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# Addressing Barriers to Land Investment and Productivity Enhancement in Zimbabwe: Some Critical Reflections

FREDDY CHIMBARI<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The study explores policies and practices that address barriers to land investment and productivity enhancement in Zimbabwe after the land reform. Post-colonial Zimbabwe has been marred by the land question from its inception as land was one of the reasons for the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. There is a missing link in the post-land reform era, that is, the lack of land investment and productivity enhancement which has caused underutilisation of land and led to food insecurity due to lack of productivity enhancement. Hence, policies and practices that address land investment and enhance productivity in Zimbabwe become important for this study. The study uses a qualitative research methodology with a case study design. The study reveals that the regularisation of land tenure security through SI 53 of 2014 improved land investment due to minimisation of land invasions. The study shows that there has been the adoption of small grains to enhance productivity through climate-smart agriculture, while reducing crop failures. The study concludes that the land question in Zimbabwe remains unanswered, with the government shifting goal posts on land ownership. The study recommends the reduction of evictions without compensation and land tenure security for farmers to increase their land investment with the guarantee of compensation.

**Keywords:** post-coloniality, post-land reform, government, securitisation, underutilisation, small grains

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## INTRODUCTION

The land issue in Zimbabwe dates back to the colonial era when the then government introduced social imbalances, especially, with the enactment of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which contributed to the outbreak of the liberation war (Nhundu *et al.* 2015). A wave of racial land reforms has been taking place throughout the world and Southern Africa, and Zimbabwe are not exceptions (Ndlovu *et al.*, 2019). Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980 and embarked upon its land reform programme thereafter. For a period spanning 30 years, the country's land reform programme has undergone through changes in terms of its key implementation characteristics, including method of land acquisition and quality of land acquired, scale of land reform, resettlement models, settler selection criteria and types of beneficiaries (Marongwe, 2011). In the early stages of resettlement, poverty alleviation and the decongestion of the communal lands were the objectives of land reform (Government of Zimbabwe, 1985). Thus, initially, the criteria for resettlement emphasized, among other categories, the landless or those with little land to support themselves and their dependents, the unemployed, the poor and returning refugees (*ibid.*).

The land reform programme benefitted poor Zimbabweans and the drive to alleviate poverty was devised by the post-colonial government with the intention of addressing the imbalances that existed in pre-independence Zimbabwean society which was dominated by racial segregation, disadvantaging the blacks. Improperly co-ordinated resettlement programmes have led to many people settling in small pieces of land with their livestock having limited pastureland (Ndlovu, 2015). Food security has been a perennial problem in Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan Africa. The 2008 food price crisis elevated this issue to the international development agenda even though the increase in global food production has outpaced that of population growth over the last 50 years. Food insecurity remains a major issue in Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan Africa

as food production and demand are not spatially balanced (Bjornlund *et al.* 2017).

UN-Habitat (2008) observes that without land, there can be no housing and without looking at the issue of land, there can be no meaningful discussion on how to solve the problems of poverty. The fear of eviction post-land reform programmes has been a big concern and a threat to land investment in the resettlement areas with most people living in the fear of losing their investments on the land. The study explores policies and practices on addressing the barriers to investment on the land in Zimbabwe. Land investment remains the missing link in post-land reform Zimbabwe, with most of the resettlement areas lacking rural planning and development. Lack of land investment in Zimbabwean resettlement areas leads to underutilisation of the land as without development and investment, productivity on the land is reduced. The study seeks to understand policies and practices of addressing the barriers in the land investment in post-land reform Zimbabwe. It is on the backdrop of the policies and practices adopted in response to the barriers to land investment in Zimbabwe that the study explores land investments in Zimbabwe to understand the successes of the policies and practices in place.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study uses the replacement theory of land ownership. Replacement theorists consider customary land tenure to be a hindrance to the development of land markets and modernisation of the economy and purport to replace it with an apparently better-suited tenure system, namely private property rights (Arko-Adjei, 2011). For replacement theorists, titling and registration are seen to be the means of solving land management and administration problems in Africa and elsewhere (Hull *et al.* 2019). This is perceived to foster successful land development, increase credit opportunities and promote the development of land markets (Platteau, 1996; Nkwae and Dumba, 2010). Arko-Adjei (2011) argues that the



conventional logic behind replacement theory is that with the focus of customary tenure systems being on group rights, the tenure of individuals is insecure, because customary rights are inalienable. They do not promote investment and thus hinder development. Common property related to customary systems is archaic and likely to disappear in the future as tenure systems evolve towards individualisation.

The colonial boundaries resulted in the replacement of indigenous land laws by an imposed colonial system and the general disruption of indigenous social systems (Hull *et al.*, 2019). African customary law was seen as inferior to colonial legal systems and suppressed on the grounds that it would naturally evolve to be succeeded by the 'better' Western law (Okoth-Ogendo, 2002; Arko-Adjei, 2011). In relation to the current study, the replacement theory holds ground as the barriers to land investment in Zimbabwe can be linked to lack of tenure security and investment security through the government eviction without compensation approach. There was, therefore, no need to acknowledge, let alone develop, customary law as a viable legal system and customary land tenure as a system of rights and duties (Okoth-Ogendo, 2002). Some scholars have strongly criticised the introduction of land titling and registration in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, using as evidence the increased marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable and their exploitation by the elite (Lahiff, 2007). The replacement theory is relevant to the Zimbabwean problem as post-land reform Zimbabwe faces the challenge of lack of land investment because of tenure insecurity as the government retains all land.

Bruce (1993) warns that comprehensive tenure reform programmes in customary contexts are often ineffective and usually expensive, and he suggests that more attention be given to community-based solutions to tenure insecurity and a state-facilitated evolution of indigenous land tenure systems. Hornby *et al.* (2017) argue that land titling is a questionable means of securing tenure and is thus not

necessarily appropriate to increase investment in land. The replacement of customary tenure through titling will lead to increased economic activity to benefit the poor (cf. De Soto, 2000). It is important to observe that the replacement of the customary land tenure with land registration and titling can improve land investments, stimulating economic growth in Zimbabwe. Providing secure land tenure to farmers can improve land investment and utilisation in Zimbabwe, giving the farmers a chance to invest on their land because that safeguards them from land evictions after investment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the study reviews literature to provide an understanding and situate the study within the historical context to appreciate the importance of land investment through food security and productivity on the land. Mutasa *et al.* (2015) observe that productivity in Zimbabwe plays a critical role in reducing food insecurity and lately it has been facing challenges in the technological advancement that have hit the agricultural sector, lack of infrastructure to enhance productivity and lack of financial resources to develop irrigation systems. Food insecurity and gender inequities influence the adoption of land productivity strategies across the world and developing countries (Nyasimi *et al.*, 2024). Food waste counts as one of the biggest causes of food insecurity as food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted across the supply chain, from production to consumption creating (O’Grady *et al.*, 2019).

Food insecurity and malnutrition are the biggest challenges of the modern world as worldwide hunger is at a moderate level, with the highest hunger and starvation levels observed in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe included (Kaur and Kiran, 2023). This shows that Zimbabwe needs to improve its policies to address barriers to land investment to allow the country to enhance

productivity through various investments. Heat and drought increased variability of precipitation, and rising temperatures strain water resources and reduced water resources, resulting in reduced productivity coupled with increased incidences of pest and diseases with serious impacts on agriculture (Bongole *et al.*, 2020). All these challenges in the agricultural sector signify the need for land investment through development of land and to be ready to tackle the challenges presented by climate change on productivity. Southern Africa has suffered years of extreme weather events that have led to hunger and starvation across nations, creating an aid-dependent rural population suggesting the need for land investment to speed up the enhancement of production in Zimbabwe. Climate change and its impacts remain rampant and countries in sub-Saharan Africa have agrarian economies focusing on food security as the catalyst for poverty alleviation and reduction of crime and other social ills that continue to haunt Africa (Nyang'au *et al.*, 2021).

The reasons for food insecurity are complex and multi-faceted, including political instability, conflict, poor economic prospects and natural hazards, all contributing (Frazer *et al.*, 2016). Zimbabwe and Southern Africa give precedence to agriculture and despite its importance, agriculture is vulnerable to impacts of climate change and the necessary steps to support the sector are not available in developing countries as most of the countries in the region are affected by extreme weather events that cause food insecurity with underinvestment on land worsening these impacts (Nyang'au *et al.*, 2021). The lack of investments through policies and practices to enhance productivity intensifies the impacts of the extreme weather conditions that affect Zimbabwe as there is no mechanisation of the farming and rural development remains the missing link in the land reform programmes. Most of the roads in the resettlement areas are dilapidated or have disappeared. These areas are affected by a multitude of problems with most of them lacking safe and clean water.

Mark and Tafadzwa (2015) argue that in most Zimbabwean resettlement areas groundwater is contaminated and water levels in boreholes dropping, with those close to improperly installed toilets suffering contamination. Chuma (2017) observes that in Zimbabwe, most rural areas face the problem of water shortages as the water tables keep shifting because of recurrent droughts. The land reform programme in Zimbabwe lacked rural planning as it remains the missing link, impeding land utilisation and land investment with most of the areas being underutilised causing food insecurity and luring land barons that end up utilising the land for the reasons. There are a multitude of problems that remain in the way of productivity enhancement and this prompts the need for policies and practices that address the barriers to land investment as land investment can enhance land utilisation in the agricultural sector, improving food security.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The study uses a qualitative research methodology with a case study research design. Qualitative research methodology was used because it allowed the study to understand the social facts. The allure of the qualitative methodology is that it allows the data to emerge within the natural setting without reducing the data into codes and numbers (Yin, 2016). The case study research design, as observed by Hancock *et al.*, (2021), is a research design which utilises schematic representation to gain concrete contextual in-depth knowledge about a specific real-world phenomenon. The study used secondary information as the source of data from journal articles and newspaper articles to understand the policies and practices that are used to address the barriers to land investment in Zimbabwe. The study used content analysis to analyse the findings of the study.

## **FINDINGS**

The post-land reform landscape in Zimbabwe has been filled with initiative that aim to improve land investment and enhance

productivity. The study used case studies from Zvimba district in Mashonaland West, Beatrice Mashonaland East, Ntabazinduna and Umguza Matebeleland

#### **CASE OF ZVIMBA DISTRICT IN MASHONALAND WEST**

The study used case study of Zvimba district in Mashonaland West. Zimvac (2017) observes that Zvimba is a district in Mashonaland West Province. Zimvac (2024) observes that Zvimba has a population of 348,002 people. Vincent and Thomas (1960) observes that Zvimba district is located within agroecological region 2a that is characterised by an average annual rainfall of 750 mm to 1,000 mm. Chen (2004) observes that in Zvimba the soils vary from the ferralic-chronic cambisols. Lithic-eutric leptosols to the leptic-chronic levisols. Muguranyanga *et al.* (2014) shows that rainfall in this region starts in November to March sometimes the beginning of April this makes the district viable for farming activities. Mashizha (2019) observes that the subsistence economy in economy of Zvimba District is based on conservation farming and favourable crops grown in the area including maize, finger millet, ground nuts, tobacco, vegetables and sorghum.

There have been strategies to various strategies to improve land investment and productivity enhancement in Zvimba district. Mashizha (2019) indicates that farmers in Zvimba District have adopted the solar powered irrigation systems to enhance land productivity at the backdrop of climate change and rainfall variability. Mashizha (2019) observes that households in Zvimba district have resorted to crop diversification to enhance productivity and reduce the impacts of climate change induced crop failure. Mazwi and Mudimu (2019) observes that to enhance productivity farmers in the resettlement areas in Zvimba district share tractors and other tools as well as reciprocal labour arrangements. Mazwi *et al.* (2020) observes that farmers in Zvimba district have been able to enhance productivity through the use of farmer cooperatives that have given them access to cooperative reciprocal labour. Mazwi *et al.*

(2022) observes that to enhance productivity and reduce the impacts of climate change in Zvimba district the Government of Zimbabwe introduced climate smart-agricultural practice of Intwasa or Pfumvudza to allow farmers to enhance productivity.

Tom (2022) observes that in Zvimba district the fast-track character of land reform was a hurdle to pre-settlement investment while government-led post-settlement investment is hampered by poor macroeconomic performance, fiscal woes and limited support from international community to solve this the government of Zimbabwe engaged both local and international partners to reinvigorate financing of and investment in agriculture to reduce persistence land use and production constraints. Tom (2020) observes that farmers in Zvimba district have joined contract farming with companies from China and Russia in tobacco production and marketing that are yielding sound result giving back sound land investment through infrastructure development such as borehole drilling and irrigation schemes. Muchetu (2019) observes that the command agriculture policy has not benefitted the poor peasants and it has hampered the attempts of the peasants' agricultural productivity and investment as the initiative favours capitalist farmers. Mazwi *et al.* (2020) observes that in Zvimba district farmers due to the need to enhance land investment have joined contract farming that is helping them with irrigation pipes and other farm development properties. Mazwi *et al.* (2020) observes that contract farming has changed the lives of farmers in Zvimba district as it guarantees them of inputs and land investment, assured markets and better extension services.

There have been barriers to land investments in Zimbabwe as well as productivity enhancement strategies across other provinces. The Herald (13 November 2021) observes that the Government of Zimbabwe introduced new securitized A2 Model Settlement Permit with advanced security features to curb fake offer letters this was done to solve the land ownership conundrum that had rocked the country reducing land investment with fake letters surfacing with

illegal occupations. Mazwi *et al.* (2017) observes that the government promulgated the Statutory Instrument (SI) 53 of 2014 which replaced offer letters it had given to the A1 farmers and 99-year leases that were issued to A2 farmers. Mazwi *et al.* (2017) observes that with the offer letter, the farmers would hold land indefinitely, tenurial guarantees prompted the farmers to develop lasting structures since SI provides for compensation to farmers for any development made, should the state consider taking the land back. Southern Eye (10 March 2023) that observes that A2 farmers were to get offer letters after five years of developing the property that is land investment then they would apply for 99-year leases.

Chibwana (2016) observes that tenure security gives an assurance to beneficiaries of land reform that they will not be evicted after they have invested their time and resources on the land such an assurance motivated the farmers to erect quality houses, addressing the investment issues as tenure insecurity was the barrier to land investment. Mashizha (2019) observes that climate change presents the biggest challenge to land investment in Zvimba with unreliable rainfall impeding agriculture and land investment as these areas are becoming unproductive. Mashizha (2019) indicate that to overcome the challenges face in Zvimba farmers have invested in solarised boreholes to improve the agricultural production. The investments in the agriculture sector in Zimbabwe have been successful but the main impediment has been land tenure issues as the farmers lack tenure security their investments on the land are limited.

#### **CASE OF BEATRICE MASHONALAND EAST**

Worldometer (2024) observes that Beatrice is located in Mashonaland East approximately 75 km from Marondera the capital of Mashonaland East and Beatrice has 1,647 smallholder farmer families. Ruzivo.co.zw indicate that Beatrice is in agro-ecological region 2 with moderately high rainfall with averages of 700-1000mm per year and rainfall is reliable. Mkodzongi and Lawrence (2019) observes that to increase productivity in the agricultural sector in Beatrice

Mashonaland East there is a practice by former white farmers that have moved up or downstream through the creation of syndicates with beneficiaries of the land reform posing as financiers or contract financiers and marketers these syndicates have totally displaced the new farmers who receive rent for the land transferred to the former white farmers. Dube *et al.* (2018) observes that there has been the introduction of state-led contract farming programme under the Command Agriculture Policy with private sector coming in helping farmers in Masvingo invest on the land through the development of irrigation schemes to mitigate climate change. The investments in the area involve irrigation schemes and the road infrastructures connecting the area to other rural areas and the markets.

## CASE OF MANGWE DISTRICT

### *CASE OF MANGWE, UMGUZA MATEBELELAND*

Worldometer (2024) observes that Mangwe rural district is located in Matebeleland South and has a population of 65,562 people and 17 wards. Taseo.com indicate that Umguza is located in the region of Matebeleland North with places such as Ntabazinduna and Nyamandlovu. These areas are in region 5 and they receive low rainfall compounded by climate change. Tirivangasi and Muzerengi (2019) observes that farmers in Mangwe District have started the growing of small grains to enhance productivity and reduce crop failure from the persistent droughts that keep affecting the district.

Phiri *et al.* (2021) found that in Ntabazinduna and Umguza Matebeleland to enhance productivity farmers have started to grow small grains, conservation and rearing of small livestock to cope with the vagaries of climate change while enhancing productivity. Phiri *et al.* (2021) observes that the farmers in the resettlements in most, dry ecological regions in Zimbabwe have adopted climate-smart agriculture to enhance productivity through growing small grains and the rearing of ruminants as domestic animals. There are various policies in Zimbabwe such as the mechanisation policy, command



agriculture policy, SI 53 were implemented to improve land investment in the post-land reform programme in Zimbabwe to allow farmers to have tenurial security. These areas have seen productivity enhancement and little has been done on land investment as the land receives low rainfall.

## DISCUSSION

The study shows that the barrier to land investment in Zimbabwe was the land tenure insecurity and the government through the securitised offer letters tried to reduce the land invasions by the land barons and give the farmers the guarantee that they were safe from invasions and evictions without probable cause. The provision of tenure security through the government guarantee of compensation when the farmers lose their land led to the land investment by the farmers as they had security that they would get their investments back if they were ever to lose their land to the government. The provision of chances for eviction with compensation addresses the issues of land investment as farmers build their structures and invest on the land knowing that their investment will be reimbursed to them in the case of an eviction. In support of this is the theoretical framework as Timmer (1955) argues that agrarian transformation involves the investment on the land to transform the land and its output.

The study reveals that to enhance productivity tobacco contract farming arrangements have boosted productivity in the agricultural sector as it has reinserted the communal farmers into the global commodity circuits. In support of the findings of the study is Shonhe *et al.* (2022) that observes that to enhance productivity in the agricultural sector there has been contract farming programmes targeting food crops notably maize, wheat and soya beans where private finance is difficult. Similar to the study are Mkodzongi and Lawrence (2019) that observes that there has been the command agriculture policy, that black capitalist farmers have been given incentives such as agricultural inputs and equipment, to grow maize

in order to address the country's grain deficit and enhance productivity. Consistent with the study is Meemken (2020) argues that contract farming traps smallholder farmers in developing countries into a vicious cycle of low-intensity, subsistence-oriented farming giving low yields that are rigged by the contract companies. To address the lack of land investment while enhancing productivity the government regulation of contract farming to protect small holder farmers from being bullied by the contract farming companies improves land investment as it brings about irrigation schemes to enhance productivity.

The study shows that in terms of policies to eradicate the challenges on productivity enhancement the Government of Zimbabwe introduced command agriculture has not benefitted the poor peasants and it has hampered the attempts of the peasants' agricultural productivity and investment as the initiative favours capitalist farmers. The Command Agriculture policy benefitted farmers while enhancing productivity in the communal areas of Zimbabwe with most of the provinces receiving a double maize production. Similar to the study findings are Mazwi *et al.* (2019) that argues that the farmers in the Command Agriculture stated that the maize was easier to grow when compared to tobacco. In support of the study are Scoones *et al.* (2019) that observes that tobacco contract farming arrangements have boosted productivity in the agricultural sector as it has reinserted the communal farmers into the global commodity circuits. In further concurrence with the study are Muroiwa *et al.* (2018) that observes that to enhance land investment farmers in Mount Darwin have joined contract farming that has enabled them to invest in infrastructures through the proceeds of farming since contract farming provides them capital and access to markets.

The study indicates that to enhance productivity and reduce the impacts of climate change the Government of Zimbabwe introduced climate smart-agricultural practice of Intwasa or Pfumvudza to allow

farmers to enhance productivity. The study shows that to enhance productivity farmers in the resettlement areas share tractors and other tools as well as reciprocal labour arrangements. The study shows that to enhance productivity farmers have started to grow small grains, conservation and rearing of small livestock to cope with the vagaries of climate change while enhancing productivity. The small grains farming has changed the farming landscape in Zimbabwe with most farmers that had low productivity enhancing their productivity as the small grains do not experience crop failure. Consistent with these findings are Sakadzo and Kugedera (2020) that posits that in Chivi area people have been growing small grains to enhance food productivity and cope with crop failures caused by climate change on maize.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study reveals that to ensure land investment in Zimbabwe the government changed the security features on the offer letters and improved their security features. The study shows that through the SI 53 of 2014 the government guaranteed the compensation of properties of the farmers during a government sanctioned eviction as this improves land investment. The study shows that to enhance productivity in Zimbabwe the government of Zimbabwe adopted climate-smart agriculture to reduce the impacts of climate change on the communal lands. The study shows that to enhance productivity there has been the adoption of small grains in Zimbabwe. The study concludes that to eradicate the barriers that stand towards land investment and productivity enhancement in Zimbabwe government policies must not always be leaning towards capitalist commercial farmers and consider tenure security for small scale farmers to encourage property development and ensure productivity enhancement. The study concludes that as long as the farmers in Zimbabwe still hold usufruct rights not land ownership the land question remains unanswered with the fear of evictions lingering on the farmers' land investment is limited.

The study recommends government genuine inclusion of communal farmers in the policies to enhance productivity. The study recommends the titling of land and the change of the land ownership laws from customary law to private ownership to allow land investment in Zimbabwean communal areas. There is a need for government inclusion of all stakeholders in the crafting of land policies. There is a need for a change in the eviction without compensation policy to improve land investment.

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