

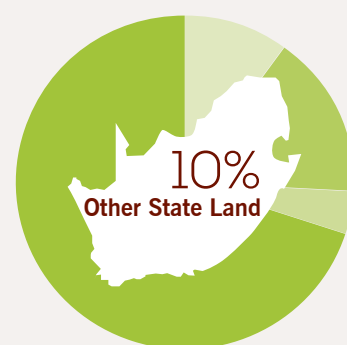
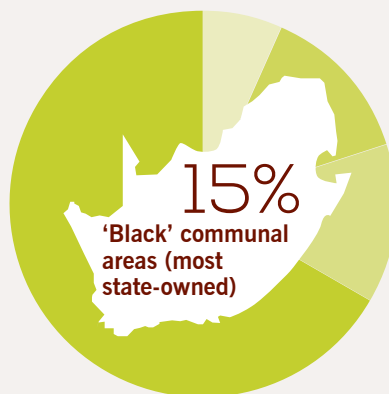
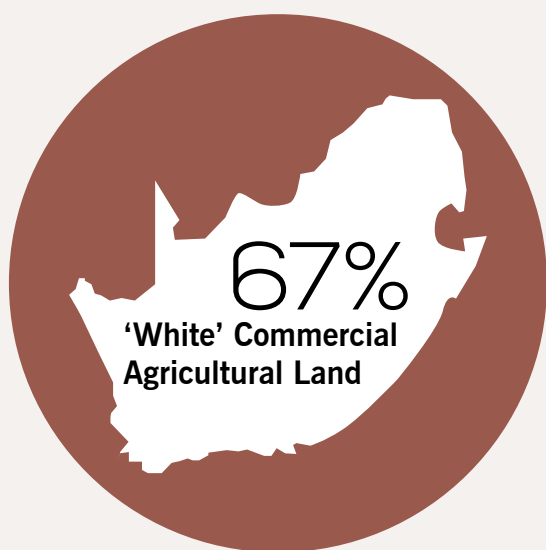
The Distribution of Land in South Africa: An Overview

Over-simplified accounts of how land is distributed misrepresent the current dispensation. It is often claimed that:

There are elements of truth in both claims, but the overall picture is considerably more complex, with important implications for land policy.

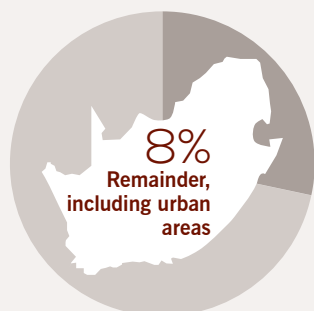
- In 1994, as a result of colonial dispossession and apartheid, 87% of the land was owned by whites and only 13% by blacks. By 2012 post-apartheid land reform had transferred 7.95 million hectares into black ownership (Nkwinti 2012), which is equivalent, at best, to 7.5% of formerly white-owned land. Whites as a social category still own most of the country's land and redressing racial imbalances in land ownership is land reform's most urgent priority.
- OR
- The post-apartheid state currently owns a quarter of the country and redistributing this should be land reform's first priority. When this is added to the 7.95 million hectares already acquired through land reform, plus the significant though unknown amount of land blacks are buying privately, the discrepancies between white and black ownership are sharply reduced and in some provinces may even be equitable.

Total area of South Africa: **122,081,300ha**



- 1% Former 'coloured' reserves
- 2% Ingonyama Trust (former KwaZulu)
- 2% Other customary lands held in trust by the state
- 10% Ex 'homelands' other than KwaZulu

- 1% Other provincial, including schools, hospitals, agricultural
- 1.6% Other national, including Home Affairs Justice, Agriculture
- 0.4% Military, police, prisons
- 7% Conservation Areas



- 2% Metro
- 6% Other, including non-metro urban areas

The **origins** of the 87/13% figure for white/black land ownership

The 87:13 ratio of white to black ownership of land derives from an apartheid blueprint based on the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 that had not been completely implemented by 1994. Under apartheid South Africa was divided between a core of about 85% of the country deemed 'white' politically, and a periphery of ten ethnically defined 'African' 'homelands', plus a number of tiny 'coloured' reserves. Race-based land dispossession and relocation caused suffering and hardship for millions of black South Africans (SPP 1983) but failed to realise the master plan. Throughout the twentieth century growing numbers of 'Africans' and most 'coloureds' continued to live in so-called white South Africa, with varying levels of tenure security: on white-owned farms and conservation lands, in urban areas, and even on a small number of black-owned properties that escaped forced removals.

67% White' Commercial Agricultural Land

The racial classification of national land as 'white' and 'black' bears testimony to the past but fails to do justice to current economic, demographic and environmental conditions. In the early 1990s just under 60 000 white-owned farms accounted for about 70% of the total area of the country. Today there are under 40,000 farming units covering about 67% of the country (Stats SA 2009). The agricultural quality of this land varies, with only 13% classified as arable and over a third located in the arid Northern Cape where just 2% of the population resides. Most farmers are white but small numbers of blacks with access to capital are acquiring land through the market independently of land reform.

15% 'Black' Communal Areas

The former 'homelands' or communal areas cover some 17,2 million hectares, of which around 14,5 million hectares was classified as 'agricultural' in 1991 (DAFF 2011). (The balance includes small towns and protected areas.) Most of this land is state-owned and densely settled by black households under various forms of customary tenure, with tenure reform a contested but neglected area of state policy. As a result of regionally specific histories the extent of black communal areas varies considerably across the provinces, from over 36% in KwaZulu-Natal to under 0.05% in the Northern and Western Cape (DLA 2002). Former 'coloured' reserves comprise a further 1,28 million hectares, mostly in the Northern and Western Cape.

10% Other State Land



State land cannot be conflated with black ownership, nor seen as an unproblematic source of land for redistributive reform. Most state land outside the communal areas is demarcated for public purposes that should be directed towards the common good. State-owned protected areas accounted for about 7% of the country by 2012 (DEA 2012).

8% Remainder, including urban areas

Currently some 60% of the total population reside in urban areas (National Planning Commission 2012), and over 95% of whites. The eight metropolitan areas account for just 2% of the land area of the country but are home to 37% of the total population and are primary centres of private wealth (SAIRR 2012).

Author: Cheryl Walker, Stellenbosch University
with Alex Dubb, PLAAS
Series Editor: Rebecca Pointer
Design: Design for development, www.d4d.co.za
Printer: Tandym Print

www.plaas.org.za
Tel: +27 21 959 3733
E-mail: info@plaas.org.za

 www.facebook.com/PLAASuwv
 www.twitter.com/PLAASuwv

Implications For Land Policy

Land and agrarian policies need to be attuned to regional specificities and regional differences, including those deriving from history and ecology

Aggregate figures for the number of hectares acquired by the state are poor indicators of effective land and agrarian reform; land targets need to be regionally calibrated and judiciously applied

State-owned land is not a significant resource for land redistribution, and state ownership is not a proxy for black ownership of land

Increased black ownership of land can be achieved through the market but a land reform programme aimed at improving livelihoods and tenure security for the rural poor has to be driven by the state

Class is slowly becoming a more significant determinant of land ownership than in 1994

Rapid urbanisation in both large and small urban centres is impacting on the nature and location of land demand; aligning rural and urban land policy and addressing urban land demand are major challenges.

Sources

- Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries (DAFF), 2011. Abstract of Agricultural Statistics 2011.
- Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), 2012. Annual Report 2011/12.
- Department of Land Affairs (DLA), 2002. The extent of state land in the Republic of South Africa.
- National Planning Commission, 2012. National Development Plan 2030.
- Nkwinti, G, 2012. Speech by the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2012 Policy Speech.
- South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), 2012. 2012 South African Survey.
- Statistics South Africa, 2009. Census of Commercial Agriculture 2007 (preliminary).
- Surplus People Project (SPP), 1983. Forced Removals in South Africa. The SPP Reports, volumes 1–5.