

DON'T GAMBLE WITH FOOD SECURITY

BY

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In his chaotic State to the Nation Address on 12 February, President Zuma confirmed that the ANC proposal of a limit on private ownership of land for 12 000 ha or more, would be incorporated in the Legislation on the Regulation of Land Ownership. Even before the Address to the Nation, the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, Mr Gugile Nkwinti, indicated that a limit of 12 000 ha had as its objective the eradication of inequality in land ownership. His director-general, Mr. Mdu Shabane, said this proposal was in line with the four-tiered system for ownership. According to this system, state-owned or public land may only be leased, there is to be a limit on private ownership, foreigners are prohibited from owning land (but may rent for a minimum of 30 years) and that provision should be made for communal ownership with institutional right of use.

As expected, the president's speech was met with fierce criticism. Tampering with ownership is seen as unconstitutional, impractical and economically not viable. It diverts the course of the country in the wrong direction. The one-sided and premature announcement revealed the ANC to be an untrustworthy partner in the land reform debate. By limiting all forms of farming enterprises, the ANC-government shows a serious lack of understanding for diverse, modern farming practices. The result of this proposal increased uncertainty in the agricultural sector, and if implemented, food security is seriously compromised. And so the list goes on.

This criticism is not unfounded. The following facts have been advocated for a long time by international organisations such as the World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organisation and the International Food Policy Research Institute. Everyone, except the ANC government, take the following facts into serious consideration when formulating policies regarding food security:

- World population today stands at 7.2 billion and is estimated to be 9.3 billion in 2050;
- The growth rate for Africa's population is 113% and the population will therefore double by 2050;
- Currently, 50% of the world's population live in urban areas and this will increase to 67% by 2050;
- In Africa, 36% of the population live in urban areas, but it is expected that 60% will be urbanized by 2050;
- Population and economic growth increase the demand for food;
- Population growth is exponential while the increase in food production is linear;
- An increase in the demand for water and land for household use will prohibit the capacity to produce food;
- Increasing food production by incorporating more agricultural land is not possible;
- Food production has to increase with limited water and land resources;
- The implementation of improved agricultural technology and practices and the know-how to implement it, is of utmost importance to increase food production.

In a nutshell, projections for the South-African population and agriculture are:

- Within the next 20 years, in 2035, the population will increase by 38% to 70 million;

- At the current rate of urbanisation, 52.6 million (75%) of South-Africans will live in cities;
- Of the 100.7 million hectares of agricultural land currently available in South Africa, 4.5 million hectares are in the hands of upcoming farmers, while 82.2 million belong to commercial farmers;
- 82.2 million hectares commercial agricultural land provide food and textile at 1.6 ha for every member of the population;
- The result of mining and urbanisation leads to a loss in agricultural production capacity, as seen in the loss of high potential agricultural land in Mpumalanga;
- If the population increases to 70.1 million by 2035, simultaneous with a loss of 5 million hectares commercial agricultural land, there are only 1.1 hectares available for the provision of food and textile for every member of the population.

It is the 82.2 million ha commercial agricultural land that is in contention. Messrs. Zuma and Nkwinti are apparently aspiring at setting aside 50%, for communal farming. This land was presumably taken from communal farmers since 1652 with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape.

The influence of Jan van Riebeeck and others on the economy of Southern Africa deserves mention, but let us first have a look at the communal system which was historically the order of the day. In *“Tribesman, Trader, Peasant and Proletarian”*(1978), Peter Kallaway says: *“Communal economy is an entity that has within itself a complete division of labour and a single cultural framework and dominantly an economy based on natural products of the land produced for personal or group needs.”*

Kallaway explains that communal economies had one aim in common: land was owned by the tribe for the good of the tribe as a whole and no individual was prohibited the use thereof. The importance of this has to be seen in the context of communal agricultural activities as being the dominant factor in the survival of society.

When Jan van Riebeeck established a trading post at the Cape, Southern Africa became a part of the world's economy. This participation rapidly increased with the discovery of diamonds in the Northern Cape followed by gold in Johannesburg. An enveloping market for labour and agricultural produce was created overnight. These growth points not only attracted white immigrants from abroad, but also local, black migrants from all sectors of the population. Communal societies could simply not accommodate this multi-cultural community. Individual identities developed where individual interest overshadowed communal importance. The cohesion of communal economies fell apart mainly because of cultural differences.

Local black and other tribes voluntarily participated in the new economic system by supplying venison, livestock, timber and agricultural produce to the trading centres. Initially they were successful at utilising new opportunities, but communal economies could not meet the ever-increasing demand for produce. In the process land was transformed from a medium providing labour to an instrument providing surplus products to the market. The economic reality is that when land provides a surplus, that land becomes a trading commodity in itself.

Communal societies eventually sold or traded vast areas of their land. Due to economic and cultural factors, not political causes, separate communal economies were replaced by a single capitalist economy. The ANC government seems determined in turning the situation around and to dispossess land of its trading value. The incentive to produce a surplus will obviously dissipate.

Since the discovery of diamonds in 1867, the South African economy has not stopped growing. Even the ANC government takes credit for its contribution to economic growth since 1994. It is therefore incomprehensible how the current government can think it will sustain the second largest economy in

Africa through a communal agricultural system. If the communal system was eradicated by economic powers more than a hundred years ago, how will it feed 70 million people in 2035, of which 53 million live in cities?

Agriculture is the only economic sector that can feed mankind. The future of agriculture is inextricable from the future of mankind. Trust in agriculture goes hand in hand with trust in the future of mankind. On occasion former American president, Thomas Jefferson, said that although the farmer has title of deed, the land belongs to mankind and our existence depends on it. The protectors of the land are farmers, on behalf of mankind.

Indian environment activist, Vandana Shiva, concluded by saying: *“If we have declared a war against the soil itself, then we are literally committing a species level suicide.”* The crux of the matter is that South Africa’s 53 million people should be more worried about the president’s statement than the 36 000 farmers. The nutritional needs of the whole nation are ignored in an irresponsible manner.

Despite early and repetitive warnings, the ANC-government ignored the Eskom-problem while it was still manageable. Now they are trying to solve a problem that is beyond redemption. This has serious consequences for power supply to the nation and has had devastating effects on the South African economy. Here follows another timely warning to the ANC government: do not gamble with the food security of millions of people by allowing populist political views to influence the value of land. Food cannot be saved by load shedding. A little disruption and candlelight cannot overcome food scarcity. Be willing to take a necessary, unpopular stand and substitute the planned statutory clause on the ‘limit on the ownership of private land’ with: *“Upon this handful of soil our survival depends. Husband it and it grows our food, our fuel and our shelter and surrounds us with beauty. Abuse it and the soil will collapse and die, taking man with it.”* Indian civilization (1500 BC).

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