

## An Assessment of Livelihood Realities in the Lowveld of Zimbabwe and South Africa After the Land Reform

### What are the policy implications?

Mutanga Shingirirai Savious

Land is not only one of the most defining social, political and development issues in Southern Africa, it contains the most intractable element. Agrarian reform has gone through considerable historical continuities that have made the resolution of the land question in Southern Africa complex. This brief highlights some of the realities on the ground in the lowveld regions of South Africa and Zimbabwe. Central to the study is the utility of geospatial technologies. Success indicators have brought forth the need to re-interpret the failures and successes of land reform. The evidence shown is contrary to the notion that land reform has been a complete failure, particularly on rural livelihoods. However the challenges faced by medium scale commercial farming raise the questions of viability of this sector. Future policy framework must pay attention to the sustainability of land reform based on evidence on the ground.

### Introduction

In the recent past, agrarian reform has undergone considerable salient historical continuities that have made it a complex process, both in terms of political and scientific interpretations. When interpreting the impacts of land reform too much has been coloured by ideological posturing and

misinformation.<sup>1</sup> For a sound policy direction of land reform, a review of the evidence as provided by practical experiences of beneficiaries is desirable. This should involve applying new technologies in assessing the impacts of land reform and to undertake field work aimed at collecting empirical data that can be used to expand the understanding of the dynamics of land reform both in

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terms of the impacts it has made to beneficiaries,<sup>2</sup> ecological systems and the processes that exist within the land that has been re-distributed.

The incorporation of new technologies, like spatial reasoning in interpreting the impact of land reform can also be of great help in improving the policy directions of land reform. The second decade of the 21st century has seen a growing trend in the application of these technologies. Geospatial technologies in the form of Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing which have the potential of providing spatially explicit evidence. The need for spatial information was clearly emphasized at the UNCED conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where it was stated that geographic data is fundamental in addressing global environmental issues.<sup>3,4</sup> Ever since this statement was made, successful applications of geospatial technologies have brought tremendous improvement to the areas of biodiversity and ecosystem management.

The popular component of geospatial technologies, GIS, has proved to be effective in capturing, storing, checking, integrating, manipulating, analysing and displaying data related to positions or locations on the earth's surface.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, remote sensing involves the process of acquiring information about the earth's physical, chemical and biological systems, through the analysis of data acquired by a device that is not in contact with the object, area, or phenomena under investigation.<sup>6</sup> It is used to monitor and assess the condition and changes in the natural environments. One way of doing so is through satellite applications. Satellite sensors measure electromagnetic radiation reflected by the Earth's surface features.<sup>7</sup> This tool is visual and objective minimizes bias in data collection and can cover extensive areas.

These tools can provide an understanding of what happened in the past, the present, as well as a deeper grasp of the processes involved. Such information acts as a prerequisite to predict the future and to subsequently validate the accuracy of those predictions.<sup>8</sup> In response to questions such as; *what, where, how much, why and how*, remote sensing fused within GIS provides such information through large area images, taken over time.<sup>9</sup>

### **Geospatial Technologies in the Context of Land Reform**

Remote sensing can aid in the understanding of land reform by quantifying (how much) land, of what type, for what use, its distribution (where)

and explaining the process of land use and land cover change (why and how) following the land reform. The ability to track changes over time makes this tool unique in aiding the understanding of land reform particularly in the realm of food security. In other words, the tools provide a good example of what<sup>10</sup> is referred to as spatially integrated social sciences. The utility of satellite applications and GIS to map land use patterns<sup>11</sup>, quantify and monitor agricultural production<sup>12</sup>, complemented with computational analysis demonstrate the power of geospatial technologies. Land use land cover change also known as land change, is a general term for the human modification of Earth's terrestrial surface.<sup>13</sup> Current rates, extents, intensities of land use and land cover are far greater than ever in history, driving unprecedented changes in ecosystems and environmental processes at local, regional and global scales.<sup>14</sup> Cropland expansion has been the main cause for widespread conversions of natural to human kind dominated landscape.<sup>15, 16</sup>

### **Juxtaposing the Case of Land Reform in South Africa and Zimbabwe**

The multiple realities of land access and use in both countries share some common ideologies. The need to redress the inequitable land allocation which emerged from apartheid is driving the land reform in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> There is a broad consensus that continued efforts are needed as a matter of urgency to resolve the land issue. However, there is much controversy as to how this should be done. Perhaps the Zimbabwean fate was decided about 10 years ago when large areas of Zimbabwe's commercial farms were invaded by land hungry villagers led by the war veterans and backed by President Robert Mugabe. The Supreme Court ruled the land reform programme illegal and since then the images of chaos, destruction, and violence have dominated global coverage.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this is a critical moment for us to learn from evidence based research and reflect on its lessons. This might be instructive for South Africa as it ponders a way forward with its own land reform challenges.

This brief has noted that comparing rural livelihoods between Zimbabwe and South Africa, particularly in the lowveld, is not that easy given that the Zimbabwean case has reached an advanced stage, whereby most of the black majority who were wishing to get land have received it after the fast track resettlement programme of 2000. On the other hand, in South Africa a few scattered

**Table 1** A highlight of the transition of South Africa’s policy on land and the associated challenges

Prior to 1994 the African National Congress (ANC) stated in the Reconstruction and Development Programme that land reform was to redress the injustices of forced removals and historical denial of access to land.		
Programme	Legislation: Description	Overview
Land Restitution Programme	Claims lodged in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 1994. This was based on a willing buyer, willing seller concept and land was to be bought from land-owners, by the government, and then given back to those who were dispossessed by the 1913 Land Act. Cut off date was March 1999.	<p>Restitution is the area where the South African government faces its biggest challenge, thus the call for a turnaround strategy. The process has taken very long and encountered many problems. Some of the challenges include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To date, only a fraction of the government’s land reform targets have been met, which has in turn angered supporters of the incumbent political party, the African National Congress (ANC).<sup>19</sup></li> <li>• Restitution claims were plagued by fraudulent and ghost claimants. The government is continually blamed for slow pace, inadequate funding and capacity problems.<sup>20</sup></li> <li>• It was also revealed in November 2009 that the Land Claims Commission still owed R10 billion to beneficiaries and land-owners from whom the land was bought.<sup>21</sup></li> </ul> <p>The South African Government reviewed this and much was included in the Land Rights Bill of 2001.</p>
Land Redistribution Programme	1994-1999. This aimed to provide the disadvantaged and poor with land for residential and productive purposes. A single, yet flexible grant mechanism of R16 000 was used to purchase land from willing sellers.	
Land Tenure Reform Programme	Provide people with secure tenure where they live to prevent arbitrary evictions and fulfil the constitutional requirement that all South Africans have access to land. (Labour Tenants Act 1996): This protects the rights of labour tenants and gives them the right to claim land. The Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act 1996 was passed as an interim measure to protect people in the former homelands. Extension of Security Tenure Act (ESTA) 1997, aimed to protect the rights of people who live in consent with the land owner.	
Land Rights Bill of 2001	Land Rights Bill was re-examined. Significant change was on the Land Redistribution Programme. Sub programmes were established among which includes: Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD), Land Redistribution for Residential Settlement, Land for non- Agricultural Enterprise e.g. eco-tourism.	
The Green Paper Document of 2010.	A Green Paper on land reform was signed off by the Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, Gugile Nkwinti. Growing scepticism about the issue of land reform with the genesis of a cacophony of voices weighed in the debate around land nationalisation. The government indicated that it had no intentions to undertake a nationalisation program. <sup>22</sup>	

Source: Author’s own

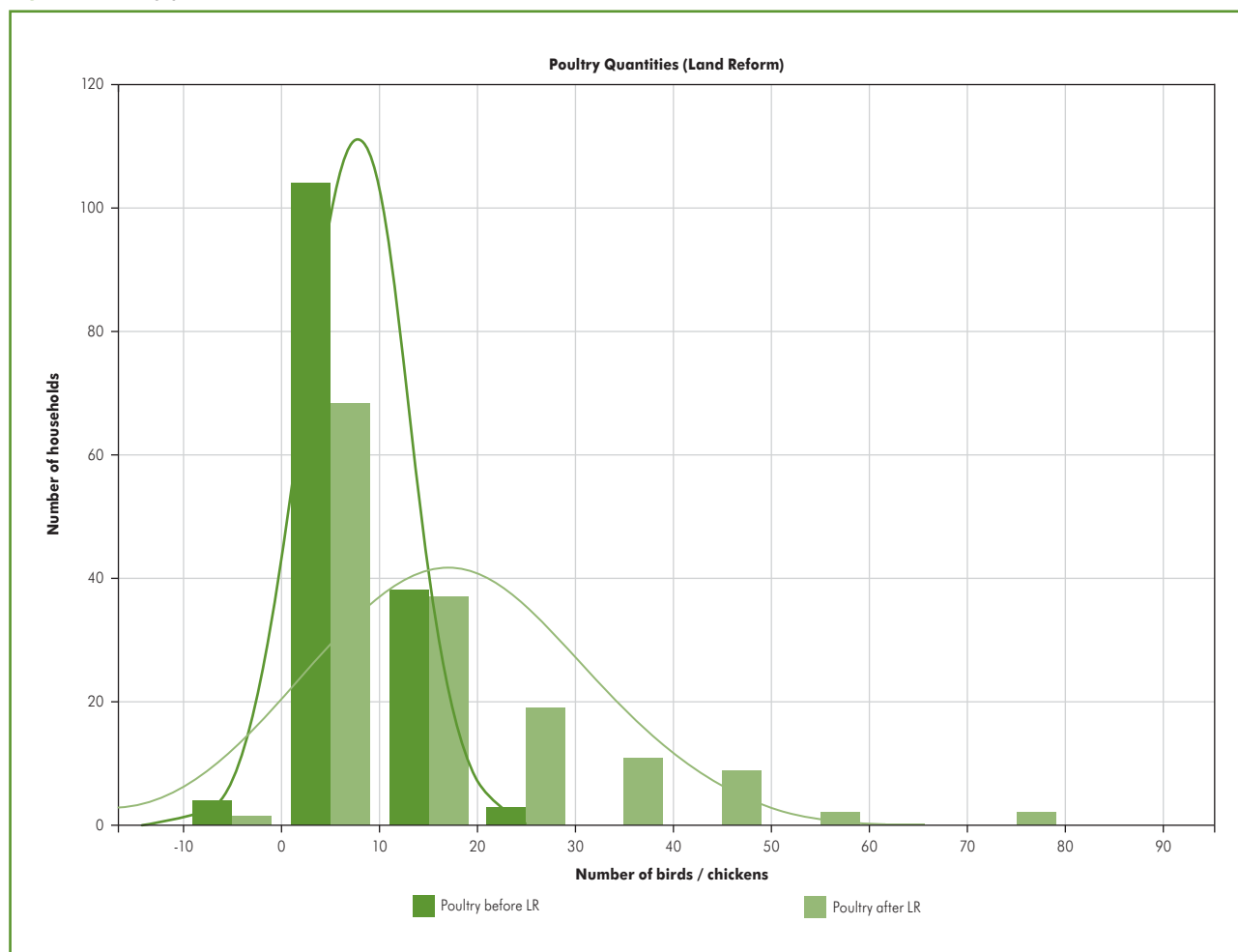
**Table 2** Transition of Zimbabwe’s policy on land

Promulgation of the Land Acquisition Act in 2000, saw the emergence of the fast track resettlement programme, commonly referred to as the ‘Chaotic Farm invasions’.		
Programme	Description	Overview
<b>A1: schemes</b> (Smallholder farming).	Small holder farms, villages or self contained units where there is low capital investment and a reliance on local labour. <b>Area:</b> 5–12 Hectares.	Across these there is much variation. Beneficiaries have done reasonably well, particularly in the wetter parts of the province.
<b>A2: schemes</b> Medium size farms (Medium Scale commercial farming)	Small-scale commercial agriculture. <b>Area:</b> 12–40 Hectares	On the redistributed areas of the sugar estates in the lowveld there is a similarly mixed story, with some new farmers making a go of sugar production on 30ha plots, often converting some of their land to vegetables and other crops to spread the risk.

The contrasts between A1 and A2, small and large scale, smallholder and commercial are rather arbitrary and misleading. There is much blurring between these different models. Since 2000 the old dualistic agricultural economy inherited from the colonial era, has gone for good and a new agrarian structure is fast emerging.<sup>23</sup>

Source: Author’s own

**Figure 1** Poultry production before and after land reform in Chiredzi district, Zimbabwe



Source: Author's own

households have been identified in communities of Huntington, Justicia, Belfast and Lylidale in Mpumalanga. Other case studies include the Makuleke Communal lands which are found in the northern most parts of the Kruger National Park between the Limpopo and Livuvhu rivers. Nonetheless, there are quite a number of notable commercial farms which have been identified close to the Trans frontier Park; such is the Case of Lisbon Citrus Estate and Malelane Sugar Cane Estates. The majority of families living in these communities are former labourers in the Citrus Estates who are looking forward to government grants for their survival.

### Land Reform Benefits as Perceived by the Beneficiaries in Zimbabwe.

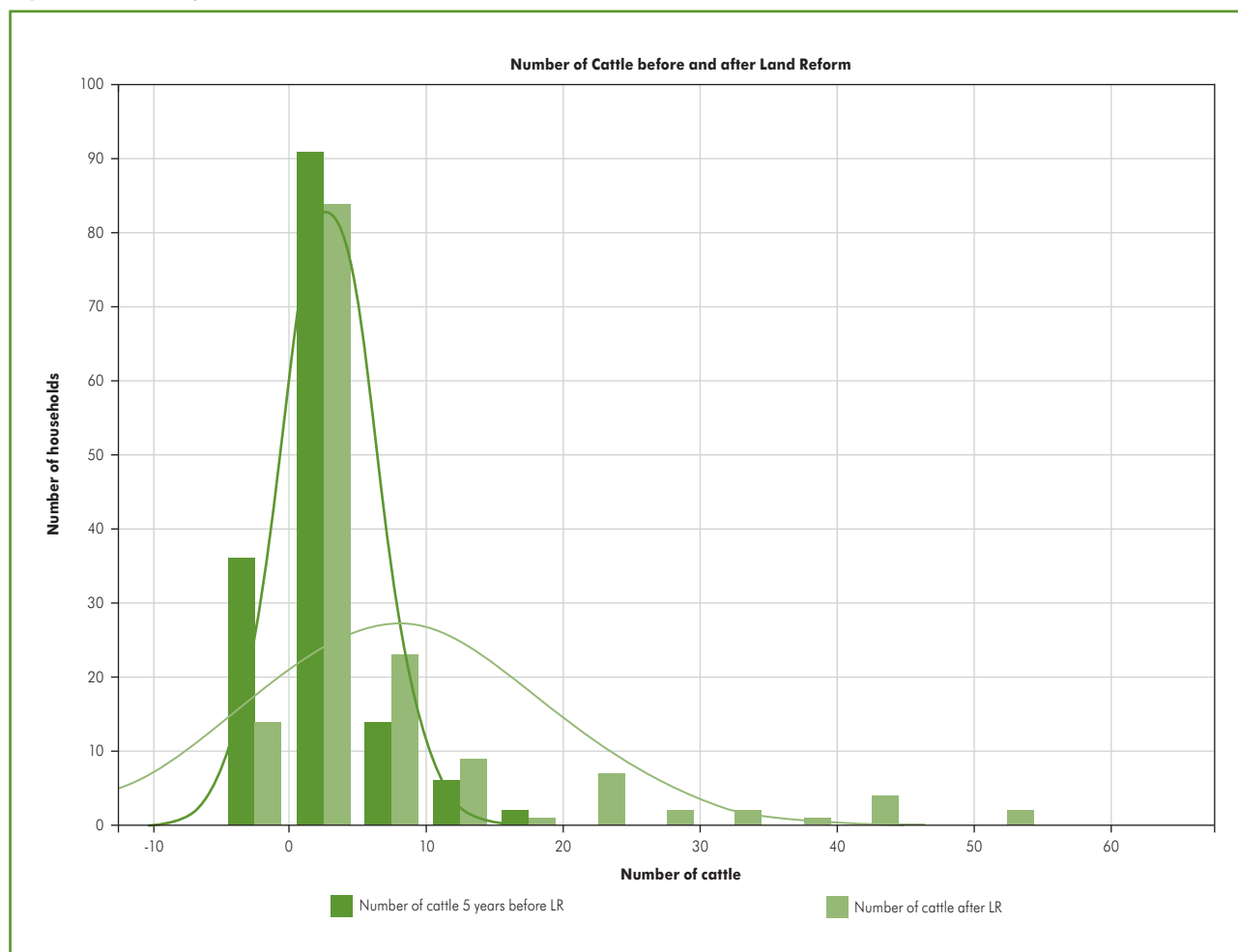
No doubt the livelihoods of these people have significantly improved. Figure 1 and 2 illustrate the increase in livestock and poultry production, after the land reform at small scale subsistence farming level. Maize and cotton production have also

improved as shown on Appendix 1. In an interview with some villagers they exclaimed,

‘Our life has drastically changed for the better since we moved to this park. I filled 3 granaries with maize last season. This is sufficient enough to eat for the next 3 years on top of which I can sell the surplus. My livestock has improved significantly, I can just milk my cows, eat their meat, and chickens are all over the yard. Trucks are coming to order maize here because they get it cheaper, we can now afford to send our kids to school and, buy their uniforms. Indeed we were deprived of a good living in those tribal trust lands.’

However there is conflict of interest on the utility of the land (i.e., eco-tourism or conservation versus rural settlement in Gonarezhou which forms part of the Transfrontier Park bordering Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa). Despite the government of Zimbabwe's efforts to compensate these new farmers with land elsewhere, they are prepared to live in the Transfrontier Park. This brief argues that perhaps

**Figure 2** Livestock production before and after land reform in Chiredzi district, Zimbabwe



Source: Author's own

participatory conservation approaches should have taken precedence in such areas.

South Africa's contractual National Parks and the Makuleke community might be an interesting reference point. The community lodged a claim for an area known then as Pafuri Triangle in 1995. The community had occupied the land until 1969, when they were removed by the then Department of Bantu Affairs. This claim was considered valid by the Department of Land Affairs and the claims court restored the land to the community in 1996 with certain conditions, namely; no mining, prospecting, residence nor agriculture. The land was to be used for conservation purposes only. The South African National Parks (SANP) retains the right of first refusal should the land be put on tender. A Joint Management Board (JMB) comprising of SANP and three community representatives was set up to act as the governing board of the day-to-day management of Makuleke Region.<sup>24</sup> By and large, the Makuleke community has gained economically through employment creation, poverty reduction through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.<sup>25</sup>

### Global Rhetoric against Local Realities on Commercial Agriculture

While much evidence has suggested an unpleasant scenario for commercial agriculture, there are success stories from which the future policy can draw lessons from.

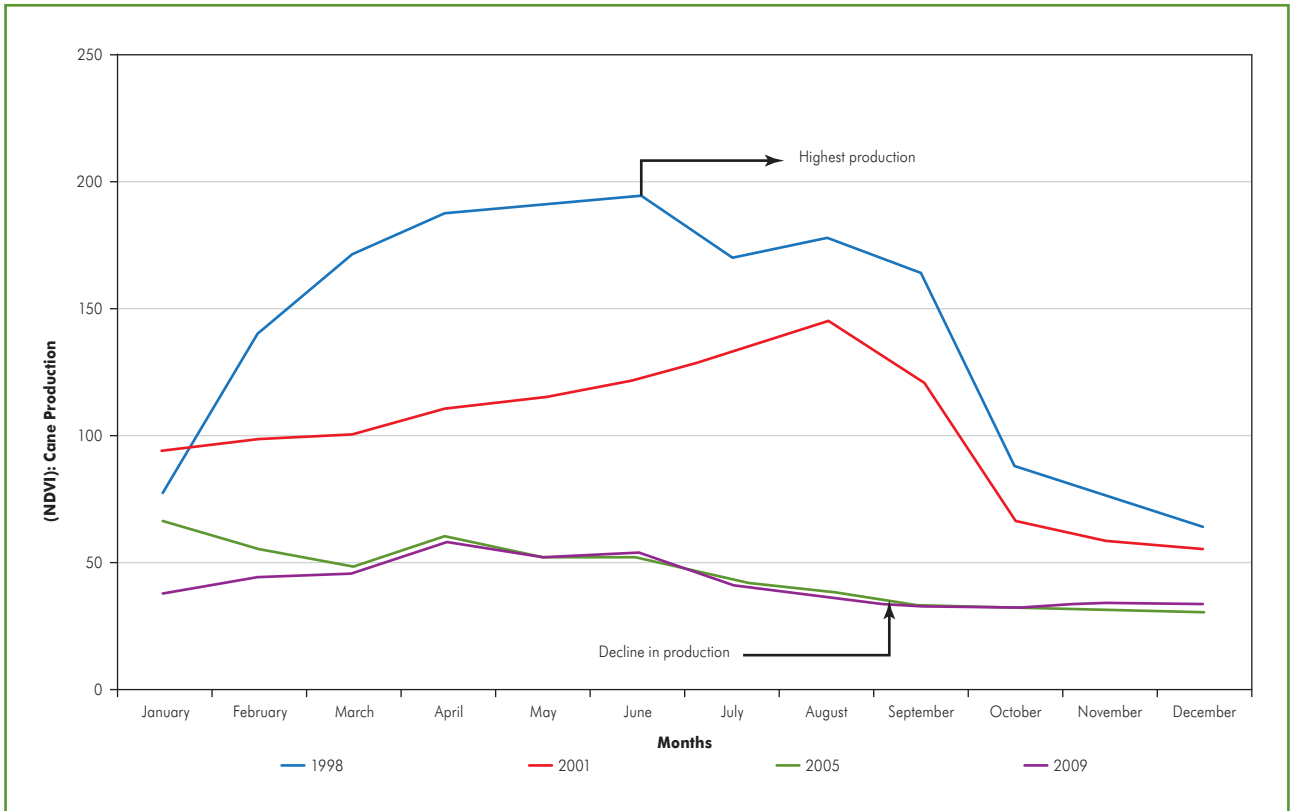
The survey below, carried out in 2010, shows mixed scenarios of success and failure from one farm to the other. In an attempt to compare sugarcane production by new farmers (beneficiaries of land reform) in Malelane Estate of Mpumalanga and Mkwesine Estate of Chiredzi district (Zimbabwe), using satellite imagery, the production levels have gone down over the years (Figures 3 and 4). As for the A2 schemes of Zimbabwe aimed at small-scale commercial agriculture, in which Mkwesine Estate falls, the economic meltdown of the past few years has prevented substantial capital investment, and new enterprises have been slow to take off.<sup>26</sup> While some farmers abandoned their land, some have opted to grow other crops such as maize for their daily consumption instead of sugar cane. A few redistributed areas

**Figure 3** Sugar cane production depicted using Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) for specific plots of land reform beneficiaries in the Malelane area of South Africa since 1998 to 2009



Source: Author's own

**Figure 4** Sugar cane production depicted using Normalised Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) for specific plots of land reform beneficiaries in the Mkwesine area of Zimbabwe since 1998 to 2009



Source: Author's own

of the sugarcane estates in Hippo Valley which is close to Mkwesine, show positive production trends despite the economic crisis; however, there is need for optimum production in these farms too. This might be partly explained by the access to irrigation, power supply and incentives from the government and the commercial white farmers still owning some of the sugar cane estates in this region.

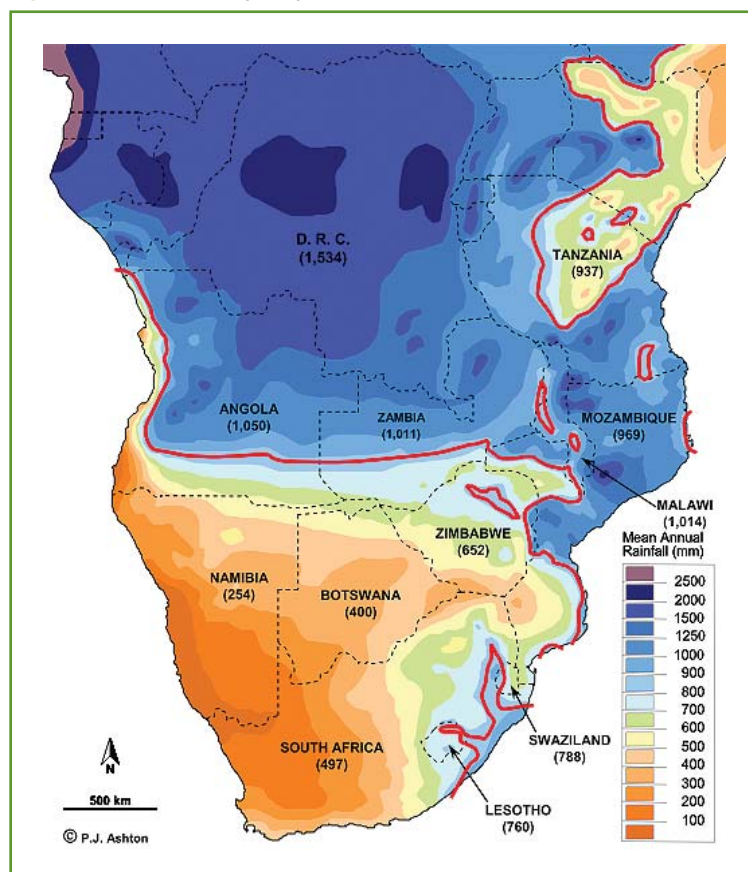
Comparatively, Malelane's case is not that bad compared to that of Mkwesine as shown on Figures 3 and 4 above, although much needs to be done to address the decline in production in both areas. A further critical analysis is however deemed necessary to explain the heterogeneous nature of production within various spatial scales in both case studies. On the other hand, within Mpumalanga, there are estates which have proved to be a total failure. Such is the case of Lisbon Estate which used to export citrus fruit and mango and employ over 2 000 workers; the whole estate is now a grazing land with dilapidated infrastructure. This failure has raised a number of fundamental questions including the preparedness of land recipients for commercial farming, the high risk environment and their ability to raise sufficient capital for commercial production. Nonetheless, this should not lead to the conclusion that land reform has been an abject failure.

### Some of the Salient Challenges for the Future Policy on Land Reform

#### Water scarcity.

The spatial distribution patterns of rainfall reflect a steep gradient from the North to the South and East to West. Significantly, most of the Southern African Development community (SADC) are all on the wrong side of the global average of 860mm/yr as shown on Figure 5. In the lowveld regions of Zimbabwe and South Africa i.e. in Chiredzi district and Mpumalanga, of the 250 households interviewed in 2010 199 households cited water scarcity as a major challenge. At the beginning of 2011, floods were wrecking the Southern African Region. Does this dispel the major challenge cited above? This brief negates this; as long as there are no proper strategies set to meet the demand of water in these regions, particularly in the lowveld regions, water scarcity shall forever be a fundamental development constraint not only to South Africa but the entire SADC region.

Figure 5 Mean annual precipitation in Southern Africa<sup>27</sup>



### Sensitivity of land redistribution in South Africa and Zimbabwe

As for the case of Zimbabwe, land hungry villagers who invaded conserved areas such as parts of the Gonarezhou National Park remain defiant of the law, as they site improved livelihoods after the fast track exercise. Certainly this is a cause for concern in view of nature conservation and management of the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations.

In South Africa, land and power struggles are a potential source of conflict in rural communities. Some communities have established the so called 'lands committee' responsible for coordinating their claims under the restitution programme. Meanwhile traditional chiefs of the same communities claim authority over the land. The key challenge is how to create stakeholder consensus around the implementation strategy and thus improve the procedure of land acquisition. Under the current policy, if the government determines that an investment should take place despite opposition of land rights holder, expropriation might be possible, subject to the relevant compensation requirements.<sup>28</sup> The slow pace, inadequate funding and capacity problems raised by South Africa's restitution programme have been echoed by villagers in Huntington, Justicia and Belfast.

A senior lands committee member in the community explained the challenges they face on their pending claim,

'Our intention is to get back our land, or we get part of the proceeds from the eco-tourism business. Millions are being generated from tourists who come in and out, yet we are suffering. The government wants to give us land elsewhere and we say no. One of our challenges now is that our legal practitioner requires 2 million Rand to represent us in court, and the poor people cannot afford such an amount. We need the government to help us fight this struggle'.

### Recommendations for the Future Policy

Production promotion models must allow income provision, employment creation and preserving access to land and natural resources of the local community. Keep land in the hands of local communities and implement genuine agrarian reform in order to ensure equitable access to land and natural resources. However the Zimbabwean experience of people living in the Gonarezhou National Park poses a big question about the sustainability of the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations. Ensuring successful operation of the Zimbabwean Land Audit Commission established by the Government of National Unity is key in addressing the land rights and use patterns in Zimbabwe.

Governments need to heavily support agro-ecological farming systems (small holder farming, fishing and livestock farming), participatory research and training programmes so that small scale food producers can produce ample and healthy food for national consumption. In South Africa not all land owners are prepared to undertake small holder farming; they look to government grants to fund larger operations. Empowering rural communities with self sustaining livelihood approaches could reduce the dependency syndrome. In addition, the shift from emphasis on the number of hectares to the sustainability of land reform through the introduction of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme should be upheld.

Land reform should lead to the emergence of viable farms. Adjustment Assistance should be seen as an inherent component of land reform. Provision of capital investment and inputs to new farmers are essential to ensure optimum production. Proper selection and follow up of beneficiaries

are crucial for land reform to develop sustainable commercial farming. Linked to this, training is essential not only in farm technologies but also in marketing and financial management.<sup>29</sup> This implies the need for a sustainable framework which encapsulates the future utility of the land.

### Conclusion

The question of land is a complex social and ecological issue which requires a coordinated response. The success indicators in subsistence farming and medium scale commercial farming brought forth the need to re-interpret the failures and successes of land reform. It should be the expectation that land reform must improve rural livelihoods by meeting households' needs, as it has largely been a success in Zimbabwe. However, from a market interpretation, if supporting the foreign market was a general expectation of land reform, then it has failed. A sustainable policy framework must therefore be drawn from evidence on the ground. Perhaps incorporation of spatial reasoning by the research fraternity would help reduce the global rhetoric on land reform. Measurements undertaken using geospatial technologies can help us understand what happened in the past and the present as well as giving us a deeper grasp of the processes involved. This information is critical for a sound policy direction of land reform.

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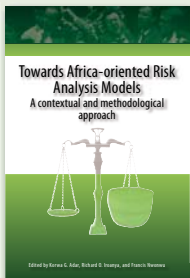
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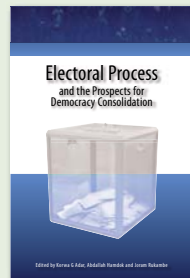
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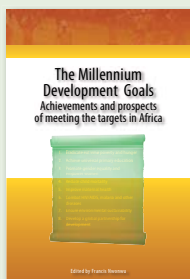
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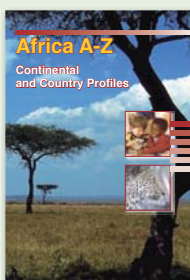
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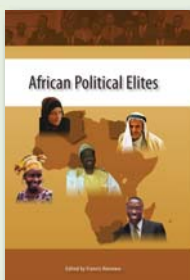
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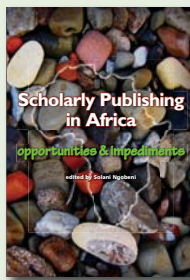
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