Serving production, welfare or neither?
An analysis of the group resettlement projects in the Namibian land reform*

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Abstract
Since independence in 1990 the SWAPO-led Government has implemented a land reform policy in Namibia aimed at addressing the imbalances in land ownership by redistributing white commercial farmlands among black farmers. As part of this policy, communities have been settled on group resettlement farms. Although these settlements are only a minor part of the land reform process, they involve more than half of the total beneficiaries. This article attempts to provide an overview of these group resettlements and to find out if they are achieving the objectives – in terms of production and social welfare – set out by the government. I seek to contribute to the ongoing debate over land reform in Namibia and to highlight some of the shortcomings in its implementation. I also consider the possibility of combining and/or prioritizing the raising of production levels with and the improvement of the social welfare of communities through land reforms.

Introduction
As was the case with other Southern African countries, when Namibia achieved independence the new Government inherited a strongly biased distribution of land ownership, where white farmers controlled large areas of farmland. Since the 1990s the Swapo-led Government has implemented several measures to try to correct this imbalance while, at the same time, complying with the agreements signed during the

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1 According to my sources of the 69.6 million hectares of Namibia’s agricultural land, 36.2 million corresponded to commercial farms – mostly in the hands of white farmers – and 33.4 million were African communal lands at the time of independence (cf. Ministry of Lands and Resettlement (MLR), Background Research Work and Findings of the Permanent Technical Team Studies, Windhoek, 2005: 1).
transition to independence. These included respecting private property and pursuing a policy of reconciliation towards white Namibians. Government officials have also always insisted that it is necessary to maintain production levels in the commercial agricultural sector and thus secure its contribution to the national economy. In the last 20 years, the Ministry of Lands and Resettlement (MLR) has acquired 725,846 hectares of land for resettlement, and the Affirmative Action Loan Scheme (AALS) – a programme based on public subsidies on loans awarded to wealthy blacks who wish to purchase farms – has resulted in the transfer of 3,470,672 hectares. Group resettlements have been a very minor part of the government’s land redistribution policy. Only 195,369 hectares of the 4,196,518 acquired through the MLR and AALS have been used for the resettlement of communities (around 4.6% of the total).

In spite of these figures, I still consider it worth devoting an article to this kind of resettlement. Even if the amount of land involved is relatively small, in 2004 it was home to a mere 1,226 families that is slightly more than half the total number of resettled families (including the AALS). These farms also house most of the San families who have benefited from the land reform programme. San are one of the most marginalised Namibian communities and they have hardly received any farmland for individual resettlement. There are 38,000 San in Namibia, around 2% of the total population. In practically all Human Development Indexes they lag behind other Namibian ethnic groups: in terms of life expectancy, literacy rates or income per capita. During the nineteenth and twentieth century the San lost most of their ancestral lands to white settlers or expanding African herders and agriculturalists. They now have very limited

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3 Reliable and clear data on the acquisition and redistribution of land by the MLR are hard to obtain. One of the biggest problems of the resettlement programme is that the MLR does not have an updated census of farms and beneficiaries. The data quoted here come from an MLR report written in 2005 and have been modified (slightly it seems) in recent years. According to the MLR, 21 farms of a combined 165,049 hectares were acquired in 2005–2006, and 25 families were resettled on 6 farms. In 2006–2007 the MLR bought 17 farms and 122 families were resettled. In 2008–2009 the MLR acquired only 3 farms. This would mean a total of 178 farms acquired by the government and 1,673 resettled families. I have been unable to trace data for 2007–008 (cf. Ministry of Lands and Resettlement (MLR), *Annual Report, 2005–2006*, Windhoek, 2006: 12-14; Christof Maletsky, “Government plans to speed up land reform”, The Namibian, 27th April 2009; Absalom Shigwedha, “17 farms bought for resettlement”, The Namibian, 30th April 2008).

access to communal land. Most San are workers on commercial farms or live in communal areas under the control of other ethnic groups.\(^5\)

The study of group resettlements, besides providing a clearer picture of the situation on the farms, should make possible an analysis of the fundamental points of the land reform process in Namibia: the ideology which sustains it, its objectives and the difficulties involved in combining the two elements mentioned in the title of this paper, productivity and social welfare.

This article provides data about several group resettlement projects with both San and non-San beneficiaries. It is important to mention that the data presented here are those collected by the researcher when the farms were visited (2008 or 2009), and it is very likely that some of them have changed since then. I believe, however, that this does not affect the conclusions presented either for each individual resettlement or for the programme as a whole.

**Group resettlements in the Namibian land reform**

Land reform policy in Namibia is basically implemented through the Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act of 1995 (ACLRA). According to this law the government has the right of first refusal on every farm which is offered for sale. If the Government is not interested in acquiring a farm a waiver is issued to the owner who is then permitted to sell his land on the free market. The Act also establishes the possibility of expropriation “in the public interest”\(^6\). In 1997 the government established a National Resettlement Policy (NRP) which provided the guiding principles for the resettlement of African farmers on lands acquired by the MLR. The NRP states that people have to be resettled in a way that is “institutionally, sociologically, economically and environmentally sustainable”. The goals are: the redress of imbalances inherited from the colonial period; the encouragement of food self-sufficiency amongst the beneficiaries; the growth of small farmers’ share in the marketed agricultural production and in GDP; the creation of employment; and the reduction of population density (both in terms people and livestock) in communal areas. Later, the alleviation of poverty was added as a further goal of resettlement. Resettlement beneficiaries have to be Namibian citizens; they must be people who have neither land, nor income nor livestock, or who have neither land nor income but have some livestock, or who have no land but have income or livestock. The NRP established five categories of people who would be given priority to when selecting beneficiaries: ex-soldiers of the Liberation War; the San community; residents in overcrowded communal areas; displaced, destitute and landless people; and people with disabilities. Those owning more than 150 head of cattle or more than 800 head of small


livestock are excluded from the government’s resettlement programme. The eligible beneficiaries are expected to show an “interest” or have a “background” in agriculture, and they are supposed to be able to pay – at least partly – some of the costs of the programme, such as for instance for the supply of water. The Act further stipulates that if the resettled farmer does not use his land “productively” he can be “disqualified” and his plot will be transferred to a new beneficiary.7

There are two kinds of resettlement projects. In individual resettlements, a farm is divided amongst several beneficiaries, each one receiving a plot (a plot is around 1,000 hectares in the north of the country and 3,000 hectares in the south, the differing qualities of the soil and grazing being the reason behind this). In group resettlements the farm is allotted to a group of people who have to exploit it communally. Beneficiaries should receive a certificate of lease for 99 years. Projects are expected to become self-sufficient after four or five years.8 It is worth making a short comment on Namibia’s climate here. In large parts of the country – and specially the regions where most of the commercial and resettlement farms are found – the annual rainfall is very low and variable, and droughts are frequent. The average amount of rain decreases from north to south. As a consequence of low rainfall 23% of Namibia’s surface is considered arid and 74% semi-arid.9

Analysis of resettlement farms

The farm Drimiopsis10, which covers 2,262 hectares, is located some 50 kms from Gobabis. It was already in the possession of the colonial administration before independence and it was used as an emergency shelter for displaced people. No formal process of selection or registration of beneficiaries was ever made (it seems that only seven families were actually registered). There are some 85 families, 600 people, on the farm now, most of them being San (58%) and Damara (25%). In the 1990s the government built houses for the beneficiaries, with running water but no power supply. There is a kindergarten and a school nearby. Although there are no health facilities on the farm and – as usual in Namibian rural areas – there is no public transport, transportation to the clinic in Gobabis is readily available in private vehicles or taxis.

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8 MLRR, National Resettlement : 6-7, 12.
10 Unless otherwise stated information in the following paragraphs comes from interviews with Silvia Sala of Fundación CEAR and the author’s personal observation on a visit to Drimiopsis.
(though it has to be paid for). There are two boreholes on the farm from which water is pumped using diesel motors. Drimiopsis, as well as two other resettlements in the Omaheke Region (Skoonheid and Donkerbos/Sonneblom) and another one in Khomas (Arovley), is included in a Livelihoods Support Programme (LISUP), financed by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). The three Omaheke resettlement farms included in LISUP are located in one of the driest regions of the country.

In Drimiopsis there is a communal garden with a dripping irrigation system where onions, cabbage, beetroot, and sunflower are grown. Tomatoes and watermelons are also planted in summer. Most of those engaged in these garden activities are women, as very few men help with the agricultural work. The income generated by the sale of surplus products goes into a communal account and is used to pay communal expenses, such as seeds or equipment. In order to encourage greater involvement in farmwork, there are plans to make those not working in the garden contribute towards some of the expenses that are now being met through the communal account. There is also a larger communal plot for dryland farming, and dryland homestead gardens close to the houses, where maize is grown. All the farm’s crops are cultivated organically. Fertilizers and pesticides are not used in order to avoid becoming dependent on those who supply them.

When I visited the farm (June 2008), the MLR Coordinator in Drimiopsis informed us that the winter crop had not been sown yet, as the tractor had not been available for ploughing. This tractor is shared amongst the three LISUP farms in the Omaheke. In fact, the project’s evolution over the last few years has been complicated. A report by the Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID) defined the agricultural production in Drimiopsis as “poor” in 2008. The resident beneficiaries have few income sources: they depend mostly on pensions and salaries earned outside of the farm. In 2006 DRFN indicated that 80 men and 49 women from Drimiopsis had employment outside the resettlement. DRFN was informed by the beneficiaries that they were often hungry, and that the residents with the best standard of living were those permanently employed in

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12 LISUP will be implemented for three years (2008-2010) by Fundación CEAR and the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN). The programme intends to improve the beneficiaries’ living conditions, make the resettlements economically sustainable, and encourage the integration and social cohesion of the San communities. Among other things the donors hope to increase the farms’ agricultural productivity and develop some income-generating activities, such as craft-making (cf. Pedro Surja, Evaluación externa del ‘Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Soberanía Alimentaria y la Sociedad Civil en 4 Reasentamientos de las Regiones de Omaheke y Khomas’ (Namibia), AECID-Fundación CEAR-Ecode, 2009: 10-11. I have to thank Silvia Sala for granting me access to Surja’s report).

13 Silvia Sala, personal communication, 30th January 2008.

14 Mosotho and Tsiu, Assessment: 18.
neighbouring farms. Silvia Sala confirmed that most of the San are more interested in looking for remunerated work rather than in making an effort to grow their own crops. If they are offered jobs on commercial farms, they usually accept them. Beneficiaries have not been issued with an official lease certificate. The NID’s researchers drew attention to the statement by several beneficiaries that “they were better off in their former farms as poverty and hunger were not so persistent”.

Recent changes seem to have resulted in some improvement in the situation. Crops are now grown in individual plots, not communally. Beneficiaries have planted two hectares under this new system and have cleared a further three. There are now 48 individual plots, in addition to the 40 family gardens. Production has increased, indicating that farmers are more motivated to work for themselves.

The LISUP resettlements have also been developing a crafts project, with help from Omba Gallery, part of the Omba Arts Trust, an institution devoted to assisting traditional craft makers with production and marketing. Omba buys the materials, is in charge of marketing the crafts and helps the artisans to create more original and marketable designs. Up to now, the purchase of the materials has been subsidised by the Spanish Cooperation. Beneficiaries have obtained up to 5,000 € as a result of the sale of handicrafts, but it seems unlikely that they will be able to assume control of the project. They have not been trained. They prefer to leave marketing to Omba and be paid according to production.

Skoonheid is a 7,000 hectare farm also located in Gobabis district, and was acquired by the government in 1993. 73 families were resettled on the farm, mostly former San farmworkers from the area who had lost their jobs. The Government built 64 houses, drilled four new boreholes, and a modern irrigation system was put in place. A disagreement between the MLR and the Regional Council has prevented the houses from being connected to the water and electricity supply networks.

The exact number of residents is not known. The MLR Coordinator declared that 464 people were living in Skoonheid (260 men and 204 women), 75% of them being San. There are also five non-San families: Ovambo, Damara, Herero, Kavango and Himba. Pedro Surja’s report, however, indicated a population of 279: 111 men and 168

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15 DRFN, Drimiopsis: 12-13, 17-18, 21; Silvia Sala, personal communication, 25th March 2009.
16 Mosotho & Tsiu, Assessment: 20 f.
17 Silvia Sala, personal communication, 25th March 2009.
18 Karen le Roux, personal communication, 9th and 11th June 2008; Silvia Sala, personal communication, 25th March 2009.
19 Unless otherwise stated information in the following paragraphs comes from interviews with Mr. Sijaja, MLR Coordinator in Skoonheid, and the author’s personal observation on a visit to the farm.
20 Tapia, Reforma: 144-146; DRFN, PRA/Situational analysis. Site report for Skoonheid Resettlement Farm. Omaheke Region, developed by Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) on behalf of Fundación CEAR, 2006: 7.
21 Mr. Sijaja, personal communication, 10th June 2008.
women. This discrepancy reflects one of the problems in many resettlements: the unreliability of official residents’ registers, which is compounded by the high level of mobility of their populations.

The resettlement has no school, only a kindergarten built by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. As no teacher has been provided, the kindergarten is looked after by a volunteer from the community. The nearest school is in Gaena, some 19 kms from the farm. Dr. de Koch, a medical doctor, has been visiting Skoonheid for the last years and takes care of the beneficiaries for free. Theoretically a mobile clinic visits the farm every month (the actual time between visits is usually longer).

There is a communal garden of 1.5 hectares, irrigated through a dripping system, and where cabbage, beetroot, tomatoes, onions and peppers are grown in winter, and maize, beans, melons and watermelons are planted in summer. 40% of production was expected to be used for consumption, revenue from another 40% was to cover the project’s expenses, and income from the sale of the remaining 20% was to be distributed among the beneficiaries. In actual fact 80% of the crops are consumed by the beneficiaries and the MLR pays the maintenance costs. Any extra income goes into a communal account. Crops are rotated and all production is organic, meaning that artificial fertilizer or pesticides are not used. There is also a communal field of 20 hectares for dryland farming, which is divided in family plots of half hectare each. Maize, beans or melons are grown on them, either for consumption or sale. Homesteads also have gardens close to the houses.

Within the farm there are also four cattle posts where the five non-San families were “temporarily resettled”. That was twelve years ago and they have not as yet received land anywhere else. These families, who enjoy higher incomes and own more livestock than the San beneficiaries, are still demanding to be transferred from Skoonheid. Some of the grazing land in Skoonheid is used by neighbouring Herero herders as well, and there are signs of overgrazing. There were 58 head of communal cattle in 2008, which are supposed to provide milk and manure for the settlement, and not to be sold.

Skoonheid’s problems are similar to those experienced in Drimiopsis. The dripping irrigation system is technically complex and neither the beneficiaries nor the MLR maintain it properly. From the beginning the beneficiaries’ training was minimal and productivity was very low. In 2006, DRFN found that food reserves normally lasted only for four to five months and beneficiaries depended on Government aid. 44.8% of the families were identified as “poor”, with irregular or no income. Beneficiaries have not been issued with a lease certificate. Some years ago, the San community expressed their dissatisfaction with the MLR Coordinator, an ethnic Tswana who apparently used

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22 Surja, Evaluación: 11; Mr. Sijaja, personal communication, 10th June 2008.
23 Mr. Sijaja, personal communication, 10th June 2008.
24 DRFN, PRA/Situational: 18, 27, 40.
the beneficiaries as private domestic workers. In 2008 part of the maize, beans and groundnuts crop from the communal field was sold in Gobabis and Windhoek’s Green Market.

According to the present Coordinator, the MLR has to ensure the resettlement’s maintenance and provide the inputs needed, but there are many deficiencies. The farm has four boreholes which were installed by the MLR, but the Ministry of Agriculture often fails to provide the diesel on time to make them work. In June 2008, for instance, only one of the boreholes was in working condition. The Coordinator also highlighted the occurrence of conflicts between the different groups of beneficiaries. He was convinced that other communities were trying to “undermine” the San efforts, and that neighbouring herders “mislead” them to believe that they should only work for cash, by suggesting that if the beneficiaries did unpaid agricultural work on the fields, they are actually working “for nothing”. Many young San men are looking for jobs in farms around the settlement.

Recently, the Special Initiative sponsored by the German government has donated 200 head of cattle to Skoonheid, and 200 more are expected to arrive soon. This is likely to create problems of overgrazing, as the San beneficiaries have access only to 2,000 of the 7,000 hectares of the farm, the rest having been taken by the cattle posts.

Excelsior is a 6,233 hectare farm located in the Tsumeb area. The resettlement was one of the projects supported through the First Spain Namibia Bilateral Cooperation Commission agreed upon in 1996. It had been acquired by the MLR in 1991 and its future remained unclear for the following five years. Fourteen families (some 100 people) were resettled on the farm. Most of them were Damara and Ovambo, with a high percentage of former People’s Liberation Army of Namibia guerrillas. The MLR and AECID designed a plan to improve the situation on the farm, and a private consultancy,

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27 Mr. Sijaja, personal communication, 10th June 2008.
28 Silvia Sala, personal communication, 25th March 2009. The Special Initiative is an aid programme proposed by the German Government in 2005 and approved by the Namibian National Assembly in 2006. Its main objective is to support development projects for the communities most affected by the genocide committed by German colonial troops in 1904-07. German wishes to avoid this initiative being seen as a reparations payment and reluctance on the Namibian Government’s side towards aid being targeted at specific ethnic groups, however, have resulted in the Special Initiative being officially designed as a support programme for all communities living in some selected regions: Karas, Erongo, Hardap, Otjozondjupa, Kunene and Omaheke (cf. Henning Melber, “‘We never spoke about reparations’. German-Namibian relations between amnesia, aggression and reconciliation”, in: Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, (eds.), Genocide in German South-West Africa. The Colonial War (1904-1908) in Namibia and its Aftermath, Mompouth, Merlin Press, 2008: 267-271; Erika von Wietersheim, This Land is my Land! Motions and Emotions around Land Reform in Namibia, Windhoek, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2008: 186-187).
29 Unless otherwise stated, the information on Excelsior comes from interviews with Amutenya Hilemi, MLR Coordinator on the farm and Christopher Mukumbuta, Development Planner for Oshikoto and Kunene from the MLR Office in Tsumeb, 22nd July 2008, and from the author’s observation on a visit to the farm.
EPTISA, won the tender to implement the project. The aim of the support programme was to increase agricultural production, and improve the living standards of the beneficiaries, providing them with, among other things, better health and education services.

Between 1997 and 2000 the MLR and the Spanish Cooperation built 14 houses, one for each of the beneficiaries’ families, and a six-classroom school (with financial assistance from the Ministry of Education). An irrigation system was put in place and other materials were provided. The programme’s cost was 1,348,768.63 €. In 2002 there was a 35 hectare dryland communal field, and each family had an irrigated garden of 1.5 hectares close to their houses. There were 237 head of cattle and 346 head of small stock. With AECID’s support, vegetables and milk were marketed in Tsumeb, bringing in an income of 400 to 500 € per family per annum. Cotton and maize grown on the communal plot produced only 700 to 1,000 € to be distributed amongst the fourteen families.

The AECID support ended in 2000. This did not create significant difficulties and beneficiaries maintained their food self-sufficiency. On Spanish insistence Excelsior residents became some of the very few farmers to be issued with a lease certificate for 99 years. The project was, however, very expensive: 95,000 € per family, and Harring and Odendaal already warned in 2002 that “it is doubtful whether the project will be sustainable in the long run”.30 In 2005-06 vegetable sales produced an income of 3,912 NAD (339 €), far less than the benefits quoted by Carlos Tapia for the years when the project was supported by AECID.31

In 2008, vegetables, maize and mahangu were grown on the family gardens, using manure and not fertilizer. The dryland communal field was supposed to be planted with crops for consumption and sale in Tsumeb. However due to a technical problem with the project’s tractor, which the MLR failed to repair, the field was not planted. There have been recurrent problems with repairs, apparently due to the MLR’s inability to obtain or approve quotations on time. The MLR Coordinator affirmed that if these repairs were to be carried out, farmers would increase production significantly and buyers in Tsumeb would collect the crops in Excelsior. However, as production is so low at the moment, this is not profitable and the beneficiaries have to send the produce to Tsumeb themselves, for which they lack transport.

Beneficiaries own individually some 130 head of cattle. That is less than the cattle listed by Tapia for the years 2000-2002. The Coordinator declared that some families still have more than 20 head, but others have lost them all due to “negligence” or to “secret” sales (it is illegal to sell cattle without informing the Resettlement’s Committee

31 MLR, Annual Report : 15-16.
Cattle are normally used for milk and for the production of butter, either for consumption or sale.

There are seven boreholes on the farm, but they constantly experience problems of maintenance. Again, the MLR is extremely slow to repair them, as they have to seek three different quotations before choosing a contractor. Payment is often very slow and this in turn makes local companies very reluctant to provide quotations or accept jobs. The beneficiaries’ houses have running water — when pumps are in order — but not electricity. When in need of medical treatment, residents have to catch a lift to Tsumeb, as there is no regular transport facility. The Excelsior school does have electricity, and a library donated by the Spanish Cooperation. 234 children attend the school; however, most of them are San from neighbouring areas, and not beneficiaries from the resettlement. According to the Principal of the school, for most of the San pupils their only daily meal is that provided by the school.

At present, the settlement does not receive any support from NGOs. The MLR provides it with seed for the communal field, but not for the family gardens, as beneficiaries are expected to produce their own seeds. There is a register of those taking part in the communal works and those who do not participate are not supported with funds from the communal account. When I asked the Coordinator if beneficiaries have jobs outside the farm, she denied it, but later she explained that one Damara woman whose plot is one of the most productive works as a cleaner at the school and her husband is employed in Gobabis.

Excelsior was considered a success for some years. Indeed it almost became a model for the resettlement programme. It is true that the situation on the farm is much better than in other resettlements. An in-depth analysis of the situation, however, clearly shows that from the start of the settlement the number of livestock as well as the income from the sale of crops have decreased.

In view of the apparently good results in Excelsior, the MLR suggested a new project to the AECID: supporting the resettlement of five farms ceded by Werner List to the Ministry (Michael, Nimitz, Tsumis, Elf and Dwight) around Otji, in the Kunene region. The farms were grouped in a single resettlement, and named after the Spanish monarch’s spouse, Queen Sofia (QS), with a total area of 21,102 hectares. In 1998 an agreement was signed between the MLR, AECID and Fundación CEAR to resettle some 50 families in Queen Sofia (including those of the four former farmworkers). The Spanish Cooperation allotted 306,122 € to the project, and the MLR contributed another 326,530 €.

The project soon encountered all sorts of difficulties. AECID objected to the first selection of beneficiaries made by the MLR, which included many urban residents,

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32 Principal of Huigub Primary School, personal communication, 22nd July 2008.
33 Unless otherwise stated, information regarding Queen Sofia comes from interviews with Christopher Mukumbuta, Development Planner for Oshikoto and Kunene from the MLR Office in Tsumeb, and with the Development Committee at Queen Sofia, 22nd July 2008, and from the author’s personal observations on a visit to the farm.
people with relatively high incomes, and some others connected to SWAPO. The list was revised and more poor people from rural areas were included. Most came from Khomas, Khorixas and Otjozondjupa regions. Out of 50 families, 31 were headed by women (widows, divorcees or whose husbands working elsewhere). In 2008 the same 50 families (some 400 people) were still residing on the farm, most of them Ovambos and Damaras, and the preponderance of women-headed households remained. Fifty houses were built at a lower cost than at Excelsior. A school with two classrooms, one office and one warehouse was also built, and it was supposed to be maintained and staffed by the Ministry of Education and the beneficiaries themselves. A mobile clinic began visiting the farm once a month.  

The scope for dryland agriculture was quickly dismissed on the farm due to the low fertility of the soils. Irrigated agriculture was started in a communal field of 10 to 25 hectares and in family gardens of 0.25 hectares each. Each family was earning around 500 € per year in 2002. That same year cattle were distributed (six cows per household). AECID had anticipated an income of 2,000 € per family per year. However both the expected support and the training of beneficiaries were delayed due to disputes between the Spanish Cooperation and Fundación CEAR, and between the Fundación’s staff in Namibia and the headquarters in Madrid. There was also a lack of qualified staff in the field. The cost per beneficiary in Queen Sofia was lower than in Excelsior, some 45,000-50,000 € per family. Each family received a lease certificate for 99 years, delivered to them by the current President Pohamba, then Minister of Lands, when the project was officially launched. According to the committee, many certificates were issued in the name of both husband and wife.

The MLR’s financial and technical support to Queen Sophia ceased in 2002, and the Coordinator left on the farm was, according to a report by the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ, German Technical Cooperation), “inexperienced and not trained in agricultural related fields”. Since his dismissal in 2006 there has been no Coordinator for the project and the Ministry’s regional office was unable to explain why this post has not been filled.

In 2006 eight hectares of both irrigated and dryland fields were planted, but no crops were harvested as the borehole’s pump was out of order for four months. The tractor which was to service Queen Sofia had also been out of commission for two years. By then there were no more than 1,000 NAD (87 €) in the beneficiaries’ communal account, whereas in the years 2001-03 there had been up to 25,000 ND (2,166 €). The farm is affected by a growing problem of bush encroachment. The GTZ concluded that, in spite of AECID’s investment of 14 million NAD (1.2 million €) in Queen Sophia,  

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34 Tapia, Reforma: 133-137.
“on the ground there is no correlation between invested Namibian dollars and current existing developments”.37

At present, residents still have family gardens of 0.25 hectares close to their homes, where they grow maize, mahangu and some vegetables, but the committee claims that they cannot irrigate them for lack of water. The communal field has been reduced to four hectares, when the original project envisaged an area of 10 to 25. Vegetables such as beetroot and carrots are grown with the help of irrigation, both for consumption and sale. In a good year some 50 kgs can be obtained monthly. A portion of the communal land is also used for dryland cultivation of maize and mahangu. In 2007-2008 further problems with the water supply meant it was only possible to sow maize. The water pump suffered another breakdown, and the MLR failed to fix it before the ploughing season. At the same time, the community’s tractor had been in Otjiwarongo for a year waiting to be repaired, thus preventing the ploughing of the fields. The existence of 17 boreholes on the farm does not prevent the recurrence of problems with the water supply. Beneficiaries in Queen Sofia own cattle individually. The committee informed us that although some families have increased their herds to some 30 head, some others have “fallen to zero”. Cattle are used for milk for own consumption, or for sale. There is also some small stock on the farm. Most of the beneficiaries work outside Queen Sofia, in commercial farms or in cities.

There is neither running water nor electricity in the settlement. To visit a doctor, residents have to go to the hospital in Outjo, and a mobile clinic comes to the project only every two to three months. The school suffers from the same problems of deficient planning as the project as a whole. Some 191 children attend the school, but there is no hostel to lodge them. The lack of power supply makes it impossible to use the computers donated by the Spanish and Indonesian Cooperations, which are kept in storage. The school’s principal affirmed that, according to promises made to them, they would be connected to the electricity network in 2015 at the earliest, and indicated that the alternative solar power system “does not work properly”.38

In spite of all these problems, the beneficiaries’ committee assured that they feel “fortunate to be there”, as their situation was even worse before being resettled on the farm. In view of the precariousness of the situation, a meeting with MLR representatives and neighbouring commercial farmers was convened in Queen Sofia in August 2008. The MLR promised to appoint a Coordinator for the farm.39

Seringkop farm, in Otjo district, covers an area of 7,956 hectares and was acquired by the MLR in 2006 from a commercial farmer. In November 2008 the Ministry

37 Ibid.
38 Principal of Queen Sofia School, personal communication, 21st July 2008.
40 Unless otherwise stated, the information on Seringkop comes from an interview with Gerson Kamatuka, Deputy Director for Special Projects in the Office of the Prime Minister, and from the author’s attendance to an Integrated Workshop in Seringkop farm, 26th March 2009.
transferred the farm’s ownership to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), “on behalf of the Hai//om communities in Kunene region”. Seringkop is part of an initiative of the ODPM to resettle San communities on farms neighbouring the Etosha National Park, from where they were expelled in the 1950s. The MLR has also bought Koppies, a 1,931-hectare farm close to Seringkop, and they wish to obtain another property located between Seringkop and Etosha in order to connect the resettlement with the Park.

There are some 78 families at present in Seringkop, most of them Hai//om San expelled from farms in the area. They arrived in November 2008, and it seems that some more Hai//om have established themselves on the farm lately. The farm’s soils are suitable for small scale cultivation and the beneficiaries’ wives have already planted maize gardens. The farm is divided in 30 grazing camps. There are 55 cattle, 63 sheep, 220 goats and 66 donkeys which belonged to the San beneficiaries before resettlement. The Joint Committee of the Namibian Agricultural Union and the Namibia National Farmers’ Union has donated some breeding bulls to the project. Livestock is used for consumption and for sale in order to pay school fees and other household expenses. In the northern section of Seringkop there is game, which is expected to be kept as part of a tourism project.

The Emerging Commercial Farmers Support Programme has made a map of the farm as well as a study of its resources, which – as usual – was not done before acquisition by the MLR. Planning deficiencies are evident: an official from the Department of Water Affairs warned that water resources on the farm were unknown and samples should be analysed as water could be too saline for human consumption. There are eight boreholes on the farm, but apparently only one, powered by a windmill, is in working order.

On the 26th March 2009 I attended an Integrated Workshop on Seringkop farm which gathered all stakeholders involved in the farm’s management (beneficiaries, different Government ministries, NGOs, etc). In this workshop the beneficiaries’ Health Committee complained of the lack of medical services on the farm and of delays in the mobile clinic visits. There is neither transportation for sick people nor a stock of drugs for the chronically ill. Officials from the Health Ministry promised to increase the frequency of the clinics’ visits. Beneficiaries also expressed their discontent at the lack of educational facilities in Seringkop, which has forced many families to leave their children with relatives or lodged in school hostels in Outjo and Otjiwarongo. Gerson Kamatuka, from the Office of the Prime Minister, told them that a kindergarten could be opened in Seringkop, but warned that the community would have to manage it themselves, as teachers would not be sent to the farm. It was also impossible to start a school for such

41 The Emerging Commercial Farmers Support Programme (ECFSP) is operated jointly by the Namibia Agricultural Union and the Namibia National Farmers Union and financed by the European Union. The Programme’s main goal is to help resettled farmers and to aid AALS farmers improve their plot management and productivity (Bertus Kruger, ECFSP, personal communication, 18th March 2008).
a small community. Residents affirmed that they don’t have “enough food” on the farm and requested the establishment of a Food for Work programme.

*Bernafay* is located in Mariental district, Hardap region, and covers 3,730 hectares. In 1995 the MLR paid 1.3 million NAD (112,000 €) to acquire it. Resettlement began in 1997, with four former workers and their dependents as well as two more Ovambo families brought in from outside the farm. They took up residence in the old farmer’s warehouse, which was converted into small houses. The area is semi-arid and can only support very small herds of livestock. In 2002 there were 14 cattle and some 200 to 300 small stock, all owned by one of the families which arrived in 1997. Two Cuban irrigation specialists work in Bernafay and a neighbouring farm, Westphalen. Until 2004 only eight hectares were planted with watermelons, beetroot, carrots and pumpkins. And in 2005-06 the MLR reported that only two hectares were under crops. In spite of a dripping irrigation system and the presence of five boreholes, production was extremely low. It seems that in those years beneficiaries earned around 50 € per family per month, as well as some extra income through the sale of oranges and lemons. Essentially they were dependent on government aid.

In October 2008 there were 12 families, some 87 people, residing in Bernafay. The percentage of women-headed households is unclear, as the Committee Coordinator quoted eight, but Mr. Ningwenda from the MLR Office in Hardap could only recall four. The two Ovambo families are still on the farm. In the irrigated communal field beneficiaries grow onions, beetroot and cabbage. They still plant only the same two hectares mentioned in the 2006 report. Most of the crop is sold and, according to the Committee Coordinator, they obtain “some income” which goes into a communal account. If there is some money left after paying the project’s expenses, it is distributed among those beneficiaries who have worked on the field. They wish to sell their produce in the Windhoek markets, as those in nearby Mariental seem to be controlled by local farmers. At current levels of production, however, Windhoek buyers do not find it profitable to come to Bernafay to collect the crops. There are two boreholes on the farm but at the time of my visit one of the engines was out of order. There was not enough water for the fields and the Coordinator confirmed that they “depended solely on the oranges”. Five of the resident families have “some” cattle and small stock, which are occasionally sold.

The government supplies the beneficiaries with seeds, fertiliser, and pesticides, and the Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) has given some support, such as starting a project of charcoal production from the farm’s trees. The Cuban advisers, who are part of a bilateral agreement between Namibia and Cuba, are still helping the farmers. There is no MLR Coordinator in Bernafay, and management is in the hands of Stephen Coetzee, the

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42 Unless otherwise stated, information on Bernafay comes from interviews with Simeon Ningwenda, Regional Coordinator of the Settlement Division of the MLR in Hardap, and with Stephen Coetzee, Coordinator of the Bernafay Agriculture Project Committee, 10th October 2008, as well as from the author’s personal observation on a visit to the farm.

Committee’s Coordinator and a former school teacher. Beneficiaries have not received any kind of official certificate for the land they are using. Thus some beneficiaries work temporarily on neighbouring commercial farms. Two residents receive old age pensions and two others are recipients of disability grants. Coetzee explained that young people do not wish to stay on the farm: “what chases them away is that we don’t have money every month”.

In Bernafay there are some old houses, which used to belong to the former owner, and some new ones built by the government. One of the beneficiaries complained that in the new houses the water supply is failing. To get medical treatment, residents have to travel 35 km to Stampriet or 38 km Gochas. However, they only have access to transportation on weekends, when two of the beneficiaries working in town come to the farm. A mobile clinic visits Bernafay once a month. There is no school and children have to go to Witkranz, a Catholic mission some 20 km from the settlement, or to Gochas, where they stay in a hostel. Secondary education is only available in Mariental. Coetzee lamented the serious problems with the water supply and criticised the fact that the farm’s infrastructure had not been renewed before settling the beneficiaries. According to him, since 2002 things “are more or less the same”, “there has not been any progress which could be seen”.

Westphalen 44 is a 1,200-hectare farm in Mariental district, acquired by the MLR for 1,617,000 NAD (140,000 €). As in Bernafay, resettlement began in 1997. A small vegetable garden was planted and nine hectares were devoted to citrus fruits. In 2000 five Ovambo beneficiaries arrived and the MLR built houses for them. In spite of problems with the water pumps, productivity increased significantly, and farmers obtained up to 5,700 € in 2000.45 In 2005-2006 only two hectares were planted, and income decreased to 8,553 NAD (741 €).46

In 2008 there were six beneficiaries in Westphalen (one of them being a woman), and some of them have relatives or “girlfriends” on the farm. They are all from Ovamboland. According to Mr. Ningwendja, the local population “was not interested in crops” and, although the Resettlement Committee shortlisted three local applicants, “they did not show up”, apparently because the Nama from the area believe the farm is not suited for livestock. The Ovambo saw the advertisement in the press and chose to move to Westphalen rather than remaining with their families but without work in the North. A five-hectare communal field is irrigated through a dripping system. This is again less than the total area under crops at the beginning of the settlement, and the beneficiaries stated that even these five hectares are not completely cultivated. They grow onions, peppers, beetroot and citrus fruits, for consumption and sale in Mariental and Windhoek.

44 Unless otherwise stated, information about Westphalen comes from interviews with Simeon Ningwendja, Regional Coordinator of the Settlement Division of the MLR in Hardap and with members of the Westphalen Committee, 11th October 2008, and from the author’s personal observation.
46 MLR, Annual Report : 16.
Mr. Ningwendja quoted an annual production of 2 to 3 tonnes of each vegetable. Citrus production is higher. Annual income was quoted as ranging from 20,000 to 30,000 NAD (1,733-2,600 €), which would mean a substantial increase compared to previous years. Money is deposited in a communal account, and used for paying the project’s bills, including diesel costs and the wages of some local workers who occasionally help the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries also send some money to their families in Ovamboland. It seems that none of the resettled farmers works outside of Westphalen. Some of them own goats for their own consumption and occasional sale.

There are five boreholes on the farm, but three of them were out of order and the MLR has not fixed them yet. This is hampering the expansion of the area under crops. The project’s tractor is also out of commission and fields are ploughed with a tractor borrowed from a neighbouring white farmer. The MLR provides seed and helps the residents with transportation. The NNF also supplies seed, as well as fencing material to protect the garden from kudus coming from farms around Westphalen. The Cuban advisers mentioned in Bernafay also work in Westphalen. All beneficiaries have a lease certificate. There is no MLR Coordinator. The Ministry built houses for the beneficiaries, with running water but no electricity. To see a doctor, residents must travel 30 kms to Hoachanas, a trip for which they have no transportation. There is no school and the resettlement’s children stay in a hostel in Hoachanas.

Other resettlements

Although this brief survey cannot be considered exhaustive, its findings are broadly in agreement with reports on other resettlements. Just to mention a few examples, in Donkerbos/Sonneblom, which is also part of the LISUP programme, an undefined number of beneficiaries are confronted with the same problems which I have found elsewhere: in 2006 the diesel pumps were out of order due to lack of finance and proper maintenance; deliveries of vegetable seeds by the Regional Council were almost always delayed as was that of a tractor; and the residents had few sources of income, basically pensions or wages earned outside the farm. They usually suffered from hunger or depended on the Food for Work programme.47

Another farm integrated in the LISUP is Arovley, close to Rehoboth. Beneficiaries arrived at this 6,500-hectare farm in 1992-93, and most of them were pensioners from !Oa//gaexas, adjacent to the Daan Viljoen National Park. Initially, only four families were supposed to be resettled there, but many more came, and there are now more than 30 (between 150 and 200 people), mostly Damara (86%) and some Nama (10%). As usual, there are several boreholes on the farm, but they don’t work due to poor

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47 The MLR indicates that there are 500 families in Donkerbos/Sonnebloom, but DRFN researchers only found 63 in 2006 – some 500 people – and Pedro Surja quoted only 174 people altogether (cf. DRFN, Donkerbos & Sonnebloom San Resettlement Project. Omaheke Region. Site Report, developed by Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) on behalf of Fundación CEAR, 2006: 10-13, 15, 20-21, 29; Surja, Evaluación: 11).
maintenance. Almost all households own livestock, and some areas of the farm are affected by overgrazing. There is also a growing problem of deforestation, as residents use wood as fuel. The communal field is not planted, as the community’s lack of interest in agriculture has to be added to the water supply problems. The wealthiest beneficiaries work outside the farm, and keep their livestock, relatives and/or salaried workers on the farm. Other families depend on cattle and pensions.\footnote{DRFN, Arovley Resettlement Project. Khomas Region. Site Report, developed by Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN) on behalf of Fundación CEAR, 2006: 9-12, 14-19; Surja, Evaluación : 12, 30-33.}

In 1993-1994 some 2,200 Hereros were repatriated from Botswana and resettled in Gam, an area occupied and used until then by Ju/'hoansi San. This is an area with poor soils and, although the government made some efforts to encourage agriculture and supplied seeds and other assistance in the 1990s, most of the residents depend on cattle. There is a serious overgrazing problem and, in addition, the area is known for the prevalence of \textit{otjikurjoma}, a plant which is poisonous for cattle. This was the reason recently given by the Herero herders from Gam for releasing their livestock into Nyae Nyae Conservancy illegally.\footnote{Andy Botelle and Rick Rohde, \textit{Those who live on the land. A socio-economic baseline survey for land use planning in the communal areas of Eastern Otjozondjupa}, Windhoek, Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, 2006: 167-170; Harring and Odendaal, \textit{One day}: 82-83; Christof Maletsky, “Herero farmers invade San area”, \textit{The Namibian}, 6th May 2009.}

\section*{Group resettlements: general remarks}

To sum up the findings of my field work on the resettlement farms, it is possible to conclude that the MLR’s group resettlement programme is characterised by grave deficiencies. To begin with, the selection and/or acquisition of farms for resettlement do not seem to have been carried out in accordance with any prior planning or analysis. This has been the case from the very beginning: in 1991 FAO produced a report advising the government not to buy the farms Mara, Tukuki and Halifax around Maltahöhe as they were considered not suitable for resettlement. The Government ignored the advice, bought them nevertheless, and in 1999 was forced to acknowledge that the Mara project had failed.\footnote{Harring and Odendaal, \textit{One day}: 54.} Things have not changed. At present, farms are almost always acquired and beneficiaries are settled on them without investigating either the conditions on the property (infrastructures, water supply, grazing lands, etc), its capacity to absorb the new farmers, or the suitability of the beneficiaries for the specific land which they are to receive. An environmental assessment is hardly ever conducted. Although the MLR has been accused of moving too slowly on the path of resettlement, it seems that buying commercial farms and settling people on them quickly to increase redistribution statistics is considered more important than doing it properly. Furthermore, the actual resettlement process, once started, is painfully slow. It is usually a matter of years from the moment a farm is acquired until the arrival of beneficiaries. In
the words of Harald Koch from the Ministry of Agriculture, by then “the infrastructure of farms is already broken before the farmers are even resettled”. An anonymous source within the MLR informed us that the Ministry “don’t know the production [of the farms] before [being acquired] and have no records of current production”. There are indications that the huge problem of not having a proper database of MLR farms and beneficiaries settled on them is apparently on the way to being solved: a land audit is being carried out with the support of the German and Spanish Cooperations.

Post-resettlement services provided by the MLR are generally poor. Practically all observers agree that the Ministry is badly in need of staff and that many of those employed are underqualified. In 2005, for instance, 66% of positions within the Directorate of Valuation and Estate Management and 37% in the Directorate of Surveying and Mapping were vacant. The supply of materials and repairs to infrastructures are extremely slow. The coordination between the different Ministries involved with beneficiaries’ support is poor. This is especially true in the case of the Ministries of Lands and Agriculture despite the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Standing Committee for Land Use Planning which was set up to improve both the coordination and the planning of combined interventions affecting land use.

Many of the MLR Coordinators are not qualified and the lack of proper supervision of resettlement projects is a serious problem. In Excelsior, beneficiaries are Nama/Damara and Ovambo, but the Coordinator in 2002 was able to speak neither Nama/Damara nor Afrikaans. In some cases, as in Skoonheid in the 1990s, the Coordinator was a Herero woman, and San and Damara beneficiaries repeatedly accused her of discrimination. The current Coordinator, Mr. Sijaja, finished his secondary education, but did not have any agricultural qualification and was unable to speak Afrikaans or any San language. He has since learnt Afrikaans in the field, and he did have some agricultural knowledge as his family are farmers in Katima Mulilo. Out of the seven farms visited while researching this article, three have no MLR Coordinator. Quite often, Coordinators do not supervise issues such as overgrazing, deforestation or poaching. It seems that game populations and tree numbers are decreasing on resettlement farms.

As it is the case with the individual resettlements, beneficiaries do not possess official certificates of lease for their land. This creates a lack of security which discourages both hard work and investment on the part of the farmers. As they have no collateral, they cannot obtain credit. The proposed certificates, furthermore, do not state clearly which

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51 As quoted in Wietersheim, This Land: 168.
53 MLR, Background Research: 81-83; MLR, Strategic Options: 41, 43; Odendaal and Tjiramba, Our Land: 34-35.
54 Harring and Odendaal, One day: 62-64, 104-105.
55 Mr. Sijaja, personal communication, 10th June 2008.
56 Harring and Odendaal, One day: 54-56.
services are supposed to be financed or implemented by beneficiaries themselves and which are the Government’s responsibility. Communal exploitation of the fields is also an element which clearly discourages individual responsibility and involvement in various tasks such as production etc. Even on those farms where production is good enough to create a surplus, marketing is severely hampered by lack of transportation. Beneficiaries’ training by the MLR has been minimal, and has been left mostly in the hands of NGOs and donors.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most of the settlements depend on food aid, Food for Work programmes, employment of beneficiaries on commercial farms or the renting of grazing land to neighbouring communal herders. In 2005 the Permanent Technical Team (PTT) of the MLR estimated that 78% of members of resettled households had no income at all and concluded that “re-settlement projects are inundated with migrant farm labourers or people looking for jobs or somewhere to live, who have little interest and fewer skills in farming”.

Group resettlements: are they serving production or welfare purposes?

From the late 1980s and early 1990s many analysts, governments and international institutions asserted that the goal of land and agrarian reforms should not be to increase production or to contribute to the growing flight from rural to urban areas. Reforms, they argued, should benefit the welfare of communities. In Namibia, authors such as Sherbourne have stated that “redistribution has to take precedence over production, at least over the short and medium term”. Others, like von Wietersheim, emphasise that many resettled farmers wish to have access to land as a “security” for their old age or to feel that a piece of land is really “theirs”. She also indicates that resettlement allows poor people or unemployed youth, who otherwise would be forced to migrate to informal urban settlements, to be lodged on farms. According to her, for many people the reform “is not primarily seen as a programme for prospective farmers, but as fulfilling a social need which can be met by farming”.

On the other hand, the Namibian National Land Policy declared in 1998 that the objective of land policies is, together with the redress of past land distribution imbalances, “promoting sustainable economic development”. The PTT defined as “sustainable” a reform which improves the life of resettled people and results in an

57 MLR, Background Research : 21, 53-54.
58 Harring and Odendaal, One day: 60.
59 MLR, Background Research : 56.
60 Tapia, Reforma : 182-184.
62 Wietersheim, This Land: 129-134.
“increased agricultural output”. Things clearly have not gone this way in terms of production levels. The PTT again estimated that if plans drawn up for the acquisition of 9.5 million hectares more for resettlement and the AALS programme were actually implemented, Namibia would suffer a loss of agricultural production valued at 141,348,700 NAD (12.2 million €) annually. Not included in this figure are the negative effects on industries depending on agricultural produce or the rise in unemployment.

The PTT concluded that most of the resettlement projects – including individual ones – “are, at best, welfare projects”. Some analysts have recently recommended the acquisition of more land for resettlement in the most productive areas of the country, and the government has warned that this is one of the main goals of their expropriation policies. Should these intentions become reality, the fall in production predicted by the PTT would in all likelihood be more acute.

In addition to this, it is painfully clear that the current group resettlement projects have failed to achieve most of the production objectives stated in the National Resettlement Policy. Beneficiaries are far from achieving food self-sufficiency, employment creation is negligible and one can hardly see any significant increase in the participation of settlements on the agricultural market. In practically all resettlements, production is very low, to say the least. Even in the few places where the situation is not desperate, such as Excelsior or Westphalen, production is rather limited — in some cases it has even decreased compared to the start of the project — and the number of families settled on the farms has also fallen. In Westphalen there are 6 families, hardly more than the usual number of farmworkers on commercial farms; this highlights the thorny question of the possibility of land reform settling people on land from where other families have previously been displaced.

Government statistics also show that the poorer the beneficiaries are, the higher the resettlement costs become. Already in 2001 the MLR stated that house-building constituted the greatest cost in resettlement projects, and warned that if people with more income were selected, costs would be significantly reduced, as they could be expected to build their houses themselves. But those targeted up to now for group resettlement, such as the displaced, the handicapped or the poor, and San communities, are precisely those least capable of making full use of the land and covering the costs of resettlement.

It seems that the MLR is now leaning towards a prioritization of production. A source within the Ministry informed me that, as part of the changes being introduced by Minister of Lands Alpheus !Naruseb, it has been agreed that in the future “only those people

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64 Ibid.: 55-56, 58.
66 MLRR, Resettlement Programme: 3.
67 Alpheus !Naruseb became Minister of Lands in April 2008, replacing Jerry Ekandjo.
who will be productive will be put on the land”. Maybe 80% of the beneficiaries are expected to be people with “skills”, and the remaining 20% will be people in need of a “social safety net” and will be settled on group resettlements. As an indication of this policy orientation, in October 2008 Naruseb publicly declared that future beneficiaries must possess “knowledge and capacity to excel as farmers”. The same ministerial source said that within the MLR group resettlements are considered “welfare projects” and many officials believe that “these schemes are now obsolescent for MLR, as the Ministry is moving away from social welfare work”. It seems that the MLR does not have any hope of these resettlements becoming self-sufficient in the future, but they do not have a clear policy of treating them as starting point for beneficiaries to be trained so that they can apply for individual plots at a later date.

The evolution of resettlement in Namibia and the problems it is experiencing are not new in the region. A brief overview shows how in South Africa a 2006 report on 179 resettlement projects indicated their lack of success in terms of production, and was critical of the shortcomings in beneficiaries’ training and the poor state of infrastructure. The projects’ sustainability was seriously questioned. In 2008 the South African Ministry of Agriculture admitted that, at least in half of the resettlement projects, beneficiaries have not seen an improvement when compared with their situation before being resettled. Deborah James has also highlighted the discrepancies between the resettled communities’ expectations in terms of material welfare – which they compare to an urban lifestyle – and the discourse of some analysts or NGO workers who propose a rural and fully agricultural lifestyle. Researchers in Zimbabwe have shown how, before the crisis of the late 1990s, the increase in terms of income or size of cattle herds for some beneficiaries of resettlement was undermined when the number of settlers increased. Not surprisingly, the larger the number of people resettled on a piece of land, the less successful they were in terms of production or income per capita. In Zimbabwe, the late 1980s and early 1990s also witnessed a shift in policies from the prioritization of poor peasants as beneficiaries of resettlement to the search for the so-called “master-farmers” who were expected to be more productive.

When approaching the related questions of agricultural production and land reform I think it is important to discard the notion – widely held among academics and politicians – that a fall in production is something which affects “macro-economics” and can be clearly compensated by the alleged “social” benefits of land transfer to peasants.

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Certainly, it is not necessary that all land acquired for resettlement should maintain the previous owner’s productivity levels, and even less so that this should be the case immediately after the transfer. In some cases, landless people’s access to land can have a beneficial effect on their welfare which outweighs the decrease in production. But this obviously does not justify allowing a reduction in the country’s productive capacity as a result of the land reform process as a whole. The ability to keep production indexes should be one of the criteria considered when selecting both land for acquisition and the beneficiaries to be resettled on that land. There is no doubt that distributing large tracts of productive farmland to farmers who would only be able to obtain a small proportion of the previous output would be a grave mistake.

The negative effects of a decline in production — more or less clearly described by the PTT — would be manifold. Namibia would be further away from food self-sufficiency; imports would have to be increased; there would probably be a rise in food prices; unemployment would grow; and the country’s foreign currency revenue would be lower.

It is crucial to understand that a significant decrease in production and growth in unemployment rates cannot be outweighed by the “social” effects of reform. In fact, the consequences for the welfare of the Namibian population as a whole would be highly damaging. As indicated by Thomas Bayer, “resettling people on plots that are not economically feasible units not only results in the continued poverty of the resettled but contributes to a downward spiral of economic development”.

It is also worth commenting on some assumptions regarding the social “benefits” expected from land reforms. Ideas, such as those expressed by von Wietersheim, which consider land as a place of “refuge” for less productive people — such as pensioners — or unemployed are frequently encountered. Apart from an unpleasant similarity to colonial policies which aimed at keeping “surplus” Africans outside of urban areas, it is by no means certain that unemployed youths will want to settle in rural areas and devote themselves to crop growing or animal herding where there is widespread poverty and little expectation of reasonable incomes. Most probably, many young people prefer to remain in cities, even if their employment perspectives are bleak.

It is obvious from the data collected in my field work that group resettlements are also failing to fulfill their social welfare objectives. As we have seen, most of the settlements have serious problems in terms of education and the provision of health care. The training of beneficiaries has been completely neglected or minimal, while the provision of social services has often been left to local or foreign NGOs as well as to donors. The projects do not serve as a “refuge” for the poor and unemployed as some analysts wished. People are unable to sustain themselves on these farms and are therefore dependent on food aid, or on waged work outside the farms. It is hardly surprising that these “refuges” fail to become attractive to people, especially to young men and women, who often try their luck in towns or on commercial farms.

It is clear, therefore, that group resettlement projects must remain a minor element of the Namibian land reform process, and that they should be considered social welfare projects. This kind of resettlement should be limited to groups in need of special and/or emergency support from the State: destitute families, farmworkers expelled from their former jobs, or San communities unable to apply successfully for individual plots. However, this must not be understood as implying that all group resettlements should be converted into purely aid projects. The provision of social services on the farms has to be greatly improved, but the resettlements have to aim at increasing productivity and striving to reach food self-sufficiency. This has to be done through the implementation of multiple economic strategies: crop growing, livestock, production and sale of handcrafts, and probably wages obtained outside of the settlements. At the same time, it is essential to prepare beneficiaries for a future outside of the projects, especially the youth. Agricultural training and general education must be improved. This is the only way to give them some chance to gain access in the future to individual farms or salaried jobs, which will provide a better standard of living than resettlements.

Many things are necessary to achieve these objectives. To begin with, it is simply unrealistic to expect resettlements to become self-sufficient in five years. A timetable of 10 to 15 years seems much more appropriate. It is absolutely essential to improve the water supply on the farms. Without a reliable supply of water and without adequate maintenance of boreholes, all other measures are useless. It is also advisable that the San be considered a priority group for this kind of resettlement. They have few opportunities to obtain individual plots, especially if the MLR goes ahead with plans to place greater demands on the new farmers in terms of their abilities to guarantee production and share costs.

The MLR and other Ministries have to improve their coordination, show more desire and ability to compromise when supporting resettlements and increase efficiency in providing services. If the government agencies are not able to guarantee the provision of services and materials, there is little chance of success, and most of the benefits derived from donor agencies’ contributions will be lost. It must be said that to date neither the MLR nor other government departments seem capable of coping effectively with an accelerated land resettlement programme. Former Minister Ekandjo himself admitted that to accelerate the path of reform “external financial and technical support” would be needed.\footnote{MLR, \textit{Strategic Options}: 41, 43; MLR, \textit{Annual Report}: 2.} It seems that an increase in the involvement of NGOs and other private sector agents will have to be considered.

All these decisions, though, depend on a much wider policy change on the part of the SWAPO-led government. On the one hand, it is necessary to acknowledge that it is not enough to transfer land from white to black Namibians. It is just as important to have a clear idea of what is going to happen to the land after the transfer, and to ensure that those settled on it are willing and able to use it fully. This seems to be the view increasingly held — at least in part — by the MLR. On the other hand, it is also imperative
that political authorities accept that the number of people that can be resettled on former commercial lands is limited. The farms where larger numbers of people are settled, as we have seen, are those experiencing the greatest difficulties in providing a livelihood for the beneficiaries. If, for political reasons, land reform is accelerated beyond the capacity of the authorities to manage it effectively, or is designed to include the settlement of large numbers of people on previously highly productive farmlands, failure is most probably unavoidable.

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