

# Zimbabwe's land reform: myths and realities

During the past decade, Zimbabwe has undergone a tumultuous process of land redistribution. The way forward on the land issue is a challenge facing us all. In an attempt to stimulate constructive national debate on this vital topic, we are pleased to publish this new series on livelihoods after land reform, based on a comprehensive 10-year study of the situation on the ground in Masvingo province. This is the fourth article in the series.



In developing their farms, most new farmers have had to start from scratch.

BY IAN SCOONES

One of the recurrent myths about Zimbabwe's land reform is that investment has been insignificant in the new resettlements: the land lies idle, people are not committed to farming and infrastructure is destroyed, neglected or non-existent.

Perceptions of a lack of order and poor tenure security have further contributed to this view. Our studies in Masvingo province have shown this is far from the case. Certainly, unstable macroeconomic factors until 2009 undermined opportunities for capital investment, but impressive strides have been made in clearing the land, in purchasing livestock, equipment and transport and in building new settlements.

with limited infrastructure.

There were scattered homesteads, a few workers' cottages, the odd dip tank, small dam and irrigation plot, but not much else. When groups of land invaders took the land they established 'base camps', under the leadership of war veteran commanders. Surveys of soil types and water sources were undertaken by the land invaders.

*'The new settlers have invested at scale'*

The new settlers then pegged fields and marked out areas for settlement. Soon, once the official Fast Track Land Reform Programme was launched,

remarkably short time, people began to invest in earnest.

There was an urgency: fields had to be prepared for planting, structures had to be built for cattle to be kraaled in, granaries had to be erected for the harvests to be stored, and homes had to be put up for growing numbers of people to live in.

A peopled landscape of houses, fields, paths and roads soon emerged. Human population densities increased significantly and livestock populations grew. Stocking densities on beef ranches were recommended to be around one animal per 10 hectares; now much larger livestock populations exist, combining cattle with goats, sheep, donkeys, pigs and poultry. Investment in stock has been significant, with cattle popu-

while in A1 self-contained and A2 sites an average of 13.3ha and 23.7ha had been cleared. In the A1 sites most of this was being cultivated. In addition, people have constructed numerous gardens, all of which have required investment in fencing. In addition, people have dug wells, built small dams, planted trees and dug soil conservation works. Investment in fields was complemented by investment in farm equipment, with ploughs, cultivators and scotch carts purchased in numbers.

Building has also been extensive in the new resettlements. Some structures remain built of pole and mud, however, after a year or two, when people's sense of tenure security had increased, buildings using bricks, cement and tin/asbestos roofing increased. Some very elaborate homes have been built with the very best materials imported from South Africa.

Transport has been a major constraint on the new resettlements. With no roads and poor connections to urban areas, there were often no forms of public transport available. This was compounded by the economic crisis, as many operators closed down routes. This had a severe impact. Lack of access to services – shops, schools, clinics – and markets meant that people suffered. Investing in a means of transport was often a major priority. Bicycles in particular were bought in large numbers, but also cars, pick-ups and trucks.

## Investing in the land

What is the value of all this investment? A simple set of calculations which compute the cost of labour and materials used or the replacement cost of the particular item show that, on average, each household had invested over US\$2000 in a variety of items in the period from settlement to 2008-09.

This is of course only a small subset of the total. In addition such private investment does not account for investments at the community level. Across our sites, churches have been established, schools have been built, roads cut and areas for shops carved out as part of community efforts. Labour and materials have been mobilised without any external help.

In the A1 sites in particular this highly-motivated and well-organised pattern of self-help has dominated. While the state has been present, it has not always been helpful. The re-planning of village and field sites was resented by

many, as the land use planning models dating from the 1930s were re-imposed, with fields removed from near rivers and streams and villages placed on the ridges far from water sources. Planning laws were also invoked in the destruction of nascent business centres as part of Operation Murambatsvina.

Extension workers are few and far-between and veterinary care almost non-existent. Instead, people have used their own knowledge, skills and connections in developing their agriculture, often relying on those with Master Farmer qualifications which they had gained in their former homes in the communal areas. Without dipping, the explosion of tick-borne animal diseases has been devastating, but many farmers have purchased spray-on chemicals, often organising themselves in groups to tackle the problem.

## External support is necessary

So without the state, and without the projects of donors and NGOs, the new settlers have invested at scale. Extrapolating the results from our sample and for the limited set of items assessed to the whole province this adds up to an investment of US\$91m across all new resettlements;

a substantial amount by any calculation.

But is this an argument that people can just do it on their own, and should be left to their own devices? Emphatically: no. There are plenty of things that need to be done, and where external support is necessary. In order to get farming moving in the new resettlements a significant investment in infrastructure – roads, wells, dams, dips and so on – will be needed.

*'A peopled landscape of houses, fields, paths and roads soon emerged'*

This is unlikely to come from individual and community contributions, although the considerable entrepreneurial initiative and deep commitment to investment in the new resettlements is a fantastic platform on which to build.

**In the next article we ask if there is a smallholder agricultural revolution in the making on the new resettlements and discuss what needs to be done to get agriculture moving.**



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## The value of investment

Focus of investment	Average value of investment per household (US\$)
Land clearance	\$385
Housing/buildings	\$631
Cattle	\$612
Farm equipment	\$198
Transport	\$150
Toilets	\$77
Garden fencing	\$29
Wells	\$79
Total	\$2161

## Starting from scratch

In developing their farms, most new farmers have had to start from scratch. For the most part the Masvingo study sites were ranches: large expanses of bush grazing,

officials from the government arrived and imposed an official plan, based on land use planning regulations, as well as much pressure to accommodate more people. Some had to move their shelters and clear fields anew. But within a

lations in particular growing rapidly, especially in the A1 sites.

One of the major tasks facing new settlers has been clearing land. In A1 village sites, on average each household had cleared 6.8ha by 2008-09,

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