

FOREST – BASED LAND REFORM POLICY



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document is a policy framework for implementing a forest-land based land reform with emphasis on exotic timber plantations and demarcated indigenous forests. The policy has been developed within the context of Zimbabwe's Land Reform Programme and is underpinned by the following:

- A recognition that exotic timber plantations are a viable and appropriate land use system that can facilitate the attainment of equity objectives.
- A realisation that demarcated indigenous forests perform important environmental, ecological and socio-economical functions that ensure the attainment of the long term sustainability of fragile ecosystems and generate income that can contribute to social equity.

2.0 PART 1: EXOTIC TIMBER PLANTATIONS

2.1 Background and context of exotic timber plantations – based land reform policy

2.1.1 Zimbabwe's exotic timber plantations cover an area of about 119 000ha. They were established in the early 1950s to augment the country's commercial timber requirements. However, they have since become the major source of commercial timber when compared to indigenous forests. The country is a net exporter of timber products.

2.1.2 According to Zimbabwe's land use classification system, plantations are an appropriate land use system for some parts of natural regions (NRs) I and II that are characterised by high rainfall and fragile and infertile soils. Apart from protecting the soil, the plantations' long rotation cycle of up to 30 years is important for watershed management.

2.1.3 Given the nature of the exotic timber plantation industry which is characterised by a long rotation cycle, vertical integration (timber production, processing and marketing) and the need to access niche markets (through certification), the subdivision of existing timber plantations is not economical and sustainable. Beneficiaries of any sub-divisions might therefore be forced to change the existing land use in favour of annual cropping for quick economic returns.

2.1.4 As a land use system, timber plantations are mostly profitable when vertically integrated into processing, packaging and marketing. Existing companies have therefore invested heavily in both timber plantations and processing capacity.

2.1.5 The State owns about 47 000ha (40%) of the land under exotic timber plantations while 71 400ha (60%) is under private companies and individuals. Of the later area, 17 850ha (25%) is outside indigenous "hands" and is covered by a country to country agreement.

2.1.6 The participation of the generality of Zimbabweans, especially local communities in exotic timber plantations has been very limited and largely confined to contract thinning and harvesting; collection of mushrooms; and timber outgrower schemes.

2.1.7 To date, land under exotic timber plantations has been excluded from compulsory acquisition for resettlement purposes. Notwithstanding, some land hungry Zimbabweans have illegally settled themselves on such land. This and other related developments have raised the need for a policy on how more Zimbabweans and local communities can meaningfully and sustainably participate in and benefit from exotic timber plantations.

2.2 Policy objectives

The policy objectives are as follows:

- 2.2.1 To ensure the continued existence and growth of the exotic timber plantation industry.
- 2.2.2 To ensure equity in the flow of benefits from exotic timber plantations
- 2.2.3 To develop and implement appropriate institutional arrangements for an exotic timber plantations based land reform

2.3 Overall policy thrusts

- 2.3.1 All exotic timber plantation land will not be sub-divided and will continue to be used for that purpose.
- 2.3.2 The current private exotic timber plantation title holders will be expected to cede their land to the State for purposes of leasing out. Companies and individuals will be allowed to lease such land for up to three rotations (90 years). Present title holders who wish to engage in the exotic timber plantation business will be required to apply to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.
- 2.3.3 The shareholding structure of existing timber companies will be broadened to include indigenous people and local communities. The companies will be required to sell some of their shares to indigenous people and local communities. The State will come up with programmes that enable indigenous people and local communities to purchase shares and build their capacities.
- 2.3.4 Trust Funds will be established for the benefit of local communities that neighbour exotic timber estates. All timber companies will contribute to the Fund.
- 2.3.5 Timber companies will contract a certain number of neighbouring smallholder farmers with suitable land as timber outgrowers. Companies will provide financial and technical support to the outgrowers and directly purchase or assist in identifying markets for the standing timber as part of their corporate responsibility.
- 2.3.6 All exotic timber plantation land will be regulated through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. The Ministry will provide leadership and be recognised as such in profiting forestry and natural resources management in the land reform process.

3.0 PART II: DEMARCATED INDIGENOUS FORESTS

3.1 Background and context of demarcated indigenous forests-based land reform policy

3.1.1 There are about 800 000ha of demarcated indigenous forests in Western Zimbabwe.

3.1.2 According to Zimbabwe's land use classification, demarcated indigenous forests are located in parts of Natural Regions (NRs) IV and V which are characterised by low and erratic rainfall and fragile and deep Kalahari sands. The forests are important for ecological protection, watershed management and biodiversity conservation.

3.1.3 Apart from their conservation functions, demarcated indigenous forests offer a number of business opportunities which include timber concessions and hunting and photographic safaris.

3.1.4 A policy on the indigenisation of timber concessions has been operational in the forests since 2002. Under the policy, a non indigenous company that wins a tender is required to form a partnership with an indigenous timber operator who gets 20% of the stake. This policy has been extended to other business activities undertaken in the forests such as photographic safaris.

3.1.5 Communities that neighbour demarcated forests are allowed to access certain timber and non timber products such as grazing, firewood and logs for carving. This is done under a permit system as provided for in the Forest Act. However, communities have not meaningfully benefited from business ventures carried out in the forests.

3.1.6 Demarcated indigenous forests are facing problems of illegal settlers. The settlers pose the greatest challenge to the conservation and business functions of the forests. This and other related developments have raised the need for a policy on how more Zimbabweans and local communities can meaningfully and sustainably participate in and benefit from demarcated indigenous forests without compromising their integrity.

3.2 Policy objectives

The policy objectives are as follows:

3.2.1 To ensure the continued existence and maintenance of demarcated indigenous forests for environmental conservation and sustainable utilisation.

3.2.2 To ensure equity in the flow of benefits from demarcated indigenous forests

3.2.3 To develop and implement appropriate institutional arrangements for a demarcated indigenous forests-based land reform.

3.3 Overall policy thrusts

- 3.3.1 All demarcated indigenous forest land will remain intact as provided in the Forest Act. To this end, there will be no settlements allowed in the demarcated forest land. *In the case of people already settled in forest areas, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in consultation with the Ministry of Special Affairs in the President's Office Responsible for Lands, Land Reform and Resettlement; Rural District Councils; Traditional Leaders and other relevant stakeholders will be expected to regularise and reorganise the settlements.*
- 3.3.2 All demarcated indigenous forests will continue to be owned and managed by the State for conservation purposes as provided for in the Forest Act.
- 3.3.3 The existing practice whereby communities that neighbour demarcated indigenous forests access certain timber and non timber forest products under a permit system will be continued.
- 3.3.4 The policy on the indigenisation of business ventures undertaken in demarcated forests will be broadened to cover local communities that neighbour the forests. The State will come up with programmes that enable such communities to raise investment capital and to build their capabilities.
- 3.3.5 The State in liaison with Rural District Councils, will implement a Social Forestry Programme for communities that neighbour demarcated indigenous forests. The objectives of the programme will be to:
- Financially and technically support some development projects initiated by Rural District Councils and communities. Funding for the projects will come from part of the revenue generated by the forests.
 - Give local communities an opportunity to contribute towards the sustainable management of the forests for the benefit of present and future generations.
- 3.3.6 A comprehensive awareness and education programme will be implemented for communities that neighbour demarcated indigenous forests. The programme will be aimed at building a conservation culture within the communities.