Land Redistribution and Public Action in Zimbabwe

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This paper assesses the evolution of land reform policy and social action for reform in Zimbabwe. This relationship has hitherto not been adequately studied. The recent land redistribution experience suggests that the analysis of the impacts of land reform on the poor requires a more complex analytic approach. It is necessary not only to examine the direct benefits that the poor can gain from new land access, but also the negative short to medium term effects on poverty that may arise. Whereas in the gradualistic land reform process of the 1980’s poor beneficiaries realised farm production and woodland resource consumption benefits from new land access in the immediate and long term. However, the “loss” of farm production and jobs, as well as the wider effects of ‘opposition’ to reform on the broader socio-economic and political front. Conflicts over land reform can arise from failure of market led land redistribution processes, and neoliberal strategies, which polarize the state and civil society, can radicalize land reform, and delay the benefits of reform to the poor. Various factors combine to determine the pattern of state-society interaction, and its prop-poor effects.
1.0 Introduction

A ‘fast track’ approach to land redistribution was introduced during 1996/7 in Zimbabwe, culminating in extensive land transfers by 2004. Land reform took centre stage in Zimbabwe’s politics and economy and polarised land policy discourses nationally and internationally. The earlier period of 1980-96, represented a relatively “slow track” land redistribution programme, characterised by a market driven approach to land reform.

The potential gains for poverty reduction that arise from land reform have hardly been discussed explicitly in Zimbabwe literature, until the beginning of the fast track process. The proliferation of academic, media and non-government organisation (NGO) based reporting on Zimbabwe since 2000 has evolved, in a polarising framework, with important shortcomings in the debate on land reform, state-civil society interactions and its to poverty reduction impacts. Current analyses of the fast track land reform have tended to be politically ‘embedded’, empirically weak and particularly inadequate in terms of understanding the socio-political dynamics of land reform policy making. This has limited dialogue over improving the land reforms’ poverty reduction benefits.

2.0 Land Reform as Social, economic and Political Project

Pre-1997 discourses on poverty oriented land reform in Zimbabwe have tended to be conceived within narrow terms of the value of incomes that beneficiaries can realize from ‘commercial’ farming, rather than on the wider benefits that could accrue from broad based smallholder access to land for improved farming, tenurial security, livelihood wider social reproduction strategies, especially from the derivate consumption benefits of land control, such as access to water, woodland and wildlife resources, and new non-farm opportunities that may arise directly or indirectly following land redistribution. Indeed many experts had not emphasized land reform in poverty reduction strategies especially in PRSP processes. Promoting improved land conservation and productivity in ‘communal’ areas for agricultural ‘growth’, rather than redistributing land and the wider resources associated with land control, and the tapping of other benefits from the structural changes introduced, had received the bulk of international support (World Bank, 1982). Some institutions even queried the existence of popular rural demand for land (UNDP Poverty assessment, 1995). The result has been a tendency to underestimate the poverty related need and potential social pressures for land reform (Moyo, 1995). For years, some government technocrats emphasized industrial development and urban employment creation policies as the panacea for poverty reduction, given their teleological perspectives or industrial ‘stages of growth’, to the neglect of investing in land reform and rural development. Recently it has been argued that creating (urban based) ‘jobs’ not land reform was the more significant problem facing Zimbabwe (see Movement for Democratic Change [MDC], 2000[2]).

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2 MDC election manifesto
Nationalist voices, largely within the state (e.g. Nkomo, Joshua) moreover always emphasized the primacy of promoting political stability through the imperative of land redistribution, including deracialising large scale commercial farming, over the social or poverty imperative (see Moyo, 1995). In this way, explicit treatment of the poverty dimension of land reform, while present in the government of Zimbabwe (GoZ, 1982; 1998) land policy objectives-pronounced in terms of creating access for “the landless, poor and overcrowded rural people”, and various ‘disadvantaged groups’ - tended to be blurred by issues of modernising agriculture and broadening the ‘commercial’ farming sector, by recruiting new ‘competent’ farmers. The neoliberal development and governance perspectives of numerous NGO’s, farmers unions (Zimbabwe Farmers Union [ZFU]), and women’s groups (e.g. women’s land lobby) also meant that they tended to emphasize market based agricultural competence as artificial to land redistribution, rather than the social imperatives such as poverty eradication, let alone political stabilization and integration issues.

Yet, recent comparative political analyses of land reform have also tended to treat the Zimbabwe’s fast track land reform experience as an odd aberration (Bernstein, 2002), contrived for narrow political or electoral hegemonic interests, and which subordinated the required ‘good governance’ (Raftopolous, 2003), under the present globalizing hierarchical order. Referring to land expropriation procedures, the reforms are condemned for their transgressions of landowners human rights (Hellum and Derman, 2005), and the exclusion of farm workers. However, land rights and rule of law issues are not adequately conceptualised or empirically defined in terms of the source of land rights and their effects on the poor. Moreover this human rights discourse remains contested vis-à-vis majoritarian and indigenous loss of land rights and marginalization (Hunzwi, etc). In this way scholars and experts alike justify the current international stand-off over Zimbabwe’s land reform, including support for humanitarian recovery, unless there is a ‘reversal’.

Moreover the ‘polarising discourses’ in the academic, media and political fora, tend to use idioms which label the land reform process in fundamentalist intellectual and ideological terms. Terms such as ‘chaotic and often violent land reform’, and racially motivated land seizure and politically vindictive land reform (see especially the media, and Willems, 2005), have tended to focus evaluation of the ‘fast track’ on narrow and mostly neoliberal economic and governance performance criteria. The polarised domestic socio-political forces, and of international opinion, is thus sustained by entrenched positions, which avoid rigorous analysis of the land reform policy processes, including public action processes. Avoiding analysis of the longer term effects of land redistribution, in favour of a critique of the short term negative manifestations of the land disputes, socio-economic decline and the electoral [mis]fortunes of the competing political parties, partitions the debate.
These methodological considerations suggest the need for an approach which can identify the dynamic structuration of Zimbabwe’s land reform policy process and public actions, and discern the unfolding responses and agency of various actors and institutions (state agents, landowners, CSO’s, land seekers, etc), within the wider historical and contemporary context of Zimbabwe’s political and economic developments. The fundamental questions that the Zimbabwe experience must answer include not only the extent to which the land reform has been distributionally “pro-poor”, but whether it can be made through social demands, also what social and class based trade-offs have and are being made, and the future conflicts these portend.

To discern this, the long run context in which these processes evolve, including periodising the broad shifts in Zimbabwe’s political and socio-economic conditions, and the related policy reforms since independence, needs to be conceptualized. The paper identifies three socio-political milieux of Zimbabwe’s land reform policy reform since 1980. The first decade of independence and nation-building, which experienced substantial land redistribution. The second phase of the SAP-type liberalisation era which decelerated land reform. The third and current era of political transitions and economic ‘rupture’, which led to radical land redistribution, that was intensely contested, at the domestic and international levels. The paper suggests that dynamic changes in the national and international political dimensions of land reform, development, and poverty reduction policies, are critical to shaping the land reform outcome.

3.0 Evolution of Market-led Land Reform Policy Since 1980

Between 1980 and 1996, a relatively “slow track” land reform process, redistribution, had transferred 3.3 million hectares to 70,000 households and 800 medium scale black commercial farms. This market-cum-state driven approach to land reform was implemented in amid scepticism among policy elites, private sector and CSO’s over the desirability of extensive land redistribution and the efficacy of using non-market approaches. During the SAP era of 1990 to 1995 the delivery of land and investment support to small farmers had also decelerated.

Questions have been raised about the “political will and capacity” of the state to do land reforms (Hellum and Derman, 2005), during the pre-fast track period to effect land reforms. The evidence suggests that various constraints were imposed by the willing transactor principle, including the quality and pace of land delivered, the high financial costs of land transfer, and the matching demand for land with supply (Moyo, 1995). The potential negative impacts of extensive redistribution on development and agriculture as evinced by policy elites (World Bank, 1991; others) while neglecting the potential benefits of redistribution (Moyo, 1998) justified slow track redistribution. The potential gains for poverty reduction were hardly discussed explicitly, until the beginning of the fast track process, and even then, in weak conceptual terms.
The structural adjustment (stabilisation and liberalization) programme, endorsed an even more directly market approach to land reform by promoting land markets deregulation, including land subdivisions, land taxation and variants of land titling (World Bank, 1991; Rukuni Commission, 1994) and expanding exports within existing land ownership and economic structures. (Moyo, 2000). While the government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) had initiated laws for land expropriation by 1992, they only applied them seriously after ESAP had collapsed in 1997. The ESAP had extensive negative effects on the agricultural output markets of the poor, deepened national and agricultural income and wealth inequalities, set in de-industrialisation (including in the agro-industrial sector), engendered drastic employment and wages declines, and increased poverty in general. While ESAP had formally subordinated land reform policy to liberalisation, one of its ‘unintended’ consequences was to increase the scale and sources of demand for land in communal areas, among the urban retrenches and poor, and among land seeking indigenous elites (Moyo, 2000).

Zimbabwe’s 25 year history of land reform reflects the dynamic nature of policy and public action under varied political and development policy conditions. The nature of state approaches to land policy and implementation, CSO advocacy and social demands for land, were shaped by both the pre-existing socio-economic structures and institutions, and the conjunctural turn in the political and economic conditions. Some of these were partially induced by international forces over time, (e.g. SAP induced poverty and economic decline), and by internal struggles for accumulation and political succession. The gradually increasing tendency to recognize the value of land reform for poverty reduction, as part of redressing colonial social injustices became evident later in the post ESAP era, as land occupation movements and indigenous capitalist land lobbies grew (Moyo, 2000).

4.0 Outcomes of the Fast Track Land Reform

A ‘fast track’ approach to land reform was introduced in 1996/7, leading to transfer of 80% of large agricultural land holdings to 150,000 beneficiaries by 2004. This brought land reform to the centre of Zimbabwe’s political and economic agenda, and polarised land policy discourses in the international community. The social and class character of the beneficiaries, reveals different patterns of access, heterogeneous capacities to use land and of their support requirements. Smallholder (A1) allocations were granted to 140,866 families, while ‘commercial’ (A2) beneficiaries amounted to 14,500 new farmers, on 4.2 and 2.3 million hectares respectively. This changed the sub-sectoral distribution of land control. Smallholders now control 70% of agricultural while a larger number of small to medium scale farmers, as well as fewer large farmers now hold 30% of the land. The quality of land received by the beneficiaries varies according to agro-ecological potential and the distribution of water and irrigation resources, with the new commercial farmers holding most of the latter.
Rural communities’ capacities to reverse poverty and improve their livelihoods is conditioned by their territorial and usufruct control over land, as well as small scale external welfare transfers from the state, urban workers’ remittances, and aid dependent NGO’s. This expanded access to new land improved land access in communal areas, has widened opportunities for poverty reduction.

These structural changes suggest the emergence of a potential significant broader based home market, founded upon a larger peasantry and its predominant rural population, as well as a larger black agrarian capitalist class on smaller farms, than in the pre-2000 situation. This has triggered new interrelated processes of agro-industrial re-organisation and the consolidation of the black capitalist class, as well as the further differentiation of the peasantry in terms of the “rich” (small capitalist) and “poor” (semi-proletarians) peasants; and the labour process which underpins these, within a context of a continued functional dualism (Moyo and Yeros, 2005). Poverty reduction effects could however be limited by the entrenchment of the new capitalists if these succeed in re-entrenching a disarticulated pattern of accumulation.

The short term impacts of the land reform are mixed. While access to land has created a wider potential economic basis for many of the poor, the failure of policy to rapidly promote the productive use of land by all small farmers, alongside the persistence of droughts, over 4 years, have contributed to rural food insecurity and poverty.

Agricultural production declined in volume, and value terms since 2000, particularly in eight of the 15 key commodities produced in Zimbabwe, albeit at varied rates of decline. This transitional decline, not uncommon where extensive land reforms were effected, has in Zimbabwe the “transition” has held longer for various reasons the interrelated decline of the macro-economic conditions, land transfers, sustained droughts and economic isolation and landowner resistance to produce under downsized landholdings.

The deteriorating macro-economic conditions affected the supply and use of inputs during the period, the land reallocation process itself and limited productive capacities of the new LSCF farming in the short term. Weak macro-economic conditions and policy (including agricultural policy) during this period, grossly affected the profitability of farming and of agribusiness and agricultural support agents, especially because forex shortages limited the entire range of inputs available to all farmers, while inflation and price controls resulted in a cost-price squeeze that weighed heavily against agricultural investment. In 2004, these conditions improved marginally. However, these internal factors were exacerbated, if not triggered off in some instances by exogenous factors, whose real effects commenced prior to the fast track programme in 1997/8, including reduced external credit and aid (i.e. economic isolation) and political conflict, and later the protracted droughts.
The Fast Track Land Reform programme was initiated in 2000 on the back of an already ailing economy, a narrowing export base and negative agricultural and mining terms of trade, the long term effects of external shocks from recurring droughts in the early 1990s and negative capital flows. Most of these economic conditions had taken a steep downturn from 1997. Previous large reductions in real GDP growth usually associated with droughts, tended to be followed by economic recovery in the next year (Matshe, 2004), given that external aid, beyond humanitarian aid had played a critical role. But between 1996 and 1999 external flows had declined significantly (Moyo, 2003). Since 2000 real GDP growth has been negative, reaching $-14.5\%$ in 2002, and projected at $-12.4\%$ for 2003 (Matshe, 2004), indicating that factors, other than the drought and land transfers were also critical.

4.4 External dependency and reliance on rain fed farming

The land reform and economic policies adopted since 1997, and the resource gaps which had emerged, were exacerbated by external isolation, and largely through increased shortages of agricultural inputs and finance (Matshe, 2004). Zimbabwe’s economic isolation began in 1996 when failure to sign the proposed ZIMPREST (SAP) programme led to reduced external financing, including concessionary loans from the Bretton Woods and bilateral financiers as well as grant aid. The usual commercial credit mainly from European institutions was also reduced. The flow of balance of payments support and export commodity credits, had for years bridged Zimbabwe’s financing gaps for imported inputs and related investments. External flows were gradually reduced first between 1997 and 1999 and then, almost completely stopped from 2000. The forex gap had been widened by 30\% in 2003 (RBZ Monetary Statement).

The reasons for this isolation are a contested arena of moral, political and economic debate. The formal reasons assembled to justify this isolation grew in number overtime, as economic and political conditions deteriorated, to include poor macro-economic policy, poor governance and human ‘rights’ practises, lack of “rule of law”, the “chaotic” land reform itself, and debt arrears (see also IMF, 2004). The GoZ’s response to this isolation and the reasons behind it are that western nations had sought to impose an unworkable and failed SAP macro-economic policy framework from 1996, the resistance to finance extensive land reforms when demands had escalated by Britain since 1997 and other donors later, punishment for the DRC intervention and radical land reforms. Moreover the GoZ emphasized external commitment to “regime change” by squeezing the economy to generate a social crisis and funding the opposition directly and indirectly (The Herald, various issues).

The reliance on rainfed farming by small farmers also became a major source of slow recovery. The effects of bad weather over 3 years (two drought years [2001/2 and 2002/3], one cyclone affected year [2000/1] and uneven precipitation in the [2003/4] year) and the major drought of 2004/5 were critical.
in reducing peasant production of the main staple food grains (maize and small grains), and to a lesser extent groundnuts. Combined with inputs shortages and lacking irrigation resources, yields declined and crops were scorched although areas cropped had remained high. Cotton production, which also produced under similar conditions by peasants, survived because of its drought resistance and the concentration of its production in adapted drylands, as well as because of the sustained inputs support services supplied by private sector marketing and contracting agencies with high export revenues such as Cottco. Outside the drought years these commodities experienced increased output especially by 2006.

Other commodities such as wheat tobacco, dairy and soya beans, which had been produced predominantly by white large scale farmers, suffered outputs decline of between 30% to 68.6%, given the land transfers on such farms. However, horticulture, produced by large estates suffered losses well below 15%, given that these were not affected by land transfers to a significant extent.

The interaction of complex range of factors (economic, social and political) which underlie the variety of outcomes, measured in terms of output, are notable. These include class and race based production and marketing networks; financing traditions and diverse capacities to mobilize resources were at play. The loss of some external commodity and financing markets also played a significant role, as did the dirigiste price control policies which led to a growth of speculative and informal markets. Socio-political alignments shaped these patterns are discussed next.

5.0 Institutional Aspects

Most analyses of the Zimbabwe ‘crisis’ lack an adequate empirical analysis of the correlation of forces at the national and local level, given their tendency to focus on the broad analytic categories targeted at simple units such as the authoritarian state, civil society, democracy movement, war veterans, and political parties (Raftopoulos, 2003, Moore, 2005; Alexander, 2003; Worby, 2003; Rutherford, 2003). Thus they miss the complexity, ‘embeddedness’ and interrelatedness of the structures underlying these complex movements. In particular, peasant movements and their alliances to political parties, especially using the land occupations process, have tended to be underestimated. This of course reflects longstanding stereotypical conceptions of peasant organisations, their strategies and influence (Hobsbawm, 1998). Their conceptualisation of the state, the class structures, and the international dimensions of policy making are unable to account for the contradictory social processes at play.

Varied land policy approaches, ranging from the ‘market led’ to the ‘state led’ approaches, were used at various points in time, in relation to the changing strategies of non-state actors, such as peasants, war veterans, chiefs and NGO’s, as well as landowners and the ‘international community’. Non-state actions, ranged from direct actions such as land occupations and street actions, to collaborative or
corporatist engagement in the implementation of official land reform programmes. Different tactics of policy dialogue, negotiation and publicised confrontations were adopted at different times. These processes changed over time because of the changing ideological and material conditions and interests of key actors, especially the growing poverty and economic decline.

The influence of CSO institutions on land policy is a more complex phenomenon than is often recognised. The shaping of the fast track policy came from varied sources, including from internal and external (oppositional) pressures mobilised by political parties and CSO’s, and local structures of the state, traditional authorities and peasants’ movements (and CBO’s). The fast track land policy evolved in response to the negative impacts of neoliberalism, which mobilised greater demands for land among the poor, and nascent black elites. The growth of political opposition ignited land politics, given the racial dimension of land inequality and prevarication over the colonial responsibility. This reinforced the nationalist ideology of the ‘land movement’, while resistance to a smaller scale of land reform and isolation radicalised central policy elites.

In addition to the critique of ‘internal’ institutions of policy influence, the ‘external’ critique (by the MDC until 2003, some NGO’s, the commercial farmers’ union –e.g. CFU and JAG- etc) of the land reform also generated important land policy responses. This critique focused on issues of corrupt tendencies, human rights violations (e.g. the farmworkers displacement, farmer evictions, and landowners ‘rights’) and on legal ‘due process’ or ‘rule of law issues. While largely couched in oppositional terms (of political party contestation) and against the land reform ‘method’, in the media and at international fora, the ‘external’ critique was led by landowners, NGO’s, the MDC and some scholars. The external critique in the independent media was effective (Willems, 2005), although it was diminished in 2003 by the closure of the Daily News, while internet and other published reports of CSO’s thrived (websites).

There is also a tendency to inadequately differentiate political motivation and deliberate organisational policy direction of violence, from the more institutionalised processes of violence in Zimbabwean society, and from the sporadic opportunistic use of violence by rogue elements (criminal and corrupt actors), which perpetuate violence and thrive from “chaos”. This has been partially admitted by Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the MDC (2005). Nor has the state capacity to address growing land conflicts, litigation, corruption and human rights violations been critically examined. The confrontational tactics and populist mobilisation of the CSOs have affected the effectiveness of both sides in the shaping of pro-poor policies.

The internal critique (supportive of the reform) and the external critique (for resistance or oppositional purposes) had their greatest effect on the “commercial” (A2) component of the land reform
programme, in which elite access to land, inputs and credit exhibited tendencies of ‘cronyism’, corruption, and ineffective use of allocated land. This pressure influenced or sustained rural demands for greater equity in land allocations. This diverted the emphasis that had initially been placed on ‘blaming’ the purported failure of land reform on the allocation of land to poor “subsistence” farmers, especially by landowners and some middle class political party and CSO actors (see Tsvangirai, 2002), decrying the method of land reform, particularly the expropriation of former large farms. These advocacy processes reflected unintended and intended, entryist and oppositional, confrontational and constructive processes of state-civil society interactions to influence the poverty and land policy nexus.

In Zimbabwe, the 1996/7 and 1998/9 periods witnessed the birth of parallel socio-political ‘movements’, arising from meta-contradictions in the domestic economy and politics, and foreign relations. Elements of spontaneity in social and political ‘movement’ building, and their ‘direction’ or orchestration by key domestic and external forces, were evident in the two movements. The emergence of the war veterans’ led peasant movement, was derived from existing scattered peasant movements. It radicalised land policy and the policy elites, as well as challenged the requirements of neoliberal development strategy, but was co-opted by Zanu PF and the state, over a three year period (between 1998 and 2001). The emergence of the ZCTU-NCA-MDC alliance, which reflected some spontaneity and calculated strategic local leadership, was boosted by external facilitation if not orchestration, during this 3-year period. It also reflected the co-optation of simmering urban social protest movements, alongside the emerging CSO networking capacities of a largely middle class social basis. To be sure, local capital was also active in promoting and financing this mobilisation process. This brought ideological incoherence in this largely urban movement, and raises questions about the organic links and social basis of the MDC in these social movements.

Nor can it be argued that the alliance of Zanu PF, war veterans, some CSO’s and elite nationalists had maintained an organic base in the peasantry prior to 1998. Existing peasant movements tended to be scattered and could not have acted spontaneously at a national level in these circumstances. War veterans ignited the existing isolated peasant land occupation movements into a national movement, while Zanu PF and then the state co-opted this movement, and succeeded in controlling and hegemonising the land ‘movement’ into a state led land reform programme.

As the contradictions of deepening economic stress and political conflict unfolded the two opposed political ‘movements’ degraded the social content of their movements by their ‘confrontational’ political strategies. Their ‘scorched earth’ tactics were deliberately aimed at sustaining polarisation and ‘machismo’. Some theoretical definitions of these polarising strategies are being developed (LeBas, 2005). This tended to marginalise serious bi-partisan debate on land reform and poverty
reduction. The regional (especially South African) and international media, interacting with the national (government and ‘independent’) media reflected and enhanced this polarisation. (Willems, 2005; Ranger, 2004).

Most of these writings on the state moreover lack a conceptual framework and empirical basis to understand the significant role played by local institutions in land reform policy making. Apart, from the influence of national CSO’s and political parties, local ‘land committees’ and the traditional leaders in networks emerge as one of the most critical institutions in shaping the policy direction and the implementation of the fast track land reform. The land committees presented contradictory sources of influence (positive and negative) on national policy and implementation procedures, as well as on the nature of equity outcome. In some cases they were a source of selfish allocations and local patronage. In this way however they ensured that many more rural peti-elites gained access to A2 land compared to urban elites. In most cases however they forced a downsizing of land holdings allocated, challenging the plans by central government for the A2 scheme to accommodate more people. The fact that land committees and local war veterans associations, tended to interact with other institutions such as traditional leaders, local peasant groups and others, tended to create a bulwark of pressure against influential central government officials and urban elites on matters of enforcing policy principles or on checking corrupt tendencies. Land committee members and war veterans, who had led land occupation’ movements became key sources of exposing corruption in land allocations and in mobilising wider social support for broadened land reform, demanding land policy adaptations and the corrections of unequal or unfair land allocations. Traditional leaders generated both equity inducing influence by seeking more land for their ‘communities’ and inequity inducing effects by seeking larger commercial plots for themselves.

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The influence of CSO institutions on land policy is a more complex phenomenon than is often recognised. The shaping of the fast track policy came from varied sources, including from internal and external (oppositional) pressures mobilised by political parties and CSO’s, and local structures of the state, traditional authorities and peasants’ movements (and CBO’s). The fast track land policy evolved
in response to the negative impacts of neoliberalism, which mobilised greater demands for land among the poor, and nascent black elites. The growth of political opposition ignited land politics, given the racial dimension of land inequality and prevarication over the colonial responsibility. This reinforced the nationalist ideology of the ‘land movement’, while resistance to a smaller scale of land reform and isolation radicalised central policy elites.

The internal critique (supportive of the reform) and the external critique (for resistance or oppositional purposes) had their greatest effect on the “commercial” (A2) component of the land reform programme, in which elite access to land, inputs and credit exhibited tendencies of ‘cronyism’, corruption, and ineffective use of allocated land. This pressure influenced or sustained rural demands for greater equity in land allocations. This diverted the emphasis that had initially been placed on ‘blaming’ the purported failure of land reform on the allocation of land to poor “subsistence” farmers, especially by landowners and some middle class political party and CSO actors (see Tsvangirai, 2002), decrying the method of land reform, particularly the expropriation of former large farms. These advocacy processes reflected unintended and intended, entryist and oppositional, confrontational and constructive processes of state-civil society interactions to influence the poverty and land policy nexus.

Local ‘land committees’ presented a critical institutional mechanism for an ‘internal critique’, which shaped land policy and broadened its inclusiveness, as they brought together local government officials with a variety of local traditional leaders, war veterans, ruling party leaders and experts. Wide regional variation in the implementation of land policy, also reflected the diversity of participation. This expanded the base of land policy influence well beyond its pre-1997 centralism, although it excluded CSO’s considered to be oppositional and MDC officials. Thus direct policy activism at the local level was fairly partisan, although at the central state level, institutions such as the parliamentary land sub-committee and related subcommittees were bi-partisan. This critique, combined with other ‘internal’ (state and non-state) critique and ‘audits’, had the effect of shaping the land policy concerns of some Zanu PF and GoZ moderates, who sought policy and implementation corrections, to ensure policy consistency and fairness, against the defensive denials of land policy problems by ‘hardliner’ policy elites. The internal exposure of implementation problems (in the land committees, government audits and in Zanu PF) from independent studies and oppositional reporting, all served to pressure “policy elites” and local implementation structures to strive for fairness, equity and ‘procedurally’ correct (anti-corrupt) implementation processes in the land reform, and to improve transparency and accountability in the process.

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3 Newspaper statements
In addition to the critique of ‘internal’ institutions of policy influence, the ‘external’ critique (by the MDC until 2003, some NGO’s, the commercial farmers’ union –e.g. CFU and JAG- etc) of the land reform also generated important land policy responses. This critique focused on issues of corrupt tendencies, human rights violations (e.g. the farm workers displacement, farmer evictions, and landowners ‘rights’) and on legal ‘due process’ or ‘rule of law’ issues. While largely couched in oppositional terms (of political party contestation) and against the land reform ‘method’, in the media and at international fora, the ‘external’ critique was led by landowners, NGO’s, the MDC and some scholars. The external critique in the independent media was effective (Willems, 2005), although it was diminished in 2003 by the closure of the Daily News, while internet and other published reports of CSO’s thrived (websites).

Both the ruling and opposition political parties and CSO’s aligned to them had various forms of influence on land policy. The government’s dramatic turn to co-opt the land movements and later to effect policy changes for extensive redistribution, was fomented both by the advocacy of war veterans and scattered peasant movements, and by the emergence of the ZCTU-MDC alliance as a political force, supported by middle class NGO formations, as well as capital (including landowners). This re-configured the correlation of social forces and the balance of power in general. The ‘pro-democracy’ alliance between the MDC and some local CSO’s, local and international capital, international donors and northern NGOs, was presented with the contradiction of apparently rejecting re-distributive policies and their potential to reduce inequality and poverty. The redistributionists and nationalist alliance faced the contradiction of being associated with the governance deficiencies, which emerged under a strong statist agenda.

The focus by some of these CSO’s on governance and human rights advocacy had the positive effect of highlighting Zimbabwe’s democracy deficit and creating civil society capacities to influence policy in general. But their neglect of promoting redistributive land reform since 1980, and when the opportunity arose in 1997, following years of devastating SAP policies and the recent economic decline, remains their main enigmatic contradiction. The rural populations’ land rights thus became a neglected basic human right, given the focus of CSO and MDC advocacy on the shortcomings wider governance of the state and its ruling party.

These processes of social pressure far land reform generated what could be called an expanded redistributionist tendency, based on an ‘internal self correcting mechanism’ using alliances within and outside the state structures. While limited, the extent of elite land and equipment grabbing and central policy control, and had the tendency of expanding, was contained by the expanded range of demands for land potential beneficiary. Social pressure did not eliminate the uneven land allocation tendency entirely hence, the continued pressures on the central state to pursue “corrections” in the land reform
implementation, which are themselves hamstrung by political struggles, among central level elites, especially over the succession up to today.

6.0 Conclusions and policy issues

Zimbabwe’s 25 year history of land reform reflects the dynamic nature of policy and public action under varied political and development policy conditions. The gradually increasing tendency to recognise the value of land reform for poverty reduction, as part of redressing colonial social injustices, was evident. The nature of state approaches to land reform policy and implementation, CSO advocacy and social demands for land, were shaped by both the pre-existing socio-economic structures and institutions, and the conjunctural turn in the political and economic conditions. Some of these were partially induced by international forces over time, (e.g. SAP induced poverty and economic decline), and by internal struggles for accumulation and political succession.

The last decade increased social mobilization for land reform reflecting failures of neoliberal market policies, in the economy had land reforms, which led the states’ retreat and development, defines a transition which emerged in Zimbabwe’s politics, expressed through contestations over economic and social policies, land reform, and the “governance” system. This transition also reflects the gradual growth and maturation of post-independence class interests and their social institutions, including of civil society organizations, and their capacities, within a wider societal process of socio-political succession politics. Organisational weaknesses such as the alliances with peasants, farmworkers and ‘informal’ sector workers, and the constraints of their weak resource base, as well as the lack of clear articulation of a redistributionist ideological direction and policies on economic transformation and land reform, constrained their advocacy for land reform.

It was the liberation movements’ war veterans, who cross-class alliances, within and outside the state, which mobilized a radicalized land redistribution agenda, outside of the formal civil society organizational framework. The latter responded with even greater calls for neoliberal economic and ‘governance’ reforms, leading to their marginalization in the redistributionist tendency.

The Zimbabwean experience suggests the need to examine carefully how national and international policy (macro-economics, governance and land) and interaction processes evolve over time, in relation to their competing objectives and conceptualisations of land reform and poverty reduction, within the wider context of political and economic agenda setting. It suggests that the wide range of public actions (including on electoral matters, land policy and wider economic policy, and direct actions over land) and institutions, compete under state and international orchestration, and that these mediate and shape state policies and public actions, in struggles to protect existing property rights against struggles to gain access to land. The dynamics of land policy and public action reflected the changing political
and economic fortunes of various classes, social groups and political formations, in relation to the progressively unsustainable economic performance and development of neoliberal Zimbabwe, in relation to changes in the political organisation and landscape of civil society formations.

5.0 References


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