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Understanding Social and Solidarity Economy in Emergent Communities

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

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Abstract

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

Introduction

In 2000 Zimbabwe experienced a major shift in its rural landscape when land occupations and the government-initiated Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) saw the emergence of new communities of black farmers. This paper concerns itself with the emergent and evolving forms of social organisation at farm level. These institutional formations are part of an emerging social and solidarity economy (SSE) based on trust, reciprocity and communality. Fast Track Land Reform Programme was criticised both locally and internationally for its chaotic character and dire economic effects. Such criticism especially from Western donors brought with it sanctions, suspension of balance of payments supports, reduction in direct foreign investment and decreases in humanitarian aid. This, combined with declines in agricultural productivity and subsequent industrial production in downstream industries, led to a rapidly devaluating Zimbabwean dollar, enormous inflation and high unemployment figures. This economic crisis has impacted heavily on new farmers who found it increasingly difficult to afford inputs and access loans. Unlike in the communal areas, most new farmers (in resettlement areas) cannot depend on kinship ties for help: thus they have formed other social networks to respond to these challenges, taking the form of institutions such as farm committees, irrigation committees and health committees.

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 hypotheses that A1 farm communities have tried to ensure services provision through their own initiatives. Certainly, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) never had the foresight or resources to monitor let alone enforce the people into becoming communities. It is through informal institutions built up through interaction and negotiation, and built on trust, reciprocity and unity of purpose, that these communities have sustained their existence. In many ways, A1¹ communities exist under pronounced social, political and economic marginalisation. These processes of marginalisation were exacerbated by a state which restricted the entry of external actors onto the fast track farms to ensure it maintains near hegemonic control of the fast track areas. In this light, this paper offers a localised and nuanced perceptible of experiences at farm level of how people made sense of their dilemmas and created their own spaces to survive within a hostile environment characterised by lack of services and social infrastructure, droughts and a national political and economic crisis. The emergent social networks, mutual assistance and farm level institutions form a complex system which I describe 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 the year 2000 and that led to the A1 and A2 farms (Alexander 2006; Hammar and Raftopoulos 2003; Moyo 2001, 2002; Moyo and Yeros 2005; Sadomba 2008; Selby 2006). Much of this literature on Zimbabwe tends to focus on the broader political economy of the country. In so doing, these works regularly make assumptions about the people on the land without offering a critical examination of their lived experiences. There is hence a serious gap in the literature on the conditions of existence of this novel class of farmers within the emerging communities in the

¹ Zimbabwe's land reform had two types of schemes namely A1 and A2. A1 schemes are small holder scheme with 6 hectares mainly geared towards household consumption. A2 farms are larger land holdings concentrating on commercial agriculture.

newly resettled areas. There are number of works emerging providing a clearer sense of life after resettlement (Scoones et al. 2011; Moyo et al 2009; Matondi 2012).

The FTLRP in Zimbabwe – code-named Third *Chimurenga* (war of liberation) or *jambanja* (violence) – was characterised by chaotic and violent land invasions which led to the destruction of property, sabotage, beatings and in some cases murder (Chaumba et al. 2003; Human Rights Watch 2002; Masiwa 2005). The ordered nature and continued existence of communities that germinated from *jambanja* is sociologically intriguing. The Zimbabwean case illuminates important insights into how communities borne out of conflict can 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 whole communities on their ancestral lands. Rather, land redistribution under fast track meant that on the majority of farms there were people drawn from diverse ethnic groups, languages, professions, communal areas, urban areas, sex, age, religious beliefs, customs and traditions. The new farm inhabitants in Mazowe are a collection of war veterans who were allocated a quota (on average, 15% 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 (SSE) is described as follows by the International Labour Organisation (ILO): ‘The social and solidarity economy (SSE) refers to organisations and enterprises that are based on principles of solidarity and participation and that produce goods and services while pursuing both economic and social aims.’ (Fonteneau, Neamtam, Wanyama and Morais 2010:vi). ILO (2009) notes that ‘the social economy is a concept designating enterprises and organization, in particular co-operatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity.’ In this paper farm level institutions in emergent communities in Zimbabwe can offer valuable lessons in understanding how alternatives to capitalist economics can emerge from everyday relations of ordinary people. ‘New farmers’ in Zimbabwe were segregated from main capitalist systems with no access to finance or support services yet there emerged institutions initiated by farmers’ agency to respond to various challenges.

Conceptual framework

This paper is influenced by the concept of social capital and how it relates to social and solidarity economy. The argument here is that every economy requires a medium of exchange and social capital provides interesting dimensions into understanding the dynamics involved in self help institutional formations at the grassroot. Social capital has varied definitions which stem from the highly context specific nature of the concept and the complexity of its conceptualization and operationalization. It does not have a clear, undisputed meaning (Dolfsma and Dannreuther 2003; Foley and Edwards 1999). Because of this, there is no set (and commonly agreed upon) definition of social capital, and the particular definition adopted by any study depends regularly on the discipline and level of investigation (Robison et al. 2002).

Bourdieu (1986:249) conceives of social capital as one of four key forms of capital, along with economic, cultural (embodied, objectified or institutional) and symbolic. He defines social capital as:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu 1986: 249–250).

Social capital is thus a collective asset that grants members social credits that can be used as capital to facilitate purposive actions (Glover and Parry 2005:452). Social relations, in this fashion, constitute useful resources for actors through processes such as establishing obligations, expectations and trustworthiness, creating channels for information, and setting norms backed by efficient sanctions (Burt 2000; Coleman 1988; Putman 2000).

Social capital has been viewed as a concept which is formed for the benefit of everyone in a community. Hence, Putnam (1995:2) argues that ‘the productive activity of social capital is manifest in its capacity to facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.’ Lin (2001:56) highlights that – like other forms of capital – social capital is premised on the notion of an investment (in social relationships) which will result in some benefit or profit to the individual. In other words, social capital makes it possible to achieve certain aims that cannot be achieved by individuals alone. Investing in social capital is however a risky venture; for example, given that a member of the network may fail to perceive or act upon a mutual obligation, any investment may fail to yield any positive result (Holt 2008:232). According to Coleman, social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist in some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors within the structure’ (Coleman 1988:98). Like other forms of capital, social capital is not completely fungible but may be specific to certain activities. A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others.

In this context, social capital is referred to as _features of social life-networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives (Putnam 1994:1). Social capital is thus productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Social capital exhibits a number of characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of capital. Unlike physical capital, but like human capital, social capital can accumulate as a result of its use. Social capital is both an input into and an output of collective action. Other forms of capital (such as physical and human capital) have a potential productive impact which social capital does not. Creating and activating social capital requires at least two people. In other words, social capital has public good characteristics that have direct implications for the optimality of its production level. Therefore, social capital should be the pre-eminent and most valued form of capital as it provides the basis on which a true civil society exists (Cox 1995). This view is largely premised on Putmanian understanding which emphasise the positive aspects of social capital.

When researching social capital there should be an insistence on identifying the ways in which gendered, racialized and other forms of power are embedded in different forms of social capital, and thus also on the ways in which certain forms of social capital serve to reproduce prevailing norms of inequality. This would make clear that a critical domain of social policy would be to challenge these norms – to upset doxa with public debate (Bebbington 2007). Bourdieu’s (1977) analysis of the reproduction of forms of power within institutions allows for a deconstruction of concepts sanitised of their radical intent. This is clearly the view of Laurie et al. (2005), who argue that the very language of social capital has played precisely this sanitizing role in policy discussions of ethnicity, exclusion and poverty in the Andes. They argue:

Whereas some versions of development with-identity engage with empowerment, racism and institutional strengthening, the understanding that has become

predominant in donor rhetoric is one rooted in narrow understandings of social capital and culture which sideline such concerns (Laurie et al. 2005: 474).

Methodology and study area

Mazowe District is located in Mashonaland Central Province and is divided into twenty-nine wards, of which thirteen wards are in Chiweshe communal areas and the rest in new resettlement areas. Mazowe has three administrative centres (Concession, Glendale and Mvurwi) and it has a total surface area of almost 453,892 hectares. It is in the south-western section of the province where Guruve and Muzarabani mark the district's boundaries to the north, Bindura and Mashonaland East Province to the east, and Harare to the west. It is also bordered by Zvimba district in Mashonaland Central Province. The district's main government administrative centre (Concession) is about sixty kilometres from Harare.

The study uses case studies from small-scale 'A1 farmers' in Mazowe District which is in Mashonaland Central Province. It employs qualitative methodologies to enable a nuanced understanding of associational life in the new communities. Through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, narratives, key informant interviews and institutional mapping the study outlines the formation, taxonomy, activities, roles, internal dynamics and social organisation of farm level institutions. Case study consisted of six purposively selected A1 (small holder) schemes in Mazowe. Five of the schemes selected (Hariana, Hamilton, Davaar, Visa and Usk farms) have one or more of the following: irrigation equipment, school and clinic as well as proximity to A2 schemes to ensure that a wide range of farm level institutions are covered. The assumption was that, on farms with such infrastructure, management and conflict issues will arise and one or more farm level institutions will be in operation. The sixth scheme (Blightly Farm) covered is situated a long distance away from major roads and service centres and would have none of the facilities noted above.

The case study approach entailed studying social phenomena through analysis of an individual case. A case study represents a detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, that is, it strives towards a thorough examination of one or a small number of instances of the unit identified by the research interest. The case method gives a unitary character to the data being studied by inter-relating a variety of facts to a single case. Hence, it entails an in-depth study of a particular situation by narrowing down a very broad field of research into an easily researchable topic (Punch 2004). In this study, the six farms offered a chance to gain an intimate understanding of everyday life on fast track farms. Using a variety of research techniques outlined below, this thesis brings forth the voices of A1 farmers in a way that pronounces their experiences in a profound way. Situated research methodologies that take into cognisance local contexts require reflexivity and flexibility so as to respond to everchanging needs in the field.

Findings

New communities and new institutions

One of the greatest legacies of the land reform programme in Zimbabwe is how communities were created seemingly overnight². The social relationships in the new communities are important in the analysis of the political and administrative structure

² Morgan Tsvangirai (then president of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change) was once quoted saying these communities were sprouting everywhere like mushrooms.

on farms. Chaumba et al. (2003a:19) note that there was a sudden emergence of a hierarchical governance structure which ensured easy monitoring and surveillance by government. They argue that in its own way the sudden appearance, seemingly from nowhere, of an integrated top-down system of governance in the new resettlements is as striking as the dramatic physical transformation of the landscape. This new pattern of authority is characterised by a very hierarchical committee-based structure and has parallels with the decentralised ruling party cell and district development committee systems of the 1980s. The various institutional arrangements that cropped up at farm/scheme level require careful analysis. In doing so, the thesis investigates the ways in which the concepts of social capital and power can be used to understand the formation and evolution of these various entities.

In Mazowe the A1 farmers have been grouped into villages on every scheme, leading to the creation of what Baar (2004:1753) terms ‘stranger neighbouring households.’ These new communities were created by chance³ and include households that have never met before. These stranger neighbours were forced by circumstances to settle and interact with each other. Given that 39% of A1 settlers in Mazowe are from Chiweshe communal areas, many people have a starting point with which to relate to each other. This is because they are coming from a similar cultural and social background. However 26% of members of these A1 communities come from a different cultural setting to the one in Chiweshe. These new citizens were forced to learn and assimilate the many norms prevalent in Mazowe. This was a source of conflict as new farmers were caught breaking various norms in Mazowe. One example is of a farmer at Wychwood Farm who killed a python which is not allowed in Mazowe.

Formation and taxonomy of informal institutions in the newly resettled areas

The formation of farm level institutions is an enterprise fraught with contestation, negotiation and sometimes domination. In this chapter diverse processes involved in the formation of institutional forms at farm level are discussed, including the involvement of charismatic leaders, external agents, everyday interaction, coercion and even negotiation. Processes of formation are highly complex and, at times, it is difficult to delineate the different factors involved in influencing farmers to organise. As noted before in this thesis, the formation of institutions was largely a response to the diverse challenges facing fast track farmers (though there are other social and political factors involved, as discussed below). What is important to highlight is that these institutions are in a constant state of wax and wane, such that they are never fully formed but are rather created and recreated in ongoing interaction among farmers.

Farm level institutions emerge in different forms within the fast track farms. Under fast

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