The Fast Track Land Reform and Its Impact on Indigenous Knowledge Systems: The Case of Zimbabwe A1/A2 Farms 2000-2014

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Abstract

Indigenous Knowledge Systems, also known as ethno-sciences or traditional ways of knowing are critical in matters of food security, heritage, lifestyles, conservation, relations and the economy among other aspects of life. The Zimbabwe fast track land reform programme starting 2000, a corrective measure in the distribution of land post independence dispensation, came and disregarded these centres of traditional knowledge. This study sets out to assess the impact of the fast track land reform on IKS in resettled areas with emphasis on matters of food security. A survey of resettled areas shall be conducted in 5 A1 and 5 A2 farms in Chinhoyi Mashonaland West and the same number in Mavise- Midlands Province. Findings are largely that because of the relocation of people from communal areas into farmlands, burning of forests, cutting down of trees and mixing of people from different cultures, some indigenous knowledge got destroyed, eroded and even erased.

Background

Land reform in Zimbabwe officially began in 1979 with the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement, an effort to more equitably distribute land between the historically disenfranchised blacks and the minority-whites who ruled Zimbabwe from 1890 to 1979, Scoones, *et al,* 2011. The government's land distribution became perhaps the most crucial and most bitterly contested political issue surrounding Zimbabwe. In the manner it has unfolded, the land reform can be divided into two periods: from 1979 to 2000, where a principle of willing seller, willing buyer was applied with economic help from Great Britain and second, beginning in 2000, the fast-track land reform program. Mugabe's targets were intended to alter the ethnic balance of land ownership.

After the Lancaster House Agreement negotiated a ceasefire and paved the way for democracy, in late February 1980 elections were won by President Robert Mugabe. The three-month long Lancaster House conference nearly failed over land issues. The "Declaration of Rights" that forms part of the Agreement and was entrenched in the constitution for ten years included a carefully worded section allowing the compulsory purchase of under-occupied land for settlement purposes, balanced by clauses requiring payment of compensation that could be remitted overseas. The Lancaster House Agreement required Robert Mugabe's government to wait ten years before instituting land reform, which they did.

Starting in 2000, the government implemented an initiative to acquire 11 million hectares of white-owned farmland and redistribute it on a massive scale; the programme was often carried out in the form of farm invasions led by frustrated war veterans and supporters of President Robert Mugabe. By its conclusion, only 0.4 percent of farmland remained in the hands of white commercial farmers, and smallholder farmers dominated the agricultural sector. Sadly though, land reform programme was followed by years of drought, hyperinflation and an economic meltdown, (Nyawo, 2012).

Key Words: Fast Track, Land Reform, Indigenous Knowledge A1/ A2 Farms, Zimbabwe

Introduction

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLP) was implemented between July 2000 and 2002 in Zimbabwe as a way to speed up distribution of land to indigenous people. The manner of its launch has been described by various writers as jambanja, mayhem, Third Chimurenga, violent chaos or agrarian revolution as distribution of land in this phase was marked by considerable coercion, violence and general lawlessness. Post this Third Chimurenga, however, dust has settled and true pictures of the impact of the nature, the manner of implementation, the breathe and the magnitude of this programme are coming out. As different historians and critics write, experiences of this phase vary farm by farm and person by person.

The fast track land reform programme is fast becoming an interesting area of intellectual and policy exchange as more empirical evidence of its outcomes emerges. Some of the early evidence soon after 2000 pointed to a decline in production and productivity but more recent findings are showing a need to relook at what impact the fast track land reform programme has been on indigenous knowledge in relation to food security. Researches by the likes of Sam Moyo, and the publication in 2010 of *Zimbabwe's Land Reform: Myths and Realities*, by Ian Scoones, marked a turning point in what has become a highly polarised discourse on the fast track land reform in Zimbabwe. This book was not only a marker of a new counter-narrative, seeking to challenge a generally accepted view that the fast track land reform had been an unmitigated disaster, but it also sought to introduce some academic rigour into what had become a politicised and professional media discourse. Adding new evidence, *Zimbabwe Takes Back its Land* supports this new narrative. It argues that the fast track land reform in Zimbabwe has worked well for some, but could work better for more people with additional support. There is evidence of beneficiaries investing in and using land to improve their food security and their lives. This should not have been a surprise, because we know from past experiences of self-resettlement that eventually people use the land to better themselves with or without State or other support.

The period, 2000-2001 was characterised by massive movement of people into commercial farms which were previously owned by a white minority population amounting to 4,500 white commercial farmers in the whole country. The invaders were mainly coming from close-by communal areas and urban informal settlements in search of agricultural land (Scoones, *et al,* 2011). The invaders would invade the farms that were within their vicinities as they would allow them to maintain support from their rural areas. During the early 1980s, the primary rationale behind land reform and resettlement has mainly been to reduce poverty and decongesting communal areas thus addressing inequalities in land ownership that was as a result of colonial regimes (Moyo and Yeros, 2009). There was, however, a shift of focus during the fast track land resettlement, where no selection criteria for beneficiaries for the programme was considered as war veterans mobilised villagers and urban based groups to occupy farms, with the support of the government. This movement of people, as this paper would argue eroded the bases of indigenous knowledge because people got scattered with even a mixing of people from different cultures and environments.

The government organised a referendum on the new constitution in February, despite having a sufficiently large majority in parliament to pass any amendment it wished. Had it been approved, the new constitution would have empowered the government to acquire land compulsorily without compensation. Despite vast support in the media, the new constitution was defeated, 55% to 45%. A few days later, the pro-Mugabe War Veterans Association organised like-minded people (not necessarily other war veterans, many of them were their children and grandchildren) to march on white-owned farmlands, initially with drums, song and dance. The program was officially announced as the *Fast-track resettlement program*. The usually white owners were forced off the land, often together with their farm workers, who were often of regional descent. This happened, often violently and without compensation, (Nyawo, 2012). In this first wave of farm invasions, a total of 110,000 square kilometres of land had been seized. Several million black farm workers were excluded from the redistribution. Fast Track was somewhat violent, as according to Human Rights Watch, by 2002, War Veterans in "seven cases killed white farm owners in the course of occupying commercial farms", and killed "several tens of farm workers" as Sachikonye (2012) puts it. Officially, the land was divided into small-holder production, so called A1 schemes and commercial farms, called A2 schemes, (Nyawo, 2012). There is, however, much overlap between the two categories as observed by Matondi (2011).

The Parliament for Zimbabwe passed a constitutional amendment, signed into law on September 12, 2005, that nationalised farmland acquired through the "Fast Track" process and deprived original landowners of the right to challenge in court the government's decision to expropriate their land, (Matondi, 2012). In January

2006, Agriculture Minister, Joseph Made, said Zimbabwe was considering legislation that would compel commercial banks to finance black peasants who had been allocated formerly white-owned farmland in the land reforms. Minister Made warned that banks failing to lend a substantial portion of their income to these farmers would have their licenses withdrawn. The newly resettled peasants had largely failed to secure loans from commercial banks because they did not have title over the land on which they were resettled, and thus could not use it as collateral. With no security of tenure on the farms, as Nyawo (2012) asserts banks have been reluctant to extend loans to the new farmers, many of whom do not have much experience in commercial farming, nor assets to provide alternative collateral for any borrowed money.

In 2008, the rival MDC and ZANU-PF parties meet to draft yet another constitution. The resulting version is called the Kariba draft. On March 29, 2008, the presidential election was held with Mugabe representing the ZANU-PF, Tsvangirai the MDC, and Simba Makoni running as an independent. The GNU started in February 2009 according to Raftopoulous (2013). Conflicting reports emerge regarding the effects of Mugabe's land reform programme. The Institute of Development Studies located at the University of Sussex published a report asserting that the Zimbabwean economy is blooming and that new business is growing in the rural areas. Reports, however, state that the Zimbabwean agricultural sector remains weak and that most lands formerly farmed commercially are now overgrown or used for only subsistence farming. Government racially motivated seizures of whites-owned lands, and distribution of much of these lands to ZANU-PF party officials, continue. As of 2011, there are fewer than 300 white farmers remaining in Zimbabwe, (Sachikonye, 2011).

Methodology

The study largely used interviews to establish the extend of movement from communal areas to resettled areas, the age groups of those that moved, their original home areas and the indigenous knowledges of such areas. Farmlands in Chinhoyi and ion Mavise were visited for these interviews. Desktop was used also to try and understand indigenous knowledge systems in Zimbabwe.

Conceptual framework

For millennia indigenous societies thrived on a solid foundation of balanced, interdependent activities and responsibilities in all aspects of life, socially, economically, politically and spiritually (Wolski, 2008). Indigenous knowledge is driven by local people who must have stayed for years in their locality, with a thorough knowledge of their culture and environment and once these people are

displaced there is a danger of the loss of this kind of knowledge. There is considerable breadth and diversity in the cultural ways and protocols of indigenous peoples of Zimbabwe, most significant are shared beliefs in holism, collectivism, kinship, cooperation, reciprocity and the absolute dependence of humans on each other, the land, and their environment. These core beliefs are evident in all spheres of life, (Battiste, 2009; Sinclair, Hart and Bruyere, 2009).

Significance of study

In the emerging global knowledge economy, a country's ability to build and mobilize knowledge capital is equally essential for sustainable development as the availability of physical and financial capital, (World Bank, 1997). The basic component of any country's knowledge system is its indigenous knowledge. It encompasses the skills, experiences and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve their livelihood even in the face of reforms such as the fast track land reform programme of Zimbabwe.

The post fast track landscape

The land reform that has unfolded in Zimbabwe since 2000 has resulted in a major reconfiguration of land use and economy. Over 7 million hectares of land have been transferred to both small-scale farm units (the A1 model) and larger scale farms (the A2 model). The land reform has had diverse consequences, and there is no single story of what happened and its implications. There have been highly varied impacts of the post-2000 land reform: on rural livelihoods, on agricultural production, on markets and the economy, on indigenous knowledge systems, on farm workers and employment, on the environment and on institutions and governance arrangements, for example. And these impacts have played out in very different ways in different places, (Nyawo, 2012 as well as Marimira, 2009).

According to Elich (2011), in a report issued just over a year ago, the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) details the results of its extensive field investigations conducted in six districts from 2005 to 2006. The other field study was done in Masvingo Province beginning in 2006 by the Livelihoods after Land Reform project, with multinational assistance, including that of the Great Britain-based Institute of Development Studies (IDS). What both studies found was that the facts on the ground were at variance with popular Western perceptions. As the IDS study noted, "Those of us exposed regularly to the international, especially British, media found it hard to match what we heard on the TV and radio and read in the newspapers with what we were finding on the ground." There were a number of misperceptions, which in large part the team felt were due to "a simple lack of solid, field-level data." Although it is true that there has been such a lack,

this factor alone does not account for the inaccuracy of Western news reports. The ideological factor is paramount, as always. For that reason, even though concrete information is now available, the tone of Western reports is unlikely to change. The Fast-track land reform redistributed much of the commercial farmland to some 170,000 families according to Nyawo, (2012). Whatever its faults in execution, the process has undeniably created a significantly more equitable distribution of land than what prevailed before.

Despite a lack of infrastructure, beneficiaries were quick to take up farming operations. For instance, nearly 72 percent of those allocated land in 2002, the peak year of land resettlement, began operations that same year. This, despite resistance by evicted commercial landowners, and the refusal of many of them to vacate the land. By 2003, the percentage of these resettled farmers that had begun farming had risen to almost 96 percent, a far cry from the popular image of land going to waste.

There has indeed been a decline in agricultural production in recent years, although for varied and complex reasons. Certainly one of the key factors responsible for the decline is that Zimbabwe's entire economy has shrunk by around 40 percent since the year 2000. By abandoning the destructive Western-initiated structural adjustment program, and then by accelerating land reform efforts in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of land, Zimbabwe triggered Western hostility. Neoliberal sensitivities were offended, and punishment was not long in coming.

By late 2001, President George W. Bush signed into law the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, which instructed U.S. officials in international financial institutions to "oppose and vote against any extension by the respective institution of any loan, credit, or guarantee to the government of Zimbabwe," (Zimbabwe Democratic and Economic Recovery Act, (2001). The U.S. wields enormous influence in the decisions of the IMF, World Bank and other international financial institutions. Great Britain and other Western countries were of like mind, and Zimbabwe found itself shut out of the kind of normal credit operations that are essential for any modern economy to operate. Agriculture does not exist in isolation. In myriad ways it is interrelated to the general economy, and it cannot remain unperturbed by a deep economic downturn. Another not insignificant factor in the decline of crop production is that much of the region in which Zimbabwe is situated is especially susceptible to the effects of climate change, and over the last decade there has been a sharp increase in the frequency of major drought conditions.

According to Nyawo (2012), the period from 2001-2005 was characterized by poor rainfall distribution, the worst in the post-independence period and so it is

inaccurate to attribute a drop in agricultural production entirely to resettled farmers. Historically, the success of any land reform effort depends on the support new farmers are given. Adequate agricultural inputs are essential. Drought in the 2007-8 agricultural season would be particularly nasty, and national maize output plummeted to 470,000 metric tons. Yet in the following season, the nation enjoyed good rainfall and, as a result, more than two and a half times as much maize was produced.

In this huge study on the impact of the fast track one measure of assessment of added value is food security and one area under this banner that beckons visitation is indigenous knowledge. It is the contestation of this paper that because of its nature and manner of implementation the fast track dislocated, dislogged and rendered some IKS moribund and dysfunctional. For the fact that the fast track aimed to decongest communal areas, it meant it would remove and separate a people who had stayed together and practised some food security enhancement practises known to them and probably permitted by their kind of environment. Relocated to new places such people would require time to study their new environment to function, meanwhile families could be going hungry.

The years covered by the fast track are also years of contemporary drought. While droughts dogged even indigenous communities there have been ways of minimizing their impact. These methods traditionally involved some elders visiting a particular tree and perform some rituals. The manner of the implementation of the fast track land reform was jambaja enabling only the physically fit to occupy the new areas, Nyawo, 2012. The elderly were left in the communal areas meaning to say the mukwerera concept of appealing to the ancestors for rains remained with them in the communal areas. The traditional system of mukwerera would also die with the elderly in the communal areas and there would be no continuity of all the paraphenalia of mukwerera.

As even implied by its name, fast track, denoting speed, energy, little time for planning and digestion, the programme would also mean that those who quickly moved in to benefit from it were those with little baggage to drag with them in terms of family. The programme introduced split households which had last taken centre stage in the days of going to Egoli (Johannesburg) the city of gold for mining, the WENELA Era. Traditionally families stuck together to enhance their human resources. Staying together made sense of nhimbe, kurimirana, kuronzera, madzoro emombe and all other methods of sharing labour and resources among people of an extended family, a clan or a village.

The land reform discourse has largely covered the economic, political and gender aspects of its impact on the nation. Not much research has focused on the impact of

the reform on the indigenous aspects affecting food security at the leve of the family unit as well as the individuals who make up the family unit in terms of how they have forged new relationships in the areas they have settled in. Publications by most local writers such as Moyo S (2000, 2002, 2005, 2009, 2012), Nyawo VZ (2012, 2013), Karumbidza B (2005), Hanlon A et al (2013), etc concentrated on the distribution, the economic effect and opinions by the west of the reform. Research among farm workers (Chambati W, 2006) has found out the cases of HIV and Aids increased with the fast track land reform. It would be interesting as well as a breath of fresh air to revisit the manner of implementation of the reform investigating the disruption of indigenous knowledge and the social dimension of the family unit to establish how much families broke, the extend of cohabitation as well as the disruption of the family unit, if any, that came with the reform.

Understanding the fast track land reform of Zimbabwe through what transpired with-in the family unit in terms of indigenous knowledge maintaining relationships and marriages during its implementation is critical in comprehending the trajectory of the reform itself. How individuals managed their families during the fast track land reform accounts for some kind of behavior experienced from that time (2000) to present. Before the fast track is read at national, provincial and community levels, it is essential to understand how the fast track changed behavior at family and individual levels.

Even those of royal blood who went on to claim land in areas where their traditional royalty is not recognised had to be contend with being treated like commoners in their new lands. This lack of power would also have a bearing on concepts like zunde ramambo and the tradition that the chief gets some portion of the first harvest from those he rules. These portions who go towards feeding visitors in the village, orphans, vavirirwa and village gatherings to ensure food security for all. Who takes care of the needy in the resettled areas the way chiefs do in communal areas.

The senseless cutting down of trees in the areas of Chinhoyi and Mavise in the fast track era destroyed some medicinal trees known and used by locals for years. It also left the soils bare and vulnerable to erosion resulting in a damaged environment. As if cutting down of trees was not enough, fires were experienced also in these areas that eliminated remaining sources of indigenous foods from fruits, tubers, insects and many others. What used to sustain cattle herders in the forest became a thing of the past.

Conclusion

That Zimbabwe's land processes seriously undermined sustainability, stability and the economy initially is a fact. Millions of Zimbabweans fled the country and

sought refuge in South Africa and other neighbouring states. In the biggest land reform in Africa, 6,000 white farmers have been replaced by 245,000 Zimbabwean farmers. 245,000 new farmers have received land, and most of them are farming it. They have raised their own standard of living; have already reached production levels of the former white farmers; and with a bit of support, are ready to substantially increase that production. Zimbabwe's land reform has not been neat, and huge problems remain in areas of food security reducing sustainability and development. Despite these problems, the fast track land reform has created a vastly more equitable distribution of land compared to the previous lopsided ownership pattern. Poverty alleviation has been real, and many, have for the first time in their lives, been given hope. Resettled farmers are determined to succeed. As one put it, "Land is what we fought for. Our relatives died for this land… Now we must make use of it." As a sovereign nation, Zimbabwe has the right to improve its citizens' lives, regardless of how offensive that ambition is to the imperialist nations. The land belongs to the people of Zimbabwe, and resettled farmers are succeeding in spite of the obstacles thrown in their way by Western sanctions and interference.

With regards sustainability, one very glaring area that the fast track land reform did not give a chance is the indigenous knowledge. Given the importance and centrality of indigenous knowledge systems in the area of food security, environmental issues and development, the fast track land reform programme needs to revisit this area for a sustainable growth.

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