

## **Land Grabbers or Climate Experts? Farm Occupations and the Quest for Livelihoods Security in Zimbabwe.**

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Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), characterized by land occupations has generated an intense debate that has polarized academia. Many commentators have dismissed the FTLRP as a politically motivated 'land grab', which ruined agriculture and contributed to food shortages. Landless peasants, who occupied white commercial farms, were dismissed as inefficient and lacking the 'skills' to productively, work the land. This paper explores the dynamics of land occupations in the Mhondoro Ngezi area of Zimbabwe.

Based on empirical data, the paper will argue that landless farmers who occupied white commercial farms under the A1 Scheme as part of the FTLRP are not merely 'backward peasants' who have ruined agriculture, as claimed by many commentators. Since the land occupations, there has been emerging evidence to suggest that such farmers have developed an in-depth understanding of agrarian issues. These farmers have mastered the art of understanding the significance of issues such as wind direction and its impact on the rainfall patterns in their areas. They have also developed relatively sophisticated understanding of soil quality that helps them to determine which crops are better suited to what soils. This seems to be contributing to better annual yields that in turn led to a marked improvement in livelihoods security.

The paper is largely based on empirical data gathered as part of ongoing fieldwork exploring land reform and livelihoods security in contemporary Zimbabwe. The data has been collected using baseline surveys followed by in-depth interviews and personal observations.