

## Land Reform, Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** Zimbabwe at the turn of the new millennium took a move to ensure that the land redistribution exercise takes place across all communities. The policy came to be dubbed Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) as it was done at a faster rate to what had been witnessed from independence. The policy saw the movement of a number of households into prime land including some areas that were never cleared. Noticeable has been the increased degradation of the environment particularly through deforestation for preparation of agricultural land and also gathering of firewood as the country was and still is facing power shortages. These activities have had a negative impact on the climate. The study, argues that land reform as a backbone to sustainable development in Zimbabwe should not be reversed because of climate change. However, the new farmer should be educated on the importance of preserving the environment to avoid the wrath of climate change. Material for this research was gathered through desktop.

**Key words:** Land reform, climate change, development, policy, movement, Zimbabwe

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### INTRODUCTION

The land question has been a topical issue in Zimbabwe since colonisation and has dominated post-independence politics because land is a powerful symbol of independence. Land in Zimbabwe like elsewhere in Africa was expropriated through force and colonial legislation. At independence in 1980, 6000 white farmers retained 39% of land amounting to 15.5 million ha of prime agro-ecological farmland while 1 million black households remained confined to 41.4% of the land according to Moyo (2007). Due to the thriving status of the agricultural sector after independence, Zimbabwe's role of ensuring food security including the constraints by the Lancaster Agreement, push for change was less forceful then. As such land reform methods which seemed to reward colonialism such as the Willing Seller Willing Buyer, dominated the years 1980-1999. To this punishing delay of justice, Mugabe lamented in one of his speeches that it makes absolute nonsense of the history as an African country that most of the arable and ranching land is still in the hands of the erstwhile colonizers while the majority of the peasant communities still live like squatters in their God-given land (Meredith, 2002). For this and other reasons, need was seen to fast track land reform. However, within that framework of accessing better arable land has been the emergence of

debate on the increasing negative impacts of climate change which is also attributed to environmental degradation that comes with continued clearance of forests and subsequent agricultural activities. Questions have emerged: should land reform be stopped or be done at a lesser scale to avert the worst effects of climate change? Should developing countries import food in the interest of saving the world from the climate catastrophe? What then should be sustainable development in that situation? This study therefore, seek to address these questions arguing that land reform is a policy in agro based economies in developing countries where there is an inequitable distribution of land that is appropriate. Issues of climate change ought to be viewed from the backdrop where at a local level, food is highly priced to be imported for countries like Zimbabwe and the only sustainable way is to encourage the rural poor to produce their own food and they can only do that if they access the land.

### THE NEXUS BETWEEN LAND REFORM AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) was implemented between July 2000 and 2002. Variously termed an agrarian revolution, Third Chimurenga or jambanja (direct action) this phase of land reform involved

the acquisition of 11 million ha from mostly white commercial farmers for redistribution. According to Chigora and Guzura, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was undertaken at the backdrop of continued contention over land. The origins were colonialism and the subsequent policies that dispossessed land from the indigenous African populace parceling it to a minority European colonialists and settlers (Chigora and Guzura, 2008). After independence, attempts were made to resettle the black majority who were landless but this did not help contain the situation as the demand for land persisted. The government sought alternative ways of improving the people's livelihood without really addressing the land issue. In the post-Economic Structural Adjustment Programme era, it became clear that land reform was the way towards sustainable development. ESAP had wrecked havoc on the economy as many people became unemployed.

The Fast Track Land Reform Program saw the movement of a number of people into land that was formally occupied by commercial farmers. New areas were cleared to enable cultivation of crops and other associated activities such as hunting, gold panning, land clearing for settlement as well as for gathering material for building the pole and dagga dwellings that characterized the phase. These activities certainly have had implications on environmental management as well as climate change.

Scholars, environmentalists and other stakeholders are of the opinion that the land reform would damage the economy and the entire agricultural sector would be destroyed due to poor environmental management. These different stakeholders are of the view that the newly resettled farmers' activities would ultimately lead to increased frequencies of droughts, change in rainfall patterns, flooding and a speedy rate of desertification.

The new farmers who moved in had a wide range of activities which they undertook to enable their survival and enhancement of their livelihood. It is from within this background that critics of the land policy of Zimbabwe argue that the Zimbabwean economy would be damaged and the entire agricultural sector destroyed. To base their argument, Maguwu (2008) cite the significant decline in crop output faced by the country in 2001 and 2002 especially as reports showed that nearly one million Zimbabweans faced acute hunger. Maize came down from 800,000 tones to about 80,000 tones, wheat from 225,000 tones to <100,000 tones, soya beans from 145,000 tones and tobacco from 230 million km to about 70 million kg (Shava, 2010). In addition, the dramatic irony that a CARE programme was put in place to import maize through the

World Food Programme for distribution in Zimbabwe, a country previously known as the breadbasket of Africa is used as an example of showing the damaging effect of the programme to the economy.

Critics such as Chenje argue that besides the decline in agricultural production, many natural resources have also suffered in the areas that have been newly settled into because of lack of expertise on land use (Chenje, 2000). He further argues that if there is no significant change in farmers behavior towards the environment both greenhouse gases concentration and global temperatures would constantly increase. The different activities undertaken by the new farmers which have resulted in large tracts of forests being indiscriminately cut or burnt, animal habitats being destroyed, scattered dwellings being left to collapse on their own has had varying effects on the environment with negative implications on the climate. These activities have reduced vegetation cover, impacted on soil conditions and runoff processes especially the transportation of sediment and has triggered gully erosion thereby leading to lowered biological productivity (Chigumira, 2010). Chigumira carried out research at Pamene and Lanteglos farms in Gokwe that revealed extensive loss of vegetation during the Fast Track. Zimbabwe is presently experiencing more hot days and fewer cold days and the amount of precipitation it receives is deviating from the mean more frequently. According to an Intergovernmental Panel on climate change, climate change is any long-term changes in weather condition. In terms of occurrence, climate change may occur in an area given the changes in weather conditions to extreme cases. However, in recent usage, climate change usually refers to change in modern climate. In the last half of 2007, again the intergovernmental panel on climate change released its fourth assessment report, drawing together scientific evidence on climate change. This report stated the manifold evidence that climate change is occurring. The report further argued that Global average temperatures are rising with eleven of the last 12 years 1995-2006 ranking amongst the 12 warmest years in the instrumental record of global surface temperature. The Panel's Third Assessment Report (TAR) also pointed out that some degree of warming is also occurring in Africa. The report further noted an average decade warming of 0.05 degrees over the twentieth century with the 5 warmest years occurring since 1996. On the same note, Chitiga and Chigora argue that there is more data than ever before to suggest that human activity is responsible for changes in climate (Chitiga and Chigora, 2010). On its part, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (AR4) further observed that the net effect of human activities since 1750 has been warming. It further

points to the fact that this degree of warming is projected to be likely larger than the global warming through out the continent and in all seasons with the drier subtropical region, Southern Africa included warming more than the tropics. For Southern Africa, this becomes a cause for concern because its climate is influenced by a range of climate factors including the El Nino-Southern Oscillation and large scale atmospheric pressure system interaction that can enhance periods of extended rainfall and dryness. El Nino has since shown its face causing a major drought that affected the entire Southern Africa region in 2002. Access to food became difficult and irregular affecting especially the jobless, women, children, the elderly and those living with HIV and AIDS. Given this setup, it is a fact that climate change for Zimbabwe would affect the new farmers, basing their hopes for transforming their livelihoods through land reform. In terms of climate change, Zimbabwe is vulnerable to climate change principally through shifting rainfall patterns. A decrease in rainfall is occurring across all seasons especially during the early and late seasons. Increased incidences of droughts and late heavy downpours have become a common problem in Zimbabwe. As testimony 2000, 2002, 2008 and 2010-11 witnessed droughts.

Other changes include increased temperatures especially in the dry season, localized floods and decreased or varying river flow. Before the FTLRP, the country's farming activities were largely dominated by commercial farmers. Currently, the agricultural sector represents the largest force driving the country's economic activity. However, agricultural production processes particularly plant growth are dependent on climatic conditions. This makes agricultural activities extremely vulnerable to climate change. A fairly significant amount of agricultural produce comes from the small scale subsistence farmers in Zimbabwe. Infact, small scale intensively farmed plots often prove to be the most efficient form of agriculture where labour is plentiful and that at present many of the rural poor are either without land or hold plots that are on extremely unfavorable terms of tenancy (McNally, 1989). As such, this research strongly argues that the land reform programme is necessary for Zimbabwe for sustainable development and to redress land imbalances. Policy makers researchers, the academia and donors in developing countries, particularly across Africa and in Zimbabwe to be specific, concur that addressing the land issue is the sure way to go. In fact, for Zimbabwe to move and get the concerns of global climate change at the expense of development would highly misguided move since most nations have not lived up to commitment to reducing emissions under the Kyoto protocol because of its disastrous effects on economic growth (Micheal, 2007).

### **ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE**

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways. This research took it to mean development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Development that sees the world as a system that connects space and time as well as environmental, economic and social well-being for today and tomorrow. The vision for the FTLRP was to assist the landless and the poor to become productive full scale farmers and to be self-sufficient. Giving land to the people is a national strategy of social, economic and political importance to sustainable development. Some, development scholars agree that for development to be sustainable, it begins with the uplifting of the grassroots. The FTLRP is therefore, an opportunity for all development partners to assist the government in making sustainable development an achievable feat. It is a crucial dimension of development and a huge national concern. However, the quality and quantity of land reform should be kept in check. Researchers strongly feel that one needs to be cautious about the extent to which environmental degradation in Zimbabwe could result in climate change. Climate change is a process, a long one for that matter not an event. Indeed production has decreased since 2000 and 2002 season but perhaps we need not forget that other factors were at play. We need not lose hindsight of the three factors that compounded the problem of low production. Drought, reluctance by the white farmers to produce in protest to the land reform programme and activities of the local seed and fertilizer companies mostly owned by those disgruntled by the process. Furthermore, the researchers are of the opinion that there has been a too rushed evaluation of the programme. Critics of the programme need to understand that policies like these, require time to bear tangible fruits.

Experiences elsewhere show that land reform, properly managed can change a people's livelihoods for the better. According to Sobhan, one advantage that can result from the land reform process is that small farmers are more productive, more efficient and contribute more to broad based regional development than does larger corporate farmers such as those who held large tracts of land prior to the land reform (Sobhan, 1993). These researchers also argue that it is only through changing its development orientation from export led free trade in dustrial agriculture made of large farms and land concentration characterized by displacements of people that Zimbabwe can hope to stop a downward spiral to poverty, low wages, rural-urban migration and

environmental degradation. On the same note, Deininger, Brink and Moyo posit that redistribution of land and the reversal of dominant macro-economic export oriented policies hold a bright promise of change towards smaller family farm based model with the potential to feed the poor at affordable rates. This also has a potential to lead to broad based development and conserve biodiversity and productive resources (Deininger *et al.*, 2000).

Redistribution of land can fulfill a number of functions in a more sustainable fashion. Where land has been really distributed to the majority of the rural poor, the results have been real, measurable poverty reductions and a marked improvement in the welfare of the people has been witnessed. The economic success of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, China and Cuba resulted from land reform (Sobhan, 1993). The argument is Zimbabwe could take a leaf from these countries. However, where reforms were piece meal and half hearted and impoverished pieces of land were given to the people or where the farmers or government has not been committed to the reform, the programme failed to effect broad based change. As such, the argument is that land reform if properly managed and fully instituted it triggers broad based development. The inclusion of the poor in development leads to the building of domestic markets which in turn would support national economic activity.

Leite argues that there is a strong relationship between land reform and poverty reduction. He is of the opinion that in the majority of cases, there is a significant improvement in the standards of living for land reform beneficiaries. For example, settlers in Brazil could earn more than they did before:

They eat better, they have greater purchasing power, they have greater access to education opportunities and they are more likely to be able to unite their families in one place rather than lose family members to migration

In the same token, one can argue that land reform holds a promise as a means to stop the rural-urban migration that is causing developing cities to grow beyond their capacity in an effort to provide enough jobs. Another way of considering the spin-off benefits from the land reform policies in developing countries is by considering the costs of job creation and income earning. In Brazil, estimates of the costs of creating a job in a commercial sector range from two to twenty times more than the cost of establishing an employed head of household on farm land, through agrarian reform (Sobhan, 1993). Thus, it becomes clear that land reform actually is a vehicle for creating more jobs at a cheaper rate than the

formal methods of job creation. On the same note, Langevin and Rosset posit that land reform beneficiaries in Brazil have an annual income equivalent to 3.7 minimum wages while still landless labourers average only 0.7 of the minimum. In real terms then land reform is a viable alternative to the dominant development modes currently offered by most practitioners in rural development.

In the case of India, Besley and Robin assert that after land reform, small farmers have absorbed far more people into gainful activities and reversed the trends of outward migration from rural areas. This is because small farmers use more labor and often less capital to farm a given unit of area. They further argue that the infant mortality rate among families of beneficiaries have dropped to half the national average for these Indian families (Besley and Burgess, 2000). The above statistics provide a convincing argument that land reform indeed is a more effective social policy than large scale agrarian practices of the foreign absentee farmer. Zimbabwe's A2 model where an individual farmer does farming and ranching of livestock could serve as a possible source of employment for a large number of the unemployed in Zimbabwe. The agricultural principle of inverse relationship between farm size and out put also shows that land reform can in the long run prove to be a long lasting solution towards the goal of sustainable rural development in Zimbabwe. From the above argument, these researchers are of the opinion that land reform if properly handled is likely to bring about better housing, education, health services, transportation, local economic diversification and more recreational and cultural opportunities which development is all about.

#### **A REFORMATION THAT NEEDS REDIRECTING**

The government was right to pursue agrarian reform from the onset. Without land reform the chance of real benefits reaching the rural poor through civil society or government assistance is dim. However, in as much as this research is for the land reform programme, the environment should be protected and guarded jealously. The rate at which forests are being cleared goes on unabated because farmers continue to use wood as building material and as sources of energy both in the resettlement areas and in urban areas. The government should have the political will to fund and allocate resources for the management of the environment. There should also be collective participation of stakeholders with the different parties that govern the environment, consultation of each other when formulating policies as well as giving feedback to each other on improvements,

constructive comparisons with similar programmes elsewhere, achievements and shortfalls of various programs on management. This feedback would then be used for better environment management which is the backbone of managing climate change.

The country has a wide range of policies, legislations and acts, all designed to protect the natural environment. Among the Acts are the Forest Act, the Water Act under the Forestry Commission and ZINWA. In total, there are 12 major Acts dealing with natural resources management in Zimbabwe resulting in problems of multiplicity of legal instruments and a lack of definition between the relations of the Acts. Again, AGRITEX also plays a pivotal role in educating communities on effective and sustainable environmental management. However, even though the country has put in place policies and legislations aimed at protecting the environment, the implementation of these policies leaves a lot to be desired. Research findings have shown that AGRITEX officers are heavily incapacitated in terms of transport and equipment. In the event that transport is availed to the department, there should be a huge positive change in how resettled farmers interact with the environment. On the same note if the department continues the way it is operating with shortages of resources and equipment, the current abuse of the environment shall continue and even rise with population increase.

In the same breath, the Forestry Commission is also ill-equipped that they find it difficult to execute their duties effectively. Yet this commission is highly relevant in protecting and rebuilding vegetation. Interviews carried out with officers of the commission point to the fact that the commission is not operating in its full capacity. If transport and equipment is availed to these officers, they would be able to operate effectively. In this regard, much can be done to rebuild the forests and educate people on proper forestry management and environmental protection. Failure to effectively implement the Forestry Act poses the most dreadful disaster of desertification. The rate of desertification *visa-a vis* the rate of reforestation projects a hazardous disaster on the environment and ultimately on the climate.

Research findings show that the people residing in the resettlement areas are able to read and are not resistant to knowledge. What these people need is to be conscientised on issues to do with climate change and environmental managed. This is only possible given that the relevant authorities such as AGRITEX and the Forestry Commission execute their duties to educate the farmers effectively on how they can responsibly take care of the environment. This can lead to improvement in the environmental management in Zimbabwe.

The state should consider a better form of lease that gives resettled farmers a sense of security and ownership to their designated plots. The 99 years lease they are presently operating under does not completely make them take responsibility with their activities on the properties nor does it compel them to improve the soil or infrastructure. A more secure tenure would make a difference in as far as creating some semblance of ownership, responsibility and accountability. Even the introduction of land taxation would induce development by providing financial viability, encouraging self assessment, discouraging land speculation and increasing production. Fresh and self driven young farmers especially from Agricultural Colleges like Mulezu, Gwebi and Chibero should be allowed more access to land. Contrary to the view that the youth of today are no longer interested in agricultural activities, if provided with proper provisions to bring them out of being mere subsistence farmers, an insignificant few would opt out.

Providing and making accessible information on climate change to minimize the effects of cyclones, droughts, floods and other climate related challenges is another way to curb problems. Information from the climate change conference held in Nairobi, together with the Stern Review on the economics of climate change should be made known to farmers as well as more extension information services. Zimbabwe's agricultural sectors would not escape the consequences and economic impact of climate change. James Benhim from the Centre for Environmental Research and Policy in Africa argues that in come from crops could decrease by 90% by the start of the twenty second century unless serious action is taken.

The warming and increased frequency of heat waves, for example in the Mediterranean, semi-arid and arid pastures would reduce livestock productivity in the country with potential increases in livestock mortality. The South African Environmental affairs and Tourism Minister, Marthinus Van Schalkwyk, once said having reached a point in the debate where the scientific and economic case is so persuasive to fail to act is both negligent and irresponsible. With the necessary information, farmers would make informed decisions on which lands to clear in what season which crops to grow when in what soils and at what cost which animals to keep and in what regions. As Mabude, a South African new farmer, puts it, it is farming knowledge that needs to be fast tracked more than land reform.

In debating land reform and sustainable development one need not to loose hindsight of the overall global framework to addressing sustainability issues. Whilst the

debate has centered on availability of land to those who lack this basic tool of development there is need at national and international level to deal with issues that affect agriculture and food production in general. Nationally, governments ought to ensure that they are more self reliant on food because food produced and imported developing countries is highly priced for government already in balance of payment problems. At global level, policies should center around the stability of prices.

Whilst agro based economies in developing countries address issues of agriculture and food production through land reform, it has to be public knowledge that issues of sustainable development can not be addressed by this policy alone. Move to start and own manufacturing industries would ensure the availability of the much needed inputs for economic growth driven of course by skilled labour force which calls for enhancement of educational facilities to facilitate research and train experts in various issues that are pertinent to the development of a country.

### CONCLUSION

In post-colonial Zimbabwe, land reform fits like a glove. However, the Fast Track land reform programme symbolized many of the contradictions of post-independence Zimbabwe. Some academics and policy makers concur that the period devastated lives of Zimbabweans yet land reform is a corrective measure that should be just, genuine and based on the truth. Critics dismiss the programme out rightly citing the destruction of the environment and the irregularity of rains that has hit the country lately. This study has argued that even if the Fast Track land reform destroyed the environment contributed to climate change and caused many other things to go wrong giving the grassroots prime land is the way to achieve sustainable development. Through providing appropriate technology, financial aid in formation new farmers could be helped to farm their lands effectively and as efficiently as possible. In actual fact when it comes to Zimbabwe poverty has been the worst killer than any foreseeable environmental distress associated with climate change and no one can think that is doing Zimbabwe a favor when one talks of climate change because the scale of clearance can never be compared with large scale timber harvesting in the tropical rain forest and also that failing to develop strategies for development on the pretext of climate change will drive poorer states to fragility or even collapse. Moreover, even to think that the newly resettled farmers have no or are incapable of having concern to their environment. It has been concluded as well that at global scale when it comes to climate change:

People in industrialized countries bear the main responsibility for having caused the problem their responsibility relates to historic emissions since the onset of industrial revolution in Europe in mid 18th Century as well as current life styles that are dependent on fossil fuel use (Micheal, 2007)

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