

European and UK sanctions against Zimbabwean farmers do little to promote democratic change.

Blog Admin

Since 2002, the UK and EU have maintained sanctions against Zimbabwe after land occupations and violence from the ruling ZANU-PF party of Robert Mugabe. **Joseph Hanlon** and **Teresa Smart** write that a decade later, the land reform that followed these occupations is proving successful, with farm production much increased. They argue that the progress made in Zimbabwe raises new questions about the appropriateness of sanctions, and ask whether the success of small commercial farmers in the country could become a model for African rural development.



Tabeth Gorovo (centre in the photo), sitting proudly in her round Shona kitchen on her six hectares in Mashonaland East in Zimbabwe, seems an unexpected subject of European and British sanctions. She is not named on any list, but she is sanctioned. All EU and UK aid to Zimbabwe is channelled through international NGOs (non-government organisations), and both the EU and the UK make it a condition that none of their aid can go to the 175,000 land reform families like Tabeth's.



A second wife, Tabeth shared just one hectare of land in the communal areas with her husband's other wife. Two decades after the 'liberation war' in Zimbabwe, veterans organised the occupation of white farms in 2000: Tabeth joined in and occupied her 6 hectares. As well as her own food, she grows maize, groundnuts and sunflowers for sale, earning around 1,500 euros profit a year. She built her house in 2002, but her life revolves around her kitchen, built the following year.



Photo of Tabeth Gorovo and her neighbours by Joseph Hanlon, from *Zimbabwe Takes Back its Land*.

Our newly published study of the results of the 2000 land reform, *Zimbabwe Takes Back its Land*, is the subject of an open discussion at the LSE on Monday 28 January. In the study we found production rising, with

some land reform farmers producing more than the white farmers they replaced. Tobacco and cotton are particularly successful cash crops. With their own drying barns, land reform farmers are now producing 40 per cent of the flue cured tobacco of the high quality demanded by international buyers.

Land has always been a contentious issue. In 1930, British colonial authorities defined the best half of the land as "white". The black farmers who had been on that land for generations were violently pushed off their farms in the 1950s, to make way for white World War II veterans. The children of those evicted led the liberation war to gain back their land. The [Lancaster House settlement](#) in 1979 allowed an initial limited land reform, but the best land remained in white hands. Finally, in 2000 the liberation war veterans

took it back – by force, as it had been taken from their parents. The land occupations and violence by the ZANU-PF ruling party of Robert Mugabe led to international sanctions. UK Foreign Secretary William Hague has [stated](#) that the sanctions are only against individuals “involved in human rights abuses or undermining democracy or the rule of law.” But apparently that includes Tabeth Gorovo and all the land reform families.

Britain and Europe have backed the 2008 Global Political Agreement (GPA) which led to the unity government between ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the introduction of the US dollar as the currency, ending hyperinflation and bringing the economy back to life. The GPA says land reform is “irreversible” so there is no going back. Thus, if we accept the GPA, there is no point in sanctioning land reform farmers.

Southern African leaders, both publicly and privately, have argued that sanctions have outlived their usefulness, and now only serve as an excuse by Mugabe for his failures. We know from our travels in rural Zimbabwe that many people have been convinced that sanctions are the root of their problems. Continued sanctions push small farmers into the ZANU-PF camp.

Of course the land reform farmers would do better with a more benign government and with some of the inputs and marketing support provided by the NGOs with aid money. Yet they are prospering. Many of these new farmers are hiring labour, and the former white farms now support three times as many people as they did before 2000, so land reform is reducing poverty. Indeed, this could be a model for rural development in Africa based on small commercial farmers.

The authors will be taking part in the panel discussion, Zimbabwe Takes Back its Land, on Monday 28 January, 2013. [Click here for more details.](#)

You may also be interested in the new book, [Zimbabwe Takes Back its Land](#), by Joseph Hanlon, Jeanette Manjengwa & Teresa Smart.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

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