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**AGRICULTURAL RESTRUCTURING**  
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**Edited by**

**Csaba Csáki  
Theodor Dams  
Diethelm Metzger  
Johan van Zyl**

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## ZAMBIA'S EXPERIENCE OF AGRICULTURAL RESTRUCTURING

R Watts

### INTRODUCTION

Zambia's agricultural industry has always been overshadowed by copper. By 1987, 53 percent<sup>1</sup> of the Zambian population were urbanised and urban political muscle tended to distort agricultural pricing policies. Nevertheless, Zambia has a resilient large-scale farming community and the Zambian Government has attempted a wide range of agricultural restructuring exercises. While it cannot be claimed that many of these have been successful, the experience gained in Zambia could help neighbouring countries with similar problems to avoid similar mistakes. The failure rate in attempts at agricultural restructuring, even in countries as technically advanced as Zimbabwe, is so high that no country is in a position to say they have all the answers. On the positive side, Zambia has had one of the least costly and least publicised attempts at the resettlement of former white settler farms in Africa - Family Farms Ltd.

It is interesting that, while most Southern African countries are seeking to reduce the proportion of land farmed by foreigners, Zambia has recently been effectively alienating quite large areas of the Zambezi Valley to foreign companies. The debate as to whether Africa should depend on peasant production or move more and more into large-scale plantation-type developments is still going strong. Back in 1922 Lord Lugard wrote: "as a cultivator of his own land the African will work harder and produce more than he will as a hired labourer, and the progress made will be the more rapid and permanent". Peasant production has made tremendous strides since then, although most of the successes have been in the high-rainfall, fertile-soil areas where perennial crops such as coffee, tea and sugar can be grown without irrigation.

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

White settlement in what was then North-Western Rhodesia started in the 1890s and we are fortunate to now have a detailed historical assessment of its impact (Vickery, 1986). The population of Tonga people in what is now the Southern Province of Zambia was relatively sparse. Vickery concludes that "it is doubtful that before 1910 any section of the Tonga people was threatened with actual land shortage as a result of alienation to European settlers" (ibid.:79). Conflicts over land came later and today Southern Province has many areas which are overcrowded both by people and livestock. Feelings were running so high in 1982 that President Kaunda set up a commission of enquiry (Report, 1985). In the 1970s, when Family Farms Ltd was set up, Southern Province was chosen as the priority area for resettlement.

Vickery (1986) gives a host of reasons why the Tonga peasants have fared better than similar people in South Africa, Namibia or Zimbabwe. The settler population was to some extent selected and "Afrikaners were discouraged both locally and in South Africa from

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<sup>1</sup> Table 35 (World Bank, 1989).

settling in North-Western Rhodesia" (ibid.:75). Some did "eventually establish themselves" but they were diluted by Irishmen, Italians, Greeks plus English or South African "colonials". "Some applications for land were ... rejected when heavy African settlement was found" (ibid.:77). "Commercial farming as they knew it was such a precarious operation, they often turned to the 'native trade' to keep afloat" (ibid.:79). "Insofar as they exchanged consumer goods or paid cash for Tonga produce, they gave the Africans another way (besides wage labour) of getting what they wanted from the Imperial economy" (ibid.:80). The Tonga were never subjected to "Kaffir farming" or allowed "squatting" mainly because of "continued availability of land outside settler estates" (ibid.:85).

Vickery confirms that proposals to move the Plateau Tonga into the Gwembe Valley to make room for white settlement were rejected (ibid.:131). While there were many cases of resistance to white settlement the eventual pattern was one of large-scale farms in blocks interspersed with areas farmed traditionally by Tonga peasants. This is one of the reasons why the settlers played a major role in the transformation of Tonga farming by ox ploughing. Although missionaries have been credited with the introduction of ploughs, Vickery concludes that "European farms were probably more important in terms of providing the example and instructing farm workers in the technique. There were, after all, many more farmers than missionaries" (ibid.:159).

### **THE OBJECTIVES OF RESTRUCTURING**

With the granting of independence to Zambia in 1964 a number of white commercial farmers sold up and left the country in spite of the fact that there was no British-funded scheme to buy them out as in Kenya. Lombard & Tweedie give the gap left by expatriate departures as one of the reasons for the setting up of State Production Units (1972:69). The other main reason was the need to pioneer new agricultural enterprises. Agricultural restructuring also includes the opening up of new land and the provision of incentives to increase production from existing land holdings. The World Bank report on Sub-Saharan Africa states that "Agricultural modernization combined with population pressure will make land titling necessary" (1989:104), yet only Kenya out of all Sub-Saharan countries has made substantial progress in this direction since independence. Political objectives involving both Zambian Humanism and Marxism have played a role in Zambian restructuring and a referendum in 1969 showed that Zambians felt it was unacceptable for expatriates to own land in perpetuity (Lombard & Tweedie, 1972:77).

### **COOPERATIVES**

In the 1960s the Zambian Government laid great stress on a cooperative approach to rural development and between January 1965 and June 1970, 805 agricultural producer cooperatives were registered with a membership of 12 175. Until 1970 most cooperatives were communal production units but, according to Lombard & Tweedie, were soon defunct (1972:67). They comment: "Rapid expansion of the movement took place without adequate administrative expansion ... There was little or no planning ... Most are situated on poor soils, and many are sited far from water supplies and markets ... Transport problems and heavy marketing costs mean that many enterprises are uneconomic for the cooperatives". Other problems included poor educational levels and "mismanagement, conflicting advice, theft and friction with and amongst cooperatives". While cooperative marketing is still practised in Zambia, the idea of communal production units has largely been dropped. It

proved to be an extremely expensive experiment because very few of the substantial loans for items such as tractors were ever repaid. The idea that loans do not need to be repaid became widely accepted amongst farmers and has continued to undermine efforts to develop viable credit programmes.

### STATE PRODUCTION UNITS

The second early stress in Zambian restructuring was on State Production Units of which by 1971 there were 46, covering maize/beef farms, beef ranches, dairy farms, piggeries and tree crops such as tea and coffee. These were run either by the Projects Division of the Ministry of Agriculture or the Rural Development Corporation, a parastatal. While some of these units are still operating, the Projects Division was closed down in the late 1970s as the government became squeezed by the fall in copper prices. Problems of management have been common and relatively few of these units have produced profits comparable to those in the private sector. They have, however, helped to develop commercial farming skills amongst indigenous Zambians and a number of staff have moved on to the private sector.

A secondary wave of enthusiasm for state farming came in the 1980s when President Kaunda had the brainwave of exploiting international rivalry to promote agricultural investment. The Ministry of Agriculture was instructed to identify two state farm sites per province. The sites would then be offered to different countries to develop using their own expertise and capital. Although the Cold War was still going on, there was insufficient rivalry for the idea to work as was intended. The North Koreans picked a promising site for rice development on the Kafue Flats and a number of other countries went through the motions of project evaluation. The main result of this initiative was, however, to develop interest in irrigation projects along the Zambezi River in commercial circles in Europe and the USA. Zambia, according to Raikes, has with Tanzania "placed less emphasis on state farms" than other African states but the results have been "similarly discouraging" (1988:53). "State farming takes land from peasants just like private large-scale farming, but often without the productivity and almost always without the same economic viability". Latterly, Zambia has described virtually all large-scale operations where the government has a financial stake, as state farms. An example is the Nakambala Sugar Estate on the edge of the Kafue Flats, which for long periods has been managed by the British company Tate and Lyle.

### LAND NATIONALISATION

As part of his "Back to the Land" campaign in 1975, President Kaunda put through a Land Act which effectively nationalised all land. In practice this was largely a paper transaction as freehold titles were converted to mainly 99 year leases. Kydd (1986:253) comments: "In the short term this legislation made little difference to the position of commercial farmers, Zambian or foreign, but the fact that the government had armed itself with such powers, and the lack of clarity as to its ultimate objectives, are said (by the Commercial Farmers Bureau) to have inhibited investment". In theory, land that was completely unimproved by stumping or fencing was valueless and when compensation was paid, it was based only on improvements. Sales of farms continued and in fact the land holding of some of the expatriate farmers has grown considerably since nationalisation.

### **LARGE-SCALE FARMING IN THE ZAMBEZI VALLEY**

In the early days of colonial rule the Zambezi valley area of Southern Province, known as Gwembe Valley, was seen as having little potential for commercial farming on a large scale. In recent years the situation has been transformed by the growing interest in irrigated farming to make all-the-year-round crop production possible and also to reduce dependence on rainfall. Land adjoining the Kafue Flats was the first area to be developed mainly for sugar production, but further expansion is limited by water availability and competition from cattle owners. The Gwembe Valley has several areas of reasonable soils for irrigated crop production, particularly at the southern end of Lake Kariba and below the Kariba Dam. The first attempt to exploit the area led to what was called the "Zambezi Valley Land Scandal". There is much resistance amongst the Zambian elite to the idea of alienating more land and "in March 1985 the Government was defeated in Parliament when it opposed a back-bench motion urging the cancellation" (Kydd, 1986) of a sale of land to a Briton and a Kenyan. The sale was eventually cancelled but a further scandal developed over the same area when a Rhodesian-born American did a deal with President Kaunda. This also eventually got wound up and there is now a major multi-national, Masstock International, who says "the farm ultimately may comprise more than 24 000 ha" (Sjerven, 1989), mostly under centre-pivot irrigation.

### **PROBLEMS WITH MOVING PEASANTS**

In view of the increasing pressures on land, it is perhaps not surprising that the independent Government of Zambia should have had similar problems in taking over peasant land as were experienced by the colonialists. Fortunately for the Masstock development in Chiawa, which is near the Kafue-Zambezi confluence, the population was relatively small and the take-over has so far gone reasonably smoothly. However, the Gwembe Valley Development Company has had a series of problems which seems to be continuing. Crops have been burnt and equipment damaged while there have been constant labour problems. Early opposition was focussed when Thayer Scudder, an American anthropologist who had studied the area since the 1950s, wrote a critical report after a visit (Scudder, 1986). He recommended offering some of the centre-pivot circles to the local people, and much more consultation. An early mistake was that only one major leader was consulted (ibid.:8). According to an unpublished report by Danckwerts, the acquisition "was illegal" (1990:12) and the 2 000 people moved "still have not been granted legal title".

### **RESETTLEMENT OF WHITE COMMERCIAL FARMS**

As has already been mentioned, at various times since independence in 1964 large-scale commercial farms have been sold or abandoned. Some have been sold to indigenous Zambians while several expatriates have increased their holdings. One Dutch volunteer liked the country, went home to borrow some money, and then proceeded to build up one of Zambia's most successful commercial farms. Other farms were taken over by a parastatal, the Zambian Agricultural Development Company. Zambia's population density at 10 per sq. km is low when compared with Malawi's (67.7) or Zimbabwe's (23.7), so pressure for using these farms for resettlement was not great. Land pressure was greatest in Southern Province and resettlement schemes were started to relieve pressure, particularly in the Mazabuka area. The Land Report (1985) gives a range of densities from 3 to 23 per sq. km for rural districts and from 0.8 (Chief Nyawa in Kalomo) to 43.2 per sq. km (Chief Macha in Choma) in

chiefs' subdivisions.

Lombard & Tweedie state that the most successful government scheme was the Ngwesi scheme which over 10 years settled 92 families on 6 070 hectares, or an average of 66 hectares per family. In a later scheme "an inventory of an individual settler's requirements for grazing land (based on the number of cattle he owned) and arable land (based on family size, number of draft oxen and implements) was made" (1972:61). A wide range of other settlements were tried, many on abandoned state land and involving the settling of trainees from farm schools or the tobacco training school. Lombard & Tweedie (1972:62) state that "the object of all these schemes has been to build a farming ladder" so that successful peasants or young men trained in agriculture can eventually evolve into commercial farmers. Drop-out rates for such schemes have been very high and there has generally been a big problem of trying to raise sufficient capital. To train someone for three years in farming who eventually goes to town to be a taxi driver has not proved to be worthwhile and the money would have been better spent on shorter courses for older people who are already committed to farming.

Lombard & Tweedie (1972:53) estimate that in 1970 there were 550 large-scale commercial farmers and companies. In the Commercial Farmers Bureau magazine more recently (*Productive Farming*, July 1990) the Executive Director, John Hudson, stated that there were "500-600 commercial farms, ranging from the 40 hectare level right up to big estates". This compares with a figure of 1 498 white farmers submitting returns in Northern Rhodesia in 1958 (Report, 1959). About a third of commercial farms today are farmed by indigenous Zambians. It can therefore be said that the number of white farmers has dropped by over 1 000. In terms of production, the drop has been much less, since many of those that have stayed have increased their land holding and the irrigated area increased from 2 000 ha in 1964 to 19 009 ha (Watts, 1986) in 1985, almost entirely on white farms.

### FAMILY FARMS LTD

Family Farms Ltd is a non-profit making and non-government organisation mostly operating in the Southern Province of Zambia. The organisation was incorporated in 1972 within the laws of Zambia as a company with a capital of limited guarantee. "The organisation is not a member of and it is not affiliated to any international organisation" (Family Farms Ltd/Lusume Services, 1990). Finance has, however, been obtained from a wide range of sources including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United Church of Canada and Christian Aid UK. Considerable use has been made of overseas volunteers from several countries, in recent years from West Germany, with financial aid from EZE Germany and German Agro Action. Unfortunately no in-depth studies have been conducted of the programme. Farrington (1979) claims that settlement farmers were achieving maize yields of 45 bags per hectare compared with 13 to 28 bags in neighbouring communal "reserve" areas. Little consideration has been given to the sustainability of yields and Danckwerts (1990) claims that yields have fallen to semi-subsistence levels. Since the mid-1980s, and with the addition of Lusume Services to its title, there has been a switch in emphasis to the provision of services to those already settled and other small-scale farmers. This switch was partly stimulated by the report of the Commission of Inquiry (Report, 1985) which recommended that Family Farms should become a government agency. It is now realised that the most crucial need is to develop sustainable systems and further resettlement is not an immediate priority: 13 000 trees of



about 30 different species were raised in 1989 (Family Farms/Lusume Services, 1989).

### **THE BENEFITS OF RESETTLEMENT**

It is regrettable that more research has not been undertaken to determine whether resettlement can be justified on economic grounds. Obviously, if the reasons for mounting a resettlement programme are primarily political, an economic justification is not so necessary. However, in all cases there is a need to maximise benefits. One would hope that those who are resettled would achieve a higher standard of living. Before and after studies are difficult, since in many cases resettlement is carried out because large-scale farms have been abandoned. In such cases it is easy to show that resettlement has been nationally beneficial in terms of food production. The main issue in this case is whether the funds would be better spent on opening new areas.

A long-term critic of Family Farms, Bruce Danckwerts (1990), is convinced that population density and agricultural production "were less after subdivision than was the case of similar farms left in the hands of commercial management". In an unpublished paper prepared for the Commercial Farmers Bureau, he stresses that in several recent land acquisition cases no "detailed study [has] been made to check whether alternative under-utilised land is available" (1990:12). He recommends minimum farm sizes with bench mark gross income of US-\$50 000 for commercial farming and US-\$2 500 for peasant farms. He is particularly critical of Family Farms on the issue of water supplies. The farm of 2 000 ha next door to his was divided into 16 farms of 125 ha each but only 4 had water supplies. As a result "the whole idea of individual farms has collapsed as thirsty cattle trample pathetic fences in order to reach our dams. Communal over-grazing is the result". He is also concerned about land degradation in cropped areas where, on land farmed before resettlement, farmers now only do subsistence cropping. "Farmers who cleared virgin land are still growing crops but their yields are declining" and he estimates that "about another 5 years of semi-commercial cropping" are possible "before they too decline to the subsistence level".

Danckwerts' experience of Family Farms is, of course, biased by his being a neighbour. It is also biased by the fact that in his area, Choma District, much of the land is sandy and of low inherent fertility. He admits that on "good Mazabuka type soils farmers appear happy and more successful since these soils "can withstand abuse for longer". His views are confirmed to some extent by the Agricultural Manager of Barclays Bank of Zambia (Mweemba, 1990). Only about 10% of Family Farms settlers are still borrowing and they are "no better than other farmers as regards creditworthiness". They are very dependent on monocropping maize so that they have little to repay loans with in a drought year. They have not been able "to increase their production by using credit and have also been involved in diversion of crop proceeds for other uses not related to farming. Most schemes like Family Farms have not been successful as farmers have not achieved sustainable agriculture" and are now "farming on a traditional basis as peasants".

### **THE COSTS OF RESETTLEMENT**

Probably the main contribution that Family Farms has made is to show that a non-government organisation can mount an effective resettlement programme. The cost to government is much reduced by raising funds from overseas sources and by employing expatriate volunteers. A detailed study of the costs of Family Farms resettlement was

undertaken by Thomas Farrington in 1979. He estimated the costs of settlement as Zambian Kwacha 983 per farmer in 1976 (Farrington, 1979). Since the average family size for the 120 farmers in his study was 2.217 adult males, 3.442 adult females and 9.558 children, the total outlay per person settled came to 65 Zambian Kwacha. He excluded from the costs recoverable items such as fencing and farm equipment which farmers would eventually pay for. In the early 1970s, before Zambia's economy declined, 1 Zambian Kwacha was worth approximately 1.5 US dollars. Thus the cost per person settled came to approximately 100 dollars.

Farrington (1979:44) stresses that additional costs were incurred because of government delays in issuing leases. It is clear from other reports (e.g. Danckwerts, 1990) that government failures in dealing with the provision of titles have been a major drawback to the entire programme. Farrington (1979:48) is emphatic in warning against attempts to replicate Family Farms' methods where political and social conditions are not as conducive to resettlement as they were in Zambia in the 1970s. Much of the success of the resettlement depended on the commitment of the staff.

### **PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY FARMS RESETTLEMENT**

The resettlement programme operated through the 1970s and the early 1980s benefited around 600 farm families who were settled on former white large-scale commercial farms. Farm sizes after resettlement ranged from 50 to 200 ha so that the total land resettled was of the order of 42 000 ha (Family Farms/Lusume Services, 1990). Towards the end, one successful settlement was carried out on formerly undeveloped state land. After land had been purchased, much of the routine layout and surveying work was carried out by overseas volunteers. This had the advantage that they cost less, were able to live in simple accommodation near the site, were more mobile and willing to work unsocial hours. While there are disadvantages to employing foreigners, a major advantage is that they are seen as neutral and not subject to pressures from those seeking to obtain farms. But cost-saving is probably the greatest advantage. Other savings were made by making motorcycles the main form of transport. Volunteers on a fixed contract are also easy to lay off at the end of the first phase of resettlement so that a large unwieldy bureaucracy is not left to reduce the economic viability of the scheme.

Great care was taken with the selection of settlers. Settlers were selected on a family basis so that the farmer had to show that he was limited by shortage of land and had the labour, livestock and capital to make a success of a 50 to 200 ha farm. Selection was done by local committees but with representation of the key government departments. Farms were initially leased on an annual rental but after a period on this basis it was intended that a short-term lease could be obtained. During the probationary period provision was made for eviction in the event that minimum standards were not being met. In practice few leases have been granted, largely due to government failures "to respond" to Family Farms' applications "for permission to issue individual subleases". Evictions "were few in number" and were mainly due to "inability to pay rent or for services or for loans" (Holland, 1990).

Many resettlement schemes in other parts of Africa have been partial failures because the credit offered to settlers was too ambitious. Credit under Family Farms was very limited and not provided by the scheme. A number of commercial banks in the area, including Barclays and the Zambia National Commercial, provided loans on their normal terms. Loans supplied through government departments or parastatals are too often taken to be grants

which do not have to be repaid. According to Lombard & Tweedie (1972:78) the Credit Organisation of Zambia, founded in 1967, accumulated losses of 7 million Kwacha in three years and was dissolved, 97 percent of debts being written off. Family Farms loans were mainly for well-digging and ox equipment, repaid on a medium-term basis while short-term loans were provided for seed, fertilizer and cotton packs, including insecticide and sprayers. Obviously in all its operations Family Farms liaised closely with the government. Technical staff on the agricultural side, who were responsible for advising new settlers, were invariably seconded from the government. Capital costs were kept to extremely low levels with the main items being vehicles and equipment for drilling boreholes.

### **MEETING DEMANDS FOR LAND**

Land is such an emotional issue that there is no possibility of satisfying everyone. The Land Commission which met in the early 1980s heard criticism from all sides. They may therefore provide a useful buffer and help to break down the old neat but divisive separation between large-scale and small-scale farmers. Vickery reports that the old black-white division of land has been broken down through purchases by "Zambia's national elite" (1986:224). He quotes another example of a local farmer who moved from medium-scale to large-scale farming after buying the farm of a Mr Whitbread and describes his management as "most efficient". He comments that the old egalitarianism is breaking down, overgrazing is still a major problem and soil erosion is becoming more serious. The old feelings that all these problems are due to the alienation of land seem to have lessened - the Land Report (1985) is mainly critical of state use of land. Some of the criticism may have been reduced by the resettlement that has gone on plus the fact that several of the remaining white farmers have greatly intensified their farming, particularly through irrigation and pasture improvement.

### **CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded that agricultural restructuring is a difficult and extremely expensive exercise, particularly where it is undertaken by the state. While up to 1975 Zambia's economy was strong enough to stand some of this expenditure, the high spending habits that developed in the first decade of independence have since contributed to Zambia's downfall. Parastatals were exposed in a report to the National Assembly (Report, 1984) which included some agricultural examples. The overall conclusion was that parastatal companies suffered from "poor financial accountability". State involvement in resettlement should, on the basis of Zambian experience, be minimised and confined to what is absolutely essential for political and social reasons.

The relative success of Family Farms Ltd and its ability to resettle farmers at lower costs, open up the possibility of other Southern African countries using NGOs for this purpose. Professor Dumont, while praising Family Farms, prefers programmes with "less expenses, less spoon-feeding than many settlement schemes" such as the Integrated Rural Development Programmes (1979:46). There is also the natural restructuring that has gone on in Zambia to reduce the previous racial gulf between large-scale white and small-scale black farmers. The Commercial Farmers Bureau has in recent years had about 1 000 members, but the majority of these are now indigenous Zambians whereas at Independence virtually all members were white. Consideration should be given to how natural restructuring could be accelerated by legislation and incentives provided by the government.

This would be a much more cost-effective way of tackling such a monumental task than massive government intervention. Even the squatter problem, which affects all the countries of Southern Africa, could be looked at again to see whether it could be regulated and used as a restructuring tool. Squatting could be justified as being in effect low-cost resettlement.

Zambia has been fortunate in many ways compared with other countries of the region. At independence it was only the Southern Province that had a land shortage problem. Zambia has a more reliable rainfall than countries to the south and so has more potential for expanding rain-fed farming. In retrospect, some of the resources devoted to resettlement and state farming would have been better spent in opening up new areas and expanding irrigation. Hopefully Zambia's experience can be used to help countries such as Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa avoid the same mistakes and the environmental degradation that has followed.

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