

## **Seeking Historical Justice: Reflections on South Africa's Land Restitution Program**

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In an admission of substantial problems the new South African Ministry of Rural Development and Land Reform (formerly the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Affairs until 2009) is to release a new Green Paper (now delayed by several months) detailing how it will carry out a more effective and viable land reform. In a separate Green Paper the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform seeks to increase the protection and security of those who work on farms including the creation of new agri-villages. Land restitution which was designed to return land has foundered on making it be simultaneously an instrument of rural development. These changes in national policy speak to multiple unresolved issues in land reform programs to date. Focusing upon ethnographic field studies on land restitution and farm workers, the paper describes how grassroots efforts to reclaim land were derailed by the centralized national and provincial decision (without consultation) to force strategic partnerships with agribusiness companies upon ill-prepared claimant land committees. While membership in land claimant committees is individual and women are members, little has been done to address women's complex needs for participation and for secure tenure. As joint venture companies were created real land needs were pushed to the sidelines while committees struggled to make joint venture companies profitable again and to provide exclusive employment for community members. Simultaneously most former homeland communities never filed for land restitution and thus watch these processes unfold while they cannot participate. How to think of alternatives has been difficult because of the dominance of African National Congress and chiefs over rural politics given their emphasis upon business models.