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THE FAST TRACK LAND REFORM PROGRAMME, POLITICAL PATRONAGE AND  
GUARDED URBAN BOUNDARIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR PERI – URBAN LAND POLICY  
IN ZIMBABWE

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## **ABSTRACT**

A preoccupation with formalization continues to dominate solutions for dealing with squatter settlements. The presumption is that formalization will turn squatters into homeowners. Emerging evidence from Zimbabwe's fast track land reform programme shows a complex picture whereby in the context of policy incoherence land in peri – urban areas has been used as a patronage resource by the state thereby undermining the tenure security of the poor. Any policy to support the poor in post – crisis Zimbabwe will need to prioritize the idea of land as a social and economic asset rather than a political instrument of the state.

**KEYWORDS:** Zimbabwe, land reform, peri – urban, political patronage, formalization, squatter settlements

## **1. Introduction**

In 2000, the Government of Zimbabwe implemented the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) that was going to economically empower the indigenous people of the country. The FTLRP created opportunities for many poor urbanites to access affordable land for housing in urban and peri – urban areas. This paper will argue that rather than securing the land tenure of reform beneficiaries, the state has been using peri – urban land as a patronage resource.

The paper shows how the FTLRP acted as a driver of informality in peri – urban areas. Secondly, it explores how acquired peri – urban farmland got used by the state as a patronage resource. Thirdly, it reviews peri – urban land policy in Zimbabwe. Fourthly, it examines strategies that have been used in the formalization of squatter settlements. Lastly, it outlines the implications for a peri – urban land policy in Zimbabwe.

## **2. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme and peri – urban areas**

Prior to the year 2000 Zimbabwe’s land reform programme was implemented in rural areas. The land occupations that gathered momentum in 2000 were no longer confined to rural land but also found their way into urban and peri – urban areas. “There was also a steady movement into and occupation of various forms of urban and peri – urban areas as the ‘landless’ urban people also took opportunity and exploited the chaotic situation created by farm occupations countrywide (Marongwe, 2003, p. 223). Within the Harare environs more than 100 farms of between 10 and 7000 hectares in size were at some stage occupied. The farms had varied ownership including indigenous farmers, urban councils, white farmers, government and agro – industrialists (Marongwe, 2003). Thus land occupations in urban and peri – urban areas preceded the FTLRP.

The FTLRP that began in June 2000 and was planned for completion in February 2001 provided for two models of settlement, Model A1 for smallholder farming and Model A2 for the indigenization of commercial farming through the allocation of small, medium and large farms to aspiring black commercial farmers (Zimbabwe, 2001). Unlike earlier resettlement plans, the FTLRP introduced a Model A2 variant for redistribution of land in peri – urban areas. Under the peri – urban A2 settlement model, farm sizes were expected to range between 2 and 50 hectares. Peri – urban farmers were expected to engage in intensive agriculture with a bias towards horticulture, market gardening and crop farming (Zimbabwe, 2001).

The land occupations cum FTLRP were driven by the failure of the economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) of the 1990s, the cost of involvement of the Zimbabwe Government in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1998, and defeat of a Constitutional referendum in February 2000. In 1999 the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed and posed a formidable challenge to the hitherto ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU PF). Hence, it was in the context of deepening political and economic crisis that the FTLRP was implemented (Moyo and Yeros, 2005).

During the ESAP of the 1990s, there was a decline in public sector investment in housing. “By 2003, there had been a decline in housing provision in urban areas, from an annual average of 15

000 – 20 000 units during the period 1985 – 1995, to a meagre 5 000 units in 2 000 (Muchadenyika, 2015, p. 1231). Economic hardships resulting from the poor performance of the housing sector and high rates of unemployment and retrenchment resulted in a high demand for peri – urban land by urbanites (Marongwe, 2003b; Moyo and Yeros, 2005). The high demand for peri – urban land occurred in the context of growing informalization of the economy and land sector (Raftopoulos, 2009). Muchadenyika (2015) notes scarcity of suitable and affordable land for residential development in urban areas as one of the contributing factors to the shortage of housing. Given severe economic constraints in accessing housing, by 2005 illegal structures had mushroomed in urban areas. During that year the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on Operation Restore Order (Operation Murambatsvina) whereby over 700 000 business and housing structures were destroyed.

In the face of income decline and destruction of illegal structures through Operation Murambatsvina the urban poor mostly resorted to peri – urban areas for housing land. Demand for low cost housing increased in peri – urban areas. In a survey of peri – urban areas, Chirisa et al (2014) found that 78.8% of respondents had moved from central Harare while 21.2% had migrated from rural areas. The trend was confirmed by 2012 census data that showed that rapid population growth had occurred in peri – urban areas. This trend has also been reported for South African peri – urban areas (Watson, 2009).

In Zimbabwe, a common feature was that occupiers formed housing cooperatives as a strategy of spearheading their land demands.

### **3. Peri – urban land policy in Zimbabwe**

Urban land use in Zimbabwe is guided through the use of master and local plans. For example, the Harare Combination Master Plan of 1994 generally envisaged the use of peri – urban areas for agricultural activities but with provision for extension of low income housing development in the south of the city. But as a way of providing land for urban development the land reform programme through the Inception Phase Framework Plan (1999 – 2000) also proposed mechanisms for managing the demand and supply of urban land in the country.

In land use planning, urban areas in Zimbabwe have grown through incorporation of neighboring farms, a process that requires government proclamation. Whenever urban areas needed to expand beyond existing boundaries, government would acquire neighboring farms and facilitate their incorporation into urban land. The incorporated land would come under the jurisdiction of the urban council for land use planning purposes. Since the 2000 elections most urban areas came under the control of the MDC while rural areas largely remained under ZANU PF. Peri – urban farms acquired by the ZANU PF government became state land but government would not provide the land to MDC run urban councils (Muchadenyika, 2015). Later, the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution would only allow change in ward boundaries at the time of boundary delimitation for census purposes, that is, once in every 10 years. By maintaining existing boundaries, central government and the ruling ZANU PF party took control of acquired peri – urban land. As a result, urban boundaries have largely remained static while urban development spilled into rural areas under pressure of rising demand for land by the poor.

In peri – urban areas, the FTLRP disregarded provisions of master and local plans as people settled in areas of their choice even where infrastructure had not been developed. As well, the FTLRP disregarded its own peri – urban policy that required people to be settled under the Model A2 only. Instead of government incorporating acquired farms into MDC run urban councils, a move that would be perceived as promoting the MDC, the ruling party controlled peri – urban space, through parallel structures such as militia, housing cooperatives, war veterans and land barons. By taking control of peri – urban areas, central government seemingly usurped the powers of local authorities in land use planning (Muchadenyika and Williams, 2017).

Against the background of a deteriorating national economy, central government allocated acquired peri – urban land without services, mainly to housing cooperatives resulting in the mushrooming of unplanned settlements around cities. Unplanned development was exacerbated by the government’s parallel development policy of 2006 that allowed property developers to raise funds for provision of services by selling off plots before infrastructure had been put in place.

In addition to housing cooperatives, there have been other authorities over peri – urban land including war veterans, urban and rural district councils, and senior bureaucrats. There has been multiple and contested authority over people and land leading to the prevalence of land tenure insecurity. Due to tenure insecurity, Chirisa et al (2014) observed the dominance of temporary structures in Harare’s peri – urban settlements of Caledonia, Hopley, Whitecliff and Hatcliffe. No wonder the major source of worry by squatters in Harare’s peri – urban areas has been land tenure insecurity that has hampered investment not only in shelter but also provision of services (Development Governance Institute, 2017).

#### **4.0 Formalization of squatter settlements and political patronage**

##### **4.1 On formalization of squatter settlements**

De Soto (2000) has put forward persuasive ideas about improving the welfare of the urban poor. In the ideas, the businesses and homes held informally are seen as dead capital. Further, the solution for dealing with squatters and those without title is given as property formalization. De Soto refers to informally held property as dead capital because it cannot be leveraged to produce growth, that is, it cannot be mortgaged as it lacks a proper title to guarantee it as collateral (Gravois, 2005).

Based on the de Soto (2000) wisdom, land titling is seen as the magic wand that would turn squatters in Lima and other urban poor into homeowners. Individual property titles are seen as providing the urban poor with access to credit and investment as they transform their dead assets into capital. But development assistance has shown that individual property titling as a solution to poverty has largely been unsuccessful.

In many developing countries legalized squatters in peri – urban areas realized that a property title has not delivered the intended benefits. Studies carried out in Peru have shown that titles did not increase access to credit (Gravois, 2005). The findings have been corroborated in South Africa, Mexico and Colombia. A related finding has been that in lending, banks care more about stable employment than a land title. Gravois (2005) cites a 2002 World Bank land titling project

in Cambodia that found that titling was more useful to high and middle income groups who afforded to worry about financial leverage, risk and real estate markets. The poor were found to settle for affordable informality. Generally, titling programmes raise land values, and exclude the poor who tend to sell cheap or get evicted.

#### **4.2 Land as a patronage resource**

Instead of providing a basis for leveraging access to financial credit, in Zimbabwe's peri – urban areas land has served as a source of political patronage (Alexander 2003). In Weingrod's (1968) view, patronage has to do with ways in which party politicians distribute land in exchange for political support. Indeed, peri – urban farms that were acquired by government through the FTLRP have enabled ZANU PF to run an urban patronage system (McGregor, 2013).

Peri – urban farms were allocated to housing cooperatives with a view to create urban constituencies that were going to be loyal to ZANU PF and in the process undercut the dominance of the opposition MDC. Cooperatives provided the platform for political organization in the urban environs with people's access to land traded for political allegiance. Thus, partisan allocation of land has been used as an instrument for manipulating political loyalties. Chabal and Daloz (1999: 158), have this to say about political patronage: "Any political action is couched in an environment of reciprocity which dictates its symbolic and instrumental value." The Zimbabwe peri – urban experience since 2000 has been one where government and the ruling party have been using land as a material reward for supporters and as a means of legitimating its rule (Alexander, 2003; Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

McGregor (2003) notes that ZANU PF militia made political loyalty a condition of access to land and housing cooperatives. At Retreat farm – on the periphery of Harare, war veterans who were allocating land expected beneficiaries to be cardholders of the ruling party (Marongwe, 2003). Beneficiaries in Caledonia (an informal settlement in the east of Harare) believed that ZANU PF empowered them through allocation of stands. Moreover, in their study of peri – urban areas of Harare, Chirisa et al (2014) found that housing cooperatives were making efforts for political recognition by the state.

Reform beneficiaries in peri – urban areas have been getting lease with option to purchase state land – an insecure form of tenure because of the state's tendency to use land to control people. In most cases processing of lease agreements encountered enormous delays because stands had not been surveyed, rendering tenure insecure and creating opportunity for politicians to act as guarantors of continued stay in peri – urban settlements (Chirisa et al, 2014). Securing of tenure through patronage was confirmed by residents of Epworth (an informal settlement in the east of Harare) who believed that their tenure derived from ZANU PF, the political party that allocated them the land (Marongwe et al, 2011). Post 2000, the possession of a ZANU PF party card in Epworth was seen as providing security of land tenure.

#### **5.0 Methodology**

The study used three basic approaches to gathering data, that is, literary review, review of policy documents and semi – structured interviews. Review was undertaken of case studies on peri – urban settlements in Zimbabwe with a focus on Harare. This was followed by a review of peri –

urban land related policy documents such as the Harare Combination Master Plan, People First: Zimbabwe's Land Reform Programme and National Housing Policy. Thirdly, were semi – structured interviews with two planners each in government, the private sector, academia, urban and rural district councils and the Urban Development Corporation (Udcorp). Also interviewed were the former Director of Housing People in Zimbabwe, a senior official at Dialogue on Shelter, a Branch Manager at Central Africa Building Society (CABS), and a housing officer for Epworth Local Board (Harare's largest informal settlement).

In semi – structured interviews, planners were asked about their understanding of formalization as a concept, peri – urban policy issues, why urban boundaries have not changed much since radical land reform, evidence of use of land as a political resource by the state, strategies that have been used for formalization of peri – urban informal settlements, whether formalization was a sustainable solution to informal settlements and potential solutions for dealing with peri – urban land use planning issues.

## **6.0 Results and discussion**

The study found that land use policies contained in master and local plans have been overtaken by developments on the ground. When land occupations and the FTLRP took place in peri – urban areas there was disregard of operative plans and the rule of law. In Caledonia only 3 out of 20 phases of the settlement had approved layout plans. Whitecliff had an approved layout plan that was disregarded by occupiers. Procedurally, the local authority for the area has to ensure that the minimum level of road, water and sewerage infrastructure has been installed and a certificate of compliance issued to the developer before construction of buildings can begin. But during the FTLRP people went ahead to build houses on land that had not been surveyed and where infrastructure was yet to be installed.

Planners had different understandings of formalization based on their work experiences. For example, a senior planner in the Department of Physical Planning believed formalization had to do with the preparation of layout plans for purposes of regularizing illegal development. Nonetheless, a senior official in Epworth Local Board had a broader understanding of formalization. In Epworth, formalization of settlements by the state has involved settler registration, layout plan preparation and title survey. Additionally, there has been provision of water, road and sewerage infrastructure. The lack of a common understanding is not surprising given Zimbabwe has yet to develop a protocol on formalization of squatter settlements.

In Zimbabwean planning law formalization is equivalent to regularization whereby illegal development is accepted by authorities subject to satisfactory corrective action. Formalization has often followed a lengthy process that culminates in the granting of title to property. The process begins with registration of land occupants, and proceeds through tacheometric survey and layout plan preparation and title survey. None of the people in Epworth where formalization has been under way since 1995 has satisfied all requirements for issuance of property title.

Otherwise, respondents concurred about the lack of a clear planning authority for peri – urban areas. The thought was that since occupation of peri – urban farms was political, local planning authorities avoided the areas. This created an authority vacuum that got filled by land barons,

housing cooperatives, militia, etc. As a matter of fact, peri – urban areas also became a point of conflict between urban and rural local authorities. While rural district councils collected taxes from the informal settlements, the residents depended on the urban councils for services.

Evidence from semi – structured interviews confirmed the use of land by the state as a political resource. As noted by the Epworth Local Board, immediately before the 2013 elections, politicians brought people to the area and new settlements began to sprout. Similarly, soon after Operation Murambatsvina politicians moved former squatters into the Harare South area in a bid to create a political constituency there. The evidence confirms partisan redistribution of land resources in return for ZANU PF loyalty (Muchadenyika, 2015; McGregor, 2013; Alexander and McGregor 2013). Housing cooperatives which had their identity in the ruling party were used as a vehicle of control over beneficiaries. In a study of land allocation to housing cooperatives Chirisa et al (2015) found that housing cooperatives had been allocated more sites to develop residential stands than those without political connectedness. This indicates the politics of patronage and clientism in the allocation of land to housing cooperatives.

Some politicians have been supporting formalization of squatter settlements as a means to creating a political constituency. This practice has been corroborated by Muchadenyika (2015) who mentions the case of Mbuya Nehanda where people who had illegally occupied land had formalization of their settlement facilitated by ZANU PF. In Epworth, some housing cooperatives saw recognition by ZANU PF as a step towards formalization. Actually, the ruling party was seen as a benefactor and it has now become common for people to illegally occupy land in anticipation of formalization.

When asked why urban boundaries have been static since radical land reform, respondents cited a Constitutional provision that only allows ward boundary changes after every 10 years. In addition, a senior planner in the City of Harare believed rural district councils were no longer willing to relinquish rural land for incorporation into urban areas for fear of losing a good source of revenue. Rural District Councils neighboring Harare have been collecting property taxes from peri – urban settlements but not providing the taxpayers with infrastructure and services. This has left Harare City Council with no choice but to take care of unfunded mandates since the peri – urban residents to all intents and purposes rely on the City Council for services.

There is a sense that while neighboring Rural District Councils may want to derive revenue benefits from peri – urban settlements; central government has been unwilling to change urban boundaries. A case in point is where three urban councils in the Harare metropolitan area were refused incorporation of rural land by the Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement (McGregor, 2013). On the other hand there has been a feeling that urban local authorities have not been keen on incorporating peri – urban areas that would be a liability because of their high level of poverty. In 2002, the Ministry of Local Government issued lease agreements to peri – urban settlers in Hatcliffe, but the Harare City Council refused to approve building plans presented by the community. The reason for refusal was that the level of infrastructural development did not meet Council's minimum requirements. The slow process of incorporation of rural land has led to mounting pressure for formal housing in urban areas and chaotic urban development in the urban periphery.

## **7.0 Strategies that have been used for formalization of squatter settlements**

In the absence of a protocol, formalization of peri – urban settlements in Zimbabwe has taken different forms depending on context and implementing agency. Two broad strategies have been applied, land titling and urban services upgrading by government and civil society respectively. Land titling is a long standing strategy that has been used in Epworth, and more recently in Chitungwiza by the Udcorp. This strategy aims at turning squatters into homeowners through delivery of title. The titling process is slow and cumbersome requiring not only the technical matters of mapping, surveying, registration and conveyancing but the resident also needs a certificate of completion of building works to be recommended for title by the local authority. The experience from Epworth, one of the oldest squatter settlements in Harare, has shown that the process is too expensive for the poor.

Soon after Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 central government put in place a programme (Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle) for formalizing squatters by moving them onto planned sites. In Phase 1 of the programme government, built core houses but quickly ran out of funds. Thus in Phase 2 the housing delivery strategy changed to allocation of stands to squatter beneficiaries. In both cases, development of settlements is in progress and not nearing the point where beneficiaries can apply for property title.

One of the arguments for land titling is the creation of an economic asset that can be used to leverage finance. But evidence from Central Africa Building Society (CABS) in Zimbabwe has shown that although title is important for accessing housing finance, upon granting of property title very few of their poor clients came back for equity finance. CABS's experience has been that the urban poor do not have stable income to sustain mortgage repayments. The Building Society believed their low income clients were likely to default on mortgage repayments and hence would not put their asset at risk. Since a stable income is essential for accessing housing finance many of the units in CABS's Harare low income housing project have been taken up by middle and high income people.

Upgrading of urban services as a formalization strategy has been applied by civil society groups such as Dialogue on Shelter and the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation. Rather than land titles, this strategy prioritizes the provision of services such as sewage disposal and water supply in squatter settlements. The strategy has sometimes come into conflict with central government's insistence on modernist planning. In the case of squatters evicted from Arlington farm near Harare International Airport who then proceeded to occupy Stoneridge farm in peri – urban Harare, Dialogue on Shelter supported squatters with provision of improved sanitation but the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare was insisting on water borne sewerage system for Stoneridge.

## **8.0 Implications for peri – urban land policy in Zimbabwe**

The study has shown that the FTLRP provided an opportunity for a politically weakened regime to use land as an instrument for political patronage, and that in the quest for legitimating its rule a government can undermine its own formal structures. While land tenure secured through patronage remained tenuous it was shown that holding land through a group such as the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation enhanced low income groups' sense of security in a place. However, in Dzivarasekwa Extension, internal pressure for individual titles reduced the

scope for ultimate group title. In the face of rapid urbanization, the conventional approach to formalization has been beyond the capacity of local governments as has been shown in the case of Epworth.

The chaotic development in Zimbabwe's peri – urban areas calls for a clearly articulated peri – urban land policy that would guide and enforce development in the urban environment. Most of the land occupations that took place in peri – urban areas are irreversible but in the absence of a protocol effort at formalization of illegal settlements have lacked policy guidance. The current set up where some government officials do not even believe in formalization and where those who have been implementing it are not knowledgeable about the process is untenable.

In the absence of a national urban policy and considering the myriad and complex peri – urban land use issues in Zimbabwe, this paper recommends a peri – urban land policy composed of the following elements: a spatial development framework, streamlined authority system, non – partisan procedures for incorporation of rural land for urban development, formalization protocol, and securing of land tenure. Each of the elements will be elaborated upon below.

### **8.1 Spatial development framework**

The implementation of the FTLRP disregarded provisions of master and local plans and the ensuing housing development was of illegal structures in areas that had no public infrastructure and services. Proper management of the future development of peri – urban areas requires the reintroduction of spatial planning and zoning. Spatial frameworks are essential tools for managing the growth of urban settlements and guiding the transformation of rural into urban land.

### **8.2 Streamline the authority system**

Some of the land use problems in peri – urban areas have arisen from multiple, complementary and competing authorities, some deriving their power from government and others from the ruling party. Moving forward there is needed to bring peri – urban land back under recognized legal authority. The legal authorities would manage land in accordance with provisions of relevant spatial development frameworks, rules and regulations.

### **8.3 Non – partisan procedures for extending city boundaries**

Rigid urban boundaries have restricted options available to urban councils for managing urban growth. Rather than rigid urban boundaries, spatial development frameworks should provide a basis for managing urban growth and urban expansion enabled when need arises.

### **8.4 Formalization protocol**

Rather than being an end in itself, a formalization protocol should be part of a broader strategy for managing urban growth. In view of dwindling central government funding there is need to explore alternative approaches to formalization that make use of resources and skills mobilized by communities working in partnership with local authorities.

### **8.5 Securing land tenure**

The land tenure of many people in peri – urban areas was insecure and was believed to explain the prevalence of temporary structures and lack of investment in the provision of infrastructure

and services. A formalization protocol that would be part of peri – urban policy would among other things address issues of tenure security.

## **9.0 Conclusion**

Land use planning and management in Zimbabwe’s peri – urban areas remains problematic. Since the radical land reform that began in 2000 in the context of political and economic crisis, the state has been using land to legitimate its fledgling rule. Amidst a policy vacuum in peri – urban areas, beneficiaries of land reform perceive ongoing efforts at formalization of their illegal settlements as partial and inadequate in addressing their tenure security. It seems that for as long as politicians continue to manipulate squatters for political benefit, land tenure security will remain tenuous in the urban periphery.

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