



## THE PROMISE OF LAND: Undoing a Century of Dispossession in South Africa

Fred Hendricks, Lungisile Ntsebeza  
and Kirk Helliker (eds)  
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*Reviewed by Rudzani Makhado (Limpopo Legislature)*

**T**he Native Land Act of 1913 led to the eviction of many black South Africans from their productive land, leaving them landless in the country of their birth. *The Promise of Land*, with its 13 chapters by national and international scholars, comes at the right time, as South Africa is searching for solutions to correct the past racial allocation of land.

This book indicates that current policies and systems do not effectively address the land reform question, and that the “willing buyer-willing seller” model is inappropriate, if not unconstitutional. I concur with the need to look more closely at the prospects for expropriation, as envisaged in Section 25 of the Constitution, as a mechanism for a more radical approach. The book also argues for the state to foster conditions that will enable citizens to gain access to land on an equitable basis.

Noting that “the land question” also involves urban land, the authors argue for an integrated, not piecemeal, approach. And any approach to address people’s problems without involving them is likely to fail. The book therefore calls for fundamental change in government strategy. The voices of social movements need to be heard and taken into account when addressing the land question. This is the direction that should be taken.

Chapter 7 considers the seizure of commercial farmlands by the poor and landless in Zimbabwe, and similar cases of private land seizure for settlement purposes in South Africa. Could the Zimbabwe phenomenon repeat itself here?



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The possibilities are high, which warrants urgent intervention. Chapter 13 suggests that a social movement is required in order to define new approaches to address the land question. However, I disagree with the suggestion that chiefs and headmen should be replaced by elected leaders (p 351). That idea needs to be revisited. In my view, they should be trained in good governance and effective accountability, just like the elected leaders.

I recommend this book for decision makers, scholars and general readers who are interested in the critical issues of land reform. [NA](#)