

Zimbabwe takes back its land: Is this the 'best use' of the land?

Dr Jeanette Manjengwa is Deputy Director, Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Zimbabwe. (jmanjengwa@ies.uz.ac.zw)

Dr Joseph Hanlon is a visiting senior fellow, London School of Economics. (j.hanlon@open.ac.uk)

Teresa Smart is a visiting fellow, Institute of Education, University of London. (t.smart@ioe.ac.uk)

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Abstract

The 1930 Land Apportionment Act defined that the best half of Rhodesia's land was for whites only. In the next two decades, more than 100,000 families were forced off the land, often violently. Independence came in 1980 and there was a first, limited land reform, but most land remained in white hands. Seventy years after the Land Act and 20 years after independence, 170,000 Zimbabwean families occupied most of the remaining white farms, and took back the land. In 1952, the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, Godfrey Huggins, said that 'The ultimate possessors of the land will be the people who can make the best use of it.' In this paper we ask if this has now happened. The paper starts by trying to define what is meant by 'best use' of the land, exploring the concepts of land being a reward for military victors; land being for production; and land as a means of addressing poverty. We also look at two implications of the Zimbabwe land reform, for the ongoing debate about large scale versus small scale commercial farming in Africa, and for the growing demand for land reform in South Africa and Namibia.

Introduction

'The ultimate possessors of the land will be the people who can make the best use of it,' the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, Godfrey Huggins, said in 1952 (Rifkin, 1968). But how do we define what is the 'best use'? Indeed, the last century in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe has been a conflict between different groups who claim they would make the best use of the land.

In this paper we look at that history, and note that three definitions of 'best use' have been in contention through the whole period:

- That land is a reward for military victors.
- That production and productivity are the measure of best use.
- That land should be used to reduce poverty and create jobs.

We also see three questions which come up repeatedly:

- Which people and groups have a 'right' to the land?
- Should subsidy be used to promote the best use of land?
- Do large or small farms make best use of the land?

Finally the responses to these questions will be used to evaluate the post-independence land reforms and look at the small farms versus big farm debate.

This paper is based on research for our book *Zimbabwe Takes Back its Land* (Jacana 2013) which gives many more details and references.

War veterans

Cecil Rhodes set the precedent at the end of the 19th century when he won a military victory in 1889 and gave large tracts of land to victorious soldiers – evicting the occupants. White control of southern Rhodesia was cemented with the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, which explicitly defined 'European' and 'native' land areas. The 1930 law gave 51 per cent of the land – naturally the best land with high agricultural potential – to 50,000 Europeans, of whom only 11,000 actually lived on the land, and 30 per cent of land – the poorer land, drier and infertile – to one million Africans (Jennings, 1935).

'The passing of the Land Apportionment Act, 1930, was a definite milestone in the history of Southern Rhodesia. It marks the first attempt in Southern Africa to effect a measure of segregation as between the European and African peoples,'¹ wrote Prime Minister Huggins in 1935, more than a decade before formal apartheid was introduced in South Africa (Jennings, 1935). When this was raised in the House of Commons in London, the British government confirmed that it agreed with the new law (Hansard, 1930).

The next war veterans to be rewarded with land were white veterans of World War II. There had never been enough white farmers to actually use the land of half the country, and many thousands of blacks still farmed and lived on their ancestral lands – although the law defined them as 'squatters'. Land was given to white Rhodesian veterans and white European veterans were encouraged to settle with a range of inducements, including two years of free training in farming. Black veterans of World War II did not receive land or any meaningful benefits (Tapfumaneyi, 1996). To clear land for the new farmers, in just one decade, 1945-55, more than 100,000 Africans were moved, often forcibly, into reserves and inhospitable and tsetse ridden unassigned areas (Palmer, 1977:242-3). Houses were burned, people could not take their cattle, and they lost all investments that had been made on the farm. One of the new farmers was a World War II Spitfire pilot, Ian Smith, who tells in his memoirs how he evicted black farmers from his land (Smith, 1997). Smith went

¹ Godfrey Huggins was named Viscount Malvern of Rhodesia and of Bexley in the County of Kent (and thus a member of the House of Lords) in 1955.

on to rule Rhodesia, announce the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965, and then fight a brutal war to keep Rhodesia white ruled.

The children of those evicted by the veterans in the decade after World War II became the core of the liberation movement in the 1970s, fighting not just for independence but also for land. Whereas neighbouring Mozambique and South Africa had liberation movements led by urbanised elite, Zimbabwe's was led by people for who land and farming were personally important. And when they won the war and independence came in 1980, the victorious warriors expected land. The Lancaster House agreement said that land could only be transferred from white to black farmers on a 'willing-seller, willing-buyer' basis. Not surprisingly, only the least successful farmers with the poorer land offered it to the government at an affordable price, and land reform was not the highest priority for government at that time. In 1986–89, 1,856 farms were offered but the offers not accepted, because the asking price was almost 10 times the amount being paid by government for farms at that time; certificates of no present interest were issued for these (Karumbidza, 2009:121). This allowed the sale to other white farmers, often at much lower prices than had been offered to the state, which set a pattern of white farmers who decided to remain collecting several farms. Nevertheless, 75,000 families received 11 per cent of the total farmland of Zimbabwe in the 1980s land reform.

From independence, Zimbabwe remained under pressure: in the 1980s from destabilisation by apartheid South Africa; and in the 1990s by economic structural adjustment, which squeezed the economy. Poverty levels increased from 26 per cent in 1990 to 55 per cent in 1995 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2006). War veterans became increasingly restless. So the veterans began to take action and there were more than 1000 occupations between March and April 2000. The occupations were known as *jambanja* ('force' or 'action in anger' in Shona). The former soldiers used their military skills to organise unemployed people from towns and landless people from communal areas, and then structuring the occupation of the farm in an orderly way. Reconnaissance teams tried to negotiate with white farmers and also tried, sometimes successfully, to involve farm workers. There were relatively few war veterans and they were overstretched, so employed veterans came to help on weekends; there was a big push on the Easter weekend 21-24 April 2000. On each farm they tried to have a base and a commander who was a veteran. In some cases veterans were able to organise lorries and other transport to bring occupiers. There seems to have been little support from government, even informally, except in departments where there was a presence of veterans. At local level there was sometimes support from Zanu-PF. Food, fuel and money came mainly from friends and relatives of the occupiers (Sadomba, 2011:170-181).

At that time, Zanu-PF at national level was not very sympathetic. In March and April 2000 acting President Joseph Msika and Home Minister Dumiso Dabengwa sent police to evict occupiers. But the party began to shift. A new Land Acquisition Act was passed on 23 May 2000. On 15 July 2000 the Accelerated Land Reform and Resettlement Programme, the 'Fast Track', was approved. But in August, Lands Minister John

Nkomo declared that the occupations had to stop. In Chipinge, Manicaland, war veterans led occupations of Makande and Southdowns estates, but they were driven out violently by the anti-riot police in late 2000; even war veterans were beaten (Zamchiya, 2011). In mid-2001 Parliament passed the Rural Land Occupiers Act which said any occupation after 1 March 2001 was illegal and must stop (while protecting occupiers from before 1 March). However, 42 per cent of occupations took place in 2001 and 2002, most after the law was passed (Moyo, *et al.*, 2009:20).

As had happened twice before, victorious war veterans simply took the land.

Catholic Bishop Donal Lamont in his speech from the dock in 1976 when he was convicted of treating guerrillas in church hospitals, warned ‘Were there to be an African government in this country – and indeed that seems inevitable, and very soon – and if the present laws which have been enacted and applied to create and preserve privilege – if these were retained and applied in reverse against the European, what a protest their would be! ... Thousands of whites could be driven from their homes and farms without compensation’ (Lamont, 1977:65). And exactly that happened. Lamont hoped ‘Europeans might possibly be treated better than Africans were.’ But the liberation war veterans had learned their lessons well, and evicted white farmers without compensation. And as the Bishop predicted, what a protest there has been.

In 1889, 1945-55 and 2000 it was decided that rewarding war veterans was the best use of the land.

Production and productivity

Land is a fixed asset in relatively short supply, which means there will always be some system to allocate land to some people and not others. Southern Rhodesia Prime Minister Huggins expressed the broad hope that those with land would make ‘best use’ of it. That is often seen as maximizing production, both of food and export crops.

White farmers were already in possession of the land, so the Rhodesian government from 1940 made huge investments to increase their productivity and production. Extensive research developed modern hybrid seeds, there were guaranteed markets paying white farmers more for the same crop than black farmers, and a range of other support. It is estimated that by the mid 1970s, the subsidy was the equivalent, in current money, of US\$ 40,000 per white farm per year (Hanlon, *et al.*, 2013:39).

There were never more than 6,000 white farmers, but these farms were huge and mechanised. Starting from very little and with huge support over several decades, some farmers were spectacularly successful. But these were not many. The white farmers never succeeded in occupying their half of Southern Rhodesia. The three Mashonaland provinces have 75 per cent of Zimbabwe's prime farmland. In 1965 the chairman of the Rural Land Board wrote: ‘Just get into an aeroplane and fly over Mashonaland's European farming areas. On

practically every farm you will see acres of land lying idle, good grasslands, that was given to these farmers by God and the Rural Land Board. ... It is a national disgrace that so much land is lying idle and not being used (Rifkind, 1968:205). A decade later, the position had not improved. In 1976 Roger Riddell calculated that only 15 per cent of potentially arable European land was being cultivated. Even in the early 1970s, many white farms were only being used for residential purposes, or as weekend farms (Riddell, 1978:13). Another estimate was that in Mashonaland, less than one-third of arable land was actually being used (Weiner, *et al.*, 1985; Moyo, 1986:174).

Furthermore, the white farmers were not producing very much. The Rhodesian National Farmers' Union in 1977 found that 30 per cent of all farms were insolvent – kept alive by loans, price supports and subsidies. Riddell (1978) notes that in the 1975/76 season, 60 per cent of farms (4,023 of 6,682) were not profitable enough to qualify for income tax, while 52 per cent of all taxable income was accounted for by just 271 white farms.

Former white farmers have created a myth of Rhodesia as the breadbasket of the region, which is still being perpetuated to date. Maize was exported in good rainfall years and imported in bad years. In the two decades before independence, the 1960s-70s, Rhodesia imported maize in 7 of 20 years.²

Rhodesian policy was to support large white farms, and actually to try to prevent competition from black farmers, most of who were squeezed into the native reserves, renamed Tribal Trust Lands, and then later renamed communal areas. At independence in 1980, the new government totally reversed the policy. In the 1970s communal land farmers produced only 5 per cent of marketed maize; and only 5 per cent used fertiliser because of high prices. The new government decided to shift rain-fed maize to the smallholder sector (Masst, 1996:83). Subsidised fertiliser, better seed, loans, agricultural extension services, rural markets, and higher prices had a dramatic impact. By 1985 communal farmers were supplying one-third of the maize bought by the Grain Marketing Board.

Meanwhile the first resettlement had begun. By 1987/88 resettlement farmers with just 5 hectares were responsible for 11 per cent of all of Zimbabwe's agricultural production (Weiner, 1989:405). The results were all the more dramatic considering that willing-buyer, willing-seller meant most resettlement farmers were on poorer land and had received limited government support. Furthermore, the experience of both the white farmers and the first resettlement farmers is that it takes a generation – 20 years – for a farmer to really dominate the farm and maximise production. These resettlement farmers were only one-third of the way.

Clearly subsidy and government policy matter, and the first years after independence showed the smallholder sector could hold its own.

² 'Zimbabwe Corn Imports by Year', Index Mundi, <http://www.indexmundi.com/agriculture/?country=zw&commodity=corn&graph=imports>, accessed 25 Feb 2013.

The 2000 land occupations and land reform were hugely disruptive. Mismanagement of the economy led to massive hyperinflation in 2005-8, making the Zimbabwe dollar virtually worthless. Political conflict was also hugely disruptive. Finally in 2008 Zanu-PF and the two opposition factions of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) signed a Global Political Agreement, which led to a unity government and the abolition of the Zimbabwe dollar. Government accounted and paid civil servants in US dollars, but any currency can be used, and South African Rand also circulates. This caused a rapid revival of the economy.

In the 2000 land reform:

- 146,000 families received small farms, typically each white farm was divided into 40 to 50 farms, giving 6 hectares of arable land (the A1 model).
- 23,000 families received medium size farms, with a white farm divided into 3 to 7 farms. (the small A2 model)
- 217 families received larger farms.

Table 1.1 gives the current distribution of farmland in Zimbabwe.

Table 1.1: Land in 1980, 2000, and 2010

	Farm households					
	1980		2000		2010	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Smallholders						
Communal	700,000	98	1,050,000	92	1,100,000	81
1980s resettlement			75,000	7	75,000	6
A1					145,800	11
Sub-total	700,000	98	1,125,000	99	1,320,800	98
Middle farms						
African purchase	8,500	1.2	8,500	0.8	8,500	0.6
Small A2					22,700	1.7
Sub-total	8,500	1.2	8,500	0.8	31,200	2.3
Large farms						
Large A2					217	
Black large-scale			956	0.1	956	0.1
White large-scale	5,400	0.8	4,000	0.4	198	
Sub-total	5,400	0.8	4,956	0.4	1,371	0.1
TOTAL	713,900	100	1,138,456	100	1,353,371	100
Total land reform			75,000	6.6	243,717	18

Source: Moyo (2011:512)

New farmers received very little support from the government. A2 farmers had to apply for the land and had to show they had capital to develop the farm, before they were allocated. A1 farmers were largely occupiers and were dependent on cattle they brought from communal lands or a family member with a job in order to buy the initial seed, fertiliser, ploughing that they needed to start. For both groups, any growth has come from reinvestment.

Despite the economic and political problems, the land reform farmers quietly expanded their farms, supporting themselves and providing an increasing amount of food (often simply bartered during the hyperinflation period). Dollarization in 2009 brought a dramatic change. The World Bank in a November 2012 report says that the 2011 harvest was quite good, with maize at 86 per cent of the 1990s average, tobacco at 67 per cent, and cotton at 125 per cent (Binswanger-Mkhize and Moyo, 2012). Finance Minister Tendai Biti reported that in 2011, 49 per cent of the maize came from resettlement farmers³ and 43 per cent from communal farmers; 40 per cent of the tobacco came from resettlement farmers (Biti, 2011).

Only halfway through their two-decade settling in period, and with none of the support given to the white farmers, the new smallholders are on a trajectory to be more productive than the white farmers they replaced.

In broad terms, white farmers used less than one-third of the land; their successors appear to be using about half the land, although so far less intensively. And we see a spectrum of success. One-third are already serious commercial farmers, marketing substantial amounts; the best earn more than school teachers or middle-level civil servants. One third are comfortable but lack investment capital and cannot use all of their land productively. And as with the white farmers, one-third are not doing well and struggling.

Poverty and jobs

Most Zimbabweans are relatively poor and cannot support themselves only from farming in the communal areas. A recent study found that 95 per cent of the rural households sampled were under the Total Consumption Poverty Line and classified as poor; furthermore lack of employment was a major driver of poverty (Manjengwa, *et al.*, 2012). Thus an alternative ‘best use’ of the land is the one that does the most to reduce poverty and create jobs.

Land reform has an obvious and immediate poverty reduction effect, simply because more people have land and can grow food. Bill Kinsey has been following 400 of the 1980s resettlement families for nearly two decades, which gives him a unique perspective. By 1997 Kinsey and colleagues concluded that there had been a ‘dramatic increase in crop incomes observed in these households’ which was much larger than the average for Zimbabwe, and ‘growth in incomes has been shared across all households’ (Dekker and Kinsey, 2011). Also, ‘there has been an impressive accumulation of assets by these households.’ Notable was the

³ A1: 24 per cent, A2: 20 per cent, and 1980s resettlement: 5 per cent.

entry by a number of households into the production of higher-value crops such as cotton, groundnuts, and sunflowers.

There has been a similar growth in income and asset accumulation among the 2000 resettlement farmers (Hanlon, *et al.*, 2013). Clearly 244,000 land reform families is a very large number, and a reform which has taken most of that group out of poverty must be seen as a success. But there are four times that number of families still squeezed into the communal areas, which are over-grazed and degraded. Furthermore, structural adjustment and hyperinflation forced more than two million Zimbabweans to emigrate to South Africa and elsewhere. Simply having more farmers on the land is not enough, and job creation becomes a key issue.

The 2000 land reform was immensely disruptive, and tens of thousands of workers did lose jobs and homes. This is similar to the large number that were displaced by structural adjustment in the 1990s. Agriculture was Zimbabwe's largest employment sector, with 26 per cent of the wage labour force in 1999 (Chambati, 2011: 1028). Throughout the first two post-independence decades, the number of permanent, full time farm workers remained steady at 167,000 (Chambati and Moyo, 2007: 10-11). There were 146,000 casual and seasonal workers in 2000 of whom 55 per cent were women. Numbers are very hard to determine, but it appears that between 75,000 and 100,000 full time workers retained their jobs on the remaining plantations, large estates, and large farms (Chambati, 2011; Hanlon, *et al.*, 2013). Thus 75,000 to 100,000 lost full time jobs and often their homes; of those, perhaps 15 per cent gained land; others are working on farms or doing gold panning. Nevertheless, this indicates a serious and very disruptive job loss.

However, by 2011, the total number of people working full time on resettlement land had increased five-fold, from 167,000 to over one million, according to Walter Chambati of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) in Harare. (Chambati, 2011). He estimated in 2011 that 240,000 people were full time employed on A1 farms and 115,000 on A2 farms. But equally important, 510,000 people from the A1 farmers' families were 'self-employed' full time and 55,000 from extended families on A2 farms. With nearly 100,000 still employed on corporate and other large scale commercial farms, this means more than 1 million people are now working full time on this land, compared to 167,000 before land reform. Most of these self-employed farmers are not 'peasants' or simply subsistence producers, but are small scale commercial farmers. Thus, this is a huge gain in rural livelihoods. In part, this is because small farms tend to be much more labour intensive, partly due to less mechanisation.

Many of the new farm workers live on the farms, as they did in the past, and many receive food. Nevertheless, as in the era of the white farmers, they are poorly paid – sometimes only half the minimum wage. Many jobs have been created, but not well paid. A recent World Bank study noted that 'the social and economic conditions of hired farm workers are in general precarious, as farm wages remained between US\$30 and US\$50/month during 2011 in all the farming sub-sectors' (Binswanger-Mkhize and Moyo, 2012).

How does it work for women?

Of the 170,000 families that received land during the land reform of 2000, 18 per cent of the A1 farms were allocated to women-headed households (Government of Zimbabwe, 2003:25). Although this was below the target of 20 per cent set for women, and much lower than the overall 38 per cent of rural households in Zimbabwe that are female-headed, it is still relatively high as compared to 4 per cent of white farms owned by women, and 5 per cent of 1980s land-reform farms that were given to women (Government of Zimbabwe, 2006:25, 26; Moyo, 2011:504). Women are now increasingly inheriting land, which follows directly from campaigns to ensure that married couples had both names on the letters granting them their farms (Scoones, *et al*; 2010; Hanlon, *et al.*, 2013). Besides the farms allocated directly to women, many more women are benefiting and farming alongside husbands. More importantly, they are making decisions about farming and in some cases, taking the lead.

How are women making the best use of land? We found that women farmers were hard working and serious about farming their land. The three definitions of 'best use' of land were also apparent among the women farmers.

We found a link between women who had participated in the liberation war and those who accessed land. Women war veterans displayed singular determination and perseverance to acquire and secure land, acting as catalysts for mobilizing other women. This link is remarkable in that the occupations occurred 20 years after independence and although these women fighters had become mothers, wives, and homemakers our research indicates that they never lost the initial passion for land that drove them to join the liberation struggle. Women were at the forefront of *jambanja*, participating alongside men in the struggle to gain access to land (Lyons, 2004). For example, Agnes Matsira, who joined the liberation war as a teenager and lost her leg to land mine in Mozambique, was one of leaders of occupation in Goromonzi District in 2000. She was then allocated a six hectare plot and has built a brick house and looks after her three grandchildren since her daughter died. Her main crop is maize. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates average yield of maize on white farms was four tonnes per hectare, and Agnes is doing better than that, despite her disability.

Many of the women farmers have become serious commercial producers. For example, Esther Makwara an A1 farmer who has a six hectare farm in Craigengower, Mazowe, some of the best farm land in Zimbabwe, is getting eight tonnes per hectare, which is double the white farm average. She employs six workers and uses every inch of her farm. Irrigation enables her to have a winter crop of wheat or sugar beans. All her profits are invested back into the farm and she has bought irrigation pipes and two tractors. Besides maize, she also produces ground nuts and has a machine to make peanut butter. Esther not only uses the land for production, but has provided jobs.

Norea Manyika has an A2 farm as part of Howick Ridge Farm in Concession, Mazowe. Previously she had been a communal farmer growing cotton in Gokwe, then she became a teacher and was teaching in Mazowe when she applied for the land. After she was allocated the land, she took a horticulture course (which she paid for—new farmers have none of the training offered to white soldiers in the 1950s) at the Women’s University in Africa. Her first season of export horticulture was 2010/11, when she exported 530 tonnes of baby corn, cauliflower, broccoli and carrots. She is already a commercial farmer producing for export, but she knows there are many years to go, and substantial investment is still required, but she remains committed.

Not all of the women farmers are commercially productive. However, they do produce enough for their household’s food security, and their production has helped them move out of poverty. Gertrude Chimbwanda, an A1 farmer in Goromonzi says ‘As a widow and woman farmer, I think I have done well for myself because I managed to build a homestead, I own a few goats and road runners [chickens]. This farming season I planted tobacco, barley and maize. I am honoured to be a woman land owner and it has helped to look after my family after my husband passed away.’ In 2011, she had received \$4,200 from the sale of her tobacco.

Although patriarchy has not gone away and land reform is still male-dominated, the decade after the occupations saw dramatic changes in ensuring that women receive land in their own right and have their names on offer letters and leases of joint farms. And with that has come a real change in attitudes, within families and communities, as women claim the right to be seen as commercial farmers. A decade on, many women are successful farmers and have transformed their lives – politically, socially, and economically.

Bootstraps, subsidies, capital, and poverty

Where there was huge support for the white farmers and World War II veterans, there has been little support for the 1980s or 2000 resettlement farmers. There have been intermittent subsidies and support, but largely they have had to find their own capital. Initial funding came from relatives or their own resources, as well as reinvestment of profits. In other words, resettlement farming has been a bootstrap operation, and any accumulation has come from reinvested profits; harsh choices must be made on spending money on fertilizer or shoes for the children or to fix a leaking roof.

Zimbabwe practices high-tech agriculture, with hybrid seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, mechanical ploughing, and hired labour. Minimum input costs are \$100 per hectare, but to get high maize yields inputs cost \$500/ha and tobacco inputs are \$800/ha. Maize yields are directly proportional to fertilizer use; not buying a \$35 bag of fertiliser can reduce production by 500 kg.

‘In maize and other commodities, 2011 yields remain far below potential,’ notes the November 2012 World Bank report (Binswanger-Mkhize and Moyo, 2012). ‘It does not appear that yields are limited by poor farming skills, insecurity of tenure, or lack of land as collateral. Rather it is capital scarcity that lies behind the low yields. In tobacco and cotton, where access to credit is easier due to the contract farming, yields have started to rise for the same farmers that also produce the commodities where they are not yet rising.’

The World Bank study notes a dramatic rise in contract farming of export crops, with more than 280,000 cotton contract farmers, 15,000 in horticulture, 13,000 for tobacco, and smaller numbers for tea, coffee, sugar, beef and sugar beans (Binswanger-Mkhize and Moyo, 2012). Contract farming is important because inputs and technical advice are provided on credit and the market is guaranteed – although the product must be sold to the contract company.

So far, however, contract farming applies mostly to export crops, so there is no support for food crops. This is an issue, because the trade off is clear. A six hectare farmer could concentrate on one hectare of tobacco, but would get a similar income by growing five hectares of maize at 3 tonnes/ha. Both require farming skills and similar inputs, but there is support for tobacco and not for maize.

In our study, we found three groups of land reform farmers. About one-third are already serious commercial farmers; they had some capital to start and have reinvested their profits. A middle third is comfortable but is accumulating only slowly. This is the real capital constrained group, because they have already shown they have the skills and could expand more rapidly if they had the capital.

The bottom third is a mix. Some are simply poor farmers and should try to earn a living in some other way. But many are caught in a poverty trap – their income is so low that they cannot save enough to buy inputs for the next year, so each year output and income falls, in a downward spiral. Credit and more technical assistance would help some of them out of their hole.

In one respect, Ian Smith and the white Rhodesian regime was right – new farmers need substantial subsidy, and without subsidy they cannot be expected to produce food. Land reform farmers are pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Considering the lack of support for Fast Track farmers, they are obviously doing better than the whites they replaced, but they cannot do it totally on their own.

Finally, although the government could have done more to back land reform *per se*, there are some important areas of support. The AGRITEX agricultural extension service remains excellent; extension officers are known and respected locally and provide useful technical support. The parastatal Grain Marketing Board (GMB) continues to operate, albeit with problems such as late payment, providing a guaranteed market and selling some fertiliser. Education in general remains very good, and UNICEF reports Zimbabwe has the highest education levels in Africa – this means farmers are literate and cope well with higher tech farming.

Is this a model?

So what can we say about the present occupants of the land and ‘best use’? On the three criteria used, victorious war veterans definitely played a leading role, production is on a trajectory to pass that of former white occupants but is not there yet, and is definitely taking more people out of poverty. So, perhaps 2.5 out of 3?

Will production by the land reform farmers surpass the white farmers they replaced? That is a political decision, but as Ian Smith showed, farmers need support to be productive. But with support, land reform will be successful. The independence government in the early 1980s showed that with government support, it was possible to move maize production from large to small farmers. So far, the only support for the land reform farmers has come from contract farming for export crops. There is no support for food crops. With credit and fertiliser subsidies of the sort used in Malawi, it would be possible to substantially increase food production. So the question for the government is if it prefers to spend money importing food, or would rather support the land reform farmers to grow it.

But that, in turn, points to two other questions. Small versus large farmers; and if Zimbabwe is a model for other countries like South Africa?

What small farmers lack in big machines they make up for in detailed knowledge and in management of their farms. The current push of the G8 and global agribusiness is for large mechanised farms. Yet Zimbabwe seems to be showing that small farmers are more productive – and because they use more labour, do more to reduce poverty.

And is Zimbabwe a model? One factor makes Zimbabwe unusual. The liberation war was fought for land and Zimbabweans have a real passion for farming. The 2000 occupiers were people who wanted to farm and had the initiative to occupy land and make it flourish. Farming is extremely hard work, even with the mechanical ploughing by cattle or tractors as in Zimbabwe. Do South Africa, Namibia and other African countries have a similar land hunger, of people who really want the extremely hard work of farming?

One of the controversial factors of the Zimbabwe land reform is that the factor that made it most disruptive has also made it a success: the land was occupied. It was not distributed ‘fairly’, either by picking names out of a hat, or by giving the land to people whose ancestors had once owned it. Instead, a group with initiative and a passion for farming took the land and went through a process of formalisation as the plots were officially allocated to them, and over a decade have made it their own. They are not subsistence farmers, but have become small commercial farmers, largely producing for the market.

This debate is not new. In 1927 small commercial farmers in the then Soviet Union produced eight times as much grain as the large scale collective and state sector, and Stalin set out to destroy what was called the ‘kulak’ sector and replace it with the large scale sector.⁴ This is a policy which has been recently supported by the G8, which in May 2012 in Washington agreed to use aid money to support multinational agribusinesses to set up large farms in Africa – in place of the current peasant producers.

Governments from the former Soviet Union to the many in the present day prefer a small number of large farmers to hundreds of thousands of small ones, simply because the small group is easier to deal with. Neither the Zimbabwe nor the South African government have ever been enthusiastic about land reform; the government of Mozambique seems to be supporting the G8 model simply because it is much easier to let a huge agribusiness bring in technology and know-how than to bring hundreds of small farmers up to that level.

And yet, the Zimbabwe land reform shows that it can happen – that the small scale can be more productive and can create more jobs – but that it requires a dynamic sector of small scale commercial farmers, and that it works better if they are supported.

Land reform and a small scale commercial sector can make the best use of the land, but only if the most dynamic farmers are promoted – those with a passion for farming.

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