

# Land Reform as Social Policy: Exploring the Redistribution and Social Protection Outcomes in Goromonzi District, Zimbabwe

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## Introduction

In early 2014, I joined the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Social Policy at the University of South Africa (UNISA) as a doctoral researcher in its ‘Social Policy Dimensions of Land Reform Project’ headed by Professor Jimi Adesina. Together with two and later three colleagues, our brief in the project was simple. Our task was to investigate the social policy dimensions (if any) of Zimbabwe’s contentious fast track land reform programme (FTLRP) which had been officially undertaken from 2000. The FTLRP which had seen over 180,000 families being resettled on over 13 million hectares of land in just over a decade (Moyo 2013) has been one of the biggest and unprecedented land reforms in modern history. It has had far reaching socio-economic and political implications in Africa and globally making it deserving of rigorous intellectual interrogation.

Coming from a background in which I had worked in the Zimbabwean civil service and NGO sector on social protection programmes, with no experience whatsoever in agrarian studies and academia, I admittedly found the task assigned to me in the project daunting. Firstly, I had self-doubt (concerning my abilities) and secondly, I wondered whether it would be feasible to undertake a nuanced and empirically grounded study that would com-

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bine the seemingly different discourses on social policy and land reform. This was in a background where Zimbabwe’s land reform programme has for the past decades been subject to many antagonistic and polemical debates. Since my undergraduate days at the University of Zimbabwe in the early 2000s, the discussions I had with colleagues always ended up with the consensus that the subject was too politically sensitive and ‘violent’ to research. This had kept me away from doing any research on land issues in Zimbabwe, despite having a passion for working on land and rural livelihoods. Interestingly with the project, I now found myself thrust into the spotlight and having to work in an area which I had avoided for a long time. I thus wondered whether I would manage to produce work that was academically rigorous, empirically grounded and nuanced which would contribute significantly to the growing body of knowledge on the FTLRP that had been accumulating over the years. It took a lot of reading of literature on social policy and agrarian studies, intense discussions with my supervisor Professor Adesina and participation at the 2014 SARChI Chair in Social

Policy Doctoral Academy (where I met the late Professor Sam Moyo) that everything clicked, and my research agenda emerged. With Professor Adesina providing guidance on the social policy aspect of the project and Professor Moyo graciously providing guidance, his time and unmatched insight on the agrarian dimension, I realised that I had a research proposition worth pursuing. Exploring the social policy dimension of the FTLRP was not only a worthwhile intellectual contribution but was timeous and important in a context where several former settler colonies in Africa were struggling with how best to resolve their land questions (with land issues becoming topical). The emergence of contemporary developmental challenges required new thinking and policy trajectories in the areas of social policy and agrarian studies.

My initial scepticism of the project disappeared, and interestingly we were given leeway to develop and pursue our own research concepts within the confines of the overall project objectives. This gave us ownership of our individual research projects and allowed us to set and pursue our research trajectories independently. The outcome of my research was the thesis titled ‘The transformative role of the fast-track land reform programme: a case study of Goromonzi District Zimbabwe’ awarded in 2019 by the University of South Africa. In the

thesis I used the concept of transformative social policy (TSP) to explore the social policy outcomes of the FTLRP. The research that informed the thesis was undertaken in a rural district of Zimbabwe called Goromonzi. A key contribution of the thesis is to provide empirical evidence that land reform is a social policy tool which has redistributive, productive, protective and reproductive outcomes which have impacted on rural livelihoods in different ways. This is rarely acknowledged in the literature where land reform is an overlooked instrument of social policy which has developmental outcomes.

In this contribution, I present a summary of the thesis chapter titled 'Land Reform as Social Policy: Exploring the Redistribution and Social Protection Outcomes in Goromonzi District, Zimbabwe' which is my contribution to the book *Social Policy in the African Context*. The chapter is derived from my thesis and in it I explore the redistribution and social protection outcomes of the FTLRP using the TSP framework as a conceptual and evaluative tool. It is an output of the Social Policy Dimensions of Land Reform Project which I am proud of and have no regrets about participating in, despite my earlier fears at its inception. In this brief I provide a summary of some of the main issues raised in the chapter. As it touches on social policy and the social protection paradigm, it is important at this juncture to point out that with Africa facing challenges of poverty and persistent inequality and inequity, the importance of social policy and social protection cannot be overemphasised. The chapter was written at a time when the world had its challenges, but it was not burdened by the challenge of Covid-19 which has burdened social protection

systems globally and has exposed the weaknesses of current social policy regimes. In Southern Africa emerging evidence shows that there has been failure by existing social policy regimes to address the welfare needs of citizens at a time of unprecedented crisis and this is evidenced in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia (see Noyoo 2021; Chipenda and Tom 2021; Pruce 2021). This has highlighted the 'need to rethink social policy', an aspect which the chapter advocates. The chapter raises fundamental questions on land reform as a social policy instrument with the potential of strengthening individual and social resilience as well as enhancing capabilities which empower the weak and vulnerable. It argues for the need to look at land reform as a social policy instrument with the same functional equivalents as other social policy instruments like pensions, education, health, labour market reforms, and social insurance among others. It argues for land reform in Zimbabwe to be looked at as 'social policy by other means' and as having had outcomes that have significantly impacted on people's lives in small but meaningful ways. These have transformed rural livelihoods, but are rarely acknowledged in the literature. In the sections below, I briefly summarise some of the key issues raised in the chapter.

### **Research settings and methods**

The chapter is informed by fieldwork undertaken over a fourteen-month period in Goromonzi District in 2015–16. The study targeted 150 small-scale A1 farmers who benefited from the FTLRP and have landholdings on twenty-five former large-scale commercial farms (LSCFs). In addition to these farmers, forty-eight infor-

mants drawn from key government institutions, the local community, traditional leadership and the business community participated in the study as well as sixty-six participants in six focus group discussions. These respondents were selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. The study was based on an interpretive research paradigm which employed a mixed methods research approach. Primary data was complemented by secondary data from multiple sources.

### **Conceptual framework: transformative social policy**

A key contribution of the chapter is to utilise the TSP framework as a conceptual and heuristic tool to unearth the social policy outcomes of the FTLRP. This is a novel approach that builds on arguments posited over the past years for land and agrarian reform to be looked at and critically analysed as a social policy instrument (see Chung 2004; Adesina 2015; UNRISD 2006). The TSP arose due to dissatisfaction with the social policy paradigm which has been criticised for being based on neoliberal orthodoxy which over-emphasises the importance of social protection at the expense of other policy instruments. Mainstream social policy was considered as being grounded in the residual safety net system geared towards responding to market imperfections, being detached from the economy, and failing to deal with the structural causes of poverty. The functional linkages of social policy are seen as being largely ignored and it does not in any way ameliorate the adverse effects of poverty, neither does it facilitate the redistribution of wealth and income (Mkandawire 2004; Fine 2009; Yi and Kim 2015). For countries in the global South, this is important as it comes in a background where after almost four decades of

experimentation with neoliberal social policy reforms, they have not had the desired effect. Countries continue to face persistent challenges of inequality and poverty.

TSP is grounded in the belief that social policy must be redistributive (Titmuss 1974), effective and linked to economic policy (Fine 2009; Chung 2004; Gumede 2016), needs to have a developmental orientation, and must be prophylactic with the aim of preventing rather than responding to vulnerability (Adesina 2007). Emphasis is placed on the need to return to the 'wider vision' of social policy which is not welfarist in orientation but focuses on the fulfilment of the redistributive, protective, reproductive and social cohesion or nation-building functions of social policy. These policy linkages enhance and transform unjust socio-economic and political relations. Through the TSP lens, social policy is considered as having a potential transformative impact on the economy, human capability functioning, social relations and institutions. Of prime importance is the interconnectedness between social and economic policies that allow for balanced state social spending that caters for the needs of already impoverished populations, preventing their further compromise while addressing the challenges of structural poverty. TSP was consciously chosen for the study as it was considered ideal and best suited in providing a better understanding and analytical lens on the social policy dimensions of the FTLRP.

### **The redistributive outcomes of land reform**

An important dimension of TSP is that it posits that social policies (including land reform) must be redistributive. Land reform thus performs the same redistributive func-

tions as other mainstream social policies in addition to some socio-economic roles. These ensure that the proceeds of economic development are redistributed to society (Mkandawire 2011). Land reform thus becomes pivotal in redistributing wealth, equalising opportunities, improving economic growth, and addressing poverty (Prasad, Hypher and Gerecke 2013). My research explores the extent to which the FTLRP was redistributive, and this perspective is informed by the assertion that land reforms are a social policy instrument. The exploration was done bearing in mind the persistent debates on the FTLRP. The debates are premised on claims that the FTLRP was characterised by patronage, clientism, cronyism and capture and that the reforms mainly benefited the political and business elite, the politically connected and supporters of ZANU (PF). The chapter touches on these issues but is careful not to get bogged down in them, rather concentrating on contemporary issues of land reform focusing on progressive redistribution outcomes. Findings from the study indicate that the FTLRP was redistributive, benefiting 2,822 small-scale A1 farmers on 36,628 hectares previously owned by 75 LSCFs, 846 A2 beneficiaries on 84,455.72 hectares which was previously owned by 51 LSCFs. In the district, the number of peasant farm households is shown as having increased from 20,253 to 23,733. When compared with their counterparts in the communal areas, resettled A1 farmers are shown as having larger landholdings at 6 hectares compared to 3.74 hectares in the communal areas.

The chapter notes that the redistributive nature of the FTLRP has seen persons of different origins and backgrounds benefiting from

the programme. A decade and a half after land reform, the chapter shows that the story of the redistributive nature of the FTLRP is now more complex and not as simplistic as is presented in the mainstream literature. With beneficiaries coming from different backgrounds of which a significant number came from the land poor, unproductive, marginal and congested communal areas and others coming from urban areas with a significant number being unemployed or holding precarious, insecure informal or temporary jobs, the resettlement areas now comprise a mix of households of people from different backgrounds. Added to this group are the political and business elite and civil servants. The mix of these different social groupings has created interesting class structures and dynamics which are being carried over to the new generation found in the resettlement areas. Using the assertion by Moyo (2011) that the FTLRP saw the emergence of a tri-modal agrarian structure (comprising the peasantry, the middle to large capitalist farms, and the agrestates), which replaced the largely colonial bi-modal agrarian structure, the chapter uses this configuration to analyse the redistributive outcomes of the FTLRP. It notes that there are multiple beneficiaries of the reforms and the differentiated landholdings have in different ways impacted on production patterns, markets and livelihood trajectories. Redistribution is thus shown not just in the context of addressing historical injustices in land tenure, but is also linked to redressing unjust socio-economic relations. To this end the chapter shows that the broadened agrarian structure and the opening of the previously enclosed farming areas have created conditions for empowerment and availed numerous economic opportunities for



households and local communities. Communities now have access to natural resources, agricultural value chains and on and off farm economic opportunities with amazing levels of agency being displayed. This fulfils an important objective of TSP which is for any social policy instrument to be redistributive while enhancing the productive capacities of citizens.

While looking at the redistributive dimensions of the FTLRP, the chapter highlights the position of women after land reform. It confirms findings from other studies that few women officially benefited from the FTLRP. Only 22 per cent of women are shown as having benefited in the study sample. The chapter however broadens the analysis and notes that even though women are not the primary land beneficiaries, there are multiple ways in which they are managing to access land. Through a complex interaction between socio-cultural practices and contemporary statutory enactments, women are shown as having secondary access to land. They are now playing very important productive and reproductive roles and contributing in different ways to household welfare and wellbeing. The chapter highlights that women's access to land is having symbolic, social, cultural, economic and political significance with their roles being acknowledged and appreciated at local and national levels. Women on small peasant farms are shown as forming a new class of petty commodity farm-based entrepreneurs who are becoming an integral part of the local economy involved in multiple business ventures and investments. This is considered as an important social policy outcome of the FTLRP from a redistributive productive perspective.

### **The social protection outcomes of land reform**

TSP lays emphasis on social protection, which it argues is integral for citizens and allows them to be better positioned to respond to social and economic risks and vulnerabilities. The chapter explores the concept of social protection indicating its centrality in unearthing the social dimensions of the FTLRP. The social protection concept employed by TSP is shown as borrowing from the transformative social protection framework by Devereux and Sabates Wheeler (2004). It is shown as providing a holistic approach which encompasses participation, empowerment, rights-based interventions, protection, prevention, promotion and transformation. In the TSP context, social policy is shown as departing significantly from the World Bank-inspired Social Risk Management framework. According to Holzman and Kozel (2007), this framework places undue emphasis on the social safety net approach. This according to TSP is ineffective in reducing and addressing the challenges of vulnerability and poverty among citizens. In the post-land reform context, the chapter argues that from a TSP perspective, the FTLRP has had ex-ante rather than ex-post social protection outcomes with the multi-tasking of social policy allowing resettled communities to manage risks, disparities, vulnerabilities, challenges and inequalities. This has been facilitated by their centrality and in allowing citizens to have access to a productive resource, the land. This has enhanced their productive capacities while empowering them to be resilient and able to cope with shocks. In pursuance of this issue, the chapter departs from the conventional approach to social protection arguing that through the

TSP lens there are discernible social protection outcomes through what can be best described as 'social policy by other means', which has seen access to land transforming beneficiaries' lives and offering them social protection.

On social protection outcomes, the chapter shows that shelter is one aspect which highlights the social protection dimensions of the FTLRP. Having been allocated land, beneficiaries have managed to build houses for themselves. In the study sample 99.3 per cent of the beneficiaries indicated having managed to build affordable, accessible and culturally appropriate shelter which has guaranteed them personal safety, security and protection. In a way this has seen the realisation of their citizenship and social rights. Closely linked to the issue of shelter, the chapter shows that through land ownership, beneficiaries now have a place which they call home, the *musha/ekhaya* or rural home. In Shona culture, the *musha* is a home of the family or kinship group which serves multiple social, economic and cultural functions. Colonialism had seen the *musha* being found in the communal areas but with the FTLRP some households have migrated with it to the farming areas. This is to be expected as one of the initial objectives of the FTLRP was to decongest the communal areas with households moving to the acquired farms (Utete 2003).

The migration of households was thus not purely production oriented as has been portrayed in the mainstream literature, but the underlying motive was communal area decongestion with farmer production capabilities secondary, especially in the A1 sector. From the study, it is clear that the resettlement of households has resulted in distinct

social protection functions with the *musha* serving as a refuge or safety net for the nuclear and extended family. It is a place in which households engage in productive farm and off farm livelihood activities which enhance food security. It also serves other cultural functions which are important but rarely acknowledged. These include the performance of some sacred rituals and the burial of family members with grave sites being important for spiritual purposes. Having the *musha* is shown as providing dignity to beneficiaries. This is very important for those of foreign descent who for decades suffered from the stigma of being labelled *vanhu vasina musha* (people without rural homes). Now they have homes.

At the household level, the chapter shows that land access has had multi-dimensional food security outcomes, which are small and rarely acknowledged in the mainstream literature but which at a micro-level are very important for households. By having access to land, households are managing to cultivate small family gardens known locally as the *bindujeke* where they grow multiple horticultural crops (including traditional crops) that are proving to be indispensable for both household consumption and for selling. These crops are essential for supplementing household food, providing nutrition, for farmgate sells (which are cheap to undertake), and for local markets allowing households to generate extra income. Household expenses, school fees for children, the payment of bills and utilities, purchase of medications and other needs are shown as being met through productive activities undertaken in the *bindu*. This is shown as contributing to social protection outcomes. The chapter also provides an in-depth analysis

of how resettled households have adopted the African grain storage system known locally as the *dura*. This is shown as having become an important symbol for rural livelihood sustenance and is useful for post-harvest storage making it a bedrock for rural livelihoods, community food security and wealth. It is shown as being a vital tool with multiple functions which include food security and social protection.

Livestock production, which is an integral component of rural livelihoods, is looked at. It is shown as a form of insurance against risks and shocks. In the face of economic and climatic challenges facing Zimbabwean farmers in the past decade, the chapter notes that for the resettled households livestock rearing has become an important asset for accumulation, buffering households against uncertainties while generating income for them. Livestock keeping has become important for multiple purposes, which are inclusive dowry payments, rituals and as a welfare instrument which households liquidate to meet immediate or emergency needs which may arise. The integration of crop and livestock production has seen household income diversification which has had multiple protection and production outcomes.

Lastly the chapter looks at how land access has allowed beneficiaries to profit from social transfers. In a context where by virtue of owning land, beneficiaries are automatically excluded from benefiting from targeted social welfare transfers by the state and NGOs, resettled households are shown as benefiting from social transfers targeting smallholder and communal farmers. Through some state led schemes like the Presidential Inputs Scheme, these households receive agricultural inputs which

are sufficient for them to cultivate small pieces of land. These inputs to some extent guarantee them some measure of food security and are helpful for the poorest AI farmers who face difficulty procuring inputs, thus there are some social protection outcomes.

## Conclusion

The chapter is quite exhaustive in exploring the redistributive and social protection outcomes of the FTLRP which it engages through a TSP lens. Through numerous outcomes outlined above, the chapter makes a case to indicate how land reform has been pivotal in guaranteeing sustained production by the poor, allowing for enhanced income and capabilities, the capacity to deal with shocks, and the building of resilience. Its important contribution is to show that from a TSP perspective, land reform is an important social policy instrument that has had redistributive and social protection outcomes which have transformed people's lives. It presents some social dimensions of land reform from a social policy perspective which are rarely acknowledged in the mainstream literature.

In retrospect, I believe that participating in the Social Dimensions of Land Reform Project at the SARChI Chair in Social Policy at the University of South Africa was a worthwhile intellectual exercise. When one looks at the research outputs, which include this article, it has been an interesting and inspirational process of growth and development. I am optimistic that this marks the beginning of greater, deeper, and more nuanced research on the social policy dimensions of land reform which is an important dynamic of unearthing and addressing the challenges of persistent poverty and vulnerability in the global South.

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