

# A Panacea To Avert The Land Grab

I WANT to join others who care about land question in Namibia and suggest a possible solution to it.

For the past years since independence, we have been observing different good measures invoked by the State to try and redress the land ownership disparity in Namibia. The "willing buyer willing seller" principle is not new to Namibians. A budgetary allocation of N\$20 million a year is put aside for the acquisition of farms that would be offered to the State for sale through the "willing buyer willing seller" arrangement. The land tax was introduced in order to finance the land acquisition and the resettlement programme. These good initiatives were met with unpatriotic and manoeuvring tactics by those in possession of land. Through the humble and noble "willing buyer willing seller" initiative, we have learned the followings;

1. It is mainly farms that are not 'sellable' to other commercial farmers that are offered to the State for resettlement, otherwise, other land barons will buy up the fertile land on sale

before it is availed to the State. However, what is not sellable to commercial farmers with farming experience might not be worth resettling on by inexperienced farmers and expect them to succeed.

2. The "willing buyer willing seller" principle became a money making scheme for those with land as infertile land is sold to the State at exorbitant prices in order to get a bigger portion of the N\$20 million.

3. Not many of the land barons are willing to voluntarily give up any of their farms to the State for its resettlement programme.

4. The status of farms offered to the State for sale change as soon as moves from the hands of a commercial farmer to the resettled communities. It becomes a communal farm in a commercial area affecting the prices and status of adjacent farms. This practice created a questionable attitude.

5. The relationship between the commercial farmers, the state and the farm workers leaves little to be desired.

6. No matter how many years we add to our independence, land remains a

means of production that the majority of disadvantaged Namibians aspire to acquire to make a living.

Article 16 (1) of the Namibian Constitution protects the right of individuals to movable and immovable properties. This has been a weapon used by the land barons not to give up any of their farms, as the State would not force them to do so. However, Article 16 (2) of the same constitution states that "the State or competent body or organ authorised by law may appropriate property in the public interest subject to the payment of just compensation, in accordance with requirements and procedures to be determined by the Act of Parliament".

Although constitutions are vague in general and are open for interpretation, Article 16 (2) provides a leeway for the State to solve the land question. The background that preceded this topic justifies this action from the State. The fundamental question is; how will the State do so without creating chaos in the country?

We have learned from our brothers in Zimbabwe that where a problem ex-

ists, it is a fact and the more we ignore it the more we risk our peace in future. I would therefore side with the Namibian government and agree that we should avoid the land grab at all costs, as the consequences are unbearable. However, we cannot postpone or ignore the land problem in Namibia, but need to rather solve it amicably.

Often we criticise whatever initiatives are taken without giving any suggestions. I would like to put on a constructive hat and propose something. I propose that we cannot rely on the "willing buyer willing seller" principle alone, unless we have the patience of a fisherman. I suggest that we introduce another concept: "willing buyer (State) - made willing to sell (farmers) concept". In this concept, the State would commission a study to determine a State allowable commercial farm size in Namibia. These are allowable hectares per commercial farm which should be a justifiable farm size appropriate for a given number of livestock. Whoever has more livestock than fits in his allowable hectares, should scale down on pro-

duction as he is farming at the detriment of other Namibians.

Any land negotiation should then be based on the compensation for the land in excess of the State allowable hectares. The excess land would automatically be available for the State to buy. The land valuation committee should be duly instituted with people from academic and professional backgrounds. The valuation committee should include different stakeholders and should reach reasonable compensations for a given excess land. The valuation committee should make sure the farmer in question is not robbed by the State and vice versa.

A portion of the farm land in excess of the State allowable farm size to be bought by the State should be on the side of a farm where little or no improvements in terms of infrastructure and development has taken place. This would minimise the costs to the State, as the sale would not include infrastructure. Where possible, the excess land on one farm should be on the side of the neighbour's farm if the neighbour also has

excess land. This would allow the excess land to make up a sizeable farm.

Areas should be clearly demarcated for crop, livestock or mixed farming depending on what the adjacent farmers are involved in, before the resettlement of new ones. Different farmland bought by the State through this scheme would then be allotted to different previously disadvantaged farmers according to their specific needs. Intensive training in farming and all necessary support should be accorded to these people, before and after the resettlement. The State should confiscate and re-allocate any piece of land allotted to any family, which is not putting it to good use in order not to compromise on the aims and objectives of the resettlement programme.

The State would similarly sell some of these farms to those from disadvantaged communities who could afford commercial farms at the market price. Nothing in this proposal prevents the State from buying up land being offered to it while this process is being carried forward.

Firstly, having done that,

we would have settled the land question amicably, with little hurt to few and much benefit to many. We would avoid the land grab with its ugly face, which would always be a potential threat to our peace as long as the land question is not addressed in Namibia. We would avoid the sale of non-productive land to the State and have access to any fertile land in the country. We would have done away with the change in farm status when occupied by people of different skin colour, as different people would be resettled anywhere in the country where there is excess land. Nobody would be robbed of his/her land, as compensation would be given. The demographic pattern created by the previous dispensation by dividing people according to skin colour would be redressed, as all types of people would be scattered all over Namibia. The mix of people in the farms would lead to the eternal ultimate true reconciliation in this country in the long run. And ultimately, we will make Namibia a rich nation.

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