

National and International Actors in the Orchestration of Large-scale Land Deals in Zimbabwe: What's in It for Smallholder Farmers?

Manase Kudzai Chiweshe
and
Patience Mutopo



Organisation for Social Science
Research in Eastern and Southern
Africa (OSSREA)

Introduction

Little research has been done on the possible benefits of large-scale land deals for local communities. This work builds on a recent study that seeks to outline the potential benefits of land deals in terms of infrastructural, human and social development through increased employment and benefits flowing directly into recipient communities. While narrowing the lacuna in literature which is dominated by work on the negative aspects of land deals, this study also provides an interesting dimension to land deals which is peculiar to Zimbabwe. In 2000, the Zimbabwean government embarked on a land reform programme which increased smallholder farmers and allowed them access to commercial farming areas. However, through land deals, areas such as Mwenezi are witnessing the government disenfranchise the same communities it had empowered with land ownership. This study questions the identity and organisation of the various actors involved in these deals and how they impact local communities. It focuses on both the positive and negative aspects of large-scale land deals in Zimbabwe. Within the

Zimbabwean context, one witnesses an interesting mixture of international investors, politicians and rich white businesses coming together to acquire large tracts of land. The study focuses on Nuanetsi Range in Mwenezi and bio-fuel plant in Chisumbanje. Showing how communities with different claims to land have been affected by land acquisitions, it questions the historical evolution of contested lands in both areas. What is interesting is to highlight how government, local elites and investors use legal systems to justify denying people's access to land.

Study Areas

Nuanetsi Ranch is located in Mwenezi East in the Southern part of Zimbabwe, in Masvingo Province. It is located 3 kms from the Chirundu-Beitbridge R1 highway which connects Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It is approximately 500 metres from the Mwenezi Rural District Council, where the offices of the district administrator, environmental management agency, the Ministry of constitutional affairs and the district agricultural extension are located. Nuanetsi is located in Ward Thirteen. It covers more than 376,995 hectares of land (Mwenezi district files, February 2010), which constitute more than 1% of Zimbabwe's total land area.

Chisumbanje is a village in the province of Manicaland, Zimbabwe. It is located in the Dowovo communal land on the eastern bank of the Save River. It is about 95 kms south of Birchenough Bridge on the Birchenough Bridge-Chiredzi road. The village is in Chipinge District and is bordered by villages such as Chinyamukwakwa and Mashubi. The ethanol plant in Chisumbanje was a US\$600 million project commissioned in 2010. After operations began, it was producing 70,000 litres of fuel per month by August 2011. The plant has over 5,000 hectares of land under sugar cane to sustain the production levels. There are also around 400 out growers in surrounding communities. The project is a joint partnership entered by the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority with Madcom Rating, Green Fuel Investments and Madcom Investments. Residents of Chisumbanje have gone as far as petitioning Parliament arguing that they were not properly consulted before the deal was done.

Methodology

The study utilized different approaches for the two sites mainly due to the difference in time and contexts. The Mwenezi study was mainly aided by an already ongoing ethnographic study that commenced in 2009 and was still ongoing in 2012.

The Chisumbanje case study included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, desk research, with farmers, desk research. Key informant interviews sought information from government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, workers at the biofuel plant, traditional leaders, opinion leaders and district officials. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Research Findings

a) Displacement of Families

Nuanetsi: Although the project's activities which include dam building, sugar mills and irrigation are being discussed, all involving significant displacement of people — including perhaps up to 6,000 households from Nuanetsi, what is currently known is that soldiers and police were (back in February 2009) given authority to evict a large number of farmers on Nuanetsi ranch so that the project could take off.

Chisumbanje: As of June 2012, figures from the Chipinge Rural District Council indicated that out of the 1,733 families displaced by the company, only 499 were allocated 0.5 hectares of land each.

b) Gendered Dimensions of Land Deals

Nuanetsi: 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 Chigwizi, which placed them in a much more vulnerable position. Elderly women are susceptible to threats of eviction because of the intersectionality of gender and age in the customary norms of the Karanga.

Chisumbanje: Women within households are responsible for food provision and loss of land meant that they face challenges in ensuring their children had food. The results revealed how the process of global capital influx as represented by key investors in Green Fuels has found ways to use women for cheap social reproduction whilst supporting the gender inequalities existent in society.

c) Actors and Dynamics of Land Deals

Nuanetsi: Nuanetsi Ranch was owned by Imperial Cold Storage and Supply Company of South Africa until 1989 when it was purchased by the Development Trust of Zimbabwe (DTZ). The late Joshua Nkomo, Vice President of Zimbabwe, founded the Trust in June 1989 with the aim of developing the poor in Matabeleland provinces. Past board members of the Trust included ZANU PF elites (and former PF ZAPU in the party) such as Simon Muzenda, Edison Zvobgo, John Nkomo, Sydney Sekeramayi and Dumiso Dabengwa, among others. Since the early 1990s, numerous international investment companies have courted the DTZ for investment opportunities in Nuanetsi. The DTZ entered into a joint venture with Zimbabwe Bio-Energy with a view of unlocking the true economic value of Nuanetsi Ranch. The joint venture terms between Zimbabwe Bio-Energy (ZBE) and the DTZ have given the company land utilization powers but the land remains the property of the Trust.

Chisumbanje: The land on both estates that comprise the company belongs to the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) through lease agreements with the Chipinge Rural District Council and has been accessed through two separate Build, Operate and Transfer agreements between the two private agricultural companies: Madcom Investments (operating at Chisumbanje) and Rating Investments (operating at Middle Sabi). The companies have been owned by maverick millionaire, Billy Rautenbach. As of 2008, Rautenbach was on a travel ban list in both the European Union and United States, for it was alleged that he aided Robert Mugabe's government financially, regardless of international sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe to limit Mugabe's grip of power.

d) Positive Spinoffs of Land Deals

Nuanetsi: At the time of the data collection, the ZBE Company had more than 100,000 crocodiles the skins and the meat of which were ear-marked for export to the European Union member countries such as Germany. The sub activities, done within the project area, besides bio-fuels production include crocodile farming, cattle ranching, and game keeping. These activities have provided employment opportunities for some members of the local communities. For instance, in 2010, it was reported that the Crocodile Department alone had already created more than 2,000 jobs (Table 1).

Table 1. Employment statistics

Permanent	Temporary	Percentage of locals (Chipinge district)
3,369	1,089	32%

SOURCE: Greenfuels

Chisumbanje: On a monthly average, a cash injection of \$US2 million goes into Checheche Growth Point as wages, salaries and procurement finance for various consumables within the project. Seven banks have opened up to mop up this cash and provide banking services for the thousands of staff. The flagship of the social responsibility programme is a 4,000 hectare community irrigation scheme being developed at an annual rate of 500 hectares to give local rural farmers irrigable plots for mainly food crops. To date, just over 700 households have been settled on irrigation plots. Greenfuels employs a total of 975 workers. Out of that number, 202 workers (20.7% of the total) are from the Chipinge District.

Policy Recommendations

To Zimbabwe Government

The Zimbabwe government should:

- Review and strengthen the legal framework governing all aspects of land rights and land acquisitions. This includes ensuring that the country's legal framework protects the land and water rights of existing rural citizens and adequately protects vulnerable groups, including the poor and women.
- Consider investments only after conducting careful impact assessments. These should include land tenure impact assessments, community impact assessments, and environmental impact assessments. And it should use the findings of these assessments to structure investments that maximize the equitable sharing of economic and social benefits while minimizing the negative impacts.
- Avoid expropriation as a tool for accessing land. One means of doing this is by prioritizing investments that work with current owners and do not require the expropriation of land rights. It also has to require investors to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of the local communities. If expropriation must be used, it should follow established procedures that include extensive consultation with "land losers", judicial review, land-for-land compensation, and

full resettlement and rehabilitation packages.

- Prioritize projects that work with existing smallholders. The best path to increasing agricultural production typically involves helping smallholder farmers to close this gap rather than just introducing large-scale production in non-cultivated areas or moving smallholder farmers on the land altogether.
- Ensure transparency. This should involve maintaining public records of all the significant documents relating to the investment and building independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the lifespan of each investment project. A level playing field for all parties requires easy access to relevant information. Public notice should be required to provide interested and affected parties a true opportunity to register their claims.

Recommendations for Investors in Chisumbanje and Mwenezi

Investments that are harmful to local communities are less likely to be successful. Constant friction and conflicts with local communities are harmful to both sides in the long-run. To ensure cohesive relationships with local communities, the owners of the companies need to do the following:

- Respect and protect land rights: In the two areas, there are people with claims on the land and who derive a livelihood from it. Investors need to understand that even where people lack legal rights, they still have strong social claims to land. It is important that investors in both cases find ways to compensate or find alternative to all those affected by the projects. They should conduct land tenure impact assessments as doing so will reduce the likelihood of future opposition from those who might have been left out of the process.
- Do what is right, even if it is not required. This is pertinent to the Chisumbanje case where the investors feel that an agreement with ARDA who legally owns the land, would protect them from claims from communal farmers. While legally they were not obliged to do anything to help the farmers, they could have done more to lessen the impact of land lose. The government has now turned the tables by using legal loopholes within the Indigenisation Act to demand a stake in an

investment they did not contribute anything to.

Recommendations for Smallholder Farmers

Smallholder farmers in Chisumbanje are already in the process of lobbying policy makers and the courts. They should continue and use the election periods as a leverage to ensure their interests are addressed. In Mwenezi, farmers remain disorganized but they require a strong association to advocate for their concerns. Farmers need better organisation and representation which is missing in the two cases. No farmer union was involved on behalf of the farmers.

Recommendations for Civil Society

In Chisumbanje, a small organisation led by Clarence Madhuku has over the past few years worked with communities and displaced households. Their role has included facilitating advocacy activities and assisting communities to petition relevant authorities. In Mwenezi, there is a lack of civil society participation which is required to assist affected communities with the following:

- Provide awareness, training, and legal aid programs to help communities understand and protect their land rights and to represent their interests in dealing with investors and governments.
- Conduct impact assessments. Assist governments by developing expertise in and by conducting land tenure impact assessments, community impact assessments, and environmental impact assessments.
- Monitor and supplement government oversight and management of investor agreements.
- Promote greater government and investor transparency by creating and implementing systems to monitor land deals and promote information sharing.

References

Alden Wily, L. 2011. "Nothing new under the sun or a new battle joined? The political economy of

African dispossession in the current global land rush." Paper presented at the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, 6-8 April 2011, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom.

Anseeuw, W.; Boche, M.; Breu, T.; Giger, M.; Lay, J.; Messerli, P. and Nolte, K. 2012. "Transnational land deals for agriculture in the Global South. Analytical report based on the Land Matrix Database." CDE/CIRAD/GIGA, Bern/Montpellier/Hamburg.

Cotula, L., Vermeulen, S., Leonard, R. and Keeley, J. 2009. *Land grab or development opportunity? Agricultural investment and international land deals in Africa*. London/Rome: IIED/FAO/IFAD.

Cotula, L. 2012. The international political economy of the global land rush: A critical appraisal of trends, scale, geography and drivers. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39, no. 3&4: 649–680.

Hall, R. 2011a. Land grabbing in Southern Africa: The many faces of the investor rush. *Review of African Political Economy*, 38, no. 128:193–214.

Hall, R. 2011b. Land grabbing in Africa and the new politics of food. *Future-Agricultures Policy Brief* 041.

Matondi, P.B. 2011. Agro investments at a time of redistributive reform in Zimbabwe. In *Bio fuels, land grabbing and food security in Africa*, edited by Matondi, P.B., Havnevik, K. and Beyene, A. London: ZED

Mujere, J. and Dombo, S. 2011. "Large-scale investment projects and land grabs in Zimbabwe: The case of Nuanetsi Ranch bio- diesel project." Paper presented at the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, 6–8 April 2011, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom.

Mutopo, P. 2011. "Gendered dimensions of land and rural livelihoods: The case of new settler farmer displacement at Nuanetsi Ranch, Mwenezi District, Zimbabwe." Paper presented at the International Conference on Global Land Grabbing, 6-8 April 2011, University of Sussex, Brighton, United Kingdom.

Mutopo, P. 2012. "Corporate land investments and rural women in Zambia." Research report for Oxfam Tanzania.

Mutopo, P. and Chiweshe, M.K. (forthcoming). Water resources and bio-fuel production after fast-track land reform in Zimbabwe.