

“Agrarian treason”: parking the agrarian issue in Zimbabwe’s Government of National unity era

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Abstract

The government of Zimbabwe embarked on a Fast Track Land Resettlement Program since 2000 under the leadership and influence of ZANU PF. However political developments post 2000 era saw the rise to power of Movement for Democratic Change and the subsequent power sharing agreement between the two parties in 2008. This agreement opened a unique political arrangement called the Government of National Unity (GNU) between the two parties. The parties have shared different portfolios in government and the political bickering is evident even on funding of agriculture. The two parties offer diverse policy options to agrarian development and thus they have parked the land issue in the GNU era. This paper seeks to point out the dangers of ignoring FTRP effects especially in the GNU era. The FTLRP in Zimbabwe impacted on the economy, food security, education, politics, environment, infrastructure and social services. There are many factors militating against FTLRP undertaken by the ZANU PF government and parking the issue simply because opposed political parties are in a temporary coalition agreement is treasonous for Zimbabwe’s agrarian reform. There are issues that emerged from the decade long agrarian revolution and political bickering has but negatively affected agriculture development. The research is qualitative as the author undertook focus group discussions with resettled farmers, carried out observations as well as in-depth interviews with the Department of Land Resettlement (informants had a national scope) and a Provincial Chief Lands Officer. The findings are evidence based and it is the conclusion of this paper that ignoring the effects is treasonous as the impact of FTLRP need to be addressed with a view that the exercise was pro-poor and a significant stride towards development. Africans need to own resources in order to participate in the development process. The FTLRP in Zimbabwe is irreversible but the manner in which it was carried out needs to be corrected hence this paper’s call for Agrarian redress. Ignoring agriculture in Zimbabwe is an antidote of develop

Keywords: Fast Track Land Resettlement Program, Agrarian, Government of National Unity.

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the sectoral impact of the Fast Track Land Resettlement exercise carried out since 2000. It starts by looking at the obtaining socio-economic and economic implications of the exercise before the paper get infield analysis of the noble exercises. The paper discusses issues around the existing infrastructure, capital resource base, leasing, climatic changes, farming knowledge and expertise, pending legal wrangles, gaps, disputes, HIV and AIDS and Gender Insensitivity.

Socio-economic issues

The FTLRP has been under siege as there has been the withdrawal of support and international credit by the multilateral institutions and this has undermined the agrarian reform in Zimbabwe. The Look East policy adopted by the government as the survival strategy has not been that successful as inappropriate technology and less durable machinery has come. Besides, the hostile reception from the western countries far outweighs the benefits coming from the alliance with the East. There has been erratic supply of fuel, shortage of farm inputs

and a technological setback to the agrarian reform in Zimbabwe. The economy has just been shrinking with alarming inflation statistics, huge unemployment levels, worsening poverty and increasing vulnerability. This has had a huge negative impact on agriculture.

Political Issues

The country has been undergoing massive political changes since 2000 and this has had an impact on the agrarian reform as there has been a shift on the balance of power politics. The beneficiaries of the FTLRP have had a partisan appreciation of the whole exercise because of ZANU PF's quest to please the electorate and remain in power. The FTLRP has been given a revolutionary clotting that resembles the nationalist liberation struggle often associated with ZANU PF in this political dispensation (Interview with ZANU PF 2012). As a result many people have been subjected to a propaganda that elevates ZANU PF to the heights linked with the reform. The rival political parties such as MDC have been portrayed as anti-FTLRP whereas according to them, they are the ones who authored Land Reform as a policy priority for them when they became a political party in 1998(Interview with MDC 2012). The political rivalry between ZANU PF and MDC has resulted in many MDC supporters being marginalized and excluded from acquisition of land by ZANU PF officials (Interview with MDC). Some MDC supporters who accessed the land have suffered systematic exclusion and marginalization as they are deliberately denied access to government assistance such as of farm inputs. Some MDC supporters have been persecuted politically especially during the 2008 elections in the period towards the runoff elections on 27 June 2008. The MDC supporters who were few in numbers in the resettlement areas were subjected to violence, torture and beatings. As a result there is polarity between ZANUPF and MDC supporters. This polarity and negative perception has spilled into land politics.

The MDC party has noted that it will revisit the FTLRP in order to bring what it calls equity while on the other hand ZANU PF noted that the FTLRP or 'Third Chimurenga' is irreversible and cannot be tampered with. The two parties signed a (Memorandum of Agreement) MOU in 2008 in a power sharing arrangement that came into existence in 2009. While they agreed to share power, the future of agriculture in Zimbabwe is unclear as they have shelved the FTLRP as a no go area in this period of the (Government of National Unity) GNU. One acknowledges that this is a temporal arrangement but indeed the FTLRP will be tampered with by MDC as it now has a share of the national cake. Besides, the balance of power seem to be shifting from ZANU PF to the MDC and thus in the event of MDC assuming total executive power, the FTLRP will be visited and amended. There are many glaring gaps and loopholes associated

with the violent, bloody and haphazard land seizures in Zimbabwe and these gaps continue to call for adjustments. From the interviews, the ZANU PF government confirmed that there is need to amend certain aspects of the reform but not in the way that MDC propagated. The MDC wants an overhaul of the entire FTLRP as it alleges that there lacked proper planning and creation of infrastructure to support the FTLRP. Besides, the MDC alleges that there has been rampant primitive accumulation and corruption. The party has criticized the government for its partisan approach and for allowing the culture of multiple ownership by the party cadres and heavyweights. Even some ZANU PF supporters have lamented against this practice. The president Robert G Mugabe has also castigated the party's corrupt officials who own multiple farms while others are suffering.

Those in strategic political positions from both ZANU PF and MDC have benefited in a shrewd manner in this reform. These politicians have accessed fertile and economically viable vast pieces of land in the FTLRP. Top ZANU PF officials like Air Marshall P Shiri, Gideon Gono, Ray Kaukonde, Emerson Munangagwa and MDC 's Welshman Ncube, G Mutsekwa, Renson Gasela, Roy Bennet and Jonathan Moyo are all said to be owning not only vast pieces but very fertile and strategic farms. One would question how these politicians got these farms considering the haphazard manner in which the reform was being carried out. There remains a political challenge to the FTLRP and thus the FTLRP's prospects need to be visited.

METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative as the author undertook focus group discussions with resettled farmers, carried out observations as well as in-depth interviews with the Department of Land Resettlement (informants had a national scope) and a Provincial Chief Lands Officer. It then summarises and analyse the findings from the above mentioned data collection techniques.

Positive gains

The Department of Land Resettlement which carries the national view of the agrarian reform noted that the FTLRP has been a reality, success and was officially concluded in 2006. According to the department, there were massive demographic shifts involved in the exercise as many families moved from communal lands to the resettlement areas. The beneficiaries were resettled under the A1 and A2 models. It noted that the FTLRP has been carried out in all the provinces. According to the department, all needy people have been resettled and had land allotted to them. The land officers highlighted

significant benefits that have been accrued by the land resettlement beneficiaries(Interview with national land officers in the Department of Resettlement, national office, Harare, 08 January 2009).

Most beneficiaries who applauded the FTLRP celebrated access to the means of production. They feel empowered because they now have access to the vital land resource. Other beneficiaries confirmed that they have indeed been empowered because land traditionally is a form of power in Zimbabwe. Besides owning land, productivity has increased. The Midlands province regional office of the Ministry of Land and Resettlement program observed that the overall yield has greatly increased thanks to the FTLRP. Besides the yield issue, there has been the mechanization of agriculture which is a milestone improvement in the technological inputs to agriculture. The mechanization aspect resembles the purchase of farm technology by the government for the betterment of agriculture in Zimbabwe. These technological gadgets have been distributed to the FTLRP beneficiaries across the country by ZANU PF presidium and party officials. Those in cattle ranching have benefited through the National Stock Breeding exercise which entail government importing exotic semen for better breeding. This has notably improved the stock herds of the beneficiaries and also the national herd (¹ Interview with the Regional Chief lands officer in the Ministry of land and Resettlement program, 15 January 2009)

The FTLRP beneficiaries have also benefited from the government input supply mechanism. The Central Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe and Agribank has been availing loans and inputs to the land resettlement beneficiaries in an attempt to boost agriculture. The maguta project through the GMB has gone a long way in boosting the agrarian reform because seed, fertilizers and other inputs have been availed to the beneficiaries. In line with central government support, other players have come on board to aid agriculture.

Infrastructure and social services

The data collected shows that in the aftermath of reform, infrastructure and social services on most farms that were acquired for resettlement have collapsed. The capacitated and resourceful commercial farmers are no longer there to maintain the available infrastructure. The new farmers have also looted and damaged infrastructure in an attempt to access the lands. Others are into poaching while others use outdated farming methods that destroy the infrastructure. There are reports of environmental degradation and destruction of vegetation. Also, there is little or no infrastructure or services in most newly settled areas. These are inaccessible areas not suitable for massive settlements hence absence of schools, clinics and business centers.

The government would have done best by building infrastructure before settling the farmers and thus the haphazard manner in which the reform was carried out is to blame. There are no roads, electricity, protected water supplies, schools or clinics. These facilities help agriculture a great deal and thus their importance is uncontested.

The FTLRP entailed massive demographic shifts as noted by the Department of Land Resettlement but this was logically supposed to be complemented by the creation of a better infrastructure. Instead, the FTLRP is known for dismantling and destroying the infrastructure created by the then Commercial farmers. The Zimbabwean agrarian reform cannot succeed without the necessary infrastructure such as roads, clinics, market centres, bridges, hospitals and better communication network. For the reform to realize its intended objectives of empowerment and increasing productivity, an excellent transport and communication network has to be established. These infrastructural structures help in business and trade attached to an agro based economy such as of Zimbabwe. Roads help in the transportation of inputs and also outputs. Roads also make the resettlement areas markedly accessible. Buyers need to access the farm areas but as things stand; there are many resettlement areas that are not accessible because of poor or no roads. The FTLRP needs schools and hospitals for them to thrive and become sustainable. There are many children that were affected by this reform and most of the children were in school and had their educational lives affected by the exercise. The FTLRP uprooted and displaced many children. These children are vital actors in the process of development and as such, their basic needs such as school need to be addressed. Unfortunately the educational needs of these children were ignored hence one can note that the FTLRP was children-needs blind. There was need to create better schools for the children that were moved by the reform.

The available satellite schools in these resettlement areas fall far short of the basic school standards. There are no standard building structures and there is no furniture. Instead most resettlement schools were former farm compound structures that have been turned into schools. There is insufficient furniture for the children. The building structures are so poor that very few of these satellite schools have been given exam centre status by ZIMSEC (Zimbabwe School Examination Council). Besides, the schools are so much spaced that the children walk very long distances to go to these poor schools. Some walk as far as 20 kilometres to the schools. The schools also lack resources as the government did not have proper plan for them. There are no books for studies of these children. The schools are remotely located and their appearances and status do not warrant them to be called schools. Due to poor roads and bridges, the satellite schools are not easily accessed.

The roads in most resettlement areas distant from the tarred roads are poor and bad that transport linkage is a problem. No established buses ply the route to and from the resettlement areas thereby causing a transport problem. The few cars that may be operating in the routes often charge exorbitant fares because they monopolies the routes. Absences of good transport network affect the farmers as they cannot access markets easily. Most of the time they cannot transport their farm produce to market centers of tier choice because of this transport problem. As a result, those buyers with transport just go to these areas and offer very low prices to the newly resettled farmers who have no choice but to sell their farm produces on such low prices. The new farmers do not have own transport as was the case with the former white commercial farmers. The inaccessibility of these farmers imply that there is no commercial business facilities for the farmers.

Agricultural supporting business centers are hard to come across in the resettlement areas due to a poor transport and communication network. Businesses thrive where there are good roads and excellent communication facilities. Because of the haphazard manner in which the FTLRP was done, there was no proper plan for such business centres. The farmers do not have nearby hardware, stores and butcheries where they can supply fresh farm produces or at least buy day to day needs of their farming programs. There is no commercial life for the FTLRP beneficiaries in some areas. Services provision has become a problem for the new farmers.

Health service provision has become difficult to offer for the new farmers because of lack of proper plan. There are no clinics and hospitals to assist the new farmers regarding their basic need of health. Absence of such facilities in light of the HIV and AIDS pandemic as well as the recent atrocities caused by cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe is an area for concern. Health is a basic need for everyone and the health service provision has been excellent in Zimbabwe until recently. The resettled farmers need access to drugs and medicine but these health service provision centers are absent in most of the resettlement areas. The new farmers are exposed to many diseases and sicknesses and thus need health facilities. The situation on the ground is a cause for concern and thus an improvement in this area is imperative. Some sick farmers are often transported through ox-drawn scorch carts for long distances before they are attended at established hospitals and clinics. Some die without receiving proper medical attention because of the absence of hospitals and clinics. A proper plan for this basic service provision is urgently needed. Pregnant women often give birth in remote houses without proper child birth facilities. Women by their biological nature need health facilities more than man and thus need this area addressed urgently or else it will always militate against the FTLRP prospects.

e FTLRP did not have communication need facilities in

its plan. In essence there is poor communication. There are no or few buses plying the routes and no posting boxes for letter delivery. There are no fixed telephone landlines in most of the areas. The advent of mobile technology has eased the problem but most peasant farmers who benefited from the FTLRP are so poor that they cannot afford cell phones. Those that have cell phones often charge exorbitant fees for communication or simply do not offer them for public use because they are personal properties. Others who have cell phones often do not have battery charging facilities and are thus handicapped in the maintenance of the phones. Communication therefore has become a problem and there is need for this area to be addressed in order to enhance the prospects of the FTLRP in Zimbabwe. Establishment of better communication facilities would improve the prospects of farming for the FTLRP. It would be easier for farmers to link up with buyers and for commercial buyers to get in touch with them as well. Communication facilities also help the FTLRP beneficiaries in their family and social communication needs. Communication is an aid to trade and thus it boosts the chances of productivity and market specific farming.

Lack of resources and capital

The government and the beneficiaries lack capital and resources to take agriculture to greater heights, worse still there has been an economic crises stemming from the cutting of aid and credit lines from multilateral institution such as the World Bank and IMF. There are no donors in the agriculture sector because of the hostile relations between the government and the Western countries. The support base of agriculture has dwindled and thus access to credit lines and expert service is critical. Besides, the farmers do not have the much needed capital to kick start and improve their activities. On the other hand the commercial farmers that were displaced by the FTLRP had their own capital and support base. The new farmers lack the much needed expertise and technical support for the enhancement of agriculture. Even the banks are unwilling to support the farmers because they lack collateral security.

Unlike their predecessors, the new farmers do not have resources. The few resources that were left by the white commercial farmers have been destroyed by the new farmers as they lack proper maintenance knowledge. Such resources entail tractors, electric pumps, borehole water, ploughs, cultivators and other machinery. These have either been vandalized or destroyed by the FTLRP beneficiaries. Other machinery lies idle and is kept in poor storage conditions simply because the commercial farmers left in a huff and the government has been slow in carrying out an audit of the machinery. Other senior government officials have

looted the machinery and have failed to surrender the assets to the government. Both the government and the looters are to blame for this scenario. If the government was serious with the FTLRP should have seized and taken custody of the resources to avoid such corrupt tendencies. The looters are to blame because they have used their powers to siphon and loot white commercial farmer property. Others who have been unfortunate and lack political muscle have been hailed before courts. While this is greatly appreciated, this research mourns the slow reaction and reluctance to carryout proper audits of the left resources.

Leasing system

Few beneficiaries have been given 99 year leases by the government while most beneficiaries do not have title deeds to prove that it is their land. The government does not have exact statistics of those with leases and those without. One wonders whether there is a proper record of who has settled and who has not settled. The government has failed to legally empower the beneficiaries with these title deeds. The lack of confidence among the farmers is buttressed by the fact that the government has failed to hand over title deeds to these farmers. The new farmers often think that the resettlement areas are not rightly theirs but rather state land. The opposition supporters have lashed at the beneficiaries using this loophole. They tell the farmers that it is not their land and they in turn resort to giving the government support not because they want but because they fear that they will lose the land. Other resettled farmers are being tossed to and fro by the government as it uses the new lands as the carrot and stick strategy. Money lending institutions have been sceptical about the FTLRP and are not prepared to lend money to the beneficiaries because they lack collateral. The government has failed to avail the leases to the beneficiaries and the speed at which it is issuing the leases is just too slow to boost confidence of the farmers. Some farmers are not yet sure as to whether the FTLRP is reversible or not. The opposition political force have been decampaigning the FTLRP and its coming to power has not been good news to most beneficiaries. The MDC party has also promised to reform the FTLRP and to carry out land audits thereby instilling insecurity among other farmers.

Abandonment of the farming objective

Agribank loans are noble idea but some farmers do have no collateral to access the loans. Some farmers have turned into gold panning which has degraded the environment. Mining activities have destroyed the environment through surface mining, creation of dongas

and dump sites. Poaching is also rampant as National Parks have to fight with new farmers who are into game hunting.

Climatic changes and natural challenges to the FTLRP

There seems to be a change of climate that has resulted in chronic droughts. In essence there has been food shortages and thus food insecurity in Zimbabwe since 2000. While nature has had a say on the food insecurity issue, people have also blamed the FTLRP as resulting in this state. Those that usually support in cases of disaster have been reluctant to support Zimbabwe as they say the disasters and famine are man made. A new farmer from Nyamandlovu district noted that nature has also sieged the reform as there are some stray cattle that have been destroying crops and these are believed to have been left by former white commercial farmers. There are also wild animals like the Warthogs that destroy the crops. Water is a critical problem as Gwai River is very far and if wells are dug it will go a long way in alleviating their plight. The farmer also noted that farmer imputes ought to be available closer to the farmers as we travel long distance to Nyamandlovu to purchase inputs.

Lack of knowledge and expertise

The farm beneficiaries lack essential farming knowledge and thus do not know what to do with their different soils and different regional areas of settlement. There is poor use of land, as well as the inexperience and lack of resources on the part of new farmers. Details of certain areas obtained through the national Department of Land Resettlement at Makumbe building are of significant value. For instance the Chimanimani DA's office highlighted that the majority of A1 farmers are doing quite well as compared to A2 who lied in terms of equipment ownership and are lagging behind in terms of hectarage covered in terms of production. History has to teach the people of Zimbabwe particularly the government, which should copy the Rhodesian government that helped its white farmers. These farmers require strict monitoring. The former settlers had acquired expertise and had technological support to help them tame their lands. While the government has its own technical experts to aid the farmers, the Department of Resettlement noted that there has been high staff turnover of agriculture experts. The professionals are running away from the declining economy for greener pastures where they get rewarded for their brains and expertise. In short there has been a brain drain for bread grain by the agriculture experts thereby crippling the services support mechanism.

The declining socio-economic and political environ-

ment resulted in many experts running away from the country thereby incapacitating the agricultural development personnel. Agriculture sector need expert and professionals such as engineers, surveyors, development agents, and veterinary personnel. These complement each other and have specific functions that work for the good of agriculture in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately the experienced personnel and strategic people have gone abroad in search of greener pastures. Other researches have confirmed that the personnel has gone abroad not as a result of brain drain as alleged by the government but for bread gain because that's where the economy respect a professional somebody. South Africa has absorbed most of the personnel and it is no shock that the Ministry of Agriculture has noted that there are no experienced officers present in the ministry. The new inclusive government has briefed the Prime Minister of the predicament confronting the new government. One chief problem is the lack of staff and experienced personnel. It's back to the drawing board for the new inclusive government. There is need to lure back the diasporas based personnel that ran away and to recruit new staff so as to inject life into the FTLRP. The staff has a lot of work to do in as far as proper planning is concerned. Appropriate reactive plans ought to be made for the haphazardly launched FTLRP. It is regrettable that the ZANU PF government has made the FTLRP a no-go area for the inclusive government. The agriculture sector need to be revisited and proper plans be carried across into the reform. There is need for capital injection into the sector so as to boost the agro based economy. This is a key area that would jumpstart the ailing economy and should have been given top priority by the GNU. The MOU however stipulate that this is a no alterations to be made on the FTLRP. The future remains bleak if such a crucial sector is ignored and left unattended. There are many factors that call for reform and adjustments.

Pending Legal wrangles

The other challenge is that of legal wrangles attached to the land reform. The former white commercial farmers have filed law suits against the government for the loss of their land. The legal wrangles have spilled into international tribunals such as the SADC Tribunal courts, thereby attracting the entire world. The regional tribunal in Namibia have handed judgment in favour of the whites. This makes the beneficiaries feel insecure because they think the legal dimension that the FTLRP has taken may lead to their loss of lands. The legal wrangles have come up with contrary verdicts and this is a cause for concern for the new farmers. In as much as the new inclusive government of 2009 would want to impress the international friends, the fast track land resettlement program remains a major challenge. There are some contradictions as the regional courts such as the SADC

Tribunal courts have handed judgment in favour of the ousted white Commercial farmers but the government of Robert G Mugabe maintains that Zimbabwe is a sovereign country and so cannot have such issues reversing the FTLRP.

Gaps

Other beneficiaries did not take up their allotted lands. Others have gone there not to farm but to just settle. Most people that declined the land offer were either settled on rocky, poor and unyielding lands. Others were unsure of the exercise and thought of leaving. Others were chased away by nature as wild animals destroyed their crops. Such animals include warthogs, baboons and monkeys. There are also cases of multiple ownership and corruption in the FTLRP. One individual might own vast pieces of land using different names while others lack. In some cases the inputs and agriculture machinery from government are distributed along partisan lines. There are reports of looting by government officials and party stalwarts. The chief lands officer in the midlands region noted the low take up rate by farmers. He noted that there has been allocation failure, implying that the beneficiaries in some cases have not been rightly chosen.

Disputes

The resettled farmers are sometimes engaged in boundary disputes and infighting. This has slowed down production as they spent valuable time fighting for the pieces of land. The Department of land resettlement also noted that there is lack of unity and cooperation among the farmers. Those whose farms have water sources and facilities such as irrigation kits, the dip tanks and dams do not allow others to use such vital farming facilities. The beneficiaries are greedy and selfish thereby slowing down the progress of agriculture development in Zimbabwe.

HIV and AIDS

The FTLRP has not been spared the HIV pandemic. The disease has besieged the agriculture sector in the 21st century. Many suffer as infected as affected. Like other social groups, farmers have been vulnerable to the HIV – AIDS epidemic. The prevalence rate among them in the 20-49 year age group is estimated at higher than 25 per cent. The consequences include a rise in the number of orphans and child-headed households. Extended family and nuclear family structures are under severe stress as household assets are drawn upon to treat people with AIDS-related sicknesses. Resources and home-based

care institutions for the sick are very limited in the land settlement areas. Constant food shortages mean poor nutrition for AIDS patients.

HIV and AIDS have a negative impact on agricultural extension service providers, performance as well as productivity. This is qualified by rate of absenteeism from work, training sessions and frequency of disruption of planned programmes due to funeral attendance, caring for the sick and ill health. Attendance of training meetings was also compromised because the elderly, women and children were absent attending to the sick and funerals. The children and youth whose parents were either ill or deceased had to assume more agricultural roles compromising school attendance and performance.

In this research it was also noted that HIV and AIDS has resulted in low levels of livestock and crop production in smallholder areas. Livestock is being sold to raise money for drugs and hospital fees, slaughtered to feed peoples at funerals. The reduction of herd sizes further impacts on draught power and inputs such as seed and fertilizers. Labour shortage is the resultant issue as people get occupied with HIV and AIDS related activities. The prevalence rates of HIV are so high and their linkages with food security have become an issue. This food insecurity requires whole new approaches towards understanding food security in the context of HIV and AIDS pandemic. Impact of HIV and AIDS on household incomes and expenditures can directly affect household access to food. Incomes earned from both on-farm and off-farm activities allow households to get food through exchange entitlements as differentiated from direct food production.

Gender Insensitivity

There has been gender blindness in the whole exercise

as females were initially left out of the FTLP. They later benefited but in insignificant low numbers. They are also not given equal or preferential treatment even after the completion of the exercise. There is evidence of existence of gender discrimination in access to fertilizers, with male headed households using more fertilizers than female-headed ones.

CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of this paper that the idea behind FTLRP was a very noble exercise though its manner of implementation was improper for development. Since it's irreversible, there is need for government and other players to chip in and assist in the exposed gaps. There is need to cover and fill in the noted challenges immediately. Ignoring them may fuel conflict or rather pose as an antidote of development. Those in government ought to wake up and build this agriculture for the betterment of Zimbabwean communities.

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