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Neoliberalism, Regime Survival, and the Environment: Economic Reform and Agricultural Transformation in Zimbabwe in the 1990s

B. Ikubolajeh Logan and Daniel Tevera

Abstract

La réforme économique du Zimbabwe sous les auspices de la Banque mondiale et du FMI a commencé en 1991. La première phase du programme, intitulée le Programme d'ajustement économique structurel (ESAP) a duré de 1991 à 1996. La seconde phase, le Programme de transformation sociale et économique du Zimbabwe (ZIMPREST) devrait aller au moins jusqu'à 2002. L'essentiel du débat concernant la performance de la réforme au Zimbabwe tourne autour de trois acteurs principaux: le gouvernement du Zimbabwe (GOZ), les institutions financières internationales (IFI) et l'environnement, particulièrement les sécheresses de 1991-92. Cet article contribue à une discussion plus vaste sur la réforme économique du Zimbabwe de trois façons: la première, en décrivant les grandes lignes de son économie, chronologiquement, structurellement et politiquement; la deuxième, en évaluant son impact sur la production agricole; et la troisième, en évaluant ses conséquences sur la sécurité alimentaire d'un ensemble négligé d'acteurs, les pauvres des villes. L'article conclut que la réforme agricole n'a pas réussi à réattribuer les ressources productives, à réorganiser la distribution spatiale de la production et à augmenter l'accès de diverses classes sociales à la nourriture. De plus, cet échec peut être attribué à un ensemble de facteurs dont la dynamique politico-économique post-coloniale orchestrée par le ZANU (PF) n'est pas le moindre.

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Introduction

Zimbabwe embarked on its Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) under the auspices of the IMF and World Bank in 1991. ESAP, which marked the first phase of economic reform under the direct supervision of the international financial institutions (IFIs), ended officially in December 1996. Published reports earlier that year indicated that the second phase, entitled the Zimbabwe Programme For Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), would be launched in January 1997 (*The Herald* 20 September 1996). However, a number of factors — most notably, food price increases, industrial stagnation, currency instability, and IMF/ World Bank reservations about the government's commitment to reform — postponed its actual implementation to February 1998. Although ZIMPREST is now officially underway, uncertainties surrounding the relationships among economic reform, government policy, and sociopolitical stability in the country have been further aggravated by a spate of events, including the 1998 food riots, land reform ambiguities, threats of labor stoppage, actual strikes, student unrest, the success of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party in the 2000 election, the recent occupation of white farms by war veterans, and subsequent threats of sanction by Britain and the West.

This article engages a broad discourse on the impacts of economic reform in Zimbabwe by examining the performance of the agricultural sector during the early and mid-1990s. The study is different from most other postmortems of the program in its focus on a single sector (for example, Kadenge *et al.* 1992; McGary 1994; Zawaira 1993; Woodroffe 1993; Osuntogun 1995; Hawkins 1995). Much of the discussion is used to adduce the implications of agricultural reform for regional and subsectoral agricultural performance, as well as for urban food security. The study is undergirded by the debates surrounding the "appropriateness" of economic reform in Africa and is grounded empirically within the political, economic, and social exigencies that underlie the Government of Zimbabwe's (GOZ) approach to economic reform. The specific objective of the analysis is to trace the nature of economic reform in the country, offer some explanations for the configuration that reform has assumed, and assess how these same dynamics manifest themselves in agricultural production and food security.

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Two issues limit the scope of our analysis and the incisiveness of its conclusions. First, it is often difficult to establish direct links between reform and economic performance. Killick (1995) suggests that there are a number of interrelated issues in assessing a reform effort: how to separate program effects from other structural effects; how to separate program effects from domestic policy effects; how to separate IMF effects from World Bank effects; how to assess partially implemented programs; and how to assess the counterfactual (that is, what would have happened in the economy without the program). To these reservations, Gibbon (1996) adds problems of data availability and methodology (with / without, before / after adjustment) — what Loxley and Seddon (1994, 489) refer to more baldly as "lies, damn lies and statistics" (see also Hoogvelt *et al.* 1992; Afxentiou and Serletis 1999; Sandbrook 1997). Gibbon (1996) notes further that, often, the forces behind economic change in Africa are unrelated to structural adjustment programs and are driven by climatic variations, population change, civil strife, the international market, and the nature of international financial assistance.

As a result of these limitations, our observations in this study are restricted mainly to the contestations between reform, as prescribed by the international financial institutions (IFIs), and domestic government policy. We have made no effort to separate between the effects of ESAP and ZIMPREST. After examining the interlinked activities of the three main actors in the reform effort — namely, the GOZ, the IFIs, and the environment — we have opted not to make bold statements about culpability for the setbacks of the programs. Instead, we draw attention to certain tendencies that have inserted themselves into reform policy over the past two decades.

As a second and final caveat, the article is not about land reform. We discuss the subject only to emphasize its centrality to agricultural reform in Zimbabwe. Our treatment of land reform is, therefore, rather selective and brief (for detailed analysis of this subject, see, for example, Alexander 1996; Moyo 1986, 1990a, 1990b).

The Post Liberation Political Economy: A Summary

In Sandbrook's (1997) linear outline of Africa's "debt crisis," he

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proposes a path according to which the heavy government borrowing of petro dollars in the 1970s created huge amounts of debt and fiscal deficits, which, in turn, established the need for economic reform and signaled the death of the Keynesian welfare state on the continent. Although Zimbabwe's path to the adjustment crucible may have deviated from this "formula" in some ways, by the late 1980s, the need to reduce the fiscal deficit through trade liberalization and to mobilize agriculture and manufacturing, had necessitated government austerity and some type of economic reform.

Zimbabwe's post-liberation economy is characterized by four main phases, which are intimately linked to the country's increasing "debt crisis" and its subsequent economic reform efforts. The period 1980-82 was marked by an economic boom, a government focus on redistribution through the nationalization of enterprises, and an extension of the colonial employment and social welfare systems to blacks. The engine of economic expansion during this period was fueled partly by European (especially British) financial assistance (Brown 1999). The period was also marked by mutual mistrust between the new socialist-oriented government and a conservative private sector, comprised mostly of whites who had either supported or been an integral part of the colonial system. These tensions are held to be partly responsible for precipitating two serious recessions from 1982 to 1986, which forced the GOZ to redirect its focus away from social equity towards the expansion of the national capital stock (Gibbon 1995). Public sector energies were galvanized towards attracting foreign direct investment and convincing domestic investors that their capital was secure within the new investment environment.

The government's relaxation of market control, as well as its adoption of macroeconomic policies designed to liberalize trade, narrowed the rift between the public and private sectors, generated local investment optimism, attracted a significant amount of foreign capital, and led to a period of economic upturn (1986-90). Nevertheless, the period also marked a serious erosion of welfare provisions as equity questions became significantly backstaged by other government priorities, which will be discussed later (see also Auret 1990; Durevall 1991). By 1990, the start of the final period, most issues of social equity had been relegated to long-term planning, and "Africanization" had become a "moot point" in the development agenda (Raftopoulos 1992a).

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For the GOZ, economic development in the decades following majority rule has been an exercise in balancing three interrelated needs — those of social justice, capital generation, and regime survival. This is particularly true of the period from 1980 to 1990, when some attempt was made to placate the needs of domestic and foreign capital while addressing the expectations of the masses, including veterans of the liberation struggle. To paraphrase Przeworski (1991), the dilemma faced by the GOZ was to strike a balance between the irrationality of capitalism and the infeasibility of socialism, while recognizing that whichever path it adopted, the ultimate goal had to be the reduction of poverty and starvation among ordinary Zimbabweans. The underlying political economy conditions in the country — namely, the interlinked activities of the GOZ, IFIs, and the environment — make possible two contrasting interpretations of the advent of economic reform and the GOZ's approach to it: (1) international or external imperatives placing the Zimbabwe case within the broad context of the IFI delineation of a political and economic agenda in Africa that disengage the welfarist state (see, for example, Bernstein 1990; Schatz 1994, 1996; Loxley and Seddon 1994); (2) domestic imperatives, which would attribute the slow demise of egalitarianism in Zimbabwe primarily to internal political economy dynamics (see, especially, Dashwood 1996; Raftopoulos 1992ab).

With regard to the first, Bond (1998) suggests that external economic pressures on the GOZ have taken the shape of strong links between local and global financial markets. In his view, the power of finance intensified in the 1990s as an integral part of the "unbridled triumphalism of the market and neoliberalism" (Fine and Stoneman 1996, 1). Market triumph and its institutional characteristics preclude government action to protect the basic needs of the poor and disenfranchised, and to abandon completely any agendas relating to social redistribution. According to this argument, market advocacy has gone through two related phases. In the 1980s, the IFIs advocated a minimalist state, whose role could best be described as overseer of the private sector — a look, but do not touch, policy. This role of a silent partner is said to be reflected, for example, in the Berg Report, which points to the East Asian market success, while astutely avoiding the centrality of state participation in that "miracle."

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In the 1990s, the second phase of international market advocacy in Africa, lack of progress in economic reform all over the continent forced the IFIs to relax their extreme minimalist state position for a more moderate one. African governments are now permitted to set about the task of establishing enabling environments for capital expansion, but their participation must be selective, at the behest of private capital, and under the strict guidance of the IFIs. The role mapped out for African governments in this process continues to circumvent a Keynesian welfarist agenda. This explains why some observers (see, for example, Moore 1999) view this neo-statist regime merely as a strategic maneuver by the IFIs to obtain the same goal of market ascendancy. According to these critics, at the cusp of the century, global capital finds itself needing the assistance of the state to "penetrate" the periphery more completely, but it does not trust the peripheral state (see also Sandbrook 1995, 1997; Loxley and Seddon 1994; Loxley 1995).

If Zimbabwe is placed within this broad context of "external factors," it could be argued that the country's road to economic reform was directed by a pragmatic reaction, first, to historical conditions and, second, to postcolonial processes under the IFI mantra, "government out-market in." With regard to the first one, economic pragmatism (the continued economic dominance of the white minority) may have compelled the Mugabe government to leave largely intact the colonial market economy and adopt market-based reform. Kadenge *et al.*, for example, note that the seeds of economic reform were planted by an inward-looking, centralized, Rhodesian economy, which was characterized by a rich white settler and poor black communal sectors, and was burdened by serious foreign exchange pressures (especially after UDI in 1965 and the imposition of international sanctions):

> These basic economic structures were maintained throughout the 1980s in an effort to redress the unequal inheritance. Price control on mass consumer items remained in place and led producers to experience losses ... by the late 1980s the inherited structures from the colonial era were fettering the growth of the economy (1992, 3).

In short, the colonial system established a hegemonic sociospatial order that was difficult to transform, partly because it was protected by constitutional provisions negotiated at Lancaster

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House (Jenkins 1997; Alexander 1996). These endemic structural difficulties, together with an unexpected drought, have handicapped GOZ efforts at socioeconomic transformation (we deal with the drought in more detail later).

A second important element of the argument that the GOZ buckled under external pressures towards economic reform is captured in Raftopoulos' observation that the government "faced a daunting prospect in attempting to consolidate and develop the support of the popular classes as well as attempting to placate the persistently predatory aspirations of capital" (1992a, 65). The strategy adopted by the government was to woo capital (both domestic and foreign), ensure continued productivity, and use these tactics to provide funds for social welfare development. However, as productivity declined as a result of a conjunction of factors — including capital flight, scarce foreign direct investment, and external pressure, not the least from South Africa — the GOZ was forced to abandon its welfarist agenda. These arguments that the GOZ's attempts at socioeconomic reform were seriously constrained by forces outside its immediate control presuppose that the socialist aspirations that had fueled the liberation struggle have continued to be central to GOZ policy and that, relatedly, GOZ policies continue to be delineated by the twin imperatives of economic equity and growth. If these suppositions are true, then ideological tensions between neoliberalism and socialism are responsible for miring GOZ economic reform in what the IFIs often perceive to be economic inconsistencies and policy irresoluteness.

The position that external pressures are tangential to Zimbabwe's path to economic reform proceed from the argument that this reform emerged primarily from changes in political alliances and social relations (what Dashwood [1996] has referred to as a "nationalist/socialist welfarist" agenda and Stoneman [1992] as a "left nationalist" agenda). Dashwood (1996) and Jenkins (1997), among others, make the argument that shifts in GOZ policies from an early emphasis on income redistribution and rural development to a later one on macroeconomic concerns did not result merely from colonial history, pressure from the IFIs, or the drought. To the contrary, economic reform was initiated within ZANU (PF) as a result of two currents: a reconfiguration of class and political alliances (a strategy towards embourgeoisement); and the

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policy perspective held by some within the party that a liberalized market economy was to be preferred over a government-controlled, socialist economy. The latter is seen also to have involved some selfish motivations. The emergent black bourgeoisie sought a "reconciliation with capital" (Raftopoulos 1992a) as the best strategy towards protecting its new assets (private businesses, large farms, ZANU (PF) commercial interests). This group formed an alliance with old, white capital to initiate market reform and to suppress the economic aspirations of groups outside the new political-economy nucleus. Pragmatism when applied, therefore, was not at the behest of a socialist agenda. To the contrary, it was applied to reconfigure the new political economy by protecting the interests of the newly empowered black middle class and their white partners in the new "liberation struggle" for economic dominance. Dashwood summarizes these factors:

> A new configuration of class forces has emerged in Zimbabwe, which now forms the basis of support for the new development strategy.... The most critical factor accounting for the reconfiguration of class forces is the embourgeoisement of the ruling elite, leading to the formation of a state-based bourgeoisie. Interacting with this dynamic was the emergence of a core of senior decision-makers who felt that market-based reforms were necessary and desirable, and the consolidation of support among the agrarian and entrepreneurial elites for market-based reforms (1996, 28).

As with many other aspects of development, the causes behind reform are both domestic and external. Clearly, when it took over control of the country in 1980, ZANU had a welfarist approach to development as evidenced by the great strides made in education and health during the early period (Tevera 1997). However, it is equally clear that Keynesianism was abandoned for neo-liberalism partly as a result of self-centered individual and party interests, the increasing power of the black middle class, and the alliance between black and white commercial interests. Since economic reform was home-grown and initiated in a robust Zimbabwean economy, a convincing case can be made that domestic dynamics, more so than external factors, paved the way for economic reform.

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Economic Reform: A Bitter Pill Swallowed in Reluctant Gasps?

Many of the macroeconomic reforms introduced by the IFIs in Africa over the past two decades have had questionable results (Schatz 1996; Logan and Mengisteab 1993; Riddell 1992, 1995; Gibbon 1996; Loxley and Seddon 1994; Brown 1996). Williams (1994) argues in his article, "Why Structural Adjustment Is Necessary and Why It Doesn't Work," that reform was necessitated by high debt burdens and emphases on the export of primary products, but that its success was constrained by domestic political forces, including state centralization, state patronage, and the repatriation of funds by ousted leaders. In her response, "Structural Adjustment: Why it Wasn't Necessary and Why it Did Work," Bracking (1999) suggests that adjustment was required not to reduce the debt obligations of African countries, but to link international finance with domestic politics in an alliance of mutual interest. As she puts it, structural adjustment programs did achieve their main agenda, which was to close "a brief historical chapter when political independence partially disrupted the dependent economic linkage between the countries of Africa and the core creditor states of global capitalism" (Bracking 1999, 208; see also Bond 1998). These debates have real relevance for Zimbabweans (which both Williams and Bond use as part of their analyses) because economic reform in that country demonstrates the outcomes of political choices and strategies of the ruling party in the process of ingratiating itself with the interests of capital.

The First Dose: Genesis of Economic Reform

Since adjustment emerged partially, if not largely, out of a dynamic of protective self interest by the ruling party and its members, it was not originally a "bitter pill" taken reluctantly. Nevertheless, the fact that its eventual shape under IFI tutelage was born out of the failures of, as well as the lack of, international support for the home-grown version, makes it an unpalatable medicine to the state.

International support for Zimbabwe's own reform program was undermined by signs of economic stress during the recessionary years of 1982 to 1986. The strain was reflected, most palpably, in

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the foreign currency shortages which followed almost on the heels of the currency devaluation in 1982. The devaluation eroded the industrial base of the economy and resulted in capacity idleness and temporary plant closures. Industrial and international trade bottlenecks were aggravated by the devastations that had been unleashed on the infrastructure by both the liberation struggle and subsequent civil war, and by the political and economic destabliza-tion activities of South Africa (for example, export performance was handicapped by South Africa's withdrawal of a locomotive which had been on loan to the UDI regime to export goods through the South African corridor). These difficulties were compounded by a drop in commodity prices induced by a global recession, high unemployment, and low domestic and foreign investments. The outcome was mounting government deficits, which sparked low investor confidence. By the end of the decade, investments as a percentage of the GDP were at their lowest since independence (Kadenge *et al.* 1992). These developments threatened the political and economic stability of the ruling party and its members, prompting the GOZ to reassess its economic agenda and to consider economic reform under the IFIs as a possible solution for the country's economic malaise (Gibbons 1996; Bond 1998).

IMF/World Bank Prescription for the Economic Malaise

Although early reform was a home-grown effort, Zimbabwe was not in policy isolation from Washington. The country had become a member of the IMF and World Bank soon after its independence in 1980. In 1982, it had its first financial transaction with the IMF, an eighteen-month, stand-by loan to meet budgetary shortfalls. The terms attached to this credit line included, among other things, the government's obligation to undertake some market reform, devalue the Zimbabwe dollar by twenty percent, liberalize the foreign currency allocation system, and limit government borrowing (Kadenge *et al.* 1992). These initial GOZ initiatives received the cautious support of the IFIs.

The first stage of economic reform under the direct stewardship of the two multilateral agencies was announced in July 1990. It spelt out reductions in social service expenditure and in the budget deficit from ten percent to five percent over a five-year period (1991-96). The economic development program was hinged on a

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projected twenty percent increase in investments in the key sectors of mining, agriculture, and manufacturing. The multilateral agencies encouraged the government to dismantle the import control and forex allocation mechanisms (two instruments it had refused to adopt in the 1980s) as a means of attracting foreign investment. Trade liberalization and foreign exchange deregulation were to be implemented through an Open General Import License (OGIL) for all import transactions. In the domestic arena, the plan called for the deregulation of the labor market, a reduction of the civil service (which accounted for a large proportion of government expenditure), the reduction or phasing-out of government subsidies, and the relaxation of price controls. In September 1990, additional steps, including increased foreign currency retention by foreign businesses and a more relaxed structure for the repatriation of profits, were adopted to mobilize foreign investment.

Even though the provisions of the July and September 1990 reform initiatives were light years beyond anything the government had previously outlined, the World Bank criticized both as lacking specificity, placing undue emphasis on social engineering, and not reducing government expenditures to appropriate levels. The World Bank was reluctant to give its full support to the OGIL until trade liberalization, devaluation, and reductions in public spending satisfied its benchmark standards. ESAP was inaugurated under these somewhat troubled conditions.

From ESAP to ZIMPREST: The Bitterest Pill of them All?

The third stage of economic reform, ESAP, was unveiled in 1991 in a document entitled *Zimbabwe: Framework for Economic Reform* (FER); the broad goals of ESAP are summarized in the first paragraph of the preface:

> The Government of Zimbabwe is committed to a programme of economic policy reform aimed at sustaining higher medium and long-term growth and reducing poverty. This requires a recovery of investment and improved efficiency. To achieve such recovery, a trade liberalization programme aimed at moving away from the present system of foreign exchange allocation and a relaxation of domestic controls will be implemented over a period of five years. Imports will be placed progressively under Open General

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> Import License (OGIL) and import taxes will be made uniform. Labour regulations and price controls will be relaxed to improve the business environment and stimulate employment. This liberalization programme will be supported by appropriate monetary, exchange rate and fiscal policies. A programme to reduce the budget deficit (net of foreign grants) from over 10% of GDP in FY90/91 to 5% in FY94/95 is being implemented. Over this period, losses on public enterprises will be almost eliminated, the civil service (excluding education) will be reduced in size by 25% and its productivity increased through reform measures, and the current high tax burden will be marginally reduced (Zimbabwe 1991).

The program is made up of five major components: (1) trade liberalization, centering on foreign exchange restrictions, as well as the relaxation of tariff and non-tariff barriers; (2) economic deregulation of the economy, including price decontrol, relaxation of labor regulations, wage decontrol, relaxation of transportation regulations, and relaxation of permit and licensing requirements; (3) fiscal reform with an emphasis on rationalizing the civil service, rationalizing statals and parastatals, and tax reform; (4) monetary policy and financial sector reform, including decontrol of interest rates, restructuring of the tax codes, and institutional reorganization of statals and parastatals; and, (5) a social agenda, whose central provision, the Social Development Fund, is designed to minimize the effects of austerity on vulnerable groups like the poor, the elderly, and children (Zimbabwe no date a).

To demonstrate the GOZ's renewed commitment to reform, the FER is used to outline a number of clear priorities, including the commercialization of some parastatals and the reduction of subsidies to all parastatals (statements on outright or widespread privatization are more muted). While the September 1990 plan had spelt out the OGIL only in skeletal form, the FER gives necessary flesh to the scheme by providing a timeline for its implementation and by spelling out some of its major elements, for example, import decontrol and expansion of the Export Retention Scheme (ERS) (Zimbabwe no date b). Under the FER, the OGIL is expanded to include a restricted and an unrestricted category, the former being a temporary measure to be liberalized incrementally through the life of the program. Initially, all raw materials are to be unre-

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stricted; in the middle years of the program, capital goods are also to become unrestricted; finally, consumer goods become unrestricted.

The FER also tackles the difficult issues of forex and trade liberalization. Tariff reform is slated to succeed foreign exchange allocation as the main mechanism of import restriction. Tariff rates are set to range from zero percent to ten percent for raw materials; five percent to ten percent for investment goods; and remain at ten percent to thirty percent, respectively, for intermediate and consumer goods (Takavarasha 1993; Gibbon 1995; Zimbabwe no date b).

ZIMPREST was unveiled late in 1996 with the expectation that its implementation would start in January 1997. However, as noted previously, its implementation began only in the beginning of 1998. This fourth stage of reform is designed "to consolidate the gains made during the first phase of reform, build on them, and use them as a springboard for the adoption and implementation of additional reforms" (Zimbabwe 1996, Foreword). Similar to ESAP, the primary goal of ZIMPREST is to facilitate economic growth and social development according to five agenda items: (1) the restoration of macroeconomic stability (for example, through low inflation, low interest rates, and stable exchange rates); (2) the encouragement of public and private sector savings and investments; (3) the pursuit of economic empowerment and of poverty alleviation through the creation of opportunities for employment and entrepreneurial initiative; (4) investment in human resources development; and, (5) the provision of a safety net for the disadvantaged. ZIMPREST is expected to complement and build upon the outcomes of its predecessor in a number of areas, particularly, a GDP growth rate of six percent per annum from 1996 to 2000 and a two percent annual increase in per capita GDP and consumption. To achieve these high rates of economic expansion, inflation is to be brought under control, infrastructural programs expanded, and as many as 422 000 new jobs created in the private sector (Zimbabwe 1996):

> ... between 1998-2002, the Public Service Commission wants the government to relinquish non-core business to the private sector, particularly to indigenous companies run by the retrenched civil servants.... There were about 190 000 workers

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> in the Services in 1990 when the first phase of reform started. Over the years the staff has been cut by nearly 22 000 to about 171 000 workers. The figure should ultimately be reduced by the year 2000 to 134 000 (*The Herald* 16 July 1998, 1)

An implicit assumption underlying both ESAP and ZIMPREST is that economic empowerment and poverty alleviation can be obtained through the market mechanism in a semi-developed market economy without fundamental social, cultural, and structural changes (Brand *et al.* 1995; Biljmakers *et al.* 1996; Bond 1998). This is a problematic assumption given that the process of indigenization, one of the mechanisms of redistribution, has been coopted by the political elite. As Bracking observes, "The Programme of Indigenization has been used for politically well-connected persons to enrich themselves" (1999, 222). With a minimal trickle-down of benefits to the broader masses, it is unlikely that widespread changes will occur in the interaction between society and the market. For instance, it is unlikely that retrenched civil servants (especially the cadre that will be retrenched) will have sufficient capital to invest in the indigenization of "non-core business" that the PSC expects to subcontract. Instead of redistribution and growth, therefore, what is a more likely outcome is growing regional and class disparities in wealth.

Regime Survival and The Return to a Welfarist Agenda

One important attribute that differentiates ZIMPREST from ESAP is its greater emphasis on welfare issues, for example, its emphasis on health expansion for the poor. While the FER had put welfare issues physically in an addendum, and that, reportedly, only after World Bank insistence (Dashwood 1996), expansion of the country's social welfare infrastructure is an integral part of ZIMPREST. Why did the GOZ move towards a more welfarist agenda from 1991, when ESAP went into effect, to 1998, when ZIMPREST was formally inaugurated? Answers to this important question could be found in the conjunction of the same external and domestic imperatives which guide economic reform in the country. External impetus from the IFIs may have emanated partly from their newly found accommodation for a slightly more welfarist state, and partly from their equally newly found respect for "development with a human face" (born of the widespread criticism of the social costs of adjustment).

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On the domestic front, regime survival during much of the 1990s has forced ZANU (PF) to pay more attention to the needs of the masses. A number of events that preceded or coincided with the inauguration of ZIMPREST suggest that large segments of the Zimbabwean population are disenchanted with the government's socioeconomic policies, if not specifically with ESAP. These events, examples of which follow, may have given the GOZ pause for serious contemplation about devising strategies to buffer the larger population from the most severe outcomes of economic austerity:

(1) In 1996, middle and upper level civil servants were awarded significant pay increases, while the minimum wage for all other workers was increased after massive popular outcry against these enormous pay raises for senior government officials.

(2) In the summer of 1997, in a bid to placate the War Veterans Association, the GOZ agreed to compensate war veterans (or their widows or widowers) with a lump sum of Z$50 000 each, lifetime pensions of Z$2 000 per month, and other benefits, such as free education for their children. This action was also designed to quiet criticisms that the lion's share of veterans' benefits have gone to party functionaries and their families, some of whom did not even participate in the liberation struggle. In 1999, prisoners of war also agitated for benefits similar to those of war veterans. This struggle was marked by street demonstrations in Bulawayo in July 1999.

(3) Also in 1997, as a result of student protest, the government agreed to increase the loan component of student grants from fifty percent to seventy-five percent. Since July 1998, a standoff between the students and the government has occurred over these issues.

(4) Again, in 1997, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of junior university staff in their salary and benefits case against the government so that the government had to pay them back salary and increases totaling several millions of dollars. On the positive side, this decision demonstrates that the rule of law is operational in the country and that ordinary citizens can take legal action against the government.

(5) Gasoline and sales taxes were increased in 1997 to provide revenues to cover veterans' benefits. Protests led by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) resulted in the repeal of both taxes.

(6) Perhaps the most serious manifestation of mass disenchantment with reform was the two-day food riots of January 1998,

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which ushered in the implementation of ZIMPREST. Riots broke out in several urban areas, becoming violent in Harare and Chitungwinza. The riots were sparked by a twenty-one percent increase in the price of maize flour, the basic staple, following increases totaling seventy percent in the preceding nine months. The GOZ rescinded the price hike and set up a three-panel ministerial committee to review food price increases. In defiance of this attempt at price control, millers increased the price of maize meal by an additional twelve percent, effective from June 1998. The GOZ reacted promptly to this move by announcing that "it was now going to gazette the price of maize-meal and other basic commodities" (*The Herald* 26 June 1998, 4).

Events such as those outlined above represent symptoms of wider discontent and help to explain the GOZ's greater affection for a welfare agenda in the present round of economic reform. Unfortunately, GOZ actions continue to target the primarily vocal segments of the urban population. The urban and rural poor are therefore being left largely to their own devices, while the gap between the rich and poor widens into an unbridgeable chasm (Bond 1998). The jury is still out on the effectiveness of this band-aid strategy of GOZ, which consists of placating specific segments of the population rather than setting the stage for more comprehensive, long-term welfare reform.

The Geography and Political Economy of Agricultural Production

Regional and Sub-Sectoral Agricultural Production

Rural communities in the communal agricultural sector are among Zimbabwe's most disenfranchised populations. In 1980, forty percent of the country's arable land was occupied by about 5 000 white farmers, compared to fifty-four percent by 800 000 black smallholders, and one percent by 8 000 black, small-scale commercial farmers (SSCF) (Rubey and Masters 1994). The allocation of land to each of these subsectors is determined by a classification of land into several natural regions (NRs) on the basis of potential agricultural production. NR1 (specialized and diversified farming) produces a lot of tea and coffee, two important export crops. NR2 (intensive farming) represents the country's "bread basket," accounting for over fifty-seven percent of national production by

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volume in most years; dominates in the production of nearly every commodity, including tobacco (the leading agricultural export) and maize (the domestic staple and important export); and accounts for seventy-six percent of the total area under arable agriculture in the country. NR3 (ranching, semi-intensive farming), NR4 (semi-extensive farming), and NR5 (extensive farming) are largely communal, arid environments, either specializing in non-critical crops or having very non-specialized land use patterns. Together, NR3 and NR5 typically account for only twelve percent of national agricultural production by volume and even less by value.

Zimbabwe's land use classification is underlain by racial and class distinctions, according to which white farms are typically located in the more fertile areas and have easy access to the requisite infrastructural support for large-scale, commercial production. Black farmers, by contrast, have holdings that are typically located in marginal zones and often lack the necessary support to improve their production and distribution capabilities.

The Politics of Agricultural Production

Although land distribution has improved slightly since independence, the related factors of race, arability, and access to inputs continue to be the primary determinants of regional agricultural output and productivity. Land in the productive agro-ecological zones is still heavily skewed in favor of the large-scale, commercial, mainly white sector (LSCS). Twenty-nine percent of the total land in the most fertile areas remains under the ownership of 4 660 white farmers (ninety-three percent of white farmers in the LSCS), compared to three percent by small-scale commercial farmers and forty-two percent, mostly marginal land, under the control of 1.1 million small-holders in the communal areas. The commercial sector consistently accounts for over two-thirds of the total value of agricultural production. For example, in 1990, one year before ESAP, the commercial sector accounted for seventy-five percent of the total value of agricultural production, increasing to ninety percent in 1992, one year after the program's introduction. In comparison, the communal sector accounted for twenty-five percent of production in 1990 but only nineteen percent in 1992 (Table 1). These performance differentials are perpetuated by the political choices which underlie GOZ policy. Specifically, there is

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Table 1: Total Value of Crop Production in the Communal and Commercial Sectors

Year	Commercial Sector Value (Z$ Thousand)	% of Total	Communal Sector Value (Z$ Thousand)	% of Total	National (Z$ Thousand)
1983	527 083	81.8	117 409	18.2	644 492
1984	721 053	80.1	178 595	19.9	899 648
1985	994 567	67.5	479 441	32.5	1 474 008
1986	1 093 565	72.8	408 865	27.2	1 502 521
1987	1 050 119	81.5	238 317	18.5	1 288 436
1988	1 219 358	80.2	301 210	19.8	1 520 568
1989	1 435 583	83.0	294 629	17.0	1 730 212
1990	1 851 352	89.1	226 990	10.9	2 078 342
1991	3 073 780	91.5	287 074	8.5	3 360 854
1992	2 253 556	96.7	77 700	3.3	2 331 256
1993	4 014 003	66.9	1 985 233	33.1	5 999 236
1994	6 760 477	86.8	1 026 040	13.2	7 786 517
1995	7 235 271	72.0	2 818 000	28.0	10 053 271
1996	12 541 874	89.0	1 547 800	11.0	14 089 674
1997	12 505 348	89.5	1 463 151	10.5	13 968 499

Source: *The Agricultural Sector of Zimbabwe: Statistical Bulletin* (March 1999). Policy and Planning Division of the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture, Harare, Zimbabwe.

widespread speculation that the key beneficiaries of land acquisition and agricultural development are black entrepreneurs who constitute the new political bourgeois class.

In an attempt to dispel views that it has abandoned its distributive efforts in agriculture, the GOZ used the FER to outline five priorities that deal with regional equity in the production and distribution of agricultural commodities: (1) liberalization to allow the trade of maize between non-contiguous communal areas without the GMB acting as "middle-man"; (2) liberalization to allow the flow of maize and other commodities from commercial to non-commercial areas; (3) liberalization to abolish price ceilings to allow regional price variations; (4) decontrol of the marketing of yellow maize, red sorghum, and millet, as a result of which farmers are free to sell in the open market and not necessarily to the Grain Marketing Board (GMB); (5) liberalization to allow private marketing channels for other commodities such as meat, coffee, cotton (Moyo 1991). Policy makers hope that these initial pillars of agricultural reform will be strengthened under ZIMPREST through facilitating the "access of small holders to farmer technology, infor-

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mation, finance and infrastructure.... A switch from pure subsistence to a balanced production is being encouraged" (Zimbabwe 1996, 22; see also Zimbabwe 1994a). The extent to which agricultural reform has succeeded in meeting some of its important redistributive goals may be discussed in terms of two sets of issues: constraints inherent to agricultural reform, and constraints that could be attributed to its implementation.

Agricultural reform in Zimbabwe contains the key ingredients of the traditional World Bank program, namely, price decontrol, the dismantling of statals and parastatals, and the elimination of government subsidies. After 1992, both the Grain Marketing Board and the Cotton Marketing Board lost some of their commodity monopoly as part of the reform effort to introduce a liberalized regime of interregional flows and price decontrol (Zimbabwe 1994b). Critics of agricultural reform (for example, Mupedziswa 1994; Stoneman and Thompson 1994; Zawaira 1993; Jayne and Chisvo 1991) argue that the absence of the marketing boards shifted much of the cost of liberalization to poor farmers who lack the sophistication and financial wherewithal to operate in a free market environment in which they face competition from both local and international bidders. This attribute of reform is criticized for perpetuating, rather than reducing, regional and class differences in productivity and income. Proponents of reform (Zimbabwe 1994ab) contend that small-scale farmers benefit from the reform environment by receiving the true market price for their produce, while obtaining valuable skills to operate in a broader, more complex market structure.

A number of interrelated trends suggest that the prognostications of critics have some validity (Rukuni and Wyckoff 1991; Takavarasha and Atwood 1993). The partial elimination of monopolies has brought in new actors (ranging from private industrial concerns to large organizations and individual small traders), thus creating new producer-buyer relationships. Many communal and small-scale, commercial farmers are unable to operate fully in a dynamic which involves sophisticated mechanisms such as the futures market, in which they are forced to sell to dealers who can out-wait and out-exchange them. Also, smallholders often have to settle for lower advance prices in order to discharge their daily financial household obligations.

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Contract cropping, another element of the liberalized agricultural environment, encourages peasant farmers to commit themselves to produce crops under conditions of extreme uncertainty, which are often characterized by the absence of formal contracts. During the 1995-96 season, for example, excellent rains resulted in an oversupply of maize, which translated into a twenty-five percent decrease in the incomes of small-scale farmers who had "contracted" to sell their output without having the wholesalers commit to a fixed price or price range (see Rubey and Masters 1994; Masters *et al.* 1996). In short, market liberalization of agriculture requires an efficient production system, an effective market structure comprised of informed producers and buyers, and a practical, operational distribution network. Unfortunately, Zimbabwe's economic reform makes the problematic assumption that policy declarations of economic liberalization, together with small doses of producer incentives, are sufficient to transform the production, distribution, and consumption components of agriculture. Experience has shown that this is not true. Agricultural reform is an unwieldy problem, and market liberalization, either in theory or in practice, is not a pseudonym for agricultural transformation.

In addition to the problems that may bedevil agricultural reform under the best of circumstances, the Zimbabwe program is also beset by a number of implementation difficulties related to domestic social and political conditions. While there is an emphasis on increased agricultural production for export, there has not been an equal emphasis on providing peasant farmers with the capabilities to engage in highly capitalized production. Strategists have not developed a method for linking a broadly dispersed smallholder sector with a highly centralized manufacturing and processing sector under a free market regime. Partly due to a lack of leadership and partly to a lack of understanding of the full implications of reform, smallholder farmer groups have been unable to assist their members to adapt to the new environment in an effective way. In particular, access to information on production (type of commodity) and marketing opportunities has not been provided for most smallholder farmers.

Agricultural reform can be found wanting even in the area of market liberalization, one of its highest priorities. For instance, price decontrol and the dismantling of parastatals have never been

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fully implemented. The GMB continues to wield considerable influence over the national maize market (Takavarasha 1992; Moyo 1991; Sithole and Atwood 1991; Masters *et al.* 1996). As late as 1998, government price control of both maize and maize meal was in force. Although producer prices for maize have increased during the reform period, the difference between the producer and actual selling prices has increased more dramatically and at a faster rate (Table 2). At the inception of reform, the producer price per ton was in the range of Z$180-195 and the difference between the producer and selling price was about Z$30. By 1992, the producer price had increased by fifteen percent over 1990 levels, but the selling price had increased by only seventeen percent during the same time period. By 1995, the midpoint of ESAP, the difference between the producer and selling price was Z$170, getting increasingly larger to reach Z$650 in 1998 and Z$400 in 1999.

Table 2: Producer Price and Selling Price of Maize

Year	Producer Price (Z$)	Selling Price (Z$)	Difference (Z$)
1983	120	137	+17
1984	120	137	+17
1985	140	157	+17
1986	180	177	-3
1987	180	222	+42
1988	180	222	+42
1989	195	222	+27
1990	215	245	+30
1991	225	305	+80
1992	270	360	+90
1993	550	690	+140
1994	900	1 070	+170
1995	900	1 070	+170
1996	1 050	1 680	+630
1997	1 200	1 550	+350
1998	1 200	1 850	+650
1999	2 400	2 800	+400

Source: Compiled by the authors from unpublished Grain Marketing Board (GMB) data, various years

The discrepancy between the producer and selling prices is symptomatic of an increasing bias against small-scale farmers who do not produce at the volume necessary to buffer themselves

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against the policies and activities of a powerful parastatal. The facts that the GMB continued to be so powerful well into the reform program and that the prices farmers receive continue to erode relative to the actual selling price of maize provide further evidence of the problematic nature of agricultural reform. Contrary to the objective of enabling peasant farmers to shift from subsistence to "balanced production," the GMB is taxing small-scale farmers and eroding their standards of living. The GOZ program of accommodation with vocal segments of the urban population must be held partly responsible for this reverse "Robin Hood" policy. Reluctant to tax the urban population to finance its strategy of regime survival, the GOZ has opted for the line of least resistance by taxing the less politically leveraged peasant producer population. Even some instruments ostensibly put in place to protect communal and small-scale farmers from the shocks of the market are now being used punitively. For example, despite assurances from administrators of the Grain Loan Scheme that seed loans payments would be required only in good years, peasant farmers are being called upon to repay their loans even after bad harvests.

It is not surprising that the LSCS has tightened its grip on agricultural production under these conditions. Prior to ESAP in 1989, the LSCS accounted for sixty-eight percent of the national agricultural output; by 1993, the midpoint of ESAP, its share had increased to ninety percent. During the same time period, the share of the communal sector dwindled incrementally, from thirty-two percent in 1989, to twenty-six percent in 1990, to nineteen percent in 1993. For much of the 1990s, the commercial sector completely dominated the production of export-oriented crops like yellow maize, tobacco, and wheat, as well as newer products such as horticulture, soybeans, and sunflower. In the meantime, the communal sector continued to be preoccupied with subsistence production. This trend is reflected in the data on Tables 3 and 4. Although the acreage given to commercial crops in the communal areas has increased for some commercial crops during the reform period, actual yields have declined in all cases. This suggests that while communal farmers are being encouraged to allocate land to export crops, they are not being provided with the requisite assistance to succeed in export crop production.

The politics of agricultural production — the emerging black,

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Table 3: Changes in Crop Area Planted by Communal Farmers pre-ESAP and ESAP Periods

Crop	Mean Area planted for pre-ESAP period (in ha)	Mean Area planted for ESAP period (in ha)	% change	% change per annum
Maize	1 056 125	1 045 133	-1.04	-0.15
Sorghum	162 200	135 813	-16.27	-2.32
Cotton Seed	145 550	192 384	+32.17	+4.60
Groundnut	164 995	138 900	-15.82	-2.26
Sunflower	92 645	130 533	+40.90	+5.84
Soyabean	2 808	3 325	+18.41	+2.63
Total	1 624 323	1 646 088	+1.34	+0.19

Source: Computed from data obtained from *Statistical Bulletin.* Central Statistics Office, Harare, Zimbabwe, various years.

Table 4: Crop Yield and Productivity Changes in Communal Areas

Crop	Pre-ESAP mean yield (1985-90) (kg/ha)	ESAP mean yield (1991-95) (kg/ha)	% change between the two periods	% change perannum
Maize	1 277.25	1 105.00	-13.49	-1.93
Sorghum	546.75	514.33	- 5.93	-0.85
Cotton Seed	794.25	662.67	-16.57	-2.37
G. nuts	477.25	445.00	- 0.73	0.06
Sunflower	498.25	426.67	-13.96	-1.99
Soyabeans	825.00	667.00	-19.15	-2.74

Source: Computed from data obtained from the *Statistical Bulletin.* Central Statistics Office, Harare, Zimbabwe, various years.

large-scale, commercial sector and its alliance with the established whites in that sector — must take some blame for the poor performance of the communal sector in export crop production. State and party officials who have acquired substantial amounts of land since the 1980s are often cited as the main beneficiaries of agricultural reform. Even farmers in cooperatives that have access to agricultural inputs feel disenfranchised under the reform regime because the enterprises are run like government, rather than community property (Raftopoulos 1992b). Agricultural reform in the sense of empowering peasant communities is handicapped, therefore, by the same set of political economy alliances that pervade the rest of the economy. In fact, given the volatility of the land question, agri-

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culture may turn out to be the arena of contestation to test the degree to which the alliance can survive, while stifling the aspirations of those outside its nucleus.

Food Security under the Reform Regime

Regional food shortages are integrally related to the distribution of land and access to inputs. As such, the phenomenon cannot be divorced from class food shortages. Regional food shortages can be traced back to the early 1930s. The drier NR4 and NR5, including the two Matabelelands, the Zambezi and Save valleys, and significant sections of Masvingo and the Midlands, have often had food shortages, even when the rest of the country reported bumper harvests. As Sachikonye observes:

> Starvation conditions existed amongst the Tonga in the Zambezi Valley region of Omay, amongst the Dema in Kanyemba, in Mberengwa, Mount Darwin and Rushinga, in Chivi, Zaka, Bikita, Ndanga and Mwenezi districts (all in Masvingo province); in Chipinge district in Manicaland, in Beitbridge, Tshitshi and Nguwunya areas in Matabeleland (1992, 88-89).

These regional-racial-class disparities persist today. The food poor, those dependent on food aid, are concentrated in Manicaland, the Midlands, and Masvingo, even though these are not the most heavily populated regions of the country (Jayne *et al.* 1991). Food aid is still a critical issue in Matabeleland South as demonstrated in the following anecdotal account:

> It is supper time and an elderly woman in Mapate village, Thabiso Ndlovu, sits with her family to have their only meal of the day which is sadza1 accompanied by water mixed with sugar. Another family is having sadza with leaves of a wild fruit, umthophi, while others in the village will eat the sadza with no relish. These are typical scenes in most villages in the drought-stricken Gwanda District in Matabeleland South province which has seen malnutrition rising and school dropouts increasing due to hunger ... In order to survive, most villagers have had to dispose of their livestock such as cattle and goats in order to buy food (The Herald 29 July 1998, 7).

During the 1990s, food insecurity has been further exacerbated by three important factors: high rates of inflation, high rates of unem-

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ployment, and the elimination of government food subsidies.

From 1991 to 1996, the consumer price index for lower income urban families rose by over six hundred percent, much of it attributable to the ripple effects of escalating food and transport prices. In 1990, when ESAP was introduced, the inflation rate was 18.6 percent. Although one of the primary goals of economic reform is to bring inflation down to single digits, it has actually increased quite dramatically, reaching stratospheric heights of forty-two percent and forty percent in the immediate post-drought years, before dropping to twenty-four percent in 1994.

Erosion in the standards of living, due to high inflation rates, has been exacerbated by high unemployment. The largest annual increases in employment occurred between 1988 and 1991, just prior to, and immediately following, ESAP. Subsequently, the employment rate has been very well below the pre-ESAP levels. Urban unemployment in Zimbabwe at the turn of the century ranges from forty to fifty-five percent. The prevailing high rates of unemployment are reflected in a number of ways, one of the most pervasive being the large number of high school graduates who opt for housework (servants and gardeners). The infusion of large numbers of unemployed into the ranks of the urban poor is manifested also in the burgeoning explosion of informal activities (both rural and urban), the swelling multitude of disguised unemployed and panhandlers, and the growing prominence of street kids in the country's major cities, especially Harare. The problem of unemployment, brought on partly by austerity, is highlighted in the following observation:

> ... As the country embarks on the second phase of economic reforms, union leaders are bracing themselves for another wave of work retrenchment similar to those under the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme when thousands of workers in various sectors lost their jobs.... If the trend continues, the unemployment rate could reach 60 percent by the year 2000 (The Business Herald 16 July 1998, 3).

The removal of government subsidies for basic staples is a third important factor that has had negative impacts on the food security of the poor. Prior to economic reform, state marketing and price control of agricultural produce, especially that on maize and maize meal, were effected mainly through a subsidy of industrial maize. In

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August 1992, the subsidy on super refined meal was removed. This action did not impinge particularly on the poor since super refined meal is consumed largely by the well-to-do. However, by June 1993, the government had dismantled the entire subsidy program on industrially produced roller meal and relinquished control of maize meal pricing to the market. Since roller meal is consumed primarily by the poor, this second action had a direct effect on their food security. Before the end of 1992, the retail price of roller meal had increased from Z$5.82 to Z$8.83 per five-kilogram bag. In 1998, the price of mealie meal more than doubled in four months from Z$13.20 to Z$29.7 per five-kilogram bag, an increase that has been attributed primarily to the removal of government food subsidies (Tevera 1997).

The combined effects of price increases and government removal of food subsidies are illustrated in the increasing price of basic staples (Table 5). To ground the discussion in context, it might be instructive to assess the implications of these factors for typical low-income and lower middle-income Zimbabwean urban families (the discussion is based on the unit price of items so that household composition and size become less relevant). The basic daily food basket for average low- income urban Zimbabweans (for example, janitors and cleaners, house servants, most street hawkers, and similarly employed low volume traders in the informal sector) is bread and a beverage or water (breakfast)) and *sadza* and vegetables (lunch and dinner).

Table 5: Price of Basic Food Commodities (Z$)

Year	Economy Beef ($/kg)	Mealie Meal (20 kg)	Bread (loaf)	Cooking Oil (750 ml)	Sugar (2 kg)	Milk (Fresh)
1990	-	-	0.65	2.52	2.17	0.95
1991	5.60	29.22	0.95	2.77	3.23	0.71
1992	6.50	15.20	0.99	5.37	5.65	1.05
1993	7.30	22.53	2.20	7.20	5.40	1.45
1994	11.90	20.00	2.60	8.99	6.85	1.80
1995	16.90	39.49	2.90	10.89	8.15	2.22
1996	20.00	54.90	4.60	14.00	4.92	2.90
1997	28.16	64.08	4.56	14.23	11.04	3.64
1998	31.58	98.09	5.68	21.56	13.43	4.55
1999	56.54	140.63	11.11	37.25	19.91	9.20
2000*	85.00	218.20	14.50	43.15	27.90	12.00

*January price

Source: Compiled by the authors

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The data on Table 5 indicate that the cost of this basic day's meal became increasingly more expensive through the 1990s. The price of bread for breakfast increased from Z$.65 cents in 1990 to Z$4.60 in 1996 (an increase of 607 percent). By 1999, the cost of a loaf had risen to Z$11; presently, the same loaf costs Z$14.5 (an increase of 2 100 percent during the decade). The cost of a basic lunch/dinner (even assuming home-grown vegetables and without oil or meat), also increased significantly over the period. The price of a twenty-kilogram bag of mealie meal increased from Z$29.22 in 1991, to Z$39.49 by 1995, to Z$54.9 in 1996. Presently (January 2000), a twenty-kilogram bag costs Z$218. Under these conditions, the cost of lunch or dinner for a typical urban poor person increased by over 1 000 percent from 1991 to 1999.

The food security impacts of reform on the lower middle class (for example, low level clerics, cab drivers, dressmakers, certain types of traders) has been equally devastating. The basic breakfast for this segment of society is likely to consist of bread and margarine, along with a beverage (coffee or tea) with milk and sugar. The cost of every item in this basic breakfast increased significantly during the 1990s. The price of bread increased by 2 100 percent during the decade. During the same time period, the price of sugar increased by 1 185 percent, and milk by 1 160 percent.

Increases in a middle class lunch and dinner have also been significant (assuming mealie meal, oil, economy beef, and home-grown vegetables). The price increase in mealie meal has been noted earlier. The price of cooking oil increased by 1 600 percent (from 1990 to 2000) and that of economy beef (low quality beef and bone) by 1 420 percent during the same period.

As general as these figures are, they demonstrate the increasingly serious nature of food availability for the urban poor. The problem is aggravated by two continuing trends. First, the ranks of the urban poor are multiplying in absolute and relative terms as a result of high unemployment and inflation rates; many in the middle class are being squeezed into a downward spiral of poverty. Second, continued austerity, along with persistent high inflation and interest rates, has the potential to translate into further food price increases, which will further reduce access to food for many people. In June 1998, in response to regular price increases by millers, which raised the retail price of a twenty-kilogram bag of

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roller meal to $98, the government gazetted maize-meal prices, setting the maximum wholesale price for a fifty-kilogram bag of roller meal at $212, $45 for a ten-kilogram bag, $23 for a five-kilogram bag, and $10 for a two-kilogram bag. Two months later, the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, which controls the price of most basic food stuffs, proposed price increases on several items: twenty-one percent (up by $1.32) for a loaf of bread, fifteen percent (up by $13 per kilogram) for maize meal, and thirteen percent for cooking oil. In July 1999, there was a two-week shortage of mealie and roller meals. When stocks reappeared in the shops, prices had increased by as much as twenty-one percent. Bread prices also increased by thirteen percent in August 1999, from Z$11 to Z$14 per loaf.

All of these developments spell imminent danger for political stability. In the meantime, the GOZ has been quick to point out that food insecurity is being caused primarily by white farmers who wish to destabilize the government, South African whites who wish to use Zimbabwe as an example of the bumpy path South Africa is likely to follow under majority rule, and, most of all, the series of droughts that occurred during the decade. These excuses quickly wear thin with a hungry population, forcing the GOZ to face the dilemma of determining how long to stay the course of market liberalization and party embourgeoisement without risking regime survival.

Environmental Crisis or Policy Misimplementation?

The GOZ and the World Bank (1995), admittedly to different degrees, have linked the limitations of agricultural reform to the 1991/92 drought, acknowledged by many to be the worst in the present century (McGary 1994). During the 1991-92 agricultural season, total rainfall was 335 millimetres, only fifty-one percent of the average annual total of 663 millimetres. Twenty percent of water boreholes and ordinary wells dried up, prompting water rationing in Bulawayo, Mutare, Chegutu, and Masvingo.

The drought affected the economy directly in a variety of ways. Total agricultural production declined by over thirty percent, influencing the availability of basic foodstuffs, especially maize, the production of which dropped by thirty-three percent in 1991. Even as late as 1996, maize production was only 362 000 tonnes, or about

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twenty percent of pre-drought averages. Regionally, the drought devastated agricultural production in Matabeleland North, Masvingo, the southern part of Manicaland, and several districts in the Midlands. The most afflicted regions are located primarily in NR 4 and NR 5, which traditionally suffer from poor agricultural output and crop shortages. The government District Development Fund, taxed to its very limits by drought-related demands, could not provide subsidized tractor tillage for the peasant sector, which was encumbered by a dearth of draught animals — over a million cattle, about twenty-five percent of the national herd, perished. Cattle deaths, which reached fifty percent and forty percent in Masvingo and the Midlands respectively, prompted a serious decline in rural milk production and consumption, contributing to malnutrition in some communities. Health and food problems were compounded by cost increases that were sparked by widespread beef shortage.

The commercial subsector was not spared from the economic crisis. The cost of both mechanization and fertilizers increased significantly immediately following the drought. During the last of three fertilizer price increases, compound fertilizer prices went up by 14.8 percent and nitrogen fertilizers by 12.2 percent (*The Herald* 6 June 1996). The combination of the drought and the rising cost of inputs precipitated sharp declines in the production and export of major crops such as maize, sugar, and tobacco.

The effects of the drought on agricultural production had ramifications for the whole national economy. Even as late as 1995, manufacturing output continued to be merely a fraction of previous levels (1995 output was fifteen percent below the previous year's). The worst hit industries were those of textiles and clothing, which had shrinking national and regional demand partially brought on by drought-induced income contraction. Total exports dropped by US $1 785 million in 1991, and the cost of industrial imports rose significantly following devaluation in the second half of that same year. Consumer spending declined by twenty-five to thirty percent from January to July 1992. These circumstances are held to be responsible for sabotaging GDP growth, which fell by 7.7% in 1992.

Critics of the government argue that the GOZ wishes to abdicate its failures to an environmental crisis. According to this view, at one level, a case can be made that the drought is not merely an

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act of God that is divorced from policy. Indeed, policy strategists should have incorporated the probability of a serious drought into their planning calculus. That they failed to accommodate a "worst-case" environmental scenario in their projections is, first and foremost, a policy oversight. Other criticisms along these lines suggest that the anemic performance of both agriculture and manufacturing are due to the government's anti-reform proclivities and to macroeconomic factors which predate the drought (Gibbon 1995; McGary 1994; Sachikonye 1992). The GOZ's claims of success are derided according to the following arguments: tighter money supply was implemented only under significant World Bank pressure; the devaluation program remains a bone of contention with the World Bank; the dissolution of key parastatals is progressing rather slowly; and land reform, a critical requisite for the redistribution of agricultural resources, has not been effectively addressed. Continued high import duties for inputs, the slow rate of reform of tariff structures, and high nominal interest rates should be attributed not to the drought, but primarily to the government's wider agenda of self-aggrandizement and self-preservation. Government policies directed at protecting the interests of the political elite, it is argued, would have colluded to strangle the reform effort under the best of environmental circumstances.

Can the Effects of Reform be Sugar-Coated?

Whether the difficulties associated with reform ensue primarily from the drought or from the government's economic strategies does not minimize their impacts on overall standards of living. Nevertheless, both the World Bank and the GOZ express satisfaction with the reform effort. Both contend that, despite the impacts of the drought, the economy is "on track," albeit on a rather bumpy road, and that a significant number of objectives have already been achieved:

> A system of open general import licensing, covering 15 percent of imports, was established and the export retention scheme was increased to 15 percent of export earnings to provide additional incentives to exports and license-free imports.... The government accelerated its program of fiscal reform by adopting a budget that aimed to reduce the deficit from 10.7 percent of GDP in fiscal 1991 to 7.1 percent of GDP

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in fiscal 1992 — a target that could not be met because of the need for extraordinary financing to counter that year's severe drought. Initial steps were taken to liberalize marketing and pricing and the Labour Relations Act was amended to formalize a transparent and quick mechanism for retrenching labour (World Bank 1994, 86).

The GOZ points to the stringency of its recent budgets as evidence of its renewed dedication to reform and takes credit for establishing mechanisms to tighten money supply, liberalize interest rates, and devalue the Zimbabwe dollar, steps which, it argues, have encouraged investors and accelerated the production and export of non-traditional exports such as textiles and horticulture. The GOZ's optimism rests on its conviction that "despite a mammoth task lying ahead and a gloomy picture painted by economic pundits, the second phase of the economic reforms laid a strong foundation for the resuscitation of most affected sectors" (*The Herald* 17 July 1998, 6). The elements of this "strong foundation" include the introduction of the value-added tax, reduction of the civil service, and "improved relations between the government, the IMF and World Bank, the implementation of ZIMPREST and the establishment of the National Economic Consultative Forum," the latter representing part of the government's effort to improve the collection of revenues (*The Herald* 17 July 1998, 6).

Critics of reform dispute the government's claims with some of the same arguments that they use to dismiss the drought question. They contend that the benefits of reform, if any, have been minimal, and that some of the major objectives of the program continue to be elusive. The IMF has broken ranks with the World Bank to join with those who view the performance of the program with skeptical guardedness. The Africa chief of the IMF has, in fact, suggested that reform has faced two fundamental problems: first, its conception has not included proper consultation with all the social and economic actors in the country; and second, its implementation has suffered from a distinct urban bias, which threatens to institutionalize and perpetuate rural-urban inequalities. According to the IMF, these problems have been aggravated by the "stop and go" measures of a government which lacks the political will to implement full reform. To underline its displeasure with the pace of reform, the IMF withheld disbursement of the final

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tranches of its loan, making unusually candid public statements about the government's increased foreign balance to non-capital outlays. Although some of these funds have since been released, the IMF maintains that for full disbursement to be implemented, the budget deficit should drop to 5.5% of GDP and inflation should be brought below twenty percent. The IMF has softened its position, however, and released the last of the funds in July 1999.

Other critics have been more scathing than the IMF in their assessment of reform. Hawkins argues that inflation, money supply growth, real interest rates, public sector borrowing, and growth of the civil service (including the cabinet) have been alarmingly high. He therefore concludes:

> Structural adjustment is not going to be made more palatable or more saleable by turning a blind eye to its shortcomings, by confining the debate to the politically correct few, and by shutting out those who dare to point out that the Emperor is as naked as the day he was born (1995, 36).

Concurring with these views, Mupedziswa (1994) argues that GDP has grown only marginally during the reform period, export receipts have been eroded by devaluation, and only three percent of Zimbabweans have experienced improved standards of living. Tevera (1997) alludes to a widespread erosion of quality of life, observing that the health sector has suffered significantly as public spending on social programs decreased by as much as fifty percent from 1991 to 1996. The Social Dimensions of Adjustment Fund, set up to minimize the impacts of reform on the poor, has had minimal success (Chisvo 1993; Lowenson and Mupedziswa 1996). This is partly a result of the fact that an initial government outlay of Z$20m has been seriously undermined by inflation rates, the high incidence of HIV/AIDS, and the drought, none of which were taken into account when the fund was established.

Up to this point, the government's reaction to the economic woes of its different political constituents seems to be guided by the philosophy that reform can, indeed, be sugar-coated — if not for everyone at the same time, at least for some, some of the time. Unfortunately, the strategy of giving with one hand to one sector or segment of the population, while taking away from another sector or segment of the population, even though politically expedient in the short term, has the potential of leading to long-term inflation,

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heavier government borrowing, increased taxation, high interest rates, and economic instability. Cumulatively, GOZ attempts to sugar-coat reform may make the "pill" more bitter and more difficult to swallow in the future, kindle popular disenchantment with the program, and conflagrate long-term unrest. These outcomes will become more probable as the gap between rich and poor increases and will be aggravated by the perception, real or imagined, that the benefits of market liberalization, for example, the growing horticulture industry, are being enjoyed only by white farmers and a small group of influential blacks.

No Economic Reform Without Land Reform?

The GOZ's efforts to avert widespread political disgruntlement are unlikely to succeed unless it confronts the vexing issue of land reform and resettlement. Unfortunately, land reform is complicated, has the potential to resurrect racial hostilities, is seriously embroiled in constitutional legalities, and touches at the heart of the new alliances within the political economy. Perhaps, above everything else, land was the rallying point of the liberation struggle. As such, the GOZ cannot afford to avoid the issue without risking serious consequences for its power base. Again, the party is faced with a serious dilemma. On the one hand, the GOZ has an interest in protecting the newly acquired assets of the emergent black bourgeois class and stabilize its reconciliation with the old white elite. On the other hand, it cannot be seen to collude with whites against the people who fought in the liberation struggle. The GOZ thus finds itself caught in a difficult position, in which it now plays both ends against each other, while trying to stay at the center. For instance, it blames the slow pace of land reform on constitutional difficulties, noting that Section 16 of the Constitution is designed to protect whites by requiring government to pay adequate compensation promptly, and, in the case of loss of land or right or interest, the compensation has to be payable in foreign currency at the option of the expropriatee (Raftopoulos 1992b). Although this constitutional requirement was modified through the Constitutional Amendment Bill (no.11, December 1990), the GOZ maintains that the constitution still hampers its efforts to redistribute land by making the program cost-prohibitive.

To placate mass discontent over the slow pace of land redistribution, in late 1997, the GOZ unveiled a plan to secure millions of

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hectares of commercial lands (1 500 properties) to be redistributed to communal farmers. A list of properties was published, and commercial farmers had up to 30 December 1997 to appeal the inclusion of their property on the list. This plan has not generated sufficient external support to make it financially viable. There are speculations in some quarters that the GOZ expected this international response but that it wished to be seen doing something in order to placate the rural population. There are claims also that the process is not transparent and, similar to earlier rounds of land acquisition, only highly placed government officials are likely to benefit if the program were to be actually implemented.

In the meantime, disgruntled peasant farmers are taking events into their own hands by "reclaiming" and resettling adjacent commercial farmsteads. The GOZ, recognizing that a hard approach would be risky, has adopted a strategy of reconciliation with the squatters. Government statements express support for the desire of the farmers to obtain land. However, government policy is to protect the commercial farms by using local party officials to persuade the peasant farmers to leave the farms and seek legal recourse for their grievances.

The GOZ's approach to the land question has been further complicated by the success of the MDC, especially in urban areas, in the 2000 elections. The GOZ is trying to convince its traditional rural and ethnic constituents that the MDC is a cover for the protection of white-farmer interests and is being financed by foreigners who wish to continue to exploit Zimbabwe. War veterans have seized upon this government stance by forcibly occupying some white farms. The ZANU (PF) party has encouraged such moves either implicitly or explicitly, and has made public proclamations of the need for white farmers to turn over land to peasants. This renewed interest in the land question is seen by many observers as a strategy by ZANU (PF) to counter MDC popularity and to recapture popular support on the eve of the forthcoming (2001) presidential elections.

Conclusion

In assessing the relationships among economic reform, agricultural production, and urban food security in Zimbabwe during the 1990s, this article concludes that the major goals of agricultural reform have not been realized: regional trade liberalization has been diffi-

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cult because an effective marketing infrastructure has not been established; agricultural parastatals continue to play a significant role in the distribution of commodities; price control is still in place at several levels of the food distribution network; and the sector is still marked by significant (if not increasing) regional and inter-sectoral differences in production capabilities and output.

The shortcomings of agricultural reform can be attributed, on the one hand, to the interconnected agendas of the Zimbabwe state and the IFIs and, on the other, to the effects of a serious drought. Where one effect begins and the other ends is difficult to say with any certitude. However, it is clear that each of these three major actors in the reform effort has left its imprint (though to varying degrees) on the initiation, implementation, and outcomes of the process.

Agricultural reform, as conceived by the IFIs, has placed much emphasis on "trickle-down" processes without ensuring adequate provisions for engaging the peasant sector in successful market reform. For example, the minimalist state formula of IFI reform has encouraged the GOZ to dismantle parastatals without establishing a suitable alternative framework to guide the peasant sector in the transition to full market production. Further, the Social Dimension Fund has failed to achieve its main objective of buffering the peasant sector from the initial effects of austerity, partly because it is undercapitalized and partly because neither the IFIs nor the GOZ has treated it as an integral part of the reform agenda.

GOZ strategies aimed at self-aggrandizement and regime survival have also played a central role in the outcomes of the reform effort. Economic reform was initiated by the GOZ when the Zimbabwean economy was quite robust, largely in response to market advocacy by party members. Although there were some who had genuine confidence in the market, the decision to implement market reform was guided also by the selfish motivations of those who believed that the free market system was to be preferred over a socialist system to preserve and expand their new capital assets. In the pursuit of capital accumulation by the party and its officials, an alliance was formed with old, colonial capital and the IFIs, which represent the interests of external capital. The agenda of this coalition of capitalist interests has been inimical to the welfare of the larger Zimbabwean population in three ways.

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(1) The welfarist program of the early state has been abandoned, and welfare concerns are addressed only as Band-Aid solutions to sporadic threats to regime survival.
(2) As part of the process of individual and party embourgeoisement, many development initiatives, including those in agriculture, tend to benefit mainly members of the ruling party or their relatives.
(3) Land reform, the rallying call of the liberation struggle, is proceeding slowly, partly because of financial difficulties, but also because the GOZ cannot afford to threaten commercial agriculture, which is a central ingredient of the new alliance.

In the decade or so since economic reform was first implemented, inflation and unemployment have reached dangerous levels and the gap between the rich and poor has become increasingly more profound. Party embourgeoisement, state predation on many productive assets, and the marriage between domestic and foreign capital interests have all colluded to contribute to the collapse of the welfare agenda of the early state. The result is reflected, among other things, in food insecurity. In all cases, the prices of basic food items have increased by more than one thousand percent since the start of economic reform. The population of the urban poor has increased to alarming levels as a result of high rates of unemployment. Unemployment, together with high inflation rates, has eroded food security to the point where many basic food items are becoming inaccessible.

The drought is blamed by the GOZ for many of the woes of economic reform, especially those connected with agricultural production and food security. Yet nearly a decade after the drought, the macroeconomic conditions that ushered in ESAP persist, and even to a worse degree. In the meantime, the activities of the state have become increasingly more detrimental to the survival of the larger population. It is uncertain how long the state can stay the course and secure temporary reprieve by capitulating to the demands of small, vocal groups over specific issues. At some point, conditions will dictate clearly that even the selfish interests of regime survival are likely to be better served by new alliances whose actions reflect more engagement with the long-term, comprehensive needs of the larger population.

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Notes

[1] *Sadza* is corn meal cooked into a thick paste; it is eaten with vegetable relish and meat in a typical Zimbabwean meal.

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