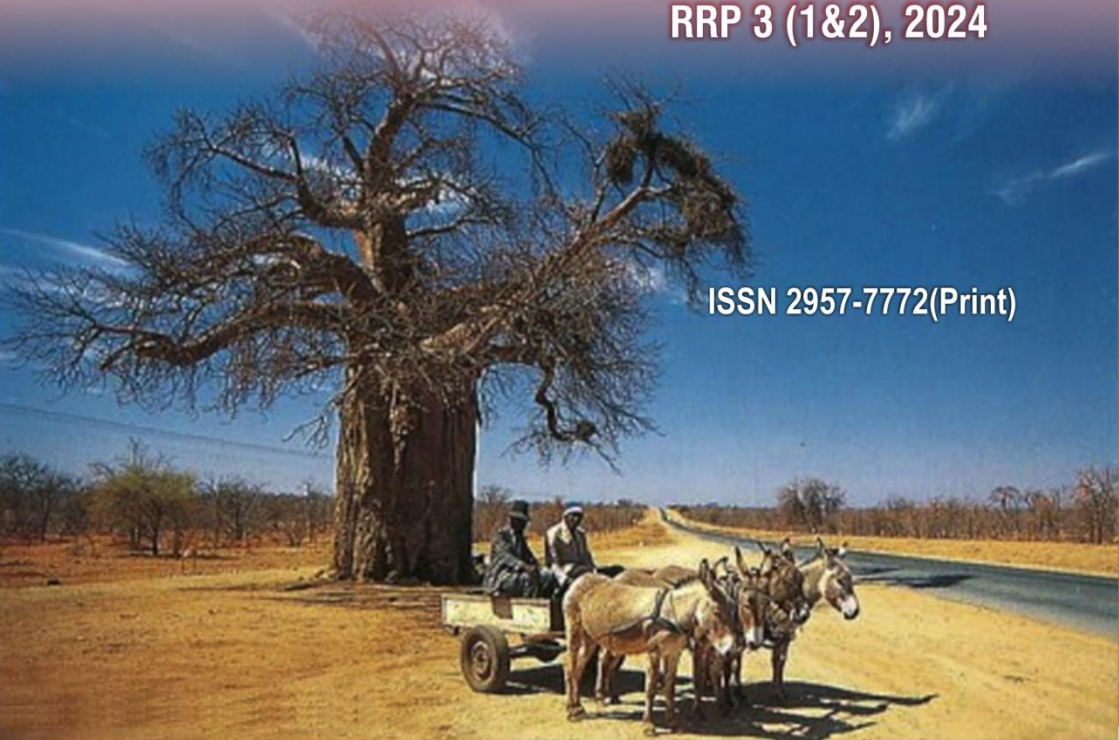




# REVIEW OF *Rural Resilience Praxis*

RRP 3 (1&2), 2024

ISSN 2957-7772(Print)



REVIEW OF  
***Rural  
Resilience  
Praxis***  
RRP 3(1&2), 2024

ISSN 2957-7772(Print)

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Stand No. 1901 Barrassie Rd,  
Off Shamva Road  
Box 350  
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# The Land Invasions Plague: The Quest or a Lasting Land Governance Solution

RUMBIDZAI MPAHLO<sup>1</sup>, MARLVIN MALINGANISO<sup>2</sup>, ENOCK MUSARA<sup>3</sup> AND ROSELINE KATSANDE-NCUBE<sup>4</sup>

## Abstract

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe could be said to have come to an end but, it was followed by another wave of land occupation that was more serious and damaging to the economy and the image of the country. The land invasions in Zimbabwe are largely seen as unlawful with land invading adversely affecting the commercial farming in Zimbabwe. The article critically explores how the land invasions have become a plague to the country reversing the government land reform and government Western re-engagement drive. The article is premised on the argument that; land invasions have a more damaging impacts on the national development strategy as it makes investors shun investing in the country because of lack of land tenure security. The study used a qualitative methodology and secondary data as the source of the data. The study revealed that land invasions are rampant in Zimbabwe with most of the state land under threat of being invaded resulting in the loss of grazing lands. The study show that the some of the land invasions are government sanctioned against perceived enemies of the state that are vocal against the state human rights violations. The study concludes that land invasions remain a thorn in the flesh haunting the post-colonial governments showing that the liberation struggle land question was not fully addressed after the independence attainment.

**Keywords:** *commercial farming, independence, post-colonialism, liberation struggle, tenure security, Western re-engagement*

## INTRODUCTION

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) is inscribed on Zimbabwe's political and socio-economic map since 2000 in the early years of the reform, the programme captured international attention and imagination, while in Zimbabwe itself it radically altered people's lives and livelihoods, and at the same time reawakened people's memories of the past (Mutondi, 2012). Events in the last decade around the land question in

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Zimbabwe and the broader political context in which they have played out are dramatic and transformational (Cliffe, Alexander, Cousins and Gaidzanwa, 2011). Sparked by land occupations locally referred to as ‘Jambanja meaning’ violence or angry argument and involving contested land expropriation and violent episodes, the process has not surprisingly proved contentious among policymakers, commentators, nationally and internationally and among all those who have sought to explain or justify or criticize it (Cliffe *et al.*, 2011).

With a few exceptions, those who have engaged in writing or political rhetoric have tended to take positions on one or other end of the spectrum in what is highly polarized debate, between welcoming a reversal of a racial distribution of land some of them bewailing the manner of implementation and its distorting of the state and those who condemn the end, in principle, and the means (Cliffe *et al.*, 2011). Regional debates on land reform have centred mainly on the social and political rationale of land redistribution as a way of addressing colonial disparities in access to and ownership of land and other productive resources (Mandizadza, 2009). Kepe and Cousins (2002), observe that development in Southern Africa can only be achieved through reducing the inequality in the ownership and effective control of both productive assets and benefit streams derived from them. Land reform thus, is framed not only in its role in achieving social equity but also in delivering social justice in the background of colonial land expropriation and alienation in the region (Sachikonye, 2005). Zimbabwe’s Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) formally began with the Land Acquisition Act of 2002 (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019).

The Programme that effectively co-opted the farm occupations since 1998, redistributed land from white-owned farms and estates, and state land, to more than 150.000 farmers under two models, A1 and A2 the A1 model allocated small plots for growing crops and grazing land to landless and poor farmers, while the A2 model allocated farms to new black commercial farmers who had the skills and resources to farm profitably, reinvest and raise agricultural productivity (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019). Studies on FTLRP have indicated that the programme led to decreased aggregate national production, Richardson (2004) observes that agricultural production has plummeted since the programme was initiated in 2000 and by 2004 it had dropped by 30%. The decrease was due to the backward and forward linkages that had been established between the agricultural and the manufacturing industries, this contraction of the agricultural sector also saw the manufacturing sector and the whole economy shrinking by 15% by 2003 (Richardson, 2004).



Mandizadza (2009) observes that the FTLRP was accompanied by a lack of support for resettled farmers, victimization of white farmers and loss of livelihoods for the former farm workers among others. Therefore, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme was not simply about land, but also about people, especially the farmers and the communities they lived, originated from and settled in it was about the institutions they interacted with on multiple levels as it represented the dismantling of institutions that had dominated society for decades and the final embodiment of empowerment after independence (Mutondi, 2012). The article explores the lasting solutions for the problems created by land reform as people continue to invade land 20 years after the Jambanja in Zimbabwe making land reform more of a social problem for planners and the government as land barons continue to unlawfully pass out land illegally.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theory that underpins this study is the conservative theory of land that sees living customary tenure as providing sufficient tenure security because land acts as a social, political and economic tie between kinship groups (Chinock, 2001). This viewpoint stems from a multi-functional, multi-generational understanding of land from a broadly African perspective that land, forms the foundation of socio-economic, religious, and political systems (Arko-Adjei, 2011). Such African customary tenure systems are based on social legitimacy through kinship ethnicity land titling programmes in these sorts of contexts may fail because titling breaks down the social structure of rural African communities hence, *de jure* tenure security may erode pre-existing socially embedded *de facto* tenure security (Nkwae, 2006) thus this system is used in the land Reform Programme to reclaim the ancestral land lost during the colonial era disregarding the existing laws of land tenure.

The role of traditional leaders is of crucial importance as that of land barons in the conservative theory because they are largely responsible for land allocation and administration. While a popular view of pre-colonial traditional leaders is that they were autocratic rulers who paid little heed to their subjects' wishes however, Delius (2008) observes that traditional leaders were consultative and democratic and allocated land to their people unlike in the modern age where land barons are parcelling out land. However, the nature of traditional leadership has changed considerably with the advent of colonialism many traditional leaders now live up to such prejudicial views of in a way to get back the former colonial masters (Kabonga, 2020) as the indigenous tenure and modern tenure carry with them colonial traits. Tenure insecurity may arise for commercial farmers under customary tenure if they become

targets and this may happen due to greed and abuse of power (Kingwill *et al.*, 2017). Ubink and Quan (2008) observe that the conservative tenure system can experience problems of gender discrimination, or abuse of power by land barons and traditional leaders. The theory becomes applicable in this study as the people who are still invading land 20 years after the Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe are using the customary tenure and the conservative stance of reversing the errors of colonialism and advocating for the empowerment of the traditional owners of land.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section presents the literature review on land reform and how the land reform has shaped the socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe. To craft a discourse for this article the researcher reviewed literature to situate the study within the historical context to understand how the land reform has shaped the lives of the beneficiaries and those who lost.

## **LAND REFORM IN ZIMBABWE**

The Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe has spawned debates with some scholars defending it for resolving the inequities or legacies of colonialism by giving the land to the natives that had unjustly lost their land (Mutasa, 2015, Chaumba *et al.*, 2003) with some scholars arguing that it was an unplanned programme that lacked foresight of the socio-economic impacts of such a venture as it had impacts on productivity and the livelihoods of the rural dwellers employed in the agricultural sector that lost their jobs (Scoones, 2012, Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019, Richardson, 2005). Putzel (1992) argues that land reform refers to the changing of land ownership and tenure, often through government-initiated modifications of the law and regulations or customs regarding land ownership generally of agricultural land to allow those who did not previously own land to do so. The term land reform is used interchangeably with agrarian reform that has a similar meaning to land reform, but it is a more complex term that refers to the multi-dimensional and comprehensive package of land rights to also include transforming rural relations to balanced power relations (Putzel, 1992).

Musodza (2015) observes that land reform has re-emerged on the front burner of the global development agenda of the Global South as land reform was identified as a key strategy for alleviating poverty, hunger and starvation and growing food insecurity in the less developed countries in the Global South especially sub-Saharan Africa. These countries share a common history of massive land dispossession from the indigenous people by foreigners through colonization (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019). The land reform in this case

becomes justified as the native people were dispossessed from their lands by the colonial regimes and relegated to the unfertile lands with unfavourable climatic conditions. Most of the critics of land reform have focused on the dynamics of the land occupations such as the displacement of farm workers and political violence in the countryside rather than engage with the changing agrarian structure (Hammar *et al.*, 2010, Rutherford, 2003).

Smith *et al.* (2010) claimed that the land reform only benefited political cronies, the so-called cell phone farmers with no interest in farming. A recurrent theme underlying the major criticism of the fast-track process is that the land reform turned the land into dead capital as the new tenure arrangements comprising 99-year leases and user permits were deemed to promote tenure insecurity (Mutenga, 2011, Tupy, 2007, Richardson, 2005, De Soto, 2000). Moreover, criticism of the new agrarian structure carries with them an implicit assumption that peasant households lack the technical skills to farm and hence could not match production levels set by the white commercial farmers (Mkodzongi, 2013). Such criticisms lament the loss of white farmers whose removal has presumably led to food shortages and general industrial decline; however, these assumptions ignore other factors that had an impact on agriculture such as climate change-related droughts and wider economic difficulties that hampered agricultural production in the aftermath of land reform (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019). Sharp production decline was noticeable immediately after the FTLRP was implemented apart from the socio-economic and political complexities surrounding Zimbabwe during the post-land Reform Programme indicating that the FRLRP contributed towards the fall in production (FEWZ NET, 2014).

To be sufficiently food secure, Zimbabwe needs a minimum of 2.1 million tons of maize annually including 1.7 million for human consumption (FAO, 2010). From the early 1990s to 2001, total maize production averaged 1.6 million tonnes, with fluctuations between periods of high or low rainfall, after 2002, the national maize production averaged 1.04 million tons per year, with a steep sloping negative trend during the 2014 harvest season (NewZimbabwe, 2014). In 2013, a decade after the official end of the FTLRP, national maize harvest was estimated at merely 800, 000 tons, a shortfall that exposed more than 2.2 million Zimbabweans to severe food insecurity. The land reform in this case becomes a negative venture as its main goal as observed by Chaumba *et al.* (2003) is to alleviate poverty and put an end to households' food insecurity that crippled the rural natives that had been moved to unfertile reserves by the colonial government. To supplement the food deficit, Zimbabwe's government increased food imports however, due to

a liquidity crisis, the government was not able to import enough grain to meet the food demand (Musodza, 2015).

Although the neighbouring countries face food production challenges, the case of Zimbabwe is very disturbing because production levels are much lower than the regional average, even though, from the early 1980s through the mid-1990s the country was recognised as the regional breadbasket (Musodza, 2015). When the FTLRP was launched in 2000, and effectively ran until 2003 when its official end was announced though it continued thereafter at a much slower pace, the overarching objective was to address colonial injustices of skewed land distribution and ownership inherited at independence in 1980 (Mandizadza, 2011). The injustice favoured the European settlers at the expense of native black Zimbabweans having failed to implement an effective land Reform Programme after a series of land reforms over almost two decades, the expectation was that the FTLRP would finally put an end to the nagging problem of unbalanced farmland distribution between native black Zimbabweans and whited commercial farmers, mostly former European settlers (Musodza, 2015).

To be effective, a land reform must be redistributive, that is to say, it must result in a net increase in poor peasants' and rural workers' power to control land resources with a corresponding decrease in the share of power of those who have used such power over the same land resources and production process (Borras, 2007). From the above review it can then be observed that land reform was a double-edged sword on one hand it addressed the colonial legacies of a skewed land distribution that was skewed in favour of the white settlers and on the other end it failed to reach the production levels that the white commercial farmers set, and this led to food shortages and loss of many livelihoods.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a qualitative research paradigm with a bias towards a case study research design. To craft the discourse forming this article, the researcher engaged in literature and document review, providing critical case studies. Constructing research and linking it to existing literature is the building block of academic research activities regardless of the discipline (Snyder, 2019). A literature review-based study can give directions on where the research is interdisciplinary and direct the researcher towards gaps within the research process (Snyder, 2019). This study builds on a literature review reviewing case studies from different sources trying to find the linkages, the ideological and philosophical, aspects of how the land reform

has become a plague to Zimbabwe affecting productivity and the economy through the uncertainty it brings to the agricultural sector halting long term development of land as farmers fear unlawful occupations.

## **FINDINGS**

The land reform in Zimbabwe has proved to have many loopholes affecting productivity in the country with most of the indigenous farmers missing out on the farming as they lack the technical know-how to boost production resulting in food insecurity. The Zimbabwean (2019) indicated that the Zimbabwe Land Commission that oversaw the auditing process that involved over 18.000 farmers revealed that there were fraudulent land allocations and other gross irregularities that resulted in the low agricultural output in the country. The Herald (2019) indicates that the late Minister of Agriculture Perence Shiri issued a warning to land invaders that the time for land invasion had ended and those caught doing that were going to be punished with imprisonment as land invasions of commercial farms were disturbing production and development. The Herald (27 September 2022) indicates that President Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe issued a warning to land barons and those buying the land saying that “it is unlawful to buy agricultural land you can only buy freehold land that is urban land”.

The Herald (31-08-2021), indicates that some farmers are unlawfully leasing and selling land while others are occupying land without offer letters from the government in Goromonzi. FleMandipaza (2023) indicates that income and productivity from agriculture are reduced by illegal grazing land occupation as people continue to settle in areas that are not legally designated for occupation and without proper documentation. The Herald (22-01-2019) observes that people in their thousands are occupying state land in Masvingo Province around Mutirikwi Dam and other reservoirs to end the unlawful occupations that are causing catchment siltation and eviction notices were being offered to these unlawful occupants. Chigwere and Chikwati (2021) indicated that the government of Zimbabwe resorted to the issuing of new securitized A2 Model Settlement Permits with advanced security features as people were using forged offer letters to grab land unlawfully.

The Zimbabwe Mail (25-11-2020) observed that the Land Reform Programme was not only under threat from unlawful occupations but, also from unlawful leasing of the land to the former white commercial farmers negating the land reform while creating black land-owning rentier class whose sole function is to extract rent from the land. The Herald (30-12-2023) indicates that in Mashonaland East land barons were arrested for unlawfully invading farms

without going through the proper channels and the ministries responsible for that. New Zimbabwe (14-01-2024) indicates that the ruling party ZANU-PF has taken disciplinary action against its members who are involved in the illegal occupation selling and parcelling of land using falsified documents. The Chronicle (26-08-2022), revealed that Chegutu West Member of Parliament Dexter Nduna was arrested for occupying land without lawful permits. New Zimbabwe (31-12-2023) indicates that the ZANU-PF National Commissar Patrick Chinamasa warned the party members in Manicaland invading and selling land in Gimboki posing as land barons with connections and the blessing of the party were going to be held accountable by the law. Landportal (2021) indicate that the government is accused of using unlawful invaders to invade black-owned farms that are owned by the people in opposition to the government and ruling party. New Zimbabwe (31-10-2021) revealed that former ZANU-PF minister Obert Mpofu invaded the Eskadini farm that belonged to Malunga a university lecturer who is vocal against government human rights violations.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study has revealed that land reform has continued in Zimbabwe even though it officially ended in 2003 when then President Robert Mugabe declared an end to it but, land invasions continue to occur in the country. These land invasions have now stretched into commercial farms that are helping in the revival of the country's economy as the first wave of land reform deepened the economic crisis in the country as the other governments in the West imposed sanctions against Zimbabwe. Concurrent with the study is Shonhe (2022) who observes that the breakdown of commercial farms in Zimbabwe did not simply lead to farmers and workers being displaced and evicted, it resulted in the collapse of a complex sector of interconnected businesses and the result was the catastrophic collapse of the national economy.

The study revealed that the land audit in Zimbabwe found that there were fraudulent land allocations and gross irregularities that have led to the low agricultural productivity and food insecurities in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that land invasions are rampant in Zimbabwe with Ministers issuing warnings against land invaders as the problem now affects productivity encroaching into commercial farms that are the backbone of the agrarian economy. Concurrent with the study is the Commercial Farmers Union of Zimbabwe (2019) that posited that the continued unlawful invasions of commercial farms were standing in the way of development, as farmers feared developing the lands amid fresh invasions. Consistent with the study is

Chibanda (2020), who observes that the invasions influenced the confidence of the farmers as they lost trust in the land tenure security.

The study revealed that land reform gains were being reversed as farmers were unlawfully leasing the land they benefited from. The study showed that income and productivity had been reduced as grazing lands were being occupied illegally by land invaders affecting the livestock business as people continue to settle in areas that are not designated for occupation. The study revealed that illegal land invasions in Zimbabwe are becoming problematic with people occupying state land around reservoirs causing catchment siltation affecting the water bodies. Similar to the study are the South African Government's (2020) sentiments that land invaders invading state land in the Western Cape must be arrested as they were disturbing the peace of the country and productivity. The study revealed that people are forging papers as A2 Model Settlement Permits invading commercial farms.

The study revealed that there are arrests of land barons in Mashonaland East after a failed attempt to invade a commercial farm. Consistent with the study is the Daily Maverick (2022) that argues that in KwaZulu-Natal more than 70 people were arrested after a land grab attempt at the iSimangaliso World Heritage Site in KwaZulu Natal (KZN). This shows that the land question is still unanswered in Africa and most of the invasions are failing endangering the economies of most African countries as land reform can lead to the country being blacklisted in the international community. The study revealed that the ruling party has issued a warning against errant party members who were posing as land barons with authority from higher places within the party and the party indicated that the culprits were to face the full wrath of the law. The study revealed that the state is vindictive against those who are front-running and echoing for human rights by sending party loyalist to invade their land. These findings are inconsistent with the theoretical framework of the conservative theory (Chinock, 2001) as land tenure security is no longer guaranteed even among the native Zimbabweans based on their political affiliation people are being removed from their land because of political views eroding the social legitimacy of land ownership.

## **CONCLUSION**

In a nutshell, land invasions remain a thorn in the flesh haunting the post-colonial government's developmental trajectory showing that the liberation struggle land question was not fully addressed after the attainment of independence. The Land Reform Programme has resulted in land invasions that have become a plague to the economy of Zimbabwe and the image of the

country even when the Second Republic tries to do damage control by compensating white farmers who lost their property to the Land Reform Programme the process still unlawfully continues derailing the re-engagement drive for Zimbabwe into the international community. The land invasions in Zimbabwe have affected commercial farming through the loss of land tenure security, as commercial farmers cannot make long-term land development plans due to the fear of being unlawfully removed after developing the land. Zimbabwe remains a pariah state because of the plague of land reform that has forced the economy to take a nosedive because of the land invasions that have halted productivity and removed commercial farmers with farming knowledge.

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