

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 series on livelihoods after land reform, based on a comprehensive 10-year study of the situation on the ground in Masvingo province. This article is the third in the series.



The majority of the people who have settled on the redistributed land are ordinary people with families to feed.

BY IAN SCOONES

One of the most repeated myths about Zimbabwe's land reform is that all the land went to 'Mugabe's cronies'; those with access to elite connections and benefiting from political patronage. This did, of course, happen, and continues to do so. Tackling such extreme excesses of land grabbing through a land audit remains a major challenge. But elite capture is not the whole story of Zimbabwe's land reform; nor indeed the dominant one.

Who got the land?

Who got the land and what is the profile of the new settlers? Our study of 400 households across 16 sites from Masvingo province showed by far the majority of the new settlers are ordinary people. About half of all new settler households are from nearby communal areas and another 18% from urban areas. These are people who had little or very poor land in the communal areas or were unemployed or with poorly-paid jobs and

living in town. The remaining third of household heads was made up of civil servants (16.5% overall, but increasing to around a quarter of all settlers in A1 self-contained and A2 sites), business people (4.8% overall, but again proportionately higher in the A1 self-contained and A2 sites), security service personnel (3.7% overall) and former farm workers (6.7% overall).

Farm workers made up 11.5% of households in the A1 villagised sites, with many taking an active role in the land invasions. In one case a farm worker organised and led the invasion of the farm where he had worked. Given that in other parts of the country, farm workers were displaced in large numbers, often ending up destitute, living in camps on the farms, this is perhaps surprising.

Yet this reflects the extent and nature of labour on the former large-scale farms in Masvingo province. Unlike in the Highveld farms, where large, resident labour forces existed without nearby communal homes, our Masvingo study sites were formerly large-scale ranches where

labour was limited, and workers came, often on a temporary basis, from nearby communal areas.

Across all of these categories are 'war veterans'. As household heads they make up 8.8% of the total population. The category 'war veteran' is however a diverse one. Prior to the land invasions, most were farming in the communal areas, a few were living in town, while some were civil servants, business people and employees in the security services.

'Only 12% of households had a woman named as the land holder'

At the time of the land invasions in 2000, many indeed had long dropped their 'war veteran' identity and had been poor, small-scale farmers in the communal areas for 20 years since the end of the liberation war. Those who led the land invasions were often able to secure land in the A1

self-contained plots, but many were sidelined in the allocation of larger A2 farms.

Land was allocated unevenly to men and women. In most cases it is men whose names appear on the 'offer letters', the permits issued to new settlers by the government. Yet women were important players in the land invasions, providing support to the base camps during the 'jambanja' period, and subsequently investing in the development of new homes and farms.

'By far the majority of new settlers are ordinary people'

However, across our sample only 12% of households had a woman named as the land holder on the permit.

The highest proportion of female-headed households was in the informal settlements, as women often saw the land invasions as an opportunity to make a new independent life and escape abusive relationships or accusations of witchcraft, for example.

So who amongst these groups are 'the cronies'? Some senior officials, often linked to the security services, were able to gain access to land, often by influencing allocations following the land invasions. The land invasions involved diverse people with multiple affiliations. War veterans, often with an ambivalent attitude to the party hierarchy but mostly not aligned to the opposition, were influential in land allocation during and following the invasions, and managed often to secure better plots on the A1 self-contained schemes.

The large group of civil servants, particularly on the A2 plots - and in our sample especially in the sugar estates - were often teachers, agricultural extension workers and local government offi-

cials. While not being poor and landless from the communal areas, most could not be regarded as elite. Indeed, in simple financial terms many were extremely poor, as government wages had effectively ceased during the economic crisis.

New land, new people

The result is a new mix of people in the new resettlements. In the A2 schemes, for example 46.5% of new farmers have a 'Master Farmer' certificate, while in the A1 self-contained schemes 17.6% do. 91.6% of A2 farmers have been in education to Form 3 or above, while this proportion is 71.6% and 44.8% in the A1 self-contained and villagised schemes respectively.

The new resettlements are dominated by a new generation of farmers, with most household heads being under 50, many born since Independence. A2 schemes are dominated by the over-

to services and support in the absence of official programmes in the rural areas.

This data from Masvingo province is reflected in other studies from other areas of the country. The overall picture is complex, but a simple narrative that land reform has been dominated by grabbing by elites is clearly inaccurate. Land previously occupied by a single farmer, often absent but with a manager and a few workers resident, is now being used by a highly diverse group of people. Overall, the new resettlements are populated by younger, more educated people with a greater diversity of backgrounds, professional skills and connections than their neighbours in the communal areas and old resettlements.

The new resettlements are therefore not a replication of the 1980s resettlement schemes or an extension of the communal areas, nor are they simply scaled-down version of large-scale commercial farms. Instead, a very different social and economic dynamic is



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40s, but often include people with significant experience and connections. That overall 18.3% of households came from urban areas (increasing to 43.8% in the A2 schemes) is significant too, as connections to town have proved important in gaining access

unfolding, one that has multiple potentials, as well as challenges. - Next week we look at patterns of investment in the new resettlements, and so challenge the myth that they are abandoned, unproductive and a wasted resource.

Table: Profiles of settler household heads (%)

	A1 villagised	A1 self contained	Informal	A2	Total
Ordinary people from other rural areas	59.9	39.2	69.7	12.2	49.9
Ordinary people from urban areas	9.4	18.9	22.6	43.8	18.3
Civil servant	12.5	28.3	3.8	26.3	16.5
Security services	3.6	5.4	3.8	1.8	3.7
Business person	3.1	8.2	0	10.5	4.8
Former farm worker	11.5	0	0	5.3	6.7

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