

# **Land Reform and Agricultural Development: Zambia versus Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

*This article examines the impact of the land reforms undertaken in Zambia and Zimbabwe on agricultural development. The Zambian land reform of 1995 has led to significant improvements in agricultural productivity and output since the early 2000s, allowing for a rising GDP and hopes that such growth will be redistributed across the education and health sector. In Zimbabwe, the land reform of the 2000s led to economic dislocation, a phenomenal drop in total agricultural output, an uncontrolled inflation, a rising debt obligation to foreign nations, and an overwhelming loss in resources as political conflicts sparked violence.*

## **I. Introduction**

At the time of independence, both, the Republic of Zambia (henceforth Zambia) and the Republic of Zimbabwe (henceforth Zimbabwe) inherited a distribution of colonial land ownership that was biased towards the white political elite. Zambia, which became independent in 1964, underwent three land reforms: first, the enactment of the 1970 Land Acquisition Act (which aimed at nationalizing land held by absentee landlords), second, the 1975 Land Act (which basically converted all land to statutory leasehold), and third, the 1995 Lands Act (which aimed at stimulating private, including private foreign, investment).

Zimbabwe, which officially gained independence in 1980, had only one land reform, which was initiated with the signing of the Lancaster House Agreement in 1979. The Lancaster House Agreement required that the government had to wait ten years before instituting land reform. Hence, though it was possible to sell and buy land under the so-called ‘willing seller, willing buyer principle’ before the 10-year waiting time, consistent with the Lancaster House Agreement, President Robert Mugabe started to implement a controversial land redistribution (the so-called fast-track resettlement program) in February 2000. The primary goal of Zimbabwe’s land reform was to transfer land ownership, rather than increasing agricultural productivity, as large commercial land owned by whites was redistributed to black smallholder farmers (Myers and Ames, 1984).

This article examines the impact of the Zambian and Zimbabwean land reforms on agricultural development in the two countries. Following this introduction, the next section provides a brief literature review, followed by some empirical background about the two countries. The fourth section examines the impact of the Zambian and Zimbabwean land reforms by analyzing the evolution of a) the share of agriculture in GDP, b) the value added by the agricultural sector, c) land productivity, and d) exports and imports of agricultural products. Following this analytical section follows then a descriptive section that tries to explain the outcomes as analyzed in the fourth section. The last section provides some conclusions.

## II. Brief Literature Review

There are many publications that have covered the land reforms in Zimbabwe or Zambia; particularly Brown (2004), Myers and Ames (1984), Ng'ombe (2010), and Tekere (2003). Nyanga (2012) provides research related to the development of the agricultural sector in Zambia. A variety of news article, like from AllAfrica<sup>1</sup> and Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)<sup>2</sup>, provide historical background as well as the present state of the agricultural, educational and political sectors in both countries.

- Brown (2004) describes the implementation of the 1995 Land Act in Zambia and explains how the conversion of customary to leasehold land tenure has led to social and economic exclusion, intra-community conflicts and elite capture. Brown's research demonstrates that many factors have caused the market-based land reforms to benefit local elites and foreign investors instead of the poor Zambian villagers. These factors include a weak administrative capacity, limited human, financial and technological resources and competing authorities at the local level. Such forces, amongst others, have allowed elites and government officials to pervert the administration of land distribution. As a result, Brown claims that the land reform has failed in redistributing land to the poorer peasants and stimulating investment and productive smallholder agriculture.
- Myers and Ames (1984) provide a historical overview of Zimbabwe's land policy reforms (until the article's publication date). They explore the contributions these reforms have made to the nation's agricultural productivity and economy. The article also describes the growth and eventual success of the European commercial agricultural sector and contrasts that with the decline in the traditional African agricultural sector. The article concludes that Zimbabwe needs to preserve the commercial sector and further develop the traditional agricultural sector. Myers and Ames also hint that the ongoing land policies, which saw some dilution of the 'willing seller, willing buyer principle, were replacing white rulers with an African elite, once more excluding the poorer majority. They present the viewpoint that rural poverty in Zimbabwe can only decrease if changes are made to the institutions and class relationships that the country inherited from the colonial era.
- Ng'ombe (2010) is critical about the achievements of the 1995 Zambian land reform. He mentions that the conversion of customary land tenure to leasehold tenure is attracting huge interest from governments and the development agencies as they consider this conversion to triggering investment and facilitating economic growth. However, Ng'ombe (p. 12)

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<sup>1</sup> AllAfrica is a voice of, by and about Africa; available at: <http://allafrica.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) is the humanitarian news and analysis service of the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/>.

concludes that “these reform proposals will continue to be frustrated by those who feel that traditional forms of holding land are still relevant especially to those communities who consider farming to be a way of life and not a business”. Ng’ombe also provides a useful overview of the various land reforms of Zambia.

- Nyanga (2012) conducted research from 2007 to 2010 to analyze the impact of conservation agriculture upon food insecurity. The paper claims food insecurity is caused by failures to promote research for improving agricultural productivity, to fund rural development and infrastructure, to provide access to education, technology, training services and a reliable and equally accessible food market. The research concludes that adopters of conservation agriculture are more food secure than non-adopters among smallholder farmers in Zambia.
- Tekere (2003) provides a detailed Zimbabwe case study for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), focusing on the implementation experience of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture, but also covers issues related to Zimbabwe’s land reform.
- Finally, news articles by Lewis (2013) and Crawford (2013) discuss the current economic state of Zimbabwe and give an historical background into Mugabe’s legacy and land reforms. These news articles describe the inhumane violence and political repression of Mugabe’s government and reach the conclusion that the land reforms would have been successful had the state provided more support, secure titles and cheap capital. Currently, Mugabe’s government is described as refraining from further radical actions since Zimbabwe’s current economy is on the brink of collapse.

### **III. Empirical Background**

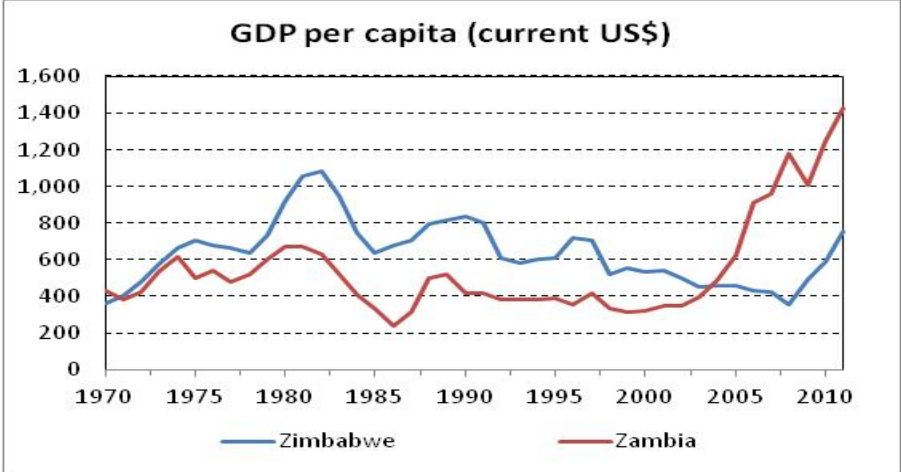
Zambia is a land-locked Southern African country. Before gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1964, it was the protectorate of Northern Rhodesia. Agriculture is the main provider of employment, occupying more than 70 percent of the working age population. Mining has provided a major part of the country’s income and wealth; yet this source of revenue has proven unreliable as it is subject to volatile market prices. Maize is the main cereal produced in Zambia and while it is second to copper in economic value, it is more valuable socially and politically as it represents 65 percent of per capita consumption (Nyairo, 2011).

Zimbabwe faces similar challenges as Zambia. It is also a land-locked country, which achieved de jure sovereignty from the United Kingdom in April 1980, following 14 years as an unrecognized state under the white minority government of Rhodesia. Agriculture is also the main source of employment, but Zimbabwe has experienced significant declines in its net food balance and agricultural productivity, and is only beginning to recover from a long period of declining GDP per capita.

Given that there is no data for Zimbabwe’s GDP per capita in international dollars, Figure 1 provides GDP per capita in current US\$ for both countries. While both countries started out with GDP per capita of about \$400, that of Zimbabwe grew faster in the early decades, especially during the late 1970s. However, both countries experienced sharp declines in their GDP per capita during the early 1980s. While Zambia’s GDP per capita remained relatively stable during most of the 1990s, Zimbabwe’s declined gradually, though with some volatility. The big diversion of the two

countries in terms of income per capita happened during the last decade as Zambia took off, while Zimbabwe continued to deteriorate for most of the 2000s. By 2011, Zambia’s GDP per capita reached US\$1,425, while Zimbabwe’s was recovering to US\$757.

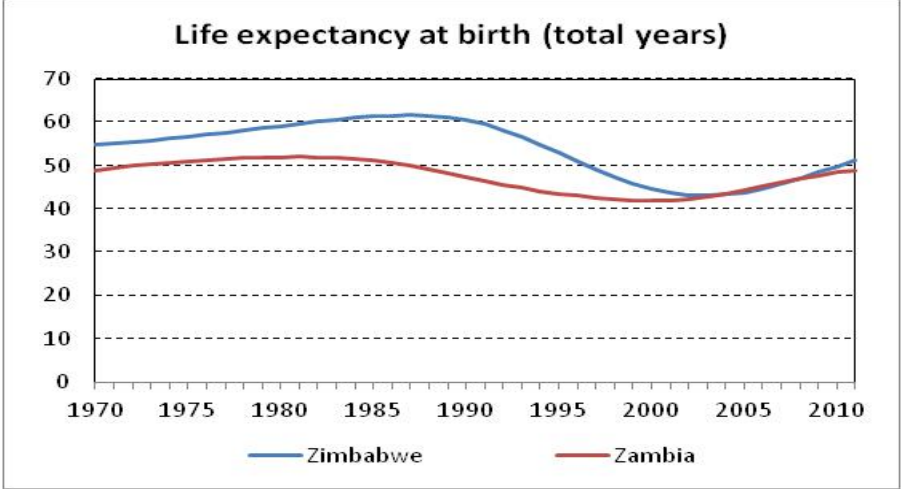
**Figure 1: GDP per capita (current US\$) in Zimbabwe and Zambia, 1970-2011**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

As Figure 2 shows, there are no major differences in the evolution of life expectancy between the two countries, except that Zambia caught up recently with Zimbabwe. However, life expectancy at birth (in total years) remains extremely low in both countries: 49 years in Zambia, and 51 years in Zimbabwe, both for 2011.

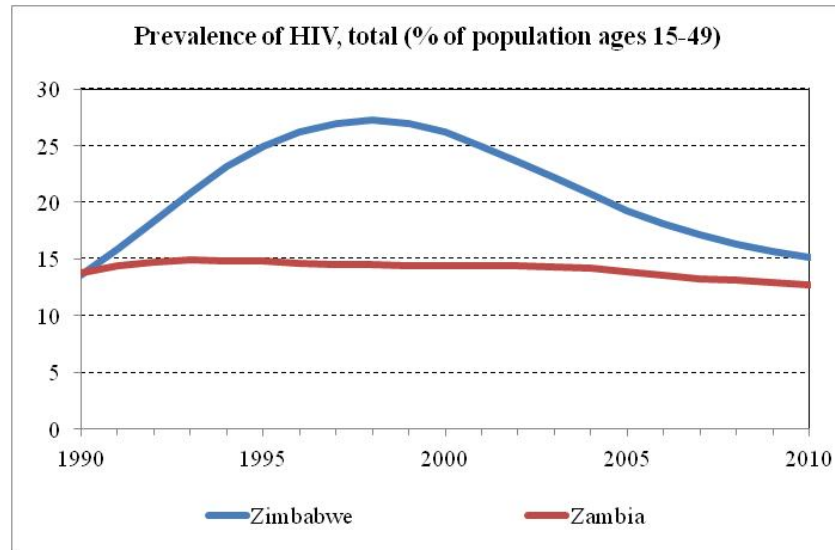
**Figure 2: Life expectancy at birth (total years), 1970-2011**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has been contributing to these low statistics, especially for Zimbabwe. As Figure 3 shows (reliable data exists only since 1990), though both countries had an HIV prevalence rate of about 14 percent in 1990, it increased sharply during the 1990s in Zimbabwe, reaching a maximum of 27.3 percent in 1998, after it decreased again to about 15 percent in 2010. In Zambia, the HIV prevalence rate hovered around 14-15 percent for most of last two decades, and declined then to 12.7 percent in 2010.

**Figure 3: HIV Prevalence in Zimbabwe and Zambia, 1990-2010**



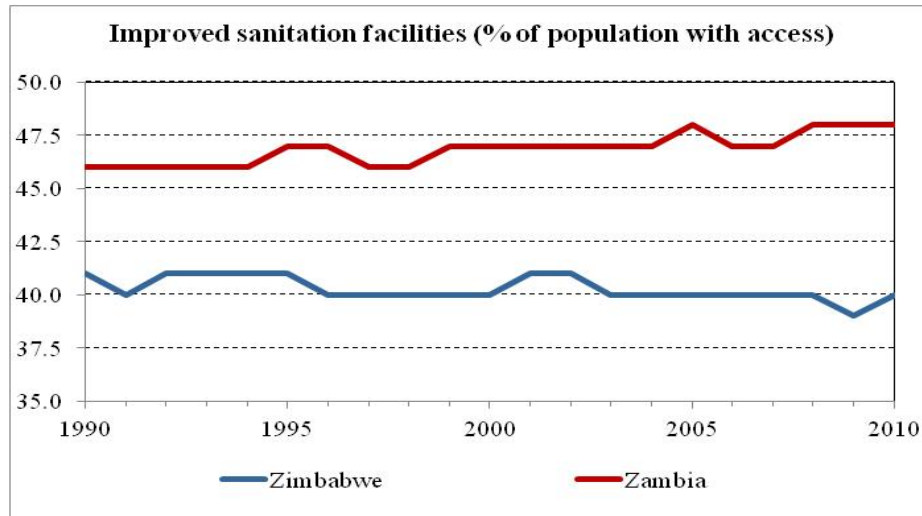
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

Access to safe water and sanitation are low in both countries:

- In Zambia, access to sanitation has not increased over the past 40 years, hovering around 47 percent. This extremely low number has favored the spread of diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea,<sup>3</sup> which are a major cause of mortality, especially in the poorest rural areas. Additionally, despite increasing rates of vaccination, infant mortality has further increased. All these elements come together to explain why Zambia has one of the world's lowest life expectancy (about 49 years in 2011). Attempts to decentralize the health sector have been compromised and rising user fees have led to lower clinic attendance.
- In percentages terms, Zimbabwe's access to sanitation facilities is about seven percentage points below that of Zambia. Access to sanitation was hovering around a gravely low forty percent, without any progress at all visible. Constant food insecurity (especially since the country has been relying on maize imports for sustenance) and increased rates of malnutrition have further increased individuals' vulnerability to infections such as tuberculosis.

<sup>3</sup> Diarrhoea is the passing of watery stools more than is normal. It is often a symptom of an infection.

**Figure 4: Access to Sanitation in Zimbabwe and Zambia, 1990-2010**

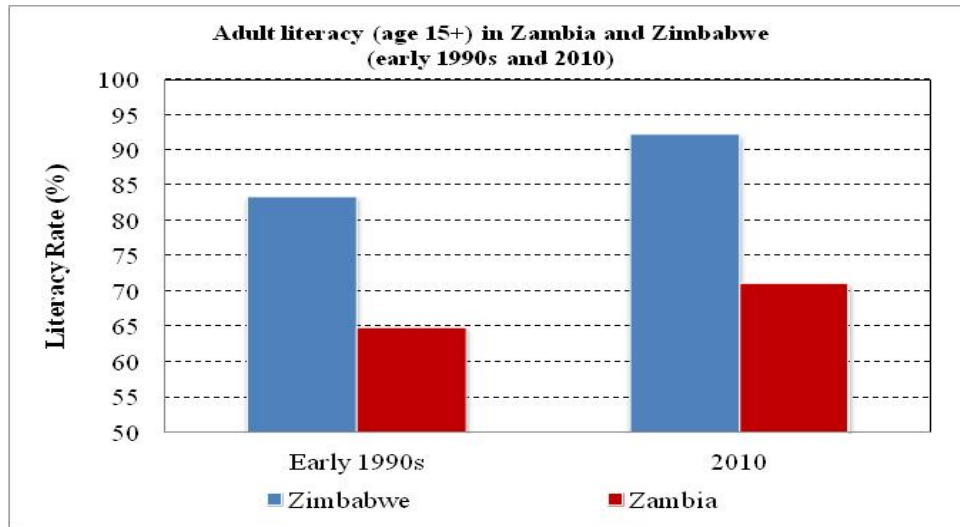


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

Though literacy rates vary considerably between the two countries (see Figure 5), both countries suffer from an under-financed, crumbling education system. Investment in school infrastructures and the acquisition of new teaching and learning materials is in desperate need in both countries.

- In 1990, the Zambian government's educational expenditure was the lowest in the world in terms of GDP (2.5 percent) and was barely enough to cover the costs of primary education. For decades, Zambia's system suffered from declining real public expenditures on education and disastrously high rates of non-attendance; which had reached 45 percent in rural areas (Saasa with Carlsson, 2002). The Zambian government, which used to completely control the educational system, has taken steps towards partnership in educational provision that would include the private sector, local communities, regional communities and other non-governmental organizations. This allows for private funding, ownership of educational institutions, and for greater local power and management of schools.
- Zimbabwe witnessed the downfall of its educational system (once considered the best in SSA), beginning right after its independence, as government expenditure was slashed, leading to eroding infrastructures and resources. Zimbabwe still boasts high literacy rates from its successful colonial educational system. However, the economic crisis of 2008 greatly disrupted the system: an estimated 20,000 teachers left the country and literacy rates and passing rates from primary school plunged (passing rates fell by 18 percent from 2008 to 2009) (IRIN, 2013a). Since the government was the sole provider for the system, funding for the distribution of school materials, the maintenance of infrastructures and the salaries of teachers ceased. Zimbabwe is now relying on the Education Transition Fund (ETF), established in 2010 and controlled by international donors. The government is relying on improving relations with the country's teachers unions to obtain the 30,000 teachers (which represents a third of the current educational workforce, IRIN, 2013a).

**Figure 5: Adult Literacy Rates in Zimbabwe and Zambia**



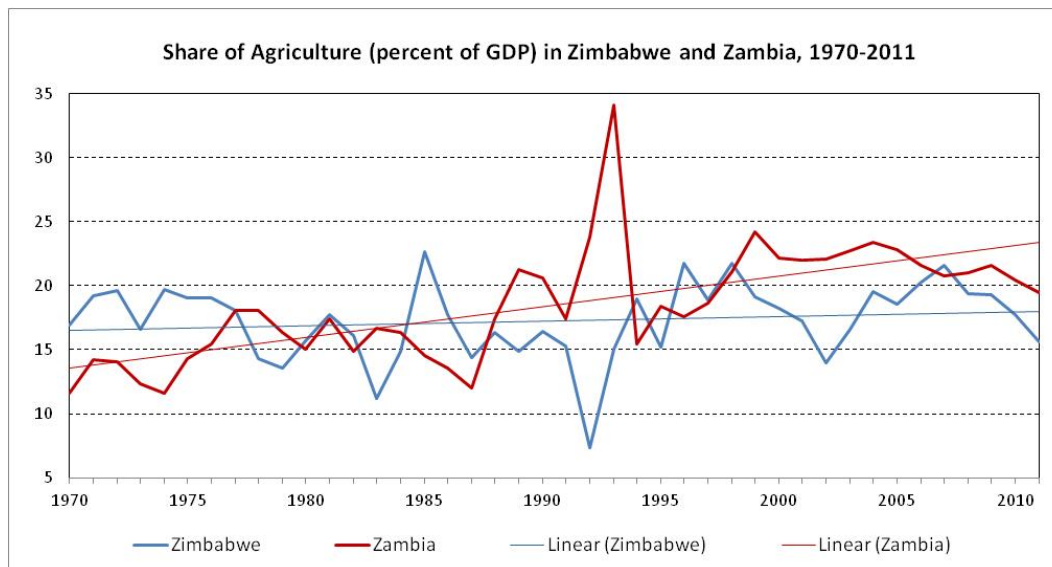
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

## IV. Analysis of Agricultural Development

### IV.1. Share of Agriculture in GDP and Share of Agricultural Employment

Despite a high volatility, the trend lines in Figure 6 clearly show that Zambia's share of agriculture increased over time, while that of Zimbabwe stagnated. In 1970, agriculture constituted 11.6 percent of Zambia's GDP, while it increased to 19.5 percent in 2011. In Zimbabwe, agriculture constituted 16.7 percent of its GDP in 1970, while it decreased to 15.7 percent in 2011.

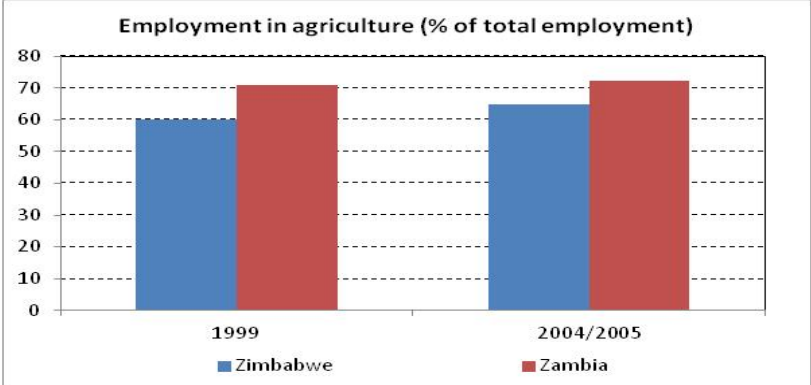
**Figure 6: Share of Agriculture in GDP in Zimbabwe and Zambia, 1970-2011**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

It should be pointed out that even though agriculture seems to be relatively unimportant for both countries if looking at the share of agriculture to GDP (which has basically always been below 25 percent for the last 40 years), Figure 7 shows that actually most of the Zambian and Zimbabwean people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The percentage of people being employed in agriculture has actually increased during the last two decades for both countries. As of 2004/05, 65 percent of Zimbabweans were employed in agriculture, while 72 percent of Zambians were employed in agriculture.

**Figure 7: Agricultural Employment in Zimbabwe and Zambia (available years)**

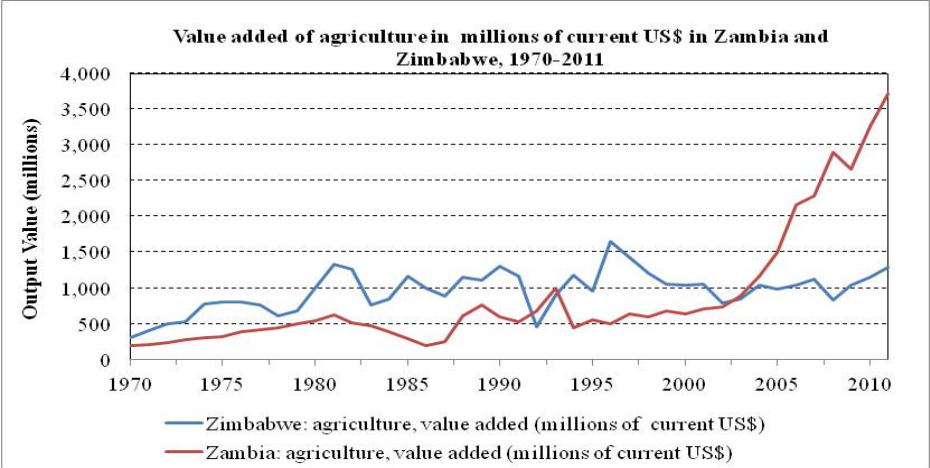


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

**IV.2. Value Added of Agriculture**

As Figure 8 shows, during the last 15 years, the agricultural sector has been gaining great value in Zambia but been declining in Zimbabwe. Given that these numbers are in current US\$, Zambia’s progress is slightly less than the nominal numbers indicate, while Zimbabwe’s progress is actually worse (as a dollar today is obviously worth less today than 15 years ago).

**Figure 8: Value added of agriculture in current US\$ in Zimbabwe and Zambia, 1970-2011**



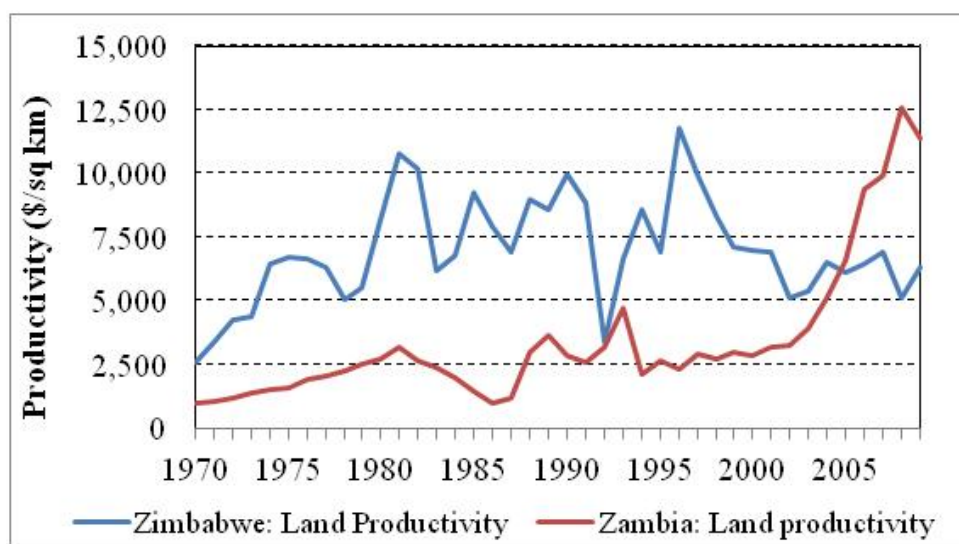
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).



### IV.3. Land Productivity

Another way to look at agricultural progress is to look at land productivity, which is simply defined as the value added of agriculture divided by agricultural land. As the amount of agricultural land has not changed much during the last four decades (relative to the changes in value added),<sup>4</sup> the trends of Figure 9 are similar to that of Figure 8. However, taking the changes in agricultural land into account, Figure 9 is reflecting the more accurate developments in agriculture than Figure 8. As Zimbabwe was able to increase its agricultural land more than Zambia, Zambia's agricultural progress (in terms of productivity) has been even stronger than just looking at agricultural progress (in terms of value added by agriculture).

**Figure 9: Land productivity (value added of agriculture in current US\$/agricultural land) in Zambia and Zimbabwe, 1970-2009**



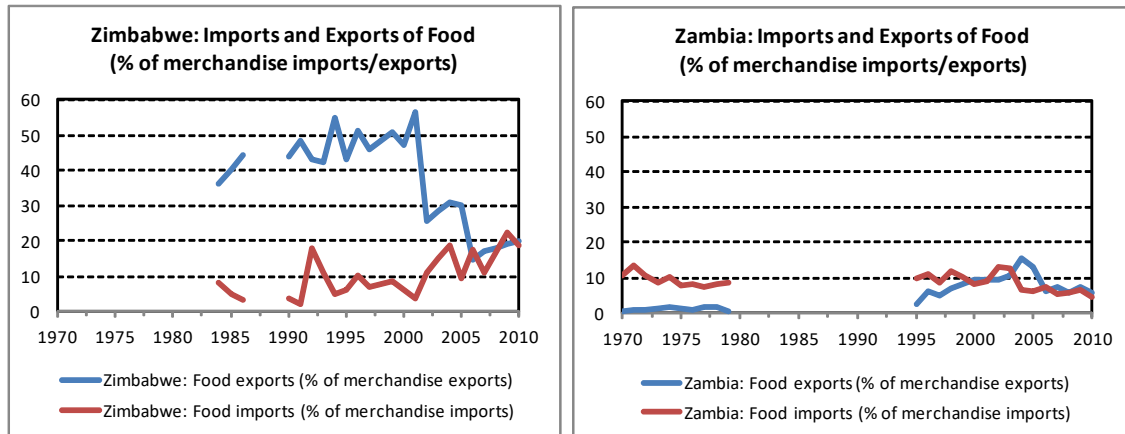
Source: Created and calculated by author based on the data of the World Bank (2013) for the value of agriculture (in current US\$) and agricultural land (in sq. km).

### IV.4. Food Imports and Food Exports

The two panels of Figure 10 show food imports as a percent of merchandise imports and food exports as percent of merchandise exports, respectively for Zimbabwe and Zambia. Given that a country's total merchandise imports are not identical to a country's total merchandise exports, the comparison is a bit distorted for each country, but the huge difference across the two countries in terms of levels and trends for food imports and food exports is still illustrative of Zimbabwe's agricultural problems and Zambia's recent progress.

<sup>4</sup> From 1970 to 2011, agricultural land increased from 118 thousand square miles to 164 thousand square miles in Zimbabwe, while it increased from 199 thousand square miles to 234 thousand square miles in Zambia. Hence, the percentage increase in agricultural land has been higher in Zimbabwe (40 percent) than in Zambia (18 percent).

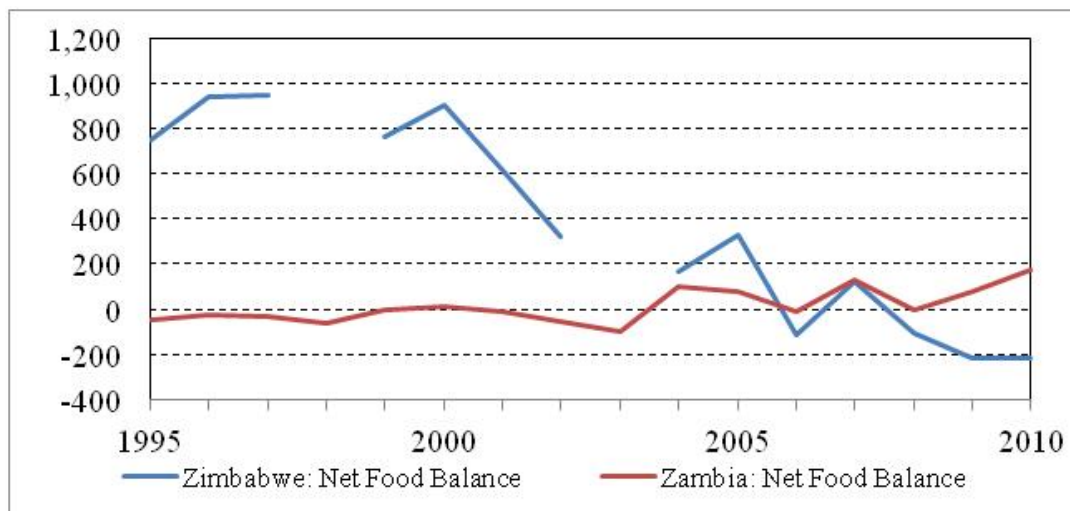
**Figure 10: Imports and Exports of Food in Zimbabwe and Zambia (available years)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2013).

The data available from the World Bank (2013) for a) food imports and food exports (as a percentage of total merchandise imports and exports) and b) the value of merchandise imports and exports in current US\$, allows us to calculate the net food balance, which we define simply as food exports minus food imports (both in millions of current US\$). Given the difference in missing data for the two countries, Figure 11 focuses on the period since 1995. Consistent to the last few figures, it shows a strongly declining trend for Zimbabwe, while it shows a slightly positive trend for Zambia.

**Figure 11: Net food balance (food exports minus food imports) in millions of current US\$ for Zimbabwe and Zambia, 1995-2010**



Source: Created and calculated by the author based on data provided by the World Bank (2013).

## **V. Descriptive Policy Analysis**

### **V.1. Zambia's Agricultural Policy**

The main reasons for Zambia's past inability to increase the value of its agricultural sector have been government intervention and mismanagement of international aid. Political parties in Zambia claimed they wanted to liberalize the agricultural market by deregulating resource allocation and commodity prices. The removal of price controls, the push towards greater exports, and the dissolution of state-owned enterprises that monopolized maize trade were believed to promote greater productivity and efficiency in the agricultural sector. Yet, repetitive government resistance to give up control of the agricultural sector deterred an efficient response from the private sector (Hill and McPherson, 2004) until more recently.

The limited and insufficient actions taken by the private sector were then taken as justification for government re-intervention into the matter. Repeated analyses of the impact of government interference have shown that it has constantly undermined development (Hill and McPherson, 2004, p. 317). Government involvement in the agricultural market has consistently generated instability in interest rates and confusion over adopted policies. The creation of structures such as the Food Reserve Agency (FRA), which was expected to absorb or release food in accordance to surpluses or shortages, have further disturbed the mechanisms of the agricultural market and imposed restrictions upon its growth (Hill and McPherson, 2004, ch.10).

Furthermore, until recently, Zambia has failed to efficiently utilize the donor aid it has been receiving. The Agriculture Sector Investment Program (ASIP) was created in an attempt to efficiently coordinate all donors' efforts in agriculture. However, ASIP and similar sector investment programs (SIP) have failed because the administrative requirements of such programs were well beyond Zambia's capabilities. Finally, until recently Zambia had been receiving regular food aid since the 1979 harvest failure. Food aid is only efficient if it is a short-term and an irregular addition to the national food supply. The constant presence of such a backup has discouraged the adoption of a broad-based strategy that would link agricultural performance with economic growth and food security.

However, as seen by the more recent increase in the value of the agricultural sector and in land productivity, Zambia has been able to develop its agricultural system in the past decade. Government support for maize research programs and the diffusion of technological research have contributed to greater yields of the crop. A tight monetary policy has allowed the country to lower inflation; market liberalization reforms have restrained government interference and provided inputs by farmers and new businesses. Finally, Zambia has also diversified its exports sector and holds further expansion potential as there is much arable land the country is still not utilizing.

In Zambia, land productivity has recently been increasing and it has been accepted that agriculture holds a potential to create employment that is unmatched by any other sector within the economy. Various studies (e.g. Hill and McPherson, 2004, Chapter 10) have also shown that in the production of high quality products, geography, market distance and isolation from international competitiveness have never been real constraints to the development of agriculture. Thus, it is up to the country to continue trade liberalization, to build up infrastructures to enhance regional development, and to increase investment into the agricultural sector to allow for the full potential of the sector to be revealed.

Finally, a last point to consider for the future progress of the agricultural sector in Zambia is the recent removal of farmer subsidies. This sum represents about US\$200 million annually, which President Michael Sata has claimed would be better spent towards national health and education (IRIN, 2013b). These funds could also be redistributed towards the improvement of infrastructures, the expansion of markets and further investment in research. Currently, maize prices have been rising due to a) the removal of the subsidies, b) a rising demand for the crop in southern Africa, and c) a poor harvest. The higher price of maize, the main food staple for Zambia, has lowered national support for the policy.

However, subsidies are known to be expensive and unsustainable in the long term and the Zambian government might have taken an important step towards the long-term development and sustainability of agriculture (IRIN, 2013b). It will be important to follow the development and application of the policy, but it seems likely that the direct investment in national health and education will prove more beneficial than the subsidy of agricultural inputs in reducing poverty in Zambia.

## **V.2. Zimbabwe's Agricultural Policy (since 2000)**

The main reason for Zimbabwe's continuing failure to increase agricultural production through its Fast Track Farms (FTFs), although progress is foreseeable, is a result of inadequate government support and land ownership uncertainties following the land reform. The primary indication that the reform would be an arduous process was the unfair redistribution of land towards elite farmers, investors, agricultural graduates or individuals who had gained social connections to either one these groups. Poor individuals and actual farmers were not selected as beneficiaries. The new landowners often happened to lack the skills set and experience the previous white farm owners had had. A second problem was the government's failure to provide new farmers with the necessary services and inputs they required.

Concurrently, Zimbabwe suffered from the withdrawal of Western countries' financial assistance, repeated droughts and violence from land transfers. Furthermore, while the land transfers were made in principle, there was no legal land tenure system drawn up and governmental compensation was denied in most cases. Without official title deeds, most landowners were and continue to be reluctant in investing into their farms because they fear arbitrary government seizure of their land.

A strong land ownership framework would not only promote investment into the agricultural sector, it would also allow beneficiaries to obtain loans, access input from private and international companies, and reduce national tensions over land ownership. The government has failed to respond to these demands because while it does want to liberalize the market place (as in Zambia) to absorb foreign and private investment, it fears such liberalization will lead to the reversal of its land reform. As a result, farmers have been given land but have been denied the legal rights and resources they need to efficiently exploit the land.

In Zimbabwe, the percentage share of agriculture in GDP as well as the value added by agriculture in current US\$, has stagnated. Land productivity and food exports have fallen compared to pre-Mugabe levels. Within Mugabe's thirty-four years reign (to date), Mugabe has organized manslaughter (such as in Mataeleland), eliminated much of his political opposition, greatly disregarded and abused human rights, and has starved and impoverished his people. An estimated 400,000 black Zimbabwean farmers were murdered under Mugabe's government (Crawford,

2013). Political and social unrest along with frequent demonstrations of violence have undermined the insignificant efforts made towards developing and ameliorating the agricultural sector.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The Zambian Lands Act of 1995 converted customary land tenures into leasehold, attempting to liberalize land administration and strengthen property rights, with the goal of promoting foreign investment and national economic development. The 1975 Land Act was repealed, allowing for land to be privatized, and thus bought and sold. Foreign land ownership was encouraged and low-income Zambians were given the opportunity to acquire private land, which they could use as collateral to acquire credit and invest in their farms and businesses (Brown, 2004). Although the 1995 Lands Act may be considered unsatisfying on social standards, it raised agricultural productivity and output.

The Zimbabwean land reform (which is the biggest land reform to date in Africa), 245,000 Zimbabwean farmers replaced 6,000 white farmers (Hanlon, Manjengwa and Smart, 2012). Yet, this redistribution forced the displacement of about 350,000 people, while an estimated two million individuals never received land and were forced to choose between poverty and economic migration (mostly to Botswana and South Africa). The fast-track land reform was declared complete in 2002 by President Mugabe, but agricultural output has significantly fallen from colonial levels, forcing the country to import the food it exported three decades ago. Today, Zimbabwe is on its thirteenth year of consecutive food deficits and the loss in agricultural output has contributed to a rising debt obligation and the further constraint of the government's capacity

Despite the differences in land reform, both countries continue to suffer from decrepit educational and health sectors. Zambia's educational system remains inefficient and inaccessible to many, although there is hope that the recent authorization of private funding will allow the system to develop and reach a greater number of Zambians. In Zimbabwe, educational infrastructures have crumbled, teachers have left, educational resources have been depleted and the quality of the system has plundered. It remains to be seen whether ETF funding will push the government to efficiently revive the system.

Zambia and Zimbabwe have some of the world's lowest life expectancy rates and among the world's highest HIV prevalence rates. The inadequacy of the education systems has greatly contributed to the spread of the epidemic, while the near invisibility of state funding of health services has exacerbated the loss of human potential. Education has a strong link with poverty reduction and it must be a priority for both countries to provide more educational resources. Sustainable economic and social progress will be favored from the development of the educational system.

Zambia and Zimbabwe must invest in the education and health of their citizens. While the sum of all international aid the countries ever received should have been enough to establish sustainable and efficient systems, corruption, inadequate administrative capacity and the need for aid to be re-distributed towards short-term sustenance have decreased the efficacy of such funding. In the case of Zimbabwe, mass murders, economic dislocation and political upheavals can be added to the list of disturbances that have hindered the country's development. The main lesson to be taken away from Zimbabwe's land reform is its absolute failure to increase the sector's value and productivity. While on principle the redistribution of land based on its uneven ownership by white farmers sounds just, the government failed to provide the legal structure and financial support needed.

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