

DTA of Namibia

National Archives
of Namibia



**Introduction to Proposals
to be submitted
to the
National Conference
on Land Reform and
The Land Question
25 June - 1 July 1991
and to the
Government of Namibia**

National Conference on Land Reform and the Land Question

Submission by the **DTA OF NAMIBIA**

INTRODUCTION

THE National Conference on land Reform offers the people of Namibia a unique opportunity to reach consensus on fundamental issues pertaining to Land Reform in Namibia which in itself constitutes an emotional issue that needs to be resolved without further delay.

The DTA of Namibia is determined to make a positive contribution towards the achievement of this goal. We must, however, caution that this conference should not at this early stage engage in a discussion of unnecessary detail but should rather discuss fundamental issues which we all know occupy the minds of many people and creates unrealistic expectations on the one hand and fears and uncertainty on the other.

The land issue is a highly political issue characterised by an intense "land hunger" and historical anger culminating in claims for the restitution of ancestral land.

The land issue is further complicated by grave concern among inhabitants of communal areas that the limited land reserved for them by former colonial powers is now in danger as a consequence of the government's resettlement policy and incursions by people who are not considered to be traditional inhabitants of their communal area. As a result of these developments inhabitants of communal areas insist that the land rights of the inhabitants of communal areas should now also be clearly defined.

Land claims by the indigenous inhabitants of Namibia has a strong historical and moral basis and economic and scientific considerations are mostly and understandably ignored. It is therefore inevitable that before this Conference can embark upon the discussion of policies and programmes based on economic, scientific and legal realities, cognisance should be taken of and understanding shown for the feelings of those who were deprived of their ancestral land.

Much as we, the DTA of Namibia, agree that final solutions will have to be based on sound economic principles, if we want to serve the best interest of all our people, we must

guard against the perception that we are using those principles to protect the interest of the "have's" at the expense of those who have been "disadvantaged" and discriminated against in the past.

The DTA of Namibia shall confine ourselves in our presentation to fundamental issues and we will do so in a language every Namibian will be able to understand. We have more detailed plans and proposals ready which we will submit in a final form to Parliament when considering the necessary legislation in terms of Art. 23 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia. These proposals will of course take into consideration and most probably incorporate ideas expressed by other participants during this Conference. We have not only come here to talk but also to listen. On behalf of the DTA of Namibia I now want to confine myself to a discussion of the fundamental issues which need to be resolved.

1. Land Rights

According to a document compiled by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, land in Namibia can be classified into the following categories:

	Area	% of Total
(1) Agriculturally unusable land	12,65 million Ha	15,4%
(ii) Agriculturally usable land		
(a) Communal areas	33,49 Million Ha	40,7%
(b) Commercial farms	36,16 Million Ha.	43,9%

While 43% of the usable land belongs to and is registered in the name of individuals and companies, 40,7% of usable land is occupied and utilized by people having no legal ownership rights in terms of the Constitution. The inhabitants of these areas have all reason to feel insecure and insist that they have vested land rights in their respective areas. These rights should be recognized by the Government and the inhabitants should be protected from incursions of others. Land reform and the redistribution of land can therefore not be discussed unless existing land rights of all Namibians, and not only the rights of the owners of commercial farms and the owners of land in Municipal areas have been recognized. The vast majority of the inhabitants of communal areas feel that the ownership of and control over their land should vest in institutions representing the inhabitants of those areas and that the further allocation of land to inhabitants for whatever purpose should be done by a Trust or Company representing the collective

owners of these communal areas. Land rights rightfully acquired by individuals in communal areas should also be respected. In the case of Rehoboth we agree with the opinion expressed by NEPRO in one of their briefing papers:

"Without undermining the fundamental provisions of the Namibian Constitution the special circumstances of Rehoboth farmers, rich and poor, on both private communal and government land need to be taken into account in any land reform so as to provide justice and equity, security and tenure and livelihood and an environmentally sustainable system of land use".

2. Development of Communal Areas

Whatever intentions and funds the Government might have for the purchase of land in the commercial farming area, it remains a fact that the development of communal areas should be high upon the government's list of priorities. The peasant farmers of whom the majority are engaged in the subsistence farming and who are not able to improve their standard of living and quality of life without the assistance of the government, should receive special attention. The following problem areas should receive immediate attention:

- (i) The provision of water for both human and animal consumption
- (ii) Marketing opportunities
- (iii) Control of stock diseases
- (iv) Extension services
- (v) Security of tenure
- (vi) Credit facilities to finance crop and livestock production, and for the development of commercial farms within communal areas or for the purchasing of farms in the commercial area on the basis of willing buyer / willing seller.

Peasant farmers must be encouraged to become commercial farmers by developing farms in communal areas, provided with basic infrastructure. These farms then to be made available to potential commercial farmers on favourable conditions. It must always be kept in mind that farming in Namibia is not very profitable and that beginner farmers will not be able to pay high interest rates and repay short-term loans.

It must also be stressed that communal areas cannot only be seen as a livelihood for farmers but also as a refuge for those who have no other place to live and as a place of retirement for the aged.

Development of agriculture as an industry will always have to be reconciled with the indisputable fact that the communal areas have become "home" for many people in Namibia wherever they may find themselves after having lost their original areas of residence. The development of commercial farming on an individual, family or co-operative basis should be supported without pushing the poor and the old off their land, depriving them of their subsistence and forcing them to move to the cities where they might have to live under adverse conditions.

The enclosure of land and the allocation of land to individuals, families and co-operatives should, therefore, be accepted in principle but it should be done in a fair and responsible manner.

The following quotations from NEPRO briefing papers relates to these issues:

Ovambo: "In common with people from other areas to the Ovambo stress their right to use land in Ovambo wherever they are located and whatever their income..."

"The majority would understandably want to have land in their home area. However, more people in Ovambo than in any other communal area said they would be prepared to take land far away if offered it."

"The younger, more educated and relatively more wealthy (Ovambo's) who aspire for the ownership of land hold that given the present rate of population growth and of degradation of natural resources, the land will soon be unable to accommodate the majority of those with ancestral claim to it. They argue that unless a programme of comprehensive land reform to convert communal into privately held land is instituted soon no system of land use, either traditional or modern, will be possible."

Kavango: "Like other communal area farmers more than 90% wanted own land for crop production so that they could pass it on to their children, not merely use it during their lifetime."

Caprivi: "In Caprivi there is a strong local antipathy to centrally conceived development plans."

Kaokoland: "As in other areas where traditional values are strongly adhered to by the community the main land related issue is the extent to which the community should decide the pace of modern change."

3. Acquisition of additional land for communal farmers

The DTA of Namibia accepts the fact that the land issue will not be finally resolved unless it is made possible for substantial number of Black farmers to own land in the central

commercial farming districts. Financial institutions should be established to administer settlement schemes for the relatively wealthy communal farmers. Seeing that many of these farmers will be able to make a contribution either in the form of cash or livestock and implements, the burden on the government could be substantially reduced.

The DTA of Namibia strongly feels that the heavily capitalized commercial farms should only in exceptional cases be converted into communal land. The results of such practices can be seen in Damaraland and Namaland where once productive farms were added to communal areas and utilized on a communal basis with disastrous results. Pressure on grazing in communal areas should be relieved by influencing wealthier farmers to buy or rent commercial farms with financial assistance from the government or from financial institutions funded or subsidized by the government. At the same time grazing fees for those farmers who can afford it should be increased while grazing fees for the poor should be subsidized.

Prospective buyers of commercial farms should be selected on merit and the following criteria and conditions should apply:

- (i) The applicant must be able to make a contribution in terms of cash and must own a minimum number of livestock or implements
- (ii) The applicant must have some experience and if possible, training in the type of farming normally practised in the area in which he intends to purchase a farm and must be able to maintain optimum production.
- (iii) The proximity of the farm to the area of origin of the farmer should be taken into account.
- (iv) The applicant must undertake not to negatively affect the position of farm workers already on the farm but rather to improve their position.
- (v) In the case of co-operatives or family concerns, care must be taken that these concerns are properly founded and registered.

4. Commercial farms in Namibia

It cannot be denied that although the present owners of commercial farms acquired their farms legally, these areas belonged to indigenous groups until it was lost during past wars and even thereafter. The DTA of Namibia is deeply aware of the agony and anger of those who not only lost people but also their ancestral land. The question now is: How can these people, directly affected, be assisted to acquire at least part of the land they have lost? There seems to be only one solution and that is for the Government to assist prospective

buyers from the affected groups financially to buy farms in those areas where their forefathers used to live. The possibility exists that governments which have been responsible for the loss of land by certain groups could be approached by these groups for financial assistance to purchase such farms.

When discussing the acquisition of commercial farms it is very often argued that the high prices of farm land puts it out of reach of the prospective buyer. There could be no doubt that farms' prices reached uneconomic levels. It is, however, evident that a downward trend in farm prices has already set in and that this downward trend might continue. Nobody owning a farm and who is determined to continue farming should be upset or discouraged by this trend. Those who bought land only for the sake of capital gain should not influence decisions on this issue. We are, however, concerned about those farmers who took up loans based on the present value of their land.

Many of them might now be forced out of business and lose their farms. This might be welcomed by the landless because it will lead to a further lowering of farm prices but the far-reaching negative effects of such a development on the economy of the country must not be under-estimated. Land reform cannot be seen in isolation. Practical experience in this country has shown that if things go wrong for the farmers because of droughts, animal diseases, low commodity prices and increasing production costs, it has an adverse effect on the economy in general. Farm workers are normally affected first because farmers, when in financial trouble, cut labour costs which constitutes the largest part of the farmers' production costs. This is usually followed by savings on commodities normally acquired in nearby towns, late payment or non-payment of accounts and decreased production with a further negative effect on the business concerns in these towns, resulting in increased unemployment.

5. Land Reform / Distribution of Wealth

There can be no doubt that the process of redressing the injustices of the past and the redistribution of wealth goes beyond land reform.

Land reform should stimulate increased production and the creation of wealth for all citizens to be shared. If this is not achieved then land reform will only benefit the farmer and not the population as a whole. Land reform should be an evolutionary process, predominantly shaped by various interacting development policies. The normal development path of a country starts from an agrarian society towards an industrial society and then to an information society. Namibia does not fit into that model. It seems we have

missed the industrialization phase which is so necessary to create new job opportunities. Approximately 16 000 people enter the job market each year, i.e. 44 each day. This dynamic supply of labour has to be addressed with a total strategy that provides dynamic solutions. Rural development could be part of the solution but rural development and land reform should also be part of an overall economic development plan.

The DTA sees land reform as part of a holistic development approach. This country cannot depend too much on agriculture to support a growing population.

In the short and even medium term it would be necessary to subsidize farmers especially the newly established farmers. Commercial farmers fall in the same category as investors in other spheres of the economy based on natural resources and investment in this field should be welcomed.

6. Employment in Agriculture

A significant part of our agricultural labour force is presently employed on commercial farms and transfer of labour to other sectors of the economy does not seem to be possible in the near future. Farm workers must be seen as a specialized work force which should be provided with a higher standard of living, quality of life, training and job security. It must, however, be remembered that commercial farming remains the economic base of the farm worker and this base must not be eroded for political reasons. The base must be strengthened while the farm workers be protected against exploitation. An in-depth study into the position of the farm workers must be undertaken to determine whether they are getting their fair share of the proceeds of commercial farming.

7. Ecology

Land and all associated with it is a national asset and must be preserved for future generations.

Great care must be taken with aspects such as over-grazing, bush encroachment, deforestation, "dustbowl effect", and a national policy should be formulated in this regard.

8. Municipal Land

A discussion of land reform cannot be confined to agricultural land only. Although Municipalities own only 0,5% of land in Namibia. This area is occupied by a considerable part of the population. The DTA of Namibia proposes a system under which plots in

Municipal areas should be given to urban residents as their property on the basis that they get the land free and that they will only have to pay for the services they require. This will give them the necessary security to take up loans to develop their properties with reasonable assistance from the Government.

9. The DTA of Namibia recommends that:

- 1) Cognisance be taken of the "land hunger", the loss of ancestral land and the historical land rights of the people of Namibia.
- 2) The ownership of the traditional inhabitants of communal areas over these areas and the people of Rehoboth must be recognized as a first step towards land reform. Communal land should be registered in the name of a Trust or Company representing the inhabitants of the respective communal areas.
- 3) Incursions into these areas by members of other groups without the consent of the local population should not be allowed.
- 4) Communal areas must be developed to their full potential and in the interests of the prospective commercial farmer, the peasant farmer and the subsistence farmers.
- 5) Communal farmers who own sufficient livestock and own capital and who meet minimum requirements, must be assisted financially by granting them soft loans to purchase commercial farms outside the communal areas.
- 6) Those groups who have lost ancestral land be given special consideration by the Namibian Government and the Governments of former colonial powers.
- 7) Only in exceptional cases should commercial farmers be converted into communal areas. The Ovitoto Reserve near Okahandja is a point in case.
- 8) All farmers should be assisted with production capital and extension services to support them until such time as they have become financially independent.
- 9) Commercial farming be encouraged being one of the economic pillars of our country, a producer of food, and earner of foreign exchange and a major creator of job opportunities for our agricultural labour force.
- 10) The farm workers of Namibia as a specialized labour force be given special attention and that an in-depth study regarding their position be undertaken.
- 11) Our environment be protected and our ecology be preserved.
- 12) Plots in Municipal Areas be made available to bona fide residents against payment of the cost of services required only.