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**OXFAM AND LAND IN POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS IN AFRICA:  
EXAMPLES FROM ZIMBABWE, MOZAMBIQUE, SOUTH AFRICA,  
RWANDA AND ANGOLA**

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***Introduction***

I was asked to write a paper on Oxfam's<sup>1</sup> strategy on land in post-conflict situations. To the best of my knowledge – and I think I should know – there is no such thing! Instead, there tend to have been a series of (very British) pragmatic responses to individual situations, highly dependent on local contexts. I don't believe that there is any need to apologise for this.

These days all organisations seem to undergo regular, in some cases almost constant, internal restructurings, and Oxfam is certainly no exception. In recent years we have sought to focus our programme work around specific aims and strategic change objectives, and have become much more assertive as a global campaigning organisation (e.g. [www.maketradefair.com](http://www.maketradefair.com)). Our work on land, a lot of which is documented in the website I manage on *Land Rights in Africa* ([www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights)) has taken a bit of a battering in this process. Land is not easy to campaign on in Western countries, and in the course of our programme restructuring into livelihoods, land was initially almost completely written out of our strategy in favour of 'power in markets' and 'women's labour rights'. It may be making a subterranean comeback however, as people belatedly recognise its critical importance to livelihoods and much else.<sup>2</sup>

Given the absence of an overall corporate Oxfam strategy on land in post-conflict situations, I intend to focus on 5 brief case studies of what we actually did in the following (roughly chronological) order – in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Africa, Rwanda and Angola.<sup>3</sup>

Before doing so, however, I need to state the Oxfam and its partners deeply resent the remorseless pressures for privatisation of land emanating from USAID. This has been a feature in Mozambique, where USAID has recently sought to undermine a highly progressive land law, and in Angola, where it has exploited the inexperience of civil society actors. Outrageously, very recently in Kenya it has been pressing other donors to withdraw their

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<sup>1</sup> Oxfam in this paper will comprise a mix of Oxfam GB (which employs me) and Oxfam International. It is not worth differentiating in every case in a paper of this nature.

<sup>2</sup> For further reflections on this, see Robin Palmer, 'Land as a Global Issue – A Luta Continua', Paper for Oxfam-Zambia Copperbelt Livelihoods Programme Land Workshop, 29-30 March 2004 [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/land\\_global\\_issue.rtf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/land_global_issue.rtf)

<sup>3</sup> In Burundi, we were waiting for peace to break out in order to undertake jointly with CARE some post-conflict research and campaigning on identifying linkages between land tenure rights and livelihood security, but suddenly withdrew from the country in 2003, a decision which many have found difficult to understand.

support for the Kenya Land Alliance, which is by far and away the most effective and constructive lobby group currently operating in a highly volatile climate.

The Kenya Land Alliance (KLA), while not the product of a post-conflict situation, is an interesting case of an institution established by a range of actors at a time when political space for action on land was entirely closed, but which was created in the belief that thinking, analysing and planning were absolutely vital so that the Alliance would be in a strong position to intervene in the policy arena when that political space opened up, as it finally did in 2002. This is a prime example of intelligent forward thinking – and Oxfam was involved, with others, in the mobilisation which led to the creation of the KLA.

### ***Zimbabwe***

Oxfam had been supporting organisations working in Rhodesia during the war, and it quickly moved to open an office in Harare following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Land issues had featured prominently in the rhetoric of the liberation struggle, but fairly rapidly dropped down the new Government's priority list. Oxfam focussed its priorities on supporting a range of local organisations seeking to help peasant farmers re-establish themselves on the land after the massive dislocation of the final years of the war. These included ORAP (the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress), which worked in Matabeleland and became very well-known in development circles, the Zimbabwe Project, which helped war veterans re-establish themselves, and the influential Zvishavane Water Project, under its charismatic leader, Zephania Phiri.<sup>4</sup>

This kind of approach was entirely appropriate; it was very much 'hands off' and was premised on enabling such organisations on the ground, whose capacities and vision we thought highly of, to support local communities recover and develop after the ravages of war.

We made one specific intervention on land at the national level in 1989/90. This came about in the context of a Front Line States campaign which we were mounting, which sought to illustrate the destruction being wrought across the region by South Africa in its notorious (and genteelly worded) policy of 'destabilisation' and to argue the case for sanctions against South Africa. This latter got us into considerable hot water with the (then very conservative) British Charity Commissioners. In Zimbabwe, the 10-year constraints imposed by the Lancaster House Constitution of 1979 were about to come to an end, and Peter Nyoni, Oxfam's Country Representative, decided that there was need for some shaking up. So he asked me (I was then a Desk Officer for Zimbabwe and other countries) to come to Zimbabwe, interview key members of the Zimbabwean Government, and write a review of the first decade of land reform. This I did; it became a chapter in our Front Line States book,<sup>5</sup> was published in the journal *African Affairs* as 'Land Reform in Zimbabwe, 1980-1990'<sup>6</sup> and has recently been made available electronically.<sup>7</sup> I was told that it was recommended reading for successive British High Commissioners going to Harare!

The thrust of the article was highly critical of the Zimbabwean Government, for only paying serious attention to land issues when there was an election to be won, and of the British Government, for seeking to constrain any radical redistribution of land, which it seemed in

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<sup>4</sup> For more details, see Robin Palmer and Isobel Birch, *Zimbabwe: A Land Divided* (Oxford; Oxfam, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Susanna Smith, *Front Line Africa: The Right to a Future* (Oxford, Oxfam, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Robin Palmer, 'Land Reform in Zimbabwe, 1980-1990', *African Affairs*, **89**, 1990, 163-81.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/zim1980s.rtf>

those Cold War days to equate with Communism. The article concluded by warning that Namibia and South Africa would be next in line for such constraining treatment. So it proved, and the folly of such attitudes is being proved in the tragedy now unfolding in Zimbabwe. Currently, Oxfam is doing what little it can to prepare for what may be yet another post-conflict situation, which will almost certainly be more complex and difficult than that of 25 years ago.

### ***Mozambique***

One of the most memorable experiences of my work with Oxfam, which I joined in 1987, was travelling in Mozambique in December 1992, a couple of months after Frelimo and Renamo signed a peace agreement in Rome. It was the sight of people making peace on their own, going home without waiting for official demobilisation, deserting both armies in droves, and being able for the first time in over a decade to do perfectly normal things in upcountry towns in Zambézia that was so memorable. I was then the Regional Manager for Mozambique, managing our Country Representative, Thabisile Mngadi. On that visit we made contact with Renamo local officials who proved to be significantly different from the stereotyped images we had expected. Thabi and I recognised that we needed to do everything we could at local levels (we worked in the Provinces of Zambézia, Niassa and Cabo Delgado) to cement the peace. Within a couple of weeks of my visit, our Zambézia Coordinator, Agostinho Chirime, had accepted an invitation to go to a Renamo zone to do a needs assessment. Within a couple of months we sent a nurse to work in a Renamo demobilisation camp. Much later we supported election monitors to help ensure that the October 1994 election was free and fair.

When I talked in London in January 1993 to a large audience at the Royal African Society on *Mozambique, December 1992: Peace, Rain and Lurching with Renamo*, I stressed the critical importance of bringing Renamo into the peace building process at all levels, and the absolute need to deal - and be seen to deal - even-handedly with Renamo and Frelimo. This was something we had all stressed during our field visit, but it was sometimes difficult for some within the Mozambique Government and in the external solidarity movements to accept. Many of us had a somewhat one-dimensional view of the civil war which had just ended, and had failed to recognise that the war was often suddenly and brutally visited on local communities, who generally had no choice when it came to being press-ganged into one army or another, or that while Renamo had certainly been created and initially sustained by racist Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa, it was later able to exploit significant abuses by Frelimo in its Marxist-Leninist mission that 'for the nation to be born, the tribe must die'. So I pressed this 'reconciliation and cementing the peace' line at all the inter-agency and other meetings I attended in the UK and elsewhere through 1993/4. This was my 'line' on Renamo:

Renamo cannot be ignored, or wished away. They are signatories to the Rome peace agreement. Lasting peace will not come to Mozambique until Renamo is fully brought into the peace process. International agencies such as Oxfam have an important role to play in this process. Until the war ended it was not possible for agencies to work on both sides. Now it is, and it is crucial that they all work in a non-partisan way in responding to humanitarian needs so as to help consolidate the peace. In the initial stages, this may involve 'getting to know' Renamo, establishing a relationship of trust and then visiting the Renamo zones to observe, verify and, where appropriate, distribute and monitor. Renamo may need to be 'wooed' to trust international agencies and helped to feel that they are getting something positive out of the peace

process, and so have less incentive to return to war. Encouraging, supporting and strengthening the peace process must be the major criteria by which Oxfam (and, hopefully, others) judge their proposed activities, in both relief and development, over the coming year. If the peace fails, there will be no development.

On land, it was remarkable to watch first women and children going home to plant before the rains came at the end of 1992, and later to witness the remarkable degree of reconciliation at the local level. When I asked how communities were coming to terms with the return of ex-combatants and of individuals known to have committed atrocities, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. This perhaps reflected the fact that people often had very little choice about which side they found themselves on; in essence Frelimo held the garrison towns (into which international agencies poured help, usually in the form of seeds and tools for the displaced), while Renamo held much of the countryside.

In my tour report of December 1992, I noted with respect to land that there were significant developments in the form of former Portuguese settler owners seeking to regain their property, which had been nationalised at independence in 1975, and of elite interests seeking to lay claims to land (especially in Zambézia) in an extremely fluid situation. ‘At this moment’, I wrote, ‘there is a legal nightmare and great confusion about whose title to land is most valid.’ Those warnings proved prescient and it was not long before Oxfam International lent its support to lobbying for a progressive land law, and then campaigning to spread awareness of its existence and what communities needed to do in order to claim those rights. I have written more fully about that process elsewhere, and this quote comes from my 2003 article in the *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik (JEP)*:<sup>8</sup>

In summary, as soon as the civil war ended in 1992, the Wisconsin Land Tenure Center and USAID were again busy pushing privatisation of land, just as they had done in Uganda. Mozambique clearly faced huge problems of reconstruction, having suffered massive destruction during a war which had displaced millions of people. There were concerns around competing claims to land as people returned to a countryside much of which had previously been unsafe, as a large number of concession claims were made by South African and other speculators, and as plans were mooted to settle in parts of Mozambique some Afrikaner farmers who had difficulty coming to terms with the new South Africa. Frelimo was also busy transforming itself from Marxist-Leninism to neo-liberalism in the wake of the collapse of its former Soviet ally. In this somewhat unpromising situation, to which should be added a long history of highly directive top-down governance, there emerged a quite remarkably open and consultative process of law making, culminating in the 1997 Land Law (*Lei de Terras*) which was followed by an equally remarkable campaign of public awareness (*Campanha Terra*) to help people understand their new rights under that law... co-ordinated by the respected academic José Negrão, and supported by a range of international NGOs including Oxfam.

More recently, in 2002, in response to pressures to undermine the Land Law from local elites and USAID, Oxfam commissioned the veteran Mozambique watcher Joe Hanlon to conduct an investigation and write a report to raise awareness of this situation. This he did in a work entitled *The land debate in Mozambique: will foreign investors, the urban elite, advanced*

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<sup>8</sup> Robin Palmer, ‘Struggling to secure and defend the Land Rights of the Poor in Africa’, *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik* (Austrian Journal of Development Studies), **XIX**, 1, 2003, 6-21.  
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/struglin.rtf>

*peasants or family farmers drive rural development?*<sup>9</sup> Recently, being asked my advice by Rosário Advirta, Oxfam International Advocacy Coordinator in Angola, I tried to be encouraging by suggesting that while in Mozambique ‘we’ won some of the early rounds in the fight but are now in serious danger of losing the later rounds, in Angola, just possibly, the reverse might prove to be the case.

### ***South Africa***

During the late apartheid years, Oxfam (and many other international NGOs) supported local land sector NGOs such as the National Land Committee and some of its regional affiliates, and other organisations, like the Legal Resources Centre, which together attempted to resist forced removals (and many other abuses) through a combination of political and legal struggles. When apartheid was in its death throes, Oxfam supported groups working on policy and constitutional issues as well as continuing to support local advice centres. When apartheid was finally overthrown, international NGOs faced difficulties about where to focus support and attention in the ‘new South Africa’. Most donors poured money into the new government, which many former struggle NGO leaders joined. There was an assumption (which proved false) that, by contrast to its neighbours, the local NGO sector was very strong and so needed little support. So, after a decent interval, Oxfam withdrew its funding from land sector NGOs and played no part in supporting the new, highly ambitious land reform programme, except at a very local level in Kwa-Zulu Natal after we moved our office from Johannesburg to Pietermaritzburg. (We have recently moved back to Johannesburg and are struggling with how best to engage in poverty issues at the national level).

I had two personal (i.e. non-Oxfam) engagements with both the land reform process as a whole and with the land reform programme of the Legal Resources Centre, which I reviewed.<sup>10</sup> In 1999, DFID asked Lionel Cliffe and I to join a South African team reviewing donor support to the land reform programme. We did our work immediately after an election and the change of minister from Derek Hanekom to Thoko Didiza, at a moment when all past policies seemed to be on hold and there was considerable disarray and tension within the Department of Land Affairs. It was clear that the programme was in great difficulties, but Lionel and I gently tried to suggest that land reform takes time and that total despair was premature. But many parts of rural South Africa and the small towns that I visited (mostly in Northern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal) seemed far less unreconstructed than post-war Mozambique a decade earlier. The recent emergence of a Landless Peoples Movement (LPM), drawing some of its inspiration from Brazil’s MST, renowned for its land occupations, and from Robert Mugabe’s ‘fast track’ seizure of farms in Zimbabwe, may indicate the dangers of leaving redistribution to the mercy of market forces.

### ***Rwanda***

Post-genocide Rwanda self-evidently faced a whole plethora of reconstruction challenges. Few were more daunting than that of land. The country has the highest population density on the continent; successive pogroms had forced huge numbers to flee into exile, and

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/debatmoz.pdf> and the Portuguese version <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/hanport.rtf>

<sup>10</sup> Robin Palmer, ‘Lawyers and Land Reform in South Africa: A Review of the Land, Housing and Development Programme of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC)’, September 2001 <http://www.lrc.co.za/Docs/Papers/palmer.pdf>



generational conflicts over land had played a significant role in the 1994 genocide,<sup>11</sup> in which over a million people were killed. Trying to be even-handed (as in Mozambique) was clearly going to be extremely difficult. Oxfam got engaged for the initial few years, with particular emphasis on the new government's villagisation policy. Oxfam's Regional Manager for East Africa, Ian Leggett, was approached by Patricia Hajabakiga, Secretary-General in the new Ministry of Lands etc, MINITERE.<sup>12</sup> The two had known each other in Tanzania, where both had worked in the NGO sector. Anticipating this, in 1998 Ian had commissioned through me a desk study of previous attempts at villagisation in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Mozambique. These countries were chosen with some care; the first two were allies of the new RPF Government. Christy Cannon Lorgen undertook the research and wrote a report, which was interesting both in its content and in the vehemence of the reactions from some of the people she interviewed who had been involved in villagisation programmes in those countries.

The intention of this piece of research was both to demonstrate what had happened elsewhere and to alert the Rwandan Government to possible pitfalls. Of course we were not blind to the politics and possible unstated reasons for the policy (social control). The handling and presentation of Christy's report required obvious sensitivity. In the meantime, in Rwanda Oxfam had come in contact with RISD (Rwanda Initiative for Sustainable Development), a new local NGO committed to participative approaches. Oxfam supported its surveys (April-June 1999) of the *implementation* (the policy could not be challenged) of villagisation in a range of different zones. Its Director, Annie Kairaba, was close to Patricia Hajabakiga and obviously needed her support and encouragement to ask any questions at all on such a sensitive subject. Also, having lived for many years in Tanzania, Patricia was well aware of the issues highlighted in Christy's report. At the end of 1999 we held a workshop which was intended to publicise both the RISD research and Christy's report and to bring villagisation into the open as a subject for legitimate discussion. We were seeking to target local and national decision makers and a number of Rwandan organisations. We hoped to create space for subsequent activities. The sensitivities certainly strained the relationship between RISD and Oxfam; there were complex discussions about whose workshop was it, the planning was difficult, and some things were off limits, such as tenure and compensation. The focus was on implementation and lesson learning, rather than criticism of policy. It was very well attended, there was lots of interest and keen participation, though Government people were tense and nervous.<sup>13</sup>

This was a cautious first step. It was followed by a workshop on the draft National Land Policy in 2000, in which RISD and Oxfam were also involved.<sup>14</sup> I had written a critique of the policy and shared land policies from other countries. Soon after this Oxfam, exhibiting a rapid turnover of Country Representatives, withdrew from national land issues to engage in conflict management and peace building work at a local level in its programme areas in Ruhengeri and Umutara.

I made my last visit in 2001, as a DFID-funded consultant, to support capacity building for LandNet Rwanda, of which RISD was a key member, and to help plan a workshop on

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<sup>11</sup> Catherine André and Jean-Philippe Platteau. 'Land relations under unbearable stress: Rwanda caught in the Malthusian trap', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, **34**, 1, 1998, 1-47.

<sup>12</sup> She has subsequently risen to be Minister of State in charge of Land and Environmental Rehabilitation.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/kigali.rtf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/rwanlp.rtf>

*Mainstreaming Grassroots Consultations into the National Land Policy and the PRSP.*<sup>15</sup>  
Here is an extract from my report to DFID:

This was the third occasion on which I had attended a workshop on land in Rwanda. The previous ones were on the *National Land Policy* (November 2000) and on *Land Use and Villagisation* (September 1999). As I said when introducing my paper to this third workshop, it is clear to me that considerable progress has been made in gradually opening up space in which the highly contentious and sensitive issue of land in Rwanda can be publicly discussed.

The first workshop was characterised by considerable nervousness on the part of Government and other participants, and even of the organisers (RISD and Oxfam). Its real purpose was to make villagisation (more specifically its implementation) an issue which could legitimately be talked about in public. The second workshop, in which MINITERE (the Ministry of Lands, Human Resettlement and Environmental Protection) tabled the first draft of its National Land Policy and opened it up to some comment and debate, was a good deal more open and relaxed than the first. This third workshop was very much a civil society affair and was notable for quite open and honest discussions, particularly on the second day when, at my prompting, people began to speak in Kinyarwanda (rather than in English or French).

Obviously there are very particular constraining factors in Rwanda, and civil society is still feeling its way and cannot be seen to be moving too far ahead of government. But the change over this two year period is very noticeable to an outsider, and something which is greatly to be welcomed. In the workshop report, you can find words such as corruption, greed, fear, mistrust, inequality, and phrases such as lack of participation and dialogue, and inequitable distribution.

For me one of the real pluses was the fact that the workshop was dominated by Rwandans, to the extent that on the second day Peter Brinn, Christine Piontek of IRC, and myself were the only foreigners present – though a number of others had attended sessions on the opening day. The fact that Rwandans (representing both local and international organisations) were in the ascendancy was to me a very positive sign, and was again something which contrasted strikingly with the workshops in the two previous years

One of the less overt but nonetheless important purposes of the workshop was to publicise the work of LandNet and land issues across a broad section of Rwandan civil society, in order to attract more members and greater interest and involvement. Time alone will tell how successful this will prove.

A final note is that I strongly urged that DFID spend some of the money it was lavishing on Rwanda to provide much needed technical support to MINITERE. This they agreed to do. The very experienced land specialist Harold Liversage was recruited, and I was delighted to hear that he took Patricia and Eugene Rurangwa, Director of Lands, to look at how land conflicts were being handled in Mozambique and Kwa-Zulu Natal, where he had previously

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/lnrwams.rtf>

worked. This struck me as both a highly intelligent use of technical assistance and useful exposure to other post-conflict situations.

### **Angola**

National land issues were relatively slow to emerge in post-conflict Angola, following the cease fire agreed between the MPLA and UNITA in April 2002. This was almost certainly in order to allow - before a new election could be held - the elites on both sides to intensify the process of land grabbing they had begun in some areas during the war. The Angolan Government is acknowledged to be one of the most corrupt in the world, while civil society is extremely weak and inexperienced. But with Oxfam International support and encouragement a land network, *Rede Terra*, has taken shape and over the past two years has sought to engage with government and donors in order to try to introduce some checks and balances in favour of the poor. I was very pleased to hear that Oxfam had been prominent in supporting *Rede Terra* and I found myself from time to time engaged long distance in this process, writing a critique of the draft land law (which had emerged from a highly secretive process) and trying to bring relevant experience from elsewhere, especially from Mozambique, and from FAO, which has a presence in Angola – and considerable relevant external expertise in the form of Paolo Groppo. In my comments on the atrocious draft land law, I stressed:

The need for relevant civil society and donor actors to seek out allies in different levels of government who share some of their concerns.

The need for rural communities to assert their ‘customary’ land rights as communities and to have those rights affirmed by government. (This should proceed regardless of what happens to the draft land law).

The need for concerned actors to support communities to assert these rights and for those actors to build alliances at different levels (national, provincial, local).

I suspect that as a result of staff changes Oxfam International took its eye off the ball at critical moments, allowing *Rede Terra* to fall too heavily under the influence of USAID. But a recent (and current) advocacy officer, Rosário Advirta, has taken a keen interest in land issues and has strongly supported *Rede Terra* in its campaign *Por uma Justa Lei de Terras* (Towards a fairer Land Law), aimed at pointing out the problems the draft law would create if it remained unaltered. Last year I helped to bring two of its members to a workshop in Pretoria on women’s land rights in Southern and Eastern Africa, and the exchange appeared to be mutually beneficial. But my attempt to get a key person from Mozambique to offer training and support to the Angolans came to naught.

In June 2004 Rosário reported <sup>16</sup> that:

In spite of civil society weakness, there has been some mobilisation around the land issue. For example, *Rede Terra* in Luanda, *Forum Terra* from Huíla and some smaller coalitions and associations, in both rural and urban communities, have been following some of the legal concerns raised in various fora and also unfair practices against the poor.

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<sup>16</sup> Independent Land Newsletter (June 2004), ‘Angola’, in *Land Reform Highlights in Southern Africa, 2003-4* [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/ind\\_land\\_newsletter\\_sth\\_afr\\_june\\_2004.rtf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/learning/landrights/downloads/ind_land_newsletter_sth_afr_june_2004.rtf)



From September 2003 to March 2004, *Rede Terra* consulted rural citizens on the draft law. This consultation, supported by Oxfam International, started with the creation of a manual explaining in clear terms, and in the principal national languages, what questions arose from the project. Activists were then trained, and the process of consultation was initiated in selected communities in 10 of the country's 18 provinces.

On 8 April *Rede Terra* sent an open letter and a position statement to the National Assembly, accompanied by the report with the results of the consultation with the communities. At the same time there was also participation in seminars and debates on Luanda radio stations.

Following the consultation process, *Rede Terra* and other stakeholders made submissions to commissions of Parliament based on the findings of the studies and opinions collected from diverse experts. The Campaign took various forms, including a Gala held on 16 April, the use of T-shirts and stickers for cars or shop windows, distributed in Luanda and in several other Provinces, and participation by members of the network in ongoing debates on these issues. *Rede Terra* is planning to continue to improve the Campaign through other tools in order to have a wider impact, particularly outside Luanda.

In recent months the process of actually passing the Land Law (*Lei de Terras*) through the Assembly took the normal highly secretive route, designed to keep everyone guessing. *Rede Terra* and Oxfam International have hung in there and apparently won some concessions here and there, with the draft presented in December 2003 showing considerable improvements on earlier versions, including recognition of and partial protection of the traditional rights of rural communities. But the extent that the law will either be enforceable or seriously address growing land conflicts in both urban and rural areas must remain seriously in doubt. For example, all citizens, families and communities are expected to complete the official process of legalising their land tenure situation (i.e. getting their 'titles') within one year. In the capital, the 'Clean Luanda' government campaign is seen by many as 'fighting the poor, not poverty', as widespread and often violent slum evictions continue and families in rural areas continue to be dispossessed of their land, but little is known about this.

But a serious attempt has been made to consult with communities and to persuade the Angolan Government to take a long term perspective and avoid sowing the seeds of future conflict - a phenomenon with which Angolans have been all too familiar for far too long.

Indeed, as Allan Cain, long-time Director of the urban NGO Development Workshop, has warned:<sup>17</sup>

Land is emerging as the most critical flash-point of conflict, as displaced persons seek settlement sites in rural and urban districts alike... The urban poor are left in a position of extreme vulnerability, with weak tenure rights over the land they occupy, and risk

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<sup>17</sup> Allan Cain, 'Livelihoods and the informal economy in post-war Angola', Jeremy Clover and Richard Cornwell (Eds), *Supporting Sustainable Livelihoods: A Critical Review of Assistance in Post-Conflict Situations* (Pretoria; Institute for Security Studies, Monograph **102**, August 2004), 87-101 (quotes here from 97-8).  
[www.iss.co.pubs/Monographs/No102/Contents.html](http://www.iss.co.pubs/Monographs/No102/Contents.html)

being turned into illegal occupiers... Mass expropriation of land occupied by poor urban families, with inadequate financial compensation, is becoming a new feature of post-conflict urban development in Angola...

The alienation of the urban poor from lands that they have lived and worked on for many years is likely to produce serious civic conflict in the years to come, unless the Government develops policies that recognise customary and existing occupational rights.

### ***Conclusions and lessons***

Writing this paper, in an hotel room in Lusaka where I have come, with others, to confront the dangerous myth that ‘there is no land problem in Zambia’, has perhaps been both something of a personal indulgence, but also an interesting voyage of discovery, reflection and learning. What kind of conclusions and lessons is it possible to draw?

I made the point at the very beginning that there is no Oxfam strategy as such in dealing with land in post-conflict situations, but there are a number of common themes which have run through this narrative. Among them are:

*1. The need to do everything you can, at all possible levels, to cement the peace.*

The extent to which any organisation like Oxfam can do this will of course depend on its past track record, its resources and competencies. In Mozambique, Oxfam had been big players in the emergency (i.e. we had spent lots of money) and had always tried, alone I think among international NGOs, to work through government structures (DPCCN), however fragile they might be, and however frustrating that could be at times. This gave us a degree of credit and credibility which could be exploited for peaceful purposes.

*2. The need to be – and to be seen to be – even-handed.*

This is part of the humanitarian imperative, and doubtless countless books and theses have been written on the subject. But it is critically important to do this in really practical and demonstrable ways at all levels.

*3. The need to adopt a pro-poor, long-term perspective on land issues.*

A pro-poor perspective almost goes without saying, but needs to be complemented by taking a long-term perspective in the lobbying and campaigning work that was / is a feature in both Mozambique and Angola. This almost always, as here in Zambia as I write, comes into conflict with the short-term horizons of politicians anxious for re-election and, as in Angola, also keen to indulge in unrestrained rural and urban land grabbing and slum clearances.

*4. The need to build capacity within civil society.*

This is a familiar refrain and illustrated in the encouragement and support both to the kind of networks described in South Africa, Mozambique, Rwanda and Angola, and also to the kind of NGOs like ORAP in Zimbabwe which worked on land as only a part of their broader objectives of post-war reconstruction and development. (Oxfam played an important role in helping Sithembiso Nyoni to found ORAP).

*5. The need for awareness campaigns to help make women and men become aware of what rights they already have or may be about to acquire.*

This is always the case with land issues, but is perhaps particularly relevant in post-conflict situations, when communities have often been displaced and there are therefore likely to be immediate competing claims to land, and where gender issues need to be addressed much more seriously than they usually are.<sup>18</sup> Again, experiences in Mozambique, South Africa and Angola illustrate this need for consciousness raising. In Rwanda the issues are obviously even more sensitive and complex, in part because of the country's history, in part because some historical claims to lands are clearly impossible to meet.

*6. The need to build capacity within government policy making and planning.*

This means establishing and reinforcing trust, offering critical but constructive comment on e.g. draft land policies, sharing relevant information and experiences from elsewhere, e.g. on the *Land Rights in Africa* website, and encouraging a genuine dialogue with civil society actors. I have mentioned the particular case of Rwanda, which called for extreme caution and sensitivity. However, in this context I fully acknowledge Johan Pottier's warning<sup>19</sup> that:

Hidden from the (chosen) outside expert's gaze is any detailed consideration of real-life scenarios and their complicating factors, such as the existence of a strong public discourse of morality through which policy directives are locally (re)interpreted. Also hidden from view is the commonly high degree of political autonomy at the local level... policy arguments may contain subtexts to strengthen the legitimacy of the post-genocide regime in power. Newcomers to Rwanda do not detect these subtle manipulations.

*7. The need, in politically sensitive environments, to work at creating space in which land issues, which are always highly emotive, can be discussed.*

Here too gaining and retaining trust is obviously a critical factor and the Rwandan case described earlier well illustrates this kind of process.

*8. Last, individuals really can make a difference.*

At all levels individual relationships, established on the basis of previous contacts and collaboration, of building good rapport and trust, can really bring about significant change for the better. In my experience, individual relationships can play an absolutely pivotal role in negotiating land issues.

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<sup>18</sup> Numerous writers have made the point that women frequently lose gains they may have made during conflict (for example skills acquired in refugee camps) when peace comes and men reassert patriarchal control.

<sup>19</sup> Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 2002), 200.