

# Land Reform in SA: Response to CDE Report

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This Centre for Development Enterprise (CDE) report, edited by Ann Bernstein, reminds me of the South African type of white liberals who used to speak in the apartheid parliament on behalf of blacks, who had no voice in the white Parliament. Their frame of reference was their black domestic workers, labourers or cleaners. They used to come across as people who knew exactly what blacks want or what is good for them.

It has begged a question, "Other than DFID who funded the research, who is the audience for this report. Is it the private sector, civil society, foreign governments, Donors"?

The report is presented as though it is superior to other surveys or land reform pieces of research, perhaps also judging by the number of professors involved. Whilst I have not seen the tools and methods used for data collection I have already picked up a serious problem with the reported questions like "I would like land even if I struggled", "would like land even if I could earn well", "would like land later in life" "would like job or house as opposed to land". These are obviously "leading questions, which may significantly influence the respondent, depending on ones circumstances. It's like asking someone "would you like to go to Iraq even if there is war?" The report is not very clear on the sampling method used to arrive at the 2144 respondents; it has not given the demographic and geographic breakdown of these respondents.

Our population is about 50 million, of which about 70% is rural. How can a sample of 2144 be representative of that population? What could be the basis of the nation considering the recommendations of this report, including abandoning its current land reform programme; given the small size of the sample? It appears the main sources of information were media reports, websites, "think tank" opinions. This makes the methodology used in this report similar to that used by the dubious "Dr" Phillip Du Toit in his book, the great South African Land Scandal. It remains curious to me which type of South African blacks can conclude that we must now abandon our land reform program.

My understanding of the thrust of this report is that we as a nation are advised to **complete the unfinished business of black spot removals, to perfect the spatial planning of apartheid, by Americanising our rural areas**, through a deliberate process of encouraging a systematic wholesale urbanisation of the rural communities. The effect of this will be the 100% release of farmland, to be used productively by the decreasing few who are best at using land for commercial agriculture, namely the

whites. This few would then be the dominant factor in the land market, which the report suggests should drive land redistribution in South Africa.

The report goes further and suggests a land reform task team, excluding government, which would drive the proposed land reform programme. The urbanisation and housing type of land reform could mean that we consider establishing the types of Harlem in New York, where our South African informal settlements and peri-urban areas are up-graded by providing better and proper houses and services. This would make the rural blacks very happy in their new environment and never to look back.

I have found subtle and tactical deception and misinformation in this report for example that “the market is a powerful force for redistribution, and that the private sector is engaged in a large number of development and reform- related activities” If this is true I would like ABSA, Standard Bank, First National Bank, Land Bank and any other Financial institution that finances land purchases to disclose their figures on how much land transfers have they financed for each of the racial groups in South Africa, the extend of land, the size of the loan and the products that they have to support land reform in this country.

CDE should substantiate their finding with evidence or support from these financial institutions. My gut feeling is that these institutions are still supporting the “bankable” clients, and our history tells us that these are the white farmers. Very little land has been transferred to blacks through commercial banks, that is, in line with the vision of our land reform programme. Even the Land Bank, which is supported by Government, may have improved their outlook in the recent past, in terms of supporting the victims of racial land dispossession, through the implementation of LRAD. If my view is incorrect then I would like to be assisted by CDE with facts and figures from these institutions.

The land reform initiatives from the cotton and sugar industries are indeed commendable, that is, that of supporting small growers and emerging farmers. But even these initiatives have not transferred significant parcels of land to the previously advantaged blacks compared to the size of land held by the said industries. The research conducted by PLAAS, based at the University of Western Cape, showed that almost all the equity schemes, which this CDE report now commends, were a dismal failure as they did not effectively transfer the land to the land reform beneficiaries, they did not ensure ownership and management of projects by beneficiaries, they did not ensure a lasting flow of benefits to them. Instead these equity schemes enriched the white landowners as they also used them to resolve their debt problems. I tend to believe the PLAAS report than the CDE report. The other private sector initiatives outlined by CDE are a wish list, which if they truly benefit the Africans, should be replicated.

The Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs is on record several times, requesting the private sector to demonstrate in concrete terms their support for land reform. Her latest intervention was the launch of the AGRIBEE framework document, where she invited proposals. The reality is that the private sector in this industry was not proactive in this regard. What has been witnessed is a negative response to the AgriBEE document from some of the farming community. So far, the commitment of the

farming community towards the support of land reform is still in words, it needs to be demonstrated through specific projects. It is for this reason that I consider it a wild and unrealistic dream to think that one can get tangible results by leaving land reform to be driven by the market and the private sector in general.

It is also not true that the current land reform programme is the single “voice of government” and therefore there is a need for “other voices”, which could be reflected in the work of the proposed Land Reform Task Team. The truth is that even before the documentation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), all the victims of racial land dispossession debated the issue of the “return of our land” for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The RDP captured the essence of the aspirations and wishes of the landless victims of apartheid. The White Paper on the South African Land Policy was a product of the Green Paper, which took such a long participatory and consultative process by all interested parties. The land policy, therefore the vision, mission, strategy for all land reform programmes as directed by the will of the people and the development demands for the same. No one, in ones sober mind, could abandon the 100 years (20<sup>th</sup> century) of struggle and sweat for land because the “in-thing- for-the- 21<sup>st</sup> century” is “urbanisation and town-housing.”

The other contradiction that I find in this report is that it condemns land reform for being “too overloaded”, for including too many things like redress, land administration, poverty, farm workers, unemployment, Bantustan overcrowding, housing settlements, rural development etc, On the other hand the report recommends that the new land reform must be integrated with economic reconstruction, national development strategy and black empowerment. If we were to follow this proposal we would still end up with a land reform programme that would have to address the same things that are currently included in our land reform and other programmes of government, unless the proposal is in fact that we must abandon land reform and simply hope that other development programmes will somewhat address land reform, and thus leave land reform to chance.

The report suggests that government could continue with implementation of the current land reform programme, provided there is adequate capacity, proper allocation of resources/ budget for all land reform programmes and the vision of economic development. My question to CDE is, if all these conditions were met would CDE still recommend that we abandon the current land reform programme and consider urbanisation and housing (“adequately planned land release and effectively controlled settlement) as the “epicentre of the SA land reform strategy” that they are proposing. My guess is that the comment about resources, capacity and development is simply for criticising government, otherwise the real proposal is about “stopping the current land reform programme immediately and pursuing “urbanisation and housing”, which the CDE reports as what the majority of blacks want.

The CDE reports suggests three key programmes for the new land reform programme namely; accelerated restitution (limited to financial compensation), accelerated urban development (with improved housing and service delivery) and normalisation of the countryside. The report places special emphasis on **“rural claimants should be encouraged to take non-land options”** This makes it very clear that the researcher’s interest is not to address the skewed land ownership pattern in South Africa nor to pursue redress in line with our land policy. The assumption appears to be that the

South African urban centres are “industrialised” like America and should thus be able to absorb this massive pressure from the millions of people that will be coming from rural areas.

The report, intentionally or unintentionally, seems to forget that the SA rural economy was always vibrant between 1900 to the 1960, precisely because blacks had a lot of cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, horses, chicken, maize, beans, pumpkins, etc. The colonial and apartheid governments decided deliberately to reduce land ownership by blacks, pushing them to Bantustan reserves, where each homestead had limited access of no more than a quarter of a hectare. The betterment scheme was most famous for achieving this result. All the homeland governments forced blacks to reduce their livestock levels.

The past 40 to 50 years were an intensive racial process of de-skilling for all the victims of racial dispossession and turning them into consumers as opposed to the producers that they have always been. The report disregards the importance of re-skilling, with a view to restore that vibrancy of the pre-1960s.

It dismisses all of this reflection and desire to “right the wrongs of the past” as emotional, nostalgic, unreal, symbolic, “hectare mentality”. It suggests a narrow approach to land reform, whose focus is only the future; based on “sound grasp of economic and agro-climatic realities” I have noted a jaundiced view even of those economic realities in this report. For example the report **says land is no longer an important factor of production**, it has been overtaken by other important factors such as human capital (employment) and technology. Who can be deceived by this crap? This finding goes against the established fundamentals of economic theory that “land is a critical factor of production”.

Even if your very big business was flying you would still need a piece of land for landing! Or is it true that these researchers are suggesting that when it comes to blacks land is not a factor of production but for whites and the rest of the world land is a crucial factor of production? The thread that appears to go through this report is “don’t rock the boat, don’t disrupt the economy, don’t disturb the status quo, pay symbolically financial compensation to restitution claimants so as to address the emotions of dispossession but don’t even consider land restoration, agriculture is tough and thus not for the weak, so don’t plunge the poor blacks into this terrain.”

This takes me to the question that I raised earlier, whose interests is this report addressing? Most researchers on land reform have endorsed the need for redress for racial land dispossession and thus accept the overall land policy. Their gripe is more on the effective implementation of all land reform programmes.

They demand speedy delivery and sustainable development, including continued support to land reform beneficiaries. On the contrary this report suggests the scrapping of the current land reform, which recognises land rights as human rights, which rights need to be restored. It suggests a radical shift from a land reform that is based on redistributive justice to an economically efficient “planned land release” and “controlled settlement.” The recommendation about deracialising ownership of agricultural land and normalising South Africa’s countryside appears to be out of place with the rest of the discussion in this report. It appears to me to be an after-

thought, calculated to make the bitter pill palatable. It seems to embrace principles covered by many other programmes of the democratic government. This is in fact one of the contradictions that I find in this report.

I have found the guiding principles for the proposed land reform programme (which by description should be in fact be called the “Urbanisation and Housing programme”) quite fascinating. They are described by words like marketise, individualise, monetise, urbanise, modernise. The word that I missed was “industrialise”, which would make the cycle more complete. All of these terms enable one to gain a better understanding of the orientation of this research. My conclusion is that this research has very little if any about the interests, preferences, wants or dreams of the victims of racial land dispossession. It has everything about global and domestic changes in the economy.

It would be an extremely horrendous and traitorous act on the part of government if it were, to even consider the recommendations of this report, to abandon the land reform contract with the people to restore land rights and ensure just and equitable access to land. Our experience is that almost all the urban claimants are opting for financial compensation and not for land. This is contrary to the finding by CDE that most blacks want a small piece of land for a house in the urban area. Most rural claimants have opted for land, especially their ancestral land with the graves of their fore fathers.