

Routledge Studies on the Political Economy of Africa

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LIVELIHOODS IN CONTEMPORARY ZIMBABWE

Edited by

Kirk Helliker, Manase Kudzai Chiweshe and
Sandra Bhatasara



The Political Economy of Livelihoods in Contemporary Zimbabwe

Since the introduction of the fast track land reform programme in 2000, Zimbabwe has undergone major economic and political shifts and these have had a profound impact on both urban and rural livelihoods. This book provides rich empirical studies that examine a range of multi-faceted and contested livelihoods within the context of systemic crises. Taking a broad political economy approach, the chapters advance a grounded and in-depth understanding of emerging and shifting livelihood processes, strategies and resilience that foregrounds agency at household level.

Highlighting an emergent scholarship amongst young black scholars in Zimbabwe, and providing an understanding of how people and communities respond to socio-economic challenges, this book is an important read for scholars of African political economy, southern African studies and livelihoods.

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First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Names: Helliker, Kirk, editor, contributor. | Chiweshe, Manase Kudzai, editor, contributor. | Bhatasara, Sandra, editor, contributor.

Title: The political economy of livelihood in contemporary Zimbabwe / edited by Kirk Helliker, Manase Kudzai Chiweshe and Sandra Bhatasara.

Other titles: Routledge studies on the political economy of Africa ; 3.

Description: New York, NY : Routledge, 2018. | Series: Routledge studies on the political economy of Africa ; 3 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017043837 | ISBN 9781138574717 (hardback) | ISBN 9781351273244 (ebook) Subjects: LCSH: Income–Zimbabwe. | Households–Economic aspects–Zimbabwe. | Zimbabwe–Economic conditions–21st century–Case studies. | Zimbabwe–Rural conditions. | Land tenure–Zimbabwe. | Fast Track Land Reform Programme (Zimbabwe)

Classification: LCC HC910.Z9 I526 2018 | DDC 330.96891–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017043837>

ISBN: 978-1-138-57471-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-27324-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Werset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear

To Sam Moyo, your legacy will endure across generations of scholars, activists and policy makers.



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Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	x
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	xi
1 Introduction: theorising the political economy of livelihoods in contemporary Zimbabwe	1
SANDRA BHATASARA, MANASE KUDZAI CHIWESHE AND KIRK HELLIKER	
2 Livelihood strategies of urban women: emerging evidence from Magaba, Harare	26
TAKUNDA CHIRAU	
3 Livelihood strategies in Harare: the case of low-income households in Budiriro	42
TAFADZWA CHEVO	
4 Sex work as a livelihood strategy in the border town of Beitbridge	57
WADZANAI TAKAWIRA AND KIRK HELLIKER	
5 Migration-based livelihoods in post-2000 Zimbabwe	74
MANASE KUDZAI CHIWESHE	
6 Agricultural production systems of small-scale farmers in Hwedza in the context of innovation platforms	91
INNOCENT MAHIYA	
7 Development NGOs: understanding participatory methods, accountability and effectiveness of World Vision in Umzingwane District	107
KAYLA KNIGHT WAGHORN	

8	A critical analysis of community participation at the primary level of the health system in Goromonzi District	124
	RACHEL GONDO	
9	Climate variability in local scales: narratives and ambivalences from Mutoko District	139
	SANDRA BHATASARA	
10	Livelihoods vulnerability among riverbed farmers in Negande, NyamiNyami District	154
	FELIX TOMBINDO	
11	“Let them starve so that they ‘hear’ us”: differing perspectives on unresolved land occupations and livelihoods at Mushandike smallholder irrigation scheme, Masvingo District	170
	JONATHAN MAFUKIDZE	
12	“Other people inherit property, but I inherit people and their problems”: the role of kinship and social capital in providing care and support for the HIV infected and AIDS affected, Chivanhu informal settlement, Masvingo Province	184
	LOVENESS MAKONESE	
13	Insecure land tenure and natural resource use in a post-fast track area of Zimbabwe	198
	TAKUNDA CHABATA	
14	Fast track land reform programme and women in Goromonzi District	213
	LOVENESS CHAKONA AND MANASE KUDZAI CHIWESHE	
	<i>Index</i>	230

Illustrations

Figure

12.1	Machekeche Cluster showing kinship networks and movement of the chronically ill and orphans over time	188
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Tables

3.1	Wealth index of Budiro households	45
3.2	Types of employment for household heads	46
3.3	Types of household business enterprises (HBEs)	47
3.4	Recipients and non-recipients of household business income	49
3.5	Practicing and non-practicing agriculture households	50
3.6	Livestock ownership	51
3.7	Recipients and non-recipients of rental income	53
7.1	Projects in Umzingwane	117

Preface

This book has emerged out of the Unit of Zimbabwean Studies in the Department of Sociology, Rhodes University in South Africa. Though the Unit was formed only at the beginning of 2015, the Director of the Unit (Professor Kirk Helliker) has been involved in Zimbabwean-focused research projects at the university since 2009. As well as pursuing his own research, he has supervised many PhD and master's degree students from Zimbabwe. The other two editors of this book, Dr. Manase Kudzai Chiweshe and Dr. Sandra Bhatasara, both graduated from Rhodes University with doctorates under Prof. Helliker's supervision. All of the contributors to this book are either current or former PhD and master's degree students supervised by Prof. Helliker, and all the chapters (except one) draw upon their PhD and master's degree theses. In this regard, the editors would like to acknowledge any funding received from Rhodes University for these PhD and master's degree students.

As editors of this book, we have been influenced by a number of Zimbabwean scholars. Of particular importance is Sam Moyo, the former Director of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies in Harare until his tragic death in late 2015. He was also a member of the Advisory Board for the Unit of Zimbabwean Studies at the time of his death. Because of the way in which he has inspired us, we dedicate this book to Sam, the person, the activist and the scholar.

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1 Introduction

Theorising the political economy of livelihoods in contemporary Zimbabwe

*Sandra Bhatasara, Manase Kudzai Chiweshe
and Kirk Helliker*

Introduction

In the context of multiple crises, this book examines livelihoods in post-2000 Zimbabwe through diverse case studies, and it provides an understanding of how people and communities act in the face of deepening socio-economic challenges. All of the chapters are firmly rooted in empirical research and, individually and combined, they weave together a rich tapestry of stories which enable analyses of various forms of localised agency – despite systemic crises – in both rural and urban spaces. Some of the themes included are: climate variability, HIV and AIDS, gender inequalities, food insecurities, primary health care, non-governmental organisations, informal employment and poverty. Importantly, the chapters in this book highlight an emergent scholarship amongst young black scholars in Zimbabwe. Broadly speaking, each chapter is informed in some way, at least implicitly, by the Livelihoods Framework, also known as the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.

This introductory chapter theorises about livelihoods with particular reference to the Livelihoods Framework, and it offers an analysis of the political economy of post-2000 Zimbabwe within which we locate the chapter-based studies. The case studies come from research undertaken since 2010, but an understanding of the livelihoods examined in the chapters requires a historical focus at least as far back as 2000 – the year the Zimbabwean state's controversial fast track land reform programme was introduced. At the same time, we recognise that a fuller analysis of contemporary crises and livelihoods requires a *longue durée* approach to unfolding events. Undoubtedly though, post-2000 Zimbabwe has undergone major economic and political shifts and these have had a profound impact on both rural and urban livelihoods and continue to do so.

The in-depth and multi-faceted micro-level livelihood studies in this book are crucial in order to provide a grounded understanding of emerging and changing livelihood processes, patterns and strategies in Zimbabwe. This, we would argue, ensures that this book makes a significant contribution to literature on post-2000 Zimbabwe. But, alone, micro-studies are insufficient unless they are properly contextualised. For this reason, the purpose of this introductory chapter is two-fold. First of all, it offers a critical analysis of the Livelihoods Framework and

examines how it can be augmented and strengthened by macro-sociological theorising. Second, and in this context, it examines the political economy of Zimbabwe. On this basis, we provide a brief review of livelihoods literature on Zimbabwe, and show broadly how each livelihood case study presented in this book can be more fully understood in the context of post-2000 political and economic restructuring. In this regard, each chapter tends to focus almost exclusively on a livelihood case study, including the empirical setting and research methods, with the introductory chapter setting the broad contextual stage for the livelihood studies.

Critical appraisal of the Livelihoods Framework

There is voluminous academic literature available on the basic principles and concepts of the Livelihoods Framework (LF). Because such ample literature exists, we make no attempt to provide a basic or comprehensive overview of the LF. The framework has been subjected to significant criticism in recent years, but in a manner which seeks to re-energise and revitalise it. Considering that this edited collection seeks to contribute to the LF (with specific reference to Zimbabwean studies), our discussion of the LF in this introductory chapter is primarily concerned with the ways in which the framework can be given a more critical analytical edge.

Livelihoods framework

From mainly the 1990s, strong advocacy for programmatic interventions designed to ensure sustainable livelihoods when pursuing socio-economic development arose (Chambers and Conway 1992, Scoones 1998, Carney 1998, 2002, Ashley and Carney 1999). The LF, as an analytical perspective, came increasingly to the fore alongside this programmatic initiative and indeed was deeply intertwined with it. The framework for instance sometimes became part of the planning phase for a development intervention via policy or for a specific development project. Development agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, Oxfam and CARE soon adopted the concept of sustainable livelihoods (Solesbury 2003). In this context, the LF sought to examine peoples' current livelihoods and then assess what was necessary for a livelihood 'enhancement', and one which would be sustainable across generations (Morse and McNamara 2013).

The roots of the concept of 'sustainable livelihoods' can be traced analytically, at least indirectly, to the works for example of Sen's (1981) classic focus on entitlements and Long's (1984) actor-oriented perspective as well as, more programmatically, to the World Commission on Environment and Development's Brundtland advisory panel report (WCED 1987) and other international forums. But the framework is more directly linked to the seminal work by Chambers and Conway (1992), as the current notion of 'sustainable livelihoods' derives from this. Drawing upon insights from previous academic research on food security

and agro-ecological sustainability, they put livelihoods, and in particular ‘sustainable livelihoods’, at centre stage within the worldwide development system and also within scholarly work. Soon, other important insights fed directly into the livelihoods framework, including those around environmental entitlements (Leach *et al.* 1999, Scoones 1998, Carney 1998) and the diversification of livelihood activities (Ellis 1998). Initially, the focus was on rural livelihoods but later the LF became useful for urban-based studies.

In terms of the framework (Chambers and Conway 1992, Scoones 1998), the crucial focus is livelihood assets, including both material and social resources, and activities or strategies that form the basis of a means of living or livelihood. A livelihood is said to be sustainable when it can cope with (and recover from) stresses and shocks, and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets while not undermining the natural resource base. Overall, the LF encompasses analysis of the context in which people live (i.e. their socio-economic, technological, demographic, agro-ecological and political context); their access to natural, human, social, physical and financial capitals or assets (and their ability to put these capitals to productive use); the institutions, policies and organisations which determine people’s access to these assets and the returns they can achieve on assets; and the priorities that people identify in confronting the problems, including stresses and shocks, which they face as well as the different strategies (even of only a coping character) they adopt in pursuit of these priorities (Ashley and Carney 1999). The framework therefore links inputs (‘capitals’ or ‘assets’) and outputs (livelihood strategies), which are connected in turn to livelihood outcomes (Scoones 2009). Households and individuals living under conditions of poverty – in both rural and urban settings – juggle ‘capital assets’ in actively seeking (hopefully) positive livelihood outcomes, and this juggling is mediated through different structures and processes which may either constrain or enable livelihood activities (Batterbury 2008, Scoones 2009).

Undoubtedly, the LF has contributed to a deeper and more integrated understanding of how marginalised groups and households make their living under adverse and dynamic conditions by highlighting their agency and ingenuity in the context of a multiplicity of vulnerabilities (Levine 2014). In doing so, according to Serrat (2008), the framework is able to, at least potentially: examine changing combinations of modes of livelihood in fluid historical and social contexts; go beyond narrow sectoral approaches in allowing for a holistic analysis of household-based livelihoods; and, though focusing on the local, show the ways in which the local is linked to broader national and even global processes. Though such positive appraisals have a certain degree of validity, the more critical literature on the LF raises a range of weaknesses which, if able to be addressed, would enhance the analytical weight of the framework.

Reinvigorating the framework

In considering the means for strengthening the LF, two points are particularly important. First of all, the LF needs to be more sensitive to the political economy

of capitalist development. In this respect, Cowen and Shenton (1998) make a distinction between small *d* and big *d* development (see also Bebbington *et al.* 2007). The former refers to the immanent development processes intrinsic to capitalism as a political-economic system, which takes on various forms over time and is uneven in its character and effects spatially. The latter refers to the current international development system (or industry) and speaks to the existence of intentional and directed development interventions and practices. Clearly, small *d* development is a broader social process which incorporates big *d* development, such that the current period of neo-liberal capitalist development is characterised by specific forms of big *d* development interventions. In terms of its emergence, as indicated earlier, the LF was linked to big *d* development; such that the programmatic interventions associated with the LF fail to address the global and national forms of domination and inequality inherent within capitalism. Analytically, the LF is marked by weaknesses when it comes to properly and fully locating livelihood studies within small *d* capitalist development. For instance, the central notion of sustainability is rarely if ever rooted in an analysis of capitalism (Fuchs 2017). In the end, this means that the LF, as a kind of actor-oriented perspective, needs to be grounded in a political economy analysis (Scoones 2009, Banks 2015). In the later section on the political economy of Zimbabwe, we seek to ensure that the chapter-based micro-studies in this volume are properly conceptualised on this basis, such that power and inequality are foregrounded.

The second main issue is that the framework is in effect a middle-level theory that is not explicitly located within broader macro-sociological theorising or a “social theoretical foundation” (Thieme 2008:56). As a form of middle-level theorising, rooted it seems in rational choice theory (van Dijk 2011), it implicitly makes a range of problematic methodological claims, both epistemological and ontological, which need to be articulated and addressed. Of particular importance, as noted below, is the question of structure-agency and the stratified character of social reality. A higher level of theorising, we would argue, would also go some way in enhancing the framework’s acknowledgement of small *d* development and therefore strengthen and enrich the analytical power of the LF without involving a complete rejection of it. We discuss the importance of macro-theorising for the LF in the balance of this section.

As it originally emerged, the LF is now identified as the ‘mainstream’ livelihoods perspective (Prowse 2010) because of its subjection to significant criticisms and subsequent revisions. At first sight, it appears that the framework focuses on both structure and agency, and in a balanced manner, but the framework is flawed in this respect (Sakdapolrak 2014). On the one hand, households are seen as enacting agency by deploying available assets in constructing and pursuing livelihoods. On the other hand, the framework notes the existence of a structural context within which livelihood activities are undertaken, a context involving ‘policies, institutions and processes’ and characterised by vulnerability. However, it is generally recognised that agency takes precedence over structure in the framework, or at least structural constraints are downplayed. Further, the conceptualisations of both agency and structure are problematic.

In the case of agency, as argued by van Dijk (2011), there is an implicit methodological individualism permeating the livelihoods approach, with the notion of rational and strategic actors using their assets in order to maximise their utilities in pursuing seemingly clearly-defined ends. Thus, households are seen as discrete rational actors carefully weighing their available options in enhancing livelihood outcomes, and it appears acting on occasion almost outside or beyond structures as free-floating agents. As Banks (2015:270) argues, “actor-oriented frameworks [such as the SL] overestimate a household’s autonomy in devising and mobilising strategies”. In this way, households come across as highly reflexive, on a constant basis and quite explicitly so. At the same time, the household as the main unit of analysis is treated as a unitary whole and, as such, the framework fails to unpack the power differentials existing within households, particularly in terms of patriarchal practices.

Some sympathetic critics of the LF (Thieme 2008, Speranza *et al.* 2014, Sakdapolrak 2014) argue that the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977, 1990), and his notions of habitus and field in particular, is an important corrective to the livelihood framework’s conception of agency. This is because habitus highlights the ways in which society becomes embodied in human subjects so that they act, in an almost non-reflective but reasonable manner, according to historically-conditioned socialised dispositions. Because of this, from a Bourdieusian perspective, human agency is not reducible to the rationalising actor. Certainly more forcefully than the LF, habitus brings to the fore the importance of structure in inhibiting the agency of households living under conditions of vulnerability, such that households become almost pre-set along particular livelihood pathways not of their choosing, and thus they are “rooted in collective histories inscribed in their *habitus*” (Sakdapolrak 2014:23). The work of Margaret Archer (Archer 1995, 2003) based on critical realism, may however allow for an ongoing retention of reflexivity in livelihoods analyses, as Lyon and Parkins (2013) suggest. Her morphogenetic approach would recognise the ways in which rationalising agents, with personal concerns and projects (such as livelihood activities), often end up reproducing their prevailing conditions of existence.

A related issue is the central notion of ‘assets’ in the livelihoods framework, with assets (or resources or capitals) conceived as things or stock owned, possessed and used by rational actors in building livelihoods. Though the world of capitalism may appear in fetishised form as a conglomeration of interacting things, the framework – in treating assets as things – fails to recognise that society is profoundly relational. This ‘thingology’ view of the world, in which assets are also regularly viewed in very economic and materialistic terms (White and Ellison 2006), thus depicts assets as objective facts (Wood 2003) rather than as being endowed with cultural and social meanings and subject to contestation. In the end, ‘things’ are the embodiment of, and are embedded in, complex and tension-riddled social relationships, and the presence and character of assets at household ‘level’ represent the fluid manifestation of a range of nested power relations existing locally, nationally and globally (Bebbington 1999, Wilshusen 2012). From Bourdieu’s perspective, as highlighted by

Sakdapolrak (2014:24), “capital does not have an intrinsic value, but rather its value is linked to the logics of fields” as sites of domination and struggle. In offering in large part a de-politicised conception of assets, power is simply treated as context rather than as central to livelihoods analyses (Scoones 2009).

In this context, livelihoods analysis has been criticised for insufficient inquiry into spatial and temporal dynamics. Regarding questions of space and place, many livelihood scholars now recognise that livelihoods are deeply immersed in intensified local-global networks of interaction and that global processes increasingly have ramifications for local livelihoods, even in deep rural spaces (Sakdapolrak 2014, Scoones 2009). This also includes the importance of considering the existence of multi-local and trans-local livelihoods beyond specific localities (de Haan and Zoomers 2003, Zoomers and Westen 2011), or what has been called the “contemporary hybridities of rural and urban ... livelihoods” (Fairbairn *et al.* 2014:661) such that the urban–rural dualism in terms of livelihoods becomes problematic. In this respect, Bebbington and Batterbury (2001:373–375) call for “more attention to the embeddedness of livelihoods within both trans-local and trans-national structures, networks and spaces, and [for] examining the effects of this connectedness”.

In terms of temporality, Scoones (2009) observes that the livelihoods approach tends to focus on how people pursue their livelihoods within current circumstances without addressing particular livelihoods historically. Because of this, stability, durability and resilience, even in times of systemic crises, tend to be taken for granted. Temporal dynamics, including historical shifts in livelihoods because of long-term social changes and socio-ecological transformations, have not been extensively analysed (Sakdapolrak 2014), including “long-term shifts in rural economies and wider questions about agrarian change” (Scoones 2009:182). This also implies “a lack of rigorous attempts to deal with long-term secular change in environmental conditions” (Scoones 2009:182) in which climate change and variation around temperature and rainfall patterns become particularly important. For this reason, the LF has been criticised as being static and ahistorical. As noted by Scoones and Wolmer (2002:27), “livelihoods emerge out of past actions and decisions are made within specific historical and agro-ecological conditions, and are constantly shaped by institutions and social arrangements”.

Another recurrent criticism of the LF is the downplaying if not ignoring of power and politics, including structures and processes of extraction, exploitation and domination (Scoones 2009). The framework privileges the power of households to access assets and to act as they rationally pursue and construct livelihoods optimally, but this claim does not derive from any theory of power including Michael Foucault’s notion that power is everywhere. Rather, the ‘power to act’ emerges from the LF’s pronounced methodological individualism and its underestimation of the constraining effects of power. It may be that at times household livelihoods are enabled in and through power relations at localised levels, and that there are cracks and crevices in local political economies in which households can manoeuvre strategically. But, ultimately, power relations

imply modes of domination in which there are winners and losers, with more privileged groups gaining at the expense of others (Harriss 1997). Because of ongoing political contestations, which may in fact deepen conditions of vulnerability, there are bound to be reversals in livelihood trajectories and pathways, and not simply incremental advances.

We would like to suggest tentatively that a turn to Roy Bhaskar's critical realism (Bhaskar 1978) may provide the strongest basis for re-energising the LF and more firmly rooting it in sociological theorising, a point which van Dijk (2011) brings to the fore. Of overall importance in this regard is that the livelihoods framework tends to operate at particular 'levels' of social reality, and fails to appreciate in full the stratified character of reality. In a manner similar to Marxism and its critical political economy, Bhaskar's critical realism speaks about ontological depth, distinguishing between 'the real' (involving structures and mechanisms), 'the actual' (events) and 'the empirical' (experiences). The LF does not delve properly if at all into the deep ('real') relational structures of society, such as capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy, and the ways in which underlying structures and mechanisms give rise to events and experiences – with events and particularly experiences in effect being the focus of livelihoods studies. Because of this, capitals – their form and extent – are treated as having causal effects when they themselves need to be explained. As van Dijk (2011:102) argues, livelihoods are "constituted by arrangements" and these are "fragile but path-dependent emergent properties of the web of structures households operate in". In seeking to show the validity of Bhaskar's critical realism for livelihoods studies, Prowse (2010) indicates that these causal-type mechanisms do not act in a deterministic manner. Rather, they represent tendencies subject to time and space specificities and thus merely set the conditions for particular livelihood events and experiences.

This ontological limitation of the LF leads to epistemological positions which inhibit deep explanatory analysis. For instance, treating assets as 'things', and households as rational actors, in large part arises from concentrating on the experiential level – or sphere – of reality, without understanding how experiences are generated through underlying processes and mechanisms marked by power, and thus how the world of households is, if only in mediated form, a manifestation of these deep structures. Likewise, events in the lives of households, including troubling events which may intensify conditions of vulnerability, are only accessible to explanation through a focus on 'the real'. This perspective does not reduce households to simple bearers of structures, but it does emphasise, if understood as well in terms of Archer's morphogenetic approach, that the capacity for households to transform their lives is often trumped by the mere reproduction of their lives and the relationships of domination and inequality which prevail.

Zimbabwe's political economy

In this section, we do not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of the political economy of Zimbabwe since the year 2000. Rather, we seek to highlight key

developments which are of particular relevance to the livelihood case studies contained in this volume. We first provide a historical narrative and then turn briefly to attempts to theorise the on-going crisis.

Before 2000

Following the first democratic elections in sovereign Zimbabwe in 1980, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) assumed power, after a prolonged guerrilla war. Politically, during the early years of independence, the post-colonial government sought to engage in national reconciliation and reconstruction, to bring about civil and political democracy, and to enact various progressive reforms, including labour reforms and state decentralisation. At the same time, the government embarked on restructuring the economy to integrate it into the world economy (after years of sanctions against the Rhodesian regime). This involved significant state intervention in the economy, including positive commodity pricing, better access to loans and credits, and the revitalisation of goods markets. In terms of the economy, the country registered an average Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 5.5% during the 1980s (Brown *et al.* 2012). A significant redistributive programme involving the delivery of social services and infrastructure also took place, particularly in relation to roads, health clinics, boreholes, sanitation and education in the former Tribal Trust Lands – now communal areas.

However, “the legacies of enclavity and dualism remained intact” (Kanyenze *et al.* 2011:18). Hence, the ZANU-PF government maintained the colonial spatial geography of the country, as it did not for example challenge the existence of communal areas. Though civil government was introduced into these areas, the chieftainship system remained influential. Nevertheless, the government provided important forms of agricultural assistance to communal farmers during the first decade. At independence, white commercial farmers possessed 45% of the prime land in the country, and were supplying 90% of the country’s marketed food. Black farmers living in the Tribal Trust Lands had been subjected to overcrowding, absence of state support and growing degradation of the land. The compromise Lancaster House Constitution, which formed the basis of the post-colonial state in Zimbabwe, provided white farmers with the investment security they viewed as indispensable for their farms by the adoption of a ‘willing-buyer willing-seller’ land redistribution agreement (Southall 2011). On this basis, the Zimbabwean state implemented only minimal land redistribution during the 1980s directed primarily at reducing rural poverty.

Despite the claims put forward by the ruling party about reconciliation and democratic transition, the 1980s were marked by pronounced state intolerance, authoritarianism and coercion. This was exemplified most vividly by the *Gukurahundi* killings undertaken by the 5th Brigade in Matabeleland against supposed Ndebele rebels in the mid-1980s, the subsequent incorporation of the Matabeleland-based party known as the Zimbabwe African People’s Union

within ZANU-PF, the seeming efforts of ZANU-PF to create a one-party state, and the creation of the post of executive president. Arguably, these developments marked significant continuity with the mode of political domination bequeathed by the colonial state.

For reasons that continue to be debated, the Zimbabwean government in 1991 adopted a standard structural adjustment programme known as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). This purported to liberalise the economy and bolster economic growth but, significantly, it undermined many social and economic gains for both workers and communal farmers attained during the first decade of independence. The cardinal weakness of ESAP was its failure to provide meaningful safety nets to buffer those groups deeply affected by neo-liberal restructuring (Raftopoulos 2001). The effects within the social sectors were very prevalent. For instance, because of declining health care, infant mortality (which had decreased from 86 to 49 per 1,000 live births between 1980 and 1990) increased to 53 per 1,000 live births by 1994 (Parliament of Zimbabwe 2010). Alongside this was the scourge of HIV and AIDS – in this respect, life expectancy at birth averaged 56 years in the 1980s and had risen to 60 in 1990, but diminished to 40 by 2000 (Nyazema 2010). As well, pronounced de-industrialisation of the manufacturing sector and rising urban unemployment took place, rural poverty in communal areas escalated, and national and rural income inequalities were amplified (Muzondidya 2009, Laakso 2003). Because of the neo-liberal trajectory, land redistribution dropped considerably during the 1990s, and any land reforms focused on maximising productivity on redistributed farms. In the meantime, white commercial farmers were able to diversify into the lucrative export market through exotic vegetables, fruits and flowers. However an overall economic decline took place, with the GDP growth rate declining sharply from a peak of 7% in 1990 to an average 1.5% per annum between 1991 and 1995 (Government of Zimbabwe 2010).

During the 1990s, if the national power structure did not entail a one-party state, it certainly was marked by a dominant party state, in the form of ZANU-PF with on-going authoritarian tendencies. The 1990s witnessed the emergence of an autonomous national trade union federation, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, which previously had operated as a subservient wing of the ruling party. It became extremely vocal against ESAP such that the decade was marked by a steep rise in strike action. Simultaneously, in seeking to counter what it considered as an authoritarian state and to defend eroding civil and political liberties, a significant urban civic movement emerged, most notably the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) (Sutcliffe 2012), which was heavily funded by international donors. As a result of the deepening political restlessness, disgruntlement and dissatisfaction within the union and civic movements, a new opposition political party emerged in 1999, namely, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Mawere 2011). Its formation was to set in motion a series of developments that continue to work themselves out.

After 2000

There is evidence that the ruling party was becoming increasingly radicalised during the late 1990s, with attempts for instance to bring about land redistribution through expropriation. While subject to pressure from the growing civic and union movements, there was agitation by marginalised war veterans (ex-guerrillas) against ZANU-PF, which led to war veterans being granted unbudgeted gratuities and the consequent crash of the Zimbabwean dollar in 1997 (Nyathi 2004). Both the civic movement led by the NCA and the ruling party itself was also pursuing constitutional reform. This resulted in a proposed new constitution, as formulated by the ruling party, which was put to a referendum vote in February 2000. Key constitutional changes involved enhancing the powers of the executive president and a move towards land expropriation. The MDC campaigned vigorously for a 'no' vote, and indeed this was the outcome. ZANU-PF's dominant party position seemed to be in jeopardy. Soon afterwards, war veterans mobilised people (mainly from communal areas) to occupy commercial land throughout the country. In July 2000, in the midst of the land occupations, ZANU-PF implemented the fast track land reform programme, which in effect legitimised the occupations.

There is no doubt that the disruption of the white commercial agricultural sector was immediate and substantial, leading to major declines in the production by white farmers of key agricultural commodities including maize, soya beans, wheat and tobacco. In the early years of fast track (between 2001 and 2002), maize output slumped from 800,000 tons to about 80,000 tons, wheat from 225,000 tons to about 100,000 tons, tobacco from 230 million kilogrammes to 70 million kilogrammes, and soya bean production plunged by 50%. The overall macro-level evidence is that fast track was followed by a contraction of the Zimbabwean economy (Chikozho 2010). In the first seven years after fast track (2000 to 2007), the GDP fell by a cumulative 40%. By 2010, agricultural output had deteriorated by 51% and industrial production by 47%. There is a direct causal link between fast track, agricultural decline and economic contraction, a point that is emphasised most forcefully by the MDC (Biti 2009). But the international sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe post-2000 were also of some significance with regard to economic performance (Nyamwanza 2012), as were incessant annual droughts.

By the year 2008, the country was pronounced as a net importer of food, with a large proportion of the population depending upon food aid. Urban poverty levels rose markedly and, as economic growth continued to slump, so did levels of employment. This involved further de-industrialisation, the increased informalisation of the economy and a growth in the feminisation of poverty. Chagutah (2010) claims that humanitarian aid for 2008 was a monumental US\$490 million, against a backdrop of over 90% unemployment and the worst crop failure in the country's history. More women (53%) were involved in the informal sector than men (47%), with 44% of those in the informal sector living below the total consumption poverty line, compared to 36% in the formal sector. Overall, poverty in the country increased from 30% in 1990 to 80% by 2008,