

# **OPERATION TAGUTA / SISUTHI**



**Command Agriculture in Zimbabwe:  
its impact on rural communities in Matabeleland**

**SOLIDARITY PEACE TRUST**

**APRIL 2006**



*Bishop Ruben Phillip*



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**“We applaud the Zimbabwe Defence Forces for taking up the challenge by strapping their guns on their backs and rolling up their sleeves to till the land under Operation Maguta. Under this programme, no doubt a huge food gap will be closed, effectively saving foreign exchange to go towards other priority sectors of the economy.”**

**GIDEON GONO, Reserve Bank Governor  
February 2006 <sup>1</sup>**

**“Not even a single person has benefited from the irrigation this year”.**

**PLOT HOLDER 1, Matabeleland South  
March 2006**

**“We made money by growing vegetables but all that was ploughed down by the [army] tractor. So now I have not one cent....**

**PLOT HOLDER 2, Matabeleland South  
March 2006**

**“Destruction of market gardening has destroyed the economic independence of these irrigation communities: where people were self sufficient, they will now be poor and have to look to government to provide everything.”**

**Ex AREX officer, 27 March 2006**

**As of now they give us 500 cobs [100 kg] of maize[of our entire harvest] and say that’s enough, we have to wait until the next harvest. Maybe then they won’t give us any.... We had bought our own seeds and fertilisers from Bulawayo and we hired a lorry to carry it for us, and we planted it, before the army arrived.”**

**PLOT HOLDER 3, Matabeleland South  
March 2006 <sup>2</sup>**

**Nothing in this Act shall prevent any person: who is the producer of a controlled product from using any such controlled product for consumption by himself, his household, his employees or his livestock.**

**GRAIN MARKETING BOARD ACT (35) (1) (c)**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle*, 1 March 2006: “Grain imports gobble US\$135 million”. This was part of a speech, addressing participants in the Zimbabwe Defence Forces Joint Command and Staff Course in Harare.

<sup>2</sup> At this scheme, harvests entirely planned, financed and planted in November, prior to the arrival of the army in December, have been taken into army custody and families have been left with only two months supply each. The rest is allegedly to be compulsorily acquired by Grain Marketing Board.

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## Findings<sup>3</sup>

- The deployment of the army under Command Agriculture has, in Matabeleland, resulted in once well-utilised irrigation schemes becoming under-utilised land.
- Soldiers have been responsible for brutality against civilians.
- Soldiers have wantonly ordered the destruction of established fruit trees to plant maize in irrigation schemes.
- Soldiers in irrigation schemes have wantonly and systematically destroyed lucrative market gardens that were a vital part of the year-round rural economy and diet in the districts in which they grew.
- This destruction has turned plot holders into paupers over night, as vegetable sales are the major source of daily income for them, year round.
- Late farming inputs from the army mean that in schemes where plot holders would have had good harvests by now, if left to manage the planting themselves, maize was planted as late as mid-March and this is going to dramatically reduce yields.
- Insufficient farming inputs from the army mean that large tracts of land have remained fallow this season in irrigation schemes.
- Soldiers who clearly know very little about growing irrigation crops are destroying established crop rotational structures, and in one instance have allegedly destroyed the fertility of fields through totally excessive application of fertiliser.
- Soldiers have taken custody of early maize harvests in one scheme, where inputs were made well before the arrival of the army. Families have been left without enough maize for their own annual consumption.
- This is in violation of the GMB Act, which states that nothing can prevent producers from keeping crops needed for their households' consumption.
- Plot holders have no information about the future intentions of the army, the consumer price they should expect for their "hijacked" maize, when, or if, there will be more inputs and further crops planted.
- Plot holders perceive that they are being treated as indentured labour, with no rights and no claim over the produce they have laboured all summer to produce.
- In Matabeleland, soldiers beating people in the fields and withholding food is reminiscent of the great food curfew of 1984 in the Gukurahundi era. During 1984, 400,000 people were deliberately brought to the brink of starvation by 5 Brigade.
- The presence of soldiers in Matabeleland rural communities has disrupted the social fabric and left people angry and afraid.

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<sup>3</sup> These findings are based on information of events at 5 irrigation schemes in Matabeleland. See pp 25 ff.

## Summary: Context of Findings and their implications <sup>4</sup>

Command agriculture has to be contextualised against a background of the collapse of agriculture since 2000, and of epidemic corruption and inefficiency not only in this sector, but throughout the government policies in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe has faced a food deficit for several consecutive years, and the need to regain credibility for the land invasions, as well as fears of food riots, and the desire to be less dependent on international aid for reasons of national pride and sovereignty, all provide partial motives for Command Agriculture.

Zimbabwe is becoming increasingly militarised as a State, and the disastrous “Operation Murambatsvina” and “Operation Garikai” were both undertaken with the collaboration of the army. The army oversaw “Garikai” and soldiers were among the beneficiaries of the few houses built nationwide under the latter scheme, which has become part of the patronage system in Zimbabwe instead of providing housing for the displaced.

The army has been in control of *food distribution* for several years now, via control of Grain Marketing Board sales, the only source of affordable maize in rural areas.

Placing the army increasingly in control of *food production* via “Operation Taguta/Sisuthi” is the next logical step for government in the militarization of the State, and is a furtherance of the patronage of the army.

Giving the army effective control over large aspects of agriculture is keeping soldiers who might otherwise get bored and angry at their poor conditions, active and fed.

Command Agriculture has to be seen in the context of a now-established pattern of political abuse of maize, particularly in rural areas, through abuse of GMB sales. Maize has been consistently withheld from those perceived not to support the government over the last four years.

The pattern of behaviour shown by soldiers at irrigation schemes as summarised in the findings, is in keeping with this established pattern of manipulation of maize. Plot holders now have to beg for the very maize they themselves have laboured to grow, and soldiers have the power to say yes or no.

The destruction of productive market gardens can be viewed as part of the pattern of abuse of communities by government. The destruction of the economic base of these communities is either an act of unbelievable stupidity, or furtherance of a policy aimed at impoverishing rural communities as a means of controlling them.

The usurping of the early irrigation harvests could be an indication of the government intending to ensure that maize ends up in urban rather than rural areas: in urban areas there is a danger of riots if people are hungry, while in rural areas, hunger makes people compliant.

Deploying the army under the guise of Command Agriculture means that army units are now embedded deep in rural areas. This is effectively closing democratic space and will have a

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<sup>4</sup> The assertions made here are developed in more depth in the main body of the report.

repressive impact during Rural District Council Elections due in September. It is likely that the army will stay in place and increase in numbers in rural areas, under the justification of Operation Taguta, from now until parliamentary and/or presidential elections.

### **Outcome of Command Agriculture**

Command Agriculture has been a failure in the 2005/6 season in relation to improving maize production at rural irrigation schemes in Matabeleland. It has undermined such production, and has had an extremely negative effect on the community at large.

In terms of destroying self-sufficiency in rural populations and creating vulnerability through dependency on government as the only source of food, Command Agriculture is likely to prove a resounding “success”.

### **Recommendations**

There is an urgent need for Zimbabwean NGOs and the international community to seek clarification of what the government’s intentions are in relation to forced purchase of crops grown by peasant farmers, whether in irrigation schemes or - in view of the remarks recently made in Insiza by the Vice President Joyce Mujuru - in communal fields.<sup>5</sup>

The government must be reminded of the GMB Act and the rights of producers to keep that which they produce in sufficient quantities to sustain their households and livestock for at least twelve months. Government should be pressurised to respect the right of communal farmers to keep all crops they do not want to sell on a willing seller, willing buyer basis, and independent observers should be allowed to ensure this is the case. In some districts where rain is erratic, producers could consider it sensible to keep two years’ maize supply on hand, for example.

There should be an inquiry into the wanton destruction of vegetable gardens and the loss of income for plot holders resulting from this. If confirmed, prosecution and compensation should follow.

It is unacceptable to have armed forces in charge of civilians under any circumstances. The army should be entirely withdrawn immediately from ARDA and AREX irrigation schemes. They have been shown to have used brutality, verbal abuse of plot holders, and to have seized control of crops from producers. In some instances they have imposed fines and interfered with plot ownership with dubious authority.

The army should be charged with committing a crime in terms of violation of the GMB Act, in schemes where they have taken custody of maize grown by irrigation plot holders, or anywhere else, where such deprivation means producers do not have maize for their daily consumption in sufficient quantity to survive at least twelve calendar months.

There is a need for other independent observers around Zimbabwe to analyse what is happening in rural areas in relation to Command Agriculture, in order to monitor the degree of abuse of crop production.

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<sup>5</sup> See this report page 18.

## 1. Command Agriculture

In November 2005, the Zimbabwe government began implementation of “Operation Taguta/Sisuthi (OT/S)”<sup>6</sup>, or “Operation Eat Well”. This Command Agriculture programme was first publicly referred to by Central Bank Governor, Gideon Gono, in May 2005. It is aimed at placing the vital process of food production under the partial control of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces. Referred to by some commentators as “Stalinist” in inspiration, and by others as “Maoist”, it has involved the deployment of army units on arable, purportedly under utilised land around the country, to try and increase maize production in Zimbabwe.<sup>7</sup> Operation Eat Well is headed by Agricultural Minister Joseph Made and Defence Minister Sydney Sekeramayi, and was apparently conceived by the Joint Operations Command (JOC), consisting of the army, police, prisons, and the intelligence service. The scheme involves the cooperation of the parastatal Agricultural and Rural Development Authorities (ARDA), and the government department Agricultural Research and Extension Services (AREX), who together with the army, were supposed to identify farms around the country suitable for OT/S, focusing mainly on under utilised land.<sup>8</sup>

“Command Agriculture seeks to optimise output by requiring a minimum input for food or export crops, and is central to agriculture as well as general economic recovery”, Gono announced when first promoting OT/S.<sup>9</sup>

The government’s Command Agriculture model intended to place 1, 500,000 hectares under maize production in the 2005/6 season and to produce 2,250,000 tonnes of maize.<sup>10</sup> It furthermore intended to produce 90,000 tonnes of tobacco, 49,500 tonnes of maize seed, 210,000 tonnes of cotton, 750,000 tonnes of horticultural crops.

The Command Agriculture OT/S programme had a projected budget requirement of Z\$ 15 trillion, but in November the parliamentary portfolio committee on lands, land reform and resettlement, reported that government had failed to raise this money.<sup>11</sup> The Command Agriculture programme was referred to in this same parliamentary committee report as “noble on paper, [but] a stillbirth”.<sup>12</sup>

### Fear of food riots

In January 2006, Gono says that Command Agriculture was implemented out of a fear of food riots. He quotes General Chiwenga, Commander of the Defence Forces, as having said to him:

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<sup>6</sup> This Operation has been variably referred to as “Maguta” – meaning “I am full” and “Taguta”- meaning “We are full” in ChiShona; and “Sisuthi” – “we are full” in SiNdebele. In English, the phrase “eat well” is used. This report uses the abbreviation OT/S to indicate the Operation. The Operation was referred to by Mugabe in January as “Operation Security/ Maguta/ Inala”: “inala” means “bumper harvest” in SiNdebele.

<sup>7</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, November 18-24 2005: “Army launches Operation Taguta” - this article refers to the scheme as “bearing the hallmarks of Stalinist agricultural planning”; *BBC News*, 16 December 2005, which refers to the operation as Maoist. In fact, as this report shows, where rural irrigation schemes are concerned, the army has taken fully utilised land and under utilised it this season: in once instance at least, they have destroyed the fertility of the soil by poor farming practice.

<sup>8</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, “Army launches Operation Taguta”, op cit.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in *Zimbabwe Independent*, *ibid*, which refers to this statement as being made in May 2005.

<sup>10</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, November 18-24 2005: “60% govt agric funds disappear”.

<sup>11</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, “Army launches Operation Taguta”, op cit.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*.



“A hungry man is an angry man... Make sure agriculture is revived and make food available so we (soldiers) will not be forced to turn our guns on hungry Zimbabweans.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Direct army input to farming during 2005/6 season**

#### ***i. Seizure of farming equipment: Acquisition of Farm Equipment and Material Act (2004)***

Since November 2005, part of the strategy of Command Agriculture has been to intensify seizures of farming equipment from commercial farms across the country. According to press reports at the end of 2005, “armed police, army personnel, prisons officials and war veterans uplifted billions of dollars worth of equipment from Masvingo, Chiredzi and Mwenezi.”<sup>14</sup> The seizure of equipment was not done in accordance with the law, as no inventories were made for compensation purposes. The Act stipulates that government is supposed to prove that equipment is lying idle, before making an inventory. Notice of intention to acquire is required and farmers have the right of appeal. However, equipment was seized without prior warning, and was allegedly in use at the time of seizure.

#### ***ii. Tilling the fields in commercial farmland***

It has not been possible to find much evidence of large-scale commercial farms under control of the OT/S scheme. There has been little attention paid to OT/S by the media, including the State media, since the fanfare announcing its implementation at the end of 2005. The authors were informed that in Mashonaland West and Central, the heart of the nation’s productive farmland, there are 300 hectares of previously commercial farmland at Hunyani Farm and surrounds directly planted under OT/S. This hectarage was only planted in January, two months after the optimum period for germination and harvest.<sup>15</sup> In Matabeleland, the authors know of one commercial farming irrigation scheme that had been unproductive since farm invasions three years ago. The commercial farmer and the army have entered into a *quid pro quo*: the soldiers have cleared the scheme of settlers, and the farmer, using his inputs, has in exchange grown a bumper crop for the soldiers.

At the end of 2005, Kondozi Farm in Odzi was taken over by the army.<sup>16</sup> Once a flourishing state-of-the-art flower and vegetable export farm, after the farm was seized in 2004, it fell into “dereliction and neglect” under the control of ARDA. The military has now planted maize in fields that once generated US\$ millions every year in flower production.

The most recent country update on Zimbabwe produced by the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET) refers to “common” labour shortages among resettled farmers hampering weeding, so it appears that army labour was not readily available with regard to all resettled farms.<sup>17</sup>

#### ***iii. Tilling the fields for out-growers***

The army is also reported by the media to have entered into an arrangement with out-growers along the main road between Harare and Mutare, whereby the army will utilise their land and

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<sup>13</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, January 27, 2006: “Army fears food riots”.

<sup>14</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, January 13, 2006: “Farming for the military”.

<sup>15</sup> Personal interviews, also *Zimbabwe Independent*, January 13, 2006: “Farming for the military”.

<sup>16</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, February 3, 2006: “Army takes over Kondozi”, for all information in this paragraph.

<sup>17</sup> FEWSNET: Zimbabwe: Food security update February 2006.

give the owners one third of the sorghum produced.<sup>18</sup> Agricultural experts approached to comment on this, said that these out-growers used to grow extremely lucrative cash crops such as mange tout, for export via Kondozi. The collapse of Kondozi has had a devastating knock on effect for them. Growing sorghum is a huge step down financially from previous outputs.

#### *iv. ARDA and ARES -run communal irrigation schemes*

In communal living areas, OT/S has in the Matabeleland provinces at least, commandeered irrigation schemes that were previously run by communities under the guidance of ARDA and ARES. Information in this report centres on Matabeleland, as that is where the authors have first hand information of these irrigation schemes. However, general inquiries with observers around the country indicate that ARDA and ARES schemes nationwide are now under army supervision. They also indicate that generally inputs by the army have been extremely late, and harvests are expected to be correspondingly poor.

Vice President Mujuru was pictured in *The Chronicle* on 24 March at Balu ARDA Estate in Umguza, Matabeleland North. Here, 158 hectares are under maize under OT/S. Command Agriculture is hailed as a big success, and is expected to yield 3,600 tonnes in Matabeleland North Province, inclusive of Balu and other estates.<sup>19</sup>

*As this report will illustrate, the arrival of the army at some of these communal irrigation schemes has been extremely negative, and far from enhancing production, evidence suggests that army interference has reduced – in some instances almost entirely halted – production, as well as seriously disrupting community functioning and undermining the rights to food and income of the plot holders.*

## **2. National Context of Command Agriculture**

### **Corruption and inefficiency**

The failure of the government and resettled farmers to produce adequate maize in the last few years has been a humiliating indictment of the land reform programme. Below average rains provided a partial excuse during the last two seasons, but there have been excellent rains in 2005/6. Apart from the obvious need to feed the nation, there has been a clear propaganda need for Zimbabwe to grow enough maize to be self sufficient in 2006/7. It is against this background that Command Agriculture has been conceived and implemented. Rather than allowing commercial farmers to revive the sector, for example, it has been of key propaganda importance that the army should rather do this.<sup>20</sup>

It was clear by November that OT/S began – and has continued - against the background of massive corruption and inefficiency in the agricultural sector, with the nation under prepared to

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<sup>18</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, February 3, 2006, *ibid*. An out-grower is a small-scale farmer who is subcontracted by a large scale farmer to produce a portion of his crop.

<sup>19</sup> ie Command Agriculture's Mat North output will be 0,5% of the national expected output of 700,000 tonnes – or 0,15% of government's projection of 2,25 million tonnes.

<sup>20</sup> There has been a battle raging between the technocrats in government (Gono) and the propagandists. Towards the end of last year, some government officials invited white commercial farmers to go back to their farms ahead of the rains, then Minister Didymus Mutasa, saying there was no reversing land resettlement. Gono is on record saying it is necessary to maintain the few remaining large scale commercial farmers on the land as one measure to prevent the total collapse of the economy: there were assurances that no more farms would be seized out of the approx 400 still in production – and then there were more farm invasions, and extensive seizing of equipment.

meet the 2005/6 growing season. There have been several substantial reports written and much media discussion on the illegalities and chaos of the resettlement programme in general: the issues will not be reproduced here. Suffice it to say that government itself has conducted several land audits in recent years, and has concluded that the process has been fraught with irregularities including “rampant vandalism of infrastructure and equipment”, dramatic under utilisation of land, and multiple farm ownership.<sup>21</sup>

A November report produced by *the parliamentary portfolio committee on lands, land reform and resettlement*, drew attention to the fact that during the previous growing season, 60% of agricultural funds allocated by government disappeared before they ever reached the farmers. Out of an allocation of Z\$ 118 billion for farming inputs, about Z\$70,8 billion could not be accounted for.<sup>22</sup> The 2005/6 growing season was also undermined before it began by a lack of money and suitable loans for farmers, and poor government planning. There was inadequate seed, fertiliser and diesel to ensure sufficient crops were planted nationwide in all agricultural sectors.

In January 2006, Gono stepped up pressure on resettled farmers who were loaned more than Z\$ 5,6 trillion by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe during the last agricultural season, and who had so far repaid only Z\$ 250 billion, or 5% of what is due. He commented on “people who choose to make a career out of moving from one farm to another each year vandalising all of them in the process”.<sup>23</sup>

### **Abuse of diesel**

In February, Gono revealed in his 2005 Fourth Quarter Monetary Policy Review Statement that there had been massive abuse of heavily subsidised diesel supplies, intended for agricultural use. A probe was instigated and senior government and secret service officials were implicated in having fraudulently claimed huge amounts of diesel, supposedly for agriculture, but then selling it on the black market.<sup>24</sup>

### **Food deficit 2006/7**

Zimbabwe is being classified by the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET) as an emergency in terms of likely food shortages in the 2006/7 year.<sup>25</sup> It is apparent at the time of writing this report at the end of March that farming outputs are once more disappointing in Zimbabwe, particularly in view of the extremely good rainy season: parts of the country have seen the best rains in twenty years. Reduced outputs are attributed to critical shortages of fuel and fertilisers, leaching of nutrients in soil, particularly in sandy areas, and lack of labour to do timely weeding.<sup>26</sup>

It is estimated that incorporating both commercial and communal yields, the maize harvest will reach around 700,000 tonnes this year,<sup>27</sup> or 30% of what Command Agriculture intended to

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<sup>21</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, December 23, 2006: “We blundered on land, admit ZANU PF”.

<sup>22</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, “60% govt agric funds disappear”, op cit.

<sup>23</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, January 27, 2006: “Government pressures farm beneficiaries”.

<sup>24</sup> *The Standard*, 12 February 2006: “Top chefs exposed – 66 000 litres diesel for former CIO boss”.

<sup>25</sup> FEWSNET, op cit

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> FEWSNET: ibid. Although communal farmers planted plenty of maize nationwide, yields are predicted to be patchy by FEWSNET as sandy soils, which are common in communal farming areas, are likely to produce “poor to no yields in the current season”. However, all rural areas also have some decent soils and some communal area harvests will be good.

produce.<sup>28</sup> Although this is better than last year's harvest of 550,000 tonnes, it will leave a shortfall of around a million tonnes of maize, taking into account 1,400,000 tonnes needed for human consumption, with an additional 200 to 300,000 tonnes for animal feed and industry.<sup>29</sup> Zimbabwe will once more be a net importer of maize.

### **Government's attitude to WFP**

*"Government will not surrender control to sinister interests which seek surreptitiously to advance themselves under cover of humanitarian involvement."*

[R.G Mugabe]<sup>30</sup>

By January 2006, 52% of rural Zimbabweans were relying on World Food Programme (WFP) as the only reliable source of maize.<sup>31</sup> Command Agriculture has been carried out in the context of huge maize deficits from the previous two growing seasons, and of government having had to swallow its pride and capitulate to international assistance in order to stave off starvation of its people. The government has viewed as a humiliation to be avoided, appealing for food from the very countries that it most hates, namely Britain and the USA, the major donors to WFP. Rather than appeal for food aid on a massive scale, government last year spent US\$ 135 million importing maize, money it could ill afford.<sup>32</sup>

The historical reluctance of the Zimbabwean government to appeal for donor aid is underscored by the fact that it took until November last year to sign an appeal for aid. This appeal for US\$277 million in humanitarian assistance, of which US\$ 111 million is for food aid, drew public attention in March 2006.<sup>33</sup>

Government's hostile attitude to international donors heightened in the wake of Operation Murambatsvina (OM)<sup>34</sup>, and the United Nations report on OM released in July.<sup>35</sup> The report recommended both prosecution of government officials responsible for OM, and payment of compensation to those affected. Those responsible for OM appear to include Joint Operations Commanders (JOC) of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), police and army, although government has predictably taken no steps to clarify this or to prosecute.<sup>36</sup>

To the extent that JOC was behind the conception of the demolitions, it is they who stand condemned, not only by the Tibaijuka report, but by the assessment of UN Special representative Jan Egeland, who visited in November 2005. Egeland referred to Zimbabwe as

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<sup>28</sup> In November, cereals were predicted by government at 2,250,000 tonnes, and in January 2006, Mugabe optimistically told parliament that OT/S would produce 1,800,000 tonnes this season: *Zimbabwe Independent*, January 13, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> This report is mainly concerned with food security, but it is of general economic significance to note that the biggest foreign exchange generating crop, tobacco, will this year fall to 20% of its 1999 production levels: the 2005/6 crop is likely to be around 55 million tonnes in total, down from 250 million tonnes in 1999: *Cape Argus*, 22 March 2006: "Zimbabwe tobacco yield estimate stubbed out". This has food security implications, as it will accelerate the collapse of the economy, fuel inflation and impact on Zimbabwe's poorest.

<sup>30</sup> Speech on the third opening of the fifth parliament of Zimbabwe, July 2002.

<sup>31</sup> FEWSNET, op cit.

<sup>32</sup> *The Chronicle*, 1 March 2006: "Grain imports gobble US\$135 million". Speech by Gideon Gono.

<sup>33</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, March 24-30, 2006: "Government swallows pride, appeals for aid".

<sup>34</sup> See *Solidarity Peace Trust*, October 2005: "Crime of Poverty", section "Starving with dignity" for details.

<sup>35</sup> *Report of the fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to assess the scope and impact of Operation Murambatsvina*, prepared by Mrs Anna Tibaijuka in her capacity as the United Nations Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, released 22 July 2005.

<sup>36</sup> *New African* magazine, quoted in the government-owned press in 2005 put forward the theory that OM was conducted on CIO instruction as a swift pre-emptive strike against a popular uprising.

being in a state of meltdown, with the suffering caused by OM now part of a much bigger humanitarian crisis, encompassing complete economic collapse and food shortages.<sup>37</sup> In the wake of this visit, the Zimbabwe government condemned the UN and its envoys as being “liars and hypocrites”. Mugabe stated that apart from the Secretary General, any more visits by UN representatives would be prevented.<sup>38</sup> By so doing, they have once more acted to protect JOC and whoever else ordered and logistically supported the demolitions.<sup>39</sup>

The extremely damaging impact of OM on Zimbabwe’s reputation, including in the African Union, and the criticism emanating from this, could have been an added incentive for government to implement OT/S with the aim of being able to throw out, or at least reduce the presence of, WFP in the 2006/7 season.

### **3. Operation Murambatsvina, Operation Garikai – and now Operation Taguta: the military connection**

The Zimbabwe government has developed a liking for terming all its large-scale policies in language more associated with the military. It is the military that undertakes “Operations”, not municipalities and farmers. However, this is no coincidence – the army, police and CIO have been intimately involved in all these “Operations”. As mentioned in the previous section, the Tibaijuka report held the Zimbabwe government responsible for “Operation Murambatsvina”, and there have been strong indications that the CIO, army and police commanders conceived and/or backed the demolitions. It is impossible in a highly militarised nation such as Zimbabwe, that such a scheme could be enforced without the backing of JOC.

“Operation Garikai/Hlalane Kuhle” – “Operation Live Well” - was similarly placed under military command. Senior army commanders have been in charge of the building of houses across all provinces. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that OG/HK was declared to be for the benefit of those displaced during OM, observations by the authors and press articles indicate that the overwhelming beneficiaries of OG/HK have been the uniformed forces, including the army.<sup>40</sup> Any observer driving past the 700 houses constructed in Cowdray Park in Bulawayo as part of OG/HK, could mistake the suburb for a military barracks, soldiers appear to be occupying so many of the houses.

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<sup>37</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, December 9, 2005: “Egeland endorses Tibaijuka report – it was not just a crisis, but a ‘meltdown’ – envoy”.

<sup>38</sup> *The Chronicle*, 10 December 2005: “Govt to rethink on UN envoys”. The stand off between the UN and the Zimbabwe government in relation to housing and UN support around this will be dealt with in a forthcoming report by *Solidarity Peace Trust*, dealing more specifically with “Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle”.

<sup>39</sup> The months between July and October 2005 saw the government stubbornly refusing to agree to any international appeal for assistance. A formal agreement for food aid, and some assistance with housing, was eventually entered into between government and UN agencies, in November 2005, shortly before the visit of UN envoy Jan Egeland. The aftermath of OM and Operation Garikai/ Hlalani Kuhle will be dealt with in a report by the current authors, to be released in June 2006.

<sup>40</sup> *The Standard*, 5 February 2006: “Chefs grab ‘Garikai’ houses”; *Chronicle*, 3 March 2006: “Housing scandal”; *Sunday News*, 5 March 2006: “Residents fume over allocation of houses”; Apart from the army, senior government officials and their extended families have been allocated houses.



*Photo two:* soldier emerges from a newly allocated house in Cowdray Park, where 700 houses were built under Operation Garikai / Hlalani Kuhle, supposedly for the displaced.

#### **4. Command Agriculture: appeasement of army, control of democratic space**

##### **Appeasement of the uniformed forces**

From the time the scheme was mooted, experienced farmers pointed out that you cannot place soldiers in charge of crop production and expect much in terms of results. The under-utilisation of commercial farmland in the last five years has been a direct result of giving arable land to those who have neither the expertise nor the inputs to produce commercial crops – among them, army commanders.<sup>41</sup>

However, during 2005/6, media reports have indicated growing dissatisfaction in the ranks of the army, the laying off of thousands of soldiers, and the partial closing of army barracks, as government battles to provide food and sufficient pay for its uniformed forces.<sup>42</sup> As recently as 26 March, there have been indications of soldiers sabotaging army equipment out of disgruntlement with their conditions.<sup>43</sup> There is an obvious need for the government to retain the loyalty of its armed forces in an economy that has collapsed, and in the face of growing political instability.

The previous section has already raised the fact that OG/HK has benefited a disproportionate number of the uniformed forces. It is possible that involving the army and other uniformed forces in Command Agriculture is also partially an act of appeasement: it has given some forces the benefits of “acquiring” farming equipment, and has placed soldiers on the site where food is

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<sup>41</sup> BBC, December 16, 2005, op cit.

<sup>42</sup> BBC World Service news bulletin, 6 am, 6 October 2005; *Zimbabwe Independent*, January 13, 2006: “Soldiers quit army”.

<sup>43</sup> *The Standard*, March 26 – April 1, 2006: “Sabotage probe at army barracks”.

being produced, opening the door to them helping themselves.<sup>44</sup> It has provided occupation for soldiers who otherwise might have little to do except become hungry and angry.

### **Control of rural communities through army deployment**

Most ominously, Command Agriculture has provided a reason to place army units throughout the nation, including deep into rural areas, where they are a repressive presence, capable of playing the role of government informers and controllers of rural populations. As the next section of this report will illustrate, soldiers have assaulted civilians, extorted money from them in the guise of “fines” for not farming well enough, and have generally interfered with long established community practice to the detriment and repression of plot holders.

In a previous report by Solidarity Peace Trust (SPT), the motives for OM are discussed: one clear motive repeatedly given by government during the early phases was that people must “go back where they came from”.<sup>45</sup> There was a clear desire to displace people to rural areas where they are easier to control.<sup>46</sup> It was also predicted in this same SPT report, that displacing people to rural areas would be followed up by the intensification of repression and the closure of democratic space in rural areas.

The army has for the last four years played a controlling role in the *distribution of food* throughout Zimbabwe, via the parastatal Grain Marketing Board (GMB), which is headed by a retired army commander, and staffed with other army officials, as well as relying on youth militia to oversee sales in some districts. Command Agriculture signals the intensification of the militarization of Zimbabwe, as the army now usurps *control of food production*.

This deployment of army should be seen to be part of the continuing process of closing all remaining democratic space in Zimbabwe. It can be predicted that the presence of the army across the nation, including in rural areas, will intensify over the next few years, ahead of the next presidential and/or parliamentary elections.<sup>47</sup> Command Agriculture will provide the perfect justification for such army deployment.

## **5. Food as a political weapon**

*Command Agriculture needs to be viewed in the general context of the political abuse of food by government: maize, Zimbabwe’s staple food, has been used to manipulate and intimidate the starving over the last four years.* The government has total control over who has access to maize sales through the GMB. In rural areas, GMB maize is almost the only source of affordable maize and the denial of the right to purchase maize on political grounds has been well documented over the last five years, particularly, but not only, during elections.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See information on Irrigation Scheme One, included in this report, where a plot holder describes soldiers helping themselves to produce.

<sup>45</sup> *Solidarity Peace Trust*, “Discarding the filth”, June 2005. [www.solidaritypeacetrust.org.za](http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org.za)

<sup>46</sup> It would appear that in fact only thousands rather than tens of thousands of people did in fact relocate to rural areas, but the intention to displace people to rural areas should not be forgotten. A forthcoming report by SPT outlines findings of an urban survey which found that 80% of those who lost dwellings are still in urban centres, in terribly congested conditions.

<sup>47</sup> Presidential elections are currently scheduled for 2008, but a constitutional amendment is anticipated that will shift this election in line with parliamentary elections in 2010. There are Rural District Council elections due in September of this year: it will be essential to evaluate the impact of the army on the campaign period.

<sup>48</sup> For example, *Solidarity Peace Trust*, “Out for the Count”, May 2005; *Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum* election report; *Amnesty International*, London; *Physicians for Human Rights* (Denmark), “Vote ZANU PF for

Most recently, the Zimbabwean courts themselves acknowledged the use of maize as an electoral weapon by the ruling party, ZANU PF. In her judgement on the electoral petition for Makoni North, in which MDC appealed the outcome of the poll in March 2005, Justice Rita Makarau acknowledged that maize sales had been abused for political purposes in the constituency during the campaign period.<sup>49</sup>

I am satisfied that throughout the constituency, villagers were threatened with the withholding of food and other handouts and were denied these if they supported the MDC.... the perpetrators of this practice were the leadership of ZANU PF at the village levels and the war veterans residing in the constituency. (page 23)

It has been my finding that corrupt practices were committed in respect of the election of the [ZANU PF] respondent. Villagers were denied food and other handouts and resettled farmers were intimidated with the loss of their land if they voted for the [MDC] petitioner. (page 27)

Government has been shown to use maize as a strategic weapon to coerce a starving population into political obedience; in view of this, they clearly have a vested interest in trying to ensure that as much maize as possible ends up in GMB silos and as little as possible in the hands of rural irrigation plot holders. This could explain the virtual theft of maize from a rural irrigation schemes under Command Agriculture that will be illustrated further on in this report.

***Urban populations: a threat when hungry***  
***Rural populations: compliant when hungry***

A further concern for government is the possibility of urban insurrection, particularly since opposition forces have been calling for civil disobedience this winter. The army reportedly fears food riots in urban centres later this year if food shortages persist.<sup>50</sup> One may predict that efforts will be made to keep urban populations fed to reduce the likelihood of them taking to the streets – and this may be done at the expense of the rural population being fed. Hunger in rural areas is likely to result in greater political compliance rather than uprisings, as the last few years have shown, whereas in urban areas the reverse may eventually prove to be true. In any case unrest in rural areas would be of insignificant national impact politically speaking, and could be easily put down.

### **Why remove maize from rural producers and leave them hungry?**

In at least one irrigation scheme in Matabeleland, the authors have documented a policy of removing almost the entire harvest from individual plot producers, leaving each with only 100 kg of maize.<sup>51</sup> The harvest that has been seized in this way was in fact planted *prior to* the implementation of OT/S, using 100% plot holder inputs. Why insist that irrigation scheme

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food”, 2003. During 2006, the authors spoke to villagers in Nkayi, Matabeleland North, who reported that ZANU PF officials addressed them at a meeting in early March and told them, weeks ahead of their harvest, that if they did not buy new ZANU PF cards, then they would either be denied access or charged double for using the only local grinding mill, owned by a ZANU PF businessman. They were also told that they would not access GMB maize without the cards. Examples of food abuse abound.

<sup>49</sup> Elton Steers Mangoma versus Didymus Mutasa: Judgment on Electoral Petition for Makoni North: Justice Makarau.

<sup>50</sup> *Zimbabwe Independent*, January 27, 2006: “Army fears food riots”.

<sup>51</sup> See case example of Irrigation Scheme One, ahead in this report. Most schemes are not yet harvesting so it remains to be seen what will happen in this regard when they do.



producers sell the bulk of their crop to GMB if you know that by so doing you render them without enough maize to survive until the next harvest? Why shift maize away from the rural producers, incurring transport and storage costs and inevitable spoilage, if there was any intention to shift it back for sale a few months later, when the very villagers who produced the maize are now starving because you removed it?

The answer could be, that in the first place, government wants to be able to make a show to the international community of silos that are as full as possible, to regain some face in the wake of the disastrous impact of land resettlement on crop production. And in the second place, government wants that maize in GMB silos so that it can control the behaviour of the nation, in terms of the dynamic outlined above: feed the urban areas and control rural areas by manipulating sparse food supplies.

### **Army destruction of market gardening and lucrative cash crops**

One of the most shocking results of Command Agriculture in Matabeleland, has been the ruthless and seemingly senseless destruction of market gardens and lucrative cash crops. Sworn affidavits in the authors' possession recount how the very first instruction and action from the army in three irrigation schemes in Matabeleland South, was to plough under every single crop already in the fields, apart from maize, in all these schemes.

- In Ngwizi Irrigation scheme in Plumtree, a well-established and flourishing paprika crop was ploughed under. Paprika is a lucrative export crop with a guaranteed market.
- In Silalabuhwe Irrigation scheme in Insiza, and in Makwe Irrigation scheme in Gwanda, long established vegetable gardens have been totally destroyed. Tomatoes, spinach, sweet potatoes, groundnuts were forcibly ploughed under in December 2005, by the army. The army harvested anything salvageable from this action and ate it.
- In Makwe, soldiers ordered that banana trees were chopped down to plant maize.

### **Motives: stupidity - or a policy of destroying economic independence?**

There are two interpretations of this action of destroying cash crops: either these were the acts of extremely stupid soldiers taking a step too far, a general instruction to plant only maize in these schemes. Alternatively, there is a more sinister interpretation: the wanton destruction of the economic and food base of these rural communities could be viewed as in keeping with the already well-documented strategy of abusing/denying food and resources, to keep rural populations subdued. As one key informant remarked, on describing events in the irrigation schemes:

Destruction of market gardening has destroyed the economic independence of these irrigation communities: where people were self sufficient, they will now be poor and have to look to government to provide everything.<sup>52</sup>

In all the districts concerned, the irrigation schemes are the life-blood of the district: they are the only source of vegetables during winter months, and provide dozens of vending jobs for the surrounding community. The income from this in turn contributes to turnover for local businesses of all descriptions. Interviews by the authors indicate that a plot holder growing vegetables at Makwe was turning over Z\$10 million a week in December, or Z\$40 million a month. This would have put plot holders into the category of wealthy by rural standards, or as

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<sup>52</sup> Ex AREX officer, anonymous: interviewed on 28 March 2006.

earning four times the poverty datum line for December 2005. These same plot holders have earned *not one cent* from these same plots since the army arrived and destroyed everything. They have been plunged into instant poverty.

The authors have made some efforts to establish what is happening in such schemes elsewhere in the country. It still remains to be verified whether market gardens nationwide were destroyed. What can be said is that there appears to have been a pattern of army behaviour in Matabeleland in which such market gardens were systematically destroyed. It could be that Matabeleland is considered a troublesome rural region, as most rural people here support the opposition, whereas in other parts of the country, rural areas are the ZANU PF stronghold. The destruction of a crucial part of the economic base of rural Matabeleland might be a specific policy targeting this troublesome region that does not support government, and the experience in predominantly ZANU PF supporting rural areas may be different. This needs to be further explored and established, and observers in the rest of rural Zimbabwe are urged to investigate.

*The authors' provisional conclusion from their observations: government does not want self-sufficiency in its rural populations; it wants vulnerability through dependency. Destruction of market gardens in irrigation schemes is part of a policy to promote such dependency.*

### **A deep concern – Vice President Mujuru announces government interest in individual harvests in Insiza**

On Friday 24 March 2006, Joyce Mujuru addressed assembled village heads in Insiza. There have been different reports of what was said. One informant reported her as saying that she warned people not to “tamper” with the yields in their fields until the authorities have assessed them. People who have grown crops at their private homesteads were reminded by Mujuru that they “owe” the government for the provision of their seeds. Mujuru said that the local elected councillors would be informed by government what the procedure was to be and they in turn would call a meeting of village heads and inform them. The village heads would then need to address their communities as to how yields should be dealt with.<sup>53</sup> Another informant reported that Mujuru had said that families should eat no more than 10 maize cobs per day from their own fields.

People in Insiza are now very confused. They feel that the implication of this meeting with Mujuru is that their yields, or some part of them, is not really theirs and will be taken by GMB. People are very worried and despondent, and also angry. Most seed in Insiza was apparently donated by World Vision this season, and not by government, although some seed packs were part of AREX “loans”. Other seed was privately purchased because of its short supply through all channels. Discussion with a previous AREX official confirmed what villagers told us: the so-called “loans” of seed and fertiliser have been de facto “grants” from government in all previous seasons. There has never before been an issue raised of a need to repay seed with a portion of yields.

*Unfolding events need to be closely watched: does government indeed intend to coerce a portion of rural yields from individual homesteads as well as from rural irrigation schemes? This will be the first time ever if this is the case. Villagers have had the best harvest in years in Insiza, they have worked very hard in their fields and are now wondering if they are going to be used as indentured labour, with their hard work taken away from them - just when they had assumed that for once they had achieved food security. On television on Sunday 26 March, Mujuru*

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<sup>53</sup> Key informant from Insiza: interview 27 March 2006.

commented that Matabeleland South was going to have a bumper harvest and that this was good because the government could buy the surplus for the nation. This is fair enough if it is willing seller, willing buyer, but not if sales are coerced and leave families with food insecurity.

## **6. The Grain Marketing Board Act**

Maize is a controlled product in Zimbabwe, which means that its purchase and sale is controlled by government, and the terms of such regulation are defined by the GMB Act. In terms of the GMB Act, “no person shall sell or otherwise dispose of any controlled product within the prescribed area except to the GMB” [Section 33 (1)]. However, Section 35 deals with “Controlled products exempted from the Act”. In terms of Section 35 (1) (c):

Nothing in this Act shall prevent any person who is the producer of a controlled product from using any such controlled product for consumption by himself, his household, his employees or his livestock.

In terms of this clause, the army at the irrigation scheme in Matabeleland where the army has seized crops compulsorily, leaving producers with only 100kg each, have violated the GMB Act. The army has no legal right to remove from plot holders, maize which they, their employees or livestock need for their consumption.

If, as hinted at by Mujuru, the government goes ahead and takes any part of any individual’s maize yield that might be needed for household consumption in the course of the next year, the government will be behaving illegally.

### ***Recommendation***

It is the recommendation of the authors that in any irrigation scheme where the army has insisted on the selling of crops to GMB, that the producers need for household and livestock consumption during 2006/7, affected plot holders should come together and put a test case before the courts, accusing the army and/or government authorities of breaking the law. The NGO sector should be ready to fund such a test case.

## **7. Rural irrigation schemes – background to management**

This section of the report will briefly describe the background to the ARDA and AREX irrigation projects over the last few decades. It will then summarise the impact of army deployment under Command Agriculture, on five irrigation schemes in Matabeleland South.

### **1968: Drought recovery schemes: TILCO<sup>54</sup>**

All five of the irrigation projects under discussion here were set up at the same time, in the late 1960s, under the Rhodesian government. Dams were built in areas that had proved very vulnerable to drought, in both Matabeleland North and South. The intention was that these irrigation schemes would be farmed to more than subsistence level, to become a source of surpluses for their surrounding communities. To this end, the chiefs were asked to identify

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<sup>54</sup> All information here from key informant interview with ex-AREX official: 27 March 2006.

“master farmers” in their areas, who were then allocated plots and put under the management of Tribal Trust Land Cooperation (TILCO).

TILCO gave plot holders inputs as loans. These included seed, fertiliser, basic land preparation (ie initial clearance), and water bailiffs to work out water quantities needed by each plot. Extension services did ploughing and fertilising. Producer prices were discussed by farmers prior to planting each year, so they could come up with proper projected plans for a year-round harvest. Harvesting was also done by the extension services, as well as the marketing. Farmers were paid the difference after all costs for the production of the crop had been deducted. In this system, farmers were always assured of inputs for the next season, and certain products such as wheat and barley had unlimited markets at good producer prices.

Vegetable growing was always done at the initiative and expense of the plot holders, who had to source their own seeds and other inputs.

### **Post Independence: ARDA, AGRITEX and ARES**

After 1980, the same tenant farmers remained. The land under irrigation was extended, and more families were identified through the chiefs, irrigation committees and AGRITEX, and joined the schemes. The parastatal Agricultural Rural Development Association (ARDA) took over management of some of these irrigation projects, and the others were taken over by the communities themselves under the guidance of what was initially called AGRITEX and is now called ARES - the Agricultural Research and Extension Services. ARDA irrigation schemes are owned by the parastatal and are for research and development. They tend to be larger than the other schemes, and in the past at least, more subject to direct control. Farmers would be told exactly what to plant and when, as ARDA was interested in comparing different hybrids, for example.<sup>55</sup> ARDA schemes are run as commercial enterprises and are supposed to produce crops on a commercial scale, and plot holders keep the returns on what they sow.

ARES is not a parastatal, but a government department, and it provides officers in the field to give general advice to farmers both within and without irrigation schemes. Out of the five irrigation projects dealt with in this report, two are ARES administered schemes, while the others are ARDA. The two case studies here are both ARES overseen projects, where the plot holders have been effectively entirely autonomous for decades.

*The new system under ARES has not been paternalistic in the way the colonial system was: land preparation and inputs became the farmers' problem, with ARES providing a purely advisory role. Farmers in these schemes by and large use their own draft power. Committees of plot holders do planning of crop rotation. They collectively source seed, fertiliser and other inputs. Farmers in these projects are supposed to be commercial producers, not in need of government subsidies and inputs.*

Management of irrigation used to be facilitated by the national budget being announced in July. This would include government's producer prices for all crops for the year, so that in good time before the growing season, farmers at all levels could make strategic management decisions about what crops to grow over the next twelve months, and source inputs well in advance of the main planting in November.

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<sup>55</sup> The entire process of agriculture has become so chaotic in recent years, and so many staff have left, that it is not easy to ascertain the current status of ARDA and the degree of efficiency – or more likely otherwise – that predominates in these schemes now.

However, a few years ago, the announcement of the National budget was shifted to November, making planning crop rotations more difficult, as decisions of what to grow have had to be made without knowing the producer price. And in this season, 2005/6, government has *yet to announce* producer prices for any crops, even as the harvest is in process.

### **2005/6 Season: Command Agriculture**

Since Command Agriculture came into force in December 2005, AREX and ARDA officials have been completely side lined in terms of management of irrigation schemes, as have the local management committees. Some AREX officials have reported being treated very aggressively by the army, who have accused them of “making Zimbabwe food insecure”.

The reports of plot holders, and our own observations of activities at these schemes since the army arrived, are disturbing.

- There have been nine reports of army brutality against plot holders - in two cases resulting in serious injuries.
- At two irrigation schemes, the fields were almost entirely fallow through the bulk of the best rainy season in years – because the army made everyone delay planting maize until February through to mid-March, because the inputs from the army arrived very late. These schemes traditionally produce enough food to feed the local community all year, and *this April the harvest will be close to nil*.
- To date, large swathes of land remain unplanted in these schemes because of lack of inputs from the army.
- Maize has now been planted three months late, which has completely thrown out all the normal crop rotation practices. It is now too late to plant sugar beans, which should have been planted in February (when the maize was planted!) The maize harvest, which is likely to be poor as it is already getting too cold for maize, will only be ready in June – and winter wheat should be planted in May.
- Established fruit trees were in December forcibly uprooted by soldiers – to plant maize!
- Vegetable plots growing tomatoes, spinach, groundnuts, sweet potatoes and other quick cash crops were in December forcibly ploughed under by soldiers – to plant maize only.
- This has resulted in children dropping out of school in 2006, as their families can no longer sell market gardening produce to raise school fees. Families that were raising Z\$10 million a week from market gardening have been left with absolutely no income to cover their irrigation scheme overheads or their personal expenses.
- Soldiers at one scheme were at one point guarding every footpath, preventing plot holders from removing a single maize cob for their own consumption or local sale. In terms of the GMB Act, this behaviour was illegal.
- At one ARDA scheme, soldiers are at times taking it upon themselves to reallocate stands from one family to another, disrupting years of established ownership and community decision-making in irrigation scheme management. This is done on the assessment of individual soldiers, without involvement of community leadership, as to who should be “punished” and who “rewarded” for their work in the fields.
- At one ARDA scheme, soldiers seem able to impose and enforce arbitrary systems of fines as punishment. This is simple extortion.
- At one AREX irrigation scheme that is now harvesting the crop that was planted in November *prior to* the implementation of OT/S – using seeds and fertilisers paid for by plot holders – crop producers are being told they may keep 100 kg of maize only, for

their own consumption, and the rest of their crops are to be compulsorily sold to GMB. One hundred kg is less than 2 months supply for most families.

- Coercing plot holders into selling maize that they need for their own use, is in violation of the GMB Act of Zimbabwe. The army is breaking the law with this policy.

Families are anxious, as usually they would keep all their own grain for consumption until next harvest, and pass any remainder on to other family members, or even keep it into the following season in case the rains failed. In the case of a bumper harvest, excess could be sold on to GMB, and the money used to supplement household expenses. But typically in Matabeleland, which is not bumper maize crop country, maize is consumed within the community, and other crops are considered for cash sales.

Family food security until the next harvest in 2006/7 is currently perceived to be under threat. If plot holders have to surrender large proportions of their harvests for some as yet unspecified producer price, they will be without maize in two months' time. They will then have to go to GMB and buy their own produce back for consumption – and no doubt as the year progresses, with inflation running at over 800%, the repurchase price will be much higher than the selling price. Where will villagers find the shortfall to buy back that which they have personally produced, and been forced to sell?

## 8. Irrigation Scheme One: Matabeleland <sup>56</sup>

This scheme has been in operation since 1968. The same families have farmed some plots continuously since the irrigation scheme's inception – a period of 40 years – with plots passing from parents to their children during this time. In the event of a family giving up a plot for some reason, or of no capable person being alive and in the region from that family to manage the plot, they have been allocated to another family through a process of discussion and assessment at the community level, involving the chiefs, the irrigation scheme committee and AREX officials. Some families joined the schemes after post independence expansion of the projects.

There are long established mechanisms for sourcing inputs for this scheme. Families pay for electricity on a three-monthly basis, shared equally between plot holders. Since Independence, these schemes have run on the basis of self sustaining commercial enterprises, where families source and pay for seed and fertiliser themselves. Inputs are not provided by government in this scheme.

In Irrigation Scheme One, plot holders had purchased their own seeds and fertilisers, and although not all the ground had been planted in the early phase, they had a maize crop in the ground and at knee height by the time the army arrived in late November 2005. There is therefore **no basis** on which Command Agriculture can lay any claim to this crop on the grounds of government or the army having supplied any of the key inputs. All ploughing, planting, and initial fertilising had been done using long established community procedures by the time the army arrived.

Furthermore, discussion with an ex AREX official revealed the alarming detail that the army, since their arrival, have seriously damaged the fertility of the soils there, by wantonly throwing thick wads of fertiliser all over the fields. They have allegedly applied **four times** the

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<sup>56</sup> All information on the irrigation schemes has been gained by extensive interviews with plot holders in the schemes, as well as with associated community leadership.

recommended quantities of fertiliser, and this official's prediction is that they have effectively killed the soil. His prediction is that in a few weeks, the army have made this soil so acidic that it will be dead and unproductive in the next season.

*In a few weeks, the army has allegedly destroyed irrigation fields that have been carefully maintained and kept fertile for the last forty years.*

### **Market gardening: an essential source of income**

In November, in addition to their maize crops, plot holders had extensive areas under other crops, including sweet potatoes, groundnuts and vegetables such as tomatoes and spinach. Some farmers also have fruit trees on their plots. Apart from the nutritional needs of families not met by a diet of strict maize, these market gardening crops are sold to give families cash for school fees and all other essentials. Those fortunate enough to have an irrigated plot, often have no other means of generating income for their survival. The sale value of such produce is high compared to the government-controlled price of maize sales to GMB. The return is also immediate and continuous – unlike maize sales to GMB, where producers have been given no producer price so far and may wait months to receive any monies. One of the producers here told the authors that in the weeks prior to the army's arrival he was getting a return of Z\$10 million a week from his vegetables, which was typical.

### **Arrival of the army at Irrigation Scheme One**

The army arrived in late November. A public meeting was called and plot holders were informed by a Lieutenant Colonel (name given) that the army was now overseeing all activities at the scheme. From this point on, dynamics in the scheme changed for the worse.

A meeting was held sometime in November 2005, which meeting was addressed by a commander known only as M [name given]. At the meeting the committee was advised by M that everything that was not maize was to be destroyed. During the meeting we toured the whole scheme, which had vegetables, that included tomatoes, green pepper, onions, chillies, sweet potatoes and groundnuts. The commander advised that all the vegetables were to be destroyed forthwith. On 14 December 2005... tractors arrived and all the committees were called and ordered to destroy all the banana trees in the section or face beatings....<sup>57</sup>

The army took over the role of deciding at what pace and in what way crops would be planted and grown. AREX officials whom the community are used to consulting with, have been rendered silent and powerless to intervene. Effectively, soldiers with no previous experience of irrigation crop cultivation, have total decision-making powers on how things should be done.

On the day that tractors finished ploughing under the crops, soldiers insisted that the following day, the entire ploughed area should be planted with maize, and that plot holders should not go to bed until the planting was done.

However, there is more to preparing an irrigation plot for planting than mere ploughing. Fields have to be correctly channelled; canals have to be formed prior to planting, so that water will run efficiently across the whole field, accessing all plants. The planting furrows also need fertiliser prior to planting. This is the established procedure in this scheme, and it is one that must be done

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<sup>57</sup> Taken from a sworn affidavit from a plot holder.

properly and cannot be done in one day, in addition to planting! The army refused to listen or have any discussion as to technique, insisting things were done their way. Plot holders actually had to work until midnight or later in their plots on the day of this instruction.

### **Army brutality**

Within a few weeks of the army arriving here, eight plot holders were assaulted by soldiers, two of them seriously enough to need medical attention. One of those seriously assaulted was an irrigation scheme committee member, who was summoned to a disciplinary meeting at the army camp and formally beaten: his crime – challenging at a public meeting the common sense in the army demanding that people work *day and night* to finish planting their fields. The victim had asked – “when then are we supposed to rest, if we work all night?” This man had in fact worked until 9 pm on the day after this meeting to finish planting his area, as ordered by the army. But soldiers had gone to check on him at 11 pm, and not finding him in his fields at this hour (!) had ordered him to their camp for punishment – in spite of the planting having been done.

He was forced to collect water for the soldiers, before being made to lie down and receiving five strokes with a stick. The beating was so severe that his leg remains numb three months later, and the shock to this individual was so intense that he has given up farming his plot. In late March he has not been to the irrigation scheme since the beating in December, and other family members have had to take over management of it.

*This plot holder also commented that when he was summoned to the office for his ‘sentencing’, the army commander was eating sweet potatoes and other produce ploughed under at the scheme a few days earlier.*

Seven others were similarly beaten around this time, for not having worked hard or fast enough in their plots. One man was severely beaten for not having completed planting in a field that in fact was not even his, but belongs to his aged father who had gone to town. The son had finished his own plot and was frantically trying to finish his father’s plot too, when he was beaten.

A woman in her fifties was among those beaten. She reported to us that the army told her she had not been working hard enough and should therefore work at night too. She challenged them, saying her family had farmed the plot for 40 years and nobody had ever worked at night, and she was too old to do so now. They accused her of being cheeky and said she should lie down and be beaten. She refused, saying they should beat her standing up as she would not die with indignity face down in the mud.

*She told them that she had survived 5 Brigade but if she was going to die now, she would die standing. A soldier then beat her about the face while she stood there, permanently damaging the metacarpe-phalangeal joint of the index finger of her hand, when she tried to protect herself. This has left her index finger disabled and painful, interfering with many activities.*

This woman reported to us that the army had forced her to uproot her fruit trees and all her vegetables. She reported that because of this, her five children were out of school for the first year ever, as she no longer has any way of sourcing the money for their fees. She has been reduced to poverty by the army.

### *Assault charges*

The plot holders who were beaten reported the matter to the police. But they were intimidated when they found two soldiers at the police base. Nobody laid charges against the soldiers.



However, they reported the incidents and those who needed clinic treatment for their injuries asked for police letters of referral so that they could access free treatment.

I did not press charges as I could see that even the police who were taking down our statements were not confident in their duty and that left us with no option and we felt less protected by the police.<sup>58</sup>

The woman who was beaten did press charges, and her case came up before a magistrate's court. The outcome of the case is not known at this time.

## **Harvesting**

The maize planted early, before the army arrived, has recently been harvested (during March). The army oversaw this process, and families were forced to use their own transport, in the form of donkey carts, to transport their entire harvests into army custody. They were then allowed to count out 500 cobs per plot holder. This is about 100kg of maize when shelled. They have been told they will have to come and justify very thoroughly any further requests to access their own produce. The maize is shortly to be transferred to GMB, and they have been told any spoilage during this process is at their cost, yet the army has left the maize in the open, and will not allow the producers to protect it from the rain. They have been told that amounts will be deducted depending on what the army decide their own inputs have been – such as the excessive amounts of fertiliser put on the fields – and then the plot holders will eventually receive some unspecified cash payout for the balance. There is no producer price, and no timescale on when payment will be made.

## **9. Irrigation Scheme Two**

*“Not even a single person has benefited from the irrigation this year”.*<sup>59</sup>

### **Extremely late planting**

At irrigation scheme two, plot holders were well into preparing their land for planting maize when the army arrived. Although some land had been planted by their arrival, most had not been able to plant early in November before the rains, as the local ZANU PF Member of Parliament had diverted all the water that should be in their irrigation dam to undertake his own gold panning activities, thus disrupting this irrigation scheme. However, by early December, planting was about to begin with the rains. The army then ordered that no planting should take place until they provided the inputs, and that people should instead plough. No inputs arrived until mid February – so in fact the entire growing season has been effectively lost. Plot holders were nonetheless forced to attend the scheme day after day even though there was not much of a crop in the fields. They were told that if a plot holder was not seen there for three consecutive days, then s/he would lose the right to the stand. People were then forced to plant maize from February through to mid March, which is three months too late for maize to achieve an optimum yield, although some little will be harvested. If people had been left to themselves, then they would have planted and been almost ready to harvest maize by now.

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<sup>58</sup> From sworn affidavit.

<sup>59</sup> Comment from a key informant interviewee: 27 March 2006.

### **Fallow land – not enough inputs**

According to those in the scheme, apart from the fact that inputs were so late, the amount of seed from the army was also too little – vast tracts of this irrigation scheme remain entirely fallow. Parts of the scheme are now unploughed fields of tall grass and little bushes.

Yet elsewhere in this district, outside of the irrigation scheme, virtually every available square inch of land has been planted with maize, and will result in some good harvests.

The late maize planting has completely disrupted the plans the community had drawn up, to plant maize in December, then to plant sugar beans during February and March, and to plant winter wheat in May, after harvesting maize in April. Maize will now be ready only in June, which has thrown out the entire crop cycle. In any case, the community no longer has any say in terms of what crops will be planted or when. They have no idea what the army will order them to plant in June, or when any further inputs of any description will arrive.

### **Destruction of market gardens**

At this scheme as at the other, the first instruction from the army was to destroy all other crops in the ground, including extensive vegetable gardens. This scheme used to supply the entire area, even beyond the district, with fresh vegetables and green maize. With the reduced water available during last year, because of the MP diverting it, women had been focusing on growing vegetables as they are more concentrated and people could get a good return off a smaller amount of land and water than by growing irrigated maize. Now market gardening has been forcibly stopped.

### **Maize crops to “pay” for “loans”**

Plot holders here are also confused and anxious because they have been told by the soldiers that they will have to surrender their crops to pay back the “loans” of diesel for ploughing, seeds and fertilisers. The yield is likely to be so little that there will be close to nothing left for them once this is done. Some of the plot holders have offered to pay in cash for the army inputs, if they have children working in town or in the Diaspora who can afford to help them with this. The plot holders would rather pay in cash and keep whatever little yield there is. However, the soldiers have made it clear that the debt cannot be paid in cash. It is compulsory to pay in maize.

Some villagers have been told by the army that as the irrigation scheme is likely to yield so little, plot holders there will have to repay the debt not only with what grows at the scheme, but with whatever they have managed to grow around their own homesteads as well. People are despondent and afraid. They are also angry.

As with the other schemes, maize from the very small early harvest is totally under army control. If any plot holder wants to take home green maize to feed his own family, s/he has to go to the army office and requisition it. S/he has to inform the soldiers how many members of his/her family live at home, and s/he is then allowed to take home exactly one cob per family member only. This is not enough maize as a daily ration – and why are people being rationed when it is their own crop?

## **Social dynamics disrupted**

Key informants from the area state that people are considering totally abandoning this scheme, after forty years of ownership, as they are not prepared to work under these conditions. There has been an incident of soldiers beating a villager here.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, there has apparently been an incident of villagers banding together and ambushing a soldier at night and seriously assaulting him, as the villagers feel what is happening is altogether unjust and they can think of no other way of expressing their anger about it all.

Apart from resentment about what is happening at the scheme, villagers are also angry at the behaviour of the soldiers in the community at large. As can be predicted when a large group of single men is moved into a civilian area, there have been accusations of soldiers interfering with people's wives and daughters, and manhandling school girls on their way home from school. The soldiers also behave badly at the business centre, getting drunk and aggressive and wanting goods without payment.

## **10. ARDA irrigation schemes, Matabeleland**

The authors have less information about these schemes, but have had the following reports from individuals and key community informants about three schemes. The three ARDA schemes all have large sections of fallow land, have been seriously under utilised through lack of inputs and bad management, and on all three, crops in the ground were ploughed under on arrival of the army. It was at the ARDA-run scheme in Ngwizi that the army ploughed under an extensive paprika crop at the end of last year.

In one ARDA scheme, soldiers have been patrolling people's plots and deciding how much work has or has not been done. One elderly couple reported that the soldiers had told them that as they had only weeded two thirds of their field in the time that others had weeded their whole fields, their field was being confiscated. The field was given to another family in the community. The original family begged and pleaded to have their plot back and finally the soldiers agreed. However, in the meantime, the second family had completed the weeding. The soldiers therefore instigated a system of fines and compensations. They "allowed" the first family back onto their plot in return for a "fine" paid to the soldiers. And the soldiers then further demanded the second family now be paid compensation for their labour.

The plot holders in this scheme are all in fear of such arbitrary justice, which flies in the face of long established practice. Families have held plots for decades, and wonder on what authority the army now have the right to confiscate and reallocate plots, or enforce arbitrary fines.

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<sup>60</sup> A man was beaten for allowing his cattle to stray into a fallow field! He is allegedly a ZANU PF supporter and not prepared to make a complaint. However, other plot holders have commented that everyone is suffering, both MDC and ZANU PF supporters.



*Photo three:* tall grass waves in fallow fields where maize should be growing, in an ARDA-run irrigation scheme in Matabeleland (March 2006)



*Photo four:* late crops – and fallow fields in a different ARDA-run Matabeleland irrigation scheme (March 2006). Maize should be two metres high by March.