

## **Agrarian Reforms for Sustainable Food Security and Development: Lessons for Developing Countries from the Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe**

By

<sup>1</sup>Percyslage Chigora , <sup>2</sup>Tobias Guzura , <sup>3</sup>Ramphal Sillah And <sup>2</sup>Tawanda Chibanda.

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**ABSTRACT:** *Developing countries across the world have been in one-way or the other been experiencing a rather stagnating condition in terms of general agricultural development and specifically food security. Differing policies have been implemented so as to deal with these problems and subsequently led to food security. Zimbabwe is one such country which at the turn of the new millennium embarked on a massive land reform programme. The justifications have been, among others, the need to increase participation in the agricultural sector and enable the majority who have been marginalized with no or little land for agricultural purpose to benefit through accessing productive land. The expectation from such a policy is that it is supposed to contribute towards food security and subsequent development of the agricultural sector. It is the purpose of the paper to examine the extent to which the reform has contributed towards food security and overall development of the agricultural sector. The findings provide a basis through which such a policy is/is not of importance in transforming the agricultural sector at the backdrop of increases participation of the once marginalized. The paper would seek to offer a number of recommendations if such a policy is ever to be followed in developing countries for the benefit of not only the marginalized but entire economic development of a country.*

**KEY WORDS:** *agrarian reform: Zimbabwe: food security*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The developing world has over the years experienced stagnating development largely due to lack of control over the means of production by the local people. Zimbabwe is one country that had such an experience prior to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme with the majority of its people having no say over land as its control was in foreign hands and such a situation obviously led to the impoverishment of the majority of the Zimbabweans. In an effort to curb the effects of such a colonial legacy, the government embarked on the FTLRP with the hope to improve the plight of the common people. However, since its implementation, a lot of changes have been noted in the people's livelihoods, but contrary to expectations, instead of improving the people's food security prospects, the programme has left the people worse off.

#### **1.1. Historical Background and conceptual Issues**

During the colonial era, the colonial masters grabbed large chunks of land and displaced the local farming peoples from fertile lands with adequate rainfall, toward steep, rocky, desert margin like environs and infertile soils leading to the progressive incorporation of these displaced peoples into poorly paid seasonal labour forces for export agriculture. Once grabbed, these lands were concentrated into large holdings used for mechanised, pesticide and chemical intensive monocultural production for export. Having lost their good soils, and being driven to poor farmland, poverty and persistent food insecurity became inescapable realities for these people. Against such a legacy, redistributive land reform policies become necessary to rescue the poor from the quagmire which they find themselves in. The terms 'land reform' and 'agrarian reform' are commonly interchanged to mean the same thing, i.e. to reform existing agrarian structure. However, some scholars find it useful to distinguish these terms, i.e. land reform pertains to the reform of the distribution of landed property rights, while agrarian reform refers to land reform and complementary socio-economic and political reforms. By making this distinction, analysts hoped that by highlighting this fact it would draw the attention of policy makers to the importance of these complementary measures for improving the chances of success of the reform sector. In this paper, we are aware of this distinction, although we will use the two terms interchangeably. Cycles of land reforms had been carried out in many parts of the world during the distant past. In its varying forms and scale, land reform was carried out during the ancient times, beginning with the Greeks and Romans. Much later, the French Revolution ushered in the era of modern types of land reform after the ancient regime and feudalism were overthrown in that country. Major land reforms were also carried out in many parts of Europe,

including Russia where, prior to the 1917 Bolshevik assumption of state power, at least two significant land reform initiatives were carried out. But it was the past century that witnessed the most numerous land reforms in human history, starting with the 1910 Mexican revolution. Prior to World War II, land reform was also implemented in the then communist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) where the role of land reform and peasants in the broader industrial development was hotly debated in the 1920s and early 1930s. Land reform became a favoured policy by most countries immediately after World War II, a condition that lasted for a few decades, decisively ending in the early 1980s. The reasons for carrying out land reforms had been varied between and within nations during the period of 1940s-1980s.

Land reform and Agrarian reform are necessary so as to introduce changes in the power structure and freedom from exploitation; greater equality in access to resources, income, status and security; an increase in production and productivity; contributions to economic growth. Such defects could include skewed land ownership and measures introduced could include land reform. This type of a policy intervention can be a powerful strategy for promoting both economic development and environmental quality. Land reform and agrarian reform can reduce rural poverty and increase food security not only by channeling a larger slice of the agricultural- income pie to low- income households, but also by increasing the size of the pie by raising land productivity. Land reform's contribution to poverty reduction can be magnified by spill over effects in the urban economy. With a supportive policy environment, land reform also can foster a transition to sustainable agriculture, due to the environmental comparative advantages of small farms. The issue of land tenure is also crucial to the success of land reform and development

**TABLE 1**  
**Land redistribution events since Zimbabwe's independence**

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1979/80</b>     | <b>Lancaster House Agreement. Matched funding for voluntary sales only. Compensation: full market price, convertible to foreign currency</b>                                                           |
| <b>1983</b>        | <b>Stalling of the land reform programme (LRRP)</b>                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>1991</b>        | <b>Amended constitution, allowing compulsory acquisition of land with little compensation, or right to appeal 1992 Land Acquisition Act. The right of the government to acquire land by compulsion</b> |
| <b>1997</b>        | <b>Decision to implement the 1992 Act and undertake compulsory purchase of land</b>                                                                                                                    |
| <b>1998 (Sept)</b> | <b>International Conference. Donor support for voluntary sales only. Various terms of support: loans, grant, etc</b>                                                                                   |
| <b>1998 (Nov)</b>  | <b>Compulsory acquisition orders issued. Dispossessed farmers to be compensated ('fair market-value'). Donor condemnation. IMF responds by delaying loan</b>                                           |
| <b>2000 (May)</b>  | <b>Amendment to the constitution and the 1992 Act, permitting compulsory acquisition of land without compensation</b>                                                                                  |
| <b>2000 (July)</b> | <b>FTLR programme started: land expropriated without compensation</b>                                                                                                                                  |

The pace of land reform between 1980 and 1986 was slow. Between 1980 and 1985 about 430,000 hectares were acquired each year. This included land abandoned by white farmers in the liberated zones during the war. Between 1985 and 1992, the pace of acquisition fell to about 75,000 hectares per year, while between 1992 and 1997; approximately 158,000 hectares were acquired per year. Thus by 1986, about 3,4 million hectares of land had been acquired, reducing the white commercial farming sector to 11 million hectares or 29 percent of agricultural land as opposed to the 50% they held in 1980. This land was resettled to about 70,000 families, which was far short of the targeted 162,000 families for resettlement. By the end of the market-based land reform in the late 1990s, black capital (800 black farmers) had established itself in the large-scale commercial farming through land purchases or leases on about 19% of large-scale commercial farmland.

## **2.2.Fast Track Land Reform and Food Security**

Economically, the question of land is linked to critical issues of agricultural productivity, agrarian relations, industrial uses, infrastructure development, employment opportunities, livelihood, housing etc. Each one of these aspects is crucial for enhancing national security by ensuring consistent economic growth, food security, export promotion, etc to reinforce the economic strength and hence, the bargaining power of the country in the international community. A skewed land distribution pattern, alienation, or poverty is bound to lead to social discontentment, widespread unrest, and violent venting of frustration and anger. A pointer towards development as a result of land reform is that of improved food security. A country that has undertaken agrarian and land reform is more likely to be assured of food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty is embedded in the concept of economic and social rights, which include the right to food. It asserts "...feeding a nation's people is an issue of national security- of sovereignty if you will." In other words as long as the population of a country must depend for the next meal on the vagaries of the global economy, on the goodwill of a superpower not to use food as a weapon and high cost of long-distance shipping, then that country is not secure, neither in the sense of national security, nor in the sense of food security.

The foregoing shows that food sovereignty goes beyond the concept of food security. Food security can only be assured in a situation where the producers have control of the land they till. Food sovereignty could be contrasted to food security which merely refers to a situation where every child, woman, and man must have the certainty of having enough to eat each day. However, the concept says nothing about where the food comes from or how it is produced the gap which is filled by food sovereignty. Thus, a process of land reform can go beyond fulfilling food security needs and fulfils food sovereignty requirements as the tillers of the land do so with the assurance that they are doing so for their own, their communities' and the nation's needs. This can only be achieved through a genuine agrarian reform process centred on a people based land reform policy.

There is a strong relationship between land reform and poverty reduction and food security as illustrated in Brazil, where there is a significant improvement in the standards of living for land reform beneficiaries. Leite shows that settlers in reform settlements in Brazil earn more than they did before, and than do the still landless, they eat better, they have greater purchasing power, they have greater access to educational opportunities, and they are more likely to be able to unite their families in one place rather than lose family members to migration.

Thus, land reform holds a promise as a means to stem the rural-urban migration that is causing developing cities to grow beyond their capacity in an effort to provide enough jobs. In the Zimbabwean case, the land reform exercise before 2000 had already shown that beneficiaries were quite substantially better off than others. Resettled farmers had already shown marked improvements as their livestock wealth had almost tripled; while their productivity had increased significantly. Furthermore, accounting for agro-ecological endowment, the income of resettled households was more than five times as high as that of communal households in similar areas. The 70,000 households which had benefited from land redistribution, by 1995 represented about 5% of the peasant farmer population, but produced between 15 and 20% of the marketed output of maize and cotton, while also largely satisfying their own food consumption needs. However, all this was to be reversed by the FTLRP.

Since the inception of FTLRP, conditions that were contributing to insecurity in the previous years persist today, agricultural production continues to fall, food insecurity has worsened, social services are failing just when they are most needed and the macro economic fundamentals continue to decline. The fall in food security levels has been directly attributable to the FTLRP. The UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka could not have been more critical, "At the heart of Zimbabwe's current socio-economic problems is the issue of land reform and the related severe decline in agricultural production, which is also partly a result of recent successive droughts." A report by a United Nations agency estimated that agricultural production fell by 26% from 2000-2003. Maize production had been decreasing as well. April 2003's harvest produced 900,000 metric tonnes, about 1 million short of what was needed countrywide. Harvest forecasts predicted that in 2004, Zimbabwe would be 40 percent short of what it needed, since high inflation and seed shortages only allowed farmers to plant three-quarters of the amount of maize planted in past seasons. Although two years of drought had contributed to the severe food shortage, experts believe that Mugabe's seizure of commercial farms was the number one reason for the food shortage. Production of food grains, such as maize, wheat and small grains, barley, sorghum and millets; and traditional export crops such as tobacco and cotton; as well as oil seed crops, like soya beans, groundnuts and sunflower, declined the most. Whilst agricultural production has suffered across the board, the most crippling impact has been in specialized production systems. These include dairy, beef production, horticulture, wildlife, maize seed production, and timber production.

New farmers have tended to concentrate mainly on maize (grain) production, but their output has yet to meet expectations. A major challenge is whether new farmers can be equipped to produce niche products likely to provide high returns. Falling foreign reserves and a weakening currency have increased the prices of imported food, which are less affordable anyway because of falling wages and profits, rising unemployment further exacerbating food insecurity. Falling domestic food production and rising prices of import substitutes have both contributed increasingly chronic food insecurity. The World Food Programme was quoted as estimating that 4.3 million Zimbabweans would require food assistance until mid-2006.

Soon after the implementation of the programme, there were already reports of widespread shortage of food among resettled farmer communities. For example: in Mashonaland West province, the staple food situation on most farms was quite critical. It has also become clear that what has made the situation even more critical was the abandonment of maize farming by most farmers. In Manicaland province, former farm workers, now part of the unemployed are in dire need of food aid because they no longer have any alternative source of income with which to sustain themselves. A few farm workers managed to harvest some maize from pieces of land allocated by the new farmers and were making do with that, but this would only last until June at most... In Mashonaland Central the former workers were desperate for food aid.

Food insecurity has increased considerably since FTLRP was implemented. The Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNet) estimated that the number of rural Zimbabweans in need of food aid increased from 4.4 million to 5 million people and that in the urban centers, 2.5 million people were food insecure. The UN World Food Program was able to feed 5.5 million people which was 2 million less than the total in need. Furthermore, 31 percent of displaced farm workers relocated to urban areas and were now part of the population that suffers from food scarcity. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) warned in December 2001 that "the already tight food situation has deteriorated as a result of reduced cereal production and general economic decline...705,000 in rural areas are at risk of food shortages. In addition, 250,000 people in urban areas are experiencing food difficulties due to a sharp increase in food prices, while some 30,000 farm workers have lost their jobs and are left without means of assistance." The Commercial Farmers' Union estimated that close to 250,000 head of cattle (nearly 20 percent of the national commercial herd) had been forcibly "destocked" by late 2001, and that over 1.6 million hectares of grazing land had been burnt out, while commercial maize planting was down to 45,000 hectares from 150,000 hectares in the 1999/2000 season. These problems have exacerbated food shortages already generated by a period of drought. Sadly, while a wider potential economic base has emerged for the rural poor, the failure of policy to rapidly promote the productive use of land by all small farmers, has alongside the effects of droughts, led to the persistence of rural food insecurity and poverty. Humanitarian aid has been provided alongside counter-accusations between donors and government over the politicisation of food. The promotion of food security, including agricultural recovery among the poor, as opposed to short term feeding, has been limited. This then goes contrary to the food sovereignty argument proffered above thus further limiting the FTLRP's impact vis-à-vis provision of food security.

### **2.3. Lessons for developing world**

It would be important to widen the scope of land reforms beyond the mere activity of redistribution of land or revision of ceiling limit. In order to be effective, land reforms must be seen as part of a wider agenda of systemic restructuring that undertakes simultaneous reforms in other sectors of such as energy and water for irrigation and product processing. These deeper structural reforms shall ensure that the exercise at redistribution of land actually becomes meaningful by enabling the small farmer to turn his plot into a productive asset.

There is need to introduce models of agriculture most suitable for a given community so as to promote the sustainability of small and marginal holdings. This could among others include the transformation of agricultural systems and land use patterns such as export oriented production, mono cropping, plantation crops, etc on biodiversity, loss of control by producers over land, forests and water etc. For instance, land reforms could also be packaged with ideas of food security and sustainable development, There is need to address crucial issues related to the legislative environment vis-à-vis land tenure to secure farmer confidence, thus ensure increased productivity. This would be with regards to such issues like land titling and registration.

It is important to realize that true land reforms require more than handouts and deeds. It also requires providing aid to the farmer through rural extension services, prudent farm credits, access to roads and education etc. In this regard, principal priority needs for resettled farmers are food, inputs and social infrastructure and services.

In implementing land reform, there is need to stick to non-violence as the only means to struggle for land equity. Furthermore, the land question should not be exploited in struggles for political office and power, rather than for social justice and historical redress. Land reform should also not be approached through emotive campaigns in which race and xenophobia are used as ideological instruments. It should not be orchestrated from the top in such a manner that the elite control the reform process and reap material gain. On the other hand, land reform can be a genuine instrument for poverty reduction, in which the criteria for redistribution favour the poor, landless and serious tillers. In this case, there is a more pragmatic approach to reform, with greater emphasis on planning, consultation with key stakeholders, and mobilisation of resources for both capital and social expenditure on the reform process. Such an approach needs to be orderly and peaceful within the realm of the 'rule of just law' for it to earn credibility and support from local and international institutions.

But clearly, if the Zimbabwe experience is anything to go by, there is a need for consistent political commitment to land reform. Procrastination is a sign of lack of political will, and populists and demagogues can exploit it. However, land reform should not be used for electoral advantage. If it is, then it is likely to pander to short-term political expediency, rather than serving as a long-term pragmatic and systematic process of historical redress, social justice and poverty reduction. The current scope of the Fast Track is not implementable on a sustainable basis unless the settlement timetable is substantially adjusted; there is a considerable infusion of resources to finance the necessary infrastructure and support services; and there is a stronger basis for optimism on the part of settlers about their future leading them to form viable community organizations aimed at ensuring the sustainability of new settlements.

## II. CONCLUSION

What has come out of the FTLRP is that it is not sufficient to have access to land. Getting enough inputs; seed, fertiliser and so forth is also crucial. Most resettled farmers admitted difficulties in obtaining inputs largely because prices have shot up in recent years. If a land reform program is well designed, it can have a large impact on equity as well as productivity. Thus, land reform and land food sovereignty might indeed be the solution to the woes of the country's development, as food sovereignty would greatly reduce the populace's dependence on external forces for survival and sustenance. However, what comes out is that land reforms if properly and fully instituted trigger broad based development. The inclusion of the poor in development leads them to build domestic markets to support national economic activity. In other words, the redistribution of land to landless and land-poor families can be a very effective way to improve their welfare as real measurable poverty reduction and improvement in human welfare occurs.

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