Knowledge, resettlement and farming

Introduction

This book is based on an ethnographic study carried out among farmers in Mupfurudzi resettlement area in Shamva Zimbabwe. I spent a period of 30 months gathering data. In 2001, I was involved in an externally funded multi-disciplinary study assessing the impact of agricultural research on poverty reduction with a particular focus on High Yielding Varieties (HYVs) of Maize in Zimbabwe (Bourdillon et al. 2002). This multi-disciplinary study looked at the pathways of dissemination of knowledge about hybrid maize. The study took advantage of the huge database with quantitative information that was available from previous studies in the same community. The research contained data on 424 households in three land resettlement areas in Zimbabwe. This panel study, unique for Africa, contained data for the years 1984, 1987, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 2000 and covered aspects such as family composition, labour, agriculture, assets, institutional linkages, sources of income, nutritional status and anthropometrics. The database was then used as a reference point from which to select cases for further in-depth studies. As the study progressed and I was confronted with situations in the field, I decided that there was a need to go beyond this rather narrow angle of study to look at the production, growth and dissemination of knowledge about farming in general and not just focus on maize cultivation as a poverty reduction strategy.

This study contributes to academic debates on knowledge. First, since the aim was to investigate how knowledge is produced and socialised, a resettlement area with people resettling from different agro-ecological regions with different knowledge and approaches to agriculture and farming provided a fascinating area. Because farmers were coming into a new area, and were confronted with new crops and new animal and crop diseases in an unfamiliar environment, investigating how farmers negotiated and adapted to this new environment forms an important part of this book. The fact that the resettlement scheme became a melting pot of different knowledge makes the
term ‘local’ a problematic one, yet farmers still use and produce knowledge that is considered ‘local’. Second, as shall be discussed later, resettlement aimed to address the racial imbalances regarding land ownership, as well as to improve production among black farmers by resettling them in better agro-ecological zones and by providing them with agricultural experts to help modernise their agriculture. This renders the book relevant to knowledge debates as it unravels how local knowledge makes use of scientifically based state-organised interventions.

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the study, a discussion on the issue of resettlement in Zimbabwe as well as a brief background to the study area. In the discussion on land reform, I will only discuss the early land reforms that occurred in the 1980s soon after independence from British colonial rule, and not the current Fast Track land redistribution. I do this because the study area is a result of the early resettlement and not of the Fast Track Land Resettlement that is too recent for consideration in this study (for a discussion of the Fast Track Land Resettlement see Moyo 2004).

Land reform in Zimbabwe represents a scientific field of great interest. The Zimbabwean government has implemented land reform from above since 1982 in the form of land resettlement. Recently the process of land redistribution has gained a new momentum. The current phase of resettlement involves ‘fast track’ land resettlement, or land invasions, depending on whether one supports the process or not. A substantial body of knowledge about the process of land reform has already been accumulated (Kinsey 1999) – about asset accumulation, strategies for acquiring income, livelihoods, the effects of land reform on gender and economic empowerment (Gaidzanwa, 1995; Jacobs, 1993) – as well as the social, political and economic justifications for land resettlement (Zinyama 1995: 222). However, little is known about the dynamic processes of acquisition, dissemination and socialisation of agricultural knowledge in the context of land resettlement whereby people move from one place to another, rather unknown, area in terms of agro-ecology infrastructure, institutions and culture.

The lack of academic literature on the issue of knowledge in resettlement areas is hardly surprising, as post-independence academics were mostly interested in evaluating the relative success of resettlement schemes, using the government’s stated objectives as a yardstick. For example, there was an interest in whether self-reliance was increasing, whether jobs were being created, incomes improved and food security achieved. Feminist scholars began to focus on issues related to women’s livelihoods. In most cases knowledge production was not regarded as an integral component of resettlement since it was assumed that the resettled people were to be ‘given’ knowledge by the government employed extension workers, and researchers were often concerned that the number of extension workers was insufficient to ensure the effective dissemination of knowledge to the ‘ignorant’ masses. Only recently in Zimbabwe has there been an attempt to study farmers’