

**Access to Forest Resources in the Context of Fast Track Land Reforms: Impacts on  
Local Level Dynamics- Lessons drawn from the Zimbabwean Land Reform  
Programme.**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

*The research focused on access to and control of forest resources in former commercial farming areas by communal people in Seke. Primary data were collected from Mhindurwa and Mangwende villages using structured interviews, key informant interviews and observations. Secondary data were collected through documentary review and participation during the 'fire wood week' that was jointly run by the Forestry Commission and the Department of Natural Resources. The results indicate that rules to accessing forest resources have changed following the 'fast track land reform' in Zimbabwe and this has prompted the communal communities to seek alternative fuel sources. The results obtained indicated an interaction of policy options and how these alter local level dynamics, which in turn influence the nature of and management of forest resources.*

## **Background**

### **The Nature and Historical Context of the “Fast Track Land Reform”**

Land reform in Zimbabwe has been a major concern since the attainment of independence in 1980. The aim of the government was to redistribute land for social equity and to restore the colonially created imbalances (Mamimine, 2003; Marimira and Odero, 2003). This process was done through land markets and on the basis of a willing buyer and willing seller but the government failed to reach the projected targets due to political and economic factors. This process of acquiring land through the land markets was brought to a halt by the ‘fast track land reform’ (FTLR) in 2000 (Chatora, 2003 and Rugube et al., 2003).

The FTLR has been characterized by the transfer of land from predominantly white large scale commercial farms (LSCF) to blacks with diverse social backgrounds (Mukamuri, n.d.). In the process, the government adopted two models and these are: A1, which is the villagized model, and the A2, which follows the commercial models but smaller than the LSCF (Marimira and Odero, 2003). This shift in land ownership led to a destabilization of institutions previously involved in the management of natural resources and the ‘de facto’ arrangements in sharing common property resources. This process has not been followed by an institutional revolution to support and maintain its initiatives (Mamimine, 2003). The FTLR has been characterized by lack of both human capital and agricultural input to support the newly resettled farmers.

Nhira et al., (1998) had indicated earlier that there was bound to be a decline in forest cover in communal areas due to agriculture-oriented activities. The establishment of resettlement areas was also anticipated to result in forest clearance and increased encroachment into the resettlement areas by communal inhabitants were to lead to forest decline. Nhira et al., (1998; 109) noted that ‘... with a comprehensive land redistribution, if settlement is not accompanied by support services and effective incentives for conservation, we are likely to see widespread stripping of forest assets as has happened in the current resettlement areas.’ Interestingly, the

process of land redistribution under the FTLR has not been as comprehensive as anticipated and there has been no institutional reform to support it since its onset in 2000.

The present study assessed issues of access and control of forest resources in former LSCF in the post FTLR context where land has not been comprehensively distributed as anticipated. The process led to the creation of new land entitlements, new challenges and opportunities for the Communal area (CA) inhabitants. These changes led to consequent changes in the rules governing access to such resources and the previously existing 'de facto' arrangements also disintegrated. It captured the local people's perceptions of such changes and the new dynamics in forest resources use in a context of transition, and how lack of support from central government had impacted on resource use patterns and the crafting of rules to manage forest resources.

**Key Words: Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR); Large Scale Commercial Farms (LSCF) and Communal Areas (CA).**

## **Methodological Issues**

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework**

The two most central themes that the study focused on are access and *control*. The Political Economy Framework of Analysis of Common Property relationships (Cousins, 1992) was used to analyze the relations between the communal people and the newly resettled farmers and the game theoretic perspectives of cooperation and competition were used guide the discussion (Aumann, 1997). The Political Economy Framework recognizes the importance of power struggles in regulating access to technology, the nature and pattern of resource degradation. Within this framework, evolution of effective institutions is the only solution to resource degradation. Marimira and Odero (2003) established that newly resettled farmers are in constant competition with the communal area inhabitants. The interaction could be characterized as a struggle since at one end a group may perceive short-term benefits whilst ignoring the long-term consequences of their actions on the environment.

### **Study Area and Methods**

The aim of this study was to understand the dynamic interaction between the communal inhabitants and the forest, and how the interface is altered or has been altered by land tenure shift, following the FTLR. Data gathered relied on both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The study relied on structured group interviews, from which the key question were identified and further adapted for the more detailed interviews with the key informants. The researcher engaged in an active process of observing phenomena, which ranged from making subjective overview of the vegetation and assessing the nature of the woodpiles at each of the homesteads. Finally, participation during the 'Firewood Week' that was run jointly by the forestry

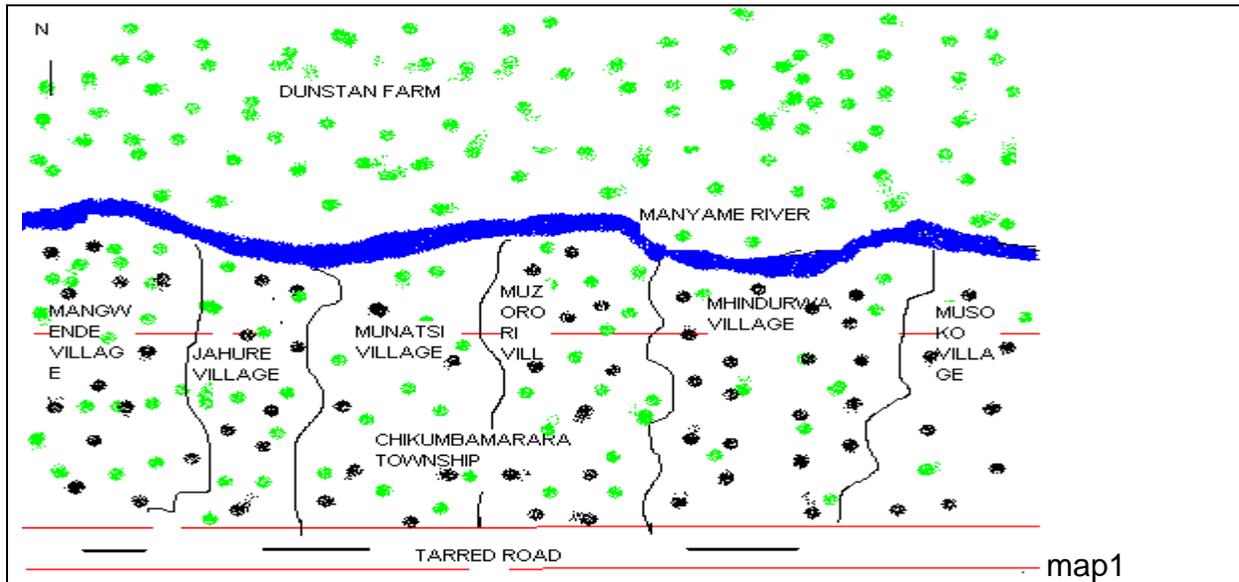
commission and the Department of Natural Resources run between the 6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 helped consolidate the data for the current study.

The study was carried out in Seke communal areas and it focused on two villages namely; Mhindurwa and Mangwende. Mhindurwa village lies within Mandedza Ward while Mangwende is in Mayambara ward and they both border Dunstan farm. The criteria for selecting these two areas were based on the distance between these two villages and the realization that their access points into Dunstan farm were also different. Mhindurwa village is thinly covered with trees compared to Mangwende and this was assumed to influence their interaction with forests both within their communities and outside. The distance between the two communities ensured that measurements were at least drawn from different groups of actors especially within Dunstan farm.

The map below shows the location of the area. The study area is located along the Seke and Hwedza road and the drop off point is at the 38.5-kilometer peg. The villages are located northwards and they are within a 5-kilometer radius off the main highway. Both communities share the same facilities and most of their basic commodities are obtained from Chikumbamara Township. The map below show the study site, and the approximate settlement patterns and the vegetation densities

**Map 1: Sketch map of the study area**

**Map 2: The location of the study area in the Zimbabwe context**



## **Results and Findings**

Data from the structured interviews were quantitatively analyzed leaving out qualitative data. Much of the qualitative data were supplemented by key informant interviews. Cross tabulations were computed and the method involved initial coding of the responses to come up with category responses per question. The frequency of responding per response category was then computed. Cross tabulations drew comparisons based on the area of the residence and the stated objectives.

Communities were asked to identify the resources that they derive from the forest and also to identify the location of these resources. The analysis grouped the resources into three major categories, which are: fuel wood, thatch and non-timber forest resources (for example honey, medicine, fruits and mushroom).

### **Resource sharing prior to fast track land reform resettlement**

Respondents were asked to look into retrospect and compare the rules to accessing Dunstan forest resources prior the FTLR and how well it compares with the post FTLR rules. The general impression gathered was that people seem content with the pre-FTLR arrangements. They acknowledged that prior the FTLR the rules were prohibitive but the resources were abundant. The current situation is compounded by the fact that there are fewer resources due to an increase in the number of people occupying the area. The rules that were reported to exist are summarised below:

**Table 1**

Rules that existed prior to the land reform	Mhindurwa	Mangwende	Total
Allowed easy access	15%	41.7%	25%
Given permits	20%	16.7%	18.8%
Not allowed to cut trees	15%	16.7%	15.6%
Trespass laws	5%	-	3.1%
Other non prohibitive rules	25%	8.3%	18.7%
No response	20%	25.6%	18.7
Total	100%	100%	100%

### **Rules of access for the trees and forests within the communal areas**

An assessment of the current rules of access was conducted for the three locations namely Mhindurwa, Mangwende, and Dunstan farm. Only 5% of the participants in Mhindurwa mentioned the existence of rules that protect the forests. They reported that they are not allowed to cut trees by their 'Sabhuku'. Such a low percentage on the awareness of the rules that govern forest utilisation can be attributed to the acute shortage of trees in the area, which is now densely settled. An indication was also given by some of the participants that most the inhabitants were new in the area and they had bought the land from the Sabhuku. The process was reported to have led to the massive clearance of the remaining forested areas as people prepared their farming land. In Mangwende, participants indicated the presence of numerous rules governing use of trees around their fields and their homesteads. The initial step one has to undertake is to consult the village head if they want to cut a tree.

## Rules of access for trees and forests in former LSCF

Both villages' perception of the rules governing access to forest resources in Dunstan farm highly coincided. The sentiment expressed by most of the participants was that the rules are not stated but the mechanisms in place are highly prohibitive and at times they are violent. The current rules governing access to forest resources in Dunstan Farm are summarized in the table below.

**Table 2**

Rules of access	Mhindurwa	Mangwende	Total
Completely forbidden	5%	16.7%	9.4%
Ask for permission	10%	16.7%	12.5%
Not allowed to cut trees	15%	25%	18.8%
First cut for the resettled farmers	5%	-	3.1%
Collect dead wood	15%	-	9.3%
No response	50%	41.6%	69.9%
Total	100%	100%	100%

There was an acknowledgement that rules of access have now changed. One of the participants stated that;

*'Murungu ange ari nane'*

The above literally translates into the white men were better or the owners of the LSCF were better compared to the current system on the ground. Some of the key informants saw the problem of resource depletion in the resettlement areas as a result of poor management on part of the settlers themselves who sell wood to the commercial companies. They estimated that the damage caused by the truckers was ten fold the harm that communal inhabitants cause.

One informant contended that;

*'Vave kukoshesa mari kupfuura miti yacho'*

The above translates into they valued money more than the trees implying that given an opportunity and their non-sensitivity to issues of environmental degradation they would rather personally enrich themselves than concern themselves with managing the trees for future generations.

One other comment was;

*'Vanoita sevanhu varikupfuura'*

The above literally means *(its as if they are passing)*. This can imply that the resettled farmers do not have a long-term vision or seemed unaware of their fate since most of them have not yet acquired title deeds. They might also be having a feeling they might be evicted hence, have to maximise their personal outcomes to the detriment of the environment.

## Current problems faced by communal people

Both communities reported facing the following problems in accessing fuel wood in former commercial areas: The problems are summarised in the table below:

**Table 4**

Problem	% Response
The river floods and people cannot access the other side of the river, have problems in transporting the wood and the transportation cost is high	25%
Completely denied access into the former commercial farming area by the newly resettled farmers	25%
There is lack of dead wood due to wood selling, the wood also has to meet the consumptive needs of the newly resettled farmers; increasing both distance and time required to gather wood	12.5%
Intimidation and confiscation of tools by the newly resettled farmers and people are required to pay a fee to get them back	6.25%
Not experienced any problems with the newly resettled farmers with regards accessing fuel wood	9.4%
No response	21.85%
Total	100%

## Alternative arrangements

The study attempted to establish whether there were some alternative arrangements to securing fuel wood from Dunstan farm. Here the aim was to establish what form of negotiation took place between the newly resettled farmers and the communal people.

The reported findings are as below:

**Table 3**

Other arrangements	Mhindurwa	Mangwende	Total
None	45%	58.3%	50%
Make personal arrangements	35%	25%	31.3%
Asked the Sabhuku to mitigate	-	8.3%	3.1%
Clear land intended for agriculture	5%	-	3.1%
Buying from the resettled farmers	15%	-	6.2%
No response	10%	7.4%	6.3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

### **Adjustment mechanisms**

The study also assessed the adjustment mechanisms that these villages have engaged to cope with the changes in access to fuel wood in Dunstan. In Mhindurwa only 30% owned woodlots while 70% did not have any woodlot at household level. The nature of the woodlots in Mhindurwa is field edge trees demarcating boundaries. There is no land that is specifically set aside for tree planting and the nature of harvesting is cutting the branches only.

In Mangwende, comparatively well-forested areas exist, as it is slightly a new settlement compared to Mhindurwa village. Most of the households are comprised of children whose parents stay in Mangwende Village 1. There is some considerable amount of land that is under tree cover compared to Mhindurwa village since land selling did not encroach to their side. In this village, 66.7% indicated having a woodlot set aside trees for domestic use. The management system entails informing the Sabhuku of any plans to harvest and harvesting once annually

Community ownership of a woodlot was supported in both instances. In Mhindurwa, 46.5% of the respondents were not aware if there have been any initiative to establish a community woodlot. In Mangwende village, 21.7% also reported that their village did not have a woodlot. However, the woodlot that most of the respondents in Mhindurwa alluded to is council owned, in reality there is no such woodlot in their village. In Mangwende, the community woodlot that exists is a jointly owned and managed Jahure and Makosvo villages as these villages established it together.

Only the community members are allowed to harvest within the community woodlot. Access to these woodlots was via the Sabhuku (Mangwende, 6.2%) and membership based on having planted the trees. In Mhindurwa, 15.5% indicated that their village had plans to establish a woodlot while 37.2% indicated that they did not for see such plans. Some of the respondents in Mangwende were not aware that their village had a woodlot and 15.5% reported wanting to see such an establishment within their village.

Factors limiting the establishment of woodlots were lack of land (Mhindurwa 35%), lack of cooperation (Mhindurwa 35% and Mangwende 16.7%). Some of the respondents have indicated that they have been used to looking for fuel wood from these areas (8.3% from both villages) and they have not thought of some other option. It is their wish that these farms continue to serve wood providers.

As an adjustment mechanism, it was hoped communities will self-organise and source alternative fuels such as coal and electricity. In Mhindurwa, 50% agreed to having made plans to source electricity, 45% reported no such plans within their village. In Mangwende, similar proportions (50%) acknowledged having such plans while others reported not having such plans. Most of the successful efforts were reported at individual level.

Some the participants indicated that their plans had reached advanced levels and they were hoping to have electricity installed within the following year (2005- the study was carried out during the month of December in 2004) and the proportions were as follows (Mhindurwa 40% and Mangwende 8.3%). Some of the plans were reported to have gone as far as the village head

meetings and some reported that they had dropped the plans due to non transparency in the handling of the funds.

## Proposed Solutions

Solutions	Mhindurwa	Mangwende	Total
Electricity and woodlots	25%	33.3%	28.1%
Government intervention	15%	16.7%	25%
Ban wood truckers and also conduct campaigns	-	8.3%	3.1%
No workable solution	25%	25%	25%
Resource sharing arrangements	10%	8.3%	9.4%
No response	25%	8.4%	9.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

The claim that wood was being cleared on land that is intended for agriculture was explored. One key informant was identified from the former commercial areas whilst was transporting a tractor load of fuel wood. The opinion he gave supported the claim by some of the respondents that they were allowed to cut trees on land intended for agriculture. However, other key informants from both villages were of the opinion that this was not true since wood was being cut on areas that were not fit for agriculture and most of the wood truckers were buying wood from such areas. Their understanding was that, if one intends to clear for agriculture then there has to follow de-stumping. This claim was taken as a defense mechanism to cover for the blame they have for selling fuel wood.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The current study is situated within FTLR context and it began by identifying the in the implementation of the Programme. It has pointed to the lack of formal institutions to facilitate the administration and control of resources in these areas. This led to the assumption that, since these areas have been the traditional forest resource sources for the communal people there was bound to have some changes in the pattern of resource use following the disintegration of 'de facto' arrangements and the introduction of new inhabitants in the former LSCF.

The objectives of the study were achieved and these include: establishing the major uses and the source of the forest resources, rules governing access to the resources lying in former commercial areas and how the communities have adjusted to any of the changes. These findings have been supported by some literature and the previous research studies done in the Zimbabwean context. The current study has extended to establish that the resident community also threatens resources if they are not given adequate institutional support.

The relevant literature shows that forest resources are highly subtractive and that there is need to combine local levels needs to ensure effective management. Indication was also given on the colonial dent on traditional institutions capacity to manage the natural resources. Successful management of forest resources was reported to be dependent on the incentives available (Lawry, 1998) and specified rules to manage them (Ostrom, 1990). There are legal provisions in the Zimbabwean law that helps in the protection and the management of forests and these are the Forestry Act and the Communal Lands Forest Produce Act.

Prior the FTLR structures existed and these allowed people to access forest resources within a defined limit. There was little pressure on the resources compared to the current situation. Currently there exist stated rules and alternative arrangements, which show that there is some bargaining at individual level. Therefore, inasmuch as rules have been limiting, there is still that room to abuse resources at individual level.

The findings also confirm the assertion by Elliot (1995) that government policies influence the human nature interface. Issues of gendered access were not established since all males in the sample indicated collecting fuel wood. However, there has been an increase in the time required to collect fuel wood. Issues of community membership have also emerged and when stated, it's explicit that any benefit to a stream of resources is based upon being a member of the community or the household (for example harvesting from community and household woodlots).

Nhira et al., (1998; 104) had predicted that '...the situation may progressively deteriorate as resettlement area forest resources are regarded as 'fair game' by neighboring communal area inhabitants...' The findings from the current study do not support this prediction. The rules on the ground have tended to limit subsistence consumption at one end, and, maximizing on commercial enterprise on the other hence these resources cannot be regarded as 'fair game'. In one-way or the other, the forests are threatened from within and without. Another prediction by Nhira et al., (1998; 105) was that that poverty will force the newly resettled farmers to embark on wood selling to supplement their income '...sale of wood to neighboring communal area inhabitants ...' this prediction has been validated by the current study and also established that this activity has even threatens the survival of the forests.

## **Lessons learnt**

The discussion now turns to the possible ways forward regarding controlling and managing forests in the context of FTLR. There two central issues that warrant focus and these are: communal and commercial extraction and the role of community level organisations in natural resources management.

Communal people have been limited to accessing fuel wood following the implementation of the FTLR and the impacts on local level dynamics. Resettled farmers sell the resources to commercial extractors and to the communal people. Justification for this has surfaced as the pretext; 'clearing land for agriculture' and such claims have not been supported by the data from the current study. The legal provisions within the Forestry Policy can help deal with this problem if refined of its ambiguities and effectively enforced.

The Communal Lands Produce Act (1986/7) prohibits the sell of trees cleared on agricultural land. This logically reduces the incentives to clear land for commercial purposes or supposedly for the supposed 'agricultural purposes'. On the other hand, the Forestry Act allows exploitation of trees sown by individuals on individual plots. The direction for institutions in the management of forests has to focus more on limiting trade in 'self sown' trees and create an incentive to plant trees for commercial purposes. Literature has also demonstrated that the creation of multiple land holding units can actually result in more trees being planted if there is adequate infrastructural support and supportive policy and legislative frameworks (Tiffen et al., 1994)

The findings from this study demonstrate that widening socio-environment interface made possible by the FTLR needs to be followed by some institutional overhaul to meet the new challenges. For example, Montalembert and Schmithusen (1994) indicated that tenure transitions have to be followed by an institutional reorientation. Institutional flexibility and dynamism are also required in the current context for example; the 'Fire Wood Week Campaign' was not an effective response since it was run during the normal working hours. Most of the wood was transported during the early hours of the morning and late at night.

Effective monitoring was also required on most of the road networks but due to limited resources that could not be done. Effective monitoring would require numerous personnel and vehicles, which will allow them to monitor the movement of resources between the market and the producer community. This also works well if there is adequate staff complement from the Zimbabwe Republic Police. All these add to the cost of monitoring and controlling forests in these former commercial areas. Therefore, an alternative and cost effective mechanism needs to be devised and this can be through mobilizing available community resources.

The two communities (Mangwende and Mhindurwa) demonstrated a high level of environmental awareness and some willingness to see some changes in the utilization of the forest resources lying within the former commercial farming areas. There is some internal cohesion in Mangwende village and there has been some indication that the local leader was engaged to negotiate access by his villagers to forest resources in Dunstan farm. The negotiation process could possibly lead to the emergence of resource sharing arrangements that could work to the benefit of the environment.

The resource sharing arrangements that can be possible exploited include having the resettled and CA inhabitants check on each other. This is possible since most of the wood truckers use road networks that pass through the communal areas to access Dunstan farm and ferry their fuel wood. On the other hand, there has been a case that has already presented itself in Mangwende where ‘sabhuku’ mitigated on behalf of his people and that can be built upon to map out a resource-sharing scheme for forests lying in former commercial farming areas.

Tenure rights have been the focus of most scholarship on natural resource use and conservation. The findings indicate that in cases where tenure is secure, individuals invest their time and resources to upgrade an area, but when absent, there is wanton destruction of resources. There is need to enhance tenure for the newly resettled farmers and even if defined as title deeds then they should be granted these. Marimira and Odero (2003) have established that government has failed to provide some basic infrastructural support to these farmers and this could be one other factor fuelling destruction of forests.

The post FTLR Zimbabwe has led to the emergence of new institutions with a strong political backing and these have assumed stewardship roles over the forests that were previously managed and shared by commercial farmers and communal villagers. There has emerged a new set of rules totally divorced from the traditional and functional rules that had governed the forest for decades without gross deterioration. Communal people are being limited to accessing fuel wood for consumptive use. The newly settled farmers thrive on selling the forest resources to commercial extractors and to the communal people and justification for this has surfaced as the pretext; ‘‘clearing land for agriculture’’.

The findings from this study demonstrate that widening socio-environment interface made possible by the ‘fast-track land reform’ needs to be followed by some institutional reorientation to meet the new challenges. Institutional flexibility and dynamism is also required on part of the formal or state institutions managing forest resources. Effective monitoring by the state institutions is also required to regulate abuse of local resources by local level institutions and prevent commercialization of such shared resources as this leads to competitive extraction, as is the case on the ground leading to resource deterioration.

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