

# Mugabe: more land than he can handle



● Robbie Mupawose

**Z**IMBABWE Prime Minister Robert Mugabe has threatened to appropriate land owned by white farmers.

He claims that Britain may cut off the aid that is used to buy European farmland.

"If the British do not give us money to buy back that land, we will not tax the people of Zimbabwe to buy back their own inheritance. We will just take that land and not pay for it," he said.

The sabre-rattling suggests that the Harare government is itself rattled by the growing demand for land from black peasants. And the Prime Minister's response implies that the government is short of land to distribute to its supporters.

*In fact, Land & Liberty has learned that the government is embarrassed by having more land in hand that it can put to immediate use — which is why some land has been returned temporarily to its former owners!*

**T**HE GOVERNMENT knows that land reform is not just a question of handing over tracts to landless peasants.

The commercial sector of agriculture is a major money-spinner for the country, and the highest productivity is on white-owned farms (see table).

## EXCLUSIVE

By Peter Poole

Productivity drops when land is handed over to subsistence farmers, but the government realises that it has to forge ahead with meeting the aspirations of black farmers.

Says Mr. Robbie Mupawose, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture: "Agrarian reform and the question of land are central to the future development of Zimbabwe mainly because the country's struggle for liberation was centred on land."\*

Over 70 per cent of the population depends on agriculture for a livelihood. Many families live on overcrowded tracts, which has led to a reduction in soil fertility.

To relocate families, the government bought 2.1m hectares of land by last February, and 33,880 families were settled on 1.6m hectares.

*The problem has been to find the money to provide the essential back-up services for the families.*

As Mr. Mupawose points out:

"It cannot be said that the mere transfer of land to people needing it will automatically lead to successful agricultural production. Reliance should not be placed on land redistribution alone as the total answer, but rather on a much more thorough analysis of the mechanisms

and operations of state-aid, and the role of inputs such as extension, management and credit."

**T**HE BUREAUCRATIC approach to rural development is one of the major obstacles to the quick relocation of landless peasants.

By adopting socialist models for agricultural enterprise, Mr. Mugabe is postponing the resettlement of families, and retarding the rate of growth of productivity.

His government is short of capital with which to provide infrastructural services, but he has so far failed to wrestle with the one model for change that would be self-financing: land value taxation.

If white farmers had to hand over the rental value of land that they were not using, this would have two crucial consequences:

- The government would not have to buy land to engineer its wider distribution; and

- The government could use the money to improve unused land, which would in turn rise in value to finance yet more rural projects.

*Unfortunately, this model of development would not find favour with the Harare government because it operates best within the framework of the free market.*

By narrowing the options, Mr Mugabe condemns many of Zimbabwe's citizens to a long period of zero growth of incomes, which will one day find its expression in more violence from which his government will not be immune.

\*Robbie Motongo Mupawose, 'Exploding Cities and Agricultural Productivity', paper presented to Second World Congress on Land Policy, Cambridge, Mass., June 20-24, 1983.

ZIMBABWE'S AGRICULTURAL SECTOR 1983

	Land		Population		Gross output
	Hectares	%	Number	%	\$ Million
Communal areas	16,355,000	41.9	4,050,000	54.1	147.4
Resettlement areas	2,142,712*	5.5	—	—	—
Small scale farming areas	1,477,081	3.8	110,000	1.5	—
Large scale farming areas	13,026,892	33.3	1,570,000	21.0	607.4
Urban land	193,315	0.5	1,645,000	22.0	—
National land	5,877,000	15.0	105,000	1.4	—
	39,072,000	100.0	7,480,000	100.0	754.8

\*Total area of farm land committed for resettlement by the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development as at February, 1983.

SOURCE: Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development, Harare.