

## Chapter 20

# Land Reform, Tobacco Production, and Wood Resources in Zimbabwe

**Manyanhaire Itai Offat**

*The Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the land reform-tobacco production-wood resources nexus using a political ecology theoretical framework. It uses secondary data sources, literature review, and onsite expert verification to estimate the quantity of wood resources used by farmers to cure tobacco. The area of forest woodland cleared to cure one hectare of tobacco increased across tobacco farming regions in Zimbabwe. Despite the fact that the country has environmental agencies and departments, farmers continue to use wood to cure tobacco in a typical clientilistic and informalisation of state institutions. The use of firewood to cure tobacco is a long-term threat to ecological sustainability. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme should incorporate sound environmental plans and avoid informalisation of state institutions.*

### INTRODUCTION

Land policy in Zimbabwe is characterized by competition for geographic space among the different racial groups. Colonialism set in motion massive cyclic land grabs that dichotomized rights to land. That is, prime land for white settlers and marginal land for the majority black population. The post-colonial land policy has three critical phases; the 1980-1990 policy of willing buyer willing seller; the 1990-1999 compulsory land acquisition and the Fast Track Land Reform Programme from the year 2000. The Fast Track Land Reform

Programme is radical redistributive land reform (Moyo & Chambati, 2013) often described as, disruptive and disorderly grab of white-owned commercial farms with considerable destructive environmental impacts (Clover & Eriksen, 2008; Mukwada et al., 2014;). The Land discourse in Zimbabwe is therefore highly polarised between views for ‘the revolutionary process’ (Rukuni & Eitcher 1994; Dalal-Clayton, Dent & Dubois, 2003; Moyo 2007, Scoones et al., 2010 ;) and a racist reform process. Despite this polarization new land use rights ushered in new small scale tobacco farmers who are beneficiaries of the land

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grabbed by the state from the white commercial farmers. Unfortunately, the global discourse gives little attention to local land grabs and the implications of the ensuing cropping systems on wood resources.

The preoccupation of the current global discourse on land is on the renewed acquisition of land (land grabs) for large scale commercial agriculture, a phenomenon with footprints that stretch back to the time of colonialism (Odusula, 2014). Land grab in current literature is understood as purchasing and leasing of land by state and private enterprises in order to produce crops for export (Watson *et al* 2006; GRAIN, 2008; Cotula *et al.*, 2009; Daniel and Mittal 2009; De Schutter, 2011; White, *et al*, 2012; Borrás & Franco, 2012). Displaced white commercial farmers from Zimbabwe are known to have moved into other countries like Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique and started viable agricultural ventures with land deals facilitated by the respective states. There is a general belief that land grabs are driven by countries experiencing food shortages and high prices for agricultural products. To hedge themselves against unforeseeable food shortages and related crises they have embarked on a global investment program at the expense of the communities that are displaced by such large scale agricultural investments. These factors are viewed as the reasons why there is a global replay of the large-scale land acquisition in Africa with linkage to the colonial phenomenon. Perhaps Africa should be viewed as an agro-economic pacifier and the building block to global economic rejuvenation as it has become the preferred destination in times of crisis.

In short, land grabs imply transnational and domestic deals of a commercial nature regardless of scale and output markets (Borrás & Franco, 2009). The word land deals imply a business transaction involving two parties and in most cases in the African context it is the state and a private foreign company. Aarts (2009) considers this definition of land grabbing to be inadequate as it

suggests that land grabbing is an illicit behavior whereas deals are completely legal. Contrary to this view, the definition of land grab is appropriate because land grabs are negotiated by political and business elites without the active involvement of local communities. Arguably, land grabs are also driven by the perceived view that the African state has failed to meaningfully invest in agriculture and rural development (Sadomba, 2008; Cotula, 2009; Scoones *et al.*, 2010). Whilst there is general agreement on the definition it is essentially narrow and less inclusive of all the manifestations of the phenomenon of land deals and grabs. Viewing land grabs as externally driven tends to exonerate the complicity of the local state in the deals (Hallam, 2009). This line of argument masks the real roles of the African state in land grabs. African states are complicit to the phenomenon of land grabs through poorly crafted land policies and the emergency of a black business and political elite that wants to exert its powers on resources. Therefore, understanding the interplay between the national and the global movements in land deals helps to unravel the connections between land reform, tobacco production and wood resources in Zimbabwe. This chapter explores the land reform-tobacco production - wood resources nexus using a political ecology theoretical framework. This is a negation of the traditional understanding of the concept of land grabbing; land grabbing is viewed as a product of power relations dynamics between the national state and global forces.

## **POLITICAL ECOLOGY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The political ecology theoretical framework has sound philosophical grounding to explain the linkage between land reform, tobacco production and its impact on wood resources. To put this into context the following discussion explores the meaning and implication of the political

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