

What about Implementability?

I am concerned about the logic of Floyd Chivambo's reasoning for changing the Constitution. I have no objections to constitutional change as such. The mother-of-all-constitutions (in the USA) has been amended 27 times in 230 years, which is almost once every 8 years. At that rate, we could have amended the "never-again Constitution" three times by now.

I myself have lobbied for changing the PR system to a constituency-based system. I also think that we are seeing in current events the necessity for either electing Premiers instead of appointing them, or else dumping Provinces altogether. They are almost as redundant as Districts! So amending the constitution is simply house-keeping, to me.

But is the fact that Mozambique, Ethiopia and China are doing something convincing enough to change our policy on Land? Three countries out of 195? Is that a clincher? (The 195 marker includes Taiwan but excludes Tibet. China can't have it both ways.)

Planet Earth has a total surface area of 510 100 000 square kilometers. More of this is covered by water than land – namely 71 percent. That leaves 147 929 000 square kilometers of land. The combined surface area of Mozambique, Ethiopia and China is 11 502 590 square kilometers. That is 7.8 percent of the land surface area on earth. Does that make a convincing case?

Why are the 192 other governments not full custodians of the other 92 percent of land in the world? Surely every country has some "crown land"? Just as Chivambo points out that land is not all privately owned in South Africa. Government may already own as much as 21 percent.

Now about custodianship. That 21 percent crown land is not as high as the 75 percent that Chivambo mentions in Singapore. But Singapore is a city-state, with a total of 719 square kilometers. Joburg has 1 645 square kilometers, so Singapore isn't even half the size of Joburg! How can Chivambo point to that city-state to guide policy of a country like South Africa with a surface area of 1.22 million square kilometers (bigger than Ethiopia, and much bigger than Mozambique)?

What about population density?

Singapore's population is 5,791,901, not even 1 percent of the planet's total population. That is 8 056 people per square kilometer.

By contrast, South Africa's population of 57,398,421 is spread over 1.22 million square kilometers, coming to 47 people per square kilometer! Chivambo is comparing oranges and pineapples to base his arguments for South Africa on the Singapore model. There is no meaning in that comparison.

Ethiopia and South Africa, however, are not that different in size. But Ethiopia's population is twice what ours is, at 107,534,882. So it is much more crowded.

No one wants to say this, but maybe Africa has a *Population* problem, more than a *Land* problem? China has learned the hard way to slow down its population explosion. Africa now has 1.2 billion people – 16 percent of the world's population. Its total surface area is 20 percent of the Land on the planet.

Compare this to China, which has only 6.5 percent of the land surface area on the planet, with 1.42 billion people. Its population is 19 percent of the 7.6 billion people on Earth.

With more people by far than any other country and a population density of 146 people per square kilometer, China really does need government intervention both in terms of land use and population planning. But this does not compare well with South Africa at 47 people per square kilometer.

This is not to say that the stake owned by the State should not rise proportionally. But Chivambo's arguments do not hold water in terms of nationalizing all land. And the question of compensation for this proportional increase has yet to be tested. Making this a gradual Process and not a one-off Event seems to be wisest – for example, by raising Inheritance Tax. One-off events such as that are usually called Revolutions. And not “democratic revolutions”.

I once learned that there are three kinds of lies – little white lies, big black lies, and statistics. I think that Chivambo's statistics are suspect.

Back to custodianship – has he never heard about the “Chinese take-away” in Mozambique? The so-called custodianship by government officials there plays right into the game of corruption and patronage. Just as the Safcol forests in Mpumalanga province were a target for looting, so also the forests of Mozambique were plundered recklessly. In part because of the decades of three successive wars there, it had remained one of the most forested countries in Africa. Until peace came, that is, and the plundering started. So-called government “custodians” feathered their own nests with kick-backs from Chinese logging companies, on a grand scale.

Our Safcol scenarios were exactly the same – stuff the SOE Board with sycophants, expel any executives who tried to stand in the way of this “fronting”, and loot the natural resources. The volume of standing timber in Mpumalanga was decimated, just as coal was plundered and Chinese locomotives were imported at inflated prices, and Russian nuclear reactors were on the cards? Why? We all know why now. How can Chivambo argue in favour of State custodianship based on government's forest management record? The Safcol debacle was quintessential State Capture.

Chivambo's weakest argument is making the State a custodian. Has he forgotten Eskom, Prasa, SABC, SAA, SARS, Transnet? Look at the way critical natural resources like water, coal, air, renewable energy and even tax revenue have been mismanaged... not to mention the rhino. Government custodians? Humbug!