# Land Grabbers or Climate Experts? Farm Occupations and the Quest for Livelihoods Security in Zimbabwe.

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Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), characterized by land occupations has generated an intense debate that has polarized academia. Many commentators have dismissed the FTLP as a politically motivated 'land grab', which ruined agriculture and contributed to food shortages. Landless peasants, who occupied white commercial farms, were dismissed as inefficient and lacking the 'skills' to productively, work the land. This paper explores the dynamics of land occupations in the Mhondoro Ngezi area of Zimbabwe. Based on empirical data, the paper will argue that landless farmers who occupied white commercial farms under the A1 Scheme as part of the FTLRP are not merely 'backward peasants' who have ruined agriculture, as claimed by many commentators. Since the land occupations, there has been emerging evidence to suggest that such farmers have developed an in-depth understanding of agrarian issues. These farmers have mastered the art of understanding the significance of issues such as wind direction and its impact on the rainfall patterns in their areas. They have also developed relatively sophisticated understanding of soil quality that helps them to determine which crops are better suited to what soils. This seems to be contributing to better annual yields that in turn led to a marked improvement in livelihoods security. The paper is largely based on empirical data gathered as part of ongoing fieldwork exploring land reform and livelihoods security in contemporary Zimbabwe. The data has been collected using baseline surveys followed by in-depth interviews and personal observations.

**Key words: Land and agrarian reform; Mhondoro Ngezi; peasants; identity and belonging; livelihoods security; social change**

## Introduction

There is a growing consensus among scholars that the results of Zimbabwe's FTLRP should be reexamined. Many assumptions or myths (Scoones *et al.* 2010) which dominated debates on the socio-economic and political impact of fast track land reform can no longer be sustained given new empirical data emerging from the field. The publication of two studies (Moyo *at al*. 2009 and Scoones *at al*. 2010) based on empirical research, and ongoing field studies have helped to dispel myths surrounding the FTLRP. These studies have certainly influenced the shift from 'apocalyptic' generalizations, which had gained prominence in academic discourse to the need for a more nuanced analysis of empirical data gathered on the ground, which could broaden our understanding of the outcomes of fast track land reform in

Zimbabwe. Such myths had perpetuated distortions in both academic and public debates. For example some critics went as far as arguing that events associated with fast track land reform, signaled the end of 'modernity' in Zimbabwe (Hammar 2003, Worby 2003) and that Zimbabwe was in some form of fascist cycle (Scarnecchia 2006). Based on colonial era stereotypes, peasants who occupied mainly white commercial farms were blamed for having ruined agriculture and that these peasants lacked the skills to match production levels set by former Large Scale Commercial Farms (LSCF). Citing anecdotal evidence, peasants were blamed (Richardson. 2000) for being agents of agrarian and environmental destruction. Underpinning the 'apocalypse' discourse was the general assumption that the confiscation of white commercial farms had forced Zimbabwe from being a 'bread basket of the region' to a 'basket case'. Very little effort was invested in trying to examine the agrarian situation in the post fast track land reform era.

This paper examines the social outcomes of fast track land reform and its economic impact in terms of livelihoods. Based on research conducted with peasant households that occupied farms bordering the Mhondoro Ngezi Communal Area (CA) in Kadoma District, Mashonaland West province. Through a case study of Damvuri area, the paper will highlight how smallholder farmers have socially organized themselves; developed a relatively sophisticated knowledge of agro-ecological issues and how this has helped them to improve livelihoods. It is hoped that the study will compliment other empirical studies that are being undertaken in Zimbabwe that are striving to address the 'information' gap that have led to problematic distortions in the land reform debate. The study is based on a community of 185 households (approximately 8 villages) farming under the A1 model (villagised). The study is based on data gathered using baseline surveys, followed by in-depth interviews and personal observations.

**Fast Track Land Reform Programme and its outcomes**

Zimbabwe's fast track land reform process characterized by 'land invasions', which started in the late 1990s and intensified after the 2000 benchmark, received widespread condemnation (Hammar *et al.* 2003). The highly political nature of the land occupations and a diplomatic row between Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom overshadowed attempts for an informed analysis of its outcomes. It is not surprising then that the FTLRP was dismissed as 'Mugabe's land grab' or the end of modernity in Zimbabwe (*ibid*). Many commentators particularly journalists (see Smith. 2010) blamed the programme for ruining an otherwise vibrant agrarian sector. They argued that confistication of large landholdings owned by white landed elites

had contributed to food insecurity as most peasants who occupied these farms lacked the knowledge and zeal to farm. Anecdotal evidence was cited which projected a dramatic decline in agricultural productivity and a looming environmental crisis as hordes of peasants went on rampage poaching wide animals, cutting down trees instead of farming. Zimbabwe was depicted as a 'bread basket' before fast track land reform and 'a basket case' after its alleged ruinous effects. In academia there was very little attempt to examine the emerging agrarian situation in occupied areas. It's only recently that a more commonsense approach to understanding the agrarian situation in the post fast track land reform era has began to find currency in academia. A result of the above is that many of the 'apocalyptic' assumptions of social chaos and ruin in occupied areas popularized by critics of fast track land reform can no longer be sustained.

Emerging evidence based on a few studies already undertaken in various sites (Moyo *et al.* 2009) across Zimbabwe and on-going fieldwork studies indicates that the outcomes of Zimbabwe's FTLRP are far more complex; beneficiaries of FTLRP are not a homogenous group; although elites with political connections got multiple farms especially bigger farms under the A2 model; the biggest number of beneficiaries is made up of predominantly rural people with farming backgrounds (*ibid*). The FTLRP did not lead to 'chaos' in occupied areas as alleged as empirical studies show that new farmers have organized themselves and new social institutions (Scoones *et al.* 2010) have emerged in these areas; new identities are being negotiated which has led to social cohesion and new forms of belonging have been established. Peasant households can now socially reproduce themselves in diverse ways (cropping and livestock production, extraction of natural resources etc). Livelihoods strategies have been diversified, new opportunities have opened up, access to bigger and better soil quality plots have also broken down barriers which barred peasant households from accessing natural resources like minerals, wildlife and non-timber forest products which were bonded in private landholdings of mainly white landed elites (Moyo *et al*. 2009).

All in all fast track land reform has led to the democratization of the agrarian sector and the emergence of a deracialised tri-modal agrarian structure comprising a:

> broadly based agrarian capitalist class, built on former and new farming elites…. the smaller segment of large scale capitalist farmers now includes both black and white farmers, but their landholdings have been substantially downsized to an average 700 hectares, compared to the 2000 hectares previously held by large scale landowners, over 75% of the new middle capitalist farmers have plots below 100 hectares but vary across agro-ecological regions (Moyo 2011a).

These wide outcomes of fast track land reform have brought with them new trajectories, in particular the way in which peasant households are now socially reproducing

themselves. These changes warrant further empirical research in order to fully comprehend their impact on peasant household strategies. This paper examines some of these broader outcomes of the FTLRP, which have not been fully explored by other studies conducted elsewhere (see Moyo *et al.* 2009 and Scoones *et al*. 2010). Through a case study of the Damvuri area near the Mhondoro Ngezi Communal Area (CA), the paper will highlight how smallholder farmers are socially reproducing themselves and how this have led to the diversification of livelihoods strategies.

Theoretically, critics of the FTLRP have failed to acknowledge that agrarian reform is a *sine qua non* for the transformation of the role of various agrarian classes in struggles for development and democratization, towards equitable land ownership and social relations of production (Moyo 2011b); they have also failed to acknowledge that the breaking up of large landholdings into small family run smallholder plots could lead to some improvements in efficiency and productivity in the agrarian sector in the long term, with many peasant households being able to socially reproduce themselves based on secure livelihoods strategies (see Binswanger *et al.*1993 and Borras Jr. 2006).

Moreover, since land rights and ownership tend to grow out power relationships, landed elites have historically employed coercive methods and distortions in land, labour, credit and commodity markets to extract economic rents from land and from peasants, such rent seeking behavior reduce the efficiency of resource use, undermine growth, and increase poverty of rural populations (Binswanger *et al. 1993*). This makes the breaking of large private landholdings a pre-requisite for transforming the lives of marginalized rural households by taking away colonial era monopoly syndicates and their speculative tendencies, which undermine efficiency and productivity and equity in the agrarian sector. Critics of the FTLRP have only selectively highlighted aspects of violence, disorder, chaos and cronyism in land allocations rather than looking at the broader agrarian sector, which have emerged after fast track land reform, and how despite its shortcomings, it has helped to fundamentally, overall alter agrarian relations in favour of smallholder farmers (Moyo *et al.* 2009). Moreover such critics fail to acknowledge that land reform involves the transfer of land rents from a ruling class to tenant workers and that the process of large scale land reforms is always associated with revolts and uprisings (Binswanger *et al.* 1993). It has also been argued that attempts at land reform without massive political upheaval have rarely succeeded in transferring much of a country's land (ibid).

It has been argued that Large Scale Commercial Farms (LSCF) suffer from productivity inefficiencies because they require large amounts of capital and labor to operate,

whereas family run smallholder farms are more efficient and cheaper to run since they employ family labor (Binswanger *et al.* 1993). Based on the above argument, the outcome of fast track land reform, which saw a big number of LSCF being broken into smallholder entities and a more diversified commercial farming sector should be viewed as progressive; it has allowed a bigger number of smallholder farmers to acquire property which will enable them to improve agricultural productivity in the long term. It has to be acknowledged that this process was far from perfect, the process of acquiring land from large landowners was and still remains contested. Recent empirical data indicates that political elites associated with ZANU PF own multiple farms and are hoarding land. This needs to be addressed, as this will further perpetuate the culture of land concentration and production inefficiencies associated with large land holdings (Moyo and Yeros 2005). It is likely that further struggles over land might arise in the future if this is not addressed.

The nationalization of land within an unstable socio-political environment and the resultant tenure regimes which ensued remain contested; 99 year leases and other permits offered to beneficiaries of the FTLRP (both A1 and A2) have been blamed for perpetuating tenure insecurity (see Matondi. 2008 and Moyo *et al.* 2009). It has been alleged that such insecure tenure turned land holdings into 'dead capital' ( see De Soto. 2000) since such land holdings can no-longer be used as collateral to unlock vital capital in order to further agrarian investment. On the other hand the link between tenure security and agricultural investment has been challenged (Platteau. 2000), empirical data gathered as party of this study and studies undertaken elsewhere (Moyo *et al.* 2009 and Scoones *et al.* 2010) indicates that secure tenure is not a panancea for agrarian investments (see Platteau.2000). Moreover many resettled farmers have invested significantly in their new properties despite the alleged tenure insecurity brought about by FTLRP. This is an area that needs further research, which cannot be fully covered by this study.

## The Case of Damvuri Farm

### *Research setting and social organization of resettled farmers*

Damvuri farm is one of the former commercial farms bordering the Mhondoro Ngezi Communal Area (CA) that was 'taken over' as part of the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ)' Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). The farm is part of large land holdings alienated during the 1940s, which led to the eviction of 'Natives' during the creation of an area bordering the Mhondoro Ngezi CA that became generally known as Rhodes dale (Ranger 1995). The farm consists of 185 households who were given land under the A1

scheme (village model). Ecologically, the farm is situated in Natural Region III (Vincent and Thomas 1960), which receives average rainfall. The farm is mainly composed of a combination of red sandy and loam soils with regular patches of red clay soils. Beneficiaries of fast track land reform in Damvuri come from diverse ethnic, geographical and social backgrounds. Women also directly benefited from fast track land reform not only through their husbands but also on their own. While the number of female land beneficiaries remains relatively small, in communal areas it was difficult for women to independently own land.

Like any other new community created by land occupations, there are new forms of authority, which emerged in Damvuri and remain contested[1]. Although the area is technically under chief Benhura of Mhondoro Ngezi, the chief did not join land invasions and hence was not involved in land allocations and many of the political processes, which led to the creation of this new community. The chief's absence significantly reduced his influence over the new community. Judicial issues which would have been normally referred to him for adjudication (petty theft, boundary disputes, acts of violence, marital issues etc) are now either decided locally or at the district level in Kadoma through local government structures rather than through traditional authorities. This has led to the chief not only losing influence but also revenue as those who are brought to his court are charged some fees that are a vital source of untaxed revenue.

The emergence of new forms of authority which included among others war veterans, who led land invasions in resettled areas, does not however mean chiefs have become completely obsolete politically, they remain key functionaries in the rural polity, periodically co-opted by ZANU-PF to mobilize rural constituencies during elections. The complexity of this new "authority" cannot however be exaggerated. In Damvuri although there are certainly complex forms of authority, order is maintained by dynamic processes which allow certain authorities to reign supreme at given times and political circumstances. These dynamic processes have guaranteed the maintenance of order in these newly occupied areas, as people are now used to dealing with diverse forms of authority; they are also able to manipulate these multiple forms of authorities to their advantage. This means a new form of local 'democracy' has emerged; the decentralization of power from chiefs to other authorities, which are not influenced by kinship and ethnic linkages. This is considered a welcome development for many resettled people who had suffered segregation at the hands of chiefs in communal areas.

[1] These new forms of authority include war veterans leadership, committee of seven, village chairman, ZANU PF local organizing committee etc

The ‘new’ farmers are growing a variety of crops; these include cotton, maize peanuts, groundnuts, soya bean, and *rapoko*. Some farmers are beginning to grow tobacco. However maize and cotton still predominate. Based on interviews and personal observations, beneficiaries of fast track land reform in the area are generally optimistic about future prospects; the number of achievements and investments made in the area since the farm was occupied after 2000 is testimony to the above. A shopping centre has been built; a school is under construction, permanent structures that are more ‘urban’ looking have emerged in place of pole and dagga huts across many villages, all this with minimum external involvement.

Far from being socially chaotic and ‘unprogressive’ as claimed by critics of FTLRP, the beneficiaries of fast track land reform in the Damvuri area of Mhondoro Ngezi Communal Area (CA) area are certainly enterprising. A key informant told me ‘when the farm was occupied, there was only one shop, now five shops have already been built with more under construction’. Moreover, infrastructure found on the farm including the ‘homestead’[2] and old barns have been converted into communal property. The former homestead has been converted into accommodation facilities for teachers and other civil servants. The barns have been converted into a primary school which is ambitiously sign posted, ‘*welcome to Damvuri primary school, fast tracking development through education’*, All these new developments are a result of voluntary work since there is very little or no support from government or NGOs.

Many of my informants were very positive about future prospects although they lamented lack of government and donor support. One respondent told me that ‘if I could get support in terms of inputs and other agricultural equipment like tractors, I could produce ten times what I am able to produce within this constrained socio-economic environment’. Although the occupied area is close to a well-maintained gravel road, like many former commercial farms across Zimbabwe, the area suffers from shortage of social infrastructure like clinics, schools, marketing facilities and reliable water sources. However this does not seem to have affected people’s determinism “to make the place work” as many of them have organized themselves into various committees to deal with a variety of challenges like the absence of a reliable water source. One borehole left by the former white farmer services eight villages.

Key social infrastructures such as schools and clinics have to be built from scratch with hardly any support from government. While I was staying in the community, another

[2] Former white farmer’s residence

committee was set up to deal with developmental issues. This committee, I was told was going to engage with companies carrying out mining activities in the area. Such companies it was claimed 'were extracting natural resources in the area and hence had a responsibility to invest in developmental projects in local communities'. In particular the target of this corporate social responsibility campaign was the giant South African platinum mining company ZIMPLATS which is believed to making 'lots of profits' from platinum sales while many locals claim it is not investing any money in the development of local communities. One key informant told me that ZIMPLATS invested in 'political' projects, which were meant to be publicity stunts meant to avoid being targeted by the government in its indigenization rhetoric. The new committee was thus tasked with engaging with the company in order to 'demand' that it invests part of its profits in community development projects such as sinking boreholes, building a clinic and providing employment for local youths.

The community has also organized itself to deal with HIV/AIDS issues. HIV/AIDS support groups have been set up across the eight villages. A coordinator was appointed who was sent to Kadoma for basic training in home based care and food and nutrition. His main job I was told was to regularly visit HIV/AIDS sufferers, set up support groups and provide counseling and information on food and nutrition and positive living. The HIV/AIDS coordinator, who I later interviewed told me that he wanted to make sure that his "HIV/AIDS support groups continue to provide support for victims of HIV and that a shortage of transport was impacting negatively on his ability to visit all support groups across the eight villages'. He went further to say 'if he could get a bicycle, that could improve mobility and make his job less difficult".

Despite a huge amount of socio-economic challenges faced by the newly resettled farmers, the level of commitment and zeal to organize socially, economically and politically is remarkable. They have been able to mobilize themselves politically to protect their newly acquired property and take the initiative to start building key social infrastructure with limited resources, they have also taken advantage of ZANU-PF) structures which are dominant in the area to engage with private companies in order to extract resources for the benefit of their community as part of a broader accumulation strategy. They have demonstrated the ability to maneuver the restrictive socio-economic and political environment in order to protect their interests. They have also demonstrated an amazing ability to manipulate the political situation to their benefit by for example making use of political elites to mobilize resources either for their individual use or for the community, as will be illustrated in the next section.

***Authority Structures and ZANU-PF***

ZANU PF had a vibrant presence in the area; it has active structures and cadres who play a central role in the affairs of the community. My access to the area had to be facilitated by ZANU PF structures and a local war veteran leadership which all form part of a multilayered hierarchical structure of authority which include local governance structures like councilors and the Village Development Coordinators (VIDCOs). The boundaries of these competing 'authorities' are quite blurred, which sometimes makes it difficult to know who to approach if one wants to get clearance to do anything in the community. Moreover it also sometimes creates confusion as to who is actually in charge. For example when we were given clearance by the counsellor to interview villagers, halfway through the interviews we were told to stop by a certain war veteran who told us we did not have 'his clearance'. We had to start another tedious process of negotiating with another 'arbitrary' authority to get clearance in order to continue with our work.

That ZANU-PF structures rule the roost in the area is no doubt. My initial introductory meeting was with the local ZANU PF leadership at which I was openly told that *'isu muno takagarisiwa ne musangano, tino sapota ZANU PF'* (we were resettled here by the party and we support ZANU PF), I later asked what happened if one supported the opposition party (Movement for Democratic Change) on which I was told *'Muno hamuna vanhu ve MDC, takapiwa ivhu ne ZANU'* (there are no Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters here, we were given land by ZANU PF). Although ZANU PF seems to be visible across the community, an in-depth inquiry helped me to understand that being ZANU PF was a convenient identity for many people; one respondent on condition of anonymity told me that there were many MDC supporters among the group who were not keen to be exposed. Such exposure it was claimed resulted in people losing their land.

During my stay in the area I however never heard of anybody who lost land as a result of his or her political affiliation. There was however one story (which I could not authenticate) of a retired soldier who had been instructed to stop farming by the District Administrator after the local ZANU PF leadership had reported him for not attending ZANU PF meetings and being linked to MDC. A key informant later told me that it was difficult to pin down people's political identities; he even went further to say 'even the local ZANU PF Councillor's husband is a member of MDC'. I could not however authenticate these claims.

It seems difficult if not impossible for an outsider to decipher and to generalize people's political affiliation in the area. This is because when people joined land occupations, the structures that facilitated land occupations were part of the ZANU PF patronage networks

which included among other groups War Veterans (who led land occupations), government ministers, the police, the army, intelligence operatives and senior civil servants who all contributed to the sustainability of the occupations by lending them legitimacy. Thus when one joined farm occupations, one was either coerced or voluntarily joined ZANU PF, the political environment during this politically tense moment did not allow for membership of the then opposition party MDC (Movement for Democratic Change). A key informant told me that during land occupations 'ZANU PF propaganda and populist discourses blamed the MDC for being against land reform and supporting white land owners'. Those who wanted land had no choice; by virtue of being part of land 'invaders' they automatically became aligned to ZANU PF; they had to be seen to be against MDC and its alleged neo-colonial networks (NGOs, Donors, Western countries etc). However the political dynamics of this era were quite nuanced and one cannot posit a simplistic analysis of who belonged to what political party during the land occupations.

There is evidence to suggest that although many people claimed to be ZANU PF (you needed to be in order to get land), this does not mean that a wholesale conversion of people took place in favour of ZANU PF during land occupations or after. It does not also mean that ZANU PF had a deliberate policy of giving land only to its supporters as other critics of the land reform have claimed (see Bernstein.2005). An important mobilizing factor was that despite people's dynamic political identities, ZANU PF's liberation narrative resonated strongly with the peasantry given Zimbabwe's recent history of colonial land alienation. Of course ZANU PF networks boosted your chances of getting especially bigger A2 farms which were favoured by elites (see Moyo *et al* 2009), however it seems in A1 areas it was easy for people's political identities to change based on circumstances; an MDC sympathizer who joined land invasions 'temporarily' became ZANU PF; they would join the chanting of revolutionary songs at *pungwes* (all night gatherings), they participated as members of a new community created by the process of land occupations. Whether these opportunistic political identities would stand the test of time would depend on individual circumstances. From my own observations in the Damvuri area, even ZANU PF itself cannot identify who is 'truly' ZANU or not, this is why ZANU PF resorts to overt political coercion during elections in order to secure the rural vote. There is no guarantee that ZANU PF will always win an election in these areas, previous electoral returns are testimony to the above.

For many, it would appear that ZANU PF links are primarily utilitarian, to facilitate their accumulation strategies based on dynamic client-patron relationships. Although MDC is not visible in the area, I gathered through informal discussions with many respondents, that it

had many sympathizers who are 'underground'. However, the absence of any other political party or opposing authority in this area has allowed ZANU PF structures to sometimes override and undermine local governance structures in terms of decision-making. This does not however seem to have an impact as to the ability of the new community to organize itself and deal with the challenges it faces. Very few people seemed to be worried about political identities; many people were interested in addressing many of the challenges they face in establishing themselves as farmers. It seems after getting land people wanted to invest in things that can improve their livelihoods like clearing fields, buying more livestock, built better houses and buy agricultural equipment. Politics seemed to be a secondary activity on the lower end of their list of priorities.

An exploration of the politics of identity and belonging is examined below, it highlights the challenges faced by people who came from different social and ethnic backgrounds in their quest to start a new community, establish roots and carve a new niche in a place where identities and belonging had to be negotiated.

**Renegotiating identities and belonging in Damvuri**

Soon after occupation, Damvuri became a melting pot of diverse ethnic groups, with people who came as far as Lupane, Gokwe, Zhombe and kadoma and those who were working for the previous farm owner. All these groups seem to have assimilated into their new 'community'. An interesting dynamic is that unlike many other places where farms were invaded largely by people from surrounding Communal Areas (Scoones *et al.* 2010), in Damvuri, people from the neighboring Mhondoro CA are outnumbered by 'foreigners' or 'outsiders'; those who came from far off places like Sanyati, Silobela, Lupane and urban areas like Kadoma, Kwekwe etc. Initially this demographic make-up brought with it a whole range of socio-political dynamics within the area. Competing claims of autochthony played a role in the way in which people tried to legitimize their new identities among a diverse group of 'foreigners'.

One of my key informants told me that people who came from surrounding Mhondoro CA and hence claim an autochthonous connection with the occupied farm were resentful of those they perceived as 'foreigners', those who came from far off areas and those former farm workers that had a 'foreign' identity. These Mhondoro villagers claimed that they had been evicted from the area and dumped in the nearby Mhondoro 'Reserve' paving way for white commercial farmers in the 1940s during what was then called the second colonial occupation (Alexander 2006). However they maintained a physical link with the area through

working in these farms or negotiating with white farmers to allow their livestock to access better pastures fenced off during forced removals. Thus many viewed fast track land reform as a recovery of lost lands.

The new community has witnessed identity politics being played out in various forms and ways with those claiming to be 'autochthones' accusing those perceived to come from somewhere else of possessing witchcraft. A Mondoro CA informant who I interviewed told me that '*Vanhu vakabva kusanyati vanoroya*' (people from Sanyati are witches). However after talking to various respondents both from Mhondoro and Sanyati and other areas, it seems these accusations and counter accusations of witchcraft are to do with power relations and access to resources, as noted by Francis Nyamnjoh (2006):

> …'the growing importance of identity politics and more exclusionary ideas of citizenship is matched by the urge to detect difference and to distinguish 'locals', … autochthons or 'insiders' on the one hand, and 'foreigners' … strangers' or 'outsiders' on the other…with the focus on opportunities economic entitlements, cultural recognition and political representation.

The conflicts, which affected the new community of Damvuri in the early days of the occupation, are reflective of the ongoing struggles to establish new identities faced by many settlers living among strangers. They also reflect how ethnicity plays a role in ongoing struggles over access to resources, as noted by Thomas Hyland Eriksen, (1993) 'ethnic identity becomes crucially important the moment it is perceived as threatened. … "expressions of ethnic identities may also be regarded rather as psychological responses to threats from outside or"…as symbolic tools in political struggles'.

On the other hand, it seems new identities are being negotiated and forged based on a variety of mechanisms. Those accused of being foreigners, who came from far off places have found ways to connect with the local area and its people in order to legitimize or "legalise their stay". While staying in the area, I observed that totems had become new networking tools; through totems, people could establish past connections and discard the foreignness label and hence establish kinship links with people who came from somewhere else. For example, at a beer drinking occasion, an old lady was bought beer by some men because '*ndavachihera vanoera mhofu ndavatete vedu*' (she is our aunt because her totem is an eland). Within this new community it seems that ethnic identities are fluid and prone to negotiation; they are also governed by time, as it seems nobody can be a foreigner forever.

Even people of Malawian origin who used to work for the evicted white farmer have established a connection with the place, either through shared subaltern discourses of oppression or through totemic linkages with local people. Some can argue that all blacks

were victims of white oppression, as laborers on white commercial farmers they suffered like everybody else; moreover some claimed that they were now part of the local community through their mixed parentage; for example an informant of Malawian origin remarked that '*ini amai vangu ndevemuno, ndiri muzukuru wenyu*' (my mother came from here and I am your nephew).

Within the area, those with a foreign identity attached to them have also established kinship ties through exogamous marriages; these have helped to strengthen ties between local people and 'foreigners' who can no longer be discriminated against since they have become part of an extended family. Historical memory is also being utilized to legitimize counter claims of autochthony, as some 'foreigners' from far away in the Gokwe District claimed that their families used to live in the area before they were evicted by the colonial regime and thus they have a historical connection with the place. They claimed that through land reform they were now back home as 'returning residents'; they even cited the existence of graves of their ancestors somewhere close by and identified sacred sites where rituals used to be conducted such as rain making ceremonies. This to a large extent shows that identities are constantly changing and those with 'foreign' identities can gradually assimilate and establish deeper roots within the new area. New burials seemed to be another way of establishing a connection with new places. Once kinsfolk are buried in the area, a connection is established which helps 'foreigners' to connect to the local 'soil' through graves. Once buried, their bones are physically 'present' in the area and thus an organic connection is established which legitimizes the process of identity creation. It seems the dead play a part in legitimizing the creation of new identities of those with a foreign label.

Another important aspect ethnic identities demonstrated in Damvuri is their utility, it seems such ethnic identities can be selectively used to legitimize access to resources, where those perceived as outsiders are deliberately excluded. However, such identities can also be subordinated for the common good when necessary as demonstrated by the ongoing dynamics of identity and belonging in Damvuri. The politics of new identity creation in Damvuri demonstrates that fast track land reform was not just about land, many other social factors were at play. It seems within Damvuri, besides getting land as a source of new livelihoods opportunities, the power of fast track land reform was in its symbolism (Mamdani: 2008); it helped historically displaced communities to reconnect with the past by so doing creating a sense of restitution and wellbeing.

***Progress in livelihoods***

An analysis of livelihoods security trends after fast track land reform in Damvuri is provided below. Data was gathered using a baseline survey of a small sample of 50 households. An attempt was made to make the survey more representative in terms of gender although it was difficult to achieve an equal number of participants due to female participants being generally 'hard to reach' due to a number of factors, chief among them being the refusal of husbands to allow their wives to be interviewed. However, of the 50 people interviewed 20 of them were women. The baseline survey was followed by in-depth interviews, informal conversations and personal observations made while I stayed in the Damvuri community.

In general, most Damvuri respondents claimed that their new farming conditions were better than where they came from. Soil fertility was highlighted as central, given the general degradation of soils in many communal areas due to excessive use. Damvuri on the other hand was relatively fertile since it was not previously used for farming purposes (and NR III). The respondents said they had left sandy soils, rocky and unfertile soils and were happy that they had been given land with better quality soils, which they saw as a positive development.

Based on results of the baseline survey and personal observations, respondents cited a variety of' 'push factors', which forced them to join land occupations. Overcrowding especially for those who came from communal areas, poor soils, a yearning to go back home, land degradation and unhealthy family relations in some cases all forced people to join land occupations. However, It also worthy of note that some respondents felt that they had no 'push factors' as such but just joined the national chorus of fast track land reform based on its rhetoric of undoing the colonial legacy.

Illustrating the major 'pull factors' respondents identified 'good soils, recovery of lost lands, better rainfall, abundance of pastures, and the prospect of one owning their own piece of land' as well as other social dynamics like being as far away from other family members compared to where they were before.

For those who claimed to have left 'fertile soils' to even better quality soils (70%), asked what they would do after exhausting their new land, they argued that it was not necessary to speculate, as they would 'deal with issues as they emerged'.

Some more 'technical' respondents (14%) noted that the rainfall pattern at Damvuri was better than where they came from and that with time yields were likely to improve 'as we get used to the rainfall pattern of the area'. Some (6%) claimed that the 'wind was coming from the right direction' and that this guaranteed them reliable rainfall. They lamented low

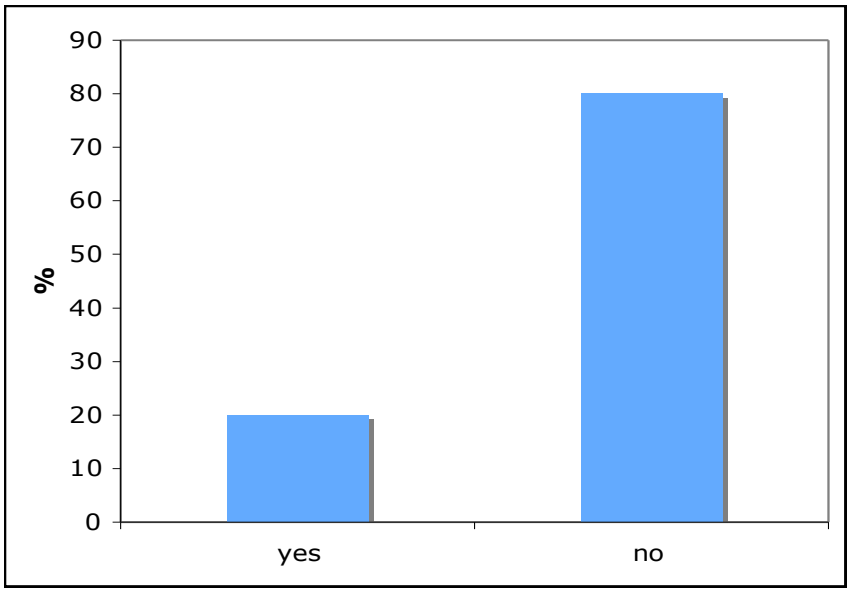
and unreliable rainfall where they came from which they blamed for persistent food shortages. Respondents in this category came from Zhombe and Sanyati, places that are generally dry and suffer regular bouts of droughts.

Although a big number (90%) of respondents rated Damvuri better than where they came from, there was a small group (10%) who observed that the agricultural situation was just the same (soil type, rainfall patterns and yields etc) like where they came from. This is a group of people who came from older resettlement areas of the early 1980s. Respondents in this group did not cite soil quality as a push factor and had mainly social reasons for having moved, like owning a bigger piece of land and autonomy from family etc. This group mainly comprised second-generation resettlement farmers who were children of beneficiaries of the GoZ Land Reform and Resettlement Programme (LRRP), which were implemented, in the early 1980s immediately after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Despite the problems they face at Damvuri, there was however a general feeling across many respondents (90%) that the move to Damvuri was a good decision something reflected in studies undertaken in A1 areas elsewhere (Scoones *et al*. 2010 and contributions to this Issue).

Most (80%) respondents did not seem to think security of tenure was an issue, neither did they think it impacted on their agricultural activity and livelihoods (see fig 1). There was however a smaller group (14%) who claimed that insecurity of tenure was impacting negatively on their agricultural activities, something reflected in a study undertaken elsewhere (Matondi. 2008). This group seemed to comprise mainly of those more enterprising peasants who wanted to use their land to leverage loans from local banks to procure farming equipment and inputs.

The impact of nationalization of land and new tenure regimes requires further research. Platteau (2000:57), have argued that 'contrary to expectations, the evidence from Kenya and some other African countries where titling have been systematically implemented shows that there has been no clearly discernable impact from land titling on investment behaviour' He goes further to argue that 'the empirical evidence on the relationship between land rights and investment or productivity in African agriculture is inconclusive' (ibid p.56).

Fig. 1 The impact of security of tenure to agricultural activities

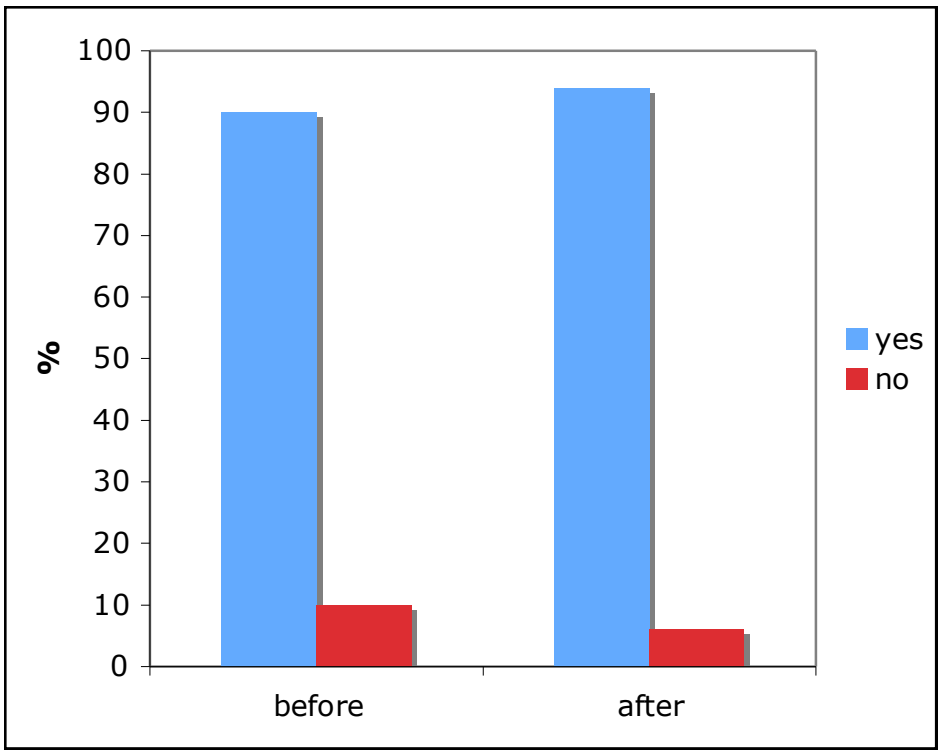



Source: Damvuri baseline survey (2010-11)

Stories of 'progress' and new livelihoods opportunities abound in Damvuri, with progress being measured in a variety of ways. Through the baseline survey and informal interviews, many respondents observed that they had moved to Damvuri with 'very few things' but they had seen improvements in their lives. Although livestock herds remain low in Damvuri as noted elsewhere (see Moyo *et al.* 2009), those I spoke to were proud of having atlist acquired one or two cows and other small livestock like chickens, pigs and sheep. Although these are relatively small achievements, this was seen as progress as cattle are the measure of wealth for rural households; they provide drought power, manure, milk and economic security during difficult times (Scoones *et al.* 2010).

Many (90%) respondents observed that ever since they got land they were now assured of food security throughout the year since they now got relatively better yields especially for grains compared to where they came from. An increase in tonnage of especially maize, which is the main staple diet, was cited as evidence that the new place improved food security. To some extent this is seen as progress to write home about considering that some (20%) families especially those who came from traditionally dry areas and urban areas like Kadoma did not produce enough to sustain themselves throughout the year. As one respondent observed 'when we were in Mhondoro CA, we did not see the need for a granary since we could just pack our produce in small bags that would be finished before the end of the year'

Fig. 2 Livestock ownership before and after FTLR




Source: Damvuri baseline survey (2010-11)

There is indeed a general feeling (80%) among land beneficiaries that land reform improved food security, although this should be understood within a broader ecological context. The Damvuri farm was previously not used for farming as explained earlier, the relative prosperity could be attributed to relative fertility of soil and bigger lots. A key informant from AGRITEX who I interviewed also agreed that the relative fertility of the soil was contributing to bigger yields especially in maize. He however cautioned against too much optimism as those farmers whose land comprised mainly of sandy soils would soon exhaust them leading to land degradation and low yields. The issue of agricultural and environmental sustainability in the post FTLRP era remain contested with some critics of FTLRP (Savory *et al.* 1999) arguing that giving land to the landless without dealing with ecological sustainability issues is counter productive as such lands will be soon degraded. Further research is needed which can fully explore the sustainability of relative gains made so far by beneficiaries of fast track land reform.

Another form of progress is manifested through what seems to be an 'open frontiers' mentality associated with fast track land reform. Some peasants have taken advantage of porous boundaries to unofficially increase the size of their plots. Unlike in communal areas,

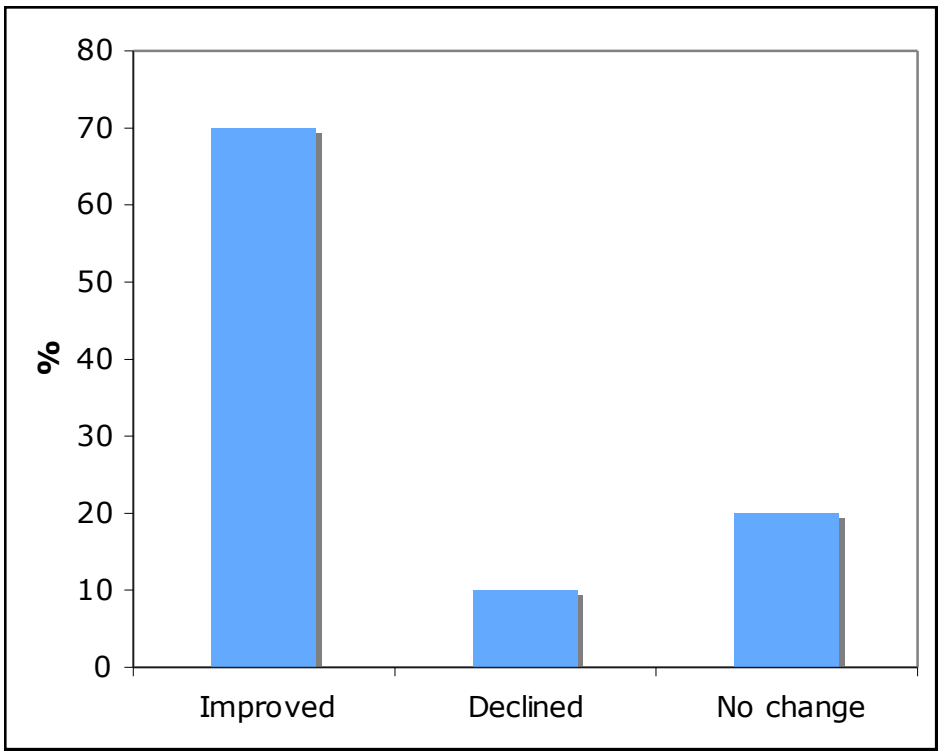
boundaries of individual plots in the occupied area seem to be flexible. This is especially for a smaller number of villagers whose plots border the common grazing lands. One such villager told me that '*ini munda wangu wakakura kudarika yevamwe nekuti urikumapeto, ndinogona kungorima kusvika kwandinoda'* (my plot is bigger than other people's because it borders common grazing land, I can extend it if I want).

Another aspect of the open frontiers mentality is reflected by the incidence of illegal and unofficial settlements within the officially occupied area, what I call 'fast track within fast track', on top of the eight official villages created during land allocations, there is an unofficial village (village 9) which I was told was created for youths by the new settlers without official consent. This village remains a secret, which the elders are reluctant to disclose to outsiders.

This demonstrates that fast track land reform created some opportunities to get bigger plots, although through unofficial means, loop holes in the land allocation process and fluid boundaries presented opportunities to accumulate larger landholdings than officially allocated for some ambitious individuals. It seemed the state sought an orderly process of land demarcations, which it achieved in its quest to bring 'order' in the countryside. However, these state led processes were interpreted differently locally, with many peasants viewing land invasions as a one off opportunity to increase farm sizes. Although grudgingly welcomed, state intervention after land occupations was resented by peasants who were aware of what seemed like sinister attempts by state officials to reduce plot sizes from bigger ones that land occupiers had generously given themselves. Class conflicts which led to the eviction of mostly poor farmers in some areas (Scoones *et al*. 2010) by political elites who relied on their political connections to acquire large holdings led to many peasants 'loosing' faith in the official land allocation system and thus devising ways of cheating the system to acquire bigger plots as a way of compensating losses.

Another measure of 'progress' in Damvuri has been crop yields. Many (70%) respondents observed that their total yields had improved compared to where they came from. Some respondents observed that they now measured their yields in 'tones rather than bags as they used to do in communal areas'. Some respondents claimed that their yields especially maize had risen from about twelve bags annually to about three tones, remarkable progress by any standard. Most respondents in this category also observed that as they were gradually getting used to the ecology of the area, their yields were likely to improve annually as they would better adapt to the rainfall pattern of the area.

Fig. 3 Trends in crop yields after FTLRP




Source: Damvuri baseline survey (2010-11)

There was however a small group (20%) of respondents who were not very sure if their yields had improved compared to where they came from. Respondents in this group comprised of those who came from old resettlement areas or those who were previously doing well in communal areas. One respondent, Amai Musvusvudzi observed ‘ the way we were farming is just the same as here’ although they were generally doing well in Damvuri she commented that they had not been able to meet the highest yields of 11 tones that they used to get back in their communal land in Mhondoro.

In general livelihoods in Damvuri are agrarian based. Food crops such as maize, peanuts and groundnuts predominates their crop production, although commercial crops like cotton and tobacco are also grown by small number of households (approximately 10%).

Surplus produce is marketed through Grain Marketing Board (GMB) and Cotton Marketing Board (CMB), while tobacco is marketed in Harare through Tobbacco Auction Floors (TAF). Some farmers (approximately 15%) diversified livelihoods by engaging in small scale accumulating processes like petty commodity broking. Others hired out their drought power while others were blacksmiths who provided small farm implements like axes, hoes and repaired ploughs. The proliferation of small-scale mining operations in the area which accompanied fast track land reform and access to non-timber forest products (fruits etc), which are found in abundance in these former commercial farming areas of Mhondoro Ngezi means that (80%) of households can reproduce themselves, based on diverse livelihoods strategies.

***Challenges***

Apart from stories of progress and remarkable social organization in Damvuri, some respondents complained that there were problems of political representation. A local ZANU PF counselor was perceived as 'corrupt and diverting resources from government that were meant for communities to her own use'. One key informant told me that the local counselor was 'diverting fertilizer meant for the community to her own plot'; I could not however substantiate the claim.

Although people generally supported ZANU PF for its role in giving them land, it seemed many doubted local ZANU PF representatives in terms of their ability to properly represent their interests. It seemed people were suspicious of such leadership especially when it came to accessing government handouts. For example results of a baseline survey[3] conducted in the area indicated that when it came to talking about service delivery many respondents (70%) did not think they could get help from the government through ZANU PF structures. They generally thought that the absence of NGOs in the area undermined the provision of services like clinics, boreholes etc. When I attended a meeting where community members were discussing 'development', I asked them if they were aware of the Constituency Development Fund, which their local MP could use to fund development projects like schools and clinics and boreholes. It seemed they were not aware of such a fund. They told me that their local ZANU PF MP had not told them about such a fund.

Apart from the political challenges, the community faces a serious shortage of drinking water. Since the settlement on the farm was not accompanied by the provision of

[3] See unpublished field notes from the Damvuri area.

water facilities, the only borehole that exists was inherited from the former white farmer, however this cannot sustain 185 households. Acute water shortages have had a negative impact on the lives of farmers who are made to spend many hours (approximately 2 hours per day) looking for water rather than work in the fields. This has also brought a bigger burden for women who generally have the responsibility to fetch water. Many (60%) women complained that the absence of water led to poor sanitary arrangements, which brought health risks. Most (70%) families especially those from villages far away from the borehole have to allocate at least 2 hours daily for fetching water.

Through my own personal observations, the absence of water in this community should be understood from a broader agro-ecological context. Despite relative prosperity brought about by Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR), it seems this new community is likely to face many more challenges related to land degradation and climate change in the long term. The over reliance on timber as a source of energy and over extraction of natural resources as communities broaden their accumulation strategies during times of stress (recurrent droughts and difficult socio-economic environments etc) is likely to 'fast track' environmental damage unless corrective measures are implemented. In order to protect new livelihoods opportunities associated with FTLR, the community will certainly require some external support from government or private NGOs as many people are more pre occupied with 'making the place work' rather than worry about the long term environmental impact of their agrarian activities.

One of the major criticisms of fast track land reform was that by nationalizing the land and giving land beneficiaries insecure leases and permits, the GoZ took away security of tenure, which made it difficult for farmers to leverage loans from banks. Although this might be the case especially in bigger A2 farms (Moyo *et al.* 2009), which requires large amounts of capital to operate, many (80%) informants in Damvuri did not seem to worry about security of tenure although this is an issue that remains largely unresolved, they cited the absence of inputs support from government as the major stumbling block, which made it difficult for them to improve agricultural productivity. It seems if such support can be provided many farmers are likely to improve productivity and investments in their farming operations.

**Conclusion**

Broadly speaking, based on the Damvuri case study, it seems fast track land reform led to a marked improvement in livelihoods opportunities although a difficult socio-economic and political environment continue to affect agricultural activities. It seems the benefits of fast

track land reform go beyond getting land to grow crops and agricultural productivity. Many beneficiaries (80%) of land reform in Damvuri conceptualise land reform as encompassing diverse benefits; better quality and bigger plots, a recovery of lost lands, and access to broader natural resources which brought with them diverse livelihoods opportunities.

Despite the ongoing difficult socio-economic and political conditions obtaining across the country, beneficiaries (90%) of land reform in Damvuri seemed optimistic; although coming from diverse backgrounds, the community have forged strategic links to protect their newly acquired property; in a very short space of time, relatively large investments have been made to improve the place, shops and schools are all being built. Many (80%) households have acquired property and invested in equipment, which is expected to improve yields in the long term. They have also organized themselves to coordinate development projects and use existing political processes to extract resources for the betterment of their community. It seems although the process of acquiring land was highly political, people's political identities are certainly utilitarian. Many beneficiaries of land reform see politics as a means to an end; it provides dynamic platforms, which can be manipulated to fast track processes of accumulation.

Claims that beneficiaries of land reform are simply part of ZANU PF patronage networks are simplistic and difficult to substantiate, as the situation on the ground is more complex. Patrick Chabal *et al*, (1999) have argued that 'relations between state and society are complex, 'high' politics is both many sided and intertwined with 'low' politics'. Thus an analysis of processes of accumulation that accompanied the implementation of FTLR, should therefore be based on an understanding that beneficiaries of land reform were active participants in an epoch making process; they influenced the way in which elites behaved through lobbying, sabotage and other forms of subaltern resistance; 'low' politics was as important as 'high' politics during land invasions. Many of the beneficiaries of fast track land reform in Damvuri seemed to have dynamic political identities with ZANU PF providing security and legitimacy to their accumulation strategies. Critics of fast track land reform, who have argued that rural farmers who occupied commercial farms have only ruined agriculture because they are not growing crops and are mainly engaged in natural resource extraction activities, can certainly be challenged as data gathered in Damvuri and elsewhere shows that many resettled farmers have invested significantly in agricultural activities with limited external support, resource extraction seems to be only a part in a broader accumulation strategy.

Despite many challenges faced by this community, livelihoods have certainly improved within what seems to be a very difficult socio-economic and political environment. There are of course major socio-economic challenges facing the community, which are hampering agricultural productivity, however these are also affecting the Zimbabwean agrarian sector at large. Issues of tenural security, environmental sustainability and the provision of infrastructure and agricultural inputs have to be factored in, in future policy making as these are likely to compromise agricultural productivity and hence livelihoods security in the long term.

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