

LAND IN A BROADER PERSPECTIVE OF STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF ZIMBABWEAN SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

In this 11th of 12 articles, I bring the issue of land in Zimbabwe towards its logical conclusion in terms of how land policy eventually impacts on the accelerating transitions from an agrarian rural society to an urban industrial society. In sum, the 10 articles so far demonstrate that land reform has been a major challenge in Zimbabwe. The challenge will continue to be burning until several transitions have been completed.

TRANSITIONS INTO RENAISSANCE

The following 3 transitions are needed and uppermost in as far as land has impact on broader structural transformation of Zimbabwean economy and society:

- Transition from a colonial setup of land settlement with its resultant social and political order-- to a more appropriate, equitable local model that has the potential to form a basis for a societal renaissance (most on my articles so far have covered this ground);
- Transform agrarian land settlement into decentralized, smaller, more self-reliant urban industrial settlements, as opposed to mega-cities with concentrated poverty (the focus of this penultimate article); and
- Transition into a more stable post-land reform political environment associated with urban-industrial development (the focus of the 12th and last article).

WHAT ARE THE PROSPECTS OF ZIMBABWE COMPLETING THESE TRANSITIONS?

History has now demonstrated that these transitions have been more effective in Asia as compared to Africa and South America. Land reforms in Japan, Taiwan, India, China and South Korea occurred earlier on in their growth and industrialization. In Africa and South

America these challenges are still raging on—even as nations enter the phase of rapid urban-industrialisation. It would appear therefore that reforming feudal land systems of historical Asia was a comparatively straight-forward matter than untangling post-colonial land legacies, especially in southern Africa and Latin America, Zimbabwe included.

It may appear that prospects are limited by the way in which land reform in Zimbabwe eventually took a decidedly political nature in the form of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. I will use counter-intuitive logic to suggest that, in fact, Zimbabwe has a solid foundation to lay a number of issues to rest and restore the land sector, agriculture, and the rest of the economy. This is my tone in this article and the final 12th article.

I have already devoted several articles in this series on how to reform and restore the land sector. In this article I therefore argue for a pathway that leads to the desirable structural transformation of the economy. A hundred year history of Zimbabwe's agriculture and land policy shows how the dualistic outcome of colonial land systems infused a bias towards large-scale farms as the only way towards commercialisation and economic growth. The underlying theory was that smallholder agriculture was not a viable path toward an urban-industrial society. That theory can now be laid to rest, given ample evidence that smallholder farms can be a dynamic commercial force to industrialisation as has been the case in most of Asia and as is taking shape in Kenya, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria and other African countries. The decisive factor is actually government policy and investment priorities, not the scale of farm size.

Zimbabwe's land and agricultural history can be summed up as follows:

- Pre-colonial period: Zimbabweans were settled smallholder family farmers for almost 2,000 years before colonisation, and had domesticated several millets, vegetables, cattle, etc.
- 1890-1950: colonisation and foundations of large scale agriculture are laid, following sustained government policy and investment support
- 1950-2000: large scale agriculture took off and became the most significant players in the commercial agricultural and food markets
- 1980-1985: following independence in 1980, smallholder agriculture proven to be a viable commercial force if given supportive policies and investment.
- 1980- 1990: first generation of resettled farmers produced mixed results, but research showing some improvement in lives of the resettled farmers
- 2000-2009: fast track land resettlement programmes; some successes and failures recorded (tobacco, cotton etc); on balance smallholder (A1 farmers performing better than medium-large scale A2 farmers.
- 2010-2013: under the GNU land and agriculture policy in the doldrums of heavily contested party politics
- 2013: forward, a big question around long term prospects of restoring the land sector and getting agriculture moving again under the Government's Zimbabwe

Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim Asset): October 2013 - December 2018. As of now, there is no clear signal in terms of a strategy for land rehabilitation. The new Constitution has provision for a Land Commission, and that has not been appointed yet. Given the need for a comprehensive set of strategic interventions including land tenure, compensation, rebuilding the cadastre, and spatial and land use planning systems, the Commission has urgent and important work ahead of it as is needed to put Zimbabwe back on the path of sustainable social and economic structural transformation.

PLANNING FOR A DECONGESTED AND DECENTRALISED URBANISATION

My proposal is that the urban-industrial model for Africa generally, and Zimbabwe specifically, is crafting a society in living in smaller settlements (mostly 'rural towns' as opposed to mega-cities), more reliant on renewable energy than fossil fuels, relying mostly on locally produced fresh foods, more integrated into nature, and where families are strong and communities strong. Zimbabwe is better off by following the Taiwanese model of urbanization as compared to the Korean model. The decentralized and decongested form of urbanization is currently the more dominant in most of Africa today. The good thing about the nature of African urbanization is that while large-cities (above one million population) are proliferating, their share in total urban population in Africa is declining – with secondary cities and rural towns making up most of the difference.

A decongested urbanization path can “spread the wealth” around surrounding rural areas more effectively. Smaller cities and towns have more accessible markets for smallholder farmers than large cities, with more spin-off effects to surrounding rural areas for rural nonfarm employment generation, and growing markets for fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, and dairy products. This is a pattern seen two decades later after Taiwan in China with the town and village enterprise boom. This, in my opinion, is the path for Zimbabwe.

Recent research findings on the emerging “Quiet Revolution” in African agri-food systems¹ represent, arguably, the most significant opportunity for accelerating smallholder-farmer driven agriculture and agri-business development in Africa—and firmly towards the more decentralised forms of urbanisation. The opportunity that agriculture is missing currently in Zimbabwe is leveraging urbanisation and diet diversification to promote rural-urban supply chains and rural growth as solutions to food security and rural poverty. Instead, Zimbabweans are consuming mostly imported manufactured products. I just completed a

¹ T. Reardona, D. Tschirleya, B. Mintenb, S. Haggbladea, C.P. Timmerc, S. Liverpool-Tasie *Five Inter-Linked Transformations in the African Agrifood Economy: Food Security Implications*. Brief for “Harnessing Innovation for African Agriculture and Food Systems: Meeting Challenges and Designing for the 21st Century”; Nov. 25/26 2013, African Union Conf. Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

small survey in December 2013 to check the extent of penetration by imported food products in 'rural towns' and small business centres in Zimbabwe and the results show that the rural community is consuming a large amount of imports.

All that demand and business should be met by Zimbabwe's rural intermediaries and entrepreneurs. The rural-urban transformation is firmly on the march in Zimbabwe and changing with it, the agri-food system in terms a) urban populations consuming more food per capita than rural populations; b) diet change that is taking place; c) agri-food system potential transformation in terms of rural intermediaries growing their businesses in transportation, wholesaling, processing, and retail systems; d) rural factor market transformation especially if the seed and fertilizer industries become more competitive; and c) intensification of farm technology that is taking place (e.g. peri-urban and urban agriculture stimulating investment into small scale irrigation, and innovative ways of growing potatoes, tomatoes, mushrooms, etc. in intensive fashion).

This is a signal for policymakers to see the urban market as at least as much an opportunity as the export market, and more accessible to small farms and firms! The emerging opportunity for broad-based rural economic growth offers Zimbabwe the best opportunity for broad-based economic participation. The intermediary groups (farmers, truckers and wholesalers, warehouse and cold store operators, and processors) grow the economy by: bringing food and fibre one way, and of money flowing the other way, back to the producers at every step in the chain. This fuels grass-roots investments (much of it in rural areas or rural towns) by thousands of small and medium scale producers in the midstream and downstream segments of the rural-urban supply chains, in farming, and in the input supply. These small/medium agri-food companies are arguably the "invisible middle" in the food debate. They have long thought to be missing in fact – with laments of lack of grass-roots investments, and turning to either parastatals again or to multinationals for investment. These are the grass-roots companies that are poised to form the backbone of the quiet food revolution. Some of these companies will grow into major players on the domestic market. But this sector urgently needs major attention to resolve hard and soft infrastructural bottlenecks they face, such as rural wholesale markets, industrial-strength electricity grids, surfaced roads; and regulation and policy reforms to improve their "business climate".

I also believe that this is the basis for growing rural nonfarm employment. The continuing challenge is to develop rural factor markets for irrigation, fertilizer, seed, pesticides and herbicides, credit, land preparation services, spraying services, and others. These input supply chains are obviously of extreme importance for the farm supply base of urban supply chains to be vibrant and inclusive. Zimbabwe therefore has to move away from the culture of hand-outs, especially of seeds and fertilisers as well as food. This is destroying the intermediary business opportunities and perpetuating the culture of dependency.

International agribusinesses – from South Africa, Brazil, Asia, Europe and USA have taken note of Africa's rapidly growing domestic food markets. Africa's growing imports of cereals,

soybeans, milk powder and poultry reflect the increasing competitiveness of agricultural imports into Africa. In order to compete successfully with imports in their own growing domestic and regional agribusiness markets, African farmers and agribusinesses will need to improve value chain efficiency at all levels. It is important to note that the local domestic food economy and the intra-regional market are at present the main opportunities.

WHAT EXPLAINS GROWTH IN SOME CAADP IMPLEMENTING COUNTRIES?

Zimbabwe has recently completed its investment plan under the NEPAD-CAADP (Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme). Zimbabwe has lessons to learn from other African countries that have embarked on CAADP as a framework for agricultural development. Building on the CAADP philosophy of country led solutions, the African Union commissioned a series of studies that seek to analyse the level of public expenditure committed to agriculture, and to identify thematic investment areas that may drive agriculture related growth, and to analyse the key drivers of success in a number of selected countries, including the public management capacity to implement agricultural strategies as well as the political drives behind them².

The study was based on purposeful sample (based on high growth in agricultural production) of 7 out of the 35 countries that have signed a CAADP compact: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda Sierra Leone and Tanzania. Agricultural growth rates in Nigeria and Ethiopia have been above 6% per annum and Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Ghana between 4.0 and 5.2%. The average across the continent since 2000 is 3.8%. The explanations for these growth rates are different across the sample. Yet there are some factors that cut across the sample. All seven have experienced greater agricultural growth since 2000 than most other African countries. The following are some of the key findings of the study that I found relevant to Zimbabwe:

- Smallholder farmers have driven agricultural growth, contributing up to 90% of production, especially staple foods – from cassava and yam to maize and rice. In Tanzania and Ethiopia, large commercial farms actively participate in cash crop production and production of cut flowers.
- Both participatory democracy as in Ghana and to a lesser extent Burkina Faso, can be just as effective as centralized bureaucratic models (Ethiopia, Rwanda) which tend to have a higher capacity for policy design and implementation, public investment, and political control.

In conclusion, there is no substitute for political commitment and leadership in getting agriculture moving again. Zimbabwe now needs such committed action and the current

² AU (2023) 'African Agriculture: Drivers of Success for CAADP Implementation' Unpublished Paper prepared for

dynamism demonstrated by A1 smallholder resettled farmers, (as opposed to large/medium A2 resettlement) is an economic force that policy makers need to recognise as the foundation for a more sustainable structural transformation, leading to a more decentralized and equitable form of rural urbanisation—creating more jobs for youth and rural industrialisation.