

THE IMPACT OF LAND REFORM
ON COMMERCIAL FARM WORKERS'
LIVELIHOODS

March 2001

Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment examined the situation on five commercial farms in Mashonaland East and West in March 2001. Each farm reflects a different context resulting from the ongoing land reform process. The five farms have the following characteristics:

1. Not designated for resettlement; not occupied; operating normally (baseline farm)
2. Designated for resettlement; not yet resettled; not occupied; farmer present
3. Not designated or resettled; part-occupied; farmer still present
4. Designated for resettlement; not yet resettled; part-occupied; farmer still present
5. Designated; part-resettled; part-occupied; farm ceasing operations

Farm workers' livelihoods are inextricably linked with the fate of the farm itself. Almost all of the workers' food and cash income comes from activities on the farm; their houses are on the farms; they pay relatively low or subsidised prices for foodstuffs from the farm store; and some are assisted with access to health and education services. Ordinarily, the workers are reasonably food secure, however their scope for coping with unexpected shocks is limited.

On the farm which has been designated for acquisition only, there has not yet been any significant changes in the workers' livelihoods, other than the limitation of credit at the farm store to the permanent workers. However, the farmer has been refused finance from the bank for his winter wheat production, and this is likely to lead to a cutback in production, and some laying-off of workers. Seasonal workers (who are often from neighbouring communal areas) will be the first to be let go.

On the farm which has been partially occupied by war veterans, the farmer has come to an accommodation with the occupiers whereby they have control of an area of land that was not formerly in production, and the farmer maintains his operations as normal on the remaining part of the farm. Again, therefore, there has been no significant impact on the livelihoods of the farm workers.

The situation of the workers on the farm which has been designated and partially occupied is of concern. Because of reduced production 450 workers were let go, and the remaining workers have been put on a 2-3 day working week, which has resulted in a loss of approximately 33% of total household income for that group. Less than 0.5% of those laid off from this farm have been given land under the resettlement process; some are squatting on the farm while seeking other work; some skilled workers have got employment elsewhere; and some are assumed to have gone to communal areas. A large number, however, cannot be accounted for. For those remaining workers, they have not been able to replace lost income and are facing food deficits in the range of 5-20%, while expenditure on non-food items and services (including children's education) has been cut back significantly.

The situation on the farm facing imminent closure is similar to the designated and occupied farm above. Again, some workers are working a 3-day week and are trying to cope with the effects of that lost income. Those unemployed have been able to remain on

the farm in their homes, and have sought piecework on neighbouring farms as a main coping mechanism. However they are also earning an inadequate income and are experiencing food deficits. This situation will have changed since the time of the fieldwork, as the farm was due to close on March 31st, and the workers would have had to leave the farm and their homes.

As a result of these findings, the main recommendations are that:

- More consideration needs to be given to the status of farm workers in the “fast-track” process
- There is a need for more clear and transparent information to be given to farmers and workers regarding the time lag between designation and actual resettlement, to assist them in adapting to their changing situation
- The question of service provision for new settlers needs to be addressed
- NGOs and other interested agencies should network further to share information on the status of workers, particularly regarding their locations after they have to leave farms
- Further research is needed on the impact of the resettlement process on labour opportunities in communal and other areas beyond the commercial farms

BACKGROUND

Commercial farm worker communities have been estimated by the Central Statistical Office and FEWS to constitute approximately two million people, i.e. approximately 20% of the Zimbabwe's total population. The farm worker communities constitute one of the most impoverished and vulnerable groups in Zimbabwe, with limited access to food security; primary or secondary education; health services; decent shelter; water and sanitation facilities and political representation. In terms of tenure security they also have very limited access to the land from which to supplement farm livelihood earnings.

A central issue at present in Zimbabwe at the moment is the land issue. While the benefits of land reform in terms of a more equitable distribution of land and an easing on pressures on communal areas have been discussed at length, relatively little attention has been paid to the impact of land reform on those who have been working and living on the commercial farms.

Until recently government policy with regards to farm workers has tended not to consider the issue of tenure security for farm workers. It was assumed that the main concerns of farm workers were better working conditions and wages. In addition it was assumed by some that the majority of farm workers were "aliens" and could therefore be return to their countries of origin at any time. While it is true that working conditions and wages need to be improved, the question of tenure security is also critical. It is also true that a sizeable number of farm workers might have their roots of origin in the neighboring countries, but the majority of them are now third or fourth generation Zimbabweans who were born on the farms and now have no real links with other countries.

FCTZ (2001) have estimated that in the period from July to September 2000, resettlement occurred on 45 farms in Mashonaland East, Central and West. Out of the 1,370 farm workers who had been employed on those farms, 137 of them or 10% were included in the resettlement. 1,192 other families were also resettled on the land, indicating that a slightly greater number of people lost their jobs than were resettled. By February 2001, 347 out of the 3,812 commercial farms in the three Mashonaland provinces had already been resettled (or "fast-tracked"), while an additional 738 have been designated for acquisition by the government ("gazetted"). Based on average farm worker populations in those areas (FCTZ, 1999), therefore, an estimated 43,400 farm worker households – roughly 250,000 people - are being affected by the "Fast Track" resettlement programme. Comparable figures for other provinces have not been systematically compiled.

Limited information has been gathered to date on how the social and economic conditions of the farm workers have been affected by the Fast Track Land Reform Programme. Because of this, Farm Community Trust Of Zimbabwe (FCTZ) carried out an assessment of the situation of farm workers in a variety of contexts, using the Household Economy Approach (HEA). FCTZ has been working on the commercial farms for the past four years.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

An earlier assessment of the situation of farm workers in November 2000 (SC UK, 2000) provided an initial outline of the circumstances this group were finding themselves in as a result of both the Fast-Track land resettlement programme and the wider economic problems in the country. It indicated that there were variations in how farms were being affected by the land issue, and therefore in how the livelihoods of farm workers were being affected. The current assessment, which was carried out in March 2001, was intended to assess the affects of developments since the earlier report, and to present the information in a way that categorised farms in a more systematic way.

The specific objectives were to:

- Investigate the workers' household economies in commercial farms and gain an understanding of the socio-economic situation in farms that are operating normally; farms that have been designated; occupied but not designated; designated and occupied; and facing imminent closure having been fast-tracked.
- Describe access to food and cash income sources and expenditure patterns for the different wealth groups, and to better appreciate the demands placed on their limited resources.
- Analyse the community's capacity to cope with a change in normal livelihood conditions as they experience some major shocks.
- Produce a document for advocacy purposes to raise public awareness and to share information about problems faced by households living and working in the farms.

METHODOLOGY AND TOOLS USED

The Household Economy Approach (HEA) methodology was used, as it is a framework for analysing household food security and a population's needs. Information is collected on the various options and strategies that households in different wealth groups employ to secure access to food and cash income, and their patterns of expenditure.

Usually in this approach, a particular geographical area is focused on and a baseline picture is developed to describe different wealth groups' livelihood strategies in a self-defined "normal" year. The baseline picture can then be compared with the situation after a "shock" (such as drought, market disruption or a change in employment opportunities) to see how people are able to cope. The scope of the current research was such that four different scenarios relating to the land reform programme had to be examined, and these scenarios had arisen on different farms. Ideally a baseline picture for each farm should have been developed for comparison. However, that would have taken twice as long and

time was limited, and furthermore it was hoped to filter out the separate effects of the general macro-economic problems which have affected the country in recent years and just to focus on the effects of the land question. Therefore it was decided to select a different farm, unaffected by designation, resettlement or occupation to act as a baseline.

The study covered four farms in Mashonaland West and one farm in Mashonaland East. The numbers of employees on the farms varied from less than thirty, to seven hundred, while the main crops produced were maize, tobacco, wheat, cotton and soya beans. Cattle-ranching was an additional activity on two farms. Permission to talk to the workers was granted by the farm owners and farm managers. Other than in the occupied farm, where only one focus group discussion was held, an average of three groups were interviewed plus the farmer himself. Farm managers/ foremen were also interviewed on two farms. The focus groups comprised 5-6 people each, and participants were selected to meet the criteria previously given for each wealth group. Focus groups were then asked to discuss the situation of “people like them” instead of their own individual circumstances as a means of gaining a picture of the typical situation in that group. Between the focus groups and individual interviews, a total of 84 people were interviewed for this assessment. At the request of those interviewed, the farms in question will not be referred to by name.

Tools used

The main tool used in gathering the information were focus group discussions (FGD) with mixed community groups, and key informant interviews. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were used to obtain information on wealth groups within the communities, on typical household’s sources of food and income and common social division of labour including roles played by children and women in sourcing food and cash income.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to keep the researchers focused. Proportional piling was also used to assist in the cross-checking of quantitative information, and as a way of realising the involvement of the target groups. Focus Group Discussions were held separately with children, who identified and described their roles in productive household activities.

Research constraints

The research was undertaken when the environment was relatively quiet, except on two farms. One had been partially occupied and the farmer is co-existing with war veterans. The farm manager could not allow some of the workers to meet with the research team for an interview as he insisted that the workers should go to work. Another farm had been fast tracked and the farmer has left. War veterans on that farm were suspicious of the motivations of the assessment team.

MAIN FINDINGS

Wealth Ranking

Wealth ranking on the farms visited mainly focused on the amount of income a household could generate through employment of one or more members of the household and engagement in other income generating activities. Therefore on farms where there was not a lot of such activities, the wage grading system was used to rank the different groups, with the skilled workers being the better-off group. However on such farms the difference in livelihoods was said to be not so different since the wage scale differences were very minor. However the less privileged groups on such farms were households solely dependent on seasonal work, since as the name indicates, their employment is limited to certain times of the year. This therefore affects their ability to provide food for their families during the months they will be out of employment. The seasonal workers were also less likely to have dry land fields and gardens to supplement their food.

As the wealth-ranking varied significantly by farm (linked to how the farm had been affected by the land reform process), wealth groups are described within the section on each farm rather than being consolidated here.

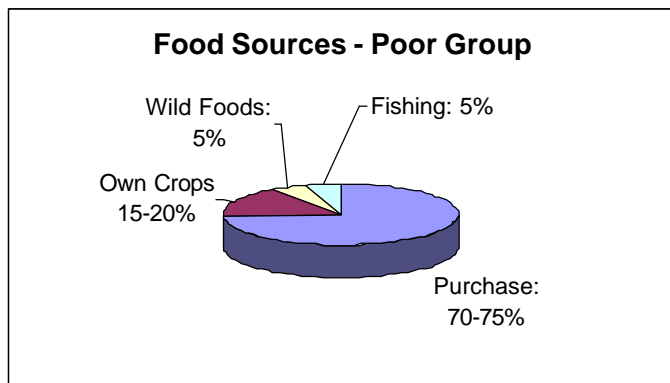
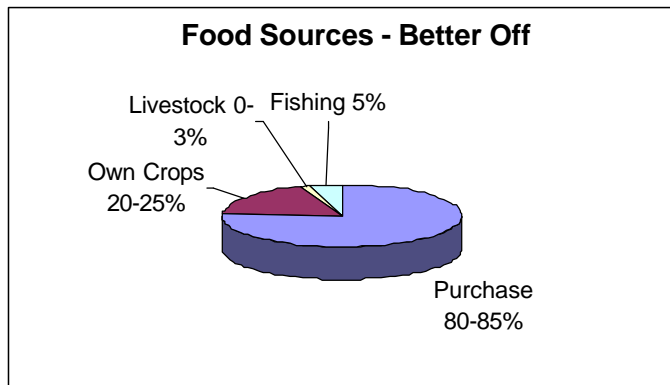
Baseline Farm

The baseline farm has neither been designated, occupied or resettled, and is operating normally.¹ Comparing the household economies on this farm with those of workers who are still fully employed on the other farms visited, it appears that the situation of workers on this farm is quite representative. Nonetheless, it is recognised that this is certainly not a perfect substitute for a picture of the other farms before they were designated, occupied, or resettled, and therefore indicative rather than strict comparisons should be made.

Two wealth groups were identified on this farm by key informants, the poor and the better-off. The main difference between the two groups is the level of the salary of the main income-earner, with the better-off comprising those higher up on the wages-skills hierarchy. Other differences arise as a result of this difference in income, and these are described below.

¹ “Operating normally” here means normal in relation to other commercial farms at this time. It is recognised that all farms and other sectors have been affected by the prevailing economic situation, and therefore are not “normal” in relation to previous years. However this research attempts to focus on the effects of the land reform process only. Earl & Moseley (1996) could, to a limited extent, provide a comparative picture from earlier years.

Food Sources



These percentages refer to the percentage of minimum daily calorific needs, averaged out over the year, met through each source. 2,100kcal per person per day is taken as the minimum daily requirement in this assessment. The percentages do not necessarily add up to 100%. In this case the better-off group consume approximately 100-120% of their needs, meaning 2,100 – 2540kcal per person per day, while the poor group consume approximately 95-105% of their needs. In general, therefore, we can say that commercial farm workers on unaffected farms are able to meet their minimum food requirements.

The main differences in the food baskets of the two wealth groups appear to be in terms of the quantity of each item consumed, rather than the range of items within that basket. The poor consume less mealie meal than the better-off, less oil, less meat and fish, less bread and less milk, but consume more wild fruits.

For both of the wealth groups, it was found that purchasing is by far the most important source of their food. As will be further discussed under the “income” and “expenditure” sections, these purchases are intimately linked to employment on the farms because (a) most food is purchased from farm shops accessible only to farm workers, often at significantly subsidised prices, and (b) the income which the workers use to purchase the food comes almost exclusively from employment and other activities on the farm.

Permanent farm workers are also allocated small plots of land by the farmer to cultivate for themselves. On the baseline farm these plots were approximately ½ acre in size, and were sufficient to produce around 250kg of maize plus some weeks’ of green consumption. The farmer on this farm provides the workers with the necessary inputs

such as seeds and fertilizers to cultivate the land for free.² On this farm, plot sizes are not very flexible and workers receive the same support in inputs, therefore production from the plots does not differ significantly between the wealth groups.

In addition to the above main sources of food, there are a number of smaller, supplementary sources for each group. The better-off can afford to keep small livestock such as chickens or ducks, which are mainly kept for consumption rather than sale. Except during the winter months, both groups are also able to engage in fishing around a dam on the farm to which the farmer grants them free access. For the poor group, collecting wild fruits (such as *matohwe*, *matamba*, *mazhanje*, *hacha* and *tsvanzva*) also contributes a small amount to their food intake.

Income Sources

The table and charts below show the amount of income earned from the various activities undertaken by the two wealth groups, both in absolute cash terms and as proportions of total income.

Average Monthly Earnings (Z\$) from Each Income Source; Baseline Farm:

Source	Better-Off Group	Poor Group
Permanent Employment	4,200	2000
Piecework	500	1050
Poultry keeping	375	0
Trading	500	400
Gardening	200	200
Fish selling	100	0
Total	5,875	3,650

The ways that the two wealth groups have of generating income on the baseline farm are on the surface quite similar, though the actual amounts differ substantially. Both groups source 80-85% of their income through permanent or seasonal piecework on the farm. However, the better-off group is comprised of those higher up the salary-scale and/ or the more skilled workers, and therefore they earn the largest part of their income from their permanent salaries. Poor households earn less from their salaries, and therefore have to supplement them by undertaking additional piecework, mainly on a seasonal basis. This work is either done after regular working hours by the permanent employee himself, or by other household members such as the wife or an older child. While better-off households also undertake some piecework, it is more in the form of overtime by the primary income-earner than seasonal or casual work by additional household members. Workers on this farm may be eligible for a number of other bonuses provided by the farmer, for example:

- If a 26-day month is worked, workers are given a Z\$200 food subsidy

² The typical plot size allocated to workers on commercial farms in Mashonaland was found by FCTZ/ FEWS (1999: p29) to be 0.3ha (0.75 acres), indicating that the baseline farm is not significantly unrepresentative in this regard.

- Other workers considered to have worked well during the month may be given a discretionary Z\$200 bonus
- There is a Z\$10,000 gratuity for workers who have worked for more than eight years

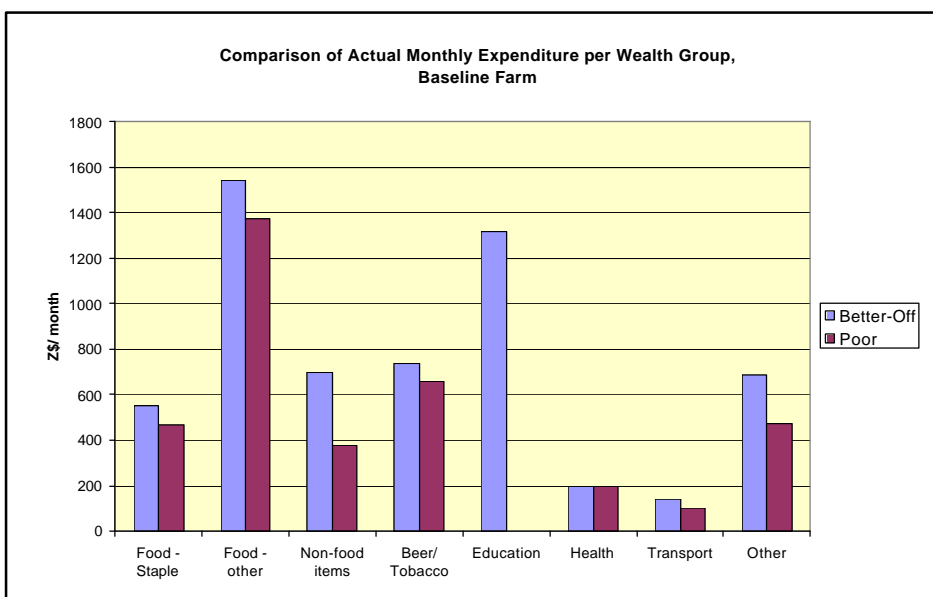
Salaries for permanent farm workers are based on a 26-day working month (i.e. 6 days per week), leaving a limited amount of time to expand on other activities. Other household members, therefore, are generally responsible for bringing in the income from other sources.

Most households at different times engage in petty trade, typically the buying and selling-on of small foodstuffs such as vegetables. Similarly, many families can earn small amounts of income (on average Z\$200 per month) by selling vegetables grown on their own plots. Better-off households have an additional source of income through the sale of poultry and eggs. While this can be quite lucrative, only a relatively small proportion of the better-off group carry out this activity. The better-off also engage in fishing near the dam on the farm, and can sell a small amount of their catch.

What is important to note from this section in considering the impact of the land resettlement programme is how most of these sources of income are inextricably linked to the commercial farm itself. Work on the farm provides a salary, overtime and additional piecework opportunities; it provides access to land and inputs for gardens; and it provides access to fishing grounds. These sources account for a total of almost 85% of both groups' income. Only poultry-keeping and petty trade are not directly related to the workers' position on the farm, though even these are indirectly linked in terms of markets for the goods and getting income as capital to undertake these activities.

Expenditure

Given that poorer households typically earn less than two-thirds the amount that the better-off earn, it is necessary to look at the differences in how those incomes are spent to see which things those with less income spend less on.



From the diagram above, which compares the actual cash expenditure on various categories of items, it is clear that expenditure on food (both staples and other foodstuffs) does not decrease proportionately with declining income. As was seen earlier when discussing food intake, both groups purchase and consume quite a similar food basket, with the main difference being that the better-off consume approximately 10% more of most goods than the poor.

It is also important to note that grain prices on commercial farm stores seem to be set either at the lower end of the range of prevailing market prices, or even slightly below the market price. On the baseline farm in March, mealie meal was selling at Z\$5.50 per kg, while the market rates quoted in the area ranged from Z\$5.50 to Z\$8.33/kg.³

The other categories of expenditure that do not decrease in line with income are beer, tobacco and healthcare. As the latter would be considered an essential and the former luxuries, this is a somewhat worrying finding. This is an example of the intra-household allocation of resources not working to the maximum benefit of the household as a whole, as beer consumption is generally limited to the male head of household.

In terms of healthcare, this baseline farm is not necessarily representative of the majority of farms. This is because this farm has a Farm Health Worker paid for by the farmer, who gives initial treatment and some drugs for free to farm workers. Further consultation and other drugs have to be paid for. While most farms in the Mashonaland provinces have benefited from the Farm Health Worker scheme, many others in those provinces and the majority of farms in the other provinces do not have access to healthcare on the farm. Those without such access have to travel long distances - usually 10-15km - to government health facilities⁴, adding substantially to the costs associated with healthcare.

The difference between the two wealth groups on the baseline farm in terms of spending on education is very striking. The explanation for this is that education on this farm is provided for free by the farmer for Grades 1 to 4 only. If parents want their children to continue to be educated above this level, they must send them to board at the nearest government school (the distance to those schools would make it unfeasible, and/ or prohibitively expensive for children to commute every day). Combining the costs of fees with boarding, most poor families simply cannot afford to pay for this service and therefore families either pay a high amount for education or nothing at all.

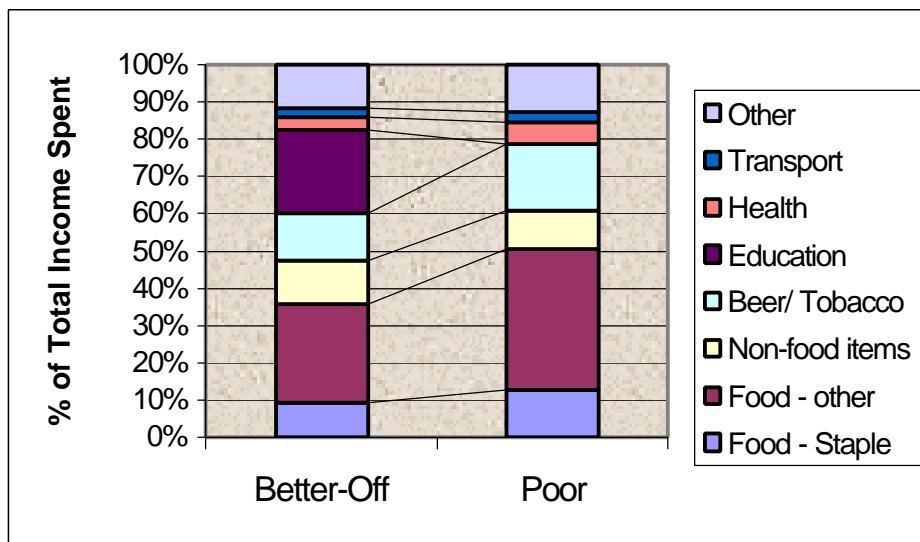
Another category on which the poor spend less is non-food items such as soap, lotion, paraffin, candles and matches. The "other" category was added to fill the gap between what interviewees listed as their monthly expenditures and their income. It has been assumed that items such as clothing, blankets and small household assets, which interviewees mentioned purchasing and having but which are not purchased monthly, account for most of this category. It also would make sense that the poor spend less on this category than the better-off: they would either purchase less of such items, or replace

³ FEWS (2001, p20) quote prices for (unmilled) maize in February 2001 in the Mashonaland as ranging from Z\$3.89 to Z\$8.33/kg.

⁴ FCTZ, 1999: p28

old items less frequently. Indeed, one of the differences between the wealth groups specified by the workers themselves was the quantity and range of small household assets (ranging from furniture and radios, to TVs and fridges) owned by each group.

The diagram below compares the relative share of income spent on these different categories by both wealth groups.



One further point of note arising from this diagram is that the poor group spends very close to 50% of their income on food. This figure is commonly used as a benchmark to indicate a high level of poverty.

SCENARIOS AND CASE STUDIES

Using the above picture as a baseline, we will now discuss the situation on the other farms that were assessed and which have all been affected to varying degrees by the official land resettlement programme and by farm occupations.

Where the information was gathered, “before and after” comparisons will be referred to when discussing each farm, but in most cases the necessary information was not collected. It is important to note that the case studies presented should not be considered to provide a model of what happens under various conditions, and that the circumstances are likely to vary to some extent from one commercial farm to another. (It is not assumed that the situation on a cattle ranch in Matabeleland is the same as that on a horticultural operation near Harare, for example.) Nonetheless we feel that there is sufficient similarity in the household economies of commercial farm workers that indicative patterns and principles can be applied which will be of use.

The scenarios covered are:

- Farm designated for resettlement; not yet resettled; not occupied; farmer present
- Farm not designated or resettled; part-occupied; farmer still present
- Farm designated for resettlement; not yet resettled; part-occupied; farmer still present
- Farm designated; part-resettled; part-occupied; farm ceasing operations

This will allow us to gauge the independent effects of designation and occupation, and the effects of both of these combined.

Actual numbers of farms experiencing each scenario have not been precisely estimated because of a lack of detailed figures on occupations, but some indications can be derived from existing information. Out of the 3,812 commercial farms in Mashonaland, as of the end of February 72% had not been designated or resettled; 9% had actually been resettled, and the remaining 19% had been designated but not yet resettled (FCTZ, 2001). Anecdotal evidence suggests that occupations are most prevalent on the latter category of farm.

1. Designation

The Designated farm has not been occupied or resettled yet, meaning that the farmer still has control of his entire land and is still continuing operations, though the government may acquire the land for resettlement under the “fast-track” programme at any time.

The main issue for the farmer in the case of designation is uncertainty. There is currently no set timeframe to indicate how much time may pass between designation and actual resettlement. In addition legal questions remain surrounding the way in which the resettlement process is being carried out, and about issues of compensation. Given farmers’ investments in the land, therefore, leaving as soon as their farm is designated is an extremely unattractive option for them, so most will continue their operations in spite of the designation.

The uncertainty resulting from designation has two main effects. First, access to credit for the farmer from financial institutions is likely to be denied as he cannot guarantee he will be able to harvest his crop, nor is his collateral secure. On the farm assessed, the farmer had been able to harvest his main crop as normal, however he had been refused credit for his winter wheat crop. Unless an alternative source of finance can be found, this will mean reduced production levels and presumably either reducing the numbers of days worked per week by farm workers, or laying off some of the workers entirely. All development work (i.e. construction and other investment) on the farm has been stopped.

The farmer said that the first people to be affected by reduced production will be the seasonal workers, as in the event of reduced piecework employment opportunities he said he would give first priority to his permanent workers (i.e. overtime), or to members of their families. The impact of reduced production is dealt with in more detail in the other case studies where this has already actually occurred.

The situation of seasonal or casual workers who are not permanently resident on commercial farms was not covered by this study. However, for poor households from neighbouring communal lands, informal mining areas or peri-urban areas, this type of work can be a very important source of income, and its loss could have a serious impact on their food and livelihood security.⁵

An immediate impact of the uncertainty is that credit facilities from the farmer have been restricted to permanent workers only. Seasonal workers now have to pay-as-they-go at the farm store. However, because of their access to credit and the difference between the farm and market prices for maize, the permanent workers quickly used their credit to buy the farmer's entire stock of maize. They then sold this on to the seasonal workers at a profit, meaning that the former have actually managed to increase their income by profiteering at the expense of the latter. The farmer has now had to purchase further stocks from other farms at closer to market prices, therefore this has been a once-off phenomenon.

Investigation into sources of food and income, and expenditure patterns revealed a very similar picture for permanent workers to the one on the baseline farm. A better-off group earn a reasonable income from the main salary of the household head, and this is supplemented by activities such as vegetable, poultry and fish sales, and petty trade. The lower group of permanent workers earn the minimum wage, and a substantial amount of income also comes from seasonal piecework by their wives. Poultry and vegetable sales make up the balance of their income. Designation, therefore, has had little immediate impact on their livelihoods.

The important point regarding designation, therefore, relates to timing issues. If this farm is not resettled by the time the winter harvest would have been ready, yet the farmer has to reduce operations and lay off workers in the meantime because of a lack of finance, a great deal of unnecessary hardship will have been caused. However if at least a date for resettlement can officially be fixed, all affected actors including the farmer, farm workers and new settlers, can make their plans accordingly.

2. Occupation

The occupied farm visited has not been designated for resettlement, but was invaded in 2000 by war veterans who occupied part of the land. The farm has now been divided between the war veterans and the farm owner, and both are currently co-existing peacefully. The farmer is running operations normally. The farm owner indicated at the time of the assessment that he and his workers were very busy and did not want to be disturbed by the exercise, therefore the researchers were only able to meet one group of key informants during the lunchtime.

⁵ See SC UK (2001) for further discussion of this in relation to informal mining communities.

A very significant aspect of the situation on this farm is that the portion of the land given to the war veterans had previously been left idle by the farmer. Therefore in spite of effectively ceding control of part of his land, he has not had to reduce his operations or the size of his workforce in any way. As a result, the partial occupation was found to have made no noticeable difference to the livelihoods of the farm workers.

One different aspect of livelihoods on this farm, which is unrelated to the land issue, is that workers are paid partially in-kind, by receiving 25kg of maize per worker each month for free and up to a further 75kg of maize per month at a heavily subsidised price (less than Z\$2/ kg).⁶ Cash income levels and, in turn, expenditure on staple foods are lower than on the baseline farm as a result. Otherwise income levels and food and non-food consumption are broadly similar to those of farm workers on “normal” farms.

The type of arrangement existing on this farm provides a degree of normality but with a different type of uncertainty to that associated with designation. With designation, the issue is not so much whether the land will be taken, but when. With occupation, it cannot be predicted how much land will be taken, when it might be taken, and any arrangements made by the farmer with the war veterans obviously do not have any legal standing. Indeed, there is even the technical possibility that the occupation could be reversed. This makes it difficult to generalise about the effects of occupation, while the sensitivity of the situation makes it difficult even to gather specific details on individual cases. Nonetheless, this example shows that official resettlement on land which is not being utilised by the farmer would minimise the effects on farm workers.

3. Designation and Occupation

The farm assessed in this category has been affected in a number of ways by the land reform programme and occupation. The farmer owns a number of blocks of land, of which approximately 85% have been designated for resettlement; this land is then split into one section comprising around 50% of his total land which has been occupied by war-veterans and which is outside of the farmer's control, and the other 35% is designated but not yet occupied or resettled. 15% of the land therefore has been neither designated nor occupied.

This farm and its workers have been very significantly affected by land issues in the last year. 450 farm workers have lost their jobs and have had to leave the land with their families due to the occupations and the reduced production levels on the farm. The remaining workers have been kept on but their working week has been reduced from 6 days to 2-3 days, creating a very significant gap in their income.

⁶ Anecdotal evidence in recent months would suggest that labourers are increasingly preferring to be paid in-kind rather than in cash, where possible. The reason given for this is typically that it is easier to avoid the effects of inflation, particularly food and fuel (transport) price increases, by negotiating a fixed payment in-kind rather than trying to re-negotiate cash wages upwards.

Information on the whereabouts and situation of the workers who were laid off proved difficult to get. It was suggested that some would have gone to try to find casual work on other commercial farms, some skilled workers (including drivers and mechanics) may have found employment elsewhere, and that others may have gone to communal areas. FCTZ's 1997 survey found that 27% and 40% respectively of permanent farm workers in Mashonaland West and East (where the current research was carried out) maintained communal area homes (FCTZ: 1999, p27). Only 2 families out of the 450 who lost their jobs have been included in the fast-track resettlement programme, which is less than 0.5% of those affected. Those who are seeking work on other farms are still squatting on this farm, and their situation should be similar to that of the "unemployed" group in the next case study.

There has not been any reported influx of displaced farm workers into peri-urban settlements in Harare. Nor has FCTZ witnessed the sorts of roadside and river-bank squatter settlements which farm workers previously stated would be some of their likely destinations in the event of displacement (see Zimbizi, 2000). As a matter of priority, then, further investigation is required to gain a better picture of where farm workers who have lost their jobs and homes have actually gone. The issue of the origin of the farm workers (with many being of foreign descent) is an extremely important factor in this regard; discussion of this issue can be found in Zimbizi (2000, pp13-14) and Kibble & Vanlerberghe (2000, p6)

For those who have kept their jobs on this farm, they have had to cope with the "shock" to their household economy of a loss of approximately 33% of their total income, equivalent to approximately Z\$1,000 (reducing total income to around Z\$2,000), as a result of the working week being limited to 2-3 days. Workers on this farm appear to have been slightly worse off than the poor group described for the baseline farm even before the designation and occupation. Except for a handful of higher paid staff (such as the farm manager and drivers/ mechanics), the rest of the workers were found to have quite similar livelihood patterns, and therefore only one wealth group has been considered. Their total income previously was approximately Z\$3,000 per month, due to a lower daily wage rate for the agricultural work compared to that paid on the baseline farm. However, their own crop production was slightly higher than on the baseline farm. Another difference is that these farm workers supplemented their agricultural incomes through gold-panning on the farm, while trade and vegetable sales were not mentioned as being very significant.

In assessing how people coped with the loss of income, the limited information that it was possible to gather suggested that the workers had reduced spending on the following:

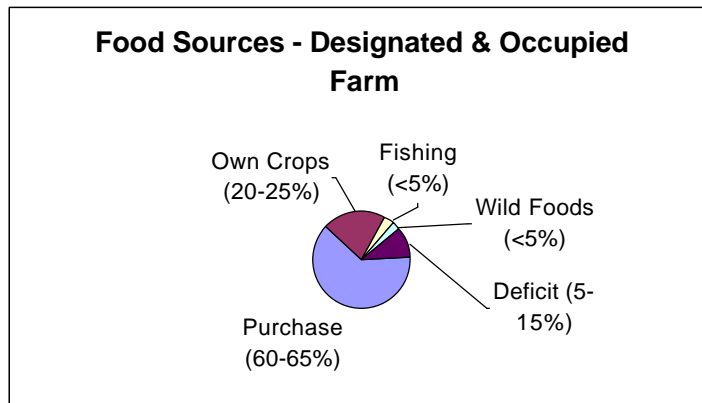
- food: purchase and consumption of mealie meal appears to have reduced only by a small amount, with the bulk of savings coming from reduced consumption of items such as sugar, meat, bread/ flour, and potatoes/ sweet potatoes. Many interviewees reported that they had taken to reducing the number of meals they consumed at certain times of the month.
- non-food items such as soap and paraffin/ candles

- beer/ tobacco
- “other” items such as clothing and small household assets

Expenditure on services such as health and education do not seem to have been reduced. In fact the costs of educating children have increased while the number of children attending school has actually decreased. This is because the farmer used to provide transport for the children to the nearest registered school 10km away (there is no farm school), but due to the combination of financial pressures and the fuel shortages, this service has been discontinued. Some children have been withdrawn from school as a result, but this saving is cancelled out by the increased cost of bus fares for those still attending. Regarding healthcare, it should also be pointed out that although these families spend a little on healthcare, they would have great difficulty meeting any large health expenses that could arise at any time, as they have very little scope to cut back further on other expenses and have no significant assets to dispose of.

These workers do not appear to have been able to increase income from other sources to any significant degree. There was conflicting information given on the extent to which income from gold-panning had changed. Some families said they had increased their dependence on gold-panning, while others said that their income from this source had been reduced because the place where they panned was on a part of the farm that is now occupied, and the war veterans had stopped their access to it. There was also said to be little scope for increasing own crop production, fishing, or gathering wild foods, again mainly due to constraints in accessing land or fishing areas.

As a result of the cuts on food expenditure and the accompanying reduction in the numbers of meals consumed, we would estimate that the remaining workers on this farm are not currently meeting their minimum food needs and that they have a deficit in the range of 5 – 15%.



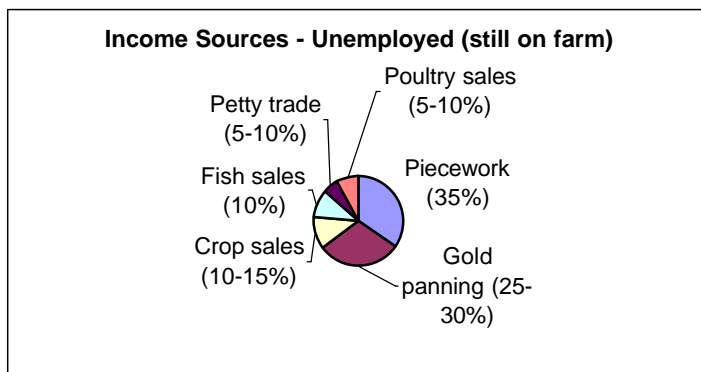
4. Designation, Resettlement and Imminent Farm Closure

This farm was in a similar position to that of the last farm discussed, having been designated and having part of the land under others’ control. In this case, however, the farm was not occupied, but new settlers had been given part of the land under the fast-track programme. Because the rest of the farm was due to be resettled, the farmer had decided to wind up his operations with the harvesting of his main maize crop, and the farm was due to close on March 31st.

As with the previous farm, the process of designation and gradual resettlement resulted in some of the farm workers (almost 60% of the workforce) being laid off entirely and the rest being kept on, but working a 3-day week. A significant difference, however, is that the farm workers' compound was on a piece of land that, in spite of designation, had not yet been resettled. Therefore those workers who had been laid off had been able to stay in their houses and could still farm their small plots of land while also trying to find alternative sources of income. These two groups – employed and unemployed – constituted the wealth groups identified by those interviewed on the farm.

The employed group on this farm appeared to have similar livelihood patterns to those workers remaining on the previous farm discussed. However, we would estimate the food deficit for this group to have been in the range of 0 – 5% because of the following. (a) They seem to have been on slightly higher wages initially than those on the previous farm, (b) the wage cut seems to have been less severe, and was partially compensated for by finding more piecework on neighbouring farms, and (c) they were selling off their chickens to make some more money. Savings had been incurred by slightly reducing the quantity of maize-meal purchased, and also by reducing relatively expensive food items like sugar and meat/ fish. Although the researchers did not get a detailed breakdown of other expenditure, it could be suggested based on the information from other farms that savings were mainly made on non-food and household items and assets.

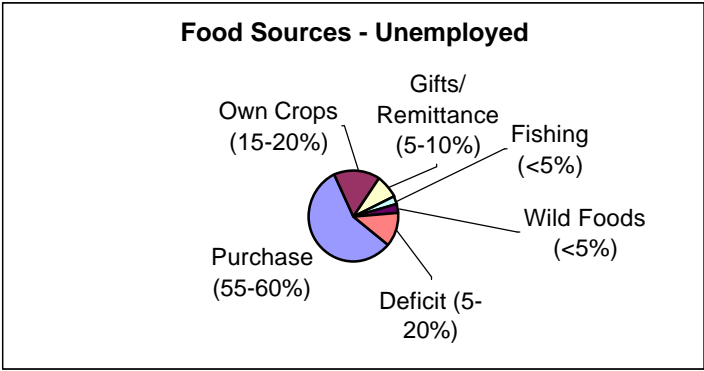
The unemployed group managed to undertake a variety of income-generating activities which brought in an estimated income of on average Z\$1,710 per month. The most important activity was said to be piecework on neighbouring commercial farms, followed



closely by gold panning (households estimated that they got an average of 1 ounce per month, which was sold for Z\$500). Smaller amounts could be earned from the sale of some of the produce from their own plots on the farm, from selling fish caught at a dam on the farm, from selling-off their own chickens, and from petty trade.

More than half of this income is spent on purchasing food. The food so purchased is limited mainly to maize meal, salt and vegetables, and provides 55-60% of the households' calorific needs. Crops grown on the plot of land provided to them by the farmer, and which they have been allowed to maintain, are also significant, with smaller amounts coming from fishing and wild foods. As with the other farms discussed, these sources cannot be increased by any significant amount due to physical access limitations.

In fact, on this farm it was said that new settlers are charging a fee to farm workers to access the dam where fishing can be carried out. (Workers on this farm also reported that they are now pulling out poles from their wooden kitchen for use as fuel since the new plot owners do not allow them to collect firewood.)



A number of these unemployed families were also engaging in begging to get food from other workers, and are seeking remittances from relatives elsewhere. However, even using all these mechanisms, it appears

that they were still facing a deficit of between 5 and 20% of their minimum calorific needs.

Non-food expenditure by this group has already been severely cut back, and there seems to be no scope to cut back anything else without further compromising basic needs. Children are not being sent to school because the cost of transport and fees are too expensive. The local health clinic provides free initial consultations and some drugs, but this group would not be able to afford any further treatment.

The picture from this farm applies to the situation prior to March 31st. However, the situation can only have worsened since then as the farm has now ceased operations. At best, the “employed” group will now face similar problems to the unemployed, assuming that they are still able to squat on the farm. The worst case scenario would be that they are forced off the land, and lose their homes and their livelihoods. In spite of the imminence of the farm closure at the time this assessment was carried out, the workers were at a loss when asked what their future plans were. Approximately 10% of the workers have been officially resettled on the farm, but the others interviewed had no clear idea of what they would do once the farm closed.

CONCLUSIONS

The key point arising from this assessment is how inextricably linked the livelihoods of commercial farm workers are to the fate of the farm. Yet the results of the research on the 5 farms visited indicate that the way commercial farm workers are affected by the current land reform process and land occupations vary quite significantly.

Based on the findings on the baseline farm, and on those for workers on other farms who have not been significantly affected by the land issue, it can be said that in “normal” circumstances workers are reasonably food secure. They can meet their minimum food needs quite comfortably and have some capacity to cope with reduced income. However

that is not to say that their situation is satisfactory. They are still poor in absolute terms, and their access to services such as health and education in particular is far from satisfactory.

The worst case scenario for a commercial farm worker involves loss of employment and displacement. If this occurs, the effects on their livelihoods are multiple and extreme:

- Loss of home
- Loss of permanent income and secondary casual/ seasonal income from agricultural work
- Loss of access to land and inputs for own crop production (affects consumption and income from sale of crops)
- Loss of access to fishing grounds
- Loss of access to gold-panning opportunities (on some farms)
- Loss of access to subsidised foodstuffs at the farm store, and loss of credit facilities
- Loss of access to education and health services (alternatives to on-farm services may either not be available at all, or may be too far and/ or too expensive to access)

Although this study examined only farms where the farmer had stayed in spite of designation and/ or occupation, there must be cases where the farmer decided to cease operations because of designation, occupation or simply because of the prevailing economic and political climate. At worst, the workers on those farms will face the above problems, and at best they will be in the situation of the “unemployed” group in the last case study.

In between the baseline and worst-case extremes are the types of situations described in the case studies. The example of the “occupied, not designated” farm shows that there is a possibility for co-existence between new settlers and existing farming activities. Current government policy is to target farms, or parts of farms, which have been left idle, and the findings here would certainly suggest that this is a positive approach. In other cases where productive land is designated, there are often problems for the farm workers. As opportunities for production decrease on a farm, the farmer is likely to cut costs initially by reducing benefits (such as access to credit), then by laying off some staff, and then by reducing the number of working days for remaining workers until operations cease entirely. Concurrently, provision of on-farm services may be cut back, though the timing of such a decision appears to depend on the individual farmer.

The ability of a farm worker to replace lost income appears to depend mainly on whether (a) there are operational neighbouring farms where additional seasonal/ casual work could be sought, and (b) whether there are (still) opportunities for gold-panning or fishing on the farm. In all the cases examined, no examples were found of farm workers being able to compensate in any substantial way for lost earnings from agricultural work. Furthermore, there will inevitably be a limit to how much additional labour other commercial farms can absorb, and a limit to the capacity of services on those farms to cope with additional people. Gold-panning and fishing are both also limited, and can have negative environmental effects in terms of increased river siltation on the one hand, and over-fishing on the other.

Alternative income sources are clearly limited; land and inputs for cultivation are limited; and the availability of “free” resources such as fish and wild foods are also limited. The burden of coping with lost income, therefore, falls on expenditure. However, because “normal” income levels are already low, it does not take long before any further cutbacks impact on basic needs. In the three cases where a group of workers had lost income, they all were estimated to be consuming less than their minimum food needs, and children were also having to forego education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further research required:

It is of great concern that the whereabouts of those most seriously affected by land reform, i.e. farm workers who have lost their jobs and been forced to leave their homes, is largely unknown. As a matter of urgency, those displaced need to be traced and their situation assessed.

This assessment focused mainly on permanent farm workers and resident seasonal workers. The impact of the land reform programme on other seasonal workers who are not resident on the commercial farms needs to be considered by any agency carrying out future assessments on communal lands, in informal mining areas or in peri-urban areas (e.g. by members of ZINISA).

There are a number of questions to be answered concerning labour on resettled farms. Dividing a large, mechanised commercial farm into smaller plots presumably with limited mechanization should, in theory, create greater opportunities for manual agricultural labour. Therefore, given that plot sizes allocated to new settlers (reportedly over 5ha) are too large for an average household to cultivate without additional labour, who is doing the work on resettled farms? And did the new settlers previously employ others or labour for others in their communal lands, and therefore how have labour opportunities been affected in areas from where settlers are being moved?

Further research or assessments on commercial farms needs to be very conscious of the poor situation in which farm workers find themselves currently, and the frustration that research without subsequent action or intervention is causing. If a commitment cannot be made to act upon findings, a very high threshold must be set to justify extracting further information from farm workers.

Recommendations to the Government of Zimbabwe:

As has been stated in previous reports, there is an urgent need for the Government to give more consideration to the plight of commercial farm workers as it pursues its programme of land reform. In this, the report re-iterates some of the recommendations of a number of

previous surveys and reports (e.g. Kibble & Vanlerberghe, 2000; SC UK, 2000; Zimbizi, 2000) regarding inclusion of farm workers in resettlement.

The timing of the designation and subsequent resettlement of commercial farms should give greater consideration to production cycles, and more advance and definite notice of resettlement should be given to all actors affected. (This will mitigate some of the potential and actual problems faced not only by the farmers and farm workers, but also by new settlers and by banks with outstanding loans to farmers.)

The problems experienced by farm workers with access to services, including health, education and water, will apply equally or to an even greater extent for new settlers. The provision of services, therefore, should be made an integral part of the resettlement process.

Recommendations to NGOs and other Interested Agencies:

Existing information needs to be consolidated to track the status of the commercial farms, and thereby to help monitor the likely situation of farm workers. Additional information needs to be compiled on whether farms have been designated, occupied and/ or resettled, and whether operations are still ongoing. Ideally the numbers of permanent and seasonal workers employed on each farm should also be gathered. FCTZ's work on monitoring events on farms in Mashonaland forms an excellent base upon which to build.

There is a need to strengthen mechanisms for sharing information on the status of farms and farm workers (presumably someone must know where unemployed workers have been displaced to, for example). The Farm Worker Action Group (FWAG) in particular, or one of the ZINISA sub-committees would seem appropriate starting points for this as they already comprise many interested agencies.

Acronyms

FCTZ	Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe
FEWS	Famine Early Warning System
HEA	Household Economy Approach
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SC UK	Save the Children UK
ZINISA	Zimbabwe Network for Informal Settlement Action

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