

Personal Opinions and Comments on the subject of tonight's topic: After the Land Reform: What's next?

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SAPES TRUST Policy Dialogue Forum

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4 Deary Avenue, Belgravia, Harare, Zimbabwe

- The people at the seminar were asked; “given an option which would you prefer between a 99 year lease and a freehold title?” **(Outcome: 70% of those who were courageous enough to express their preference were in favour of freehold title deed, only 30% were for the 99 year lease. The majority shied away from expressing their preference openly probably due to polarisation of views and mistrust among the participants, I suppose mainly for fear to be viewed to be on the wrong side, since the presenter (Ian Scoones) had clearly indicated, in his presentation, that he was more in favour of the 99 year lease than the freehold title deed).**
- In my opinion, the 99 Year Lease compared to freehold title is second best and as a country why should we settle for something second best, given the wide appreciation of freehold title among the country's citizens, especially the business leaders and entrepreneurs, the ones who drive the private sector, which is the main engine of economic growth, development, prosperity and wealth creation?
- Nearly 40 out of 54 African countries rely on food imports at exorbitant prices, in particular maize imports, including Zimbabwe whilst they are sitting on some of the best agricultural land in the World. This is a dire situation in terms of food security, which is getting worse by the day and we must be ashamed of this. Isn't this also insane?
- We have a problem financing farming, year in and year out. The question is: what is the real problem with the reluctance of financial institutions to get involved in financing farming anymore, when they have been doing so in the past?
- The answer is the issue of property rights and security of tenure on agricultural land. It is fundamental and must be addressed. In this regard, we have a huge opportunity to lead the rest in Africa and make a difference. We have the infrastructure and institutions to have the best secure land tenure system, not only in Africa but even to the envy of the rest of the world. This will give us a head start in terms of competitive advantage and attracting investments in agriculture, agribusiness and other sectors of the economy. It changes the negative perceptions. We become an investor friendly country. The perception of our business environment will dramatically change for the better. We become an investor's destiny of choice.
- The greatest tragedy of the overall outcome of the fast track land reform programme would be a situation where former commercial farmland is turned or reverted into communal area 'dustbowl'. This takes many shapes, including wanton destruction of the natural fauna and flora, loss of boundary fences and survey marks, running down existing infrastructure, etc.
- Even in the era of ownership by indigenous people this should remain commercial farmland, properly surveyed, mapped and titled.

- The best final performance indicator of the outcome of the fast track land reform programme must be agricultural production surpassing that before the reform with more wealth and prosperity being created through farming.
- It is only a functional land market which can ensure that future generations can have access to land given that land is a finite (limited) resource. We do not always need government's land acquiring gazettes for more people to have access to land. It is wrong for the government to try to give itself the sole responsibility of allocating land to people in perpetuity. I REPEAT; this is a function of the land market. Sooner or later the government would run out of land to gazette.
- The success of any redistributive land reform programme depends on follow-up actions. The redistributive phase is typically a political process characterised by tensions and emotions usually with two antagonising groups of people, the ones gaining access to land and the ones being dispossessed. Follow-up actions correct any wrongs during the redistributive phase. In our case, this includes addressing the major outstanding issue of compensation, correcting the myth that everyone is a farmer and everyone can be a farmer. And we don't need everyone to be a farmer. I reckon, crudely, out of the 5-6000 commercial farmers before the fast track land reform, we need just to double or treble the number of farmers to about 20 000 to take care of some of the inefficiencies of land underutilisation which was in some instances the case with large scale farming in the past. This would also serve to avoid expensive, uneconomic and unnecessary landholding fragmentations, which is a major problem throughout Africa.
- We can't keep doing the same things over and over again which have proved not to be working, with the hope that one day they would wake up working. The truth is that as a continent and a country there is something that we are not doing right, and that is why we are a continent of well known beggars of food and for us to continue arguing that the way we are running our land and agriculture affairs is fine, is a self-deceiving and foolhardy denial. We have to be introspective to find out what it is that we need to do differently and better.
- If 70-80% of your population are peasant farmers desperately trying to earn a decent living out of subsistence farming, this is not something to be proud of. It means the majority of the people are living a substandard (poor quality) life. It is not by desire; it is only because there are no other choices. In terms of economic development this only serves to remind us that we have a long way to go and there is a lot of work to be done. We should endeavour to change this situation, not to perpetuate it.
- Given that the Grain Marketing Board's (GMB) grain storage infrastructure has a capacity in excess of 5 million metric tonnes, Zimbabwe can easily become a major player in the global grain and agricultural commodity trade market. Unfortunately, we have produced less than 2 million tonnes annually in recent times, which means that most of the time 60% of the silos are empty. What a shame and waste of vital national assets and resources?
- Whether we like it or not, this country has a lot to learn from the way commercial agriculture was organised in the past and used to function. If we don't, we do that at our own peril.
- Even the so called **LAND GRABS** now happening in Africa and other developing countries are a dictate of market forces (demand and supply). For as long as the demand of food is going to continue to increase astronomically, with declining availability of arable land on which to

expand agricultural production, with land somewhere lying idle, whether in reality or perceived so, or is being farmed sub-optimally, rudimentarily and feudally (again whether in perception or in reality) nobody can stop **LAND GRABS**. If anything they are going to get worse and even more vicious with time as land availability pressure increases. In Africa, Zimbabwe included we should begin to get our act together now as far as land and agriculture are concerned-moving away from subsistence to more organised and commercial forms of farming and land ownership.

- As we all learnt and experienced during the hyperinflation era the **MARKET is STUBBORN**. We could not tame supra hyperinflation or save the Zimbabwe Dollar (ZW\$) through price controls and printing more money. Similarly in our quest to rebuild and see the recovery of agriculture we should avoid the same mistakes of keeping doing and arguing about the same things we have been trying without getting results. If we keep doing this, this would be synonymous with the proverbial ostrich's burying of the head in sand to avoid inevitable danger. It is not business as usual and we have to try to do things totally different and radically, learning from many success cases of other countries, and our own world agriculture success in the past, which was an envy of the Africa, if not of the world. We don't have to re-invent the wheel.