

# *Little evidence that private tenure is best*



**T**HE idealised opposition of private tenure to 'traditional' tenure has little in common with how these systems actually work, says Catherine Cross, a researcher at the Rural-Urban Studies Unit at the University of Natal and an advisor to the National Land Committee.

She says there is little evidence that private individual tenure is necessary for productive agriculture.

On the contrary, private individual tenure has not promoted transfer of land to efficient farmers, it has not significantly improved security of tenure, nor has it encouraged a land

market or helped with provision or increase of production or commercial goods.

In South African rural communities, social relations are informed by a land ethic which recognises the prior right of first settlers and the community's obligation to the poor. This is particularly so in rural Zulu speaking Natal. Land is as much a relation between people as it is a means of production. The land right is also concerned with security, but this is not limited to production.

Cross identifies two areas of need regarding rural tenure options. The first is for tenure reform in areas currently occupied by African people. The

second is for tenure options to serve land reform itself - in new areas available for African occupation.

In rural areas now occupied by African people the need is probably to maintain subsistence production and to preserve survival strategies people have built up. In these areas, the poor are in the majority and they need tenure that preserves their existing land rights and lays the basis for mobilizing their resources. Tenure forms that risk loss of land rights would be highly problematic. The rural poor are not in a position to move to urban areas and would be unemployable there. However, Cross cautions that tenure reform alone cannot deal effectively with rural poverty and that other development approaches are necessary.

For new areas open to black settlement the situation is less clear. When and where there is good quality farmland, tenure systems that can support optimal production will be necessary. Private property is not necessarily the answer. There is much evidence that private property is not necessary to good farming and that land title is problematic in a land reform context.