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**Youth Agrarian Futures in Zimbabwe's  
New Land Tenure Framework:** Navigating  
Intergenerational Transitions and the Crisis of 'Waithood' in  
Post-Reform Agricultural Communities

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# INDEX OF CONTENTS

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<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<hr/>	
<b>An issue of land rights and security: Whose?</b>	<b>3</b>
<hr/>	
<b>The crisis of 'waithood': Structural constraints on youth transition to adulthood</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Youth as transient demographic: Policy design challenges</b>	
<hr/>	
<b>Innovative youth pathways: Agency beyond formal systems</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The LTIP framework: Contradictions and possibilities</b>	
<hr/>	
<b>Policy recommendations: Toward youth-inclusive agrarian futures</b>	
<b>Institutional framework for youth-inclusive tenure security</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Addressing the crisis of waithood through comprehensive support systems</b>	
<hr/>	
<b>Safeguarding redistributive achievements within market-oriented frameworks</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Gender-inclusive implementation and intersectional equity</b>	
<b>Preserving social justice within agricultural modernisation</b>	
<hr/>	
<b>References</b>	<b>9</b>

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## Abstract

Zimbabwe's new Land Tenure Implementation Programme (LTIP), which issues title deeds to Fast Track Land Reform Programme beneficiaries, represents a significant shift in the country's agrarian policy landscape. We argue that while generational questions of land beneficiation are now being slowly acknowledged in Zimbabwe's land and agricultural policy, significant gaps remain in addressing youth-specific constraints. This article critically engages with the dynamic intersection of tenure reform and youth agricultural pathways, analysing how young people navigate structural barriers to access land. Drawing from existing literature, we identify four key innovative youth pathways to access land which include parental subdivisions of existing plots, allocations from central and local government authorities, inheritance (with evolving gendered patterns), and emerging land rental markets. We emphasise that these pathways reflect adaptations to limited formal options, with subdivisions being significant for both male and female youth. We advocate for formal recognition of these diverse approaches in the emergent tenure arrangements. The emergent tenure system creates dual possibilities, potentially enabling greater access to agricultural land and finance while risking accelerated land concentration without adequate safeguards. We contend that successful implementation requires targeted interventions addressing youth-specific needs, with attention to the transient nature of 'youth' as a category necessitating flexible policy accommodations. We conclude that the LTIP must incorporate mechanisms that support viable youth agrarian futures while preserving the foundational principles of equitable land distribution in Zimbabwe's contemporary agrarian context, ensuring intergenerational equity and sustainable agricultural development.

**Keywords:** intergenerational equity; land access; land tenure security; land ownership; policy implementation; title deeds; youth agrarian futures

# Introduction

Zimbabwe's new Land Tenure Implementation Programme (LTIP), launched by President Emmerson Mnangagwa in December 2024, represents a historic shift in the country's agrarian policy landscape. It challenges us to confront the problématique of youth as a transient demographic in land reform processes. The land tenure implementation programme represents another step in land reform, replacing 99-year leases, offer letters and permits with what are presented by the government as 'bankable, registrable and transferable tenure documents' for beneficiaries (GoZ 2024). This initiative emerges at a critical juncture when generational questions intersect with unresolved national and agrarian questions that have persisted since Zimbabwe's independence. This is in a background where resettlement areas have experienced significant demographic transitions that were neither anticipated nor planned for during the initial Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). While the FTLRP was primarily focused on correcting historical injustices, decongesting communal areas, and creating a medium-scale agrarian class to replace the dispossessed white commercial farming elite, many original settlers have now aged or died, leaving their children and grandchildren requiring land access. This emerging reality of an increasingly ageing settler population alongside a landless younger generation presents unprecedented challenges around inheritance and intergenerational land transfer that expose significant gaps in Zimbabwe's agrarian reform strategy.

We argue that the central challenge Zimbabwe faces today is not merely technical, how to issue better and secure tenure documents but social and political. The question is how the country can design a land tenure system that accommodates the fluid, evolving nature of youth as a demographic category while addressing deeper structural inequalities that land reform was meant to resolve. This occurs in a context where the first generation of children who witnessed FTLRP in 2000 have now matured into the 15-35 age bracket that defines youth in Zimbabwe's constitutional framework (GoZ 2020). However, they find themselves confronting new forms of exclusion within the very areas that were supposed to represent liberation from historical injustices. Against this background, a central question has emerged with increasing urgency in Zimbabwe and beyond: Who will be the next generation of farmers? This question is important in land reform contexts where major redistribution occurred to one generation. What becomes of the emerging generation? Will they follow in their forebears' footsteps, abandon rural life for alternative economic opportunities, or

will they manoeuvre with what is at their disposal and perhaps revolutionise agricultural systems in ways their predecessors never envisioned? These are critical questions in a context where policy debates have crystallised around both doom and positive narratives, but the reality demands more critical analysis.

In light of the dynamics raised above, we are cognisant of the fact that generational questions of land beneficiation are now being slowly acknowledged in Zimbabwe's land and agricultural policy frameworks. These include the National Agricultural Policy Framework (NAPF 2019-2030) and the Agriculture Food Systems and Rural Transformation Strategy (2020-2025) with its anchor plans: Agriculture Recovery Plan, Horticulture Recovery and Growth Plan, Livestock Recovery and Growth Plan, Accelerated Irrigation Rehabilitation Development Plan, and Agriculture Information Management System (AIMS). These frameworks prioritise women and youth in agricultural development. They are supported by fiscal commitments from the National Treasury and numerous interventions from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development (MoLAFWRD). The approach however, remains flawed because it treats youth as a static category rather than recognising the transient, evolving nature of this demographic. This conceptual failure has significant implications for policy design and implementation, creating systems that cannot adequately respond to the dynamic realities of intergenerational land access and utilisation challenges.

The current reality presents a stark paradox that demands urgent attention. While agriculture accounts for approximately 67% of employment in Zimbabwe, youth participation remains alarmingly low, with over 10,000 youths reportedly on the MoLAFWRD waiting list for land (Mazwi, et al 2020). This exclusion occurs within a broader context of de-industrialisation and unemployment that characterise Zimbabwe's current socio-economic environment. This dynamic has forced many youths to consider agriculture as a primary rather than residual livelihood strategy. The challenges of unemployment and the difficulty youth face in accessing productive economic sectors make land a critical asset for accumulation and for young people to establish themselves economically. However, the livelihood landscape for today's youth differs significantly. While it is a challenge, it is better for those youths whose parents and grandparents benefitted from land reform, but worse for those who never had family access to land. This has created new dynamics and complexities in how

## An issue of land rights and security: Whose?

The emergence of youth land access challenges in post-2000 Zimbabwe reflects tensions between resolved and unresolved aspects of the national question. As Archie Mafeje demonstrated in his analysis of colonial land relations, the land question in Africa cannot be separated from broader questions of social transformation and power relations (Mafeje 2003). While the FTLRP successfully addressed the racial dimension of Zimbabwe's colonial land question by transferring a significant portion of the country's fertile land to the previously marginalised black populations (Moyo 2011), it simultaneously created new contradictions that reveal the incomplete nature of agrarian transformation. This reflects the persistence of class based and racialised land relations even within post-reform contexts, where addressing one dimension of the land question can generate new forms of exclusion (Moyo 2011, 2013).

The inadequate attention to intergenerational transitions has been identified as a critical gap in Zimbabwe's agrarian reform strategy, with scholars highlighting the absence of comprehensive approaches that extend beyond initial redistribution to encompass long-term generational needs (Scoones, 2019, Chipenda and Tom 2020). This limitation reflects what can be argued as the incomplete resolution of the agrarian question as land redistribution without corresponding transformation of production relations and institutional frameworks creates new contradictions rather than resolving structural issues. These new contradictions are not incidental but structural, emerging from the intersection of demographic transitions with inadequate institutional frameworks for managing intergenerational land relations. Building on Samir Amin's analysis of how colonial capitalism created forms of peasant production in Africa, these contradictions (as exemplified by Zimbabwe) reveal how post-reform agrarian structures continue to be shaped by inherited institutional legacies that were never fully transformed.

Unlike the communal areas where traditional mechanisms allow parents to subdivide land for their children through village heads, the state-based tenure system governing FTLRP areas has proven structurally inadequate for facilitating intergenerational land transfers. The current system does not legally permit land subdivisions resulting in change of ownership, creating institutional rigidity that cannot accommodate the organic evolution of land access patterns necessary for demographic sustainability. The generational dimension of Zimbabwe's agrarian question becomes significantly acute when we consider that country's youthful population (aged 10-35 years) constitutes slightly less than half of the total population, at 46%. The youth population in 2022 stood at 4.8 million and was projected to reach 5.4 million by 2024 (ZIMSTAT 2022). These numbers represent a substantial demographic seeking integration into productive economic activities and it is at a time when alternative employment opportunities have contracted dramatically. This demographic reality largely intersects with the ongoing nature of Africa's agrarian transformations, where rural households maintain dynamic and complex connections between subsistence agriculture and other livelihood strategies.

Over the past decades, the transformation from traditional patterns of circular migration where young men would leave rural areas for stable employment in towns, farms or mines before returning with accumulated assets to the contemporary reality of jobless work in the informal economy has created unprecedented pressure on land-based livelihoods. Children who were not yet born or very young in 2000 when the FTLRP started are now in their youth.



The prevailing state-based tenure mediating land relations for most resettled farmers has limitations of land transferability to these youths. Worth noting is that these formal limitations have not prevented adaptive responses. While the idea of subdividing land was initially not considered by the older generation of land reform beneficiaries, it is now increasingly being considered as a more pragmatic alternative to address the pressing needs of their children (Scoones 2025). This shift represents an important evolution in thinking about land use and inheritance within resettlement areas, suggesting that practical pressures are driving institutional adaptation even where formal policies lag behind. These adaptive responses reflect what Mafeje (2003) viewed as the dynamic nature of agrarian relations, where social actors continuously negotiate and reshape institutional arrangements in response to changing material conditions, even within seemingly rigid formal frameworks.

## **The crisis of 'waithood': Structural constraints on youth transition to adulthood**

Zimbabwe's post-land reform youth face an unprecedented phenomenon of suspended adulthood, characterised by prolonged liminal states that scholars have conceptualised as 'waithood' (Scoones et al 2019, Scoones 2025). For Scoones (2025), this is an extended transitional phase where young people find themselves trapped between adolescence and autonomous adulthood. This emergent social condition reflects deeply embedded structural barriers that systematically block youth access to traditional markers of adult status and economic independence. We would argue that the experience of waithood creates a multi-layered exclusion where young people encounter simultaneous barriers across critical life domains. This manifests through difficulties obtaining real estate, restricted pathways to steady work, obstacles to wealth creation, deferred personal partnerships, inaccessible housing markets, and continued economic dependence on parents. This creates a temporal contradiction whereby individuals advance chronologically through their twenties and thirties while remaining economically and socially positioned as dependents, unable to achieve the autonomous status typically associated with adult membership in their communities (Scoones 2025). This suspended transition proves significant within land reform contexts, where state-administered allocation frameworks have disrupted established pathways to independence. Traditional societies historically enabled youth advancement through customary land distribution mechanisms activated by marriage and household formation. The resettlement schemes offer no equivalent institutional arrangements for generational transition. The absence of these structured progression routes generates prolonged uncertainty and intensifies dependency relationships, producing significant psychological and social ramifications for affected youth. Within these constrained environments, the pursuit of asset development and personal agency becomes central to youth strategies, although both objectives face systematic impediments given restricted land access and minimal starting capital. These structural limitations create cyclical disadvantage, whereby exclusion from productive resource ownership prevents the capital formation required to eventually break free from dependent status, thus perpetuating the very conditions that sustain waithood.

## **Youth as transient demographic: Policy design challenges**

The conceptualisation of youth as a transient demographic category presents significant challenges for land tenure policy that have been inadequately addressed in Zimbabwe's approach to agrarian reform. Unlike other categories used in land allocation such as gender or war veteran status, youth represent a temporary condition that individuals pass through over time, creating constantly evolving populations with changing needs, capacities, and circumstances. Zimbabwe's constitutional definition of youth as persons between 15 and 35 years encompasses individuals at vastly different life stages, from teenagers completing secondary education to adults with established families and enterprises. We are of the opinion that this twenty-year span reflects a misunderstanding of how demographic transitions intersect with land access requirements. A 16-year-old completing Form Four has different land access needs than a 30-year-old seeking to establish an independent farming enterprise, yet current policy approaches rarely acknowledge these distinctions. The transient nature of youth also intersects with broader questions of institutional capacity and administrative efficiency. Land administration systems must be capable of tracking and managing constant demographic transitions while maintaining accurate

records and preventing conflicts. The current situation, where official records are unable to keep pace with transfers, inheritance bequests, and other changes, becomes even more challenging when youth transitions are factored into the equation. The challenge is further complicated by the fact that as new generations seek out land-based livelihoods in land reform areas and beyond, standard ways of thinking about land are being reinvented by this new generation. With new ideas of ownership emerging, young people are utilising property in innovative approaches that previous generations had not envisioned and at times questioning traditional beliefs about agricultural land management and utilisation.

## **Innovative youth pathways: Agency beyond formal systems**

Despite the structural constraints and policy limitations outlined above, Zimbabwe's youth have exhibited extraordinary adaptability in forging alternative routes to land access. These emerging strategies expose both the inadequacies inherent in official allocation mechanisms and the remarkable capacity for creative problem-solving among young people. Our observations reveal four primary approaches that youth employ to circumvent restrictive formal distribution systems. The most prevalent and effective strategy centres on strategic kinship mobilisation, whereby young people capitalise on family networks, especially when parents undergo transitions between farm classifications or generational phases. Youth frequently instrumentalise relationships with politically influential parents to secure land access, although this pathway reinforces existing patriarchal structures. From a gender analysis perspective, this approach predominantly advantages male youth, demonstrating the persistence of patriarchal dynamics despite sustained advocacy for equitable resource distribution including land rights. The second strategy involves electoral mobilisation, where youth strategically present themselves as important voting blocs to obtain land allocations through collaborative arrangements between traditional authorities and local political figures. Given youth constitute a decisive electoral demographic, numerous young people have successfully secured land through these

politically mediated channels. However, such allocations frequently lack proper documentation and often occur on communal grazing areas, generating tenure insecurity and exposing beneficiaries to potential post-electoral displacement. The third pathway encompasses evolving inheritance practices that indicate possible transformations in traditionally gendered land transmission patterns, while the fourth revolves around emerging land rental markets that offer alternative access mechanisms for youth without necessitating permanent ownership arrangements.

These innovative strategies demonstrate that youth function not as passive policy recipients but as proactive agents developing creative responses to structural limitations. Nevertheless, the reality that most successful pathways require family connections or political networks indicates that youth lacking such social capital encounter even more formidable barriers to land access. The proliferation of these informal mechanisms suggests that official land allocation systems remain inadequate for addressing demographic pressures generated by the maturation of the first generation of land reform beneficiaries' children and other youth whose parents did not benefit from the FTLRP. Limited opportunities exist through ongoing subdivision of original plots, although these remain constrained and often lack formal recognition or tenure security.

## **The LTIP framework: Contradictions and possibilities**

Given the constraints outlined above, the LTIP emerges as critically important yet contradictory. Government rhetoric frames the programme as transformative wealth creation, with Land Tenure Committee Chairperson Dr Kudakwashe Tagwirei asserting that 'President Mnangagwa's vision through the land tenure is to give us wealth as Zimbabweans, to empower us and ensure we have got power to protect ourselves and our resources' (Zimpapers Digital 2025). This vision of secure, bankable and registrable tenure rights promises economic transformation through full land utilisation. However, the LTIP's prioritisation of 'veterans, youths and women' creates new hierarchies that may perpetuate rather than resolve

underlying inequalities. This tripartite categorisation obscures the dynamic intersections of gender and generation, especially how female youth experience compound exclusion within the FTLRP framework. While the LTIP recognises youth as a priority category, it is yet to be seen how it addresses gendered cultural expectations and patriarchal land access patterns that limit young women's ability to benefit from these tenure reforms. The programme's restriction of land transferability to indigenous Zimbabweans further contradicts Section 289 of the Constitution, which guarantees all citizens rights to 'acquire, hold, occupy, use, transfer, hypothecate, lease or dispose of agricultural land regardless of race or colour' (GoZ 2013). While this restriction was originally conceived as a safeguard against reversing land reform gains, it may be time to rethink this approach considering the new policy trajectories the government has taken towards market-oriented agricultural development and investment attraction. There may be need to allow land access based on citizenship rather than the narrow racialised view of indigenous identity. This constitutional contradiction we would opine poses significant future challenges, potentially undermining investor confidence in the agricultural sector, complicating international financing arrangements, and creating legal uncertainties that may deter both domestic and foreign investment in agricultural value chains.



The emphasis on 'bankable' documents represents a significant shift toward market-oriented land relations with both transformative potential and significant risks for youth. This market-oriented approach potentially conflicts with redistributive imperatives essential for addressing structural youth marginalisation. While promising enhanced agricultural finance access through bankable collateral and market integration, the LTIP's current policy architecture risks accelerating land concentration and commodification without adequate institutional safeguards for intergenerational equity and meaningful youth participation. While promising to address systematic youth exclusion from formal credit markets, bankability depends on institutional frameworks beyond mere document

issuance, including mortgage enforcement mechanisms and agricultural finance infrastructure. The programme's emphasis on individual titling, while addressing historical grievances about tenure security, inadvertently reinforces the institutional rigidity that created 'waithood' by failing to establish flexible mechanisms for sustainable intergenerational land transfers. For female youth, the challenge becomes even more complicated as traditional gender biases in financial institutions may persist despite improved collateral availability, creating what is termed 'double jeopardy' in land access through intersecting age and gender discrimination. The question of who will finance the next generation becomes critical, as making land available as collateral does not automatically address other barriers preventing youth from accessing credit, including limited credit histories and cultural constraints on youth economic autonomy. The gendered dimensions of waithood intersect directly with LTIP implementation, as young women face additional cultural pressures around marriage and family formation that may limit their ability to secure individual tenure documents. Traditional expectations that women access land through marriage conflict with the LTIP's promise of individual title deeds, creating tension between customary practices and formal tenure systems. The programme's emphasis on transferability may inadvertently reinforce patriarchal inheritance patterns if cultural norms continue to favour male land ownership.



Despite these structural constraints, youth demonstrate remarkable entrepreneurial capabilities that could be enhanced through secure tenure. Their informal economy experiences provide skills in market analysis, risk management, and resource mobilisation that become valuable when combined with bankable land documents. Some youth explore intensive production systems, value addition, and direct marketing strategies. These differ significantly from first-generation beneficiaries' approaches, reflecting both necessities given limited land access and opportunity through utilising technology and market connections. However, the LTIP's success in facilitating these innovations depends on whether the programme can overcome the intersectional barriers that disadvantage the youth, ensuring that secure tenure translates into genuine economic empowerment across gender and generational lines while addressing the constitutional contradictions that threaten long-term agricultural sector stability.

## **Policy recommendations: Toward youth-inclusive agrarian futures**

We would argue that the LTIP will operate within a dynamic policy environment that increasingly embraces neoliberal agricultural frameworks while attempting to preserve the redistributive achievements of the FTLRP. As the country embarks on this neoliberal policy trajectory in the agricultural sector, emphasising market-oriented solutions, private property rights, and commercial agricultural development, youth accommodation within the new land tenure framework becomes critically important. This accommodation must not inadvertently reverse the FTLRP's foundational commitments to correcting historical colonial imbalances and ensuring social justice and equality. The tension between tenure reform, neo-liberal agrarian trajectories and intergenerational equity presents challenges that require carefully calibrated policy interventions. While the LTIP's emphasis on 'bankable, registrable and transferable' title deeds aligns with neoliberal frameworks that prioritise market efficiency and private investment, these market mechanisms must be structured to prevent the re-concentration of land ownership that characterised Zimbabwe's colonial agricultural economy. The challenge lies in harnessing market forces to expand youth access to productive agricultural opportunities while maintaining the redistributive principles that justified land reform in the first place.

## **Institutional framework for youth-inclusive tenure security**

The LTIP must incorporate flexible subdivision mechanisms that recognise the demographic realities of maturing resettlement communities without compromising productive land use or enabling speculative accumulation. This requires establishing graduated land allocation categories that acknowledge varying youth capacities and needs, from recent school leavers requiring skills development support to experienced young farmers seeking expansion opportunities. Community-based land allocation systems grounded on delegated authority could manage intergenerational transfers within established parameters, reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks while maintaining oversight of land use planning and community development objectives. These mechanisms should build upon the organic evolution of resettlement areas toward dynamic social formations that blend formal and traditional governance systems. Rather than imposing rigid institutional structures, policy frameworks should recognise and formalise the innovative pathways youth have already developed, including strategic kinship mobilisation, electoral engagement, evolving inheritance practices, and emerging rental markets. This approach acknowledges youth agency while providing institutional support for sustainable land access patterns.

## **Addressing the crisis of waithood through comprehensive support systems**

The prolonged liminal state of waithood that characterises many youth experiences in post-reform agricultural communities. It requires interventions that extend beyond land access to encompass the broader structural barriers preventing youth transition to productive economic autonomy. Youth-responsive support programmes must recognise the extended transition periods many young people face while providing practical pathways to economic independence that utilise their demonstrated entrepreneurial capabilities and informal economy experiences. This comprehensive approach should include targeted skills development that builds upon youth innovations in intensive production systems, value addition, and direct marketing strategies. Financial instruments must move beyond simply accepting new title deeds as collateral to recognise diverse youth assets including livestock, equipment, future crop receipts, and demonstrated business capabilities. Group-based lending schemes can spread risk while building social capital among young farmers, creating peer support networks that facilitate knowledge transfer and market access.

## **Safeguarding redistributive achievements within market-oriented frameworks**

As Zimbabwe's agricultural sector increasingly embraces market-oriented policies, safeguarding inter-generational equity requires mechanisms to prevent land re-concentration among established beneficiaries while ensuring ongoing youth access. Progressive taxation arrangements should encourage productive land use while discouraging speculative accumulation, and estate planning requirements should consider youth beneficiaries in inheritance arrangements. The newly established AFC Holdings (which emerged from the former Agribank) and its subsidiary the AFC Commercial Bank has an important role to play in ensuring the youth have access to financial and other opportunities in the agricultural sector and has measures in place that accommodate demographic transitions over time. These safeguards become crucial given the LTIP's emphasis on transferability within the context of Zimbabwe's broader economic liberalisation. While market mechanisms can enhance agricultural productivity and investment, they also create risks of excluding youth who lack initial capital or family connections. Policy frameworks must therefore incorporate protections against the recreation of exclusionary patterns that characterised colonial and to some extent post-colonial agricultural development.

## **Gender-inclusive implementation and intersectional equity**

The compound discrimination facing female youth requires specific interventions that address intersecting age and gender barriers rather than treating youth and women as separate policy categories. This includes establishing quotas specifically for female youth, ensuring women's land rights recognition in joint titling arrange-

ments, and creating institutional mechanisms that amplify female youth voices in land allocation and management decisions. Such measures become important within neoliberal frameworks that may inadvertently reinforce existing power structures through market-based allocation mechanisms.

## **Preserving social justice within agricultural modernisation**

Ultimately, successful youth inclusion requires recognising young people as active agents of agrarian transformation whose innovations can contribute to agricultural modernisation while preserving social justice principles. The spatial strategies youth employ including movement between different land categories and navigation of multiple tenure regimes demonstrate adaptive capabilities that should inform policy design rather than being constrained by rigid institutional arrangements. Administrative reform remains essential for preventing the reproduction of exclusionary patterns within new tenure arrangements. This requires significant investment in transparent procedures, accountability mechanisms, and technology systems that can accommodate demographic flux while maintaining security for existing landholders and providing opportunities for successive generations. The stakes of this challenge extend beyond immediate land access questions to encompass Zimbabwe's long-term commitment to social transformation and equitable development. The LTIP represents a critical test of whether market-oriented agricultural policies can be implemented in ways that enhance rather than undermine the redistributive achievements of the FTLRP. Success requires policy frameworks that can harness market efficiencies for expanded youth opportunities while maintaining commitments to social justice and historical redress.

Zimbabwe's embrace of neoliberal agricultural policies need not compromise the foundational principles of equitable land distribution that justified the FTLRP. However, achieving this balance requires deliberate policy design that recognises youth as both beneficiaries of past and ongoing land redistribution initiatives and agents of future agricultural transformation. We believe that this will ensure that market-oriented tenure reform strengthens rather than weakens Zimbabwe's commitment to inter-generational equity and social justice in its contemporary agrarian context.

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