



Situation Report

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Zimbabwe: Reaping the harvest?

Introduction: Historical Overview

When Zimbabwe obtained its independence from Britain in 1980, it inherited an inequitable pattern of land distribution. The unbalanced pattern of land allocation was characterised by a small minority of white large-scale commercial farmers owning vast amounts of the most productive agricultural land while the majority of the population, made up exclusively of black Zimbabweans, were relegated to crowded lands in the lower rainfall and poorer soil areas. Some 6,000 white commercial farmers owned 15.5 million hectares of land, another 8,500 small-scale farmers possessed 1.4 million hectares. The remaining indigenous communal farmers, comprising roughly 700,000 households, subsisted on 16.4 million hectares, which represented less than half of the country's agricultural land.²

This highly skewed, and largely racial-determined, distribution of land was the direct consequence of the European settler colonisation in the 1890s of what later became known as Rhodesia. White settlers, acting with the encouragement and protection of Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company, dispossessed the African inhabitants of the prime areas of the newly "acquired" territory, reducing many of them to become landless labourers for the newcomers. An attempted African rising in 1896, known as the Chimurenga, failed in its efforts to expel the white invaders, who subsequently set about the consolidation of settler rule. At one stage this course seemed destined to end with the incorporation of the territory into the Union of South Africa, but Afrikaner political domination of Rhodesia's southern neighbour persuaded the mainly Anglophone settlers to pursue their own interests, and in 1923 they rejected the idea of being formally included in an expanded Union.

Thereafter, Rhodesia's settlers took swift steps to consolidate their position of privilege and power over the indigenous people of the colony. The Land Appointment Act of 1930 divided up land along racial lines, both in terms of quantity and quality. Thus, 51% of the land was reserved for white settlers, the bulk of it in the arable central highlands. As pointed out by Chitsike, "the African population (the vast majority) was allocated 30% of the land, which was designated as African Reserve Areas (now known as communal areas). The remaining 20% of the land was either owned by commercial companies or by the colonial government (Crown Land)".³

From 1930 to 1980, the year in which Zimbabwe became independent, the area held by whites decreased from 51% to 41%, and the land available to Africans grew from 30% to 40%. However, due to the different population sizes (there are

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very few whites relative to Africans), the population densities in the African areas remain extremely high through to the present day. In 1951 the Native Land Husbandry Act was passed. Central to this legislation (and also common to many other British colonies in Africa at the time) was the limiting of livestock numbers and the introduction of soil and water conservation methods and technology.⁴

Data from the 1960s indicates the continuation of a high degree of segregation, in which the African population suffered. “The whites had much more land, in the more fertile regions, and received state support for their agricultural development. The land belonging to black people remained abandoned by the state, receiving no support.”⁵

It was quite apparent from the time before Zimbabwe became independent that there was an urgent need for land reform. In the mid-1970s the second Chimurenga rebellion erupted, led by the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU). Both liberation movements were committed to carrying out radical land redistribution if and when they took power. According to Sachikonye, “the principal motive for the rebellion was to repossess lost lands – in other words, it was a struggle on the land and for land”.⁶ Above all, it identified racial segregation at the root of the land problem in Zimbabwe.

The new constitution that emerged in 1979 after the Lancaster House negotiations on Zimbabwe’s independence, however, did not allow for a comprehensive land reform programme. This was primarily because the constitution contained explicit clauses protecting private property, including land, which essentially meant that the land reform process would have to be carried out using the relatively expensive “willing seller, willing buyer” system. As the late Vice President of Zimbabwe, Dr Joshua Nkomo pointed out, the cost constraints involved in this market-based reform process significantly restricted the government’s room for manoeuvre on the land question in the 1980s.

*...we said that the new constitution should permit government to expropriate land if it was not being properly used. The British said ‘fine’, so long as we paid the full market price, but we knew that vast acreage were lying idle and therefore without a market price in the areas formerly reserved for white ownership. To buy areas adequate for resettling the many land hungry African farmers, who had been confined to the former tribal trust land, would be beyond the financial ability of the new state.*⁷

The restrictions imposed at Lancaster House were to remain in place for 10 years and as a result of this the new Zimbabwean government found its hands effectively tied in respect of agrarian transformation. This state of affairs ruled out the possibility of any significant redistribution of land. These constitutional restrictions were exacerbated in that following Zimbabwe’s liberation war there was an urgent need for reconstruction, and measures to address mass displacement and the collapse of peasant production. Moreover, as “a result of the collapse of peasant agriculture, 90 percent of the country’s marketed food requirements were being produced by white farmers”.⁸ Ironically, the course of the war itself had placed white farmers in a strong position both economically and politically by the end of the conflict. In the years since independence, the restrictions imposed by means of the Lancaster House agreement have remained a constant theme in the issue of Zimbabwean land reform.

The First Phase: 1980 to 1996

The Land Reform and Resettlement Programme of the Zimbabwean government can be seen as comprising two phases. In the first phase, from 1980 to 1996, the dominant approach to land redistribution and acquisition may be characterised as “a state-centred market-based approach”. Accordingly, “land was purchased by the state from willing sellers and redistributed to beneficiaries”.⁹ Between 1980

and 1996, land was purchased by the State from white sellers and redistributed to black beneficiaries to form settlements. However, as will be explained below, the government was unable to redistribute land on any significant scale.¹⁰ The state could buy land only from those people who were willing to sell. There was pressure against this type of land reform that came from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as from the largely white Commercial Farmers Union (CFU), which encouraged white farmers to refuse to sell land to the government.¹¹ As a result of these pressures, the government began cutting back on the funds allocated for the settlements.

The World Bank insisted on a market-based land reform, yet, “during the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) period of 1991 to 1995, failed to mobilize the resources needed to support such an approach. The ESAP period thus saw an even slower pace of reform, generating land conflicts as well”.¹² In fact, the majority of commercial farmers eventually benefited from the economy’s new agro-export orientation. This created more demand for land and fuelled conflicts between black and white commercial farmers, competing for the same scarce resources. The ESAP also served to internationalise interest in Zimbabwe’s land issue, introducing further conflict.

The Second Phase (1997 to the present)

The second phase, beginning in 1997, was less orderly and more controversial than the first. At this point, the government started to adopt a more radical posture, using the police to repress spontaneous land occupations by landless blacks. At the same time, the government’s commitment to full market compensation began to evaporate, placing emphasis on the obligation of the former colonial power, Great Britain, for historical redress.

This second phase of the land policy eventually came to be known as the “fast track” land reform programme, and opened with the gazetting of 1,471 farms for compulsory acquisition. In July 2000 the Zimbabwean government formally announced a fast track programme stating that it would “acquire more than 3,000 farms for redistribution”.¹³ Between 2000 and February 2001 a national total of 2,706 farms covering more than six million hectares were gazetted for compulsory acquisition. This phase in the land reform programme marked a decisive shift away from a market based approach and saw the government plan for the forcible acquisition of about 90% of commercial farms by the end of 2002, as can be seen in the table below dated from 1998:

Table 1: Land acquisitions 1980-2002

	Total acquired	Average ha per year
1980-85	2,147,855	429,571
1996-1990	447,791	74,632
1992-97	789,645	157,929
2000-02	11,000,000 a	3,660,000 a
TOTAL	14,385,291	

a. Estimate
Source: Government of Zimbabwe, 1998

There were two models for resettlement under the fast track programme. Model A1 was developed as “the decongestion model for the generality of landless people with a villagised and a self-contained variant” with the aim of benefiting 160,000 beneficiaries from among the poor. Model A2 was aimed at creating a cadre of 51,000 small-to-medium-scale black indigenous commercial farmers.¹⁴ Furthermore, 20% of all resettlement plots under the model A1 pattern were officially reserved for war veterans, reflecting a commitment made by the government since the early 1990s.

In 2000, the Amendment to the Land Acquisition Act stipulated various factors to be taken into account in future indemnification. As recently pointed out by Chitiyo, this Act had the consequence of effectively freeing the Zimbabwean government “from the obligation to pay compensation for land expropriated for settlement, only requiring indemnification for improvements on the land”. In addition, this author considers that “this new process had minimal success, as the landlords soon tied it up in judicial challenges”.¹⁵ The result was the continuation of an intense process of land occupations throughout the country.

A small number of occupations began during August 1997 with the explicit objective of redistributing land held by white estates to the landless masses and to veterans of the liberation war; by 2000 these incidents numbered more than a thousand. Unfortunately in many instances this process of occupation was not implemented in a carefully planned manner and was accompanied by violence and intimidation against the commercial farm labourers and their employers who had previously occupied the land.

When, in July 2000, the Zimbabwean government formally announced the commencement of the “fast track” resettlement programme, it indicated that it would acquire more than 3,000 farms for redistribution. Sachikonye describes the fast track programme as follows:

*...the first phase ran between the onset of the “land invasions” or occupations soon after the constitutional referendum in February and continued in the build-up to the June 2000 election. This appeared to be a phase in which there were no officially defined targets or clear direction for the ‘invasions’. The elements of orchestration, coercion and violence were present in this first phase.*¹⁶

According to the Commercial Farmers’ Union (CFU), which represented the large-scale commercial farming sector in Zimbabwe, in the course of 2000 settlers led by war veterans occupied 1,600 commercial farms, though some question this total, and certain farms were occupied for a short period only. It should also be noted that not all of these occupations were accompanied by violence.

From July onwards, the government defined the parameters of the “fast track” land occupations more clearly; they were to be implemented at an accelerated pace. The targets of the programme were specified, and the amount of land to be redistributed increased from 5 million hectares to 9 million, and then to 11 million. The number of beneficiaries was to rise to 160,000 (and later to some 300,000) under the A1 model, and a new set of indigenous commercial farmers numbering up to 51,000 would also benefit from the redistribution.¹⁷

In early November 2000, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which had been mediating land issues between Zimbabwe and Great Britain, unveiled plans for gradual, controlled, land reform in the southern African country. Great Britain had pledged in 1998 to finance legal land redistribution in Zimbabwe, but failed to follow through on this promise. The UNDP compromise plan, however, received guardedly favourable reactions from both London and Harare, prompting the Times of London to report, on 9 November 2000 that, “Britain and Zimbabwe are moving towards a deal to end two decades of dispute over land reform”.¹⁸

The very next day, the situation underwent a fundamental change when the Zimbabwe Supreme Court issued an order for the government to halt its “fast track” land-redistribution program and to evict land occupiers. The following weekend, squatters occupied 50 more commercial farms, reportedly with government assistance in some cases. Agriculture Minister Joseph Made declared “there is no going back on the land-redistribution exercise, regardless of the Supreme Court ruling”.¹⁹

This more expansive phase lasted between July 2000 and September 2001, when the Abuja Agreement was brokered between Zimbabwe and the UK with the assistance of key Commonwealth states. It was stated at this meeting that Zimbabwe was a threat to the socio-economic stability of the entire sub-region and the continent at large. During this same meeting, Zimbabwe was threatened with sanctions and expulsion from the Commonwealth if it failed to comply with the main aspects of the agreement. In April 2001, the objectives of the land reform and resettlement programme were, among other things, said to be to “acquire not less than 8.3 million hectares from the large-scale commercial farming sector for redistribution an increase from the five million hectares stated in 1998.”²⁰

Table 2: Land tenure in Zimbabwe 1980-2002.

Land category	1980 ha (m)	1997 ha (m)	2002 ha (m)
LSCF a. (white-owned)	15.5	12.1	1b.
LSCF (A2)	—	—	2.0
c. CA	16.4	16.4	16.4
d. SSCFA	1.4	1.4	1.4
Resettlement	—	3.6	11
State farms	0.3	0.8	0.6
National Parks	6.0	6.0	6.0

a. Large-scale commercial farming area

b. Approximation

c. Communal Areas

d. Small-scale commercial farming area

Source: Government of Zimbabwe.

The final phase of the fast-track programme began during the last quarter of 2001 and ended during August 2002, when it officially came to a close – although land acquisition continued into early 2003. Between June 2000 and February 2001, a national total of 2,706 farms, covering more than six million hectares, were gazetted for compulsory acquisition. By January 2002, up to 6,481 farms had been listed for acquisition. Of these, 918 had been removed because they were counted twice, and 689 were de-listed after litigation or negotiation, leaving a total of 4,874 listed farms, or 9.23 million hectares of land.

In October 2001, the government announced that it intended to list for acquisition 4,558 farms, covering 8.8 million hectares.²¹ In the same month, based on a survey of its members, the CFU estimated that 1,948 farms had been occupied physically and that the number of people occupying farms had risen to 104,000 from an estimated 25,000 at the end of 2000, with an overall average of fifty-three occupiers per farm. By the end of 2001, some 250 farmers out of the CFU’s total membership of 3,500 had left their farms over the previous year and

the Ministry of Land, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement had recorded that 114,830 households had moved and resettled on 4.37 million hectares.

Land reform and agrarian reform

According to Martin Adams land reform is generally accepted to mean “the redistribution of property or rights in land for the benefit of the landless, tenants and farm labourers”. However he is quick to point out that this is ‘a narrow definition, reducing land reform to its simplest element’.²²

Even though ‘land reform’ and ‘agrarian reform’ are often used interchangeably, Adams notes that agrarian reform embraces improvements in both land tenure and agricultural organisation. Accordingly, “its policy prescriptions urge governments to go beyond redistribution: they should also support other rural development measures, such as the improvement of farm credit, cooperatives for farm-input supply and marketing, and extension services to facilitate the productive use of the land reallocated”.²³

Thus, land reform pertains to “the remodelling of tenure rights and the redistribution of land, in directions consistent with the political imperatives underlying the reform”. As Adams points out,

*...those favouring revolutionary change advocate a drastic, planned, public intervention to redistribute land. Yet attempts at drastic redistribution of private land, in the face of strong opposition from landed interests (and in some cases related budgetary impediments), may distract from more feasible evolutionary policies aimed at improving access and security of tenure for small farmers under alternative forms of individual and communal tenure, which do not involve expropriation and compensation.*²⁴

The second phase of the Zimbabwean government’s policy on land redistribution that began in 2000 (the “fast track” land reform programme) is more consistent with the definition of ‘land reform’ provided above, having ostensibly been driven by political imperatives as opposed to economic ones.

The Politics of Land in Zimbabwe

During 2000, the government’s constitutional commission, tasked with creating a new constitution for Zimbabwe, submitted its final draft, which included provisions relating to the acquisition of land for resettlement and also placed the onus for providing compensation for the acquired farms on the former colonial power. The Government would no longer be obliged to pay compensation for the acquire land except for infrastructural improvements. A referendum was held in the same year to allow the people to either accept or reject the draft constitution. The verdict of the majority of Zimbabweans was to reject the draft constitution in its entirety for reasons that were largely political.²⁵

With parliamentary elections due later that year the ruling party found itself increasingly under pressure to deliver on the land question. It was now twenty years since independence and there was little to show in terms of greater access to land for the majority of Zimbabweans residing in the communal areas – the ruling party’s slogan of “land is the economy and the economy is land” notwithstanding.

Shortly after the verdict of the referendum war veterans of the “Second Chimurenga” began invading white owned farms in a “spontaneous demonstration” which had the backing of government. White landowners were told to co-exist with the new “settlers”. This new phenomenon soon spread throughout the country with ordinary peasant farmers joining in. The government soon put in place legislation to protect the new settlers, who could be moved only once new land had been identified for resettling them. Table 3 below provides an outline of legislation related to land acquisition, and how it has changed over time.

Table 3: Legislation Relating to Land Acquisition

Year	Legislation	Provision
1979	Constitution of Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – No property shall be compulsorily acquired – Introduced willing-seller/willing buyer provision
1981-1984	Land Acquisition Act, no. 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Enforces constitutional provision to land for resettlement – Prompt payment of adequate fair compensation
1985-1990	Land Acquisition Act, amendment of 1985	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Introduces certificate of no present interest or right of first refusal
1990	Constitutional Amendment Act, no. 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Denies power of the court to declare unconstitutional on compensation decisions – Allows for compulsory land acquisition.
1992-1993	Land Acquisition Act (Amended to section 10 of chapter 20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Right of first refusal abolished – Designation provision is introduced enabling addition of compulsory land acquisition to willing-seller/willing- buyer.
2000	Constitutional Amendment Act, no. 16 Land Acquisition Act Amended through Presidential Emergency Temporary powers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Absolves government from paying compensation for land (compensation now only for improvements) – Elimination of dual designation route – Enable payment of compensation through payment of 3-5 year bonds – State can refuse to buy land deemed too expensive – Allows for time-delay in actual acquisition

Source: Moyo 2001

The results of the parliamentary elections saw the ruling party beating the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), by the slightest of margins. Following this victory, President Mugabe appointed a new cabinet that was generally referred to as the “war cabinet”, whose major thrust was to see to the completion of land reform exercise now dubbed the “Third Chimurenga”. What followed was a wholesale acquisition of farms that were quickly subdivided into small medium and large-scale self-contained units. Previous owners were given a time limit (in accordance with the revised Land Acquisition Act) to vacate their land. Applications were invited from individuals who were keen to take up the plots for serious agricultural purposes. Applicants were required to submit detailed project proposals before being considered for the allocation of a farm.

Land reform in Zimbabwe has been hampered by the lack of administrative capacity. According to Sam Moyo, “a widely deployed cadre of well-trained field staff is essential to inform people of their entitlements and to facilitate the legal processes of land acquisition and distribution. The numbers of staff involved vary

with the type of reform. In Zimbabwe the fast track land reform programme has been unsuccessful because there have been limited administrative and agricultural extension services to sustain the new farmers".²⁶

Questions have also arisen about the timing for this particular exercise, with one school of thought arguing that orderly and planned land reform was sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. According to this view, the implementation of Zimbabwe's "fast track" land reform faltered because the policy was opportunistically conceived to mobilise support at a critical time in the life of the ruling ZANU-PF government.

One of the immediate consequences of the "fast track" programme was that agricultural output declined substantially during 2001-2002. Even if drought had not negatively affected the land reform programme, a decline would have been inevitable. Following a 21% drop in output in 2001, agricultural output dropped a further 40% in the 2002-2003 season. For instance, tobacco production dropped from 236 million kg in 2000 to 165 million kg in 2002. The Financial Gazette reported that "when 65 per cent of 700 wheat farmers were served with eviction notices in January 2002, this implied that wheat production in the same year would be cut by up to half, to 115,000 tonnes. Maize and livestock production also declined sharply".²⁷ One study by the UNDP in 2002 concluded that agricultural exports had declined owing to disruptions associated with the "fast track" programme.

As matters now stand, the land-reform process has coincided with other factors, including drought, the AIDS epidemic, and ineffective economic policies, to erode household self-reliance, economic productivity and ultimately sustainable livelihoods for millions of Zimbabweans. According to United Nations sources, some 6 million Zimbabweans are unable to secure their minimum daily food requirements and depend on food aid and other social safety programs. The ripple effects have been felt widely in the economy with further contractions predicted for 2005.

In the last phase of the "fast-track" programme, the major development was the government's designation of farms for A2 model settlement. Even though this process was undertaken at a slower pace it proved to be more contentious than the process with the A1 model. Originally the A2 model aimed to settle 51,000 indigenous commercial farmers. However, far fewer than the anticipated number of indigenous farmers had settled on the farms by the cut-off date of the end of August 2002. This was mainly due to the large investment necessary to start production.

Even though it is still not clear how many farmers have been settled under the A2 model, experts have estimated that about 30,000 or 60% of the original target had been settled on some 2 million hectares by 2003. Access to credit finance is a major constraint for most A2 model farmers. Attempts to create state-financed credit through an agri-bond issue in the last quarter of 2003 were under-subscribed mainly due to the depressed economic climate that prevails in Zimbabwe.

Other evidence of the faltering economy caused in part by land reform includes high unemployment. A report by the Economist Intelligence Unit places unemployment in 2004, which heavily affects young people, at a staggering 60%. Gross domestic product per capita was estimated at some US \$371, according to the report.²⁸

The land reform programme has also seen a competitive scramble for commercial farms by members of the ruling ZANU-PF elite, some of whom are reported to have received preferential access to prime agricultural land at the expense of the land hungry rural masses. This phenomenon has been reported widely in the national and international press. Some of these privileged beneficiaries have even gone so far as to evict peasants who had earlier settled on land that had been earmarked by the ruling elite. Most of the land that witnessed intense competition amongst the elite was not only in the prime agro-ecological areas but also possessed good infrastructure.²⁹

If serious efforts are not made to redress the inconsistencies and corruption that has dogged the second phase of land reform one of the long term consequences will be the substitution of a white landowning elite with a new black landowning elite. Such an outcome would run contrary to the expressed motive for land reform, which was to create an equitable distribution of this key resource. Similar concerns were raised at ZANU-PF's national congress held in Chinhoyi in December 2002. Ironically, it was the war veterans who were most vocal about land appropriations by the elite. Some governors were alleged to have acquired several farms each. Prominent members of the ruling party alleged that political connections were a factor in acquiring land.³⁰ If most of the new landowners turn out to be largely "weekend farmers", with no real commitment to engaging in serious commercial farming, this could have the effect of undermining agricultural production in that country.

The sector of Zimbabwe's population that has been most negatively affected by the land reform programme in the commercial agricultural sector has been the farm workers. In a study entitled, "The Situation of Commercial Farm Workers after Land Reform in Zimbabwe." prepared for the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe in 2003, Sachikonye estimates that up to 130,000 farm workers were forced to flee by land invaders from commercial farms. He says that,

...most of the farm workers who were stripped of their livelihoods were made to leave without receiving any compensation from their employers or financial or social assistance from the government. The combination of a disruptive land reform programme, unemployment and lack of land has thus forced the majority of farm workers into the "chronic poor" category.³¹

In particular, certain groups amongst them have proved to be more vulnerable. These are migrant workers, women, the elderly, children and youth. They have fewer resources, rights and opportunities compared to other categories of farm workers. Migrant workers are mainly second or third-generation descendants of immigrants from neighbouring countries in the early part of the 20th century. Sachikonye points out that "they now constitute about 26 percent of the farm worker population. Numbering between 80,000 and 90,000 households, they support a population of over half a million. Migrant farm workers are more vulnerable than other social groups because most of them do not have homes in communal areas (once called tribal trust lands) to fall back on. Ties with their ancestral homes from which they or their forebears originally came have become very weak at best and non-existent at worst. This means that they are in limbo in the wake of land reform".³²

Several reports have suggested that some of the migrant workers were moved by the authorities to border areas in the Province of Mashonaland Central while others were resettled in a remote area of the Lower Zambezi Valley. But there were scarcely any infrastructure and services in this marginal area: "there has been no conscious planning to meet the immediate and long-term needs of these farm workers. Within this group are elderly retired workers who normally lived on farms till they passed away. There was no social safety net for this group except perhaps a tiny pension, and (now diminished) access to housing and land on commercial farms".³³

At the international level there has been serious opposition, not to land reform *per se*, but the manner in which it has been implemented. This sentiment has had negative consequences for the country, one of the most serious of which is that the programme has not received international financial support. To this end, travel and financial sanctions have been imposed on government ministers and certain senior officials by the UK, the USA and the European Union as an indication of their opposition to a system of governance in which the rule of law and human rights are ignored, as exemplified in many instances by the implementation of the "fast track" land reform programme.

The land reform programme has had serious economic, political and social consequences that will affect the nature of Zimbabwe's society in the medium to long term. The negative consequences of land reform are by and large the result of placing political imperatives before sound policy considerations. Conspicuous in their absence are policies regarding the implementation of agrarian reform through other rural development measures, such as the improvement of farm credit, cooperatives for farm-input supply and marketing, and extension services to facilitate the productive use of the land reallocated.

It would appear that Zimbabwe's land reform has focussed narrowly on the remodelling of tenure rights and the redistribution of land, in directions consistent with the political imperatives underlying the reform. This does not seem consistent with the Zimbabwe government's mantra for land reform: *"the land is the economy and the economy is the land"*.

There is no denying that the root causes of Zimbabwe's land problem can be found in its colonial past. At independence in 1980, this country inherited a land tenure system that was founded on an inequitable distribution of land, based on racial lines. Even though the urgent need for land redistribution has always been apparent and justified, the main challenge has been how to equitably redistribute land in a manner that addresses historical injustices, while simultaneously ensuring that agricultural production, which has been the bedrock of this country, is not undermined.

The first phase of Zimbabwe's land reform programme attempted to redistribute land through a market-based "willing seller, willing buyer" system. However, due to various legal and financial constraints discussed above, this approach yielded minimal outcomes for the land hungry masses. Later on, political imperatives led to the implementation of the controversial "fast track" programme, which has all but ruined this country's agricultural sector.

In its quest to deal with the problem of land tenure, the Zimbabwean government has not addressed critical issues related to actual land use, agricultural production and land administration. If the land reform programme is to be rescued, the government of Zimbabwe must embrace agrarian reform – a process that the international community could assist through the provision of resources and training to the newly resettled farmers. This will at least ensure that Zimbabwe's rapidly declining agricultural output will improve and that this country may once again reclaim its role as the breadbasket of the Southern Africa region.

True agrarian reform in Zimbabwe could become a genuine instrument for poverty reduction, creating sustainable livelihoods particularly for poor, rural people and former commercial farm workers. In order to achieve this the government will have to take a more sensible approach, placing greater importance on planning, consultation with key stakeholders, and mobilisation of resources for both capital and social expenditure related to the current reform process. This approach will have to be based on an orderly system that embraces the rule of law and the equality of all citizens irrespective of their political affiliation, race or ethnic background. Such an approach will undoubtedly earn credibility and support from international institutions.

At the international level, the initial response and criticism of the "fast track" land reform programme were somewhat inopportune – to many, the criticism seemed to be concerned singularly with the plight of the white commercial farming community who had been dispossessed of their land, without really expressing concern for the millions affected by unequal land distribution. This subsequently led to accusations in Zimbabwe and most of the Southern African region that the international community's concern, and particularly that of the UK, was racially motivated.

A shared pan-African worldview, based on the need to redress the history of colonialism and white minority rule in Southern Africa, coupled with non-

interference in the sovereign affairs of member states, have to a large extent informed the quiet support (even indifference) of several member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) with regard to land reform in Zimbabwe. This has unfortunately resulted in the reluctance of these organisations to publicly criticise the economic and political instability that the “fast track” land reform programme has caused.

The signal that ought to be sent by all the segments of the international community, including African regional and continental organisations, to the government and people of Zimbabwe needs to be consistent and based on finding a solution to the problems arising from the land reform programme. The message should be that only agrarian reform is going to change the current negative trajectory – and that agrarian reform must be guided by questions related to long term sustainability, genuine socio-economic justice and historical redress, rather than one guided by short-term political expediency. This will lead to the implementation of policies which strengthen the relationship between agricultural and other commercial and industrial activities. Such an approach could very well lead to the medium-term revival of the agricultural sector and stimulate other sectors of the economy that have suffered as a result of the “fast track” land programme. In Zimbabwe *‘the economy has been the land’* and if this economy is to recover all policies including those related to land reform should be guided by rational and well-planned decisions – not by populist, uncoordinated, and ultimately nefarious policies by a regime’s whose only purpose seems to be that of self-preservation.

- 1 Chris Maroleng is a Researcher at the African Security Analysis Programme, Institute for Security Studies.
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- 31 *Ibid*.
- 32 L.M. Sachikonye, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- 33 *Ibid*.