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Rural development through land reform in South Africa and Zimbabwe: Prospects and challenges

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Abstract

Land reform has been one of the strategies used by post-colonial African governments to confront poverty among their vulnerable populace. Colonial governments had used military prowess and unjust laws to violently or fraudulently dispossess indigenous people of their land in favour of whites. This left rural areas inhabited by blacks undeveloped. However, when examining the impact of land reform on development, existing studies often underestimate the implications of structural differences between countries, which usually determine the effectiveness of land reform. This has practical and policy implications. To close this gap, this article explores the potential of land reform as a development strategy in South Africa and Zimbabwe, focusing on opportunities and challenges. Using a qualitative literature review, the article argues that the structural differences between the two countries' populations as agriculturalists and the nature of political leadership present the most opportunities but also challenges for inclusion, equality, resource access, ownership, and utilisation. The article concludes that the effectiveness of land reform in South Africa is slowed down by the low agrarian nature of its population. In agrarian Zimbabwe, disorganised policies, international isolation, corruption, nepotism, charisma, patronage, and climate change natural hazards have undermined the potential of land reform as a development strategy.

Keywords: Development, Land Reform; Poverty Alleviation; Rural Livelihoods; Rural Development

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1. Introduction

Land reform has had different outcomes in South Africa and Zimbabwe. However, existing discourses seem to have dismissed the differences between the two countries as having an impact on the outcomes of the land reform itself as well as the benefits accrued from the redistributed land. While land reform has paraded as the potential engine for growth in African economies, its impact across countries warrants investigation.

Land redistribution has been one of the popular development strategies on the African continent since political independence from colonial rule. After gaining independence, most African governments turned towards land and agriculture to develop themselves. At the height of political transformation in the 1960s and 70s, the diagnostic potential of agriculture as a development strategy gained popularity among the first generation of political leaders Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Seretse Khama and scholars such as Claude Ake, Archie Mafeje, and Samir Amin. To date, agriculture still dominates the economic practice and activities of most people on the continent (Moyo, 2016; Ndhlovu, 2022a). Most households in SSA depend on agriculture for domestic livelihood, food production, employment creation, and household income generation (Zougmore et al., 2021). Agriculture is also a major human economic practice in terms of contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in most countries on the continent. Except for Botswana (17%) and South Africa (SA) (14%), agriculture contributes 65% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Angola, Lesotho (80%), Mozambique (67%); Namibia (69%), and Eswatini (61%) (Ndhlovu, 2021a). Most of the workforce was also located in the agricultural sector between 2010–18, the highest being Malawi (85%). It is followed by Mozambique (75%), Madagascar (73%), Eswatini (65%), and Zimbabwe (67%) (World Bank, 2017). As a result of the great potential of agriculture as a livelihood tool in Sub-Saharan Africa, it received increased post-independence development ahead of the other economic sectors.

One of the contributing factors promoting the focus of post-independence governments on agricultural development over the rest of the economic sectors had to do with affordability in terms of capital availability and sectoral expertise in agriculture. Most post-independence governments were resource-poor and, therefore, opted to begin their development agenda on agriculture mainly because the region's general populace would have already had indigenous skills in agriculture and not in the other economic sectors. To date, although the SSA region is still experiencing low levels of agricultural productivity and mainstream market expertise and participation of farmers at large, the region is advancing in crop farming, horticulture, fisheries and livestock production, albeit dominantly for subsistence reasons (Majova, 2024; Ndhlovu and Dube, 2024a). SA and Zimbabwe are some of the countries that have implemented land reform as a rural development strategy.

Existing studies do not sufficiently explore the causes of these differences in outcomes. Existing studies underestimate the implications of structural differences, the nature of oppression, and the population distribution on land reform in these two countries and, therefore, require the support of further studies and conceptualisations. This article undertakes to fill this gap. The article is located at the intersection of agrarian studies and development literature. The article (i) explores land reform dynamics in South Africa and Zimbabwe and (ii) examines the impact of land reform on rural development.

The article could be important for policymakers implementing land reform as a rural development strategy. The comparative approach of the article readily commends it compulsory reading for students, policymakers, and activists interested in emerging new directions in African development thinking and research.

The article is organised as follows: The next section outlines the research methodology for the study. This is followed by a review of land reform in South Africa and Zimbabwe under two sub-sections. The similarities and dissimilarities, in terms of both opportunities and challenges of rural development through land reform in SA and Zimbabwe are discussed under three sub-sections. Lastly, conclusions are drawn from the discussion.

2. Materials and methods

This article used a qualitative semi-systematic literature review to identify articles to be reviewed. The search was conducted on Google Scholar database. Unlike other databases, Google Scholar is accessible even by researchers without institutional login details. The author, therefore, preferred this data to avoid the login restrictions often associated with the Web of Science and Scopus databases, for instance. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) approach was used to search for articles. PRISMA offered the flexibility to search potential articles using titles, abstracts, introductions, methods, results, and discussion, among others. PRISMA is a 27-item checklist used to improve transparency in systematic reviews (Ndhlovu and Dube, 2024b). The search covered the period 01/01/2010 to 31/12/2023 to include as many recent articles as possible. Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles searched.

Table 1. Article retrieval limits from Google Scholar

Database	Google Scholar
Search field	Title, abstract, keywords
Keywords	'Land reform', OR 'livelihood' AND 'Rural' AND 'South Africa' OR 'Zimbabwe'
Open access	All
Years	01/01/2010 – 31/12/2023
Author names	Exclude unidentified names
Publication stage	All
Document Type	Academic
Affiliation	All
Country	South Africa, Zimbabwe
Source type	All
Language	English

The search used 'Land reform', OR 'livelihood' AND 'Rural' AND 'South Africa' OR 'Zimbabwe' as keywords. Using this search method, a total of 87 articles both academic (books, book chapters, journal articles, and dissertations) and opinions (newspapers and blogs) were identified. This number was considered large for a qualitative systematic review. Thus, a search string was structured to manage the search: The articles selected had to contain at least two keywords in the title and had to be either on SA or Zimbabwe as the main case study.

The articles needed to be academic works to allow the article to record only peer-reviewed assessments. Using this procedure, 42 were excluded to generate an initial sample of 45 articles. The articles were further selected using the criteria summarised in Table 1. This resulted in a further exclusion of 10 articles and the identification of 34 articles. These articles were then subjected to latent coding. This refers to the study of the underlying meaning of words or phrases (Mhlanga and Ndhlovu, 2023). The articles were read through to make sense of them. This type of coding is subjective and generated an in-depth understanding of the views of different scholars on the land reforms of the two countries. After this process, 24 articles were then identified for analysis. Table 2 summarises the articles that were selected for analysis. This list was considered sufficient for a qualitative semi-systematic study since the intention was to provide an overview of the opportunities and challenges of rural development through land reform in the two countries.

Table 2. Articles identified for analysis

Author(s)	Title	Type	Publisher	Results/Finding
Hajdu et al. (2020)	Changing Livelihoods in Rural Eastern Cape, South Africa (2002–2016): Diminishing Employment and Expanding Social Protection.	Academic	Journal of Southern African Studies.	Despite established patterns of agrarian change in SA, rural locales remained characterised by prevalent poverty and susceptibility in SA.
Ragie et al. (2020)	A portfolio perspective of rural livelihoods in Bushbuckridge, South Africa	Academic	South African Journal of Sciences.	Rural households exhibit frustration with the government but remain simultaneously heavily reliant on state fiscal transfers through grants and public employment schemes in SA.
Neves and du Toit (2013)	Rural Livelihoods in South Africa: Complexity, Vulnerability and Differentiation.	Academic	Journal of Agrarian Change.	Land beneficiaries battling poverty in the absence of adequate support in SA.
Twala (2010)	Land and agrarian reform in South Africa.	Academic	Unisa Press	Improperly implemented land reform for impoverished and unemployed rural population in SA
Majova (2023)	Rethinking Financial Inclusion for Post-Colonial Land Reform Beneficiaries in South Africa.	Academic	Springer Cham	Land recipients lack adequate support SA
Hall and Kepe (2017)	lite capture and state neglect: New evidence on South Africa's land reform	Academic	Review of African Political Economy	In adequate state support to land recipients in SA

Rusenga and Ndhlovu (2023)	Land Reform and Financial Inclusion Challenges in South Africa.	Academic	Springer Cham	Inappropriate model is the source of failure by land recipients in SA.
Lahiff et al. (2012)	Prospects for agrarian reform in Southern Africa.	Academic	PLAAS	Land recipients remain as workers on state farms, working for strategic partners at below-minimum wages.
Rusenga (2022)	Rethinking Land Reform and Its Contribution to Livelihoods in South Africa.	Academic	Africa Review	Land reform beneficiaries cannot sustain the huge costs and complexities associated with large-scale farming.
Rusenga (2019)	The Agribusiness Model in South African Land Reform? Land Use Implications for the Land Reform Beneficiaries	Academic	Agrarian South	Agribusiness model forced on land reform beneficiaries much to their failure in SA.
Aliber and Cousins (2013)	Livelihoods after Land Reform in South Africa.	Academic	Journal of Agrarian Change	Rural livelihoods have not changed much even after land reform in SA.
Chitonge and Ntsebeza (2012)	Land Reform and Rural Livelihood in South Africa: Does Access to Land Matter?	Academic	Review of Agrarian Studies	Where land was used outside the dictates of the agribusiness model, it improved lives and provided non-material benefits in SA.
Ndhlovu and Majova (2023)	Women Empowerment in the South African Agri-Business: Opportunities and Constraints in the Gauteng Province'	Academic	Springer Cham	Inadequate support the major cause for stunted rural livelihoods and low incomes in SA.
Ndhlovu and Dube, (2024b)	Contract Farming and Climate Change Adaptation in Rural Zimbabwe	Academic	Mankind Quarterly	State-led contract farming boosting smallholder farming in Zimbabwe.
Dabale et al. (2014)	Empirical study on the fast-track land reform program (FTLRP) and household food security in Zimbabwe	Academic	European Journal of Research and Reflection in Management Sciences.	Land reform improved the livelihoods of recipients in Zimbabwe.
Moyo (2011a).	Three decades of land reform in Zimbabwe	Academic	CODESRIA	Land reform has been a source of livelihood improvement in Zimbabwe.

Moyo (2011b).	Changing agrarian relations after redistributive land reform in Zimbabwe.	Academic	Journal of Peasant Studies	Land reform improve land ownership and rural livelihoods.
Ndhlovu, 2017	An analysis of household livelihoods under the fast-track land reform programme in Chiredzi, Zimbabwe	Academic	University of South Africa	Land reform improved household livelihoods in Zimbabwe.
Moyo (2013)	Land reform and redistribution in Zimbabwe since 1980.	Academic	CODESRIA	Land reform improved the livelihoods of A1 farmers and the incomes of A2 farmers in Zimbabwe.
Moyo and Nyoni (2013).	Changing Agrarian Relations after Redistributive Land Reform in Zimbabwe.	Academic	CODESRIA	Land reform improving livelihoods in Zimbabwe.
Majova (2024)	A Proposed Framework on Women Empowerment in the South African Agri-business: A Case Study of the Gauteng Province.	Academic	University of Johannesburg	Lack of post-resettlement support undermining rural livelihoods in SA.
Cousin (2016).	Land reform – the solution to rural poverty?	Academic	PLAAS	Land reform has barely been regarded of as an integral part of a wider process of agrarian reform meant to restructure the class structure of the rural economy in SA.
Maponya (2021)	Opportunities and Constraints Faced by Smallholder Farmers in the Vhembe District, Limpopo Province in South Africa.	Academic	Circ. Econ. Sustain	Capitalist farmers, traditional leaders, large-scale commercial farmers, and agribusiness corporates seem to have benefited more from land reform than the rural poor in SA.
Meer (2013)	Land Reform and Women’s Land Rights in South Africa.	Academic	Heinrich Boll Stiftung Publishers.	Capitalist grabbed the benefits of land reform.

Content analysis - the study of what is contained in a text - was used in the study (Mhlanga and Ndhlovu, 2023). This analysis was done manually. The analysis allowed for the inspection of what is contained in the selected texts to ensure that the texts formed the basis for conclusions. To analyse texts, they were first coded into manageable classes. Thematic analysis – a method in which themes are developed from available data –

was used. Rural livelihoods, land reform models, and legal and political constraints emerged as the dominant issues. Thus, the author used these issues as the themes for the study.

In using content analysis, latent coding was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues under investigation. The author read entire texts to make sense of them rather than depending on the recurrence of words in the text(s). This coding type allowed for an in-depth understanding of the issues under investigation. The qualitative systematic literature review method provided reputable information for land reform theorisation and historicisation to inform decision-making and work practices and stimulate further research.

3. Colonial encounter and land dispossession

To understand land reform in SA and Zimbabwe, one has to first understand the multifaceted social and political incongruities emerging from pre- and post-independence land policies together with the continent's 'development' as well as capital accumulation trajectories, particularly regarding land rights, land tenure and land use. The next sub-sections undertake this task.

3.1. Land reform in South Africa

The post-apartheid SA faced a wide range of tests and trials that originated from colonial injustices in which land alienation resulted in most of the lands suitable for agricultural activities being owned by a few whites. One of the challenges is how to address the racially skewed landownership patterns in the country. Since its independence in 1994, the government has been undertaking a constitutionally based land reformation process based on three components: restitution, land redistribution, and tenure security. The restitution component is positioned in section 25(7) of the 1996 Constitution, which requires that all persons or communities that lost lands after the effect of the notorious Native Land Act of 19 June 1913 and other subsequent racially discriminatory laws and tendencies have their lands be restored or that they be given equitable redress (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996). Section 25(7) of the 1996 Constitution necessitates that: "A person or community whose tenure of land is legally insecure as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices is entitled, to the extent provided by an Act of Parliament, either a tenure which is legally secure or a comparable redress..." Equally, section 25(5) of the Constitution introduced the land redistribution programme in which the state is expected to acquire land and allocate it to the landless or those with inadequate land access. Regarding this second pillar, the state is constitutionally bound to: "...take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to foster conditions which enable citizens to gain access to land on an equitable basis..."

The third pillar – tenure security – is dealt with through section 25(6) of the Constitution. This pillar is meant to ensure protected tenure for people who lived on land owned by others without protected rights. The policy was intended to benefit former and current farm workers and vulnerable labour tenants who lived on communal lands. Section 25(6) of the Constitution requires that: "A person or community disposed of property after 19 June 1913 as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices is entitled, to the extent provided by an Act of Parliament, either to restitution of that property or to equitable redress."

Armed with these constitutional requirements, the government of SA focused on correcting the racial injustices meted on its various population groups during colonialism and apartheid with the aim, among other

things, to generate large-scale employment, increase rural incomes (Department of Land Affairs (DLA), 1997) and fight poverty (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR), 2013). At independence in 1994, 86% of all the fertile land in the country and the majority of all lands (68%) were in the hands of Whites (Lahiff, 2007). Approximately 82 million hectares were owned by Whites while over 13 million Blacks scrapped for a living on only 13% of the land in the homelands with no hope of securing a job or any other means to develop livelihoods (Kleinbooi, 2010; Twala, 2010). Land reform was, therefore, important to redress this situation. Land reform in the country was, therefore, implemented to encourage and support black land ownership and ignite the development of the rural economy to develop livelihoods for the black communities (Rusenga, 2019).

However, the free-market land reform approach, which the country preferred, undermines its efforts and pace to redress the historical land imbalances as expected. Three decades later, in 2024, blacks, who constituted 79% of the total population, as individuals, only directly owned slightly over 1.2% of land in the countryside and a meagre 7% of formally registered property in cities and towns (Ndhlovu, 2021a). Meanwhile, white South Africans, who hardly constituted 9%, directly owned 23.6% of land in the countryside and about 11.4% in cities and towns (RSA, 2017).

Land restitution has also been a pressing issue in the country. As a result, land reform policy, implementation, and impact have been under much scrutiny by land activists and intellectuals since the promulgation of the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 (see Boudreaux, 2009; Hall, 2005, 2015; Twala, 2010). Land restitution is based on the 1993 Interim Constitution, section 25(7) of the 1996 Constitution and the Restitution of Land Rights Act. The South African Constitution of 1993/1996 provided that communities and individuals who lost their land since June 1913 had the right to restitution of that land or could be given fair compensation for the same land (Hall, 2015). The Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 set up a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights in 1995 led by a Chief Land Claims Commissioner and seven Regional Land Claims Commissioners representing the country's nine provinces. These commissioners had the directive to support people and communities that wanted to claim land. They received claims and also updated applicants on the status of claims. The Restitution Act was amended in 1997 to reposition it in line with the 1996 Constitution after it had been discovered that it was very slow in processing claims due to its emphasis on legal matters instead of administrative issues (Ndhlovu, 2021a). Instead of going through the winding route of the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights, those who claimed land were now allowed to access the Land Claims Court directly. The Minister of Land Affairs was consequently empowered to settle claims through negotiation.

In 1995, the Land Claims Commission and the Land Claims Court were established based on Section 4 of the Restitution Act and Section 123 of the Interim Constitution. Whereas the Land Claim Commission intended to deal with the management of the claims, how the current owners would be compensated, and the restitution to those who made claims, the Land Claims Court focused on resolving land-related disputes that the Land Claims Commission could not resolve. In this view, the Land Claim Commission scrutinised all land claims, vetted those eligible under the Constitution and the Restitution Act, and attempted to resolve claims through negotiation. Restitution was meant to provide unbiased compensation to victims of land denials based on race. It was consistent with the requirements of the Restitution of Land Rights Act. The key purpose of the Restitution Act was to make stipulations for the restoration of land rights to those who lost it due to prejudiced race-based laws and to settle claims for restitution within the stipulated period or provide alternative equitable forms of compensation (African National Congress (ANC), 2012).

The White Paper on South African Land Policy of 1997 was based on a market approach whereby the 'willing buyer, willing seller' arrangement prevailed. The founding fathers of democratic SA prioritised national reconciliation for nation-building, which would not disrupt the national economy. The willing buyer/willing seller land reform was promoted by the Settlement Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG), which made land reform very slow (Boudreaux, 2009; Twala, 2010). In 2001, the SLAG was replaced by the Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development (LRAD), which was designed to assist previously deprived groups (black, coloured or Indian) in purchasing land or agricultural inputs. Large amounts of up to 100,000 were granted to individuals in this program (Boudreaux, 2009).

The land reform programme initially sought to redistribute 30% of land from white farmers to black ownership by 2014. By March 2002, only 56 245 households had been settled on 427,337 hectares; by June 2009, only 5.5 million hectares (6.7%) had been redistributed. In the same period, 75,400 land restitution claims had been processed with 1,551,249 beneficiaries, while 4,296 claims were still outstanding (Boudreaux, 2009). By 2011, about 79,696 land claims had been lodged (Zenker, 2012).

As with land restitution, by March 2002, 29,877 claims on a total of about 427,337 hectares had been resolved to benefit about 56,245 families (Mphela, 2009). Only a total of R938 million was paid in monetary compensation. By 2021, the government had settled about 80,664 claims to benefit about 2.1 million people at the cost of R40 billion, including compensation in the form of money. The state also stored a total of 3.5 million hectares of land, which could be used for agricultural purposes or other economic development activities (RSA, 2021). These statistics are considered to be very slow, as would be expected (Du Plessis et al., 2023; Ndhlovu, 2021). Boudreaux (2009) argues that the grants people received from the government to acquire land were very few, and they had to source more money to purchase the lands they needed. In addition, the LRAD is criticised for being biased towards those resourced black South Africans who were more likely to succeed as commercial farmers instead of the rural poor whose livelihoods needed to be developed and strengthened (Boudreaux, 2009). Norfolk (2009) criticised the country's land reform for its perceived lack of capacity to redress historical land imbalances, sustainable household livelihood development, poverty alleviation and development in general in the countryside.

In addition, South African white landowners, in an attempt to resist the new democracy and also take advantage of the deficiencies of the market-based approach, inflated land prices beyond what the government could afford. On the other hand, blacks who were given land did not fully utilise it, thereby depressing the impact of this policy (Ndhlovu, 2021). Twala (2010) also observed that the land reformation was frustrated – in the first years- by resource constraints, which rendered some legal institutions incapable of dealing with the claims. Rusenga (2019, p. 441) argues that the country's land reform currently largely "enforces an agribusiness model that promotes large-scale production through failure to subdivide the large farms, and encouraging the beneficiaries to use the land in the manner the former white landowners did." Hall and Kepe (2017) argue that the South African government's current promotion of large-scale production only bolsters modernist and colonial orthodoxies, which are centred on criteria of commercial viability, much to the exclusion of smallholder farmers. Other challenges included claims for financial compensation being given first preference, thus rendering the entire process ineffectual (Department of Rural Development and Rural Land Reform 2015). Thus, unlike in Zimbabwe, in SA, the number of households engaged in agricultural activities was only about 2,33 million in 2016 in a country with a population of 56.02 million (RSA, 2017). This shows

that land reform in SA has not been as robust as that of its neighbour Zimbabwe, where the free-market approach was not accorded pre-eminently.

Of concern is that the literature in South Africa fails to explore the need to subdivide land so that smallholder farmers can be given land sizes that they can manage. Many of these farmers have large land sizes. Subdividing the land would also increase the number of beneficiaries.

3.2. Land reform in Zimbabwe

Land dispossession by whites in Zimbabwe dates back to 1894 when the Pioneer Column – a group of the British South African Company (BSAC) policemen and pioneers - defeated the Matabele (Moyana, 1984). The Pioneer Column had been assembled in SA for Cecil John Rhodes to promote British interests by taking the territory north of the Limpopo. The column was placed under the leadership of Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Graham Pennefather to conquer Mashonaland and prospect for minerals. However, as the hopes for minerals waned, the Pioneer Column shifted its attention to agricultural land, (Ndhlovu, 2021b). By the year 1890, land dispossession by whites already reached alarming levels such that Archibald Colquhoun, the first colonial administrator recognised that in fact, the company was not entitled to any legal right to administer land acquisition – a view that made him lose his job with the company. In 1899, out of the 15,762,364 acres of land that had been wrenched from blacks, about 9,276,222 acres of it were controlled by companies (Moyana, 1984). After defeating blacks in the First Chimurenga 1896-7 uprisings, the colonial regime began to acquire land either through fraudulent concessions with local leadership structures or racial land reform policies that cemented their dominance in agriculture, politics, and the economy.

In 1888, pre-illiterate King Lobengula of the Matabele was tricked into signing a fraudulent document in exchange for a gunboat, 1,000 rifles, and a £100 monthly rental. The resultant Rudd Concession deceitfully gave rights to Cecil Rhodes and the BSAC to occupy the country, pass laws, establish a police force, and administer lands (Ndhlovu, 2017). In 1891, King Lobengula signed another fraudulent concession with Eduardo Lippert which granted a 100-year concession over land to Eduardo Lippert. In 1898, the Natives Reserves Order in Council was adopted to create Native Reserves for Africans to ensure the availability of more land for white settlers who flocked into the country. By 1914, the white settlers whose total population was hardly 3% occupied 19,032,320 acres of land while Africans, making 97% of the total population reeled on only 21,390,080 acres of the land most of which was dry and marginal (Njaya, 2014). In 1925, the Morris Carter Commission also recommended the institutionalisation of a policy that would ensure separate areas from which Africans and Europeans would purchase land (Moyana, 1984; Palmer, 1977). It also paved the way for the infamous Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which shared land as follows: 8.8 million hectares for Native Reserves, 3 million for Native Purchase Areas, 19.9 million hectares for white farming and urban areas and 7.2 million hectares was unallocated land (Moyona, 1984). In 1951, the Land Husbandry Act was adopted to impose destocking practices on lands which were in the hands of Africans (Utete, 2003). The 1969 Land Tenure Act substituted the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. It categorised lands into European, African, and National lands whereby settlers and Africans owned 45,000 acres each, while National land stood at 6,500 acres (Palmer, 1977). The Land Tenure Act institutionalised segregation and divided land equally between the minority whites even though the former constituted a mere 5% while blacks constituted a staggering 95% of the total population. At independence in 1980, whites owned 51% of all the farming land while blacks (72% of the population) eked for a living in the Communal Areas where they scrambled for 42% of the land most of which

was in ecologically dry areas such as the Lowveld where rainfall amounts could not sustain subsistence agriculture (Mugandani et al., 2012).

Zimbabwe commenced its land reform immediately after independence. The focus was on the landless, the poor, those displaced by the war, and returning refugees. Phase 1 of land reform involved the movement of people from communal areas to designated lands. The government committed itself to developing rural areas by building infrastructure and by providing basic services as a way of grappling with the poverty of the people who had been harshly affected by years of colonialism as well as the war of liberation (Masiwa and Chipungu, 2004). In this first phase, the government aimed to acquire 8.3 million hectares from whites using market-based approaches, and thus, resettle about 162,000 households (Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ), 1998). The government, however, pursued the market-based approach and managed to resettle only 43% of the targeted 162,000 families. Nevertheless, Phase 1 improved population distribution and land use patterns as more people moved into formerly dispersed areas (Ndhlovu, 2021a).

Phase 2 commenced in the mid-1980s and was characterised by spontaneous land grabs, with some communities occupying abandoned and underutilised farms (Moyo, 2001). However, when the government outlawed farm occupations in 1986, these spontaneous grabs could not be continued. Phase 2 was, thus, officially launched in 1999 to acquire five million hectares and resettle 150,000 families (GOZ, 2001). This phase was cut short by the advent of the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in the early 2000s.

The FTLRP, known as the Third Chimurenga (The ideological banner under which the programme was undertaken), was earnestly launched on 15 July 2000 as a radical departure from all other previous land reform programmes. Its major intention was to accelerate both the acquisition and redistribution of land. The programme was meant to be undertaken in a short-circuited manner, relying on domestic resources (Dabale et al., 2014) to get over 3,000 farms and redistribute them under the A1 small-sized model and A2 (commercial farming) fast track models (Ndhlovu, 2022a). By October 2001, the state had acquired about 1,948 farms for redistribution, but the number of people requiring land had swollen to 104,000 instead of only 25,000, as had been projected in the previous year (Ndhlovu, 2017). In the period leading to the FTLRP, 11.8 million hectares were owned by a few large-scale commercial farmers, while the CAs occupied 16.4 million hectares. By 2003, land ownership by the large-scale commercial sector had been reduced from 30% to 12%. The small-scale agricultural sector expanded from 54% to 71% (GOZ, 2003). By 2010, farmland had been reallocated to over 150,000 urban dwellers, farm workers, peasants in the countryside and civil servants under the A1 scheme, while an additional 20,000 recipients were allocated A2 farms (Moyo, 2013).

4. Similarities and dissimilarities

This section flags the social, economic, political, and legal aspects that work individually or in tandem to determine the nature and pace of land reform programmes in SA and Zimbabwe.

4.1. Livelihood dynamics in South Africa and Zimbabwe

At the time of writing, in the first quarter of 2024, the population of SA is 61,020,221 (Worldometer, 2024). About 42,416,701 (69.5%) of this population live in urban areas, and only 30.5% live in rural areas where agricultural activities are likely. However, due to the country's apartheid legacy that disrupted social cohesion

through large-scale displacements of people into reserves, the level of farming activities is low in rural SA. This is supported by a 14-year study by Hajdu et al. (2020), which found that despite established patterns of agrarian change in SA, rural locales remained characterised by prevalent poverty and susceptibility. This was particularly apparent in former 'homelands'. Instead of agricultural activities, the key livelihoods that have emerged since independence include paid employment, social grant receipt, marine resources, and firewood harvesting. The major causes for increased poverty in rural SA include a significant decrease in waged work and an inability by households to commit to agricultural activities due to expanding social welfare provisions which shield them from extreme poverty (Hajdu et al., 2020). According to Ragie et al. (2020), as jobs and other livelihood opportunities decrease, instead of turning to agricultural activities, rural households exhibit frustration with the government but remain simultaneously heavily reliant on state fiscal transfers through grants and public employment schemes. This situation speaks not only to the dynamics of rural livelihoods in SA but also points to changes in rural dwellers' livelihoods within contexts of agrarian change, rural dispossession, inequality and receding prospects for employment increasingly evident in the country. SA's complex history of colonialism and apartheid largely explains the complex web of poverty and crumbling peasant activities despite land access through land reform.

While there are similarities between the former homelands of SA and other former settler colonial societies such as Zimbabwe, the racialised land dispossession in SA intensified crises in agriculture within the ethnic enclave of the 'Native reserves' (later 'homelands'). These 'homelands' have long been incorporated into the wider political economy of the country and are now characterised by 'de-agrarianisation' – the social, occupational and economic shift away from agriculture (Neves and du Toit, 2013). Enduring into the post-apartheid period, these dynamics have created an impoverished and unemployed rural population that is neither engaged in significant agricultural production nor able to transition to scant industrial employment (Twala, 2010). However, unlike Zimbabwe which mobilised and supported its people to put their labour to productive use in farming, SA partially responded to the poverty that characterised its population through the expansion of social protection, including public housing, education, and health provisioning and the expansion of cash pensions and welfare grants paid to nearly a third of the population, mainly the impoverished elderly, caregivers of children, and disabled (Ragie et al., 2020). Since the advent of COVID-19 in late December 2019, social protection has also been broadened to cover the unemployed. Meanwhile, rural SA remains split into the formerly 'white' countryside, where commercial agriculture thrives, and waning peasant activities and smallholder agriculture mark the communal areas of the former homelands.

Overall, although SA is redistributing land, the demographic nature of its population somehow constrains the level of participation in agricultural activities and the capacity to use farming as a rural development mechanism. In Zimbabwe, on the other hand, political instability, hyperinflation, and an inconsistent agricultural policy environment serve to frustrate the potential of rural households to bolster their commitment to farming.

4.2. Choice of land reform model

The South African agriculture sector has also been undermined by the government's failure to give people manageable land sizes under its land reform programme. Despite the lack of agricultural expertise and resources, land beneficiaries are given land pieces of land (sometimes exceeding 20 hectares (see Majova, 2023) and expected to use land in the same manner as white commercial farmers do (Hall and Kepe, 2017).

The government expects land reform beneficiaries (most of whom are from previously disadvantaged groups) to use land for economic purposes within the constraints of the agribusiness model, characterised by large-scale production for markets (Rusenga and Ndhlovu, 2023). Hall and Kepe (2017) found that even where land reform beneficiaries engaged in strategic partnerships with agribusinesses, the partnership failed to provide significant benefits to them. Hall and Kepe (2017) also argue that because beneficiaries do not own the land, they cannot lease it. Therefore, they remain as workers on state farms, working for strategic partners at below-minimum wages. Lahiff et al. (2012) found that joint ventures on restitution projects did not provide material benefits for most community members. According to Rusenga (2022), the challenges with strategic partnerships are embedded in the fundamental problem of enforced large-scale farming in land reform projects, and many land reform beneficiaries cannot sustain the huge costs and complexities associated with large-scale farming.

Focusing on the economic aspect of land use limited the South African government's appreciation of social and environmental aspects, which might be more important for some farmers. As shown by several African scholars, land yields diverse imperative meanings in Africa. It is not only a source of wealth but also a symbol of belonging, a livelihood source (Ndhlovu, 2018, 2021a), and the ancestors' habitat (Gumede, 2014). A land reform programme that is cognisant of various land uses can be an emancipatory project for many people. A successful land reform should be able to incorporate a variety of the meanings and uses of land by beneficiaries. Rusenga (2019) and Aliber and Cousins (2013) argue that livelihoods improve when beneficiaries implement individual small-scale farming for home consumption and sale against government plans. Disregarding the composite nature of land use in SA has resulted in land reform failing to generate the anticipated results. According to Aliber and Cousins (2013, p. 158), "it is apparent that poverty reduction benefits are mainly available to those who fall outside the intended project plans", with such opportunities "concentrated in restitution where the main design parameters of 'which land for whom' are beyond the reach of policy-makers and implementers." Several other studies in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and Gauteng provinces confirmed these findings and showed that where land was used outside the dictates of the agribusiness model, it improved lives and provided non-material benefits (see Chitonge and Ntsebeza, 2012; Ndhlovu and Majova, 2023; Rusenga, 2019).

In SA, land beneficiaries also needed to accept a mentor or strategic partner as a condition to receive funding under the Rural and Development Programme (RADP). All business planning duties should be the responsibility of strategic partners (Maka and Aliber, 2019). Rural livelihoods were therefore expected to emerge within the context of large-scale production run by agribusiness. This econometric approach to land use has been one source of the despondence of many land reform beneficiaries in SA since it ignores non-material land uses, such as the link between land, identity, and social esteem. On the contrary, in Zimbabwe, land reform beneficiaries were given the freedom to use personal resources, networks, and partnerships to finance operations and make necessary investments in land (Ndhlovu, 2023). In addition, in 2016, the government of Zimbabwe also began to contract farmers through its Special Maize Programme for Import Substitution (SMPIS) also known as Command Agriculture. The initiative was funded through a public-private partnership between the State and its private partners. Private partners provided capital and coordinated the marketing of produce, including exporting, sharing of best practices and farming knowledge, and transfer of expertise through farmers' training while the government provided an enabling environment and monitored the whole process (Ndhlovu and Dube, 2024b). Under this initiative, for the first time since 2000, Zimbabwe experienced a major decrease in grain imports following the bountiful harvest of the 2016/2017 season under

the SMPIS. The import expenditure for maize dropped by 92, 86% in 2017 (Ndhlovu, 2022b). As a result, although widely criticised for its 2000s land reform, the majority of land reform beneficiaries in Zimbabwe approve of the country's land redistribution trajectory (Dabale et al., 2014; Mhlanga and Ndhlovu, 2021).

Zimbabwe, under its 2000s fast-track land reform, also modified the bi-modal structure (comprising white commercial farmers and agro-industrial estates on one hand and small-scale black commercial farmers and black peasant households on the other) into a tri-modal agrarian structure comprising peasants (communal areas, old resettlement and A1 farms), medium to large scale farms (A2 farms), and Agro estates and agro conservancies (state or privately owned) (Moya, 2011a; Moyo and Nyoni, 2013). The bi-modal agrarian structure represented unequal and discriminatory relations of land ownership, with large-scale farmers, mostly white, holding private property rights, while peasants held communal tenure rights (Muchetu, 2018). The Zimbabwean government preferred a tri-modal structure, given the new propensities of class formation at the top (Moyo, 2011b) as well as the fact that there was always a huge difference in how the two structures were integrated into the input and output markets (Moya, 2011b).

The A1 model comprised smallholder farmers and peasants in communal areas to whom agricultural activities are either the key or an additional source of income (Ndhlovu, 2017). Production in this category is meant for household consumption. However, surplus is also sold to individual households, to vendors and other small fruit and vegetable outlets and in a few designated areas for cash or can be exchanged for goods or services. In the current economic crisis, the category also engages in cross-border trade of products produced by farmers. The A2 model, on the other hand, comprises 'emerging' black small-scale farmers operating on land acquired through land reform, although some of it may be private land, and are market-oriented farmers. A significant number of these are extroverted blacks who have been continuously calling for affirmative action and the redistribution of land. In this way, the Zimbabwean land reform did not adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, hence the positive results being recorded and the satisfaction of recipients.

4.3. Legal and political constraints

The land reform trajectory in SA and Zimbabwe can also be explained by the nature of negotiations at independence. Both countries negotiated independence from colonial rule. In Zimbabwe, independence negotiations culminated in the Lancaster House Agreement drafted in 1979 which, for the first 10 years of independence, subjected land reform to market-based principles of willing buyer - willing seller with the state paying for the land at the full market price as well as competing for land with prospective buyers on the open market. Chapter 3, Section 16 of the Constitution also required that the "authority [requiring land] to pay promptly adequate compensation for acquisition" and that "if the acquisition is contested, to apply to the General Division or some other court before or not later than thirty days after the acquisition for an order confirming the acquisition." This meant that the state could not expropriate any lands for redistribution. The Lancaster Agreement expired in 1990. Loosed from this Agreement, the dominated revisited the property rights section of the Constitution. The 1992 Land Acquisition Act which provided for compulsory land acquisition for redistribution was enacted. The Act also empowered the government to acquire land for settlement, subject to a fair payment reached by a designated committee of six persons deploying a set of procedures that included the limit to farm sizes (Ndhlovu, 2017). The Land Tenure Commission was also launched in 1994 as a way of improving the efficiency of land reform processes. In the 2000s, the government implemented the FTLRP which saw land being redistributed to over 150,000 urban dwellers, farm workers,

peasants in the countryside and civil servants under the A1 scheme, while an additional 20,000 recipients were allocated A2 farms by 2010 (Moyo, 2013). The success of the Zimbabwean land reform was, therefore, based on its capacity to revisit legal provisions and the political will of leaders to redistribute land.

In SA, a dirty mixture of complex challenges has undermined the potential of rural development through land reform. Firstly, political leadership and policymakers seem to have influenced policy design in a wayward direction. Unlike in Zimbabwe where land beneficiaries were placed in different categories, SA seems to have considered them as a homogeneous group which is not socially differentiated. As a result, targeting has been ineffective (Aliber and Cousins, 2013). For instance, much of the land given to beneficiaries is also not subdivided, thus, leaving much land unutilised (Ndhlovu and Majova, 2023). Subdividing would have enabled beneficiaries to get land sizes they can manage effectively. Majova (2024) found that most beneficiaries in the Gauteng Province preferred smaller land sizes which they would manage effectively and efficiently.

Secondly, it has also been observed that, unlike agrarian Zimbabwe, SA had incoherent agricultural and land policies. According to Cousin (2016), in SA, land reform has barely been regarded as an integral part of a wider process of agrarian reform meant to restructure the class structure of the rural economy. This explains why there has not been noteworthy support for black smallholder farmers. In urban areas, squatter camps also flourish as the state shows reluctance to release land for human settlement. As Cousin (2016) argues, spatial targeting of land and beneficiaries in zones of opportunity and need has been absent, and local government has hardly been involved in planning and implementation. As a result, land reform continues to fail as a rural development intervention (Majova, 2023).

Thirdly, in SA black capitalist farmers, traditional leaders, large-scale commercial farmers, and agribusiness corporates seem to have benefited more from land reform than the rural poor (Maponya, 2021; Meer, 2013). According to Cousin (2016), this has been caused, in part, because a once-effective civil society sector has lost its capacity and most of its leadership has gone into government or consultancy, and it can no longer influence policy and decisions. On the other hand, farmworkers are disjointed while the position of small-scale farmers within influential organisations such as the African Farmers Association of South Africa remains weak.

Lastly, SA is widely criticised for a lack of capacity to implement and efficiently oversee a land reform programme (Cousin, 2016; Gumede, 2014; Hall and Kepe, 2017; Maponya, 2021; Rusenga and Ndhlovu, 2023; Twala, 2010). The implementation of a public policy such as land reform requires state capacity that includes robust leadership and management, sufficient budgets, proper policies and institutional structures, well-organised procedures, and an effective system for monitoring and evaluation (Cousin, 2016; Hall and Kepe, 2017; Maponya, 2021). According to Cousin (2016), all of these have been problematic in SA, and the DRDLR is known as one of the weakest government departments. As a result, the benefits of land reform are yet to materialise for the majority of South Africans.

5. Concluding remarks

In contributing to the ongoing debates on land reforms in Africa, this article detailed some of the prospects, concerns, and challenges regarding land reform in South Africa and Zimbabwe. The article has highlighted the key areas that need special policy and practical attention in the two countries to enable them to develop rural areas through land reform. This is a departure from previous studies that seem to parade Zimbabwe as a success story of land reform while South Africa is depicted as struggling to implement land reform. The article

firstly argues that the outcomes of land reform in these two countries should be expected to be different because Zimbabwe is a strong agrarian community, with about 70% of the population living in rural areas where they engage in agricultural activities. In South Africa, many people live in urban areas where they depend on paid employment, non-agricultural self-employment, social grant receipt, and other off-farm activities. Furthermore, although both countries negotiated their independence, the Lancaster Constitution adopted in Zimbabwe had a 10-year lifespan, whereas there was no clarity on when South Africa would disengage from the colonial status quo in property relations. Thus, although South Africa has the potential to support land reform beneficiaries, truth and reconciliation commitments do not allow for a radical land reform. On the other hand, Zimbabwe lacks resources but has radically improved land access, ownership, and utilisation by its people.

The two countries, however, pursue neoliberal development approaches. Although the Mugabe regime pursued the Pan-African approach, the Mnangagwa administration prefers the neoliberal approach under its 'Zimbabwe is open for business' development approach. South Africa has always pursued market-based land access and utilisation and the agribusiness model in agricultural operations. The two countries also suffer a crisis regarding political leadership that is pro-poor. Furthermore, climate change-associated natural hazards are among the key factors that frustrate land reform as a development strategy in these two countries.

Interventions in agrarian Zimbabwe must assume a transformative social policy stance. Policy focus should be on increasing land redistribution, social protection, social cohesion, and nation-building through land reform. The government should raise funds from its various partners to support land reform beneficiaries until they can operate as businesses and not as subsistence farmers. In addition to social policy interventions in South Africa, there is a need for land subdivisions so that smallholders can have manageable farms. Emphasis should also be shifted from the agribusiness model so that farmers can pursue what works for them to improve their livelihoods and incomes through farming. Future research should explore how the various aspects of transformative social policy can be satisfied in the two countries.

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