

Multiple Realities: An Assessment of the Impact of a Generation of Land Redistribution on Food Security and Livelihoods in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords

land reform, resettlement, livelihoods, rural poverty, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

In 1980, Zimbabwe initiated a land reform programme intended to improve the welfare of the poor and the landless. Land resettlement was a significant component in Zimbabwe's early development efforts in rural areas following independence, but policy directions over recent years threaten to undermine past accomplishments—whatever they may have been. In the furore created by sweeping land confiscations beginning in 2000, the earlier experience with land redistribution has been all but forgotten.² Early beneficiaries overwhelmingly came from the overcrowded communal areas whence successive rounds of discriminatory legislation had pushed them. And, for more than a decade, they were expected to utilize the land resources made available to them to earn their livelihoods exclusively from farming. The extent to which they were successful in doing so raises crucial questions for the future of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector and economy as a whole.

The paper examines the ways in which the livelihoods of resettled households have evolved over some 28 years in response to the opportunities created by access to additional, productive land. The analysis looks both at livelihood trajectories and outcomes in the resettlement areas and at selected contrasts between the communities of origin and the new communities. This examination is set in a context characterized by recurring drought, policy shifts—principally those under structural adjustment and alterations to resettlement regulations, declining public sector support, long-term demographic shifts, and the rising toll of HIV/AIDS.

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² Journalists have been perhaps the most notoriously ahistorical. In his 2002 book, *Degrees in Violence: Robert Mugabe and the Struggle for Power in Zimbabwe*, David Blair, for example, ignores the fact that Zimbabwe's land reform had been underway for 20 years and dates its beginnings only from the farm invasions that started in 2000.

The paper poses two central questions: to what extent have the programme's original welfare objectives—food security and the enhancement of rural livelihoods—been achieved. The attempt to answer these questions draws both upon a wide body of empirical data from the author's 26-year study of three resettlement areas and a set of largely unpublished materials.

A SHORT BACKGROUND

Disentangling whatever may have been the welfare achievements of almost three decades of land redistribution in Zimbabwe in the country's current economic maelstrom is a daunting challenge. The very first families to be resettled went onto their new holdings in October 1980, more than 28 years ago—and only some six months after Zimbabwe's independence. Since then, the national land programme has mutated through several different 'phases,'³ each with different foci and emphases. At the same time, the country has experienced—among other afflictions—periodic severe droughts, the arrival and rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the economic upheaval caused by structural adjustment, dramatic alterations to property rights, and a tidal wave of corruption and abuse of public office.

In early 2009, Zimbabwe's economy had deteriorated from being one of Africa's strongest to one of the world's worst. It was in a condition where it could only be described by a set of stylized but unrivalled negative indicators: the world's worst rate of hyperinflation—officially estimated at more than 230 million per cent but knowledgeably reckoned to be nearer a quintillion per cent (*Business Day* 22 August 2008; <http://en.afrik.com/news12533.html> 16 January 2009); a currency that was declining in relative value by 13-15,000 per cent a day; unemployment and poverty levels of between 85-90 per cent; life expectancy, now the lowest in the world, has halved since independence;⁴ and the lowest real growth rate of GDP in any independent country.⁵

In such a setting, it is not surprising that *land reform*⁶ is viewed by many as an absolute failure and that this failure is seen as a major contributing factor to the dismal state of the economy.⁷ This viewpoint, however, is heavily influenced by several misconceptions. One is that land redistribution in Zimbabwe began only with the land seizures that started in early 2000; the 20 years of prior experience are usually ignored. Both during this time and since, there has been a wide variety of approaches to solving Zimbabwe's 'land question', but this history is largely ignored. A second

³ Often so identified only retrospectively rather than as a conscious shift in overall approach.

⁴ Historian John Iliffe (1990) concluded that there was no evidence that there had ever been a death from starvation in Rhodesia prior to 1960. By late 2008, reports of deaths from starvation in hospitals, prisons and rural areas in Zimbabwe were commonplace. (See, for example, Maingire (2008), Muleya (2005), McGreal (2008), <http://www.hararetribune.com> (July 15 & August 9 2008), <http://www.thestandard.co.zw> (August 9 2008), and Sachikonye (2003).)

⁵ The abandonment of the Zimbabwe dollar and adoption of multiple foreign currencies in January 2009 have dramatically reduced inflation, brought financial stability and relieved some of the deep economic distress but have done nothing to assuage underlying structural problems.

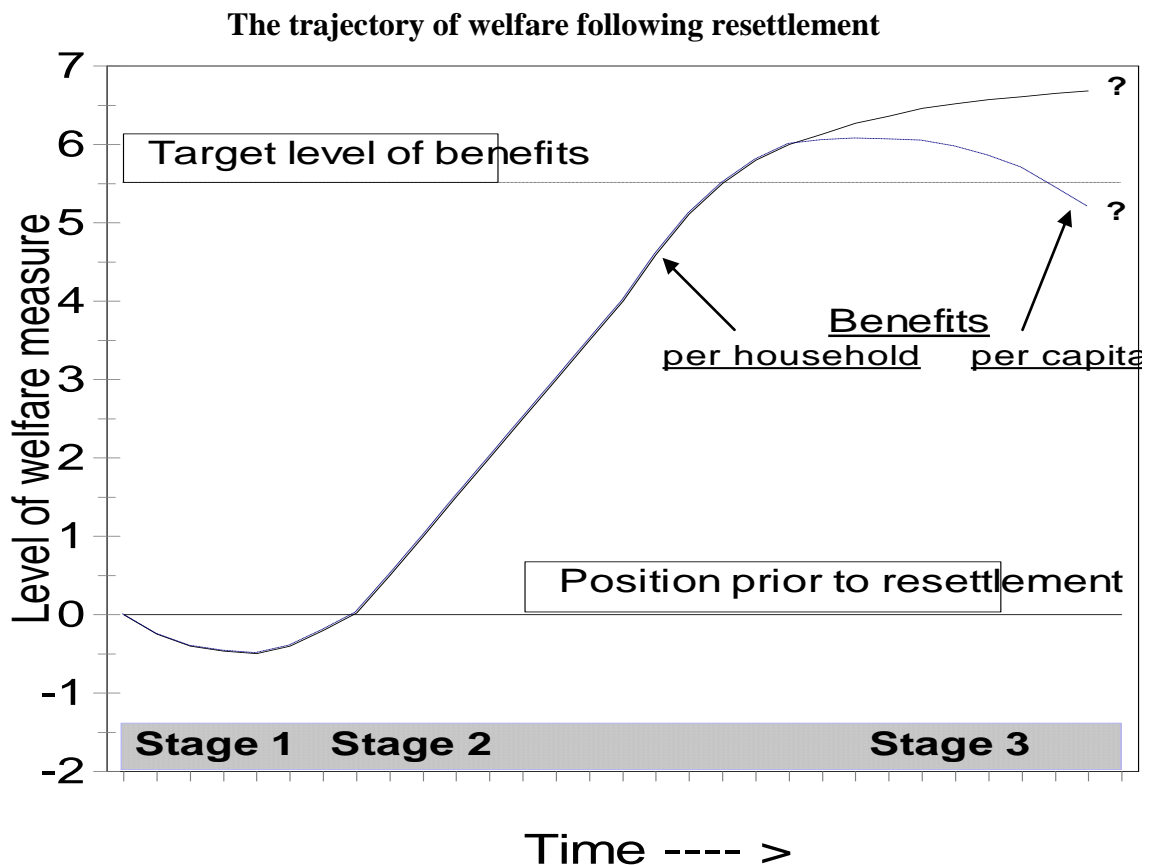
⁶ I italicize *land reform* because of my conviction that Zimbabwe's experience has been characterized far more by redistribution of land than it has by reform of the institutions that support agriculture.

⁷ The most mileage on this theme has been logged by Craig Richardson (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007), who attributes the greatest share of Zimbabwe's economic decline to a single factor—the loss of property rights. David Blair also reports regularly (See Blair 2002 and 2005, for example) on the 'failure' of what he [mis]understands to be Zimbabwe's 'land reform'.

misconception is that, with the wrong starting point in time and relying upon ill-informed media reports, many observers paint the land redistribution exercise as uniform and monolithic—and characterized entirely by the violent seizures of large commercial farms by the political elite. Reference from this perspective is usually made to the 'land grab' rather than land redistribution.

While this stereotype completely dominates media accounts, it is very far from a unique reality. The stories of those who have been resettled, as well as the accounts of how they came to be settled, are highly varied; they differ by geographical region, by the period when resettlement took place, by the approach taken to resettlement, as well as by the particular circumstances of individual settler households. These stories are still being assembled, and the rendering of a comprehensive picture is far from complete. In contrast, the documentation of those cases where land grabs have truly occurred—accompanied often by intimidation and violence, many forms of lawlessness, and overt theft and asset-stripping—is far more readily available, and deeply colours perceptions of what is happening in Zimbabwe today. The reality is fractured: land redistribution—in a form that most researchers would accept as genuine, if limited, land reform—is taking place on a significant scale, but it is simultaneously being consciously manipulated by a predatory elite as a smokescreen to conceal their destructive and self-serving behaviour.

After decades of studying land reform on a global basis, but particularly in Africa, I have found it helpful to employ the conceptualization set out in the figure below. The figure, which is highly stylized, attempts to capture the main outcomes following



'planned resettlement', whether this be state- or market-led, but it does not encompass spontaneous or community-led resettlement.

Planned approaches to land resettlement almost always include three elements: a notion of the welfare of proposed beneficiaries prior to resettlement; a definition of the anticipated gains from resettlement—usually expressed as targets to be achieved; and the expected rate of change, the growth path of benefits (which I broadly term *welfare*) projected by the planners. Typically, these three elements assume the proposed beneficiaries to be a homogeneous mass, characterized by uniformity in terms of 'average' expectations, family size, experience, skills, education, assets, and the like.

The figure subsumes these three common elements but tempers them with the outcomes that also seem universal. First, in what I call stage 1, welfare does not rise but instead declines. As a consequence of being displaced from landscapes of the familiar, suffering from broken social connections, and having simultaneously to build new homes and clear and prepare land for planting, newly resettled households are stressed to their limits. And often beyond their limits, for many may never recover from the initial shock to welfare levels.

Stage 2 is characterized by an inflection point at which the original drop in welfare levels off and then welfare slowly begins to improve. All the hard work is starting to pay off. The remainder of stage 2 witnesses continued [albeit often erratic and, as drawn, unrealistically rapid] growth leading eventually to a slowing of growth at the beginning of stage 3. This slowing is a natural phenomenon and results from full utilization of the land, labour and technology available, as well as from the fact that the most profitable and accessible markets are being exploited.

In stage 3, I depict the growth path as diverging. The upper path shows the continuation of the slowing rate of growth of benefits at the household level. The lower path explicitly recognizes that households go through cycles that alter their demographic profiles. A growing family is a huge advantage in stages 1 and 2 because additional labour assists in coping with the larger land area resettlement typically provides. But, as children mature, marry and have children of their own, the number of persons dependant upon a fixed land allocation increases, and per-capita welfare declines.

Both growth paths end in stage 3 with question marks, indicating uncertainty about each path beyond that point. For the upper path, its trajectory will hinge substantially upon factors such as continuing institutional support in areas such as research and development, extension, agricultural credit, and marketing. The trajectory of the lower path reflects the fact that the benefits from land reform and resettlement are, in one sense, exhausted after a single generation. The level of welfare achieved will be preserved provided that the initial beneficiary is succeeded by only one of his/her offspring's families. This condition is likely to be met in only one of two circumstances. The first, and ultimately impossible, is that there will be successive rounds of resettlement to absorb the growing population. The second is that there is sufficient growth elsewhere in the economy to provide jobs for those who would face only declining welfare if they remained on the family farm.⁸

⁸ Zimbabwe's experience provides a third option. Seeking opportunities that no longer exist within the

The wide diversity of experience in Zimbabwe occurs, however, within two dominant ‘models’ employed to shape the land redistribution exercise since 1980. The first of these, the so-called model A1, is based on small-scale (typically 3-6ha), family-based farming and has been operational (as model A) from the very beginning. For some eighteen years, the great majority of resettlement took place using this approach. Typically resettlement areas were carefully planned and laid out, and beneficiaries received preferential access to a wide range of support services. Beginning in the late 1990s, the relative emphasis shifted to A2-style resettlement, and the rate of A2 resettlement greatly accelerated beginning in 2000; but total numbers resettled under the A2 approach remain something of a mystery.⁹ A2 farms were meant to replace the production from the white- (and black-) owned commercial farms that were seized to provide the land, and it is this approach to resettlement that has generated the greatest amount of criticism.¹⁰ The sizes of A2 holdings vary enormously—from around eight hectares to thousands of hectares.¹¹

Very little empirical research has been done on resettlement since 2000. Among the most ambitious efforts is the still incomplete household ‘baseline’ survey carried out across more than 2,000 households in six different districts by the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS 2008). According to draft publications, the distribution of holding sizes under post-2000 resettlement has been along the lines indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution by size of allocated holdings, A1 and A2

Agro-ecological region	Size range (ha)					Total
	1-20	21-50	51-100	101-250	251+	
	(percentage)					
I	74.7	17.7	6.0	1.6	0.0	14.2
II	78.6	7.5	7.6	4.2	2.1	48.0
III	39.4	56.5	1.5	2.3	0.3	22.2
IV	5.6	1.4	10.6	76.8	5.6	8.1
V	45.1	42.1	3.0	3.0	6.8	7.6
Total	60.9	22.0	5.9	9.2	2.0	100.0

Source: Derived from AIAS (2008). Despite correction for numerous mathematical errors in the original, the figures here should be considered indicative only.

The data in Table 1 indicate several primary findings. First, of the holdings situated in the two most favourable agro-ecological zones (those with the lowest numbers), the majority allocated were 20ha or less in size. The holdings allocated in region III also tend to be surprisingly small. The distributions for region IV are what would be

country, members of resettled households, particularly the skilled and able-bodied, have joined to exodus to South Africa, other countries in the region, and further afield.

⁹ Under the A2 rubric, farmers have been both settled and then subsequently displaced.

¹⁰ Even Robert Mugabe has reportedly complained about the number of ‘cell-phone farmers’ created by the programme (*The Daily News* 23 February 2005).

¹¹ It is not clear whether the farms taken by the politically powerful are or are not included in the overall ‘formal’ figures of land area for A2 resettlement.

expected, but the findings for region V are paradoxical because the distribution pattern for this lowest potential area quite resembles that for the highest potential area.

An additional idea of the distribution of holding sizes can be had from Table 2, which presents data from a sample for a single district for 2004. The majority of new A1 farmers cropped on average well below one and a half hectares, while half of the A2 farmers sampled had access to twenty-five or fewer hectares of arable land, although very little of the larger area available to A2 farmers was in fact cultivated.¹²

In Masvingo province, it is reported that 1.2 million hectares have been redistributed to around 20,000 households, implying an overall average of some 60ha per beneficiary household, a figure that will include both arable and grazing land (Scoones 2008).

Scoones also reports outcomes that accord with those found by the author and other researchers. On the A1 schemes, with their low levels of capital investment and reliance upon local labour and animal draft power, some settlers have done reasonably well, particularly in areas where rainfall is favourable. Households have cleared and stumped land, planted crops and invested in new assets, and many have hired in labour from neighbouring communal areas. And, while some beneficiaries have left, overall attrition rates have been low.

Table 2. Comparative 'Holding Size' for A1 and A2 Farmers, Shamva District, 2004

Holding size (hectares)*	A1 farmers (percentage of farmers)	A2 farmers
Below 1.42	37.4	--
1.46-2.63	16.0	--
2.67-3.85	17.0	--
3.89-5.06	26.4	--
5.10-6.28	8.5	--
6.32 and above	4.7	--
8-15	--	23
16-25	--	27
26-35	--	8
36-45	--	15
46-55	--	12
55+	--	15

Source: Derived from Sukume (2004), pp83-4 and 87.

*For A1 farmers, the reported figures are cropped areas in 2003/04. For A2 farmers, the figures represent arable land holdings. Odd-looking data ranges for A1 holdings come from the conversion of reported data from acres to hectares.

On A2 schemes, in contrast, there has been only limited capital investment, and new enterprises have been slow to emerge. Although there are rare exceptions where new commercial farming enterprises have emerged against all odds, the struggle with

¹² Sukume (2004, p113) reports that only some 30-33 per cent of land is utilized in the newly resettled areas in Shamva District.

hyperinflation and the absence of credit have plagued almost all A2 farmers, despite state-provided largesse intended to guarantee beneficiary success.¹³

There is at present simply no comprehensive picture of resettlement outcomes for Zimbabwe's 29 years of experience in redistributing land. Given the diversity of experience across the country's varied agro-ecological zones, plus the fact that many different 'vintages' of resettlement co-exist side by side, this absence is perhaps not so remarkable. The hiatus has not been helped, however, by government's proclivity to obscure the realities of what is and what is not happening in resettlement areas.

The remaining sections of the paper focus on just three sets of outcomes from Zimbabwe's land redistribution experience: food security, poverty and changes in livelihoods.

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE NATIONAL LEVEL

So much of the limited detailed documentation on Zimbabwe's resettlement programmes comes from specific case studies, usually with confined geographical representation, that it can be easy to misrepresent specifics as generalizations. For this reason, I begin here with a review of information from a national perspective.

Food Security from a National Perspective

The most representative national picture of food security in recent years comes from the 2003 Poverty Assessment Study Survey (PASS), a survey of nearly 32,000 households across the country undertaken from November 2003 to March 2004 (Government of Zimbabwe 2006; hereafter PASS). PASS used an expenditure-based method to calculate food poverty lines and total consumption poverty lines. Nationally, the food poverty line amount of Z\$29,595 (at November 2003 prices) required per person per month to meet basic food requirements, defines the threshold of extreme poverty.

A basic conclusion of the 2003 PASS is that poverty increased substantially since the earlier PASS in 1995. Although there is wide variation between rural and urban provinces, the proportion of households nationally below the food poverty line—the very poor—rose by 148 per cent, from 20 per cent in 1995 to 48 per cent in 2003. Those in the combined categories of poor and very poor increased from 42 per cent in 1995 to 63 per cent in 2003, and a higher proportion of rural households ranked as poor compared to those in urban areas. Over all rural districts, 79 per cent were in the high-poverty category.

PASS assesses food security using anthropometric measurements of children¹⁴ and reported indicators of food shortages. Nationally, the proportion of children underweight increased from 13 per cent in 1999 to 18 per cent in 2003/04, just below the high prevalence category threshold of 20 per cent defined by WHO (p611). The proportion of underweight children in very poor households in resettlement areas was just above the 20 per cent threshold.

¹³ In Shamva, 90 per cent of both A1 and A2 farmers failed to obtain the government-subsidized inputs in 2003/04 (Sukume 2004). As a result, those who could resorted to the parallel market where prices for fertilizer, as one example, were double the government's prices.

¹⁴ Of the three nutritional indices commonly used, PASS employed only the one with the least diagnostic capability—weight for age—because of the unreliability of data on height (PASS, p610).

Nearly 60 per cent of all households reported having experienced food shortages, including a surprising 43 per cent of households classified as non-poor. The figure for very poor households was 70 per cent. The incidence of food shortages among resettled households was just above 57 per cent.¹⁵

After the empirical approach taken by PASS, assessments of food security tend to degenerate into the realm of claims and counter-claims. In May 2004, for example, the government had stopped a UN crop and food supply assessment mission from completing an evaluation of crop production in the 2003/04 season, and then claimed that Zimbabwe had had a 'bumper harvest.' Speaking on 22 May 2004, President Mugabe asserted: 'Our estimates are there and they are showing us we will have enough food for the country and with a surplus.... We are not hungry. . . . Why foist this food upon us? We don't want to be choked. We have enough.'¹⁶ (Amnesty International 2004, p41).

Early the following year, the government again denied Zimbabwe faced a hunger crisis and accused a US-funded famine early-warning unit of exaggerating food shortages to cause panic. A report by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, a food security monitoring group, had said some 5.8-million people in the country would need food aid to avert starvation before the harvest in April (*Mail and Guardian* 31 January 2005).

Agriculture Minister Joseph Made¹⁷ then claimed the United States was stepping up efforts to destabilize Zimbabwe ahead of parliamentary polls in March by causing alarm over food stocks. The government still insisted that Zimbabwe had produced a bumper harvest of 2.4-million tonnes of maize from the 2004 harvest, much of it being held in private rural granaries by growers.¹⁸ Made said the famine unit report was part of a campaign by the US to vilify the government's land reform programme in which some 5,000 white-owned commercial farms were seized, often violently, for redistribution to blacks since 2000. He described the programme as 'a resounding success' despite shortages of farm equipment, fuel, seed, chemicals and fertilizer.

With elections approaching, the government became increasingly less candid about the food security situation. But the dominant issue in political discussions during the 2005 election season in Zimbabwe was the growing problem of hunger, as evidenced by the acres of brown and dying maize that stretched to the horizon across a country once regarded as southern Africa's breadbasket (Timberg 29 March 2005). In the face of his prior boast of a bumper harvest in 2004 and cancellation of general feeding programmes and donor assessment missions, Mugabe's hubris probably would not allow a climb-down that would acknowledge a need for food aid; but many political analysts in Zimbabwe regarded the continuing denial as an attempt to gain control of all food stocks before the election.¹⁹

¹⁵ Both the 1995 and the 2003 PASS surveys took place in seasons affected by adverse rainfall patterns.

¹⁶ His assertion was widely discredited by independent food monitors and UN agencies.

¹⁷ Made became a laughingstock after his high-altitude flight over a landscape marked by patches of green led him to conclude that all he saw was maize and that there would be a bountiful harvest.

¹⁸ In contrast, the Commercial Farmers' Union said that Zimbabwe produced only 850,000 tonnes of maize in 2004, not enough to meet domestic demand (Blair 2005).

¹⁹ Such tactics have been used by Zanu-PF in almost every election since independence.

At about the same time, however, Mugabe chastised those beneficiaries of land redistribution who were not utilizing their land fully. In a broadcast aired on state television, he admitted that millions of hectares of prime land seized from Zimbabwe's large-scale farmers were lying empty and idle. After years of trumpeting the success of land redistribution, Mugabe disclosed that most of the farms transferred to new black owners had never been used. 'President Mugabe expressed disappointment with the land use, saying only 44 per cent of the land distributed is being fully utilized,' state television reported (Blair 2005).

Some 4.2 million hectares had been seized under a scheme designed to create a new class of black commercial farmer. By Mugabe's figures, 2.3 million hectares were lying fallow. At the same time, paradoxically, the land redistribution programme was credited with making Zimbabwe self-sufficient. Mugabe repeatedly claimed a record national maize crop of 2.4 million tonnes from the 2004 harvest and boasted that the bumper harvest meant that Zimbabwe no longer needed help 'foisted' on it from the UN World Food Program.

Similar contradictory claims have been made in subsequent seasons. For example, the 'bumper harvest' of 1.8 million tonnes announced by the government for the 2005/06 season was said to be unlikely by food monitoring groups and farmers, who forecast output at a maximum of 900,000 tonnes. The unfortunate agriculture minister Joseph Made told the parliamentary committee on agriculture in May 2006 that crop forecasts indicated that the grain harvest would significantly improve compared to the previous three years. 'We expect 1.8 million metric tonnes total harvest and we expect to purchase 900,000 tonnes....,' Made is reported to have said (ZimOnline 17 May 2006).

Just four months later, it was reported that Zimbabwe had run out of the staple maize meal. The chairman of the Zimbabwe Grain Millers' Association declared the countrywide shortage of meal was because the state-owned Grain Marketing Board (GMB) had not supplied maize to millers because it did not have any in stock. He said: 'There is a crisis; I can confirm that there is no mealie-meal around the country and millers are currently not getting any (maize) supplies' (ZimOnline 15 August 2006).

Mugabe, and the former army colonel whom he put in charge of the GMB, had since the beginning of 2006 claimed that the GMB would collect enough maize from farmers after a good harvest from the 2005/06 farming season. But in contrast to their projected harvest of 1.8 million tonnes, enough for national annual consumption, local farming experts and international food relief agencies disputed the government's figures, saying Zimbabwe was likely to harvest only some 800,000 tonnes of maize—after a shortage of seed and fertilizer crippled planting operations despite the country's receiving good rains (ZimOnline 15 August 2006).

Finally, some six weeks later, the Zimbabwe government tacitly admitted that the country had not harvested enough to feed itself when provincial governors were directed to allow non-governmental organizations to distribute food aid (ZimOnline 2 October 2006).

Most recently, in 2008, the government again banned non-governmental organizations from distributing food aid. And again the ban was in the context of elections. This time, however, the ban came not just in the face of growing food shortages but also in

the setting of a rapidly deepening humanitarian crisis. That the ban resulted in deaths is beyond doubt but, worse, it left a rural population weakened, with diminished coping mechanisms, in the face not only of an agricultural crisis but also of a national cholera epidemic.²⁰

The prognosis for the 2008/09 season was grim indeed. According to Matibe (2008), Zimbabwe only harvested 575,000 tonnes of maize from the 2007/08 season—28 per cent below the previous year's production, and a shortfall of 1.2 million tonnes below consumption needs. This shortfall had to be imported—at an estimated cost of US\$260 per metric tonne, excluding transport and handling charges. Thus Zimbabwe had to expend some US\$312 million in order to cover the shortfall.

Emergency imports of maize, moreover, competed for severely limited logistical support with the imports of seed,²¹ fertilizer, diesel and other farm inputs. Much of these imports are made necessary by the collapse of local production facilities. Zimbabwe's annual fertilizer requirements are between 50-60,000 tonnes, but in late 2008 there were almost no stocks of seed, fertilizer, fuel or other inputs in the country. The existing rail and road facilities simply cannot cope with both food and agricultural input imports at the same time.

While maize is the staple of all Zimbabweans, bread is also enormously important, particularly for those in urban areas. Wheat in Zimbabwe is a winter crop, grown under irrigation. While government had earmarked 70,000ha for the winter wheat crop in 2008, only some 8,900ha had been planted by the 23 May cut-off date—about 10,000ha less than in the previous year.²² Only some 40,000 tonnes of wheat (less than 10 per cent of consumption needs) is expected from the area planted, under the unrealistic assumption that there is adequate electricity and pest control (Matibe 2008, IRIN 2008).

While the government evades any responsibility for this disastrous economic performance and attributes it instead to the targeted sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries, sheer mismanagement lies at the heart of many of the country's problems. Nevertheless, in his recent speech at the United Nations, Robert Mugabe argued that the economic turmoil in Zimbabwe was caused by the 'illegal' sanctions that have been 'unilaterally' imposed on his government by countries 'hostile' to his land policies (Takavarasha 2008). Refusing to acknowledge that it was his government's disastrous agricultural policies that had destroyed the farming sector in Zimbabwe, Mugabe claimed that the food shortages in the country were a result of prolonged drought. He told the UN General Assembly that for the past ten years Zimbabwe has been besieged by relentless drought.

Invoking the drought explanation was an interesting *volte-face* on Mugabe's part, since he has repeatedly claimed that Zimbabwe enjoyed bountiful harvests following the land

²⁰ In mid-2009, the official death toll from cholera was reported at over 4,000, but health specialists helping to fight the epidemic believe this figure represents only a third of the actual deaths (personal communications).

²¹ Zimbabwe requires 50,000 tonnes of maize seed in order to plant 1.2 million hectares and produce 2 million tonnes of grain in a normal agricultural season. Seed houses report that they jointly hold stocks of only 11,300 tonnes of maize seed from the 2007/08 agricultural season, leaving a national deficit of 38,700 tonnes for 2008/09—to be imported at an estimated cost of US\$4,600 per tonne (Matibe 2008).

²² Zimbabwe had the irrigation capacity to irrigate 95,000 hectares of winter wheat, yielding an average of 5 tonnes per hectare.

seizures that began in 2000. But, of course, it is better to blame the weather, which is beyond even his control, than to attribute any fault to those institutions that he has played such a large part in shaping. As a reprieve from economic mismanagement, the 2008/09 growing season was one of the best in many years. Bountiful and well-distributed rains meant that production increased despite the countrywide shortage of cropping inputs.

Whatever the merits of Zimbabwe's land redistribution programme may be, it has failed dismally to enhance the country's food security situation. There are without doubt many beneficiaries of the programme who are competent farmers, willing to produce the crops and livestock the nation needs, but even the best farmers in the world are unable to operate under an economy that exhibits the pathology Zimbabwe's does. Agriculture was once the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy. Due to the eviction of large-scale farmers, the ability of political opportunists to seize land and the government's inability to sustain efforts required to support capable new farmers, this is no longer the case. Reliable crop estimates are no longer available due to the Zimbabwe government's attempts to hide the realities following the evictions, but the consensus is that what was once called southern Africa's breadbasket is now empty.

Poverty across Resettlement Areas

Across Zimbabwe as a whole, poverty increased dramatically over the years between 1995 and 2003. The proportion of people classified as very poor more than doubled—to 58 per cent, while 72 per cent of the population was classified as either poor or very poor (PASS 2006, p70). Moreover, the severity of poverty, the poverty gap and inequality measures all also worsened sharply during this period.

As of January 2006, the official national poverty line (based on urban prices) was Z\$17,200 per month (then US\$0.17). However, as of March 2008, this had risen to Z\$875 million per month (US\$35) and, one month later, was Z\$3.5 billion per month (*The Herald* 9 April 2008). It then continued to rise so rapidly that the Central Statistical Office, confounded by the complete absence of ordinary consumer items in shops, ceased to calculate a monthly poverty line.

Unfortunately, because of the way land redistribution was done from the late-1990s, the categorization of *resettlement areas* between 1995 and 2003 is not strictly comparable. With this caveat, however, the PASS data show the proportion of total poor in resettlement areas has risen from 52 per cent in 1995 to 58 per cent in 2003, while the proportion classified as very poor rose much more dramatically—from 25 to 46 per cent (PASS 2006, p25). Resettlement areas were intended to contrast very positively with the communal areas from which most of the early land redistribution beneficiaries came; in 1995, the two areas exhibited virtually identical levels of extreme poverty, but in 2003 the level of extreme poverty in resettlement areas was some 10 per cent below that of communal areas, perhaps reflecting a degree of acquired resilience.

In the PASS results for 2003/04, many newly resettled farmers were categorized not as living in resettlement areas but rather in large-scale commercial farming areas. These latter areas witnessed a 247 per cent increase in very poor households between 1995 and 2003—from just above 10 per cent to just below 40 per cent, the worst deterioration in poverty levels in the country (PASS 2006 pp24-5). The PASS authors speculated that this outcome might be the result of the worsening situation of farm workers, whose

employers had been evicted, and the effects of drought on the newly resettled farmers.

Poverty in resettlement areas remains very high, perhaps just as high as it is in the communal areas, with which resettlement was to have provided such a contrast (Kinsey 2003). Moreover, rapid socioeconomic stratification within the new resettlement areas appears to be the common experience (Scoones 2008). While nationally the Gini coefficient²³ increased from 0.59 in 1995 to 0.64 in 2003, indicating a worsening of income distribution as a minority became richer while the majority became poorer, the author found extreme Gini coefficients above 0.80 for several new resettlement areas in 2002 (Kinsey 2003).

LAND AND LIVELIHOODS

This final section returns to the issue of rural livelihoods in the context of Zimbabwe's land redistribution programme. A set of basic questions needs to be addressed if even tentative conclusions are to be drawn. In addressing this set of themes, I draw heavily upon Ian Scoones' recent paper (2008) and upon my own work of the past 28 years.

Who are the beneficiaries of land redistribution?

The importance of political patronage in shaping access to land since 2000, indeed since 1980, especially to the highly capitalized farms in favourable areas with easy access to Harare's markets, is easy to misestimate given the skewed nature of media reporting and government's lack of transparency. While elite capture has been an unsavoury feature of land redistribution from the very beginning,²⁴ it is however very far from the full story. For example, in Scoones' recent work (across 16 sites and 400 households in Masvingo), 60 per cent of the new settlers were classified as 'ordinary farmers' — defined as people who had joined the land invasions from nearby communal areas and had been allocated land through subsequent administrative procedures.

This group was not a well-off, politically connected elite but rather rural people in search of land as the basis for a viable livelihood—or simply copying the example of their neighbours who relocated. They were very similar to households in the communal areas—although somewhat younger and better educated, but equally poor in terms of assets. This group is very comparable to those observed by the author who left the original resettlement areas in 2000/01. Others also benefited from the land redistribution, including relatively small numbers of former farm workers. This group constituted seven per cent of the total, a similar proportion to the war veterans, who had often led the farm invasions and who, as a result, generally had slightly larger plots (Scoones 2008).

The figures reported by Scoones contrast somewhat with those from the much larger, but still incomplete 2008 AIAS study. AIAS reports very slightly higher overall percentages of beneficiaries coming from communal areas and former commercial farms, but the proportion is significantly higher on A1 than A2 holdings in both cases. Similarly, the proportion of A2 beneficiaries coming from urban areas is 77 per cent greater than for A1 beneficiaries (AIAS 2008, p16). Curiously, Scoones does not report

²³ The Gini coefficient measures distributional inequality. A Gini of 1.0—perfect inequality—indicates that all wealth is held by a single person; a Gini of 0.0 indicates that all wealth is shared equally.

²⁴ Judith Todd (2007, pp259-60) describes in vivid terms how Joshua Nkomo, during a 1988 tour of Matabeleland South, discovered that the political elite had acquired 'ownership' of more than 75 per cent of the farms purchased for resettlement in the province with donor—largely British—funds.

on gender-related aspects in his paper, but of the 2,055 beneficiaries surveyed by AIAS, only some 19 per cent were women (p27).²⁵

In the new resettlement areas, especially the A2 schemes, there were sizeable numbers of civil servants (14 per cent) who had been allocated land. With salaries from their government jobs becoming increasingly valueless, access to land provided an asset that could perhaps sustain an alternative livelihood, or perhaps could be sold or rented. An additional five per cent of beneficiaries identified by Scoones were business-people, who were involved in both rural and non-rural trades.

Finally, Scoones notes, there was a group, ‘mostly given land in the A2 schemes, who were members of the security services—police, army and intelligence officers with strong political connections’. This group, amounting to three per cent of total beneficiaries, appeared to be the one ‘most associated with political patronage and ruling party connections’.²⁶

The presence of these groups—civil servants, business-people and security service staff—contrasts sharply with the composition of resettlement communities created in the 1980s. In a review in the mid-1990s, it was estimated by the government that over 80 per cent of those selected for resettlement to that point fell into the declared priority categories of the most-needy: refugees and the war-affected, the landless, and those with insufficient land to maintain themselves (Zimbabwe 1995). Work by the author has shown that this figure is certainly an overestimate, as more than 40 per cent of households resettled in the early 1980s should have been disqualified on strict application of the selection criteria then in force (Kinsey 2002b). Nevertheless, there is no evidence from the examination of resettlement beneficiaries in terms of household characteristics that inconsistent use of the selection criteria resulted in the selection of a privileged elite in the early 1980s.

The somewhat haphazard use of the selection criteria did, however, result in a set of beneficiary households that was less homogeneously disadvantaged than otherwise might have been the case. The heterogeneity of the households selected is evidenced most greatly in terms of factors related to personal backgrounds of the heads of households and the stage attained in the household cycle. One of the dominant features of Zimbabwe’s original resettlement programme was its uniformity of approach—a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to resettlement. Would the inclusion of modules or activities to address the specific needs of certain categories of households have resulted in more positive outcomes? Or would a more conscious mixing of households possessing different characteristics have stimulated greater community dynamism? It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the question of whether such a programme redesign would have yielded greater benefits, or yielded them more quickly. The

²⁵ This figure almost certainly overstates the proportion of female beneficiaries because Zimbabwean women married to aliens, who are largely excluded from benefiting, will declare themselves widows or divorcees in order to access land.

²⁶ Because research tends to link one household with one holding, it overlooks the activities of the asset-strippers widely reported to be busy in prime farming areas. In such cases, a powerful individual will occupy a farm in February or March, just before most crops are ready to be harvested, and forcibly evict the owner. The crops will then be harvested and sold, the homestead looted, and all farm equipment spirited away. In some cases, the occupier also applies for a loan to develop his ‘new farm’, and then immediately abandons it, defaults on the loan, and occupies another farm the following year. In the most notorious case reported, one politically influential individual has gone through this cycle four times.

existence of such heterogeneity in ‘screened’ populations does at least suggest the issue needs serious consideration.

Scoones is positive in his view that greater diversity among those resettled can add in different ways both expertise and connections which may ultimately assist the broader community. This wider social mix in the new resettlement areas, he notes, contrasts both with older resettlement schemes and the communal areas. Moreover, he conjectures that such diversity may offer ‘opportunities for economic and social innovation’ in the fast-track areas. Scant attention, however, is given to the probability that innovation springing from underlying socio-economic differentiation is likely to serve only to accentuate and strengthen differentiation.

An appreciation of the way demographic changes affect social composition and alter the ability to utilize land is critical in future policy support for both the new resettlement communities and the older ones. While it will be important not to assume that the new A1 farms merely replicate the old communal areas, and that the new A2 farms are not simply miniature commercial farms, it must be borne in mind that benefits will be slow to materialize in both. And with the passage of time, what now looks like a radically transformed agrarian structure will be modified by intractable social and economic forces. A generation is all the time that is available. What is required is the recognition that sensibly tuned policy measures, matched to practical support, are necessary if the still-to-be-realized potentials are to be developed. Part of this recognition demands something completely new in Zimbabwe—an acceptance of the notion that much ‘wisdom’ about what is needed to make land reform work resides in the communities concerned, and not in some distant bureaucratic centre.²⁷

The central point here is that land redistribution efforts in Zimbabwe, both past and more recent, have served primarily to provide access to land for those who are most likely in future to use it to broaden the basis of their livelihoods. This is a story that is as yet only partly told. And a theme I return to later in the paper.

Much better known are the anecdotes around the numbers of outrageous land seizure cases that have dominated the public media, although many cases have never attracted media attention.²⁸ The methods employed to evict farmers vary from intimidation to bribery, but typically the ‘new owners’ arrive at a farm gate accompanied by land department officials armed with ‘take-over documents’ (Mudzwiti 16 March 2009). Hired heavies are often used to intimidate farmers, and white farmers will then be arrested by the police ‘for defending their properties’. The police, moreover, refuse to uphold the law, justifying their inaction on the grounds that the ‘farm invasions are political’ (Chikari 16 March 2009). In one recent example, the speaker of Zimbabwe’s Senate, one Edna Madzongwe—the beneficiary of a number of other, now unproductive farms, showed up at a local citrus estate accompanied by 20 others, including police, and armed with a copy of a local newspaper in lieu of legal papers (JAG 26 & 27 February 2009). Despite a High Court order protecting the estate, the white farmer was ordered to cease all farming operations. Simultaneously, the minister

²⁷ Ongoing work by two of my collaborators, Abigail Barr at Oxford and Marleen Dekker at Leiden, is investigating ‘social capital’ and the long-term development and growth of social networks in the original resettlement communities.

²⁸ The best systematic documentation of individual experiences is provided by Justice for Agriculture, an organization representing farmers’ interests.

responsible for land and resettlement denied that there were fresh farm invasions and disruption of farming activities (*The Zimbabwe Independent* 14 March 2009).

The foundations for growth: Levels of investment in resettlement areas

The international media in particular have portrayed Zimbabwe's land redistribution programme as characterized by looting, chaos and destruction.²⁹ As with the entire resettlement programme for 29 years, a critical problem countrywide has been government's repeated failure to prevent vandalization of production infrastructure and assets; irrigation infrastructure has been particularly affected since 2000³⁰ (Marongwe n.d.; Zawe 2006).

Even as there has unquestionably been substantial damage done to farming infrastructure across the more heavily capitalized, former commercial agricultural ventures, there has also been in some areas at least a significant volume of new investment that mirrors the experience of two decades ago in the older resettlement areas. This investment, almost entirely from private, individual efforts with precious little provision through state or formal financial mechanisms, has occurred mainly through the capitalization of human labour in the landscape and in community facilities.

Many of the production technologies that characterize large-scale commercial farming systems do not fit well into predominantly smallholder mixed-farming systems. Thus most new investment—certainly in A1 farming areas—will not be made in the form of familiar centre-pivot irrigation infrastructure, mechanized dairies, or ranks of tobacco barns; rather, investments will be more modest and gradual. Indeed, the dearth of agricultural credit caused by the absence of recognized forms of land rights and pandemonium in local and international financial markets ensures that new farmers will remain heavily reliant on self-financing for some time to come.

As was the case with those settled in the 1980s, the recent settlers, especially on the smallholder schemes, have cleared sizeable areas of land for cropping (typically around three hectares per household), involving substantial labour in clearing bush, de-stumping and ploughing (Scoones 2008). Recent small-scale settlers have also built new homes (41 per cent of brick), many with tin or asbestos roofing; and this performance outshines that of those who resettled a generation earlier. As with the earlier settlers, key investments have made been in cattle, with herds building up quickly. Just under two-thirds now have cattle in the Masvingo resettlement areas, with an average herd size of five animals,³¹ but the proportion owning cattle across the six districts represented in the AIAS study is much lower—just over 42 per cent (p94).

Cattle are a special category of asset in Zimbabwe for reasons that are too numerous to detail here. Three important characteristics need to be mentioned however. First, cattle

²⁹ Zimbabwe's banning of foreign journalists has contributed to some highly distorted reporting of events within the country.

³⁰ Buildings, particularly tobacco barns, have commonly been demolished to provide the bricks with which the new settlers have built their houses. It has been reported to the author that Chinese-owned companies are purchasing stolen irrigation pipes and power and telephone cables, reverse-smelting them into ore-like slag, and exporting the slag to China.

³¹ The proportion now owning cattle compares very favorably with the comparable figure for those resettled in the initial programme, but the mean number of cattle owned should be treated with caution since it can conceal huge disparities in herd sizes.

provide critical inputs to smallholder farming in the form of draft power and manure. Second, as biological capital, cattle have until very recently served as a significant hedge against inflation. And, third, cattle are a mobile asset. By focusing on changes in beef marketing chains, Mavedzenge *et al.* (2008) perhaps underplay some important dimensions of livestock production that they lump into what they call a 'technocratic' livestock model. One of these is disease control, while another is systematic breeding.

Newly resettled farmers have also acquired equipment (ploughs, bicycles, ox-drawn carts, motorized vehicles, etc.), and levels of asset ownership are higher than in the neighbouring communal areas and comparable with the earlier generation of settlers. That most new settlers have been accumulating since acquiring their land, despite rapidly worsening economic hardships, is a remarkable accomplishment.

The investment picture on the A2 schemes examined by Scoones is less promising. Most A2 schemes in Masvingo province differ little from the A1 areas, with only the homestead and a small portion of the land utilized. A few A2 holders, however (those with access to alternative income sources, usually in foreign exchange), have managed to capitalize with new equipment and to develop new enterprises. Examples cited include an irrigated wheat farm, a linked dairy-beef production feedlot system, and horticultural enterprises based on reclaimed abandoned irrigation equipment. Such endeavours, however, are rare, and they have yet to be confirmed as successes. Most farmers have been unable to invest due to the dire state of the wider economy.

Again, the AIAS data somewhat temper Scoones' reported findings. Over one-fifth of all beneficiaries failed to cultivate any of their land in 2007/08, while the smallholder A1 beneficiaries cultivated significantly more of their land than the larger A2 group (p70). Only a quarter of beneficiaries managed to cultivate more than 80 per cent of their land. Tellingly, nearly 73 per cent of attempted cropping had no source of funding at all, not even farmers' own resources (p82); government schemes provided funding for less than 20 per cent of cases, while the private sector accounted for some 8 per cent.

Marongwe goes on to observe that the lack of tenure security for the new farmers has also been associated with a lack of investment on the land, potentially undermining agricultural production. With the absence of tenure security serving as a disincentive to investment, beneficiary selection was nevertheless inconsistent and indiscriminate, and to some extent was 'free for all' provided one was in the 'correct political camp' (Marongwe n.d. p30). In the end, land was allocated to some farmers with such low individual resource bases that it is inconceivable that they will make any investment on the land. Marongwe concludes in this regard that poverty alleviation via multiplier effects, especially for the A2 schemes, is questionable under post-2000 land redistribution approaches.

In short, Zimbabwe's entire history of land redistribution is marked by an enormous willingness on the part of beneficiaries to invest—to capitalize their own labour into improving the land and making it more productive. This willingness is matched, in the small-scale settlement areas at least, by an obvious readiness to invest both labour and capital into construction of shared social overhead facilities. The chief impediment to achieving the full potential agricultural production levels is the abject failure of the state to support those to whom it has given land.

Livelihoods and agriculture in disarray

While it is an exaggeration to claim that the agricultural sector in Zimbabwe is in a state of complete collapse, it is no overstatement to assert that agriculture is going through extremely difficult times. Many of the institutions that have traditionally supported farming activities—for example, the extension and veterinary services, the departments of agricultural engineering and of irrigation, the District Development Fund, and the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority—have struggled to adjust to the new circumstances that have followed radical land redistribution in 2000. Not only have they been challenged by the rapid loss of skilled staff to the diaspora, but also they have had to contend with the arrogation of responsibilities and functions of the professional Ministry of Agriculture by the ill-informed Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe.

Radical restructuring is inevitably painful and even more so when it is combined with economic collapse and recurrent drought. Although trend indicators for all commodities continue to point down, these are a reflection of two things. First is the transition from the old, formal, commercial agricultural economy to an altered agricultural economy in which the smallholder subsector will inevitably play a greater role. And second is the failure of the entire agricultural support industry to evolve quickly enough to be able to cater to the rapidly changing nature of demand.

Based on his work in Masvingo Province, where the former commercial agricultural sector was dominated by beef ranching, the wildlife sector and sugar and citrus estates, Scoones (2008) is positive about underlying developments. He notes that the beef industry has transformed radically (although the wildlife sector is suffering from the decline in tourism and hunting); former beef ranches have been taken over by small-scale mixed agriculture, with significant new investment in multiple-use livestock herds and flocks, combined with arable agriculture. While operating well below capacity due to the poor supply of inputs, particularly seed and fertilizer, this sector, especially the small-scale A1 farms, is producing. In the relatively good 2005/06 season, around three-quarters of households in Scoones' more climatologically favourable research sites produced more than one tonne of maize, sufficient for household provision and very limited sales. This experience was not replicated in the less-favourable areas, however, or in recent drier years when the food security situation has been very precarious.³² In the six districts covered by the AIAS fast-track survey, most in more favourable areas for maize than Masvingo, A1 farmers on average produced just over 4 tonnes and A2 farmers just over 19 tonnes in 2007/08; but, with the severe shortage of inputs, the average yield was only just over 1.5 tonnes per hectare (p88).

In other parts of the country, small-scale settlers have successfully taken to growing what should be for them a lucrative export crop—tobacco. They have mastered the demanding tasks of planting and fumigating seedbeds, transplanting, curing, and grading of tobacco. Levels of disenchantment with growing such high-value crops mounted very rapidly however because of unrealistically low government-controlled prices, inefficient marketing systems, the inability of growers to convert cheques into cash, and the impossibility of sourcing inputs to maintain production.

³² The experience in Masvingo is reported more extensively in Mavedzenge *et al.* (2008).

Such findings illustrate the potential of small-scale agriculture in the newer resettlements, as one among perhaps many sources of livelihood from diversified portfolios of off-farm activities, craft work and trade.³³ The potential of agriculture, as the core livelihood element for most rural households, needs to be nurtured and enhanced by policy interventions and investments that guarantee timely input supply and broad extension support, both severely lacking everywhere in the country. For drier areas, water management is the key constraint, and investment in water harvesting and small-scale irrigation, including electricity and water distribution infrastructure, is undeniably a major priority for the future.

My long research experience in Zimbabwe's resettlement areas leads me, however, to temper Scoones' positive interpretation of the meaning of 'diversified portfolios of off-farm activities'. As I have reported earlier (Kinsey 2002a), the proportion of small-scale households reporting one or more non-farm³⁴ sources of income tends to grow over time—and most rapidly in times of stress, such as drought—as does the number of activities undertaken. What happens though is that, at the same time that average non-farm earnings per household are growing—lending strength to the arguments in favour of diversified livelihoods, the mean earnings per activity are declining—implying that households are pushing themselves closer and closer to the margins of viability. When the capital available is insufficient to permit self-employment activities to operate at the most appropriate scale or to reach the most promising markets, resettlement areas seem to reach the state of 'over-trading' and market saturation that characterize so many communal areas. This certainly appears to be the case for those activities with the lowest barriers to entry.

Similarly, as I read the work of Scoones and his collaborators, I am struck by a powerful sense of *déjà vu*. Their fieldwork, carried out five to seven years after fast-track land acquisition began, uncovered exactly the same kinds of phenomena I observed following an equal interval of time after the first resettlement in the early 1980s. New opportunities had opened up and unlocked new forms of entrepreneurialism. There seemed to be unbounded energy to take advantage of the wider access provided by land reform, and it was impossible not to be enthusiastic about the potential of land redistribution to improve the economic fortunes of large numbers of rural households. I am now all too well aware, however, that it is very easy to mistake disequilibrium for dynamism. Mavedzenge *et al.* clearly also recognize this problem (2008 p634):

A bigger question is posed as a result of this assessment: are we seeing a sustained transition, a fundamental reconfiguration of production and markets, or a passing phase, after which a new technocratic order will be imposed, controlled by a new set of elite players?

Livelihoods in a disintegrating rural economy

While the wider formal economy is under extreme duress, brought on by hyperinflation

³³ A traditional method of diversifying rural household livelihoods is through remittance income from family members working in Zimbabwe's urban areas, but urban employment levels are likely to grow only very slowly following the return of economic stability. The current pattern is for one or more family members to leave the country to seek employment.

³⁴ I prefer this term to 'off-farm' because it includes all nonagricultural activities wherever performed.

and deepening bureaucratic inertia, Scoones reports that the rural economy in Masvingo Province has been adapting fast. The radical shift in agrarian structure noted earlier has altered previous value chains—dominated by large-scale commercial agriculture, white-owned businesses and government parastatals—beyond all recognition.

The beef value chain supplies a good example. Reliance in the past was on only a few suppliers from the large-scale ranchers, with beef going through a few abattoirs or the parastatal Cold Storage Company. Today a wide range of sources supply meat, and many new players are involved along the chain. The focus has shifted from export sales to local selling and market connections.³⁵ Beef is now sold both through urban supermarkets, as well as through small butcheries and local slaughter outlets in the rural areas and townships.

Newly emerging supply chains in Masvingo are also reported to be linking the resettlement areas with feedlots and butcheries in patterns of ownership and management that differ from the past. Thus, new players are participating in the rural economy, and benefits appear to be more widely distributed. Economic flows have altered and now link local supply and demand, as well as new trading links further afield.³⁶

Scoones also finds evidence of substantial investment in new business start-ups in and around the more recent resettlement areas. These include, mirroring the pattern of older areas, shops, bottle stores, hair-dressers, butcheries and transport operations. Such investment has generated a mix of new economic linkages, creating some much-needed rural employment. The beneficial multiplier effects have, however, been seriously undermined by the hyperinflationary pressures, together with the imposition of administrative price controls and other restrictive measures.

Future strategies for the rural economy must prioritize the enhancement of economic stability while boosting local production and spending power. At present, the overall net benefits of the radical restructuring that is following land reform are far from clear. There seems little doubt, however, that, fostered by appropriate support—institutional and industrial, wider economic growth can be realized. What is vital is to ensure that such support does not fetter the diversified entrepreneurialism that has been seen emerging by Scoones, myself and others in recent years. While the new structures and continuing adjustments may appear haphazard, unregulated and chaotic at times, especially to administrators who see their primary task as control, their benefits are more widely distributed and the economic relationships more deeply incorporated in the local economies. Over a longer horizon, these new economic currents may enhance broad-based and resilient growth and livelihood generation in ways that the old agrarian structure could never do.

CONCLUSIONS

Judging by the perceptions reported, on the one hand, by out-of-touch journalists, remote critics and those most violently affected, Zimbabwean ‘land reform’ has been a total failure. On the other hand, government sycophants, neighbouring countries in SADC, some distant academics and a few African-American activists applaud the

³⁵ There have been some supply constraints, as new farmers build up their herds and avoid selling to retain assets that outperform inflation.

³⁶ These often involve illegal cross-border economic exchange.

programme as a complete success. The truth, as usual, lies somewhere in between.

An erroneous assumption that underlay much of the post-1999 land acquisition was that settlement of good quality, well-developed land would lead at worst to sustained production levels and, at best, to immediate increases in agricultural production. Many other issues were overlooked in the land-acquisition process that ultimately resulted in the collapse of production on the formerly highly productive enterprises. Such factors included the background, aspirations and expertise of beneficiaries, the adequacy of extension support, the absence of secure tenure arrangements, and the shortage of farming inputs, among others.

Evidence to date is proving wrong the assumption that transfer of productive land from one set of farmers to another can be carried out without compromising production, even in the short term. Indeed, as Marongwe (n.d.) notes, Zimbabwe's recent experience with land acquisition gives weight to the argument that the so-called 'Fast Track' land programme contributed both directly and indirectly to the national escalation of poverty.

The contrasts among A1 and A2 farmers, small- and large-scale agricultural operators, and smallholders and commercial growers are increasingly arbitrary and confusing. There is now only a blurred distinction among many farmers operating under these various labels. Since 2000, the old dualistic agricultural economy inherited from the colonial era and based on race and scale of operation, has vanished for good. In its place, a new agrarian structure is rapidly emerging (albeit one with its own dualistic characteristics). This evolving structure creates challenges and opportunities, along with winners and losers, but it cannot be characterized universally as abject failure ... as critics of Mugabe's 'land grab' are wont to do. New policy frameworks will have to evolve to recognize the fresh realities on the ground and avoid the rigidities that could come from the re-imposition of outdated and inappropriate models and the continuation of old ways of thinking about land and livelihoods.

An open question is how long the recovery period will be before Zimbabwe's economy returns to possessing anything like the capacity and capabilities it had at its strongest in the past. It will be a considerable time before the state agencies that once serviced agriculture are able to do so again. In the vacuum of support services that developed following the 2000 land invasions and subsequent economic decay, there is evidence that former commercial farmers joined forces with the invaders to implement resettlement programmes in many types of novel coexistence arrangements and sharecropping practices. As noted by Zawe (2006 p339), 'This scenario shaped a new policy process that was born out of practical and political necessities of the actors on the ground rather than as a result of concerted governmental planning.'

In his analysis of long-term resettlement outcomes, Mazvimavi (2004) also stresses the lessons that can be learned from ground-level experience, provided the ideological preconceptions of planners can be overcome. For example, he concludes that there is no evidence that male-headed households are any more efficient than female-headed ones, and that social structures that affect working relationships among people are important in contributing to agricultural productivity. Farmers in the old resettlement areas are judged to be on the whole a technically efficient group of producers, and only an increase in purchased inputs, especially chemical fertilizers, will increase total factor

productivity. Using the same data, Chikwama (2004) concludes that technical efficiency levels converge over time across different agro-ecological zones because farmers in less-favoured areas devise farming systems that suit their circumstances far better than the recommended ones. Importantly, he also discovers that, given the incomplete capital markets faced by resettled households, the attempt to overcome credit constraints by seeking rural off-farm employment works only partially; such employment improves capital investment for more commercialized agriculture only when the adoption of commercial farming frees some resources from agricultural activities that then go toward expanding the rural off-farm sector. Chikwama's research contradicts the widely held view that rural off-farm income provides households with cash resources to assist them in financing farm investment. Resettled households in the 1990s used their rural off-farm earnings almost entirely to finance consumption, and the same will be even more true in 2009.

The key macro-policy challenge is the continuing stabilization of the economy. Somehow, in parallel with this undertaking must come provision of credit and input supply for new farmers—not only those undertaking recognized 'commercial' enterprises, but also the many commercially minded smallholders who are innovating in ways perhaps unfamiliar to the old credit administrators. Yet, however essential this provision is, credit institutions and input supply houses have been so crippled by financial and economic mismanagement that they themselves face major challenges to recovery.³⁷ Moreover, the absence of title deeds to their land poses what many observers regard as an insurmountable difficulty to new farmers seeking credit. Donor support for the 2009/10 season is understandably cautious and focuses almost exclusively on supplying established small-scale farmers with sufficient inputs to ensure domestic food security.

Even though much diversity has been lost with fast-track land reform, the agricultural sector is now in many ways more diverse than ever in the country's history. Building on the strengths of this diversity by investing in structures and systems not previously supported could lead to a substantial revitalization of the agricultural economy. Nevertheless, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that in the present economic climate most of the needed resources can only come through self-investment. The institutions that in the past have supported agriculture have not yet gone through a transformation comparable to that which the agricultural sector has.

What can the available analyses of household characteristics and economic performance tell us about the poor and the benefits from land redistribution? The evidence reviewed here gives us hope that land reform, properly done, can genuinely uplift the disadvantaged. There are two important caveats however. One is that doing so requires time for the medicine to work. Many changes just briefly touched here are only detectable over quite long time horizons. Yet there is often an impatience to see results, and this can result in inappropriate expectations, design and management styles. Land reform is an approach to poverty alleviation that does not tinker at the margin of livelihoods—rather it profoundly alters people's lives. These alterations occur in many dimensions, and benefits come from the chemistry of combining access to resources,

³⁷ The Agriculture Bank of Zimbabwe, once a major financier of farming, is said to be on the brink of collapse not only because of the effects of hyperinflation on its capital base but also because of the systematic looting of its resources by politicians who defaulted on their loans (Chenga 2009).

technology, institutional support, social capital, learning opportunities, and much more. Clearly, many of those admitted to the programme in Zimbabwe were unlikely in either the short or long run to make best use of the land resource. But, over time and with the appropriate support, many—perhaps most—households should be able to make impressive gains.

The second caveat arises from the fact that rural households are neither homogeneous nor static. Many of the households in the resettlement areas where I have worked for nearly 30 years can no longer be regarded as farming families. Rather, they have become part of what I call the ‘grandmother economy’, characterized by the elderly looking after the very young but with no middle generation to do the hard work farming demands, and producing at or below subsistence levels. No amount of credit or input provision will alter this scenario. These households command land far in excess of their ability to utilize it, and increasing production from such land would appear to require the development of a land rental market, a more dynamic rural labour market, or both.

A new Zimbabwean government must be careful however. Too much of what has happened in the past has been guided by ideological posturing, self-interest and misinformation—from all quarters. For a rigorous, sustainable policy approach for the future, a careful examination of the evidence on the ground must be the point of departure. This examination must involve an empirical questioning of the evolving dynamics of land, agriculture and livelihoods—and, critically, the perspectives of farmers and land-users themselves. Zimbabwe now confronts both declining food security and rapidly diminishing livelihood possibilities. To date, it remains an open question as to whether Zimbabwe-style land reform is an avenue for growth and the deepening of beneficial intersectoral linkages within the economy—or merely an alternative path for survival in a rural landscape.

Much still needs to be done, but there is also much to build upon ... and much to learn. With the right approaches, the gains from land redistribution can be consolidated and the as-yet-unrealized potential of small-scale agriculture to be the engine of economic growth and regeneration can be tapped.

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