Discoveries in Agriculture and Food Sciences - Vol. 10, No. 3
Publication Date: June 25, 2022
DOI:10.14738/dafs.103.14353.
Muromo, F., & Mafongoya, P. (2022). Emerging Dynamics in Mkwasine Sugar Estate after the Land Reform in Zimbabwe. Discoveries in Agriculture and Food Sciences, 10(3). 1-10.

Emerging Dynamics in Mkwasine Sugar Estate after the Land Reform in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Using secondary as well as descriptive data collected from a sample of 45 farmers in Mkwasine Sugar Estate in Chiredzi District in Zimbabwe's south eastern lowveld, this study examined the dynamics that have emerged in Mkwasine Sugar Estate in the aftermath of land reform. The estate, formerly owned by the multinational-between Tongaat Hullet Group (THG) of South Africa was compulsorily acquired for the resettlement of black farmers in an attempt to redress the colonial imbalance of land ownership between whites and blacks. The study highlights reconfigured land ownership structures, tenure regimes, tensions and conflicts between the THG and the farmers as well as amongst the farmers themselves. Findings from the study established the reconfiguration of the once centrally managed estate into individually run farms of 10-20 hectares by over 400 black sugarcane farmers. The study recommends the resolution of contestations by all the stakeholders for the sustenance of the sugar industry.

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study examines the dynamics that have emerged in Mkwasine Sugar Estate after land reform in Zimbabwe to highlight the reconfiguration of the land ownership structure and tenure regimes in the sugar estate. Although there had been white sugarcane out growers linked to Mkwasine Estate during the colonial era, the uneasy relationship between the out growers and the core estate has not been as pronounced as now. The black farmers resettled in the aftermath of land reform are experiencing different challenges from those faced by their white predecessors of the colonial era. Whereas white out growers in the colonial days enjoyed loan facilities from financial institutions as well as economies of scale from the large landholdings they owned and managed, the black farmers were allocated fairly smaller farms ranging from 10 to 20 hectares each (Jackson and Cheater, 1994; Watts, 1994). The freehold tenure system for white farmers provided them with collateral security of tenure when applying for loans from financial institutions. However, this was replaced by, a 99-year leasehold tenure given to the black farmers following the proclamation in 2001 by government that all commercial agricultural land in Zimbabwe was state land.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This dramatic transformation of Mkwasine Estate has not been subjected to a detailed analysis although Scoones et al (2010) and others have nuanced some developments which occurred in the sugar industry in the aftermath of land reform. This study therefore attempts to give a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics that emerged as a result of these developments. . The findings from this study contribute to the broader debates on land reform in general and Zimbabwe in particular. It is also hoped that the findings from this study will inform the government, the resettled farmers and other stakeholders in the sugar industry in their future planning endeavours.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Premised on the nucleus estate-out grower model, Mkwasine sugar estate is one of the three sugarcane producing estates in Chiredzi District in Zimbabwe's south eastern lowveld, apart from Triangle and Hippo Valley. Just before the topical and historic compulsory acquisition of the whole estate by the government under the Fast Track Land Resettlement Programme in the year 2000 and beyond, Mkwasine was co-owned by THZ 's subsidiaries-Triangle and Hippo Valley sugar estates. Since its inception in 1968 to present, the estate has gone through profound changes in terms of ownership and crops that were grown in it. From being privately owned by the Stockhill Brothers in its formative years, the estate has evolved through public ownership through the then Sabi Limpopo Authority in the colonial era and then private ownership through the government's land redistributive thrust after independence.

Two Waves of Land Reform in Mkwasine Estate

Land reform in Mkwasine has been characterized by the following waves;

- The Chipiwa Settlement Scheme (CSS) of 1982.
- The A2 farmer Scheme introduced under the Fast Track Land Resettlement Programme (FTLRP)

The Chipiwa Resettlement Scheme (CSS) of 1982 constituted the first wave of reforms in the estate. It was the first land redistribution attempt by post-independent Zimbabwe in the first decade of independence. The CSS was an out-grower scheme that aimed at redressing the colonial imbalance in sugar production hitherto dominated by white farmers. The scheme comprised of the first groups of 191 black farmers who were allocated 10-hectare sugarcane plots by the government in the sugar estate. Under the scheme Mkwasine Estate shouldered the costs of providing the necessary infrastructural requirements to the new farmers which included putting up core houses for the farmers, preparing the land, installing irrigation works as well as planting the first sugarcane crop for the new farmers.

The farmers were expected to repay the cost of these developments over a 15-year period from crop proceeds after which they would acquire freehold title to their plots. The CSS also provided for the transportation of the resettled farmers' sugarcane to the mills at Triangle and Hippo Valley. Mkwasine Estate also provided accounting services for the farmers. It also helped the settlers in cutting their sugarcane as well as purchasing agricultural inputs for the farmers.

The second wave arose when increasing pressure for land across the country by the war veteran movement in the second decade culminated in mass occupations of commercial farms across the country. This resulted in the Fast Track Land Resettlement Programme (FTLRP) which compulsorily acquired and officially transferred land from the THG by the government for the resettlement of black farmers. Mkwasine Estate was not spared by this wave. Under the FTLRP, over 4 000 hectares of land in the estate were compulsorily acquired and subdivided into 20 hectares farms that were redistributed to over 200 beneficiaries known as A2 farmers (Scoones et al. 20, Moyo, 2011).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in three phases namely: i) the first phase involved the review of literature on the sugar industry in general and Zimbabwe in particular, ii) the second phase involved a preliminary visit to the sugar estate to sensitize the key informants of purpose of the study (sugarcane farmers, community leaders, government officers and residents in general). Subsequent trips were dedicated to information gathering from affected farmers and government officers. The researcher used interview guides, questionnaires, focus group discussions and narrative cases of specific incidences/experiences.

This data and information were captured in both audio and video forms with permission from respondents. Research assistants were used to gather data. Analysis of all qualitative and quantitative data was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and content analysis.

STUDY FINDINGS

The study established tensions and conflicts between THZ and the resettled farmers and between the resettled farmers themselves. These tensions emanated from land sizes allocated to farmers and changes in tenure regimes. The sources of the tensions and conflicts were traced to the Hippo Valley Agreement of 1957. The Agreement was the first piece of legislation in the country to formalise the out-grower scheme in the sugar industry. The sequel to this legislation was the Sugar Control Act of 1962 (GOZ, 1957).

The provisions of these acts gave core estates unparalleled powers over out growers in the growing, processing and marketing of sugar in that they approved who had to be resettled in the estates, what cane cultivars had to be grown, milling quotas for the out growers as well as the distribution of proceeds from the sale of sugar products. These pieces of legislation were not revised after independence despite the resentment of the out growers to the provisions of the acts. Since the colonial period the colonial period resented the contempt with which the core estates treated them. After land reform, the THG continued regarding the resettled farmers as depending on them for survival.

On the other hand, there are tensions and conflict between the Chipiwa group of farmers and the A2 farmers. The former allege unfairness on the part of government for not benefitting from the FTLRP process. They argue that they paid for the 10 hectare plots they already possessed whereas the A2 farmers did not. Land sizes between the CSS and the A2 farmers has created animosity between the two groups. While the former was allocated 10 hectares each, the later

were allocated double that (approximately 20 hectares) each. Also, while the former argue that they paid for their land over a 15-year period they have not gotten the title to their land. This was because freehold tenure was overtaken a 99-year leasehold proclaimed by the government in 2001. The proclamation state that all commercial agricultural land was state land. The CSS farmers also argue that since they have sugarcane farming experience and have been on the estate for more than 15 years, they, should have been allocated larger pieces of land than their A2 counterparts who they claim did not have the requisite skills and experience.

The CSS catered for the provision of agricultural inputs and credit for the resettled farmers by the THZ while the A2 scheme did not. Also, the CSS assured the land beneficiaries of post settlement support up to a time they had fully paid back the loans advanced them by THZ on resettlement (Jackson and Cheater, 1994; Mlambo and Pangeti, 1996). This unequal treatment of the two groups of farmers by in the same sugar processor (THG) has created tensions and conflicts between the two.

While the CSS farmers were provided with farming inputs by THZ the A2 farmers on the other hand sourced their own inputs from the open market. This practice often affected the profitability of A2 farmers' farming venture as inputs could either be supplied late into the season or after they had expired (Duffy, 2013). Only a few out of the over 400 farmers in Mkwasine Estate got fuel for agricultural purposes from the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOCZIM) in 2015.

The recently introduced 99 year-leasehold) for all agricultural land owners has resulted in both groups of farmers not being able to access credit from financial institutions. The new tenure regime is deemed to be insecure yet access to credit can significantly increase the ability of farmers to invest in future production. Currently, both groups of farmers cite lack of capital and access to affordable credit as major factors behind the low productivity experienced in estate. The package of financial services available to the farmers is severely limited, especially for the A2 farmers whose presence has been contested since their incorporation into the estate. There are also high administrative costs per unit of currency when lending to smallholder farmers. This is due to the small amounts of money borrowed resulting in high administration costs which may outweigh the revenues (Fairtrade Foundation, 2013). Also because of the lack of collateral and/or credit history, most smallholder farmers are by-passed not only by commercial and national development banks, but also by formal micro-credit institutions (Curtis and Adama, 2013).

One of the most pressing issues in Mkwasine has been the pressure for more land by prospective beneficiaries from the government. The Shangaan people who live in adjoining communal lands claim an autochthonous ownership to the sugar estate and therefore demand to have been considered first when land allocation was rolled out. They also indicated that they should be restituted for the land that was forcibly taken from their ancestors to pave way for sugarcane farming. While a few chiefs and some politicians from their side were allocated land under the 'A2' sugarcane scheme, most of the beneficiaries in the estate are outsiders from elsewhere in the country. The lucrative nature of the sugar farming activity has attracted politically connected elites from the more distant areas with some powerful politicians trying

to assert themselves in the distribution process the following narration by a chief from the adjoining communal lands (who is an A2 farm beneficiary), summarizes the local people's sentiments;

Our forefathers used to occupy this area and were forcefully moved beyond Mkwasine River by the colonial government to pave way for sugar production. My great grandfather used to reside at the foot of that small hill near Mkwasine Secondary School! There are our ancestral graves on that hill. When land redistribution started here l thought the lands officials were going to consider the original inhabitants

In 2014, there were high profile invasions of the sugar estate by angry villagers and some war veterans who argued that the promise by the ZANU-PF leadership of giving them land for sugarcane farming during the 2013 harmonized general elections had not materialized (Newsday May 24 of 2014 page 1).

There exists deep mistrust between the THG and the black farmers. The farmers' sentiments resonate globally with those of other out growers who are locked in a monopsonic contractual relation with powerful companies (Glover and Gusterer, 1994). From informal conversations the farmers indicated that the THG expected the resettled black farmers to fail from the onset and tried to sabotage the land reform effort by any means possible (Informal conversation with Mr Y at Mkwasine Country Club on 14/05/15). However, the negative perception by the THG seems to have changed with time as it has realized that the land reform exercise is irreversible. The group realized the need to accommodate these land reform beneficiaries in order to optimally utilize the crushing capacity of its processing mills at Hippo Valley and Triangle.

There are also some conflicts amongst the resettled farmers over water usage. Some farmers complained that those farmers who were higher up the canal system diverted most of the water to their fields depriving those down the system of the precious liquid. It was revealed that some farmers at times exchange harsh words with each other and in extreme cases exchange blows over water distribution, (Interview with Commercial Sugarcane Farmer Association of Zimbabwe official in Mkwasine on 15/10/15). Sometimes there are exchanges during harvest time when fire spreads to other farmers' fields. Sugarcane is burnt before harvesting to make the harvesting easier.

The staff houses and compounds which were formerly owned by THZ are major points of conflict, as farmers fight over their occupation. There are also conflicts over how former THZ assets such as the country club, retail shops, butcheries and beer-outlets are going to be distributed to those who are willing to run them.

The way accommodation is allocated is chaotic. No one is responsible for the allocation of houses in the former THZ compounds. As a result, you don't know who is staying in the next house. We need a social services committee to dispense community development services as THZ used to do (Informal conversation at Mkwasine Country Club on.7/08/15)

Also given the location of the estates, there is constant through traffic of visitors and relatives of the labourers from the adjoining communal lands for fishing and sometimes, illegal hunting. Issues of security, crime, occasional violence in the residential compound's due large populations of single men, often on extremely poor or no pay also abound. Theft of sugarcane from the resettled farmers' fields is common as a vigorous illegal trade in fresh sugarcane develops. Disputes over pay, protests about the condition of housing and lack of services and complaints about the safety of residents, given the large mobile populations, are frequent.

The Chipiwa Scheme which used overhead irrigation in the initial years of resettlement converted to furrow irrigation after realizing rampant theft of aluminum irrigation pipes, high maintenance costs of pumps and motors and the ever-escalating electricity charges and power cut offs. The Chipiwa Scheme with the assistance of the European Union and the Successful Rural Communities (SUSCO) project embarked on a massive flood conversion exercise requiring sugarcane plough out and redesigning of field layouts, sugarcane replanting and construction of night storage dams.

While the A2 farmers claim to be charged monthly for their water use, the CSS farmers pay a lump sum once in a while. As a result, A2 farmers are appealing for the standardization of payment terms as the anomaly is negatively affecting them because of their limited financial resources and also taking into account that the crop is harvested after twelve months. Cash flow in this case will be a problem. Closely related to this both groups of farmers in the estate complained that ZINWA was charging exorbitant fees on raw water.

The farmers also allege that the government is not taking them seriously as other crops are being funded under different schemes in the national budget but nothing is put aside for sugarcane (Interview with Mrs. X –a farmer on 10/06/15). She indicated that sugarcane was being funded under livestock and 'other crops. The farmers are not relieved to learn this but ask why sugarcane is classified under 'other crops' (Interview with Mr Z-another A2 farmer on 13/05/15). This only shows that nobody has really sat down to consider the importance of sugar in the country yet about 70% of dietary consumption at household contains sugar.

There is no law or regulatory authority overseeing the activities of the stakeholders in the estate.

The sugar estate would continue to have problems until such a time all the stakeholders in the estate come together and form a council that represent the views of both the THG and all the black farmers. The Commercial Sugarcane Farmers Association of Zimbabwe (CSFAZ) as has been observed only represents sectional interests of the resettled farmers. Farmers' associations are essential institutions for the empowerment, poverty alleviation and advancement of farmers and the rural poor (Penunia, 2011).

Farmers' associations reduce transaction costs such as transport, research, negotiation and administration costs faced by farmers (Chikazunga, 2013) and enables knowledge sharing through networking, peer to peer training and good practice demonstrations which can yield widespread and significant benefits (Kumwenda et al., 2013). Economically, farmers'

associations can help farmers gain skills, access inputs, form enterprises, process and market their products more effectively to generate higher incomes (Robbins et al., 2004; Penunia, 2011). By organizing, farmers can access information needed to produce, add value, market their produce and develop effective linkages with input agencies such as financial service providers, as well as output markets (Poole and Frece, 2010). Robbins et al. (2004) also noted that collective activity might also help farmers to obtain credit.

CONCLUSION

From the above findings and discussion, the study concludes that tensions and conflicts emanate from tenure regimes, land sizes and accessibility to resources by the farmers in the estate. Due to lack of conventional funding, sugarcane growers were left with no option except to get their inputs from the parallel market at a very high cost. Farmers are left at the mercy of THZ's sugar mills at Hippo Valley and Triangle, yet these are private companies who are in business to make money and not to be good Samaritans.

The study further concludes that linking the resettled farmers to the THG's processing mills at Triangle and Hippo Valley was good as it overcame some of the small farmers' traditional problems which include lack of accessibility to inputs, and farming equipment. These problems extend to lack of capacity by small farmers to adopt new technologies such as drip irrigation and centre pivots. The smallholder farmers have usually been reluctant to adopt new technologies themselves because of the costs and risks involved.

The study also concludes that land reform in the estate is irreversible and that the THG stands to benefit from their partnership with the black farmers as it does not have to invest on the resettled farmers' land, hire labour or manage large-scale farming operations which may tax it. Land preparation, canal construction and maintenance of loading zones costs in the estate are met by the farmers themselves. In the same vein, the THG has shaded off responsibilities associated with hiring labour such as the provision of social amenities like housing education and entertainment. Overall, THZ has avoided conflicts over landownership as well as labour issues which have been plaguing the sugar industry since the early days of independence.

Cost advantages for THZ have been made possible. Sugarcane production requires a lot of labour and careful attention which large corporates like THZ cannot afford. In this vein production by resettled farmers becomes more efficient than estate plantations due to the fact that the farmers pay lower wages as compared to large firms such as THZ. Another advantage is that it is easier for the resettled farmers to get some services from the government at sufficiently lower rates of interest than THZ from lending institutions, thus keeping operating costs down. This would have resulted in THZ avoiding huge financial risks if it were to provide those services itself. The nucleus estate–out grower model thus adopted in Mkwasine Sugar Estate promotes good public relations for THZ by presenting a progressive image exuded by partnering with local black farmers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above conclusions the following recommendations can be made;

- The government must take a kin interest in the sugarcane crop due its economic importance in terms of foreign currency generation. The government should not leave the farmers at the mercy of the THG through its operations at Hippo Valley and Triangle milling companies. THG cannot continue to help the resettled farmers with loans and inputs at no premium as is being suggested by the authorities. The resettled farmers can only be provided with inputs for some time until a time they have acquired enough resources to stand on their own.
- The government should also increase the size of land given to both groups of farmers in Mkwasine. According to Scoones et al (2010) any land size of irrigable sugar production less than thirty (20) hectares per farmer is sub-economic and therefore not sustainable.
- All resettled sugarcane farmers should be given security of tenure. The 99-year leases should be bankable documents and provide collateral when borrowing.
- The government with other stakeholders must seriously consider setting up sugar technology training institutes to improve sugar production and sector knowledge. Most of the beneficiaries do not have expertise in sugar production although they are willing to learn. It should also break the monopoly of existing millers in the sugar industry by bringing in more players.
- The government, the THG and other funding partners provide the resettled farmers with inputs for some time until the farmers have acquired enough resources to stand on their own. There should be an allocation for sugarcane inputs in the national budget for resettled sugarcane farmers so that they access fertilizers, fuel and chemicals through institutions like the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) and the National Oil Company of Zimbabwe (NOCZIM) just like other crops covered under the Government Input Programme (GIP). The government should set up of a regulatory body-an all-inclusive Sugar Council. The council should draw its composition from government, resettled farmers, THZ millers, financiers, marketers, researchers and development practitioners and other stakeholders. This would, eliminate fragmentation and partisan representation of the sector as is currently the case. This would increase the bargain and lobbying leverage of the sector to THZ and government. It is this council that should convince the government that their project is very important to the nation.
- Lastly, the government has the key to the formulation of the legal and institutional environment that promotes the growth of the sugar industry as a whole. The government has the legislative tool as well as the political muscle at its disposal to create an even playing field for all the players in the industry. Provision of post-settlement support, creation of markets for sugar products and managing those markets are among some of the things the government should delve into.
- The sugar industry needs tremendous government support and intervention. There is therefore need to declare sugarcane as a strategic crop and not treat it as any ‘other crops. This is because the government has an imbedded interest in the crop due foreign currency earned or saved by the industry. The government should desist from exercising distant interest and urgently address the challenges being faced by the sugar industry.

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Mr Y on 15/06/15 in Mkwasine

Mrs X on 10/06/15 in Mkwasine