

Foreword

The International Crisis Group's mission to prevent the outbreak, continuation and recurrence of deadly conflict fits naturally with the issue of land policy in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The stakes involved in both nations are of tremendous economic and social consequence. As the situation in Zimbabwe has painfully demonstrated, if land issues are handled poorly, conflict of one kind or another is almost inevitable. Land redistribution is an issue across much of southern Africa, but Zimbabwe and South Africa continue to stand out as the vitally important – and very different – test cases.

Few topics in these countries have been more widely discussed but less understood than land reform. While agronomists, land tenure specialists, economists and political scientists have done much excellent work, there has been little systematic effort to synthesise their findings and combine them with intensive field research to produce practical policy recommendations for both local actors and the international community. This is what we have endeavoured to do in this report, placing land policy in its real-world political and economic context. Two key propositions underpin our approach. First, the colonial and white rule periods created tremendous injustices in the patterns of land use in both countries with blacks suffering a terrible degree of displacement; second, land reform efforts should advance within the rule of law and as part of a broader effort to realise the social and economic potential of the countries concerned.

In the case of Zimbabwe, sadly, it will be virtually impossible to get land policy on the right track until it experiences new leadership or a fundamental change in the ruling party's approach. But outside observers have oversimplified the story of land policy in Zimbabwe. The focus on the plight of white commercial farmers has obscured the even more acute suffering of millions of black citizens who face hunger, increasingly severe repression and bleak economic prospects. It is critical that the international community be prepared to help Zimbabweans act decisively on land reform when a political transition eventually takes place.

Putting in place plans that will allow Zimbabwe to boost its agricultural production will be crucial given the country's structural food deficits. A Land Commission will need to be established, with technical, and as far as possible non-partisan, expertise. It will need not only to conduct a national survey to determine the status of land use and current

holdings, but also to adjudicate rapidly a myriad of claims and counter-claims that have the potential to tie the legal system in knots for years. The international community will need to support a process of binding arbitration that allows reasonable payment to those whose farms have been illegally seized, while acknowledging that any sensible policy will be a compromise balancing production, legal concerns and fair compensation.

In the case of South Africa, partly in response to the heightened attention to land issues consequent on the seizures in Zimbabwe, leaders have committed themselves to significantly accelerating the pace of land redistribution while minimising illegal occupations. South Africa has set the bar high in promising to redistribute roughly one third of all commercial farmland by 2015, part of a major effort to increase black economic empowerment and ownership across a range of economic sectors. Even though such a land program is feasible, it will require increased resource commitment from the government, a wide range of local stakeholders and international partners.

There has been in South Africa something of a shift in emphasis away from poverty reduction and a focus of the land redistribution program on commercial beneficiaries. The objectives of poverty reduction and encouragement of a new generation of black commercial farmers should not be mutually exclusive, but these approaches must be coordinated to ensure a balanced and effective program. Despite the complexities, it is both possible and desirable to implement a more broad-based reform program on both private and communal land that will encompass the landless poor as well as black commercial farmers.

Zimbabwe and South Africa have contrasting histories in some key respects, and they are very different societies today. While events in Zimbabwe are not likely to be replicated in South Africa any time soon, it is clear that countries across the region are burdened with chronic land problems that are frustrating attempts to promote economic development and eradicate poverty. Uncertainty over ownership and access to land deeply discourages productive investment, and the massive dispossession of blacks under colonialism and white rule has left a bitter legacy of dislocation. The colonial exploitation of land and resources for the narrow benefit of favoured groups helped perpetuate the underlying poverty of the black population, and tenure insecurity remains linked to the limited economic prospects of many in the region.

Greater equality in access to land ownership would increase economic growth and reduce poverty, while minimising the risk of a future land crisis such as Zimbabwe's. Small and medium-sized farms should thus be a central element of land reform and of a diversified livelihoods strategy. Simply putting more people into the commercial

agricultural model as collectives – or merely changing the racial profile of individual commercial farmers – will not reverse poverty and inequality.

This report, like all ICG publications, has been a collective team effort, relying heavily on field work and close consultation with external specialists. I would like to thank all those – too many to name, and in some cases inappropriate to do so – who participated in interviews and provided peer review. ICG Special Adviser John Norris was the principal author of the Zimbabwe section and the report's lead editor, while ICG Special Adviser John Prendergast was the principal author of the South Africa text (and a major contributor to ICG's earlier reporting on Zimbabwe on which this report partly draws). ICG Vice President (Research and Publications) Jon Greenwald and Africa Program Director Stephen Ellis made major contributions to the editing process, and Nathalie De Broyer, Jen Leonard, and Dan Vexler to the production stage. Numerous others within ICG devoted many hours to the report, including Philip Roessler, Gideon Maltz, Jessica Bowers, Greg Pollock, Dara Francis, Paul Verzillo, Brenda Bradberry, Sasha Lezhnev, Jamal Jafari, Alison Rose, Erin Hunt, Fanta Toure, Elizabeth Martin, Jan Bachmann, Newton Kanhema, Shannon Field and Director of Advocacy and Research Nick Grono. I thank them all for an immense collaborative effort.

ICG will continue to track land policy issues in southern Africa as they directly relate to conflict and the possibility of conflict, assisted by our recently opened project office in Pretoria. We have been reporting on the political situation in Zimbabwe since 2000 and will continue to follow events closely, in land reform and more generally, as the country navigates this very difficult period. Much will depend on South Africa's democratic leadership being prepared to play a leadership role in helping Zimbabwe emerge from its current plight.

Gareth Evans
President
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