



# Livelihoods after Land Reform in Zimbabwe

## Working Paper 4

Confronting Water Challenges in a Micro-Irrigation  
Scheme in the Umzingwane Catchment of  
Zimbabwe

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June 2010

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## Working Paper Series

The land reform that has unfolded in Zimbabwe since 2000 has resulted in a major reconfiguration of land use and economy. Over 7 million hectares of land has been transferred to both small-scale farm units (the A1 model) and larger scale farms (the A2 model). The land reform has had diverse consequences, and there is no single story of what happened and its implications.

The Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex, UK), the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS, University of the Western Cape, South Africa), the African Institute for Agrarian Studies (AIAS, Harare), the Centre for Applied Social Sciences Trust (CASS Trust, Harare) and the Ruzivo Trust (Harare) came together to support a small grant competition aimed at generating new case study insights based on original and recent field research by young Zimbabwean scholars. The aim was to bring together solid, empirical evidence from recent research in the field. There were over 70 applicants, and 15 small grants were offered. The result is this Working Paper series. All papers have been reviewed and they have been lightly edited. In all cases however they remain work-in-progress.

Today policymakers are grappling with the question of ‘what next’? How can a new agrarian structure be supported, and a vibrant rural economy be developed? Yet such discussions are often taking place in a vacuum, with limited empirical data from the ground and overshadowed by misperceptions and inappropriate assumptions. We hope this series – together with the wider research work being undertaken by our organisations and partners – will help to enhance policy making through a solid evidence base.

As these papers clearly show, there have been highly varied impacts of the post-2000 land reform: on rural livelihoods, on agricultural production, on markets and the economy, on farm workers and employment, on the environment and on institutions and governance arrangements, for example. And these impacts have played out in very different ways in different places. These papers cover a range of themes and offer insights from across the country.

They add up to a complex picture, but one that offers key pointers for the way forward. They counter the excessively pessimistic picture often painted about Zimbabwe’s land reform, yet highlight important failings and future challenges. We very much hope that they are widely read and shared, with the insights made use of as Zimbabwe charts its way forward.

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**The small grant competition was coordinated through the Livelihoods after Land Reform research programme ([www.larl.org.za](http://www.larl.org.za)).**

# Summary

This paper is based on a case study of the Potbury Farm Resettlement, one of the few civil society-supported resettlement initiatives in Matabeleland South. An international organization, the International Organization For Migration (IOM) funded the initiative which was implemented by Help Age Zimbabwe (HAZ). The study found that livelihood improvement had stalled. This arose from the fundamental inability of settlers to identify and mobilise the much-needed resources to run the irrigation scheme. In order for land reform to ultimately deliver, there must be changes in the roles of the state, NGOs and the beneficiaries themselves. All the three players in land reform must abandon or revise their traditional roles. The state's role must shift to facilitating and coordinating development, rather than simply providing land. NGOs must shift from initiating their own programmes and imposing these on 'beneficiaries' to working with local people and contexts. In turn, the role of settlers must shift from passive 'beneficiaries' to active partners in development, designing development options more suited to local circumstances. Only with such changes, will the full benefits of land reform be realised.

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# Acronyms

AGRITEX	Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services
CASS	Centre for Applied Social Science
GMB	Grain Marketing Board
HAZ	Help Age Zimbabwe
IOM	International Organization For Migration
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
PISC	Potbury Irrigation Scheme Committee
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front Party
ZINWA	Zimbabwe National Water Authority

# Introduction

Land reform has historically been regarded as a vehicle for improving livelihoods. This is one of the reasons former colonial states in Africa and Latin America have carried out land reform and resettlement upon independence. In Zimbabwe at least, an internationalized land reform that is qualitatively different from the market-based reform of the eighties is still underway (Moyo et al. 2004). This process has seen government seizing over 4324 farms from white commercial farmers (Utete 2003). This untidy process which saw nearly 350000 farm workers losing jobs (Magaramombe 2004), has in part been driven by the conviction that land is the basis for development, at whatever scale. The land reform process is seen as dynamising livelihoods, which is why it is believed that it generates tension among social groups (Marongwe 2004; Wels 2003; Moyo 2000).

The concern for livelihoods saw Zimbabwe settling landless peasants. There were, contrary to what policy assumed, multiple and contesting authorities involved in land distributions. These authorities included government departments, war veterans and chiefs (Marongwe 2008; Mamimine 2003). The lack of coordination in land allocation made it difficult to know the precise number of beneficiaries. Some reports indicate that over 135 000 households had been resettled by mid 2003 (Utete 2003). Of this number, over 6226 households were settled in Matabeleland South. These were settled as A1 farmers. Another 171 households were settled as A2 farmers with land size sometimes up to a 1000 ha. The A1 is effectively an expanded communal resettlement format. The A2 model is intended to produce an indigenous elite participating in the economy and politics of the country. In Matabeleland, as everywhere in the country, the unemployed and any other person who joined the state-orchestrated-protest for land (Marongwe 2008; Buckle 2002) were rewarded with settlement in any one of the above two models.

For reasons relating to justified intolerance, Zimbabwe's recent land reform remains dark and poorly understood and scholarship is still far from knowing not only what took place on the resettled farms but what exactly obtains in terms of the challenges to improve agriculture. The recent shaky political compromise between the then ruling ZANU PF party and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has provided an unprecedented lull of peace, allowing new research to assess the livelihood performance of the reform programme and accumulate knowledge on land reform and livelihoods generally. What is more, policy makers and bureaucrats are anxiously waiting for such studies with a potential to give viable direction to their intervention. From every angle, then, research is overdue, and this present study responds to the challenge.

Building on ongoing WATERNET-funded research work to identify and develop an appropriate institutional model for water resource management in the Umzingwane Catchment of the Limpopo Basin, and drawing from an ongoing study on water resources and decentralization by one of the researchers, this study seeks to understand the challenges new settlers meet in trying to get land reform to work for them, first and foremost. The paper focuses on those irrigation-based water challenges encountered by settlers, the livelihood-based impact of those challenges and a variety of strategies that these adopt not only to improve irrigation but to improve their own lives as well. Its observation, expectedly preliminary, is that settlers are yet to experience changes in their life situation.

This observation is hardly new, because the isolated studies done to date seem to indicate this. What is novel is the second part of the observation, namely, that the stall in livelihoods improvement arises from the fundamental inability of settlers to identify and mobilize the much needed resources to power

the irrigation scheme. More concretely, the former squatters and other vulnerable belong to another world and they lack the resources to engage in modern irrigation such as past landowners engaged in. On the basis of this observation, the paper reflects on what it considers to be the critical or outstanding issues that require attention in order for land reform to better deliver in such circumstances. As well, the study reflects on research priorities and directions capable of mediating this effective delivery of land reform.

The paper is based on a single case study, the Potbury Farm Resettlement, one of the few civil society-supported resettlement initiatives in Matabeleland South. An international organization, The International Organization For Migration (IOM), funded the initiative which was implemented by Help Age Zimbabwe, (HAZ) an old people's organization affiliated to the London –based Help Age International. In terms of research methods, the research is based on rapid but intense primary field visits to the Potbury Resettlement Scheme, unstructured interviews with IOM, Help Age, senior government officials and beneficiaries based at the scheme. The paper is also based on the review of obviously biased reports and minutes supplied by Help Age and IOM staff. These were used because they provided an insight into the scheme's history and assumptions. As observed earlier, it also draws from earlier institutional and gender work, by the Centre for Applied Social Science (CASS), around water in the Umzingwane Catchment of the Limpopo Basin. Throughout the paper, the study uses false names to protect informants from possible state recrimination.

## **Potbury Farm and its new beneficiaries**

Located in Matabeleland South, Potbury measures about 5000 hectares of land. It lies along the Zvishavane - Mbalabala highway and is roughly 65 km from the city of Bulawayo. The farm is dry and hidden from the overpopulated Umzingwane Communal lands. Potbury was formerly owned by a white commercial farmer who left the property. The owner, a Mr. Dunckworth, fled in 2001 following the invasion of his property by the indigenous people. The farm did not meet acquisition criteria.

A small town, Esigodini, is the centre for administration and is where the District administrator's and Council offices are located. These two institutions uneasily share the control of houses on the deserted farm. It is also where the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) which levies water used at the farm is based. Government agricultural staff operates from Gwanda, a mining town further south, although the Potbury extension worker is housed at an adjacent deserted farm.

Before 2000, which is before the land reform period, the farm specialized in crop production. Because of the limited rainfall, crop production was via the medium of drip irrigation. A perennial river, Umzingwane, supplied water to the overnight storage facility which then distributed water to all parts of the arable land on the farm under vegetables. In addition, the farm also specialized in livestock production. At its height, the farm employed 100 people.

By 2009 when the researchers first visited Potbury, the farm was run down. Windows and doors were broken down, the fence was broken and the farm infrastructure was in a state of disrepair. But the farm seems to have been originally well-endowed with good infrastructure because even as early as 2004, its infrastructure took the attention of visionaries. The Board members of HAZ were impressed by the Potbury site which they said "had a good infrastructure suitable for outdoor life and had the potential of

generating income as a leisure spot”<sup>1</sup>. Tourism visions arose from the existence of the two elevated Victorian farm houses that were the official residence of the Duckworths. Even among Non-Governmental Organisations, the image of the farm as a site largely for irrigation was and remains largely lost.

When the owner fled to Bulawayo, paving way for the acquisition of the farm as resettlement land, Potbury farm workers were scattered all over the region. Even those who had been in charge of the water works, a delicate component of irrigation, were expelled from the farm, and were together with the owner, politically prevented from returning on the farm even when the High Court reversed its designation a year later. The majority of the farm workers, returned to their rural home. Some of them turned themselves into precarious gold panners along the Umzingwane River, leaving the property under the control of 28 new settlers retrenched from the mines and farms, some far afield. All the 28, claimed to be war veterans.

For the International Organization for Migration, IOM, the sparsely populated land represented an opportunity to settle old people – mostly foreign labour migrants working on farms and mines roundabout<sup>2</sup> - from the neighbouring countries and now squatting at Trenance and Cabatsha, 10 km west of Bulawayo city. For that reason, it contracted Help Age Zimbabwe, as a local implementing partner. The implementing partner had no experience or expertise in land reform resettlement, and had a dominant interest in shelter and domestic water provision. For this reason, it targeted the elderly who were over 60 years as beneficiaries of the land reform project at Potbury. Over a long period and through a process that endeared the beneficiaries to the implementer, twenty-three (23) households, from Trenance and Cabatsha, were identified and settled at Potbury farm in 2005, becoming the second layer of beneficiaries to the long-term settlers – all with no experience or interest in farming. Initially and for reasons relating to its long term mandate, HAZ wanted an exclusive project targeting the elderly. In fact HAZ assured the former squatters that they were the chosen few. Later, and perhaps on account of political pressure, HAZ curiously dropped the exclusive focus on the former squatters, expanding the resettlement project to include the 28 migrants who after all were vulnerable, having been retrenched from mines round about. In total, the settlers numbered 51, with 19 female headed households.

The two dominant social groups - the Potburians as we have recklessly called them - did not like the idea of residing together. The former squatters identified by HAZ on account of old age regarded the 28 settlers as potentially threatening their spoils from a loving donor. The 28 long term migrants opposed the elderly for increasing competition over land as well as over handouts<sup>3</sup>. The inescapable conclusion is that even the common condition of landlessness could not be the basis of a new community requiring cooperation in respect of challenges hindering the success of Potbury.

IOM provided ‘shelter-fund’ which the implementing partner, HAZ, used to construct 2-roomed flats for each household. Shared toilets were put in place and a borehole was drilled to ensure access to clean water. The Potburians were also given starter packs which included maize seed, wheat, vegetables and fertilizers. Each settler was allocated half a hectare for crop cultivation and access to water the above crops.

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<sup>1</sup> HAZ subcommittee meeting held in Bulawayo, 14/12/04.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mike, Bulawayo, 5/10/2009.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Mike, Bulawayo, 5/10/09

It must be stressed that, the donor and the implementing partner had no interest in production, but rather the decent relocation and settlement of people through the provision of modern housing and proper sanitation. Their beneficiary selection and the flats they built against the overwhelming need for irrigation rehabilitation reflected these two partners' ideological concerns and priorities. Unfortunately, the stress on vulnerability as a condition of settlement meant that the scheme was hamstrung, from its birth, by lack of internal resources to deal with challenges overwhelming the scheme. This is the subject matter discussed in the section below.

## Challenges: getting the scheme to work

Perhaps like other schemes in Matabeleland, Potbury is overwhelmed by challenges. Even leading officials from government shook their heads as soon as the name was mentioned. 'One does not know what to do with that tragedy' remarked a senior officer dismayed by lack of progress on the farm<sup>4</sup>. But what exactly is the challenge or challenges faced by members of this once vibrant farm which by the 1950s had made a name for itself in colonial agriculture. And what is the impact of this challenge in respect of production?

Ultimately Potbury challenges are about how to make the scheme deliver water in ways that guarantee independent livelihoods to the now 51 households. Put in another way, the challenge is really about getting the water system to work in ways that enable production of food and cash crops. As pointed out earlier, the old farm was irrigation based. An aquifer on the Umzingwane River supplied water to the various blocks on the scheme. But since 2006, the settlers have not been able to consistently irrigate for a single season. The sprinklers donated by HAZ remain idle and unutilized, as the various storage facilities strategically located on the farm. In 2009, settlers were able to harvest over twenty tones of maize, but this was because the area received generous rainfall. Otherwise, the settlers have not been able to irrigate crops, supply homesteads with water and provide water to the various paddocks. All this happens in the context in which water still flows and the aquifer remains intact, although the uncontrolled gold panning poses a future risk to the water body.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Ndlovu, AREX, Gwanda, 26/9/09



**Figure 1: Potbury's unutilized aquifer**

At present, Potbury Irrigation scheme cannot be sustained because the water system is constantly breaking down. In early 2009, the main pump ceased, leaving the scheme with very little hope for water. The second pump which distributes water to the night storage is always leaking, and in fact loses the bulk of water through leakage. Finally the pump that supplies water to various blocks is constantly breaking down on account of high water demand. According to AGRITEX staff, the constant break downs make it useless to continue maintaining the pump: 'they break down every three days that is if you are lucky'<sup>5</sup>. The HAZ technical advisor also added that 'the pumps cannot sustain a full circle'. Then, the underground pipes are constantly bursting, and can't work one single circle. Sometimes the motor develops problems and when it does, 'the whole scheme is without water of any kind'.

Repairing the water pumps is not easy, because there is no longer a mechanic, the old and resident one having been chased away as part of 'cleaning the farm of retrogressive forces' against land reform<sup>6</sup>. In rare circumstances, a bush mechanic from Gwanda or Filabusi comes to repair the faulty equipment, which usually takes days to fix. Otherwise the equipment must be lifted to the nearest town, Bulawayo,

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Zinyemba, Potbury, 5/10/09

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mike, HAZ, 5/10/06.

where there are professionals. Both options, which are resisted by Potburians often cost them between R3000 to R5000. Ordinarily, and by any standards, any farming business operation should be able to meet this cost. Potbury circumstances are such that settlers cannot get the challenges fixed. 'We can't get the irrigation to work' remarked a settler, adding that it is impossible to do so'<sup>7</sup>.



**Figure 2: Potbury's dry overnight storage tank**

The observed 'impossibility' arises from fundamental factors. The major problem is that the cost is not easily manageable to the old and vulnerable Potburians lacking alternative sources of income. According to settlers, 'Potbury is a place of unemployment and there is no green (US dollar or foreign currency) here'<sup>8</sup>, which is 'why people must live on the offending handouts from HAZ and government'<sup>9</sup>. The available money is understandably directed to those activities contributing to immediate hunger alleviation. 'You just have to choose whether to contribute to the pump maintenance or buy food for your family'<sup>10</sup>. Matters are made worse by the fact that the settlers cannot afford the cost of hiring a

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Nqwababa, Potbury, 26/9/09

<sup>8</sup> Interview with settler Mlauzi, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>9</sup> Interview with settler Mlauzi Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>10</sup> Interview with settler Maurene, Potbury,6/10/09

qualified pump minder neither is any of them mechanically minded. Water pumps and motors' remain mysterious gadgets 'beyond our capacity to understand or repair'<sup>11</sup>.

Explanations or stories about why the pumps in particular are not functional reveal hidden and political interests among respective social groups involved in the scheme. These explanations are not, and should not be taken, as mere statements of observed reality. Wishing to shield themselves from the usual charges of poor planning and bureaucratic bungling manifesting themselves in dysfunctional equipment, technical staff that is linked to government blame the antiquated nature of the equipment. 'These pumps are not repairable, because they belong to the museum'<sup>12</sup>. To be sure, the equipment is old, and there is one that is over 20 years old. But by stressing on its antiquated nature, and deemphasizing the fact that these worked well under the control of the previous owner, the technical staff diverts attention from their bureaucratic ineptitude and bungling of the resettlement process. Whether the diversion achieves the intended effect and cause settlers to change their view regarding them, it's hard to say. Similarly, wishing to draw attention from their obligation and responsibility to maintain the pump, Potburians blame the cost of the equipment or its repair. Potbury leadership complains that the parts for the equipment are charged in foreign exchange which is difficult to access. 'Where do we get the foreign currency from if farming is not taking place'<sup>13</sup>, charged Mrs. Moyo, the scheme Chairperson. They also drew attention to the high repair costs, which they said were, and until recently, confusingly fluctuating. 'Last time we were charged R2000, where does one get the sum of money', remarked Tshabalala<sup>14</sup>. Sure, R2000 is a big sum of money, and more so for people without any financial resources at their disposal. But it is as if the problem is merely with mysterious and uncontrollable economic forces; in other words, it is as if the problem is with the market rather than with them as proprietors or managers of the farm. Such a view is political, because it provides them with some form of security that they are not wrong. It also endows them with the unusual courage and boldness to collectively locate and confront whom or what they consider as the culprit, the villain or the invisible witch. Their liability is conveniently tugged away. As in the case with technical staff, explanations are clearly an attempt at responsibility deflection. The explanations qualify, as discourse of a kind.

However comforting to their proponents, explanations have not and cannot help the situation at hand; the needed water remains in the aquifer, and as indicated earlier, unintentionally conjuring and reinforcing among passers that the farm can easily qualify as a place for nature-based tourism. Adjacent to the aquifer, and as far as the eye can see, the irrigable land remains inexplicably dry, and without water. In fact from 2006, the scheme has not been able to sustainably water a single season; 'The system is sometimes on standby' remarked one outspoken woman in her 50s. 'Sometimes it's on and other times it is asleep'<sup>15</sup>. As indicated earlier, the notable harvest in 2009 was purely a result of good rainfall for that year, not irrigation. Crops wilt, and equipment lie idle. 'I do not think that the new sprinklers have tasted water', remarked one settler regarding the waste. But what is the impact of this on the settler and his agriculture? This matter is examined, briefly, in the section that follows.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with settler Ndhlovu, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Zinyemba, AREX Bulwayo, 6/10/09

<sup>13</sup> Interview with settler Moyo, Potbury, 1/9/09.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with settler Tshabalala, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>15</sup> Interview with settler Moleen, Potbury, 1/9/09

# Water challenges and the impact on agriculture

Because production remains low, the farmers cannot raise income to buy inputs. In the circumstances, they have to rely on donations from two sources. Firstly they turn to the state. In 2008, seed maize was advanced to them under 'Operation Maguta' a military led agricultural program meant to improve food security by emphasizing the production of traditional small grains which are draught resistant. As with most government support in rural Zimbabwe, the promised input comes late, sometimes a season late, in which case the only sensible thing the settlers do is to either sell or consume it where it is edible. Nevertheless the support invariably and inevitably entangles settlers in relationships they can't easily withdraw from. For example the beneficiaries who were given maize seed in 2006 were expected to repay at the end of the season and market their produce through the government. This is why one old settler described the support as 'extortion of a kind'<sup>16</sup>. The settler had these sentiments because, usually the prices government offers for their produce are low and payment comes late. Thus, even the external agricultural support designed to complement farmer's resources, does not dynamise household agriculture in ways that contribute to water abstraction.

The second source for inputs is HAZ, the implementing partner. Since 2005, the settlers have turned to HAZ for Compound D fertilizer. In November 2006, Potbury irrigation scheme received Compound N for that season. That year, each farmer received 25kg of top dressing which according to the HAZ technical expert 'combined with predators to contribute to the significant reduction in scheme yield'<sup>17</sup>. The settlers claim this to be the basis of why they can't raise, and will not be able to raise, the required revenue to get the water system working again'. 'It's a catch 22', remarked the village head, 'how do you break out?'<sup>18</sup>

Clearly and based on what informants said, Potburians are facing serious financial and organizational problems which render it difficult for them to mobilize enough money for the repair of water infrastructure. This has resulted in the scheme grinding to a near halt. Still, there is a conviction among most Potburians that the farm is a far better place than being elsewhere; that something must be done to make the new place home for them. For the former squatters and homeless retrenches, the scheme represents a place where they can retire in dignity, in the comfort of a home and not in 'patches of metal and plastic sheets'<sup>19</sup>. There is collective, though uneasy, desire to ensure that water problems are fixed, and fixed for good. The next section looks at the non agricultural and institutional strategies that settlers have taken in order to rehabilitate the water system.

## Local responses to water challenges

The strategies to get the water system working fall into two categories. The first category involves settlers looking towards and experimenting with external helpers. The second category is inside looking, and involves settlers exhausting their own resources. These strategies are described separately.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with settler Zulu, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mike, HAZ, 5/10/09

<sup>18</sup> Interview with settler Ndhlovu, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>19</sup> Interview with settler Mlilo, Potbury, 6/10/09

## External assistance

In a bid to get the pumps and motors working and solve the water crisis, Potbury settlers typically look to outsiders. They look up to government and nongovernmental organizations.

### *Looking to government: working through institutions*

In order to facilitate communication with government, the settlers as in other irrigation schemes throughout the country, have patched themselves into a collectivity headed by what is called the Potbury Irrigation Scheme Committee (PISC). This has been rather difficult because, in spite of their common language, Potburians share diverse backgrounds which according to the secretary of the scheme, 'makes us many people'. Coalescing together is deliberate, and is seen as allowing communication without ambiguities. 'Multiple voices are confusing, its noise to government' remarked a committee member on the importance of grouping together. Similarly, the settlers think, rather correctly, that grouping simplifies communication with government. The government, as the village head constantly repeats, can address people, through a committee. In order to dialogue effectively with government, Potburians therefore organized themselves under PISC.

The chairperson of the committee who is married to a local businessman and now renting one of the Victorian farm houses appears to be the only farmer of note. The rest of the membership are former squatters, including the very powerful and organized secretary, Tshabalala. To avoid conflict, and facilitate coordination, the PISC has co-opted the village head who is one of the founding settlers. 'He is the father', noted Tshabalala, 'and he must be in everything'<sup>20</sup>.

It is this grassroots leadership that Potburians have sent to urban places, to see if government can assist with water pumps and motors. In 2006, the committee approached the Member of Parliament for 'a brand new pump'. In 2009, the committee sent their representative to the Gwanda-based provincial leadership so they could have pumps for their scheme, 'just like Guyu scheme further down'<sup>21</sup>. A year before, in 2008, the committee was dispatched to the Reserve Bank's Operation Maguta, again at Gwanda, to ask for the same support.

It must be pointed out that, for most of the time, the relevant government departments do not always respond to these institutional demands in a manner locally expected. Promises, comfort and apologies are often what settlers get. The Member of Parliament for example, is said to have apologized for the situation and vowed that he would henceforth tackle the issue of the pump as a matter of urgency<sup>22</sup>. Officials at Maguta comforted the people that their needs and the irrigation scheme generally were considered urgent. AGRITEX staff reportedly promised to link up settlers with service providers. Where state institutions vary the rule, and indeed provide something to the settlers, it is noteworthy that the resources provided are not always inappropriate. Often the resource is something that the state has in abundance and for which it is under obligation to give out. The urgent request for a new pump made to the Reserve Bank's Maguta was met with a brand new Holland tractor, now parked at the Chairperson's premises for security. It is possible that in due course the tractor would be put to some use, possibly used for tillage and general transportation in the scheme. What the settlers wanted, and still want, is

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Tshabalala, Potbury, 26/9/09

<sup>21</sup> Interview with settler Moyo, Potbury, 6.10/09

<sup>22</sup> Interview with settler Phiri, Potbury, 1/9/09

equipment 'assisting us to draw water for irrigation from the river'<sup>23</sup>. Similarly when the settlers prevailed on Maguta officials for two water pumps in early 2009, they were pleasantly surprised to receive tones of wheat seed. Unable to comprehend the logic of intervention, and besieged by hunger because of a non functional scheme, settlers did what other rural people do, namely put the wheat to consumptive and other related uses, much to the horror of the government officials. 'But what else could we have done?' is the usual response one gets from the settlers when asking them why they ate the wheat seeds. But to turn to another component of external support.

### *Looking to NGOs*

Through their grassroots leadership, Potburians also target Non Governmental Organisations. This targeting has a logic, and follows from the locally held conviction that, the state's role in agriculture can never be dependent upon. It has also followed from a realization that everywhere else, NGOs are supplanting, if not taking over the function of the state. Thus, the same request for a pump was delivered by the settlers, through their committee, to HAZ. When the motor broke down and the faulty pump could not even work, the committee was dispatched to HAZ in Bulawayo.

Whilst the NGOs represented by HAZ have often responded, and faster than the state, the support given is also not always appropriate. The request for a new pump for example was immediately met by a 7 day workshop on good irrigation management. The training, hosted at one of the Victorian farm houses, was prolonged, spanning 5 days, from 8 to 430pm and covering various modules that included Budgeting, Marketing, Irrigation types, Crop Management and Leadership. It was as if the problem was not the faulty pump needing rehabilitation or replacement, but rather people's understanding and management of irrigation. Similarly, when the scheme leadership asked HAZ for a replacement of another booster pump which had irreparably broken down, its request was met by a tiny 10 HP pump. The pump was not appropriate because from the first day, it succumbed to pressure and could not deliver the required water. 'What was needed', admits one of the technical advisors from government 'was a 25 HP'. Otherwise you can't water even a single block'<sup>24</sup>. The point is that non-governmental organization responses are not always appropriate, which raises the question why?

It could very well be that HAZ is also financially constrained to provide the required and up to standard equipment for the scheme which may be expensive given that the organization relies on donations from well wishers. It could also be the case that the NGO is under pressure to do something rather than nothing at all. Related to this, it maybe that the organization is involved in symbolic gestures: that the gifts it provides, represents a largeness of heart. All these could very well be explanatory. A more likely – perhaps probable- explanation is that the intervention proffered reflects programming and priorities of the service provider, rather than local needs. HAZ is an old people's organization, and mechanizing agriculture is not one of their interests or business. Agricultural pumps and motors are good investments, but this is not IOM or HAZ's precincts. Whatever the case, the result is inappropriate support which does not help the water situation at all. Thus, baffled by NGO inappropriate response and frustrated by government's predictable ineptitude, the expectant settlers look at each other in search of what may work to get the visible water onto the irrigation blocks. This takes us to the second category of strategy to get water.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Tshabalala, Potbury, 1/9/09.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Zinyemba, AREX, Potbury, 6/10/09

## Internally-focused approach

As the last section suggests, externally focused approaches have rarely worked; they have yielded depository forms of interventions; these are interventions in which inappropriate equipment is deposited in the scheme in line with organizational programmes rather than local needs. This form of intervention causes frustration among both settlers and leadership. This is why increasingly settlers turn inward focused strategies or local solutions. We have classified these strategies into two categories: the settler squeeze approach and the localized structural adjustment approach.

### *(a) The settler squeeze*

In the first category, settlers try, where possible to raise money to repair the water system by 'squeezing themselves', a process mainly opposed by former squatters. Thus Potburians in 2007 contributed money in local currency to get their leaking pump repaired. It is not clear how much money they were able to raise, but when they finally did, the price for repair had risen dramatically and their savings fell far short of the required cost. Again in the first half of 2008, farmers passed a resolution to raise 100 rands from each household for use in getting the pumps working again. Some settlers, it is reported, sold their household effects to raise the required money especially the old former squatters who neither had cattle, goats nor chickens to cash in on<sup>25</sup>; most settlers made arrangements to pay in grain, a contribution that the leadership welcomed. Though the money raised was so little, because the prices received for grain (from the Grain Marketing Board) was so little that it did not make a difference, what is clear is that Potbury does supplement external and formal support with self reliance based on a brutal but mutual squeeze of its members. Brutal because some settlers had to dispose of blankets, the only possessions they had.

### *(b) Localized structural adjustment*

The second category of local strategy is predicated on the assumption that 'settler squeeze' has its own limits. It is based on the assumption that it is not possible to expect, still less demand, the elderly, the poor and former squatters to suddenly raise the foreign currency needed for any maintenance or capitalization work relating to Potbury Scheme. It is also based on the understanding that, the scheme is rich in natural resources and that by manipulating people's relationship with these resources, especially water and land, they can get the equipment to work again. Whether this is informed by structural reforms taking place in other schemes, or whether it is action of last resort, this is much difficult to say. What is fascinating and informative is that it reflects the creativity of settlers to deal with a fundamental problem of how one can get the vulnerable to resource themselves. This strategy is clear from the 'big man and the pump' case described below.

#### **Big man and the Pump**

In 2008, realizing that they could not raise the required \$ US4000 to get their system running, the leadership summoned people to reflect on other strategies. Ideas were thrown in the air and one gained dominance. Nobody remembers who originated the idea, but it was proposed that settlers give up part of their land, a thin flat belt that runs parallel to the river and a few yards from the main pump station. It was also proposed that settlers defer their priority rights to water crops to any such person as would help fix the water system. Some people, mostly the elderly, objected, saying that it would result in landlessness as land would pass to the service provider. Other people recommended that efforts should be made to contact HAZ, sensitizing it to the plight of the settlers and the

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with settler Ndhlovu, Potbury, 6/10/09

danger of an impending demise of the scheme. Such a view was considered better and workable, because 'HAZ would not want to see its efforts going down the drain', according to one settler. For days, the proposals were debated, at the local churches, at beer parties, at funerals. 'It was a hot topic, like the Government of national unity (GNU)<sup>26</sup> recalls one settler. So in June 2009, the proposal was put as a resolution to the general assembly, resulting in its adoption. The next task was to identify the business partner. The partner turned out to be a Mr. Moyo, the husband to the scheme chair which gave confidence to the settlers that the deal would not disadvantage them as the wife was a trusted member. Mr. Moyo agreed to repair the pump on the good condition that he would be allowed additional land from the scheme which all members would help to create. He also indicated he wanted to be accorded priority in watering the crops, should the pump be either repaired or replaced, whichever was possible. And so in July 2009, Mr. Moyo took the pump to some unknown place. 'We do not know exactly, perhaps Bulawayo, perhaps Filabusi; we do not know', mourns Ndlovu, a committee member<sup>27</sup>. Four months later the pump is still not returned. Whether the pump will return and when it will return remains shrouded in mystery as the question around its present location.

This local strategy, evident in the case study, may work to get water. This is because of the range of incentives that in the end accrue to the service provider. But it is likely that the deal will also take much more than it gives, and this will become clear perhaps at the stage of implementation. In many resettlement contexts where big men interface with smallholders, disenfranchisement almost always surfaces (Chereni 2007). Invariably, and paradoxically too, such disenfranchisement is facilitated by the patron's claims to assist the stranded smallholder. And so, it maybe that the Potburians will, in the unfortunate event that the pump returns in good order, have their fingers burnt by this strategy of last choice. They may, as their premonition warns them against, entangle themselves in processes ultimately disenfranchising them of both water and land rights. But whether it turns out that way, and one hopes it doesn't because settlers have nowhere to go, it is very useful to see this local strategy as evidence of Potburians' intense imagination and will-power to work out solutions independent of both the state and civil society, both of which have evidently transformed Potbury into a depository of inappropriate intervention and technologies.

To summarise the section, through their institutions, the settlers have tried to get the water systems working again. They have approached both public and private players for assistance. Although reflecting their imagination and ingenuity, strategies adopted, whether local or otherwise, have not as yet produced any fruit. As a result of the persisting challenges, the whole enterprise, loftily-conceived and donor supported, is slowly grinding to an unexpected collapse. Already the little harvest is by way of rainfall, which is erratic in that region. The result is chronic poverty reflecting itself in aid dependency. From 2004, the new settlers have largely survived on food handouts. 'We gave them cooking oil, meat and beans in early years' confirmed the HAZ project officer. 'Now that we are no longer funded, what will happen to these people?'<sup>28</sup> In the last section below, attention turns to the livelihood activities that Potbury settlers turn to in order to survive in this very difficult place.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with settler Lumumba, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>27</sup> Interview with settler Nkosi, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mike, HAZ, 5/10/09.

# Livelihood strategies and failed schemes

In the last section it has been intimated what external supporters are doing to mitigate hunger. HAZ has donated food packs to the settlers. In addition and perhaps increasingly more important than this external resource and support to livelihoods, the Potburians themselves have adopted a number of internal strategies.

In their choice of survival strategies, settlers have not picked things as they come. Rather they have been typically guided by their own experiences and capability. They have been forced to consider those livelihood strategies whose performance is practical and viable within their own circumstances and environment. Thus, only former squatters have turned to the production and sale of what locals call (*tototo*). This is a fast selling illegal beer of extremely high alcoholic content that is brewed especially in slums and squatter camps. 'It is a cursed beer', noted a war veteran in support of its toxicity. The settlers do not just engage in the production and trade of beer and drugs. Most importantly they also engage in its consumption, individually or collectively. HAZ officers have reported this growing trend, which they say make them doubt whether there is a future for these former squatters<sup>29</sup>.

For their part, the long term residents who are comparatively fit have turned to resource extraction guided by their experience, knowledge and ability. Thus, they have turned to the fuel wood trade, hunting and gold panning, all arduous practices that only a fit person can do. Their market has typically been the Local Township and motorists plying the busy Beitbridge highway. Other times, daring settlers 'target Bulawayo as a market for bush meat and firewood'<sup>30</sup>. These are underground economies and we may never know how much they contribute. Settlers are more interested in the uses to which the income is put, rather than how much they get from a disallowed activity. Some settlers use income from the trade 'to order goods for resale in fast places'. Fast places are those locations where social change is rapid, and these tend to be gold panning places. Tuck shops, precariously patched from papers and tin, now dotted in every place where panners are active or socialize in between their activities. Potburians like Tuck shops because 'these are our Bulawayo'<sup>31</sup>, that is, places where the luxury goods from the city of Bulawayo can be found.

Although they are different in terms of the way they are organized and the resources upon which they trade, these activities share two common characteristics. The two are frowned upon by the private sector and civil society. HAZ officials described the rampant use of wildlife and panning as 'primitive acts' and 'dangerous to the environment'<sup>32</sup>. Secondly, and to the state, the activities are illegal and attract jail terms for defaulters. The conclusion from this is that, because they are not supported by civil society and private sector and because they attract persecution from the state, these activities provide precarious livelihoods and can never be depended upon for sustainable livelihoods. Because settlers fear imprisonment for defaulting, most settlers would rather maintain a low profile, extracting as much as they can but not enough to bring them closer to danger. Settlers likened this to 'living like a rat in the

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Mike, HAZ, 5/10/09

<sup>30</sup> Interview with settler Movern, Potbury, 26/9/09

<sup>31</sup> Interview with settler Mlilo, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>32</sup> Interview with settler Mlilo, Potbury 6/10/09

cat's world'<sup>33</sup>. One settler Mover added, 'You can't operate visibly, lest you are sent to college'<sup>34</sup>. Clearly, and in spite of what is generally said about them, these strategies can only support insecure livelihoods.

Strictly speaking, these two spheres have soft boundaries. There is a possibility of long term settlers adopting illegal beer brewing as livelihoods; indeed the researchers came across one case of a young man (from the 28 households) drinking carousing *Tototo* in the company of former squatters. Similarly, limited cases where able bodied former squatters engage in gold panning have been reported. For the most part however, these economic spheres have remained very much separate. The different groups have cherished and encouraged the apparent boundaries. Long term settlers value their dominant activities, because these are 'not associated with drunkenness and immorality as is the case with the *tototo*'<sup>35</sup>. They accuse former squatters of prostitution, trouble, theft and uncontrolled noise 'such as one finds in squatter camps'. For their part, the former squatters look down upon gold panning as an 'activity and sphere of hopelessness'<sup>36</sup>. They say that those practicing panning are so 'dirty and prone to risk and danger' and that practitioners 'can die in a pit, any time'<sup>37</sup>. They state, with reckless abandon, that these panners are 'warthogs', - dirty and filthy. All this assignment of sphere and identity has implications for the scheme and the challenges that people face.

By emphasizing differences, the settlers make it difficult for themselves to cooperate over common concerns. Good ideas about how to tackle water issues as well as strategies are dismissed because they originate from a different camp. Thus, former squatters have opposed openly, the idea to have each household contribute some money for the maintenance of the scheme<sup>38</sup>. They argue that, it is an attempt by the 28 households to further impoverish them as well as work out a reason for finally disqualifying them out of the scheme. For their part, the long term settlers have deliberately left out the former squatters in some of the activities, saying that they are a useless lot from which nothing else can be expected<sup>39</sup>. It is true that some squatters drink heavily and that some have at times refused or better still, been unable to provide required labour because of drunkenness. These incidents however, sometimes provide the 28 settlers with an excuse for not engaging the former squatters in matters affecting the scheme.

## Conclusion

In this study, we have shown that resettlement dynamics in Matabeleland South are intricate given the diverse backgrounds of the settlers and their ages. HAZ and IOM came together in a land reform project that has seen the movement of people from, among other places, squatter camps to an irrigation-based farm. The newly resettled farmers continue to face enormous challenges around getting the water system to function. Conventional attempts to resolve the problem through state and NGOs support have not been helpful, giving rise to local complementary strategies which include self reliance and some localized structural adjustment. These local strategies have not, until now, been successful, which is why settlers now turn to illegal and dangerous activities for sustenance such as illegal brewing and selling of

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with settler Movern, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>34</sup> Interview with settler Movern, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>35</sup> Interview with settler Ncube, Potbury, 6/10/09

<sup>36</sup> Interview with settler Phiri, Potbury, 26/9/09

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Phiri, Potbury, 26/9/09

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mike, 5/10/09

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mike,HAZ, 5/10/09

local beer and gold panning which could end them in prison or even cost them lives. What does the study say about livelihoods and land reform, in general? How can land reform, involving the state, the private sector and beneficiaries, deliver livelihoods in Southern Africa and beyond?

In order for land reform to ultimately deliver, there must be changes regarding the roles of the state, NGOs and the beneficiaries themselves. All the three players in land reform must abandon or revise their traditional roles which although comfortable and easy to do, have hitherto failed to make meaningful difference to local livelihoods.

In regards to the state, its role must shift from that of an eternal warrior delivering land to that of facilitating and coordinating development. Facilitation could take the role of identifying service providers that can respond to settler needs in appropriate ways. It could mean maintaining an oversight role in resettlement scheme, ensuring that all arrangements and linkages to help settlers do not end up as full blown disenfranchisement, as might shortly befall Potburians in the hands of big men.

In regards to the NGOs such as HAZ, the role must shift from initiating own programmes and imposing these on 'beneficiaries', to that of being a listener- worker. This is important because it is only in listening to voices from below that ideas for good programming congeal. It is arguable that, had HAZ listened to local people, it would have modified its programming to ensure that the bulk of funding did not go to urban style houses but rather to the rehabilitation of the water system. It would also have resulted in the delivery of pumps that work for irrigation contexts rather than for domestic use.

With regards to the settlers, it is important that their role shift from that of being 'beneficiaries' to partners of NGOs and the state in social change. To date, a sleeping partner, the settlers must adopt the role of personally searching for solutions that can better contribute to production. There is another benefit from this change of role: when they seize unto themselves the right to identify and develop solutions, the result is appropriate and relevant intervention. By delegating the role of service provision to outsiders, Potburians transformed themselves into depositories of technologies without immediate relevance to livelihoods.

This tripartite reconfiguration of roles is arguably the missing dimension in land reform. Without it, what remains is land without livelihood improvement, at best, and disenfranchisement of settlers at worst. This has some important implications for the focus of research and policy. Rather than concentrate research on proving that land reform is necessary or that it is not performing, the more useful way of looking at the matter is to concentrate on how this tripartite reconfiguration of roles can actually be done. How might this role change be brought about? What are the challenges towards this change? Will NGOs find this easy? Will the state accept any role transformation that subtracts its power? Are settlers sufficiently endowed to assume the role of partners in resettlement? These questions are frighteningly many and equally challenging, but they must be confronted by research if land reform does not end up as a vehicle that (re)creates settlers into panners and poachers of the countryside.

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