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## Resettlement is a failure

BRIGITTE WEIDLICH

**EVEN though land reform is necessary, the resettlement policy of the Government has not brought the desired results and not a single farm has become sustainable, a new study concludes.**

Given the background of unequal distribution of land along racial and ethnic lines in pre-independence Namibia, the land reform process was not only desirable from a social and political point of view, but also necessary to give the agricultural sector a much-needed injection of new life, according to the study 'SADC Land and Agrarian Reform Initiative - the Case of Namibia', published by the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (Nepru) just before Christmas.

However, "it has become clear (that) after nearly 16 years of implementing the Resettlement Programme, that it is not working; or to put it more bluntly, the programme has failed thusfar to empower the poor and the landless in their bid to become self-sufficient farmers," the author, local land reform expert Willem Odendaal, who is attached to the Legal Assistance Centre, stated.

"Land reform involves more than just buying or expropriating land from one group in order to give more land to another group; it also involves a complex human process that requires careful social and economic planning," Odendaal noted in the study.

"It is thus essential for the Government together with all other stakeholders in agriculture to evaluate the land reform process on a regular and transparent basis."

The White Paper on the Government Resettlement Policy stipulates that it will restrict its support for individual resettlement projects to five years only.

It reasons that, "within this period it is expected of settlers (beneficiaries) to have gained enough experience and self-confidence to be able to support themselves".

However, "not a single resettlement project has become sustainable after five years," Odendaal states in the 55-page document.

Sustainability could only be achieved if development projects were implemented over a longer-term period of 10 to 15 years, on condition that the projects are monitored independently by consultants on a tender and five-year renewable contract basis, he added.

"Even then, this monitoring process must be active, and the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement must be prepared to intervene in and restructure failing projects.

It must also provide more education and technical support."

The author recommended, among other things, that Government should come up with clear criteria for the expropriation of commercial farmland.

So far, three farms have been expropriated, although about 20 other white farmers have received expropriation notices since 2005.

According to the study, recent expropriation notes appear to have been handed to farmers who had a history of labour disputes with their farmworkers.

This would have the effect of reducing the process of expropriation to a punitive measure instead of basing it on what is in the public interest.

Said Odendaal: "While 'unofficial' Government policy dictates that land belonging to such farmers should be expropriated, it does not take into account the contribution their farms are making in terms of earning foreign currency and providing employment."

This unclear policy on expropriation also had a negative effect, mainly on white commercial farmers, as it gave them little incentive to invest in their farms, and indeed makes them reluctant to do so.

"The negative effect of this on the country's economy is obvious."

Land expropriation should be dealt with in accordance with set criteria.

Such criteria ideally would be contained in policy documents.

The Government would be bound to follow its own policy guidelines in making decisions on expropriation.

Such policies would also set clear guidelines for the public as to how the Government is to implement its expropriation policy, Odendaal recommended.

Established farmers should become more pro-actively involved in sharing their wealth of experience in farming commercially with black farmers to make the land reform a success.

Government should approach and encourage established farmers to become more involved in the land reform process as a whole.

There was sufficient goodwill and willingness among established farmers in Namibia for their involvement to be realised.

Some good examples of established farmers' involvement already exist among the established farming communities of Uhlenhorst and Outjo.

Some aspects of land reform gave Namibia an opportunity to create a 'unique' land reform programme, according to Odendaal.

"Namibia has a relatively low population, enough European donors willing to support the land reform process, co-operative white farmers and arguably enough time to not have to succumb to political pressure as happened in Zimbabwe's disastrous land reform process," the study noted.

Odendaal concluded by stating that Namibia needed an integrated agricultural economy, based on a new model of agricultural planning to transform and close the gap between commercial and communal agricultural practices.

"This type of effort, which is absolutely necessary for a land reform programme to be effective, requires a level of rural and agricultural planning not yet seen in Namibia.

Despite its large agricultural sector and small population, Namibia is self-sufficient only in beef, mutton and dairy production.

This kind of monoculture is not good agricultural policy.

Namibia could grow much more fruit, vegetables and nuts," he noted.

"Excellent examples of post-independence commercial agricultural initiatives are the date project at Naute Dam and the vineyard irrigation project at Aussenkehr on the Orange River," according to Odendaal.