

THE POOR AND THE WHITE PAPER ON LAND REFORM

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The White Paper on Land Reform is based on commendable principles. Its three main policy objectives are:

- * Utilization of land as a national asset
- * Broadening of access to land rights to the whole population
- * Upgrading of quality and security of title.

Implementation of these policy principles should improve general living standards. The White Paper does not, however, stand up to scrutiny with regard to its impact on the urban poor.

In formulating its policy objectives it would seem that the government is pursuing a goal of strengthening a stable, land owning black *petit bourgeoisie*. Such a group can facilitate the stability needed for economic growth and evolutionary political change. In this process the government is moving away from a class structure based on race to one based on economic differentiation. Neither of these class structures benefits the poor. The growth of our cities is inextricably related to the influx of rural poor, who most often are jobless, homeless and living at, or below, the household subsistence level.

Traditionally the poor have been forced to cope with their shelter needs by squatting on marginal land. This "self-help" by avoiding the land market reflects the

inability of the housing delivery system to provide affordable and sufficient shelter. The White Paper limits the continuation of this "self-help" process by attempting to formalize the ownership of land, without providing for adjustments in the housing delivery system in order to reach the very poor. The current system requires ownership of a subsidized serviced plot in order to qualify for a loan to build a house, thereby excluding the poor from the housing market. The problems that the White Paper wants to address will therefore be enhanced if legislation continues to limit access to informal land market avoidance.

The primary need for affordable housing is not reflected sufficiently in the thinking of both policy makers and planners. The sheer magnitude of urbanization implies that the costs associated with formalizing access to land cannot indefinitely be subsidized. Formalization has both real and hidden cost implication for the poor. The impact of real costs (such as provision of infrastructure) can be softened by soft loans and subsidies. Formalized development exposes the newly settled owners to a variety of hitherto unfamiliar hidden costs such as rates and taxes. These place an unexpected additional financial

burden on the poor, who often lack even provision in basic needs. The White Paper will therefore reinforce the marginal position of the urban poor, which will amount to economic influx control. This will however not stem the surge to the cities, but rather create a potential threat of conflict and social instability.

It is an open secret that the violence in the townships is fuelled and, indeed, partly caused, by the competition between an established urban class and the more marginal poor. Competition for jobs and access to services manifests itself in violence between brickhouse and squatter/hostel dwellers, exacerbated by racial tension and political rivalry. More efficient access for the poor into the urban system by means of pro-active planning is part of the solution. This involves identifying suitable land for township creation in advance to direct urbanization. Policy makers should allow more flexibility in approach and adopt standards suitable to the needs of the poor.

Policy should accommodate provision of shelter at different levels at the bottom of the income ladder. If the goals of the White Paper are to be realised, the marginal poor should not be excluded in its implementation.