



**Colonialism and Inequity
in Zimbabwe**

*Photo: A young Zimbabwean harvesting crops, Mbanefo
Obiago/WWF-Canon*

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Abstract

The battle over access to land resources in Zimbabwe demonstrates how gross inequities with respect to distribution of and access to key life supporting resources such as land and forests can compromise human and environmental security, and undermine conservation efforts. Matabeleland North, a large province in western Zimbabwe with low rainfall and poor soil fertility, has been a staging ground for such conflict. Colonial land policies alienated indigenous people from much of the land, and effectively started a cycle of resettlement, resource exploitation and degradation, ultimately leading to livelihood insecurity and resource-based conflicts. Following independence in 1980, this cycle was perpetuated in Matabeleland North as civil war raged on in the western part of the country, fuelling more insecurity and impeding environmental management and conservation efforts as the State's forest administration broke down. Both the people and the environment in Zimbabwe will continue to suffer until the inequities in resource distribution and access are resolved. Conservationists can contribute to this process by advocating policies that integrate communities into resource management decisions, by initiating and strengthening negotiation processes and conflict management skills, and by promoting further research and dialogue on Africa's protected areas that take into account colonial legacies and socio-political contexts.

Overview

Matabeleland North is a large province in western Zimbabwe with low rainfall and poor soil fertility. Traditionally, indigenous Zimbabweans in the region survived by a combination of agriculture and use of forest resources. Beginning with the invasion in 1890, British colonists alienated the indigenous people from much of the land. Rural blacks were largely confined to communal areas, while the remaining land was designated as white-owned commercial lands, demarcated or other forest lands and national parks. These land and resource allocation arrangements were first established under the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, and were furthered by the Land Tenure Act of 1969 (Vudzijena, 1998). The forced evictions in Matabeleland North have been described as “institutional violence,” and in some parts of the province the evictions were described as “exceptionally harsh even for Rhodesian standards” (Alexander *et al.*, 2000)

Inequitable land distribution forced people in communal areas to subsist through overexploitation of resources, leading to resource degradation and ultimately enormous insecurity as livelihoods became threatened. This situation was further exacerbated when the colonial government established “state forests” for conservation purposes and as a source of indigenous commercial timber. The first indigenous forests were demarcated in 1936 and other forests were added in 1941. This development resulted in the further exclusion of local people from land and resources, which the people had previously depended on as a safety net in times of drought and resource shortages.

Not surprisingly, population growth and increasing resource scarcity forced people to encroach into state forests and underutilized commercial farms. The ensuing struggle for land and resources led to the liberation struggle in the 1970s and eventually to the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980. Throughout the liberation struggle the colonial government was not able to control settling in these demarcated regions, which further undermined conservation attempts and the sustainable use of resources. After independence, uncontrolled settlement in demarcated forests continued in Matabeleland North following the outbreak of a civil war in the western part of the country between the minority Ndebele and military forces of the newly elected government of independent Zimbabwe. This civil war resulted in a complete breakdown in forest administration, furthering resource depletion and illegal settlement in both the forests and surrounding large-scale commercial farms (See Table E1).

The legacy of inequitable land and resource distribution remains unresolved and has fueled resource depletion and associated human insecurity, mainly in the communal areas. Communal households are unable to diversify their sources of income due to social and environmental constraints. Ultimately, the inequity led to the current occupation of large-scale com-

mercial farms throughout Zimbabwe by landless people. Both the people and the environment in Zimbabwe will continue to suffer until the inequity in resource distribution and access is resolved.

Table E1. Key Events Affecting State Forests in Matabeleland

Time period	Event
1890	Alienation of indigenous people from the land begins with the arrival of British colonists.
1890–1970	Increased land alienation, including the establishment of Demarcated State Indigenous Forests beginning in 1936.
1970–1980	The liberation struggle, leading to independence in 1980, during which time the government is unable to manage or control resource use and settlement in state forests.
1980–1987	Civil war, with continued inability of the government to manage or control resource use and settlement in state forests.
1987–present	Internal peace accord (1987) and re-establishment of forest management. Poor progress on land redistribution. Continued occupation of state forests.

Conceptual Considerations

This case study reinforces the model of environment and security links illustrated throughout this book. It demonstrates how gross inequities with respect to distribution of and access to key life supporting resources can undermine conservation efforts. In Zimbabwe, inequity contributed to resource scarcity, which ultimately undermined livelihood security and forced people in communal areas to encroach into conservation areas. Ultimately, livelihood insecurity fueled conflicts, which have in turn contributed to further environmental degradation and resource depletion.

Background

General Characteristics of Matabeleland North Province

Matabeleland North is one of Zimbabwe's 8 provinces, taking up 76,567 km² or 19 per cent of the total area of Zimbabwe (AOAD, 1992). The estimated population was 1.14 million in 1992 or about 12 per cent of Zimbabwe's total population. The province's population is currently about

half rural and half urban, with the majority of the urban population living in Zimbabwe's second largest city, Bulawayo. The rural population density is estimated at 15.5 persons per km². Most of the indigenous inhabitants in the province are Ndebele (also known as Matabele), who migrated from Zululand in the south in the early nineteenth century (AOAD, 1992).

A large portion of the land in Matabeleland North is allocated to commercial farmland, national parks, sanctuaries, and state forests (Table E2). The majority of the rural population lives on communal lands, which occupy 39 per cent of the total land area in the province.

Table E2. Land and Population Apportionment in Matabeleland North (note: population data exclude the city of Bulawayo)

	% of total land area	% of population
1. Commercial farmland	16%	7%
2. State national parks and sanctuaries	27%	0%
3. State forests	11%	3%
4. Communal lands	39%	73%
5. Resettlement areas	3%	3%
6. Other (including small urban areas)	4%	14%

(Sources: AOAD 1992; CSO 1992; Dewees 1992; GOV 1998)

Matabeleland North is mostly middleveld (915 to 1220 m elevation), characterized by limited rainfall and poor soil fertility. Mean annual rainfall in most of Matabeleland North is less than 600 mm, and as in other parts of Zimbabwe, acute shortages of water are common due to the seasonality of rainfall patterns (AOAD, 1992). The rainy season is November to March and very little rain falls between April and October. In such conditions, soil nutrients are sufficient to sustain agricultural activity for a limited time only. The communal population of Matabeleland North is confined to regions where cultivation is hindered by poor soils and low and unpredictable rainfall. Besides these environmental constraints to agricultural production, the other significant limiting factor is availability of draft power (Bradley and Dewees, 1993).

Currently, livestock husbandry is the most common form of employment. This is a result of unpredictable rainfall patterns, infertile soils, the attractive zero cost of fodder and water in communal grazing zones and a lack of alternative employment options. Most of the province is categorized as "semi-intensive livestock farming region" and used for marginal rainfed maize and semi extensive livestock farming. This zone has extensive ranch-

es averaging 5 to 10 thousand ha and supports 1 to 2 thousand head of beef cattle.

History of Land Allocation

The land appropriation laws, policies and practices during the colonial era led to the current dualism in Zimbabwe's economy and land use practices by creating two broad land use categories of state and freehold land. Indigenous peoples were settled in communal lands (state land) with usufruct rights while settler farmers occupied freehold land with title deeds. Throughout Zimbabwe, communal lands tend to be located in land-use regions characterized by poor agricultural potential. Until well after independence the large-scale commercial farmers enjoyed unparalleled access to finance, agricultural extension services, and research facilities which enabled them to prosper. By 1992, communal lands occupied 42 per cent of the total land area of Zimbabwe supporting 55 per cent of the national population. Further, at least 60 per cent of the communal areas are in the least productive regions of the country. In contrast, some 4,660 large-scale commercial farmers own 30 per cent of the total land and 70 per cent of the prime farming land (Bradley and Dewees, 1993).

Demarcated State Indigenous Forests, which were established in 1936 and 1941 under the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, are also under state control. The province of Matabeleland is unique in that it contains about 90 per cent of the country's 908,422 hectares of indigenous demarcated forests. At the time of establishment people were already living in two of the demarcated forests (Gwaai and Bembezi), cultivating and grazing their cattle along the valleys of the Gwaai and Bembezi rivers. These communities were allowed to remain since at that time they posed no evident threat to the forests or management plans of the forest authorities. In fact, they were considered to be an asset as these communities provided a source of seasonal labour and assisted with fire fighting. However, over time, their population increased both naturally and by in-migration and began to have significant effects on the forests. In order to control the populations within the forests, forest residents were legitimized through a permit system. Permits were granted for one year at a time and could be renewed. Even with permits, those living in the forest could not keep goats. Children of forest permit holders were required to leave the forest when they got married or reached the age of majority.

Jurisdiction over the various types of land and responsibilities for resource management within those lands has been and continues to be somewhat unclear and confusing. The institutional hierarchy in Zimbabwe runs from the national level to provincial, district, and finally village level. In the communal areas the district level, or the Rural District Council (RDC), is the lowest legal entity responsible for local level resource management and

enforcement of council by-laws. It coordinates district level planning and implementation of projects. One of the strengths of the RDC is its local representation that provides a link to rural communities. However, the problem with the RDC as an institution is that it tends to sympathize with the ruling political party. This often results in a confusion of roles between the RDC, the party and traditional structures in issues such as land allocation, resource management and conflict management.

The Forestry Commission is the state agency responsible for regulating forest utilization under the Forest Act (1954) (for gazetted forests) and more recently under the Communal Land Forest Produce Act (1987) (for communal areas). This latter Act requires the RDC to seek authority of the Forestry Commission to exploit its forest resources within the area under its jurisdiction. The Act does not require the RDC to consult communities when granting concessions nor to share any of its income. This has proved to be a problem because as finances are centralized at national level, the RDCs have been forced to raise funds on their own, limiting the ability of the RDCs to manage natural resources at the local level. The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management is responsible for national parks (Nhira and Fortmann, 1993). In total there are 12 acts dealing with natural resource management in Zimbabwe, and there is poor definition of relationships among these (Katerere *et al.*, 1999).

Resource Depletion in Communal Areas

Agricultural potential in Zimbabwe is categorized using a 1960s classification scheme based on rainfall volume and pattern (AOAD, 1992). This scheme divides the country into five agro-ecological regions, ranging from the high rainfall of regions I and II in the east and central north-east, to the drier, more erratic rainfall of regions III-V which characterize the majority of the country. The two regions with least potential to support small-scale farming as practiced by the communal farmers are regions IV and V. Yet almost 75 per cent of all communal lands are located in these two regions with the remainder in regions I to III. In comparison, 55 per cent of the large-scale commercial farms are located in the better-off natural regions I to III (Maposa, 1995). In short, the productive capacity of the communal areas has become inadequate to support the communities sustainably over the long term. Consequently, many of these areas have become overexploited, and the pressure for access to additional land and resources has increased.

Although degradation of communal lands has occurred throughout Zimbabwe, it is perhaps most substantial in regions like Matabeleland North, where the natural conditions of rainfall and soils were and remain poor. Zimbabweans in this province have traditionally survived on a low-

input, communal production system based on a combination of crops and livestock. The communal farming system in Matabeleland is characterized by privately managed arable fields and communally-managed grazing lands. As population increases, new arable fields are allocated from under-utilized arable land or sub-divided from privately-managed fields. Continued growth in demand for arable land ultimately leads to encroachment of the common grazing lands. With time, designated grazing lands are insufficient to support communal livestock. The situation is exacerbated during periods of drought, which are a frequent occurrence in Matabeleland North.

Partly due to the poor soil fertility and limited rainfall in Matabeleland North, the indigenous people of the region are particularly dependent on trees and woodlands as a source of their livelihoods and as a safety net in times of crisis. This is manifested in the following ways (adapted from Dewees, 1992):

1. *Land Productivity:* Long-term soil fertility and productivity depends on nutrient fixation by trees, on nutrients from decomposed wood material, as well as on nutrients from termites and animals (including cattle in the dry season) that feed on the trees. Hence, the clearing of trees from the communal lands severely affected the ability of the soil to remain fertile over the long-term. Trees also help maintain soil nutrients by protecting the soil surface from erosion.
2. *Direct Food Source:* Trees and woodlands provide a direct source of food such as fruit, mushrooms, and insects, as well as provide a habitat for bees which produce honey.
3. *Fuel Source:* Woody material is the main source of fuel for rural Zimbabweans.
4. *Food for Livestock:* Woodlands provide important food for livestock during the dry season, which in turn provide food and manure.
5. *Materials Source:* Trees provide raw materials for baskets and other goods that can be processed and either used or sold.
6. *Formal Employment:* Some communal areas derive employment and income from sawmills that process hardwoods.

Given the important functions of forests in the region, it is clear that communal areas require forests in order to maintain ecological and social sustainability. Unfortunately, the growing population in communal areas has run into the limits of the available land, and thus increased the pressure placed on the communities to clear their woodlands in order to maximize short-term food production.

In Matabeleland North, the risk of food shortages is very high. Stunting due to malnutrition is reported to occur in as many as 37 per cent of all children in the region aged 2 to 5 (AOAD, 1992). Studies have shown that the primary cause of deforestation throughout Zimbabwe is clearing land for agriculture (World Bank, 1991). Not surprisingly, the greatest woodland depletion and soil erosion occurs in areas with high population densities and the longest duration of settlement. Thus, over time, the communal areas have become increasingly barren and inhospitable, with fewer resources per person. In the long term, therefore, it is the poorest families that will suffer most from land clearing as they are most directly dependent on the woodland resources for survival.

In short, then, there have been three mechanisms of resource scarcity in Matabeleland North. First, the limited availability of land and poor productivity intrinsically constrain supplies of food and basic resources. Second, demand for resources has increased as a result of population growth. Third, land clearing has further degraded and depleted the natural resource base as described above. This final mechanism of scarcity can be more catastrophic in cases where land is cleared or damaged at a high rate during violent conflicts (Percival and Homer-Dixon, 1995).

To make matters worse, the state's regulatory apparatus is not able to control the use of woodland resources in communal areas. To begin with, there is an ambiguous allocation of jurisdiction over natural resources, so it is unclear which institution has the authority and responsibility for the management of these resources (Moyo, 1992). In particular, the clearing of woodlands for agricultural production and the use of forest produce for personal use remains unregulated in communal areas (Katerere *et al.*, 1999). Thus, an outdated and confusing regulatory framework combined with competing institutional mandates fuel local level social and environmental insecurity.

Furthermore, there are no leases or title to land, so there is little incentive for individuals to conserve, a classic example of the tragedy of the commons (Moyo, 1992; Hardin, 1968). Communal areas have degenerated from a traditional resource management regime for common property with rules of exclusion to open access, to one in which there are no features of exclusion. For example, the "commons" are increasingly being utilized by the urban elite as a "free good" to graze large numbers of livestock. The communal areas have also become a conduit for the urban elite to access free grazing resources in the forests. The livestock are initially brought into the communal lands to be integrated with livestock belonging to communal people. The communal people then become the front agents to demand access to forest grazing for the artificially inflated herds. The urban elite are never visible in subsequent conflicts between the forest

authorities and the communal area residents. Under the circumstances, communal livestock owners seek relief grazing in the neighbouring forests or large-scale commercial farms.

A rise in competition and conflict between different social groups has been brought about by a protracted process of dislocation of traditional resource management systems and under-valuation of traditional knowledge, the limiting of options available to communal area residents through inequitable land administrative systems, and through continued population increase.

Conflict and its Consequences

Under the colonial system, Southern Rhodesia's vision for economic development was focused on the levels of white farmers' production rather than improvement of peasant livelihoods. Thus, the colonial regulation and administration justified direct interference in the affairs of peasants including evicting them from their land (Alexander *et al.*, 2000). The brutalization of the peasantry escalated after the Second World War. The colonists introduced land-use planning and hence aided the slow transformation from traditional knowledge systems towards commercial agriculture production in the 1950s and 1960s. Shortages of natural resources in communal areas worsened, and the inequity between the indigenous people and the white commercial farmers became greater. By the late 1970s and early 1980s people began settling illegally on forest lands and commercial farms at an increasing rate. As the numbers of forest dwellers increased naturally and through incipient in-migration, the forest authorities were obliged to introduce limits on the settler population by introducing a tenant registration system and raising the rent per family from Z\$1 to Z\$10 per annum (at that time Z\$1 \approx US\$1.30 to \$1.50, whereas in May 2001 Z\$55 \approx US\$1). The increase in the tenant fee resulted in a sharp fall in the number of tenants in demarcated forests from 1350 to 350.

Although the authorities were trying to reduce occupant numbers they did not try to discourage cultivation in the forests. In fact, a detailed agricultural plan was drawn up in 1975 to provide selected tenant farmers with up to 50 ha each (Dore *et al.*, 1999). This plan was never implemented because the Forestry Commission's hierarchy did not support it.

Ultimately, inequity in the distribution of land and resource scarcity in communal areas helped spark Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, which intensified in the 1970s after initial guerrilla incursions into Matabeleland North as early as 1966 (Alexander *et al.*, 2000). As the war escalated, the colonial government was unable to control the migration of people from communal areas to forest lands, especially in Matabeleland North. Control of the tenant programme in state forests finally collapsed due to the escala-

tion of the uprising, and the subsequent civil war which occurred in the early 1980s. Hence, the Forestry Commission was powerless to prevent people from continuing to settle and use forest resources. This inability to properly administer the forests was due to the weak law enforcement capacity of the government and to that of the Forestry Commission in particular.

According to Moyo (1998), despite a tough government anti-squatter policy in forest lands, illegal settlement by rural and urban poor spread across all tenure regimes during and after the civil war. Thousands of families had relocated from communal areas from around the country to settle in the demarcated forests resulting in increased pressure on forest resources. People left communal areas to occupy not only forest lands but also underutilized large scale commercial farms, especially those that had been abandoned during the war. Some commercial farmers eventually sold their farms to the government after having failed to evict the illegal settlers.

Only in 1987, when hostilities between the Ndebele and the government finally ended, was the Forestry Commission able to attempt to re-establish management in the demarcated forests. However, the initial efforts of the forest authorities to formalize the residency of those that had settled in the forest prior to 1987 failed to stem the flow of new settlers. The uncontrolled increase in the number of settlers placed tremendous pressure on forest resources. Forest was cleared for cultivation and construction of new homes. The number of livestock in the forest increased disproportionately to the number of illegal settlers. Fences were cut to allow livestock from neighbouring communal lands into the forests. The emerging Black urban elite also sought to lay claims on forest resources in the form of grazing leases and timber concessions. They expressed their frustration with the unchanged legacy of colonial rule and viewed these state controlled resources as a means to begin narrowing the income gap between the former settlers and the marginalized Black majority.

The transition to peace in Matabeleland North was not a smooth process due to lingering hostilities and feelings of insecurity among the forest dwellers and neighbouring communities seeking access into the forests. The liberation struggle should have contributed to greater access to forests resources by Blacks, especially those in Matabeleland North, yet the legacy of exclusion of people from much of the land in the province continued. As part of land redistribution, the Forestry Commission was expected to lead the challenge to the monopoly of white commercial interests over forestry, hunting safaris and tourism industries. Instead, in defending the forests against new settlers, the Forestry Commission was seen as an extension of an "oppressive" central government and not trustworthy. The heroes of the liberation struggle were now the post-colonial state enemies based on ethnic competition. Efforts at re-establishing economic activities,

re-uniting divided communities and rebuilding decimated institutional capacity, were mired by local political entrepreneurs that wanted to portray themselves as the new post independence “economic war” heroes.

The conflict in Matabeleland North started as part of a national conflict against a colonial power over gross inequities with respect to land and scarce resources. At the end of the liberation war, the conflict had taken on new dimensions based on ideological and political differences between ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) and ZAPU (Zimbabwe African Peoples Union)—the main liberation movements—and had raised concerns about future economic, social and political relationships between the minority Ndebele people and the ruling Shona majority.

The conflicts around the demarcated forest reserves came to symbolize the broader struggle by the Ndebele against the establishment. The forest represented a sense of local identity and pride, a symbol that not all had been lost to others. Any attempts to evict people from the forests or to prevent them from accessing forest products were seen as a direct challenge to the legitimate claims of the Ndebele to their rightful local resource endowment. It would seem that the Forestry officials and the state itself failed to appreciate the complexity of the conflict and sought to deal with it as a forestry sector matter, and then purely from a legal and technical perspective.

There were significant, long-term adverse effects on forest resources produced during the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. These conflicts have been particularly damaging due to destruction of physical assets such as infrastructure and equipment, loss of human life, environmental degradation and disruption of economic activities. The conflict surrounding forest access has indefinitely postponed any efforts at economic development and instead extended and increased social and environmental insecurity. Between 1983 and 1987 development activities in Matabeleland North were totally paralyzed as the ruling ZANU party sought to eliminate “dissident” elements and gain greater political allegiance (Alexander *et al.*, 2000).

Current Situation in State Forests

Adverse effects on the environment and resources as a consequence of war have been common in Southern Africa. The prolonged civil war in Mozambique, for example, displaced many people who had no choice but to resettle in areas without adequate land for cultivation. As a result, the settlers were forced into intensive agriculture which led to a decline in soil quality and fertility (Dejene and Olivares, 1991). Also in Mozambique, anti-poaching stations had to be abandoned and many wildlife populations were decimated by poachers over a period of several years (Dejene and Olivares, 1991). The white rhino population in Mozambique went extinct while the elephant population was reduced from 60,000 to 15,000

(Stoddard, 2000). The war in Angola has created similar problems. War has numerous other effects as well, including wildlife mortality from land mines, and direct destruction of forests from battles. In general, the most important effects have been the inability to regulate resource use and the resource pressures associated with displacement of people.

This has been the case in Zimbabwe. As of 1998, there were 1420 squatter families residing inside ten Demarcated State Indigenous Forests in Matabeleland North (Dore *et al.*, 1999). Country-wide, there are currently about 20,000 people residing illegally in these national forests (ZDID, 1999). The Forestry Commission as the state forest authority has the legal right as a landowner to institute proceedings for the eviction of illegal settlers. Despite the Forestry Commission's legal rights, its power to enforce its rights has been severely weakened by political intervention and lack of political will by the government to enforce the law. On the one hand, the government's political rhetoric about land redistribution encourages unauthorized settlement by opportunists expressing their impatience over delays in resolving the land issue. On the other hand, the government does not want to resettle the illegal settlers for fear that it will encourage the illegal occupation of state land or forests elsewhere. There are many more squatters on commercial lands and other state lands in addition to the squatters in the DSIFs. Those squatters may relocate to the DSIFs if they perceive that they will subsequently be resettled legally elsewhere.

Pressure upon these forest lands continues to grow, through several pathways. There is considerable evidence that poaching of forest products occurs in demarcated forest reserves that share common borders with communal areas (Nhira and Fortmann, 1993). The use of wood at household and rural industry levels for brick making, beer brewing, and baking can have severe influences on forest resources. While more than 85 per cent of household energy consumption in Zimbabwe is based on woodfuel (Makoni, 1990), it is unclear on a national basis whether woodfuel use is exceeding supply. On the other hand, it is clear that the situation in and near many communal lands tends to be one of critical scarcity, due to the removal of fuelwood to supply urban markets. In both the communal lands and DSIFs, deforestation has continued in order to provide land for cultivation. Finally, uncontrolled grazing, wild animals (Zimbabwe's elephant populations have increased enormously) and both wild and deliberate fires can also contribute to the further destruction of the forest and woodland vegetation (AOAD, 1992).

The Way Forward

The history of land in Zimbabwe is a history of alienation and marginalization of the peasantry. The land acquisition process enabled the minori-

ty white settler population to designate and capture the fertile parts of the country for themselves and they continue to occupy these lands today. The failure to address the land question comprehensively and redistribute land to the Black majority, coupled with population increase has left many communal farmers with no option but to illegally settle on state forest land, as these are considered easy targets. However, the solution to land inequity will not emerge from this kind of illegal settlement. Research has shown that there is a powerful economic incentive for communal households to convert forest land into crop land (Dore *et al.*, 1999), and if the Forestry Commission relaxes current controls on illegal settlement, massive invasions will result in rapid depletion of the forest resources.

The issue of forest preservation must therefore be addressed within the broader national land question. The options available to the Forestry Commission are to either evict the illegal settlers; or, to accept forest settlement as a legitimate use of the forests. In the event of the latter scenario, the objectives of managing state forests need to be restated such that future forest plans and practices reflect the needs of such a new policy. It may be that many of these state forests should no longer be designated as protected, in recognition of how their use and function have changed over the last several decades, from one of conservation to one of providing livelihoods. Any re-designation or new designation of protected areas should not be the prerogative of the state but demand-driven. Where biodiversity is to be protected for the national and global good there must be public consultation and consensus. Where such protection results in loss of benefits, affected communities should be adequately compensated.

Current Farm Invasions in Zimbabwe

Although this paper focuses on the particular case of state forests in Matabeleland North, the problem of inequitable and unsustainable land distribution exists throughout Zimbabwe. Thousands of white-owned large scale commercial farms have been occupied by squatters across the country since March 2000. Officially the squatters are veterans of the liberation struggle who are demanding that they receive benefits in the form of land. In actuality, only a small portion of the squatters are veterans of the struggle for independence—the remaining squatters are landless peasants who are frustrated with the inequitable distribution of land in Zimbabwe. In many cases the squatters have disrupted farming and intimidated farm owners and workers in an effort to make their point.

Since independence in 1980, the laws of Zimbabwe have recognized and respected land owners. Commercial farm land was to be redistributed over time on a willing buyer—willing seller basis. Unfortunately, this approach had little effect on land distribution because farmers occupying productive

land had little desire to sell, and few buyers in Zimbabwe have the resources needed to purchase. In response to this failure, the constitution of Zimbabwe was amended in 2000 (Constitutional Amendment #16 of Year 2000) to allow the government to acquire and redistribute land of its own volition. To date several hundred commercial farms have been designated for redistribution. The unresolved issue is that of compensation for current farm owners.

The problem with distribution of commercial farmlands is representative of the broader issue of inequitable distribution of land and resources in the country. As with the occupation and use of state forests, occupation of farms is indicative of broad human insecurity resulting from scarcity of resources and means of livelihood. The challenge is to find a just and peaceful means of redistribution that also meets conservation objectives.

Lessons for the Conservation Community

This case study illustrates the relationship between environment and human security at several levels: the environmental sources of conflict, the links between colonial conflicts and conservation effectiveness, and the impacts of conflict on conservation.

An initial cause of insecurity and eventually a main cause of the war was the inequitable and unsustainable allocation of land by the colonial government. The obvious lesson from this aspect of the case is that the concept of equity—implying that people have equal chances to participate in the opportunities that society has to offer—is a necessary prerequisite for long-term stability and thus for conservation. While the pursuit of a more equitable distribution of land may seem elusive, ignoring it will not pacify the marginalized. Effectively, members of society want community, food and economic security as well as the right to participate in the management of the nation's natural resources and to benefit from their efforts. Conservationists should therefore advocate for more-equitable resource allocation structures, focusing on their potential to alleviate and to prevent conflict.

Second, an impact of the unfolding dispute over land has been the loss of the State's ability to declare and maintain certain lands as protected forests and national assets. Although there is some indication that things will change, the current government in Zimbabwe has still largely been ineffective in reducing land and resource scarcity in communal areas. IUCN and other conservation-oriented NGOs must therefore continue to advocate policies that integrate communities into decision-making regarding resource management, and should help fulfil civil society's role of separating political rhetoric from reality. Evidence throughout southern Africa shows that conservation efforts which do not involve communities and

which do not provide benefits to communities are seldom sustainable (Katerere, Hill and Moyo, 2000).

This case study also demonstrates a clear demand for conflict management skills at all levels to help parties to conflicts. The escalation of the land and agrarian struggle in Zimbabwe is likely to see a demand for conflict management. Moreover, inter and intra-country resource scarcities and resource-based conflicts remain unresolved in many other Southern African countries, offering opportunities for transborder resource-sharing arrangements to minimize conflicts. IUCN and other conservation organizations can assist in initiating and strengthening negotiation processes and resource-based conflict management skills.

The State's loss of control over protected areas contributed to new environmental problems through uncontrolled illegal settlement in the forests. This undermined the ability of the state forest authority to fulfil its technical and administrative responsibilities. The lesson here is that war creates circumstances where it is difficult to manage the environment adequately and that political, social and economic considerations prevent attention to the common interest. In the context of the current situation in Zimbabwe, the unfortunate reality is that we cannot expect management of state forests to improve in the short-term. The reason for this is that the state, as a major land owner, will experience similar pressures as other land owners until there is equitable land redistribution.

There have been considerable efforts by the World Bank and other organizations to rehabilitate economies and to clean up natural environments in the post-conflict state. We do not believe that conservation-oriented NGOs should focus on this aspect of environment and security links. Rather, we believe that it is most important that conservationists begin to focus on recognizing the resource scarcity issues and other conditions that lead to war in the first place, and advocate and act to alleviate and eliminate these conditions. However, conservationists can in post-conflict states help to prevent further conflicts by building new relationships between parties to a conflict so that there is mutual recognition of expectations and rights. Building on research of environment and security case studies, and deriving specific lessons from these studies for action, can help not only to prevent conflicts but also to resolve them.

Finally, the case study raises the question about the relevance and legitimacy of many protected areas. Most of the protected areas in sub-Saharan Africa were established during the colonial era and continue to be managed using the same outdated laws and policies. IUCN and other NGOs can contribute to research and dialogue on the future of Africa's protected areas. The lesson here is that conservationists should ensure that resource management activities take into consideration the impacts of the colonial

legacy, which may include protected areas which were created under the colonial regime without consultation with, and often to the detriment of, the indigenous peoples.

In the case of Zimbabwe, resource scarcity in communal areas has continued to increase despite the war. International pressures are against the repossession of commercial lands, partly because this might scare away foreign investors. Still, it is clear based on past experience that people on communal lands need better access to land and resources. Otherwise the country could easily return to a state of armed conflict. There remains an expectation among indigenous Zimbabweans that land will be reallocated since inequity in land distribution was the fundamental cause of the independence struggle. The consequences of another conflict for environmental management and conservation may be significant.

Thus, IUCN and other NGOs must continue to advocate for community empowerment and a policy-making and implementation process that is participatory in nature. We must engage conservation issues not in isolation but in the context of Zimbabwe's socio-political situation. Only then can we contribute to ensuring that issues of land reform are addressed comprehensively in a way that meets the needs of the people while concurrently meeting conservation needs.

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Environment and Security Brief 7:

Solomon Islands and Environmental Sources of Insecurity— Logging and Urban Sprawl

By Ted Gaulin

The Solomon Islands, a chain of islands in the southwestern Pacific, faces a number of development problems including low literacy, disease, poverty, and population growth rates that are among the highest in the world.²⁹³ Two other problems, however, both related to the availability or degradation of resources, can be linked directly to wave of civil strife that consumed the islands in 1999 and 2000. These two problems are unsustainable logging and urban sprawl.

Intense logging in the Solomon Islands over the last decade has resulted in extensive environmental destruction. Nearly 10 per cent of the country's productive lowland forest have been harvested, and at various times throughout the 1990s timber was being logged at three times the estimated sustainable yield.²⁹⁴ This has significantly disrupted life in a country where 82 per cent of the population live a subsistence lifestyle and draw on wooded areas for food, medicine, and building materials. In addition, silt from logging roads is polluting streams undermining already limited supplies of freshwater, such that today, only 64 per cent of the population have access to safe drinking water.²⁹⁵ In coastal areas, soil erosion from heavily logged areas degrades coral reefs and threatens local fisheries, the island's primary source of protein.²⁹⁶

On the island of Malaita, extensive logging and high population growth rates have undermined livelihood security to such an extent that thousands of Malaitans have migrated to the larger island of Guadalcanal. Many of these immigrants, seeking employment in the capital of Honiara, have established squatter communities on the outskirts of the city. These unplanned settlements, which now comprise more than 10,000 people or 23 per cent of the city's population, spill over the town boundaries, intrude upon tribal areas, and breed resentment among the native inhabitants of this land. Moreover, these peri-urban communities have increased the environmental strain on fragile ecosystems. The absence of even basic amenities means that human waste is disposed directly into the ground, polluting local water supplies and degrading agricultural areas of indigenous tribes.²⁹⁷

Tensions between immigrants and locals over these issues has produced 18 months of civil strife in which two armed groups—the Isatabu

Freedom Movement and the Malaita Eagle Force—have attempted to lay claim to the land surrounding the capital. This conflict has resulted in the death of over a hundred people and the displacement of tens of thousands. It has engendered urban firefights, the burning of villages, summary executions, and a coup d'état. Leaders of the two sides signed a peace treaty in October 2000, but intermittent fighting continues as the primary cause of this conflict—the possession and degradation of land—has not been definitively resolved.²⁹⁸

From a sustainable development perspective, the case of the Solomon Islands brings a number of issues into focus. First, it highlights the potential dangers of globalization for it was Indonesian logging companies backed by Japanese and Korean buyers that pushed log production to unsustainable levels. Only the Asian economic crisis, and the resulting crash of the tropical timber market, has slowed logging.²⁹⁹

Second, the case points to the importance of state capacity because the weak, corrupt, and generally undemocratic nature of the Solomon Islands government has exacerbated the country's environmental problems. The government lacks the institutions necessary for urban planning around the capital and it has taken few steps to slow internal migration.³⁰⁰ In addition, a close association between elites and foreign logging companies has allowed these companies to harvest timber far beyond that allowed by law, and allegations of bribery by logging companies are widespread.³⁰¹ When the government agency responsible for enforcing forestry laws criticized logging practices as unsustainable, it was disbanded.³⁰² In a further affront to democracy, the government has imposed news blackouts on the forced relocation of islanders displaced by logging.³⁰³

Finally, the case demonstrates how quickly disputes over resources can be transformed into ethnic conflict. Until recently, Malaitans and the indigenous people of Guadalcanal identified few differences between themselves. Indeed, both groups are Melanesian in origin. However, under conditions of environmental stress and resource scarcity, elites were able to manipulate tribal differences such that the ensuing conflict appeared to be based on ethnic cleavages.³⁰⁴

These three conclusions suggest that conservation management aimed at creating and maintaining sustainable livelihoods could dramatically reduce the likelihood of conflict and instability.

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