

CONCLUDING VISION OF THE FUTURE: BASED ON LESSONS FROM ZIMBABWE'S LAND REFORM EXPERIENCES

BY MANDIVAMBA RUKUNI

INTRODUCTION

This is my last article in this series and I have given myself the liberty to dream about the Zimbabwe I would like to see in the future and how the land issue, agriculture, and the environment shape this future.

THE ZIMBABWE THAT DREAM OF

In the last article, I try to pull together the essence of the previous 10 articles into the elements of desirable economic transformation. In this last article I take that analysis further into social transformation. The following are my ideals of a balanced and advanced Zimbabwean society that I would like to see evolve in the next two to three decades:

- **Cultural strength:**
 - ***Belief in education:*** in terms of both quality and relevance at all levels. Zimbabwe has done well on basic cognitive education but poorly on practical skills training in most sectors, especially for youthful employment in response to urbanisation and changing dietary patterns favoring manufactured foods, etc. There is need for alternative education for rural communities where currently formal education and agricultural extension have little impact on people's lives and life skills. Formal education is divorced from traditional, cultural and historical knowledge. Local and indigenous knowledge on the environment, land and governance issues is not integrated in the formal educational system leading to massive erosion in people's sense of identity, belief and confidence in what they know. The higher and tertiary education system as a whole is several decades behind the market trends. Zimbabwe's entire workforce needs major reconfiguration in line with rapidly changing consumer and dietary patterns due to urbanisation, youthful tastes of the population. Moreover Zimbabweans have to more technologically savvy especially in the field of agriculture, manufacturing

and ICT if Zimbabwe is to enter the sphere of an innovation and knowledge driven economy.

- **Hard work:** This is an enduring traditional value that Zimbabweans are now losing fast. For decades, Zimbabweans were easily the hardest workers on the African continent with the highest productivity levels. Hard work is even more important for agriculture as the only way to build competitive and profitable farming systems. Handouts and the growing dependency syndrome are a major impediment to the restoration of this important cultural trait. If Zimbabweans (and Africans generally) are to compete with the Asians, there is a lot of room to catch up. Asians have done better in maintaining the habit of hard work within their contemporary culture. The latest in demonstrating this are the Chinese who still work so hard that Africans have a long way to catch up. The Chinese managed to achieve the highest agricultural growth rates in world for most of the 1990s and 2000s, yet the average farm size in China has remained well below a hectare.
- **Saving and investment:** This cultural value of frugality and stewardship translates into higher domestic savings and therefore more investments into long term assets. This was also historically a major traditional value of rural and agrarian Zimbabweans. But Zimbabweans have unfortunately caught the bug of 'artificial elitism' where the culture is now a willingness to pay high premiums for luxury goods. In rural areas there is lots of room for intermediate technologies of small farm implements and low cost transportation as is in Asia where small farms and small family businesses rely on small machines, 'tuk-tuks', bicycles, and motor cycles. The bottom line is that Zimbabweans have to re-discover how to save for long term investment, and how to save the fast deteriorating natural resource base, especially soil, water and trees. The Chinese experience has also been the latest example of the way high levels of domestic savings also attract high level of foreign investment.
- **Collective responsibility:** This is an African value that is now at risk because of a new culture of selfishness and greed, and the breakdown of family and community structures. The African traditional culture of Ubuntu or humaneness is essentially about cooperation and collective responsibility. The values of cooperation and collective responsibility are expressed in many respects. In my December 2013 quick survey of the situation in rural communities I was shocked to find that family and community structures are deteriorating further. The number and frequency of land conflicts in Communal Areas (not Resettlement Areas) is escalating and rural police systems have no capacity to deal with these cases. Historically and culturally, family, community and traditional leadership structures handled these cases—not police. Today these local authority structures are decayed, at the same time police and local government structures are even less capable of containing this challenge. The social decay has gone

beyond land conflicts to escalating domestic violence, and crime. It is important for the reader to note that I am referring here to Communal areas where land settlement has been stable enough back into pre-colonial times. I can only extrapolate that this development automatically means that there is even more chaos in the management of the commons, especially grazing areas, forests, mountains and so on. Sustainable management of the 'commons' especially natural resources and the environment depend entirely on functional community governance structures.

- **Society**

- **Strong families:** Strong families are the main foundation of a functional African society. Family is where values are acquired and citizenry groomed, reducing costs of social ills such as crime, domestic violence, as well as responsibility for looking after and living with orphans and the elderly. This is also where values and agricultural skills are bequeathed to new generations. It is naturally more difficult to excite the younger generations about agriculture, yet it is paramount for rural parents to pass on the tradition. The youth should be supported to take the family farm tradition further in line with their preferences, by investing in downstream activities such as transportation, wholesaling, warehousing, processing, marketing, and in urban and rural towns offer competitive manufactured products and well groomed and branded food and hospitality products and services.
- **Strong communities:** Self reliant communities are the foundation of a viable nation. Resilience and food security are among many capabilities required in addressing local issues. As alluded to earlier, communities need to develop strong social structures as a precursor to a strong economic, investment and business environment. The desired future of most Zimbabweans settled in smaller rural towns, as opposed to mega-cities, can only be met if urgent action is taken now to invest in strong social capital, where rural community systems are strong, self-governing, self reliant, and resilient in addressing most life and social challenges, such as managing common natural resource assets, containing anti-social behavior, coping with hunger and food insecurity issues, and so on. On the other hand, the more political, social and economic unrest in rural areas, the faster the pace of youth migrating to mega-cities, even in the face of unemployment and homelessness—adding to growing challenges of urban poverty and crime associated with mega-cities.

- **Business/Economics**

- Small/medium family farms and businesses are the foundation of Africa society and economy. For Zimbabwe, with about 65% or so rural population, the social, economic and political significance of small family farms will prevail for at least

another 30 years. As the structural transformation I have been harping on about occurs and Zimbabwe becomes a sustainable urban-industrial society then the consolidation of farms will occur more organically, and larger farm sizes become consistent with an industrial society. The same applies to manufacturing industries where small family businesses still have a lot on offer to a diverse market, especially in rural towns and settlements. Agriculture in Zimbabwe has lost most of its autonomous character where historically it had huge pushing power. Today agriculture relies more on the pull factor from cities and rural towns. This is where small intermediary businesses have the greatest growth opportunities: moving products and services to rural towns and cities, and moving cash and other products back to rural areas. This phenomenon has more multiplier effects on the overall economy, as compared with one way value chains that emphasise large firms contracting small farmers to grow high value crops for high end markets. In as much as these traditional value chains contribute to economic growth, they tend to be a small portion of the market compared to rural towns and cities, and they also tend to extract value one way and bring back less into the rural community. The locally driven value chains also drive 'value-circles' by promoting value addition and circulation of exchange and trade locally.

- **Politics/Governance:**

- Highly decentralised political and governance systems are the strength of traditional society and that should go for contemporary political and governance systems. As alluded to already, Zimbabwe's rural areas has seen a decay in local capacity to govern and address local social and economic challenges. Family and community are the foundations of viable Zimbabwean society. Currently all efforts are going into trying to build strong central government with far less commitment to building and supporting capable and efficient family and community systems. Central government's main function is the facilitation of strong families and strong communities including, among other things, systems and capabilities to manage locally the land and natural resource governance systems. This is the main foundation of the advances to Zimbabwean society that I dream of.

- **Technology and environment**

- Technology is basically the enhancement of nature-given services and capabilities. Technology should therefore not be a substitute for natural phenomenon, rather a way of enhancement without depreciating sustainable use of natural resources. Agriculture can be a major harm to soils, water, flora and fauna due to excessive and irresponsible use of chemicals, fertilisers, invasive genes, destructive mechanisation, and so on. Zimbabwean agriculture should be intensified responsibly, based on a sustainable relationship with nature.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL AND GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

As I look at the period 1890 to 2013, therefore, it is clear that Zimbabwe has struggled for more than a century with its politics that has largely been defined by the land issue. I certainly hope and believe that the Fast Track Land Reform Programme signalled the last phase in stabilizing the land sector, and in preparing for a post agrarian economy and political environment. During this century old challenge, Zimbabwe's political leadership across the board has failed to address and resolve the issue of race in Zimbabwean society, and specifically as it loomed large on the land issue.

The land reform experiences, in my opinion, are only a tip of the iceberg when it comes to the contentious issue of racial integration, not only in Zimbabwe, but also in countries of similar racial colonial history such as South Africa and Namibia. The experience to date, certainly in Zimbabwe, is also what I see as unfolding in South Africa. For me and at my age, having lived through the Zimbabwean experience from 1950s, I have to say that South Africa for me is like reading the same book over, except it is a bigger book, with more characters and more intricate plots—but essentially the story is so similar.

The main experience broadly is that after Blacks attain political freedom from protracted White minority domination, they move on to seek economic liberation. If economic liberation does not come soon enough and/or is difficult to attain through 'legitimate' means, then eventually the end justifies the means. The politics of all that is that liberation parties concerned will make it difficult for the White elite, who continue to dominate the economy, to champion democracy in a Black country where memories of White domination are fresh enough to convert to political capital. This is also why most Westerners are baffled by Robert Mugabe's apparent popularity on the African continent. The fact is simply that the man is more popular for bravely engaging the post-colonial legacy of land—and it would appear that for most Africans such issues are priority for them as compared to electoral issues.

To make matter worse, the historical enclave colonial economies of Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe are limited in their scope for broad based economic empowerment by the very fact of total reliance on a few large farms feeding a few large manufacturers. This is why leadership is needed earlier on in designing and implementing land reforms that have a long-term structural transformation design in mind. This is why time was wasted in both South Africa and Zimbabwe arguing first about the need for land reform, accompanied by pointless ideological debate as to whether small farms are viable. All this is just ideological and political and has no technical basis as already argued. In the end, land reform becomes a purely political process mainly because liberation parties such as ANC, ZANU PF and SWAPO, if it is within their capabilities, will not allow a White minority to champion the economic liberation of people whom yesterday they were supposedly part of the oppressor group. That, put crudely, is the politics of land in southern Africa, and why that race card can

be played at any time. This is the challenge Zimbabwe is now finally trying to emerge out of, and for Namibia and South Africa they are still at early stages of experimenting with solutions, or at least postponing the inevitable crunch.

For Zimbabwe, the leadership challenge is for both ZANU PF Government and the disposed White farmers to enter a pact immediately that says—this is a Zimbabwean problem to be resolved largely by the said parties. The Government must engage the disposed white farmers and agree with them on the compensation values and a payment plan that is realistic. Agreeing on a value and payment plan is more important at this stage than having all the cash in one pile because, as I explained in an earlier article, such a fund is feasible with multiple contributors over a period of time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION

I am no expert on these social issues, but I think once Zimbabwe has restored its land issue it will be on the path to rapid agricultural and economic growth. Inter-racial and social integration will be a lot more feasible. At the risk of sounding like I am lecturing to White Zimbabweans I would encourage alternative approaches to strengthening solidarity with their Black counterparts. And that is to imitate how Blacks have more openly bought into European or White culture through almost all facets of life from names, religions, language, and so on. Yet they have maintained their African identity. I think White Zimbabweans can buy into African culture much more without losing their identity yet generating the solidarity that future generations of White Zimbabweans will need to enjoy fully their Zimbabwean heritage including, of course, being legitimate landowners and farmers. I am not suggesting such rights are delayed for any reason. All I am pushing for is the Zimbabwe I dream of including this sensitive element of race and ethnicity. For White Africans, the colonial brand may have served them well for the last century, but my guess is that time is fast approaching for re-branding, and those future generations of White Africans will benefit from such rebranding.