

Urban Livelihoods after the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the impact of land access on the livelihoods of urban middle-income, low-income and urban poor who are beneficiaries of Zimbabwe's fast track land reform programme. Focusing on Bulawayo-based beneficiaries, it finds a wealth of historical and cultural value attached to this new land ownership. It also finds that while not all new Black farmers are productive, there is emerging evidence of some urban-based smallholder farmers investing private capital in on-farm implements and operations resulting in sizeable food production for urban consumption. There is also emerging entrepreneurialism among those who produce surpluses as they trade these in urban food markets. Through this, they are not only raising income but channelling food into the urban food system and urban food chains. However, even though there are success cases, the paper identifies financial, input, asset and technical know-how limitations among urban based smallholder farmers. In view of these, it poses questions on what policy interventions need to be instituted, by who and how to support these smallholder urban based farmers become sustainable and more productive under Zimbabwe's new agrarian structure.

INTRODUCTION

Land reform is an essential component of efforts to reduce poverty and create sustainable livelihoods, not just for the rural poor, but for urban households as well. However, despite important empirical studies on the rural focused distributional outcomes and livelihood impacts of Zimbabwe's fast track land reform programme (FTLRP) (African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) 2009; Scoones 2010; Scoones et al. 2011; Scoones et al. 2012), there has to date been no systematic assessment of the livelihood impacts of this land reform on beneficiary urban households. This paper aims to fill this knowledge gap through focusing on Bulawayo-based beneficiaries of the land reform programme. It explores the impacts of land access on the livelihoods of urban based middle-income, low-income and urban poor who are beneficiaries of the A1 resettlement model. An A1 farm is a small-scale 40 hectare farm either self-contained or in a village-like arrangement (Scoones et al. 2011). The arguments in this paper are informed by the following questions: What has happened to A1 urban beneficiaries' livelihoods since acquiring land? What are the tangible effects of this new access to land on their urban livelihoods? Have their livelihoods been transformed? If so, how? What challenges are they facing? What does

this new agrarian structure mean for urban livelihoods going into the future?

Critics of Zimbabwe's fast track land reform argue that it destroyed agriculture and the economy. They note that 'crony capitalism' and corruption resulted in previously productive farms being allocated to ZANU-PF politicians, war veterans, and the elite with no expertise or interest in commercial farming (Rukuni and Jensen 2003; Campbell 2008; Bond 2008; Hawkins 2012). These new Black farmers have over the years left vast tracts of prime agricultural land unutilized or underutilised (Theron 2011). The result was a collapse of agricultural productivity creating a 'humanitarian (food) crisis' (Campbell 2008; Bond 2008; Hawkins 2012). There were also extensive losses of jobs within both the agricultural and downstream industrial sectors (Rukuni and Jensen 2003). These critics further ascribe all of "Zimbabwe's economic and farming woes to the displacement of white farmers and related 'misgovernance', while the effects of diverse internal and external factors operating over time, before and during the fast track land reform, are ignored" (Moyo 2011). This narrative is the dominant discourse on Zimbabwe's fast track land reform. Its implicit assumptions are that the new Black farmers are not farming, the few that are farming are not productive enough hence the 'humanitarian crisis' engulfing Zimbabwe. On the contrary, this paper argues that

while not all new Black farmers are productive, some critics' assumptions have no empirical basis especially in relation to farm beneficiary socio-demographics and levels of productivity in some smallholder A1 farms.

The arguments in this paper are informed by empirical evidence which indicates that a variety of urban based socio-economic classes benefited from the FTLRP (AIAS 2009; Moyo 2010; Scoones et al. 2011). This means it is not only ZANU-PF aligned political and business elites, securocrats, war-veterans and youth militia who benefited from the FTLRP. Ordinary members of society such as civil servants, low-income industrial workers, urban informal traders, the unemployed and urban poor were also beneficiaries under the A1 resettlement model (Moyo 2007; AIAS 2009; Elich 2011; Scoones et al. 2011; Scoones et al. 2012). It is these urban middle-income, low-income and urban poor who are the subject here. What is unique about the 62 beneficiaries under discussion is their spatial location since all live in the city, yet they are A1 smallholder farmers in rural areas.

Objectives of the Study

This study examines the impacts of land access on the livelihoods of urban middle-income, low-income and urban poor who are beneficiaries of Zimbabwe's fast track land reform programme. The specific objectives of the study are to investigate the levels of on-farm agricultural productivity by A1 farmers, examine the impact of A1 farm ownership on the socio-economic conditions of beneficiary households and the operational challenges faced by the farmers in their production activities.

Land Reform and Resettlement in Zimbabwe from 1980-1990: A Synoptic Contextual Note

Zimbabwe inherited a highly unequal land ownership structure from colonial Rhodesia. Inequality in landholding between White and Black people at independence in 1980 was glaring: about 6,000 White commercial farmers owned 15.5 million hectares of the most prime land, while 8,500 small-scale African farmers had 1.4 million hectares and an estimated 700 000 communal farming households subsisted on 16.4 million hectares located in drier and less fertile regions (Cliffe 1998, 2000; Moyo 2000, 2004; Sachikonye

2003). Given these inequities in land access and ownership, the first government of Zimbabwe strongly committed to addressing them through the Normal Intensive Resettlement Programme. This land reform programme which was pursued within a state centred but market-based approach to land acquisition on a 'willing-seller-willing-buyer basis' (Cliffe 2000; Moyo 2004; Sachikonye 2003) managed to resettle 52 000 households on about 2.8 million hectares of purchased land (Chaumba et al. 2003) by the end of the 1980s. This was however a long way short of the government's initial target of resettling 162 000 families on nine million hectares of land.

With the expiry of the Lancaster House Agreement in 1990 – which stipulated that between 1980 and 1990 only land deemed to be under-utilised could be expropriated, and this had to be bought in foreign currency – the government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) amended constitutional provisions governing property rights. In 1992, the government passed the Land Acquisition Act which gave it strengthened powers to acquire land for resettlement subject to the payment of fair compensation, powers to limit the size of farms and introduce a land tax (Stoneman and Bowyer-Bower 2000; Human Rights Watch 2002). Despite this new land law, the pace of land acquisition and resettlement in the 1990s slowed further in comparison with the relative impetus of the first decade of independence. Fewer than 20 000 new settlers received land between 1990 and 1997, signifying a substantial slow-down in land reform. By the end of 1997, almost 71 000 households (including those resettled in the 1980s) had been resettled on 3.4 million hectares (Stoneman 2000; Sachikonye 2003). However, only 19 per cent of the 3.4 million hectares made available to the landless poor was classed as prime land, the rest was either marginal or unsuitable for grazing or cultivation (Stoneman 2000; Human Rights Watch 2002).

The reasons for the immense slowdown in land reform and resettlement during the 1990s are numerous (Moyo 2004; Sachikonye 2003; Raftopoulos and Phimister 2003; Bush 2007; Moyo 2010; Scoones et al. 2011). Among many others, some of the most cited reasons given for the reduced pace of resettlement in the 1990s include the government's argument that the market-driven 'willing-buyer-willing-seller' approach was constraining since it limited the scope of spatially matching land supply with

demand (Raftopoulos and Phimister 2003; Sachikonye 2003). The government further argues that scarcity of land, escalation of market determined land prices (which had trebled since the late 1980s) and government's lack of funds to pay these prices limited its capacity to achieve its targets (Raftopoulos and Phimister 2003; Sachikonye 2003). These government arguments are however disputed. For example, Raftopoulos and Phimister (2003) argue that even though the government introduced the Land Acquisition Act (1992) to support its land redistribution and resettlement programme, these legal developments had little political backing. There was generally little political will and momentum for land reform as most energies and attention during this period were directed towards implementing the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (Sachikonye 2003). The government also did not feel, or was immune from, local political pressure for land reform. Furthermore, until 1998, there was little organised pressure from peasants and the landless (Sachikonye 2003) on the government to expedite land reform and resettlement.

All the above, and other factors, compounded to slow down Zimbabwe's land reform and resettlement in the 1990s leaving the racially skewed nature of land ownership intact. By 1999, 12 million hectares of the richest land were still in the hands of about 4,000 large scale commercial farmers, the great majority of them white (Stoneman 2000; Scoones et al. 2011). Thus, Zimbabwe remained one of the most unequal countries in the world where despite wealth in one sector of the white dominated agricultural economy, the majority of the Black population remained poor and landless. This was the racially skewed land ownership context within which the government officially launched the fast track land reform programme in April 2000 against a backdrop of intertwined internal and external political developments coalesced around the land question and the changing political landscape in Zimbabwe (for a full debate on these FTLRP forerunners see Sachikonye 2003; Raftopoulos and Phimister 2003; Hammar and Raftopoulos 2003; Moyo 2004; Bush 2007; Moyo 2010; Scoones et al. 2011).

Chaos, destruction of property, asset stripping, violence and murder of some white commercial farmers characterised the fast track land reform programme (Sachikonye 2003; Hammar

and Raftopoulos 2003; Moyo 2010; Scoones et al. 2011). However, whatever its faults in execution, the FTLRP has undeniably produced a new land occupation, land ownership and agrarian structure in Zimbabwe. Across the country, the FTLRP resulted in the transfer of nearly 8 million hectares of land from White commercial farmers to over 161,500 Black households (Elich 2011; Scoones et al. 2011). These new – predominantly Black – A1 farmers on 4.1 million hectares of land represent over 145,000 smallholder farm households with a further 16,500 households living on 3.5 million hectares under the A2 commercial farming model (Scoones 2010). This indicates that the FTLRP marked a momentous shift in the character and shape of Zimbabwe's land ownership structure (Bush 2007) in terms of the different farm size allocations, the inferred class character and nationality of beneficiaries, as well as the demography of the farmers' population in terms of its racial and gender composition (Moyo 2007). The FTLRP has broadened access to land to various social segments across the urban and rural divide as evidenced by the different socio-economic status of the 62 beneficiaries under discussion. It has reconnected some urban middle-income, low-income and urban poor with their 'ancestral' land. This reconnection has given them a valuable asset with which to make a living (or build livelihoods) and affords them the means and capability to act.

Undeniably, the chaotic and violent land transfers on such a scale from over 4,500 large white commercial farmers to Black A1 smallholder farmers and A2 medium-large scale commercial farmers heavily disrupted agricultural productivity, including that of food and cash crops (Hammar and Raftopoulos 2003; Bush 2007; Moyo 2010; Scoones et al. 2011). This disruption of food and cash crop production was compounded by droughts (Scoones 2010; Elich 2011) with the period 2001-2004 characterized by erratic rainfall patterns and distribution (AIAS 2009). These adverse weather events in conjunction with the disruptive effects of the FTLRP on farm productivity compounded to expedite Zimbabwe's dramatic decline from a leading African agricultural producer, food secure country to a 'basket case' country largely relying on humanitarian aid to feed some of its citizens. However, against the backdrop of such dominant arguments of Zimbabwe's decline to a 'basket case', there remains an untold story of how some A1

farm beneficiaries are utilising their smallholder farms to produce food for household consumption while some entrepreneurial commercially-minded ones are trading surpluses to generate income.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

A qualitative research methodology was used in this study. Within the qualitative framework, purposive sampling and the snowball technique (Babbie and Mouton 2011) were used to identify and interview 62 A1 farmers in December 2010 and January 2011. All 62 farmers were selected in townships that include Nketa (13 farmers), Nkulumane (22 farmers), Cowdray Park (18 farmers) and Magwegwe West (9 farmers).

Sampling was only done in townships because that is where the majority of Bulawayo's Black low-income and urban poor reside as well as some middle-income people. Given that the A1 resettlement model was designed with the general low-income landless (land short) population in mind, townships were thus ideal locations for the sampling and identification of beneficiaries within this socio-economic stratum. In-depth semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection instrument.

URBAN LIVELIHOODS AFTER LAND REFORM IN BULAWAYO: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Access to land – the first time for some – is the first direct benefit. All respondents viewed accessing land as a benefit in its own right and expressed positive views on the meaning, material content and expectations deriving from accessing land. These positive views centred on the historical meaning, quantity and quality of land as well as the material benefits (immediate and future) to be realised from this land. As some of the farmers explained:

“I did not have land before government gave me a farm. I have an A1 farm now; it's big enough for me and my family. I am happy because owning this farm has changed my life. It has changed my life because now I farm some of the food we need, I also have cattle there. These are all things I did not have before (Interview 33, December 2010)”

“I used to stay in Inyathi communal areas. I was sharing farming land with my brother, but now I don't. Inyathi was too crowded; too many

people and livestock were sharing small pieces of land. And the land was not good for farming anyway. Things are different now. I have my own farm in Nyamayendlovu. I grow maize there. I also have cattle, goats and they have enough grazing space on farmland and in surrounding villages (Interview 5, December 2010).”

These comments by smallholder farm beneficiaries do not only suggest that access to land is a general benefit but also imply that the lives of the beneficiaries have been changed. Changes in their lives are captured by visible new land ‘ownership’. Their comments also indicate a view of land as an asset that enables them to produce food, allow livestock investments and guarantees a sustainable livelihood for their children and future generations (more on this later). Such views from the land beneficiaries themselves are very important for they mirror the worthiness of land access from an insider's perspective. Given these farmers' insider perspectives, the immediate questions are: What are the tangible effects of this new access to land on these urban based beneficiaries' livelihoods? Have their livelihoods been transformed? If so, how? What challenges are they facing?

Granted, there is no single narrative. Farmers' experiences are complex and vary; and while not every farmer is succeeding (Elich 2011; Scoones et al. 2012; Hawkins 2012) there are emerging successes among these smallholder farmers. Using private capital, 54 respondents were practising mixed farming, that is, crop cultivation and animal husbandry. This in itself challenges the popular media image of land allocated to black farmers lying idle and going to waste. In terms of productivity, the level of food and cash crop productivity varied not just from season to season but among farmers. Intervening variables included erratic rainfall patterns, limited finance to purchase adequate inputs such as proper hybrid seeds, fertiliser, herbicides and pesticides. Despite inadequate inputs and farming equipment, food production was substantial. A majority 42 farmers were producing food that could meet their subsistence needs as confirmed in the following extracts:

“Last year I had a very good harvest. I filled my granary with maize. I also harvested five bags [1 bag=50 kg] of groundnuts and a lot of round-nuts. Food was not a problem for my family last year (Interview 53, January 2011)”

“I had a lot of maize last year. I also had a lot of groundnuts and pumpkins. I kept going to my farm to collect maize and groundnuts to bring here for my family to eat. Everything was fine and I hope to get more this coming harvest season (Interview 52, January 2011)”

These examples mirror findings from Gutu (Masvingo) where around 75 per cent of A1 smallholder farmers produced more than one tonne of maize each in the 2005-2006 season (Scoones 2008; Scoones et al. 2011). In the Bulawayo case under discussion, the contribution of this food production to urban households' food needs and healthy nutrition is one of its most important assets. Then and now, these rural-urban food transfers have improved urban food access and the quality of food consumed since these farmers directly produce and eat fresh food. This production of food by these urbanites has also diversified their livelihood strategies. Although they still live in predominantly cash driven exchange entitlement based urban economies, food transfers from rural areas give them an additional option for accessing food outside urban food market channels. At a more general level, these transfers are also contributing to the urban food system. They are complementing communal smallholder production (Matondi 2012), medium and large scale commercial farmer's contribution to the urban and national food system.

The level of productivity on farms has also been enhanced by private (individual) capital investment in farming operations. Since the state and financial institutions are not providing agricultural finance to many (Hawkins 2012), 87 per cent of respondents invested their own money in farming operations while a minority 13 per cent had received minimal state support which they invested in farming in conjunction with individual finance. This individual investment is modest, mainly for farm assets such as ox-drawn ploughs, planters, harrows, and carts as well as smaller farming equipment such as axes, hoes, forks, shovels and picks etc. The returns of asset ownership and farm investments on levels of productivity were positive as explained by the farmers:

“When I first got my farm in 2003, I had no farming equipment. I asked my brother in South Africa to borrow me some money to buy equipment. He said he had no money. I then asked my sister who is also in South Africa. She said she

was not going to give me money but buy me the equipment. She bought a plough, planter and hoes. She hired somebody to bring me the equipment here...After getting a good harvest in 2005-2006, I sold some of my maize and bought a bigger harrow and an ox-drawn cart. Last year I bought two cows (Interview 21, December 2010).”

“I have used a lot of money to improve my farming. I bought four herd of cattle when I was allocated a farm. I use those cattle for farming...I have been getting good harvests, like last year I had one granary full of maize and the other full of sorghum. Over the years I have managed to buy three donkeys and a cart. So my cart is hired by other farmers and I charge them a fee for that, so my cart is raising money for me (Interview 48, January 2011).”

These on-farm investments are not only increasing levels of productivity but they are also enhancing smallholder farmers' progression on the socio-economic ladder (see Hanlon et al. 2012 for similar arguments). Livestock ownership – especially cattle – is an agri-business investment in its own right. With 65 per cent of respondents owning between two and 10 cows, there are immediate (on-farm) returns plus potential medium to long-term income returns if farmers decide to sell their cattle in future. Cattle also provide means of transport through ox-drawn carts while cow dung is rich manure. In addition, cattle ownership (especially among the Black African community) also traditionally confers on the owner a certain level of social prestige and respect within the community. However, while this asset ownership and on-farm investment successes are commendable, there is no need to gloss over the fact that as many as 35 per cent of respondents did not own cattle, had fewer farm (and non-farm) assets with direct negative consequences on their levels of productivity. These farm asset limitations (and their negative impacts on productivity) are not only faced by the cohort of farmers under discussion here but are prevalent across the A1 farming community as observed by Matondi (2012) and Hanlon et al. (2012).

The entrepreneurial dynamism of urban based smallholder farmers extends beyond rural asset ownership and investments. On-farm investments enabled 30 per cent of respondents to harvest surplus food produce, especially during the relatively wetter 2005-2006 and 2008-2009

farming seasons. This surplus was transferred by farmers to Bulawayo for trade in urban food markets. As some of the respondents put it:

“I don’t do it every year or all the time but when I do harvest a lot of maize I bring some of it here to town to sell. I raise some money which I then use to buy things that my family need...Maybe if I had a bigger farm, more seeds and fertiliser then I would produce more and sell more here in town (Interview 31, December 2010)”.

“I always plant too much sweet-reeds and watermelons so that I can bring some of them here to sell. I do that every year. Last year I even had too much round-nuts, they were getting rotten in the field. So I decided to go there one weekend and get two bags, I brought them here and sold them in the neighbourhood (Interview 49, January 2011).”

This indicates that while a large part of the agricultural production on A1 farms is for self-consumption, fresh farm surpluses are being traded in townships and other parts of the urban hinterland. Living in a cash-driven urban economy permits households with surpluses to take advantage of diverse urban economic opportunities with a huge competitive market place for their produce. The economic contribution of this marketed produce to household incomes cannot be over-emphasised. This surplus is also a small contribution to the urban food system and urban food chains. While that is currently the case, with improved access to sufficient farming inputs and better farming techniques, there is huge potential for these A1 farmers to increase their surpluses which will not only make them raise more income but further contribute to the urban food system and food chains.

CONCLUSION

While not all beneficiaries of Zimbabwe’s fast track land reform programme are utilising land productively, there is emerging evidence that some urban based A1 smallholder farmers have capacity and are productive despite persistent economic, financial, operational and climatic obstacles. Among the success cases, there is no single simple narrative, experiences are complex and nuanced. In the absence of agri-finance and state financial or institutional support; private individual finances are driving smallholder productivity. Farmers are investing their own

capital in mixed farming purchasing inputs, farm equipment, livestock and non-farm assets. This investment is not only transforming rural economies but also enhancing on-farm productivity leading to production of sizeable quantities of food. The transfer of this food to farming households’ urban homes signifies how access to land has added production entitlement to their food access means thereby diversifying their urban livelihood portfolios. Access to land has thus transformed their livelihoods in the medium to long term. A certain degree of entrepreneurialism is also emerging among those farmers who produce surplus food commodities. These commercial-minded farmers are selling surplus produce in urban food markets. Through this food marketing, they are not only raising income for other household expenditure, but channelling food into the urban food system and urban food chains. A reinvigoration of urban-rural, rural-urban livelihood linkages is clearly being driven by this new cohort of urban based land-owners reminding us that urban livelihoods straddle the rural-urban divide. Admittedly, it’s not all rosy in A1 resettlements, many farmers – including some urban-based ones – are struggling to produce with no inputs, finance, equipment, assets and agricultural technical know-how. These farmers should be targeted by any future policy interventions. Without being prescriptive; input supply, input availability (and affordability) on a commercial basis, provision of credit by agri-finance houses or the state, universal agricultural extension support (as previously done by the Agritex department) are some of the interventions that can be instituted to stimulate, drive and enhance smallholder productivity.

EMERGING POLICY ISSUES: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

What is telling about these urban based smallholder farmers is their ability to farm so productively under difficult economic and weather conditions. Farming in drier Matabeleland provinces – with no (or very limited) state support or agri-finance – farmers are using their own financial resources to purchase inputs, on-farm (and off-farm) assets and run all farming operations. Inevitably, their finances are limited; hence they cannot afford to meet all farming expenses. Despite these obstacles, the scale of investment by the farmers is substantial and they are pro-

ducing. To optimise this productivity, these farmers need to be supported by the state and/or international development partners through ensuring that they have access to inputs on time and capacitated through training that focuses on farming best practice techniques and know-how. Such interventions in Matabeleland provinces should also include investment in small-scale irrigation in order to ensure farmers' productivity is not adversely affected by perennial water stress.

The provision of credit to new farmers – be it by agri-finance houses or state institutions – should also be extended to urban based smallholder A1 farmers since some of them have demonstrated entrepreneurial dynamism with capacity (and potential) to produce surpluses that feed into the urban food system. This credit provision has potential to drive the emergence of a commercial-minded vibrant smallholder A1 farming community that will not only alter the rural economy but further transform and secure the livelihoods of urban based smallholder farmers. Potential positive by-products that can emerge from this state (and private institutions') investment in smallholder farmers are numerous. For example, the growth and enhanced viability of smallholder farming activities has potential to stimulate the development and expansion of agriculture related micro and macro-enterprises that can generate employment and income for urban unemployed. Such agricultural enterprises can be input production, farm produce processors as well as agricultural packaging and marketing retail concerns. A productive and commercially vibrant smallholder farming sector also offers a route to on-farm employment not just to rural denizens but urban groups such as the unemployed, unskilled, semi-skilled and poor in search of alternative forms of livelihood outside the urban hinterland.

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