
1 *Introduction*

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Background

From 25 to 27 March 2004, the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust (HWMT) hosted a conference entitled ‘The Land Question in South Africa: The Challenge of Transformation and Redistribution’ at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront in Cape Town.

The HWMT was established in 1996 shortly after Harold Wolpe’s untimely death and, as a tribute to his life and work, is committed to fostering public debate on political transformation between government, civil society, intellectuals and scholars. The HWMT believes that ‘such initiatives would be congruent with Harold Wolpe’s lifelong passion for and commitment to a radical politics based on critical scholarship that is as rigorous as it is engaged’.¹

The conference on the land question brought together stakeholders in the land sector including representatives from the departments of Agriculture and Land Affairs, rural social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), farmers, academics and researchers, to debate what the organisers considered to be the core issue at the heart of the land question in South Africa: how can a large-scale redistribution of land provide redress for centuries of dispossession while contributing to the transformation of the economy and the reduction of poverty, both rural and urban? There have been, in recent years, relatively few fora within which the key stakeholders in the land sector could engage constructively with one another on questions such as these. This conference aimed to provide such a forum and to promote dialogue on these burning questions.

A number of commissioned papers set the scene for intensive discussion and debate on the key issues, and a wide range of views was represented. These included contributions from international speakers who provided insights on land reform in other countries, government representatives, and South

African scholars and researchers. Working groups, which were set up after the presentations, developed positions on the key questions, and presented them for debate in plenary sessions. Key questions addressed at the conference included:

- What are the goals of land reform in South Africa (historical redress, black economic empowerment, poverty reduction)?
- Who should be its primary beneficiaries (the rural poor, women, farm dwellers, emerging rural entrepreneurs, a new class of African commercial farmers)?
- What are the appropriate mechanisms to acquire and redistribute land ('willing seller, willing buyer' transactions, land taxes, limits on land holdings, state purchase and resettlement, expropriation)?
- What role can a rights-based land restitution programme play in changing patterns of land ownership?
- What kinds of post-settlement support services do land reform beneficiaries require, and who will provide them?
- What wider transformations of the structure of the agrarian political economy are required to reduce structural poverty and inequality, and what policies can promote such transformations?

From these questions, it seems clear that the focus of the conference was on assessing the South African land reform programme. In many ways, and with the benefit of hindsight, this conference proved to be one of the many initiatives which sought to review the performance of the African National Congress (ANC)-led government in the first ten years of South Africa's democracy.

The land question in South Africa

Ten years of democracy in South Africa have seen some impressive achievements in addressing the debilitating legacy of apartheid. Economic growth has occurred, inflation has been kept under control, and the provision of infrastructure and social services (e.g. houses, water, electricity and medical services) to ordinary citizens has dramatically improved. However, despite these achievements, there is compelling evidence that structural poverty, a key apartheid legacy, is deepening. Unemployment has risen rapidly over the past decade and over half of all South Africans live in poverty.

With regard to land, it is undeniable, as is clear from the various chapters in this book, that the pace of delivery has been painfully slow. This is disturbing given that one of the key challenges facing the post-1994 South African state is how to reverse the racial inequalities in land resulting from colonial conquest and the violent dispossession of indigenous people of their land. This is undoubtedly a key issue in our understanding of the land question in South Africa.

Historically, white settlers in South Africa appropriated more than 90 per cent of the land surface under the 1913 Natives Land Act, confining the indigenous people to reserves in the remaining marginal portions of land. This process forced a large number of rural residents to leave the rural areas for urban areas and farms in search of work. A significant number of rural people became fully proletarianised, while others became migrant workers with a tenuous link to land. It is important to note, though, that this process of proletarianisation should not be viewed in linear and teleological terms. Whenever colonialists got the upper hand, they introduced commodity farming, challenging indigenous agricultural systems which were not geared for the market. However, prior to the discovery of minerals in the 1860s, Africans adapted quite remarkably to commodity farming. As Mafeje puts it, they were 'the most dynamic agricultural producers in South Africa' (1988: 100). Radical scholars of the 1970s and 1980s have documented this phenomenon, and the best known of these studies is Bundy's (1988) *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*. In the Cape, the colonial government and missionaries went further and attempted to establish a class of African farmers in their bid to marginalise chiefs who were associated with anti-colonial wars.

The discovery of minerals, particularly of gold in the 1880s, led, amongst other things, to a demand for cheap labour. The obvious target was African labour. The colonial strategy, even in the Cape, shifted from promoting a class of African farmers to compelling Africans to becoming wage labourers. The first legislative measure in this regard was the promulgation in the Cape Parliament under the premiership of Cecil John Rhodes of the notorious Glen Grey Act in 1894. After the Union of South Africa in 1910, some of the provisions of the Glen Grey Act were incorporated in the Natives Land Act of 1913. This Act forbade Africans to buy and own land outside the 7 per cent of the land that was reserved for their occupation. It also abolished the sharecropping system and labour tenancies. These developments, according to Bundy, by and large accounted for the fall of the peasantry in South Africa.

While colonialism and apartheid systematically undermined African agriculture, white farmers, through substantial state subsidies and the availability of cheap African labour, developed a model of large-scale commercial farming in South Africa. This has led some commentators to argue that there existed two forms of agriculture in South Africa: so-called subsistence farming in the communal areas and white commercial farming.

In recent times, President Mbeki has articulated a version of this dualism. According to him and some analysts, South Africa is a country with 'two economies': a developed core that is well connected to the international economy and a periphery of informal urban settlements and rural areas. The latter are characterised by weak local economies, low-wage casual and seasonal work, low-income self-employment, and hunger.

While the existence of a large-scale white-dominated commercial farming sector on the one hand and, on the other hand, a crumbling rural subsistence sector in the former bantustans cannot be denied, it is important to point out that the two systems cannot be viewed in isolation. In much the same way as Wolpe (1972) has argued that the development of mining capital in South Africa in particular was 'inextricably linked' with the reserves, the so-called subsistence and informal economy of President Mbeki's two economies cannot be understood outside the context of the formal economy and white-dominated commercial farming. White commercial farming in South Africa is what it is precisely because of the disintegration of the rural economy in the former bantustans and the cheap labour policy resulting from this. A view of these two sectors as separate, rather than causally linked, leads to a flawed understanding of how these 'dualisms' can be resolved. There is, therefore, only one land question and it is a complex one that encompasses the question of how land is accessed and used, how labour is reproduced and how capital is accumulated. In this sense, the land question cannot be resolved in isolation, but is intimately linked to the wider political economy.

A fundamental issue facing policy makers in contemporary South Africa is the role of land in poverty eradication or alleviation. This question becomes all the more pressing given the fact that, compared to the rest of the continent, South Africa is an industrialised country with a strong urban sector and an agricultural sector which contributes less than 5 per cent of the total economy (NDA 2004: 78). At the same time, in an era such as ours, which is dominated by the neo-liberal agenda, urban economies are increasingly failing to absorb

the growing labour force. The loss of jobs in the formal sector, alongside a rising influx of new entrants to the job market, contributes to growing poverty among large sections of society.

These considerations raise the following questions: is there a role for land in the struggle against poverty in South Africa, especially given the inability of the urban economy to create jobs? How do we characterise South Africans living in rural areas? Are they interested in making a livelihood out of land, or are jobs their main preoccupation? What would be an appropriate strategy and vision for the future of the former bantustans or former 'homelands'? Where should the state invest its energies and resources? More specifically, why should the South African state invest in transforming land relations?

These questions remain largely unaddressed, not only in the current land reform programme, but also by academics, researchers and activists. Some of the contributions in this book, too, assume that, given the fact that the economy under neo-liberalism is not creating jobs, land may assume a new significance in the struggle against poverty, urban and rural. There is an urgent need, however, for these assumptions to be examined and tested.

International and historical perspectives

The contributions by Bernstein and Moyo in this book provide a useful framework within which South Africans can begin to think about land and agrarian questions. Bernstein locates the land question within a larger agrarian question which, he argues, must be periodised. During the rise and development of capitalism, he argues, the agrarian question was how to transform social relations of production in farming as well as enable agriculture to contribute to industrialisation. It was concerned with transitions to capitalism (and then to socialism). Bernstein labels this 'classic' agrarian question the 'agrarian question of capital'. He goes on to argue that the transition to capitalism has occurred on a global scale, and concludes that there is no longer an agrarian question of capital today. Where these transitions have not fully taken place, as in the peripheries (the South), the question in its original formulation is not relevant given the dominance of capitalism as a world phenomenon.

Rather, in the contemporary era of global neo-liberal capitalism, to the extent to which the agrarian question exists, it can, according to Bernstein

(in this book), be characterised as an 'agrarian question of labour'. Bernstein contends that, where contemporary capitalism fails to absorb the labour force by providing adequate and secure employment, particularly for those in the South, land redistribution may acquire a new significance. Hence his notion that the agrarian question today is one of labour. Bernstein suggests that demand for land could be one of numerous survival strategies that some but not all rural people in the South adopt in response to the crisis of the reproduction of labour. Land in this case would not make any significant contribution to industrialisation as conceived in the 'classic' formulation.

Whereas Bernstein's contribution focuses on land as part of the agrarian question, Moyo takes a broader view of the politics of land and agriculture in southern Africa. His departure point is that land remains a basic source of livelihood for the majority of people in the region, who depend on land in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, mining, housing and industry. Thus, according to him, the land question is not only an agrarian issue, but also a critical social question.

Moyo argues that the principal land question facing post-colonial and post-apartheid southern Africa is that little progress has been made in the implementation of large-scale land reform. Following the tradition of Samir Amin (1976) and Archie Mafeje (1988), he distinguishes between countries which were subjected to large-scale land dispossession and settler colonialism such as South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and those that went through limited settler colonialism such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. With respect to the former settler colonies which went through a negotiated political transition, such as Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, the legacy of racially unequal land control was by and large maintained at independence in the form of constitutional guarantees such as the protection of existing property rights. Other countries in the region have also experienced large-scale land concentration and class differentiation and face the challenges of establishing legal and administrative systems to secure customary land rights and promoting effective land management. With regard to the agrarian question, Moyo argues that the 'peasant' question in southern Africa has long been subordinated to an agrarian modernisation project that is based on export-oriented capitalist agriculture. He criticises this agricultural model for marginalising the peasantry, though he does not define who constitutes the 'peasantry'.

While the regional perspective is important and, as Mamdani (1996) has warned, we should beware of the presumption of South Africa's exceptionalism, we should also resist pushing the pendulum to the other extreme, pretending that there are no fundamental differences between South Africa and other countries on the African continent. This is particularly the case when one takes a political economy perspective. South Africa is not primarily an agrarian society, and the extent of the dispossession of the land of indigenous people has been such that a large number of them were converted into wage workers. For this reason, there remains widespread disagreement about the demand for land in South Africa, and therefore also about the purpose and prospective beneficiaries of land reform.

The demand for land

Little is known about the nature and extent of the demand for land in South Africa. The few sources of survey data on the demand for land have been heavily criticised and debated, and have relied on attitudinal surveys (Marcus, Eales & Wildschut 1996; CDE 2005; HSRC 2005). While the question of how many people want land for agricultural purposes has not been satisfactorily answered at a national level, there does seem to be evidence that, across parts of the country, there are people who are in need of land. The establishment of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) in 2001 and the People's Tribunal on Landlessness that was organised by the Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE) in December 2003 provide some pertinent examples.

While unemployment may accentuate the demand for land, research in the Xhalinga magisterial district in the Eastern Cape suggests that, even within adverse circumstances, some people have opted for land-based livelihoods instead of jobs. There is evidence of a pattern of migrant workers choosing to return to the rural areas of the former bantustans to pursue land-based livelihoods, even within the limited resources available in these areas as a result of overcrowding and limited fields for cultivation and land for grazing. Research conducted in this magisterial district suggests that the demand for land is particularly acute among these livestock owners (Ncapayi 2005).

However, more research needs to be done on the nature of the demand for land in South Africa, particularly in the light of the issues and questions raised by Bernstein and Moyo. For example, is the demand for land in South Africa

a confirmation of Moyo's claim that there is a (perhaps latent) peasantry in South Africa, or might it be a confirmation of Bernstein's notion of an agrarian question of labour?

It is also clear that land is as much an urban issue as it is a rural one, and that there are multiple non-agricultural uses of land – for settlement (housing), for security, for natural resource harvesting – which tend to be underestimated. Further, while there may be a demand for land as an economic asset, ownership of land in South Africa also represents a source of identity and a symbol of citizenship. Land reform is therefore also a political imperative and continuing inequality in land ownership is a highly emotive and controversial issue. On the one hand, commercial farmers fear a Zimbabwe-style 'land grab'; on the other, landless people and their supporters are becoming increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of reform.

The South African land reform programme

From 1994, the ANC-led Government of National Unity embarked on an ambitious land reform programme. In the early 1990s, after the unbanning of the ANC, there were high expectations among rural people that land would be returned to them and that the advent of democracy would mean that opportunities to own and use land would be opened up across the country (CLC 1994). The World Bank, advising the ANC as the government-in-waiting, proposed that 30 per cent of commercial farming land – in the former 'white' areas – could be transferred to 600 000 smallholders through a market-led programme of land redistribution. It estimated that this could be achieved relatively cheaply, at a cost of R21 billion, but would require substantially expanding the institutional capacity in the public sector to implement a programme on this scale (World Bank 1994: 219–223).

These proposals were extensively criticised at the time. One of the main criticisms was that the proposals relied on ideologically driven and untested models that ignored the reality of land markets, and would be prohibitively expensive (Williams 1994). Nevertheless, the policy was confirmed and the 30 per cent target adopted in 1994 in the ANC election manifesto, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, which anticipated that this could be achieved within the first five years of the programme.

Slow pace of land reform

As has already been indicated, and will be evident in the chapters that follow, the pace of land reform has been frustratingly slow. Delivery of land reform started with a pilot programme in 1995. By 1998, the programme had picked up pace, though the rate at which land was being transferred from white to African ownership was still a far cry from the targets of the government and the expectations of citizens. Five years into democracy, less than 1 per cent of agricultural land had been transferred through the programme and, at the end of the first decade, this figure had risen to 3.1 per cent. However, there are problems with measuring 'pace' only in terms of the number of hectares transferred. Contributions to this book, especially Cherryl Walker's, raise wider questions regarding the quality of livelihoods produced. She argues instead for attention to be paid to actual outcomes and, having weighed this, for a more cautious assessment of what can realistically be achieved. In this way, policy debate and planning can move beyond the vague 'wish lists' of who should benefit – the disadvantaged, the poor, aspirant commercial farmers, women, farm workers, the disabled and the youth – and towards real-world prioritisation.

Ruth Hall's chapter presents an overview of delivery against targets, outlining where redistribution has taken place and considering some of the factors impeding progress. Some of the reasons cited for slow progress include institutional weaknesses, as the short-staffed Department of Land Affairs (DLA) was being established and, having inherited apartheid-era civil servants, was undergoing its own transformation process; the limited budgets available; and the reactive approach to the programme, which relies on landowners offering property for sale. Lungisile Ntsebeza's chapter on the property clause in the Constitution argues that the protection of existing property rights is an impediment to meaningful land reform. While it does not prohibit expropriation, current interpretation requires market prices to be paid and this still renders land reform dependent on land markets.

Agricultural reform and the land question

A core challenge in resolving the land question is the dissonance between land and agricultural policy and the implications of these for land reform. While debate has tended to focus on how land can be acquired and transferred, in

truth this is only a starting point. For land reform to succeed, those getting access to land need to be able to use it in a way that contributes to improving their livelihoods. However, as some contributors to this book argue, over the past decade agricultural policy has failed to support the transformative vision of land reform. Rather, it has developed in ways that are antithetical to land reform.

The institutional separation of the departments of Agriculture and Land Affairs is part of the problem, but the artificial divide between state policies on land and agriculture is fundamentally a political problem that arose out of South Africa's emerging macroeconomic economic policy framework in the 1990s. Among the factors driving agricultural reforms was the ANC's commitment to ending the era of apartheid subsidies for white farmers. The ANC also faced international pressure to deregulate the economy and to liberalise trade, in the context of the Washington Consensus. There were thus both domestic and global pressures towards liberalised economic policy, including in agriculture. The result was a rapid process of dismantling the apparatus of state support to agriculture, including subsidies and marketing boards.

In this respect, the ANC-led South African government initiated its own structural adjustment programme and went beyond what was required by international institutions as it liberalised the economy. The question of whether the ANC could have engaged international actors and adapted these international norms, given the urgent need to confront the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, is an ongoing one. As Ntsebeza's chapter shows, one view is that, due to internal politics within the ANC and the emerging dominance of a neo-liberal faction, the ANC-led government did not use its potential room for manoeuvre to bring about structural change in the mid-1990s (see Marais 1998).

As agriculture was being liberalised, land reform policies were being developed within the constraints of a market-led approach and a policy based on a 'willing seller, willing buyer' principle. This led to a complex set of challenges and opportunities. White farmers confronted with the sudden withdrawal of state support, and exposed to foreign competition in domestic markets, had to adapt rapidly to remain in business. Winners and losers emerged from this process and there was a rise in bankruptcies and farm sales, which depressed land prices in some regions – though since the late 1990s land prices have risen dramatically across most of the country. At the same time, the agricultural policy reforms also led to a rise in job losses among farm workers.

As argued in Ruth Hall's chapter, this situation presents substantial barriers for new African entrants to farming, who are expected to compete with white farmers but without the benefit of decades of accumulated subsidisation. Representing the National African Farmers' Union at the conference, Motsepe Matlala confirmed that deregulation of agriculture and the withdrawal of state support services have produced an exceptionally hostile environment for new African farmers and called for more state intervention and public-private partnerships.

Land tenure and use

Appropriate forms of landholding have yet to receive serious discussion and debate among activists, researchers and academics in South Africa. However, the adoption of neo-liberal policies, with their insistence on a prominent role for the market and a minimal role for the state, severely restricts the scope of policy makers. For example, the possibility of nationalising land, which was suggested in the Freedom Charter, was ruled out at the start of the 1990s. Contrary to many other countries, it is a South African peculiarity that reform has been framed largely in terms of transferring private property rights. The only area in which the state became the owner of redistributed land was in the municipal commonage programme, where municipalities acquired land to be made available to disadvantaged residents, primarily for grazing purposes.

Apart from individual land tenure, group ownership of land in private title emerged as the option most preferred during the first five years. This was partly by default. While some applicants wanted to own and use their land collectively, the impetus towards group ownership also arose from the need for groups of people to pool their state grants – which were small compared to the price of land – in order to be able to buy commercial farms being offered for sale in their entirety. This made individual ownership unfeasible. Despite the policy emphasis in the 1990s on creating a class of smallholder farmers, land redistribution led to large groups of people acquiring large farms intact.

The argument that there is an inverse relationship between size of landholding and productivity in agriculture, and that small farms are relatively efficient, was the basis for the World Bank and others to propose a smallholder class. This argument is elaborated in the chapter by van den Brink, Thomas and Binswanger. Another reason why this model might be appropriate is that

of the desperate need for people to be able to generate or improve their livelihoods, in a context of poverty and vulnerability, as emphasised in the chapters by Andrews and Cousins. In practice, though, the model of large-scale commercial agriculture, established through subsidisation by the apartheid regime, was perpetuated – this time through forms of joint ownership by Communal Property Associations, a new legal form of landholding for groups. However, the new owners of redistributed commercial farms were seldom able to continue with the same commercial land uses, because they lacked capital to invest and received very limited support in the form of direct subsidy or agricultural extension.

The advent of the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme in 2001 heralded a shift in emphasis away from smallholder agriculture for the poor and towards creating a class of African commercial farmers through land reform. Group projects have been discouraged under LRAD and instead ownership by individuals or families is preferred. Because few can afford to contribute substantial own capital or loans, this places much of the land offered on the market beyond the reach of applicants. This led to the recognition that subdivision of large farms into smallholdings is needed in order to advance land reform and to make available appropriately sized parcels of land – yet people continue to express a demand for land that they can farm collectively. A number of contributions to this book, including that by van den Brink, Thomas and Binswanger, emphasise the need to expedite subdivision. Moyo's chapter, too, argues in favour of the social as well as economic benefits of small-scale farming. By contrast, Bernstein is generally critical of 'models'. He is particularly critical of the World Bank's smallholder model, premised on the relative efficiency of small farms without wider changes in the political economy. This ahistorical belief in models to reconcile equity and efficiency objectives he dubs 'agrarian populism' – a charge that he might level at some of the other contributors to this book.

The question of what would be an appropriate agricultural model to be followed was thus eclipsed by the policy design. It nevertheless remains a contested matter in policy debate. Commentators have questioned whether the way that commercial farmers use land is the best and most appropriate model, arguing that it is both economically and socially inefficient. This view is exemplified in the chapters by Moyo and by van den Brink, Thomas and Binswanger.

The politics of the land question

What land reform is for, who should benefit and how should it be pursued are often treated as technical economic questions, but at its heart the land question is political – it is about identity and citizenship as well as production and livelihoods – and can be resolved only through political processes. The politics of the land question may be understood through the prism of the relations between key participants in this debate: the landless, the farmers, agribusiness, NGOs, political parties and trade unions. In recent years, the positions of some of these have tended to polarise, underlining the importance of research and debate to break through the impasse and inform policy development.

It must be noted in the first place that the organised voice ‘from below’ in the land sector was through a network of land-based NGOs that established the National Land Committee (NLC). These organisations had emerged during the apartheid period as a response to the forced removal of millions of Africans from white designated areas. In the 1990s, these NGOs forged strong links with policy makers in the DLA. Some of their members resigned from the NGOs and joined the DLA. They started to participate in developing policy and implementing land reform together with the government, hoping that some delivery would result. This was despite their misgivings about the market-led policy framework and, by 1996, the unilateral decision by the ANC leadership to adopt the extremely conservative set of macroeconomic policies under the misleading acronym of GEAR (growth, employment and redistribution), and the entrenchment of the market-based ‘willing buyer, willing seller’ principle as the basis for land reform in 1997 – all of these coming on top of the endorsement of the property clause in the Constitution.

As the programme unfolded, however, and the very small scale of delivery became apparent, NGOs increasingly questioned policy. Indeed, by 1999 when Thabo Mbeki came to power, the NLC affiliates found themselves in an increasingly difficult position. On the one hand they were drawn into implementing the limited land reform programme. At the same time, they were confronted with growing pressures from below in different regions, in particular farm workers and labour tenants who suffered abuses on white-owned farms despite the Extension of Security of Tenure Act and the Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act. From 2001, some NGOs started to withdraw

from implementing the official land reform programme, turning their attention instead to the landless people themselves. These developments greatly contributed to the formation of the LPM in 2001. The NLC supported the establishment of the LPM. Events in Zimbabwe also helped to propel the formation of the LPM. The LPM forged links with the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* or MST) and is a member of La Via Campesina – the international 'peasant' movement.

While relatively small, the emergence of the LPM has had a significant impact on the politics surrounding land reform. But it must be said that its establishment, its efforts to advance the interests of, and give voice to, the landless, and to challenge the government's policy, including by threatening the coordinated occupation of farms to drive home their point, led to tensions within the NLC, ultimately leading to its untimely demise. After the initial optimism that the formation of the LPM would mark a new era in grassroots-based activism, faith in popular mobilisation as a driving force behind land reform appears to have been waning in recent years, not least due to the inability of the LPM to galvanise its membership towards a programme of action, including the land occupations it has threatened.

While the NLC and LPM were garnering most of the publicity and attention, there were lower profile organisations engaged in grassroots work with some local communities. They included the TCOE which, like the NLC, is a network organisation with a number of affiliates under it, and which was established by community-based organisations from various regions of South Africa. TCOE's roots are in the black consciousness movement, in liberation theology and the education crisis following students' protests and boycotts against 'gutter education' in the 1970s and early 1980s. Since 2000, the focus of TCOE has been on issues of land, local government and basic needs. To mark its 20th anniversary, TCOE organised a People's Tribunal on Landlessness in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape in December 2003. Members of the tribunal were drawn from various sectors, including academics, lawyers and community leaders. An executive member of the LPM was one of the members of the tribunal. Witnesses included representatives from landless communities across the country, academics and researchers in the field of land, and government representatives.

Since then, the terrain has shifted yet again. Political parties have generally taken little interest in land reform, and none except the Pan Africanist Congress has challenged the basic tenets of the ANC's land reform. Among the ANC's tripartite partners, however, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) has acknowledged the importance of advancing a more progressive, rapid and pro-poor land reform and, since its Red October campaign in 2004, the South African Communist Party (SACP) has called for radical agrarian reform to replace the 'willing buyer, willing seller' market-led redistribution. In a bid to win a mass base among rural people, the SACP established an ambiguous relationship with the LPM. Both organisations supported the need for a land summit to revisit the fundamentals of land policy and to chart a course towards a new policy framework.

The national Land Summit of 2005

No current debate on land reform in South Africa can ignore the historic Land Summit held in Johannesburg in July 2005. The summit was built around the theme 'A Partnership to Fast Track Land Reform: A New Trajectory, Forward to 2014'. The year 2014 is the new target set by government for the redistribution of 30 per cent of white-owned farmland to Africans. At the time of the summit, 11 years after South Africa's democracy, just over 3 per cent of the agricultural land had been transferred. The theme and the use of the term 'fast track', which most would immediately associate with the current land reform initiative in Zimbabwe, and indeed the resolutions of the summit, demonstrated this urgency.

For example, in the commission on land redistribution, far-reaching resolutions were taken, and later adopted by the summit. On strategic direction, for instance, there was overwhelming support that:

- the state should be proactive and be the driving force behind land redistribution;
- the 'willing seller, willing buyer' principle should be rejected;
- the state should have the right of first refusal on all land sales;
- land reform should benefit the poor, particularly women, farm workers and youth; and
- land should be expropriated.

Similar radical resolutions were adopted from the other four commissions at the Land Summit – on land restitution, on implementation strategy, on land tenure reform and on land use and sustainable human settlements.

From the early 1990s, as Lungisile Ntsebeza's and Mercia Andrews's contributions show, civil society organisations consistently criticised the emerging policy direction, and NGOs working within and implementing the policy framework were increasingly able to articulate this criticism based on their experiences on the ground. More recently, senior government officials have acknowledged the very serious challenges of redistributing land when landowners are unwilling to sell, when land prices are rising sharply, and when land transfers are not matched with support to assist the new owners of the land to make productive use of it. There is widespread agreement that the problems that land reform has encountered are not just with delivery; policy changes are needed to speed up the process and to improve the impact on livelihoods. These issues were also strongly articulated at the summit.

Shortly before the summit, more than 20 organisations, including the former affiliates of the NLC, TCOE, the LPM, Lawyers for Human Rights, Women on Farms Project and the Young Communist League came together to constitute a new consortium pressing for land reform, which they named ALARM (Alliance of Land and Agrarian Reform Movements). Its stated mission is 'for a people-centred rural transformation rooted in a rapid and fundamental transfer of land to the poor and the promotion of security for those living and working on the land'.

However, as Lungisile Ntsebeza's chapter notes, the attitude of the minority white commercial farmers who were delegates from the farmers' union AgriSA was vehement opposition to both the scrapping of the 'willing seller, willing buyer' principle, and what they argued was interference with 'the market' when it came to determining the price of land. They threatened that if the state interfered with the market, there would be consequences far beyond the imagination of those at the summit. They pointed to Zimbabwe as an example, threatening that those who defy the world, currently dominated by a neo-liberal agenda, will find themselves in a position where this world will boycott them, with dire consequences. In this regard, it was quite clear that the delegates from AgriSA were conscious that they represented broader, global neo-liberal capitalist interests.

It is not clear how things will develop after the summit. Land-based organisations, including the LPM, seem to have contributed to the decision by Minister Thoko Didiza to organise the summit. To this end, one can conclude that, although they remain weak and unorganised, land-based organisations can claim some victory for the occurrence of this event. A central challenge confronting land movements in South Africa, it seems, is organisation from below, the relationship between different organisations and movements, and the forms of pressure on the state at different levels.

While the summit witnessed some shifting political dynamics, with the state apparently acceding to a number of the demands of landless people's formations and their supporters in the NGO sector, and blaming landowners for hiking up prices, the key outcome of the event – a commitment to review the 'willing seller, willing buyer' principle – remains ambiguous. Some critical reflection is needed on whether it may indicate a shift towards a more state-driven land reform, but still within a market framework, and whether or not this might constitute the start of a 'new era' of land reform. The summit did not address constitutional issues, as called for by Lungisile Ntsebeza, or the specificities that Cheryl Walker emphasises are so important for success in land reform. The focus turned almost wholly on the mode of land acquisition rather than on issues of land use that have long been marginalised, or on the ways in which redistribution of land might be the basis for different social relations of production and reproduction in society – in other words, how land redistribution helps to resolve the wider land question or agrarian question.

The question of alternatives

The summit illustrated the lack of coherent alternatives and resulted in a debate that runs the risk of being technicist, as stakeholders debate the merits of individual policy mechanisms such as expropriation, compensation, land taxes, subdivision of landholdings, limitations on foreign ownership, and so on, rather than focusing on the land question as a whole.

South Africans, both within and outside the government, are increasingly searching for alternatives, while still debating where the fundamental constraints lie. There are broadly three schools of thought. One view is that the fundamentals are in place, but there is a need to fine-tune policy, to manipulate land markets to make them more pro-poor and to improve the modalities of

implementation. The chapter by van den Brink, Thomas and Binswanger, for instance, demonstrates that thinking in the DLA and in the World Bank is increasingly moving towards options that involve more state intervention in land markets, without discarding the market-assisted framework.

A second view is that the neo-liberal solutions are not working and this demands a rethink within a capitalist paradigm (a version of the Keynesian approach). The chapter by Cheryl Walker, for instance, advocates a pro-poor programme that focuses on proactive land acquisition by the state to meet the needs of the landless. The chapters by Mercia Andrews and Ben Cousins also call for a more interventionist, state-led approach, but argue that this needs to happen in conjunction with social forces mobilising from below. These chapters share some common assumptions: that South Africa will continue to be a capitalist country in which property rights will be constitutionally protected. Within this long-term vision of mobilisation, Andrews argues that attention must be given to 'transitional demands'. Andrews and Cousins blame a lack of political will for slow progress with land reform and argue that the state can use the room for manoeuvre within the Constitution to advance transformation by expropriating land where necessary and paying below-market compensation to landowners, through a fair process. However, there remains the problem of sufficient public funds being made available, as this would nevertheless be an extraordinarily costly undertaking.

A third view is a radical, anti-capitalist and socialist perspective, which locates reform within the wider economy of South Africa and advocates cooperative farming and possible nationalisation of land. At the conference on the land question, Andile Mngxitama – a land rights activist who was, at the time, Land Rights Coordinator at the NLC – called for a democratisation of land ownership that would involve a people-driven (rather than state-driven) process of land occupations of unutilised or underutilised land. In a similar vein, Lungisile Ntsebeza in this book argues that, for fundamental land redistribution to take place, there is a need to revisit the constitutional framework which protects existing property rights that may have been acquired through colonialism and apartheid, to allow for expropriation without a market-driven compensation formula.

While all three of these views are evident among the chapters of this book, none has been clearly articulated in developed policy proposals or in public debate. All focus on the redistribution of white-owned farmland and reflect

the separation of this issue from the burning question of what is to be done about the former bantustans and what vision there is for the future of people living there.

There is a further view prevalent within the debate in South Africa, which is not represented in this book, namely, that land reform is not centrally relevant to the future of the country. The 'de-agrarianisation' view is exemplified in the controversial report of the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE), which argued that there is little demand for agricultural land among the rural poor, and that land reform has little potential to reduce poverty. Instead, it concludes that the existing commercial farming sector is an efficient model whose structure must be retained intact while being gradually deracialised. With faith in capitalism to create jobs, it advocated limited redistribution to a limited stratum of potential African commercial farmers, while prioritising provision of peri-urban land for settlement purposes. The CDE view has been widely criticised by academics, development practitioners, NGOs and government, and branded right wing, not least for its insistence that existing economic structures provide a basis for broad-based development and job creation. However, elements of the CDE perspective are also shared by some on the political left, notably among Marxists and within the labour movement, which have tended to see the rural poor and landless as a 'displaced proletariat'. Advocating proletarianisation, this traditional leftist perspective has both anticipated and advocated the absorption of the rural underclass into the urban working classes in the future. This is partly a strategic imperative but is also seen as part of the inevitable, even teleological, logic of capitalist development. Most of the contributions to this book fall between these two somewhat linear visions of economic development – capitalist modernisation on the one hand and, on the other, proletarianisation which precipitates a crisis in capitalism. The chapters in this book investigate the potential of land reform in a context where deteriorating conditions in the rural areas and the failure of the urban industrial economy to generate sufficient jobs call into question the paradigm of development being pursued.

Another issue that needs to be raised, on the question of alternatives and where South Africans can draw appropriate lessons, is the relevance of the Latin American and Asian experiences to South Africa. None of the South African contributors in this book deals with these continents. Yet, land-based South African organisations such as the LPM, NLC and TCOE have drawn inspiration from organisations such as the MST in Brazil, and La Via Campesina.

There remains a fundamental tension between conceiving of land reform as being a national project, yet decentralising implementation to the local level where it is framed as a series of discrete 'projects'. For this reason, implementation has involved the interaction of the national DLA and provincial departments of agriculture and local government – and has proved to be unwieldy. The alternative area-based approach suggested by Ben Cousins holds the promise of more coherent and integrated planning approaches, where access to and rights over land are part of wider local economic development planning, but it also runs the risk of placing land reform at the mercy of local politics. However, to the extent that it has been articulated, the area-based approach has consisted mostly of a state-centric view of how land reform can be driven by a planned approach, although Ben Cousins and Mercia Andrews emphasise a 'people-driven' vision of land reform. In this way, they remind us that, while the search for 'technical fixes' to land reform continues, it is a fundamentally political project and no major shift in policy and practice is likely in the absence of the mobilisation of potential beneficiaries.

Lastly, but equally importantly, a discussion on alternatives must raise the critical question of the role of intellectuals, and academics and researchers who are based in universities and have specialist interests in these land-related issues. They are often not part of the civil society that they investigate. At the same time, some have established collaborative links with rural organisations and make their research findings available to these practitioners. Additionally, given their capacity to investigate developments in other countries and draw lessons for South Africa, some academics and researchers are keen to share their research and findings with land-based activists. They can also bring their skills to bear by conducting policy-relevant research: to analyse experience to date, to reflect on why land reform has fallen short of expectations, to contribute lessons from comparative experience elsewhere in the world, and to propose possible directions for future policy. There remains also the challenge of using research not only to feed into policy but also to support social movements and civil society. A question that often crops up in this relationship is the issue of the 'politics of knowledge' and who determines the agenda. An issue that was debated among participants at the land conference was the perceived dearth of African academics and researchers, and the consequent need for academic institutions to be at the forefront of developing a new generation of African academics. This book demonstrates this ongoing challenge.

About the book

A key objective of the conference was to solicit as broad a spectrum of opinion around the land debate as possible. Apart from academics and researchers, there were also presentations from government and civil society representatives. In planning this book, the Wolpe Trust hoped that all the presentations would be included. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to do so. Nevertheless, this book includes a diversity of institutions and perspectives, from the World Bank and the DLA to South African and foreign academic commentators and land activists.

The book has two sections. In the first section, the chapters by Bernstein and Moyo establish a theoretical, historical and comparative context for the South African debate, as discussed earlier in this introduction. In the second section, in six chapters, contributors present their perspectives on how the land question should be framed in South Africa, analyse existing land policy and its results, and propose alternatives and future directions for policy and practice. Hall reviews the current land reform programme in South Africa and identifies three main obstacles confronting it. Ntsebeza reflects on the constitutional parameters within which this has proceeded. Walker revisits the question of what we can expect from land reform and, by drawing attention to the quality of processes and livelihoods, emphasises its limits and warns against economic reductionism. Van den Brink, Thomas and Binswanger review the rationale for land reform and its application in South Africa, proposing new policy mechanisms within the market framework to improve implementation. Andrews suggests that the arguments presented by advocates of market-led land reform have proved to be fallacious and argues that organisation by the rural poor presents the most promising avenue towards a more radical policy framework. Cousins locates land reform within the debate on South Africa's 'two economies' and sets out a proposal for area-based agrarian reform that would open opportunities for more meaningful participation and more effective planning.

It is a challenging task to address the land question comprehensively, and three substantial shortcomings to this book must be noted. First, with the focus falling on issues of race and class, few of the contributions analyse gender dimensions of the land question. The chapters by Moyo, Walker and Cousins address the issue to a degree, but nevertheless the issue is not a

substantial focus of the book. Secondly, with the emphasis on redistributing commercial farmland, the issue of transforming land rights in the communal areas is largely absent, with the exception of Cousins's chapter. So too are farm workers, except in Hall's chapter. Finally, the perspectives in this book do not represent the full spectrum of debate in South African society. All agree – for different reasons – on the need for land reform. All agree that the current programme is inadequate and too slow. The value of the book stems not from covering the full range of opinion, then, but in illuminating the nuanced differences among those advocating land reform as a necessary means of resolving South Africa's land question.

Few books have been published on this topic. The most significant contributions during the early years of land reform in South Africa were *Agricultural Land Reform in South Africa: Policies, Markets and Mechanisms* (Van Zyl, Kirsten & Binswanger 1996); two volumes of *Land, Labour and Livelihoods in Rural South Africa* (Lipton, De Klerk & Lipton 1996; Lipton, Ellis & Lipton 1996); and a special issue of the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, entitled *The Agrarian Question in South Africa* and edited by Henry Bernstein (1996). A few years later, following a conference hosted by the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (School of Government, University of the Western Cape) and the NLC in 1999, a further volume was published, entitled *At the Crossroads: Land and Agrarian Reform in South Africa into the 21st Century* (Cousins 2002).

This book is the first, however, to review the land reform programme in its first decade and to present a range of views on alternatives to the existing land policy framework in South Africa, informed by the hindsight of ten years' experience. A decade after the advent of democracy in South Africa, the focus falls both on reflecting on experience and considering alternative policy approaches. In this respect, this book marks an important new phase in the debates on how to resolve the land question in South Africa. We hope it will contribute to a more robust and focused policy debate and to building linkages between practitioners, policy makers and academics.

Note

1 Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust website: <<http://www.wolpetrust.org.za>>.

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