

# Land: An Empowerment Asset for Africa

The Human Factor Perspective



Edited by  
**Claude G. Mararike**

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University of  
Zimbabwe

**UZE**  
Publications

© C. G. Mararike, 2014

ISBN 978-1-77920-110-2

First published in 2014 by  
University of Zimbabwe Publications  
P. O. Box MP 203  
Mount Pleasant  
Harare  
Zimbabwe

Typeset by D. Masala, University of Zimbabwe Publications

**Printed by Printforce Productions**

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## Chapter Eight

# Land as the Game-changer: Utilising Local Community Talent and Resources in Development Initiatives

Mcdonald Matika

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### Introduction

With the realisation that Africa is home to the largest youth population also ravaged by high levels of unemployment, governments have to develop talent and resource management programmes that address the immediate and future concerns of young people. Zimbabwe has also not been spared from the damaging effects of failed and often prescribed economic policies that have left communities fragmented and worse off as the economically active have been forced out in a bid to seek employment elsewhere. With unemployment currently at around 11 per cent and the youth making up the majority of the unemployed and underemployed, the need for locally driven programmes to assist young men and women cannot be overemphasised. Employment creation is also crucial to addressing social stability as availing work opportunities will ensure that the youth are also part and parcel of the development of their communities. The land reform programme that went into overdrive from 2000, has opened vast opportunities for the previously marginalised rural communities to chart their own development destinies. The shrinking manufacturing sector in most urban centres has a negative effect on the employment rate and this has exacerbated the lack of opportunities in the formal labour market. Such realities have forced the youth in their localities to initiate development projects that create employment for themselves. An immediate advantage of the locally driven economic activities is the reduced chance of failing as the motivation and “buy in” of the beneficiaries is already assured. It is, however, still possible to include development agencies as partners. Such assistance can be in the form of assistance with growing the market and/or the value chain activities which have the added effect of creating more employment within the local community through formation of downstream beneficiating industries. In some rural areas, much success has already been realised

at least on the employment status and statistics dimension. By year 2011, the agriculture sector employed 66 percent of the country's labour force. The mainstreaming of women into the economy has also been enhanced through land reform. Importantly, those areas that have realised a major change in their fortunes, with tangible local community driven development initiatives need to be celebrated and showcased. These areas must be seen as a blueprint for other communities to take a leaf from in their drive to tackle youth unemployment. Strategies for creating employment opportunities for the youth must be alive to the exploitation of local resources and such programmes must have their genesis in the local community. The 2011 labour force and child labour survey points to the need to enhance land-based employment creation and economic activities. The contribution of agriculture in fighting unemployment can no longer be ignored. It is indisputable that Zimbabwe's strides in changing the land tenure system has served as a game-changer in responding to the youth's call for a stake and rallying point in the country's economic development.

### **Land Ownership and Social Cohesion**

High levels of unemployment and poverty are the breeding grounds for social crisis among the youth. Availing opportunities for the youth to be in gainful economic activities promotes social order and improves a community's development indices. There have been calls for a youth-targeted strategy in the economic revival of Zimbabwe. However, the youth, in previously marginalised rural areas, have already shown their urban counterparts that young people are already contributing significantly in meeting some targets set out in the economic blueprint, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET), particularly on food security and poverty eradication clusters. Availing land to the youth promotes citizenship behaviours, as they can easily demonstrate their contribution to the community's development through the land-use activities they would be undertaking. A community's recognition of the youth's right to land-ownership goes a long way in cementing the youth's ties with their location. Being entrusted with land-ownership rights comes with responsibilities. A sense of responsibility then promotes citizenship behaviours in the youth.

### **The Intrinsic and Extrinsic Value of Land**

An understanding of the dynamics to land tenure and ownership can never be fully appreciated unless an effort is made to unpack its intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. The intrinsic value of land is an issue beyond

simplistic immovable assets valuation. It is very difficult to place a value on land as it represents life, consciousness, pleasure, satisfaction, self-expression, honour, esteem, if we are to borrow from the philosopher William Frankena (Ryberg, 2002). To further bring the matter into perspective, one needs to experience the fights that rage over small portions of land in the urban wetlands and areas where peri-urban farming activities take place. A portion with no more than 10 square metres is enough to invoke the wild side in men and women, should they feel that boundaries have been encroached or an attempt to usurp their land has been attempted. There is much pride that goes in being a land-holder and naturally this attests to its potential as a source of community wealth and pride.

The extrinsic value of land is in relation to it being an asset which is pursued not for its own sake, but for the sake of something else. This could be in the form of the beneficial consequences it often brings about. This is differentiated from the intrinsic value, which is pursued in and for itself. A thing has an extrinsic value because it is a means to the achievement of intrinsic value or because it, in some sense, contributes to such achievement. Land-ownership and utilisation makes it possible to engage in activities that enhance intrinsic values. Success in cropping enables the land-owner to acquire property that could bring satisfaction and self-esteem. For instance, a farmer would tell you that the activities he or she does on the land are extrinsically valuable as there is money to be made. There is also intrinsic value that comes with knowing that one is contributing to feeding the nation and also creating employment for others. Land thus can be argued to be both intrinsically and extrinsically valuable.

### **Youth Livelihoods and Community Property Titles**

Income-generation activities by individuals and households are a function of access to resources and/or assets (Coetzee, 2002). This is evidence of the fundamental role that asset-ownership plays in development initiatives. With respect to community assets, an individual's way of life and social well-being is dependent on the level of access and use the individual has to the community assets. This is very imperative for the poor individuals such as the unemployed youth whose only resources are those they can lay a claim to as part of their community's assets. In addressing the inherent lack of asset-ownership, the youth need to become actively involved in the management of such community assets. This process, however, needs to be superintended by community leaders in the initial stages and as it unfolds.

For one to move from the weak position to a sense of well-being, ownership of assets is key (Chirisa and Muchini, 2011). Assets include all financial, natural, human, as well as social capital constituted by the household relations. Trends such as employment changes act directly on livelihood assets-ownership. Land-ownership is a transforming process with an apparent livelihood strategy whose outcomes are known.

Unemployment thus often illustrates the dire situation that most young people find themselves trapped under, consequently making them vulnerable. The successful disentanglement of young men and women from that helplessness points to ensuring that the youth in their communities have access to assets that can determine their chosen livelihood strategies. The chosen strategy is often in response to the available community assets. The solution then becomes much more than just not simply creating more jobs for the youth, but to have a responsible youth who thinks in rational productive ways and employs positive livelihood strategies to come up with viable solutions to community challenges using the available local resources.

It is in this respect that various policies can be used to allow the youth to manage community assets, either voluntarily or for personal growth. Such youth can graduate into responsible community members who then chart a prosperous future for themselves, their families and communities. Young people need to learn how to manage individual and community assets. When they eventually acquire their own personal and private assets, they become more immune to the effects of economic shocks and negative trends in the social, political and economic environment. Land thus presents a resource communities can employ in teaching the youth the importance of assets-ownership. The rural and urban public places are a key to determining and identifying the community assets. The available and repossessed lands must then have clearly defined parameters on use, rights and ownership structures that include the young men and women in the area.

## **Tackling Rural Youth Unemployment with Land as the Game Changer**

### **The Mutoko Irrigation Scheme Case Study**

Chitora and Murara youth irrigation schemes in Mutoko in Mashonaland East have transformed the lives of young land beneficiaries. The youth were allocated half-hectare plots where they are involved in intensive land use on irrigated plots. They also obtained dry-land fields where they



engage in maize and sweet potato production on a bigger scale. It is very easy to distinguish a young land beneficiary from the initially sceptical who viewed the land allocation programme as just a political gimmick. The full utilisation of the plots has seen the beneficiaries being able to afford decent cars and putting up modern houses for their families. This level of development was previously not possible until land was made available. The irrigation schemes have become a model for horticulture production and such success stories need to be made visible to celebrate how land-ownership transforms lives of the previously marginalised.

Of major significance has been the demonstration of the potential for the programme to stem the tide of rural-urban migration. All urban centres in Zimbabwe have been grappling with overpopulation and lack of opportunities for the youth graduating from school and tertiary institutions. This dearth of economic opportunities presents a real challenge for government. However, this need not be the case as all areas have natural resources which must be exploited to create opportunities for the young and unemployed living in such areas. Land has become the game-changer, serving as the bedrock for social and economic transformation in those areas where deliberate positions have been taken to look at the available resources and use them to create economic activity opportunities for the youth.

In Mutoko, just like in many other rural settings, the unemployed youth have to deal with two fundamental problems. Firstly, they have to manage the inherent shortcomings of their communities such as limited formal employment opportunities and, secondly, they have to deal with the location disadvantages of their areas which sustain the marginalisation of both the area and the youth resident therein. These disadvantages have been tackled in various ways through exploring value chain opportunities for the produce from the land utilisation activities and enhancement of market share. Other contributing factors the youths have to grapple with include the inadequate infrastructure base made up of poor roads, lack of power, limited clean water supply and poor communication systems. These are common rural phenomena. Though there are many rural livelihood opportunities in their areas, most youths previously found them unappealing (Juma, 2007). The next challenge is the growth of the agro-industry to feed off and promote the land-based activities.

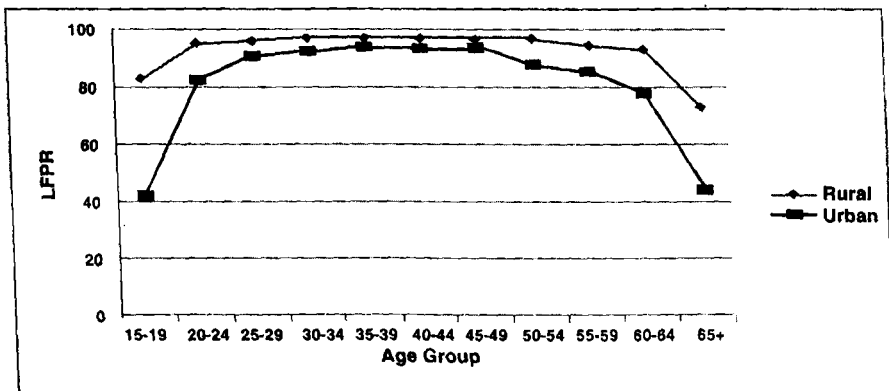
Already, a growing number of potential donors are lining up to be associated with the success story through offering to finance agricultural production in these already relatively successful communities. However,

an important lesson from these schemes is that there will be a need to revisit the common donor-beneficiary relationship. The youth in Mutoko have viable and local resource-driven solutions to poverty alleviation and unemployment that afflict most African nations. They have a product which the international partners could transplant successfully elsewhere. It is important to note that this potential which was abundant could not have been realised without correcting land-ownership patterns that now reflect local ownership of this very valuable resource. Zimbabwe's agenda for tackling youth unemployment would be better footed on the game-changing opportunity opened by the fast track land reform programme.

### Rural/Urban Labour Force Participation Rates and Implications for Employment and Unemployment

Figure 1 typifies the rural/urban Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) by age group. For all age groups, LFPR were higher in rural areas than in urban areas. The LFPR in 2011 for urban and rural areas were 80 percent and 91 percent, respectively. The LFPR in urban areas ranged from 43 percent for those of age 15 to 19 years to slightly above 94 percent for those of age 35 to 39 years. In the rural areas, the LFPR ranged from 73 percent for those of age 65 years and above to 97 percent for those in the broad age group 30 to 44 and age group 50 to 54 years. These observed rural/urban differentials in LFPR can be attributed to the fact that the agriculture sector, which is mainly rural based, offers the highest employment in Zimbabwe. These figures demonstrate the positive impact of the land reform programme on employment.

Figure 1: The Labour Force Participation Rates by Age Group and Rural/ Urban.



## **Employment/Unemployment**

All individuals of 15 years and above are considered to be currently economically active if they were either employed for at least one hour in the last seven days, or usually work but were temporarily absent from work, or were without work and available for work (unemployed). This definition of the unemployed is often cited as the broad definition of unemployment by Zimbabwe Statistics.

In the 2011 survey, out of the 6.1 million economically active persons, 89 percent were employed and 11 percent were unemployed. For the economically active population in Zimbabwe, the highest percentage of the labour force (54.0 percent) were own-account workers (communal and resettlement farming), followed by paid employee-permanent at 14 percent. Forty-nine percent of the male labour force were own-account workers (communal and resettlement farming), 20 percent were paid employees in permanent jobs and 12 percent were own-account workers (other). Of the females in the labour force, 59 percent were own account workers (communal and resettlement farming), 15 percent were unemployed and 12 percent were own-account workers (other). These figures bring into focus the contribution of land-ownership to the unemployment question.

## **The “Vulnerable Employment” Puzzle**

Knowing the number of workers in paid self-employment or working for others is important in unpacking the labour market’s structure and dynamics. Zimbabwe Statistics differentiates paid employees as permanent or casual, temporary, contract and seasonal. The own-account workers are made up of those in the communal and resettlement areas as well as anyone employed by a family business. This latter group is said to make up the own-account workers and is then classified under “vulnerable employment” in the Millennium Development Goals employment targets. In 2011, over three quarters of Zimbabwe’s population were deemed to be in vulnerable employment. However, workers in the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy, from anecdotal evidence, appeared to be not faring any better judging by the number of retrenchments and non-payment of salaries! With this in mind, it is important that the definition be revisited as the agricultural sector and, indeed, the so-called informal sector, have demonstrated their potential for decent employment. In a macroeconomic environment characterised by operational and survival challenges mainly from liquidity crunches, every work sector can potentially be tagged as vulnerable employment. The definition of

vulnerable employment has the effect of downgrading employment opportunities availed by the fast track land reform programme. Surely, the land beneficiaries who have been getting decent income from land-based activities over the last decade cannot be said to be in vulnerable employment.

## Implications and Looking into the Future

The various strategies to optimise talent and land resource management being deployed by the youth in rural areas have demonstrated the potential for land-ownership to tackle the harmful effects of youth unemployment and underemployment. The attendant social ills common among out-of-work youth can be reduced through availing economic space for the young men and women in their localities. With Africa still likely to have a large proportion of young people in its demographic profile into the future, it follows that the contribution of the youth to tackling unemployment and graduate to paid and self-employment can never be overlooked or be viewed as a normal consequence of the often common economic meltdowns. The available natural land resources serve as the starting point for any employment-creation strategy. Such poverty alleviation plans must be responsive to the full exploitation and value chains creation of the existing resources. Land-ownership has become the game-changer and what only remains to be done, is to translate land as pivotal and a natural aspect of economic development and social cohesion. The youth irrigation schemes of Chitora and Murara in Mutoko have already demonstrated the game-changing nature of revisiting land tenure systems. Prioritising the youth is key to talent and natural resources management at a local level. These are success stories which donors now scramble to be associated with. Other areas grappling with youth unemployment need to take a leaf from the youth of Murara and Chitora to experience how fulfilling and empowering home-grown development programmes can be.

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