United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Understanding Social and Solidarity Economy in Emergent Communities

Lessons from Post–Fast Track Land Reform Farms in Mazowe, Zimbabwe

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
DDF	District Development Fund
FLI	Farm-level institution
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Programme
GoZ	Government of Zimbabwe
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
SSE	Social and solidarity economy
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZESA	Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority

Summary

This paper deals with the emergent and evolving forms of social organization in Zimbabwe's post–Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). It highlights the way in which these institutional formations show the emergence of a social and solidarity economy in which self-help and grassroots organizations surface as a viable alternative to state or capitalist interventions. In 2000 Zimbabwe experienced a major shift in its rural landscape when land occupation and government-initiated land reform saw the emergence of new communities of black farmers on formerly white-owned farms. The government of Zimbabwe had neither the funds nor the capacity to provide social amenities when the fast track programme began. This paper shows how small-scale farmer communities ensured service provision through their own initiative. The government did not have the resources to monitor, let alone force, people into functional communities. It is through informal farm level institutions built up through interaction and negotiation, and based on trust, reciprocity, unity of purpose and communality, that these communities have sustained their existence and are part of an emerging social and solidarity economy.

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Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to outline the way in which small-scale farmers in Zimbabwe are using social and solidarity economy to survive the various social, economic and political challenges that they are faced with after resettlement. In 2000 Zimbabwe experienced a major shift in its rural landscape when land occupation and the government's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) saw the emergence of new communities of black farmers. This paper deals with the emergent and evolving forms of social organization at the farm level. These institutional formations are part of an emerging social and solidarity economy (SSE) based on trust, reciprocity and communality. The FTLRP has been criticized both locally and internationally for its chaotic character and dire economic effects. This criticism, especially from Western donors, brought with it sanctions, suspension of balance of payments support, reduction in direct foreign investment and decrease in humanitarian aid. This, combined with declines in agricultural productivity and subsequent industrial production in downstream industries, led to a rapidly devaluating Zimbabwean dollar and high inflation and unemployment. This economic crisis impacted heavily on new farmers who found it increasingly difficult to afford inputs and access loans. Unlike in communal areas, most new farmers in resettlement zones cannot depend on kinship ties for help: they have, consequently, formed other social networks to respond to these challenges, which take the form of institutions such as farm, irrigation and health committees.

Farm level institutions are, however, important sources of social cohesion; they maintain order and resolve conflicts at the farm level. Institutions such as the Committee of Seven have several roles in maintaining security and ensuring good neighbourliness among fast track farmers. Organizing into institutions allows greater interaction and promotes togetherness of farm dwellers as they work for the collective good. Bonding of farmers is facilitated through working together for similar causes. Households that were strangers to each other find a way through associational activities to get to know and interact with each other. Rules, norms, mores and regulations are affirmed, shared, and policed through various institutional forms that ensure that, despite personal differences, conflicts remain manageable. This positive side of social capital as outlined by Putman (1995) is apparent in Mazowe, and building on it has potential benefits for fast track farms as they continue to evolve towards well-functioning and highly productive communities. Scoones et al. (2010) note that creative solutions generated by the necessity for solidarity, organization and a sense of community have emerged on the margins of state action and practice.

The government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) had neither the funds nor the capacity to provide social amenities when the fast track programme started. The paper is thus based on the assumption that A1[1] farm communities ensured service provision through their own initiatives. Certainly, the GoZ never had the foresight or resources to monitor, let alone enforce, people into forming communities. It is through informal institutions, built up through interaction and negotiation—and founded on trust, reciprocity and unity of purpose—that these communities have sustained their existence. In many ways, A1 communities exist under pronounced social, political and economic marginalization. These processes of marginalization have been exacerbated by a state that has restricted the entry of external actors onto fast track farms to

[1] Zimbabwe's land reform had two types of schemes, namely, A1 and A2. A1 schemes are for smallholder farmers with six hectares geared mainly towards household consumption, while A2 farms are larger landholdings concentrating on commercial agriculture.

ensure it maintains near hegemonic control of these areas. Civil society organizations have also not been interested in working in areas that international donors view as contested lands. In this light, the paper offers a localized and nuanced perceptive of experiences at the farm level of how people have tried to resolve their dilemmas and create their own space to survive within a hostile environment characterized not only by a lack of services and social infrastructure, but by droughts and a national political and economic crisis. The emergent social networks, mutual assistance and farm-level institutions form a complex system which the author describes as social and solidarity economy.

Background to the Study

Significant literature exists analysing the farm occupations and fast track land reform process that emerged in Zimbabwe in 2000 and that led to the A1 and A2 farms.[2] Much of this literature on Zimbabwe tends to focus on the country's broader political economy. In so doing, these studies regularly make assumptions about people on the land without offering a critical examination of their lived experiences. There is hence a serious gap in this literature on the conditions of existence of this novel class of farmers within the emerging communities in newly resettled areas. There are a number of newer works that provide a clearer sense of life after resettlement.[3] The FTLRP in Zimbabwe—codenamed Third *Chimurenga* (war of liberation) or *jambanja* (violence)—was characterized by chaotic and violent land invasions which led to the destruction of property, sabotage, beatings and, in some cases, murder.[4] The ordered nature and continued existence of communities that germinated from *jambanja* is sociologically intriguing. The Zimbabwean case provides important insights into how communities born out of conflict sustain themselves through various forms of associational groupings at local—in this case, farm—level.

Another related dimension of the land reform programme in Zimbabwe is that there were very few restitution cases that resettled entire communities on their ancestral lands. Rather, land redistribution under fast track meant that, on the majority of farms, there were men and women drawn from diverse ethnic groups, languages, professions, communal and urban areas, age groups, religious beliefs, customs, and traditions. The new farm inhabitants in Mazowe are now a collection of war veterans (who were allocated a quota of, on average, 15 per cent of the plots on farms), youths, war collaborators, government workers, formerly unemployed urban dwellers, politicians, women, and ordinary people from all walks of life. The concept of the social and solidarity economy is