

# Subdivisions, a Viable Option for Land Redistribution in Zimbabwe

Sam ZHOU, Zimbabwe

**Key words:** Subdivision, large commercial farms, legal transfer.

## ABSTRACT

On attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a complex land problem that came from the colonial policy of land distribution that was based on race. This policy and pattern of land distribution favored the white settler-community and multinational companies while the local indigenous population lost most of their rights to land. However, now there is general consensus that this situation is not sustainable, and there is need to redistribute land. Land subdivision is one of a number of options available to parcel out land from those who hold large and uneconomic farms.

During the last twenty years of independence, the redistribution of land never took off in earnest, due to a number of constraints, including legal, logistical and financial support. As at 1998, the large-scale commercial farms, owned by less than 1% of the population still held 11.2 million hectares of land, representing 45% of the country's agricultural farmland. Since February 2000, land-less villagers have invaded privately owned farms and demanded to be resettled there. In response, the Government sought a solution by embarking on an exercise to compulsorily acquire farms for redistribution.

The Land Tenure Commission Report of 1994 pointed out that the Zimbabwe government policy for subdivision within the Large Scale Commercial Farming sector is to ensure that all subdivisions are viable, based on the general farming system of the area. Over the years, government policy has also tended to stress the need to ensure security of tenure for all land holdings. This paper draws from international examples and argues that the process of subdivision in Zimbabwe will be viable since it provides smaller, economic and legal land units.

This paper argues that the process of subdivision can contribute to the sustainable redistribution of land in Zimbabwe, in particular, the legal transfer of land to the formerly disadvantaged groups, especially the black population. This process can and could still have worked better in the last twenty years of agrarian reform in an environment of relaxed subdivision controls. The arguments and debate over land tax encouraging the release of more land on the market through subdivision is also discussed. Research has shown that 60 % of Zimbabwe's large-scale commercial farmland is not only underutilized but also wholly unutilized, particularly by absentee landlords and multinational companies.

## **CONTACT**

Mr. Sam Zhou  
Survey Institute of Zimbabwe  
P O Box 6265  
Harare  
ZIMBABWE  
Tel. + 263 4 750 402  
Fax + 263 4 774 820  
E-mail: zhou@ecoweb.co.zw

---

TS7.7 Land Policy and Land Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa  
Sam Zhou  
Subdivisions, a Viable Option for Land Redistribution in Zimbabwe

FIG XXII International Congress  
Washington, D.C. USA, April 19-26 2002