

Impact of the fast track land reform on rural poverty in Masvingo District in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of the fast track land reform in addressing the poverty crisis in Masvingo district. The study targeted those rural residents who did not benefit land during the fast track land reform. The target population was the poor people who live in Masvingo area. The study triangulated the qualitative and quantitative research designs. The theoretical framework of the study is the revisionist theory which suggests that rural agriculture is a solution to the poverty crisis in rural communities. The study concluded that the agro-based land reforms in Zimbabwe did not reduce household poverty in Mushandike. The study recommended, among other things, the application of the sustainable rural development framework for analysis model to improve the livelihoods of the farmers who did not move over to occupy new land in the resettlement areas.

Key Terms: Zimbabwe, Mushandike, Masvingo District, rural poverty, land distribution

Introduction

In 2000 the Zimbabwean's government engaged in a land reform programme in favour of the black majority in the country. Although the whites constituted 3% of the country's population, they held more than 51% of the land in Zimbabwe (Marongwe, undated). The land reform was a way of redressing the colonial imbalances in land holding at the same serving as a barometer for empowering blacks to fight poverty and underdevelopment. The land reform programme saw many white farmers being evicted from their properties to give way to the black farmers. Writers

such as Chambers (1992); Abbot (1995), Makumbe (1996), Swanepoel (1997), Swanepoel and De Beer (1998), Anyanwu (1988), Jackson (2002) and Chiripanhura (2008) and many others have been practical about land use, poverty reduction and food security in rural areas. Regrettably, little has been done to establish the impact of the land reform on the rural people in semi-arid regions such as Masvingo district. The district is one of the seven administrative districts that make up Masvingo province. The province is home to 265 172 people (Zimbabwe National Census Statistics, 2002), of which 79% (Cavendish, 1999) of the people survived under absolute poverty of less than \$1 per day. Figure 1 shows the position of the district in relation to the other districts in the province.

Position of Masvingo district and in relation to other districts

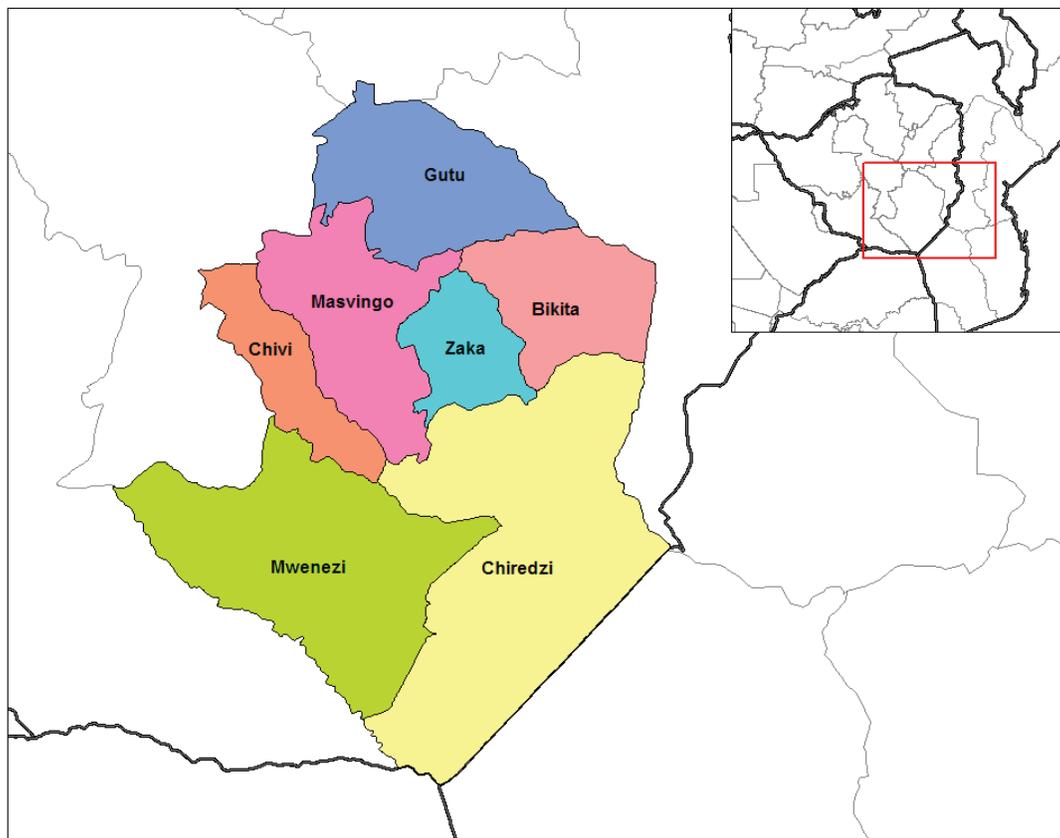


Figure1

More specifically, the study targeted A1 farmers in Villages 7a and 7b of Mushandike Resettlement Scheme. The A1 resettlement scheme, which resembles the earlier model A of the 1980s, accommodates poor people who had no agricultural land. The scheme is welfarist and therefore a tool for fighting poverty (Zimbabwe Government, 1995). In the A1 scheme, farmers are allocated individual plots but do share communal grazing areas. The A1 resettlement scheme differs from the A2, which targeted farmers who were considered to be well resourced. The main aim of the A2 scheme is not reduce poverty but to engage in commercial or economic productivity along the lines of the Commercial Farming Resettlement scheme of the early 1980s. Expressed differently, the discourse on the A2 resettlement scheme is on the multiplier effect of the land reform.

Mushandike, which houses the villages under study, lie in Zimbabwe's natural ecological region V, which receives an average annual rainfall of less than 450mm, and persistent droughts are common (Bird and Sheppard, 2003). The villages are not part of Mushandike Irrigation Scheme, which houses about 445 smallholder households (Dzingirai, 2003). Agricultural activities in the irrigation scheme are dominated by the state in terms of input supply, marketing and supply of irrigation water, unlike those of Villages 7a and 7b.

About 489 households benefitted land in the outskirts of Mushandike Irrigation Scheme. Most of the land beneficiaries in Mushandike (Vhutuza 1991) were already experiencing absolute poverty (inability to meet basic needs such as water, shelter, clothes, health, education and food). The people who benefitted land in the area came from the adjacent poverty stricken densely populated districts. The districts include Chivi, Gutu, Nyajena, Gutu and, and Zaka (Arrighi and Saul, 1993; Hughes, 2001). A decade later, little is known about the impact of the fast track land reform programme on the poverty levels of those who occupied Mushandike (Chimhowu, Manjengwa and Feresu 2010). In other words there seems to be no tracer studies of the poor who benefitted land in villages 7a and 7b in Mushandike; and the current study is an attempt to fill the void. The study is guided by one major objective, which is to establish the effect of the fast track land reform on the poverty levels of households which acquired land in the outskirts of Mushandike Irrigation Scheme. Such

information is likely to be of benefit to policy makers, academia and researchers. The other objective of the study was to contribute in the current debate on the impact of fast track land reform on rural livelihoods in semi-arid regions, not only in Zimbabwe, but throughout the world.

Theoretical framework

It is generally acknowledged by many development scholars that Africa is characterized by persistent widespread poverty (Dochas 2008). The current discourse is confident that rural agriculture is the panacea for poverty and development; and so ascribes to the revisionist theory of poverty reduction, which suggests that rural agriculture is the engine for rural poverty reduction. However, at independence in 1980, whites (Weiner et al, 1985) constituted 3% of the Zimbabwe's population, but controlled 51% of the country's arable land (44% of Zimbabwe's total surface area), with 75% of the prime agriculture land under Large Scale Commercial Farming (LSCF).

At independence, the rural areas were home to 4.3 million people of which 43% had access to 42% of the land; and 75% of them were allocated land in the poor agro-ecological regions VI and V (Transitional Development Plan, 1982). In light of the above scenario, land redistribution in favour of the poor and landless blacks was therefore justifiable. In fact, the land reform programme is supported by Kofi Annan, who in 2004 called for a new uniquely African Green Revolution (AGRA 2007). The above call stemmed from his awareness that most of sub-Saharan Africa's poor people, particularly its women, depend on farming for food and income. The policy fitted well with the notion that rural agriculture reduces rural poverty. Apparently agriculture achieves this goal because of its direct impact on food security. Besides food security, rural agriculture productivity enhances rural farm incomes which can be used to purchase other basic needs such as clothes, water, education and health.

Notably, Zimbabwe's land reform programme was successful in terms of availing land to the land hungry. Just before the fast track land reform, the government had acquired 3 498 444 ha and settled 71 000 families; and between 1998 and 2000 some 168 264 ha had been allocated to 4698

families under the Inception Phase of Land Reform and Resettlement Programme Phase II (LRRPII) (Government of 2006). According to the Presidential Land Review Committee (PLRC 2003), about 127 192 A1farmers had been allocated land under the Fast Track Land Reform and Resettlement Programme (FTLRP) (Government of Zimbabwe 2006). Cumulatively, over 200 000 families have been resettled under the A1 model since 1980. In terms of the revisionist theory of rural poverty reduction, 200 000 families have been empowered to fight poverty in Zimbabwe. However, it remains imperative that follow-up studies be carried out to establish the extent to which the land reform has reduced rural poverty. Of course, the simplistic assumption is that all the people who obtained land in the A1 scheme were poor and land hungry.

According to Lipton (2004), apart from a few states and small island countries like Mauritius, most communities worldwide, including the richest have managed to reduce rural poverty through rural agriculture. Rural agriculture was able to uplift the lives of the rural residents in Malawi. In 2005 the country experienced food shortages and more than half of the population had to survive on imported food and in 2008 the country supported rural agriculture and was able to move from being a net food importer to position of net food exporter. In the same vein, studies on the impact of rural agriculture on rural poverty reduction in Asia revealed that whereas 60% of the population lived in poverty in 1975, this ratio had fallen to less than one in three by 1985, and the total number of poor people declined from about 1.2 billion to about 0.8 billion despite a 1 billion increase in the total population (Rosegrant and Hazel 2000; Chimhowu, Manjengwa and Feresu 2010). The study trusts that rural agriculture has the potential to improve the poverty levels of the people who benefited land during Zimbabwe's land reform programme.

Methodology

The study triangulated research designs. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from a sample of 85 households in villages 7a and 7b, two local community leaders, Ministry of Lands and Resettlement official, and a representative of non-governmental organizations (NGO) operating in the district under study. Observations, semi-structured

questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the main data collection instruments. The study targeted only those households that had been poor prior to settling at Mushandike. The current study is an extension of the one that was carried out by Dzingirayi in 2003. In the current study, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were used in the data collection process. Secondary data were collected from the internet, farming magazines and reports at the NGOs offices and at Ministry of Lands offices as well as from the Agriculture Research and Extension (AREX) services offices in Masvingo town. The Table below presents the demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents (N= 90)

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Respondents</i>		<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Respondents</i>	
1. Age in years	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	4. Employment status	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Below 20	11	12.21			
21 to 29	20	22.2	Middle Management	2	2.22
30 to 39	30	33.3	Line Management	3	3.33
40 to 49	22	24.42	House wives	26	28.86
50 to 59	4	4.44	Students	8	8.88
Over 60	3	3.33	Unemployed	46	51.06
Total	90	100	Others	5	5.55
			Total	90	100
2. Marital status	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>			
Not married	27	29.97			
Married	48	53.28			
Divorced/widowed	15	16.65	5 Highest Educational Attainment	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Total	90	100	Secondary	31	34.41
			Primary	43	47.73
3. Gender	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	Certificate	9	9.99
Male	47	52.17	Degree	1	1.1
Female	43	47.73	Others	6	6.66
Total	90	100	Total	90	100

Data presentation and analysis

Data were collected with respect to five main indicators of absolute rural poverty. The indicators of poverty are based on basic human needs such

as; food, water, shelter, clothes, education and health, as outlined by Rowntree in 1901 and as supported by the 1985 World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) Report of Copenhagen.

(a) Responses on availability of water

Water is one of the basic needs for human survival. It is used for cooking, drinking, washing, laundry and for supporting rural agriculture. It emerged that most of the respondents no longer have access to water in quantities that are adequate to their basic needs. Table 2 is a summary of the responses on water availability in the villages under study.

Table2: Availability of water to village 7a and 7b residents

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Water is readily available in the villages		
Strongly agree	3	3.33
Agree	4	4.44
Disagree	48	53.28
Strongly disagree	35	38.85
Total	90	100

A majority of 83 (92.13%) claimed that water was not readily available to the residents of the villages in question. The least number 3 (3.33%) of the respondents claimed that availability of water in Mushandike was not a problem. When asked to explain more about water availability, it emerged that supply of domestic water is poor. An interview with one of the community leaders revealed that most of the villagers were relying on boreholes, which were sunk by an International Humanitarian organization based in Masvingo town. A short survey of the boreholes by the researcher established that about a third of them were defunct, and that people together with their livestock were sourcing water from either shallow wells or from Tokwe River.

A follow up of those respondents who claimed that availability of water

was not a challenge to them, revealed that the households were located close to community boreholes that yielded water throughout the year. It was also established that during FTLRP, the richer and more prominent people allocated themselves plots with better water infrastructure. One of the respondents noted that, "It was survival of the fittest. Rich people and the war veterans (who were our leaders during FTLRP) allocated themselves farmhouses and the most fertile parts of the farm. The poor were allocated the worst portions of the farm". The above observation confirms Chimhowu's (2006) view that the economically poor and the politically weak benefited poor soils during the land reform. The researcher got interested in establishing the respondents' views on the availability of water at their places of origin and at the new place (Mushandike). In the current study, a place of origin is that place where the respondents used to live before settling at Mushandike. Table 3 is a summary of the responses.

Table 3: Comparison of water availability

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Water availability was better at my place of origin		
Strongly agree	21	23.31
Agree	32	35.52
Disagree	28	31.08
Strongly disagree	9	9.99
Total	90	100

According to Table 3, 53 (58.83%) of the respondents agree with the notion that water availability was better at the places of origins when compared to the situation at Mushandike. A minority, 37 (41.07%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement. During an interview with an NGO representative in Masvingo, it emerged that water supply in most of the

traditional rural areas was better than in the outskirts of Mushandike Irrigation Scheme. The above position explains why the majority of the respondents claimed that water supply was better at their places of origin when compared to the scenario at Mushandike.

(b) Responses on Food security

Food is one of the basic human needs. No human body can survive in the absence of food. The respondents had varying views about food production in the villages in question. Table 4 summarises the responses.

Table 4: Food production at Villages 7a and 7b in Mushandike

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Harvests are better at Mushandike than at my place of origin		
Strongly agree	11	12.21
Agree	36	39.96
Not sure	14	15.54
Disagree	22	24.42
Strongly disagree	7	7.77
Total	90	100

A majority 44 (52.17%) of the respondents agreed in varying degrees with the statement that 'household food security has improved since their stay at Mushandike'. However, the respondents went on to add that the improvement is not significant. One of the residents of village 7a said, "Comparatively, our harvests have improved, but the yields are still poor. They cannot sustain us to the next harvest – hence we rely on food aid from Humanitarian organizations such as Care International." In concurrence with the above claim, the United Nations office of the Humanitarian Affairs (2007) noted that most rural communities in Masvingo province received food aid from Care International and World Food Programme. The AREX officer's explanation for the improved field

harvest at was that the farmers were benefitting from the natural fertility of the soil, which has accumulated over many years. The respondents also noted that, "The soils in the established rural communities are generally over used. Their fertility has been depleted. If improper agricultural practices are used in the villages in question, the soils are depleted of their fertility and yields will also decline."

It was also established that the lack of technology and finance were some of the factors that inhibited the famers from producing enough food for their consumption. The community leader pointed out that his area could not rely on rain-fed agriculture but on irrigation. Additional investments such as irrigation are necessary to mitigate against the adverse effects of climate change. Infrastructure such as dams and irrigation equipment are therefore important for sustainable poverty reduction in the villages understudy.

These findings match with the ideas of Chimhowu et al (2010) who argue that one of the key challenges of agricultural development in resettlement areas is that most of the A1 farmers rely on rain fed agriculture to make a living. Irrigation and related water harvesting technologies can offer greater opportunities for use of acquired land. In this respect, constructing a dam on the Tokwe River would go a long way in improving food security in the Mushandike. The above suggestion is well received especially now as government of Zimbabwe has successfully delinked access to water from the ownership of land. In the past, water masses were accessible only for commercial purposes such as mining, commercial farming and manufacturing industries, and was tied to land.

Table 4 also shows that 14 (15.54%) of the respondents were not sure of whether or not their farm yields had improved. In general, 29 (32.19%) of the respondents did not agree with the notion that food yields had improved since the time they started farming at Mushandike. In view of the statistics above, the study concludes that food production improved in villages 7a and 7b but the levels are not sustainable.

(c) Responses on Shelter

According to the World Summit on Social Development Report 1995, shelter is one of the basic human needs. This study established that most of the respondents had not improved in terms of the size and quality of their dwellings. Table 5 is a summary of the responses from the field.

Table 5: Quality of dwellings

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
The quality and size of my dwelling is better than the one I had at my place of origin		
Strongly agree	13	14.43
Agree	28	31.08
No improvement	27	29.97
Is worse	22	24.42
Total	90	100

On average 41 (45.51%) of the respondents claimed that their current dwellings were better than those that they used to occupy when they were at their places of origin. When asked to explain what improvement there were, they said that the dwelling were of farm bricks and asbestos roofing sheets. Table 5 also shows that 27 (29.7%) of the respondents claimed that the quality of their dwellings had not changed; they are just as poor as the ones that they occupied at their places of origin. Observations by the researcher revealed that most of the dwellings were huts, which were constructed out of poles and dagga. It also emerged that some of the respondents believe that their dwellings are inferior when compared to the ones that they occupied prior to settling at Mushandike.

(d) Responses on Clothing

In 1901, Rowntree and Booth established that clothing is one of the basic human needs. Without clothing, the quality of human life is compromised, as one is exposed to violent weather and such other factors that may affect the skin of a person. Clothes provide warmth during cold

spells; and are worn for aesthetic purposes. The significance of clothing was demonstrated by Florence Nightangle's (1820-1910) study of epidemiology in the Crimean military camps. According to Turner and Chavigny (1998), by providing clean clothes among other things, Nightangle was able to reduce the fatality of soldiers from 40% to 2% percent. With respect to factor of clothing, the respondents proffered the following responses.

Table 6: Responses on clothing

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
The quality and quantity of clothing for my household have improved since we settled in villages 7a and 7b.		
Strongly agree	9	9.99
Agree	18	19.98
No improvement	40	44.4
Situation is worse	23	25.53
Total	90	100

Table 6 shows that 27 (29.97%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that the quality and quantity of their clothing had improved since they started occupying the outskirts of the Mushandike irrigation scheme. However, a majority of 40 (44.4%) of the respondents claimed that there was no improvement in the quality and quantity of their clothing. Notably, 23 (%) of the respondents claimed that the quality and quantity of their wardrobes had actually deteriorated. In the view of the data above, one is tempted to conclude that the residents have not been able to improve their status in terms of the quantity and quality of clothing that they wear.

(e) Education and Health

Accessibility and quality of education and health services are some of the measures of poverty in Zimbabwe. The respondents claimed that the education and health services are no longer as accessible as they were

in their places of origin. For instance, it emerged that children walked long distances to high school. In fact, at the time of the study, the nearest secondary school was Tambudzai in Chivi in ward 8, which is about 24kilometres away (using bush paths) from the area under study. Some children could to go Temarraire School in Mashaba Mine (about 19 km away), but the place is not accessible because of mountain ranges and small rivers. The accessibility of Tambudzai School is also very poor especially during the rainy seasons because of the Tokwe River. During the time of the study, there was no bridge to allow a direct flow of people and services between the area understudy and Tambudzai or any such other place in Chivi district. At the time of the study, the nearest boarding school was Chibi High school, which is situated 36 km away from Village 7a. It was further established that some households send their children to go and live with their relatives during school terms.

A review of literature on Zimbabwean education standards revealed that the catchment area of primary schools should not exceed 5 km and 10km for secondary schools. During an interview with one of the community leaders, it was mentioned that schools were being constructed for the villages in question. The researcher was shown the new site for a secondary school in village 7a. There is no argument on the fact that education is critical for development. It equips children with the necessary skills and knowledge to fight poverty and underdevelopment. According to one of the respondents, a delay in constructing schools in the villages is a delayed justice and a way of violating children's right to formal education. One of the officials pointed out that unless parents send their children to go and stay with their relatives elsewhere, it would be difficult for their children to access formal education. It was also established that there were no clinics and hospitals close to the area. People who reside close to Tokwe River could access health facilities either in Masvingo town or Mashaba Mine Hospital or Chivi District Hospital. However, the centres are too far and inaccessible. The Table below summarises the responses from the respondents on the issue of education and health service provision in the villages in question.

Table 7: Accessibility of Education and Health services to the residents of villages 7a and 7b in Mushandike

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
The health and education services are more accessible in villages 7a and 7b than in my place of origin		
Strongly agree	0	0
Agree	0	0
Disagree	27	29.97
Strongly disagree	63	69.93
Total	90	100

Table 7 shows that 90 (100%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that education and health services are more accessible in Mushandike than in their places of origin. In the light of the above statistics, the study concludes that health and education facilities and services are not accessible to the residents of villages 7a and 7b.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The phenomenological study established that while the land reform programme was a noble idea in terms of fast tracking the redistribution of arable land to the majority of the land-hungry people in the rural areas in Zimbabwe, the programme failed to uplift the lives of most residents of the villages under study. This is in line with the findings by Kinsey (2000) who established that welfarist land reforms (A1) are generally not good welfare programmes. According to the Zimbabwe Poverty Assessment Report (2003), for the period of 1992 to 2003, there was a huge increase in the incidence of rural poverty; the proportion of households in the very poor category (below the Food Poverty Line) from 20% in 1995 to 48% in 2003. More specifically, Chimhowu's (2006) study concluded that the land reform programme of 2000 contributed to the deepening of rural poverty in the country. In the same vein Alway and

Ersado's (1999) study observed poverty incidences at 65,3% among land reform beneficiaries. In Mushandike, the programme left the residents in short supply of clean water, and in possession of pieces of land whose agricultural productivity is low. Re-planning of the resettlement area is essential so that beneficiaries are afforded such social facilities as water, clinics, schools and roads. This could be carried out along the same lines as the accelerated resettlement programme of the 1980s. If well planned, and resourced, the people of Village 7a and 7b may be able to work themselves out of poverty. Agreeably, this would be expensive but it is one of the surest ways of improving the livelihoods of the area under study.

The rural farmers in villages 7a and 7b were also left with little access to health and education services, as the service delivery institutions are too far and inaccessible to the poor residents of the resettlement scheme. The study concludes that neither Government alone nor the residents of Mushandike would be able to successfully deal with the poverty in the area under study. A strong synergy is required between the various national stakeholders such as the business community, NGOs, the government and the people living in villages 7a and 7b. A key determinant of whether a household is able to make a living and stay out of poverty in the resettlement areas is access to adequate stocks of assets build around ownership of land. The study recommends a Sustainable Rural livelihoods analysis framework – a driven antipoverty strategy for the residents of the villages in question. In principle, the framework requires that before instituting a poverty reduction strategy, there is need to consider such issues as the context of the poor, the livelihood resources available, institutional processes and organizational structure and the livelihood strategies that may bring up sustainable poverty reduction to the poor.

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