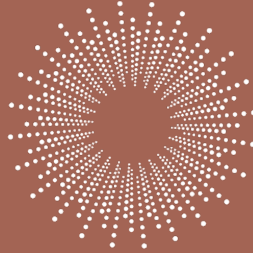


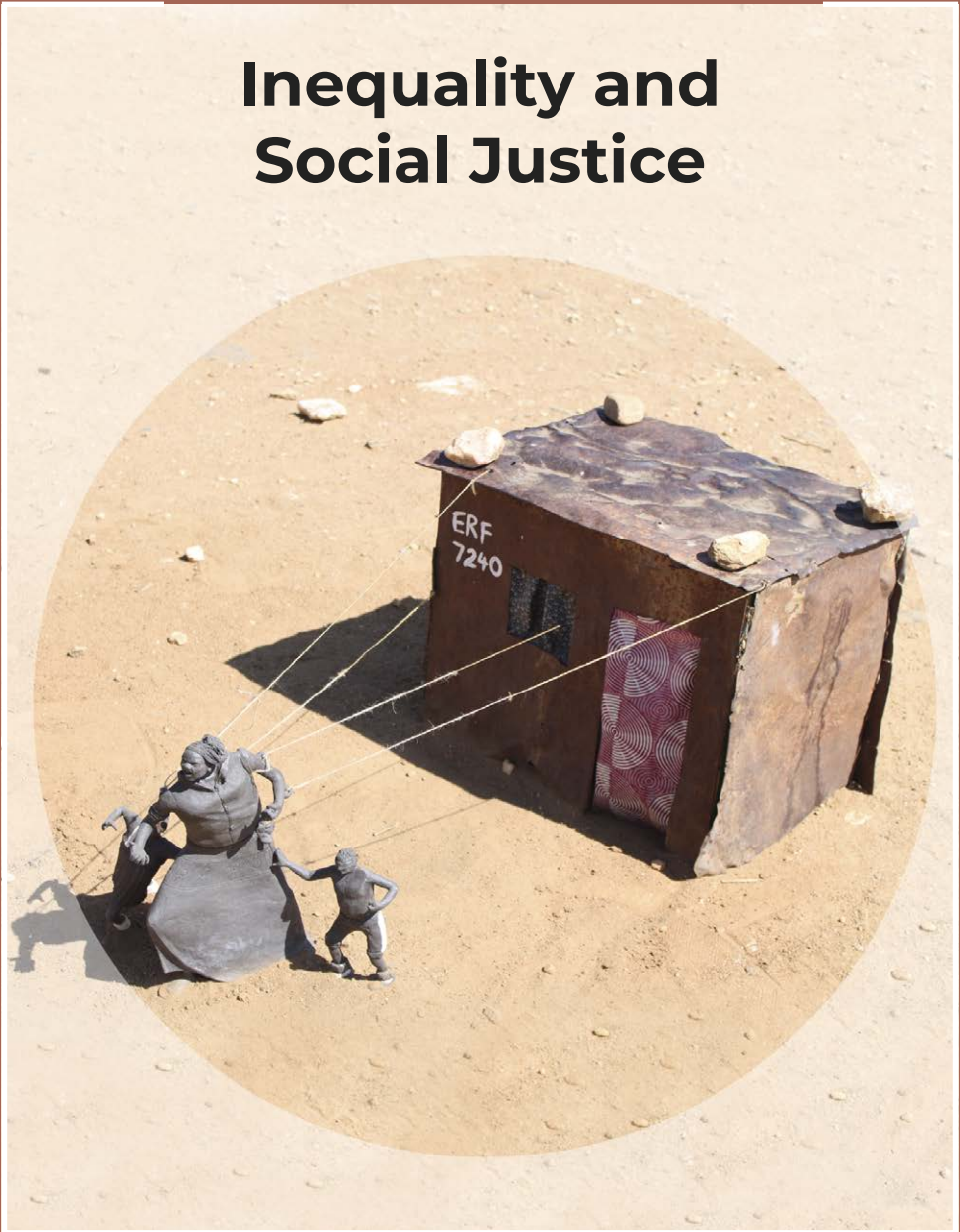
Volume 2

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Inequality and Social Justice



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**FRIEDRICH
EBERT** 
STIFTUNG
Namibia Office

Acronyms and Initialisms

AMCU	Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union
BEPS	base-erosion profit shifting
BIEN	Basic Income Earth Network
BIG	basic income grant
CCN	Council of Churches in Namibia
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	civil society organisations
DSD	Differences of Sexual Development
ELCN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
ELCRN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia
ESOP	Employee Share Ownership Plan
FMS	Finnish Missionary Society
GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
GRB	gender-responsive budgeting
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
HDI	Human Development Index
HTA	Hai om Traditional Authority
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICT	information and communication technology
IFFs	illicit financial flows
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	International Mineral Resources
IOC	International Olympic Committee

LMS	London Missionary Society
MAWLR	Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MGEPEWSW	Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MPUCT	Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfer
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NLF	Namibia Labour Force
NNSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher-level
NPC	National Planning Commission
NSA	Namibia Statistics Agency
NSSCH	Namibian Senior Secondary Certificate Higher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDS	Public Distribution System
PIT	personal income tax
RMS	Rhenish Missionary Society
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SEM	structural equation modelling
SEWA	Self-Employed Women’s Association
TAA	Traditional Authorities Act (No. 25 of 2000)
TVUCT	Tribal Village Unconditional Cash Transfer
UCT	unconditional cash transfer
VAT	value added tax
WHO	World Health Organization
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society
WSWB	willing-seller-willing-buyer

Case Study

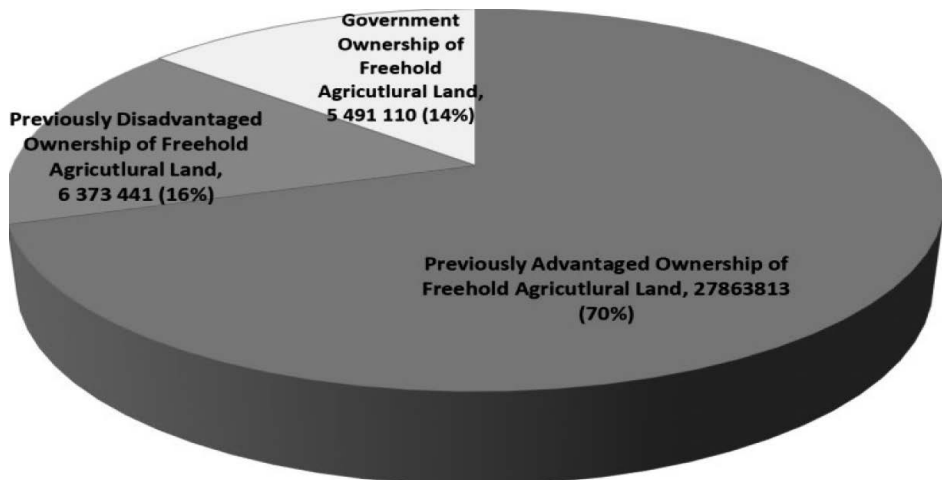
Land Inequality in Namibia: White Indifference, Elite Capture and Policy Inadequacies

Ellison Tjirera

Introduction

In Namibia's socio-economic landscape, it is apparent that land inequality is a harbinger of many other forms of inequality. Historical accounts are replete with assertions that the fight for independence was by and large about land (see e.g. Botha, 2000; Pankhurst, 1996; Werner, 1993). What stretches credulity in the post-independence era is that patterns

of land distribution have remained largely undisturbed. The Namibia Statistics Agency damningly reveals that previously advantaged farmers (read whites) own 27.9 million hectares (70%) of the freehold agricultural land, compared to 6.4 million hectares (16%) owned by previously disadvantaged farmers (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2018, pp. 12, 30).



Source: Namibia Statistics Agency (2018), p. 30.

Part of the problem in resolving the land question in Namibia seems to be the absence of any meaningful cooperation from white Namibians in finding a local solution to the burning issue of land inequality. This observation is made without denigrating efforts of some white Namibians who have tried to contribute towards a genuine debate regarding what is a social time bomb. Erika von Wietersheim should be lauded for her efforts in charting various contours of open discussion on the land question (Von Wietersheim, 2021; 2018). Other notable voices include but are not limited to Melber (2022; 2019; 2005) and Werner (2015; 1997; 1993). An argument can therefore be made that progressive scholarly voices of white Namibians on the land question are not necessarily muted. Nevertheless, and for lack of a better phrasing, what mainly appears to be prevalent is callous indifference to the land question on the part of most white Namibians. Or how else shall we make sense of the recent pronouncement (Petersen, 2022) by a German-speaking Namibian farmer – one Harry Schneider – that German settlers never stole any land? It says a lot that there was no condemnation of this insensitive assertion by a white Namibian.

On the one hand, elite capture of processes that are put in motion to ‘resolve’ the land question remain

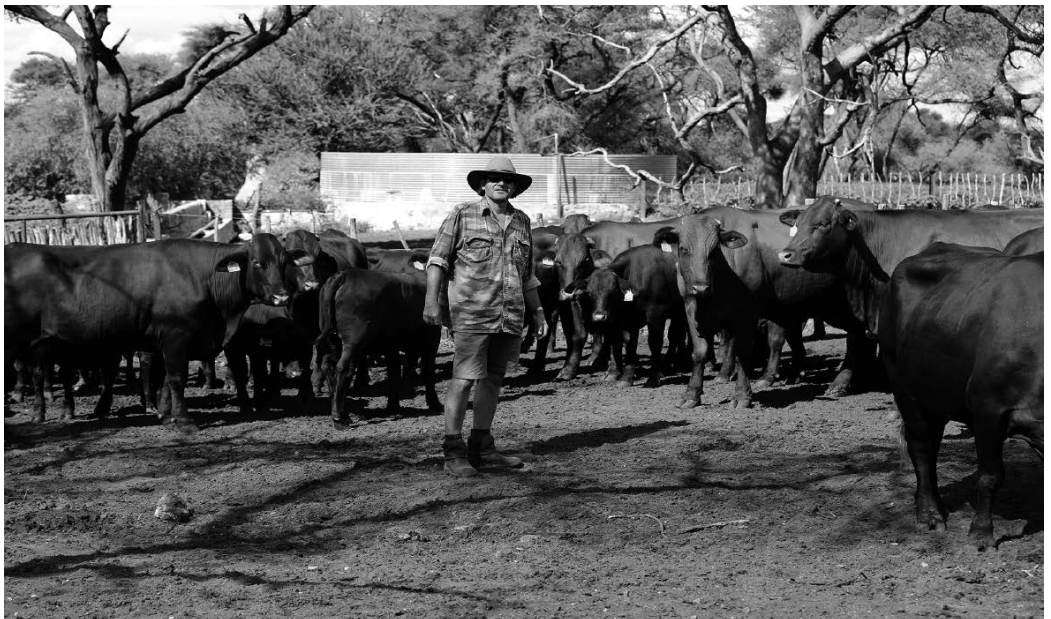
another area of concern. Bedevilling ‘fair’ distribution of land is a coterie of well-connected political elites who continue to amass huge tracts of land through the Affirmative Action Loan Scheme, as well as the resettlement programme(s). The practice of illegally fencing off land in communal areas is another avenue through which the elites acquire huge acres of land at the expense of needy Namibians. A damning yet not surprising observation from SWAPO’s advisory body – dubbed the Think Tank – sums it succinctly: “[t]hese well-connected individuals use[d] their positions to gain control over large farms and directed government-subsidised inputs to these farms, including those in communal rural areas, alienating many rural communities” (Immanuel & Shihepo, 2022). In the light of the foregoing, it is telling that the then Ministry of Land Reform had to be threatened with legal action before releasing the list of resettlement beneficiaries (Ikelala, 2018). As von Wietersheim (2021) posits, a cursory examination of the list of beneficiaries lends credence to the narrative of elite capture, for a significant number of those resettled include ministers, regional governors, executive directors and other high-ranking officials.

Background

There are intimations of white Namibians’ disinterest in contributing

to solutions that are aimed at resolving land inequality. Arguably, “black people feel that whites are not only unwilling to share land, but use all kinds of tricks to keep white land in white hands” (von Wietersheim, 2021, p. 121). As beneficiaries of colonial land dispossession, white Namibians’ class privilege seems to have rendered them largely indifferent to the structural violence that land inequality continues to sustain. In February 2022, Harry Schneider (a German-speaking Namibian farmer) was quoted saying “[t]he people [colonial settlers] who came here, *none* (emphasis added) stole any land. The people who came here bought the land under the laws of the government of the day”. Speaking of “laws of the government of the day”,

the Schneider family bought their farm near Okakarara in 1909, a year after the 1904–1908 genocide against the Ovaherero and Nama people (Petersen, 2022). Incontrovertibly, “in the aftermath of the war, large swathes of territory, constituting ancestral land historically inhabited by and belonging to indigenous communities, were seized and occupied by the German State” (Germany-Namibia Joint Declaration 2021: I [para. 6]). On his part, Sarkin (2009) draws on archival documents to assert that the German genocidal war in Namibia was about conquest and subjugation. That the buying of land cannot possibly take place under conquest and subjugation is a moot point.



Harry Schneider at his farm. Source: <https://waterbergnamibia.com/our-story/>

Challenges

Unequal land ownership perpetuates the historically high levels of income inequality in countries such as Namibia and South Africa (World Bank, 2022, p. 4). It is no wonder that these two countries remain the most unequal in the world. In the case of Namibia, the issue of historical land dispossession is intricately linked to the Herero-Nama genocide of 1904–1908. Despite protracted negotiations over this genocide, the Joint Declaration between Namibia and Germany did not bring any closure to this ugly period of Namibia's colonial history.

Implementing various resolutions adopted at the two national land conferences has proven difficult over the years. Most of the resolutions adopted at the 1991 National Land Conference did not see the light of day. Whether or not the implementation of resolutions adopted at the 2nd National Land Conference will be any different remains to be seen. Of the 177 resolutions adopted at the 2nd Land Conference, only nine were implemented between 2018 and 2020 (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020).

As the 2018 land ownership statistics suggest, the process of acquiring land for resettlement has proceeded at a snail's pace. The usefulness of the willing-seller-willing-buyer (WSWB) principle has come under scrutiny as

those sympathising with the landless blame it for impeding the land reform process, as landowners are arguably reticent to surrender their land to the state (Kaapama, 2007). The 2nd National Land Conference resolved to abolish the WSWB doctrine and replace it with “alternative acquisition methods” (Ministry of Land Reform, 2018, p. 1). Two years after the Second National Land Conference, the Government back-peddled on the abolition of the WSWB principle. What informed this change of position is worthy of quoting in full:

Government consulted thoroughly on the implementation of this resolution and found that Willing Seller- Willing Buyer is entrenched in Article 16 of the Constitution that bestows persons with the right to sell and buy property in Namibia. This means that the express deletion of the principle of Willing Seller- Willing Buyer from the [Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act (No. 6 of 1995)] would be a futile exercise as the right to buy and sell will remain entrenched in Article 16.

(Office of the Prime Minister, 2020, p. 2).

In light of the above, it appears that what has been identified as an impediment to an accelerated land reform process will remain in place. With regards to developing “alternative acquisition methods”, the

progress report on the 2nd National Land Conference states that “[so] far the market has delivered land for acquisition” (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020, p. 2). The latter assertion is open to contestation, for the market seems to be crudely distorted by the sellers, making land acquisition a very expensive undertaking. Indeed, the political balance of forces remain stacked against the landless and the dispossessed in particular (Werner, 2001).

Actions

White Namibians, particularly those who own huge tracts of agricultural farmland, need to realise that prevailing land inequality is a social time bomb that will have consequences too ghastly to contemplate if not handled with the necessary care. In light of the dust that refuses to settle around the ‘land question’ in Namibia, a number of social movements have been established to push for land redistribution and/or restoration. Before morphing into a political movement, the Landless People’s Movement (LPM) came into being to advocate for land restitution and restorative justice.

With regards to urban land, it has been argued elsewhere that notwithstanding the mushrooming of slums having become a noticeable feature of most urban centres across Namibia, until very recently urban

land hardly featured in the national discourse (Tjirera, 2018). This state of omission is what the Affirmative Repositioning movement has sought to address since entering the fray in 2014. In 2015, the ensuing mass mobilisation of land applications in Windhoek and other towns in Namibia by Affirmative Repositioning brought the plight of the urban poor with regards to land allocation into sharp focus (Becker, 2016).

Under the stewardship of Sir Welcome Kazondunge and Jarinovandu Tjeja-Tjatindi, the Ancestral Land Foundation of Namibia has been agitating over land inequality in the country, calling for a dialogue between the local German community and the affected communities on historical land dispossession and injustices. All indications are that the determination of pressure groups shows no signs of dissipation, pointing to the urgent need to take bold steps to deal with land inequality sooner rather than later.

Outcomes

Partly owing to the advocacy work and activism of various social movements and pressure groups, it has become apparent that the ‘land question’ is a prominent aspect of national discourse. Resolving long-entrenched and persisting disparities will by no means be a simple task, but the momentum generated should be

augmented by deliberate efforts aimed at restorative justice. The structural violence that land inequality exposes will continue to haunt Namibian society unless drastic changes are embraced. Without advocating for anarchy and lawlessness, the enduring structural violence besetting Namibia requires that the difficult exercise of interrogating the dictum of “maintaining law and order” be undertaken. Walter Rodney reminds us that “colonial governments were repeatedly speaking about the maintenance of law and order, by which they meant the maintenance of conditions most favourable to the expansion of capitalism” (Rodney, 1972, p. 164). Backtracking on abolishing the WSWB principle was certainly done within the spirit of “maintaining law and order”. In this instance, the express goal is to maintain the class privilege of previously advantaged white Namibians.

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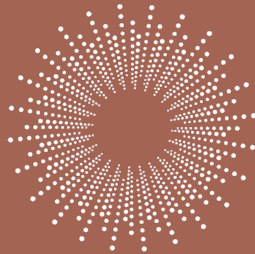
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