political parties and institutions inside the country also addressed the issue and developed a land reform programme. At Independence, therefore, the need for redistributive land reform was no longer an issue – everybody agreed on its necessity. Instead, the objectives and nature of redistribution had to be agreed upon. It was inevitable that all the stakeholders argued from positions that had been developed before Independence and under conditions that were different to the post-Independence period.

#### **3.1 Developments in exile**

In the mid-1970s the United Nations established the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka, Zambia. Its broad mandate was to prepare Namibians in exile for Independence. It was composed of several Divisions, each with teaching and research obligations. The Agricultural and Land Resources Division was responsible, *inter alia*, to undertake research in

- land reclamation and its possible development;
- conversion of white owned ranches and ‘native reserves’;
- existing livestock and future possibilities; and
- existing and future tillage possibilities (UNIN 1979: v).

In 1979 the United Nations Institute published *Toward Agrarian Reform. Policy Options for Namibia* (Unin 1979). The study was based on the work of S. Mshonga, the Deputy General Manager of the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) in Zimbabwe. Much of this study was incorporated into the more comprehensive *Namibia. Perspectives for National Reconstruction and Development* (UNIN 1986: 128ff).

In terms of the approach to land reform elaborated by the United Nations Institute in Lusaka the post-colonial state was to play a powerful and central role in matters of land redistribution and tenure. In view of the dualistic nature of land ownership in Namibia – freehold vs. non-freehold – the study argued that the state would have a cardinal role to

play in correcting this inequality by repossessing and redistributing land held under freehold tenure. More specifically, the state needed to be invested with

sufficient powers to be able to control, regulate, allocate and marshal all resources, especially land and water, so as to correct the prevailing imbalances (Ibid.: 130).

The UNIN study proposed that ranches in southern and central Namibia should be kept large 'for them to be viable and efficient' (Ibid.: 131). Small-holder farms, which 'are more efficient in terms of output per unit area, return on capital and on labour' were only regarded as an option in the northern parts of the country. The large ranches in the southern and central parts of the country should be turned into state farms or co-operatives (Ibid.). State farms were regarded as ideal vehicles for providing conditions 'for establishing a sound and stable agricultural system, social equity, and political education'. Acknowledging severe problems with state farms elsewhere in Africa, the UNIN study nonetheless favoured them as productive structures because

- the state might have been able to intervene through state farms in order to avert major food shortages, should agricultural dislocation have followed Independence; and
- state control of production would help to prevent over- or underproduction.

It proposed to pre-empt some of the worst problems with state farms by providing necessary management skills (Ibid: 134-135).

The notion of state control also permeated thinking on land tenure systems. Freehold tenure was identified as an unsuitable land tenure option. It was perceived to be open to all sorts of abuse, 'as the government has very little control over it' (ibid.: 132). Consequently, leasehold tenure was put forward as a possible option for post-Independence Namibia. Under this system, all land would be owned by the state on behalf of the people, i.e. 'the state (would) be owning the land absolutely'. Utilisation of land would be at the behest of the state and against payment of rent. The advantage of this system was perceived to be that as owner of the land, the state could 'ensure that its agrarian reform and other socio-economic and political objectives are met through several institutions and financial means'. Similarly, the question of compensation for land would not arise (Ibid.).

Co-operative farming has occupied a prominent place in thinking on rural development in Namibia. Co-operatives were characterised as 'higher forms of political and economic organisation in which the means of production are owned collectively and are used for the benefit of the community as a whole' (Ibid: 135). Several different agricultural co-operatives were proposed, including state co-operatives in which members work on state land as well as private co-operatives where individual land owners pool their land. In addition, it mentioned producer and marketing co-operatives (Ibid.).

The usefulness of production co-operatives in agriculture was questioned in a later UNIN study (Aulakh et al 1989). Referring to an FAO study which 'could not point out a single successful experiment involving collective production by pastoralists in Africa' (Ibid.: 86), it recommended that 'farmers engaged in the production of crops, cattle and karakul could be encouraged to form co-operative credit and marketing societies' (Ibid.: 87). The authors recognised the importance of individual ownership of land and 'place(d) emphasis on joint cultivation and/or sharing of farm support services collectively' (Ibid.: 85).

On the basis of these analyses, the UNIN studies proposed a model of co-operative farming which was based on the Zimbabwean Model B. UNIN found this model attractive

as it was perceived to assist people with very few resources to become established in agriculture. Co-operatives would facilitate the provisioning of resources such as land, tillage equipment, services, agricultural credit, buildings, livestock and equipment (UNIN 1989: 129). However, these studies recognised that for this model to succeed it required well-motivated beneficiaries with ‘a heightened ideological consciousness’. In the long run, Model B was regarded as implementing socialist transformation of small scale agriculture (Ibid.: 129).

Apart from Model ‘B’, the *Perspectives for National Reconstruction and Development* also proposed Zimbabwe’s Models ‘A’ and ‘C’ as possible models for post-independence Namibia. Nothing was proposed on how land reform would deal with grazing land allocated to settlers. At the time when the *Perspectives* were written, Model ‘D’ had not yet been developed in Zimbabwe (UNIN 1986: 129-130).

The possibilities of nationalising land at Independence were discussed as well. The *Perspectives* argued that ‘the time span and method of expropriation ‘ would depend to a large extent on the attitude of white settlers towards the new government. In the event of whites leaving the country, nationalisation of land would have to happen fast. In the event of whites electing to stay, ways of compensating for the nationalisation of land may have had to be considered. But the study was well aware that any programme of nationalisation would meet with stiff resistance (Ibid.: 134).

Land tenure reform in the non-freehold areas received little attention in the *Perspectives*. Customary tenure was characterised as an open access regime, which ‘can be really damaging to the ecology, because it does not encourage investment in soil and water conservation, fencing etc., either by the individual land-user or by the community as a whole’ (Ibid.: 133). However, customary tenure was ‘seen as a basis for creating a modern socialist society’ on account of its perceived emphasis on co-operation, mutual respect and responsibility. Based on these rather brief considerations, the *Perspectives* proposed that in the event that customary tenure systems be allowed to continue in Namibia, ‘legislation to control the grazing patterns, and selling and purchase of land’ be introduced (Ibid.:).

To summarise, land redistribution and tenure reform in UNIN’s deliberations, were based on socialist transformation, with the state playing a central role in planning and controlling production and tenure.

### **3.2 Internal developments**

Land reform – both in terms of land redistribution and tenure reform – also featured prominently in political and economic programmes of internal parties in Namibia. Political parties grouped under the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) agreed that land reform was important. However, whereas UNIN (and SWAPO) conceptualised redistributive land reform and tenure reform in terms of socialist transformation, the internal parties regarded widening of access to freehold land for commercialising black farmers as an important element of socio-economic and political reform. Where UNIN emphasised the need to redistribute white owned ranches, all major stakeholders inside the country regarded tenure reform in the ‘communal areas’ as a priority. And finally, while UNIN probably regarded the socialisation of agricultural land as essential for poverty alleviation, the internal groupings were guided in their reform efforts by the principle of private ownership. Underlying the conceptualisation of land reform inside the country was the aim to develop and entrench a black middle class by extending the right to own land under freehold title to the country’s black population, both in the urban and rural areas. This, it was hoped, would

provide a bulwark against the forces of liberation and the threat of wholesale nationalisation of land.

The blueprint for this development trajectory was laid in the mid-1960s by the *Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs* (the so-called Odendaal Commission). The Commission was entrusted to make recommendations on the accelerated development of the black population in Namibia. Its recommendations amounted to a programme for the development of a small minority of farmers in the 'native reserves' into a class of wealthy commercial farmers. Apart from a broad programme of capital expenditure, the *Commission* recommended that a limited fencing programme be introduced in reserves in order to convert subsistence farming into an exchange economy. Such a programme would also contribute towards optimal pasture utilisation through rotational grazing (Werner 1997: 14-16). These recommendations provided the impetus for the official surveying and enclosure of communal pastures in the eastern and northern parts of the country in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1982 and 1984 development conferences were held under the auspices of the then Directorate of Development Co-ordination in order to review development policies and to bring them in line with the political demands of the time. In 1987 the results of these conferences were summarised as *The National Development Strategy of South West Africa* (SWA 1987). In essence the *Strategy* confirmed the principles recommended by the Odendaal Commission. Customary tenure systems were to be gradually transformed towards 'private ownership of land, aimed at higher productivity and more efficient utilisation of production factors'. 'Communal land ownership' was explicitly regarded 'as a stumbling block to improved quality of life and welfare' (SWA 1987: 21). The so-called Cabinet of the interim government undertook to use these recommendations as far as possible in the formulation of policy.

At Independence, therefore, two diametrically opposed concepts of land reform had been in existence. However, policies and legislation since 1990 seem to have been shaped primarily by concepts of land reform developed in exile. The state has been centrally involved in the identification of land for allocation, its purchase, planning, allocation and the selection of settlers since Independence. With regard to ownership rights of land allocated by the state, the *Land Reform Act* provides for leaseholds to be registered over such allocations with an option to buy after a five year probation period. It is interesting, however, that the Act tries to circumscribe the rights normally associated with a registered lease agreement. Section 46 subjects the right to sub-let, mortgage or any other encumbrance to prior written consent of the Minister. Similarly, support to settlers is provided by the state through the Ministry of Lands, and each resettlement scheme has its government appointed manager. As a rule, settlers do not participate in the selection of freehold farms for acquisition and planning or the management of resettlement projects.

#### **4. Experiences with land reform and its connection to poverty**

It is difficult to draw any lessons from experiences with land reform and its connection to poverty alleviation. In the first place, it is not entirely clear what redistributive land reform is expected to achieve with regard to poverty alleviation. It was indicated in the Introduction that policy statements on land reform and poverty reduction are ambiguous. Secondly, only two assessments of resettlement have been carried out so far. In 1998 a group of post-graduate students carried out an assessment of resettlement projects in two regions (NAPCOD 1998), while the Directorate of Co-operatives in the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development commissioned a study on resettlement co-

operatives in 2000 (Werner *et al* 2000). No systematic and independent evaluations of the land reform and resettlement programme in its entirety exist.

The Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation has established a monitoring unit in the Ministry. The activities of the unit have been limited to resettlement projects, and have not included the monitoring of progress of settlers who have been allocated portions of freehold land. All attempts to assess resettlement – including those of the Ministry – are hampered by an absence of baseline data and records since the inception of schemes. This makes it impossible to obtain a reliable picture of whether land reform is reducing poverty, and if so, to what an extent and at what cost.

In view of these concerns, most of the observations below will be based on the two studies mentioned. Nothing can be said on resettlement involving allocations of grazing land on freehold land to individual households.

With regard to co-operative resettlement schemes, it has emerged clearly that the success of these schemes was severely compromised by a lack of settler selection. In most cases beneficiaries were not selected according to specific criteria, but joined resettlement schemes after having been evicted from commercial farms. One key defining characteristic of several such projects thus is that they have been used as a means of attempting to deal with a number of special needs caseloads resulting from serious social problems of a national nature. Such special needs caseloads have included: landless returnees, unemployed landless farm workers, and the San. The socio-economy and socio-psychology of these groups has made the resettlement process far more difficult than it would have been had criteria been used to select more suitable settlers. In the event, it has meant that many projects have become mainly social welfare projects providing free accommodation, food and other transfers, which show few signs of being resettlement projects as commonly understood.

Project beneficiaries come from a variety of backgrounds. However, nearly all have worked as farm labourers on either communal or freehold farms. A variety of practical skills have thus been acquired and experiences gained. Levels of formal primary and secondary education appear to be low, with many informants being illiterate. As most beneficiaries were not systematically selected, it was not possible to match beneficiary skills and experience to the needs of specific projects.

The inability to balance need with suitability on many resettlement schemes has also meant that settlers are dependent on government for the provision of services and inputs. Few beneficiaries exhibited a desire for self-reliance and independence. Rather, attitudes of dependency towards the projects and the free food, accommodation and other transfers they involve, are the norm. This is perhaps to be expected because no realistic alternative to on-going dependency has been presented to them, and because no incentives or timeframes for moving towards these alternatives have been discussed.

Resettlement project beneficiaries, especially those from special needs groups, need advice and training if they are to organise and manage their own affairs in the new and demanding resettlement environment they find themselves. Where beneficiary committees exist, their decision-making powers in relation to those of Ministry officials appear to be unclear. In some cases, officials are members of committees, in others they must approve committee decisions. In most cases, MLRR project co-ordinators or supervisors can be said to have adopted a paternalistic relationship towards project beneficiaries, which constrains the development of internal beneficiary leadership. It is also not clear how much advice and training these committees have received. Ministry officials tasked with working with these



committees have not been trained. Organisation and management support is required in relation to both the social, technical and business enterprise spheres.

Little co-operation and co-ordination exists between the Ministries responsible for resettlement and agricultural services at the national, regional or local levels. On the contrary, with isolated exceptions, MAWRD staff tend to steer clear of resettlement projects as far as possible, and the MLRR has, for the most part, given up in their limited attempts to seek collaboration. It appears that neither the senior management nor political leadership of the respective Ministries has been involved on a sustained basis in attempts to engineer inter-Ministerial collaboration. The result is that beneficiaries did not receive the kind of support they need to farm independently. In all projects beneficiaries require assistance towards developing financially cost-effective and efficient marketing systems if they are not to remain dependent on government services. However, the need for beneficiary-managed marketing has not been addressed in most cases. In practice, marketing costs are largely met by the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation. In addition, marketing usually relies on government transport and drivers.

On co-operative resettlement schemes, beneficiaries do not enjoy any formalised rights to their land. This clearly limits the stake that beneficiaries feel in the projects which in turn decreases motivation and discourages long-term planning. Current management systems on many resettlement projects do not employ methods that ensure worker performance and discipline. Existing systems for motivating work on activities involving collective labour are based on food-for-work managed by Ministry officials, by forms of compulsion, or on worker goodwill when managed by beneficiaries themselves. In the latter case, where individuals are unwilling to work, it seems they nevertheless receive the benefits accruing to those who do work. Inevitably, the result is that beneficiary productivity is extremely low.

The numbers of settlers at each project appear not to have been determined on the basis of their income needs and the income generating potential of the project activities. The projects nearly always involve multiple enterprises, including combinations of commercial and subsistence irrigated vegetable and fruit production, commercial and subsistence rainfed grain production, commercial cash crop production, commercial and subsistence beef and goat and milk production, equine and poultry production. In addition, various non-farm production income-generating enterprises are integral to beneficiary livelihoods, notably agricultural labouring and handicraft production. Assessing the viability of project enterprises to provide for the livelihoods of beneficiaries is thus a complex undertaking. Further, it is one about which there is currently virtually no readily available data. Also, target incomes for project beneficiaries have not been set.

With regard to the environment, there is reason for concern as to the sustainability of water supplies on some projects with irrigation. It is not known if the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) has approved current rates of groundwater abstraction. It is reported that in some instances where ground water investigations were conducted by the DWA, current rates of abstraction are unsustainable. On the other hand, livestock stocking rates in most projects are below carrying capacity because beneficiaries are still in the process of building up their individual herds. Of concern is the fact that very few, if any, resettlement schemes have any sort of grazing management system in place or envisaged for the future, nor had any related beneficiary training been provided.

Finally, farm labourers seem to be the losers in redistributive land reform. In most cases, they had to leave farms which were subdivided and allocated to new settlers. Government seems to be indifferent in this regard. It maintains that new settlers are to be blamed for

these evictions and not the Ministry of Lands. However, no policy is in place to deal with this problem.

The issue of farm workers presents government and land reform in Namibia with a difficult problem. If land acquired for redistribution is allocated to farm labourers currently employed on these farms, it is likely that sustainable redistributive land reform will not put more people on freehold farms than the agricultural sector is currently employing. It must be borne in mind that approximately 1,000 ha of freehold farmland is supporting one farm worker and his dependents at present. In terms of resettlement guidelines laid down by the Land Reform Advisory Commission, settlers should be allocated at least 1,000 ha of grazing land in the central and northern cattle ranching regions of the country, and not less than 3,000 ha in the more arid south. If, however, farm workers are evicted in favour of new settlers, government would be solving one problem by creating another one: large numbers of unemployed farm workers. This suggests that the potential of redistributive land reform to reduce poverty significantly is severely limited.

Experiences with co-operative resettlement projects in Namibia seem to confirm some of the problems identified with similar models elsewhere in the world. In the first place, a top-down approach to resettlement perpetuates dependency on government. It is significant that despite the objective expressed in the *White Paper on Resettlement Policy* (RoN 1997: 6) to restrict government support to the first five years after which settlers are expected to be self-supporting, very few projects and settlers have achieved this. In some cases projects are still dependent on government support close to ten years after their inception. It is imperative that beneficiaries are trained to manage their own project, rather than be dependent on government officials. This requires, however, that government devolves decision making powers to settlers.

Settlers by and large do not have the means to make any capital investments in their enterprises. They either do not have any capital or are no position to obtain credit. Without secure tenure on resettlement schemes this is also not likely to happen. Up to now, government has supported beneficiaries materially. This is not sustainable in the long run, and settlers must be encouraged to obtain credit to invest.

Training in various aspects of agricultural production and management is imperative if resettlement is to succeed. Evidence suggests that the majority of poor people settled by the Ministry of Lands are not only poor in terms of material assets, but also in skills. In view of this, the question needs to be asked whether agricultural projects are the most cost-efficient way of alleviating poverty.

It would appear that with regard to allocations of grazing land to individual families, government is following an opposite strategy. After allocation, settlers do not receive any support from the Ministry of Lands, except in water emergencies or where additional fencing is required to demarcate a small holding. It can be assumed, however, that settlers in this category are not necessarily poor, since the ownership of livestock is a precondition for allocation.

Indications are that collective farming has failed in Namibia. Many settlers indicated that they would prefer to farm individual household plots. However, the notion of service co-operatives seems to hold some promise in assisting settlers with the provision of services such as marketing for example.

## 5. Prospects for land reform

The pace of land reform and in particular land redistribution is not likely to accelerate significantly in the foreseeable future. The main reason for this assertion is that the political balance of forces is stacked against the landless and dispossessed in particular. This, in turn, is related to the differential impact land dispossession had on indigenous communities. Briefly, dispossession affected only pastoralists, who practised trans-humance. Those communities in the north-western and north-eastern regions who practised cultivation and animal husbandry were never dispossessed of their land. Instead, colonial policies limited their mobility through the establishment of artificial boundaries. It is suggested that for these reasons, redistributive land reform never loomed large in the minds of the majority of these communities or SWAPO as their political party. Other issues were more pressing, such as the provision of water. The land question, therefore, simply did not occupy as central a place in the liberation struggle as politicians would like us to believe.

In addition, the dispossessed in Namibia constitute a small minority of the population. Mixed farmers in the north-western and north-eastern regions not only constitute the vast majority of Namibians, but also form the main constituency of the ruling party, SWAPO. The dispossessed, in turn, are not well organised, and thus do not wield any bargaining power. The ruling party is therefore under very little pressure to accelerate the process of land redistribution. This is borne out by the medium-term targets set by government. In terms of the draft National Development Plan for the 2000/01-2004/05 period, the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation aims to settle 36 families per year or a total of 180 over the five year planning period. This amounts to an estimated 1,080 people (RoN 2001b: 14-10). The budget for land acquisition approved by Cabinet has also not been adjusted for inflation and will remain N\$ 20 million per annum. In real terms, therefore, this budget is decreasing steadily. If anything, this suggests an even slower pace of redistribution than witnessed up to now.

The slow pace of implementation has allowed the new elite to acquire land in their own right. On the one hand, this involved the purchase of freehold land through the Affirmative Action Loan Scheme. Since Independence, about 300 previously disadvantaged Namibians have acquired their own farms under this scheme. On the other hand, and more detrimental to the poor and marginalized farmers in the non-freehold areas, many wealthy individuals and politicians have enclosed communal pastures for their own use. It would thus not be farfetched to suggest that the new elite has a vested interest in the status quo and is thus not likely to move too fast on either land redistribution or tenure reform.

The restitution of ancestral land rights has already been sacrificed on the altar of these interests, albeit under the guise of a consensus resolution of the *National Conference on the Land Question and Land Reform* in 1991. A former senior minister, Ben Amathila, articulated these interests very well when he argued that the historical aspect of the land question, i.e. dispossession and hence restitution of rights, should not be dragged into the land reform debate. He reminded the members of the National Assembly that he was a farm owner in the freehold area, and added that it would be 'a most unsatisfactory state of affairs if somebody would appear today to claim this to be his ancestral land and that I would have to move (Republikein 17.5.200).

It is difficult to assess what kind of tenure reform government may implement. The *Communal Land Reform Bill* was submitted to the National Assembly in early 2000. Although it was passed by the Assembly, the National Council rejected the Bill. A

prominent reason for rejecting the Bill was that members of the National Council felt that it did not address the issue of communal rangeland enclosures adequately. It could be argued that the *Bill* was designed to provide a framework and procedure for the legalisation of fencing. It did not make any proposals on how rights to communal grazing could be protected.

Government is not likely to confer common property rights over pastures and associated resources to communities of users. This may seem odd in view of the fact that legislation has been passed a number of years ago to confer use rights of game to communities who were prepared to establish legally registered conservancies. Such rights are limited and do not confer powers to communities to exclude people from their grazing land, for example. The principle of inclusion and/or exclusion is fundamental to property rights, however. Conferring property rights to land would thus mean that the power of land allocation and administration would be transferred to communities, implying that some other institution would lose it. This redistribution of power away from traditional leaders is likely to bring about a completely different balance of power in non-freehold areas, something politicians at the national level are likely to be comfortable with.

## **6. Options for assistance**

The pace of land reform in Namibia is constrained mainly by a shortage of financial and human resources. Although the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation alleges that freehold farmers are not forthcoming in making their land available, evidence suggests that there is much more land available on the market than the Ministry is able to buy. With more financial resources government would have been able to buy in excess of 100 freehold farms per annum.

In reality, however, the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation was not able to spend all the monies voted for land acquisition by the National Assembly during the first five year planning period - NDP1 - which ran from 1995 to 2000. These amounted to N\$ 20 million per annum or N\$ 100 million over the five-year period. (RoN 2001b: 14-8). In FY 1998/1999, e.g., 248 commercial farms had been offered to the Ministry, of which only 11 were purchased. The remainder were waived, i.e. owners were given permission to sell their farms on the open market (RoN 1999: 18). During FY 1999/2000 only N\$ 3,85 million out of an allocated N\$ 20 million for land acquisition was spent with the remainder having been returned to treasury (RoN 2001: 10). A similar situation was reported for FY 2000/2001, when the Ministry bought only 18 out of 173 farms offered to government. (Pohamba 2001: 6).

This suggests strongly that the Ministry of Lands does not have sufficient capacity to manage the acquisition and allocation of land efficiently. In its own assessment, 'the shortage of qualified land use planners, land valuers, land managers, resettlement officers and land economists has made land reform difficult' (RoN 2001b: 14-8). A more specific training needs assessment based on these broad areas of support identified by the Ministry should form the basis for any support, be it from government or donors.

Assistance, particularly from donors, does require that the aims and objectives of redistributive land reform in particular be spelled out more clearly by government. At present it would appear as if land redistribution is expected to address a range of different issues such as redressing past injustices, poverty alleviation, environmental protection (by relieving pressures on communal land) and increased agricultural productivity and output. At present, no prioritisation of these objectives exists. This may in turn be related to the absence of comprehensive cost-benefit analyses, which would enable government to weigh

different options for land redistribution against another and make more informed decisions.

Socio-economic analysis and planning is not only lacking at national level, but also at the project level. A recent review of co-operative resettlement projects (Werner *et al* 2000) found that no business plans had been drawn up for those resettlement projects visited. For an agricultural development project it is essential to calculate the income that may be generated from the agricultural enterprise as a basis for determining a project's labour requirements as well as the number of settlers that a project can sustain, and the capital investment that the project warrants (Werner *et al* 2000: 39). Similarly, no systematic records are kept to assess the actual financial and social performance of project enterprises. A specific problem in trying to assess social performance is the lack of baseline data on the status of beneficiaries before they joined projects (Ibid.: 40). Apart from a lack of baseline data, the monitoring of land redistribution is further hampered by a lack of qualified staff. The newly established Division of Planning, Research and Projects Development should be supported through training and exchange visits to build its capacity.

The capacity to carry out economic analyses and draw up project plans accordingly, as well as capacity to monitor resettlement could be strengthened through technical assistance.

Although the Ministry still does not have enough land use planners, it has made great strides in building land use planning capacity through the development and institutionalisation of training courses in this field in the Polytechnic of Namibia. The benefits of this seem to manifest themselves already. These efforts to train local land use planners could be supported

An aspect that is often neglected in resettlement projects is the social component. Resettlement projects consist of many family units, the smallest projects consisting of ten and the largest in excess of 1,400 families. It was found on co-operative resettlement schemes that managers of such projects were ill-equipped to deal with social problems. Skills in group mobilisation and motivation and dispute resolution, for example, are essential to ensure settler retention. Staff of the Ministry who wish to acquire these skills should be supported through training programmes.

The capacity of settlers on co-operative resettlement schemes to plan and manage their enterprises seems to be completely lacking. This creates and perpetuates a dangerous dependence on the Ministry of Lands with regard to important decisions, provisions of inputs and marketing. The feasibility of providing land reform beneficiaries with 'starter packs' tailored to their specific situations should be investigated. These could consist of limited financial support but should include training in basic farm management and planning. It should be borne in mind that beneficiaries of land in the freehold sector do not receive any support from the Ministry of Lands, except where fences need to be erected to define the boundaries of a subdivision and in case of emergencies regarding water. Training in issues such as animal health, animal and range management as well as marketing may be very useful.

Little can be said on how possible land tenure reform in non-freehold areas can be supported until the Act has been passed. If the first *Communal Land Reform Bill* is anything to go by, the Ministry could benefit from technical and training support in implementing the envisaged changes in land administration, such as the establishment of Regional Land Boards, for example.

## 7. Conclusion

Land reform in Namibia has progressed at a very slow pace. While a number of freehold farms have been purchased for resettlement, government has not been able to meet the demands of the poor and unemployed. Targets for land redistribution suggest that land reform is not anticipated to play a major role in poverty alleviation. It is more likely that issues such as national security will drive land redistribution rather than poverty

With regard to land tenure reform in non-freehold areas, very little has been achieved. Ten years after Independence, communities subsisting on non-freehold land are still waiting for appropriate legislation. The interests of those who have fenced off communal pastures are likely to stall attempts to implement meaningful tenure reform.

Despite these considerations, land redistribution in particular is not going to disappear as an issue from the Namibian political landscape. The challenge remains to find sustainable ways to address the political demands for redistribution. A precondition for success in this regard is that policy makers and senior civil servants become more open to rational and scientific debate and move away from purely populist demands and advocacy.

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