

# Journal of History and Development

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**Letter from the Editor**

Welcome to the first issue of the Journal of History and Development. This issue explores ranging issues pertaining to development in Africa. Specifically, it analyses issues of child migrants, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, famine, food security, land reform, and Indigenous Knowledge systems among others.

The Editor in Chief would like to thank editors and manuscript reviewers for taking their time to work towards the publication of this issue.

For your comments do not hesitate to contact us.

Enjoy your reading

Percyslage Chigora

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## **The Plight of Zimbabwean Child Migrants in the Border Town of Musina, South Africa: A Child Rights perspective**

By

**Constantine Munhande and Sharon Dzimba**

### **Abstract**

The paper examines conditions of Zimbabwean child migrants in South Africa (SA) using the border town of Musina as a case study. The paper argues that Humanitarian crises on the continent have significantly increased. Competition over dwindling natural resources and authoritarian regimes and projects has produced most of the conflicts that the continent is agonizing under. Regrettably, these conflicts created grave circumstances for normal human survival in these conflicts hit countries forcing thousands of people to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Since the year 2000, Zimbabwe has experienced one of the worst economic and political crises that have been dubbed the “Zimbabwe Crisis” within the academic and international circles. This forced millions of people to leave the country for other countries in the region, SA in particular, and beyond. However, in the official language, as well as academic circles, much focus has been on professionals and adult migrants, forgetting the hundreds and thousands of unaccompanied minors and refugee children who have joined the exodus. Because of their age and vulnerability, these children have suffered the worst in the host nations. Therefore, this paper examines the lived experiences of Zimbabwean migrant children who have crossed into, Musina, SA as a reference point. It is further argued that, these children have been denied much of the Human Rights as well as Children’s Rights as specified in various international laws and Charters to which both SA and Zimbabwe are signatories. This raises doubt over the commitment of most African governments to respect international law, making these commitments more rhetorical than real.

### **Introduction**

In 1948 the world through the United Nations adopted the Universal declaration of human Rights. The immediate historical context to this declaration was the experiences of political, social, economic as well as religious intolerance, including the high rates of unemployment and rising poverty that resulted from the economic depression in Europe and the Western Hemisphere during the 1920s and 1930s (Andreassen 1996). The declaration covered all individuals residing on mother earth as bluntly spelt out in article 2 of the Declaration,

*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, region, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status...* (UN Declaration 1948)

When the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted it was hoped that it would go a long way in ending human misery caused by Human Rights violations. However, four decades down the line, the UN came up with yet another piece of international law, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Unlike the 1948 Declaration, the latter was specifically concerned with the human rights of children. This followed the realization that despite the presence of the 1948 Declaration and specific declarations on Children, children all over the world continued to live in a hostile world characterized by violence against children, child labourers in dangerous environs, child soldiers as well as children growing up in poverty particularly in low income countries of the

world. The preamble of the 1989 Declaration is clear, "... Recognizing that in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration ..." (UNCRC 1989).

In 1990 African countries came up with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which was put into force in 1999. The rationale for coming up with a parallel piece of law to the UNCRC was the need to take into cognizance the ugly fact that the situation of most African children remained critical notwithstanding the presence of the UNCRC due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances. The African Charter on the Rights and welfare of the Child did not, however, mean that the UNCRC ceased to have effect on African countries. It rather sought to buttress, fortify and complement it.

The UNCRC as well as the African Charter classified these rights of children into three broad categories. These are provision protection and participation. The first two categories are of concern to this paper. Zimbabwe ratified the CRC in 1990 there by committing itself to upholding children's rights as spelt out in the Declaration. However, the situation of children in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, especially from 2000 can only at best be described as pathetic and deplorable. As the country experienced one of the worst economic crises believed by many to have been caused by the unbudgeted for war veterans' payout in 1997, a chaotic land reform programme, Zimbabwean intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo and disputed elections that have left the country without a credible and legitimate government until the formation of the Government of National Unity, children have found themselves on the receiving end (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007).

The economic crisis described above created tough circumstances for human survival in the country. At the peak of the crisis in 2008, for instance, the annual inflation rate stood well over 2 000 000% in October <http://www.zimbabwesituation.com> (accessed 10 January 2010). Describing this situation, the American Ambassador to the country noted, "I know of no other example in the world of an economy that, in times of peace, has contracted so precipitously in the course of six years as that of Zimbabwe" (Bell 2005). By the end of 2008 both the unemployment rate and poverty rates hovered well above 85%.

This harsh macro-economic environment compelled many Zimbabweans to migrate into neighbouring countries in search of better opportunities. Children also joined this exodus either with their parents and guardians or on their own from all areas in the country, rural, urban, farms and mines. According to the South African Home Affairs Department, more than 1000 unaccompanied child migrants are living in the small towns of Musina and Makhado as well as the surrounding farms (Desal). This has raised debate regarding their welfare and security as acknowledged by the UNCRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Such large numbers of child migrants are found in these two small towns, particularly Musina, because it's the entry town into South Africa, only separated from Zimbabwe by the mighty Limpopo River. The bulk of these children lack adequate documentation as well as professional skills thus making it difficult to proceed into the interior.

Despite this glaring evidence of the presence of thousands of migrant children living on their own in these few towns of South Africa, authorities in both South Africa and Zimbabwe appeared to have totally forgotten that they have both ratified the UNCRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which oblige them to always consider the principle of the best interests of the child. As a result of the crisis in Zimbabwe, the government was no longer able to adequately provide for and protect its children hence the decision by these children to endure the hardship of

walking down South in search of a better future. On the SA side the dreams of an ideal world for children were not realized either. In most cases, these children have in fact endured more violence and abuse. This is despite the fact that SA has several legal instruments which claim to uphold and advance children's rights regardless of their origin. These include the SA Constitution section 28 (1), Refugees Act and the Children's Act. The Children' Act, for instance, bluntly states that "These rights are for the enjoyment of all children, including refugee children and refugee unaccompanied minors" (Shabangu and Mbecke 2008).

Studies on the political economy of Zimbabwean migrants into SA have not also helped the situation. Much of these studies have concentrated on adults, particularly labour migration into SA, as if child migrants do not exist (Matlosa 2001; Crush et al, 2005). It is for these reasons that this paper endeavours to chronicle the hardships which Zimbabwean child migrants endure using the border town of Musina as a reference point. These hardships are traced back to the transit period when these children are trying to find their way to SA. The principle of the best interests of the child enshrined in the UNCRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is also interrogated.

### **Conceptualization**

Conventional definition view migration as a movement of people from one country to another for settlement that is either permanent or temporary. The decision to migrate may be spawned by unfavourable economic political or environmental conditions prevailing in the home country (Akokpari 2000). Whilst, the definition appears so straight forward, there is variance within migration discourse on what constitutes forced and voluntary migration. On a more general basis, voluntary migrants are those who relocate within or beyond their countries of origin at their own discretion rather than for uncontrollable factors. These people include those seeking better social and economic opportunities in other regions or countries. Involuntary or forced migrants on the other hand are those who relocate either proactively or reactively because of conditions beyond their control. Among these people are also those seeking economic opportunities (ibid). There is now growing consensus that most movements within the region and the continent are more inclined to the latter. Declining economies, political persecution and a whole range of conflicts are forcing an increasing number of people to leave their homelands and Zimbabwe is no exception to this trend.

A child migrant is defined by the UNCRC (1989) as any person under the age of 18 who has either crossed an international border alone or has subsequently found one's self living in a foreign country without an adult care giver (UNICEF 2005). Whilst some of the Zimbabwean child migrants do not have very strong reasons for leaving their homes and country, others have well founded reasons such as fear of political persecution and the threat of hunger and starvation. Such children would qualify for refugee status. The 1969 African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa considers a refugee to be a Person, who, due to; External aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disrupting public order in either a part or the whole of his or her country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his or her place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality

Events in Zimbabwe particularly in the run up to the 2008 Presidential run-off election witnessed unprecedented levels of violence unleashed against political opponents of ZANU Pf especially in those constituencies where the party was defeated in the March election. People's homes and



livelihoods were destroyed leaving in some places families without anything including any form of protection. Children who found themselves in such circumstances are among the ones who have crossed into South Africa. Thus in this paper, child migrants will be treated as all unaccompanied children and minors found in the streets of Musina regardless of their refugee status.

### **Factors behind Child Migration into South Africa**

Although much of the studies that have been done on Zimbabwean migrants into SA have predominantly focused on adults, the push and pull factors that have caused these adults to go there are not very different from those that have also led children to leave the country. Socio-economic and political conditions such as persistent economic decline since the mid-1990s, recurrent years of draughts, and a political environment characterized by high levels of intolerance and violence have been at the center of Zimbabweans' migration into SA and beyond. The only major difference between child and adult migrants lies in the amount of opportunities once there in SA. Children, because of their age which translates into lack of professional and technical experience as well as lack of proper travel documents, have very little opportunities for finding decent employment. This in turn makes them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation than adult migrants (IOM 2004).

A large proportion of child migrants interviewed in Musina cited poverty, vulnerability as a result of orphan hood and political violence as the major reasons why they left the country. Over 60% of the child migrants interviewed in the town of Musina indicated that were it not for the economic difficulties the country was facing they would not have left for SA. Dumisani Nkomo a child migrant was not only speaking of his experience, but of thousands of child migrants in South Africa when he said that,

*Before I went to SA things were difficult for the family and I dropped out of school because my parents could not afford sending me to school because they are poor. I felt helpless and it is when I decided to come to SA where things turned out better for me. I can now take care of my family needs (Dumisani Nkomo 2009)*

It is, however, pertinent to hastily add that not many of the child migrants have been as fortunate as Dumisani. For many, life is a daily struggle for survival with very slim chances of being in a position to support the family back home.

The study revealed that the majority of the child migrants in South Africa had failed to complete their education as a result of the poverty of their families. The majority of the child migrants interviewed had not completed secondary education which is regarded as Ordinary level education in Zimbabwe. In 2009 more than 75% of the population was estimated to be living below the Poverty Datum Line with scarce resources (Bobb 2009). The 2008 Health Council Report showed that cases of Kwashiorkor, for instance, had increased by 43.7% from the 2005 figure (ibid). Because of such conditions, children not only dropped out of school, but also left the country for other countries in search of employment. Jacob Matakanye from the Musina Legal Advice Office noted that Zimbabwean children are crossing the border as the only practical solution to their many problems. They cross in an attempt to improve their own lives or the lives of their families (Matakanye 2009).

Apart from the lack of resources to send children to school, the country's education system had virtually collapsed in 2008. For much of the year, schools throughout the country, urban and rural, as well as institutions of higher learning were closed due to the economic collapse which made it

impossible for government to pay teachers and lecturers adequate salaries as these were soon eroded by the galloping inflation the country witnessed (Masangomai, 2009). These conditions and the violence that accompanied the June 2008 presidential run-off, particularly in the rural areas made many teachers and other professionals to leave the country for other countries for security and in search for greener pastures further crippling the education system of the country. These circumstances saw many children dropping out of school as well crossing into South Africa for both security reasons and survival thus denying them the right to education as spelt out in article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Vulnerability of children as a result of the HIV and AIDS pandemic emerged to be another important factor for child migration into SA. A considerable number of the child migrants in Musina are orphans some of whom who have seen their entire families succumb to the pandemic and themselves in turn being abandoned by the extended family and communities also too destitute to support an extra mouth. According to R Leslie (2008), the pandemic is moving down at least 3000 people every week in the country leaving hundreds of orphans without parental care. Robert, an orphan from Masvingo province explained how he dropped out of school at the age of ten to become the sole bread winner for his grandmother and an elder sister. He only returns home once in a while to give them some money and food (interview 2009). Another child migrant respondent also narrated how she was psychologically traumatized by unpleasant social encounters after the death of her parents. "Before I came to SA I had to do begging for my disabled grandmother. I did not like that. Both my parents are dead, so I did not have much of a choice" (interview, May 2009).

The political violence that gripped the country from 2000, particularly during election periods, has not spared children. The abduction of 2 year old Nigel Mutemagau with his parents allegedly for undergoing training to overthrow the government in October 2008 is a case in point, (<http://www.zimdaily.com> accessed 12/01/2010). Although children may not have been the targets for politically motivated violence for much of the time, they found themselves victims and at times suffered violence for the political beliefs of their parents. This created an insecure environment for living forcing children, just like their adult counterparts, to leave the country for other peaceful countries, SA in particular. One child migrant respondent in Musina gave a tip of the ice berg of the situation, "First they burnt down my father's shop and threw stones through glasses. One time they beat my father. When they eventually killed him, I decided to flee the country" (interview Samson 2009). Some respondents stated that they fled because they were accused of being traitors that resulted in them being either arrested or tortured and beaten.

### **The plight of the Child Migrants**

As highlighted above on the factors for migration and as in the experience of African slaves who crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, the ordeal of the child migrants did (does) not start when they reached their destinations, but immediately when the journey started. However, crossing the Zimbabwe- South African border is the most gruelling part of the journey. Most respondents did not want to remember the experience of this part of the journey.

Because of their age, most children lacked proper travel documents like the passport that would enable them to pass through the authorized border check points. As a result they resort to illegal, unauthorized and dangerous crossing points and routes that expose them to a whole host of dangers. In these "underground routes" children are often robbed, raped or even killed by both "human lions" as well as real animal lions. Crossing the border through the undesignated areas is usually facilitated by unscrupulous intermediaries known in local lingo as Amagumguma. These people

charge money for their services but also often take advantage of their customers. Sometimes they take advantage of the children and women who they either rob of all possessions including clothing, rape or physically assault. The story of Brenda Moyo (not real name) represents that of many girls, who are brutally raped in the wilderness around the border,

I paid someone a hundred rand to help me cross the border. On the way he asked me for more money. He said give me R200 which I said I did not have. We were many, but others run away soon after crossing the border. He was angry and took all my clothes, shoes and everything. I cried and cried. I begged him to leave me but he refused. He raped me many times after which he gave me R15 and left me (interview 2009)

According to the IOM cases of children who arrive in Musina naked after being robbed by gangs are not uncommon (IOM 2009). Lacking the money needed by intermediaries to facilitate in crossing the border, girls sometimes bribe their way through by offering sexual favours to border guards who are in most cases members of the South African defense forces manning various farm gates situated along the SA border side (Save the Children UK). These sexual favours are also extended to truckers, bus drivers and amalayitshas (porters who mainly transport goods across the border), to facilitate their passage right through the authorized points by paying very small amounts of money to the immigration officials and police. In other instances, some attempt to cross the border through the mighty Limpopo River. While this might be possible during the dry season as there would be many dry patches on the river bed, during the rainy season many face the risk of drowning and attack by crocodiles. Many cases and stories of human body parts found in the river, baby found on the river bank and body seen going through a whirlpool in the river have been told and witnessed (Save the Children UK).

Zimbabwean child migrants face even more difficulties upon arrival in Musina. Sooner rather than later, they are exposed to the ugly realities of the world. Accommodation, food, medical care, education and physical security are immediate and long term problems and challenges which they confront daily. These conditions subject them to more vulnerability as people take advantage of their desperation to survive. The appearance of these children in Musina can tell anyone that these children are lacking enough food. Most of them are characterized by slim and pale bodies showing stunted growth. Interviews with these children revealed that they could go up to 2 days without a decent meal. In such situations they mostly survive on left-overs thrown into dust bins by other people.

Proper adequate accommodation also lack for the Zimbabwean child migrants in the town. Shelter is one of the basic needs and right that every human being is entitled to yet the situation on the ground in Musina violates this very basic right. The majority of the child migrants virtually live in the open on the streets of the town, surrounding bushes as well as the Musina Taxi rank where they easily fall prey to thugs who can rob them of whatever possession they could have. All these places lack any form of sanitation making these children filthy dirty as they can go for days without bathing as well as washing their clothes. A few fortunate ones who have some form of remuneration stay in one of Musina's townships called Matswana. However, even here the conditions are also bad as the rooms are overcrowded. In one instance, about 9 boys were sharing a very small room built of corrugated iron sheets. Cases of theft in these places are a daily occurrence.

In 2008 at the peak of the Zimbabwe Crisis, accompanied by one of the worst cholera outbreaks to hit the country, thousands of people crossed the border into SA not only to look for opportunities, but to run away from the cholera epidemic as well as seek medication for cholera as the country's

health system had collapsed. These people were housed at a refugee camp in Musina's Show grounds. Conditions, here too, were deplorable as several hundreds of people had to share few sanitation facilities. There were, for instance, only six toilets to be shared by a population of about 700 people. Because of such over crowdedness and lack of adequate sanitation facilities, incidences of cholera outbreaks recorded in the town were mainly centred on the Show grounds refugee camp. Children, because of their vulnerability, were the hardest hit. The child migrants also confessed to being attacked by locals during the 2008 xenophobic attacks.

Instead of ameliorating the situation of these children as they have committed themselves to in the SA Constitution, the Children's Charter and other international instruments, the SA authorities actually inflict more misery on them. The majority of these children are not able to get asylum permits because they are unaccompanied and lack proper documentation. According to the SA Home Affairs system, children are not supposed to be seeking work or working. Thus if they are granted special permits they are actually accepting child labour (<http://www.iom.org.za>). Such laws therefore allow children to be exploited.

Further, according to the SA laws, children are not supposed to be detained, unless as a last resort, but certainly not with adults (Bobb 2009). However, the situation on the ground is the direct opposite. Child migrants spend most of their time running away from the police who would want to arrest, detain and deport them for lack of proper travel documents. If caught, these children are detained together with adults awaiting deportation in a detention hall which is not conducive for human habitation. Having been formerly a Goods Warehouse, the roof is of corrugated iron sheets making the heat inside intolerable. The situation is made worse by the fact that Musina itself is unbearably hot with average temperatures hovering around 35 degrees Celsius (Ibid). IRIN (2008) estimated that more than 2100 children, a daily average of 14, without birth certificates or any other form of identification, were deported from SA to the Zimbabwean border town of Beitbridge in the first five months of 2006 alone. Such inhuman conditions traumatize children and are in contravention of Universal Human Rights norms and principles to which SA is a party and should observe.

In addition to the harassment and brutality they suffer at the hands of the SA authorities, child migrants are also taken advantage of by unscrupulous business people and other locals. About 85% of the child migrants interviewed in Musina reported failing to get formal employment because their age put them at a disadvantage in comparison to their adult counterparts. As a result, the majority of the child migrants find work in the informal sector, doing dangerous and exploitative work as they are rendered by desperation to do anything. A sizeable number of these children are employed in shops in the town. According to SA labour laws, shop workers are supposed to earn an average amount of R1500 a month. However, this is not the case with most foreigners, children in particular. Lacking the relevant travel documents and with the threat of arrest always hovering over their heads, children can be paid well below R500 a month despite working for more than 8hrs a day, the legal working hours permitted by government (Republic of SA labour Act).

Despite all these odds, Zimbabwean child migrants, just like their adult counter parts, have devised a wide range of coping strategies. Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society as well as the SA government itself have also come in handy periodically to ameliorate the conditions of these children. Because of lack of any professional training as well as technical skills, most children engage in temporal irregular piece works for survival. The bulk of these piece works, for boys, revolve around loading and off-loading goods trucks around Musina's factories as well as supermarkets. In 2008 when Zimbabwe experienced the worst shortage of consumer goods as a

result of the economic meltdown and drought, most Zimbabwean business people and individuals resorted to buying from Botswana and South Africa. There was brisk business in Francis town as well as Musina, the entry town into SA from Zimbabwe. This created a lot of jobs for the migrant children who earned about R25 per each truck load (interview Sikhosana 2009). Some children assist shoppers at both supermarkets and wholesalers in carrying their goods and groceries to the Taxi rank or their respective cars. For such jobs they are usually paid R5 per trip load of luggage (ibid).

Vending, that is selling of a variety of assorted goods like sweets, freezits, fruits, biscuits, vegetables as well as clothes on the streets, is another survival strategy that has been adopted by other child migrants. These goods are either theirs or belong to other people who would have employed them to do the selling on their behalf. However, this line of business often engage them in a cat and mouse game with the town's municipal police as the by-laws do not allow vending on the streets. If caught, their wares are often confiscated and forfeited.

In addition to these honest survival strategies, these children have also engaged in dishonest, illegal and immoral strategies. The most pervasive of these is stealing unsuspecting people's goods and money. So many incidences of children beaten after stealing from the Cross-Border traders during the loading of their trucks or within the shops have been witnessed. The owner of Factory shop where most Zimbabweans buy their goods from complained of these children giving his customers trouble (Factory shop owner 2009). Other girls who have found survival tough have turned to prostitution for survival. Very young girls are seen loitering and roaming around areas where heavy cross border trucks park, such as near the Ultra City just across the border on the SA side, while they await the processing of their papers. Prostitution is so rife in these areas with truck drivers. Such activities do not only compromise these children's rights, but also expose them to the risk of being infected by the deadly HIV and AIDS.

Non-Governmental Organisations like International Organisation of Migration (IOM), Medicines San Frontiers (MSF), UNICEF, South African Red Cross Society (SARCS), Save the Children UK, churches and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) have also intervened in various ways and capacities to ameliorate the plight of migrant children in Musina. These interventions include establishment of drop-in centers where children access facilities such as meals, water, HIV and AIDS education, medication, shelter, rape and trauma counselling, documentation as well as some form of entertainment among many others (SARCS report 2007). For the SA government, intervention is largely in the form of legislation through the Constitution, Refugees Act and the Children's Charter. However, on the ground, the SA authorities such the police actually worsen the plight of these children. A 2006 Save the Children UK study revealed that 94% of the children claimed that harassment, abuse, humiliation and confiscation of goods and money by the police were their biggest concern (Save the Children UK report 2007).

## **Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the universality of the impact of crises on the population. It has pointed out to the need for considering all sections of the population when it comes to policy issues as well as research concerning the impact of such crises. Specifically, the paper has shown that while the emphasis in research and academic circles has been on adult migrants in general and professionals who have migrated to SA in particular, migrant children who have been excluded have, in fact, so many ugly untold stories of what it is to be a child migrant. These children have suffered all sorts of abuse and exploitation, including abuse at the hands of government authorities who are supposed to be custodians of the law that is meant to protect those children. Such conduct clearly shows that

talking about children's rights and the principle of "the best interest of the child" in particular, is just mere rhetoric in Africa and other poor nations of the world

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## **Gender, Ethnic Identity and Citizenship in Nigeria: The Post-Colonial Experience**

By

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### **Abstract**

Identity and citizenship subjects are highly powerful, political and historical questions in Nigeria; not only in its people's socio-economic relations, but also, and more interestingly, in gender relations. The place of ethnic identity and citizenship in gender relations, as it relates to Nigeria, was largely inherited from the colonial period, unfortunately, they were not properly and adequately redefined, refined and transformed over the years. Consequently, in the current post-colonial globalisation era, the 'unattended mistakes of the past' on these subjects have led to unacceptable deprivations, suppression and oppression of the female gender specie in the Nigerian society. This paper investigates the historical backgrounds of the problems of ethnic identity and citizenship in gender relations, and presents its analysis of the problematic within the historiography of gender relations in Nigeria. This task is undertaken in the context of the notions of equity and exclusion, and the competing contestations over them. The paper further interrogates the remarkable nexus between, and dynamics of these subjects in the context of gender, showing how these have led to the institutionalisation of 'second-class citizenship' in the society over time. In highlighting the varied subjugations faced by the female gender specie on account of these 'institutionalisations', and the significance of these in gender relations, the paper also demonstrates how these have limited females' capacities and capabilities in the society. The essay concludes that since the marginalisation of the female gender in identity and citizenship rights is a systemic and systematic injustice of the Nigerian male-dominated socio-economic structure, only aggressive structural changes at the institutional levels must occur for the needed positive transformations to take place. These would require built-in mechanisms that would enhance women's abilities to participate as equals in all areas and segments of life, which, indeed, should be the hallmark of the age of globalisation.

### **Introduction**

The discourse on ethnic identity and citizenship, and the application of citizens' rights often generate political tension in contemporary Nigerian context. This is due to the crisis of identity and citizenship in the country's socio-political history since the pre-colonial era. Today, however, much less recognised conflicts in the area of gender relations have become proliferated in the country. Underlying most of these conflicts are basically issues of citizenship and identity, and their derivable rights. The construction and nature of the Nigerian state, which is rooted in the colonial pedigree, tend towards the institutionalisation of practices of entitlements, rights and privileges, which create differentiated and unequal status of identity and citizenship among the genders. Consequently, in an analysis of identity and citizenship in Nigeria, there is the need to look at how colonialism created a split in not only group relations, but also gender relations and the gender personality of the average Nigerian elite under colonial rule. It was not surprising therefore that anti-colonial political struggle in Nigeria was couched in the language of citizenship, that is, 'the right of the natives to become citizens'. Thus, the political slogan of the nationalist movements was, 'equal rights for all' (Coleman 1958).

Gender, ethnicity and citizenship are abstract analytical and descriptive concepts and categories. In

other words, they are not 'real', but are used to describe differences between and/or among people, and men and women. They help us to understand better who people are, by differentiating and delineating them on certain (identifiable) grounds. Thus, they are related to identity politics, as they define people in terms of who they are (identity). With them, there is a 'physicality' that is attached, and a biological infliction that is imposed.<sup>1</sup> This essay examines the dynamics of these notions of ethnic identity and citizenship as it relates to gender in Nigeria in the globalisation era. Though ethnicity and citizenship, as descriptive categories, are 'keywords' in this essay; gender, more than any, or them both, is central – the context in which this discourse is based. Since the word 'Gender' presupposes the existence of, and distinction between two human species, namely the masculine and the feminine, it would be proper to begin by stating at this stage, clearly and unequivocally, that this essay primarily focuses on the feminine gender – women – in the context of a male-dominated and controlled society, or what has often been referred to, though informally, as a man's world. Lastly, globalisation, on the other hand, merely underlines the period on which this study focuses on.

This discourse is organised into five parts. The first segment tries to clarify the import of globalisation in the study, showing its relationship with time perspective and periodisation of trends in societies. The second part briefly looks into the concept of gender and its importance for, to, and in development. It also embodies a historical trajectory of the post-colonial conditions of women in Nigerian societies, tracing it to colonialism. It discusses the colonial legacies of strange patriarchy and patrimony, and gender differentiation which ultimately led to women subjugation, as opposed to the pre-colonial setting, when and where women had full and incontestable identity and 'citizenship'. The correlates of gender and ethnic identity in the country are discussed in the third part. This segment shows how pervasive the issue of ethnic identity is in the Nigerian context and how it has moved into the arena of gender relation to the detriment of the womenfolk. 'Gender in Citizenship: The Citizenship of Women' is the fourth part. It is used to undertake an exploration of the constitutional provisions on citizenship and its attendant rights on the one side, and its execution and practices in the context of the feminine gender on the other. This section shows how women, through discriminatory 'traditions', laws, practices, and outright subjugation, have been excluded from full and effective citizenship in the country. The last section of this essay tries to undertake an excursus of certain ideas, opinions and thoughts that could help in the restoration of women's full and effective identity and citizenship.

### **Gender and the Colonial Heritage**

What is gender? Just as every adult knows, or believes s/he knows, what or who a *woman* is – a human being whose physical anatomy happens to differ in some essential respects from that of a man – also with gender, a similar superficial acquaintance is made to pass for knowledge. But there is more to this term as there exists a conceptual distinction between sex and gender. Indeed, there is considerable, but not total correlation between female sex and feminine gender, and male sex and masculine gender, and most societies use biological sex as one criterion for describing gender. But beyond this simple starting point, no two cultures might completely agree on what distinguishes one gender from another. Oakley (1987) makes useful distinction and clarification of these terms, noting that sex is connected with biology, whereas gender is socio-historically, culturally, and psychologically determined. In other words, biological and certain physical conditions and

<sup>1</sup> This assertion was made by Professor Samita Sen of the Department of History, University of Calcutta, India, during a lecture at the 2006 Social History Workshop on "Gender, Ethnicity and Culture" in Dakar, Senegal. The workshop was organized by CODESRIA and SEPHIS.



characteristics lead to the classification of male and female sex, while the determination of the gender identity of men and women involves the taking into account of social and cultural perceptions of masculine and feminine traits and roles in a given society. An in-depth definition and explanation of 'gender' is given:

Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, and refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, gender is determined by specific socio-cultural conceptions of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in the society and in public and private life.

Gender issues, especially as they relate to women in the development process, have been topical; and being so, they have been increasingly examined over the years, thus generating a plethora of literature from all and sundry. However, these have taken varied disciplinary dimensions, diverse analytical frameworks and a motley of perspectives. One may quickly wonder at this point: Why is gender a development issue, and why is the case of women being treated separately? Most answers to these may suggest a bias or seem emotional. But the fact is and remains that women are 'unique', especially due to their historical experiences and social reality in gender relations, which are characterised by unequal power. Similarly, gender norms assign specific entitlements and responsibilities to men and women – for example, women might be expected to take on caring or domestic duties and remain close to home, while men may be expected to be the main breadwinners, working outside the home, with greater freedom to move around in public places. Thus, women, due to these socio-cultural dichotomies, deserve some distinctive attention and approach in their affairs.

The roles that women play are different in any given society, and their situations are determined by the legislation, religious norms, economic status or class, cultural values, ethnicity and types of productive activity of their country, community and household. Women are usually responsible for domestic work, the care of children, family health, farming, cooking and providing food, income-generating activities, paid jobs and other household services. In all these areas – women have often been adversely affected by the development process. There is a wide gap between women's high, yet largely unrecognised, economic participation and their low political and social power, and development strategies have usually taken the needs of the most vocal and politically active as their starting point. Thus, to understand gender appropriately, the activities of men and women need to be addressed separately.

In pre-colonial indigenous societies of what is presently Nigeria, women played a more significant

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<sup>2</sup> This definition and explanation was given by the UN Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Internet Resource: <http://www.itu.int/gender/about/gender.html>. Retrieved: 16/06/06.

role in society than did their western counterparts before the middle of the twentieth century. These indigenous societies' women's roles and traditional responsibilities included providing for their families, financially and otherwise, as tradition expected them to be significant wage earners in the family. In other words, apart from being mothers and wives and taking charge of the domestic front, women contributed substantially to the production and distribution of goods and services. Qualls (1999) notes that they laboured in farming, fishing, herding, and commerce (pottery making, cloth-making, and craft work) alongside their male counterparts. They also participated in the provision of health care and spiritual services, in local and long distance trade criss-crossing different regions of pre-colonial Nigerian area and were fully involved in the procurement and sale of various food items and related commodities. They also were fully involved in food processing and very active in salt production.

Evidence abounds also of their activities and vast exploits in the areas of governance and administration during this era. In fact, women traditionally had the right to profit from their work, and the money usually served as a contribution to the family income. They were also helped by the extended family members (mostly females and children) in the rearing of children, hence providing them with the needed space and time to undertake other fruitful ventures for the benefit of their families and communities. These functions were fully complementary, and the economic freedom they experienced was much different from that in many western societies, where women had to 'fight' for the right to work (Qualls 1999).

However, the advent of colonialism altered, changed, and shifted these women's statuses and worsened their conditions in some remarkable ways.<sup>3</sup> Rodney contends that just the same way African political states lost their power, sovereignty, independence, and meaning under colonialism, women's status and roles were also negatively affected:

...objectively, there was deterioration in the status of women owing to colonial rule. ...their social, religious, constitutional, and political privileges and rights disappeared, while the economic exploitation continued and was often intensified. It was intensified because the division of labor according to sex was frequently disrupted (Rodney 1982:226).

Accordingly, they were exploited and suppressed in some respects by the colonial structure of power and politics. The strange assumptions of European patriarchal conceptions of the appropriate social roles for and of women as dictated and introduced into the Nigerian society by colonialism altered the roles and position of women in economic and social endeavours. These colonisers' ideas resembled the pre-twentieth century European patriarchal assumption that women, as subordinates to men, belonged in the home, engaged in child rearing – an exclusively female responsibility – and other domestic chores. Furthermore, this thinking was not all about domesticity alone, but women were equally seen as inferior to men: intellectually, physically, morally, spiritually and so on. So not only were they to be in the home, but they were deemed not fit enough to participate in the public sphere. These differed greatly from the traditional roles of women in the pre-colonial indigenous African societies. Thus:

...women's work became greatly inferior to that of men within the new value

<sup>3</sup> Focus here has largely been on positive aspects of women's position in pre-colonial African societies, and the negative effects of colonialism on them. Some critiques have, however, also identified some 'negative aspects' of women's roles and positions in pre-colonial life, as there were various forms of subjugation which colonialism also helped in addressing.

system of colonialism: men's work was "modern" and women's was "traditional" and "backward". Therefore, the deterioration in the status of African women was bound up with the consequent loss of the right to set indigenous standards of what had merit and what did not (Rodney 1982:227).

In other words, colonialism emphasised the 'functionality' of males at the expense of females in the productive areas of the economy. This was heightened when men were required to leave their farms to seek wage employment, and women remained behind burdened with every task necessary for the survival of themselves, the children, and even the men as far as foodstuffs were concerned. This focus on the male gender further alienated females and encouraged the separation of economic roles of men and women – roles that had previously complemented each other. Moreover, since men entered the money sector more easily and in greater numbers than women, women's work became greatly inferior (Rodney 1982:227).

Rojas (1994) further contends that the colonial state passed certain legislations in Nigeria, which indirectly restricted women, preventing them from performing their duties towards their families and societies. Indeed, colonial policies and statutes were clearly sexist and biased against women. It would be interesting to note that many of the smaller trades hitherto dominated by women in pre-colonial times gradually disintegrated in the colonial period, as a result of the emergence of such big expatriate firms as the Royal Niger Company (RNC), John Holt, United African Company (UAC), Lever Brothers, CFAO and so on. Similarly, in agriculture, cash crop incentives, technology and innovations were restricted to men (Curtin 1964). Thus, colonialism disrupted the traditional system of production in these societies, reinforcing social inequality and introducing oppressive forms of social stratification and gender differentiations throughout the Nigerian society (Rojas 1994). These unfortunate heritages of colonialism – "a foreign and unwarranted imposition" (Davidson 1986:43) – have doubly impacted negatively on the womenfolk since the post-colonial periods and changed their position to a subservient and second-class one.

Attempting a summary of the plight of women in post-colonial Nigerian societies, Reiter (1996:1) posits that: "...they are the poorest of the poor, doubly oppressed by national and international injustices and by systems that give males the whip. Men enjoy greater privilege, women bear greater burden." This situation, Awe (1991:1) further adds, makes women to live on the periphery and between poverty and ignorance. The human tragedy of this marginalisation and dispossession ensures the complete economic manipulation, sexual exploitation and political marginalisation of this very vital section of our society (Mazrui 1991:6). This unfairness is often legitimised by 'tradition' and socialised into women's attitudes (Odoemene 2003:2). These have often led to discriminations against the womenfolk at both the domestic and public arena, as exemplified in the practices in, and politics of ethnic identity and citizenship.

For women, whatever happens at the level of the domestic arena is in turn carried over to what is generally called the public space. The reason that this is significant is that women may experience the denial of their citizenship and fundamental human rights at any one, if not more, of these levels – family, community, private sector, state and so on. Hence it is necessary to go beyond the public space when we talk about women's citizenship and rights, to address the interconnected and interlocking character of women's lives as well as women's rights (Salihu *et al* 2003:3).

### Gender and Ethnic Identity

Ethnicity is one of the main keys to understanding Nigeria's pluralistic society. It distinguishes groups of peoples who for historical reasons have come to be seen as distinctive – by themselves and others – on the basis of locational origins and a series of other cultural markers. It refers also to sets of social relations within which members of distinct social groupings such as men, women, poor, rich, young, old, all relate to each other (International IDEA 2000:122). Thus, it refers to cultural relations at the same time as it refers to specific power relations between and/or among people of different ethnic backgrounds.

Ethnicity has to be understood within its historical context of how people are called on to accept ethnic identity as an explanation of who they are, what exists, and what the world and nature are like. It constitutes a way in which people think of themselves and others and make sense of the world around them. In this way, the subject integrates his or her consciousness into conceptions of self, identity and worldview. It also refers to the call addressed to ethnic subjects in their mobilisation and the outlook and practice of members of ethnic groups – their social identity (International IDEA 2000:122). Experiences in the post-independence period has fostered widespread belief that modern ethnicity is a very powerful force in the politics of many countries including Nigeria. Ethnic identity in the country affects members' life chances: it has profound consequences for the bearer's physical safety, political status and economic prospects.<sup>4</sup>

Is ethnic identity in Nigeria rigid and fixed? The answer is both yes and no. The politics, dynamics and intrigues involved in the 'identity process' is very complex. Yes, in the sense that one can identify with, or claim only one ethnic group, and that is the ethnic group of his/her father or that of the husband (for a married female). Thus, the society, due to its patriarchal construct and nature, inadvertently (or not) imposes on all its subjects a patrilineal structure, notwithstanding the fact that some Nigerian groups are matrilineal. No, because it is not a static category: it is subject to frequent reconstitution and redefinition. An interesting example of this point to note, is that from what the British colonialist identified in the early part of the last century as about 90 distinct ethnic groups in the present location called Nigeria, the number has expanded to about 470 (CFCR 2002:18) or at least 398 (Otiite 2001:86). Therefore, groups have been splitting into smaller ones, while some others at one point or the other construct their own separate identity, and successfully too.

What then is the position of women in ethnicity? Whose ethnic identity does or can a woman claim? In Nigeria, a woman, like a man, assumes the identity of her father (not the mother), and upon marriage, this identity is changed to that of the husband. This is on the condition that she marries outside of her "indigenous" society, be it the local government community, state, ethnic group or country. If the marriage collapses for whatever reason, the woman loses the identity of her former husband including his name and, in certain (seldom) cases, reacquires that of her father, while the

<sup>4</sup> See: U. Ukiwo, "The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria", *Oxford Development Studies*, (2005). Vol.33. No. 1, March; P.O. Agbese, "Managing Ethnic Relations in a Heterogeneous Society: The Case of Nigeria", in J.M. Mbaku, *et al* (eds.), *Ethnicity and Governance in the Third World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); International IDEA, *Democracy in Nigeria*, 2000; I.O. Albert, "The Role and Process of Action Research in the Management of Community Conflicts in Nigeria", in M. Smyth, and Robinson, G. (eds.); *Researching Violently Divided Societies: Ethical and Methodological Issues* (Tokyo: UNU Press, 2001); E. Osaghae, "The Role and Function of Research in Divided Societies: The Case of Africa", in M. Smyth, and Robinson, G. (eds.), *Researching Violently Divided Societies*, *Ibid*; O. Otiite, *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria* (Revised Edition) (Ibadan: Shaneson C.I., 2000).

children of that union retain the identity of their father – her estranged husband.<sup>5</sup> Hence, unlike elsewhere where people (including females) change and/or can choose their ethnic identity intermittently as certain circumstances may dictate, or even at will, Nigerian women are ‘not allowed’ to choose theirs but has one bequeathed to them at any point in time. They might also, as often is the case, be caught up in a dilemma of not having any at all.

A brief explanation of this situation, using the illustration of an assumed inter-marriage between an Igbo and a Yoruba, would do for a clearer understanding. For instance, the marriage of an Igbo man to a Yoruba woman produces children that are Igbo, never Yoruba, nor indeed Igbo-Yoruba, as some people have chosen to address products of Hausa and Fulani unions in Nigeria. Even if the children of such an Igbo – Yoruba union have lived all their lives in Yorubaland, speaking and understanding the language perfectly, and none of the Igbo language, they still remain Igbo. The married woman in question ‘ceases’ to be, or be identified as Yoruba, but Igbo too, in so far as she remains in the marriage. This is irrespective of the fact of whether she wants to acquire (assume) her husband’s identity or not.

The varied inherent socio-economic and political implications of this situation for the woman and, of course, the children of such a union, are very worrisome. By this, she (the married woman) has lost all ‘rights and privileges’ that should come to her by virtue of being a member of her natal community. Also, such ‘rights and privileges’ are only extended to her in her community of marriage (husband’s place) at the discretion of that community. Often times, this is highly contentious.<sup>6</sup> Thus, sometimes women who are married to men from communities other than their own are in dilemma, as they can neither identify with their places of origin nor that of their husbands. And for the children, the possibility of adopting a bi-lineal descent is neither an option nor acceptable. In other words, in the light of competing notions of citizenship, identity and ‘belonging’, how will people of ‘mixed indigenship’ find justice?

Again, in times of violent ethnic conflicts involving members of a woman’s birth community and that of her marriage, the fate of the woman is certainly precarious. This is of particular interest

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<sup>5</sup> The only exception to this situation is in the case of women National Honouree, whom the laws of the country permit to retain the names, be it her father’s or the husband’s, in which they got the honours.

<sup>6</sup> With regards to this issue, three celebrated cases readily come to mind: that of Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, late Justice Atinuke Ige and Senator Daisy Danjuma. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala hails from Abia State (her state of birth) but married to Delta State. Thus, by virtue of marriage, she should be considered a “Deltalite” (from Delta State). She was, however, appointed a Federal Minister as an “Abian” (from Abia State), an action that was greeted with so much opposition and condemnation by many “Abians”, including government officials. On the other hand, Justice Ige’s natal state was Oyo, but she got married to Chief Bola Ige, the assassinated Minister of Justice of the federation, who hailed from Osun State. Justice Ige was of the Oyo State Judiciary where she rose steadily and was to become the Chief Judge of that State. This position, however, eluded her because she was considered an Osun indigene (by marriage), thus not “qualified” for the highest judicial post in Oyo State, her ‘former’ state of origin (by birth). It would be necessary to state also that in all these common practices in terms of the politics of identity and citizenship in Nigeria, there were certain glaring, though isolated, exceptions. One of such cases was the suitability of the candidacy of Senator Daisy Danjuma. Senator Danjuma, a Bini (from Edo State) by birth, who was married to General T.Y. Danjuma (rtd.), a Jukun man (from Taraba State). Nevertheless, Senator Danjuma was elected into the Senate of the Federation to represent Benin Senatorial Zone (Edo State). The acceptability of her candidacy by the generality of Benin people was not unconnected with the power politics and connections of her husband, Nigeria’s former Army Chief and the ruling party’s stalwart.

because of the intractability, frequency, reoccurrence, and severity of violent ethnic conflict in Nigeria, and the mixed identities of a significant proportion of women who have married across ethnic boundaries. Research has shown that more often than not, most women in such circumstances are sent home (divorced) 'for security reasons' during such conflict episodes. Most of such marriages never got mended after the conflicts. And in some extreme cases, women in these situations were killed (Odoemene 2002:62), supposedly for lack of trust and confidence in the loyalty of the women involved and the potential risks it portended for such communities, should they be left alive.

### **Gender in Citizenship: The Citizenship of Women**

An important craving of almost, if not every individual is to have more control over his/her life. This desire has been articulated in various forms including a sense of belonging or participation within a given space. In order to assert this sense of belonging, the notion of citizenship has been used variously, depending on changing identities and interests. Citizenship can be defined as the membership status in a political society given to a legal member of that society, which involves full rights to political participation within that society. Citizenship also carries with it some prescribed duties and privileges. Yuval-Davis (1997), in a significant contribution, conceptualises citizenship as a multi-tiered construct that applies simultaneously to people's membership in sub-, cross- and supra-national collectivities as well as in states. This is also an important dimension to the concept of citizenship, as it throws light on certain issues that affect the citizenship of women in Nigeria. From Yuval-Davis' explanation, if the simultaneity of the citizenship is not evidenced, the citizenship of the person is jeopardised.

This assertion is especially germane to the issue of '*indigeniety*' that was introduced into the Nigerian constitution in 1979, as identity resides in a person's knowledge of, sense, experience or enjoyment of citizenship. In other words, ethnic identity, as opposed to citizenship identity, determines who gets what, when, how, and how much in the state. In Nigeria, issues of employment, public appointments, education grants, scholarships, etc, are subjected to ethnic and state arithmetic by the central state. For instance, despite the idea of "One, indivisible Nigeria" often touted by the leaders of the country, and contained in certain official documents to give a sense of single national identity to every citizen, the definition of a citizen of Nigeria as stipulated in the 1979 constitution (and even as amended in the 1999 version) is rooted largely in primordial origins. An individual's membership of, or origin in an ethnic group or community is a major criterion for the qualification of citizenship. Thus, citizenship gains expression more from the primordial, than the civic perspective in Nigeria.

In any case, many scholars agree that citizenship is a politico-legal agreement between an individual and the state (Gasiokwu 1995:36-7, 46; Okoye 2004; Nwabueze 1982). Thus, every country or nation-state identifies a particular set of persons as its citizens and defines others as non-citizens, or as aliens. Figuratively speaking, citizenship gives a person ground to stand on and space to move in within a defined political territory (Okoye 2004). Citizenship is, therefore, an instrument of social closure through which the state lays claim to, and defines its sovereignty, authority, legitimacy and identity. It is the means through which the modern nation-state made of various nationalities seeks to forge a common identity and collective experience for its people.

In other words, if the notion of citizenship is critically analysed, one would find out that it assumes the existence of nationals of a country without the markings of gender, class, caste, community and other forms of differences or discriminations. This 'nationality-based' view is well underscored in Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which recognises that everyone,

without any exception, has a right to a nationality. It further provides that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his/her nationality, nor be denied the right to change his or her nationality. Many other countries' constitutions also embody similar provisions. Without doubt, the framers of the 1999 Constitution, like all other previous constitutions, had the intention of using the provisions on citizenship to promote the national political objectives of building a united and free society for all Nigerians, and to, as much as possible, promote reciprocal obligations between state and citizens. These are eloquently espoused in the preamble of this constitution which reads thus:

We the People of the Federal Republic of Nigeria having firmly and solemnly resolved... to provide for a Constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people...(FRN, 1999:2). (Emphasis mine).

This is in keeping with the vision of the nationalists and founding fathers of modern Nigeria as evidenced in the anti-colonial struggles. These objectives re-echo in many important national documents such as the Second National Development Plan and other various constitutions of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Second National Development Plan clearly stated that the goal of national development is to build a strong and buoyant economy, a free, democratic and egalitarian society in which no one is oppressed on the basis of sex, ethnic and religious differences (CFCR 2002:12). However, since the attainment of independent status, Nigeria has consistently defined its citizenship in patrimonial mode, and has continued to rely on indirect and undemocratic control of the vast majority of its populations, especially the womenfolk.

Many issues of citizenship that impact on one's identity and *vice versa* centre on, and around social, political and economic inclusion and exclusion. Citizenship is intricately tied with the issue of identity and, to a large extent, the inherited colonial construct. This is the case in terms of identity, in so far as '*indigeneity*' and/or its derivative "indigenous to" are tied to membership of a particular local community (CFCR 2002:13). On the other hand, the colonial inheritance is seen in the institutionalisation of patrilineality as the basis of citizenship, even where, in pre-colonial and colonial times, many descent systems (or inheritance) showed only a weak commitment to patrilineality or were unambiguously bilateral, or even matrilineal. Therefore, as Cheater and Gaidzanwa (1996:194) aptly note, "...the experience of colonial patriarchy has influenced the commitment of contemporary states to patrilineality." Thus, though citizenship is a fundamentally contested notion, for women and for men, the terrain on which such battles are fought and sometimes won differs considerably for women compared to men. As a direct result of this, women have suffered various forms of socio-economic disabilities, with regards to full rights and access to privileges, in their ordinary lives.

Before a discussion on various aspects of discriminations against women is undertaken, a proper and better understanding of the concept of 'discrimination against women' is essential. To this end, the examination of the United Nations' *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* (UN-CEDAW) of 1979 would be a necessary reference resource. Article 1 of that convention defines discrimination against women as:

...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political,

economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field (UN-CEDAW 1979:4).

From the foregoing, this convention acknowledges any situation where patterns of inequality, structural or otherwise, are maintained by rules, norms and procedures that dictate a subordinate role for women in all spheres of society as discrimination against them. It is important to note that Nigeria signed the UN-CEDAW convention on 23rd April 1984, and ratified it without any reservations on 13 June 1985. Similarly, it ratified the optional protocol to UN-CEDAW on 8th September 2001. Why then should exclusionary and discriminatory practices against women be found among societies in the country, especially when the relevant constitutional provisions regarding non-discrimination (as exemplified in its preamble quoted above) and also the UDHR and UN-CEDAW instruments are taken into account?

The provisions on Citizenship in Nigeria's 1999 constitution are contained in Chapter 3. This chapter basically focuses on provisions relating to citizenship by birth, naturalisation and by registration in addition to provisions relating to dual citizenship, renunciation and, interestingly, deprivation of citizenship (CFRCR 2002:19). By virtue of any of these forms of citizenship, every Nigerian citizen is entitled to the rights and privileges provided by the state, and are also subject to the duties and responsibilities prescribed for citizens in the constitution. As can be gleaned from the provisions of this chapter, there is nothing to suggest that the enjoyment of the rights of citizenship have, or should have discriminatory application. But this is not the case.

First and foremost, it is axiomatic that the language of the 1999 Constitution, as with the previous ones, is exclusively masculine. This applies as much to its Chapter 3, which deals with the issue of citizenship, as it does to Chapter 4, which focuses on issues of fundamental rights. The use of "exclusive masculine language", Pereira (2003) argues, "implies that the norm is masculine and therefore that women are not full citizens in their own right". This anomaly is further buttressed by the stark omission of any provision to address it in Section 318 of Chapter 8 (Part IV) which deals with the interpretation of the constitution. Nowhere in the Constitution is it clearly stated that reference to the rights of male citizens apply also to female citizens. Again, a significant omission in the Chapter 3 of the constitution (on citizenship) is the provision for (or the application of) citizenship rights by marriage, as it relates to Nigerian women (Imam 2000). This fails to address the issues that arise through gender inequality and the rights of women in the country. And the fact that there are gender inequalities already in society leads to some people being excluded from the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship on the basis of these differences.

As discussed earlier, a woman's identity is jeopardised if she marries from 'outside'. Let us consider again the following situation which has been dealt with earlier in the discussion on ethnic identity: a Nigerian woman marries a man from a Local Government Area, State or ethnic group other than hers, or a Country other than Nigeria. In any of these situations, the woman may either have to adopt the citizenship of her husband (whether Local Government Area, State, ethnic group or country), subject to the approval of the relevant authority respectively, or she forfeits the notion of 'belonging to' as provided in the constitution. In other words, the act of marriage to a husband from a different locality from hers may economically and politically sever the links of such a woman from a community of her choice.

Specifically, a woman married to a man 'foreign' to her own place of origin does not acquire the residency rights of her husband's community, even if she lives with him in his community all her life (CFRCR 2002:21). Meanwhile, she has 'lost' all such rights and privileges in relation to her place of origin (birth) or natal community. Even more disturbing, foreign husbands (that is, men who are not nationals of Nigeria) are not allowed to take on the nationality of the Nigerian women



they marry. Through these acts, these women are allowed to fall through the cracks and therefore cannot participate in social, political and economic processes due to circumstances beyond their control. For a lot of women, this, in actual fact, may mean a life relegated to poverty and destitution, as they are excluded from accessing socio-economic and political benefits as citizens of their country. Similarly, the children of such a woman do not acquire the residency or citizenship rights of their mother's place of origin, even if they reside in their mother's community for all their life.

Thus, though the constitution absurdly empowers the president of the federation to deprive persons of their citizenship (FRN 1999: section 30), a substantial proportion of the Nigerian populace are already denied of basic livelihoods which make their citizenship worthwhile. By this, they are excluded from full, practical and effective citizenship of the country. The socio-economic and political implications of this are also diverse, and their children, having parents with different citizenships, are put in a compounded situation where the benefits of the state elude them. This is, however, not the case with their male counterparts. Ironically, Section 15 (3) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979 had this to say about intermarriage among persons of different 'places of origin': "For the purpose of promoting national integration it shall be the duty of the state to – (a) encourage intermarriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties" (FRN 1979:13). This section is in agreement with Section 15 (3) (c) of the 1999 Constitution. But non-Nigerian women who marry Nigerian men are constitutionally protected, if they decide to take on Nigerian citizenship. Why is there such disparity in the citizenship rights of these categories of women?

Imam argues that certain discriminatory features of state processes and practices restrict the character of citizenship in diverse ways, pointing out that one such arena is that of the existing laws in Nigeria that discriminate against women, thus constituting a significant area of limitation on the application of citizenship and fundamental rights:

The law on domestic violence is clearly inadequate, particularly regarding wife battery. Domestic violence is currently classified under common assault, which downplays the seriousness of this crime. According to section 55 of the Penal Code, wife beating is allowed as long as it does not amount to 'grievous hurt'. As defined in section 241 of the Penal Code, 'grievous hurt' includes emasculation, permanent loss of sight, ability to hear or speak, facial disfigurement, deprivation of any member or joint, bone fracture or tooth dislocation. This means that a man who beats his wife, short of exercising the injuries above, is acting within the law. One may very well ask how women's fundamental right to dignity is protected under such circumstances... Rape is yet another area in criminal law where women are discriminated against on the basis of marital status. Forced sexual intercourse, or marital rape, is not recognized as an offence. Sexual harassment is also not recognized as an offence, despite the fact that it is extremely widespread (Imam 2000:7).

Some other administrative discriminatory practices in both formal and informal sectors are also highlighted:

Discrimination against women on the basis of marital status is not prohibited in the Constitution or other Nigerian laws. Pregnant women who are not married continue to be targets in the civil service and in the private sector, being denied

maternity leave because of their marital status. At the same time, qualified married women of childbearing age are often turned down by prospective employers on the grounds that they would soon get pregnant and start asking for maternity leave. Taxation and revenue laws and policies discriminate against married women and women with children. Such women pay higher taxes than men because they have no automatic allowances for children, even if they are the only income earner in the household. Married women but not married men are prevented from joining the police. Women police officers but not their male counterparts require the written permission and approval of their prospective spouses before marrying. Women face restricted economic opportunities due to credit and loan conditions that are not illegal but are biased in favour of men (Imam 2000:6).

Imam *et al* (1985) argue that the Nigerian social structure favours men over women, resulting in exploitation which effectively subordinates women in all spheres of life. In other words, beyond the practices of the law and administration, the everyday activities of women are also hampered by varied forms of injustices and discriminations at both domestic and public arena. On the method of distribution of political offices and other forms of employment, the “Federal Character” principle was introduced into the 1979 Constitution, and was carried over to the 1999 version. Its provision reads thus:

The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria, ... thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies (FRN 1999: Section 13/3).

In the interpretation section of the Constitution, “Federal Character” is defined in a way that recognises the need to reconcile and manage state, ethnic and sectional differences. No reference was, however, made to gender differences. Why were gender-based differences not recognised and problematised where necessary in this provision, or indeed, the constitution? A point to note here is that despite the overwhelming gender inequality in the country, the constitution, as presently fashioned, does not recognise the need for what Salihu refers to as ‘gender character’ (Salihu 2001). This is very important, more so since “the federal character of Nigeria is after all, fifty percent female” (Okoye 2000). Even in the application of the Federal Character principle, ‘indigenouness’ or “*indigenity*” is measured in terms of the community of birth of one’s parents. Therefore, since women who marry outside of their community of birth are denied access to resources as members of their natal community, and in the same vein, they do not gain full acceptance by their husband’s community, they are left out of the benefit of the same federal character which is enshrined in the constitution (Salihu 2001).

Another point in question is the contemporary controversy surrounding the re-introduction of the *Sharia* legal system in some northern states of Nigeria. *Sharia*, hitherto known as a body of laws largely regarded as divine Muslim injunctions, has been radically redefined over the years. At present, it is no more than a set of laws that have developed more from the evolution and interpretation of a Muslim community over time, than as a set of inimitable laws (Imam 2000:13). This legal system has been operational in most parts of northern Nigeria since pre-independence times, but was then restricted to matters of personal law (social relations, such as marriage, divorce, inheritance and contractual agreements), as guaranteed by Section 275 of the 1999 Constitution.

The system was, however, 're-introduced' in the country's legal dictionary in 2000; this time it was unconstitutionally<sup>7</sup> extended to cover issues of criminal law.

By December 2001, *Sharia* in its use of criminal law had been legally established in the States of Zamfara, Sokoto, Niger, Kebbi, Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Kaduna and Gombe (Pereira 2003). Similarly, Babalola (2001:27) informs us that plans were afoot at the time to extend the *Sharia* to Kwara, Oyo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau, Nasarawa and Kogi States.<sup>8</sup> As Salihu (2001) points out, this *corpus* of laws "has become a metaphor for religious imposition and the abuse of fundamental human rights" since this re-introduction, especially as it relates to women. This is represented by the mental torture and physical abuse of women, segregatory/discriminatory application of its laws on the genders and a directive to all working spinsters to marry or lose their jobs (CDD News 2000:7).<sup>9</sup> Similarly too, a majority of landlords in these '*Sharia* states', who incidentally were males, evicted single women from their properties (International IDEA 2000).

The controversial case of Bariya Magazu, a 16-year old mother, readily comes to mind here. She was given a sentence of 100 lashes of the cane for fornication less than six weeks after the birth of her child. This was despite a pending appeal initiated by some lawyers and women's Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on Bariya's behalf. The men named as her sex partners were, however, freed. The psychological trauma and stigmatisation to which the teenager was exposed is a cause of concern. Again, the judgement was all too selective, and infringed on women's rights as full citizens of the country. Currently, many women, both Christians and non-Christians alike, continue to have their rights violated by the selective interpretation and implementation of this body of laws (Salihu 2001).

The high point of the controversial *Sharia* legal system came in October 2001, when a certain woman, Safiyatu Hussaini of Tungar Tudu, a village in a remote part of the Gwadabawa Council area of Sokoto State, was sentenced to death for adultery. She had claimed to have been raped three times by a man called Yakubu Abubakar. The attacks took place after she had separated from her husband and she subsequently became pregnant (Uguru 2001:18). She left Tungar Tudu for her mother's village but was caught by the police and brought back to Gwadabawa. Her pregnancy was used against her and Safiya was charged with adultery, despite the fact that she had no husband at the time (Pereira 2003). Typically, while Yakubu was discharged by the judge at the *Sharia* court for lack of evidence as he denied any responsibility for Safiyatu's pregnancy, Safiyatu was tried and found guilty by the same court. The penalty was "Death by Stoning". As Dorothy Akan'Ova, the Executive Director of the International Center for Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights (INCREASE) strongly argued, since Safiyatu was a divorcee (or legally separated) at the time the purported offence was committed, her charge should have been that of fornication, which has the punishment of 100 strokes of the cane. Though a retrogressive form of punishment, the *100 strokes*

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<sup>7</sup> The unconstitutional nature of this legal system is based on the secularity of the Nigerian state, which is enshrined in its constitution. *Sharia's* politicisation and the tension over its introduction, however, have made it odiously difficult for a proper interpretation in a competent court of law.

<sup>8</sup> This statement was credited to Dr. Ibrahim Ahmad, the President of the Supreme Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN), at a meeting of the Council in Gusau, Zamfara State, in November 2001.

<sup>9</sup> It would be recalled that during the Generals Buhari/Idiagbon regime (1983-1985), some Nigerian Northern states gave unmarried women a deadline of three months to show evidence of a husband or lose their jobs.

penalty for fornication would be welcome as opposed to *death by stoning* for adultery. She further contends that, the judge, having discharged Yakubu (the man named by Safiyatu as responsible for her pregnancy), had no basis for charging her “as she could not have committed adultery by herself” (Alofetekun 2001:26).

Another classical case in point which also exposed the travails of women under this legal system is that of Amina Lawal Kurami, who was similarly sentenced to death by stoning after being found guilty for adultery. The man charged with Amina, Yahaya Mohammed, was also discharged after he denied the allegation (Asemota and Uzendu 2002:8). This incident took place in March 2002, while Safiyatu’s appeal was still pending in the *Sharia* Court of Appeal. It is worthy of note that Pereira (2003) reports that activists who were working on Safiyatu’s case had uncovered the cases of at least four other women being incarcerated in jails in similar circumstances to Safiyatu, awaiting death sentences. Their cases were unreported and thus, unknown to the wider world. Interestingly, Anaba (2001) notes that while the country’s president, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (Rtd.), described the extension of the *Sharia* Legal system to criminal matters as politically motivated, the then Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Chief Bola Ige, had pronounced the development as “constitutional”.

Violence against women in Nigeria, in new as well as old forms, is widespread and alarmingly high. It represents one of the largest obstacles to realizing female citizens’ constitutional rights to life (Section 33) and to dignity of the human person (Section 34) (Pereira 2003). Women suffer all kinds of assaults and violence, especially those of them who are poor and most often defenseless. Indeed, these may occur simply because they are women or because they attempt to assert their fundamental rights as citizens, whether politically, economically or socially (Pereira 2003). However, this type of conflict – gender-based conflict – has not been regarded or recognized as being serious because the violence rarely involves large numbers at any one time, and its intensity may be relatively low in a number of cases. Yet women are attacked, maimed, raped and killed on a daily basis. In a vivid protest to this situation in the country, the Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women incisively notes that “There can be neither justice, development nor democracy if violence against women is seen as acceptable” (LACVAW 2001:41).

From the foregoing, one can safely argue that the experience of women’s citizenship is that it is treated as being of secondary or devalued status relative to men’s. The same is true of women’s fundamental human rights, as a consequence of the subordinated status of most categories of women (Pereira 2003). State-sanctioned patriarchal ‘traditions’ are given priority over individual rights. This is amply exemplified when the State fails to intervene if a woman is being discriminated against in her own country and by her own country-men. As a result, it would be safe to conclude that citizenship in Nigeria, as it relates to gender relations, is discriminatory in many respects, as the constitution from which citizenship rights are derived is not founded on non-discrimination.

## Conclusion

“The concept of national citizenship of equal rights, benefits and duties for all citizens has been attenuated or bifurcate. The claims of marginalisation, domination, and social injustice by groups and individuals often derive from this reality” (Adejumobi 2005:20). That Nigerian women are discriminated against in terms of ethnic identity and citizenship is no more an issue to be debated or argued as compelling and convincing evidence abound in the affirmative. Gasiokwu (1995), after a critical examination of the nature and content of identity and citizenship in the various political

structures throughout history – from slave-owning societies to feudalism to capitalism – concludes that in spite of the distinctiveness of the forms of expression in different societies and corresponding socio-economic formations, the essence of citizenship has been the same – a means of dominating and exploiting members of the unpropertied class. Based on this conclusion, Okoye (2000) submits that a gendered interpretation of the “unpropertied class”, that is, one which identifies the proportion of women in this class *vis-à-vis* that of men, would make this conclusion a difficult one to fault. The issue of women identity and citizenship rights does not concern only the womenfolk; men must be involved in the struggle for it to be meaningfully successful. This has become imperative as the conditions of Nigeria’s women will continue to rub off on the country’s developmental efforts.

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# **Pre- Colonial Famine Control and the Causes of Colonial Famines in North-Western Zimbabwe, 1850-1960**

**By**

**Godfrey Tabona Ncube**

## **Abstract**

This paper makes a significant contribution to the debate about the causes and control of famine in the pre-colonial and colonial periods, which has concerned historians, social scientists, and development workers since the nineteenth century. It locates the causes of colonial famines in North-western Zimbabwe in the agrarian crisis created in the African Reserves by the segregatory land policies of Southern Rhodesia, population displacement, and land degradation, which reduced total African grain production per head from the 1930s onwards, and contributed significantly to the number of famine years experienced by Africans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The paper presents two main arguments. Firstly, that while drought and scarcity had been common enough in North-western Zimbabwe in the pre-colonial period, the indigenous societies had possessed many agricultural techniques that sought to prevent crop failure and minimize the risk of famine. Consequently, death from actual starvation was very uncommon in the Zambezi valley; a fact that David Livingstone had learnt as early as 1855, when he was in the valley for the first time. However, in the colonial period, land alienation and population displacement to make way for key colonial development projects, such as railway construction, coal mining, game reserves, and dam construction, dispossessed the Africans of productive land, and destroyed their pre-colonial methods for drought security. Consequently, famine and famine-mortality became more common during the colonial period. Secondly, the paper argues that, even the Famine Relief Scheme introduced by White capitalist farming in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century did not render much assistance during famines due to the general shortage of cash among the impoverished indigenous societies for the purchase of grain. It argues that this colonial situation, whereby it was possible for people who could not afford to buy grain to starve to death outside well-stocked grain stores, was indicative of the fact that the nature of scarcity itself had changed from its pre-colonial form.

## **Introduction**

The debate over the causes and control of famine originated in India after that country had experienced several appalling famines in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indian scholars argued that famines became more common and severe in the colonial period because, their natural cause, drought, was acting on a society impoverished by British policies such as over-taxation, uncontrolled free trade, and railway construction, through which the British had drained wealth out of India and destroyed the indigenous techniques by which Indians had previously protected themselves against scarcity (Iliffe, 8; Dutt, 1-322; Bhatia, 1-389; Greenough, 1-342). Michael Watt's study of Hausaland in northern Nigeria similarly argues that, although famines in this region were chiefly caused by drought and had occurred at intervals before colonial rule, the Hausa people had possessed many agricultural techniques that sought to prevent crop failure and minimize the risk of famine. In the colonial period, however, these resources were eroded, especially by the commercialization of agriculture and by the demands of an alien state which only gave token aid during famine, and as a result, famine became more common in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hausaland (1-500).

Similarly, the history of famine in Matabeleland, the most drought-prone region in Zimbabwe, has shown that colonial disruption of indigenous survival techniques through policies like land

dispossession, evictions, and the concentration of growing African populations in limited reserves, contributed significantly to the frequency of famine and famine mortality from 1930 onwards. John Iliffe has shown that from 1930, the effects of the agrarian crisis that had been created in the reserves by land alienation and population growth began to appear, primarily in the form of reduced total African grain production per head in the reserves. These effects appeared first and most severely in Matabeleland, the region most disrupted by European settlement through a series of land dispossessions and evictions since the 1890s, and North-western Zimbabwe became the chief area of scarcity (10-11).

The case study of famine in North-western Zimbabwe that is provided shows that, while drought and scarcity were common in the pre-colonial period, the people had employed a variety of agricultural techniques to minimize risk; which included settling in relatively favoured environments, cultivating the highly productive alluvial fields on the edges of the Zambezi River to minimize the risk of crop failure, pursuing supplementary non-agricultural occupations, and living in large families so they could practice mutual aid in times of need. Consequently, despite the risks associated with agriculture in the region, in the majority of years, general scarcity or famine was not experienced (Livingstone, 535; Ncube, 2004: 41-45). However, land dispossessions and population displacements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to make way for key colonial development projects like the Kariba Dam, the Wankie Coal Concession, the railway line, and national parks, destroyed these indigenous methods that sought to minimize the risk of famine, which had been contrived over many centuries. These developments not only led to the underdevelopment and impoverishment of the indigenous rural communities of North-western Zimbabwe, but also left them more vulnerable to the periodic droughts in this region, and contributed significantly to the number of famine years they experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ncube, 2004: 73-78, 101-106).

Colonial schemes for the relief of famine are also shown to have been ineffectual as they did not render much assistance due to the general shortage of cash among the impoverished Tonga and Nambiya for the purchase of grain, and the vast distances and difficult terrain between the Native Commissioners' stations, which served as famine-grain stores, and the Zambezi valley.

### **Pre-colonial Agriculture and Drought Security in Northwestern Zimbabwe**

In the pre-colonial period most of Zimbabwe's peoples had minimized the risk of drought by living in relatively favoured environments. For example, the Ndebele in the more arid Southwest had clustered their settlements on the Highveld which attracted rainfall by its altitude of over 1200m above sea-level. The Shona, on the other hand, had historically shown preference for the exploitation of a variety of environments which occurred where the Highveld merged into the drier Middle-veldt, between 900m and 1200m above sea-level, which also received good rainfall (Iliffe, 14).

However, there are many other pre-colonial groups, such as the Tonga, Nambiya, Hlengwe, Venda etc., that sparsely populated the remaining third of modern Zimbabwe that consisted of ill-favoured marginal environments in the Lowveld, bordering the Zambezi, Sabi, Shashi and Limpopo valleys, which only received adequate rainfall every third or fourth year, and scarcity was recurrent (Iliffe, 14). Unlike conditions on the Zimbabwean Highveld, where there was much more rainfall, the lack of food security from farming dry land in these marginal environments led to the evolution of wetland farming on vleis, streamsides and riverbanks, as these areas had both high soil-moisture and good nutrient availability, and therefore produced higher and more regular yields (Wilson, 4).

In the marginal environment of North-western Zimbabwe, which was characterized by rainfall of a



very uncertain nature, with frequent mid-season droughts which adversely affected crop growth, the pre-colonial economies had adapted their agricultural techniques to suit the local conditions and minimize the risk of famine. The Tonga, for example, had contrived to exist in the Middle Zambezi valley in relative security from famine by exploiting the annually inundated alluvial soil along the Zambezi River, where they were able to harvest two crops a year. They had permanent fields on the floodplain near the banks of the Zambezi, wherever the banks were not too steep to allow cultivation (Scudder, 36-5; Colson, 138; Ncube, 2004: 41; N9/1/17, NC Sebungwe, 1914). The fields could be cultivated twice a year, first during the rains and again during the winter after the annual Zambezi flood had receded (Chapman, 92, 94; Colson, 138).

Although the alluvial fields were greatly valued for their high yields and permanency, they were insufficient by themselves to support the dense populations in the river neighbourhoods. As a result, most cultivators also had fields in the poorer soils of the plain beyond the river margin and in the neighbouring hills, where they planted the summer crop in October and November (Colson, 138; Chapman, 92, 94; Ncube, 2004: 42). The two types of fields cultivated by most of the Tonga therefore guaranteed two crops each year and security from famine. In the vicinity of the Zambezi-Sengwa junction, three separate crops were reported in 1899 (Chorley, 13; Gielgud, 380; Ncube, 2004: 42; NB6/1/2, NC Sebungwe, 1899). In the years of food shortage, when the summer crops had failed due to drought, pests or some other unforeseen reasons, the winter crops were invaluable and kept the people alive (Hemans, 122; N9/1/17, NC Sebungwe, 1914). Consequently, death from actual starvation was very uncommon in the valley, a fact that Livingstone had learnt as early as 1855, when he was in the valley for the first time (Livingstone, 535; Ncube, 2004: 41-43, 96).

Similarly, in the Nambiya area of settlement, west of the Gwayi River, where arable land occurred in isolated patches of good ground, they had adapted their settlement pattern to the exploitation of this marginal environment by settling in correspondingly small, dispersed villages, concentrated on the islands of fertile soil, and also cultivated the alluvial soils in the river valleys (NB6/1/2, NC Sebungwe, 1899; N9/4/29 vol.1, NC Sebungwe, 1915; N9/4/31 vol.1, NC Sebungwe, 1916; Ncube, 1994: 61). The Nambiya also developed localized preferences for certain crops, depending on the nature of the country occupied. It is clear that bulrush millet and finger millet were the major crops grown on the light sandy soils of the drier bush. Maize and sorghum were far more general in the heavier soils of the vleis lands and open glades in the south of the Nambiya area and along the upper Gwayi valley, than in the north and centre of the Nambiya area, where the soil was generally unsuitable for maize (N3/24/35, Native Reserves, Wankie, 1914-1923; NBH1/1/1, NC Wankie, 1912; S235/501, NC Wankie, 1923; Ncube, 2004: 44).

In the majority of years, the region's people were generally able to harvest enough grain crops to store for several months after each harvest. Grain storage facilities existed at every village in the region. Livingstone observed these storage facilities in Tonga villages in 1860, while Chapman observed them in the Nambiya villages in 1862 (Livingstone, 226, 235; Chapman, 148). However, since storage problems often made it difficult for stored grain to last until the next harvest, animal husbandry provided the chief defence against scarcity (Ncube, 1994: 81-84; Ncube, 2004: 45). The slaughter of large numbers of small stock in times of food shortage occasioned by crop failure became the major means of countering scarcity. Livestock represented stored surplus wealth that could be exchanged for surplus crops from other areas in the event of local scarcity.

Thus, despite the risks associated with agriculture in the region, in the majority of years, famine was not experienced because of the efficiency of pre-colonial agricultural techniques, a fact that seems to explain why, despite the many challenges associated with agriculture in this environment;

it still remained the major element in the region's economies (Ncube, 1994: 66).

### **Colonial Developments and Population Displacement, Wankie District, 1903-1960.**

The first population displacement in the region occurred in 1903 in the Wankie District as a direct consequence of alienation and development of the Wankie Coal Concession area. The Concession area lay within the area of the greatest concentration of the Nambiya population in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the majority of the Nambiya population was concentrated in the area between the Deka and Nyantuwe rivers, extending from the Bumbusi area in the south and the middle reaches of the Lukosi and Nyantuwe rivers, to the Zambezi valley in the north, from whence their settlement area expanded westward to incorporate the middle and lower Matetsi valleys (Ncube, 1994: 149; Ncube, 2004: 73). When the development of the Wankie Coal Concession began in 1903, all the Nambiya who lived within the Concession area were forcibly removed to the east of the Concession and resettled in the hilly and stony areas traversed by the middle courses of the Lukosi and Nyantuwe rivers, where there was little arable land away from the river valleys. The Coal Concession area became the first tract of Nambiya land to be alienated to Europeans in the district (Tabona, Hwange District, 13/12/88; Nyelukwa, Hwange District, 15/12/88; Mukoma, Hwange District, 5/1/89; NB6/1/5, NC Wankie, 1904).

The second population displacement that occurred in the Wankie District was a direct result of the construction of the railway line from Bulawayo to the Wankie coalfields in 1903, and its extension to the Victoria Falls in 1904. This development led to the pegging of most of the inhabited Nambiya land that surrounded the railway, and its alienation to Europeans. This land was surveyed into European farms between 1904 and 1909 (NB6/1/10, NC Wankie, 1909; Palmer, 276; Hemans, 198, 200). By the end of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 3,383,800 acres of the best Nambiya land had been alienated to Europeans, an area representing 45% of the total area of the Wankie District (Palmer, 1977: 183, 276; Ncube, 2004: 73; N3/24/35, NC Wankie, 1914).

In 1909, the Native Commissioner, noting the increasing number of European settlers in the Wankie District, ordered the eviction of all the Nambiya who still lived on lands surrounding the railway that had now been designated as European land, to a new locality where a 'Reserve' would later be established (NB6/1/10, NC Wankie, 1909). Consequently, all the Nambiya who occupied the European farms that surrounded the section of the railway between Dete and the upper Matetsi River were evicted and resettled in the Lukosi and Nyantuwe valleys, in which the earlier evictees from the Coal Concession area had been resettled in 1903 (Elliott, 1). This resulted in overpopulation in these valleys and exerted considerable pressure on the little arable land that was available in these river valleys because the surrounding country is hilly and stony. What makes the evictions of the Nambiya from the European farms more poignant is the fact that most of these farms were not put to any productive use after the evictions. In fact, most of the farms remained under-utilized throughout the colonial period (Ncube, 2004: 74)

When a reserve was finally demarcated for the evicted Africans by the Native Reserves Commission in 1914, it was located in a largely uncultivable, extremely hilly and waterless part of the district. The Wankie Reserve had only a small proportion of land suitable for cultivation. There were no large tracts of arable land anywhere in the reserve and what arable land there was occurred in very small patches scattered here and there throughout the reserve. Commenting on the agricultural potential of the Wankie Reserve, the Native Commissioner observed that 'out of any block of ground available at present, nine tenths would be practically useless owing to the want of water and the rocky nature of the soil' (N3/24/35, Native Reserves, 1914, 1922; N3/8/2, Alteration of Boundaries, 1909-1923; Ncube, 2004: 75). Most of the Nambiya expressed unwillingness to

move into the Wankie Reserve because they were aware of the low agricultural potential of the part of the district in which it had been demarcated, choosing to remain on Unalienated land (N3/24/35, Native Reserves, 1914-1923).

Since similar resistance to movement into the reserves had already been experienced by the BSA Company Administration in other districts much earlier than in the Wankie District, the Commercial Branch of the BSA Company had devised and introduced a land rent on Unalienated land in 1909, which was designed to induce African movement into the reserves. The land rent had transformed all Africans who continued to live on Unalienated land into tenants. Throughout Southern Rhodesia, the rent had been used as a means of driving more and more unwilling Africans into the reserves (Arrighi, 1970: 208; Ncube, 2004, 75-76). In the Wankie District the rent was met with overt resistance from the time of its introduction, and for a long time, did not achieve the desired result of driving the Nambiya into the reserve. There were threats from many Nambiya communities of protest migrations to Northern Rhodesia or Bechuanaland in order to avoid the rent (N3/16/6 vol.2, NC Wankie, 1915). Confronted with this situation, the BSA Company decided to suspend rent collection in the district until such a time that the Nambiya were in a position to pay the rent. The rent was deferred until 1919, when some improvement in the agricultural produce was expected because of the copious rains of 1918 (N3/16/6, BSAC Commercial Branch, 1918).

When the resumption of the collection of the land rent in 1919 did not result in any significant increase in the scale of Nambiya movement into the Wankie Reserve, increasing pressure was brought to bear upon the Chief Native Commissioner by the Wankie District Farmers' Association in 1920, and the Rhodesia Agricultural Union in 1923, to evict all the Africans who lived on Unalienated land which was adjacent to European farms, and move them into the reserve. The White farmers complained that the Africans were starting veldt fires and tended to 'squat' on European farmland (N3/24/35, Secretary, Wankie District Farmers' Association, 1922; Secretary, Rhodesia Agricultural Union, 1923). The subsequent evictions substantially increased the scale of the Nambiya movement into the Reserve.

Because of the increased scale of Nambiya movement into the reserve, it soon proved to be too small to absorb all the evictees as it could only absorb half of those who lived outside it on Unalienated land. The situation was deemed sufficiently serious to necessitate the creation of two additional reserves (Wankie Additional Reserves A and B) on land adjoining the main Wankie Reserve in 1924, in order to cope with the influx (Palmer, 1977: 276; N3/24/35, Native Reserves, 1914-1923). However, little settlement took place in these additional reserves because Reserve A was 'waterless, rocky and barren', while, according to the Native Commissioner, there was no 'poorer land in Rhodesia' than Reserve B (N3/24/35, Native Reserves, 1914-1923; Palmer, 1977: 276).

In 1928 Nambiya communities that had remained on Unalienated land south of the railway line between Dete and the Lukosi River, were evicted following the declaration of the Wankie Game Reserve (Davison, 1978). The Game Reserve took up the whole southern part of the District, which received better rains and had the best land in the district, viz. the fertile flatlands of the Upper Deka and Bumbusi Ruins areas, locally known as *ntandabale*, where some intensive wetland farming had also evolved on marshes, vleis, streamsides, and river banks. Despite resistance, all the communities in this area were forcibly removed to the north of the railway and resettled in the reserves and agriculturally less productive, hilly country in the north, after the police had burnt down their villages (M. Mukoma, Hwange District, 05/01/89).

Although major changes occurred to the land situation in the district between 1930 and 1960 as a result of four forest areas over much of the remaining Unalienated land, no changes occurred to the extent of the African reserves (Ncube, 1994: 157). The desperate situation in the District's Reserve Area 'B' was worsened by the resettlement of about 400 Ndebele families who had been evicted from European farms and Unalienated land in the Essexvale, Matobo and Gwelo areas in 1955 (Elliot, 1965: 12). This led to a considerable increase in the population of man and beast in the reserve, and aggravated the rapid deterioration of the little cultivable soil available, which was already underway.

### **Colonial Developments and Population Displacement, Sebungwe District, 1910-1960.**

The first major compulsory population movement among the Tonga occurred in 1913 during Southern Rhodesia's first sleeping sickness campaign, which sought to remove all the Africans who lived in the rapidly expanding fly belts in the Sebungwe, Lomagundi and Hartley Districts. The expansion of these fly-belts followed their drastic contraction during the rinderpest panzootic of 1889-1896, which had affected the whole of Southern Africa. During the rinderpest, big game populations (long considered the hosts of the tsetse fly) had been decimated throughout Southern Rhodesia. This had resulted in the elimination of the fly from the most of the country, except for three small foci of fly that remained located in north-western Zimbabwe at the Manzituba vlei, the mouth of the Sengwa River, and the Umniati River (Ford, 283). Entomological research has shown that the rapid recovery of the tsetse fly areas in the post-rinderpest era was caused by colonial policies such as the general disarmament of the African population and the prohibition of hunting (Ford, 300-1). Research on the 'Big Game Theory' has shown that Africans armed with guns had been able to effect a considerable reduction of big game in the region, resulting in the elimination of the tsetse fly from large areas of the region (Selous, 152-6). Entomological research has shown that, in many ways, the rapid expansion of the fly areas after 1900 reflected the unimpeded growth of big game populations, free from any checks on them such as Africans hunting with guns. It has been shown that between 1896 and 1913, the Sebungwe fly-belt's rate of expansion from its Manzituba vlei residual focus was 28.2% per year (Ford, 300-1).

In response to the threat of 'sleeping sickness' or Human Trypanosomiasis, the colonial government decided early in 1913 to remove 3,000 Tonga from the upland areas that were threatened, and resettled them on Unalienated land in the neighbourhood of the Zambezi River (L2/2/117/2, Asst. Director, Land Settlement, 1913; Colson, 1960: 12). There is evidence that the forced removals of the 1913 created tremendous population pressure on the agricultural land along the Zambezi River and set off an agrarian crisis in the District. The Native Commissioner's Annual Report for 1942 reveals the desperate demographic and agrarian situation that prevailed in the Tonga neighbourhoods along the Zambezi by the 1940s. It shows that Chief Binga and Chief Sikalenke's people, numbering about 2,000, were concentrated in an area of about 65 square kilometres, and that all the land in these chiefdoms, with the exception of the river banks, had been worked out and could no longer support the population (S1215/1432/4, NC Sebungwe, 1942). Coupled with the effects of natural increase over time, this overpopulation resulted in a considerable impoverishment of the originally rich alluvial fields along the Zambezi in the 1950s and '60s.

In 1942 the Native Commissioner received many requests from the Tonga who had been resettled along the Zambezi in 1913, for permission to return to their old settlements in the fly-area, which had fertile land, because of annual harvest failures along the Zambezi due to impoverished soils. Nevertheless, none of the Tonga were permitted to return to old settlements but were resettled on new lands outside the fly area (S1215/1432/4, Acting Chief Entomologist, 1942). At the same time,

many unofficial Tonga population movements out of the lower Zambezi valley floor into the central and southern portions of the district were occurring at this time throughout the District, as people fled the increasing poverty of the soils in the valley (Vincent, 84-85).

The most massive eviction and resettlement of the Tonga occurred in the late 1950s to make way for the construction of the Kariba dam. Since it was expected that the damming of the Zambezi would throw back the waters of the river for more than 240 kilometres, and form a lake covering some 5,180 square kilometres that would submerge the Zambezi plain and many of the lower hills, the government of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland decided to evict all the Tonga who lived below the 488-meter elevation (Anderson, 37-39). This decision led to the phased eviction of 23,000 Tonga people from the Zimbabwean side of the Middle Zambezi valley to the escarpment between 1956 and 1958. Most of the Tonga were relocated as far as 160 kilometres south of the Zambezi valley (Latham, 6-17; Nesham, 22-27). The loss of the fertile alluvial fields of the Zambezi valley forced the Tonga into dry-land farming in the rugged foothills of the escarpment, where they were forced to open new fields in the poorer, drought-prone Karroo uplands. Poor resettlement planning led to the resettlement of many evictees among host communities, forcing them to share the limited resources available, such as land for cultivation, firewood, building materials and pastures, thereby worsening land pressure, deforestation, soil erosion and overgrazing. Recurrent falling yields due to drought and infertile fields further impoverished the resettled communities by forcing many of them to resort to selling off their cattle for survival (Chenje, 232-3). The depletion of cattle, which had been a major means of countering scarcity, left the Tonga more vulnerable to the periodic droughts in this region and contributed significantly to the number of famine years they experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Colonial Agrarian Crisis and Famine in North-western Zimbabwe, 1903 – 1960.**

The roots of the agrarian crisis that developed in the African reserves of North-western Zimbabwe in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be traced back to population displacement and the confinement of growing African populations in dry, uncultivable, sandveld and stony areas, under the colonial policy of land segregation. There is evidence that the agrarian crisis began as early as 1903, and that most of the colonial famines were the result of repeated harvest failures due to the impoverishment of the alluvial soils in the river valleys due to the tremendous population pressure that had been created on all the agricultural land along the Zambezi River and its tributaries by forced population movement (Scudder, 219; S1215/1432/4, Acting Chief Entomologist, 1942; S1215/1432/4, NC Sebungwe, 1942). Throughout the colonial period, the Wankie and Sebungwe districts became the chief areas of scarcity in northern Matabeleland. Scarcity came to be concentrated among the poor and weak, taking the form not of famine mortality but of endemic malnutrition (Iliffe, 11).

North-western Zimbabwe suffered its worst famines in the 1940s and 1950s because of repeated harvest failures, as the agrarian crisis created by land alienation, population displacement, population growth, and land degradation in the African Reserves became more acute. There is evidence that the increased population pressure and degeneration of soil fertility along the Zambezi became worse in the 1940s and contributed significantly to the intensity of these famines (Scudder, 219; Iliffe, 90). Iliffe has shown that throughout the colony in general, from 1930 at least, land alienation and population growth were reducing total African grain production per head, although the effects were felt at different times in different regions (10-11). The drastic increase in the environmental degradation that was evident in the African reserves in the 1940s was in large part, a function of the growth of both human and livestock populations, leading to overcrowding and shortage of farmable land. Ngwabi Bhebe and Henry V. Moyana have shown that the dismal

economic conditions in the African reserves during the colonial period were prevalent throughout the country (Bhebe, 1-160; Moyana, 1-228).

In many ways, the deplorable environmental degradation and declining productivity that was evident in the African reserves also reflected changes in the land-use system that were forced on the Africans by their relocation from their traditional lands. For example, the majority of the Valley Tonga were faced with a reorganization of their methods of land usage following their resettlement in the hills, on land that would normally be subject to shifting cultivation only. But since there was insufficient farmable land in the hills to permit shifting cultivation because of the increased population now dependent on it, new techniques needed to be introduced to permit a conservative type of agriculture based on rotation, and possibly, the use of fertilizer, which the Tonga could not afford (Colson, 149).

Although in the 1910s the colonial government took over the relief of scarcity in North-western Zimbabwe by introducing the Famine Relief Scheme, which entailed the establishment of grain dumps at Native Commissioners' stations during famines and the transportation of some of the grain to the villages for sale, most people in the region could not afford to buy the grain at famine prices (N9/4/30 vol.2, NC Sebungwe, 1916; N9/4/31 vols. 1&2, NC Sebungwe/Wankie, 1916). Iliffe has argued that this colonial situation, whereby it was possible for people who could not afford to buy grain to starve to death outside well-stocked grain stores, was indicative of the fact that the nature of famine itself had changed from its pre-colonial form. Whereas in the pre-colonial period people had starved when there was no food, in the colonial period people starved when they had no money to buy food which was available (10-11). Greenough has discussed a similar situation in Bengal, India, during the famine of 1943-1944, where people actually starved to death outside famine relief centres that were well-stocked with grain for sale (1-342).

When the Famine Relief Scheme was first introduced in North-western Zimbabwe, those who did not have cash were permitted to purchase the grain using small stock. This was later discouraged in response to the labour demand for public works throughout the country, and people were subsequently sold grain on credit, in return for working for six months on road construction and other public works in the district, without pay (N9/4/30 vol.2, NC Sebungwe, 1916). However, the majority of the Africans in the Wankie and Sebungwe Districts failed to benefit from the Famine Relief Scheme because the colonial government failed to transport the grain to the Zambezi valley, where the majority of the region's population lived, because of the steep and rugged nature of the Zambezi escarpment. Other factors included the great distances that had to be travelled by starving people to the Native Commissioners' stations where the grain dumps were located. The problem of distance was particularly prevalent in the Sebungwe District. In June 1916 it was reported that the distance from the Zambezi valley to the administrative centre at Gokwe was so great (320 kilometres) that the Tonga who went there to buy grain ended up no better than they were before, because the greater part of what they bought would be consumed on the return journey (N9/4/30 vol.2, NC Sebungwe, 1916; N9/4/31 vols. 1&2, NC Sebungwe, 1916). Similarly, in 1923 the Native Commissioner, Sebungwe, reported that, "While grain supplies were available in 1922 for all those who wished to purchase, Africans living at a distance were unable or unwilling to travel the great distance to Gokwe and preferred to subsist on what the veldt would yield them" (N9/1/26 vol.2, NC Sebungwe, 1923; Iliffe, 76).

## **Conclusion**

Using North-western Zimbabwe as a case study, this paper provides contrary evidence to the arguments found in much of the settler historiography that celebrates the "triumph" of European

settler capitalist agriculture in Southern Rhodesia, and maintains that capitalist farming succeeded in preventing famine in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The paper presents two arguments that show that the very same factors that led to triumph of White settler capitalist agriculture in the country, led to the underdevelopment of the African agricultural sector, and created an acute agrarian crisis in the African Reserves, thereby contributing significantly to the number of famine years experienced by Africans in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Firstly, the paper shows that in the majority of pre-colonial years, general scarcity or famine had not been experienced in the region because of a number of factors, such as, the pre-colonial settlement patterns throughout the region which had been adapted to maximise agricultural exploitation of the region's marginal environment, and the efficiency of the agricultural adaptations to the marginal environment. However, famines (and death by starvation) became more common in the Zambezi valley in the colonial period (viz. 1903, 1912, 1916, 1922, 1933, 1942, 1947, and 1960) because segregatory racial land policies, that led to land dispossession and displacement of the region's societies, had destroyed the pre-colonial agricultural techniques that had minimized the risk of crop failure. Related colonial developments such as the imposition of taxes and land rents, the expropriation of African labour from the peasant economy, and deteriorating environmental conditions in the African Reserves, had further impoverished the region's societies, making them more vulnerable to the natural cause of famine, drought.

Secondly, it is shown that colonial schemes for the control of famine, ranging from schemes devised by the Native Affairs Department in the early decades, to famine control systems provided by the Maize Control Board and White farmers in later years, were ineffectual and did not succeed in replacing the indigenous systems that colonial rule had destroyed. The Famine Relief Scheme introduced by White capitalist farming into the region in the 1910s did not render much assistance during famines due to the general shortage of cash among the impoverished Tonga and Nambiya for the purchase of grain from the Native Commissioners' stations, which served as famine-grain stores. Furthermore, throughout colonial period under study, the colonial government failed to transport the grain during famines to the Zambezi valley, where the majority of the region's population lived, due to the vast distances between the Native Commissioner's offices and the Zambezi valley. This colonial situation, whereby it was possible for people who could not afford to buy grain to starve to death outside well-stocked grain stores, is indicative of the fact that the nature of famine itself had changed from its pre-colonial form.

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# **Indigenous Knowledge Systems as a Survival Tool in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Rural Zimbabwe. A Case for Selected Rural Communities in Zimbabwe**

By

Isaac Choto and Joshua Chakawa

## **Abstract**

This study explores the indigenous knowledge systems which Zimbabweans in rural areas, particularly in Mashonaland West, used as a mechanism to survive in the past decade against the backdrop of economic meltdown, hunger and a variety of other debilitating challenges. Basically, the paper adopts a field-based qualitative and ethnographic approach which involves field surveys, direct observation, unstructured interviews and evaluation of traditional practices. As researchers, we participated in some of the activities we went out to observe. Rather than relying on formal interviews in artificial settings, the approach we adopted allowed for observation in natural settings. As the Zimbabwean crisis deepened rural communities relied more on their indigenous knowledge to cope with the life threatening challenges they faced in the areas of food supply, health, agriculture, hygiene and trade among others. However, the study decries the lack of a multidisciplinary approach to research in indigenous knowledge systems and recommends that the government, the academia and development agencies should adopt strategies to revive and mainstream these knowledge systems in community development programmes for sustainable rural development.

## **Introduction**

Zimbabwe entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a litany of serious economic and political challenges which went on to threaten people's food and medical security. The lack of food and medical security was felt more acutely in rural communities. This paper investigates the indigenous knowledge systems which the rural folk invoked and made use of in their quest to survive in a turbulent and decaying socio-economic and political environment. It goes further to interrogate the effectiveness and sustainability of the resuscitation and use of indigenous knowledge systems as a survival strategy. As it interrogates the above, the paper advocates for a thorough investigation into local knowledge in a bid to integrate them into existing 'modern' and more scientifically proven systems so that they can become an integral part of Zimbabwe's crusade towards economic development and sustainability.

## **Conceptualising Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

According to Matowanyika (1995: 51), indigenous knowledge systems are localized African systems developed over a long period of time and whose patterns are based upon local knowledge systems and expressed in local languages. He further contends that indigenous knowledge systems are in balance with the local environment or seek such a balance. They are also influenced from within, from other indigenous systems and from national and international systems. Thus, indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) are essentially African in origin even though they might display foreign influences. His definition tallies with that of Warren et al (1995: xv) who defines IKSs as knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society as contrasted to international knowledge which is generated through universities and research institutes. It is vital because it forms the information base for a society and facilitates communication and decision-making.

In pre-colonial Africa, the widespread and productive use of indigenous knowledge systems reflected itself in such industries as metal-ware, architecture, pottery, food, clothing, basketry,

leather-ware, woodwork, weather forecast, selection and storage of seed among other areas. The study seeks to establish the extent to which the knowledge systems have been redeployed after years of neglect and devaluation as people tried to cope with their day to day existential challenges in the midst of political turmoil and international condemnation.

From the onset, it is imperative to bear in mind that there are various problems commonly encountered in the study of indigenous knowledge systems. Matowanyika (51) observes the following problems: lack of systematic records, the easily degradable nature of indigenous knowledge systems, the difficulties in identifying them due to recurrent changes and language barriers for foreign researchers. In addition, local people perceive non-African systems as modern and superior to theirs. We tried to address the inhibitive effects of these challenges by using multiple data gathering tools such as observations, media surveys, interviews and studying the activities of Non-Governmental Organizations working towards the revival of indigenous knowledge systems.

### **A Review of Zimbabwe Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Today, most Zimbabweans in both rural and urban areas have 'forgotten' and 'lost' knowledge about their traditional medical remedies, food items, agricultural practices and mining and mineral processing skills. Only sections, though small and marginalized, of traditional institutions still survive. However, when faced with challenges which cannot be solved by Western means owing to high cost or unavailability of foreign remedies people in rural communities have always sought refuge in their indigenous knowledge which has existed and assisted them for centuries. Although a great deal of this knowledge has been lost over the years, some of it has been preserved through oral tradition and some still existing traditional institutions especially in the field of medicine, nutrition and agriculture.

In the medical field, African herbalists were so efficient in dealing with a number of health problems even where modern medicine failed. In 1959, Barker, who worked as a doctor in Zululand, noted that:

Where we failed in hopeless cancers or in chronic ailments, the spirit world would once again be invoked...yet I fancy that return to the magician owed more to love than to fear... To some extent, their continued existence like that of the tribal medicine man must be laid at our door, we do not know enough (Barker : 1959;104).

The choice of going to a traditional healer or otherwise was and is still guided by a number of factors. Chief among them include: the cause attributed to the illness by the patient and his social group, whether the illness is normal or abnormal and the failure by the doctors to diagnose the cause (Bourdillon: 1997;99).

Traditional medical practitioners were quite knowledgeable in their areas of specialization to the extent that their knowledge was and still continues to be biopirated by pharmaceutical companies. For purposes of this paper, biopiracy is the theft of indigenous medical knowledge from herbalists by scientists. It has also been defined as process whereby external researchers, pharmaceutical companies and food companies get into a community and collect information about the community's livelihood, indigenous knowledge and health care systems without the community's consent. This information and products are used outside the community for commercial purpose. In other words such companies rob the community of their knowledge and products they nurtured over the years (Chigora et al :2007;28). Because of this piracy, most knowledgeable traditional healers

are not willing to be interviewed and give correct information. Their fear is that research into their work is a subtle way of robbing them of their knowledge as such knowledge is often hijacked by established pharmaceutical companies. Generally traditional healers view it as unethical and a disservice to their ancestors if information about their practice and herbs or concoctions is made public. This is so even when the researcher acknowledges them as the source. The matter is even worse without this acknowledgement. MaClean (1985:49-58) argues that traditional healers are right in withholding information since the fears they express are genuine. Many traditional healers have been exploited by modern scientists. As a result, the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) has a Traditional Medical Practitioners Council which supervises and controls the practice of traditional medicine and develops knowledge in the field of traditional healing. Its other mandate is to address issues related to bio-piracy.

The field of Agriculture in Africa is replete with evidence that buttress the view that Africans had already mastered considerable skills and expertise long before the dawn of colonialism. Firstly, Africans in various parts of the continent could irrigate fields using their own technologies. For example, Wickins (1981:41) observes that in early 1824, Hugh Clapperton saw irrigated fields near Katagum in what is now Northern Nigeria though he left no evidence of methods that were used there. In addition, long before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the water wheel was known in the Nile Valley. Rice was grown under irrigation in Madagascar and irrigation was practiced in the Nyanga Mountains of Zimbabwe. Joseph Thompson even observes that in 1883, the Chagga on the slopes of Mt Kilimanjaro constructed miniature canals which they used to irrigate their fields of beans, millet, Indian corn, sweet potatoes, yams and so on (Wickins:1981;41). In this study, we make an effort to establish the extent to which some of these age-old practices are still in use.

Studies show that in Zimbabwe, cultivation levels had reached considerably high levels long before the advent of settler rule. Bourdillon (1998;71) observes that there is evidence in the South of the Shona country of trade in surplus grain from the highveld for stock from the lowveld. This observation is reinforced by Beach who asserts that central houses of the Duma people of the Bikita Section of the Southern Plateau grew crops for sale to the lowlands. In the Middle Sabi, the highland Ndau people grew crops for sale to the people who were settled in the dry valley floor (Beach:1983;52). The peasant economy which these cases exemplify was unconnected to external trade. Further evidence of lucrative agriculture comes from the works of Mudenge (1988). According to him, Father Conceicao states that the Mutapa fields stretched beyond where the eyes could see. Another Catholic missionary, Father Gomes, also claims that the Mutapa Empire had plenty of cattle and food. They actually never saw the bottom of their quituras (matura) or granaries for they were always full of grain (Mudenge:1998;165). This evidence is useable to buttress the view that agricultural knowledge systems in pre-colonial Africa were sustainable. In the context of Zimbabwe's controversial land reform programme which unleashed massive disruptions in both commercial and communal agriculture and the inputs supply chain, it is interesting to find out if people, particularly communal and small scale resettled farmers made use of indigenous knowledge systems to boost production in their farms.

Many questions have been raised on whether the Shona had the capacity to store grain for more than one season. Livineh claims that the Shona could not preserve a crop for one year without it going bad (Beach: 1974:24-25). Another historian, Beach claims that Shona agriculture was perpetually in a state of disequilibria which resulted in severe droughts in the Shona states. Hopkins contemptuously dismisses the argument that because African farmers lacked the plough, they were therefore uninventive. (Hopkins: 1990; 32) .Other studies establish that using their indigenous knowledge systems, the Shona could keep crops like finger millets for 3-5 years without

evidence of deterioration. Dr. Mudenge noted that small grains could actually be kept up to 10 years.(Mudenge:1988:29). Even Beach (1983;252) later acknowledged that storage techniques made it possible to keep grain for up to five years. He concludes that it was a tribute to the Shona agricultural economy that the people managed to ride out of frequent famines on their own lands.

Using their own systems of knowledge, the indigenous people of Hwange already had knowledge of the existence of coal before it was 'discovered' by colonialists. According to Ncube (2004;79) the acclaimed coal discoverer Albert Giere, then a young German gold amalgamator at the Monarch Reef Mine in the Tati Concession had first heard of the coal fields from an African he met while on a hunting trip near the Victoria Falls who told him that there were black stones that burned in Chief Hwange's area some 113km South East of the Falls. Similarly, gold mines scattered all over the country usually followed sites of small mines which had been worked by the indigenous people prior to the advent of colonialism. Ncube further illustrates indigenous knowledge systems that existed prior to the coming of the whites by citing varieties of crops grown, grain storage systems, practices in animal husbandry, iron smelting and blacksmithing, cotton spinning, weaving, salt production and many other activities(Ncube:2004;42-59). However, because Africans lacked the competitive edge and a raft of coercive strategies instituted by colonial governments against indigenous knowledge systems, many Africans soon relinquished their traditional practices and knowledge systems and adopted systems that were foisted on them by their colonizers. This study seeks to establish the extent to which Zimbabweans in rural areas have remembered and redeployed some of their indigenous knowledge systems to sustain themselves for the past decade when they were virtually marooned and sealed off from the external world.

### **The Destruction of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Rural Zimbabwe**

The missionaries in their evangelizing mission to Africa brought Christian education which was thought of as a sure way of psychologically conditioning the Africans to abandon their traditional religious belief systems and their faith in traditional healers. Mission schools and hospitals were built around the country to support the missionary crusade and the colonial expedition. Not to be outdone, colonial administrators weighed in by enacting acts like the Witchcraft Suppression Act whose main thrust was to suppress the activities of traditional healers. Gordon Chavhunduka (1995; 5) observes that the Medical Council of Modern Medicine did not recognize traditional healers as medical practitioners. Further, Chavhunduka points out that patients who went to hospitals after being attended to by traditional healers were insulted by nurses. In addition, some employees lost their jobs after absenting themselves from work while being attended to by traditional healers instead of the preferred modern doctors and nurses. To further denigrate traditional healers, colonial officials referred to them as witchdoctors, herbalists, sorcerers or diviners. Emergence of African churches which emphasized on faith healing and a few charlatans who regularly posed as traditional healers in order to swindle unsuspecting people of their hard earned money further contributed to the unwarranted denigration of traditional healers.

From as early as 1903, repressive measures were adopted by colonial administrators in a bid to destroy African Agriculture. This was in spite of the fact that, using their traditional agricultural methods, the Shona had successfully fed sprouting mines and towns. They had survived disastrous famines by exchanging cattle for grain. Records show that the Shona of the Salisbury District had accumulated about 2000 cattle by 1895. The 1896 drought compelled them to trade a thousand beasts and eat another 500.(Beach:1983; 259). The cases cited above are a small fraction of the numerous cases we find in many historical, archaeological and sociological studies. However, the cases cited serve to lead us to the next part of our study which looks at whether or not the people in rural Zimbabwe, particularly in Mashonaland West, have been able to resuscitate traditional

knowledge systems in light of the 21<sup>st</sup> century crisis that wrecked havoc in many people's lives.

### **Indigenous systems and the 21<sup>st</sup> century crisis**

As mentioned in the introduction, the 21<sup>st</sup> century crisis in Zimbabwe was particularly instigated by the political polarization between ZANU PF, which has been in power since 1980, and the Tsvangirai-led MDC which entered politics in 1999. The land reform which the ZANU PF led government embarked on created an incendiary atmosphere in the political and socio-economic landscape of Zimbabwe. As a result of this, the country suffered extreme ostracisation from the international community. The European Union imposed sanctions, the United States Government enacted the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act which also imposed a raft of sanctions against the Mugabe-led Zimbabwe government. Multilateral lending institutions, with the leadership of the World Bank and The International Monetary Fund and a host of Donor Agencies withdrew support for the Zimbabwe government citing the breakdown of the rule of law, financial mismanagement, a lack of democratic practices and many other reasons. In the context of this ostracisation, the resultant economic meltdown, political polarization and a fair share of repeated droughts and hunger spells, the rural folks suffered the most. In the ensuing analysis we study how these people had to cope and manage their lives in the areas of food security and agriculture, health, trade and other economic oriented activities. Emphasis is mainly on how the people used their indigenous knowledge system to deal with their day to day challenges.

### **Methodology**

This study is basically qualitative in nature. As Dooley succinctly points out, qualitative research refers to "social research based on non-quantitative observations made in the field and analysed in non-statistical ways. The subjects may or may not be aware that they are being observed for social research purposes" (Dooley 1990:76). As a field-based study, we actually had to visit selected rural communities where we observed people as they battled to stay afloat in a sea of life-threatening challenges. The rural communities we visited as both participant and non-participant observers are scattered in the Mashonaland West province particularly Sechuru in Sanyati District, Obva in Makonde, Mahwada/Mudzimu in Hurungwe West District and Inyati near Mhangura in Makonde District. Apart from these selected areas in Mashonaland West, we also interviewed a small number of people from other provinces just to ascertain the relevance and applicability of our findings to areas outside Mashonaland West Province.

The research method we adopted in the rural communities we visited allowed us direct observation and relatively unstructured interviews in natural field settings. Because of the genuine social interactions we had with the subjects, we inevitably enjoyed the opportunity to indulge in flexible, spontaneous and open-ended questions. This made it possible for us to glean as much information from the subjects as possible without provoking unnecessary suspicion.

### **Coping Strategies**

Most researches carried out in rural areas have tended to ignore coping strategies which people resorted to in times of difficulties such as droughts and economic recessions. When harvests were poor in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, the most common techniques were hunting and gathering. Gathering wild fruits in times of drought was mainly practiced by the Tonga people who had apparently advanced techniques of removing toxic ingredients in certain tubers before eating them. (Ncube :2004)

The highly contested land reform programme the government embarked on in 2000 gave birth to a myriad of challenges which saw many rural folks elbowed out of the fast deteriorating economy. Systems that used to support them and give a semblance of normalcy in their daily lives in areas such as agriculture, food supply, health, education and others suffered an unprecedented massive attack and eventual collapse which ultimately left rural folks in a state of quandary and helplessness. It is in this moment of desperation that rural communities resorted to long forgotten age-old techniques to ward off hunger, disease and the numerous deprivations which stared them in the face.

### **Coping Strategies in Agriculture**

Rural communities in Zimbabwe have been for years supported mainly by agriculture than any other economic activity. Each communal household has a piece of land on which they derive their staple food and grow some cash crops such as cotton, sunflowers and others. From 1980 to the late 1990s, the Zimbabwe government consistently provided agricultural support to communal farmers in the form of fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, technical know how and soft loans. This contributed immensely towards the creation of self contained and self-sustaining rural communities. All this came to a screeching halt in the post 2000 period when resources dried up and communal farmers were left to fend for themselves. The rapid devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar made life even more difficult for communal farmers.

Without fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides and other agricultural inputs they had grown accustomed to, communal farmers had to make do with what was available and useable as substitutes. Munyaradzi Mutemi, a communal farmer in Sechuru, said that farmers resorted to the use of farmyard cattle manure as an organic fertilizer that improved the nutritional value of the soil, its structure, aeration and drainage. In addition to cattle manure, farmers used ash for correcting the acidity and alkalinity of the soil, a veritable substitute for lime. Anthills were also dug and spread in fields in order to improve the nutritional value of the soil and its structure. Farmers who stay close to Kachure Mine in Sechuru visited this disused mine and collected bates droppings which they used as top dressing in their gardens. (Munyaradzi; 2009). Except the application of bates droppings reported in areas close to the disused Kachure Mine in Sechuru, the other nutrient supplement methods cited above were widely applied in many of the areas we visited in Mashonaland West.

The collapse of the agricultural inputs supply industry in the post 2000 period meant that farmers in general and rural communal farmers in particular, faced a herculean task in their efforts to secure key inputs such as seed. In Zimbabwe, maize is a staple food. A poor maize harvest translates to hunger. A good maize harvest is consistently guaranteed by, among other inputs like fertiliser and herbicides, a good seed variety suitable for the rainfall received in a particular region. Faced with the scarcity of certified seed varieties they were used to, farmers resorted to traditional maize seed varieties. From Shingirirai Kuzondiwana an A1 resettled farmer in Inyati, we gathered that there was an increasing use of open pollinated varieties such as hickory or king/white Salisbury and Kalahari. (Kuzondiwana:2009) On maturity, this maize seed variety typically bears an eight-lined cob with varying grain sizes. Although the yield per hectare is lower than certified hybrid seed varieties from Sedco and Pannar, it was nevertheless a viable substitute. Those who could not access this seed variety, selected their seed from the seed of a previous harvest, preferably from a certified variety or first generation of hybrid seed. Others had to give away their goats, chicken or other valuables in their possession of value in exchange for the locally available traditional varieties. As things continued to worsen in agriculture and the economy in general, rural farmers started to build reserves of their own traditional seed and that selected from the yield of a first generation hybrid seed. Others started to grow their own hybrid seed which they sold to their

neighbours and to commercial seed houses if the harvest was good.

### **Grain Storage and Preservation**

The farmers who were fortunate enough to have a big yield of maize had to worry about the preservation of the grain so that it would last for a season or two without the risk of it going bad. In many cases, communal farmers over the years have been using fumigators/fumigants like Target Chirindamura or Shumba to protect their grain against weevils. With very little or no money to spare, the farmers opted for traditional means of preserving their yield. Many people within the locality preserved their grain by collecting the ashes of burnt shelled maize cobs and mixing it with the grain. (Choto:2009) This exercise was repeated each time they noticed that their grain was starting to get affected by weevils. Another method was the use of dried or fresh gum tree leaves. The leaves were mixed with the grain before it was stored in the granary.

Another typical characteristic of communal farmers in Zimbabwe-Mashonaland West is not an exception is that nearly every homestead keeps a herd of cattle. The wealth of a rural farmer is largely determined by his or her herd of cattle. This has been so for decades if not centuries. Cattle provide draught power, manure and are also a source of income. Deprived of the privilege to enjoy free dipping services and cattle vaccination programmes to prevent tick related diseases and killer pandemics such as anthrax and lumpy skin which government traditionally provided to rural communities, many farmers suffered huge losses particularly in Sechuru and Makonde areas. Once again, rather than watching idly while their cattle died, many farmers had to dig deep into their indigenous knowledge reservoirs in order to save their herd. Those cattle that looked sickly were given a dose made up of the bark or leaves of a climber called Bambamupani in Shona which was mixed with salt, soot and water. This potent concoction which the ailing cow was forced to drink was meant to dose it against parasitic intestinal or gastric worms. Wounds were cured by administering the powdered substance from the bark of the Murima and Mukundahonye trees which was mixed with salt. (Chaparadza: 2009) This medication instantly killed worms that would have grown on the festering wound. Other farmers with access to pesticide such as fen kill and Rogor mixed this with water in recommended proportions and sprayed their cattle to prevent ticks. Although there were many fatalities some animals recovered and these methods which enjoyed widespread use in many areas. Some desperate farmers even applied home-made beer on cattle suffering from lumpy skin. The beer was applied on the lumps. Again this method registered limited success. If the disease persisted, the beast was slaughtered and with gold as a medium of exchange was sold to other villagers and unsuspecting gold panners. This practice was discouraged by government officials as it posed a health hazard to the people who consumed the meat.

### **Food Sources and Types**

With the increasing shortages in the supply of food, itself a culmination of the near collapse of agriculture owing to the contested land reform, drought spells and the economic meltdown, rural people in many parts of Zimbabwe had to recollect the past, innovate and devise methods of finding alternative sources of food. In Honde Valley, raw bananas were boiled, peeled and eaten. With resources permitting, sugar or salt were added. People were so hungry that they could not wait for the fruits to ripen. A mixture of avocados and bananas locally referred to as 'dhotonya' was also a common meal. (Nyamutsaka :2009) Our findings in Honde Valley complemented similar incidences which we observed in Hurungwe. However, in Hurungwe the boiled raw bananas were eaten without the addition of avocados due to their scarcity in Mashonaland West. In some extraordinary cases in Zaka, hunger stricken people dug up the tuber of banana trees, peeled and dried them before pounding the dried stuff into a flour-like substance which was used to prepare



porridge. (Madzore:2009) Apparently, this particular method has no historical precedence and is a typical case of innovativeness spurred on by the deepening food crisis experienced country wide in 2008.

Wild tubers and roots, some of them little known, were widely consumed at the peak of the food crisis in 2008. In many districts of Mashonaland West, a wild tuber known as 'manyanya' in the vernacular was extensively consumed. One of the researchers had the privilege of eating this tuber which did not really taste bad when well cooked and salted. The consumption of this tuber in Hurungwe, Sechuru, Makonde and surrounding areas is not an unusual thing especially when food supplies are scarce.

In Honde Valley, roots of a climber, locally called nyamutata was used to prepare porridge. First the red root was washed clean and left to undergo gradual decomposition until maggots came out. This was intended to flush out toxic substances from the root before it was sun-dried, pounded and used as flour to prepare porridge. Porridge was also made out of the 'nyamupfu' root. The toxic bark was first removed after which the root was cut into small slices, dried and pounded into a blackish powder which was used to prepare sadza or bread. Despite side-effects such as severe stomach discomforts it caused, people endured it all (Nyamutsaka :2009).+++ Other wild fruits widely used to make porridge or as an additive include the 'muchakata/hacha' and 'matamba'. The juicy extract from a ripe 'damba' fruit added to porridge acted as sugar to create a delicious meal which left children crying for more.(Madzore and Hove:2009)

Across Zimbabwe's dams and rivers, legal or illegal fishing became a common means to ward off hunger. In Mashonaland West Province illegal fishing was quite rampant. Fishing, when the economy was still stable, was considered a lowly occupation fit for those who occupied the lowest rungs in the social ladder. As things worsened, professionals such as teachers and nurses quit their jobs to join groups of people raiding rivers and dams for fish. Many people walked long distances from Hurungwe to Morogoro in Sanyati where they camped, caught and dried fish which they brought home to exchange for grain. Many dams such as Biri, Reinfield, Mazvikadei, Shackleton and many other smaller ones around Chinhoyi suffered massive invasion. Many drowned, others were marauded by hungry crocodiles and some succumbed to malaria. Those who brought home their catch enjoyed brisk business as they exchanged their fish with mealie-meal or grain and some bit of foreign currency. Attempts by health officials to curb the spread of cholera particularly in Chinhoyi registered little success as fish and other food stuffs were sold everywhere under circumstances which were hazardous to health. As a result, cholera spread to both rural and urban areas like a veld fire killing a large number of people in its wake.

One of the most important ingredients for many food items and dishes is salt. The economic disaster experienced in 2008 meant that many families found it extremely difficult to access basic commodities like sugar and salt. Around the Sanyati area in the Chiparanganda a communal area across the Sanyati river, villagers who lacked the means to buy salt had to make do with some locally extracted salt which they called 'bare' in Shona. The extraction method involved digging the salty soil from a sampled and proven site usually an anthill. The soil was put in a bucket of water and was allowed to settle for some time before the salty water was sifted into a clean container. This water was applied in stew or any relish as salt. (Mahohoma:2009)

### **Soap /Detergents**

The scarcity of soap and washing powder coupled with the inaccessibility of the worthless Zimbabwean dollar left villagers in a very desperate state. In order to maintain some semblance of

cleanliness and hygiene rural folks had to once again, fall back on indigenous knowledge systems. For purposes of bathing, a creeper called *ruredzo* in Shona was used as bath soap. In more desperate cases the juice of the lemon fruit and ‘*matamba*’ was used as lotion. Many people under Chief Dandawa in Hurungwe used the roots of a bush they locally referred to as ‘*mudyabveni*’ to wash clothes. The bark of the root was peeled and the root was then crushed, put in water for sometime and stirred until the water was foamy or frothy. The detergent could help clean all types of clothes except white ones. Some villagers used pounded leaves of the pawpaw tree mixed with water as a detergent and clothes were left clean.(Chakawa :March 2009) In Sechuru fruits of a thorny bush called ‘*mugabewanyara*’, pound to a powdery substance which was mixed with water until it foamed was widely used to wash clothes. (Choto :2009) Obviously, the effectiveness of these methods is much lower than modern soaps and detergents.

### **Health**

In 2008, the health delivery system tottered at the brink of collapse. Many rural clinics suffered massively from lack of drugs, qualified personnel and other necessities. Unable to afford fares to hospitals in town and money for medical bills and drugs, many villagers suffering from one ailment or the other had no option but to visit traditional healers. In fact, according to Sekuru Manjengwa a traditional healer in Sechuru, business was briskier in 2008 than ever before. (Manjengwa:2009) The traditional healer attended to a variety of ailments ranging from headaches to HIV/AIDS related cases. Some people for fear of being seen by their friends and church mates, paid nocturnal visits to the traditional healer. Of course, it is common knowledge that since the dawn of Christianity and the advent of colonialism, traditional healers, derogatorily referred to as witchdoctors, suffered unremitting denigration from both Christians and colonial administrators who dismissed their work as a grotesque display of paganism. Many people accepted this denigration and ended up visiting the local clinic or district hospital rather than suffer the ‘embarrassment’ of being seen visiting the traditional healer. Well, 2008 and its litany of problems changed many things as it resuscitated and brought into fashion long forgotten practices. In Chinhoyi, the Catholic Health Commission, initially through the leadership of one Sister Yulitha, started to promote and popularize herbal gardens wherein traditional herbs for the cure of a variety of ailments were grown. The Commission has since set up herbal spas where traditional herbs for the cure of such endemic ailments such as hypertension, asthma, diabetes and many others. The concept of herbal spas and the use of traditional herbs have since spread in many parts of the country. This is a clear case of how people have realized the need to reclaim and popularize indigenous herbal medicines as an effective means of dealing with local challenges.

Not only did people visit traditional healers, many consulted and sought divine intervention from prophets and faith healers. In Sechuru, a local woman, from one of the Apostolic Faith sects, became very popular as a prophetess and midwife. She could even solve problems that would normally call for a caesarian operation in a hospital by praying for the pregnant woman and prescribing a fast and the use of some ‘holy’ water and stones.(Ncube :2009). She, too, like the local traditional healer, attended to a variety of ailments and complications. Admittedly, such efforts did not solve many of the other medical challenges people had to grapple with.

### **Sources of Income and Trading Patterns**

The collapse of the economy in 2008 meant that conventional and established sources of income and trading patterns were out of sync with the reality on the ground. The Zimbabwean dollar succumbed to the hyperinflationary environment as it ceased to be the means of exchange much to the detriment of the vulnerable members of the rural communities. Before the complete devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar became a nationwide phenomenon, people in rural communities had

already been surviving in an almost cashless environment. In this section we examine the various means rural folks used to pay for the goods and services they wanted.

In Sechuru, Obva and other districts in Mashonaland West many people resorted to illegal gold panning. With no proper mining resources and modern technology to use, the rural folk, once again, relied more on their indigenous knowledge systems. A rudimentary assortment of picks, shovels, basins and other creatively made accessories was all they used as they descended on plains, plateau, river banks and other sites where gold was thought to be available. The exploration methods used were as rudimentary as their tools. In Sechuru, gold prospectors used two fresh sticks of a tree called *mutowa* in Shona which they held parallel to each other while moving around possible sites. Where the two sticks responded to a centripetal force pulling them towards each other, the prospector stopped and marked the site. Copper wires were also used in similar fashion. In the majority of cases the sites were picked when the prospector spotted the characteristically white granite rocks. After picking the site, in some cases, the culturally sensitive folks paid a visit to a local spirit medium or *svikiro* where they were given some snuff which they were asked to sprinkle on the site they wanted to dig for gold. Of course, the spirit medium gave them a list of conditions which had to be observed. This reliance on spirit mediums in times of difficulties is a very common phenomenon in Zimbabwe. During the liberation struggle, the fighters consulted spirit mediums; in years of drought community elders paid visits to shrines where rainmaking ceremonies were conducted. In the case cited above, those who visited '*ambuya*' the local spirit mediums registered spectacular successes which baffled many.

In many parts of Mashonaland West and even Shamva in Mashonaland Central, gold became the means of exchange. Using gold, the rural folk in Sanyati, Chegutu, Kasimure and other areas, paid for their daily needs. The local miller, traditional healer and even a trip to the city were paid for in gold. Likewise, areas in Manicaland Province, particularly Marange and Chiadzwa, diamond, became 'legal' tender. However, the means of exchange was not solely mineral based. Those who had cattle, goats or other domestic animals used these in exchange for maize mainly and other basic products. In Sechuru, some poor families gave away their daughters in exchange for a few bags of maize. This age old practice which was becoming very rare due to massive campaigns against it by such organisations as The Girl Child Network and Musasa Project became quite common in 2008. Money ceased to determine trading and commercial relationships as it was no longer the sole means of concluding trading and commercial relationships as it yielded to barter trade.

Many barter traders from the cities and towns came in their numbers to rural areas with heavy loads of sugar, salt, soap, second hand clothes and many other essentials which they exchanged for gold maize and a variety of domestic animals. The scenario was basically a clash of equally desperate and poverty stricken people trying by all means necessary, to eke out a living from each other. The city traders were notorious for trying to get the most from the little but cheap wares they were selling. As a result, rural folks derogatorily referred to them as '*makoronyera*' – a Shona word which means charlatans or tricksters. In Sechuru, some equally charlatan rural folks responded by giving the city traders brass coated stones which the gullible traders accepted as they mistook them for gold. It actually takes a trained eye to notice the difference between pure gold and the brass coated stones.

### **Sustainability**

Many survived but others died. In Batanai-Hurungwe, a father and his son ate an inedible root which resulted in the death of the child while the father narrowly escaped death at Chidamoyo Hospital.(Chakawa:2009). A woman in Bikita dug a small anthill called '*chavhurwe*' in Chekenyere

village, boiled and served it to her children. After taking this strange meal, the woman and three of her family members died.(Madzore and Hove: 2009) After helplessly watching her children and realizing that food was least likely to come, one woman in the same area scribbled a note, left it outside the hut as she gathered her children in before setting the thatched hut on fire. Such and many related nerve wrecking cases, are the typical worst case scenario many succumbed to as the Zimbabwean crisis deepened. However, many survived and it is the story of such survivors that has inspired this study.

In spite of all the above, it is regrettable to note that the government and local authorities have done very little by way of reviving and promoting indigenous practices that have saved rural communities for generations. Instead, many traditional practices have continued to suffer massive denigration despite the huge potential they offer in alleviating poverty and suffering in rural communities. For academics and researchers, the challenge is to depart from academic provincialism and adopt a multidisciplinary approach to research whose goal would be to establish and promote the real value of particular herbs, traditional detergents, foodstuffs, farming and mining methods. Biochemists, food scientists, medical practitioners, sociologists, historians among other academic disciplines can work together in a bid to come up with research oriented strategies aimed at enhancing the sustainable use of indigenous knowledge systems so as to ensure that communities are capacitated to sustain themselves in both good and bad times.

In Zimbabwe, the year 2008 and the first two months of 2009 exposed the deficiencies of the so-called 'modern' systems. Zimbabweans in rural communities ask some of the following questions: Can we really trust the use of money as sole means of exchange? To what extent can rural communities rely on clinics and hospitals for their health? How dependable are hybrid seeds and inorganic fertilizers for good harvests? These questions and others deserve maximum attention. A Christian-based organization pioneered a new farming technique they called Farming God's Way which they are encouraging rural communities in Mashonaland West to adopt. The organization basically encourages people to farm using natural means such as minimum tillage and use of locally available organic manure. The method allows the farmers to rely more on what surrounds them rather than on fertilizer and seed houses whose products are erratic and unaffordable. Similar projects can be encouraged in areas like herbal medicine, sustainable mining and food science. This can capacitate rural communities and minimize their dependency on donor organisations and the government. All these attempts can yield fruits if the government and research institutes commit themselves to uncover and integrate indigenous knowledge systems into to the already existing bank.

## **Conclusion**

This study has revealed that for the past ten years, Zimbabweans have experienced unprecedented challenges. The entry into the political arena of the MDC in 1999, ZANU PF's most formidable political opponent since independence, coupled with the heavily contested land reform programme set into motion a myriad of events which saw the country gravitate into a sea of challenges. The economy collapsed, the country experienced repeated droughts and hunger spells and the political landscape was engulfed by a mist of politically fuelled violence and polarization. The freeze in economic and political relations between Zimbabwe and the international community only helped to exacerbate the untold suffering which the generality of Zimbabweans experienced over the last ten years. In the midst of this suffering, Zimbabweans, particularly in rural communities, remembered the past and desperately tried to revive age-old practices and habits as strategies to shore them up against the raging wave of hunger and multiple challenges.

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# **Peasantry Transformation and Policy Planning in Zimbabwe**

**By**

**Crispen D. Hahlani**

## **Abstract**

Since the mid-to-late 1980s, the Zimbabwean peasantry sub-sector has experienced progressive stagnation and subsequent decline. This situation has, no doubt, led to an inordinate delay in the sub-sector's much expected transformation. The main hypothesis in this discourse is that lack of beneficiary participation in policy planning has been the major reason behind this woeful performance by the peasantry sub-sector in Zimbabwe. The purpose of this paper is therefore to analyze the policy planning system in the country and assess its impact on peasantry transformation. In this policy-centric perspective the paper argues that policy planning in this Southern African country has largely been too centralized, rational and top-down, and that, for the most part, this policy process has failed to take into account the views and opinion points of the peasantry, leading to policy claims or policy choices that are inimical to the cause of peasantry transformation in the country. The policy choices discussed in this paper revolve around the following major clusters : land reform, the subsidy regime and, lastly, issues to do with lack of diversification as well as the inherent policy problem of urban bias.

## **Introduction**

The past few years have seen peasantry production in Zimbabwe taking a deep plunge. This downward spiral in peasantry production has, in part, been due to drought and other externalities. However, in the main, a defective policy making system has been the major cause of this steep decline in peasantry production. The slump in production has not only led to loss in rural incomes and employment but has also engendered a situation of acute food shortage resulting in a livelihood crisis of an unprecedented proportion. In stark contrast to the peasant-propelled short-lived green revolution and bread basket status of the early-to-mid 1980s, Zimbabwe, just prior to the 2008/2009 harvest had degenerated into a 'basket case', becoming, according to one Alex Bell, quoting from a report released by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the most food-aid dependent country in the world with more than 80% of the country's population of slightly more than 11million people relying on food-aid to survive (<http://www.swradioafrica.com>,2009). It is against this background of chronic food shortage and rampant poverty in the country that the paper seeks to identify and analyze the major policy issues behind this dramatic deterioration in peasantry production and livelihood fortunes in the country.

This paper is essentially qualitative in methodological approach and is informed mainly by secondary data sources and the writer's own observations, professional experience and personal insights. Theoretically, the paper is premised on both Keynesian neo-classical public choice theory and Marxist thinking. In these two schools of thought, the interest group approach and the important role of the state in policy planning are both evident. The paper therefore assigns both the market

and the state complementary roles in development and further subscribes to the ideology of pluralism in which the state is viewed as being only one among a multiplicity of diverse interests in the policy planning arena.

In its structure, the paper begins by exploring the role of the skewed and racially-inspired colonial agricultural policies and land tenure systems on peasantry underdevelopment in Zimbabwe. This exploration is then followed by a brief discussion of the half-hearted and insincere but positive and growth-oriented policy measures adopted by the post-colonial government in its short-lived support of the peasantry in the country. The paper goes further to identify and analyze the key tenets defining the peasantry as a class before proffering a meaning of peasantry transformation in the Zimbabwean context. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, an evaluation of the policy planning system in the country is given and so are peasantry-focused policy claims or policy choices that have been a logical outcome of the obtaining policy planning system in the country.

### **Colonial Legacy**

Like in most post-colonial societies, the peasantry in Zimbabwe as currently constructed is largely a legacy of the colonial political economy. Racially-inspired British colonial policies adopted by the Rhodesian government which ruled Zimbabwe before the country's independence in 1980 created a dual space economy wherein a well developed, privately-owned, highly productive and large scale commercial agricultural sub-sector existed alongside a poorly endowed and marginally-productive subsistence agricultural sub-sector. While the former was exclusively owned and worked by a few farmers of the caucasian race, the latter was where the majority black population eked its livelihood. Most white-owned farmland was located in agro-ecological regions where rainfall is good and soils rich while on the other hand the majority of black communal farmland was in agro-ecological regions of marginal agricultural value and utility in terms of rainfall and soil fertility (Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, 2006: 645). Apart from being poor in quality, the land allocated to the blacks was also small in area relative to population size. The Land Apportionment Act promulgated in 1930 by the colonial government allocated only 29 million acres of land to the blacks who were over 90% of the population while the less than 10% whites got away with 49 million acres of land (Tshuma, 1997:16).

Added to the differential land endowment structure, the black communal land holders also received little support from the government in the form of extension services and affordable agricultural inputs compared to their counterparts in the commercial sub-sector who enjoyed mandatory and full extension support as well as training and subsidized input-credit. The result of such policy action or lack thereof was low productivity, meager incomes and structural poverty among the black communal households who could only manage to produce at subsistence level and below. While lack of support to peasantry production may have made political sense to the colonial government, such a policy does not make much development sense given the increasing importance of the small-holder sector in agricultural production and rural development in general.

Although both Marxist and liberal classical economic theorists have no faith in the efficiency of small scale cultivation, experience from the more industrially-developed countries of Western Europe, North America and the newly-industrialized economies of the Asian 'Tigers' such as South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia and Malaysia give credence to the efficacy of this sector (Birner & Resnick, Undated). The Green Revolution which started in Mexico in the late 1950s and spread to India and some parts of Africa in the 1960s has also amply demonstrated that the strategy of agricultural intensification can significantly boost output in the face of limited land supply. According to Deiningers and others, it has also been established that for given technology levels,

small farms are more productive and efficient than large farms mainly because of fewer problems of supervision (Deiningers et al, 1992 quoted in Zikhali, 2008:2). The above empirical examples therefore show that small farms can be as potentially, if not more, viable than large farms depending on the form of policy support available.

### **Early Post-Colonial Policy**

It is partly on the basis of the recognition of the efficacy of the small-holder strategy as alluded to above but perhaps also mainly because of the importance of the peasantry as a political constituency that the government of Zimbabwe in 1980 committed itself to redressing the situation of skewed land ownership and low productivity in the peasantry sub-sector. Both the three year Transitional National Development Plan (TNDP) produced in 1981 covering the plan period 1982/3 to 1984/5 and the First Five Year National Development Plan (1986 -1990) had agricultural development in the communal peasant sub-sector as their main thrusts. In addition, the mere fact that political independence in Zimbabwe had been won on the back of mass peasantry support and amid promises of radical land redistribution upon independence means that any policy decision otherwise would have meant erosion of legitimacy on the part of the new post-colonial government.

True to its policy pronouncements the government of Zimbabwe made some commendable efforts in supporting the peasantry agricultural sub-sector to the extent that between 1980 and 1985 peasant delivery accounted for 45% of total maize delivery to the government-owned Grain Marketing Board (Republic of Zimbabwe, 1986:25). This “Great Leap Forward” in production is mainly attributable to increased fiscal or budgetary support through the provision of properly designed and directed subsidized credit, input packs, increased extension services and facilitation of market access to the farmers. The result, as already noted above, was a boom in production and agricultural incomes in the sub-sector. However, the boom period was short-run as the government soon abandoned its support for peasant agriculture. The reasons behind the abandonment of peasantry support by the Zimbabwean government are discussed later in this paper under the section on the policy planning system in Zimbabwe. However, for now it is important and probably logical to first of all look at some of the basic tenets defining the peasantry as a class so that it becomes clear as to what it is about the peasantry that needs to be done for transformation to be realized.

### **Understanding the Peasantry**

The systematic study of the peasantry originated in Central and Eastern Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Shanin, 1971). The term peasantry is used here to describe and analyze the traditional systems of agriculture based mainly on subsistence crop and livestock production. The term has ever since dominated agrarian lexicon and has also become a buzzword in Marxist scholarship wherein it has been used rather derogatorily to describe pre-capitalist modes of production or what Karl Marx refers to as the irrational and old methods of agriculture (Goodman et al, 1981). While in most parts of Western Europe the peasant mode of production has disappeared completely in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution as a result of capitalist penetration, this system has, however, remained dominant in the peripheral and less technologically-advanced economies of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Under the peasantry farm family system, production relies mainly on family labour and is largely geared for consumption by the household and very little, if anything, is earmarked as surplus for the market.

However, while the peasantry system of production has remained marginal, consumption-based, independent and detached from the core market, the peasantry has, over the years, increasingly come under market pressures as a result of capitalist penetration. In other words, the incorporation of peasantry societies into the world capitalist economy has led to the commodification of peasantry



agricultural products (Dixon, 1990). With one foot in the market and the other in the subsistence the peasants are neither in the market nor insulated from its pressures (Ellis,1993). As Michael Bratton aptly observed, peasant farmers live in a hybrid world and their daily existence denies the neat conceptual divide between subsistence and the money economy (Bratton, 1986).

To a very large extent, the Zimbabwean peasantry both at the dawn of political independence and in the contemporary era approximates and fits well into the conceptual frame of the peasantry given above. What this means is that despite promises by the post-colonial government to transform the fortunes of the peasantry not much has been done in terms of peasantry social and economic integration. If anything the independence dispensation in the country has brought with it further marginalization and underdevelopment of the peasantry.

### **The Meaning of Peasantry Transformation**

Peasantry transformation should be viewed at both the material base and superstructural levels. However, the distinction between these two levels is purely academic since in reality the two levels are mutually-inclusive, and from a Marxian perspective, therefore difficult to separate. At the material base level production should move away from subsistence to market-orientation while at the superstructural level transformation would entail political empowerment through access to information and participation in policy decision making by the peasantry. Both market-orientation and political empowerment must also be viewed not as ends in themselves but as grand strategies in the achievement of higher developmental outcomes of poverty eradication, enhanced capabilities and improved well-being among the peasantry. Thus, in this context transformation should be looked at as a short-hand for new and radical forms of economic and social organization for a sustainable peasantry livelihood.

In orthodox development theory peasantry transformation means 'agrarian transition' or a process through which a predominantly peasant agricultural system is transformed into one that is characterized by total disintegration of pre-capitalist modes of production, development of fully-agrarian capitalism and the emergence of a large rural proletariat completely alienated from the means of production (Goodman et al, 1981). Liberal peasantry economists also view peasantry transformation as constituting changes in scale of operation through cultivation on large estates, institution of private property in land, adoption of large-scale modern technology, risk-taking and profit-maximization among other attributes (Ellis,1993). While valid to an extent, this modernist view of peasantry transformation is too narrow, conservative and euro-centric as it fails to take on-board the material realities obtaining in less developed countries and other economies in 'transition'.

While private ownership of land may have worked in the largely industrially-diverse and rich countries of North America and Western Europe, this form of tenure may not be tenable in the mainly poor, rural and agrarian settings of less developed countries. For example given the high magnitude of poverty in less developed countries peasants may for instance be tempted to dispose of land for a 'quick buck' once private ownership replaces communal tenure. This tendency would inevitably lead to land alienation on the part of the same peasantry class. Therefore a free land market may not necessarily be a good recipe for peasantry transformation. What may be ideal and indeed good are long-term leases. In China, as part of land reform, such long lease arrangements have gone a long way in improving productivity and incomes among the peasants (Ghimire, 2001). Transformation is also not necessarily about large-scale production. Neither is transformation about the disintegration of kinship structures nor the emergence of a rural proletariat as liberal thinkers always argue. As already alluded to elsewhere in this paper, small scale production can actually be more viable than large scale production depending on the land-use practices and factor-input mix in

place.

In the final analysis it should be noted that any meaningful peasantry transformation in countries like Zimbabwe should entail rise in peasantry incomes and employment achieved through a complete break with existing peasant systems in terms of production techniques and access to factor and product markets. To maximize on incomes and employment in the sub-sector there is also need for diversification into non-farm and off-farm economic activities. Such measures also need to be under-girded by strong institutions in the form of secure land titling systems, rule-ordered relationships and effective rule enforcement mechanisms.

From the above discussion, the prescription for peasantry transformation sounds a simple and straight forward point. However it is such apparently simple and straight forward issues which policy in Zimbabwe has, ironically, failed to address over the years. In order to clearly understand the policy failure in the country with regards to peasantry transformation it is necessary at this juncture to interrogate the policy planning system in the country with a view to identify gaps or weaknesses in the same planning system.

### **The Policy Planning System in Zimbabwe**

Lately, policy planning has become an important subject in development discourse. A policy is a decision which outlines the most effective and efficient means of achieving a collectively determined objective (Mayer et al, 1980:41). This definition of policy shows that policies should ideally always be arrived at through a process of collective action. In other words, policy planning practices should be viewed as political and social processes in which many actors representing many different interests, participate in a refined division of labour (Friedmann,1987). An effective policy planning system should therefore be participatory and be able to take on board the views and opinion points of all and sundry, particularly the views and opinion points of the main beneficiaries of the policy or policies in question. It is against this understanding of a good policy process that the policy planning system in Zimbabwe with respect to peasantry transformation should be analyzed.

Since the attainment of political independence in 1980, the government of Zimbabwe has consistently failed to recognize the value of true beneficiary participation in policy planning. This non-participatory policy planning stance has been part of the ideological baggage of the elitist and fascist colonial Rhodesian government led by Ian Smith from whom political power was inherited at independence. By and large policy planning in most countries has invariably reflected the ideologies of the governing elite (McAuslan,1980). As shall be demonstrated later in this paper, in Zimbabwe the governing elite has exhibited an unmistakable bourgeois class mentality. Independence in 1980 was not a victory of the masses but a victory of the black "bourgeoisie" middle class (Gwisai, 2006:23). To buttress and cushion its bourgeois class interests, the ruling elite in Zimbabwe has adopted the policy planning model of rationalism.

Rationalism has been central to western planning thought since the renaissance (Alexander, 1984). This policy planning model is closely associated with German sociologist Max Weber's philosophy of rational social action, which philosophy has come to shape public bureaucratic norms and behavior in modern development planning practice. As a model, rationalism views policy planning as a scientific and technical activity which entails the application of theoretically and empirically generated facts in solving policy problems. Planning in this thinking is therefore regarded as an expert area and a sole preserve of people trained in the art and science of planning. By being strictly expert-based, rationalism as a policy planning model is therefore, not only technical, but also

centralized, top-down and anti-participatory in its practical approach. The model focuses more on intellectual cogitation than on social interaction, more on telling than on asking (Wildavsky, 1979:12). This kind of planning approach has been dominant in authoritarian and corporatist states throughout history. Zimbabwe has been and, to a very large extent, still remains a good example of an authoritarian state of the corporatist variety.

Corporatism as a state ideology or philosophy is monarchical and paternalistic and has its origins in the aristocratic and organic states of medieval Europe where governance was considered a natural right possessed by a privileged minority and exercised by each privileged group within its own sphere (Low, 1991: 132). In principle corporatism, like pluralism, accepts representation of all significant economic, professional and social interests within the policy planning arena but in practice this interest representation is limited in that it is done on an integrated and non-competitive basis (Self, 1985). In other words, just like pluralism, corporatism accepts the existence in society of a multiplicity of diverse interests and the need for these interests to be represented in policy fora. However, unlike in a pluralist state wherein there is voluntary, open and free competition with individuals in each interest sphere free to form as many interest groups as they so individually and collectively wish, in a corporatist arrangement interest representation is limited to one organization in each sphere of interest or, alternatively, different interest groups in one sphere could form a closely integrated and coordinated front or coalition through which their combined interests can be collectively channeled to the state. For example in the sphere of peasant farming there would be only one peasant farmer organization or an alliance of all existing peasant representative organizations in that society. The same goes for other social and professional spheres of interest. Membership is therefore not voluntary but is literally compulsory and representative groups are also carefully chosen by the sanctioning state agency on the basis of their loyalty to the state with their leaders similarly holding office at the pleasure of the state.

In line with this corporatist thinking, in Zimbabwe, the government has railroaded the formation of one peasant farmer organization for the whole country in the form of the Zimbabwe Farmers' Union (ZFU), which union emerged in 1991 from the ashes of two peasant-based farmer associations in existence hitherto i.e. the Zimbabwe National Farmers' Union (ZNFU) and National Farmers' Association of Zimbabwe (NFAZ). It is this amalgamated interest group formation which has enjoyed monopolistic policy relations with the government ever since. One important thing to note here is that the amalgamation of these two farmer organizations was not only done at the behest of the government but the government also made sure that the amalgamated association was always led by ruling party loyalists. While the political affiliation of the first president of ZFU, Garikai Magadzire, can not be vouched with any degree of certainty, his loyalty to the then ruling ZANU(PF) party is almost without any doubt given the fact that upon his death Magadzire was buried at a flamboyant cemetery located in the country's capital city, Harare. Although the cemetery is ordinarily referred to as the National Heroes Acre, the burial place is however solely reserved for ZANU (PF) party loyalists, real or perceived.

Advocates of the corporatist ideology in Zimbabwe and elsewhere have argued that adoption of such an ideology obviates or reduces conflicts and fosters consensus, unity and social order. In this regard the ideology rejects the premises of classical pluralism of accepting conflict as natural (Low, 1991:15). Critics of the corporatist system on the other hand blame the ideology for legitimating authoritarianism under the guise of promoting social harmony. However social harmony or no social harmony what is worth to note is that the adoption in Zimbabwe of the state ideology of corporatism has given rise to a situation whereby policy making has remained a preserve of an 'exclusive club' made up of a few members carefully chosen from singular and monopolistic interest

representative groups more for their loyalty and allegiance to government than for their representativeness.

As a sole peasantry pressure group, ZFU has also been further compromised by its lack of financial autonomy. As a membership organization ZFU should ideally be self-sponsored and be deriving most of its funding from member-subscriptions. However subscriptions have been meager given the association's small membership size which has rarely gone beyond 10 percent of the total potential membership (Burgess,1994:145). Lack of a sound and independent financial base has been a common problem with most grassroots organizations everywhere, particularly in the less developed countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Such a situation has led to interest groups and social movements in these countries failing to mount high profile national level policy campaigns (Moyo, 2002). ZFU has not been an exception to this universal problem. The organization has in the past depended on financial support from the government, among other donors, with the government contributing unfixed amounts towards the association's budget (Makumbe, 1994:117). There has therefore been fear among successive ZFU leaders that any form of pressure to force government to yield to policy demands in favour of peasant farmers could be misinterpreted as confrontational and therefore smacking of 'biting the hand that feedeth'. The association's support for and solidarity with its benefactor, the government, has been so legendary ZFU has run the risk of becoming in Nge'the and Odero's words, 'a state agent' (Bratton, 1994 :19).

The other problem facing ZFU is that, while purporting to be peasants so as to earn the right to represent peasants, its leaders have, in reality, not been peasantry themselves. The late founding president, Gary Magadzire was a large-scale commercial land holder and the same applies to the incumbent Silas Hungwe. To the extent that these leaders are bourgeois in class outlook they cannot therefore be expected to be effective in representing the peasantry. Thus the priorities of the elite have tended to dominate ZFU policy demands (Moyo, 1996 quoted in UNDP 1998:53). The elite's natural priority and overriding ambition in any situation is always to be accommodated in the system and not to overhaul it. Therefore confrontation with officialdom is generally viewed by such elitist leaders as having the potential to rock the boat or as tantamount to killing the goose that is likely to lay the golden egg in future.

ZFU has also rarely been consulted by government on policy issues and on the rare occasions the organization has been consulted, its contributions have largely been viewed as lacking in rationality. For example an economist in the then Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement once confessed that the government had paid more attention to pricing policy submissions made by the Commercial Farmers' Union(CFU) and ignored submissions by ZFU (then NFAZ) because the former's submissions were detailed, well argued and factually accurate unlike those of the latter which were seen as more of 'political appeals' (Makumbe,1994: 128). This intimation alone clearly demonstrates how contemptuous and disdainful officialdom has been towards the peasantry and also how rationalistic and technocratic policy planning has been in Zimbabwe. Needless to also mention that this contemptuous and disdainful regard for the peasantry did however eventually culminate in ZFU being literally elbowed out of the policy planning arena as the Zimbabwean government decided to give more value to labour and capital when in 1998 the so-called negotiating forum of social partners was created consisting of labour, business and government (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2003:5). It is this tripartite arrangement which has dominated the policy planning space since then with very limited if any more planning room at all being given to the peasantry. This is so simply because peasants, being only small subsistence family farmers, are neither labour nor capital.

Thus, small-scale farmers at the bottom of the political ladder have had difficulty making their voices heard in the policy planning arena and have often been ignored at the top (Burgess,1994). This has not happened only in Zimbabwe but it is also the practice in most peasantry societies. The tendency has been for agricultural extension staff and other rural officials to look upwards and towards the centre for authority and guidance (Chambers,1983:76). As a result of this centrifugal and top-down decisional mode, policy planning in Zimbabwe has been for and not with the peasants. The political philosophy in the country (or lack thereof) has ever since the attainment of political independence gravitated back and forth from state capitalism (or so-called socialism) to neo-liberalism, back to state capitalism and back again to neo-liberalism. This iteration or movement back and forth in state policy ideology has taken place with peasants as mere passive onlookers and bystanders. Consequently the policy claims or choices emerging from such a policy planning regime have, not surprisingly and as will be shown below, failed to address the real and felt needs of the peasantry in the country.

### **Policy Choices**

One of the most visible blunders in terms of policy choice has been in the area of land reform. The accelerated land reform policy (code-named Fast Track) launched in 2000 is a classical example of a policy choice as bad as they come. Not only was the policy planned ex post after it had already been implemented but the policy was also implemented against expert counsel and without any due regard for the concerns of the peasantry. Despite claims from some quarters that the programme was a historical case of peasantry revolution, nothing indeed could be further from the truth. The programme had nothing to do with peasantry transformation nor did it epitomize a revolution but had indeed everything to do with primitive accumulation, political self-preservation and personal aggrandizement.

True, many isolated, sporadic and genuine peasantry demonstrations for land have taken place in post-colonial Zimbabwe. These have mainly been in the Mashonaland provinces, north of the country with the last and more prominent of these land self-provisioning moves or land invasions coming towards the end of the 1990s and carried out by peasants in the Svosve communal land which lies some 70 or so kilometers east of Harare. However all these land protests including the prominent Svosve one were duly suppressed by the state with the State President in 1998 personally ordering the Svosve land protesters to move out of the land they had illegally occupied (<http://books.google.co.zw/books?id=MWHY9fyocgQ>).

The moves to suppress these sporadic peasantry-initiated protests for land was not at all surprising given the fact that the Government of Zimbabwe had all along never been for massive land transfers to the landless peasants, preferring instead to keep large-scale commercial farming interests intact for export revenue generation purposes. This desire was further pushed forward by the government's adoption in the early 1990s of the neo-liberal structural adjustment policy under pressure from the dominant comprador bourgeois element within ZANU(PF). It is implementation of this policy which led to the shelving of the 1993 Land Designation Act because the Act was seen as not in conformity with the World Bank and IMF prescriptions which favoured land allocation to wealthy individuals ahead of land-starved peasants (Bond and Manyanya, 2002:51). Needless also to point out that these neo-liberal Bretten Woods prescriptions had themselves been adopted without any input from the peasantry farming community in the first instance.

The Fast Track land reform policy could therefore be best described as a government or ruling party initiative planned from above and implemented from below with peasants being used as a physical

and not revolutionary force, to wad off political opposition. The policy was adopted at a point at which it appeared ZANU(PF) would lose power (Bond and Manyanya, 2002: 51). The policy was adopted after some self-styled veterans of the 1970s anti-colonial war moved to occupy white-farmer-operated land in 2000. This came immediately after the announcement of results of a referendum on a proposed constitution which the then opposition MDC political party and some civil society organizations had campaigned against and won.

It has been argued that after this rare and painful defeat the ZANU (PF) government decided to instigate and sanction land self provisioning or invasions by party activists under the thin veneer of war veterans as a way of punishing white commercial farmers who were perceived as having aligned themselves with the opposition to torpedo or shoot down the proposed new constitution. The role of the government in the whole scheme was quite evident as army and other government trucks were used to transport land invaders to the farms and keep them supplied with rations while there, with the wider purpose of their deployment being to crush support for the opposition in rural areas in the run-up to the June 2000 parliamentary elections (Meredith, 2002). It is therefore safe to conclude that the chaotic and largely violent Fast-Track policy programme embarked upon in Zimbabwe at the turn of the millennium was not a 'classical case' of peasantry revolution planned and executed by the peasants themselves as a way of addressing their land grievances but was, instead, ZANU (PF)'s weapon for political self-preservation.

Despite its apparent radical stance, the fast-track land reform policy programme did not in any way further the cause of peasantry transformation. Redistribution of land to benefit black peasant farmers has up to this day remained an elusive target in Zimbabwe (Ghimire, 2001). Although a thoroughgoing and independent audit to determine the impact of the fast track programme on peasantry land ownership is still to be conducted, casual observation shows that communal areas remain as heavily congested as they were before the adoption and implementation of the Fast Track land reform policy. The valid suspicion here is that the policy benefited mostly the urbanites, in particular those well connected, socially and politically. For instance it has been widely reported that the majority of these privileged few beneficiaries have gotten away with multiple large scale farms. Thus, true to Trotsky's prophetic prediction years back, nationalized property in Zimbabwe was turned into private property (Gwisai,2006).

The fast-track land reform programme was also premised on the false assumption that land was the most pressing and immediate need among the peasants. While land is a critical factor input in peasantry production, studies have shown that peasants generally have not perceived land shortage as their most pressing and immediate need. In a study carried out during the mid-980s, only in half the districts studied did peasants cite access to land as their principal production constraint (Bratton,1986:367). A poverty assessment survey study (PASS) carried out by the government of Zimbabwe itself in 1995 showed that people often did not think that access to land was an important determinant of their poverty status (quoted from PASS, 1995 in UNDP, 1998:57).The major problem observed in most studies has been that of poor utilization of available land. This problem was clearly unraveled by the government poverty assessment survey study of 2003 which indicated that 68% of peasant communities did not fully utilize their land mainly due to drought, lack of inputs, lack of draught power and lack of ploughing implements (Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare, 2006:658).

The policy argument by peasant farmers that provision of supportive infrastructure and other services should always precede placement of farmers on acquired land was also evidently ignored by government (Makumbe,1994). In its bid to "fast-track", government ended up literally dumping

peasants in settlements where there was no access to such basic amenities as roads, water, schools and clinics. Such a move has not in any way helped in furthering the cause of transformation in the country. Resettled peasant farmers have also argued for long-term land tenure arrangements to allow them to make fixed capital investments on the allocated land. This policy proposal was consistently ignored by policy planners with government deciding to settle for the insecure permit system for the A1 land reform model designed for subsistence peasant producers coming from the congested communal areas. This is despite the fact that the same government has agreed to give long-term 99 year leases to farmers resettled under the A2 model, a model designed for black capitalist farmers of means. What is worth to note is that the permit system has proved to be the most insecure form of land tenure in Zimbabwe as it provides for fewer rights for the permit holder (settler) while according broad rights to the state with the latter having the power to terminate the permit any time (Rukuni,1994).

Lack of proper social amenities and insecure tenure have both been a source of great disenchantment and is perhaps one of the reasons why quite a good number of targeted land beneficiaries have not even bothered to take up the land allocated to them under both the fast track and pre-fast-track land resettlement programmes. Most of those who decided to take up the allocated pieces of land abandoned the land immediately after being resettled and returned to their communal areas of origin where tenure was perceived as being more secure and social amenities better. For instance, a study by the Ministry of Community and Cooperative Development in the early 1990s found out that under the model B resettlement scheme designed to benefit peasants from the communal land on a cooperative basis, only 69% of those offered land under this model had taken it up while 15% of those who initially took up the land latter resigned from the land in no time after taking it up (Ministry of Community and Co-operative Development, 1992:8). Thus, issues of tenure and social amenities are not imaginary needs but are real and felt needs which therefore require urgent policy attention.

The policy dimension of gender and women has also been greatly underplayed in Zimbabwe's land reform programme as a facet of peasantry transformation. In light of historical and cultural gender-based inequalities and cognizant of the fact that before the adoption of the fast-track or accelerated land reform programme 86% of women in Zimbabwe lived in rural areas, depended on land for their livelihood and constituted 70% of all agricultural labour, the government of Zimbabwe in 1998 committed itself to having gender equity as a key principle in the land reform process (Republic of Zimbabwe, 2004:5). However too fewer women as compared to men have benefited the government's land reform policy. Three years into the fast-track land reform and resettlement programme only 18 percent of the total land beneficiaries under the peasant farmer-based A1 model were women-headed households (Utete Land Report, 2003 quoted in Made and Mpfu, 2005:7). Such an achievement is not only measly and mediocre but also smacks of lack of policy seriousness given the truism that when people talk of peasants in Zimbabwe, and any agrarian society for that matter, they would be in reality talking about women because universally women dominate the peasantry class.

Traditionally and across all cultures women's needs have also been seen as both marginal and separate (Burkey, 1993). In Zimbabwe this thinking has been clearly demonstrated by the quota policy system in land allocation. In 2002 the Zimbabwean government committed itself to reserving a meagre 20 percent of all land acquired for resettlement under the fast-track resettlement programme for the benefit of women (Made and Mpfu, 2005:7). Such a policy decision is not only marginalizing and discriminatory but is also as demeaning as it is patronizing of women and is therefore a stab in the back of the women peasantry-folk who incidentally provide the bulk of

family-farm labour and management.

Another bad policy choice which has been an outcome of the corporatist-inspired rationalistic, top-down and monopolistic representation policy planning tradition in Zimbabwe is the policy regime of Subsidies are important in making agricultural inputs affordable to small farmers. In Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika has a strong record in boosting growth and improving security through the introduction of fertilizer subsidy (The Herald, 20 May,2009). However, subsidies are again neither always necessary nor desirable. In Zimbabwe subsidies, far from being a production catalyst, have instead promoted an unproductive behavior. South Africa's ANC presidential spokesperson, Smuts Ngonyama at one time blamed Zimbabwe's 'economic mess' on too many 'subsidies' (Bond and Manyanya, 2002:130). It is therefore a monumental fallacy to posit that subsidies always benefit development. What is more important for peasant farmers and all farmers for that matter is timely availability of inputs and not necessarily their price. Farmers throughout Africa have shown a willingness to pay a market price for fertilizer and to be more concerned with opportune availability than with price subsidy (Bratton,1986: 379). A subsidy generally works well when carefully designed and properly targeted to those who are genuinely in need of it. However, design and targeting has been a real nightmare to many a policy planner not only in Zimbabwe but almost everywhere.

In Zimbabwe, mainly due to the breakdown of the institution of law and the erosion of traditional administrative norms of transparency and accountability since the turn of the millennium, the subsidy regime has suffered immense portfolio contamination in that policy makers and policy implementors have often used their political and bureaucratic offices to acquire and allocate subsidized agricultural credit and inputs to themselves and their relations. The media in the country, both print and electronic, public and private, has been awash with stories of members of parliament and other public officials arraigned before the courts of law to answer to charges of corruption and theft of subsidized agricultural inputs and other supplies. Subsidies have also created and sustained a culture of rent-seeking and arbitrage in the country as people use their 'connections' in government to access cheap subsidized products and sell these at a profit. Apart from benefiting professional rent-seekers, subsidies also tend to benefit big farmers more than small peasant farmers since the former are more likely than the latter to be better connected and to have with them readily available financial means to intercept and grab all the cheap commodities on offer.

Perhaps the worst case scenario on predatory behaviour with regards to subsidies is that of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe with its quasi-fiscal farm mechanization programme which was adopted in 2007 when, in light of increasing treasury bankruptcy, the central bank assumed the role of a surrogate ministry of finance. While the programme was aimed at providing farmers with tractors and other farming equipment pseudo-farmers benefited from the programme ahead of genuine farmers. For example during the 69<sup>th</sup> Zimbabwe Farmer's Union annual general congress held on 3 September 2009 at Esikhoveni Provincial Public Service Training Centre in Esigodini more than 400 kilometres south of Harare, farmers took turns to complain about the manner in which the central bank's farm mechanization programme had been managed airing concerns that real farmers had not benefited from the programme as most implements had been taken by people who were not known to be farmers and further pointing out that the distribution of such supplies should have been done through either farmer organizations or other organizations with something to do with farming (Chronicle, 4 September,2009). This complaint by peasant farmers further lends credence to the argument that assumption pulling and synthesis or beneficiary participation is an indispensable ingredient in policy design and implementation.



Other agencies used by the state in distributing cheap credit and subsidized inputs such as Agribank have also frequently fallen prey to predators in the form of rent-seekers and other opportunists because of their heavily subsidized products. Due to meddling by politicians, for a long time Agribank, a 100% government-owned agricultural development bank has, for example, been charging 20 percent interest on loans to farmers when inflation was even very conservatively estimated at over 300% (Financial Gazette, 27 August, 2009 quoted in <http://allafrica.com/stories/200908280942.html>). Such negative rates of interest, apart from attracting rent-seekers, are also very unbusinesslike, erodes fund value and ultimately affects the viability and technical solvency of a lending institution and therefore its ability to continue offering credit in future. This has been the case with Agribank which has become perennially under-capitalized and has always appealed for new credit lines and fresh capital injections from the government.

At another level, policy in Zimbabwe has dismally failed to support diversification as one critical dimension of peasantry transformation. Policy focus has largely been on farming and very little attention has been paid to the development of non-farm and off-farm rural enterprises. The policy assumption has been that every peasant is cut-out for farming. For example, under the government's permit tenure arrangement in land reform, non-farm enterprises are disallowed among resettled subsistence farm families since resettlement is pre-eminently seen as a farming project (Rukuni, 1994). This has been a source of great frustration to those peasants with interest and skills in non-farm businesses. The same can also be said about off-farm activities at rural service centres and rural growth points. Not much has been done at a policy level to provide physical and economic infrastructure for the viable operation of off-farm activities at these centers. Lack of peasantry involvement has therefore generally led to urban bias in policy. As Michael Lipton observed in his celebrated urban-bias hypothesis:

“The urban elite, for all the well meaning talk of rural development is in practice driven to concentrate the action heavily on cities” [Lipton, 1982:67]

The government's urban bias and anti-rural policy stance has also been quite evident in many other facets. For example during the period 1991 to 1993, government spent about 70% of the Ministry of Agriculture budget to subsidize grain millers who produced mainly for urban consumers (CSO, 1998:12). The government has also used the price control mechanism to irrationally reward urbanites at the expense of peasantry welfare by making farm products cheaper and farm inputs more expensive. This policy has been traced to political demands for cheap food from coalitions of urban, industrial and bureaucratic interests (Bates, 1981 quoted in Bratton, 1994:9). This coalition is more vocal and is generally viewed as being more organized and is therefore naturally more feared than the largely dispersed and seemingly unorganized and 'passive' peasants. Urban bias has thus been one of the main trade-marks and stock-in-trade of government policy planning business in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it should be noted that the transformation of the peasantry, while a key rural development objective, has largely remained a pipe-dream in Zimbabwe. Policy rhetoric aside, selfishness and paternalism at the top have led to the adoption of an authoritarian corporatist state ideology in the country. The state ideology of corporatism, by going for non-competitive and selective stakeholder participation in policy making has indeed negated classical pluralism, a public choice-informed state ideology which recognizes and values a free, competitive, unfettered,

stakeholder-driven, participatory, advocative, semi-technical and social policy planning process. This corporatist state ideology together with its rationalistic policy planning approach have resulted in policy claims that have been inimical and toxic to the peasantry.

Admittedly, peasantry transformation has been a problematic proposition across all agrarian societies throughout history. That notwithstanding, it is however contended that designing policies that favour the peasantry is still possible. Not only do pro-peasantry policies make development sense but these policies also promote among the powers-that-be what the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century 'father' of Economics, Adam Smith, has referred to as enlightened self-interest. What this means is that while pro-peasantry policies may be financially costly in the short-term adopting the same policies has high returns in the long-run in terms of societal development and increased security of political tenure among national leaders, which security of tenure, concomitantly, comes with development. In other words, the electorate which in countries like Zimbabwe is pre-dominantly peasantry, is likely to vote for leaders with pro-peasantry performance records and whose policy commitment is with peasantry transformation.

Peasantry transformation in the modest sense of diversification, improving production techniques and adopting market-orientated production is also not something out of this world. The introduction in some Indian villages in the 1960s of high-yielding seed varieties, irrigation and mechanized sources of power has resulted, not only in increased per capita crop production and significant increase in rural incomes in these villages, but has also led to a complete disappearance of camels as a means of drought power in addition to bringing about notable changes in labor economies wherein hired labor largely replaced family labor (Goldman and Smith, 1995). As already alluded to, elsewhere in this paper, in countries like China, South Korea and other 'Asian Tigers' family farmers have also considerably increased their marketed output with a significant number of these small producers even going for the export market. The same has already been said about Zimbabwe itself with its mini-green revolution of the early-to-mid 1980s. If only the policy momentum of that era had been maintained who knows where the country could have been by now in terms of peasantry transformation. These examples, however few and far in between, clearly show that while admittedly problematic and difficult, peasantry transformation is indeed possible, and mainly so with meaningful and active peasantry participation and involvement at every turn along the policy way.

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**Allison Goebel: *Gender and Land Reform: The Zimbabwe Experience***  
McGill-Queen's University Press, London, 2005. 178 pages. ISBN0-7735-2907-1

The title of this book is a just description of its contents. A glance at chapter headings gives an indication of the pattern of the book which dwells on the shortcomings of the procedural and substantive aspects of the land policy and the redistribution exercise in as far as women and their productive rights are concerned. It explores the women's situation and gender relations within the context of the political and economic issues in the land reform process and the gender relations born of conditions under which people have been allocated resettlement land. In fascinating detail, the book also delves into the differences in women and men's relationship to agricultural land and their penultimate consequences for women's status, standard of living and survival. The intricate gender relations and struggles are exhumed and transmitted through a case study of the Sengezi Resettlement in east-central Zimbabwe. The different forces and effects in the resettlement process, from the level of state policy and relevant legislation, through customary norms and practices, local institutions, ideologies, cosmologies, household structures and people's practices are examined in the eight Chapters comprising the text.

Chapter one provides a rich tapestry of the background to the land question in Zimbabwe, located in the colonial and post-colonial history of land distribution. The consideration given to colonial land use and allocation patterns through the Land Apportionment Act (1930), Native Land Husbandry Act (1951), Land Husbandry Act (1970) and the 1979 Rural Land Act (which provided the legal basis for the establishment of resettlement areas) acquaints the reader with the historical legacy of racial injustice with regard to land distribution. The invisibility of women on land distribution in colonial Zimbabwe however, limits an inquisitive reader from identifying continuities and discontinuities in the post-independence gendered land reform process. While the absence of women's voices might appear as a calculated omission on a gendered subject, it suffices to note that rural women's relationship to land has historically been mediated through male entitlement and control through the institution of marriage and the allocative powers of mostly male traditional authorities.

Chapter Two inserts gender into the land question in Zimbabwe within the historical and contemporary contexts and analyses the central role of the state in understanding women's relationships to land. Central to the discussion is that, although family dynamics and gender relations changed with colonisation with high rates of male migration, (p35) the gendered patterns of African peasant farming still condoned the supremacy of male authority even in male absence.

Chapter Three discusses the central place of marriage in determining women's relationships to resettlement land in terms of both how women are treated under resettlement policy and how they are treated as wives in households. The discussion oscillates around the resettlement policy which dictates that a wife gains the right to farm in the resettlement by virtue of being married to a man that has been granted a resettlement permit. This obviously makes women vulnerable to complete loss of land in the event of divorce or the men's eviction from the area. No doubt, the permit system buttresses patriarchal control by investing the husband with the only formal rights to land. Even though in some cases women are allocated pieces of land by their husbands (*tseu*) for supplementary foods and that they control the produce from these pieces, what is crucial is not

access to and control of produce from the land but the primary rights to all arable land which are exclusively accorded to men through the permit system.

Chapter Four explores how the state, through law and policy has been an agent for gender justice for women. Although the research findings confirm that the state has played a major role in improving women's opportunities by treating them as farmers in their own right, granting them access to irrigation schemes, and supporting their cattle fattening projects, the author laments the limitations laid out by a patriarchal state as well as patriarchal local institutions, practices and ideologies which force women to operate in the shadow of the law. Although the observable trend in resettlement has been for men to treat wives as labour in the household production unit; the author established that the incidence of polygny in Sengezi is almost non-existent. The author attributes the low rates of polygny to the less labour intensiveness of the main cash crop maize. Readers may be mildly irritated by the author's monocausal explanation to an otherwise complex issue. The author fails to appreciate how the changing gender ideologies, cultural dynamism and what she refers to as the enlightened teachings of the Women's Action Group (WAG), benefiting both men and women have seen behaviour change in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis (see pages 126, 127, 131 and 137). Generally though, the broad coverage of the social system which evidently subordinates women through mediating their economic rights through the institution of marriage portrays a picture that marriage does not deprive women of all economic rights or of all room to negotiate an improved sharing relationship within marriage.

Chapter Five continues the discussion of the effects of state policy and action in the lives of resettlement women, as mediated through their marital status. The experiences of widows and divorcees are described with delightful humour and a light touch which makes reading the book a real pleasure. Personal stories and testimonies from informants which point both to women's strength, perseverance and their vulnerability to injustice are capable of conjuring sympathy from the reader. What however transforms sobbing to sobering is the indication that aspects of resettlement policy and processes in the 1980s and 1990s created strategic opportunities for some women, especially widows to improve their access and entitlement to arable land.

Chapter Six outlines the local institutional context and its implications for women's relationship to resettlement land. The author explores how the deployment of traditional practices and institutions underpins and expresses patriarchal and patrilineal control. Of interest however is the success with which women are circumventing the rigidities (the practices such as *kupira* and *kurova guva* which support the patrilocal marriage system and patrilineal inheritance patterns) which made their entitlements to agricultural land insecure. Although women are on local committees under the Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), they exhibit a tendency of shunning such institutions in favour of those which bring services to the villages. Resultantly, the women have ended up being marginalized in state-sponsored institutions which are mandated to manage arable land and other natural resources. This exposes women as architects of their downfall in that their marginalization is by choice and not a function of any law or policy. Women have to be advocates of their own cause.

Chapter Seven narrows the focus to the micro-relations of gender in households by investigating the social phenomenon of husband- taming herbs. The author outrightly considers marriage as an institution in crisis and hence the obsessive use of husband –taming herbs. (p 125) She states that 'the work that women put into their marriages through the use of husband-taming herbs reveals both their desperation in the face of high rates of marital instability in the context of few economic and social alternatives and key ways that women take up gender struggle...' (p142) Such a stance exhibits the dilemmas of cross-cultural research and the accompanying inadequacies of

interrogating one's own perspectival orientation. The use of herbs is as old as humanity and to give an impression that marriages are loosely knit social webs whose stability rests upon the use of herbs is likely to enflame tempers. Most probably some of the Sengezi women's gullibility towards the use of husband-taming herbs and consulting traditional healers rests upon their social outcast status.

Besides giving conclusions from the research findings and tying the loose ends of the discussions throughout the text, Chapter Eight provides insight on the implications for women and gender relations of the current and future land reform process. Although the book was written at a time when large-scale redistribution of land was occurring in the midst of a political and economic crisis, concluding that women's struggles will continue far beyond any victories of policy reform might be too pessimistic a position. Efforts by the state, the Women and Land Lobby Group (WLLG) now the Women and Land in Zimbabwe, the Women's Action Group (WAG) and other stakeholders that women have access to credit, labour and social resources such as training, technical support and social transformation should allay fears of women losing gains made in the first stage of resettlement.

The study however reminds the readership that the land question remains Zimbabwe's unfinished agenda which calls for the need to involve women in the designing and implementation of new policies on land reform against a background of the fast-track process which was characterized by violence and lack of planning. One of the many merits of this refreshing work is that the references to recent publications are not simply listings in the bibliography but have been studied and are taken into account in the body of the work. Well, Goebel writes with sympathy and insight and this makes her arguments attractive. Especially felicitous are her chapter conclusions which carry summaries of the arguments for and against chapter themes, presented as they were seen by contemporaries and not with the distorting wisdom of hindsight. The book is full of stimulating generalizations and suggestions which are notable contributions towards unexplored corridors in the maze of the land reform exercise as a gendered enterprise.

**Review By  
Gilbert Tarugarira**





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