

PARALLEL LAND REFORM - A CASE STUDY FOR MUTARE SOUTH CONSTITUENCY, MANICALAND, ZIMBABWE

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1.0 Introduction

The land reform programme was a noble initiative undertaken by the Government of Zimbabwe in 1999 to rectify previous imbalances of the colonial era in land ownership between the white minority and the black majority. It became a fast track exercise in the year 2000. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930¹ had resulted in unequal distribution of land in which the black majority was confined to reserves where soils were infertile while the white minority occupied vast rich fertile land in high rainfall areas. The success or failure of the land reform programme by the government can be measured in terms of the number of people who really benefited and the change in agricultural output.

Mutare South constituency is a rural constituency located in Manicaland Province which covers Zimunya, Vumba, Burma Valley, Rowa, Chitakatira, Chigodora, Mupudzi and Wengezi.² This area is renowned for its mountaineous landscape³, which made local headmen to grapple with little farmland for allocation.

Close to 90% of the population in this constituency rely on subsistence farming while others on income earned from nearby and surrounding commercial farms and plantations in areas like Vumba and Burma Valley.

During the land redistribution exercise, most commercial farms in Vumba, Burma Valley and Chimanimani were officially acquired by the government and divided for resettlement. There were however, members of the society who took the government initiative into their hands and unlawfully took some farms, properties and state land without government approval. The focus of this research therefore, will be on the role played by local headmen (maSabhuku) in these parallel land acquisitions and distribution exercises, and there resultant effects on the communal areas of Mutare South constituency.

While the headmen were government agents in spearheading the allocation of land to the landless, some took advantage of the confusion. Also, the fight for headmanship and territorial space among village leadership, for example, between Mr. Muranda, Ishe Mambwere and Mr. Kaswa exacerbated illegal resettlements, especially in Bedza, Mururu, Manzununu, Mamvuramai, Burma Valley and Ndorwe villages. They were/are haphazardly allocating people areas which are not suitable for arable crop production, such as hills and mountain tops. This is one key factor that exacerbated massive land degradation, rampant wild animal slaughtering and wanton decimation of the

¹ *The Land Apportionment Act was very discriminatory and its objective was to put in practise the recommendations of the Morris Carter Commission of 1925.*

² *Parliament Research Department, 2011*

³ *Vumba highlands, the Rhine which is a mountain range stretching from Fernvalley through to Zimunya and finally to Mt Dangare. Overlooking Bedza and Manzununu are the mighty Himalayas protruding to Burma Valley and the Chishakwe mountains.*

natural forests which had long served as a safe habitat for wild animals such as bushbucks, pangolins, kudus, duikers, to mention but a few. Some of the wild animals are actually endangered species which must be protected if our heritage is to be preserved to future generations.

The aforementioned behaviour by headmen promoted steep slope and stream bank cultivation, the effects of which were made manifest in the washing away of topsoil and siltation of rivers downstream. Thus the poor farming methods coupled with lack of knowledge on good farming practises by the new families meant that the once scenic picturesque mountaineous terrain in the area was on the receiving end of inevitable degradation and waste.

Needless to say, prime forests in areas like Vumba which had hitherto attracted some tourists because of its thick forests have since disappeared in the wake of the indiscriminate cutting down of trees that resulted. More so, the area is a major source of rivers e.g. Mupudzi river relies on feeder streams such as Nyamakamba, Nyachowa, Nyamatikiti and Nyarutimba, all of which are subjected to ill-human activities upstream thus affecting people in downstream areas such as Wengezi, Manzinde and Gutaurare who rely on the Mupudzi river for a living.

2.0 The outcomes of parallel land reform in Mutare South constituency

Some of the major adverse effects noted as results of illegal resettlement by local headmen are:

☞ Siltation

Following massive stream bank and steep slope (*ploughing up and down slope*) cultivation instead of terracing, several tonnes of topsoil have been washed away during heavy storms. Upon noticing that communities further downstream, for example in Wengezi, were no longer

guaranteed of enough water for farming, the government of Zimbabwe built Mamvuramai dam (Boterekwa dam) and Mupudzi dam at 24 miles along Mutare-Masvingo road. Such projects were meant to boost irrigation projects, fishing and to supply clean water to communities in the south. By 2005, Mamvuramai dam had disappeared completely due to massive siltation and if measures are not taken to reign in stream bank cultivation, the two Mupudzi dams, one upstream (Mupudzi/Zimunya dam) and the Mupudzi dam at 24 miles will also be on the verge of being affected by siltation. Thus, essential national development is hampered because of the improper settlement of people upstream and northodox farming practices.

☞ Deforestation and Desertification

Zimunya area especially Bedza, Nyamakamba, Ndorwe, Mamvuramai and Mururu villages were known for their thick natural forests. The forests were characterised by an assortment of indigeneous vegetation locally known as misasa, minhondo, bamboos, mihute etc. The forests were also renowned for being endowed with wild fruits such as mazhanje, tsubvu, maungo, masekesa, matohwe, among others. There were other benefits derived by the locals from the God-given forests such as natural honey, mushroom (during the rainy season), grazing lands, beautiful scenic views, firewood, etc. Following unplanned resettlement exercise by the local headmen, the natural furnishings of the forests have vanished. Areas like Vumba and Burma Valley have had their prime forests decimated. The forests had been instrumental in attracting tourists and maintaining cool temperatures but the area is now a pale shadow of its former self.

☞ Food Production

After independence in 1980, the government opened new resettlement schemes and this saw the birth of most

rural communities in Mutare South; Bedza, Mururu, Manzununu, Ndorwe, etc. The well noble initiative gave people decent farming land, grazing land and open spaces. Most of the families have until recently productively utilised their land and excess food such as grain was sold to the Grain Marketing Board. With time due to overcrowding, poor farming methods became the norm as some were settled on top of hills and mountains. Since most of the topsoil has been washed away, communities are no longer capable of producing enough food on a subsistence basis. Most families are hardly depending on their lands fully such that they have to supplement their food requirements with work in the nearby commercial farms and the food hand-outs from donor agencies. The situation, if not tamed, will inevitably lead to massive starvation in the constituency and a direct drain on the fiscus.

➤ **Overcrowding & Overpopulation**

The illegal resettlement of people by headmen was sometimes done on the basis of nepotism. Relatives of the headmen would still gatecrash even if it was clear that the land has been completely allocated. Consequently, the constituency is heavily overcrowded and average land size per family is very small. Grazing lands are virtually non-existent with all people forced to use few nearby mountains as possible grazing areas. Poverty levels and malnutrition cases have escalated beginning as early 2004 in an area which was once a food basket when compared to the usually dry areas of Marange. Unlike in the 1990s, the area is now on the priority list of most donor organisations for food assistance.

Overpopulation implies too many people than the available resources can sustain. Reduced food production coupled with lack of employment opportunities either on commercial farms or in the nearby city of Mutare means that population pressure on

resources is exerting its toll to unassailable levels, thus leading to reduced standards of living and a poverty-stricken community. Livestock has also reached levels which can be equated to overpopulation as the available pasture lands can no longer accommodate increased numbers and the absence of grazing areas further aggravates an already knee-jerking situation.

➤ **Climatic Changes**

About 80% of Mutare South constituency falls in natural farming region one. The area was endowed with a unique climate which makes it distinct from other communal areas. A host of factors acted in concert to produce a not-so-hot and not-so-cold climate. A combination of mountains, proximity to water bodies such as the Indian ocean and the famed Chikamba dam (*popularly known as Ndambi Lake*) across the Zimbabwe border in Mozambique as well as evergreen thickets of forests (*known in Shona as tsoka*) had all the ingredients of above-average rainfall which was induced by orographic trajectories due to the presence of mountains. Such climate lured tourists from across the world.

The Bunga Forests in Vumba, The Botanic Gardens, various hotels and resorts were established in this area (the Vumba mountains) in search of such a climate. The Leopard Rock Hotel provides a refreshing view and a delicious aroma of the fresh air and droppings from the floral vegetation. Almost every morning, it would be drizzling and the sky covered by thick fog and mist. The view from the mountain top is as refreshing as it is breath-taking. However, due to deforestation, all the glitter, especially in Bedza and Mururu villages, has gone like last month's clouds. Few tourist arrivals, reduced rainfall activity, disappearance of the thick fog and mists which used to envelope the whole area every morning are now tales of the past. Very high

temperatures are beginning to be the norm and sometimes rainfall patterns become erratic in the once famed jewel of the east. Such are the consequences and rewards of tampering with the natural environment.

➤ *Increased Cost of Living*

The declines in food production coupled by erratic and sometimes unreliable rainfall have all acted in concert to raise the cost of living for the people. The hopes and expectations of a people that engulfed and reigned supreme at the time of resettlement have all but fizzled amidst an awakening reality that once upon a time there used to exist a land in which milk and honey flowed. The cost of living has risen partly because of reduced agricultural output which means products which communities had hitherto produced on their own are now being bought from elsewhere. Employment opportunities due to increased land acquisition and reduced commercial farming capacities have also diminished.

Firewood is now a scarce commodity following episodes of rampant and reckless tree cutting with no one to control another. Today it now appear like an albatross yet if measures had been adopted in due season to avert the impending catastrophe, the problem should have been managed easily and put under control.

Water sources are drying up as people continue unabatedly to tamper with major sources. Availability of water throughout the year (which is no longer guaranteed) means people can no longer produce food all year round thus creating a great chasm between supply and demand. Communicable and preventable diseases have also taken the communities by storm as inadequate and unsafe water is now being consumed. All this increases the cost of living.

3.0 Recommendations

After noting the about heart-rending and spine-chilling story, we therefore urge the

government of Zimbabwe to urgently enforce strict intervention measures in affected areas in order to return sanity, boost agricultural activities and to ensure sustainable infrastructural development. Suggested intercession measures would include:

1. stopping immediately the continual land allocation by headmen without the government approval to facilitate a well coordinated and defined approach to land distribution. Such a move will not only guarantee development but also enhance resource conservation as stipulated in the national constitution.
2. relocating people, commonly referred to as “squatters” by local people, away from water sources, and steep slopes where massive deforestation and stream bank farming are currently taking place.
3. appointing a taskforce to assess the magnitude and severity of damage caused with a view to salvage and consolidate any gains that resettlement brought about lest they all vanish as well. We urge the government to set up decentralised bodies which can monitor environmental standards and conduct periodic audits/inspections to curb massive land degradation in all provinces. It may not be surprising that ten years from now most communal areas in Zimbabwe would be indeed wastelands which are beyond rehabilitation.

4.0 Conclusion

Land acquisition exercise will have positive social, economic and political developments in the country particularly if an orderly and planned approach is to be adopted. In fact, it presents opportunities for intensification of land use and also widens the income base and purchasing power among the communal people mostly. Above all, it brings total economic and social sovereignty among

Zimbabweans. However, production and productivity will be maintained if the right people are given access to the land and the present collateral security base in commercial farms is maintained at least, and broadened at best.

5.0 References

Central Statistical Office (CSO), 2002. Census 2002 Provincial Profile: Manicaland, Government of Zimbabwe, Harare.

Government of Zimbabwe, Mutare South Constituency Profile, Parliament of Zimbabwe Research Department, 2011.