

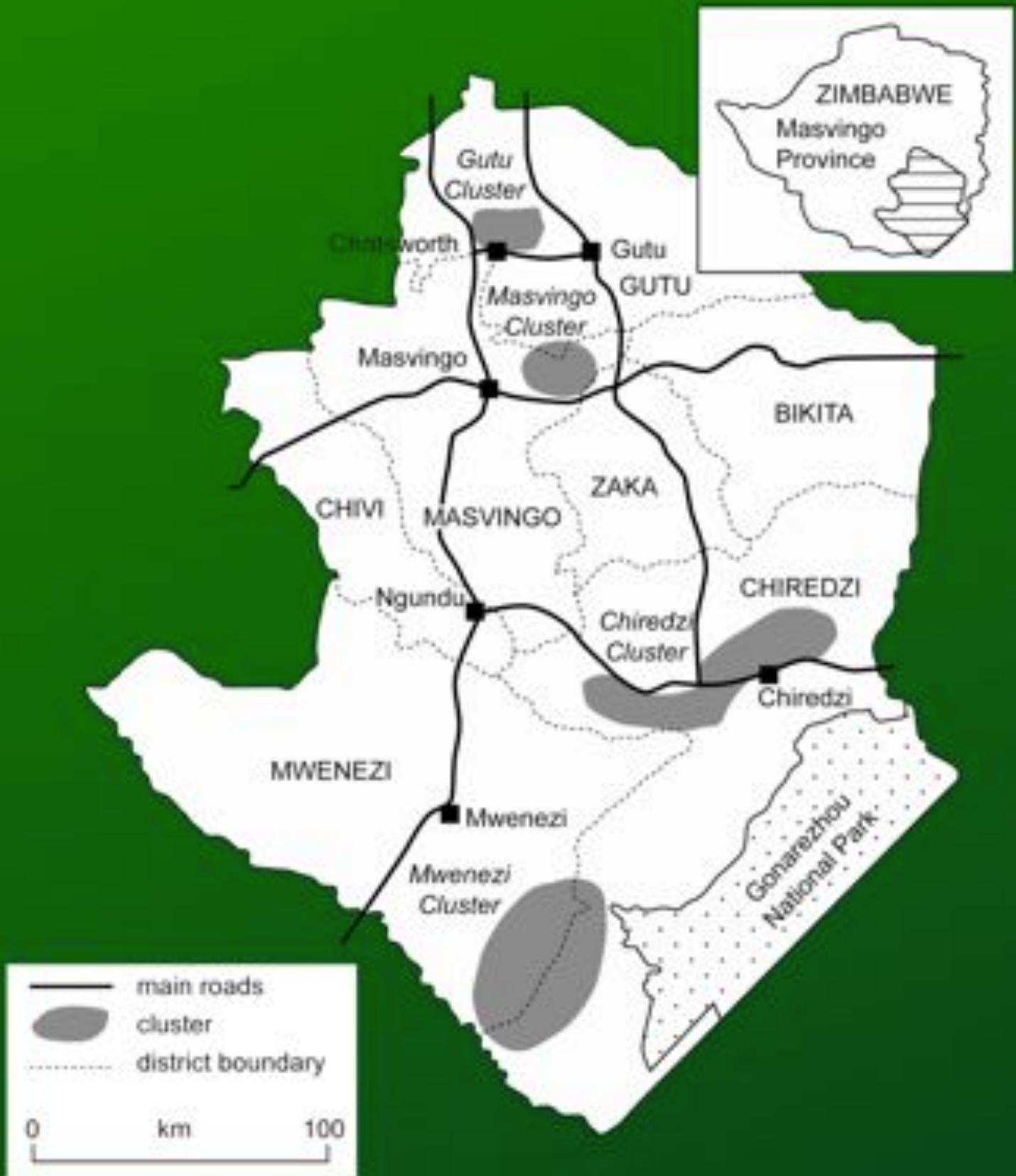


# Zimbabwe's Land Reform

## A summary of findings

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# Map of Masvingo Province showing study areas



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# Introduction

Zimbabwe's land reform has had a bad press. Images of chaos, destruction and violence have dominated the coverage. Indeed, these have been part of the reality - but there have also been successes, which have thus far gone largely unrecorded. The story is not simply one of collapse and catastrophe. It is much more nuanced and complex. As Zimbabwe moves forward with a new agrarian structure, a more balanced appraisal is needed. This requires solid, on-the-ground research aimed at finding out what happened to whom and where with what consequences.



This was the aim of work carried out in Masvingo province over the past decade and reported in the book, *Zimbabwe's Land Reform: Myths and Realities*. This booklet offers an overview of the findings. The question posed in the research was simple: what happened to people's livelihoods



once they got land through the 'fast-track' programme from 2000? Yet the answers are extremely complex.

The research involved in-depth field research in 16 land reform

sites across the province, involving a sample population of 400 households. The study area stretched from the higher potential areas near Gutu to the dry south in the lowveld. What we found was not what we expected. It contradicted the overwhelmingly negative images of land reform presented in the media, and indeed in much academic and policy commentary. Problems, failures and abuses were identified for sure, but the overarching story was much more positive: the realities on the ground did not match the myths so often perpetuated in wider debate.

Most coverage of Zimbabwe's land reform insists that agricultural production has almost totally collapsed, that food insecurity is rife, that rural economies are in precipitous decline and that farm labour has all been displaced. The truth

however is much more complex. We need to ask far more sophisticated questions: Which aspects of agricultural production have suffered? Who is food insecure? How are rural economies restructuring to the new agrarian setting? And who are the new farm labourers?

These are the sort of questions we have been asking over the past decade in the research carried out in Masvingo province. Of course Masvingo is different to the Highveld, where highly capitalised agriculture reliant on export markets did indeed collapse and where labour was displaced in large numbers. But the picture in the new farms of Masvingo is not unrepresentative of broad swathes of the rest of the country. And here the picture is not so catastrophic. There is much to do, of course, but there is already much that is being done.

# A radical change in agrarian structure

Across the country, the formal land re-allocation since 2000 has resulted in the transfer of land to nearly 170,000 households by 2011. If the 'informal' settlements, outside the official 'fast-track' programme are added, the totals are even larger. Two main 'models' have been at the centre of the process - one focused on smallholder production (so-called A1 schemes, either as villagised arrangements or small, self-contained farms) and one focused on commercial production at a slightly larger scale (so-called A2 farms). In practice, the distinction between these models varies considerably, and there is much overlap.

Events since 2000 have thus resulted in a radical change in the nation's agrarian structure. At Independence in 1980, over 15m hectares was devoted to large-scale commercial farming, comprising around 6,000 farmers, nearly all of them white. This fell to around 12m hectares



by 1999, in part through a modest, but in many ways successful, land reform and resettlement programme, largely funded by the British government under the terms of the Lancaster House agreement<sup>33+</sup>.

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme, begun in 2000, allocated to new farmers over 4,500 farms making up 7.6m hectares, 20% of the total land area of the country, according to (admittedly rough) official figures. In 2008-09 this represented over 145,000 farm households in A1 schemes and around 16500 further households occupying A2 plots

Overall there has been a significant shift to many more,

smaller-scale farms focusing on mixed farming, often with low levels of capitalisation. In Masvingo province, the new resettlements cover 28% of the land area, with 1.2 million hectares being small-scale A1 settlements, while a further 371,500 hectares are devoted to A2 farms. Although there is much variation, the average size of new A2 farms is 318 hectares, while that of A1 family farms is 37 hectares, including crop and grazing land.



## Changes in the national distribution of land, 1980-2010

Land category	1980	2000	2010
	Area (million ha)	Area (million ha)	Area (million ha)
Communal areas	16.4	16.4	16.4
Old resettlement	0.0	3.5	3.5
New resettlement: A1	0.0	0.0	4.1
New resettlement: A2	0.0	0.0	3.5
Small-scale commercial farms	1.4	1.4	1.4
Large-scale commercial farms	15.5	11.7	3.4*
State farms	0.5	0.7	0.7
Urban land	0.2	0.3	0.3
National parks and forest land	5.1	5.1	5.1
Unallocated land	0.0	0.0	0.7

Source: derived from various government sources and compiled by the African Institute of Agrarian Studies \* includes all large commercial farms, agro-industrial estate farms, church/trust farms, BIPPA farms and conservancies.

This is not to say that large-scale commercial units no longer exist. Especially important in Masvingo province is the estate sector, including for example the major sugar estates in the Lowveld, which largely remained intact following land reform, with out-grower areas being transferred to sub-divided A2 plots. Today, there are still over 4m hectares under large-scale farming, some of it in very large holdings, such as the 350,000 hectare Nuanetsi ranch in Masvingo province. There are, however, perhaps only 200-300 white-owned commercial farmers still operating, with most having been displaced, along with a substantial number of farm workers.

Land reform has resulted in a very different farming sector, but one that is not without

considerable entrepreneurial dynamism and productive potential. This major restructuring of course has had knock-on consequences for the agricultural sector as a whole. Any radical reform will have a transitional phase as production systems, markets and trading priorities readjust. Thus the transfer of land from the narrowly-controlled, large-scale farm sector has resulted in heavy hits on certain commodities and markets.

Wheat, coffee and tea have all suffered, as has the export of beef. For example, on average, across the harvests from 2001 to 2009, wheat production decreased by 27%. Tobacco also declined dramatically, but production has bounced back in recent years as new A2 farmers have gone into production.

National maize production has become more variable, because of the reduction of irrigation facilities and significant droughts have resulted in shortages, with average production over this period down by 31% from 1990s levels. However other crops and markets have weathered the storm and some have boomed. Aggregate production of small grains has exploded, increasing by 163% compared to 1990s averages. Edible dry bean production has expanded even more, up 282%, Cotton production has increased slightly, up 13% on average.

The agricultural sector has certainly been transformed, and there are major problems in certain areas, but it certainly has not collapsed.



# Transforming land and livelihoods in Masvingo province

Yet aggregate figures – with all the caveats about accuracy - only tell one part of the story. To get a sense of what is happening in the fields and on the farms, we need a more local focus. Only with such insights can we really begin to understand the impacts of Zimbabwe’s land reform. In this section, we zero in on Masvingo province in the central south and east of the country.

In Masvingo province about 28% of the total land area was transferred as part of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, according to official figures. Much of this land was previously cattle ranches, with limited infrastructure, low levels of employment and only small patches of arable land, often irrigated patches around homesteads. This was taken over by over 32500 households on A1 sites and about 1200 households in A2 areas, alongside perhaps a further 8,500 households in informal resettlement sites, as yet unrecognised by the government. At the same time one million hectares (18.3% of the province) remains as large-scale commercial operations, including some very large farms, conservancies and estates in the lowveld that remained largely intact

This radical transformation of land and livelihoods has resulted in a new composition of people in the rural areas, with diverse

livelihood strategies. In order to understand more about who was doing what we undertook a ‘success ranking’ exercise in all 16 sites across Masvingo province. This involved a group of farmers from the area ranking all households according to their own criteria of success. A number of broad categories of livelihood strategy emerged from these investigations. These are listed in the table below.

Over a half of all the 400 sample households – across A1, A2 and informal resettlement sites - were either ‘stepping up’ – accumulation of assets and regular production of crops for sale – or ‘stepping out’ – successful off-farm diversification. These

households were accumulating and investing, often employing labour and ratcheting up their farming operations, despite the many difficulties being faced.



## Livelihood strategies in Masvingo province

Category	Livelihood strategy	Proportion of households
Dropping out (10.0%)	Exit – leaving the plot	4.4%
	Chronically poor, local labour	3.3%
	Ill health affecting farming	2.2%
Hanging in (33.6%)	Asset poor farming, local labour	17.8%
	Keeping the plot for the future	10.3%
	Straddling across resettlement and communal areas	5.6%
Stepping out (21.4%)	Survival diversification	2.8%
	Local off-farm activities plus farming	5.3%
	Remittances from within Zimbabwe plus farming	5.0%
	Remittances from outside Zimbabwe plus farming	4.4%
	Cell phone farmers	3.9%
Stepping up (35.0%)	<i>Hurudza</i> – the ‘real’ farmers	18.3%
	Part-time farmers	10.6%
	New (semi-)commercial farmers	4.7%
	Farming from patronage	1.4%



But not everyone has been successful. 46.5% of households were finding the going tough, and were not regarded as 'successful' at this stage. Some are really struggling and only just 'hanging in'; others are in the process of 'dropping out' through a combination of chronic poverty and ill health. Joining the land invasions and establishing new farms in what was often uncleared bush was not easy. It required commitment, courage and much hard work. It was not for everyone.

Others without start-up assets have been unable to accumulate, and have continued to live in poverty, reliant on the support of relatives and friends. Some have joined a growing labour force on the new farms, abandoning their plots in favour of often poorly-paid employment. Within the 'stepping out' category some are surviving off illegal, unsafe or transient activities that allowed survival but little else. Still others are straddling across two farms – one in the communal area and one in the new resettlement – and not really investing in the new

areas, while some are simply keeping the plot for sons or other relatives.

It is not surprising that there have been such variable outcomes. In the period since 2000 there has been virtually no external support. Government was broke and focused support on the elite few, and the NGOs and donors have shied away from the new resettlement areas for political reasons. Instead, most new farmers have been reliant on their own connections, enterprise and labour. Without support to get going, many have found it difficult, and it has only been those through a combination of access to assets, hard work and luck that have really made it.

As has been widely reported, there are some who have made it only because they have benefited from patronage. These are the so-called 'cronies' of the party, well-connected to the machinery of the state and able to gain advantage. These cell

phone farmers preside over areas of often under-utilised land, perhaps with a decaying new tractor in the farmyard. Yet, despite their disproportionate influence on local politics, they are few-and-far between, making up less than 5% of the total population in our areas. In Masvingo province such elite capture is not the dominant story, despite the media assumptions. Masvingo is of course not Mazowe or Marondera, but even in the Highveld the situation is much more diverse than what mainstream portrayals suggest.

Overall, in our study sites there is a core group of 'middle farmers' – around half of the population – who are successful not because of patronage support, but because of hard work. They can be classified as successful 'petty commodity producers' and 'worker peasants' who are gaining surpluses from farming, investing in the land from off-farm work and so are able to 'accumulate from below'. This is having a positive impact on the wider economy, including stimulating demand for services, consumption goods and labour.



# Who got the land?

One of the most repeated myths about Zimbabwe's land reform is that all the land went to 'Mugabe's cronies'; those with access to elite connections and benefiting from political patronage. This did, of course, happen, and continues to do so. Tackling such extreme excesses of land grabbing through a land audit remains a major challenge. But elite capture is not the whole story of Zimbabwe's land reform; nor indeed the dominant one.

Who got the land and what is the profile of the new settlers? Our study showed by far the majority of the new settlers are ordinary people. About half of all new settler households are from nearby communal areas and another 18% from urban areas. These are people who had little or very poor land in the communal areas or were unemployed or with poorly-paid jobs and living in town. The remaining third of household heads was made up of civil servants (16.5% overall, but increasing to around a quarter of all settlers in A1 self-contained and A2 sites), business people (4.8% overall, but again proportionately higher in the A1 self-contained and A2 sites), security service personnel (3.7% overall) and former farm workers (6.7% overall).

Farm workers made up 11.5% of households in the A1 villagised sites, with many taking an active role in the land invasions. In one case a farm worker organised and led the invasion of the farm where he had worked. Given that

in other parts of the country, farm workers were displaced in large numbers, often ending up destitute, living in camps on the farms, this is perhaps surprising. Yet this reflects the extent and nature of labour on the former large-scale farms in Masvingo province. Unlike in the Highveld farms, where large, resident labour forces existed without nearby communal homes, our Masvingo study sites were formerly large-scale ranches where labour was limited, and workers came, often on a temporary basis, from nearby communal areas.

Across all of these categories are 'war veterans'. As household heads they make up 8.8% of the total population. The category 'war veteran' is however a diverse one. Prior to the land invasions, most were farming in the communal areas, a few were living in town, while some were civil servants, business people and employees in the security services.

At the time of the land invasions in 2000, many indeed had long dropped their 'war veteran' identity and had been poor, small-scale farmers in the communal areas for 20 years since the end of the liberation war. Those who led the land invasions were often able to secure land in the A1 self-contained plots, but many were sidelined in the allocation of larger A2 farms.





Land was allocated unevenly to men and women. In most cases it is men whose names appear on the 'offer letters', the permits issued to new settlers by the government. Yet women were important players in the land invasions, providing support to the base camps during the 'jambanja' period, and subsequently investing in the development of new homes and farms.

However, across our sample only 12% of households had a woman named as the land holder on the permit. The highest proportion of female-headed households was in the informal settlements, as women often saw the land

invasions as an opportunity to make a new independent life and escape abusive relationships or accusations of witchcraft, for example.

So who amongst these groups are 'the cronies'? Some senior officials, often linked to the security services, were able to gain access to land, often by influencing allocations following the land invasions. We estimated that this group represented around five per cent of those with land in our areas. The land invasions involved diverse people with multiple affiliations. War veterans, often with an ambivalent attitude to the party hierarchy but mostly not aligned

to the opposition, were influential in land allocation during and following the invasions, and managed often to secure better plots on the A1 self-contained schemes. The large group of civil servants, particularly on the A2 plots - and in our sample especially in the sugar estates - were often teachers, agricultural extension workers and local government officials. While not being poor and landless from the communal areas, most could not be regarded as elite. Indeed, in simple financial terms many were extremely poor, as government wages had effectively ceased during the economic crisis.



# New land, new people



The result is a new mix of people in the new resettlements. In the A2 schemes, for example 46.5% of new farmers have a 'Master Farmer' certificate, while in the A1 self-contained schemes 17.6% do. 91.6% of A2 farmers have been in education to Form 3 or above, while this proportion is 71.6% and 44.8% in the A1 self-contained and villagised schemes respectively.

The new resettlements are dominated by a new generation of farmers, with most household heads being under 50, many born since Independence. A2 schemes are dominated by the over 40s, but often include people with significant experience and connections. That overall 18.3% of households

came from urban areas (increasing to 43.8% in the A2 schemes) is significant too, as connections to town have proved important in gaining access to services and support in the absence of official programmes in the rural areas.

This data from Masvingo province is reflected in other studies from other areas of the country by the African Institute for Agrarian Studies and the Ruziwo Trust, for example. The overall picture is complex, but a simple narrative that land reform has been dominated by grabbing by elites is clearly inaccurate. Land previously occupied by a single farmer, often absent but with a manager and a few workers resident, is now being

used by a highly diverse group of people. Overall, the new resettlements are populated by younger, more educated people with a greater diversity of backgrounds, professional skills and connections than their neighbours in the communal areas and old resettlements.

The new resettlements are therefore not a replication of the 1980s resettlement schemes or an extension of the communal areas, nor are they simply scaled-down version of large-scale commercial farms. Instead, a very different social and economic dynamic is unfolding, one that has multiple potentials, as well as challenges.

# Investing in the land

One of the recurrent myths about Zimbabwe's land reform is that investment has been insignificant in the new resettlements: the land lies idle, people are not committed to farming and infrastructure is destroyed, neglected or non-existent. Perceptions of a lack of order and poor tenure security have further contributed to this view. Our studies in Masvingo province have shown this is far from the case. Certainly, unstable macroeconomic factors until 2009 undermined opportunities for capital investment, but impressive strides have been made in clearing the land, in purchasing livestock, equipment and transport and in building new settlements.



In developing their farms, most new farmers have had to start from scratch. For the most part the Masvingo study sites were ranches: large expanses of bush grazing, with limited infrastructure. There were scattered homesteads, a few workers' cottages, the odd dip tank, small dam and irrigation plot, but not much else. When groups of land invaders took the land they established 'base camps', under the leadership of war veteran commanders. Surveys of soil types and water sources were undertaken by the land invaders. The new settlers then pegged fields and marked out areas for settlement. Soon, once the official Fast Track Land Reform Programme was launched, officials from the government arrived and

imposed an official plan, based on land use planning regulations, as well as much pressure to accommodate more people. Some had to move their shelters and clear fields anew. But within a remarkably short time, people began to invest in earnest. There was an urgency: fields had to be prepared for planting, structures had to be built for cattle to be kraaled in, granaries had to be erected for the harvests to be stored, and homes had to be put up for growing numbers of people to live in.

A peopled landscape of houses, fields, paths and roads soon emerged. Human population densities increased significantly and livestock populations grew. Stocking densities on beef ranches were

recommended to be around one animal per ten hectares; now much larger livestock populations exist, combining cattle with goats, sheep, donkeys, pigs and poultry. Investment in stock has been significant, with cattle populations in particular growing rapidly, especially in the A1 sites.



One of the major tasks facing new settlers has been clearing land. In A1 village sites, on average each household had cleared 6.8ha by 2008-09, while in A1 self-contained and A2 sites an average of 13.3ha and 23.7ha had been cleared. In the A1 sites most of this was being cultivated. In addition, people have constructed numerous gardens, all of which have required investment in fencing. In addition, people have dug wells, built small dams, planted trees and dug soil conservation works. Investment in fields was complemented by investment in farm equipment, with ploughs, cultivators, pumps and scotch carts purchased in numbers.

Building has also been extensive in the new resettlements. Some structures remain built of pole and mud, however, after a year or two, when people's sense of tenure security had increased, buildings using bricks, cement and tin/asbestos roofing increased. Some very elaborate homes have been built with the very best materials imported from South Africa.

Transport has been a major constraint on the new resettlements. With no roads and poor connections to urban areas, there were often no forms of public transport available. This was compounded by the economic crisis, as many operators closed down routes. This had a severe impact. Lack of access to services – shops, schools, clinics – and markets meant that people suffered. Investing in a means of transport was often a major priority.

### The value of investments

<i>Focus of investment</i>	<i>Average value of investment per household (US\$)</i>
Land clearance	\$385
Housing/buildings	\$631
Cattle	\$612
Farm equipment	\$198
Transport	\$150
Toilets	\$77
Garden fencing	\$29
Wells	\$79
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$2161</i>

Bicycles in particular were bought in large numbers, but also cars, pick-ups and trucks.

What is the value of all this investment? A simple set of calculations which compute the cost of labour and materials used or the replacement cost of the particular item show that, on average, each household had invested over US\$2000 in a variety of items in the period from settlement to 2008-09.

This is of course only a small subset of the total. In addition such private investment does not account for investments at the community level. Across our sites, churches have been established, schools have been built, roads cut and areas for shops carved out as part of community efforts. Labour and materials have been mobilised without any external help.





In the A1 sites in particular this highly-motivated and well-organised pattern of self-help has dominated. While the state has been present, it has not always been helpful. The re-planning of village and field sites was resented by many, as the land use planning models dating from the 1930s were re-imposed, with fields removed from near rivers and streams and villages placed on the ridges far from water sources. Planning laws were also invoked in the destruction of nascent business centres as part of Operation Murambatsvina.

Extension workers are few-and-far-between and veterinary care almost non-existent. Instead, people have used their own knowledge, skills and connections in developing their agriculture, often relying on those with Master Farmer qualifications which they had gained in their former homes in the communal areas. Without dipping, the explosion of tick-borne animal diseases

has been devastating, but many farmers have purchased spray-on chemicals, often organising themselves in groups to tackle the problem.

So without the state, and without the projects of donors and NGOs, the new settlers have invested at scale. Extrapolating the results from our sample and for the limited set of items assessed to the whole province this adds up to an investment of US\$91m across all new resettlements; a substantial amount by any calculation.

But is this an argument that people can just do it on their own, and should be left to their own devices? Emphatically: no. There are plenty of things that need to be done, and where external support is necessary. In order to get farming moving in the new resettlements a significant investment in infrastructure – roads, wells, dams, dips and so on – will be needed. This is unlikely to come from individual and community contributions, although the considerable entrepreneurial initiative and deep commitment to investment in the new resettlements is a fantastic platform on which to build.



# A smallholder agricultural revolution in the making?



A recurrent myth about Zimbabwe's land reform is that it has resulted in agricultural collapse, precipitating widespread and recurrent food insecurity. There is little doubt that the agricultural sector has been transformed, as discussed above, but our data show that there has been surprising resilience in production.

Take maize production on the resettlement farms in Masvingo. We tracked production on all farms over seven seasons from 2002-03. The data showed a steady increase in output over time as farms became established, and draught power and other inputs were sourced. The trend was not smooth however, and the major droughts in this period saw low yields. Availability of seeds and fertiliser was also highly variable across years, with various government

schemes delivering patchily and unreliably. And patterns of differentiation across households were also very evident.

In the better rainfall years of 2005-06 and 2008-09 the proportion of households producing more than a tonne of maize – sufficient to feed an average family for a year - was significant across all sites. For example, following the 2009 harvest between 63% and 100% of households outside the lowveld sites in Mwenezi produced more than a tonne of maize. If sorghum and millet were added to the tally, more than 60% of households even in the Mwenezi sites produced more than a tonne of grain.

Such surpluses may be sold or stored, providing a buffer for future years. Around a third of households sell crops regularly.

For example in 2009 two-thirds of such households in the A1 self-contained settlement sites sold over a tonne of maize, although marketed output was not so high on the A2 farms, by contrast. While across the sites there are of course some who produce little and had to rely on local markets or support from relatives, this is not a picture of production failure, widespread food insecurity and lack of market integration.

Markets are key to the resettlement farming enterprises. But these are new markets, radically reconfigured by the restructuring of the agrarian economy following land reform and deeply affected by the economic crisis that plagued the country for much of the past decade.

# Dynamic entrepreneurialism

The dynamic entrepreneurialism shown should not be underestimated and represents an important resource to build on. Across our sites, we have small-scale irrigators producing horticultural products for local and regional markets; we have highly successful cotton producers who are generating considerable profits by selling to a wide number of competing private sector companies; we have livestock producers and traders who are developing new value chains for livestock products, linked to butcheries, supermarkets and other outlets; we have traders in wild products often engaged in highly profitable export markets; and we have others who are developing contract farming and joint venture arrangements, for a range of products including wildlife.

We also have an important group of sugar producers with A2 plots on the lowveld estates who, very often against the odds due to shortages of inputs, unreliable electricity supplies and

disadvantageous pricing, have been delivering cane to the mills, as well as other diverse markets, alongside diversification into irrigated horticulture production on their plots.

The new farmers are also employing labour. This is often casual, low-paid employment, often of women, but it is an important source of livelihood for many. The new resettlement sites have become a magnet for others, and households on average have grown by around three members since settlement through the in-migration of relatives and labourers. On average, A2 farm households have employed 5.1 permanent workers and regularly employ 7.3 temporary labourers, while those households in A1 schemes and in informal resettlement sites employ on average 0.5 permanent workers and 1.9 temporary labourers. Comparing this level of employment with what existed before on the former cattle ranches, where perhaps one herder was employed for each 100 animals

grazed over 1000ha, the scale of employment generation afforded by the new resettlement farms is considerable.

Wherever we look, there is a sense of optimism and future promise amongst many resettlement farmers we have worked with. SM from Mwenzezi district commented "We are happier here at resettlement. There is more land, stands are larger and there is no overcrowding. We got good yields this year. I filled two granaries with sorghum. I hope to buy a grinding mill and locate it at my homestead". Comparing the farming life to other options, PC from Masvingo district observed: "We are not employed but we are getting higher incomes than those at work". Despite the hardships and difficulties – of which there are many – there is a deep commitment to making the new resettlement enterprises work, but also a relentless plea for more assistance and support.



# Much to build on



There is much to build on in terms of basic investment and the skills and knowledge of the new settlers. The challenge is a new one however for agricultural research and development. As the head of extension in the province put it: "We don't know our new clients: this is a totally new scenario". Responding to this scenario requires careful thought. The new resettlement areas are not a replication of the communal areas, nor are they a scaled-down version of the old commercial sector. These are new people with new production systems engaging in new markets – all with new opportunities and challenges. The new farmers are often highly educated, well-connected and with important skills. Support for marketing or input supply via mobile phone updates, or agricultural extension or business planning advice offered via the Internet offer real opportunities.

It is this commitment and drive that is the basis of the emergence of a group of

successful agricultural producers – around half of all households, especially concentrated in the A1 farms - farming for the market and generating wider economic impacts, including employment. If given the right support, this group of new farmers can drive a vibrant agricultural revolution in Zimbabwe.

This has happened before: with white commercial farmers from the 1950s and with communal area farmers in the 1980s. But both past agricultural revolutions required support and commitment from outside, something that has been starkly absent in the past decade. Zimbabwe's green revolution of the 1980s has been much hailed, but this only involved perhaps 20% of farmers, mostly in high potential communal areas and was quickly extinguished following structural adjustment. The nascent green revolution in the resettlement areas potentially has far wider reach, both geographically and socio-economically, and must not meet the same fate. We argue that a

smallholder-based agricultural revolution could indeed be the basis of wider growth and development if given the opportunity and provided the support.

The past decade of land resettlement has unleashed a process of radical agrarian change. There are now new people on the land, engaged in multiple forms of economic activity, connected to diverse markets and carving out a variety of livelihoods. Our data identify an emerging process of 'accumulation from below', rooted in smallholder farming. But if the new resettlements are to contribute to local livelihoods, national food security and broader economic development, they unquestionably require investment and support. This means infrastructure (dams, roads), financing (credit systems), input supply (fertilizer, seed), technology (intermediate and appropriate) and institutions and policies that allow agriculture to grow.

Sustained support was central to the success of large-scale commercial agriculture from the 1950s, and was critical to the boom of smallholder agriculture in the communal areas in the 1980s. Getting agriculture moving on the new resettlements through building on existing achievements must be central priority for policy today.

Yet the outcomes of land reform have been highly varied, and so require carefully attuned institutional and policy responses. What should the top priorities be now? Here we identify three.

### Securing the land

Security of land tenure is an essential prerequisite for successful production and investment in agriculture. Tenure security arises through a variety of means. Existing legislation allows for a wide range of potential tenure types, including freehold title, regulated leases, permits and communal tenure under 'traditional' systems. All have their pros and cons.

Policymakers must ask how tenure security can be achieved within available resources and capacity; how safeguards can be put in place to prevent land grabbing or land concentration; and what assurances must be made to ensure that private credit markets function effectively. Lessons from across the world suggest there is no one-size-fits-all solution centred on freehold tenure.

Instead, a flexible system of land administration is required – one that allows for expansion and contraction of farm sizes, as well as entry and exit from farming. While the excesses of elite patronage and land grabbing must be addressed through a land audit, a successful approach, overseen by an independent, decentralised authority, must not be reliant on technocratic diktat on farm sizes, business plans and tenure types.

This will mean investing in land governance, building the effectiveness of local institutions to manage resources, resolve disputes and negotiate land access in clear and accountable ways. Without attention to these issues, conflicts will escalate as uncertainties over authority and control persist.

This will have damaging consequences for both livelihoods and environmental sustainability. Support for rebuilding public authority from below must therefore be high on the policy agenda, linked to a revitalisation of local government capacity.

### Fostering local economic development

Land reform has reconfigured Zimbabwe's rural areas dramatically. No longer are there vast swathes of commercial land separated from the densely-packed communal areas. The rural landscape is now virtually all populated. Links between the new resettlements and

communal and former resettlement areas are important, with exchanges of labour, draught animals, finance, skills and expertise flowing in all directions. As a result, economic linkages between agriculture and wider markets have changed dramatically.

This has given rise to the growth of new businesses to provide services and consumption goods, many only now getting going. Yet the potentials for economic diversification – in small-scale mining, hunting, cross-border trade and a host of other enterprises – are currently constrained by legal and regulatory restrictions.



While a regulatory framework will always be required, it must not be excessively and inappropriately restrictive. Businesses must be encouraged to flourish in support of rural livelihoods, capturing synergies with local agricultural production.

To make the most of the new mosaic of land uses and economic activities, an area-based, local economic development approach is required. This would facilitate investment across activities, adding value to farm



production. Today, with a new set of players engaged in local economic activity many possibilities open up. An area-based approach needs to draw in the private sector, farmer groups and government agencies, but with strong leadership from a revived local government, with rethought mandates and rebuilt capacities.

### Giving farmers a voice

Reflecting a wide range of interests, the new resettlement farmers are highly diverse in class, gender and generational terms. This diversity has many advantages, adding new skills and experiences, but it is also a weakness. Formal organisation in the new resettlements is limited. The structures that formed the basis of the land invasions – the base commanders and the Committees of Seven, for example – have given way to other arrangements, and there is often limited collective solidarity.

There are of course emergent organisations focused on particular activities – a garden, an irrigation scheme, a marketing effort, for example – but these are unlikely to become the basis of political representation and influence. Because politics has been so divisive in recent years, many shy away from seeing political parties as the basis for lobbying for change, and there are few other routes to expressing views.

Building a new set of representative farmers' organisations, linked to an influential apex body, will be a long-term task, and will be highly dependent on the unfolding political alliances in rural areas. The new resettlements are characterised by an important and numerically large 'middle farmer' group. There is also a significant group of less successful farmers with different needs and interests. And there are those elites reliant on political patronage who, despite being relatively few in number, are disproportionately influential.

In contrast to the past when smallholders could easily be marginalised and were courted only at elections for their votes, the new farmers – and particularly the burgeoning group of middle farmers - now control one of the most important economic sectors in the country, and must be relied upon for national food supply. Today, the politics of the countryside cannot be ignored.

Zimbabwe's rural politics has taken on a new form, and organised farmer groups may exert substantial pressure in ways that previously seemed unimaginable. How the new configuration of political forces will pan out in the future is a subject of hot debate, but the role of diverse agrarian interests, including new small-scale farmers, will certainly be important.

# A new debate on land in Zimbabwe



While it remains important to address abuses of the land reform programme according to strict criteria set by a land audit, it is also important to focus on the wider story, dispelling myths and engaging with the realities of the majority. The Masvingo study has challenged a number of recurrent myths about Zimbabwe's land reform: for example, that there is no investment going on, that agricultural production has collapsed, that food insecurity is rife, that the rural economy is in precipitous decline and that farm labour has been totally displaced. Getting to grips with the realities on the ground is essential for reframing the debate. This is why solid, empirical research is so important. Only with these facts to hand can sensible

policymaking emerge. Evidence rather than emotion must guide the process.



Land and politics are deeply intertwined in Zimbabwe. The current impasse cannot be resolved by technocratic measures alone: plans, models, audits and regulations are only part of the picture. A reframed debate must encompass redistribution and redress, as well as rights and responsibilities. The recent divisive debate on land in

Zimbabwe has seen these as opposites, creating what has been called a 'dangerous rupture' in Zimbabwe's political discourse. But of course a focus on rights need not emphasise only individual private property rights, while an advocacy of redistribution must also accept appropriate compensation for those who lose out.

Bringing a broad perspective on rights together with a continued commitment to redistribution must therefore be central to Zimbabwe's next steps towards democratic and economic transformation. Only with land viewed as a source of livelihood and redistributed economic wealth, and not as a political weapon or source of patronage, will the real potentials of Zimbabwe's land reform be fully realised.

**AFRICAN ISSUES**

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Jacob Mahenehene, Felix Murimbarimba & Chrispen Sukuwe



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