

Looking Back, Looking forward on Land Tenure in Zimbabwe

D.P. Goodwin
Dept. of Geoinformatics and Surveying,
University of Zimbabwe,
P.O. Box MP167,
Harare, Zimbabwe.
e-mail: dpgoodwin@eng.uz.ac.zw

This paper is not the first but the second that I have written for the FIG Seminar in Pretoria. The first paper explored managing the vulnerable periods between one, tenure system and the next in times of accelerated transition. However, I abandoned it not many weeks ago in favour of something far more personal and less formal in style. The reason for the change is that I suddenly realised that this would probably be the last paper I would deliver in Africa for a long time, since I am hoping to stay in New Zealand for about six years while I study further and my daughters embark on some form of tertiary education. What better time, I argued, to review work that I have attempted over the years and to step back and see whether I am now in a better position to comment on the vexed land tenure equation?

I guess that a good place to begin is when I left a private surveying practice and joined the University of Zimbabwe in January 1986. I was idealistic, wanting to change the world – who wasn't at that age? It was six years after Independence, and everyone was talking about resettlement, in particular "Model A" Resettlement. Model A was an approximation of Communal tenure but one in which Government administrators took the place of Chiefs and Headmen. The surveying arrangements were of particular interest to me. I found that Model A parcels were planned on semi-controlled photo-mosaics.



Fig 1: Model-A photo-mosaic showing residential parcels (small, square, numbered boxes) and the larger arable parcels with white circles at turning points. Farm boundaries are thick white lines.

In other words, the mosaics comprised photographs pasted together to fit a scaled line (approximately) and then re-photographed, but with camera and other distortions left uncorrected. Parcels were planned on these mosaics, following which, minimally trained surveying teams from what was then the Department of Rural Development (DERUDE) identified features and, using pacing and compass methods, set out land parcel turning points relative to these features.

It worked well enough, although a student project compared what had actually been set out on the ground with what the official record showed, and found departures in the study area of up to 98 metres.

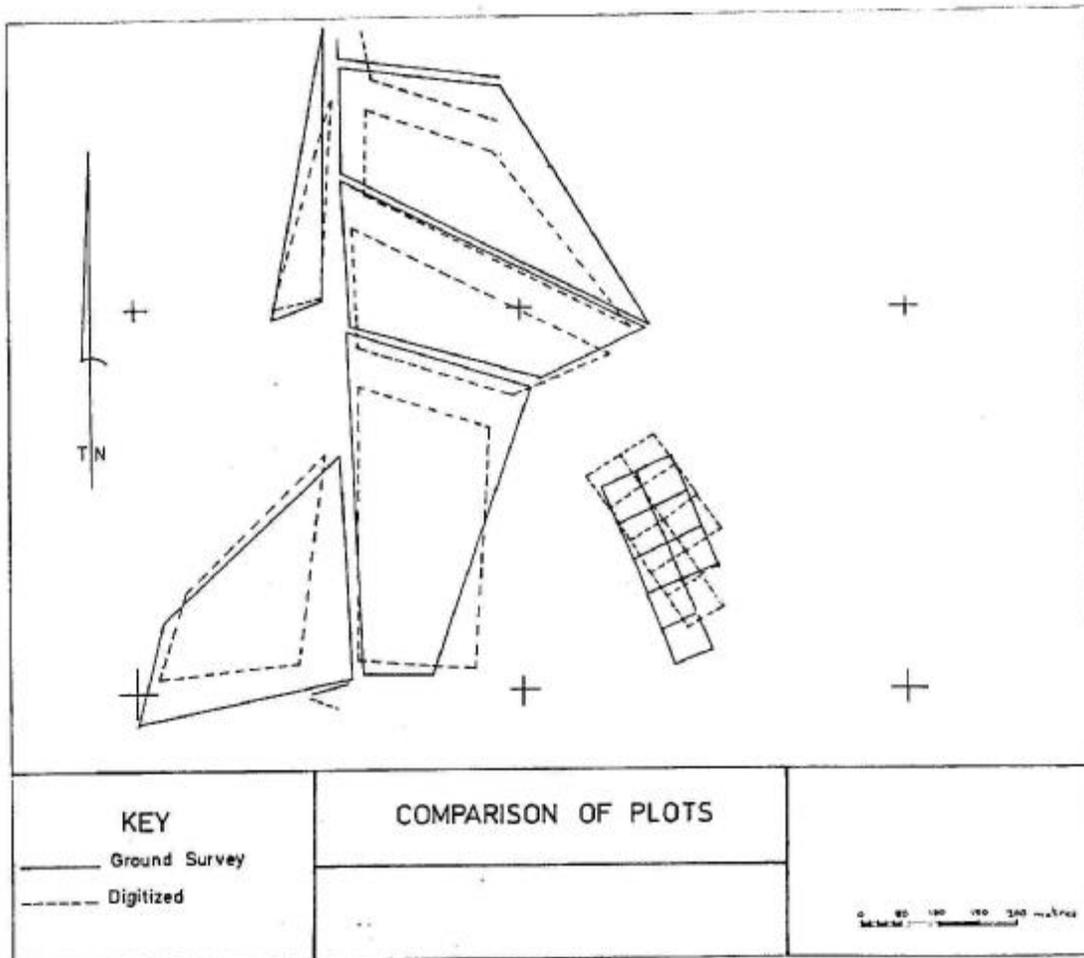


Fig 2: Model A plots as delineated on the photo-mosaic compared with the same plots as demarcated on the ground

But did this really matter? We were back to Simpson’s salmon analogy, and the fact that it makes all the difference in the world if a fishmonger offers a certain piece of fish as displayed in the window for a stated price, in which case the weight is not critical (what the customer sees is what he gets) or whether he sells his fish by the kilogram and the customer is charged for say 1,35kg at so much per kilogram (in which case the

fishmonger's measures have to be correct or else he is culpable). The point is that in resettlement schemes, settlers are not promised exactly 5 hectares net of arable land; rather land parcels are pointed out to them and they are free to take them or leave them. Nowhere is there any guarantee that the records are correct to within certain limits.

One argument is that resettlement records are quite good enough for the purpose they serve. On the other hand, our study was taking place in the early days of the settlement schemes, and people generally still remembered where their boundary corners had been pointed out to them, but what about later, when human memory faded? Already there were cases of doubt and dispute, and these were likely to escalate in the future, at which time it was clear that in most cases the official records would be of little help. It was also extremely unlikely that financial institutions would lend money against such sketchy records, although then, as now, the land was only held under permit and the question of using it as collateral to secure a loan did not arise. What we did agree upon, was that if land records are poor then, for any degree of security, monumentation needs to be accordingly good to compensate. In the ideal Model A scheme¹ fencing standards were driven in at turning points, on the top of each of which was a galvanised tag with an identification number and letter. However, it did not take long for some of the fencing standards to be diverted to other uses, such as the manufacture of chicken runs.



Fig 3: Fencing standard with galvanised metal tag, positioned at the corner of an arable land parcel.

How could monumentation be improved? Concrete and steel are expensive and heavy to transport, so an obvious improvement would be to augment the fencing standards with vegetative boundaries. Things like rubber hedge had been tried in Kenya, and Vetiver grass has been used for centuries in West Africa and India to mark boundaries. No one can hear about *Vetiveria Zizanioides* without getting excited. Without equal in controlling erosion, it is also non-invasive since it is sterile and only propagated by root division. This, coupled with the fact that a Vetiver hedge lasts for centuries, makes it ideal for

¹ Later on, the “Accelerated” Model A scheme omitted many of the more expensive steps

boundaries – you can move a peg or a fencing standard overnight, but just let someone try digging up a Vetiver hedge! It did not even have to be a hedge along the entire boundary. Offshoots from boundary turning points in the direction of boundaries would be a vast improvement, and these offshoots would also serve a dual purpose as micro-nurseries of planting stock to draw from for controlling erosion elsewhere on the farms. Finally, if even small quantities of whitewash were applied to the tops of these short Vetiver hedges, then photographing an area from the air would permit the photo-mosaics to be upgraded in future to become title-plans fit for any purpose you could name.

This all sounded good in theory, and I set about trying it out in practice. I made a number of contacts at Agritex Mutare and Chipinge, with a sugar estate and among commercial farmers who had supplies of the grass, and with a small research grant I paid Agritex officials to put in some Vetiver one season.



Fig 4. Field edged with a grass border partly of Vetiver grass

It was only then that a minor problem presented itself. Vetiver is virtually indestructable once established, even by the voracious goat, but until it gets properly established it is as delicate as any other plant. It is therefore best planted at the start of the rainy season, at the time when food and cash crops are also planted, and in that first season it needs regular weeding and watering. What I am saying, is that humans have to make a choice. They have to decide whether:

A: to spend time weeding and watering cash crops and thereby to raise money for school fees and food.

B: to spend an equivalent amount of time weeding and watering a hedge that may or may not make their boundaries safer a long way into the future.

We humans find this kind of decision very easy to make. When we are faced with a choice between delayed or instant gratification we go for the short term every time. In

this case, the cash crop that will put food into our children's stomachs and pay their school fees. So without building in either some short-term incentives or some form of coercion it looked as if the Vetiver idea was not going to progress much further.

One last comment on Model A resettlement before moving on. Record keeping. I did not have to study resettlement for very long to find out that our Surveyor General's Department might on occasion be pedantic but they actually did quite a good job. Care of photo-mosaics fell under a different Department, and it transpired that mosaics were often "borrowed", and those that were not borrowed regularly, lay about in untidy piles and risked having the white ink lines eaten off by fish moths and cockroaches. In fact, we finally chose a study area about four hours drive from Harare, virtually on the banks of the Zambezi, because it was the only scheme whose records we could find in reasonable condition. This did serve to reinforce that secure title is inseparable from good record-keeping.

So much for resettlement. If nothing else, we had confirmed that good monumentation does to some extent compensate for poor records, but although it may be expensive to put in either in terms of cost or else time. But at the back of my mind was the niggling feeling that other aspects of resettlement were even more problematic than the technical issues we had been focusing on. That if we were to get the complete picture of resettlement dynamics we should look not only at boundaries, we had to look at schemes holistically. Just for starters, it was clear that not all settlers were sufficiently committed to their land. They still spoke of ancestral land as "home", and in many instances they were quite prepared to move onto a scheme, cut down all the trees for sale in urban centres or for firing bricks, plant a couple of crops of burley tobacco while the soil still had some residual fertility, and then move off again. It seemed that this stemmed partly from the fact that this land was held under permit, and rights could be revoked at any time at the sole discretion of the Minister, but there were clearly other factors involved as well. Settlers were not allowed to have an off-farm income, for example, and with mainly subsistence crops in the ground "cash-flow" can present a problem. In other words it may be difficult to raise hard cash for agricultural inputs. Borrowing money was out of the question of course, because the land was held under permit rather than owned. Then there was remoteness from the main centres with associated transport problems, and finally there was a chronic lack of money at local level to put in and maintain roads, dip-tanks and clinics.

To digress for moment, how *does* one make settlers more committed? The Indigenous Commercial Farmers' Union (ICFU) vice-president, Davidson Mugabe, quoted in the Sunday Mail 14/2/99, captures one widespread view when he says:

"We do not believe that land has to be given for free." ... "We want sustainability and this means going commercial." "In our view any commercial property has to be purchased and Government has to facilitate the process of purchasing. It can put in place schemes to help people purchase the land but what is important at the end of the day is that this piece of ground must be paid for."

Of course land that is paid for will naturally be owned outright rather than being held under an indeterminate permit, which would change the equation markedly. In addition

the payment, even if small, spread over many years and with provision for drought and pest years, would perform three functions:

- it would weed out some of the “chancers” who wanted to acquire land for speculative purposes only and had no intention of farming it. Denmark offers an interesting model whereby farmers must work their land and live on it or else lose it.² [Enemark 2002]
- Secondly, even if land were to be subsidised and “soft-loans” were offered with low interest rates the exercise would nevertheless be significantly cheaper for the taxpayer than giving land outright.
- Thirdly, paying even a proportion of the value of the land would make a clear statement that this was commercial land, not under customary law, and the land would not be subject to some of the stifling “knockdown” aspects of customary tenure (more details are given later on in this paper).

Was even this really getting to the heart of the matter? The FIG is very sensibly making a point of steering clear of politics at this seminar, but it has to be said that very soon after Independence it became clear that only a very small percentage of land taken for resettlement was actually finding its way to the genuinely needy. This is well documented by such people as ex-combatant Margaret Dongo. To mention this is not to sling any political mud, I simply draw attention to an age-old failing of human beings anywhere in the world, most of whom can generally be counted upon to pursue personal power and wealth single-mindedly. The process was written up in graphic detail a couple of thousand years ago in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, it was there between the lines of the Rhodesia Herald in pre-independence Zimbabwe, and it is still there in the Daily News today. The same issues, the same lust for personal gain, and any society has to factor this in and build in controls to contend with it.

Let us return to the quest for the perfect land tenure system. The next direction in which I began to look was away from Resettlement Schemes and towards our Communal Areas, where land is held under customary law. So as not to point any fingers specifically at Zimbabwe, I will read a sentence from another country about the offering of title to land hitherto held under customary law. The sentence happens to come from the German D&C magazine about Cambodia, but it is easy to find the same sort of sentiment elsewhere. The quote for me admirably captures the overwhelming popular opinion on land titling, the world-view that does not even have to be justified because it is thought to be beyond question.

² A key regulation of Danish Agricultural Law (the Danish Act on Agricultural Holdings, paragraph 5, 7, 16 and 18) states that an agricultural holding must be maintained and farmed as such and must have adequate housing and buildings as a base for the owners to run the farm. The intention is to maintain the so-called family-agricultural concept. An agricultural holding cannot be owned by any person (or a limited company) solely as an investment. The owner must begin to live on the farm within six months from the date of acquisition. To live on the farm entails establishing a normal household and the farm must be the permanent address of the owner (in the population register and also for taxation purposes.) Exemptions from complying with these regulations are only granted under very special circumstances. It is possible to own more than one agricultural holding, but there is a limit on the total area to be owned by the same person. These regulations are subject to politics and constant change. Agricultural holdings are registered in the cadastre and the requirement for agricultural use can only be lifted by a very specific application e.g. for housing purposes according to a local plan.

Lack of titles threatens the poor with land grabbing, IMPEDES INVESTMENT and holds back development of a land market which COULD allocate land to those who need it most. [Zimmerman 2002 p16]

The capitals are mine. What we read is perfectly true, but it is rather misleading. Firstly, the idea that a lack of titles impedes investment. Sure, you cannot invest money in land if that land is not held under alienable title and is therefore incapable of being bought and sold. But we need to ask ourselves whether the “investment” mentioned would benefit the rich or the poor? Because it is axiomatic that the poor are generally in no position to invest. Secondly, yes, certainly a land market COULD allocate land to the needy, but we cannot count on it, because seldom in the history of the world has land ever been allocated to the needy without a bitter struggle. We can hear exactly the same sentiments about our Communal Areas (CA’s) in Zimbabwe, for example, “the poor would be more secure if they had title deeds to land.” However, the facts of the matter are that family use-rights in CA’s are generally very secure, and individualising those rights historically has generally proved quite the opposite, at least for the poor. Going right back to England’s enclosure movement, which effectively turned common or open field cultivation into individualised tenure, S.R. Simpson tells us of a vigorous advocate of enclosure who nevertheless wrote in 1801:

“By nineteen out of twenty Inclosure Bills the poor are injured and most grossly.”
[Simpson p248, 13.5.8]

Those words were written over two centuries ago, but has anything changed today? Any holistic look at land tenure cannot ignore this tendency for tenure transition to short-change the poor.

But we must not lose sight of where we are going. In 1994 I was part of a team that looked at registration of CA parcels. The terms of reference for our study were interesting. To paraphrase, the study-group were asked to recommend ways of “revamping and streamlining the land surveying and land titling process” ... “with a view to registering all communal, resettlement and other unregistered land.”

Significantly, not *whether* to give title, but *how* to give title.

So in the company of distinguished colleagues I began to look at mechanisms for giving title systematically in Zimbabwe’s CA’s. For various reasons we advocated a type of low-order photogrammetry by digital monoplotted. [Goodwin et al. 1994 p37] Some important principles emerged that were independent of time, but of course technology soon moved on and not many years later photogrammetry was no longer the cheapest option and we were back in the field again doing tests on handheld DGPS and designing data-dictionaries to lead “barefoot surveyors” simply through the data-capture process [Torhonen & Goodwin 1998]. Today I am fairly confident that the best way would be to use third-party-corrected DGPS, which can give sub-metre accuracies in real time, but this will no doubt be superseded before very long and we will use some other means. The technology for surveying land for title is dynamic. It presents us with a spatial data

management challenge but, frankly, that is the least intractable of the problems associated with giving individualised title in CA's.

What other challenges exist to offering wholesale title in our Communal Areas? One of the most significant is providing comparable security for the aged and unemployed. In Zimbabwe NSSA (the National Social Security Agency) was set up some years ago to provide age and unemployment benefits, but it can hardly be said to be effective, and Zimbabwe's roller-coaster inflation makes a mockery of even the best run pension schemes (I found the other day that after nearly seventeen years at the University I could buy either four tyres for the car or a tent in which to spend my declining years but not both). Unless a viable social security alternative is offered, title is likely to condemn many to penury. Furthermore, many more people will flock to the cities. The economist John Robertson estimated that giving full, marketable title in Zimbabwe's CA's would result in populations of our main centres trebling in a few years. If the experience in other countries is anything to go by, part of the urban influx will in part be precipitated by irresponsible family heads selling the family land for very little and drinking the money away [Simpson, Hollaway]. But irresponsibility would not be the only reason for losing land. In Cambodia, even responsible, women-headed households have felt bound to sell their land to raise money for school fees or health care [Zimmerman p17]. Registration of land also opens up an avenue for comprehensive taxation by Government and families may lose land through an inability to raise the necessary taxes.

We can see that registration is not to be undertaken lightly. But what if it is not undertaken at all, or is done piecemeal, very gradually and only in certain clearly defined instances? Is the rest of the land in the country, the unregistered land, then without hope? Over the next few years I began to look into ways of improving land without using it as security for loans. Firstly the use of crops as collateral, and secondly opportunities for micro-credit and peer-pressure lending schemes on the lines of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh where individuals in groups of mainly women are given small loans and additional loans are contingent upon satisfactory repayments of the other group members. The acid test of the Grameen banking model is that it works. There is now an extensive body of literature on the subject, and repayment rates of 98% are common. In Malawi, the Malawi Mudzi fund does not have the same repayment rates as the parent model (only about 70%) but it is still viable. Silveira House near Harare have operated micro-credit lending in quite a number of smaller centres for many years [McGarry, 2000]. I visited the M-CAP (Masvingo Credit Against Poverty) Grameen replica some years ago, and found aspects that offered hope, although Zimbabwe's crisis economy is a huge factor to contend with, and interest rates were verging on the usurious in order to make the scheme sustainable. Finally, there are other, international experiences to draw from such as co-operative land banks, community land trusts, community loan funds and guaranteed loans (government or private) [Goodwin 1993 p4ff.]

Are there any other possibilities for improving and developing unregistered land? I tried to take a broader view of land management than merely considering title, and in particular I found three ideas to be of interest:

“Conservation farming”:

Conservation farming, including minimum or zero tillage practices coupled with mulching, has already demonstrated an ability to improve yields dramatically and minimize drought risk without using land as collateral to secure loans. Rather than deep ploughing (which apart from being expensive, destroys soil structure and dries it out), just a small hole is made for seed and fertiliser with anything from a hoe right up to a heavy-duty planter capable of planting through the previous year’s mulch. The mulch layer among other things inhibits splash and sheet erosion and helps the soil to retain moisture. (Aldrieve 1993) “The message that no-tillage reduces input costs, benefits soil quality and reduces erosion and environmental pollution, is beginning to be embraced by farmers worldwide.” (FAO, 2002).

Animal-Impact Grazing:

Another way to improve land without land tenure reform is to use large ungulates as a tool to break up hard, earth-capping to allow the penetration of seeds and water and break up oxidising grass tufts that are a bottleneck in the carbon cycle. Of special importance is the fact that when grass is grazed it “borrows” energy from the roots to give a “quick-fix” re-foliation. However, at that point the plant’s internal economy sets about re-growing the root system. If grazed again before the roots have re-grown, this spells disaster for the plant. In natural systems what prevented this was the presence of predators, which caused animals to feed bunched together and moving about restlessly. Feeding like this, animals could not be “choosy”. They had to eat everything, non-selectively, and they spread dung and urine about as they fed. Animals were then reluctant to return to that area until their wastes had weathered away. In the absence of predators, however, animals tend to feed spread out, and their movement is placid rather than nervous so they don’t break up old tufts of grass (carbon remains locked up while grass oxidises slowly). Animals feed selectively, a mouthful here and a mouthful there, and there is not the same concentration of dung and urine so that as soon as new growth appears they return to the same plants and nibble again, thus killing the plants. In the absence of predators, animals need to be concentrated by some other means, e.g. by small paddocks or electric fences, and then prevented from returning until new growth is fully established. Timing may thus be seen to be critical, and also planning (Savory 1992 & 1995)

Water harvesting:

This includes contour ridging, water traps (pits to separate topsoil and water and assist runoff water to sink into the ground) and other means of encouraging water to remain on the land and raising the water table below it. Although wetland (dambo) cultivation used to be anathema some decades ago, today a strong case can be made for the intelligent use of wetlands (e.g. Owen et. al, 1995). In “The Water Harvester” also, we read how Zephaniah Phiri has done universally recognized work. In essence, while in no way condoning ploughing in *dambo* areas, Phiri makes a case for a careful use of wetlands with no more than hoe cultivation, and with certain safeguards such as choice of crop (e.g. bananas and reeds to protect the soil), no chemicals etc. (Witoshynsky 2000)

Another possibility of improving Communal areas without giving title, was to make information more readily available for planning. For example, animal-impact grazing

needs very careful planning, and this is best done with some sort of scaled down representation of reality such as a map or aerial photograph. Our research has shown that even illiterate or little educated people are remarkably adept at recognising features and locating themselves on aerial photographs. [Torhonen & Goodwin 1998]. However, in isolation, access to spatial data will not solve the most intractable problems faced our Communal Areas.

As well as land management issues, social issues also need to be addressed. Perhaps one of the biggest factors conspiring against high production in CA's is the "knocking down" of the progressive and innovative. This is the negative side of extreme egalitarianism. Unlike the West, where all too often we try to "keep up with the Jones'", in Africa there is more pressure to "keep down with the Moyos". If someone is seen to be producing higher yields they are soon told to come down to the level of everyone else. If they do not, perhaps a threat will be made that *muti* will be sprinkled on their fields by a witchdoctor and their first-born will die. Or if they are industriously digging a well to cushion their own animals and family from drought they may be told to share the water with the whole community or else it will be poisoned. Stifling, and one of the reasons why commercialisation of land might in some instances be the lesser of two evils. In other words, opening the door to credit might not be as important as closing the door to the downside of communal tenure.

Many of the gloomy predictions about commercialisation of land have been shown to be well founded, for example in Kenya and Thailand. To paraphrase what Anna Knox writes of Kenya following a systematic land titling exercise:

- "The risk control function of community tenure systems was overlooked"
- landlessness continues to rise
- urbanisation has escalated
- land is often bought for speculative purposes
- land registries are often out of date or irrelevant
- women's rights have often been eclipsed

[Knox pp 175 - 180]

In Thailand, a success story from a surveying point of view, a Thai person at the recent Victoria Falls conference said that "offshore" borrowing by the Thai government to modernize their land system was certainly one of the biggest factors in the collapse of the village economy, and perhaps even of the entire Thai economy [Sasaki 2002].

We are now getting close to the present time. At the IASCP conference earlier this year I stressed the importance of communities. Allow title when the time is right, I said. Don't let custom, to use Simpson's words, become a sacred cow that survives long after its usefulness has gone. For example, if a crocodile farm is planned that will bring money and employment into the area then by all means allow title or long leases³. But, if

³ Umi crocodile farm on the shores of Lake Kariba is an example. It is sited on Communal Land under a long lease. A small amount of customary land has been lost in return for a very lucrative source of income for the community, plus accommodation, schooling etc.

possible, do not split communities in the process. For example, only give title where there is an 80% vote in favour of the idea but then adjudicate and survey systematically for entire villages rather than just for individual parcels (this should also come out less expensive due to the economies of scale).

At the Victoria Falls, apart from moving communities wholesale from the customary to the commercial I also advocated creating new communities where none existed before. "Community Zoning" was the name I used, but the idea is by no means new. The Kenyan experience is that communities can perform a risk-control function. [Knox p176]. Back in 1994 a consultant for the Land Tenure Commission made a recommendation that, if implemented, would have resulted in a form of Community Zoning. The suggestion was that there should be much higher taxation of under-utilised or unused land while simultaneously lowering the minimum subdivisible area. The rationale behind this was that landowners would very likely divest themselves very quickly of all but their most productive land, and a glut of new plots could be expected to come onto the market concurrently thus forcing prices down. The ensuing mixed-density parcels would, in theory, mean that larger farmers would bear the brunt of road maintenance etc. But this would only happen, the consultant warned, if the bulk of rates and taxes were kept at local level rather than going to centralised coffers. With local taxes, rate-paying would be accordingly more palatable. [Zimbabwe 1994] In the new community zones, large farmers would in theory assist smaller farmers with transport for inputs and market goods, as frequently happens today when a commercial farmer adjoins a communal area. Another study for the Land Tenure Commission showed that small family farms have proved to be the most efficient, which is true but has to be qualified. Small family farms are not efficient if they are remote from markets, water and expertise. We need many new, small farms, but we need them to be created in areas of good rainfall that are already serviced with roads, dip-tanks, clinics and schools. Such a thing could come about if part of the area of very large parcels was subdivided into many new, smaller parcels, and new, mixed-density tax zones were created.

The million-dollar question, is why the enlightened recommendation (namely to tax unutilised land heavily while allowing smaller subdivision) was not implemented with alacrity? It seems likely that had this been done, land redistribution might already have taken place painlessly and peacefully in Zimbabwe as farmers vied with each other to get rid of any land they were not using to its maximum potential. One answer, perhaps, is that the new interests in farmland are not, in general, held by farmers. Many of the owners have neither farming expertise nor any desire to farm. And disturbingly, these new vested interests may have the political clout to block any move to tax such land heavily. We are back to motives as old as human societies, motives of greed and power-hunger.

So where do we go from here? What do I feel today? A conference on land redistribution may address technical and administrative issues, but more and more it seems to me that these are not at the root of the problem at all. It is very easy, in a country such as contemporary Zimbabwe, to despair. I have been able to identify with the speaker in

Philip Larkin's poem "Going, going". The entire poem repays reading and rereading, but here are just a few selected lines:

– But what do I feel now? Doubt? ...
Or age, simply? ...
On the Business Page, a score

Of spectacled grins approve
Some takeover bid ...
... It seems, just now,
To be happening so very fast;
Despite all the land left free
For the first time I feel somehow
That it isn't going to last, ...
...
Most things are never meant.
This won't be, most likely: but greeds
And garbage are too thick-strewn
To be swept up now, or invent
Excuses that make them all needs.
I just think it will happen, soon.

[From "High Windows"]

Conclusions

Larkin's message is not hopeful, and I would not like to end on that note because there is always hope even if it is only of our own making. The following seven points offer us at least avenues where we may concentrate our efforts no matter what the political equation of a country:

- Firstly, we cannot stop the buying and selling of customary land indefinitely, nor would we wish to do so, but we should perhaps try to ensure that it is at least only with the consent of both spouses. Knox [p179] writes of Kenya, "Land sale and mortgages should also require both spouses' in-person consent and signature." Ideally we should perhaps even take this a stage further and wherever possible deal with communities as entities. Community consent might, for instance, take the form of an 80% or higher vote needed before a village can opt for an adjudication package that will lead to marketable title. This would ensure that people know what is entailed and the risks involved, and go into it with their eyes open rather than having marketable title (a) imposed from above or (b) forced through by a minority who may be unaware (or uncaring) that the majority of a village do not understand that borrowing money against land collateral will put their land at risk.
- Secondly, to do what was suggested in 1994 and tax unused and under-utilised land heavily and lower the minimum farm size. This would effectively clamp down on speculators who hold land without using it efficiently if at all. Such moves have never been popular with vested interest groups, and change is particularly difficult when those

interest groups occupy positions of political power. However, we cannot afford to have huge tracts of unused land in the hands of only a few people and for that land to be unused or little used. The Danish requirement for farmers to farm their land and to live on their farms may prove to be a key model here.

- Thirdly, to create new, mixed-density communities by “community zoning”. We need many new, smaller parcels of land side-by-side with larger farms in areas with good soil, close to roads and close to advice and assistance. These mixed communities need to become cohesive entities with the realisation that large scale and small-scale operators are in some sort of symbiosis and will stand or fall together.

- Fourthly, land needs to be viewed holistically, with land management being seen as something much broader than merely the giving of title. Widespread education is needed in such things as conservation-farming, water-harvesting and animal-impact grazing. Needless to say other forms of education continue to be important, from the 3R’s of reading, writing and arithmetic, to practical skills such as welding, joinery, sewing and knitting, book-keeping etc, and finally to Aids education – Uganda appear to be winning the struggle against the spectre of Aids, but contemporary Zimbabwe is full of tragedy.

- Fifthly, failing better records for resettlement land we need to work on better monumentation, including Vetiver offshoots at boundary turning points. This would have the added bonus of providing numerous micro-nurseries for Vetiver stocks to control sheet-erosion.

- Sixthly, technical issues are interesting but not insoluble, and it is the non-technical aspects that present the greatest challenges. Human beings need to alter direction, and messages from podium and pulpit and rotary table speaking out against greed and corruption and calling for care of our neighbour are going to be at least as important in the long term as any legislation.

- Finally, it is heartening to look back over the course of history and observe that when popular feeling runs high, sooner or later law is modified to accommodate that thinking and, by inference, to be in line with the collective conscience of society. For example, we must surmise that Danish society abhorred speculation in agricultural land and felt strongly about the virtues of family agriculture, and Danish legislation now offers us what I believe to be a valuable law that insists on farmers living on their land and farming it productively. The people of Zimbabwe have exhibited great courage and resilience, and they are beginning to speak out in spite of all opposition. Sooner or later the collective conscience of society will be written into law.

Envoi

I sometimes wonder if wisdom can ever be said to have come to maturity before it can be distilled to the level of a “bumper sticker”. Either that, or else a tin sign nailed to a tree: no one in Zimbabwe can have missed the quite crudely painted but ubiquitous and heartening signs on Zimbabwean trees condemning a certain practice. If I were to pick on a handful of key changes to crusade about, to print on bumper stickers and to paint on pieces of tin to nail on trees all over the country, I think they would be the following:

FARM OWNERS MUST FARM

FARMERS MUST LIVE ON THEIR LAND

PAY BIG FOR IDLE LAND

BIG FARMS DON'T HAVE TO BE BETTER

CONSERVATION TILLAGE FOR REAL FARMERS (similarly water-harvesting and animal-impact grazing)

KEEP FARM TAXES AT LOCAL LEVEL

(naturally so long as their use is completely transparent and properly accounted for)

It does not need a crystal ball to see that most of the above moves would be unpopular with many in positions of wealth and power. And change is especially difficult when judicial and legal systems are not divorced from political power. However, if the past grim couple of years have taught us nothing else in Zimbabwe, it is that among Zimbabweans of all ethnic groupings there is an outstanding degree of courage and a readiness to suffer for moral convictions. In Zimbabwe, as in the world at large, there will never be true peace while there are huge disparities in wealth and without meeting at least the basic needs of all people. On a national and international level we need to continue to strive towards this goal.

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