

Post Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme: Land Conflicts at Two Farms in Goromonzi District

Tom Tom

Zimbabwe Open University, Department of Development Studies, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, National Centre, Harare

Abstract: *The study was conducted to enhance the breadth and depth of knowledge on the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) through analysis of land conflicts and their sources in Goromonzi district. The researcher applied a qualitative approach to design the study. Two AI farms were selected- one from the northern part and another from the southern part of the district. Three framework elements were considered. These are: knowledge claims, strategies of enquiry and data collection and analysis methods. The key themes on land conflicts that emerged from the field are farm boundaries, access to farm infrastructure and equipment, extraction of natural resources, land ownership and the government of Zimbabwe's land reform re-planning exercise. Maximising the positive functions of land conflicts; enhancing the farmers' knowledge on administrative mechanisms and resolution procedures of land conflicts and refining land tenure policy and its implementation are the three key recommendations. The conflicts may point to issues pertaining to the organisation and relations within the new farming communities and beyond. Accordingly, the conflicts partly facilitate deeper understanding of the FTLRP and are cornerstones for improving the success of the FTLRP and future land reforms.*

Key words: *land conflicts, land reform, agrarian reform and development*

I. Introduction

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) that was initiated by war veterans through sporadic land occupations, and was formalised in 2000 by the Zimbabwean government led to varied and complex impacts and outcomes. Moyo (2013) explains that the FTLRP is marked by several misconceptions and misunderstandings because most people relied on media reports instead of empirical studies to evaluate the programme. Accordingly, there is scanty literature on the impacts and outcomes of the Zimbabwe's FTLRP. This study sought to address this gap by analysing land conflicts at two farms in Goromonzi district. The study of land conflicts is aimed at enhancing the breadth and depth of knowledge on the FTLRP (when integrated to other studies) to enhance policy interventions in the land and agrarian reform sector.

1.1 A Brief Overview of Goromonzi District

Goromonzi district is one of the nine (9) districts of Mashonaland East Province. The district is situated approximately fifty (50) kilometres east of Harare. To its west lies Ruwa Township. Goromonzi district also borders with Marondera district to the south. According to the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) (2009: 10), Goromonzi district lies in Natural Region II and receives average rainfall of 900 millimetres to 1 200 millimetres annually.

Intensive farming is most appropriate for the district. Horticulture production has become a key land use pattern after the FTLRP due to closeness of Marondera and Harare markets. Most of the new farmers are also engaging in tobacco, soya bean, maize and paprika production. During the FTLRP, most urban dwellers in Harare and Marondera sought to access land in Goromonzi district due to its proximity. Figure 1 below shows the map of Zimbabwe. The map also shows the Provinces and Districts of Zimbabwe.



Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing Provinces and Districts

Source: Ministry of Lands (2009)

While Figure 1 above shows the whole map of Zimbabwe with Provinces and Districts, Figure 2 below is a specific map of Goromonzi district. The detailed map shows the main and minor centres of the district including the communal areas, Intensive Conservation Areas (ICAs), boundaries and some physical features. One farm was selected from the northern part while the other from the southern part of the district.

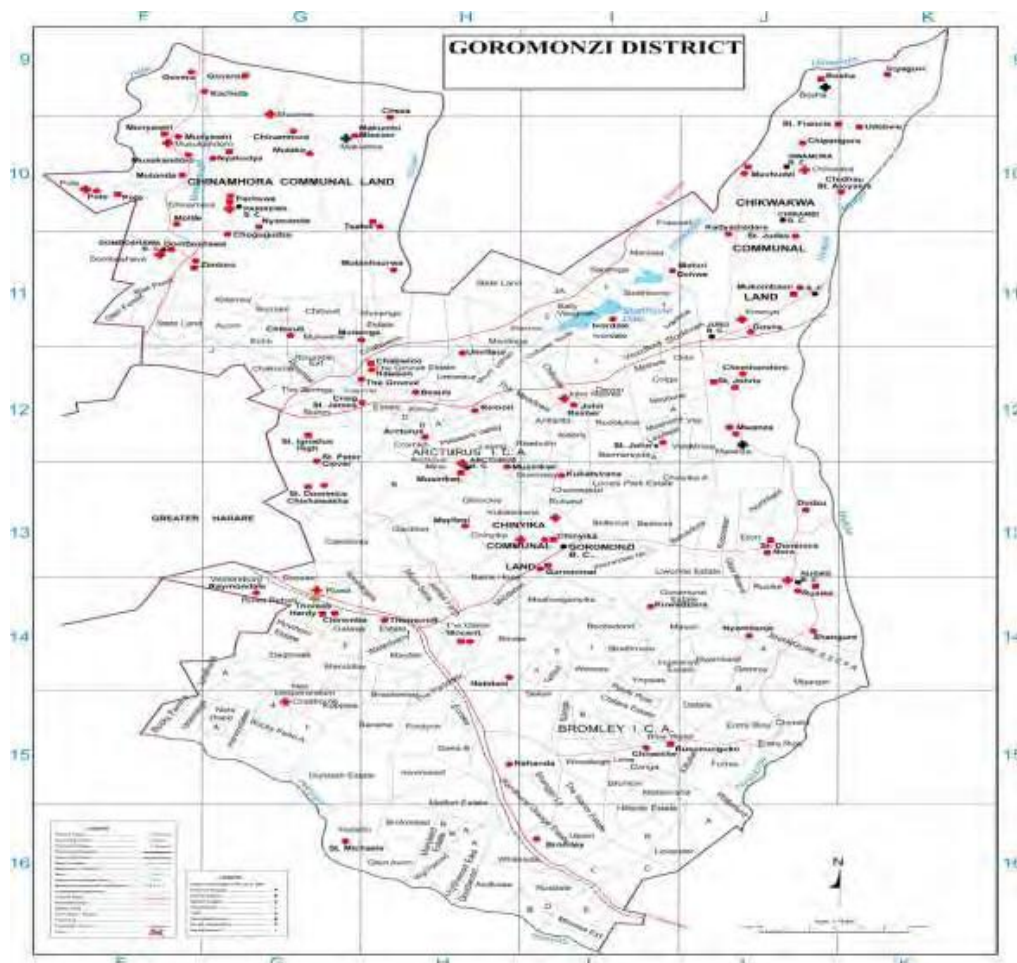


Figure 2: Map of Zvimba district

Source: Ministry of Lands (2009)

1.2 Land Conflicts in Zimbabwe

Land is a key social, economic and political resource in any country. Development efforts are done on the land. The ownership, control and use of land are sources of wellbeing (Moyo and Yeros, 2005b). Most of the struggles across the world have been and continue to revolve around land and other key resources (Anseew and Alden, 2010). The land issue is common across the world. The land conflicts are therefore universal issues.

In Zimbabwe, land conflicts have always been a part of the country's existence. They range from the small family and community and ethno-regional conflicts to the national struggles against the colonial racially-based land regimes favouring the whites. Colonialism by the British is a single major practice that influenced racial land conflicts in Zimbabwe. The colonial land regimes led to the First, Second and Third anti-colonial struggles (Chimurengas) were caused by the racially-skewed land regimes and the other colonial discriminatory and oppressive practices (Moyo, 2011; Moyo and Yeros, 2007b).

The three land reforms in Zimbabwe were executed to correct the imbalances created by British colonialism on the land and agrarian sector and social sectors. These are the First Phase of Land Acquisition and Resettlement, the Second Phase of Acquisition and Resettlement and the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (AIAS, 2009). The FTLRP brought people from varying ethnic and regional groups, worldviews, cultural beliefs and practices. These differences are sources of conflict in addition to the other contextual factors at the farms. Generally, land conflicts may be permanent features of every society.

II. Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, in general is among the sociological theories that explain social structure and social relations in a scientific way. At a specific level, conflict theory desires to achieve explanations of conflict on the basis of methods and principles of science (scientific explanations). The causes, variations and effects of conflict are at the centre of Conflict theory. The core concern of conflict theory is unequal distribution of power and scarce resource. However, it is important to note that what are termed scarce resources may not be uniform for all the conflict theorists.

Among the Conflict theorists are Karl Marx, Max Weber (although he is not classified as such by many authors), Georg Simmel, Lewis Coser, Ralph Dahrendorf and Randall Collins. Overall, all the conflict theorists, despite their variations, seem to focus on the three stratification systems by Max Weber. These are class, status and power. As opposed to Structural Functionalism, Conflict theorists argue that power is a core societal attribute and that society is not always integrated by cohesive cultural aspects (collective agreement).

According to conflict theory, society may also be held together through coercion and exploitation. Consensus may not always imply agreement and togetherness. In addition, they argue that depending on the situation, conflict may be as normal and functional as consensus. Of central importance to conflict theory are core questions such as, 'Where is power located?' Who uses power? Who does not use power? Basing on conflict theory, power is not essentially bad. Power is a key aspect that directs society and social relations.

Coser (1956: 8) suggests the basic propositions of social conflict. Among these propositions are that a certain degree of conflict is vital for group formation and persistence; groups need disharmony as well as harmony and that groups require dissociation as well as association. This is a contradiction to the 1951 Parsonian view of conflict as a disease that should always be eliminated from society. Dahrendorf (1959) fuses selected ideas from Marx, Weber and Coser. Dahrendorf (1959) argues against the Parsonian equilibrium approach and reiterates that power is the one unavoidable aspect of all relations in society. The existence of differential interests and attempts to super impose interests over others coupled with struggles for power as a key resource create and escalate conflict. However, the emerging conflict should not always be viewed as negative.

Collins (1975) drew on the work of Durkheim, Weber and Goffman (1959) and focused on the micro-level of conflict. Stratification is a feature of all societies and it operates through oppressive structures that limit access and choices for some individuals and groups. Emotional solidarity and symbolic goods are intangible weapons used in conflict (Collins, 1975: 59). A crosscutting theme among these conflict theorists is that conflict should not always be viewed as negative because it may be functional.

Conflict theorists emphasise that both conflict and consensus may be functional or dysfunctional depending on the situation. This level of understanding contradicts the Functionalist view that consensus implies common good while conflict is always negative. A point of departure is that the conflicts being experienced in the new farming communities are indicators of challenges, problems and normal human interaction. The conflicts should be appropriately understood and used to improve the social and economic structures and relations in the farming communities.

III. Methodology

3.1 The design of the study

The researcher applied a qualitative approach to design the study. Two A1 farms were selected- one from the northern part and another from the southern part of the district. As compared to the quantitative and mixed methods approaches, the qualitative approach best matched the research problem. Three framework elements were considered. These are: knowledge claims, strategies of enquiry and data collection and analysis methods. Creswell (2003) refers to these as three framework elements.

Knowledge claims were based on social construction, that is, the understanding that people have multiple and varied experiences, and that the meanings attached to these are complex and far from being uniform. The meanings formed depend on one's social and historical perspectives. The views of participants on aspects being studied are important. The processes of interaction among the individual and groups of land beneficiaries in the new farming communities, and with lands officers and key institutions and the context of the interaction are central to socially constructed knowledge claims.

The two case studies formed the basis of the strategy that informed the procedure of data collection. This entailed in-depth exploration of land conflicts and their sources basing on the two farms. The selection of a qualitative approach implied that the specific methods used to gather and analyse data had to be qualitative. Flexible interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were applied to collect primary data. Primary data collection was complemented by a review of a secondary source - the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) (2009). The researcher considered social science research ethics at data collection and analysis stages. The data collection methods and techniques are explained in detail below.

3.2 Primary data

Primary data were gathered primarily using interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These data collection methods are consistent with the qualitative approach adopted for the study and the need to understand land conflicts and their sources from the point of view and experiences of the participants.

3.2.1 Interviews

Forty-six (46) participants were selected for interviews. Forty (40) land beneficiaries were selected from the two farms (twenty (20) from each farm). The additional six (6) participants are two (2) traditional leaders, two (2) agricultural extension officers and two (2) lands officers. The face-to-face interaction of the interview process created a platform for discussion. Moreover, although the interviews were time consuming, they were essential in exploring the land conflicts beyond the aspects stated on the interview guide.

3.2.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Six (6) FGDs were conducted per farm. Four (4) FGDs were composed of solely male participants, four (4) were composed of female participants while the last four (4) were constituted by both men and women. The average number of participants per group was ten (10). Small groups were easier to manage. All the FGDs were essential for aspects of the land conflicts that were appropriate for group discussions. Stratifying and mixing the participants according to sex was intended to allow the researcher to gather the views and experiences of men and women separately and collectively. Gender, age and ethno-regional differences were managed for smooth discussions.

3.3 Secondary data

The African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS) has been gathering data on the impacts and outcomes of the FTLRP since the programme was formally launched in 2000. The data pertaining to land conflicts in the 2005/2006 Baseline Survey and reports were extracted for use in analysing land conflicts and their sources at the two farms in Goromonzi district. Some of the data collected by AIAS on land conflicts pertains to other districts (Mangwe, Zvimba, Chipinge, Chiredzi and Kwekwe) while some were not on land conflicts. The researcher restricted secondary data collection to land conflicts.

IV. Land Conflicts and their Sources: Voices from the Field

The presentation of data on land conflicts is based on key themes emerging from the field. These are farm boundaries, access to farm infrastructure and equipment, extraction of natural resources, land ownership and the government of Zimbabwe's land reform re-planning exercise.

4.1 Farm boundaries

Disputes pertaining to farm boundaries were mentioned as the major land conflict at the two farms. These conflicts were more pronounced in cases where more fertile soils, water sources and forests were involved. Neighbours, former workers of commercial farmers and gold panners were identified as the major

movers of land conflicts. Generally, land is a key resource that provides social, economic and political benefits to the land owners. Accordingly, some land beneficiaries may seek to extend their territory while some groups (such as gold panners and former commercial farm workers) may also claim rights to the land. For example, former commercial farm workers conflicted with the new land owners on access to residency and natural resources that are necessary for their survival.

According to the AIAS 2005/2006 Baseline Survey, boundary conflicts accounted for 10.2% of all land conflicts in the six (6) districts covered in the survey. Various individuals and groups seeking land compete for Goromonzi district because of its location in high potential ecological zone and its closeness to sources of agricultural inputs and markets in Harare and Marondera. The AIAS 2005/2006 Baseline Survey revealed that land conflicts in general and boundary conflicts in particular are more prevalent in high potential ecological regions.

The land conflicts were resolved amicably within the farming through intervention of elders, headmen and chiefs and in exceptional cases through the intervention of district land officers. Conflicts over farm boundaries lead to the revival of boundaries, strengthens the role of the community and land officers in resolving conflicts. Boundary conflicts therefore may lead to peace as opposed to the functional view of conflict as a 'social illness' that should be eliminated from society.

4.2 Access to infrastructure and equipment

The unequal access to farm infrastructure and equipment that has been provided by the government of Zimbabwe and those that were established by the white commercial farmers leads to conflicts among the land beneficiaries. Irrigation equipment, tobacco bans, houses and tractors are among the contested assets. Equitable use of these is not guaranteed at all the farms.

4.3 Land ownership

The ownership of the land implies rights to the land. Notable land conflicts pertaining to land ownership were mainly between the new land beneficiaries and the former farm workers for white commercial farmers. Land rights between the new farmers and former workers of white commercial farmers are inequitable. The former commercial farm workers who remained on the land claim rights to residency on and use of the land allocated to the new farmers. They are clashing with the new land owners on access to natural resources and pieces of land for subsistence farming. In addition, the farm workers need improvements in labour and general conditions of living.

4.4 Extraction of natural resources

The extraction of natural resources at the two farms is an area of conflict. Access to and control of forests, gold-fertile areas and those assumed to have gold deposits were identified as the drivers of conflict. In some cases, illegal gold panning and uncontrolled cutting down of trees are being done on allocated pieces of land.

4.5 Government's land reform re-planning programme

The government of Zimbabwe's initiative on re-planning the land reform is a source of conflict. Central Government, local authorities, land officers and agricultural extension officers were mentioned as the main instigators of land conflict pertaining to land reform re-planning exercise. This conflict stems from assumed loss of land if the re-planning exercise succeeds. Uncertainty on the implications of the re-planning exercise is rife. The land holders fear the unknown consequences of the changes emanating from the exercise. A general concern is that the exercise may lead to reduction or loss of land holding. Often change brings losses and gains for different groups and when the planned change is least understood, uncertainty and fear heightens.

V. Recommendations

5.1 Maximising the positive functions of land conflicts

Some land conflicts may have positive functions. Land conflicts may point to the existence of land problems and challenges in farm and social organisation and relations. In addition, the land conflicts may revive group norms. The land conflicts should be assessed on the bases of their merits in improving the socioeconomic benefits of land reforms in the farming areas. Depending on issues at stake and extent, a land conflict can be a starting point for understanding and resolving underlying problems. However, dysfunctional conflicts should be reduced or eliminated.

5.2 Enhancing the farmers' knowledge on administrative mechanisms and resolution procedures of land conflicts

The key players on resolution of land conflict are the traditional leaders (such as headmen), land officers and courts. Each of these players is important depending on the nature of the conflict. For example, a headperson may play a central role in resolving land conflicts because of his or her frequent interaction with members of the community. However, the land conflicts that are appropriate for legal action should be referred to courts. The new farmers should be informed adequately on dispute resolution procedures and mechanisms.

5.3 Refining land tenure policy and its implementation

The FTLRP and the other land reform programmes in Zimbabwe are hinged on policy. The land tenure policy should specify those who have rights to a piece of land and what is stated in policy should be effectively implemented. For example, the co-existence of the new farmers and the former workers of white commercial farmers should be sorted out to avoid ownership and use rights. In addition, the land tenure policy should be effectively communicated to all the stakeholders.

VI. Conclusion

The key land conflicts emerging from the field are boundary, access to infrastructure and equipment, land ownership, extraction of natural resources and the Government of Zimbabwe's land reform re-planning programme. Conflicts over land may be normal and functional as consensus over land. However, dysfunctional conflicts should be reduced or eliminated. The conflicts may point to issues pertaining to the organisation and relations within the new farming communities and beyond. Accordingly, the conflicts facilitate deeper understanding and are cornerstones for improves the success of the FTLRP and future land reforms. The FTLRP is work in progress, particularly on improving the contribution of the new farmers to national development. Understanding land conflicts is important in this endeavour. These arguments contradict the pessimistic views on the FTLRP that tend to emphasise disorder and disintegration.

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