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# FOOD SOVEREIGNTY PROSPECTS UNDER THE 'NEW DISPENSATION' IN ZIMBABWE

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## ABSTRACT

There has been an abrupt change in land policy pronouncements, from pro-peasant to pro-capital, under the 'new dispensation' era under President Emmerson Mnangagwa in Zimbabwe. The results have received increased scholarly attention: tenure insecurity, weakening peasant livelihoods, gender inequalities, and increasing rural-urban migration. One of the issues less remarked upon, nevertheless, has been the implication of the country's prospects for attaining food sovereignty. Using secondary data sources, and underpinned by the Food Sovereignty Framework, this article takes issue with the new government's pro-capital stance. It argues that the switch to neoliberal capitalism undermines societal dialectic, relational, and interactive features that should combine to make food sovereignty – a condition in which Zimbabwe and its people have the complete and sovereign to produce, market, consume food, and control landscapes upon which food is produced - conceivable. Food sovereignty is key to the decolonisation process which is crucial for the well-being of indigenous families and communities and is therefore, only fundamentally imaginable when the country's political, cultural, and socio-economic conditions support it. The article concludes that the regrouping neoliberal tendencies in Zimbabwe will shatter, not only the accumulation potential of the indigenous people but also compromises the country's chance to be food sovereign.

**Keywords**: Agrarian transformation, food sovereignty, neoliberal capitalism, Zimbabwe

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The terrible implications of changing land policy pronouncements in Zimbabwe have received sustained scholarly attention. The effects include tenure insecurity, weakening peasant livelihoods, and increasing rural-urban migration (Elich 2020; Mandishekwa and Mutenheri 2020; Mazwi and Mudimu 2019; Mazwi, Tekwa, Chambati, and Mudimu 2018; Ndhlovu 2020a). One of the issues less remarked upon, nevertheless, has been the implication for Zimbabwe's prospects for attaining food sovereignty. Zimbabwe, which has been on record since the 2000s for its radical pro-peasant agrarian practices policies, is on the verge of walking backward. The country's pro-peasant discourses and practices particularly under its Fast Track Land Programme (FTLRP) had not only enabled it to shun foreign domination but also disrupted neo-liberal capitalism with its tendencies to clampdown state sovereignty to enable its unbridled flow of transnational capital.

From a racially-skewed landownership structure in which about 6,000 white farmers owned about 15 million hectares of land, the FTLRP saw the transfer of about 13 million hectares of land to approximately 240,000 beneficiaries under the small-sized model (A1) and to about 170,000 under the medium-sized and commercially-oriented model (A2) operating alongside agro-industrial estates (Moyo 2016). While this was meant to address colonial and neo-colonial racial injustices, it was also part of an effort to expand the food production base and attain food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is defined as the right of Zimbabwe and its people

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to produce, market, consume, and control food production landscapes (MacNeill 2020). Although vilified by countries of the Global North (Ndhlovu 2020b), in the South, the FTLRP is widely viewed as a resounding success that brought to completion the decolonisation project to enable economic emancipation and redistributive justice (Cite). Land and the various agricultural activities to which it is put provide food which itself is fundamental to humanity. Adequate land ownership, access, and utilisation ensure the production of adequate food needed for the survival of humanity. As a result, countries always fight to place themselves at the centre of food production to ensure the health of their populace. However, changing agrarian discourses and practices under the pro-capital 'new dispensation' regime under President Emmerson Mnangagwa threatened to wipe out the gains coming out of the FTLRP radical transformation.

The regime advocates for pro-capital agrarian policy adjustments in an attempt to appease former colonisers who slammed the country with economic sanctions. This is being done through several discourses and practices including the "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" chant, the Transitional and Stabilisation Plan (TSP), the Investment and Business Facilitation Bill (IBFB), the Global Compensation Deed (GCD) signed by the government with the Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) and the Southern African Commercial Farmers' Alliance – Zimbabwe (Sacfa-Z), among others. While these efforts could improve the country's re-engagement with the international community, they undercut Zimbabwe's autonomy to be food sovereign. The relaxation of investment procedures to attract land-based investments will not only result in the displacement of the peasantry which produces most of the grain crops in the country but will also see the country's lands used for export production of both foods and non-food crops.

The article explores the implications of changing agrarian discourses and practices on the prospects for food sovereignty in Zimbabwe. The article takes issue with the government's pro-capital stance and argues that the switch to neoliberalism undermines societal dialectic, relational, and interactive features that should combine to make food sovereignty imaginable in Zimbabwe. It posits that food sovereignty is only fundamentally possible under the political, cultural, and socioeconomic support and autonomy of the Zimbabwe peasantry. Moreover, food sovereignty is key to the decolonisation process which has emerged as crucial for the general well-being of indigenous families and communities (MacNeill 2020). The article concludes that the regrouping neoliberal tendencies in Zimbabwe have the potential to shatter, not only the accumulation potential of the indigenous people but also compromise the country's chance to be food sovereign.

In the next sections, the research method used in the article is outlined. This is followed by a discussion on Zimbabwe's politics, land, and agriculture with a focus on the FTLRP, its opportunities, and constraints as a pro-poor and inward-looking political endeavour. Thereafter, the article unpacks the concept of food sovereignty and then makes a discussion on the implications of changing land discourse and practice for food sovereignty before moving to a conclusion.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article is mainly conceptual in nature. The author believes that some of the problems that societies face require in-depth abstraction to grapple with them. This justifies the use of this approach. However, the article also benefits from existing secondary data sources, mainly books, journals, newspapers, and government documents to examine food production levels

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between two periods: before and after the 'new dispensation' period. There was no criterion applied in the selection of the secondary literature. Instead, sources that assisted in clarifying or supporting the main argument were referenced. The Food Sovereignty Framework was deployed to examine the implications of changing land policy pronouncements on national food sovereignty. The article explores when, how, and where communities in Zimbabwe may find food sovereignty a meaningful and effective policy and politically stimulating concept. This is achieved through an examination of the implications of pronouncements such as the "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" chant, and some practices such as the TSP, the IBFB, and the GCD. The data is examined in line with the seven principles of the food sovereignty framework.

## 3. POLITICS, LAND AND AGRICULTURE

Zimbabwe has always shown a sustained commitment to place itself at the centre of how its affairs are managed. This has included continued calls for non-external interference in resource access, ownership, and utilisation, particularly agricultural land. One of the buzzwords in recent decades popularised by the late President Robert Mugabe in the country has been the need for 'national sovereignty' especially in natural resource use. Zimbabwe, as an agrarian community, has a large section of its population residing in the countryside and engaged in agricultural petty commodity production (United Nations 2020). Land is, thus not just a source of livelihood and wealth, but it also represents people's spirituality and culture, hence the need for sovereign protection. For this cause, liberation wars (the *Chimurengas*) were fought as the country sought to wrench itself from white domination and the monopolistic tendencies of white capital. One of the country's major confrontations of pro-capital land policies since its independence from Britain in 1980 has been the famous FTLRP.

The FTLRP transformed a dual agricultural system comprising large-scale commercial farming and small-scale communal land, with the former predominantly held in freehold while the latter *de jure* owned by the president, but *de facto* communally owned and inherited at independence. (Moyo and Skalness 1990). The FTLRP transformed the system into a tri-modal one comprising peasants (communal areas, old resettlement, and A1 farms), medium to large scale farms (A2 farms), and Agro estates and agro-conservancies (state or private owned) (Moyo and Nyoni 2013). While numbers are disputed, it is widely acknowledged that 90 percent of white-owned land was transferred to landless Zimbabweans. It is thus, argued that the FTLRP represents the only radical assault on neoliberal capitalism which redistributed land from below since the end of the Cold War (Moyo and Chambati, 2012). Yet very few have seriously bothered to draw important lessons on the diagnostic potential of this project to attain food sovereignty. In part, this was the result of hegemonic campaigns by Euro-North American media outlets and scholars together with local opposition politics, and certain non-profit outlets that painted the project as an economic disaster that produced food insecurity, unemployment, degraded natural environment, international boycott, plummeting agricultural production and failing livelihoods (see Raftopoulos and Phimister 2004; Zamchiya 2011). This distorted the image of the project and its capacity to place the country at the centre of its agricultural activities. However, for the peasant majority, the FTLRP offered much hope as it presented them with an opportunity to once again manage their lands and make decisions on what, when, and how to produce on their ancestral lands.

In recent years, the literature on the need for an eclectic engagement with the FTLRP has been growing. This has been a campaign initiated by the leading Zimbabwean agrarian scholar Sam Moyo and popularised by Ian Scoones from the University of Sussex, United Kingdom. The

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campaign critiques both the ideologically driven celebratory views of the project as well as its vilification by monopoly capital. The campaign posits that to arrive at a scholarly rather than ideological and polemic argument on the results of the FTLRP, intricate empirical case studies are needed to reveal a more complex picture of the situation on the ground. Its conclusions were that the project was neither a total disaster nor a perfect success story. It was inevitably hit by teething problems within the context of economic breakdown such as low and waning soil fertility as a result of land overuse; truncated investment; labour shortages; inadequate support by financial institutions with regard to credit, extension support; constrained access to markets; and overall poor physical and institutional infrastructures, but it was necessary and has some very positive outcomes (Ndhlovu 2018; Scoones, Morongwe, Mavedzenge, Murimbarimba, and Mahenehene 2015; Moyo and Chambati 2013).

The FTLRP, however, poignantly emerged from the basic matters of survival in a country where livelihood issues had been subordinated to speculative priorities of development through industrialisation (Moyo 1995). As Sadomba (2011) argues, “the Zimbabwean state, being essentially a bourgeoisie neo-colonial establishment, promoted interests and values that were opposed to those of peasants, rural and urban workers, and marginalized war veterans who comprised the land movement” (2011: 80). It is this neglect of the poor by the political leadership, which gave birth to the land occupation movement and revolution, which commenced in the late 1990s and culminated into the FTLRP early 2000s (Moyo and Yeros 2005a). While the FTLRP was the result of numerous movements, it is widely agreed that the war veterans were at the forefront (Sadomba 2011) and that the reason why the FTLRP continues to be compromised is that the war veterans were short-sighted to perceive land occupations as the ultimate victory (Moyo and Yeros 2005a). Had the war veteran movement been well aware that for it to build and sustain a critical mass with adequate power to bargain and to democratically influence the government and international organisations, it should have mobilised the people, not on the ‘veteran’ basis, but rather by identifying common goals, and embracing the interests of farmers and consumers from all geographic locations and development levels regardless of political fellowship.

While the land occupation movement was anti–bureaucratic and autonomous, its partisan and ‘war veteran’ eventually exposed it to Robert Mugabe who hijacked it as political capital against the fast-growing opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and its perceived funders - the white commercial farmers (Raftopoulos and Phimister 2004). However, even though access to lands for production improved, the land movement did not break from a neoliberal capitalist framework and it remains in the clutches of “monopoly-finance capital that drives the supply of agricultural seeds, technology, and credit” (Sadomba 2011: 80). The war veterans-led land movement lacked a long term agenda to defend the acquired land and reorganise production in former settler zones (Moyo and Yeros 2005b). This has made the land movement fail to retain a critical mass to resist creeping neoliberalism under the new regime and well-established powerful private actors who benefit immensely as long as the land movement and farmer organisations remain disjointed. New initiatives such as the Zimbabwe Small Organic Farmers Forum, though weak, have emerged to challenge the industrial model of agriculture, defend the land reform, and engage in new struggles meant to realise autonomous development and thus, meekly drive the food sovereignty agenda.

Much belief has been placed on the diagnostic potential of smallholder farmers to boost the quantity and variety of grain crops as they put their skills, labour, and independence to productive use in farming (Griffin, Khan, and Ickowitz 2004; Shivji 2017). This belief is not baseless. Drawing from the 1995-1996 agricultural census in Brazil, it was observed that

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"output per unit of land, or yield, often is higher on smaller farms than on large" (Griffin et al (2004:368) This census revealed that yields on commercial farms (average farm size of 433 hectares) were only 42 percent as high as on small farms (average size of 26 hectares). In Tanzania, it was observed that large-scale, industrialised agriculture offered no alternative to the realisation of national food sufficiency (Shivji 2017). The ineffectiveness and low productivity of the smallholders were a result of deliberate policy measures, which favoured large-scale producers. These included inputs subsidisation and the creation of cheap labour reservoirs at the expense of smallholders, thereby making them a hidden subsidy to the large-scale producers (Shivji 2017). Investment per hectare was also noted to be slightly higher on smaller farms than on larger commercial farms (Griffin et al. 2004). Where this obtains, improved land access and utilisation by smallholders could increase efficiency and productivity in the agricultural system, thereby boosting national food reserves. Where this is also supported by land tenure policies which provide land tenure security both for rich and poor peasants, as was the case under the FTLRP, national food sovereignty stands a chance.

While the FTLRP was an emancipatory struggle, it was also a political, anti-capitalist, and radicalised food sovereignty movement vaguely conscious that capitalism, as a system, was incompatible with the emancipation of both peasant majorities and the attainment of food sovereignty. As a result, the FTLRP movement forged a broad alliance comprising peasants, smallholder farmers, and workers, thereby rooting itself in the history and tradition of emancipatory struggles of peasants and workers.

## 4. FOOD SOVEREIGNTY REVISITED

While the literature on food sovereignty abounds, what emerges poignantly, however, is that the concept speaks broadly to nations and people's right to have full control of their food systems, food cultures, markets, production modes, and environments (Barbara 2014; Hannah, Annette, and Nettie 2011; Macartan 2017). More broadly, food sovereignty defines the policy guidelines needed so that both agrarian reform and rural development policies stand a chance to reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost broad-based, inclusive economic development. The central pillars of the concept include the respect and enforcement of the right to food and the right to land; the right of people or each nation to decide their own food and agricultural policies; respecting the right of indigenous peoples to their territories; the elimination of free trade policies, with a synchronised greater prioritisation of food production for local and national markets, and an end to dumping; candid agrarian reform; and peasant-based sustainable, or agro-ecological, agricultural practices (Agarwal 2014; Bernstein 2014; Macartan 2017; McMichael 2014). In the context of Zimbabwe today, food sovereignty refers to the rights of communities in the countryside to access land for uninterrupted food production, both by local and international monopoly capital. In earnest, food sovereignty seeks to restore to local farmers/peasants their ability to control local resources and markets and also stimulate local cooperatives.

While the food sovereignty concept has a complicated history, it is habitually closely associated with La Vía Campesina – the largest and most influential transnational agrarian movement comprising smallholder farmers, the land-poor, landless farmworkers, and indigenous peoples. During the World Food Summit of 1996 in Rome, La Vía Campesina made a submission in which farmers and activists showed displeasure with the 'food security' concept which sought to maximise the production of food ignoring how the food was produced, who produced it, where, and how it was produced. The food sovereignty agenda tabled by the movement considered food as a basic human right and thus, beyond the simple

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notions of food security. The agenda empowered smallholder farmers and other land-dependent categories to collectively grapple with their common threat from expanding corporate power over agricultural inputs, processing, distribution, and marketing. The seven principles of the submission are:

- Food, a basic human right: All people have a right to nutritious food access in its appropriate quantities and quality to sustain their healthy life, and therefore, the primary sector should be developed so that this right can be met.

- Agrarian reform: Food sovereignty can be realised when there is an agrarian reform that is free from gender, social class, race, and other biases, and it should bolster tenure security and shield indigenous producers from the land-grabbing tendencies of monopoly capital.

- Protecting natural resources: Food sovereignty is hinged on the sustainable utilisation of natural resources including soil, seeds, and water. This requires smallholder farmers to have full property rights to manage these resources sustainably to conserve biodiversity. Emphasis is placed on the need for tenure security, healthy soils, and reduced use of agro-chemicals.

- Reorganising food trade: Food should not be viewed as a commodity for sale, but rather as a source of nutrition. National policies should focus on supporting food production for local consumption and the attainment of food self-sufficiency. In addition, food imports must not be allowed to distort and dislodge local production nor reduce the prices of local products (Macartan 2017). Trade liberalisation, which has become the major source of hunger, unemployment, and shortage of rural farmers, should be eliminated (World Development Movement 2012).

- Eradicating the globalisation of hunger: Food sovereignty requires that multinational corporations be taxed, and regulated and that a strictly enforced code of conduct is designed for them. It rejects policies that are designed to facilitate the economic interests of transnational institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

- Social Peace: Food should not be as a weapon. Every person must have the right to peace without which food production and consumption is unimaginable. Peasant displacements and oppression should be stopped.

- Democratic control: Smallholder farmers should be key participants and must have a direct influence on the formulation of agrarian reform and agricultural policies at all levels through accurate and democratic decision-making (Agarwal 2014).

Since then, La Vía Campesina and its allies presented the food sovereignty agenda in events such as the World Forum on Food Sovereignty in Cuba (2001) and the International Forum on Food Sovereignty in Rome (2002). To bolster the coherence of the politics of food sovereignty, Vía Campesina's Nyeleni Declaration on Food Sovereignty was prepared in 2007, and this remains a basic reference point for understanding food sovereignty. The Nyeleni Declaration (2007:75) based the food sovereignty concept on six pillars: i) Food for People; ii) Importance of food providers; iii) Importance of localised food systems; iv) Importance of local control; v) Builds knowledge and skills; and vi) Nature conservation.

The land lobbying activities by the peasantry in Zimbabwe particularly since the mid-1990s speak to the agricultural-related activities that played on the global arena through La Vía Campesina. Deep and radical land lobbying in Zimbabwe followed the country's ceding of sovereignty through structural adjustment and trade agreements in the early 1990s. The land

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lobbying culminated in the FTLRP in 2000 the key target of which was to speed up both land acquisition and redistribution to the land needy under the A1 and A2 models (Utete 2003; GOZ 2003). Although the intended criteria for land identification and redistribution were not followed in practice, the FTLRP intended to acquire land that was underutilised, derelict, foreign-owned, owned by a farmer who owns other farms or the land was very close to communal areas for redistribution (Utete 2003; GOZ 2003). This would increase the number of people engaged in agricultural production as well as the sizes of cultivated land.

The FTLRP is one of Robert Mugabe's pro-Africanist legacies. Its land tenure permit models were an effort meant to protect farmers, smallholders in particular, against the land-grabbing tendencies of capital-rich actors through the market. The permits offered farmers an opportunity to decide how, when, and what to produce, where to market their produce, and how to practice environmental sustainability. Changing land pronouncements under the 'new dispensation' regime, however, parade a complete departure from the Mugabe administration which advocated for national sovereignty with a view of promoting inward-looking land policies. The new regime has since either made or hinted at adjustments to policies on land access, ownership, and utilisation to lure foreign investment. This breaks up patterns and levels of agricultural production needed for national food self-sufficiency by farmers as discussed in the next section.

## 5. CORPORATE THE RULER? NEW DISPENSATION REALITIES

As Zimbabwe once again embarks on neoliberal reforms, and ceding its autonomy on the backbone of its economy to corporate power, prospects for food sovereignty are not only slim but unimaginable. The corporate has ones gain empowered to direct agricultural production: inputs, processing, distribution, consumption, retailing, and whatnot. The result is Zimbabwe walking backward. The next section revisits the six pillars of food sovereignty espoused in the Nyeleni Declaration (2007), which has now become the basic point of reference in food sovereignty discussions, and flags out how these are impacted by the changing agrarian discourse and practices in Zimbabwe.

### *5.1. Food as a basic human right*

The food sovereignty concept advocates for the right to quality food and adequate accessibility and utilisation for everyone to sustain their healthy lives. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Article 11 endorses the right to food by stating that every person has the right to a good standard of living "including adequate food." The right to food is also echoed in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa adopted in 2003. In positing land rights as women's rights, Article 15 of the Protocol requires nations to "…ensure that women have the right to nutritious and adequate food." Article 15 of the charter obligates nations to ensure people's [women] "right to nutritious and adequate food" through the deployment of suitable actions to provide and improve land, clean water, domestic fuel sources, and the means of producing nutritious food. (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights 2003: para. a a). Improving the people's right to food, however, requires a strong socio-economic and political will by a nation to develop the primary sector so that the food right can be met.

Although having short-circuited and also racialised the FTLRP (in contexts of black and white divides), as part of its commitment to guarantee adequate food production, the previous administration provided land beneficiaries with security tenure permits: resettlement permits for A1, leasehold for A2 while some white-owned large-scale commercial farms deemed

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strategic were also left untouched, and continue to be held under freehold tenure permits. This enabled farmers to access support using land as collateral. In 2016, it also launched a state-run contract project called the Command Agriculture (CA). This assisted farmers who produced cereals for domestic consumption with inputs and a ready market. The facility prioritised the security tenure and livelihood rights of farmers and the state over neoliberal capital interests which poor farmers could fall for in joint ventures and contract farming arrangements. It did not require farmers to provide collateral upfront, and therefore, was accessible unlike in the private sector where some farmers had to offer their properties in towns as collateral (Shonhe 2019).

As a result, significant food production increases were recorded across the country. Through the CA facility, Zimbabwe experienced a major maize production increase of 321 percent in the 2016/2017 season while crops that were not covered under the facility dismally performed (Elich 2020). The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAT) found a 280 percent maize production increase across the country before 2017 (see Table 1). The average household maize production in Mashonaland West was 739.2 kilograms while the least was 174.5 kilogrammes in Matabeleland South. Masvingo with an average of 356 kilograms (ZimVAT 2020). This was confirmed as the first major maize output in which “yields were also high, surpassing the national maize requirements for the first time…” since the onset of the FTLRP (Mazwi, Chemura, Mudimu, and Chambati 2019:15). Chemura, Chambati, and Mazwi (2018) also found maize production to be sufficient to ensure household food security across several district case studies. Poor peasants in communal areas also made remarkable progress. In Mvurwi, Shonhe (2019) found that poor peasants utilised an average of 60 percent (1.5 hectares out of 2.5 hectares) of their lands while on the Sangwe farm in Chiredzi, 56 percent of the participants confirmed adequate food production (Ndhlovu 2018). This enabled peasants to sustain their livelihoods through food production for their own consumption, and thus, meet their right to food.

Changing land and agrarian discourses and practices under the current regime, however, threaten to reverse the gains made (Mazwi and Mudimu 2019). Current pro-capital pronouncements and practices including the TSP, the IBFB, and the GCD, among others, have destabilised production as summarised in Table 1. The new dispensation regime has not only discontinued the CA facility but has also been clear that, henceforth, it will not assume any key role in financing agricultural activities. Instead, it will limit its interventions only to providing guidelines through which financial institutions and enterprises can engage willing farmers on their terms on a commercial basis (GoZ 2018a). It has also reconfigured the Command Agriculture to Smart Agriculture to allow the same opportunistic and export-oriented financial institutions to engage with domestically-oriented farmers on monopolistic terms. This continues to undermine efforts towards Zimbabwe being a food self-sufficient state. Reduction in state-directed finance towards indigenous smallholder farmers has engendered high credit costs and reduced the economic viability of cultivation (Mazwi 2019). These shifts in agrarian practices undercut any prospects to attain food sovereignty in the country.

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**Table 1: Average Cereal Production per Household by Province**

| | Maize (Kg) | | | Small grains (Kg) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2016/17** | **2017/18** | **2018/19** | **2016/17** | **2017/18** | **2018/19** |
| Manicaland | 335.1 | 274.3 | 164.6 | 30.9 | 11.1 | 11.5 |
| Mash Central | 517.5 | 329.5 | 351.2 | 45.9 | 13.2 | 42.5 |
| Mash East | 378.7 | 331.6 | 297.1 | 23.7 | 0.9 | 16.3 |
| Mash West | 739.2 | 890.6 | 433.3 | 1.1 | 0 | 8.6 |
| Mat North | 240.5 | 164.8 | 91.0 | 88.1 | 49.5 | 39.5 |
| Mat South | 147.5 | 126.8 | 46.5 | 68.4 | 24.1 | 19.7 |
| Midlands | 522.9 | 453.1 | 261.3 | 29 | 8.5 | 11.9 |
| Masvingo | 356.7 | 378.1 | 204.8 | 86.1 | 33 | 47.8 |
| National | 480.9 | 334.2 | 233.1 | 42.2 | 14.2 | 24.4 |

*Source: ZimVAC (2020:41).*

The food sovereignty agenda in Zimbabwe has the added difficulty in that farmers are largely fragmented and lack well-defined militant organisations to lobby for state support. In contrast, corporations seeking to grab land and the new regime with its "Zimbabwe is open for business" chant have some more structured agendas and finances at their disposal to organise movements to intimidate farmers or to change public opinion to their advantage. As the government, the new regime has the power to sign large-scale long-term land lease agreements and dictate agricultural policy under its IBFB (GoZ 2018a). In comparison, individual farmers have frequently the temptation to depart from collective interests, as they often can improve their incomes or evade threats by deviating from collective interests. These tendencies undercut food sovereign prospects.

### *5.2. Agrarian reform*

Food sovereignty is imaginable when a country has an agrarian reform that bolsters tenure security and shields indigenous producers from the land-grabbing tendencies of monopoly capital (Macartan 2017; MacNeill 2020; McMichael 2014). Under the FTLRP, this was bolstered by providing farmers with A1, A2, and 99-year lease permits for large-scale commercial farmers and estates and other inputs and equipment provision facilities including the CA and the Farm Mechanisation Programme (FMP) launched by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) in 2007. The aim has been to support the land reform programme and expand agricultural production among the newly resettled indigenous farmers (Chisango and Obi 2010). However, the scrapping of the CA and the domination of the FMP list by political elites, and not the poor peasants who make up the majority of farmers have continued to compromise food sovereignty prospects (Magaisa 2020).

The scrapping of Communal Agriculture has further complicated the capacity of smallholders to produce. Elich (2020) posits that reliance on private financing has been one obstacle compromising production by smallholders who struggle to access inputs needed to achieve full productivity as financial institutions continue to focus on export-oriented operations by corporations. Mazwi et al (2018) argue that the withdrawal of state support for farmers exposes small-scale farmers, in particular, to the opportunistic tendencies of capital which could dispossess them of their properties, including land when they fail to pay back the loans. Mazwi et al (2018:8) posit that:

*Markets offer many chances for opportunistic behavior and tend to favor strong market actors, that is, those with the capital, know-how, and information to protect and expand their*

*property rights, and to buffer themselves against risk. The local culmination of the process is a gradual transfer of land rights via the market to capital-rich actors and a gradual concentration of land ownership in the hands of those who can invest to achieve optimal economies of scale in production and commercialization.*

Where the above is obtained, the result is the repossession of lands by corporations for export-oriented agricultural production. In addition, where farmers are trapped in debt, they could also sell off farm equipment and livestock to repay loans. This undermines the country's crusade toward food food-self-sufficient state.

While input shortages have led to the utilisation of private moneylenders by farmers in some cases, it has also triggered mass outmigration from the countryside (Ndhlovu 2020a; Vhumbunu 2019). Outward migration due to continued socio-economic deterioration and landlessness by the youths, coupled with constrained farming choices by individual farmers also affect food crop production. Outward migration will consequently result in an aged population in the countryside as the youth leaves. This negatively impacts land sizes cultivated as well as the amount of labour available on farms. The result is reduced agricultural production needed for national food sovereignty. A major challenge for food sovereignty will be to excite a new generation of young people to choose to work on the land. In addition, with increasing rural-urban migration in the new dispensation, issues of ecological sustainability become more pressing. Food sovereignty requires the amplification of ecological processes in agriculture to achieve local yield potentials, enhance soil quality parameters, and integrate technological advances and farmer knowledge (Timmermann and Georges 2016). Yield potential can be realised through proper diagnostics of farming systems taking into account locally available labour and biological diversity as well as the aspirations of farmers.

The new regime blames farmers for underutilisation land and posits that their land should therefore be downsized or that they should relinquish it to more productive farmers (Ndhlovu, 2022). Land audits have also been carried out in this regard (Tome and Mphambela 2020). The then Minister of Lands, Agriculture, Water, and Rural Resettlement, Perrance Shiri, also revealed that; "The time [would] come when the government [would] really consider taking back all underutilized land and allocate it to other potential users" (Tome and Mphambela 2020). This was effected on 31 August 2020 when the same Ministry released a joint statement with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development enabling former farmers to apply for the repossession of lands acquired under the FTLRP. Where investors need land that is already occupied, the government will "… revoke the offer letters of resettled farmers currently occupying those pieces of land and offer them alternative land elsewhere (GoZ 2020). Mazwi et al (2018) argue that whilst land audits are important in the context of releasing more land to the landless from individuals with multiple farms and those with illegally larger farms, land audits may be captured by the state or elites and released to export-oriented investors. This undermines the types of crops to be produced to meet national food needs. The result is not only the deterioration of peasant livelihoods but also the undermining of national food sovereignty prospects through indigenous food production. This confirms West and Haug (2017) observations in Tanzania that neoliberal capitalistic agricultural investments eventually interact with land rights, power relations, social and economic entitlements, and inequality aspects between investors (local and foreign) and smallholders.

To attain food sovereignty, agrarian reform should also ensure that land acquisition, utilisation, and support are free from gender and other biases (Macartan 2017). Food sovereignty acknowledges the critical role played by women in food production and

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preparation, and thus, demands recognition of their contribution. Discriminatory laws for divorce and inheritances should be abolished, particularly those that jeopardize women's access to land (Nyéléni 2007). The new administration has not been militant enough in addressing gender biases both in land access and utilisation and the provision of agricultural support (Mazwi et al 2018). Since its ascendency to power, a 20 percent underutilisation of agricultural land has continued to be recorded across all three peasant-dominated tenure models, namely, A1, A2, and the communal land tenure models (Mazwi et al 2018). Some of the causes have been the gendered provision of inputs, credit, and mechanisation which restrains optimal production by farmers, especially women. The lack of a proper framework for gender-sensitive agrarian reform that provides support to vulnerable and resource-poor women farmers is a setback to the national food sovereignty agenda. Considering that women produce 70 percent of food crops across the African continent (United Nations 2020), inadequate support for them in Zimbabwe could be one crucial factor that frustrates food sovereign prospects.

### *5.3. Protecting natural resources*

In addition to the need for an agrarian reform framework that supports production for local consumption by indigenous farmers, sustainable utilisation of natural resources including soil, seeds, and water should be part of the broader food sovereignty framework. This is possible where farmers have full property rights and land tenure security, such as the landholding permits under the FTLRP, to manage resources sustainably and thus, conserve biodiversity. The neoliberal policy changes and statements of the new government have been accompanied by tenure insecurities with about 30,000 landholders either having been or are under the threat of eviction in favour of capital-intensive foreign investment (Mazwi and Mudimu 2019). In Chilonga, about 2258 peasant farmers face displacement in favour of Lucerne grass (*alfalfa*) farming by a Chinese investor (Masvingo Centre for Research Advocacy and Development (MCRAD 2020). About 100 peasants have also been evicted from the Bromley farm (The Zimbabwe Mail 13/07/2019) while an unspecified number has been evicted from the Manzou farm by security forces where the farms have been earmarked for redistribution to a capital-resourced state officials (News24, 12/12/2018). Evictions have also accelerated in Chisumbanje where 15,000 households have their lands seized for bio-fuel production (Mandishekwa and Mutenheri 2020). These tendencies do not translate into food sovereignty and are, therefore, contested by the La Vía Campesina network.

### *5.4. Reorganising food trade*

Another major challenge in Zimbabwe under the new full-fledged neoliberal regime is how to reorganise the food trade by placing food producers at the centre. With the exception of diamond and platinum mining, the regime has amended the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act which restrained foreign investors to own no more than 49 percent of business shares in various sectors (GoZ 2018b). This empowers monopoly capital to operate without restraint and to influence food trade policies with the result being expensive basic foods in the country.

The food sovereignty agenda in Zimbabwe has the added challenge that smallholder farmers count a very large number of people with varying political priorities, challenges, and opportunities. These farmers face enormous collective action complications as a group, and have, together and individually, limited resources to organise their interests. As a result, pro-capital actors seeking to introduce their products, genetically modified organisms for instance, in the local market and the government which seeks to attract foreign investments, have a much more established agenda and resources to organise and exert their will. The need for

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income increases the temptation by farmers to budge to private and government needs. However, while smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe are currently resource-poor, to attain food sovereignty, capacity building for these farmers is needed while the activities of multinational corporations are checked through government food trade regulations. Food sovereignty requires that multinational corporations be taxed, regulated and that a strictly enforced code of conduct be designed for them. It rejects policies that are designed to facilitate their economic interests. Energy should be invested in how to improve their organisation, build new food retail channels, recover traditional farming techniques, and learn and improve agro-ecological farming methods. The food system must also be decentralised. The government needs to adopt inward-looking policies which support sustainable production by smallholder farmers instead of neglecting them in favour of export-oriented corporates in the name of 'Zimbabwe is open for business.'

In Zimbabwe, however, in pursuit of economic revival, the government has relaxed investment regulations. Only the mining industry has been exempted from the 2 percent broad-based tax for the next 10 to 15 years. In addition, personal income over US$3,601 is taxed at 25 percent while income above US$12,001 is taxed at 30 percent (Elich 2020). In addition, both fuel and electricity costs have been raised with electricity tax indexed to the US Dollar (Bearak 2019). Coupled with hyperinflation, these high energy costs undermine food sovereign prospects as smallholder farmers struggle to cultivate and plant. In Mvurwi, Shonhe (2019) found that most smallholder farmers now struggle to acquire tractor services for land cultivation due to high fuel prices.

Instead of supporting these farmers, the government has on the 27$^{th}$ of July 2020, rather signed a US$ 3.5 billion GCD meant to compensate former farmers while no significant effort has been made to support land reform beneficiaries. While this is important in the context of resolving one of the controversial issues in Zimbabwe, it would have been important for the government to first address production challenges that can lead to national food self-sufficiency. As argued by Mazwi et al. (2018), the government should have prioritised the needs of smallholder farmers first (both tenure security and operation support); and then continued to design a land investment assessment model that takes into account unpaid labour costs, historical social injustices of blacks, and state subsidies. It could then approach Britain for assistance in compensating former white farmers for land improvements since, in terms of section 72(7) of the Constitution, it is the obligation of the former colonial power, Britain, to compensate for the repossessed lands.

### *5.5. Social Peace*

Peasant displacements and oppression should be stopped to achieve food sovereignty (Agarwal 2014). While social peace, cohesion in particular, remained a challenge in FTLRP-resettled areas (Makunike 2014), the situation has worsened as even peasants in the Communal Areas are being displaced to accommodate capital activities. Social cohesion and cooperation in the form of networks (political and communal), cultural norms, and other social attributes are essential in the sharing of knowledge, exchanging experiences, and cooperation among peasant farmers. This increases the chances for increased productivity needed for food sovereignty. The eviction of peasants in areas such as Chisumbanje, Chilonga, Clipsham and Bani, and Batoka for pro-capital investments disrupts production and thus, undercuts prospects for food sovereignty. The government has, however, already clarified its intention to make Zimbabwe "critically… a destination where capital feels safe to come, and to do so we had to introduce various economic measures to attract global capital

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into our jurisdiction" (Sunday Mail 23/06/2019). Thus, no peasant affliction can change its pursuit of capital.

### *5.6. Democratic control*

Agarwal (2014) advises that to attain food sovereignty, nations must ensure that smallholder farmers are key participants and have a direct influence on the formulation of agrarian reform and agricultural policies at all levels through accurate and democratic decision-making. Zimbabwe, however, currently focuses on "…implementing investor-friendly and sustainable supply-side policies to stimulate production across all sectors" (ZANU-PF 2018:20) and also to protect private property rights as well as "lowering the cost of doing business, including trade and labour regulations" (ZANU-PF 2018: 22). This has shrunken the democratic space for farmers who lack a critical mass to be able to advance policies that promote common interests. Through its changing land discourse and practice, the government has attracted foreign capital with which it now exhorts smallholders to engage in contract farming and joint ventures to 'guarantee' large-scale production or else lose their lands. While these measures can be condoned in the context of addressing the agricultural financing gaps that constrain agricultural production, the reality is that peasants will eventually lose control of their land and production process to partners, thereby, further complicating food sovereignty prospects. The result will be land concentration and alienation by the elite and foreign capital, thereby escalating "social stratification and the pauperisation of the peasantry whose livelihoods are dependent on land control and ownership" (Mazwi and Mudimu 2019:3). The democratic control in policy design and implementation as well as of production arrangements could enable the state to adopt the right model for farming to achieve food sovereignty. Its current model is one of high-tech, modern, large-scale commercial production by skillful business managers, in which economies of scale are vital. The lack of democratic control in policy design makes the government side-line smallholders practicing dryland cropping systems in which economies of scale are pervasive, and upon whom food sovereignty can be achieved.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has been to explore the implications of shifting agrarian discourses and practices for food sovereignty in Zimbabwe. The article concludes that this shifting disrupts smallholder farmers' tenure security, weakens livelihoods, and triggers rural-urban migration and thus, disrupts production. Smallholders make up the majority of all farmers and grain crop producers for domestic consumption in the country and therefore, food sovereignty depends on their capacity to produce (Mazwi et al. 2019). Operating in highly charged socio-economic-political and harsh climatic conditions, the pro-capital switch in agrarian discourses and practices by the new regime increases the vulnerability of smallholders; and exposes them to exploitation by monopoly capital through contract farming and joint ventures, thus, undercutting prospects for food sovereignty. The regime which also desperately needs foreign investment to revive the economy and which now prefers high-tech, modern, large-scale commercial production as the best model of farming could also confiscate their lands for 'underutilisation' and place it under large-scale land leases in exchange for capital. Such capital tendencies will result in a shift of agricultural production from food to biofuels, thereby compromising food sovereignty prospects.

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