FROM PROMISED LAND TO PERILOUS PLIGHT: UNPACKING TENSIONS, CONTESTATIONS AND MARGINALISATION IN RESETTLEMENT SCHEMES OF ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Phase 1 of Land Reform Programme soon after independence redistributed land previously owned by white farmers to the majority black Zimbabweans. In understanding this phase, previous studies have emphasized on how it was structured, the tenure systems, the beneficiaries and land use patterns. However, the existing socio-political landscape, livelihoods and well-being of resettled farmers has been understudied. This article examines tensions between resettled farmers and illegal settlers using empirical qualitative data from a case study in Nyajezi resettlement scheme, Nyanga District. The article presents new forms of conflicts, contestations and marginalization in resettlement schemes.

Keywords: Illegal settlers, land reform, livelihoods, resettled farmers, resettlement scheme

Introduction

After gaining independence in 1980, the government of Zimbabwe initiated a land reform program that involved the resettlement of landless peasants onto newly acquired from or abandoned land by white commercial farmers (Muringa and Zvaita, 2022; Ndhlovu, 2022). The 1980-1989 resettlement schemes were the flagship of the government's agriculture policy designed to address the issue of land inequality in the country, which had been a major source of political and social tensions for many years (Ndhlovu, 2022; Runganga et al., 2022). The term 'scheme' connoted the spatial; that is, the acquired and redistributed unit of land, as well as the planning regime under which the land was allocated to beneficiaries (Karumbidza, 2009). Conceptually, resettlement schemes aimed to redistribute land in order to restructure Zimbabwe's inherited colonial agrarian economy of unequal distribution of wealth, land, income, resources and other opportunities (Nyandoro, 2019). In correcting the imbalances between the two sub-sectors of agriculture – commercial and peasant - resettlement schemes attempted to provide alternative productive employment opportunities for the rural poor to improve their living standards and transform peasant agriculture (Muringa and Zvaita, 2022). In addition to its political rationale, the National Report of the Government of Zimbabwe in 1980 highlighted that another objective of the land resettlement programme was also meant to facilitate the entrance of blacks into the mainstream economic activity of the country (Muringa and Zvaita, 2022). Since agriculture was the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy, it worked to provide an enabling environment for sustainable economic growth in the resettlement areas (Chipenda, 2018; Chipenda, 2020; Scoones and Murimbarimba, 2021; Tarusarira, 2021). Besides political and economic reasons, the specific objectives for the establishment of resettlement schemes was to provide some relief of the pressure on over-populated land especially in communal areas (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019).

At the turn of the millennium, most studies on land reform in Zimbabwe focussed on the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of post 2000 because it is regarded as an antithesis of the earlier land reform period of 1980-1989 (Dzvimbo et al., 2018; Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Muringa and Zvaita, 2022). In fact, the FTLRP in its entirety (including the land allocation process) is characterized as 'chaotic' and lacking orderliness, implying a 'free for some' situation (self-allocation of land through illegal land occupations) in accessing land in the former large scale commercial farming (LSCF) sector (Sachikonye, 2003; Davies, 2004; Masiiwa and Chipungu, 2004; Mudimu et al., 2021; Muringa and Zvaita, 2022). In contrast, the early 1980-1989 land reform was done in a planned and systematic manner so that agricultural production would suffer minimum disruption and settlers would be introduced to modern commercial farming methods, and not permitted merely to extend traditional methods into new holdings (Davies, 1984; Palmer, 1990; Masiiwa and Chigejo, 2003). Sachikonye (2004), asserts that the process of selecting settlers for resettlement was, by and large, transparent and that the resettlement process itself was carried out under an intensive programme of limited scope which made use of detailed planning, a systematic procedure of settler selection, large amounts of specialist inputs, and provision of a wide range of infrastructure and supporting services to assist the new communities. While scholars largely concur that land reform post-independence was carried out in a planned and systematic manner, there remains a lacuna within studies that have empirically examined the existing socio-political landscape, livelihoods and well-being of the resettled farmers of the early 1980s in specific contexts. Most attempts to explain the evaluation of resettlement schemes and development projects in Zimbabwe has been largely approached from a quantitative approach and a cause and effect relationship between inputs and impacts on intended beneficiaries (see Gunning, et al., 2000; Hoogeveen and Kinsey, 2001; Deininger et al., 2004; Mazwi et al., 2019; Runganga et al., 2022). By neglecting to examine the current character and experiences of the resettled farmers resettled post-independence, the literature on Zimbabwe's agrarian reform is deprived of a crucial viewpoint contextualizing current challenges.

Given that these resettled farmers started out in a completely different political, social and economic environment, this study investigated the current or prevailing conditions and challenges being faced by these resettled farmers and their communities, how these conditions have changed over time, and the factors that have contributed to these changes. In addition, in the ongoing interlocking array of complex social and political issues facing the country there are concerns that these resettlement schemes have been neglected. In these increasingly volatile settings secure access to land for livelihoods and settlement are of fundamental importance to vulnerable households. The research aims to address the gap in the literature on the long-term impact of the 1980-1989 land reform context and to provide insights into the potential implications for future land reform policies in Zimbabwe.

The main objective of this paper is to explore and identify the nature of challenges, experiences, constraints and attitudes arising in resettlement scheme areas following the first phase of land reform period of 1980-1989. Understanding this is important for government (extension workers) and policymakers to know the patterns and dynamics of the current resettlement schemes as a way to guide future efforts of appropriate land reform programmes that will better fit the needs of resettled farmers.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section of the article provides a background of Zimbabwe's land reform and the research problem. This is followed by a brief discussion on the historical background of resettlement schemes in Zimbabwe. The third section is the background of the case study. The methodology of the study is the fourth section. The fifth section discusses the various ways in which traditional leaders are promoting anarchy and land conflict in Nyajezi resettlement scheme. This is followed by a section discussing how Nyajezi resettlement scheme is

experiencing losses and damage due to environmental degradation. The seventh section details the livelihoods vulnerabilities in Nyajezi resettlement scheme. The eighth section focuses on the contestations of belonging emanating from the addition of illegal settlers. The section that follows is a discussion of the findings whilst the last section is the conclusion of the article.

Historical background of resettlement schemes

According to Masiiwa and Chapungu (2004), the selection criteria into resettlement schemes included: being refugees or other persons displaced by war, including extra-territorial refugees, urban refugees and former inhabitants of protected villages; being unemployed; being a landless resident in a communal area or having insufficient land to maintain themselves and their families or being a war veteran. For an individual to qualify for resettlement a person had to be unemployed, or if not, they had to be willing to give up their urban job and focus on farming full-time (Masiiwa and Chapungu, 2004). In addition, at the time of settlement, the household heads were also supposed to be married or widowed, and aged between 25 and 50 (Jacobs, 1993). Families selected for resettlement were assigned to these schemes and the consolidated villages within them, on a largely random basis.

The legal aspects that bound families when being resettled were that they were required to renounce any claim to land elsewhere in Zimbabwe (Roth and Bruce, 1994). They were not given ownership of the land on which they were settled, but instead were given permits by the plan for land use: a permit to reside, a permit to cultivate, and a permit to depasture stock (Roth and Bruce, 1994). The permits were issued under the legal authority of section 6 of the Rural Land Act (CAP 155), which confers broad authority on the government to lease or alienate state land (Roth and Bruce, 1994). The use of the land is strictly limited to the purpose for which the permit is granted, and the permit holder renounces any right to build upon, cultivate, or depasture livestock on the grazing commons (Roth and Bruce, 1994). In theory these permits could be terminated or withdrawn should settlers fail to follow the guidance of government-appointed resettlement officers who taught farmers how to farm and adjudicated in cases of conflict between resettled people (Roth and Bruce, 1994). The resettlement officers had the legal power to evict settlers from land (Jacobs, 1991). Cusworth and Walker's (1988) evaluation suggests, however, that these permits were initially granted for a five-year period and that in many cases a second set of permits has been issued.

According to Alexander (2018), besides overseeing and enforcing legal matters in resettlement schemes, resettlement officers got governance assistance from setup elected Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) to take over the functions of the older, inherited and appointed headmen (*Sabhukus*). Alexander notes that VIDCOs were set off as a way of promoting decentralization, and as a result they were part of the local government system. The total area that was traditionally led by one village head now fell under the jurisdiction of one VIDCO. Furthermore, the VIDCOs were mandated with carrying out tasks such as distributing land to new settlers, tasks that had previously been executed by the traditional authorities. However, in the year 2000, the government re-introduced the position of headman. The major reason for this change was that local people complained that the VIDCOs were headed by people who came from other areas and did not know enough about local traditions and religion and did not respect them. The local people who complained were mostly local chiefs who were not necessarily in the resettlement schemes but who were now becoming increasingly politically powerful (Alexander, 2018).

According to Shonhe (2018), in line with the National Land Policy, two land distribution schemes were availed in the initial phase. The first schemes were Models A, B while the second schemes were C and D. In a "typical" Model A (Normal Intensive settlement), resettled households were given 5 hectares of land to be farmed on an individual household basis with the remaining area in each

resettlement site being devoted to communal grazing. Model B (Communal farming) involved the formation of cooperatives to manage farms on a cooperative basis. Model C was based on the nucleus of a commercial estate while households had their own individual plots but acted as out-growers. Model D was intended for low rainfall areas in natural regions IV and V and involved the use of ranches for grazing by communal communities (De Villiers, 2003). In return for this allocation of land, the Zimbabwean government expected male heads of households to rely exclusively on farming for their livelihoods. Until 1992, male household heads were not permitted to work elsewhere, nor could they migrate to cities to leave their wives to work the plots. However, model A proved to be the most popular. Jacobs (1990) notes that of the 38,000 families resettled by 1985, approximately 35,000 were in Model A schemes, 2,500 in model B and a small number in one of the other types. Nyajezi resettlement scheme which is the study area falls under Model A.

Background of study area

Nyajezi Resettlement Scheme is one of the earliest joint schemes of the then European Economic Union (EEU) and the government of Zimbabwe situated in Nyanga district in the eastern province of Manicaland and lies to the north of Mutare in Zimbabwe (Zimstat, 2012). The district is made up of 31 administrative wards and 443 villages (Zimstat, 2012). It covers an area of 5 897.82 $km^{2,}$ of which 28% falls under natural region one, while 24% falls under natural region two (Zimstat, 2012). The rest of the district falls under natural regions three, four, and five (Zimstat, 2012). Average annual rainfall varies largely between 650 and 1 500 mm, but areas to the east of the highlands, and more particularly to the south-east, are significantly wetter, reflecting the direction of the prevailing south-easterly winds (Chirenje et al., 2013). In most seasons, rainfall and temperatures are favourable for cultivation even in the lower areas, but uneven distribution through the season may be critical (Chirenje et al., 2013).

The soil types in the area vary from village to village but are mainly moderately leached, light to dark grey granitic sands (Soper, 2002). These are deep sands with very little silt. These granite-derived sands are inherently infertile and susceptible to erosion (Soper, 2002). Although resettled farmers acknowledge that their villages are located in a better agro-ecological region than where they previously lived, and some farmers state that whilst they are grateful, they would have preferred to be settled elsewhere where they could have obtained more land and better soils (Nyanga District strategic plan, 2012). Most people in Nyajezi resettlement scheme attended Ordinary level education and very few went on to Advanced level education (Nyanga District strategic plan, 2012).

The area is made up of about 14 villages of varying population compositions and the main ethnic groups are Manyika and waBarwe tribes. (Nyanga District strategic plan, 2012). There are several clusters of villages under different headmen and village heads, and the traditional jurisdiction is under Chief Saunyama and headmen and village heads report to him (Nyanga District strategic plan, 2012). The predominant agricultural practice is small-scale mixed subsistence farming where households grow crops and rear livestock for example cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, rabbits and poultry (Nyanga District strategic plan, 2012). The support regime for the farmers comes from agricultural extension officers and veterinary officers who work according to a comprehensive monthly programme that is designed to suit the specific needs within the agricultural seasons (Nyanga District strategic plan, 2012).

Methodology

A single case study (Nyajezi Resettlement Scheme) was chosen in which the ethnographic and qualitative methodologies were applied. Through this approach, resettled farmers' current experiences, challenges, attitudes in the resettlement scheme, farm-level constraints were explored and identified. Primary data was collected using key informant interviews, participatory observations, non-participatory observations and life history. Primary data was collected from September 2018 to January 2020. Purposive, simple random sampling techniques were employed. A desired sample size of thirteen key informants was used for this study. It included three lead farmers composed of two male and one female, one District Administrator (DA), one agricultural extension officer, three village heads, two spirit mediums, and three elders - locally known as *vakweguru*. The agricultural extension officer, a representative of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Extension (AREX) and DA, who are government officials, provided insight on issues of land allocation and tenure in the resettlement scheme.

Eighteen households participated in this study; ten are resettled farmers, while the remaining eight were illegal settlers. Informal conversations and interactions with participants were important sources of rich data. Further follow-up interviews were made in February and April 2022 to enhance the narratives of the case study. Observations conducted during transact walks around the farm to gain an understanding of issues of land use, building structures of participants, arable plot activities, grazing land and associated activities and cattle dipping were useful in enhancing the data. Through the interviews, the research gathered detailed life histories of beneficiaries (Kvale, 1996). Secondary literature and government reports were also used.

Living on the edge: traditional leaders role in anarchy and land conflict

As in many African countries, Zimbabwe recognises the role of traditional leadership as revealed by its inclusion in the Zimbabwean constitution that was adopted in 2013. Government's realization only came after the Rukuni Commission, which established that traditional leadership had an important role in Zimbabwe, leading to the enactment of the *Traditional Leaders Act of 1998*. The *Traditional Leaders Act*, Chapter 29:17, reinstated most of the powers of traditional leaders, allocating 23 functions to chiefs as provided under Section 3 of the act (Chigwata, 2016).

Currently, Nyajezi resettlement scheme is replete with political and power struggles over land. Legally, on the resettlement farms, government resettlement officers had authority over land and it is illegal for traditional leaders to sell it, so they risk being prosecuted. Section 282 of the constitution gives chiefs jurisdiction and control over surplus land in the communal areas where they can allocate residential and agricultural land to expanding families among local communities, but this is with the consent of rural district councils (RDCs) and in line with customary law. Despite the law stating that resettlement scheme land is illegal to sell and that it is under the authority of resettlement officers, the chief and village headmen have been conniving and selling communal grazing land for personal profit without consulting the government district office. These illegal settlers locally known as *vabvakure*, which mean foreigners, are most often people displaced from other state infrastructure or mining projects and relatives of traditional leaders with no application process involved. In addition, agitation and pressure for land, as well as long waiting lists prompted by worsening socio-economic conditions in the country, characterized by unemployment and deindustrialization have opened room for such corrupt methods of allocation of land in the area. Given the limited social reproduction opportunities outside of land, this trend is likely to continue and, indeed, many studies are pointing to growing demand for land in the countryside even among urbanites and youths (Moyo, 2013; Chipenda, 2018).

Allocation of communal grazing has become contentious leaving disputes on 'two sides of the stream' between illegal settlers and resettled farmers whose communal grazing land is being sold. Insecurity resulting from the addition of illegal settlers means that they are regarded as a threat and outsiders who are bringing instability to the resettlement area. Interviews with village leaders reveal that most of the illegal settlers fail to respect the local customs and traditions in the area, as seen by their destruction of sacred bushes and failure to observe *chisi*, a day of rest when no one is allowed in the fields according to the Shona custom.

Referring to the challenge of illegal settlers in the area, one resettled farmer elder explained,

> When we were being resettled here in 1980, we were told by the resettlement officer that there will never be any additional people who will come into our area. Now, our land has been taken over by people from all over the country. Above all, the dignity of our village has been eroded. Look now, even *chisi* is no longer being respected and most of our sacred places have been destroyed to accommodate these foreigners. (Field interview, 20 December 2018)

Another resettled farmer expressed her anger at not being given land by the village headman for a project she wanted to start and said,

> Our children now have nowhere to go and end up cramped in our homesteads. For example, when my divorced daughter returned, we wanted to start an orchard and gumtree project, but the village headman would not give us land, but always gladly allocates our grazing land to foreigners. It seems we will soon end up as backyard tenants in the land of our ancestors. (Field interview, 29 December 2018)

The haphazard sale of communal grazing land has also led to boundary disputes amongst the illegal settlers themselves due to double allocations. Ironically, when such clashes happen, the aggrieved parties are brought before the same traditional leaders' courts who allocated them the land for conflict resolution. Consensus among the illegal settlers is that the double allocation provides further rent-seeking opportunities for the traditional leaders because they solicit bribes from them in order to be allocated a new place. Those who are poor and cannot afford to pay a bribe are forced out leading to some families struggling to grow enough crops to feed their families as some of these evictions happen during the rainy season. Evicted illegal settlers cannot successfully contest that decision because they are intimidated and they also lack legal documentation that supports ownership of that land. In addition, it is impossible to reverse decisions enforced by traditional leaders regarding land allocation both by resettled farmers and illegal settlers as they are locally viewed as too powerful and have support of the ZANU PF, the ruling party. Over the years, the party has successfully used local government, chiefs, credit loans and local extension services as a way of extending its control over rural areas. Similarly, a study by Marewo, Ncube and Chitonge (2021), found that ZANU-PF politicians have been taking advantage of pressure for land to enforce the addition of beneficiaries onto existing A1 villages to extend their support base through votes. The above narrative highlights the lack of power of resettled farmers to challenge the actions of the state. Hence, there is acceptance of its decisions for the sake of peace, but in the process causing conflicts and contestations for resettled farmers.

The illegal parcelling out of land in Nyajezi resettlement scheme has also led to the local schools and hospital being overwhelmed as the population is rising fast without a corresponding development in social amenities. There is also overcrowding in primary and secondary schools in the area, a problem they have never experienced before. Equally, the nearby mission hospital that used to cater for the resettled farmers can no longer accommodate and cope with the increasing number of people.

Discussion with hospital staff revealed that allocation of medication from the government has remained the same, while the number of patients has increased exponentially. Many people who visit the hospital complain that they cannot get ordinary pain killers and that they instead receive a prescription to buy using their own scarce monetary resources.

Counting losses and damage from environmental degradation

Nyajezi resettlement scheme has not been spared from the adverse impacts of land degradation and farmers' livelihoods are increasingly vulnerable due to the unprecedented increase in the number of people and livestock. The chief drivers of this phenomenon are mostly bio-physical factors due to communal grazing land encroachment by illegal settlers. These settlers wantonly cut down trees and clear out key vegetation, such as grass, to make way for growing crops leading to loss of vegetation cover. The absence of vegetation and overgrazing, leaving bare and loose soils, results in soil being easily washed away by rainwater.

The causes of veld fires in the area are mainly ascribed to human activities associated with land-use systems and farming practices that are vulnerable to veld fires such the burning of crop residues. Most fires start on farms then spread to the surrounding veld, where they become uncontrollable and cause extensive damage. Increasing climate variability and the effects of climate change have also exacerbated the problem of veld fires due to the frequent dry spells and delayed onset of rain which is becoming more common in the area. It was observed that a majority of both resettled farmers and illegal settlers are not fully committed to controlling veld fires that break out but rather resort to blaming each other, which further strains relations that are already at breaking point. Even though the government through various stakeholders has intensified veld fire management awareness campaigns to achieve the minimum target of a 25 per cent reduction in losses to veld fires by 2022 and ensure aspirations of the National Development Strategy (NDS1) are achieved (*The Herald*, 2021), the veld fire trends continue to increase in Nyajezi resettlement. It appears that raising awareness and prosecuting offenders are not sufficient deterrents to prevent veld fires. Close examination has shown that both resettled farmers and illegal settlers in the area lack training and skills on how to comply with the veld fire pre-suppression, suppression, and post-suppression measures. In addition, they lack adequate manpower and are not mechanized to install fireguards or carry out fire fighting operations.

Households' livelihoods vulnerability

Aware of the pitfalls of its oppressors and the reason for armed struggle against white minority, one of the main objectives of the government of Zimbabwe for the implementation of the resettlement program was to ensure food security at household level (Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, 2018). In addition, resettlement aims at extending and improving the base for productivity in agriculture for peasants, thereby improving standard of living of the largest and poorest sector of the population in a given area. Resettled farmers in Nyajezi resettlement are facing an existential threat to their way of life, as the effects of illegal parcelling out of communal grazing land continue to ravage their farms and disrupt their livelihoods. Women in the area are at the front of this battle bearing the brunt of the suffering, because they make up the greater proportion of the population reliant on agriculture and are the majority of the agricultural labour force (World Bank, 2022).

Fellman (2012) argues that socio-economic vulnerability is context-specific, but it is aggravated by poverty and gender inequality among other things. In the study area, the use of draught animals for farming is widespread and long-established. Farmers who do not own draught power usually hire or

borrow animals to prepare the land before planting seeds during the farming season. Resettled farmers, especially women, pointed out that ever since illegal settlers occupied the communal grazing land resettlement scheme there has been low and declining farming productivity. One of the reasons cited for the reduction in harvest is that draught animals, a critical component of how farming is done, are becoming malnourished as grazing lands have become depleted because of land occupations. Cattle are used for both primary and secondary tillage because animal-based systems demand less labour for the entire farming cycle. But most farmers can no longer plough all the twelve acres they were allocated, which was possible before illegal settlers came to occupy the communal grazing lands. Other resettled farmers reported incidences of late planting because they are forced to postpone farming at the onset of the rains while waiting for cattle to become stronger and when the soil is less hard, which takes away 'the expected benefits associated with early planting.' Purchase of supplementary feed for livestock is beyond the reach of many due to the economic situation in the country and also the trade-offs between paying school fees and buying stock feeds. The delay in planting and failure to till all the acres reduces expected yields and money from farming impacting livelihoods.

Livestock value acts as social currency, thereby adding to capital and managing risk (Herrero et al., 2010). They also represent liquid assets or 'fluid capital' that can be realized at any time, reducing the risk for these households, which is integral to their farming, adding stability to the farming system. Rural life also requires people to rear livestock because they come in handy in times of a poor rain season that affects crop production. Farmers also rely on livestock for certain social transactions such as lobola, payment of school fees, etc. Besides being used as social currency, livestock produce manure that is used in farms and gardens to address the problem of infertile soils, which are dominant in most fields, in the area as a way of adding nutrients to the soil. Households without livestock pick cow dung from the fields during the offseason and apply it in their garden as a strategy to offset the cost of fertilisers. Women and widows sell these vegetables from the garden to enhance their livelihoods, and the money is used for household needs (medical, school fees, etc.). To add on, in cases where resettled farmers are food insecure between December and March when they do not produce enough food to last until the next harvest, they rely on produce from their gardens. However, due to the dwindling numbers of livestock for most households there is no longer enough manure to apply on farms or in gardens, nor are fertilisers affordable, leading to poor yields for most farmers, which negatively impacts on their livelihoods.

Livestock production constitutes a very important component of the agricultural economy of most rural areas. It is a contribution that goes beyond direct food production to include multipurpose uses such as capital accumulation. Furthermore, livestock in such communities is closely linked to the social and cultural lives of these households for whom animal ownership ensures varying degrees of sustainable farming and economic stability. Livestock, especially cattle, remain the most cost-effective power source for small and medium-scale farmers. In most resettlement schemes, just like in communal areas, livestock reduces the risks associated with crop production. They also represent liquid assets that can be realized at any time, adding further stability to the production system. Owning livestock, especially cattle and using them for farming is also important for social reasons as it is viewed as a sign of wealth and gives one an elevated status in the community. Sekuru Rupawo, who resettled in the area in 1980 and built his herd to an impressive 30 cattle, but now makes do with none, confirmed that the receding pastures in the area was a contributing factor in him losing all his cattle, in the process losing his dignity amongst other villagers. He explained,

> There is hardly any more grazing land for our cattle around here and when the drought came, I could not afford to buy supplements for my cattle and they all died because of hunger. I feel heartbroken and useless to be honest. (Field interview, August 2019)

The recent Cyclone Freddy that happened in February 2023 destroyed crops that were almost ready for harvest, further worsening the vulnerability of women and widows. Climate change amplifies the situation, as impoverished households have limited access to resources to prevent losses and recover from climate shocks (Trisos et al., 2022). Interestingly, the majority of resettled farmers now conceive that farming on settlement schemes no longer provides a future career and prosperity for their children. Most now prefer their children to follow livelihood options outside farming such as gold panning. This was explained by one resettled farmer who said,

> Farming paid very well in the time when we didn't have *vabvakure* in this area. We could afford to buy a lot of property, our own inputs and remain with extra income to use throughout the year. Ever since the illegal settlers invaded our grazing land, we have just become poor and it no longer pays to farm. It's better for our children to do gold panning or look for formal work in towns. (Field interview, August 2019)

As income and productivity from agriculture is reduced by illegal grazing-land occupation, women are now forced to engage in paid work or petty trading to access cash. It has also led to an increase in financial disempowerment, conflict incidences and the challenge of GBV in the area as some husbands are reported to seize the cash earned from farming**.** In some cases, teenage girls have gone into early marriages with minimal education leading to economic dependency and restricted participation in economic activities leading to further women's vulnerability. As women are already facing various difficulties in maintaining their insecure livelihoods, most reported that their situation has become worse rather than improving, and more feel their families are worse off than those living off the scheme.

A streak of "Them and us" sentiment

From the onset, the placement of new families in the communal grazing land from 2002 was filled with uncertainty and introduced new complexities of belonging and contestation in the area. The illegal settlers in the area are labelled "foreigners" and belonging has never been easy despite living in the area for more than two decades. The resettled farmers and illegal settlers have nothing in common except the soil they now both lay claim to and now grudgingly share. There is a powerful streak of discrimination which dominates in the place where 'We were legally settled and here before you' becomes the simple basis for claims-making.

Central to life approach in Nyajezi resettlement scheme is shared resources and cooperation which helps in enhancing social relations and cohesion among the people. Yet, twenty years after the illegal settlers have come to occupy the resettlement scheme the resettled farmers have not agreed to working with them or allow them to join their already established community organisations. For example, this sentiment is confirmed by the case of a burial club formed by villagers on behalf of their families as a source of support in cases of death. The membership of the club included members and beneficiaries from all of the fifteen villages. In the event of a death of a club member or their immediate relative, a stipulated amount of money is disbursed from the pool of funds to contribute towards the funeral. Members of the burial club provide emotional support and assistance in the running of the day-to-day activities of the funeral. However, the illegal settlers have not been allowed to join the burial club, even though they would like to be part of the club if given the opportunity.

Another example is that from its inception villagers formed groups amongst themselves that help foster social capital when farming, such as *gumwe,* as a rural coping mechanism. *Gumwe* is a work system through which community members provide extra labour to help each other in farming activities (Shutt, 2002). The resettled farmers run their own *gumwe* separate from the illegal settlers and do not want to work with them because they are 'not part of us'. The organisation of crop production varies amongst different households but is organised around family farming, relatives and neighbour labour mobilisation, several types of sharecropping, community resource pooling, labour tenancies, and hired wage labour. In cases where a villager has inadequate family labour to complete the farm tasks, preference is given to fellow village members as hired labour rather than using an illegal settler.

In early 2000, a savings and lending group, locally known as *kufusa mari* (Shona term meaning investing money) was introduced in the resettlement scheme. Group members teach each other how to set financial goals and work towards them. Through the savings group, each member regularly contributes an agreed-upon amount, especially after harvesting, to the group's collective savings. If someone needs a loan for an expense, they will make a request to the group, which then approves or refuses it. This is another example of 'them and us', where illegal settlers in the area have not been allowed to join this group as all the resettled farmers argued that it would mean that they are helping to develop people who have invaded their area.

The illegal settlers are also not allowed to get water from the village boreholes that supply safe drinking water because 'they were not part of initial beneficiaries'. Several of the illegal settlers have yet to access a clean water supply and they rely on unsafe drinking water sources such as uncovered wells. As a consequence, many illegal settlers are being forced to use contaminated surface water sources. Village assemblies where discussions on community matters are raised do not include illegal settlers, nor do they participate in community work. There is also exclusion from ceremonies such as *maganzvo* (rainmaking) that is practised so that the area has abundant rain and as an appeasement of avenging spirits.

Despite attempts at exclusion by the resettled farmers, the illegal settlers always have the support of traditional leaders. The only time resettled farmers and illegal settlers only collaborate or work together on structures or programmes enforced by the state at village level is when traditional leaders in the area intervene, but never on social networks created out of their own. When the traditional leaders are not involved, illegal settlers are even side-lined in the decision-making regarding the development of the resettlement area and even at times that they attended the meetings their views are side-lined. However, the illegal settlers are defiant and argue that they have a right to be settled by reason of being bona fide citizens of Zimbabwe. One illegal settler said,

> Those resettled farmers who got here soon after independence have no right to be angry. Land belongs to all Zimbabweans so it is important to accommodate us because we have nowhere to go. This is now our home and we will die here. (Field interview, September 2019)

Even though the stance of the illegal settlers tells a story of resistance and defiance in their response, they indicated that with the tension they have with the resettled farmers, they don't see Nyajezi resettlement scheme becoming a place they call 'home'. The responses above portray the marginalization and conflict which leads to illegal settlers lacking a sense of belonging in the area. Key informant interviews have highlighted that the failure of acceptance of illegal settlers into local groups is due to a number of factors that include; how they came and acquired land from the

resettlement scheme, failure to follow proper procedures in settling, and the inability to accept and respect local customs and traditions.

Discussion

The study shows that growing levels of environmental degradation and, to date, land reform has done little to improve the environmental sustainability of rural land use practices. Mudau, Mukonza, and Ntshangase (2018) observed that despite the stated intention of addressing some of the problems of overcrowding and inequality, land reform in Zimbabwe has paradoxically failed to address overcrowding and resource scarcity on marginal lands and has instead precipitated new ecological, social and economic challenges. Compounding the situation is that environmental sustainability is not mainstreamed in the land reform process (Davies et al., 2020) and because of this, the pace of environmental degradation has been much quicker in resettlement areas ZERO (2005). Mukwada (2007) and Kepe and Hall (2018) assert that serious environmental degradation has produced a semblance of communal areas in resettlement schemes, rather than a place of stability and growth.

Evidence from this case study illustrates that the state, through traditional leaders, is involved in enabling the contests and conflicts since they deliver various government responsibilities through delegated, limited or no presence; a case in point is this case study where the addition of illegal settlers without due consultation and process enabled tensions. This has been emphasised by the fact that belonging to a location is more frequently informed by social, political [state institutions] and economic factors through which access to various resources such as land, are sought and contested (Koot et al., 2019; Scoones, 2021). Under normal circumstances, laws and regulations must be enforced non-selectively to discourage chaos and preserve the legacy of land reform. However, the case study demonstrates the weakness of a top-down land governance system (Chigwata, 2016; Marewo et al., 2021), which, through the haphazard and illegal allocation of communal grazing land in resettlement areas, is vulnerable to how its decisions affect people on the ground.

Analysis of data shows that resettlement scheme resettled farmers create boundaries of excluding others mostly in the ownership and use of land. This is also evident in Ncube and Marewo (2022) who concur that land plays an important role in the definition and contestations of belonging particularly in agrarian societies. The politics of belonging therefore helps unpack the preferences, differences and boundaries that are created by people (Scoones, 2021; Ncube and Marewo, 2022). Furthermore, the insights from this case study show that the politics of belonging as a framework is important in understanding the preferences, differences and boundaries that are created by people, particularly in the context of land reform (Antonsich, 2010; Ntali, 2021).

Even though one of the objectives and intentions of the government of Zimbabwe for its land reform programme was stimulating agricultural production, as well as the well-being of the newly settled, this study illustrates that the contestation and conflict has led to vulnerability of resettled farmers. Even though they own the land, resettled farmers seem to be struggling to sustain their livelihoods due to a combination of socio-economic and political factors. This has now exposed them to poverty that manifests in the form of food insecurity, lack of cash, early marriage for young girls and GBV. As recognised by Fabusoro et al., (2010) and Scoones et al., (2011) households that lack assets remain rooted in farming and reel in poverty. Discussions with resettled farmers show that they are reliant on agriculture and their livelihoods depend on farming and that once challenges set in they were exposed to poverty.

Conclusion

The research examined the dynamics surrounding resettled farmers in their existing socio-political landscape, livelihoods and illustrated the well-being of farmers resettled soon after independence in the Nyajezi resettlement scheme. It highlighted that while the first phase of land reform largely resolved the historical land question brought about by colonial conquests, the programme arguably created new, backward, hopeless communal area settings in the resettlement areas and that things are no better for the people, perhaps worse. Resettlement schemes were mainly meant to decongest people from communal areas, but there are strong indications that traditional leaders are using their power to illegally parcel out land creating contestations, conflict, and marginalisation and new questions have emerged. Now more than ever, there is the crisis of how the illegal settlers who are resident in Nyajezi resettlement area will be accommodated, since the current land tenure laws does not permit communal grazing land subdivisions. Tenure security for the illegal settlers was shown to be tenuous as they live under constant threat of being evicted by traditional leaders and resettled farmers who insist that they do not belong to the area. There is strong evidence that the state has partially withdrawn from Nyajezi resettlement area and has been superseded by traditional leaders whose control and influence is used for their narrow political interests. As a result, the resettled farmers in the study area are now being impoverished as manifested by food insecurity, lack of incomes, early marriage and GBV. While the land question was deracialised, new inequities are starting to evolve. If the country's economic crisis persists, demand for land will continue to rise and fuel future land struggles.

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