

LAND TENURE/RURAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP - PRESS REPORT

Ciskei, Venda and KwaNdebele have recently considered changing their respective land tenure systems. In addition, there has been talk of modifying or repealing the Group Areas Act; and of reviewing the land rights both of rural and urban blacks.

Against this background, a Workshop on Land Tenure and Rural Development was held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, in November 1986. The Workshop was organised jointly by the University's Institute of Social and Economic Research and the National Programme for Human Needs, Resources and the Environment of the National Institute of Personnel Research. Sixty delegates of widely differing backgrounds, including academics, government officials and members of private organisations, attended.

In a keynote address, Professor Rodney Davenport (Rhodes University) presented an historical overview of the development of land policy in South Africa. He pointed out that agriculture and land-use patterns have developed as a result of particular political considerations, rather than agricultural and commercial considerations.

Most delegates felt that land tenure reform alone could not promote or retard economic development. Land tenure was only one of a number of interrelated factors, such as the effectiveness of local government, influx control, migrant labour, agricultural services and subsidies, and wider political factors.

There was little consensus as to which specific land tenure systems should be implemented in black-occupied areas of South Africa. In urban areas, and in rural areas where cash-cropping is possible, freehold tenure offers certain advantages; security of tenure, proof of ownership and collateral. While freehold tenure allows consolidation of land into viable agricultural units, it could simultaneously lead to landlessness, unemployment and impoverishment as the poor sold off their land to the rich. In the Ciskei, freehold tenure has been practiced for over 100 years in some areas, with very little land consolidation having taken place. In those areas, yields have been no higher than in non-freehold areas.

Most delegates felt that one of the requirements for economic development, both in rural and urban areas, was security of tenure, and that several factors militated against this. One of these was the inefficiency and perceived lack of legitimacy of local authorities, especially in urban and peri-urban areas. These authorities have little say on how

land is used, and accordingly are unable to offer security of tenure. Betterment schemes, for example have deprived local authorities in many rural areas of control over land use. While having limited powers and financial resources, these bodies are kept in office by government, and have only limited accountability to their constituencies.

A hotly debated issue was the question of influx control and security of tenure. Some delegates argued that influx control would continue to operate in hidden form: forced removals, labour recruitment policies. Others argued that this was not the case. Influx control, together with the continued forced removal of people from informal peri-urban settlements, militated heavily against the security of tenure of black people. It was argued that informal settlements were an acceptable form of housing, given the national housing shortage, and that such settlements could be upgraded through the provision of services, security of tenure and effective leadership.

Development initiatives often deprived people of control over their land. Rural black people in a number of communities established informal self-help and co-operative arrangements. It was felt that such initiatives should be supported and allowed to develop, by allowing people an effective say in the planning and control of co-operatives, and of other development projects which affected their lives.

For historical and political reasons, black rural areas could be seen not as agriculturally-based, but as disadvantaged consumer communities, dependent upon the cash earnings of migrant workers. In many such areas, agriculture played only a minor role, and had a low place in people's priorities.

For these reasons, it was felt that development initiatives should focus on increasing the general economic viability, and standards of living, of rural communities. The emphasis should be on developing the kind of community that would have the resources, skills and energy to make a significant investment in agriculture.

All people in South Africa should be able to own, and to gain access to, land and to develop it economically. This would involve farmers or businessmen of all races having access to the same credit facilities and support services. Such equality of access – without which meaningful economic development could not take place – would involve changes in the nature of land tenure systems and the repeal of the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, the Group Areas Act and other discriminatory legislation. □