

UFS Inaugural Thought-Leader panel discussions: Land Reform

Dr Ina Gouws

Political Studies and Governance

My rather peculiar presence in this panel of agri -today is making me as nervous as you all probably are. The business of Agriculture is not my area of expertise, nor is land reform as an area of research for that matter. But I have opinions, and ideas and thoughts which is seemingly appropriate for this platform.

Like for most people in this country, the topic is an emotional one for me. It is the case because of my own background and because of the critical way I view this background. Academics call such topics 'red flag' topics; the ones where we find it difficult to step back from our own views and perception. It is generally very disappointing when you find yourself in such a situation as an academic; knowing there is this topic that gets the better of you professionally. So I leave this topic as research focus to those for whom that is not a problem.

So what am I doing here? I decided to try and use this red flag to think about the stakeholders and the kind of participation I've witnessed in these conversations the past few months and just maybe aid in some way in the conversations at least for today.

To tell you the truth you can thank a TV show called Criminal Minds for my contribution this afternoon.

They had terrible murder again and one of the agents used a phrase I've hardly thought about recently; the unsub had motive, means and opportunity.

No, I'm not comparing the debate around land reform with a murderer's thinking; I'm comparing it with the way an agent investigates a crime; looking at motive, means and opportunity. No. I don't think land reform is a crime. I think the way in which it was dealt with by our government, by several stakeholders, might be.

Authors like Esterling, Neblo and Lazer used this analogy in an article in 2008 to theorize about becoming informed in politics; "citizens' capacity (means) to become informed when given a motive and opportunity to participate in politics is important for democratic citizen- ship."¹

Citizens in South Africa have a clear motive to participate in the land debates and have been given an opportunity to participate in land reform debate and ultimately policy making. From reports of those who attended some of the hearings these past weeks, it seems that our citizenry does have the means to become informed and ARE informed about the main issues in this debate and most encouragingly seem to be quite reluctant to mess with the constitution in the process.

¹ Esterling, K., Neblo, M. and Lazer, D. 2008. *Means, Motive, & Opportunity in Becoming Informed About Politics: A Deliberative Field Experiment with Members of Congress and Their Constituents*. Public Opinion Quarterly no. 31, September 2008. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228455142>

So let's look at each of these concepts in the context of the land debate.

MOTIVE:

The basic definition of MOTIVE is: a reason, motivation or rationale for something.

So what is the MOTIVE for land reform? What is the motive behind expropriation without compensation? What are the MOTIVES of all stakeholders in the hearings, the debates, the policy makers?

On the face of it most stakeholders as we'll hear today, are in agreement that land reform is important, restitution as part of this reform, is necessary. Also that most attempts at this was largely a failure which brings into question the MEANS of those in charge of these processes.

Enter POLITICAL MOTIVE: an act carried out in the interest of a government or political party or interest group.

If restitution is the main motive, and most agree that this is imperative, are there stakeholders whose motives are NOT aligned with this main motive? Out in the open? Probably not, but it does seem that secondary motives manifest; punishment under the guise of justice, self-interest & profit, political interest for the sake of careers, obtaining or retaining power or keeping hands in state coffers. These OTHER motives have been seen to derail or stifle this important process. The joke is that they actually try to hide these motives, in this day and time where academics, intellectuals, investigative journalists leave NO stone unturned since Nkandla & State Capture and will never do so again. Hiding questionable and also blatantly immoral motives forever is something of the past. Civil society which has woken up in a big way will insist on accounting for it when it comes to light.

Keeping with motive; currently the administration can't agree on which land or whose land will be expropriated. There is no clear definition or even explanation of what "without compensation" means outside of a speech to a particular audience. Statements from leaders of this administration differ from one audience to the next, from one traditional leader to the next. Political and personal greed motives have soiled the most necessary government policy for the last 20 odd years.

On the part of organized agriculture the motive might be restitution and expropriation without damaging the agri-economy and food security and contributions have been valuable. There are at times though, moments where 'keeping the status quo' seem to be a motive and that is not constructive.

MEANS:

Meaning: an action or system by which a result is achieved or a method the ability to achieve a result.

Whose means do we look to achieve the desired result with land reform? Do we know what the desired result is yet? Is there any consensus about that at least?

There is serious doubt about the means of the current administration to govern a process of reform, including restitution and expropriation and with good reason. The evidence of failure up to now largely speaks for itself.

The means of other partners to inform the citizenry have however been commendable. Academics, some of whom are here today are doing stellar work, our media have been equally active (although some have made themselves guilty of campaigning instead of reporting facts), and researchers in organised agriculture like those on our panel here today are displaying their means to constructively address this issue. Why are their efforts put on the backburner when their findings do not serve the motives of those who would rather protect their own interest instead of that of the motive of land reform?

There ARE examples where land reform policies worked (Western Cape and Eastern Cape, and if I understand correctly, it worked because although government facilitated a process, they largely stayed out of it...) Do we as a citizenry have the means to address the main motive of land reform? Do we have the motivation? We certainly have the opportunity.

OPPORTUNITY:

Meaning: a time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something.

I guess one's first instinct here is to talk about lost opportunities. It is difficult to ignore the frustration when we think of how much could have been done, what could have been achieved by now if it wasn't for suspicious motives and questionable means of those in charge of the land reform processes to date.

But now we are asked to deal with the here and now. The policy of expropriation without compensation is being driven hard by the Ramaphosa administration and opportunities exist to participate as a citizenry, as the private sector and government to shape policies to achieve this as fairly as possible. Will this opportunity once again be lost because of political motives clouding and even distorting the motive from one day to the next?

What I did not allude to at the beginning was that MOTIVE, MEANS AND OPPORTUNITY are used as a standard of PROOF during a criminal investigation. So what is the PROOF?

It is impossible to be neutral in this process. It IS however possible to be truthful. And I'm not talking about nonsense like "your truth and my truth". The truth is what it is; we have different opinions of the truth, have different perceptions of the truth and have different experiences with the truth but it is what it is:

- Land is disproportionately owned.
- Access to land and the wealth it can create is unequal.
- Government policies to address this have failed.

- This administration's ability to address it further is questionable at best.
- There are stakeholders who wish to keep the status quo and that is wrong and impossible.
- The temptation to ride a populist wave running up the elections is going to be tough to resist it would seem for our President. The wave always crashes though, and when we all come up for air after being wiped out (if I may presume to use a surfer term in the middle of the Free State), what will have spilled out when the wave pulls back?

There are stakeholders, organisations and individuals with the motive, means and certainly the opportunity to constructively address this issue and they should be allowed to do so and they should be given support. We as a citizenry should stay informed, participate when called upon, keep each other honest.