

**Zimbabwe's Decentralised Natural Resource Management
Programme: Evolution and resilience in the face of adversity or a
vindication case of CBNRM in crisis?**

By

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Abstract

Decentralisation should ideally result in democratic transfer of effective powers and control from the state to elected local level authorities. Where this occurs, it enables resources users to actively participate in decision-making and hold accountable those to whom decentralised powers have been transferred. This paper describes and analyses the politics and practice of decentralisation in Chizvirizvi, a resettlement area in Chiredzi district in Zimbabwe's South Eastern Lowveld. It investigates the relationships between different institutions and how this influences land use, resource access and practice. The transfer of power to local level institutions has resulted in challenges in its actual appropriation. Using empirical evidence drawn from district level processes, decentralisation is not likely to result in thoroughgoing empowerment even where it is demand-driven. Evidence can be adduced to show that this shift has led to highly questionable institutional arrangements at local level. Chizvirizvi is unique because this is the first community in Zimbabwe to be granted appropriate authority to manage wildlife. This case represents attempts by government at empowering locals but this has led to changes in power relationships between traditional institutions and the powerful political institutions. This resulted in conflicts between the various actors as weak institutions are marginalized and rendered invisible. At times, this shift shows resistance and resilience of communities in the face of change but it could also be interpreted as a crisis where communities feel they have lost control over their livelihoods. Where community collective interests are threatened, the powerful actors make adjustments, compromise and form networks and alliances aimed at fulfilling individual or collective interests. It is not the interest of these representative institutions to build alliances with poor and marginalized users who would have demanded such powers. Strategies to empower the marginalized rural poor often simply invert such relationships. There are internal differentiations that seem to thwart a sense of collective community interest. This policy shift has weakened local traditional leadership as powerful committee members engage in client patron relationships with powerful members outside the area further marginalizing the plot owners in the scheme. Stakeholder groups usually emerge from different socio-economic and political backgrounds; with varying levels of power and they view interventions and the resource from their own perspectives to further their own interests. The paper argues that devolving powers to local institutions spawn conflicts as new responsibilities and opportunities arise as these are saturated in power struggles. External actors should be conflict mediators to challenge local despotism in an institutional landscape marred by politics.

1. Introduction

That the world is characterized by skews in the distribution of power within and among various levels of social organization is hardly surprising. That decentralization is a mechanism of choice in aligning governmental powers among different levels of social organization also appears to be stating the obvious (Murphree 1991; Murombedzi 1991; Ribot 1999). The merits of decentralization are now more readily understood. It seeks to empower local bodies and communities by bestowing upon them ‘bundles of entrustments’¹ transferred from the central state. Such entrustments include regulatory and executive powers, responsibility and authority in decision-making, institutional infrastructure and assets, and administrative capacity. Considered in its most ideal form, decentralization should result in devolution or democratic decentralization in which entrustments are transferred to lower level, and preferably elected, authorities that are largely or wholly independent of central government (Bosuyt and Gould 2000).² But in practice decentralization often results in outcomes that are commonly referred to as deconcentration – states extend themselves into the local arena by the transfer of some entrustments to local branches of government that remain responsible and accountable to central government (Ribot 1999).

Though stated in the extreme, the above binary of outcomes mirrors the often under-studied question of whether or not to use decentralization as a policy intervention. As pointed out by Ruitenbeek and Cartier (2001:4), policy makers are impatient and often seek a quick fix when

¹ The concept of entrustments was introduced by Ribot (1999), and was adopted by Mandondo (2001) in an article that gives a historical overview of natural resource governance in Zimbabwe.

² The paper adopts a Weberian definition, which sees the state as a clearly defined set of institutions with official powers. Admittedly, based on Gramscian perspectives, it is not easy to draw neat lines between the state, civil society and civil society organisations (see also Holm et al. 1996). The state is an amorphous entity of elected politicians and non-elected civil servants and other actors with different interests and often conflicting preferences (see also Hasler 1993).

things are better left to themselves. Their ‘hands off’ reproach appears a crude but poignant reminder to environment and development practitioners to be more modest in their quest to effect change, because change cannot be invented: it is a pervasive and eternal feature of all social and ecological systems. And we have absolutely no reason to assume that peasant communities are so fatalistic and improvident to the extent that they are incapable of appropriately adjusting to changes in their everyday social and other environments. More often than not, most such people are adapting to change in ways that are more attuned to the prevailing challenges and opportunities, and what they do, or what they are capable of doing, is often a reflection of options and resources at their disposal. Such systems evolve naturally! It is in the face of such a truism that Ruitenbeek and Cartier (2001:17) strongly argue for non-interventionism, with the related foreclosure hypothesis being that ‘premature introduction of external interventions could lead to system failure. This may occur because the introduction of such a process disrupts existing evolutionary processes within the system’.

Everyday common experiences with decentralizations appear to lend weight to the above conjecture. For instance, in pointing out how most decentralization interventions in Southern Africa appear to have a predilection for turning into de-concentrations, Murphree (1991) observes that ‘there is a tendency in bureaucratic hierarchies to seek power from levels above and a general reluctance to devolve such power to levels below’. Conyers (1990) and Murombedzi (1991) echo similar sentiments by pointing out that higher-level actors tend to decentralize service type activities whilst retaining control of fiscal and production oriented activities. Elsewhere, it has been noted that decentralisation reforms have not enabled resource users to participate in the making of binding decisions and to hold accountable those to whom

decentralised powers have been transferred. For example Nyangabyaki identifies the failure to devolve effective control as an impediment to the democratisation of natural resource management in Uganda. In summing up such tendencies Mandondo (2001) argues that decentralizations often turn into de-concentrations because most such decentralizations are supply led interventions that predictably result in conditional empowerment. He argues that in supply led empowerment scenarios, state level and other external actors hold wide discretionary powers with respect to the form and extent of power to be given to actors on the fringes of formal systems of power, including local level bodies and communities. Mandondo (2001) articulates a language of alternatives and reversals in which he appears to be arguing that decentralization is likely to result in more thoroughgoing empowerment if it is demand driven. Such reversals and alternatives fall under the rubric of emancipatory approaches (Reason 1999), and have also been alternatively popularised as putting the last first (Chambers 1983). This stems from the implicit message that peasants should act locally and think locally. Explicitly, development planners embraced Elinor Ostrom's (1990) formal model of collective action. The argument is that geographically bounded communities are best suited to manage their resources as sustainable commons.

The ideals, in relation to everyday common outcomes of decentralization, therefore implicitly appear to justify a continuum of policy options that spans from full-scale and wholesome intervention to non-intervention. A mid-point logic of balances occupies the centre of the above continuum. Based on pragmatic considerations, it argues that: no one - among local communities, researchers and other stakeholders - holds monopoly of insight or is a priori exclusively endowed with superior qualities in terms of knowing, skills; that none of the

stakeholders will accept to be simply wished away through approaches that are not sufficiently inclusionary; and, that locals do not exist in isolation but are in fact subsets of over-arching systems with which they are intricately interconnected. The emerging discipline therefore emphasizes on integration across a variety of axes - including across stakeholders, disciplines as well as across scales (Sayer and Campbell 2003; Lovell et al. 2003; Hughes 2002). The aim of this study was to use empirical evidence from a decentralization initiative that largely appeared to be demand driven to test the wider generality of the emancipatory conjecture: that decentralization is likely to result in more thoroughgoing empowerment if it is demand driven. The analysis is situated within the broader context of related counterfactuals i.e., that full scale or some form of mid-point external intervention is still necessary. The study was conducted in the Chizvirizvi area, which lies some 40 km east of Zimbabwe's southeastern Lowveld town of Chiredzi. The total area of Chizvirizvi is about 23, 440 hectares. During an extended stay in Chizvirizvi Resettlement, wildlife management activities, land use plans and other community driven projects were investigated and people interviewed living or working in the area. Both before and after visiting Chizvirizvi, interviews were conducted with representatives of relevant NGOs, government agencies, and private sector firms based in Harare and Chiredzi District. In all, the researcher completed open-ended interviews with 64 respondents both inside and outside the community. Focus group discussions were conducted with villagers in the Scheme to understand their resource sharing arrangements in the scheme. Focus groups targeted current and former insiders of the scheme because of their personal knowledge of the scheme's history and its current status.

The Chizvirizvi community opted from government initiated consolidated villages that were heavily congested to a system of more spacious self-contained ‘private plots’, which they planned for and implemented. The community in question has staked several other demands, including: that they be conferred with legal titles over their plots; that there be fiscal accountability, and parity between taxation and service delivery by the Rural District Council; and, that appropriate authority status³ over wildlife resources in their area be bestowed directly upon them, and not on the Rural District Council as has happened in other CAMPFIRE⁴ districts. For purposes of brevity the present study mainly restricts itself to issues pertaining to land use planning, land tenure and resource access. The next section gives an overview of land tenure and settlement in communal areas, with special emphasis on the evolution of land tenure and settlement patterns in Chizvirizvi.

2. A brief history of land tenure and settlement in Chizvirizvi

Colonial land alienation and apportionment policies that were crafted in the early 1930s left a deep imprint on present day patterns of land tenure and settlement in the Chizvirizvi area. The Chizvirizvi area adjoins a private wildlife conservancy and a state national park, the Malilangwe conservancy and Gonarezhou National Park, respectively. The creation of these nature parks involved the eviction of communities then residing there into the adjacent Sangwe Communal Lands. Over time, the status of communal areas as reservoirs of evicted peasant communities was compounded by natural growth resulting in a general prevalence of population pressure in

³ Appropriate Authority is a legal instrument in the Parks and Wildlife Act that confers custodianship of wildlife resources in wildlife-rich communal areas of Zimbabwe on peasant communities residing in such areas, with such authority being vested in Rural District Councils in which such communities reside

⁴ CAMPFIRE is an acronym for Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources. It is a programme for decentralized wildlife management in districts that have received appropriate authority status over wildlife resources in their areas (Martin 1986).

communal areas. Behind a backdrop of population pressure, the key features of communal land tenure have remained largely intact from colonial to postcolonial times (Wels 2002; Dzingirai 2002). In black communal lands most wildlife programmes expanded wildlife ranges whilst confining agriculture. Communal lands are legally state lands in which peasant communities enjoy rights based on usufruct. In practice, people living in communal areas enjoy *de facto* traditional freehold entitlement over their residential and arable plots, beyond which there are usually grazing, woodland and other commons, which people use and manage through various forms of collective or non-collective arrangements (Government of Zimbabwe 1994). But during the late 1970s most communal lands, including Sangwe, became fragmented into zones of shifting control between the Rhodesian⁵ military wing and the mass mobilization committees of the guerrilla movement, in response to which the Rhodesian regime introduced protected villages (Lan 1985; Godwin 1996). The protected villages were a Rhodesian military strategy aimed at creating buffers of uninhabited land in order to minimize contact between peasants and the guerrilla arm of the liberation movement, which depended on the peasants for material, moral and other forms of support (Lan 1985).

The abandonment of the protected villages upon the attainment of independence did not significantly alleviate population pressure within the communal land, which necessitated the need for interventions to decongest the communal area. Such initiatives had the twin objective of improving infrastructure and service provision in communal areas in order to address the imbalances of colonial neglect.⁶ Colonial neglect of African reserves was the result of a fiscal

⁵ The former name of Zimbabwe is Rhodesia. Independence in 1980 came on the back of a guerilla war waged by liberation fighters operating mainly from Mozambique and Zambia.

⁶ The policy of reconstruction and development ran under a national policy framework that emphasized on 'growth with equity'.

apartheid in public sector capital investment policies (Wekwete 1990). The bulk of the social and physical infrastructure investment was located in European areas to support a fledging capitalist economy, which was further supported with a lot of subsidy and preferential marketing policies (Murphree and Cumming 1991; Scoones and Matose 1993; McGregor 1995). Under-investment in the African reserves reinforced the under-development of the peasant sector, which remained a source of cheap labour for the emerging capitalist economy. Over time the peasant sector was also weakened by the downstream effects of the communal tenure system under conditions of high population growth - including lack of collateral, subdivision into smaller and smaller holdings, low productivity and declining surpluses, and very low propensities to save and invest.

Decongestion and reconstruction and development policies in Chizvirizvi were partly played out through the implementation of a government driven resettlement scheme based on a system of consolidated villages. The scheme was established on land purchased by the government from the adjoining commercial farms for purposes of resettlement. The consolidated villages⁷ were based on a system of land use planning that divided landscapes into three major categories, including clustered villages that lay in between, and separated distinct grazing and cropping areas. It was also hoped that the centralized settlements would enhance peasant access to a variety of services, including water, electricity, road networks and other amenities like schools, clinics, beer halls and grinding mills. In total, ten villages, each presided over by a village chairperson were established, with all the villages falling under the control of a government paid resettlement officer.

⁷ The system bears parallels to colonial land use policies that were implemented under the Land Husbandry Act. Such policies were purportedly meant to promote environmental conservation through rationalization of land and resource use in order to bring some semblance of order to the then perceived 'disorder' and environmental destruction in the African peasantry.

Modest progress was achieved in providing services and basic infrastructure within the consolidated villages. Such progress was, however, undermined by the failure of the plan to decongest settlement. Over time people got disillusioned by the scheme's failure to de-congest settlement as well as its propensity to worsen social ills, with some of the most commonly reported being: deprivation of individual and family freedom and autonomy; prevalence of misunderstandings and fights; jealousy; increases in theft; suspicions of witchcraft; increased incidences of adultery among others. Social pressure thus became one of the major drivers that inspired the search for alternatives and the coalescence of concern within the villages. Additional concerns included perceptions of rampant degradation of woodlands in areas surrounding the consolidated villages. A five-member committee of scheme residents became the vehicle through which such concerns could be articulated. Sustained concert and consultations within the committee led to the broaching of a vision of settlement based on self-contained plots as opposed to overcrowded cluster villages. The next sections of this report consider the evolution of such a plan within the framework of hypotheses posited in the introduction. A starting point to such more critical analyses relates to the composition of the Chizvirizvi Development Committee, as the committee was later to be known. The committee has an exclusively male membership. As pointed out in the literature, gender is an axis through which privileged access to resources is often entrenched and reproduced, with men being more privileged in most of cases (Fortmann and Nabane 1992; Price 1993). Related implications on gendered aspects of entitlement over land in Chizvirizvi are considered in a later section.

3. From top-down to bottom-up vision of tenure, settlement and resource use

Community concern about congestion within and environmental degradation around government-initiated consolidated villages in Chizvirizvi came to prominence around 1987. The community, through the Chizvirizvi Development Committee, solicited the support of the Department of Natural Resources for a more dispersed resettlement scheme to be based on a system of individual plots in which the plots-holders would be ultimately responsible for most resources within their plots. Similar support was solicited from the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture in 1989. Although both these government agencies were supportive of the idea, the rampant destruction of the natural resources in areas close to the clustered settlement continued unabated. The support, nevertheless, gave impetus to scheme residents to put in place temporary mechanisms of apprehending violators and protecting their resources. Such measures included collective monitoring and policing of resource use.

Meanwhile, at a local level the Chizvirizvi Development Committee enlisted the support of the local chief and the chairpersons of the ten villages in question. This led to local level endorsement of the plan, with signatures of endorsement being attached to the plans. The plans were subsequently formally submitted to the government through the provincial Lands Office. Although the community received a favourable response from the government in 1995, it was indicated that the government did not have funds to support the implementation of the plan. Through his links with the Zimbabwe Farmers Union, the chairman of the Chizvirizvi Development Committee was able to meet with the Minister of Agriculture to open up avenues for funding. Although no financial support could be obtained from the ministry, the committee

was able to secure ministerial endorsement to enhance access to alternative funding pathways, including donor support. On the advice of the Chiredzi District Administration the community's donor outreach strategy laid emphasis on building lasting partnerships with local potential donors. The strategy was mainly meant to avoid the projectized and the time-bound nature of externally funded projects. Thus building strategic partnerships appears to have been critical as the community forged ahead with their vision of decentralized land use planning and conservation of natural resources.

Subsequent to initial community overture for funding the Malilangwe Trust organized a multi-stakeholder meeting that included expert attendees as well as other potential learners from as far afield as Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, and even the United States of America. The Trust subsequently donated funds to the community for surveys and mapping and demarcation of plots. After concerted efforts at securing the support of the district and provincial agricultural extension agencies for technical support, a survey team was eventually assigned to the area in June 1999. The survey and demarcation work started in late 1999, with logistical support being mainly provided by the Malilangwe Trust, whilst the community provided labour as and when needed. After completion of surveys and demarcation, allocation of plots was done in March 2000, and several external actors, including the district administrator, the MP for the area as well as representatives from the President's office, witnessed it.

Thus partnerships at a range of levels including the local, the district and the national appear to have been critical in planning for and implementing the vision. But conceptual and theoretical debates about state-local relations tend to dichotomise the two as disparate entities, with the

state's presence at the local level often considered at best as intrusive, and at worst as inefficient, unaccountable, insensitive, conspicuous, obtrusive, and hegemonic (Phimister 1989). Distrust of the state's local presence is rooted in Africa's historical processes. For instance, the imposition of the state from the outside has tended to reinforce the view of governments as imperial organizations aspiring to control the entire national jurisdiction (Marcussen 1996). Moreover, partly because of their quest to exert enduring and far-reaching political control, governments have indeed aspired to establish single centre administrations. Thus, over the years, state visions of the appropriate way to manage resources have generally been implemented in peasant areas through a centrally directed structure and process (Moyo et al. 1991). Supporters of decentralization often advocate empowering local communities by pushing back and scaling down the state's role – 'rolling back the state'. However, this solution seems based on certain unrealistic assumptions: that the state has the political willingness to agree to a roll-back; that communities have the know-how and wherewithal to step in and fill the gaps left by this scaling back; and that communities, *a priori*, have qualities that the state lacks in terms of accountability, representativeness and efficiency (Helmsing 1996). Evidence from Chizvirizvi indicates that though the land use planning initiative was community driven, it drew on the support of various other actors at scales that transcend the local, including the district, the national as indeed the international levels. Effective empowerment therefore appears to need to preserve a role for upper-level (non-local) actors, especially in providing political legitimating, technical back stopping as well as financial support.

4. The practical political economy of land allocation in Chizvirizvi

A total of 294 plots, each measuring 85 hectares in size, were to be allocated to each household from the ten consolidated resettlement scheme. However there are other farmers who were allocated more than 85 hectares to compensate for the poor soils, this being especially so for farmers in villages 6 and 10. Allocation was done through a raffle in which people randomly picked cards whose numbering corresponded to numbers assigned to plots. Villagers took turns to pick their cards but two of the villages declined to partake of the process, preferring to remain in the consolidated village. Not everybody was subjected to the raffle though – there was a system of open and hidden exemptions. The chief was exempted from the raffle process as a sign of respect, with him being allocated a bigger plot encompassing his original homestead. Two plots were additionally given to the chief to allocate to nominees of his own choice. Local leaders who oversaw the allocation process had to devise a more secretive and clandestine way of exemptions in order to raise funds for the logistical costs associated with the allocation process, including the provision of food. Households that contributed funds for logistic costs associated with the allocation process, including the provision of food. Households that contributed funds for this purpose were secretly allocated cards prior to the public raffle exercise, and through this arrangement were thus able to gain privileged access to prime plots. Plot 83 was specifically assigned to the youths of the area for various projects and activities. Patterns of ownership of plots were markedly skewed, with only a very small proportion of women in Chizvirizvi living at plots that are registered in their names (Table 1). Decentralization is often portrayed as a one-off allocation process involving transfers from one level (often the state) to another, usually the community. The implicit assumptions appear to be that resource use and other relations in community settings are more egalitarian, and that empowerment is almost

guaranteed once powers are retired at that level. But as evident in the above narrative, ownership relations engendered by a community driven initiative encompass elements of both equity and imbalance. For instance allocation of land through a raffle together with assigning a plot to the youth appears to have been premised on equity considerations, whilst allocation to the chief and his network of colleagues, though representing gesture of respect, could arguably be seen as entrenching elite domination. Thus, as Mandondo (2001) argues, resolving the dilemma of community marginalisation through decentralizations needs to be addressed together with intra-community inequalities of access to resources.

Table 1: A breakdown of ownership of plots in Chizvirizvi by gender

Gender of plot owner	Frequency (n = 293)	Frequency of ownership as % of total
Male registered ownership	231	79
Female registered ownership	51	17
Inherited from father	9	3
Inherited from mother	2	1
TOTAL	293	100

The raffle together with the related system of exemptions saw a total of 293 plots being allocated to individual households. As a sign of gratitude for support rendered, the community reserved a quota of six plots that were to be allocated to the District Administrator (DA), an agricultural commodity provider employee, Malilangwe Trust, Agritex and other relevant service institutions. Most of these individuals appeared interested in gaining their own plots within the

scheme. Thus much as researchers envisages a dichotomy between local and state-level and other external actors, the communities themselves show a sense of partnership and community that appears to transcend the confinements of locality. Hence, narratives of community need to portray community within the context of social and political continuums within which most such communities are intricately linked. Though such narratives might proclaim the sanctity of community, there is need to recognize that other actors with which communities are linked cannot be simply wished away, neither do the communities themselves appear to embrace approaches that appear to sever them from broader social and political systems of which they are part. The above narrative of land allocation in Chizvirizvi appears to portray the land allocation process as having been largely consensual. This was not necessarily the case. The next section will consider the micro-politics surrounding the land allocation process.

5. The micro-politics of land allocation in Chizvirizvi

First preference to take up the new plots was given to people formerly residing in the government initiated consolidated villages. Some of these people were initially reluctant to move into the new plots mainly because they had made a lot of infrastructural investments at their homesteads. These people were to join the last minute rush for the plots, when ownership of the plots was opened to anyone else willing to own such plots. The rush grew in volume on the back of good crop harvests secured by the pioneer group of settlers. A diverse array of power plays ensued as various people asserted claims to the land. A group of teachers at one of the local schools was one strong constituency that had been left out of the initial allocation process. They are reported to have clandestinely instigated the local village worker to mobilize people in two of the villages to revolt against the scheme purportedly because they had been allocated infertile

plots. In the hope of limiting the ensuing conflict, the District Administrator unilaterally took over control of the unassigned plots, but such custodianship did not last long, neither did it dampen the conflict. Realising the futility of intervention, the DA later capitulated and re-vested such control in the committee that had hitherto overseen the allocation process. To break the impasse, the Malilangwe Trust organized a multi stakeholder meeting in which the various adversaries were invited.

In August 2000, the land allocation committee was reportedly approached by a group of 16 liberation war veterans⁸, who felt that they were also being left out of the entitlement process. The chairperson of the land committee decided to enlist the support of the chief in deciding how best to handle the issue. For fear of squaring up against the veterans, it was quickly decided that they be allocated land as soon as possible. But the problem was how to allocate the seven then remaining plots among the 16 veterans. With initial concurrence of the veterans, it was decided that the plots be allocated through an elimination raffle in which the veterans would randomly pick cards marked YES or NO, with those picking the latter relinquishing their claims to the plots. Although the raffle was done with the initial support of all concerned, the losing veterans did not honour the raffle verdict, with the majority of them just opting to grab plots that had been earlier allocated to other people. One of the war veterans annexed the plot that had been assigned to the DA, where he promptly started development.

⁸ The war veteran movement has risen from the obscurity of political neglect to a force to reckon with on the Zimbabwean political scene. They forced the government into awarding them hefty gratuities for their contribution to the liberation of the country in 1998. In 2000 they spearheaded the violent seizure of white-owned farms with tacit and overt support from the government, culminating in what is popularly referred to as the fast “track phase” of land reform in Zimbabwe.

The ensuing conflict assumed legal dimensions in one instance where a certain woman just went ahead and annexed plot number 83, which had earlier been allocated to the youth. She enlisted the support of lawyers to resist her eviction from the plot. The ensuing process saw four members of the land allocation committee being sued despite their resolve to remaining steadfast in endorsing the youth's claim to the plot.

Later day conflicts mainly revolve around boundary disputes and the gender dimensions of entitlement to land by way of inheritance. Although the conflicts mostly pit local peasants against each other there are instances in which other actors are also involved. For instance an official of the national agricultural extension agency (AREX) is currently embroiled in a boundary dispute with his peasant neighbour, with the resolution of such conflict still pending at the chief's court. In generally unwritten law is that the spouse should inherit a plot on the death of a partner, with the children taking over the plot if both the mother and father die. Despite such arrangements conflict over plots still arise depending on the nuance and entitlement and peculiarities of intra-household relations. One such inheritance conflict pitted the relatives of a deceased woman against the husband, as prospective inheritor of the plot. There are diverging stories on how the woman registered the plot in her name in the first instance. One version is that the woman was able to apply for the plot instead of her husband, who was made ineligible because he was in formal employment. The second version is that the woman was able to register the plot in her name on the merit of her status as a member of the Master Farmer Club.⁹

There was a misunderstanding between husband and wife when the former had retired from formal employment. This saw the two arriving at a mutual agreement in which they both

⁹ Master Farmers are farmers of repute, recognized by farmers' associations for their high production records and contribution to agricultural advancements in their areas.

occupied and lived at different locations within the plot. Over time, the wife fell ill and died, but she had reportedly made a verbal will bestowing the ownership of the plot to her brothers, and not the husband, and hence the present conflict. Inheritance conflicts come in many shades and forms, with women being generally disadvantaged in most of the cases, unlike the above case.

Conflicts over land and resources in the plots often cascade to higher levels where customary, elected and other leaders vie for influence and control over the whole resettlement domain. Thus, over the years, the institutional set-up of Chizvirizvi appears to have typified what Makamuri (in a personal communication) refers to as the ‘waxing and waning’ as well as the ‘emergence and submergence’ of institutions. At the national level, the socialist-inspired institutions of VIDCOs and WADCOs appeared to be on the ascendancy in the immediate post-independence period. The VIDCOs and WADCOs were elevated at the expense of traditional institutions of chiefs, headmen and village heads. Having acted as grassroots arms of colonial administration within the African peasantry, traditional institutions were purportedly relegated in the immediate post-independence period because they were seen as functionaries of colonial oppression (Makumbe, 1996). Although the establishment of Chizvirizvi resettlement scheme coincided with the inception of VIDCOs and WADCOs such institutions did not necessarily emerge as prominent institutional players within the scheme. The scheme was in fact under the leadership of a government employed resettlement officer,¹⁰ who was assisted by a subordinate cadre of village chairpersons, each of whom presided over each of the resettlement scheme’s ten villages.

¹⁰ The resettlement officer fell under the Department of Rural Development. War veterans were essentially a disgruntled and forgotten lot, with their fortunes only having turned for the better around the year 2000 when they were, through an extended system of accelerated incentives, courted by the government into the political limelight.

Although the scheme was established within Chief Tshovani's area, the chief's influence over the area essentially remained fringe having been further jettisoned by the lack of a supporting cadre of headmen and village heads within the scheme. Over time, the clustered resettlement scheme championed by the Department of Rural Development lost favour with its intended beneficiaries, who saw it as having perpetuated the over-crowding that it had been intended to alleviate. The need to decongest the consolidated settlements saw the ascendancy of the development oriented Chizvirizvi Development Committee, which has been earlier mentioned. Over a 5-year period this incipient institution mobilized local support for the scheme, drew together the support of relevant institutions at a variety of levels, and championed the process of planning and implementing the scheme. The establishment phase of the community-driven resettlement scheme coincided with national trends towards the re-empowerment of traditional leaders. Traditional leaders, including chiefs, headmen and village heads, recuperated their hitherto eroded influence on the back of a land tenure commission report, which endorsed them as the more appropriate and legitimate institutions within the African peasant sector. The emerging influence of traditional leadership appears to have had a bearing on the process of forging new political administrative institutions within the new scheme. Through the scheme, the village heads were able to recoup their lost power, with them displacing village chairpersons as leaders of the newly reconstituted villages, with the blessing and support of both the chief and the resettlement committee.

A very strong alliance between champions of development, as represented by the resettlement committee and the 'more legitimate' traditional leaders appeared to have emerged by the turn of the century. The emerging configuration of institutions however did not translate into an

enduring monopoly on power and influence. Events leading to the year 2000 parliamentary elections as well as the 2002 presidential elections saw the emergence of the war-veteran movement as a significant political force. With prospects of looming defeats in these elections, the ruling party rehabilitated this movement of hitherto forgotten liberators, mobilizing them into a campaign machine that spearheaded the violent seizure of white-owned commercial farms for black settlement. Significant events through which this movement thrust itself at the centre of local political processes in Chizvirizvi included: the seizure of some surrounding commercial concerns; capturing of the councillorship post for the ward¹¹; and establishment of grassroots election campaign command centres that were mainly manned by war veterans and members of the ruling party's youth militia. The coercive and often violent activities of these groups significantly eroded the power and influence of both the developmental resettlement committee and traditional leadership. In order to consolidate his stronghold on power, the new war veteran councillor of the ward under which Chizvirizvi falls dissolved the Chizvirizvi Development Committee, replacing it with a newly constituted Wildlife Development Committee, which he now heads, in addition to doubling up as ward councillor for Chizvirizvi.

People in Chizvirizvi now more readily attest to the benefits of their land use planning initiative, including, in general, bigger and better, greater autonomy and distance from suspected bewitchers. There is nothing in the above narrative to suggest that all is bliss and harmony in Chizvirizvi, the bottom-up manner in which the initiative was introduced notwithstanding. Orienting change in the bottom-up direction appears pivotal, but such interventions still need adequate follow up if they are to result in through-going empowerment. Thus, whether it is

¹¹ It is alleged that the current councillor/Chairman of the Wildlife Committee was formerly resident in the neighbouring Sangwe Communal Area and thrust himself in the height of land invasions where he grabbed a plot on the scheme.

bottom-up or top-down decentralization appears to need robust follow up efforts aimed at removing the conditions that may, from time to time, detract from the attainment of enduring empowerment. The conflicts outlined above are among such factors, and they need to be resolved. Rural development practitioners could thus conceivably do such follow-up with competencies in conflict resolution. Caution however needs to be exercised in resolving conflicts because they are often tools and weapons through which the poor and marginalized often insert themselves into political processes (Scott, 1985). There is, however, no reason to assume that the local poor and powerless can go it alone in effectively staking their claims given the preponderance of elite influence, as is evidenced in paragraphs that consider contests over influence and dominance. The next section considers resource use relations within and between plots and the adjoining Sangwe communal area.

6. Resource access and use relations

The issue of accessing resources from resettlement plots was a highly contentious one: plot owners in general want to exercise exclusion management of resources in their plots, whilst neighbouring communal areas, on the basis of historical claims, want a continuation of open access use regimes that used to prevail before the plots were established. The contested nature of resources within Chizvirizvi is thus a major source of conflict, with, with plot owners generally under siege from tenurial and use pressure from adjoining communal farmers. Thus policy shifts in wild resources, particularly wild life, seem to have marginally benefited local communities, for example Sangwe Communal Lands from Gonarezhou National Park where CAMPFIRE programme is operational. The views of those asserting use pressure varied from (1) extremist arguments against the compartmentalization of land and resources, with proponents insisting on

a reversal to the then existing open access utilization regimes (2) moderate viewpoints, that tended to emphasize the need for some form of dialogue and mutual use regimes together with related win-win obligations; to (3) acquiescent viewpoints which tended to emphasize the need to respect the entitlement and ownership of the plot owners. On the other hand most plot owners argued for exclusion management, with most of them advocating for the fencing off of their properties, together with the need to re-erect the boundary fence between the whole resettlement area and the adjoining communal areas. Most people, however, recognized the limitations of such an option in terms of cost, and also in terms of effectiveness since an earlier existing fence had been vandalized. Most plot owners saw the conferment of formal title over plots as a key facet of the incentive structure for enhancing exclusion management.

Despite the above seemingly conflictual resource use relations there are also aspects of mutual and reciprocal arrangements relating to the use of resources. In general the northern part of the scheme is drier and less fertile - with less arable land, but more well wooded and endowed with better grazing resources. The reverse generally tends to obtain in adjacent communal areas as well as in southern parts of the resettlement scheme. Disparities in the spatial distribution of resources generally necessitate the need for reciprocity. Reciprocal resource use relations are mostly forged at a personal and informal level – people from the drier north negotiate for access to arable land, thatching grass and water from those in the southern parts of the scheme and from adjoining communal areas, with the latter two groups usually seeking to have access to grazing resources, firewood, mopane worms and poles from the former. In general, people usually seek to access resources that are closest to them.

In some cases, the need to maintain social capital often predisposes people to accept compromises to the manner and extent to which they exercise exclusion management. For instance, a certain scheme resident is renowned to have been very strict and hostile to resource users from the adjoining communal area. His son was later to die, on the occasion of which he received a lot of sympathy and support from his communal area neighbours. The event appears to have marked a turning point in social and resource use relations since the owner began to condone and tolerate the use of his resources by others.

The foregoing narrative appears to have important implications on the scale to which solutions to dilemmas of resource access can be crafted, particularly in situations where resource use relations are of a conflictual nature. There appears to be no simple solution to the above patina of problems of access when considered in relation to scale, but what appears to be evident is the need for parsimony with an emphasis on forging solutions that match the scale of the problem. The array of possible options with regards to the above description of resource use could be: (1) to leave things as they are at the inter-personal scale where people come up with arrangements for mutual use; and, (2) to facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue with appropriate groups where problems appear to cascade over larger spatial and social scales. Given polarity of opinion in some instances, particularly that generally obtaining between communal area versus Chizvirizvi scheme residents, there may be need for neutral arbitration, a role that can be usefully be taken up by external actors. Such arbitrators often turn out to be those whom the anti-state fringe of the environment and development research movement is quick to vilify.

7. Discussion

The general thrust of the argument is that empowerment that is demand-driven stands a better chance of being based on people's felt needs and priorities than top-down and supply-led modes of empowerment. However, even if empowerment is demanded, relations in decentralized arenas are seldom egalitarian. Thus regardless of their orientations environmental decentralizations are best not conceived as one-off events in which power is abstracted from one level to be retired into another level. The emergence of many new institutions has created institutional conflict and confusion. Such interventions should be regarded as continuous processes in which the dilemma of community marginalisation from the centers of power is tackled in tandem with intra-community impediments to such empowerment.

Earlier-stated hypotheses posited whether it is best to intervene fully, whether to intervene a little or not to intervene at all in environment and development processes that subsume a decentralization agenda. Subsequent findings and analyses have largely supported a mid-point logic of integration and multi-stakeholder partnership in which community should comprise the fundamental locus of initiative and change. This is best done within a framework in which other stakeholders play a more supportive role of fostering conditions that enhance that attainment of thoroughgoing empowerment, or dismantling those detract from its attainment. Contrary to the anti-state fervour of some sections of the environment and development research movement, the logic of integration and partnership sees a role for state level and other external actors particularly in providing the political legitimacy that community driven initiatives are so utterly in need of. Also important, would be providing a platform or forum as a source of information, skills and ideas through which community driven ideas can be scrutinized and improved. The

logic being that no side has monopoly of insight. It is also envisaged that providing funding and other forms of material support to community driven initiatives would be crucial for developing enduring and representative institutions. This could be achieved through co-ordination where community level issues and problems appear to cascade beyond scales at which communities can address them on their own. This is crucial in that it does not limit communities as bounded entities but communities are seen changing, and should be allowed to exercise resource management options within these spaces. There should be no disjunction between policy intentions, which aim to improve the livelihoods of rural people and the realities of poverty, that rural people face. This raises the need for providing neutral arbitration in instances where community-level polarization stalls the scope for progress.

Finally, in considering the scope for extrapolation and scaling up I note that no context is exactly the same as the other – thus what worked for Chizvirizvi may not necessarily work in other contexts and conditions, and vice versa. For instance, the general applicability of the idea of self-contained plots appears not viable in more densely settled parts of Zimbabwe where shortage of land is likely to be a major limiting factor. The issue of context specificity notwithstanding, demand-driven approach to transacting rural empowerment constitutes a far-better option than top-down, supply-led, and sadly seldom successful ways of doing things.

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