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Transcript

Land Reform in Zimbabwe Revisited: A Qualified Success?

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Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP

Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee; UK Foreign Secretary (1995-97)

Chair: David Simon

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David Simon:

I am David Simon from Royal Holloway, University of London and I'm your chair for this evening. Unusually for a panel of this sort we actually have three speakers and a discussant, so we're going to have to be even more disciplined than normal, both in terms of talking time from the podium but also in terms of interventions, questions, observations from the floor.

An additional complicating factor is that Sir Malcolm Rifkind has been delayed by parliamentary business, and I'm told he's actually on his way and is due shortly, but we are going to start in the hope that he arrives magically at the time that he makes his discussant's remarks that will follow the three speakers who fortunately are here.

This panel is organized as an event linked to the launch of the new book of which there are copies both there and upstairs where we'll have the reception afterwards for purchase: *Zimbabwe Takes Back Its Land*, co-authored by Joe Hanlon, and Teresa Smart and Jeanette Manjengwa who will be first and second speakers. And then Admos Chimhowu will be the third of the speakers before Sir Malcolm Rifkind's discussant's observations.

So just by way of introduction: Teresa is a visiting fellow at the Institute of Education here in the University of London and in addition to co-authoring this co-wrote the book with Joe a few years ago: *Do Bicycles Equal Development in Mozambique?*

Jeanette is deputy director of the Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Zimbabwe and also co-author of this book.

Admos Chimhowu is lecturer in the School of Environment and Development at the University of Manchester.

And as many of you know, Sir Malcolm Rifkind is Conservative Member of Parliament for Kensington, and former foreign secretary; one of only four ministers who served throughout both the entire Thatcher and Major premierships and was foreign secretary for four or five years from 1995. [*sic*]

He will come in as soon as he arrives, but so as not to delay us further; I'm just going to ask each of the speakers to use no more than five minutes, and I'm also going to be firm in relation to interventions from the floor and keep everybody to no more than two minutes.

Teresa Smart:

We're here today to report on a study of the largest land reform in Africa, and one of the most controversial. In 2000, the liberation war veterans led an occupation of most of the remaining white farmland in Zimbabwe.

About 4,000 formerly white farms are now occupied by 170,000 Zimbabwean farm families. It mirrored a violent occupation that took place 50 years ago. In that case, the occupiers were white veterans of World War Two: 100,000 families lost their farms. They were forced out at gunpoint, their houses were burned, they lost their cattle and any investments they'd made on the farm and there was no compensation. It was many of their children that led the liberation war to regain the land. A real focus of the Zimbabwean liberation war was land.

There was an early land reform in 1980: 75,000 families gained land, and so did members of the political elite; but most of the liberation war veterans did not, and they began to protest, and they continued to protest. In the late 1990s there were speeches about land reform, about when it was going to happen; but the liberation war veterans believed it was all talk and would never happen. So finally the veterans took the land and organized the occupations. They organized spontaneous and large occupations of the land in 2000.

Initially, the government tried to stop this. Ministers went to the farms. They said you have to move off; this is illegal; you have to leave the occupations. But they failed, and the occupations continued. And so finally, the government realized it had no choice and it passed legislation to legalize what it called the 'fast-track' land reform.

There was a myth that [Robert] Mugabe was totally behind the land grab, and organized it, but the war veterans stressed that they were occupying against the Mugabe government.

And as the white farmers found in the 1950s, it takes a generation; it takes 20 years to dominate a farm and become highly productive. And similarly in the 1980s, the first land reform, these farmers needed 20 years to become fully productive and use the land best. The 2000 land reform farmers – they're only halfway there. But the World Bank in November said Zimbabwe's total agriculture production has almost returned to the average of the 1990s, the decade before land reform. Even the World Bank accepts that land reform farmers are reaching the production level of the former white farmers.

Land reform farmers are a dynamic sector. They're producing half of the maize, and they're producing 40 per cent of the tobacco for export. The land reform farmers have become small, commercial famers. They're not simply growing their own food, but they're growing primarily for the market. We stood in lush maize fields of land reform farmers, who produce 25 tonnes or more of maize from their small six hectare farms.

Small tobacco farms with just one hectare but their own barn to cure the leaves are earning high prices from demanding international buyers. The 2000 occupation – yes it was chaotic and sometimes violent, although in many cases less violent than those of the 1950s. But some of the cronies grabbed land, and we estimated about 10 per cent of the land; but remember 90 per cent of the land went to 160,000 small farmers. Even Mugabe doesn't have that many cronies. We want to concentrate on the 90 per cent, and in the book we concentrate on the 90 per cent although of course we visited some of this 10 per cent as well.

Zimbabwe had a major economic crisis; it had one of the world's worst hyperinflation, caused by the government simply printing money and continuing to print money. There was dramatic damage, not just to agriculture but to the whole economy. It caused severe poverty. But in 2009, under the unity government, the US dollar was brought in as the currency, and dollarization made major changes. Yes, of course there's still a long way to go. There is still poverty and there's a lack of jobs.

So we asked: how will the land reform impact, and how has it impacted on poverty and jobs? Many more farmers now are working at a much lower level of technology so they're much more labour-intensive. Even small farmers hire labour. We estimated from the data that there are 550,000 family members who are working full-time on the farm, plus 350,000 full-time workers. That makes nearly a million people who are working on these farms. This compares with 175,000 full-time workers on the previous white farms. And this certainly doesn't take away from the violence and the difficulty and the 70,000 farm workers who lost their jobs and often their homes. But we have to remember that there now a million people working full-time on the farms.

The Zimbabwe economy still has great problems, but the land reform farmers are the dynamic sector that is leading Zimbabwe out of its crisis.

Jeanette Manjengwa:

To gather data for this book, we did our own survey in Mashonaland, which has some of the best farmland in Zimbabwe. We spent many weeks in the

field with farmers collecting data about their production over the last three seasons. But more important, we used extensive research from books, PhD theses and from earlier research by my University of Zimbabwe team, particularly about women farmers.

We were very impressed about how much data is available on Zimbabwe's land reform. During our research we saw that the farmers had a real passion for farming. We found that farmers are making investments: building houses, round brick kitchens, barns, irrigation and water development and buying farm implements. There may still be disputes about some of the big farms, but the 160,000 smaller farmers feel secure and are investing. These are not really 'small' farmers: they have six hectares or more. They are making the land their own, and they are becoming serious commercial farmers.

One surprise was the role of the present and former white farmers. In the early years, advice from white farmers was useful, and the land reform farmers we interviewed told us about this. But now that advice is not so much needed, and instead, what has become important is that many of the white farmers are selling equipment and inputs, and especially expanding contract farming with land reform farmers, and this is important to promote growth.

These farmers that are re-settled are now established and there is now economic stability that came with the 2008 Global Political Agreement (GPA) between the ZANU–PF (Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front) and the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) formations which formed the unity government. The GPA says that the land reform is irreversible. Furthermore, there are a million people and their families working their land who cannot be moved, so there's no going back.

So, how to move forward? It's important to remember that white farmers have received huge subsidies in the past, but new land reform farmers have received very little. It's not surprising that the new World Bank study talks about how undercapitalized they are. Any investment they had came from jobs, mortgaging their houses, selling their cattle and then reinvestment of profits into the farms. The 160,000 small farmers have built their farms from scratch by themselves. Yet, they are the dynamic sector, growing and producing.

In researching this book, our eyes were opened by the farmers, especially by the commitment and the way that they're improving every year. We hope our book will open your eyes to these 160,000 land reform farmers. If they continue to grow, they need input, machinery and credit. To move forward, we

need to find a way to give these small farmers some of the support that the white farmers got 50 years ago.

Admos Chimhowu:

Joe, Teresa and Jeanette's book is published nearly 13 years to the day when the first invasions kicked off with the occupation of Yotamu Farm in Masvingo. I want to start by congratulating you three for writing such a readable book and no doubt a very controversial one too. It sure enriches the policy and intellectual exchange and by so doing forces us researchers to go back to the field, and to do more work. Rational disputation is what drives knowledge for better policies.

A lot has happened in Zimbabwe since 2000. Fast-forward to 2013 and things in Zimbabwe have stabilized sufficiently to allow a growing number of researchers opportunities to go and find out what has happened to the land. At the peak of the fast-track, a narrative had emerged, and to some extent this still endures, on the outcomes of this programme. This is not to say what some people were observing was not true, but this was a narrative which painted a picture of social dislocation. Many farmers and their workers got displaced; violence, which was worse in some places than others; disruption in production and decline in productivity.

This is a narrative that is still alive but we have seen in the past few years the emergence of a powerful counter-narrative which this book joins. It suggests that 13 years later, the picture is changing and a new, evidence-based narrative has emerged. This looks beyond the polarized discourse of black smallholder farmers who can't use the land versus white, and it considers fast-track as an egalitarian asset transfer, with all its faults: corruption, patronage, you name them. It has come up with evidence reflected eloquently in this book.

Before this launch we should also include people like Sam Moyo, Ian Scoones and his team, Prosper Matondi, Lionel and others who have been writing on these narratives. So through robust research this book suggests that in various ways a recovery of agriculture which is not led by large scale commercial farmers but by smallholder farmers has begun to emerge. Essentially it says fast-track actually worked in some ways better than before. This should not have been a surprise because we all know from past experiences of self-resettlement that eventually people use the land to better themselves when they get it, with or without state support. The suggestion

that fast-track was not an unmitigated disaster presents three main dilemmas for various interest groups that have maintained the original narrative.

The first dilemma is: should it now be accepted that fast-track actually has helped people to improve their lives, and is helping to revive agriculture in Zimbabwe? Is the evidence presented credible? Can it be contested? The dilemma is whether to accept this growing body of evidence and risk endorsing the methods used to achieve the asset transfer. With South Africa still facing similar challenges, any suggestion that massive dispossession when done at speed can produce good results in the long term – and we know already from examples of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and China – this would create problems for some interest groups. But then is dismissing fast-track land reform as an unmitigated disaster still tenable given the evidence that's coming from the field? That's the first dilemma.

The second one: if it is accepted that fast-track has worked to improve people's lives, should it therefore not be accepted and supported with all its bad history for some, and its faults? This is particularly important for people who might want to provide aid and support whose next question would be: how do we engage with the beneficiaries without being seen as endorsing a process through which these outcomes were achieved, in case these are used elsewhere? It seems to me that this dilemma can be resolved if the legal issues that remain unresolved surrounding the accusations have been addressed; I'm talking particularly here about compensation. This is for the government of Zimbabwe to work through and can potentially unlock further support.

The third dilemma: this mainly concerns the Zimbabwe audience, particularly the political class in Zimbabwe who are fighting for power. With the elections looming in Zimbabwe, the various political groups also have a crucial dilemma: accepting that the evidence which is being presented here on fast-track is saying fast-track actually is beginning to bear fruit hands over political advantage to those who led or allowed this to happen. But at the same time, rejecting the evidence that's beginning to emerge, and most of it is quite credible too, seems to me like being very insincere. So this dilemma probably will be resolved after the elections.

The more I look at the evidence being presented by all these researchers who've been working over 13 years on land in Zimbabwe, the more I actually think we shouldn't be surprised that when people are given land they begin to use it to improve their lives. Asset transfer programmes may not work and they've never in the short term anyway at all, but should always work in the

medium to long term. All the evidence in history points to this important fact. However the painful truth is that many of the successful asset transfer programmes, particularly the land reforms, only work substantially to influence economic growth when they are done at scale, with speed. But also we know that this often causes a lot of pain, but in the long run can establish a foundation to build an egalitarian society.

I was just reflecting and reading on the experiences of the farmers who were asked to leave their land in Taiwan, South Korea and Japan just after the Second World War. It did feel very painful at that time, but if you look at what they went on to do once they had moved on from that; they actually became part of the success story for economic growth that these countries eventually experienced. And I quite agree with Jeanette's point here about us exploring opportunities to try and support the people who've got the land but also allowing those who still have the skills to move into other sectors in agriculture.