

# IS LAND OWNERSHIP THE ANSWER TO ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT?

Natur sum eum harchil itiaerum ut as as et expel id quate volectist eost, quos int, tes nos ut que latiant. Cil ipsam faceperro et verempos volorporro verovidus ad

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Rhetorical question much? Ownership is power. Power and economic empowerment work together much like a hand would in a glove. The quest for ownership is the very reason why colonial masters embarked on journeys from lands marred by seasonal frigid temperatures and poor soils, to scaling seas to settle across Africa's vast terrains. The result was what scholars now refer to as classical colonialism of the 19th century; a systemic, violence-ridden willful plan by European settlers that had capitalism, racism, cultural indoctrination, and domination at the core of its agenda. Today's Africans are products of a series of traumas associated with the tremendous shift for the inhabitants of our continent as our forefathers were methodically displaced from their arable tracts of land, and economies would erupt that later became the subjects of much heated debate on the issue of socioeconomic imbalance across racial and political lines.

The subject of land redistribution in Africa remains controversial, but the happenings of recent months beyond our coastlines, as painful as the circumstances that led to them have been, created extensive dialogue on the "black struggle" and what disparity has meant for the

people of colour, not just overseas but in Africa as well. We've witnessed statues <sup>been</sup> toppled and the roaring outcry that stemmed from <sup>pro</sup>tests the world over. Whoever imagined that we would see the Japanese or the Australians in their own countries, carrying signs that professed the need for reforms? Then there was the global pandemic to add to the conditions for a perfect storm.

Again, the message was as clear as a reverberating gong. Disparity. Disparity between the poor and the wealthy the world over would highlight who lived because of access to healthcare and who died because they couldn't find a stronger line of defence. For some, it was mostly a feeling of being short-changed and violated all through history. As headlines and hashtags trended, the more reflective in our midst took the time to further dissect what roles they could play in redrafting their life's future narrative for future generations. Legacy means impact. But impact rarely comes about without freedom to enact change, to create solutions, to participate in the transformational process and most importantly, to have a seat at the table.

## But who is at this table?

It's a long wait for that invitation to the table if you are part of the "have-nots" or the "powerless". This is a sad reality that most of us have had to contend with as we grapple with our quest for equality in the workplace, beneficial constitutional reforms, financial inclusion, empowerment opportunities for all, and all other such topics that have fostered age-old discourses. There's something about having – be it an education, a strong sense of belief, a job or source of income, a home with your name on the title deeds and critically, a plan. One would rather have any one of these examples than not, which brings me back to why ownership is the consistent battle, and the reasons why kingdoms continue to rise and fall. While others may look to the ownership of material belongings, the real victory is ownership of something that can contribute towards bettering the status quo today and be passed on to generations after ours. Yes, knowledge can be passed on, but what good it is if it doesn't result in the economic empowerment and emancipation across varied fronts.

## Land is wealth

Growing up and visiting relatives in the rural areas as most African children do, there was a sense of "having" that was tied to the earth, more so than it was to material belongings. Our grandparents would speak of needing fertilizers from the cities in preparation for cropping season in "their fields". If there was no fertilizer, an organic route would be taken using animal manure. Every homestead had designated fields and livestock. The bigger the tract of land and the more livestock one had, the wealthier and more revered they were in their community. Ownership and power. Even in the most subsistence of economies, ownership or in many instances, tenure as is the case with many rural communities, is critical to sustained living and respect from peers.

Access and ability to use land and benefit from its natural resources is viewed as a symbol of power. It is the reason why those who want to venture into mining must secure mining claims before they can begin the process of excavation. Parties who own land that borders bodies of water have greater value placed on their land, with littoral or riparian rights awarding them an even greater benefit of water access – be it for agricultural or leisure use.

## Land access denotes security and well-being

As more members of the diaspora have started looking to Africa for investment and retirement opportunities, it's interesting to note just how many migrating from cosmopolitan European and Western cities are looking at availability and affordability of land on the continent as a real impetus for heading back to Africa. In African cities, many are looking at embarking in agricultural production activities outside metropolitan areas for both commercial and subsistence farming reasons. The thinking is logical. Why pay exorbitant prices for produce when you can grow it? Why endure crowding in city neighbourhoods when you can enjoy vast expanses of land, the appeal of nature and the opportunity for a more sustainable way of life?

Perhaps as Africans, we ought to ask ourselves how we define our wealth, security, and the notion of well-being? Is it a collection of cars parked in a rented garage or the owned hectares of land (of equal or lesser value to the cars in the rented garage in many instances) that have capacity to yield enough crops to feed communities or produce for export? Is it in having the best purses out of Milan or enough farm equipment to lease out to other subsistence farmers that need to till their fields ahead of a new cropping season? Is it living in a high-rise leased penthouse with no retirement plan in motion or land ownership being a part of the retirement plan?

And to our youth – is economic empowerment about finding a job or creating employment through the continuation of production on land owned by our forefathers? Is a symbol of self-actualisation travelling the world on flights paid for by credit cards, or starting small so we can raise enough resources to one day purchase title to that land or brick and mortar?

Is land ownership the answer to economic empowerment? Of course, and so much more. Land ownership is about having some place to start, and the security of knowing that you are creating a legacy just by having an asset that appreciates in value no matter the season of economic growth or recession. Land ownership is about power; the power to fight back with an economic weapon in your arsenal as you fight your way through life and being able to rest your head at night without the fear of displacement by exploiters. ■



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