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## بعث أفريقيا الغد في سياق التحولات المعولمة :

## رهانات و آفاق

# Livelihoods, Gender Configurations and Large-Scale Land Deals in Zimbabwe

## Patience Mutopo

# Manase Kudzai Chiweshe

## Chipo Plaxedes Mubaya



## CODESRIA

**08 - 12 June / Juin 2015**

## Dakar, Senegal



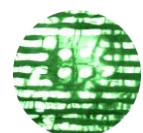
## Abstract

*The notion of large scale land deals has been topical in recent years in Zimbabwe; it has even created more nuanced debates since 70% of rural women in Zimbabwe are the majority of food producers. Foreign and locally orchestrated land deals have presented new challenges and threats to the livelihoods of women in rural Zimbabwe, at a time of land redistributive programs that have been viewed (nationally and internationally) as chaotic affecting the food security, economic prowess and international relations of Zimbabwe. The main aim of this study is to examine how women are particularly affected by the investments, based on three case studies. An analysis of the Zimbabwean scenario is presented with regards to participatory methodologies that reflect on perspectives women's rural livelihoods and land loss.*

**Key words:** Foreign; Land Deals; Large scale; Livelihoods; Local; Women; Zimbabwe.

## Introduction

The notion of large scale land deals has been topical in recent years in Zimbabwe. It has created more nuanced political economy debates as 70% of rural women in Zimbabwe are the majority of food producers (Matondi, Chiweshe & Mutopo, 2013). Despite the African Union's commitment to strengthening women's access and control of land by placing land rights in the public domain of human rights, it is silent on the issue of land grabs. This is a gap that the African Union's land policy framework, yet 2014 has been declared the year of agriculture in Africa by the African Union. However the foreign and locally orchestrated land deals have presented new challenges and threats to the livelihoods of women in rural Zimbabwe. At a time also of land redistributive programs that have been viewed nationally and internationally as chaotic affecting the food security, economic prowess and international relations of Zimbabwe. Our aim in this study is to understand and plainly bring out how women are particularly affected by the large scale land investments within the Zimbabwean context. To include women's stories and experiences is necessary because their stories are often forgotten, trivialized and placed at the periphery (Tollin & Törnqvist 2011). A broad analysis of the Zimbabwean scenario is presented and reference is made to the differential impacts of the investments on livelihoods of women within the Southern African context. In the last decade foreign companies or governments have acquired 227 million hectares of land in Africa, according to a recent report by OXFAM, (Mutopo 2012). Women in rural Zimbabwe tend to be disadvantaged by the large scale land investments, as loss of land a critical livelihood component becomes a relational issue that constantly feature in different contexts of discussions with the women, and the effects the loss has on their lives. The study uses three unique case studies carried out in Chisumbanje, Mwenezi and Chiadzwa to highlight how women have experienced land dispossession in Zimbabwe. We dwell on empirical investigations to further unravel how women are affected negatively by the large



scale land acquisitions. The impacts are almost always negative and irreversible. Action Aid (2013: 13) reports that:

*Multi-national corporations are key players in land grabbing, often acting in conjunction with governments that create the policies and broker the deals that undermine land rights. Donor governments and international financial institutions play a critical role in land grabs by crafting the policies, financial incentives, and development programs that place business interests ahead of the interests of local communities. Among the top governments engaged in large scale land deals are the UK, the USA, and many northern investors.*

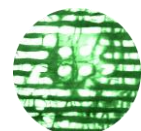
In such processes women are not key actors at all therefore compromising the African Protocol on Women's Rights, the Convention on Economic and Social Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women which emphasize the need for states to ensure that women's access to land, water, livelihoods and other natural resources are upheld by state parties, and that discriminatory laws and cultural practices should not be the basis of violating women's rights to land and livelihoods.

### **Gendered Dimensions on Land Acquisitions in Africa**

Although the study specifically focuses on Zimbabwe, it is true, that across the African continent women remain largely responsible for food provision at household level thus any issues relating land affects women (Shah, 2012). Thus it is to this extent that, land remains a valuable livelihood asset for rural women. Large scale land deals across Africa have generally affected rural women negatively, with women losing their identity as well as the right to land ownership and land use, as the conglomerates often ask people to leave the land and women emerge as poor victims in most communities as they cannot fight for their land due to patriarchy which insists on land being a male regulated commodity (Mutopo 2012; Mutopo & Chiweshe, 2012). Behrman, Meinzen-Dick, and Quisumbing (2011) provide a gendered analysis of land grabbing in Africa showing how rural women face many disadvantages when it comes to land deals. They argue that:

*Land deals will likely exacerbate these existing gender disparities in land access and ownership. In contexts where titling is prevalent, if the title has only the male household head's name, a woman may not have any say regarding its sale or lease, even if they jointly acquired the land or if the woman uses some portion of the land for productive purposes or both (Behrman, Meinzen-Dick & Quisumbing 2011:1).*

Land deals thus often entrench already existing gendered dimensions of land ownership inequalities. The prevailing picture therefore demonstrates that, in terms of land ownership experiences across Africa show that women tend to suffer loss.

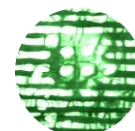


In a study of ZAMBEEF operations in Zambia, Mutopo (2012) highlight how women lose access to basic livelihoods through losses of land. Her study illustrates how 'gendered power relations across the globe demonstrate women farmers' lack of political, legal and economic participation at all levels of land deals negotiations be at the community, national or international levels' (Mutopo 2012: 21). Displacement also has negative implications for food security and nutritional levels of rural households. This places a heavy burden on women who are generally in charge of household food consumption. When deals are entered into between governments and investors, often the concerns of rural women are not taken into serious consideration. Behrman, Meinzen-Dick and Quisumbing (2011) argue that whilst there has been a proliferation of studies on large-scale land deals across the world, there is still scant focus on how gender mediates grassroots experience of these deals. The socially constructed norms of maleness and femaleness offer different land rights and opportunities between men and women hence they experience land deals differently. Hence, Gersetter et al. (2011:54), has pointed out that:

*Each land acquisition project involves multiple parties on both sides of the agreement. On the provider side, several government agencies are typically involved, such as the Ministry of Agriculture or the agencies responsible for foreign investment. On the buying side, land deals are often a public-private venture; the purchasing country's government signs and sponsors the land contract, and then brokers a deal with a private entity to implement and carry out productive activities. It is also common that the buyer will involve a number of advisors, consulting firms, and international lawyers to acquire the necessary local knowledge and capacity to carry out the purchase. The process of concluding a land deal is complicated to the extent that even investors lack a clear overview of exactly what steps are involved. A current review of 12 land deals found that some of the contracts are short, unspecific documents that grant enforceable, long-term and largely transferable rights to extensive areas of land. Moreover, a number of the deals do not address environmental impacts such as water depletion and/or only provide weak safeguards for local interests. Often, local people are not involved in the decision-making processes before the deals are signed. Negotiations and contracts are rarely transparent or made public in a detailed way. Information on the deals is frequently not accessible.*

This serves as evidence of how the deals themselves are not clear cut policy processes that are imbued in different layers of politics and laws that ordinary people and let alone rural women cannot understand.

Daley (2011:1) argues that the impacts of land deals on women in Africa need to be understood in relation to the 'four aspects of women's vulnerability: systemic discrimination related to land access, ownership, and control; systemic discrimination related to decision-making; relative income poverty; and general physical vulnerability.' Land deals built upon and entrench already existent vulnerabilities for women in rural areas. Already women across





Africa have limited access to land. Land deals only increases land unavailability, a development which affects women negatively. Women are not involved in the decisions that lead to land transfers. Daley, Osorio and Young (2013) highlight how in Laos land acquisitions impact on food security of rural women. Forests are turned into plantations and estates on the basis of the argument, that there are no people settled on the land. The forests however are an important source of food in times of drought. Rural areas do not have an official social safety net. Root crops and trees offer a food source that is now being lost as investors' fence off land.

Mutopo (2011) posited that, the gendered bio-fuel, livelihoods and displacement discourse operate within the definitions of politics, which entail who gets what, when and how. Therefore, the gendered nature of livelihoods reflects the structural relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in households, labor markets and political structures. Thus in conceptualizing land grabs and its gendered nature, it is important to evidently demonstrate the interaction between the displaced farmers, both men and women and the civil society, an issue which is currently missing in the literature. The drivers of land acquisitions in Africa have been mainly centered on market pressures, urbanization, globalization, need for pension funds, increasing demands for food, increasing demand for bio fuels and mineral excavation, (Makura- Paradza, 2011). However with these factors in the lime light women have tended to be the most affected since they do not have a voice in negotiations that involve the large scale land acquisitions are which are more so high level political processes that exclude women.

Lacking from the debate is a deeper analysis of the gendered implications of the phenomenon, even though it is known that women are more vulnerable when it comes to land change. The debate is further focusing on foreign investments, when the land grabbing situation is more complex and deeply rooted in political processes than that (Hall, 2011).

## **Methodology**

In this section, how empirical validations create a good basis for analyzing the impacts of large scale land acquisitions on women's livelihoods is brought to the core. Data collection modes of study are qualitative in nature in Chisumbanje, Mwenezi and Chiadzwa. Since this is a study that raises emotional overtones from the different respondents due to land questions, we decided to remain largely qualitative. The authors wanted to acquire important information into the lives of the women; so in- depth interviews, focus group discussions and informal modes of questioning based on interacting with various groups were engaged. In Mwenezi participatory rural appraisal techniques were prime in the data collection, as the authors are already engaged with the community since 2009. This made data collection more plausible as they were no problems with regards to research clearance matters. The study also utilized desk research as a means to analyze how land deals have been constructed in Zimbabwe. The data analysis was done by coding the variables and thematically



conceptualizing the data, this helped in understanding how studies on large scale land investments ought to have coordinated reflective methodologies especially with regards to livelihoods.

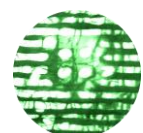
Methodological considerations of studying large scale land acquisitions have also been recently contested (Scoones et al, 2013; Oya, 2013; Peters, 2013). It is argued that in order to have sound methodological premises for studying large scale land acquisitions, there is need for original research that acts as a feeder into the different mismatches and inconsistencies in the data.

### **Theoretical framework**

Theorizing land grabs locally and internationally has been fraught with controversy. The disagreements emanate from the different discourses permeating academia, civic and international organizations working on the importance of land based foreign direct investment growth in rural areas. Since we wanted to find out the nature of the effects of large scale land acquisition on the livelihoods of women, we adopted the gender analysis theoretical approach, (Moser, 2005; Berhman, Quisimbung & Meinzein- Dick, 2012; Mutopo 2011). This was adopted, because it demonstrates that women operate in a sphere dominated by men and with regards to land based livelihoods certain discriminatory practices emanate. The unfair treatment of women emanates from the cultural and social conditions that see women as producers of food and not the rightful owners of the land and the food produced ( Razavi, 2003).

The authors focused on the gender analysis since it gives detailed accounts and affirmations of the control and activity profiles that are eminent in the social governance sphere of households, particularly African households. Women operate in an environment where men are key actors. We wanted to decipher how women get affected whether it is detrimental effect or positive effect from the land investment. This has also been explained by (Tandon et al., 2013; Behrman 2012; Mutopo, 2012) who argue that a gender analysis of land grabs entails understanding the activity and control profiles of women in a community where land grabs are evident and negatively affect women in land access and use, thereby threatening sustainable livelihoods economically and socially. Warren (2007:251) notes that:

*Gender-analysis frameworks have been used in development practice, to varying degrees, since the mid-1980s. They aim to provide methods by which to gather and use Sex-disaggregated and gender-related data and information to inform development Interventions at various stages, from project conception and design through to evaluation. They aim to promote gender-aware development practice by ensuring that gender is taken into consideration at every stage of program implementation.*



## Findings and Discussion

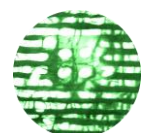
This section rather took a thematic approach of the issues that emerge with regards to women, livelihoods and large scale land acquisitions, which is juxtaposed with the literature and also bring out how the women feel with regards to the large scale land investments. The authors analyzed whether the benefits are positive or negative and laid thrust on the policy dimension in relation to the field based evidenced and how women can be cushioned from larger scale investments that threaten their livelihood base.

### Land Based Livelihoods

The case presented an important continuum in which land emerged as an important resource for the women's livelihoods. Discussions with the women and other important stakeholders revealed that most of the crop farming in the area was undertaken by women on small plots of land that ranged from one hectare to three hectares of land. However due to the expansion of the bio fuel production by, Green Fuels, a huge company that produced ethanol, leading to the production of bio fuels in Zimbabwe that were on the market country wide, the women had also lost alternative sources of livelihood. Huge tracts of land had been parceled to the company in the process of land acquisition; we define land acquisition as the process whereby the large company automatically has ownership of the large tracts of land after the land has been taken from the original owners. After this process, the women were left at a disadvantaged position further putting them at risk of finding alternative livelihoods in a political economy whose mandate is shrouded in controversy, with financial liquidity problems and unemployment levels recorded at 80%. One woman pointed to us that:

*"I have lost my land and I cannot work in the company as I do not have the requisite qualifications. Therefore I have resorted to going to the surrounding areas of Masvingo and Mutare's communal and farming areas in search of piece jobs were I normally ask payment in the form of food items such as maize, vegetables and grains so as to feed my immediate family and other extended family members".* (In depth Interview held at Chisumbanje in 2012).

It emerged that women had the role of food production and had to engage in other food reproduction strategies that involved, (*kusunza*), meaning searching for work and being paid with food parcels. Even if jobs are made available, in patriarchal societies in Africa it is the men who benefit from these opportunities while women carry out reproductive roles at home. Women are also further disadvantaged by their lower levels of education and lack of academic qualifications and experience necessary for the foreign firms' requirements. Hence the quests for foreign direct investment actually hurt women more as the investors do not target raising the educational capacity of the rural women.

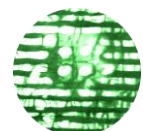


Gendered impacts of land loss are not peculiar to Chisumbanje. At Nuanetsi, the loss of land amongst women was also very evident. The community in Nuanetsi, in Mwenzezi, lost the land after the establishment of a conglomerate that specializes in crocodile farming and is currently preparing the land for the establishment of a bio fuel plant. In as much as the company is defined as largely Zimbabwean the land losses have been treated invariably with women emerging as the worst affected as they do not have local women representatives in the provincial and district land committees to fight for their cause against eviction by the company. Even in contested areas, thus the fast track new established farms, male domination of land is the norm yet women are given the responsibility of feeding the household. Most women we came across were fearful of how loss of land would negatively impact on their ability to feed their children. Chiweshe and Mutopo (2014) highlight that in terms of the gender dynamics generated by the eviction threats posed by the government; women and children were at a much more disadvantaged position. This disadvantaged position of the women and children emanated from the structural configurations of the society at Nuanetsi which placed them in a much more vulnerable position. The land acquisitions by the large conglomerates, lead to the further disempowering of women as they have to focus more on food security, water and child care burdens affecting their capability of independence and assertiveness. In 2009, the African Union adopted the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa. The guidelines call upon states to “prioritize land policy development and ensure that land laws provide for equitable access to land and related processes among all land users” (African Union, 2011:3). Given the past and present experience of forcible displacements, signing away of land and water rights and other increasing hardships for rural based communities, it is clear that several African governments are prioritizing foreign direct investments over the well realization of economic and social rights of their own citizens, particularly, land based livelihoods.

Before the land losses to the large company, the women and men were involved in rain fed crop production and livestock rearing which enabled them to be involved in agricultural value chains that saw them permeating local and regional markets. This has however changed with the acquisition of the land by the large scale companies, the people no longer have the land for ploughing and pastures for grazing livestock due to the land annexation. Kameri- Mbote (2013:23) argues that:

*Since land ownership indicates a person’s identity, social standing and citizenship, the negation of women’s rights to land has implications at the national, family and household level. Social standing is also influenced by gender, age and marital status, raising the need for holistic policy responses to transform the position of women in Africa. The issue of land rights in African countries is complex because of the multiplicity of claims to land and land-based resources.*

The impacts of land loss are also different amongst women. Widowed and single women from our research faced a bleaker future because they had nowhere to go and relocation was difficult for them. One elderly widowed noted that:





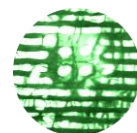
*‘I feel very much afraid and do not know who will help me build new huts, how I will relocate and whether I will not lose the property and livestock that I have acquired at the farm during the past years that we have stayed at Chigwizi. I feel that the government should have been considerate and allowed us to continue staying on the farm since this is the only home that I now know and have. My livelihood security is under threat as it is still not clear whether I am being moved to a new farm or to the communal areas north of the Tokwe River.’* (Focus Group Discussion held at Mwenezi in 2012).

The government did not give the people ample time or eviction notices it was simply announced unexpectedly. Discussions with the women revealed that they had been given a month’s notice to vacate the land. As a result the process of migrating to the new area was not well coordinated as people are not always ready to move from land they have known as their homes for years. This also demonstrates that governments’ policy responses to issues of large scale acquisitions tend to be affected by other political expedient processes that are seen as more robust other than issues that affect women. Issues that affect women have always been generally seen as invaluable due to the prescriptions that the woman’s place is the home. Such sentiments have been untrue and misdirected as women are known to be custodians of land based livelihoods.

In this discussion it is important to note that women are the ones who have been relatively more disadvantaged than their male counterparts in the process of losing land and alternative livelihood sources after large scale land acquisitions. We do not purport to be ignorant of the fact that men are also affected in the process, however we try and show the femininity side through the gender analysis we adopt which also demonstrates that women exist in communities that are regulated by men and in which they have different familial relations with men.

In Chiadzwa the gendered impacts of land loss on land based livelihoods are evident. Mining related displacement is not a ‘new’ phenomenon but the discovery of diamonds in Zimbabwe provides an interesting intersection of displacement, corruption, human rights and resource management. Women’s access to land has been severely affected by the militarization of diamond mines. Communities have been fenced off land and access to natural resources has been negatively impacted. Madebwe, Madebwe, and Mavusa (2011:292) note that:

*Chiadzwa villagers were given a month’s notice before they were evicted from their homes to make way for diamond mining. Phase one of relocations occurred in May, 2011 in the midst of the crop harvesting period. Some displaced families were relocated before they had quite finished harvesting their crops which has implications on household food security. Displacement was involuntary...*



This had serious implications for women who are traditionally responsible for food security in rural households. Women highlighted of the food insecurity and suffering caused by relocation. The families were not compensated and have very little benefit from the mining activities being conducted. They were not involved in the negotiations for the deals and they were not consulted about relocation. With resettlement, land has decreased in size and fertility. One woman complained that: ‘After being resettled we no longer had any gardens for women. We lost our gardens which provided us with vegetables and the soil here is not very fertile.’

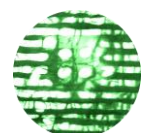
This has meant local communities having little say in the control of resources found in their areas. Women tended to be treated as homogenous community members yet in such mineral excavation systems women have different constituencies and the effects are highly different depending also on marriage patterns and social standing in the community. Makura- Paradza (2011) argues that, displacement and reallocation increase pressure on already weaker land rights that women have, there by leading to more livelihood based problems for rural women. An important conduit related to these issues is the notion of gender based violence, which women are subjected to in the process of evictions as they are the primary targeted group since they are not able to fight for their rights as individuals do the dominant patriarchal forms of household governance that ostracize women who challenge men in public particularly over property and resource issues, of which land is the most important one in Zimbabwe.

Land grabs pre-empt land reforms that secure the legitimate land and resource rights of women and other marginalized communities. By defending their rights, they (and the communities they belong to) gain the value of the land not only as a productive resource, but as a source of status, political mobilization, and security for themselves and their descendents.

### **Livelihoods Based on Other Natural Resources**

Land is also the embodiment of other natural resources such as flora and fauna. It emerged from the women and men that when the large bio fuel plant at Chisumbanje was constructed, a lot of depletion of flora and fauna took place. Focus group sessions pointed out that edible fruit trees, insects and firewood had become scarce in the village, with women now forced to walk more than 5 km to search for firewood from other communities. When large scale multinational corporations take over land previously sustaining people’s livelihoods changes also occur in the activity profiles of households. In some households particularly those with young children, the men also at times took upon themselves the task of searching for firewood as long distances had to be walked to do so. This raises the argument that livelihood configuration patterns can change with men either taking over other traditionally feminized roles.

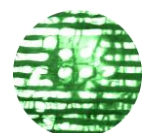
Traditionally forests on open spaces in villages are endowed with trees that produce edible wild fruits and insects. In Chisumbanje, the depletion of the wild fruits was culminating fast,



as some lands had been taken over and became the company land further threatening livelihoods based on fruits to the communities. The wild fruits are wild berries (*nhunguru*), casternapas (*mazhanje*) and black berries (*tsubvu*), the wild insects are the, edible larvae, (*mopani worms*). During the wet and dry periods women normally search for edible fruits and edible larvae's but the fencing out of the community from the fruits and the forest made this an arduous task with trespassing cited as a crime for anyone found collecting fruits on the bio fuel plant land. Mutopo (2012) has argued that access to fruits for fenced out communities in Zimbabwe led to the loss of identity for women in Mimbolo village since they had been connected to their land via the natural fruit trees and small game animals they hunted on the land they lost to a large corporate investor, ZAMBEEF. It should be understood that identity of the African people is also closely tied to the natural environment and the ability to use that natural environment for livelihoods purposes is a link with ones personality and heritage. Who denied them access to the land and had erected high electrified fences, to deter movement by the women and men into the company premises. The fencing out of the communities with the erection of high fences by the companies could also lead to possibilities of the electrocution of the communities and this could result in grave losses of life.

Critical values and assets associated with African and other indigenous tenure regimes around the world have been largely taken away from the customary sector over the last century of state-making. This includes wholesale loss of rights to minerals, oil, or water associated with customary lands, and less uniformly, loss of wildlife, tree and timber ownership (Wily, 2011). In Chiadzwa the loss of forests has also adversely affected women who can no longer depend on the various wild fruits as an alternative food source. As noted by Chimonyo, Mungure and Scott (2011:24) 'Villagers lamented the loss of fruit trees such as the baobab tree (*adansonia digitata*) which especially, Anjin, the diamond mining company, removed without thought of the social and economic role the tree played in the community.' Access to firewood and grazing lands has also negatively impacted on women. Distances to get firewood have increased with the inability to access vast tracts of land now the jealously preserved commodity of the diamond mines.

The presence of illegal miners for some in 2008 also entrenched firewood problems as there was massive deforestation to feed the massive population. At Nuanetsi, this is also the reality for women who due to fences and guards can no longer access firewood, wild fruits and tubes. This also includes access to certain trees with medicinal purposes. Loss of natural resources is rarely considered when loss of land is discussed on land grabs but this has a direct bearing on women's livelihoods. Discussions with women from Mwenezi, reflects how the fencing out phenomenon has affected even access to small based wild life ruminants that have been used for food, this is evidenced by these sentiments: "*We can no longer access rodents, termites, wild rabbits or an eland as the area has been protected using electric fences that are a menace to your life, if you touch the fence it is death out rightly*". (Focus Group Discussion held at Mwenezi in 2012).

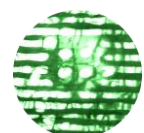


The notion of fencing out natural resources from the women serves as evidence of how the companies also contribute to the food insecurity of the communities since they cannot engage in hunting activities which have traditionally been taken as a complementary activity, juxtaposed with farming, thereby contributing to the dietary needs of the families.

## **Water Access**

Most of the world's 1.2 billion poor people, two thirds of whom are women, live in water-scarce countries and do not have access to safe and reliable supplies of water for productive and domestic uses (International Fund for Agricultural Development-IFAD, 2011). Water is the lifeline of any community and failure to access water is a violation of a codified human right in the covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. The study area is situated in a dry area in natural region 4, such that some of the land that the bio fuel investment is sitting upon was also taken with water sources being acquired in the process. A water source refers to the rivers, dams and streams that support the livelihoods of the men and women at Ndowoyo communal area in Chisumbanje. Green fuels' entry into this area and amassing of the land and some of the water sources affected the women and men's access to water, thereby affecting the principles of equitable water availability and water use tenets to the community. Mutopo and Chiweshe (2014) have argued that loss of water by smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe due to bio fuel developments has been instrumental in Zimbabwe, and with negative effects on communities, because of the riparian water principles that allow water access and use by the one who has the right to the land. This has been an ideology and a human rights issue that has been supported by the Victorian ideology on water use and also the common Roman Dutch Law.

Interviews with the women pointed out that they now relied on perennial water sources from other villages and they had to walk long distances ranging from 4km to 10 km in search of water affecting the uptake of their other daily livelihood activities. An interesting scenario is that in terms of changes in household governance systems with regards to water access, both men and women in the village had to help each other fetch water since also livestock was affected in this regards and men had to play an active role in searching for water for the livestock, which is predominantly a male centered activity. Evidently the Zimbabwe case brings to the core the operationalization of the principle of "water grabbing" from the communities by the investor. Since the community has lost its right to the water sources that are fenced with the premises of the bio fuel's jurisdiction legally and politically. Gender differences in livelihood management are noted since men and women cannot be involved in other income generating activities such as community gardening initiatives as they do not have access to traditional physical water sources. They are not in a position to erect man made water sources such as dams in place in order to enhance livelihood security. This is further evidenced by the women, who repeatedly pointed out that: "without water we are dead, for water is life, and life is water"



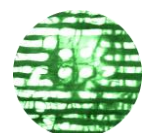


A lack of access to water is equated with death a reflection of the symbiotic interdependence between water and life. The huge processing company mentioned earlier, Green fuels got automatic access to the land and water, which proved to be a positive affirmation for their bio fuel production but affecting the livelihoods of the affected men and women in Ndowoyo communal area. Women's limited access to water is also often coupled with their limited access to land; the two are often linked. Securing access to land among poor farmers, particularly women, can lead to secure water rights. It can then lead to access to other resources such as financial services and investment in farms, offering the potential to improve livelihoods and reduce water wastage.

In Mwenezi, Zimbabwe Bio Energy company has employed a fencing system which ensures exclusivity from water access. In getting the land, the assumption is that the company has the legal basis of excluding others from its property. Water sources found within this area are thus out of bounds for neighboring communities. The process of fencing out communities raises serious moral questions among the local traditional leaders who argue that water is not a private commodity and that it is God given gift that can be freely accessed. In corroboration of this view one villager remarked that, "by fencing the water sources away from us, we have gone back to the colonial period where every form of livelihood was guarded so that the black communities could not access". (Focus Group Discussion held at Mwenezi in 2012).

The company running the ranch has a legal basis of fencing off water claiming that they have paid water levies to water authorities. The villagers cannot thus have access to water as the water sources are legally under the jurisdiction of private entity. This highlights the insensitivities of deals made without proper consultation of rural people. Such deals give away water rights which negatively affect local populations. National governments which are guarantors of these rights are part of the problem as they sign off water resources to foreign and local investors. Linked to water issues at Nuanetsi, is the relocation of people from 100 000 hectares to pave way for crocodile farming. In dry areas communities depend on water ways for their access to water. The crocodile section at Nuanetsi has around 2000 crocodile and its benefits include the supply of crocodile meat and leather products for domestic use and which also have export potential for international markets. This has however meant loss of access to water for the local communities.

Loss of access to water in Chiadzwa is exacerbated by the environmental concerns involved in diamond mining. With fencing out of communities, they are unable to access all water routes as water ways are also used as a form of transportation, in the areas controlled by the mines. This loss is made worse by the effects mining waste has on water bodies and ground water. Pollution of water sources has long term effects on women's reproductive and general health including the safety of children. Chimonyo, Mungure and Scott (2011:25) argue that:



*The change in both the aquatic and terrestrial habitats would have a profound effect on biodiversity, an issue that needs further investigation. The mining operations have drastically changed habitats in addition to increasing human population. Wild life seems to have been squeezed out by the human population while the mining operations created an environment unsuitable for the survival of many biological species...Several forms of pollution have been recorded in Chiadzwa from dust, noise, sediment, human waste associated with lack of sanitation facilities. It is the lack of sanitation facilities and hygienic conditions that brought cholera to Chiadzwa in 2008.*

Whilst the long lasting impacts of the loss of biodiversity and pollution require further longitudinal research, what is clear is that both rural women and men will pay a heavy price for diamond mining without any substantial benefits. Rural communities were also reporting that the pollution of Odzi River has led to emergence of skin rushes and death of livestock.

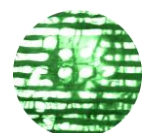
IFAD (2012:1 ) reports that:

*Securing water for both productive and domestic uses is critical in achieving food security and improved rural livelihoods in most parts of the world, but particularly in arid and semi-arid areas. However, despite the role that women play in reducing food insecurity through their knowledge of crop production, local biodiversity, soils and local water resources, they are often excluded from decision-making processes in new agricultural water management approaches and other projects and initiatives on natural resource allocation. This means that women have no choice in the kind or location of services they receive.*

This serves as evidence of the importance of water and the lack of recognition that women face in water management levels at both community and governmental levels.

### **New Forms of Livelihoods and Gender Configurations**

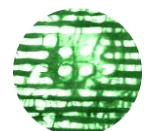
In Chisumbanje, new gender configurations were emerging after the building of the large bio fuel plant by Green Fuels, with women being overburdened with food reproduction strategies whilst men abandoned the village in search of jobs in the towns of Masvingo, Mutare, Harare or the neighboring Mozambique and at times migrating to South Africa. Some men migrated locally or regionally they did not contribute much to the home food baskets as they were reported to argue that they faced economic meltdown and financial liquidity of the regional Diasporas they moved to. In such scenarios women assumed the role of being de-facto household heads in patriarchal societies, there by challenging cultural norms that place men at the centre of the household livelihood activities. Mandihlare (2013) highlights that women lost little autonomy and economic independence they had prior losing land. She notes that some women have managed to raise capital from wages and start their own small businesses such as trading in clothes. Other women have embarked on cross boarder trading given



closeness to the Mozambican boarder; whilst others travel to South Africa to buy merchandise for resell. The main challenge regarding this form of livelihood strategy is that it is too oversubscribed, as almost most women are doing it resulting in more competition to get clients.

Livelihood opportunities for women increase with the large movement of people into rural communities. In Chiadzwa and Nuanetsi, the experiences are similar and point to an emergence of alternative livelihood activities based on demands by the new workforce on the farms and mines. These workers require food, shelter, clothing, conjugal rights and various other commodities. In the case of commercial sex work thus, chiefs in Chiadzwa were complaining that the diamond rush had led to a distortion of cultural norms as there was rampant commercial sex work. One villager noted that: ‘Diamonds brought many people here and this led to high demand for sexual services. Many girls are now engaging in the activity and making some money out of it.’

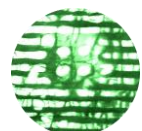
Loss of land has been devastating but for some women new livelihood opportunities have emerged. At Nuanetsi ranch, the workers provide a market for villagers selling different produce including maize and vegetables. An influx of workers provides a ready market which women can tap into for various merchandise. Some of the livelihood activities are however illegal and leave women vulnerable to infections. At Chiadzwa and Chisumbanje, illicit beer brewing by some women was also emerging as a livelihood option. There are thus, many contestations over the morality and legality of some of the livelihoods options but what is clear is that space is being opened up for new livelihood options. We argue that, a major government commitment to “restructuring the long term and deeply unequal process” by which agrarian households are being integrated into the global market is necessary in order to deal with the problems of the effects of land rights in Africa, O’Laughlin (2008: 21). The situation is slightly different with domestic actors standing behind the large scale land acquisitions in Zimbabwe. The consequences are felt by the rural poor population, especially by the women. Through field studies and interviews with women exposed to the phenomenon we found that even though legislation exists to provide human rights, these are often violated on the ground. Women’s experiences are examined and together with other first and secondary sources these are analyzed with the theoretical lens of the gender analysis, leading to the conclusion that women are more vulnerable for land grabs but are capable actors fighting to make their lives better.



## **Conclusion**

This study concludes by suggesting that large scale land deals lead to new gender based configurations in terms of livelihood strategies as evidenced by the case studies. Gendered costs of land grabbing emanate from the lack of negotiating powers that women have in terms of securing land rights. The costs have also been revealed through the loss of alternative food sources and bio diversity which serves as a critical food resource in rural Zimbabwe. The labor system that is created tends to be in favor of men, inhibiting women's access to jobs created by the investors due to the lack of education opportunities for most rural women. Therefore there is need for large scale land investments that are sensitive to the livelihoods of women and how women ought to be protected from harmful land investments that kill their land based livelihoods.

A policy initiated forum that includes women at local and national levels in terms of livelihoods and land investments is also here advocated for. The state in Zimbabwe is embarking on a somehow dangerous precedent in its quest for undertaking more foreign direct investment without understanding the gender implications in rural communities. What is clear from the cases discussed above is that women's issues and interests remain at the periphery of decision making. Concerns about rural women rarely get factored in when making and discussing large scale land deals. This has perverse implications on their ability to ensure more secure livelihoods. The study has also shown that new livelihood options can inadvertently emerge for women with large scale land deals. Some of these livelihoods such as commercial sex work are illegal and socially shunned in Zimbabwe. The livelihood options often highlight a radical shift from land based activities and in some cases increase women's earning capacity as evidenced by the trade diaspora livelihoods sources by the women and the migration of men within the region to search for jobs.





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