

Understanding the dynamics of large-scale biofuel investments in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This thesis examines the consequences of large-scale land acquisitions in Chisumbanje, a rural village in south-east Zimbabwe. The land acquisition was for the purposes of establishing sugar cane plantations and a biofuel plant that would supply ethanol to Zimbabwe's fuel industry. The project was owned jointly by Green Fuel (Pvt) Ltd and the Agricultural Rural Development Authority, a public parastatal. Using a combination of political economy concepts and ethnographic data from Chisumbanje, the thesis tells a story of the unfolding relationships between Green Fuel, political party cadres and their allies in government who wanted to extract political and economic capital from the project at the expense of citizens affected by it. As a result, the project failed to usher in development, in that local people were dispossessed their land, in some cases using force. The company justified the loss of land on the grounds that it would introduce subsistence farmers to the market. But only a small proportion of the local people were given the opportunity to participate in this market, the market was not in the main ethanol feedstock, and the market was not guaranteed. Typical of capitalist settler operations, those who were hired got seasonal menial jobs that could not sustain their families while the better-paying jobs of supervisors were given to people coming from outside the area. In addition, local workers worked under poor conditions and were not allowed to join unions except one union that was linked to the ruling party, a sign that even the government was on the side of capital and not on the side of the workers. The project seemingly made profit, but the people's livelihoods worsened in the process. Over and above this, the thesis goes beyond those reports that simply discuss, and bemoan, the land dispossession resulting from corporate land acquisitions by exploring the unintended consequences of the biofuel project. Inadvertently, the project and its operation triggered a huge, unplanned income diversification response in the surrounding areas. The company's injection of cash into the local economy - mainly in the form of wages - resulted in a surge in the quantity and variety of businesses and shops in Chisumbanje and the surrounding areas and the creation of several 'downstream' jobs many linked to agriculture and housing. While downstream jobs were not deliberately planned, and many of them were entirely informal, their existence suggests that local people were not simply 'victims' of corporate and state machinations, but active participants in fashioning new livelihoods in a southern Africa that has gone through massive changes in the way the economy is structured over the past 30 – 40 years. This thesis seeks to add nuance to our understanding of the proactive agency of subalterns usually taken to be passive in the wake of multiple capitalist assaults in the neoliberal age.

Key words Chisumbanje, Biofuel, land, labour, livelihoods, agency

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List of Abbreviations

AAG	Affirmative Action Group
ARDA	Agricultural Rural Development Authority
BOT	Build Operate Transfer
CDC	Chisumbanje Development Company
CSOT	Community Share Ownership Trust
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EBRD	European Bank of Reconstruction and Development
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IBDC	Indigenous Business Development Centre
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ISIS	Import Substitution Industrialisation Strategy
LSLA	Large scale land acquisition
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NEDPP	National Economic Development Priority Programme
RDC	Rural District Council
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SLA	Sabi Limpopo Authority
TILCOR	Tribal Trust Land Development Corporation
UN	United Nations
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union

Chapter 1

Introduction and methods

Introduction

Chisumbanje is an area in the province of Manicaland, Zimbabwe. It is situated in Chipinge rural district on the eastern bank of the Save river close to the border with Mozambique. Baobab, acacia, and mopani trees are sparsely scattered around the area, part of the lowveld grassland ecosystem. The people of Chisumbanje have a history dating back to the early 20th century when they made their way down to the lowveld to settle permanently, particularly near rivers such as the Save after being dispossessed by white settlers in the more fertile highveld regions to the west. Most families in Chisumbanje owned a fair amount of land, passed on through generations, which they farmed with pride. Despite lying in a valley which is semi-arid and prone to poor crop yields, the people of Chisumbanje are cultivators, and herders of goats, pigs, and cattle, practising subsistence agriculture and often selling small surpluses of beans and corn to outside merchants. Income from migrant labour played an important role in supporting agricultural activities and ensuring food security. People in Chisumbanje were careful to hold on to their land in order to sustain their livelihoods.

In 2007, anxiety gripped the inhabitants of Chisumbanje when news filtered through that Green Fuel (Pvt) Ltd, a company owned by controversial entrepreneur Billy Rautenbach, was negotiating with the state to take over a tract of state-owned land in the middle of the Chisumbanje communal lands. The land in question had been excised from the communal lands by the Smith regime in the 1970s, as part of its (largely abortive) attempt to introduce 'development' to the Lowveld, and it had been inherited by the state-owned Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA) in the 1980s. Green Fuel was reportedly interested in this land as a site on which to construct a biofuel plant that would supply ethanol to Zimbabwe's fuel industry. ARDA's land was sufficient to house the ethanol plant, but local people were concerned by the fact that it was not obvious how it would be possible to supply the plant with enough sugarcane feedstock without

removing the people who had been allowed to rent farmland on the ARDA estate, and indeed intruding onto the adjacent communal lands.

Their anxiety in this regard came to a head in August 2008 when then agriculture minister Rugare Gumbo signed a 20-year lease agreement with Green Fuel (Pvt) Ltd involving a 'build, operate and transfer' (BOT) contract, (Makombe, 2013). The contract imposed a technical and financial obligation on Green Fuel to construct an ethanol plant and develop the necessary sugarcane feedstock in Chisumbanje, in return for being allowed to reap returns on its investment for 20 years, before handing the plant and the sugarcane fields over to ARDA (ibid).

In March 2009, 16 days after the formation of the inclusive government following the 2008 election crisis, Green Fuel began construction of the ethanol plant on the ARDA land which had been leased to it. It also embarked on the process of terminating ARDA's agreement with the small farmers who had leased its land before then and of simply taking over some of the communal lands in order to cultivate the quantity of sugarcane the plant required.

Green Fuel (Pvt) Ltd started producing biofuel in November 2011 but stopped production in February 2012, by which point it had filled its storage tanks with 10 million litres of ethanol for which, it transpired, it had no market. Motorists who were expected to use the blended fuel were hesitant to adopt the product owing to safety concerns for their vehicles. Meanwhile, traditional leaders and farmers on the communal land were protesting vociferously, alleging that Green Fuel's sugarcane plantations were encroaching on their land and disregarding boundaries. This created anxiety across several villages in Chisumbanje as most farmers felt there were in line to lose their land. At the same time, there were reports that government was evaluating losses experienced by people affected by the project in order to effect compensation. (Thondhlana, 2015).

Research questions and objectives

The establishment of the ethanol plant and the development of sugarcane plantations in the surrounding communal area raises several issues which I explore in this thesis. I begin by giving

more details about the Green Fuel company and use a political economy analysis of post-colonial Zimbabwe to examine the history of decision-making about its investments. I go on to assess the consequences of biofuel production in Chisumbanje for the various categories of people affected by it, investigating issues of land rights and ownership, food security, availability and quality of employment, and local people's priorities.

The overall objective of the thesis is to contribute to debates on projects and institutions that create and administer similar initiatives purporting to improve the economic well-being of the most marginalised and to eliminate poverty. The thesis is framed around four main objectives. The first objective is to examine how the Chisumbanje biofuel land deal was shaped by the Zimbabwean state and its policies. The questions related to this objective are;

- What institutions governed the process by which the investor acquired the land?
- Which actors and social groups were included or excluded from the decision-making?
- What power relations shaped the decision-making process?

The second objective of the thesis is to examine the impact of the land acquisition process on local people's livelihoods. This objective is guided by the following questions;

- Whose land was transferred to investors?
- Which social groups were obliged to give up their land use rights?
- Who was compensated for losing their land, and how?
- Who was not compensated for this?

The third objective of this thesis is to examine the quality of jobs and the overall employment dispensation the company offered local people in the sugarcane fields and the plant itself. Questions related to this objective are:

- What was the nature of employment created by the biofuel project?
- Which kind of people were employed in each job category?
- Which social groups benefitted from employment opportunities?

- How did different categories of workers seek out livelihoods in the context of a fragmenting post settler economy that was unable to provide a living wage?

The last objective of this thesis is to explore the unintended consequences of the biofuel operation guided by the questions below:

- What new social or economic relations were emerging in the study area?
- What were the indirect consequences of the injection of cash into the local economy by Green Fuel's activities?
- Who took up these opportunities and how did they shape the contours of the biofuel project and its wider environment?

Global debates on large scale land acquisitions

The Chisumbanje bioethanol project came at a time when land acquisitions were on a dramatic rise across Africa and in other developing countries. This was attributed to a combination of global crises that involved food, energy, climate change and finance, often referred to as the 'triple-F crisis: food, fuels and finance' (Hall 2011, p. 1). The food crisis was triggered by food price spikes of 2007/8 which exposed many food importing nations to the vagaries of global commodity markets. In response to this crisis, countries with large population and food security concerns (such as India and China) sought to secure future food supply for their own populations as insulation against a volatile world market by leasing foreign farmland while countries rich in capital but with limited land and water resources (such as South Korea and the Gulf States) scrambled to secure reliable food supplies through increased overseas investment (Cotula *et al.*, 2008). The private sector too, expected to cash in on promised positive returns from agriculture (*ibid.*).

This fuel crisis was linked to rising and fluctuating oil prices in the period 2007–08, and speculation that the world had hit peak oil production. This created powerful incentives for companies to acquire land to grow crops that can generate biofuel. The main crops planted to produce biodiesel were jatropha, soya, maize and palm oil while sugarcane was the main

feedstock for bioethanol. The rush towards the production of biofuel was also triggered and sustained by the European Union's renewable energy policies which had set targets to include 10% biofuel in its fuel stocks by 2020 (Hall, 2011; De Schutter, 2011).. The origin of the financial crisis is located in the meltdown in international financial markets in 2008 and the subsequent recession which led investors to consider those markets volatile and risky. Many sought to invest in the more tangible asset of farmland with the promise that rising demand for food and fuel would make this a secure investment in an increasingly unpredictable global system. Overall, during the conjunction of the triple Fs, international capital markets gravitated 'towards agriculture as a relatively safe investment haven for the relatively long-term '(McMichael, 2012, p. 690).

The widespread acquisition of large-scale farmland attracted the attention of policy makers, researchers, academics, and development practitioners. International financial institutions, the World Bank in particular, were some of the first to acknowledge that large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) could contribute to positive development in affected communities and national economies, and produce good outcomes for the entire continent, if properly executed. The *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*, the World Bank's first flagship report exclusively devoted to agriculture in more than 25 years provided important insights on the role and place of large-scale agricultural development. The report raised various concerns on themes related to agricultural development such as pathways out of rural poverty and the role of migration and wage labour, among others (Oya, 2009). Given that there is limited investment in agriculture especially in rural areas, large-scale land acquisitions (LSLA) were seen as a perfect opportunity to support small scale farmers and to stimulate rural economies (ibid).

The prognoses of other multilateral organisations were not very different from the one advanced by the World Bank. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO, 2009), international research institutes such as the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) (von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009) and aid agencies for example, German Technical Cooperation, (GTZ, 2009) talked somewhat cautiously of an upsurge in 'foreign investments in land', and the

potential they had to bring sorely needed foreign investment (FDI) to African nations. Their argument was that by making productive use of under-cultivated areas, FDI would contribute to increased liquidity in rural areas and investments in crucial public infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and health posts.

Furthermore, it was argued that investments in the agricultural sector had the potential to create employment, facilitate technical transfers and modernize the agriculture sector to improve its productivity and increase its production.

Other proponents of LSLA may have used different case studies or analytical lenses, but they generally shared the same view and policy conclusions that new land deals presented a potential opportunity for rural development, especially if implemented alongside 'responsible agricultural investments principles', a set of guidelines, jointly worked out by the World Bank (2010), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Through implementation of these principles, it was envisaged that private international investment in large-scale agricultural projects in 'developing' countries would lead to win-win outcomes for all those involved. The idea was that, host governments would get FDI, small-scale cultivators would get access to capital and a place in global supply chains, investors would get good returns, and consumers in the global North would get secure, if not cheaper, food and less environment-damaging, and possibly cheaper, fuel.

Despite the promise LSLA had, it did not take long for critical voices to emerge. One of the first reports to critically evaluate the drivers of a dramatic increase in large-scale land acquisitions by rich foreign investors in poor countries was published by the Spanish NGO Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) in 2008. The report, titled "Seized: the 2008 land grab for food and financial security" exposed how a new wave of land grabbing was sweeping the planet in the name of addressing the global food and financial crises. *'On one hand'*, the report states, *'food insecure' governments that rely on imports to feed their people are snatching up vast areas of*

farmland abroad for their own offshore food production. On the other hand, food corporations and private investors, hungry for profits in the midst of the deepening financial crisis, see investment in foreign farmland as an important new source of revenue.' (Grain, 2008, p.2).

Beyond focusing attention on LSLA, critical scholars who examined the implications of foreign farmland investments questioned their benefits for host communities. For instance, a research study carried out in five African countries revealed that LSLA aggravated the vulnerabilities of host countries as these were poor and already food insecure nations (Cotula *et al.* 2009). Several NGOs and concerned activists also sprang to the defence of local communities and warned of 'a massive land-grab', with far reaching consequences for domestic farmers who might be forced off land they had farmed for generations, to be replaced by foreign agribusinesses (see, for example, GRAIN, 2008; Daniel and Mittal, 2009; Oxfam, 2011; Human Rights Watch, 2012; Via Campesina, 2011). Some observers who evaluated the efficacy of voluntary guidelines challenged the notion that land deals can lead to win-win scenarios on the grounds that many host countries, 'neither have legal or procedural mechanisms in place to protect local rights, nor take into account local interests, livelihoods or welfare' (Zoomers, 2010, p.433).

Significance of the study

In response to the questions raised above, this thesis will put forward several points which I hope will add to the ongoing debates on LSLAs. To begin with, I agree with the critiques of LSLAs that argue that 'win-win' outcomes are difficult to achieve. I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters that people in Chisumbanje district did not become 'winners' as a result of the construction of the biofuel plant and the cultivation of the feedstock. They lost farming land and access to resources including areas for grazing, fishing, gathering, and collecting firewood and materials for various activities. Without land they are obliged to become daily labourers or tenants, but even these opportunities were becoming scarce, and they were forced to migrate to other countries or to urban areas where they are not always able to secure a job and often ended up living on the margins of society. Most locals received no compensation for their loss and had

problematic access to jobs in the plant itself. Where compensation was provided, it rarely covered the true value of the land and the production and income lost.

But beyond simply siding with the critics, the aim of this thesis is to extend their analysis regarding three issues. The first one is the role of the postcolonial state. Land deals are often a product of political decisions made by ruling elites. In fact, when the issue of large-scale acquisitions first became prominent in the international media community in 2009, what made worldwide newspaper headlines was not the proposed land deal but street protests and threats to overthrow Madagascan president Marc Ravalomanana after his government attempted to lease a significant portion of the country's arable land to a South Korean company (Burnod et al., 2013, p. 357-380). Land acquisitions at a large scale has happened before, especially in Africa but did not get the same attention, but when a government falls, it attracts massive attention.

The dominant critical narrative in the early stages of land grabbing, particularly in Africa, laid the blame on post-independence states themselves. It was argued that land grabs were happening in states which were disorganized and fragile (Arezki *et al.*, 2011, p. 3; Deininger *et al.*, 2011a), and where governance of the land sector was weak (Deininger *et al.*, 2011b). Most states in Africa and Asia were depicted as unable to resist land grabs because the rule of law did not cover the full extent of their territories. The implication of this narrative was that government officials and politicians in countries targeted for large-scale agricultural investments could claim that they had no way to prevent the deals from going ahead.

I seek to show that governments in countries targeted for such investments are actively involved, rather than being passive recipients. I pay more attention to the way in which the Zimbabwe government and ruling-party cadres inserted themselves into Green Fuel's land grab than is usually the case in other studies of land grabs in Africa.

In considering the role of the state, this thesis avoids the trap of treating it as a homogenous entity comprising actors with identical interests and aspirations. Instead, I focus on how different state actors thought and worked, showing how they drew on different kinds of authority to aid or complicate the deals. The Chisumbanje biofuel project was initiated at a time when Zimbabwe

was governed by a coalition of two rival political parties, ZANU-PF and the MDC. The ZANU-PF minister of agriculture welcomed the agribusiness investment and sought to influence the project through his authority over land management, while the MDC Minister of Energy was angling for corresponding benefits from the biofuel. The thesis illustrates how the political elite, government officials, and party cadres in Zimbabwe exploited the complex composition of the state wherever they could, and often acted against each other to extract political and economic capital from the biofuel project.

The second issue this thesis takes on concerns another conclusion often reached by opponents of LSLA (Oxfam 2008, TNI, 2013) when they argue that, since LSLAs have devastating effects on local people's livelihoods, the latter would be better off if big corporates and states simply left them alone to carry on organising their lives according to their own longstanding understanding of the environment. This thesis concurs with the view that land grabs and investment in large-scale agriculture are exploitative and that the 'win-win' outcomes promised in the pro-LSLA literature are an ideological smokescreen, but it questions the conclusion, particularly in research based on case studies of specific instances of dispossession, that the people involved would be better off if they had simply been left on their own.

This thesis argues that while the idea that 'leaving the people on the ground alone' may be plausible in some parts of the world, its application in southern Africa ('Africa of the labour reserves') is problematic. The lowveld area around Chisumbanje took on many of the characteristics of the settler economies of southern African which were sustained by people's reliance on access to communal land for agricultural purposes and their access to income from employment earned outside the communal areas. However, deindustrialization following structural adjustment and the political uncertainty after land invasions at the turn of the century in Zimbabwe had a negative impact on livelihoods based on these two sources. During the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1990s agriculture subsidy programmes were suspended, institutions that supported farmers were dismantled while budgets for the public sector were significantly reduced (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012). At the same time, the system of labour migration that sustained the underwriting of agriculture with wages in Chisumbanje was also

declining. All this combined to put farming on the communal land in Chisumbanje in crisis for lack of cash inputs well before the arrival of Green Fuel (Pvt) Ltd.

The third issue I seek to address is that, given that land grabbing should be seen as part of a wider process of economic change which was having effects on the people anyway, analysis needs to go beyond simply lamenting land grabbing to look at how people respond to economic changes more broadly. For a long time, rural areas across the southern African region acted as labour reserves for the mines. Migrant workers were poised between a need to retain access to land and a need to secure a viable wage income to underwrite small-scale agricultural production. The situation has, however, undergone significant changes since at least the 1980s. Since then, the large mining corporations in South Africa have now reduced and 'casualised' their labour forces. They have outsourced production, cut down drastically on welfare provision, and move their profits offshore without hindrance (Laterza & Sharp, 2017). All of this poses serious challenges to people who have to secure a livelihood in southern Africa. Given limited land, poor job prospects and threats posed by LSLAs, life in the communal areas has become more and more precarious.

It is time to shift analysis from one based on structural changes to grounded realities as (Sharp *et al.*, 2014, p.14) observe, *'If workers in the settler mining economy were able to exploit opportunities for self-organized development, southern Africans now must explore the potential of flexible capitalism to generate a more sustainable future. The tradition of building alternatives to formal economic structures is as flexible in its own way as capitalism. If we pay attention to what people are actually doing, we could well find that this regional tradition is expanding in the era after the heyday of the mines. Flexible capitalism obliges people to be more flexible themselves.'* This thesis illuminates the fact that people in Chisumbanje were not simply victims - passive in the face of disastrous land dispossession, but active participants in fashioning new livelihoods in a southern Africa that has gone through massive changes in the way the economy is structured over the past thirty or forty years. Due to these ongoing economic changes, people had no choice but to adapt to this regime of greater flexibility, and how they do so in Chisumbanje is the subject of my final chapter.

Methodological reflections

The idea of studying large-scale land acquisitions in Zimbabwe was born out of a long interest I had in the factors influencing change in the rural landscape and in how its inhabitants' experiences of such change shape or are shaped by these factors. In Zimbabwe most people - an estimated 70% of the population – reside in the rural areas, and their livelihoods are mainly agricultural and depend on access to land and related resources (e.g. water, woodlands). Poverty is also pervasive in the rural areas with a Country Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Progress Report estimating that 76% of the population, predominantly rural, is poor and struggles to meet daily food requirements (United Nations, 2014). This partly explains why such areas have been convenient targets for poverty alleviating interventions ranging from donor-driven aid programmes to land reforms and, more recently, large-scale biofuel investments.

In 2009, I joined a humanitarian organisation which was carrying out countrywide relief and agricultural recovery interventions in Zimbabwe. Working in its research unit, I amassed experience in field data collection especially in rural and marginal areas of Zimbabwe. The data that I collected include indicators for food security, poverty, health local hazards and risks. This was when I enrolled for a Masters in Social Ecology at the University of Zimbabwe. The programme orientated me to the question of how rural people both manage and benefit from locally available natural resources.

During my routine field visits to monitor progress in humanitarian aid and livelihood recovery, I came across a village - Mateke – located in the 'deep rural area' of Mwenezi. The residents of Mateke lived in scattered households, farming cotton, sorghum, and livestock. But the conditions the people residing there experienced were harsh, characterised by high temperatures, unreliable rainfall, and lack of access to water and sanitation facilities. Residents of Mateke had resettled themselves on a wildlife ranch during the 2000 land invasions. It took three days to walk from Mateke to the nearest shop, and people who made the journey had to sleep in trees to evade marauding wild animals.

I set out to do my Masters field-research in Mwenezi in order to understand the experiences of farmers since they settled in the area in 2000, paying particular attention to the resettled farmers' attitudes towards investing and managing natural resources on their 'property'. In the course of my research I discovered that part of the land that the people of Mwenezi had occupied was in the process of being taken over by a corporate investor. This opened my study to look at corporate interest over large-scale land resources, sometimes referred to as large-scale land acquisitions or simply land grabs. My Masters study noted that despite allocation of land to poor, landless peasants during the land reform programme, a new form of land grabbing was taking place, a process led by a large business and supported by Zimbabwe's political elite.

The study also noted that the farm invasions which took place during the 2000s may have dismantled a system of private property rights, but in the absence of political and legal momentum behind granting tenure rights to land occupiers, this has rendered the 'new plot holders' vulnerable to second-wave elite- and state-sponsored land grabs. The study also noted that, land grabbing in Mwenezi and new displacement threats were impacting negatively on the resettled farmers. Investments on the plots began to decline; there was disregard for natural resources, low confidence and heightened anxiety among the resettled farmers who faced an uncertain future (Mabumbo, 2011).

In 2012, I was awarded a fellowship in a programme titled Human Economy covering broad research areas in sub-Saharan Africa. The objective of a human economy is the social reproduction of people. This approach aims at making ideas about economic behaviour and practices more relevant and applicable to most people by ensuring that it is anchored in their every day practices and local circumstances. (Hart *et al*, 2010).

Large-scale land acquisitions have consequences for people around them. Some are recipients of promises of jobs which may or may not materialise, some face displacement with promises of alternative livelihoods which, again, may or may not materialise. The PhD scholarship gave me an opportunity to build on my Masters research and explore further the dimensions around this topic of large- scale land acquisitions.

Choice of research site

My original intention was to carry out research in both Mwenezi, the site for my Masters study, and Chisumbanje, a village located 200 km north east of Mwenezi close to the Mozambique border. During my Masters fieldwork, I had unearthed the fact that the investor behind the large-scale land acquisition at Mwenezi had also acquired 50 000ha of land in Chisumbanje district operating as Green Fuels (Pvt) Ltd, and was already constructing an ethanol plant at an estimated cost of USD\$ 600 million. Using these two case studies, my idea was to carry out a comparative study. I was also open to the possibility of making comparison with other biofuel projects in South Africa or Mozambique.

In the end, however, I settled for an in-depth study of the Chisumbanje sugarcane biofuel project for three main reasons. Firstly, the Mwenezi ranch which was earmarked for biofuel developments was turned into refugee camp by the government to accommodate at least 18 000 villagers who were severely affected by floods when Tokwe Mukosi dam burst its banks and affected surrounding villages. This meant that plans for biofuel investments were temporarily set aside while the government, fearing that adverse human rights reports might emerge from the camp, stepped up bureaucratic requirements for journalists and researchers requesting access to it. On the other hand – and this is the second reason I found myself slowly but steadily opting to do research in one field site at Chisumbanje - the construction of the ethanol plant there was already complete and ethanol blended fuel became available on the market, although issues of land, labour, and the fuel itself remained contested.

The Save valley, a rain shadow in the eastern highlands where Chisumbanje is located, has generally been recognised as one the least developed regions in the country in terms of infrastructural provisions, agricultural production and general socio development, despite its rich black soils and proximity to the Save river. The underdevelopment of the communal areas makes it a convenient target for rural development initiatives such as the biofuel project. As a result of these characteristics, the third reason I chose Chisumbanje for my field work is that it fits the

narrative peddled by mainstream institutions about the availability of ‘under-utilized’ land in large parts of Africa. Several studies have noted the use of the same argument to justify large scale land acquisitions. For example, in their study on the political economy of the ProCana sugar cane ethanol plantation in Mozambique, Borrás *et al.*, (2011) made the same observation that farm land identified for the project was labelled as “idle” or under-utilized by interested institutions mainly from the state and the private sector.

Chisumbanje can be, and has been, depicted as an area where land is so abundant that appropriation of large tracts of it for purposes such as biofuel production will neither displace people nor impact negatively on their livelihood.

Research methods

American anthropologist Nader (1972) explained how she noticed that many students were concerned with the workings of major organizations and their effects on the lives of people in the societies in which they were entwined. She claimed that when studying these institutions, or “studying up”, students ‘raise important questions as to responsibility, accountability, self-regulation, or on another level, questions relating to social structure, network analysis, library research and participant observation,’ (Nader, 1972, p.287). In addition, Nader argued that attempts at studying up were ‘attempts to get behind the facelessness of a bureaucratic society, to get at the mechanisms whereby faraway corporations and large-scale industries are directing the everyday aspects of our lives,’ (ibid, p.288).

Nader’s ‘studying up’ approach inspired my methodological approach. The rationale for adopting this approach was that instead of being studied simply as ‘objects’, local peasants and others on whom ethanol project was unleashed also needed to know something about the people, investors and institutions which affected their lives. In this regard, my research focus was not limited to a mere description of the characteristics of the biofuel project. I sought to go beyond that, in order to unearth details about the investors themselves and the rationale behind their biofuel investment, as well as to engage with the actors and the institutional structures propagating large-scale land acquisitions. At the same time, I believed, this exercise would

address one of the important objectives of the study which was to understand the historical, legal, and socio-political processes shaping the biofuel development.

I joined networks of people involved in both anti-biofuel activism and biofuel advocacy. The former involved community groups such as the Platform for Youth Development and the Motoring Associations, while the latter comprised the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Green Fuel, the Ministries of Energy and Power Development and Agriculture, Mechanization and Irrigation Development, the Zimbabwe Energy Regulation Authority, the Zimbabwe Energy Council. I spent significant time in these organisations as well as in the Parliament's research division. I also attended conferences on policy relating to biofuel and other renewable energy sources. Within these bureaucratic institutions, formal and informal interviews were conducted. I made use of various documents from these organisations, including public relations documents which provided insight into the organisations' preferred self-image, and internal documents on the structure and statistics of work planned and accomplished by the organisation. These were all useful in pointing to trends and revealing what was thought of as problematic by the actors involved.

In embarking on this study, I was also interested in broader conceptual and theoretical questions on how those most affected by large-scale commercial land deals perceive and react to them and the reasons they do so. For this reason, my study aimed at producing deeper insights into the phenomenon derived from the kind of rich, contextual, and nuanced data rarely captured in surveys. I privileged an ethnographic approach, which involved sustained observation, participation in observed practices and events, collection of documents, and in-depth interviews with participants. The aim was to produce rich and detailed data on the practices and politics of the investors and the state officials, particularly about land negotiations and matters pertaining to labour, as well on the lived realities of the peasants as observed through their everyday lives and their engagements with corporate entities and the state.

Firstly, to get baseline evidence on local people, their livelihood practices and agricultural practices, I consulted historical sources. This involved visiting the National Archives in Harare, the University of Zimbabwe library and other research institutions such as Ruzivo Trust, SAPES Trust,

African Institute of Agrarian Studies, the Centre for Applied Social Sciences, and the Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association.

I also conducted interviews to get oral histories from older residents Chisumbanje on the history of the area and its inhabitants. I made six visits to Chisumbanje in all, each lasting for a minimum of two months, during which I did participant observation, and undertook formal and informal interviews and focus group discussions to understand the differentiated impacts of the land deal on local livelihoods and land uses. Combining a historical perspective and fieldwork in the area provided a strong basis for an in-depth analysis of the project.

To harness the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, rapid rural appraisal techniques were adopted. A questionnaire was designed to capture size and land-holdings, uses of land, crops grown, and harvests to understand the general performance of the out-grower scheme.

Navigating a difficult field terrain

From the beginning, I was aware of the limitations of over-relying on, or even romanticising, the 'studying up' technique. Nader did not offer much insight as to how a researcher can go about infiltrating major organizations in order to conduct research. Instead she challenged interested researchers to discover ways of doing so. She acknowledged, that 'the powerful are out of reach on a number of different planes: they don't want to be studied; it is dangerous to study the powerful; they are busy people; they are not all in one place and so on' (Nader, 1972).

'Large corporations . . . have gates, guards, and security devices . . . Even welcome visitors encounter inner lines of defense: public relations departments, 'official spokespeople', and whole levels of management trained in how to represent the company to the outside world', (Thomas, 1995, p.5-6). This is the situation that I faced when I made repeated, and in most cases unsuccessful, attempts to meet the proprietor of Green Fuel, the Chief Executive Officer of ARDA and other gatekeepers in institutions where valuable data for my study were located such as the Parliament and various Government departments. In one case I had to wait for almost six months

after encountering repeated bureaucratic procedures with executive assistants and other gate keepers in an attempt to reach two executives in Green Fuels' sugarcane production department.

I realised that in these instances being granted a formal interview, let alone attempting to do participant observation would be an uphill task. Thus my data collection in these instances became characterised by what Gusterson (1997) has termed "polymorphous engagement." Polymorphous engagement means interacting with informants across several dispersed sites, not just in local communities or company offices, and sometimes in virtual form; and it means collecting data eclectically from a disparate array of sources in many different ways (Gusterson, 1997). Polymorphous engagement preserves the pragmatic amateurism that has characterized anthropological research, but shifts it away from an obsession with participant observation (ibid).

By joining a network of mainly renewable energy advocates, researchers and media representatives, I got to know some of the informants on my list of targeted interviewees. A level of trust was established over time with these interviewees, after I had met them several times at conferences or made repeated visits to their offices. I socialized informally with them in their offices, local churches, social clubs, bars, and at football matches. This made it relatively easier to conduct both formal and informal interviews with most the 'busy and elusive' interviewees.

In the field in Chisumbanje, I took heed of Dzingirai (1992)'s caution that in a politicized environment (such as the Chisumbanje communal lands), it might not be sensible for the researcher to be seen as taking sides. He cautioned against erecting a fieldwork camp at sites about which some informants may have misgivings. Such perceived collaboration may result in lack of cooperation from those who regard the researcher as siding with the opposition. Realising that cooperating with Green Fuel would associate my research with the biofuel company and its policies towards farmers and workers, I revised an earlier decision to take up Green Fuel's offer of accommodation in Chisumbanje for the first months of field research. I resolved to station myself at a neutral venue instead.

I was not quite sure at first whether to establish my lodgings inside the villages on the communal land or outside them – perhaps in the ‘township’ where modern facilities were to be found. I was also worried about the issue of personal security. Fearful that disgruntled peasants were a suspicious and militant group liable to take law in their own hands (as evidenced by media reports of earlier clashes between the peasants and Green Fuel) I chose to establish a base at Chisumbanje ‘township’, approximately a kilometre equidistant from the Green Fuel ethanol plant and its sugarcane fields and the villages.

At my research base, I created friendly relations with several informants. I hoped that they would give me news of any activities of interest in the locality and guide me to them. I would keep my doors open to everyone - more so to my informants. I felt that by living outside the village I would be less involved, and therefore more objective in my observations and analysis of the peasants. The social environment was good. I understood the local language. In one sense I was not entirely new there since my father had spent his childhood in the area, and although I had not grown up there myself, I had visited the area several times before to see my relatives. My sojourn felt, to a certain degree, like an extended holiday as I joined in the routine activities of villagers and in some cases, kinsmen brought in various anecdotal and novel news items which they hoped were of use to the research.

Although my field work appeared to be smooth sailing in the initial stages, there was the issue of research ethics. I could not bring myself to study people without having their informed consent. They had a right to know my plans and they were entitled to privacy and dignified treatment. They also deserved to know the use to which the data gathered would be put, whether it would be used against them or to develop the area. Some people on all sides were suspicious of what I was doing, but I endeavoured to give everyone the same story about the purpose of my research and to seek their informed consent. For example, I revealed my intentions to the elders at village meetings the same way I did to the villagers when I was gathering information on their response strategies which sometimes involved illegal activities.

I also sought Informed consent when I conducted interviews both formal and informal with staff and other members of Green Fuel. Some of the interviewees viewed my research positively while others were suspicious. For instance, one of the Green Fuel managers took my research as an opportunity for a public relations exercise which would potentially result in a book about the development of the area, and readily allowed me access to certain information to which ordinary village members would not have been privy. The manager gave me reference materials and reports pertaining to the project, along with the minutes of meetings held with the local communities. Again this information was not meant for outside people. Respondents both villagers and from Green Fuel volunteered their information when they thought my research would somehow benefit them.

There were some moments during the field work when people would cancel appointments arbitrarily because they thought I was working for or against state security. Instances such as these obliged me to be more reflexive about the role 'we' as researchers play in research work in so-called 'sensitive environments'. The irony, by the end of fieldwork, was that some villagers accused me of being a spy and Green Fuel believed I had sold the company out because of my perceived closeness with the villagers. It is likely that the tension I experienced affected the way I collected information as well as the interpretation I gave to it.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 reviews literature focusing on the main themes that dominate research on this topic. First it reviews literature on large-scale land acquisition, analysing the meaning and interpretation given to the concept, and the consequences of such acquisitions for local populations. The chapter also looks at large-scale acquisitions for biofuel production and summarizes how the debate about biofuels has evolved over time

Secondly, the chapter traces the history of land and agrarian transformation in Zimbabwe over a period 100 years. Zimbabwe has a complex and controversial history of land reform, dating back

to the arrival of British settlers in 1890. Zimbabwe's accelerated 'radical' land reform in 2000 was considered the biggest in Africa and attracted significant international attention. This review will examine the complex interaction of a radical land reform programme and corporate interests over the same areas. The last part introduces the reader to the contemporary context in southern Africa that influence events in this study. This is done through focusing on a brief history of Chisumbanje and linking it with the ongoing changes in the socio economic context and state capital relations that affect the region as a whole.

Chapter 3 examines the politics and economics behind large-scale commercial biofuel investments in Zimbabwe. It unpacks the identity of the investors behind the biofuel investment and the complex story of how they came to invest in biofuel production in Zimbabwe. The chapter also seeks to explore the success or lack of success experienced by the biofuel producers in finding markets and making a return on investment over the period they have been in operation.

Chapter 4: examines the land acquisitions process in Chisumbanje and its impact on local people's livelihoods. It shows that through this project, rural people were dispossessed of their land, in some cases using force. Although the company announced they were saving ten percent of the land they acquired in this way to be distributed back to the villagers, the process of distributing this land was haphazard. Former residents and others who had not been resident in the area at all were allowed to claim plots of land, leaving less for the people who had had theirs ploughed over for sugarcane.

Chapter 5: Examines the number and quality of jobs created at Green Fuel ethanol plant and in the sugar cane fields. It shows that the jobs generated at the biofuel project were largely unskilled, short-term, and insecure. Local people who were hired got menial jobs that could not sustain their families. The chapter concludes by noting that while many local people suffered from the lack of security resulting from irregular wage employment, there were multiple trajectories of change, with some taking advantage of the stability and the predictability of a

wage to engage in wider livelihood activities beyond the estate which considerably improved their livelihoods.

Chapter 6: offers a preliminary foray into some of the initiatives taken by local people to insert themselves into the 'enclave economy' created by Green Fuel (see below). I describe efforts made by local people in the course of their everyday lives in order to fashion a livelihood, and in the process, offer an alternative perspective on some of the key underlying issues at stake. These efforts reflect show people participated in market based activities as well as in activities based more on solidarity and mutuality.

Chapter 7 summarises the main findings of the thesis and reflects on their wider implications. It focuses on the major themes discussed in the thesis; role of the state in large scale land acquisitions, land rights and livelihoods, labour in the context of land grabbing , agency and rural change. It concludes by noting that if large-scale land acquisitions by corporates continue, as the trend on international land deals suggests, then there are real and important choices to be made with important consequences for coming generations. Poor people most affected by land grabs are left with limited options except to act innovatively, off their own bat, with whatever resources that come their way as an unintended by-product of the self-interested activities of the private sector and the states.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter serves as a background to matters central to this thesis. It reviews literature on large-scale land acquisitions, the history of land and agrarian change in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, and on the ongoing changes in the socio economic context and state-capital relations with specific reference to southern Africa.

The chapter opens with a review and analysis of the meaning and interpretation given to large-scale land acquisitions, outlining the main terminological challenges that confront research on this topic. This is followed by an overview of global land grabbing (and biofuel production) highlighting core explanations and summarising how the debate has evolved over time, analytically and empirically. Beyond casting doubt on large-scale agro-investment as a strategy for rural development, most research studies tend to focus on the activities of the western-based corporations which do the land grabbing and the investing, and often portray local people affected by them as the victims of powerful forces over which they have little or no control, (Oakland Institute, 2011; GRAIN, 2008; TNI, 2011).

In the second part, i summarise the main elements of the history of land and agrarian change in Zimbabwe. The purpose of this is to preface and ground my examination of corporate interest in current large-scale biofuel investments in Zimbabwe's rural areas. This is important because unlike in most countries targeted for large scale agro-investments, Zimbabwe had, in 2000 started to implement a land reform programme which involved the occupation of large commercial farms (mainly white owned) by smallholder farmers (mostly black). The occupations were led mainly by former freedom fighters of Zimbabwe's liberation war of the 1960s and 1970s and attracted international attention with terms such as 'grabbing' or invasion often used to reflect the violence that characterised its implementation its impact on local communities. Only

a few academics have contemplated either linking the ongoing land and agrarian reforms in Zimbabwe to the recent surge in transnational land deals or exploring the possibility that such reforms can potentially open up avenues for making new alternative livelihoods for people affected by them.

The last part attempts to synthesise the above literature by situating the Chisumbanje area within the national and regional context. It describes events and other ongoing processes that are influencing contemporary life in southern Africa. The main point is that the ongoing changes in state–capital relations has had an effect on the region’s once centralised economies which now appear to be fragmenting. This is posing challenges to millions of people in southern Africa who had been accustomed to subsist in its diverse economies. In this section, I bring together multiple perspectives on labour, economy, money, migration, urbanisation and political institutions in an attempt to describe the specific details of the country and area under study.

This chapter concludes by arguing for an approach that engages methodically with historical, political and social contextualisation in the analysis of current land transactions. In addition, there is a need to pay attention to local people as potential agents in large scale land acquisitions, instead of assuming that they are powerless victims of a situation which they have no control over. This approach leads to a nuanced analysis of how people respond and adapt to the changing context and local circumstances.

Land scale land acquisitions

This section reviews literature on land scale land acquisitions, sometimes referred to as the global land grab phenomenon starting with the meaning of land itself.

The meaning and multiple uses of land

The main focus of the literature on large-scale land acquisitions is on transactions that involves the buying or leasing of large acres of land for the production of biofuel, fibre crops or food mainly for the export market. Several reports estimates that large-scale land acquisitions are happening

at an extensive scale m (Grain, 2008; World Bank, 2010). However such reports should be treated with caution since most projects rarely take off and in most cases the data is unreliable due to the secret nature of the land deals and practical methodological challenges (Anseeuw, 2012).

More reasons why it is difficult to ascertain the extent of LSLA is that, 'the details of most investment projects are shrouded in secrecy, corporate reports are often vague, the projects themselves are constantly changing, and there exists no (accessible) land deal inventory that registers every investment that occurs,' (Goetz, 2015). Despite their power, influence and international networks, even international institutions have failed to give a correct picture of the details of land acquired. A World Bank Report noted with some frustration the 'astonishing lack of awareness of what is happening on the ground' (World Bank, 2010, p. 2). Before delving into the detail of large-scale land acquisitions, it is important to understand the significance of land questions and the meaning of the term 'land' itself in its broader sense.

Human beings have been involved in conflicts over land since time immemorial. Land is a source of many protracted conflicts and wars around the world. This is because land is more than just territory; it is home to people and animals, it is a source of water and a place to grow trees, grass and food crops. It is important to note that there are several activities beyond agriculture that man do with land.

Below are some of the ways in which people, especially in Africa's rural areas make use of land and land rights:

- 'to live cheaply, often while retreating temporarily from expensive urban life;
- to hunt or forage, collect firewood, medicinal and other useful plants, and other natural resources;
- to provide a home base for trading;
- to bury their dead properly, and to properly respect, remember and tend to them;
- to bury the umbilical cords of their children;

- to anchor kinship and other social networks by providing a place of connection and return for an interrelated group of people;
- to reward political allies through processes of allocation or sale;
- to establish continuity with the past, including, but not only, via ancestors;
- to shore up male control over women;
- to underpin the powers of traditional authorities;
- to have a place to rest and to be cared for when ill; and
- last, but not least, to symbolise collective identity, belonging, pride and liberation’,
(Ferguson, 2013, p.168)

The above list shows that what people do with land is diverse and complex. ‘Land is bound up with a range of social processes and emotions, and cannot simply be reduced to the agrarian question’ (Ferguson, 2013, p. 168). It is also important to decipher the differences between land and other resources. Three primary differences are as follows; land does not move, land uses vary from one piece of land to another and lastly some control is needed to govern land access and utilisation (Hall, 2013). The latest struggles over land and the new wave of land grabbing is closely connected to most of these characteristics of land.

Drivers of contemporary large-scale land acquisitions

Besides land having multiple uses, there is simple economical interest in it as a secure investment. Since the food, finance, and fuel crisis which started in 2008, the demand for land by foreign investors has been rapidly growing, mainly in Africa but also in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe (Anseeuw et al., 2012). One of the main drivers for the land rush is the growing search for a vertical integration of global supply chains in agricultural-food companies (De Schutter, 2011). A sharp increase in the prices of agricultural commodities provided incentives for investors to rediscover the potential of the agricultural sector as a secure and profitable form of investment (Cotula et al., 2009; Grain, 2008).

Investments are coming mainly from countries dependent on food imports. These countries were severely exposed to the vagaries of the volatile global food markets in 2007 – 2008. Since most of these countries can be regarded as ‘financially secure’ but ‘food and land insecure’, they began an active search for suitable land abroad for the production of food crops to supply their local markets (De Schutter, 2011).

Private sector companies also saw land deals as an opportunity for expanding their investments in commercial agriculture for profits (Cotula, 2013). Another main driver for large scale land investments has been the search for alternative fuels. This realisation came after the 2007-08 fuel crisis, which ignited debates about the long term sustainability of an overdependence on fossil fuels given threats posed by climate change (Anseeuw et al., 2012, p.26; Harvey and Pilgrim, 2011). It is against this background that biofuels emerged as a ‘viable’ alternative with potential to produce environmentally friendly and possibly cheaper fuel. Countries in the European Union were some of the first to jump onto this potential by enacting legislation with targets to cover 10 % of transport fuels with renewable energy sources, mainly biofuels, by 2020 (Cotula et al., 2011, p.102). National governments too, keen to develop and modernise agriculture, create employment and stimulate rural development also embraced biofuels and enacted national legislations to promote their use (Lavers, 2012).

Definitions of land grabbing

Land grabbing, while it appears to be an effective terminology favoured mainly by activists, is not a simple term with a universal definition that can be easily understood by most people. This is because in most countries, few people have formal land titles making user rights unclear and contested. As a result, land grabbing takes on different forms which influences the way it is characterised. Land grabbing has been defined as ‘enclosure of commons’ (Holmen, 2015). Others tend to summarise by referring to land grabbing as a ‘concentration of decision-making about how land is to be used’ (Aubry *et al.*, 2012), viewed by others as a necessary condition for enhanced agricultural productivity and rural development. In its simplest form, land grabbing

implies that land is taken away from smallholder farmers usually by people from outside using illegal means (La Via Campesina, 2012).

Land grabbing has been described as a neo-colonial scramble for Africa (Borras & Franco, 2010), while Zoomers (2010) interpreted it as 'foreignisation' whereby capital travels far and wide and in the process restructure global agriculture (Akram-Lodhi, 2012). International institutions and other less critical researchers use terms such as 'acquisitions' or 'large-scale investments in land' (FAO, 2009; Deininger et al., 2011).

The term 'land grabbing' has been labelled inappropriate since it suggests unlawful or immoral behaviour while in most cases the deals will be done according to national laws and regulations, (Hall, 2011). Land deals in most countries can be classified as legal because in most cases it is the host country governments which decide on investment deals (Hallam, 2011). In addition to making decisions on investment deals, most governments especially in Africa are usually the custodians of land who ostensibly hold titles in the interests of the people who are only granted limited customary individual or communal use-rights (ibid).

While it is plausible to argue that some land transactions are legal, the structure of the deals and terms of the contracts needs qualifying. In this case, 'confiscation' can be regarded as a more suitable term than 'grabbing', because 'to confiscate someone's property implies that the process has both legal and government support and therefore is legitimate to some extent' (Djurfeldt, 2011, p. 15). Although both government involvement and legal endorsement can be at the centre of defining land grabs, there are other fundamental political issues of national pride and sovereignty, legitimacy and nation building that come to the fore, particularly on the African context.

In sub-Saharan Africa, political processes are often contested and the role of the state in rural areas is controversial. As a result, the issue of large scale land acquisitions is not only an issue of small holder farmers vs large scale commercial agriculture entities, it also reflects the 'long-

standing and ongoing struggles between chiefs and states' (Jayne et al., 2013, p. 22). A good example is a case that was reported in November 2011 when a group of 'peasants and indigenous people' challenged the Malian government's decision to lease large tracts of land to private investors, pointing out that 'communities had occupied land for generations; how could a Mali state which had "only existed since the 1960s" claim sovereignty?'¹.

Main actors in large-scale land acquisitions

Several of those who view large-scale agriculture as a viable development approach are the very people pushing for large-scale land acquisitions, principally international financial institutions, especially the World Bank (Akram-Lodhi, 2012). Other financial institutions associated with promoting such acquisitions include the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), with their particular focus on sub-Saharan Africa (McMichael, 2013).

Beyond financial institutions, rich and transitioning countries are also behind the expansion of large-scale land acquisitions. European countries are actively involved in seeking farmland for growing food and energy crops; Germany, and Italy and the UK have been mentioned as the pacesetters in this respect, with total acquisitions of more than 3m ha by 2011, over 80 per cent of which was earmarked for biofuel production (Schoneveld, 2011).

In the south, India, Libya and Saudi Arabia are reported to account for over a million ha of land acquired in sub-Saharan African countries such as Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan, Zambia and Ethiopia. Among these countries, Ethiopia is shown to have the highest number of foreign investors (Schoneveld, 2011). Although in some of these projects there is scope for the host country to benefit, issues of land rights and access can result in local disputes over land control and access and food sovereignty for smallholder farmers.

¹ 'New Landlessness and the Lessons of Biafra', *Pambazuka News*, 1 February 2012.

In addition to financial institutions and rich countries, foundations and individuals have been reported to be promoting large-scale land acquisitions. The Sultan of Dubai, Bill Gates, Richard Branson and Paul Allen have previously submitted financial proposals towards the purchase of large tracts of land in African countries including Tanzania, Sudan, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Timbo, 2015). At the local level, entrepreneurs and other elites in most African countries are also actively involved in the scramble to secure valuable land resources or to be part of the proposed land deals. The main actors that often play a leading role in land negotiation have been traditional village chiefs and state bureaucrats, who will either be under pressure from central government to facilitate the land transfers or they do so for personal gain (Borras & Franco, 2012).

African lands and the concept of 'idle, underutilised land'

Contemporary large-scale land acquisitions have been justified by their using idle, under-utilised and uninhabited marginal land (Matondi et al., 2011; McMichael, 2013). The definition of what constitutes such land has remained largely contested. In most cases terms such as 'uncultivated' or 'degraded' land is deployed to justify the occupation of communal land without considering multiple uses of land by local users (Oakland, 2011). There is controversy over what is considered unutilised or under-utilised land, especially for African countries with huge tracts of fallow land and long fallow periods (Matondi et al., 2011, p.25). Little is known of how this perception of African land came about.

Most parts in sub-Saharan Africa have been classified as unsuitable for agriculture for a long time, except for a few areas. This is because deserts, rainforests and arid lands occupy large parts of Africa. The African continent is regarded as a home to some of the most marginal and unproductive soils in the world (Bationo et al., 2006), in addition to unreliable rainfall patterns, periodic heat waves and limited capacity for irrigation (FAO, 1987). It has therefore been concluded that Africa has limited availability of suitable and irrigable land.

In contrast to the conventional wisdom, recent literature is now suggesting a different story. . Africa is now being portrayed as region with an abundance of natural resources and fertile soils (e.g. World Bank, 2009). Furthermore, land in Africa is now being labelled as 'affordable' and appropriate for large scale commercial agriculture (Deininger, 2011).

There have been attempts to make scientific analysis of land use patterns in Africa. .One such study was carried out by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) who used GIS and space technology which estimated that there are 445 million hectares (almost a third of the acreage currently being farmed) worldwide which are not under cultivation or forestry activities that are suitable for rain-fed agriculture. (Djurfeldt, 201, p. 17). The IIASA report further estimates that there millions of hectares of agro-ecologically suitable land currently not in use thus suggesting that foreign investments in African farmland is a viable option.

While they might be scientific basis through satellite and aerial imagery to determine land availability, these techniques do not document user rights and the institutions that govern land access and control on the ground (HLPE, 2011). The limitations of using arial photography and other techniques which view land from an elevated position is that the land may appear to be 'idle' but in reality it is often not unused at all. This is because in communal areas, land has multiple and complex usage rights and, probably it will be, under temporary fallow in a shifting cultivation system. People in communal areas have flexible yet complex land use patterns in which some areas are left for grazing and are designated not suitable to be put under the plough. People have different user rights and ideas about land and what they do with it is not always obvious. It is important before dismissing a piece of land as 'not viable' to ask, 'viable for what?,' (Cousins& Scoones, 2010).

A case study carried in three countries Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Mozambique, revealed that land that was leased in large scale commercial agriculture deals was under shifting cultivation rotation, an ecologically sustainable system that poor smallholder farmers use to restore soil nutrients (Cotula et al., 2009). In most cases, it seems as if traditional rural livelihood activities

are neglected when decisions about large scale land deals are being made. As a result large scale land acquisitions leads to the destruction of valuable forest resources. Yet some of these resources such as tree barks, leaves and roots are an important source useful source for traditional medicine and support other livelihood activities. (Matondi et al., 2011; Von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009).

Even the deals documented by the Land Matrix database, which shows that most of the land targeted was already being used for crop production, the database does not reveal much about the overall availability and quality of (potential) farmland.

Biofuel production and the global land grab

One of the main drivers of contemporary large-scale land acquisitions is the search for sustainable energy sources. Biofuels have been identified as a viable alternative to meet future energy needs for society, and as having multiple advantages. It is argued that biofuel production has the potential to improve the environment, reduce dependency on fossil fuels and revitalise the socio-economic conditions of rural communities in developing countries by providing employment opportunities, access to new markets and helping with expanding agriculture production technology (Dubois, 2008; Amigun et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is argued that increased purchasing power and decreased vulnerability to food and energy shocks would lead to significant welfare gains.

However, despite these arguments, there is significant disagreement on the net social, economic and environmental impact of biofuel production. Several research studies have revealed that biofuels have a negative impact on food security for growing populations (FAO, 2008, 2009; Chakraborty, 2008; Pimentel et al., 2009) with some attributing the 2008 world food price hikes to the increase in the area of land being reserved for biofuel production (Mitchell, 2008; Bailey, 2008).

Studies from technical fields such as energy, the environmental and plant sciences have also questioned the carbon balance of biofuels (Creutzig & Kammen, 2010) and have so far revealed that biofuels actually have aggregate environmental costs that are higher than those for fossil fuel (Scharlemann & Laurance, 2008; Fargione et al., 2008). Other studies show that biofuels actually yield less energy than they consume in production (Shattuck, 2009). A study carried out by the FAO argues that biofuel production cannot to any significant degree improve the energy security of developed countries because achieving this would require an impossibly vast allocation of land (Eide, 2008). Research studies indicate that first-generation biofuel feed stocks are highly inefficient sources of fuel energy which actually lead to an increase in global carbon emissions and require huge expanses of land to make any significant contribution to global energy supply (Ernsting, 2007; White & Dasgupta, 2010).

Furthermore, first-generation feed stocks have been found to be less efficient to such an extent that they will be replaced by other technologies within a decade or two (Evans, 2008). If this is true, then the current venture into biofuels is simply a way of passing the environmental costs of rich countries and elites on to lower income countries and the poor. Rao (2008) observes that the fuel needs of the middle class with their consumerism and rising demand for energy are going to be met only by marginalising the poor people further. The nightmare scenario these projects create is when capital abandons these land-intensive schemes in search of other more profitable ventures elsewhere, thereby leaving degraded environments and mono crop plantations with nothing productive to show except poor plantation employees, displaced farmers or abandoned contract farmers (White & Dasgupta, 2010).

State agricultural policy and smallholder farmers

A study by a consortium of 40 organisations working on a database that documents the size of large-scale land deals has concluded that the corporate thirst for land which is fuelling the dispossession and marginalisation of the rural poor is likely to continue for some time (Anseeuw et al., 2012). But why would such a trend continue? To understand this question it is necessary to examine why governments in the developing world are actively involved in land deals that

require extensive land resources that may result in the displacement of its citizens or destruction of the environment.

The performance of smallholder agriculture in developing countries has been on a downward spiral for the last decade and governments neither had the capacity nor intention to intervene decisively to revitalise it (White and Dasgupta, 2010). As a result, poverty has remained pervasive in rural areas. This can be attributed to the negative 'impact of neoliberal trade regimes on markets for smallholder crops, stagnant productivity in African agriculture, or the increasing shift of 'de-agrarianising' peasant households to non-farming activities, agriculture and the rural sector are in crisis' (Gulay, 2008, p. 16). In her study of farmer suicides in rural India, Vasavi (2012, p.5) came to the conclusion that they were 'situational acts which are a result of the vulnerable positions of marginalised agricultural households, caught in a web of risks and whose distress remains unrecognised and unresolved by an uncaring political regime'.

The solutions proffered to the challenges facing agriculture in the global south have come in the form of a standardised market-driven policy packages prescribed mainly by multilateral organisations. The World Bank in particular has played a prominent and destructive role in setting up failed agricultural policies across Africa. Although there were impressive outcomes in the form of high yields in African maize and other commodities resulting from state subsidies in the 1970s, the World Bank's prescriptions in the 1980s overturned such gains with economic shock therapy. Under structural adjustment conditionalities of the 1980s, the World Bank promoted high land rents and high concentrations of ownership in fewer hands, and encouraged cuts in services and subsidies by compliant African governments (Havnevik et al., 2008). This was done at a time when the USA, Canada and Europe maintained very large subsidies for their farming sectors, maximising western comparative advantage and the resulting harm to African agricultural producers (ibid.). These subsidies contributed significantly to the decline in the performance of agriculture in Africa and rendered smallholder farming on the continent untenable. .

The solutions offered to challenges faced in agriculture bring to the fore competing narratives on how agriculture should be organised. On the extreme end, there are advocates for a large commercial farms who thought to have a comparative advantages in a globalised economy, and these have been often be used as justifications for large-scale corporate deals (Collier, 2008). In its 2008 report *Agriculture for Development*, the World Bank envisaged a dualistic agrarian economy, with large-scale farms at the centre of production to supply for the markets, smallholder farmers become contracted out growers while the former peasants provide wage employment to the new estates and plantations (White & Dasgupta, 2010). Researchers have come to the conclusion that because of neoliberalism, such a situation is an inevitable extension of global capital into rural economies with implication on agrarian relations in rural areas. (Sender & Johnston, 2004). National governments, investors and donor agencies seem to embrace and promote this idea.

The dangers of an agri-business-oriented vision for agriculture, even with a provision to include smallholder farmers in out grower schemes, is that it threatens the existence of 500 million small farmers, pastoralists, and forest users globally, (White & Dasgupta, 2010). They are expected to upgrade themselves technologically in order to become strategic players in a market with other competitive and fast developing value chains. Those who fail to cope up with the demands of competitive markets may end up quitting agriculture completely or forced to retreat to non-farm livelihood activities or migrate to the urban sector (World Bank, 2008). This model, which envisages the parallel existence of large farms and smallholders with both hooked into large agribusiness nuclei, fails to acknowledge that such a dualistic model does not present a fair playing ground especially on the part of small holder farmers who may struggle to access niche markets. On the other hand, there is mounting evidence from Zimbabwe's land reform experiences where some smallholder farmers who received plots were successful in acquiring new assets and producing for the market, despite numerous constraints (Scoones et al., 2010; Mabumbo, 2011; Mutopo, 2011, Hanlon et al., 2012).

Local impact of large-scale agro-investments

The current literature on the impact of large-scale agro-investments is so far inconclusive. Despite the importance of this discussion for the development of large scale commercial land deals very few case studies have made comparative analysis of different projects. Only a few authors have made attempts to summarize the local impact of LSLA in developing countries.

With a specific focus to the years 2008-2013, Hufe & Heuermann (2017) have documented some of the social consequences of LSLA on local populations for projects which were implemented between 2008 and 2013. The analysis yielded the following impacts of LSLA on livelihoods; countries in east Africa such Tanzania and Kenya, local people lost farming land without appropriate compensation. In West Africa, a Ghanaian project had mixed outcomes; land scarcity lead to significant out-migration; disruption of livelihoods and the expansion of social infrastructure. In southern Africa, large scale agricultural projects in Mozambique and Zambia resulted in displacement and lack of adequate employment creation. In South Africa income diversification yielded and increase in the revenue for contract farmer's (Hufe & Heuermann, 2017).

Overall, most case studies revealed that LSLA had negative overall impacts on local livelihoods. These results show that leasing large parts or parcelling out large tracts of land to private investors may not be a viable strategy for rural development.

Land and agrarian change in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe

This section reviews the literature on the history of land and agrarian change in Zimbabwe. The first part locates the historical roots of the land question and traces the changing narratives and debates that followed Zimbabwe's controversial agrarian transformation since the arrival of British settlers in 1890. This period was marked by land alienation and reallocation as the African inhabitants lost most of the fertile lands, until 1980 when the new government initiated a slow and negotiated land reform and redistribution process.

The second part illuminates how land issues remained at the centre of Zimbabwe's development trajectory even after its independence in 1980. It also shows how residual anti-settler sentiments about land ownership triggered dramatic land reclamation by the African population at the start of the twenty-first century. The year 2000 marked the beginning of an accelerated land reform programme which saw the occupation of white-owned farms by black occupants, an exercise that made international headlines.

What similarities can be deciphered from the country's 's long history of agrarian change and the recent wave of land grabs which have an international dimension and are driven by interests other than poverty reduction? This section helps to answer this question by providing an important context to the history of colonial land policy and associated dispossession in Zimbabwe.

Beyond juxtaposing the discussion on large-scale biofuel investments on the current context in Zimbabwe and pre-independence land policy and associated dispossession, the last part looks at one specific community, Chisumbanje, and shows how state land policies played out in this particular area.

Historical roots of the land question in Zimbabwe

It is now four decades since Zimbabwe gained political independence from British settler colonial rule. Despite this achievement, land remains, as it has always been, a highly emotive and political issue. This has been true for over a century. This issue has its roots in the colonial period when in 1888 Rudd persuaded Lobengula, the Ndebele king, to sign a land concession which paved the way for the British South Africa Company's (BSAC) occupation of the country (Moyana, 1984). In 1890 Cecil John Rhodes' pioneer column hoisted the Union Jack over Mashonaland and claimed the country under a royal charter granted by the British government (Mlambo, 2005). Ironically, the royal charter made no specific mention of land ownership (Moyana, 1984). After 1893, when hopes for striking gold in Mashonaland faded, the BSAC turned its attention to the tempting lands

of Matabeleland, initially as payment to soldiers, and later for sale to white settlers for profit (Palmer, 1977).

Even after the first settlers arrived in the 1890s, Africans were relatively economically self-sufficient and produced enough agricultural products to feed themselves. (Mlambo 2005, 2014). They were therefore not keen to work on the recently established colonial white farms, making it difficult for the settlers to secure the labour they needed. White settler farmers had to devise strategies to undermine African self-sufficiency and 'attract' Africans to wage employment. These strategies included forced labour, dispossessing Africans of their cattle, requiring them to pay various taxes and, most importantly, systematically depriving them of their best land and confining them to marginal, unproductive areas that would become labour reservoirs for the growing colonial economy (Mlambo, 2005).

In 1893 the land commission appointed by the colonial government to recommend future land policy suggested that the lands in the sandy, arid regions of Gwai, Tsholotsho and Nkai should be designated as African reserves. Consequently, in 1894 Africans in Matabeleland were forcibly relocated from their traditional home areas to newly established African reserves in the arid, malarial regions of Gwaai and Shangani while the land they vacated was allocated to incoming white settlers (Palmer, 1977). In 1898, another Southern Rhodesia Order in Council issued by the British government empowered the BSAC to determine what land would be allocated to Africans for occupation and agricultural activities in future, thereby codifying racial segregation and entrenching the dispossession of Africans by incoming settlers (Moyana 1984).

By the outbreak of WW1, there were 752,000 Africans occupying 21,390,080 acres of land, while a mere 23,730 white settlers owned 19,032,320 acres (Mlambo, 2005). As more and more immigrants from England arrived after the war in response to the Southern Rhodesia and British governments' campaign to encourage white immigration into the country, further African land was alienated for the settlers' use.

By locating the origins of land alienation, this study shows how Africans lost their customary rights to ownership of land and how the principle of land segregation which was a common feature among many former settler colonies in southern Africa brought this loss about. Moyana (1984) traces the origins of the principle of land segregation in Southern Rhodesia to Shepstone's locations in Natal around the middle of the nineteenth century. The principle was subsequently adopted as a necessary ingredient of native policy in Rhodesia. Land was the most precious commodity among both the Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe; it was the foremost value in traditional society prior to the advent of colonial rule. It was the loss of lands suitable for cultivation and for pasture that created the discontent that found expression in the uprisings of the later nineteenth century. Land was at the heart of the first 1896-97 liberation struggle and of the second liberation struggle in the 1960s which gave birth to an independent Zimbabwe in 1980. It continues to play a pivotal role to the present day.

Between the advent of European settler occupation and independence, Zimbabwe's indigenous population was deprived of most of its fertile land. At independence in 1980, 15 million hectares of predominantly good quality land was owned by about 6,100 families of European descent and 16.4 million hectares of less fertile land was occupied by nearly 800,000 indigenous families (Mlambo, 2005). It is against this background that there were high hopes that upon gaining independence the question of disparities in land-holding and forms of tenure between the two groups would be tackled once and for all. In response to this political pressure arising from the independence euphoria and to the need to increase crop production in order to secure rural livelihoods, the government embarked on an ambitious land reform and resettlement programme in September 1980. The programme aimed at redistributing land to approximately 18,000 families especially to those in overcrowded rural areas over a period of five years (Palmer, 1990).

At the same time, the government was conscious of the need not to jeopardise large-scale commercial farming. In the Lancaster House constitutional negotiations, the government had succumbed to the demand from commercial farmers and their allies regarding the need to

guarantee agriculture's contribution to the national economy. The commercial farmers, in alliance with transnational capital, argued persuasively that there should be only limited land redistribution; they insisted that there was a need to maintain agriculture's role as a source of food, industrial raw materials, employment, and foreign investment (Mumbengegwi, 1988, p.158).

The Lancaster House constitutional negotiations therefore impeded wholesale land redistribution (Palmer, 1990; Moyo, 1995; Tshuma, 1997). The Lancaster House constitution contained a clause (section 16) which prohibited the compulsory redistribution of land and required the acquiring authority to give reasonable notice of intention to acquire particular properties. Land could be acquired only for certain purposes: for defence, public morality, public health, law and order and town and country planning (Tshuma 1997). Added to the restrictions on the purposes for which land could be acquired legally, the concept of 'willing-seller, willing-buyer' compounded the limitations of the post-independence Land Reform and Resettlement Programme, since it allowed whites who wished to keep their farms to do so. Moyo (1998) argued that the government's initial land policy was contradictory and hesitant, and that limited financial support was provided for the implementation of land acquisition and resettlement.

Any redistribution of land was therefore bound to be slow and expensive. In the first decade of independence, land redistribution fell far short of the government's own target, with only 52,000 out of a targeted 160,000 families having been resettled by 1989 (Palmer, 1990). White commercial farmers numbering an estimated 4,500 continued to own no less than 42 % of the country's total land area (representing 70 % of the most productive land) (ibid.). But the obligation to proceed on a 'willing buyer, willing seller' basis expired in 1990, and two years later the Land Acquisition Act was passed, making the compulsory acquisition of farms possible (Kinsey, 2004). The process was still slow, however, partly because of continuing resistance from white farmers. Pressure was also brought to bear by international donors and western governments, at a time when the government was highly dependent on them for support in the context of the debilitating economic structural adjustment programmes that Zimbabwe had

begun to implement in 1990 (Mlambo, 2014; see also Angus Selby, 2006, on white farmer politics).

The Fast-Track Land Redistribution Programme.

The second phase of the land reform programme started in 1998 with the aim of redistributing at least 5 million hectares to 91000 households from communal areas (Chaumba et al., 2003). The basic objectives included reducing poverty, increasing agricultural GDP, promoting environmentally sustainable land use and enhancing conditions for peace and stability. The 1998 donor conference on land reform however failed to come up with an agreed land reform and resettlement package.

Two decades after independence more than six million indigenous black people continued to live in Zimbabwe's marginal rural lands, the communal lands, which have poor soils and unreliable rainfall, while a mere 4,500 mainly white large-scale farmers dominated the country's productive land (Marongwe, 2003). This was clearly a situation that was potentially explosive should politicians have exploited the longstanding African resentment over land tenure for their own purposes. This is precisely what happened in the year 2000, when landless black people in the rural areas started to seize white-owned farmland.

The dramatic developments around land which started in 2000 cannot be explained solely in terms of events in the rural areas or the agricultural sector. They were a product of a wider crisis of livelihoods and poverty which was affecting both urban and rural Zimbabweans. Sachikonye (2002) traces the roots of the economic crisis to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) of the early 1990s, itself a response to the fiscal crisis of the 1980s. The structural adjustment programme promised economic growth and employment, but left the economy in a much weaker position than before. Between 1997 and 2000 the economy entered a period of 'sustained meltdown' which can be related to a complex range of factors, notable amongst them the paying out of vast amounts of money in 1997 as compensation to the war veterans. This pay-out precipitated a major budgetary shortfall and a decline in the currency and led the government

to embark on a mission to assist in the Democratic Republic of the Congo civil war in order to recoup its losses (Lahiff, 2003).

By 2001 the economy was shrinking dangerously. Hyperinflation had set in and public sector debt, both foreign and domestic, was spiralling out of control. This was accompanied by an upsurge in corruption at high levels. The economic meltdown, Sachikonye (2002) argues, intensified an unfolding social crisis, characterised by growing unemployment, dramatic increases in poverty and inequality, and massive food shortages. The drought of 2001-2, the third since Zimbabwe's independence, greatly exacerbated the problems. It resulted in widespread crop failures and dangerously low strategic grain reserves. The government seemed incapable of implementing effective relief efforts (Lahiff, 2003). The HIV-AIDS pandemic, which had devastating effects on the rural population, must be added to this list of problems.

The economic crisis was clearly both a cause and an effect of the political crisis experienced in Zimbabwe, although factors beyond the government's control such as shifts in world markets and recurring droughts played a part. Deteriorating socio-economic conditions led to growing discontent with the ZANU-PF government, fuelling widespread perception that the country was being run by an authoritarian elite that seemed intent on furthering its private interests and was determined to hang on to power at all costs.

The temperature of politics in Zimbabwe had been greatly raised by a series of general strikes in 1997 and 1998 over economic and political grievances. This saw the emergence of the first credible opposition to ZANU-PF in nearly 20 years in the form of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), mass mobilisation against the government's proposed constitutional changes, the government's defeat in the referendum in February 2000 and its near loss in the parliamentary elections in June 2001. The 2001 election results precipitated calls for the president's impeachment (Moore, 2001; Sachikonye, 2002).

Against this background of economic and political crisis, the land question remained the defining issue confronting the Mugabe regime (Lahiff, 2003). The land question was invested with great symbolic and practical significance by Mugabe's supporters and opponents alike, both at home and abroad. The war veteran's movement re-emerged at a critical point in Zimbabwe's post-independence history, launching a direct challenge to the government over land and compensation for their participation in the liberation struggle. The government bowed to the veterans' pressure, announcing a one-off payment of Z\$50,000, (then about £3000) and a Z\$2,000 (then about £125) per month pension for life for each veteran (Kriger 2003; see also Human Rights Watch, 2002). Buoyed by this success, the war veterans adopted the national land question as their own agenda and spearheaded a violent campaign of land seizures and occupations (Chaumba, 2006). The war veterans soon came to enjoy the support of a wide range of social groups, including sections of the rural population. In the absence of a viable political opposition for much of the 1990s, rural people looked to the veterans' movement to give voice to a range of demands (Lahiff, 2003; see also Sadomba, 2011, on the war veterans).

According to the UNDP report (2002), the government announced the formal implementation of an 'accelerated land reform programme' in July 2000, stating that it intended to acquire more than 3,000 farms for redistribution to indigenous black farmers. Between June 2000 and February 2001 a total of 2,706 farms, covering over six million hectares, were gazetted for acquisition. Various reasons were given for hastening the designation and acquisition of properties, and the government sought to employ a variety of controversial policy tools in order to justify its action in amending the law (Saruchera, 2002). The amendments were designed to legalise the government's land policy.

The Fast Track Land Redistribution Programme (FTLRP) redistributed agricultural land held mainly by white commercial farmers, to black smallholder farmers and peasant families and other middle scale farmers (Moyo et al., 2009; Scoones et al., 2010; Moyo, 2011). The FTLRP attracted international commentary. The exercise was criticised for being violent, selective and the partisan nature of the process especially on the basis that most beneficiaries were aligned to the

ruling Zanu Pf party (see Hammar et al., 2003; Hellum & Derman, 2004; Raftopolous, 2009; Karumbidza, 2004). Other scholars chose to examine details of the distribution of land and the cumulative impact of land reform (Mandizadza, 2009; Matondi, 2010).

Only a few academics have examined the potentially positive effects that land reform could have on rural development and agrarian transformation (Bernstein, 2005; Moyo & Yeros, 2005; Mamdani, 2008). Recent studies have attempted to document the performance of the newly resettled farmers. Some of these studies have shown that resettled farmers were indeed deserving to receive the land and have managed to acquire assets and transform their lives and rural economies (Scoones et al., 2010; Mabumbo, 2011; Hanlon et al., 2013).

Brief review of precarious livelihoods and agency

Southern Africa's centralised economies are undergoing severe transformation. For more than a century the migrant labour system supplying the mines of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, the Zambian Copper Belt and Katanga in the Congo, dominated its economy. Mining once created millions of jobs. The wages and welfare they provided had effects that spread well beyond the industry itself. This is no longer happening as large-scale wage labour in the region's centres of capitalist production appears to have disappeared overnight. This wider fragmentation influenced migration patterns and the academic preoccupations which had accompanied it. Earlier scholarly focus on labour migration, the 'productivity' historiography of 'the Africa of the labour reserve' has given way to research topics such as trade networks (e.g. Andersson, 2006), or identity and 'abjection' in the neoliberal world order (Ferguson, 1999), and human economy and agency (Laterza & Sharp, 2017).

The way in which people especially in economies which have been undergoing restructuring for the past few years respond to these changes have been discussed elsewhere in the context of labour and economy. (Standing, 2011). The discussion has focused on the emergency of the "precariat". The precariat has been variously defined as an 'army of unemployed and a detached group of socially ill misfits living off the dregs of society', 'people who have minimal trust

relationships with capital or the state', 'a distinctive class with a truncated status' or 'a romantic free spirit who rejects norms of the old working class steeped in stable labour' (ibid.: 11 P.12). The precariat does not feel part of a solidaristic labour community. This intensifies a sense of alienation and instrumentality in what they have to do. The precariat knows there is no future in what they are doing. To be 'out' tomorrow would come as no surprise, and to leave might not be bad, if another job or burst of activity beckoned (ibid.).

Some studies of precarity suggest that it is largely a case study of the consequences of recent interventions such as land grabs – the corporations take people's land and this plunges the victims into a situation of precarity. However, precarity means different things to different people. In Europe and North America, precarity is applied to describe new forms of employment which leave employees exposed and vulnerable. For instance, precarious existence in Germany is used to refer not only to temporary workers but also to the jobless who have no hope of social integration. In Italy, the *precariato* has been taken to mean more than just people doing casual labour and with low incomes, implying a precarious existence as a normal state of living. In Japan, a country with a relatively low level of income inequality, the precariat lacks the rewards of socio-economic security associated with higher status positions in society (Standing, 2011, p.9).

While there is mounting evidence that the recent changes in the socio-economic context caused by aggressive neoliberalism and austerity is creating similarities between the North and the South, the condition of insecure labour and livelihoods are not necessarily new in southern Africa (Larmer, 2017). From the early days in colonial southern Africa, Africans were confronted with land dispossession and harsh measures to compel them to work without security on farms and in towns. As a result, most Africans have extensive experience of fashioning livelihoods under considerable constraint. Even though farm workers in colonial Zimbabwe or miners in the Witwatersrand or the central African Copper Belt experienced harsh working conditions, they were still able to sustain their families despite the challenges they experienced in their insecure workplaces. Miners and their families relied on solidarity and extended families to overcome some of those insecurities.

Migrant workers and their families worked round the political restrictions placed on them, producing and distributing wealth in alternative economies of their own making that afforded them a measure of autonomy from the structures imposed by settler rule. From the perspective of individual workers, these alternative economies were aimed at 'building the house' – not just keeping members of the household in rural areas alive, but facilitating their involvement in economic activities that served to construct meaningful lives for the worker and his dependents, and to ensure the social reproduction of the household over time (Murray, 2008).

Livelihood trajectory in Chisumbanje

This section focuses on account the development practice and history context of the host community. Instead of reproducing a well-known story of Zimbabwe's political economy of land and agrarian reform, it opens with insights from the literature on the political economy of rural development in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe (Bratton, 1978), chiefs and councils in Rhodesia (Weinrich, 1971) and a study of settler estate agriculture (Kelly, 1972), to illuminate how state policies played out in Chisumbanje in both the colonial and post-colonial era. This section also shows that Green Fuel's intervention was not necessarily a new, cataclysmic event, but the continuation of a long-term process of rendering people vulnerable and insecure and at the same time providing opportunities – no doubt unintended – that local people could explore actively.

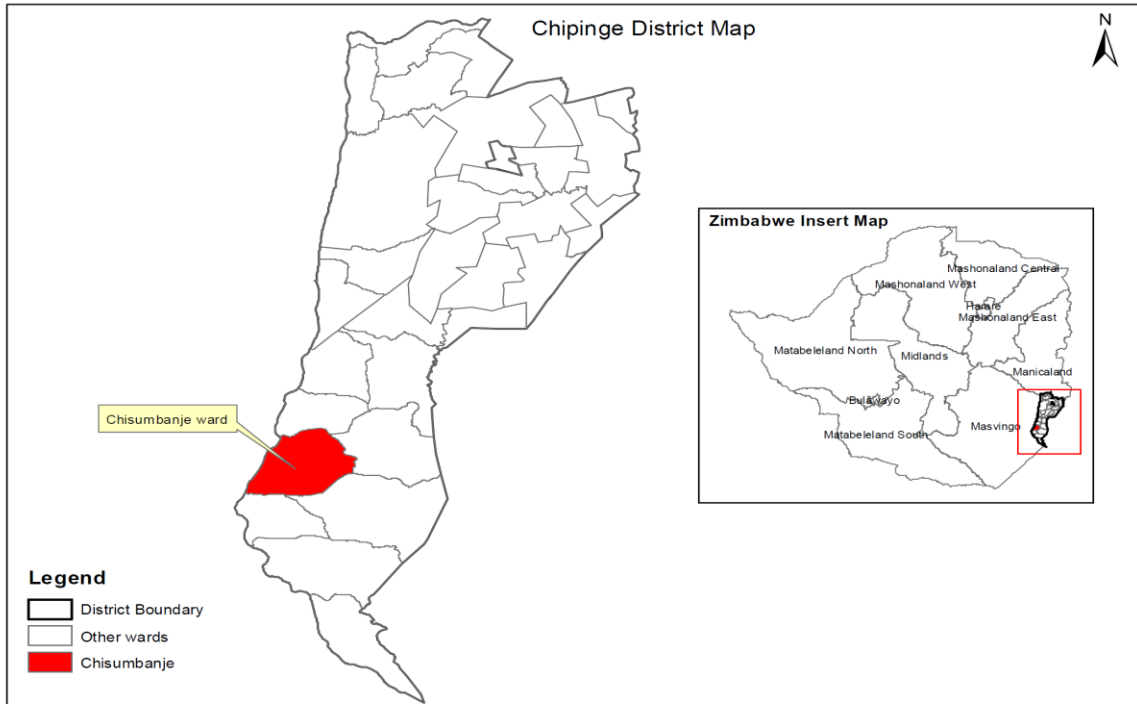


Figure 1. Map showing location of Chisumbanje.

Chisumbanje is in the lowveld area between the highlands to the west and Mozambique to the east. In terms of climate, rainfall and soil productivity, it is more like the adjacent area of Mozambique than the rest of Zimbabwe. In pre-colonial times it was very sparsely settled. People from the highlands used it for hunting and laid claim to various parts of it as hunting grounds. The drawing of the colonial border between Rhodesia and Mozambique at the end of the nineteenth century did not change this immediately, although it divided some chiefdoms in two, leaving the senior chiefs on the Mozambique side. This presumably made it easier for people in the Eastern Highlands to stake their claims to land in the lowveld to the west of the border.

By the 1920s, white settlers has appropriated so much land in the highlands that black people who had been dispossessed there made their way down to the lowveld to settle permanently, particularly near rivers such as the Save. But the possibilities for riverine cultivation were limited, and as the population of displaced highlanders grew, people became more dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Although there were some fertile soils in the area, dry-land agriculture was a risky business, and people were obliged to look for alternative sources of income, including labour

migration to the capital, Salisbury, and the industrial city of Bulawayo. Some also made their way to the Witwatersrand, following the example of their neighbours in Mozambique. Indeed, some were recruited through Mozambique itself, which was an obvious route for those people in Chisumbanje who were subjects of chiefdoms located there.

The lowveld area around Chisumbanje took on many of the characteristics of a southern African labour reserve in this period – people relied on access to communal land for agricultural purposes, but their relative success in agriculture turned on access to cash inputs earned outside the area. The Rhodesian colonial authorities followed the pattern familiar across southern Africa regarding the administration of these areas: first they sought to establish direct control by downgrading the powers of the chiefs, and then they turned to restoring some of the powers of chiefs in an attempt to get the chiefs on their side.

However, they retained tight control and implemented little by way of agricultural development throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The lowveld was peripheral to white settler interests, which were focused on the more fertile and better-watered highlands. This changed in the second half of the century, notably after the start of the war of liberation in the 1960s. This was the decade in which the agricultural potential of the lowveld was 'discovered' by the authorities. The fertile soil could be made to produce significant crops if it was irrigated. A series of plantations was established, eating into the land available to the black residents of the area, but providing them with local employment opportunities. Wages were lower than in the cities or the South African mines, but people did not have to travel so far, with all the attendant risks, to earn them.

The first plantations were state projects because of the capital costs of developing them. The state also made an effort in the late 1960s to develop a class of African farmers with a more individualised stake in the land, out-growers who became tenant farmers. This scheme was encouraged throughout the country in the hope that farmers in tribal trust lands would slowly graduate into the cash economy and therefore contribute to the national economy.

The idea, also apparent in the south African Bantustans at the time, was that other people would copy the application of scientific methods of agriculture taught to those selected as tenant farmers, and who would develop a stake in the land which would make them less favourably disposed to the liberation movements. The demonstration effect didn't work, of course, but those selected as tenant farmers did benefit from the development initiative.

Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980. This had limited repercussions for people in the lowveld. The communal lands remained, and people's dependence on cash inputs for successful communal land farming remained as well. On the other hand, the state-sponsored plantations in the area began to get into difficulties as funds to keep them going effectively began to dry up. Earning cash outside the area also became more difficult as Bulawayo collapsed as an industrial city and the South African mines internalised their labour recruitment activities. There was a short-lived respite at the turn of the century, when the production of cotton took off. People rented land from the plantations to grow cotton, which was also grown in the communal areas.

There is no doubt that colonial policies and apartheid-style planning constituted a major attack on the viability of rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe. Centrally controlled 'development' dating back to the 1950s and 1960s through state functionaries, although laying the foundation for agricultural development in the lowveld, was simply not enough to satisfy the needs of thousands of communal people in Chisumbanje. Firstly, state interventions in land use planning, and legal restrictions, reduced access to resources and flexible management of land. Secondly, the colonial government manipulated the role of chiefs and rural district administrators by supporting them in obtaining and maintaining undemocratic control over village institutions, thereby excluding the majority of the local villagers. As a result, state projects were implemented without community consultation and other socio-ecological considerations of the local inhabitants, and this had adverse consequences on their livelihoods.

Despite this rather grim picture, some brighter lessons can be drawn. Chisumbanje agricultural landscapes and livelihoods have been shaped by continual adaptation and innovation over time. Local people in Chisumbanje responded to the structural constraints imposed from above by carving their own paths. Some depended on plantation agriculture for cash wages while for others it remained possible to carry out subsistence agriculture and informal activities centred on the household economy. A modest pattern of differentiation emerged where successful farmers and some households who had members working in South Africa accumulated assets with some of the income and crops being redistributed to an extended network of relatives and friends.

Conclusion

This chapter has critically engaged with the literature and made three main observations. Firstly, at the centre of the notion of 'land grabbing' is the idea that someone is obtaining access to or control over a piece of land through processes involving 'extra-economic' force; using some degree of force, illegitimacy, violence or theft. The violent connotations inherent in the term 'land grabbing' convey an image of mal-intent on the part of the land acquirers, a weakness on the part of the host countries and a victimisation of the communities previously using the resources.

Secondly, the growing literature on LSLAs in Africa have been dominated thus far by western academics and western institutions. In this body of literature, the main actors are seen as the western corporations which act on African governments and the people on the ground and the story is one of neo-colonial exploitation which Africans are powerless to avoid. This approach has the effect of portraying the Africans involved in these projects – governments as well as people on the ground – as relatively passive. They are shown as the victims of powerful forces over which they have little or no control.

The third observation is that the lack of thorough historical, political and social contextualisation in the analysis of current land transactions has often led to assumptions about the drivers and

outcomes of deals, further feeding dominant, but sometimes flawed, narratives. In arguing for the value of an engagement with host countries' specific development practice and history, the chapter argues that studies that challenge the dominant narratives of 'land grabbing' by presenting deep empirical analysis of motivations of the investors, the role of the state, the history of the local community and its people, and an analysis of local people as potential agents, will in the process open up the possibility that that large-scale investments in farming can be accompanied by the emergence of other opportunities of accessing money or making new livelihoods, particularly in countries currently experiencing neoliberal restructuring.

The next chapter examines the establishment of a biofuels project at Chisumbanje.

Chapter 3

The Political Economy of the Chisumbanje Biofuel Deal

Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with current debates on land deals and revealed two contrasting poles. On one hand, land deals are described as beneficial by providing employment and opportunities for rural development (Cotula et al., 2009; Deininger, et al., 2011; FAO, 2009), on the other hand, they are regarded as a liability on the basis that they displace local people and disrupt ecological systems (Zagema, 2011; La Via Campesina, 2011). However, both sides have at least one thing in common: they portray this phenomenon as fundamentally top-down. In addition, the bulk of the literature focuses on the factors that motivate international actors to acquire large scale land resources in developing countries. The debates are normally framed around the triple F crisis (food, fuel, finance) (Grain, 2008; Cotula et al., 2009; Zoomers, 2010) and tends to view land acquisitions as an impact of the foreign upon the domestic.

This narrative glosses over the complicity of host country elites and the mass of actors and motivations which appears when domestic institutions are brought into focus. This chapter seeks to contextualise the Chisumbanje biofuel deal by examining the mediating role played by national-level institutions and domestic elites in determining the outcomes of farmland investment and the extent of its impact on rural communities. The main point I make is that the Zimbabwean state was not simply a passive victim in the biofuel land deal, as if it was imposed on it by powerful economic actors. This analysis adds nuance to the growing literature on the land grabs, which focusses on the role of the state in the development and implementation of large scale commercial land deals.

The first part of this chapter considers the motivations of actors in Zimbabwe's government and the political cultures that shaped the path from policy to practice in the case under consideration. I identify rent-seeking as one of the main organising principles of the political economy since the 1980s and as the context in which the Green Fuel story played (and still plays) itself out. The second part provides an account of the development of the ethanol project, and seeks to show

how the state was an active and calculating partner in the land deal. This is followed by an analysis of the power relations that governed the bio-fuel deal. In this section, I unbundle the state by focusing on how different actors at various levels thought and worked, and stress the role of domestic elites and other power brokers, and how they used or abused their authority to facilitate the deal. In doing so, the chapter problematizes the concept of land grabbing by complicating the notion that global land deals are a top-down phenomenon driven by global markets and/or foreign states.

Locating biofuel investments: post-colonial national development policy

This section expands the concept of land grabs by focusing on the different industrial policies that have been adopted by the Zimbabwean government since 1980. This is a build-up to the description of the ethanol project and will help to situate the case study in its proper historical and political economy context. It locates the expansion of large-scale agricultural investments within Zimbabwe's neoliberal import substitution industrialisation policy, itself a product of post-colonial national development policy, and then provides a brief sketch of the domestic institutional framework for various policy interventions and links the widespread corruption at the local and district levels to the approach pursued by some within the national government.

At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe was regarded highly in terms of its economy and political trajectory. It was among the most industrialised countries in the developing world on the basis of its human and natural resource base, (Hammar & Raftopolous, 2003). Its economy was anchored on viable agriculture and mining sectors as well as service industries (Moyo, 1995). The ruling party was pragmatic in its approach; through maintaining a fair balance between capitalistic adventures and social welfare provisions and subsidies on infrastructural development (Dawson & Keshall, 2012).

Policy making was generally expansionary and redistributive with a definable bias to meet the goal of widening access to public goods and services. These fundamentals anchored the macroeconomic policy of 'growth-with-equity', which guided and influenced fiscal policy

planning, agricultural policy, education policy, health policy and reconciliation policy for much of the 1980s (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012). Policy imperatives in Zimbabwe in the first decade generally resonated with policy making experiences in other post-colonial settler countries in Africa during the first decades of independence, during which nationalist agendas of nation-building and economic growth took precedence (Adesina, 2007).

Some critics raised concern on the nature of state Zimbabwe had inherited at independence. It was criticised for continuing with some of the colonial structures and policies (McGregor, 2002; Alexander, 2006). The establishment of state parastatals or State owned enterprises (SoEs) in the 1980s was a reflection of a government keen on centralising accumulation and firm control ahead of indigenisation of the economy (Magure, 2012). The emergence of state parastatals created a breeding ground for corruption given that the state selected the SOEs' board members on the basis of clientelism rather than technical competence (Moore, 2012). The elite was, against the idea of promoting local businesses because they feared that they would become independent and vocal against government policies and become difficult to control (Raftopolous, 1996).

The early land redistributive efforts were seen more as ways to drum up political support in rural areas by the ruling party. The distribution of agricultural inputs was done on a partisan basis. Contracts in state parastatals were awarded to the ruling elites and their associates in return for which they provide funding for Zanu Pf campaigns, (Dawson & Keshall, 2012). The patronage system created in the business sector went beyond class and racial lines and Zimbabwe saw the growth of a new 'bureaucratic-financial comprador elite', an elite of political businessmen whose positions and profits depended not on productivity but on connections to the ruling party (Bond & Manyanya, 2003).

The Zimbabwean economy had been built upon import substitution by the colonial government during Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), and this was maintained by the post-independence regime. The economy reached a crisis point in the early 1990s with the adoption

of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) framework. The general idea of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) was an outcome of the New Public Management (NPM) movement, which sought to reform the public sector worldwide by introducing the broad principles of managerialism and marketization, both imported from the private sector (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012). In pursuit of these precepts, the role of the state in the economy had to be reduced to allow 'the market' to be a major player. This resulted in a significant shift in economic orientation worldwide, with states meant to withdraw from the economy and, at the same time, to encourage private-sector production for export.

Zimbabwe's move from a capitalist, welfarist model in favour of a market economy increased inequalities (Mlambo, 1997). The adoption of the neoliberal ESAP reforms in the early 1990s, the 1992 drought that severely affected agricultural productivity, and the rapid growth in HIV/AIDS left the economy in a weak state (Sachikonye, 1995). The deindustrialisation that followed the adoption of the ESAP and resulted in a substantial decline in real wages and overall standards of living (Bond, 2001; Raftopolous, 2001; Sachikonye, 1999) led some analysts to describe Zimbabwe as losing its capacity to provide adequate social services for its citizens and a ruling party suffering from popular resentment (Muzondidya, 2009, p.189).

At the same time, debates about the increasing role and participation of black African business people in the national economy intensified with the formation of the Indigenous Business Development Centre (IBDC) in 1991, and the Affirmative Action Group (AAG) in 1994 (Raftopoulos & Compagnon, 2003). Several party-linked businessmen emerged through these organisations and became prominent players in the construction, banking, agriculture, manufacturing and communication sectors. Most of them leveraged on their close association with the ruling elite to start business ventures, and some of them became involved in major scandals which bordered on state-sanctioned cronyism (Goredema, 2003). The continued economic decline triggered by the economic indigenisation measures reflected poor macro-economic planning and showed that the ruling party's policies were doomed to fail (Magure, 2012).

The relationship between the government and white commercial farmers was tenable at the time as long as large farms contributed overall to the country's food security (Selby, 2006). This relationship was tested in the 1990s when ZANU Pf faced growing challenge from the newly formed party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Political challenge from the MDC and pressure from war veterans over land reform drove Zanu Pf to adopt a radical land reform exercise to pacify the situation (see Hellum & Derman, 2004; Raftopolous, 2009; Karumbidza, 2004).

Earlier, in 1997, former Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe succumbed to pressure from the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association and authorised an unbudgeted cash payment and an increase in monthly payments to war veterans as payback for their role in the liberation war. Pay-outs to veterans of the liberation struggle, together with military intervention in the DRC in 1998 to shore up the Kabila government, led to a serious hyperinflation and is often pointed to as the beginning of the crisis period which went on until 2009 (Sachikonye, 1999).

On the other hand the MDC which had the support from other quasi political outfits such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) and other middle-class urbanites mounted a strong campaign to contest political power in the watershed parliamentary and presidential elections in 2000 and 2002 which created a stage for intense political contestation over continuing ZANU-PF hegemony (Dawson & Keshall, 2012).

The elections of 2000 and 2002 were hotly contested with ZANU Pf employing brutal tactics to undermine the opposition. The first notable strategy was the roping in of the military to take part in civilian matters. The bond between the executive and the military was a function of the legacy of the liberation struggle, shared ideological orientations, and the politics of patronage, as well as collective guilt as a result of human rights crimes (Moyo, 2014).

In addition, the ZANU-PF government provided predatory commercial opportunities for the military officials through secondment to state enterprises and parastatals to increase their personal wealth as reward for their loyalty in ensuring regime survival in the face of mounting challenges from the political opposition (Moyo, 2014). Not surprisingly, this prebendal practice maintained military elite loyalty to Mugabe and gave them a potent incentive to protect ZANU-PF from defeat in elections (Tendi, 2013, p.841).

The second strategy was the undermining of press freedom through harassment of journalists and partisan use of state media. Non-governmental organisations and international journalists were threatened and undue influence was put on the judiciary while the country's foreign policy was marked by paranoia. (Sachikonye, 2002, p. 19).

This was a reflection of the weak foundation of Zimbabwe's post-colonial governance policy framework and development practice (*ibid.*).

On the public policy front, third-decade policymaking was done under highly untenable social, political, and economic conditions. Though the intentions behind policies elaborated during this decade were still in accord with post-independence imperatives, their substance took on an increasingly partisan, temperamental, exclusionary, hurried, and short-term character (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012). In an attempt to arrest economic decline, the government came up with a plethora of economic policies, such as the Zimbabwe Millennium Economic Recovery Programme (2001), the Ten-Point Plan (2002), the National Economic Revival Programme (2003), the Zimbabwe: Towards Sustained Economic Growth — Macroeconomic Policy Framework for 2005-2006, and the National Economic Development Priority Programme (NEDPP) launched in 2006. Added to this were a series of repressive and exclusionary laws which created a climate of siege and anxiety within state and civil society (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012).

Under these circumstances the patronage system reigned supreme as the elite stampeded to accumulate assets at the expense of the majority of citizens (Dawson & Keshall, 2012). The lack of an effective land tenure system, corruption in the agricultural input subsidy program and weak

extension support discouraged productive farming. A sharp decrease in agricultural performance was recorded in 2002 which triggered an increase in food prices (Moyo, 2011). Maize production declined from an average annual output of about 1.7 million tonnes in the mid-1990s to between 0.9 million and 1 million tonnes in 2000-2004 (Sachikonye, 2005). Between 2002 and 2005, Zimbabwe had to rely extensively on importing maize to meet its population's nutritional requirements. Similarly, by 2005, wheat production had fallen by about 20 per cent from the average annual output in the mid-1990s (*ibid.*).

Faced with a socio-politico-economic meltdown, the ZANU-PF government resorted to measures aimed at survival rather than long-term welfare for the masses (Zhou & Zvoushe, 2012). This is reflected in interventions such as 'Operation Restore Order', unleashed in 2005, which demolished and criminalised the entire informal economy (Vambe, 2008). The government's poor calculation in its macro-economic planning was reflected in an operation dubbed 'Operation Reduce Prices' which directed all businesses to reduce prices by 50% irrespective of either original or replacement costs (Dawson & Keshall 2012). Non-compliant business people were arrested, but most businesses were forced to close shop while private sector companies could not supply agricultural inputs (Moyo, 2011). This had negative repercussions for the whole economy.

Agricultural policy became focused on 'command agriculture' under a programme named Operation Maguta/Inala. This was administered by the army and became a government vehicle for mobilising and distributing inputs such as seed, fuel and fertiliser to communal farmers, including new small-scale land beneficiaries countrywide under a managed national cropping plan. Opposition politicians questioned the involvement of the military in agricultural operations, arguing that Operation Maguta was nothing but a calculated move by ZANU-PF to maintain the army's presence in rural areas in order to intimidate the rural electorate into voting for it. At the same time, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe became a central institution in sustaining the government through quasi-fiscal activities that involved printing money and purchasing foreign exchange in parallel markets to support ailing parastatal sectors of the economy such as banking,

health, water, transport and agriculture (RBZ, 2008). The printing of money to provide concessionary financing to key sectors of the economy fuelled hyperinflation.

High inflation was accompanied by shortages of foreign currency. Essential infrastructure began to collapse from lack of maintenance and under-capitalisation. Critical energy shortages were experienced as the country failed to source petroleum products and adequate electricity supplies as a result of the shortage of foreign currency. The country had no foreign currency to import oil, and suppliers were not willing to supply it on credit as the country had a poor credit rating. This situation was made worse by the volatile international oil market at the time, and the situation in Zimbabwe became untenable and desperate. The little fuel available inside the country was sold on the black market and was very expensive (Mtisi & Makore, 2010).

As the country's economy deteriorated, politicians started to think of strategies to deal with the crisis. In 2005, the state began to change its trade and economy policy towards a more inward-looking strategy that would enable the country to reduce foreign dependency through the local production of industrialised products. By 2006, a new policy on import substitution was developed to address fuel and food shortages and to stimulate local production (Moyo, 2011). The ISIS aimed to reduce fuel imports through local production of agricultural-fuels, representing this as a defence against sanctions from the West.

Under the rubric of the (import substitution industrialisation strategy (ISIS), the Energy Ministry presented a strategy paper to Cabinet proposing investment in large-scale jatropha and sugarcane cultivation for domestic production of biofuel. The government envisaged that such a strategy would not only contribute significantly to security of fuel supply through domestic production but also help to solve problems of internal underdevelopment and climate change (GoZ, 2007). In 2007 the state began to court domestic capital and new foreign investors with an eye to financing jatropha and sugarcane production on state-owned land (Moyo, 2011).

The strategy paper, 'Principles for Biofuel Development and Use in Zimbabwe', which had been adopted by cabinet in 2007, was underscored by the realisation that the country had a lot of potential in biofuel production, given its agricultural base and prior experience of growing sugarcane in the lowveld and jatropha in other rural areas. The intention was to use the fuels produced from jatropha and sugarcane to power motor vehicles and the agricultural sector. Production of the biofuel would assist in reducing poverty in rural communities. By stimulating domestic fuel production, the state also sought to reduce the country's oil import bill. Zimbabwe is a landlocked country with no oil fields and relies heavily on foreign and imported oil. It is this motif, together with arguments about rural development, clean energy and import substitution that motivated local institutions and the private sector to consider biofuel as a viable business opportunity.

From a political perspective, the launching of the biofuels projects was a response by the government to the fuel crisis. The background to this is that due to human rights abuses and poor governance and the suffering of the people, many Western countries such as the United States, Great Britain and Australia had imposed trade embargoes on state companies and issued travel sanctions on the ruling political elite (see Bourne, 2011). As the situation further deteriorated the government reasoned that in order to arrest fuel shortages caused by 'economic sanctions', domestic biofuel production was the solution. From the perspective of the ruling elite, the development of biofuels was a sanctions-busting measure meant to sustain a country under siege.

However, it should be noted that a similar strategy had been adopted by the colonial Rhodesian government in the 1960s when they faced economic sanctions from Britain. The colonial state could not import fuel easily, and responded by establishing sugarcane plantations in the lowveld for ethanol production. This project has been maintained up to today. While the colonial ethanol project at Triangle has continued production up to today, the knee-jerk response to the fuel problems in 2007 was marked by a hurried and haphazard commissioning and rollout plan of a National Bio-diesel Feedstock Production Programme and the commissioning of a Bio-diesel

Plant, neither of which lived up to expectations. The project failed owing to, among other reasons, a lack of adequate feedstock and incentives to stimulate feedstock production and poor coordination in the running of the programme (Karavina et al., 2011). Other reasons cited were the absence of a comprehensive and specific national policy and legal framework as well as thorough research on biofuels (Moyo et al., 2014).

An outline of the Chisumbanje ethanol project

This section provides a detailed description of the Chisumbanje ethanol project. It illuminates the way in which the state was an active, calculating partner in the land deal, negotiating the costs and benefits of the project in order to maximise returns from what were considered marginal lands and marginal communities. This section identifies individuals and institutions and their roles in the provision of assistance and obstacles to would-be investors.

The Chisumbanje ethanol project is a public-private partnership between Green Fuel, a local private company owned by Zimbabwean businessman Billy Rautenbach and the Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA), a state-owned parastatal. The development of the project started in August 2008 after Green Fuel signed a 20-year investment deal to revive sugarcane estates on land owned by ARDA in Chisumbanje, in Manicaland Province, and to set up a plant to produce ethanol there.

The agreement that was signed allowed Green Fuel to develop 40,000 hectares of land at a rate of 10,000 hectares per annum. The agreement also stipulated that smallholder farmers who were already using part of the ARDA land were to be given at least 3,000 hectares. This area would be set aside for farmers already on the ARDA land and for those on the neighbouring communal lands who wanted to expand their farming activities. Small farmers on the ARDA land and nearby communal lands of Chisumbanje were to become out-growers of sugarcane for the plant and were promised a guaranteed market for their produce as well as at least 5,000 job opportunities in the plant itself.



Figure 2: Picture of the Green Fuel ethanol plant (Source: The Patriot, 19 June 2014, p1)

At the preparatory stage, the white managers at the project, many of them former commercial farmers whose land had been taken during the land reform programme, were at the forefront in presenting the project to the public as the greatest investment ever in Zimbabwe's agricultural history, (Matondi, 2011). At the same time, politicians and the state media lauded the project as the largest agricultural-investment by 'local Zimbabweans' in Manicaland Province, which would unlock value 'unparalleled' since independence.

Optimistic reports, accompanied by colourful land-use layout plans and 'green' architectural designs, were splashed in newspapers, claiming that the bio-ethanol project would, once fully operational, produce 100 million litres of ethanol annually (enough to meet 50 % of Zimbabwe's fuel needs), generate 20 MW of electricity (with an excess of 15 MW to be sold and connected to the national grid), trigger local development, and create more than 5,000 jobs in a country that had been starved of investment².

² E.g . 'Ethanol Plant Still Lying Idle', *The Sunday Mail*, 18 August 2012. 'Ethanol Project: Is There Light at the End of Tunnel?', *The Manica Post*, 11 January 2013.

At the project's inception, Green Fuel was awarded a 20-year lease under a 'build, operate and transfer' (BOT) contract which stated that the company had technical and financial obligations to develop the sugarcane fields and construct an ethanol plant, in return for which it was to be allowed to reap returns on its investment for 20 years, before handing the project over to ARDA. During the 20 years, ARDA would be entitled to receive a BOT royalty payment calculated at 8% of gross income.

Green Fuel decided to operate the project with two of its subsidiary companies. Based at Chisumbanje, Green Fuel was to operate and maintain the ethanol plant, acting as the exclusive buyer of the cane grown and harvested by its subsidiaries, Macdom and Rating. The latter companies were to be responsible for sugarcane production and were to operate from Chisumbanje and Middle Sabi respectively.

From the outset, a fourth company in the operations was SABOT Transport, which was owned by Rautenbach at the time (but has since been sold to Russian investors). The transport company was responsible for ferrying sugarcane from the two sites of cultivation to the ethanol plant, and for taking ethanol to the Harare storage depots. Rautenbach's business strategy clearly drew forward and backward linkages within Green Fuel itself. Moreover, machinery for the establishment of the ethanol plant was imported from Brazil and the work of assembling the plant was done by a palm-oil corporation from Malaysia.

Initial capital investments in the project were US\$37 million from ARDA, the valuation of its local land assets, and US\$135 million from the Green Fuel Consortium, derived from private investors. Who these investors were has never been made public.

The Green Fuel consortium claimed at the outset to have plans to invest US\$1 billion by 2017, to increase the area devoted to sugarcane production to 50,000 hectares, and to establish four additional ethanol plants. Investors were, apparently, to be guided by a vision of Green Fuel

becoming ‘Africa’s leading supplier of a dependable source of high-quality, competitively-priced renewable energy’. Below is the original investment rollout plan.

Table 1: Green Fuel Investment rollout plan

Year	Area under cultivation (ha)	Total ethanol produced (million litres)	% of Zimbabwe fuel usage	Power produced (mw)	Jobs created (700/ha)	Irrigated land for locals (10% of planted)	Number of local families supported (4/ha)
2011	800	18			4,500	800	3,200
2012	11,000	120	20	18	7,700	1,100	4,400
2013	16,000	156	26	22	11,200	1,600	6,400
2014	21,000	205	34	80	15,700	2,100	108,400
2015	30,000	293	49	98	22,000	3,000	112,000
2016	40,000	390	65	102	29,000	4,000	116,000
2017	50,000	488	81	120	39,500	5,000	122,000

Source: Green Fuel project documents

The vision was to develop 46,000 hectares of land for commercial cane (approximately 10,000 at Middle Sabi and 36,000 at Chisumbanje), according to a section on land development in Green Fuel’s investment blueprint document. The document did not, however, say how the land for expansion would be acquired. The document also says the company was planning to build at least four ethanol manufacturing plants ‘with an annual capacity of 1.5 billion litres to meet Zimbabwe’s domestic requirements and export the balance to the external regional markets while co-generating 120 megawatts of electricity’. The total amount of land earmarked for the project once complete was to be 40,185 hectares. At the time of my fieldwork, the company was using 9,500 hectares, as tabulated below.

Table 2: Total land sizes at the estates

Estate	Gross Area (Ha)	Arable Area (Ha)	Under use (Ha)	Remarks
Chisumbanje	40,000	30,500	6,000	Full potential on the construction of Kondo and Chitowe
Middle Sabi	21,468	9,685	3,500	Fully developed. Balance of land made up of protective works and mountain slopes

Source: Green Fuel project documents

In the study area, farmland is located away from people's homesteads, thus most households were not physically displaced, but nonetheless lost access to their farming land. A total of 1,754 households who were using 5,112 hectares of the ARDA estate lost their 3-6 hectare plots to the project. Of this land, Green Fuel set aside 408 hectares for the local community but only 516 have benefitted from the out-grower scheme – each having been allocated 0.5 hectares – a situation which has riled many opponents of this project.

The contentious politics of the Chisumbanje biofuel project.

The benefits to local communities from large-scale land investments depend on how the latter are designed and managed (Von Braun & Meinzen-Dick, 2009). One measure of the success is the degree to which citizens have access to the terms of investment. Lack of transparency and public scrutiny arguably creates a breeding ground for corruption and for deals that are not in the public interest. It also fosters misinformation that can ultimately damage the investor and the host government (Cotula et al., 2008).

Since their inception in 2008, operations at the Chisumbanje biofuel project, including the negotiations regarding the investments, took place behind closed doors. Details of the contracts for the project were never made available to the public. The result was that the project courted controversy from the start, and became a source of heated debate during the period of the unity government between ZANU-PF and MDC (2009-2013). For many opponents of the project, the first and major talking point was the moral and ethical standing of the Green Fuel CEO, Billy Rautenbach, given that he was well known as a controversial figure who had dominated newspaper headlines on account of his alleged involvement in major financial scandals in the past.

Opponents knew that Rautenbach was a Zimbabwean businessman who had diverse businesses in different parts of the world. His reputation for being close to former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe led the Western countries and United States to blacklist him for funding ZANU PF and its allies (Scoones et al., 2012). Many of his business dealings had relied on political connections with the ruling elite in Zimbabwe. With such links, he had been able to cash in on

the economic chaos of the early 2000s, seizing many opportunities such as the acquisition of 100,000 hectares of land in Mwenezi for large-scale agricultural developments, at a time when many white-owned farms were being redistributed to black farmers (Mabumbo, 2011; Scoones et al., 2012). In the wider region, Rautenbach has previously been charged with fraud in South Africa,³ while his speculative investments in land and biofuel in Mozambique have been the subject of investigative journalism and research (Borras et al., 2011).⁴

Rautenbach leveraged on his closeness to Mugabe to secure contracts in the DRC during Zimbabwe's military operation there. Rautenbach got a contract in one of the Cobalt production mining companies in Katanga. His appointment was curious, because Rautenbach had no prior mining experience. His appointment also came less than a day after President Mugabe met the Congolese leader to discuss how to pay for Zimbabwean troops fighting for the Kinshasa government against Rwandan troops.

The fact that Rautenbach was enlisted for the DRC job ahead of other competent Zimbabweans showed that despite ZANU-PF's anti-white rhetoric, the government continued to maintain alliances with selected white businessmen (Dawson & Keshall, 2012). Rautenbach was not the only one to be involved in intimate relationships with the ruling elite: John Bredenkamp was embroiled in the scramble to profit from the incursion into the DRC, and Nicholas van Hoogstraten was assisting the ruling elite in its political campaigns (Africa Confidential, 2008). These cases reflect issues of crony capitalism that is embedded within many governments, of a class of people who claim to be businessman yet they collude with the ruling elite to facilitate corrupt deals facilitate (Godwin, 2010, p.246).

A report published by the United Nations in 2002 described Rautenbach as a man whose 'personal and professional integrity was in doubt'. The report found that he was part of a network of Congolese and Zimbabwean political, military and commercial interests that sought to

³ 'Rautenbach's fast and furious ride to riches', *Mail and Guardian*, 20 November 2009.

⁴ In Mozambique he was involved in a botched ProCana biofuels deal. See Borras et al., 2011 for details.

maintain a tight grip on the main mineral resources – diamonds, cobalt, and copper – in the DRC-controlled area. The network had transferred ownership of at least US\$5 billion worth of assets from the state mining sector to the private company under its control in the previous three years, with no compensation or benefit to the DRC state treasury (United Nations, 2001). The report concluded that the network’s representatives in the Kinshasa government and Zimbabwe Defence Forces had fuelled instability in the DRC.

By his participation in the military and commercial activities in the DRC, which continued even after Zimbabwe’s withdrawal of troops in 2002, Rautenbach entangled himself in what Magure (2012) has termed ‘ZANU-PF’s militarised patronage politics’. His subsequent recruitment as Green Fuel executives of a former military commander who was part of the DRC mission, a former senior executive in a state-owned enterprise, and a number of other leading ZANU-PF officials, was a clear illustration of the close ties between Rautenbach’s ethanol project and the ruling party, at the same time making the project a significant site for rent-seeking.

Dawson & Keshall (2012) provide a useful analysis of the scope of the extensive rent management system operated by the ZANU-PF government. It is at the centre of a politicised rent management system that controlled foreign currency, land and minerals among other things whose primary beneficiary was the ruling elite or their allies. Other ZANU-PF functionaries were also part of this network and were used to entrench ZANU PF’s hegemony.

The Green Fuel project is, however, a particularly clear illustration of the way political patronage operated in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The original contract for the project was awarded to a consortium of five partners: the IDC (a state infrastructural development company), PGBI (a South African sugar industry consultancy company), Transcon (Pvt) Ltd (an investment subsidiary of the Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe), Star Africa (Pvt) Ltd (a sugar trading corporation) and ARDA as the fifth entity with a 20 per cent equity contribution. But after all the preparatory work had been done, Rautenbach put pressure on the ARDA chairman, a former

ZANU-PF provincial leader, to reverse the deal and allow his companies to take over the project instead.

As a result of the close alliance between Rautenbach and the state, Green Fuel received special treatment not only at the start of the project, but also after construction of the ethanol plant had been completed. Barely six months after beginning ethanol production, Green Fuel encountered problems in marketing its product. The company was obliged to halt production once it had filled its storage containers. Green Fuel then offered to fund the purchase of maize and seed for distribution to the ZANU-PF rural electorate if the government agreed to the addition of ethanol to all petrol sold in Zimbabwe. The government adopted a mandatory blending policy in due course, thereby ensuring a captive market for Green Fuel as the sole licenced supplier of ethanol sold on the domestic market.

The decision to prop up the biofuel project was initially contested by Elton Mangoma, who was appointed by the MDC-T to the inclusive government that came into power in 2009, and became the Energy Minister. He refused to accede to the company's pleas to introduce mandatory blending of ethanol and petrol. Mangoma's argument was that developing a public policy to benefit an individual or a single company set a wrong precedent. He demanded that scientific research on the mechanical effects of ethanol on vehicles, and the cost structure of ethanol blends, had to be done before his ministry could consider mandatory blending. In its Election Handbook, the MDC had, ironically, outlined that if elected as the new government, it would introduce mandatory blending. This suggests that the two political parties in the unity government both wanted to extract political capital out of the project. But whatever Mangoma's motivation in opposing mandatory blending, his objections appeared to dovetail with the concerns of the villagers in Chisumbanje, particularly because he also called for a proper resettlement programme to be worked out to accommodate the people who had been forced to relocate so that their land could be devoted to the production of sugarcane by Green Fuel's subsidiary.

It did not take long before the news media, patently sympathetic to ZANU-PF, started accusing Mangoma of trying to frustrate the project for political reasons.

In August 2012, when an inter-party team of ministers visited the project site, they were met with several 'irate' villagers, workers and local war veterans who harassed and threatened to beat up Mangoma on allegations of closing down the ethanol plant, jeopardising their economic survival, and sabotaging the project. It later turned out that the crowd was bussed in from ZANU-PF strongholds elsewhere in the area. The party was widely known to have employed such methods during elections, going to the extent of closing down rural primary schools in order to frogmarch the pupils, invariably not even part of the electorate, to its political rallies.

The unity government also raised concerns at this time about the veracity of Green Fuel's claim that US\$600 million had been invested in the ethanol project, and demanded information about the source of the financing. These concerns emerged after parliament learnt that the ARDA representatives, who should have been safeguarding the public interest, had attended only two meetings to discuss the project between 2008 and 2010, in what can best be described as a listenership capacity. By 2014, the state sought to increase its ownership to 51% per cent, in line with the country's indigenisation laws. The state claimed that it owned no more than 10 per cent of the project, but this was difficult to verify given that neither the size of the total investment nor the identity of the investors was known.

The government estimated the project value to be in the tune of US\$60 million, while Green Fuel acknowledged the current value was US\$150-million, but insisted that it intended to raise it to USD650-million. Green Fuel also claimed that the company was 'heavily borrowed and under contract to keep confidential the source of borrowings and their levels, (and that all) technical information (was) to remain proprietary' (Green Fuel, 2012).

The smooth operations of the project continued only as long as the personal relationships that made them possible remained productive. Themba Mliswa, a maverick former ZANU-PF official

and reputedly a nephew of former Presidential Affairs Minister, Didymus Mutasa, had helped Rautenbach to enter into two earlier deals with state companies, but fell out with him over the ethanol project.⁵ In a protracted legal battle that played out in the public media, Mliswa demanded US\$65 million from Rautenbach for ‘unpaid facilitation fees’ incurred in the ethanol deal. Mliswa claimed he had introduced Rautenbach to the ARDA chairman who approved a US\$650 million ethanol project in which Mliswa would receive an agreed ten per cent stake.⁶ Rautenbach retorted by labelling Mliswa an extortionist, while Mliswa declared, *‘I do not come cheap, I am not one of those who get satisfied about being given a brown envelope and go. I want a stake in the business.’*

The corruption and rent-seeking involved in the Chisumbanje ethanol project was not an isolated case. In 2006 a major new rent source developed in the diamond fields of Chiadzwa in eastern Zimbabwe (see Partnership Africa Canada, 2010). In the Chiadzwa mining field, violence and patronage governed the operation of mining syndicates where individual soldiers and police formed profit-sharing syndicates with civilians whom they recruited, often forcibly, to dig for diamonds illegally. If the workers demanded too large a share of the profits, or if they were caught mining for themselves, they were likely to become victims of violence (ibid.).

The Mugabe regime managed to use the system of patronage to reward the military in return for its key role in regime survival. Many leading figures in the military, in partnership with civilian leaders, entrenched themselves in the economy through massive accumulation of wealth. The mining in Chiadzwa diamond fields was dominated by the military. All companies involved in

⁵These are Hwange Colliery Company, Unki Platinum and Chisumbanje Ethanol project. In facilitating the Hwange coal deal, Mliswa was paid US\$10 per tonne of coal and US\$5 for every tonne of coke supplied to Hwange thermal power plant. At Unki, Rautenbach got platinum claims worth over US\$4 billion from the government and sold them for US\$1 billion. Mliswa claims he was owed ten per cent of that sum for his verbally-agreed shareholding in the Unki platinum concession.

⁶ Maodza T, (2014) Temba Mliswa in USD\$165million scandal- Demanded facilitation fee- Mutasa, Savanhu, Nyabadza sucked in, Herald, Zimpapers Zimbabwe, accessed on 02 June 2014 <http://www.herald.co.zw/temba-mliswa-in-us165m-scandal-demanded-facilitation-fees-mutasa-savanhu-nyabadza-sucked-in/>

Chiadzwa were co-owned by the military operating in joint venture partnerships with Chinese, Russian, Pakistani, Malaysian and Singaporean companies (Moyo, 2014).

The proceeds from these joint venture companies have not been remitted to the treasury save for a paltry token of less than US\$50 million in 2012 (Mangongera, 2014). Credible reports suggests that the bulk of the diamond receipts have been channelled towards ZANU-PF election campaigns as well as to the private pockets of the senior military commanders and their civilian partners in ZANU-PF (Moyo, 2014). Clearly, this revenue has led to the accumulation of huge personal fortunes for military and political leaders in Zimbabwe (ibid.).

This brings to the fore the perennial question about the fate of primitive accumulation in Africa and much of the rest of the 'Third World', whether this form of accumulation leads to 'progress' in the sense that proceeds 'trickle down' to create real wealth (through the formation of surplus value producing classes), or simply serve to enforce a form of conspicuous consumption that only trickles up to the 'crony capitalists' and out to those with whom they do business globally (Moore, 2012).

Other often cited examples of the state's predatory tendencies are the Fast Track Land Redistribution Programme (FTLRP), and Indigenisation and Empowerment laws. It has been argued that such laws were mere redistributive nationalist rhetoric designed to suggest that Mugabe and ZANU-PF were engaged in a project of completing the unfinished business of the liberation struggle while concealing their regime survival strategies (Bond, 2001; Moyo, 2012). Official records and several academic studies indicate that the ruling elite together with their military counterparts became proud owners of multiple farms and businesses expropriated from former white commercial farmers between 2000 and 2008 (Hellum & Derman, 2004; Raftopolous, 2009; Magure, 2012; Moyo, 2014).

Some analysts have argued that the former president and his ZANU-PF associates used liberation memory and pan-African rhetoric, which was promoted as 'patriotic history', to justify their

primitive accumulation of wealth in the name of redressing colonial injustices (Ranger, 2004; Tendi, 2010). Thus, 'the Mugabe regime has been very effective in broadening its appeal through its use of an anti-imperialist ideological offensive, while carrying out a very specific, repressive class project domestically' (Raftopoulos, 2006, p.13).

Indications so far are that the implementation of the empowerment policy is vindictive and lacks transparency (Magure, 2012). The Chisumbanje case is a clear example of how the policy has been abused and hijacked by local elites, making it difficult to achieve the goals which were intended. Ordinarily, the scale of the project would render it subject to the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act [Chapter14:33]. The Act was developed in 2007 and seeks to ensure that local Zimbabweans participate meaningfully in the national economy through schemes such as community share ownership trusts (CSOT), joint ventures and majority shareholding in key businesses. Yet, when the ethanol project started, some ZANU-PF politicians demanded free shares for themselves claiming that although Rautenbach was born in Zimbabwe, he was not 'indigenous enough' because he was of the 'wrong colour', hence he had to cede a 51 per cent shareholding to them in accordance with Act.⁷

Additionally, the local ZANU-PF MP for the area, an influential figure in the project's local politics, objected to the establishment of a broad based community share ownership trust that would have given many local youths a chance to benefit, declaring that 'I cannot support share ownership where community projects will be signed for by someone I do not know when the investor is doing a lot in supporting the community through various projects.'⁸ Most of the beneficiaries under CSR programmes are linked to ZANU-PF, as will be discussed in later chapters.

The politics surrounding the Chisumbanje project were intertwined with succession battles within the ZANU-PF political and military elite for access to resources. Since 2000, black business

⁷. 'Zanu PF chiefs plan to grab ethanol project', *The Standard*, 11March 2012.

⁸ 'I will not support share ownership scheme – MP', *NewsDay*, 14 October 2013.

groups' empowerment deals were increasingly tied in with, and dependent upon, powerful political factions in the party – especially those with military and security connections who were in the ascendant in this period (Saunders, 2008). Since the securing of new economic assets was perceived as having a direct bearing on these factional struggles, empowerment initiatives became increasingly contested, ad hoc and unstable. Long-standing competitors to succeed former president Mugabe, Emerson Mnangagwa, then Defence Minister, and the late retired General Solomon Mujuru's wife and then vice President Joice Mujuru, also fought to control the centralised rent management system in ZANU-PF. Both faction leaders reportedly had close ties with Rautenbach, and the project itself became a critical battleground for the hearts, minds and pocketbooks of key business and political constituencies related to ZANU-PF's internal struggle for power. This was evident when the rival factions joined forces in vigorously persuading a reluctant Mugabe to accede to Green Fuel's request for a mandatory blending policy without even taking the matter to cabinet as per procedure (Zaba, 2013).

The emphasis of this section on elite rent-seeking and other negative aspects of Zimbabwe's governance system should not be taken as a characterisation of all government officials who deal with policy or of all Zimbabweans involved in business. In fact, this could not be further from the truth. Hanlon et al. (2013) offer an optimistic perspective on the land reform programme in Zimbabwe that goes beyond the limitations about its implementation. They argue that the land reform was organised by landless man and women and war veterans acting against President Mugabe and his cronies and their corruption. These ordinary Zimbabweans have taken charge of their destinies in creative and unacknowledged ways through their use of land holdings obtained from the land reforms, suggesting that some government officials, NGOs, donors and peasants can indeed harness large-scale agro-investments in directions that will be more positive for rural communities.

Conclusion

Using a political economy framework of national development policy in post-colonial Zimbabwe, this chapter has explicated the role and place of corporate interests in large-scale land

investment. Firstly, it argues that African capitalist interests continued the oppressive policies that had been implemented by settlers before independence. Marginalised people residing in the rural areas continue to have little say in the development of policy, or even the design of projects which tend to favour individual and corporate capitalist interests. Secondly, the chapter shows Chisumbanje ethanol to be an addition to the list of other projects which have been turned into rent-seeking sites by the ruling elite. Despite the establishment of a centralised rent management system, it is not being used for developmental purposes, as illustrated by the limited opportunities and benefits that flow to the citizens affected by it. In this way, the chapter has provided an insight into, and the reasons behind, degenerating socio-economic conditions under ZANU-PF.

The chapter also shows that the government was actively involved, rather than being a passive participant, in the Chisumbanje ethanol deal. This point is important because it makes it impossible for government officials and politicians to claim that they had no choice and were simply forced into the course of action they took. More broadly, the chapter also looks at the nature of the state and the development it fosters. The contradictions of land policy will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4.

'We want to get our voices heard!' Land Grabbing and Farming Livelihoods in Chisumbanje.

Introduction

This chapter examines the process by which Green Fuel established the ethanol plant and sugarcane plantations that would provide its raw materials. It focuses specifically on the land acquisition process and its impact on the local people's livelihoods.

It shows that Green Fuel, through its connection with the political elite, moved in to occupy not only land previously used by ARDA but also a portion of the communal land. This resulted in the displacement of numerous families and constituted a major assault on their livelihoods. Through an engagement with the history of Chisumbanje, its people and their livelihood trajectory, this chapter advances several points to show that the story of the impact of the biofuel project on local people cannot simply be reduced to a 'winners and losers' narrative, which is often the case with studies on large-scale land acquisitions.

While land dispossession and associated livelihood dislocation can be cited as a direct impact of the recent large-scale transnational land deals in many parts of Africa and Asia, this is not a sufficient explanation in terms of the historical settler economies of southern Africa. As discussed in the previous chapters, for much of the twentieth century, most rural people experienced land dispossession as paving the way for white settler agriculture, leaving them with no option but to diversify into non-farm livelihoods. In this chapter, I show how the local people in Chisumbanje, when faced with a major land dispossession during the colonial period, adapted to their predicament by seeking employment as migrant workers in cities, mines and agricultural estates elsewhere. The income they received from this was reinvested, so that by the time of retirement the rural home was well capitalised and able to provide support in old age.

As discussed in the background chapters of this thesis, there is an implicit assumption that local people in Chisumbanje occupy productive land, that much of it is being used for subsistence agriculture, and that Large Scale Land Acquisitions (LSLAs) deprive them of this. Even in independent Zimbabwe, land in the rural areas was not adequate for independent peasant agriculture, and people had to make do by participating in the growing industrial economy as labour migrants. However, this system of labour migration and the underwriting of agriculture with wages went into decline in the 1990s for various reasons, including deindustrialisation following structural adjustment and the political uncertainty after land invasions at the turn of the century, and the changing political economy of labour recruitment in the South African mining sector. As a result, farming on the communal land in Chisumbanje even before the arrival of Green Fuel was already in crisis for lack of cash inputs as will be revealed further in this chapter. It is this context that will be considered in detail in the assessment of the LSLA undertaken by Green Fuel.

In pointing to the limitations of literature on LSLAs which focuses narrowly on land dispossession, I am not suggesting here that the land takeover was fair. The main body of this chapter, with support from several case studies, shows that the process in which Green Fuel took over communal land was harsh and sometimes violent towards existing land users. Its justification – that those people who lost land would transition to market-based irrigation out-grower schemes – was only an ideological smokescreen for the intended consequence, which was to grab land for commercial agriculture at any cost to the local people. The case studies presented here show that most local people who lost farming land did not get an opportunity to participate in this market as the market was not mainly for ethanol feedstock and the market was not guaranteed. The net result is that many local people lost access to land that was held under a form of tenure that was adapted to their economic predicament on the periphery of a colonial and then post-colonial state.

The overall picture that emerges is that local peasants in Chisumbanje did not oppose investment in land per se. They were contesting the ethanol project's attempt to alienate them from their

sources of livelihood without providing alternatives. They wanted to have their concerns heard, including exploring whether the new project could offer opportunities for more local people to earn cash inputs and if they could become tenant farmers producing for a guaranteed market.

Livelihoods and the rural economy: Brief context

This section looks at changes in livelihoods over time with a series of case studies from men and women of different ages. It historicises the discussion by focusing on the people who first occupied the Chisumbanje area and the tenure system which governed their occupation. It also documents the experiences of people who endured the first forced land dispossession in the area. It shows that despite agricultural activities in communal areas being often described as subsistence farming, people in Chisumbanje have long been in a position in which they could not subsist on agricultural activities alone. They relied on income from elsewhere – working in the cities, mines and agricultural estates – and ploughing income earned there into their agricultural activities back home. This flow of money had a major impact on the rural economy and provided a significant cushion when their livelihoods were shaken up by land displacements in the 1960s (Kelly, 1972).

Chisumbanje is in the lowveld area between the eastern highlands to the west and Mozambique to the east. It forms part of the south-eastern lowveld belt, a semi-arid region with an average altitude of 400m above sea level which experiences a low annual rainfall of 300-500mm and high temperatures of 32-38°C. In terms of climate, rainfall and soil productivity, it is more like the adjacent area of Mozambique than the rest of Zimbabwe. Administratively, Chisumbanje falls under Chipinge district in Manicaland Province.⁹

In pre-colonial times the area was very sparsely settled. People from the highlands used it for hunting and laid claim to parts of it as hunting grounds. The drawing of the colonial border between Rhodesia and Mozambique at the end of the nineteenth century did not change this

⁹ There are 62 political administrative Districts in Zimbabwe which are spread across the country's 10 provinces, classified according to agro-ecological regions.

immediately, although it divided some chiefdoms in two, leaving the senior chiefs on the Mozambique side. This presumably made it easier for people in the eastern highlands to stake their claims to land in the lowveld to the west of the border.

By the 1920s, white settlers had appropriated so much land in the highlands that black people who had been dispossessed there made their way down to the lowveld to settle permanently, particularly near rivers such as the Save. The name Chisumbanje derives from the first chief from the Chimanimani highlands who asked the Ndaou chief, Garahwa, for land for his followers. Despite settling close to the Save river, the possibilities for riverine cultivation were limited, and as the population of displaced highlanders grew, people became more dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Unlike the highlands, which had a climate suited for agriculture all year round, farming in Chisumbanje, despite its rich black soils, was a risky undertaking? People were obliged to look for alternative sources of income, including labour migration to Salisbury and Bulawayo. Some also made their way to the Witwatersrand in South Africa, following the example of their neighbours in Mozambique to the east. Indeed, some were recruited through Mozambique, which was an obvious channel for getting to South Africa given the fact that at least some people in Chisumbanje were subjects of chiefdoms located in Mozambique.

Patterns of circular migration, with periods of work away, preceded and succeeded by farming activities, characterised the life cycle of men in Chisumbanje and indeed in the migrant labour economies throughout southern Africa (Murray, 2008; Potts & Mutambirwa, 1990). The flow of remittances from off-farm work helped to sustain the rural economy and to structure social relations. In Chisumbanje many buildings, most agricultural equipment and nearly all cattle were purchased from the pay packets of migrant workers. Similarly, marriage payments were also made from this source, with initial bride wealth (*lobola*) payments often being paid by the prospective husband with support from the father.

A typical household demographic pattern was that a young man grows up dependent on his parents until marriage. After marriage he would be expected to establish a new home, but it is likely that he would still be reliant on his parents or older relatives for the supply of draught

power, equipment and perhaps labour for farming. He would usually seek formal employment around this age. As men were increasingly expected to contribute to the payment of their own bride wealth, seeking employment became a prerequisite of marriage.

Formal employment was a route to investment in the rural home through marriage, acquisition of cattle, purchase of farm equipment and the building of a home, as well as the regular provisioning of the family through payment in cash or kind for groceries, medical expenses, school fees and other expenses. Older age men would usually return home to farm, taking on the responsibilities of an elder within the family. This was the idealised pattern of the demographic cycle which was dominant in Chisumbanje and in many rural areas, although the accumulation and disposal of assets over a lifetime was highly variable.

To have a greater understanding of these historical experiences, interviews were conducted with seven elders from the community. Below is an extract from the life history of one respondent, recorded in Chisumbanje.

'I was born in 1930 in Chisumbanje village and worked in Triangle as a general worker from 1952 to 1956 and then later in South Africa from 1956 to 1979. When I was working in South Africa, I managed to buy a bicycle, a scotch cart, build a new house, and purchase a sewing machine and radio and also livestock. In 1981 I returned home, and two years later I joined St Peters hospital as a general hand until my retirement in 1990. Since then I have been at home and have been farming. I married Purutanai Mazhini in 1958 and we now have eight children – five daughters and three boys. My home was established in 1960 when we were granted a field and garden. My eldest daughter was married in 1983 and the eldest son completed his university in 1989 and is now working in the United Kingdom. Most of my children have become teachers, only two have been struggling to find something to do. They didn't do well at school and one passed away of suspected HIV/AIDS so we stay with two her children. In years of good harvests there are no problems and I sometimes sell my crops and buy things. Sometimes I get support from the children

but now they have their families. Last year we had a good yield and I bought some more farm implements to replace those bought long ago. However, with the costs of things today such as school fees, clothes and groceries and so on, things are getting increasingly tough.'

The Chisumbanje community depended on migrant workers, and their monthly cash injection was a lifeline for many families. In many such areas, a labour issue was also a community issue. Men's lives in the rural areas and in the urban areas where they worked were interwoven. At the same time they were agents for both rural and urban economies, social welfare, cultural systems and household livelihoods.

The lowveld area around Chisumbanje took on many of the characteristics of a southern African labour reserve for much of the first half of the twentieth century. People relied on access to communal land for agricultural purposes, but success in their agricultural activities depended on access to cash inputs earned outside the area. The Rhodesian colonial authorities followed the pattern familiar across southern Africa regarding the administration of these areas – first they sought to establish direct control by downgrading the powers of chiefs and then they restored some of the powers of chiefs in an attempt to get the chiefs on their side (Weinrich, 1971; Ridell, 1978; Bratton, 1978).

The Lowveld was peripheral to white settler interests, which were focused on the more fertile and better-watered highlands. This changed in the second half of the century, notably after the start of the war of liberation in the 1960s. This was the decade in which the agricultural potential of the lowveld was 'discovered' by the authorities. The fertile soil could be made to produce significant crops if it was irrigated. A series of plantations was established, eating into the land available to the black residents of the area, but providing them with local employment opportunities.

In Chisumbanje, an agricultural experiment and demonstration station was opened in 1953 with the aim of investigating the prospects for irrigation and crop management in the area with a view to its future development. The area's potential to grow sugarcane was identified and the idea was later taken up by the Sabi Limpopo Authority (SLA), a statutory body established in 1965.

Due to crippling sanctions imposed on the Rhodesian government in the same year, the SLA received substantial state subsidies with the aim of diversifying its operations into wheat, cotton, bananas, maize, animal feed, tobacco, cattle ranching and ethanol production to rescue the faltering economy.

The Chisumbanje Development Company (CDC) was established in 1966 as a subsidiary of the SLA. Government land planners pegged the whole area of communal land (40,000 hectares) for an ambitious agricultural development dubbed the 'Greater Chisumbanje Project'. The project did not take off on a large scale and in its first year used only 1,400 of the 5,000 hectares excised from the communal lands. This land was used mainly for the cultivation of wheat in winter and cotton in summer using flood irrigation with water drawn from the Save River. By 1972, the CDC had gradually increased the irrigation area on its estate in Chisumbanje to 2,400 hectares.

The setting up of the commercial agricultural estate in Chisumbanje communal – or 'tribal trust' – land in 1966 displaced no more than a small number of Chief Garahwa's subjects. The takeover affected fewer than a dozen families. I was able to contact six of these families during my fieldwork. One of the victims of this first land dispossession, Tobias Makatuka, a man in his late 60s, gave an insight into what had transpired.

'Our family originated in Honde Valley area near Chimanimani. Our parents migrated from there riding on donkeys and first settled in the Manzvire area. Here they found fertile sandy soils and very few people. They farmed successfully, exchanging food for cattle and goats. As the sandy soils became tired, they got less and less productive. They decided instead to move to Chisumbanje where the in-laws were staying. They were welcomed in the area and given fields with rich black soils. I was born soon after their arrival in this area in 1942. I grew up herding cattle, and started school in 1952.

I was old enough to remember what transpired. The Smith government came and told us that all the land belonged to the state and there was a big agricultural project earmarked for this area. We did not have much to say as the area had been pegged.

Our family was told to move the homestead to its current location. We lost about 8 hectares as the state was setting up electricity power lines and water canals that link the Save River and the

agriculture estates. Our father was given some compensation which he reinvested into farming. Young boys like me were promised jobs and farmer trainings.'



Figure 3: Tobias Makatuka showing pegs that were set up the colonial government in 1966, and behind are some of the homesteads that were affected by the first project.

Tobias Makatuka continues, *'In 1967 I went to Marandellas and got a job at Proton bakery as a general labourer. This job lasted until 1971 when I went to Mvuma Mine where I was employed until 1980. As soon as I returned home I got married, and my daughter was born the following year. With the little income I saved during years of working and support I was given by my father, I managed to pay lobola costs. In the rural areas, I had very little and struggled to make ends meet through farming so I looked for another job. In 1982, I also got a job at the District Development Fund as a labourer and managed to buy cattle and goats over time. In 1986 I built my own home*

– two houses of brick and thatch. I continued combining farming and working until my retirement in 2001.'

The first displacement was clearly not as serious as the recent one by Green Fuel. Back in the mid-1960s, the area was still sparsely populated and local people owned large tracts of land, some as large as 40 hectares per family, which they used for rotational farming and keeping livestock. At the time it was also relatively easy to cross borders into Mozambique and South Africa in search of waged employment.

In 1968, the Tribal trust land development corporation (TILCOR) acquired 416 hectares within the CDC estate in Chisumbanje as part of its larger task of establishing a cadre of black commercial farmers throughout Rhodesia. TILCOR started by selecting seven men living and farming on the adjacent communal lands to become tenant farmers on its portion of the estate. Initially the management of land, knowledge and labour was placed in the hands of 'technically qualified Europeans' who coordinated and made all decisions regarding land preparation, planting, irrigation, reaping, pest control, harvesting and marketing. But the number of black 'settler farmers' (as they called themselves) increased to 116 by 1972. Of the 166, 66 had 3 hectares, 44 had 4 hectares and 6 had 6 hectares.

My field research sought to understand more about this first batch of 'settler' farmers: who they were, what allowed them to take up this opportunity, and what they did with the plots on TILCOR's land. I managed to interview fifteen of the settler families or their descendants.

Sekuru Dota was 65 years of age at the time of interview, and lived with his wife and four grandchildren. He had been 17 when the allocation took place. He narrated his story.

'Most people in the surrounding villages of Chisumbanje such as Mwatikwa, Konjana and Machona used to farm large areas before the establishment of the estate. I remember CDC started by testing crop varieties on the estate plots adjacent to our fields. This is when they invited the local villagers to come and join in the agricultural scheme. There was a white agricultural demonstrator called Makaranga who identified us (young boys who could read and write) and sent us to the Blackford by Agricultural Training Centre in Gatooma [a small town in central Zimbabwe, now called Kadoma]. We were taken through training in pest control, irrigation, and

farming practices. When we came back we were allocated plots ranging from 3 to 6 hectares in size. Initially the local village leadership was sceptical and not interested in joining the agricultural scheme. But for us, we saw this as a benefit as we could now apply our newly-acquired skills to increase agricultural production and uplift our livelihoods. We were planting winter wheat, and summer cotton under flood irrigation and we also tried paprika. TILCOR provided the technical back-up and most of our produce we sold to state entities GMB and CMB.'

Another respondent, 66-year-old Charles Magandanga narrated how the plots were allocated.

'Although we are originally Ndaou and come from this area, my father migrated to South Africa in the 1940s where he married a Sotho woman. We stayed in South Africa for a while where my father was working. We had a decent life there. My father had a stable job which enabled him to accumulate a fund in order to have a respectable retirement back home. In 1960, he returned back to Chisumbanje as an esteemed elder with a relatively successful family. When we arrived, Chief Garahwa through his headman Chinyamukwakwa resettled us on 40 hectares. We became successful farmers and, perhaps noticing this success, TILCOR allocated us a 6-hectare plot under the tenant scheme in 1969. Our plot immediately flourished because we were allocated inside the CDC on the edge of the estate where we could access irrigation water. The estate boundaries were clearly marked and fenced. My father died in 1992 and I took over the plot and continued farming maize and cotton. TILCOR provided the technical know-how, and agriculture finance houses such as African Finance Corporation provided loans and seed subsidies. I continued working on the plot, and in post-colonial times ARDA sub-contracted us to plant sugarcane in its out-grower scheme. We became a success and we could afford relatively comfortable lifestyles, sending children to school, buying cars, tractors and supporting our dry-land farming in the communal area.'

Farmers who received out-grower plots formed the Chisumbanje Settler Farmers Association with a Committee that represented them in negotiations for better terms with finance and marketing companies as well as local authorities. Almost all the farmers who acquired the plots were locals from the neighbouring communal area, which was one of the factors allowing them to take up the opportunity. Over time, these 'settler' farmers became relatively successful

compared to their counterparts who relied only on dry-land farming in the communal area. As one farmer put it,

'We were real settler farmers, who could afford to acquire cars, send children to boarding schools and own big herds of cattle.'

Agricultural development in the colonial period through establishment of large-scale estates and the state's attempts to develop a class of African farmers with a more individualised stake in the land – the 116 out-growers who became tenant farmers – was also apparent in the South African Bantustans at the time (Fischer, 1988). The idea was that other people would copy the application of scientific methods of agriculture taught to those selected as tenant farmers, thereby developing a stake in the land which would make them less favourably disposed to the liberation movements. The demonstration effect didn't work, of course, but those selected as tenant farmers did benefit from the development initiative.

Livelihoods in transition: Chisumbanje in the post-colonial era

Following independence in 1980, a number of the policies pursued in the colonial era were revived. Bans on river-bank cultivation were again enforced and people were shifted into consolidated villages some distance from the water sources. In addition, grazing schemes were reintroduced and land reorganisation and villagisation were pursued vigorously after some settlements had been disrupted during the liberation war. Smallholder farmers in the arid but fertile soils around the ARDA estates practiced crop production with periodic irrigation from the estates. The communal lands remained and crop production was the major livelihood strategy practised in Chisumbanje. The main crops grown were cotton, maize, sunflower, sorghum and rapoko, but crop failure under rain-fed conditions was high, mainly due to erratic rainfall. As a result, a newly independent Zimbabwe had limited resources for people in the lowveld, where people remained dependent on cash inputs for successful communal-land farming.

People in Chisumbanje continued combining income earned working elsewhere with agriculture throughout most of the 1980s, and migrant labour was largely responsible for the growth in trade

in townships such as Checheche and Chisumbanje. Remittances became an agent of social stratification. Successful migrant workers were able to purchase assets such as cattle and scotch carts, build good houses and even start business enterprises. They could also afford to send their children to better educational facilities such as Chikore and Mt Selinda boarding schools. Migration was not only to South Africa. Others saw opportunities in local towns and agricultural estates. Local migration saw the movement of people from Chisumbanje to the cities and to agricultural estates such as Triangle, Mkwesine and Hippo Valley, and the mining towns of Redcliff, Mvuma, Shurugwi and Renco.

While in the early 1980s there was a predictable movement of men away from the farm to work following household establishment, this system started to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The main reason for this was that the South African mines internalised their labour recruitment activities, placing restrictions on the free flow of labour across most of southern Africa. Structural Adjustment Programmes of the early 1990s also led to massive job losses. A sharp decline in the economy from 1997, and the political uncertainty after the land invasions, also saw the decline of incomes from non-agricultural activities.

This had an impact on Chisumbanje's rural economy as illustrated in an interview I had with one elder member of the community, Godfrey Mazvita, who is his late 70s. Godfrey lives in Mwatika, a village adjacent to Chisumbanje, with his two wives and eleven children. He has worked for almost his life in the industrial city of Bulawayo.

'After brief stints in Gatooma in the 1970s, I joined Bulawayo textiles in 1981 and rose to the position of shift supervisor. Over the years I have been shuttling between Bulawayo and my rural home, combining the income I earned in my town job and returns from opportunistic farming to acquire assets such as cattle, ploughs and building a decent house. I have also managed send my children to school and most of them are now in their secondary level. I lost my job in 1996 when the company pursued compulsory retrenchments citing depressed performance. Although the company was already struggling by the time it folded and decided to send everyone home, the company, like many others in Bulawayo, had a rough ride particularly in post-colonial Zimbabwe.'

Firstly, the political disturbances that hit the region from 1982 through 1987 caused capital and industrial flight. Industries moved to the capital city Harare and neighbouring countries. Secondly, ESAP which led to the liberalisation of the economy in the early 1990s, dealt an even bigger blow to industry. As a result of the economic challenges triggered, many local industries were running with outdated equipment. Textiles began to decline because of competition with cheaper Chinese fabrics. Additionally, structural adjustment programmes shifted focus away from expanding manufacturing industries. The focus moved toward agro-processing and horticulture, a challenge for the water-scarce city. My wish was to work for 6 more years before I eventually retire. I would have used that time to fully capitalise my farm and also ensure my children are through with school. Now that I am here, my wish is for those industries to reopen or at least to have some of them in our areas so that our children can have somewhere to earn some sort of income to start their own families.'

On the other hand, the state-sponsored ARDA plantations in the area began to get into difficulties as funds to keep them going effectively began to dry up. This had a knock-on effect on both the small group of tenant farmers who were operating as out-grower farmers linked to ARDA, and communal farmers as well.

'The situation here is disturbing. I, like most of my neighbours, do not have cattle to use as draught power. As you can see, I don't have a cattle pen and a goat is the only form of livestock I can boast of. As a result, I have been forced to use my own hand', said Chanda, a farmer on the communal land in Chisumbanje.

Half the farmers I interviewed said they had been forced to adopt zero tillage, known locally as 'chibhakera', a simple technique of planting seed into the soil with little or no prior land preparation. They cited lack of draught power as the main obstacle to planting. Long grass and shrubs now characterise vast tracts of land that used to grow a variety of crops for both the local and export market. Most farmers were planting only half of their total land holding.

The irrigation scheme which continued to operate alongside ARDA estates was also facing challenges. Although they had attempted to diversify into market gardening and poultry as a way

to provide a livelihood for a number of households, in many other ways the scheme was now a shadow of its former glory.

Lacking capacity and capital, much of Irrigation land was underutilised, and only 65 of the 116 cooperative members were actively farming. The pumps and motors of most of the wells had been stolen along with the electric barbed-wire fence that once kept out stray animals and intruders. The five fowl runs that used to hold 2,000 egg-laying hens each were empty – instead, one shelter provided storage for harvested onions, another housed drying sugar bean pods, and the refrigerated wagons that once held cattle and game carcasses now acted as warehouses for maize.

'I left my job in South Africa when my father passed on in 1988 to come back to take over the irrigation plot which was thriving then. I ploughed all my terminal benefits into the farming project and we used to get significant support from ARDA. However since 1997, ARDA have virtually stopped assisting us and our production had significantly dropped. With no ARDA support and opportunities for income generation, the costs of electricity, labour, chemicals, water and inputs are beyond capacity for many famers here.'

Green Fuel's land takeover: Land negotiation and control

Green Fuel's first step was to seek approval to begin construction of the ethanol plant. The application was made at Chipinge Rural District Council (RDC) and approval was granted to set up the plant inside the ARDA estate covering approximately 69 hectares of land. Although details of the meeting between Green Fuel and Chipinge RDC could not be recovered, data gathered from key informants (including the Councillors who should form a quorum that approves projects of such magnitude) indicate that it was the RDC chairman and CEO who unilaterally made the decision before any consultation was done. This shows that despite the fact that the 1993 Rural District Council Amalgamation Act was supposed, in theory, to enhance the democracy, autonomy and financial solvency of councils, the RDC and District Administrator continued to make decisions without consulting their constituents.

The second step for Green Fuel was to acquire land for setting up sugarcane fields that would provide raw materials to the ethanol plant. To ensure optimal production, Green Fuel's initial interest was 9,500 hectares of land to set up the plant and sugarcane plantations that produce the raw material. At the time, almost 5,000 hectares which ARDA had historically farmed had lain idle since the 1990s when the state adopted economic structural adjustment policies leading to many parastatals including ARDA systematically disinvesting in large-scale projects of national interest. However, local people continued farming in the estate's surrounding communal areas, and the 116 settler farmers still held valid leases for plots which they were allocated inside the ARDA estates.

Green Fuel took over the 5,000 hectares which historically has been used by ARDA. ARDA had not had the capacity to go beyond this since it was formed, but previous reports indicated that the estate can potentially expand to 35,000 hectares. The 5,000 hectares was less contentious because even the locals knew about it. Plots for settler farmers were on the borders of this land and hence attached to the estate. But Green Fuel needed an additional 4,500 hectares for optimal production. This land was contentious because locals had historically farmed it and never imagined the estate would encroach on it. When Green Fuel established its operations on the 5,000 hectares they did not consider the 116 black settlers who had for a long period farmed there as out-growers. By expanding with an additional 4,500 hectares, Green Fuel were also appropriating land which was deemed communal land by the locals who had previously settled and established their livelihoods there.

Documents I received from a senior Green Fuel official stated the following:

'Various studies have been commissioned by the Government of Zimbabwe particularly targeting the greater Chisumbanje area not only for agricultural purposes but also for the establishment of an ethanol plant. The most comprehensive study was carried out by Atkins Consulting Engineers (UK) in 1983, which was accepted, at the time, as the blueprint for future expansion. The Report estimated that an area of approximately 35,700 hectares would be available for agricultural purposes, after making allowances for settlement villages and infrastructure. This area was surveyed and pegged, however, due to Zimbabwe's hyper-inflationary environment,

ARDA fell into a long period of dormancy and nothing was done with the land. In 2008, ARDA embarked on a turnaround strategy and drive to find investment partners to rehabilitate their properties and pursue a vibrant social responsibility agenda for the benefit of the rural population, which to date has been successful. This is the context in which ARDA entered into Build, Operate and Transfer arrangements (BOT) with private investors Green Fuel (Pvt) Ltd, Macdom Investments (Pvt) Limited and Rating Investments (Pvt) Limited on the Chisumbanje and Middle Sabi Estates.’ (Green Fuel, 2013, p. 3).

By agreeing, at least in principle, with Green Fuel to initiate a large-scale biofuel project in the countryside, the state implicitly made a fallacious assumption that existing users would be favourably incorporated either as out-growers or workers. In fact, the state, by acting in this way, was consigning existing local land-based social relations and practices that are diverse and distinct to being vestiges of the past; to be acknowledged, but in the end not worthy of being taken seriously enough to protect and advance into the future. This practice is certainly not unique to the Zimbabwean state. In essence, this describes what Scott (1998) noted as the ‘simplication’ that people’s way of life is subjected to by external interference from the state.

‘We want our land back!’ Settlers and the new land enclosures

This section describes the land acquisition process of the ARDA estate and its effects on the 116 settler farmers who had traditionally operated as out-growers to the main estate and held pieces of land inside the estate. It describes the different methods and tools Green Fuel used to produce a new knowledge about the land. One of the most obvious technologies they used was cartography. The use of maps and other modern technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) have significant potential as tools for both knowledge generation and control (Millar, 2016).

On one of my early visits to Green Fuel offices in December 2012, the public relations manager took me into a waiting room where I found the whole table covered with maps. Before even being asked, the manager informed me that these were plans for the ethanol project that had

just been constructed, and they were in the in the process of mapping out new plans for the second phase of the project.

I experienced the same situation again in November 2013 when I visited Green Fuel field offices in Chisumbanje. There were plenty of maps; maps of villages, roads, rivers generated using aerial surveys and other drone equipment. According to Green Fuels' project manager, the production of maps was one of their biggest contribution to the project despite the fact that very few local people were consulted in the process. Below is a map for Chisumbanje phased rollout plan.

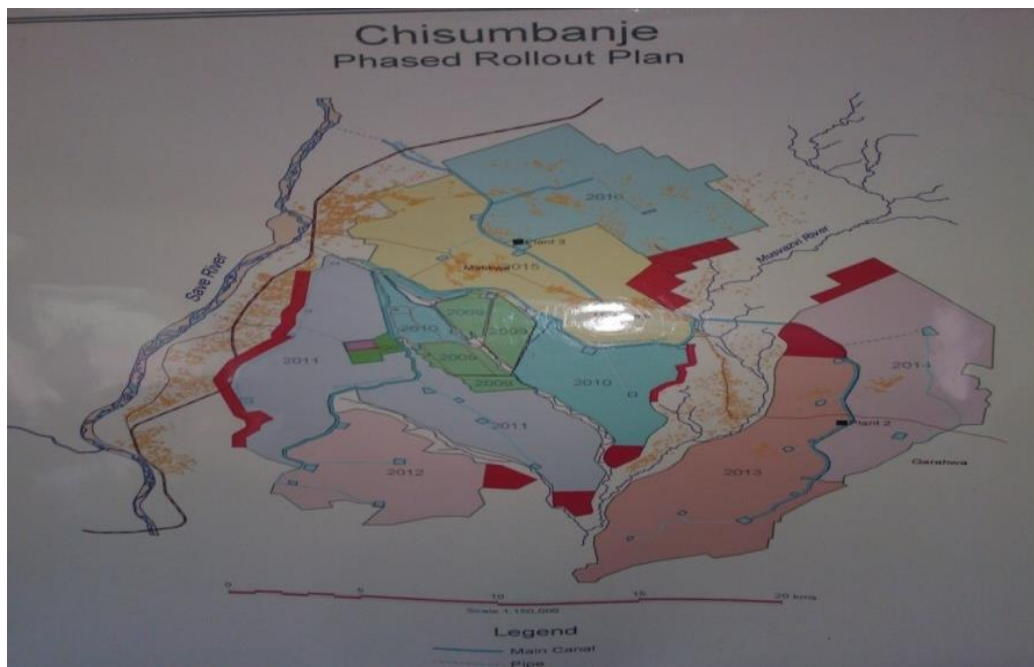


Figure 4: Chisumbanje phased rollout plan

This mapping is important because to those managing the project in 2013, primarily white project managers and at least one black Zimbabwean who had returned from the diaspora, the land is invisible without some medium of visual representation. It seemed to me that the project managers saw the use of digital maps as an opportunity to adequately visualise and therefore control the land and the resources on it.

The use of digital photographic representation of the land justifies claims within the recent literature that such projects are suitable for African countries where land is abundant, idle, 'empty' or 'unused'. Using these technologies, Green Fuel were also able to reproduce boundaries which the colonial government had marked for a similar project in the 1960s, but they deliberately overlooked the land rights of the 116 existing land users of 416 hectares inside the estate. In a session I attended where the Chisumbanje Settlers Association and other local farmers who lost their land were discussing challenges related to loss of land, I could not help but imagine the different interpretations that Green Fuel using their mapping technology would take and how local farmers who work on the land would give to the incoming biofuel project.

One of the farmers exclaimed that, 'Our farms were basically invaded! When Green Fuel came, they did not even consult us. We just woke and we found our sugarcane fields had been taken. What worries me most is that when the project started we had sugarcane on our plots but Green Fuel sent its people to start irrigating and working on them. When we asked the rationale of such a move, Green Fuel officials said they were temporarily using our plots because they wanted to control pests. They also backed this excuse with promises that they will build new houses for us closer to our plots but as you can see, nothing has been done.'

Another farmer, 46-year-old Mr Tee, was furious, and echoed the same sentiments. 'Our farms were invaded by Green Fuel. This is a much politicised deal, how do you reconcile the fact that Green Fuel claims we own the land yet they control the crops on that land! In fact we now owe them. When they came in 2009, they took over our crop without our permission, harvested it and gave us nothing. They said they wanted to maintain the quality of the cane but on whose land? In fact they said we owe them US\$2.4 million for managing the crop, harvesting and selling it to the production company. This is not how TILCOR used to operate.'

The chairman of the Chisumbanje Settlers Association said, 'Once Green Fuel took over the plots they served us with a debt of US\$2.4 million of which we were asked to develop a payment plan. We agreed as an Association that we will be paying US\$800,000 per year in the recovery of the

debt by letting Green Fuel use our plots. However on 19 October 2015, we completed the debt payment and asked them to provide us with a letter/certificate of debt clearance of which they declined. Imagine! Even the price at which our cane was being sold to the Green Fuel mill was ridiculously low. At Triangle sugar mill, a tonne of cane is sold at US\$70 but here Green Fuel is buying at US\$4. We are currently trying to develop an agreement between the settlers and Green Fuel. The company wants a seven-year agreement, but our members insist on an annual agreement which will be subject to review each year. As things stand we are in a deadlock. Green Fuel continue occupying our plots and make irregular payments, an average of US\$100 per farmer monthly. Some of our members have already died before this issue has been resolved and we cannot rule out stress-related illness due this land deal.'

Asked what the significance of the Green Fuel is, Sarah Topera, a 46-year-old mother of eight children and six grandchildren whose husband, a settler farmer, had lost five hectares of irrigation land, said she felt disempowered.

'Look at her [pointing to a young girl of school-going age], she has just finished O levels and she is very bright. I do not have any income for school fees for my daughter to proceed with school or go to a tertiary or technical college to find something to do. We have no money, we used to survive on these plots.'



Figure 5: Marita, a 16-year-old girl daughter of a settler farmer whose family lost farmland.

Sarah Topera continued, *'With this year's ravaging drought, we have sold most of our assets to get food and it's really disheartening when you look at your children who look up to you for support, and you fail to provide them with basic needs such as education, food and other material needs. We hope this land theft will be reversed to allow our husbands to go back to their plots and plough and sell on their own like they used to do before.'*

The Chisumbanje Settlers Association chairman concluded by saying, *'We demand our land back. TILCOR never did this. Yes, we want development but this is certainly not the kind of development that we want.'*

'We are very afraid! Communal land dispossession in Chisumbanje

This section deals with the land outside the 5,000-hectare ARDA estate which was held under communal tenure by the Garahwa Chieftainship. To kick-start their operations, Green Fuel required at least 9,500 hectares which meant that 4,500 was required from the neighbouring communal area. This latter was occupied by approximately 2,000 families and Green Fuel needed authority from the local leadership to begin the process of negotiating the acquisition and control of this land, most of which was under cultivation.

In an interview, Chief Garahwa, the local custodian of the land, narrated what happened. *'They [Green Fuel officials] came with their big trucks here at my homestead in 2008. They told me they wanted authority to use part of the land for a big sugarcane project that would benefit the local community. I was sceptical of that, and I asked them what they would do with families who are already using the land? They made promises that those who lose land will be adequately compensated. In addition they will also receive new houses and irrigation plots for cultivation throughout the year. As an act of good faith, they promised that the following week they will set an example by coming back to renovate my house and build a new court room. On top of that, they promised that I was now entitled to a monthly allowance of USD 2,000 as long as the project operates.'*

Buoyed by these promises, Chief Garahwa became well disposed to the biofuel project. The approach used by Green Fuel to incentivise traditional leadership is reminiscent of the practices which were used by colonial settlers. The logic was that appeasing the chief was synonymous with engaging the whole community, since 'tribal subjects acknowledged their chief as the owner of territory so long as they tilled the land which he owned' (Moore, 2005). Communal tenure was used to hide any difference between the chief and his followers, with the result that if you dealt with the chief you dealt with everyone. This emanated from the patriarchal principles of kinship and chiefly rule: the family is part of the tribe and owes allegiance to the chief who is the father of its head. Such a colonial discourse has been recreated by Green Fuel.

Despite the local chief's initial agreement to have part of the communal land annexed and incorporated into the biofuel scheme, the majority of the local people initially refused to join it. This is because they have been used to work and to take care of themselves with limited external support. Despite the area being drought prone, villagers adapted by inter-cropping maize, small grains, and cash crops such as cotton, and livestock husbandry. This was also complemented by income from migrant labour. Land plays an important role since most of the people there are primarily farmers who depend on access to land and related resources. Since the establishment of the project local people faced impossible choices as some were obliged to choose between giving in to the demands to hand over their fields to Green Fuel and possibly become out growers to the estate or retaining control and risk being pushed away by force. In the end both options did not pay off since none of their consent were taken into consideration. .

According to the Green Fuel public relations officer, the outreach team that was set up to propagandise and mobilise the community held several meetings with the villagers to explain how beneficial the project would be and what people were going to receive. Some of these meetings lasted for over five hours. The villagers noted some of the following concerns: What benefits would they get? What does contract farming mean? What alternatives are there for those who lost their land? When would they get their land back? Villagers were also concerned about what would happen in case things went wrong with the biofuel project, or if the partnerships failed.

Once the company realised that most of the villagers were sceptical about the project, they made promises to build new schools and health centres, or promote participation in other community projects and scholarships. Rumours also circulated that those who were against the project will be deprived of these benefits such as access to new schools, health care or other social responsibility programs. .

Despite spirited efforts to continue staying on 'their' land, a total of 1,754 households lost their land and their houses were destroyed to pave way for the sugarcane fields. Green Fuel used a combination of the state security apparatus (law enforcement agents) and technologies of knowledge production (GIS maps) wedded to technologies for recording knowledge (legal language, contracts, agreements and signatures, etc.) to forcibly take over land to establish sugarcane fields.

The function of the technologies of knowledge production, is to know, while the function of the technologies for recording knowledge, is to reify that knowledge for the protection of power (Millar, 2016). Green Fuel made use of these tools in order to gain domination over land, local traditional institutions and the communal people who fall under them. This constituted a major assault on the livelihood of the local people.

Data from the affected population was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire which was administered to 100 respondents. During interviews with Green Fuel staff at the time of my fieldwork, I explained that local people were not happy that they were losing their land to the project in return for low paying jobs and that some of the promises the company had made such as the establishment of new schools and hospitals were yet to materialise. In return I was shown papers and pictures which "proved" that the project was officially authorised and above board.

One of the victims of the land take-over was Cecelia Makawa, who was interviewed soon after losing her farming land to Green Fuel. Cecelia is a 33-year-old mother of five children, married to

Dickson, a 62-year-old divorcee. Cecelia was married in 1996 and started staying in Makogova, a village adjacent to the ARDA estate where her husband was working.

'I have stayed in this village ever since I got married and all my children were born here. My eldest child is doing her form 3 at Takwirira secondary school. We used to own seven hectares of land and we have cultivated maize, sorghum, cotton. We have eight goats and ten chickens and six ducks. My husband used to work for ARDA as an irrigator and when Green Fuel came he continued working in the fields. He starts work at 6 a.m. and finishes at 4 p.m. while I take care of the family. I take turns to look after the goats with my young children but sometimes they interchange going to school in order to help me. We were told last year that our fields have been earmarked for sugarcane by Green Fuel. They told us to destroy our homes before the land preparation for sugarcane fields starts. Now the bulldozer came and my whole homestead was destroyed. I am really devastated and do not know where to start.'



Figure 6: Hungry and nowhere to go.... A family regroups after losing their homes and farming land in Chisumbanje.

Cecelia Makawa continued, *'At the moment we do not know where to go or what to do next, we have not been given anything.'*

Another respondent, 58-year-old Gwaku, casting a lonely and sad picture, narrated, *'I was allocated 15 hectares of farming land in 1976 by Chief Garahwa's headman Chinyamukwakwa. We have enjoyed good returns from farming different food and cash crops [with no fertilisers] and livestock rearing over the years. The problem started only in 2008 when Green Fuel descended in the area with plans to convert this whole area into sugarcane fields. I was one of the people who were at the forefront of resisting this project. I refused to allow them to take my land. I told my fellow neighbours that this Green Fuel is up to no good, we cannot allow anyone to take away where we walk, live, farm and pray. I told them, this Green Fuel was up to no good, all they wanted ibanirendowoyo [valley of the rich, black basalt soils]. When they came to instruct us to pull down our houses and allow the Caterpillars to clear the land, I refused. Police were then later called in and they brought with them water cannons and also started firing tear gas on us. Fearful of the choking smoke, I ran and hid in a toilet and in no time we were all displaced and our land was gone. This is the conflict we have here, I want this land, Green Fuel also wants it but GF want a larger portion of it. The surrounding villages of Machona and Vheneka are not yet affected but they are being targeted. You wonder where this would stop.'*

The project has not only taken away land but it has also appropriated resources held as common property, including grazing land, an important natural resource, since livestock rearing and export is a major practice in Chisumbanje and other surrounding lands near the rich and insatiable illegal Mozambique cattle market. The resources also include rivers such as the Jerewachera, pools and pans, and other water sources which are critical to both humans and livestock.

Another concern if the project expands is that it will take away 'community reserve land', that small but critical mass of land which communities often set aside for expanding households and strategic relocation as a result of conflict, witchcraft accusations, feuds and general misunderstandings. The company has already started the process of fencing out communities. During my fieldwork, most respondents indicated that each time their livestock trespassed on the company estates they would be shot, or their owners would be required to pay punitive fines

in the region of US\$5-10 per cow. Some families who could not afford to pay these fines ended up selling their cattle at low prices to the company.

Gwaku narrated how he had fallen victim of this before.

'The area that Green Fuel annexed into the project was also partly used by our livestock as grazing pastures. So our cattle continue to roam in this area. More so, our cattle are attracted by the green sugarcane leaves and water in the canals and they cross over to this area which has since been taken over by Green Fuel. Due to this, Green Fuel has constructed a kraal where every cow that trespasses is confined and kept there indefinitely until the owner comes to claim. In this kraal, no food or water is provided to these roaming livestock.'



Figure 7: Captive kraal built by Green Fuel to keep stray cattle. Behind is the ethanol plant.

Gwaku continued, *'At some point, ten of my cows strayed and were kept there for five days until I paid a fine of US\$200. The following week, fifteen cows strayed and I only discovered that after four days. I made frantic efforts to look for money but I could not, until I sold one in order to get them back. It is really terrible and unfair. At times overzealous Green Fuel workers looking for*

promotional favours at work just take all the cattle even if only one trespasses into the fields. You get a sense this treatment is no different to that practiced by the oppressive colonial regime.'

Tokenism and deception? Compensation and the Smallholder Farmer Out-grower Scheme

This section deals with what those families who were affected by Green Fuel got in return. At the time of study, a total of 1,754 families had been affected by the project. They had lost grazing land for their cattle. Within this number, 116 settler farmers who owned the 416 hectares which was developed inside the ARDA estate were not forced out of their homes since they were built outside the estate, but lost their arable fields to Green Fuel's project. The remainder – 1,638 families who occupied the communal land adjacent to the project – were displaced from their land and were forced to pull down their houses. An estimated 60,000 people who lived in the surrounding areas continued to live under uncertainty as their land was the target of an imminent land grab as the Green Fuel project continued to expand.

Most villagers who were asked what they received as compensation expressed disappointment about the arbitrary nature of the assessments which were done to determine the amount of money to be paid for housing units which were pulled down. One respondent, a 47-year-old mother of seven children who had lived in Magokova village for over 20 years remarked, *'On average households with 3-5 structures received a payment between 50-300 dollars. Imagine the whole homestead built over the years and you receive so little for that. In addition, when paying compensation for farming land, they considered only the portion that was currently under cultivation without considering that here we own large pieces of land which we use for rotational farming. This is not fair. It appears the intention of the compensation was kutitiitevarombo, vasinachinhu [to structurally impoverish us]. It's very difficult to eke out a new start with this money.'*

Almost all the local people who had planted their lands in time for the rainy season had their crops ploughed down and were promised a total of US\$100,000 as compensation. This amount is too small to support all of them compared to the crops that were destroyed.

One respondent whose crops were ploughed down commented, *'Imagine, I receive an average US\$500 in a bad cotton season and also harvest two tonnes of maize which is enough to take me to the next season, yet we are supposed to share US\$100,000 among the 1,638 of us, which is US\$62, this is madness! Even more, the payment has been delayed and it seems Green Fuel will only pay when it feels like doing so.'*

This dynamic illustrates clearly the conflict between how the company and local people know the land. It is related to the different interpretations given to the meaning of land due to its multiple uses. This is also further reinforced by claims made by managers of the project that the area on which the project was set up was empty and idle before their arrival. This perspective clearly sees the land from a static temporal position and is related to the static knowledge tool of the map (Millar, 2015). On a map, a tree, grazing pasture, sugarcane or food crop is a point in a geographical space, collected through laborious GPS surveying of every tree in the project area – not a thing in time, generating income that has been used to support household needs. The meaning and value that is attached to land by a villager is different from the way a private investor does to the same piece of land.

The 'out-grower' scheme

As discussed earlier, the settler farmers whose sugarcane fields were incorporated into the Green Fuel operation did not receive any compensation for their arable fields and crops; instead, they now owed Green Fuel the costs of harvesting and processing the cane. As for the rest of the displaced farmers, Green Fuel set aside 408 hectares of land meant for the establishment of an out-grower agricultural irrigation scheme. This scheme was intended to target primarily those who had lost their arable fields to the project. Each individual plot measured half a hectare and the number of available plots under irrigation were enough for only 516 farmers. On these smaller pieces of land, and as promised, the villagers would continue to grow crops of their choice as they used to. They were promised a ready market for their produce, a permanent supply of water and agricultural inputs, including seed and fertiliser.

The responsibility of allocating plots and negotiating 'agrarian contracts' in the smallholder scheme was given to the Joint Ethanol Project Implementation Committee (JEPAC). This committee comprised the sub-chiefs, police, extension workers and representatives of the Rural District Council. The absence of displaced farmers, and even the negotiation process itself and partnership that was envisaged between small-scale farmers and the company, was likely to lead to the poor losing out because it was based on a depoliticised and unrealistic vision of engagement between various actors (see Ferguson, 1990).

It later transpired that some people in the community benefitted disproportionately from the scheme by occupying several plots, using the names of their wives and children. This category included the sub-chiefs themselves and petty traders who had been living in South Africa, some of whom had managed to acquire assets such as livestock, set up small businesses and marry several wives. An estimated 150 people received preference in the allocation of plots through the use of political connections, thus systematically disadvantaging the majority of communal farmers seeking livelihood opportunities in the context of land dispossession.

Even the 366 people who genuinely deserved the plots were not happy with size of their plots because neither the family size nor the size of land which they lost was considered. It was a one-size-fits-all approach.

As one respondent put it, 'Land is the main resource that my family depends on. Now we have been allocated *half a hectare*. *We have entirely surrendered our land to the biofuel company, we do not know what will happen in the future.*'

The scheme is run under the rubric of 'partnership', but the returns to the out-grower farmers are linked to what happens at the larger estate, and its profitability for the corporate investors. The people who were favoured in the allocation of the out-grower plots did not really become out-growers; they were not allowed to produce sugarcane for which there was a guaranteed market, but were told to produce vegetables, ostensibly for sale to the company which intended to use them to feed its workers. There was high demand for their produce while the Green Fuel

plant was under construction, but the market began to dry up when construction finished, and also when production was halted owing to lack of a market for ethanol. In effect, the company had advanced credit to the out-growers to buy seed and fertiliser and wanted its money back even though it wasn't buying their vegetables.

One of the beneficiaries of the out-grower scheme narrated the events that transpired from the time she received the plot. Maria is a 37-year-old mother of five children married to a settler farmer. She benefitted from the half-acre plot and developed 14 irrigation lines where she grows maize and beans.



Picture 8. Maria stands in her out-grower plot in Chisumbanje.

'I benefitted from the scheme because our three hectare sugarcane plot was incorporated into the ethanol project. I joined in phase 1 of the scheme and the company provided seed and fertiliser in the first year. I harvested a tonne of maize and sold green mealies to workers at the plant and the remainder was for family consumption. I also got returns from vegetables and beans after deducting the quantities that went to Green Fuel as part of the payment of the inputs. In the second year, Green Fuel provided the seed but did not provide the fertiliser. This affected my harvests but I could still afford to sell beans to the company albeit at reduced prices due to the

quality of the harvest. In the third year, productivity started to decline. Green Fuel stopped providing inputs as initially promised, the plant was also closed for the better part of the year and water supply to the plots became a challenge. I made a huge loss and actually although the plant reopened, I could not afford to invest anything into the plot. I had no livelihood alternative. At this point, I decided to rent out half of my plot to a local teacher at US\$10 a line and I continue using the US\$70 I receive to purchase inputs. I have also diversified into vegetables and tomatoes and due to market limitations here, most of my harvests are meant for household consumption. At times I barter with those who receive maize from humanitarian organisations.'

Jonathan, a 34-year-old father of three children, received his plot together with his younger brother, June, on the basis that their father's fields on the communal land were annexed by the project. *'This is a hopeless scheme. When I joined in 2009, we were told that phase 1 was for us to cultivate food crops to sell to the company until we upgrade to phase 2 where we start growing cane as contract farmers, but nothing has happened yet. Green Fuel has reneged on its promise to provide seed and fertiliser. Moreover it has been very difficult to keep out cattle that often trespass and destroy our fields.'*

The out-grower scheme borders the sugarcane fields, from which the farmers obtain excess water.

'I think Green Fuel established this scheme only as a buffer to protect their sugarcane from stray animals. I have not realised any significant harvests since I started working on it. We resolved to abandon it, actually we handed it over to an uncle before June left for South Africa to look for better opportunities. I haven't heard from June in a long time and I hope he is not in trouble with the police because he had no passport. I decided to go into full-time employment at Green Fuel where I am working now as a tractor driver.'

Other recipients of the plot continue relying on Green Fuel and seek to diversify their income under the rubric of 'partnership' with the company.

'I come from Mwatika village, an area which has not been affected by the project – where we have been staying with my family. My husband has been working for ARDA since the 1990s. When

ARDA collapsed, my husband lost his job although he continued providing security services to ARDA properties. When Green Fuel revived operations, we were all excited that this project will open new income opportunities for the family. My husband easily secured a job with Green Fuel by virtue of his past connection with ARDA. At the time of the allocation of plots I was one of the 39 people who received the plots in my village which has 300 households. Green Fuel provided inputs in the first two years of the project but apparently stopped in the third year. This was also partly due to circumstances surrounding the marketing of ethanol and production was halted. I organised women whose husbands were working on the plant and with help from Green Fuel public relations department, we visited the vice president to lobby for the plant to be reopened. We started composing songs and held several drama acts to demonstrate the likely benefits of the plant. We rallied all the different stakeholders until the plant was finally opened. Although they could no longer support us with inputs for the out-grower plots, we approached them with another proposal aimed at diversifying our income. Some of us were selected to work in the factory sewing uniforms for workers and others including myself started a chicken project. Green Fuel procured 300 chickens for us and we were told to repay 10 per cent of the profits. We received good income in the first cycle which I used to revive activities on my plot. Although we ended up scaling down the chicken project due to enormous debts accrued by Green Fuel workers who failed to service their debts on time, this income diversification enabled me to keep me and my plot going. I continued cultivating mainly maize and beans. Due to difficulties in accessing markets in the surrounding areas, I continued to approach Green Fuel who is buying a 50kg bag of beans at US\$75. I also target some people within the community and the local township where I sell in small packets or tins [20kg] which goes for US\$18-20.'

One respondent who is closely connected to the local elite gave insight to the internal workings of the out-grower plot.

'Let me tell you this first, the allocation of out-grower plots was not necessarily targeting those who lost land, neither was it looking at socio-economic status. The plots were allocated on the basis of ethnic belonging, kuti urimwana wemuno here [are you from the local area, belonging to the Ndau ethnic group]. It doesn't matter if we see some of the plots being owned by traders

or civil servants working in the area, as long as they are from this area. This is development coming to our area and everyone should benefit. As times goes on, everyone is expected to receive their own irrigated land.'

Pisa, third wife to one of the local leaders who is a recipient of a plot herself, had this to say. *'When I received this plot in 2009, some of the local villagers refused in solidarity with others saying they will only accept provided everyone in the village receives. But since in some villages people had already been allocated, I decided to go ahead and secured 15 lines where I cultivate maize and beans. My husband owns a similar size of land. The harvests have been good over the years except in the third year when Green Fuel decided to wean us from the programme of input subsidy. I then approached local grocery shops [she is also renting out a shop] where I sell my produce [beans] in small packages. I have arranged with a local school [Chisumbanje Primary School] to provide them with relish of beans. The school receives maize from government as drought relief support for child supplementary feeding. At times where their supplies do not take them through the month, I provide them with maize which I harvest from my plot. Some of the time it would be lower than the market prices but it gets me going.'*

Although a modest differentiated pattern of accumulation is slowly emerging among the plot holders, it is mainly among those who can access extra capital and markets to sustain their farming. The majority work on and off the plots and have to work for those whose plots are flourishing in order to eke out a living. An estimated 1,238 who were displaced did not receive irrigation plots by the fourth year of the project. These people lived under hardship as compared to their earlier predicament. Those who managed to secure employment in the biofuel company also suffered a significant reduction in their salaries. A significant reduction in income also affected access to food at household level.

While the government claim that the ethanol project is contributing to food security, employment creation and rural development, the situation on the ground did not reflect this optimism. The justification that has been put forward by the biofuel company on limiting smallholders to food crops was for mitigating food and nutrition insecurity. Local farmers were

not given a guaranteed market in the main ethanol feedstock and this affected their incomes. In the first two years, when the smallholders received inputs and had a guaranteed market from the company, those households who intercropped maize did relatively well.

Green Fuel thrived due to the benevolence of the government who facilitated the deal but on the ground local people raised several concerns especially around loss of land. In the long-term, the livelihoods of the local people who lost farming land had become dependent on the biofuel project. Some people who lost land were unable to work and were given all sorts of promises but by the time of this study none of this assistance had yet materialise.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the land local people lost to the Green Fuel project and what they supposedly gained in return. Agricultural activities in communal areas have often been described as subsistence farming, but people in Chisumbanje have long been in a position where they could not subsist on agricultural activities alone – income from labour migration was necessary to keep 'subsistence agriculture' going, and subsistence agriculture was a way of spreading income from labour migration through local communities.

This is what has come under threat after the development of the Green Fuel project in Chisumbanje. The people there now face a situation in which becoming labour migrants is more difficult than it was earlier; they have lost land that was under a system of tenure that was adapted to that earlier reality (and may lose more in future), and have been exposed to market-based agricultural activities offered to them under extremely unfavourable terms.

Some local people in Chisumbanje who believed promises made by Green Fuel did not understand why those promised services were not forthcoming. The following chapter looks into the issue of labour conditions in the ethanol project.

Chapter 5

'All we want is fairness': Labour and Livelihoods in a Biofuel project

Introduction

'Subsistence economy, upon which people here depend, is out-dated and in fact inferior to a more modern, cash income economy. What Green Fuel investment has done in this area is to rehabilitate the old agricultural estate, revive irrigation schemes and modernise production on the same piece of land. It makes sense from the perspective of raising land productivity – income earned per hectare of land. Local villagers will do better with compensation for relocation and cash income for jobs. They need to be patient, as the project develops, everyone is guaranteed to get irrigation and plenty of jobs in the biofuel venture. Now we have employed 4,500 and the plan is to reach 15,000 as the project develops.' Interview with Green Fuel public relations manager.

'My understanding is that the company has compensated some of the affected people, although it was yet to pay compensation for some. The company has also offered to incorporate farmers in irrigation. Irrigation is a form of compensation and the people tend to reap much more from irrigated land, even if it is smaller, more than they did in their rain-fed agriculture. Either way, everyone around here has an added advantage of employment opportunity in the biofuel project. I know thousands of youths who have come to me for letters of recommendations and most of them have started work.' Interview with Enock Porusingazi, Chipinge south Member of Parliament.

I have started this chapter with extracts from interviews with two prominent protagonists of the Chisumbanje biofuel project. Such comments could be heard frequently from politicians and

officials. They implicitly believe that even if land must be forcibly taken from peasants, before the former occupants are coerced into providing cheap labour, the trauma that people endure is warranted because the expected changes make the suffering worthwhile in the long run. This is not entirely new or unique to Zimbabwe. The transformation of semi-subsistence farmers into people highly dependent on wage-labour has been noted in other countries, such as Vietnam, China and Thailand.

Baird (2011) demonstrated that the Laos government's policy on large-scale investments to 'turn land into capital' is crucially intertwined with another important factor: 'turning people into labour'. He states that 'drawing the Lao labour force into the market economy is, for many reasons, one of the key justifications amongst officials in Laos for the present land concession system. Entering into agreements that disempower indigenous peoples and even the state is frequently accepted due to the belief that such sacrifices are, at worst, a necessary evil, something that is needed to propel Laos into the modern world and eventually out of poverty.'

Similarly, Dao (2015) noted that in the rubber plantations of north-west Vietnam, local land users were dispossessed of their land and new labour regimes were established. He argues that the government's development strategy favours a neo-liberal market approach, one that promotes large scale agro investments at the expense of small holder farmers and workers who needed to work in the plantations.

The previous chapter has shown that in order to grasp the impact of the Green Fuel intervention on local people's livelihoods, it is important to engage with the history of the area and its people. The lowveld area around Chisumbanje took on many of the characteristics of former settler economies of southern Africa which were sustained both by people's reliance on access to communal land for agricultural purposes, and by access to income from employment earned outside the area. Chapter 4 has detailed how livelihoods were reconfigured following the ruptures of the biofuel project. While the chapter was unable to say definitively whether local people affected were better or worse off after the Green Fuel intervention, what is certain is that their livelihoods were changed, and they had to confront new vulnerabilities.

During my fieldwork, it even seemed at times that there was more concern about labour issues than with the loss of land. Plantations had been developed in and after the 1960s in Chisumbanje and a small number of black people had been turned into relatively prosperous tenant farmers growing crops for sale to the plantations. The estate at the time also offered extensive employment on its plantation, albeit at low wages, which created opportunities for local people to earn cash to support subsistence farming. Is it possible that local perceptions of the Green Fuel intervention were shaped by their experiences of these earlier developments to the extent that they were initially relatively well disposed towards Green Fuel's arrival?

To answer that question, there was a need to pay close attention to the employment dispensation the company offered local people in the sugarcane fields and the plant itself.

In this chapter I examine the quality of jobs generated at the ethanol production plant and the general working conditions experienced by people who work in the sugarcane plantations. I ask two main questions: First; what was the nature of employment created by the biofuel project and which kind of people were employed in each job category? Second, how do different categories of workers survive in a fragmenting post-settler economy with limited secure employment opportunities?

Contrary to the rhetoric from the state and the ethanol producer company, the biofuel project at Chisumbanje failed to conjure up vast numbers of jobs that provide discernible benefits to workers in the countryside. The jobs generated at the biofuel project were largely short-term, unskilled and insecure. The chapter also shows that the poor working conditions which prevailed in the plantations coupled with low wages are reminiscent of colonial labour practices, (see Moore, 2005). It shows, moreover, that workers engaging in a battle to reverse this were facing a struggle where the odds were stacked against them.

While many workers were poorly remunerated, a deeper analysis of their livelihoods beyond wage employment, shows that alongside the revival of wage employment at Chisumbanje by Green Fuel, was the growth in informal or casual work which enabled them to combine their meagre incomes with other livelihood activities. Half of the workers I spoke to — both women and men — who worked in and around the biofuel project were pursuing a range of livelihood activities, including farming and petty trade, as well as selling labour to farmers on small-scale plots. These survival strategies were linked to small but reliable salaries from the Green Fuel operation which allowed them to invest in a range of off-farm projects and fairly benign arrangements whereby the company did not enforce strict rules about who they lived with or what they did with their free time.

This chapter is organised around five key sections. The first provides a brief historical overview of labour relations as a context to the issues under study. The second provides a detailed description and analysis of the type of work within each category of work involved in Green Fuel's operations, and the kind of people employed in them. The third addresses the question of security — the security people had enjoyed when in possession of land, and the lack of security associated with the new employment conditions. The fourth shows that while many people suffered from the lack of security provided by the wage employment on offer, there were multiple trajectories of change, with some benefitting from new opportunities through flexible livelihoods. In the last section, I attempt to map out emerging patterns of workers' mobilisation and resistance strategies against labour exploitation and show how such efforts have continuously been frustrated by company management in collaboration with the state.

The labour setting: historical perspective

Since the colonial era, rural economic activities have been shaped by the historical lineage of 'hoe and wage/wage and hoe' in communal areas (Bernstein, 2004). Many people who resided in the rural areas were dependent on both agriculture and urban jobs, creating 'a rural semi-proletariat class' (Arrighi, 1970; Bush & Cliffe, 1984). This situation was prevalent in most of Rhodesia's rural areas. In Chisumbanje, most people have been heavily reliant on mixed subsistence involving semi-subsistence agriculture in which a large portion of the food consumed has been obtained

through family farm agriculture, as well as hunting and gathering of wild fruits and vegetables. Although there were some fertile soils in the area, dry-land agriculture was a risky business, and people were obliged to look for alternative sources of income, including labour migration to the cities.

The relative returns from formal employment versus agricultural incomes were a determining factor in migrant labour in Rhodesia since mines, commercial farms and industries were established from the 1920s. With increased real wage rates and improved conditions, periods of full-time employment became increasingly attractive for men, particularly in drought-prone areas like Chisumbanje. By 1945, participation in the formal labour economy had increased significantly and 40 per cent of the 'indigenous' African population over the age of fourteen was employed (Scoones et al., 1996). By the mid-1960s, this rate had increased to 55 per cent (Arrighi, 1970). This reliance on periods of formal employment became characteristic of the livelihood strategies of the majority of the population, even after independence.

Since the mid-1980s to early 1990s, however, the contraction of the economy has led to increasing levels of unemployment and declining real wages. The devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar following the implementation of ESAP policy had an inflationary impact on the economy (Sachikonye, 1999). Structural adjustments exacerbated the trend of decreasing real wages and increasing unemployment, especially as loan conditions required major retrenchments in the public sector. The state's capacity to create employment and to support farmers in the communal areas was severely diminished and the situation would further deteriorate in the decade-long economic crisis of 1998-2008.

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, it is this crisis in the agriculture sector, combined with economic collapse and sanctions that provided powerful incentives for the government to adopt an inward-looking strategy that would enable the country to reduce foreign dependency through the local production of industrial products. Energy crops such as sugarcane were identified as strategic commodities to be used for domestic fuel production and to drive the economy. In the perspective of the government, biofuels would solve problems such as climate change and

underdevelopment, as well as boost the economic prospects of the country which desperately needed new and sustainable investments.

ARDA's colonial predecessor, the Chisumbanje Development Company (CDC), employed mostly white technical extension personnel seconded from the Sabi Limpopo Authority in 1965. In the 1970s, as its estates developed, the CDC started to employ more local black people. Those employed were trained in agronomy, soil conservation techniques and basic equipment maintenance. These skills were critical for operations at both the large commercial estate and the out-grower schemes. Strict rules governed operations at the farms where workers were expected to be disciplined under a form of 'domestic government' (Rutherford, 2001).

Following independence in 1980, the regulatory and policy environment changed, and the CDC became ARDA. New labour laws that set minimum wages and employee welfare were created. As a result of this, more people were attracted to work in the agricultural sector. On the ARDA estate in Chisumbanje, a structured work regime was developed as more workers were employed at the estate. Sometimes living on the edge of the estate in informal compounds or in nearby communal areas, workers at ARDA became relatively successful in combining temporary wage work with other livelihood activities.

By the late early 1990s many generations had stayed on the ARDA estate depending on the availability of employment. This all changed in 1992 following the introduction of ESAP which led to the contraction of the economy, increasing levels of unemployment and declining real wages. ARDA started to disinvest and many workers lost their jobs.

Information on the exact figures may not be readily available, but after ESAP it is estimated that only 30 per cent of the workforce retained their jobs on the estate, 30 per cent were retrenched and remained on the estate, and the balance were forced to move¹⁰. Of those who migrated away, some maintained a keen relationship with their rural homes by investing in assets such as

¹⁰ Interview with former ARDA manager, 16 December 2014.

livestock while others sought employment, notably in Mutare and Harare. Others crossed the border to South Africa, Mozambique or Zambia, while others moved to private estates such as Triangle, Hippo Valley and Mkwesine in search of work.

Reliant as they were on the success of the estate, many workers found their futures more uncertain as access to cash and benefits vanished. New jobs at the estate had become more insecure. For those who remained in work, ARDA struggled to pay their salaries. ARDA attempted to ameliorate these challenges by renting out houses in the compound, but these houses were being used by retrenched workers, who then had to undertake *maricho* (temporary, poorly paying work) just to cover the rent. Thus, by time the biofuel project started, many workers and former workers at the estate had been pushed further to the extremes of poverty and were engaged in highly precarious livelihood activities with little or no security.

It is against this background that there were high hopes that the revival of the ARDA estate would offer renewed prospects for citizens who had endured years of suffering. The Chisumbanje biofuel project was an opportunity for thousands of retrenched rural workers and many more local villagers with limited alternative sources of living to get formal employment in the sugarcane estates. Below I look at the different categories of jobs created by the project.

‘The Pioneers’: Working on land clearance and preparation

From the onset of the project, it was clear that Green Fuel would encounter some form of resistance especially with regards to the acquisition of land and finding workers to help in the process. Recruiting people from the local area earmarked for sugarcane plantations, the same people who would potentially lose the right to their farming land, was problematic. Recruiting from external markets was also likely to create tension between ‘outsiders’ and local residents.

Work on the first 5,000 hectares – the area which traditionally belonged to ARDA – was carried out by Green Fuel workers seconded from ARDA. The agreement between Green Fuel and ARDA to use the latter’s premises for sugarcane production provided for the incorporation of employees who had been working for the state-owned entity. To ensure a smooth transition, one

senior employee of ARDA, Rueben, was appointed into the 'management structure' of the largely white-dominated biofuel company. Rueben joined the new company along with over 500 workers, most of whom were local residents of the area while others had assimilated into the local community and were now conversant with local tradition and practices. This work mainly involved the resuscitation of infrastructure that had been used by ARDA, such as opening up of canals. Some of these workers, as will be seen later, also took part in the construction of the plant.

In order to maximise production on their 200,000 litre/day capacity ethanol plant, Green Fuel needed additional land to expand its sugarcane plantations. As stated in Chapter 4, additional land from the communal land in the adjacent villages was identified for this purpose. In order to clear this land, Green Fuel identified and sub-contracted Tobias Magwere, a farmer and long-time resident of the area.

'I was awarded a contract for clearing land to set up sugarcane fields in 2009. I went into negotiations with Green Fuel and agreed a daily rate of US\$9.62 per worker. The initial agreement was for my team to clear land amounting to 4,000 hectares. I recruited a total of 107 people, 50 of which were women. I had all the equipment and Green Fuel provided additional equipment such as a tractor and a few picks, axes and shovel. All my workers who did the actual land clearing worked at a rate of US\$2.60 per day. My supervisors received US\$3.00 per day which I later increased to US\$5.00. We started with phase one in section H which has 721 hectares and moved on to section G and H which is over 1,000 hectares. We did not finish the 4,000 hectares but we covered the bulk of the area currently under sugarcane cultivation.'

Tobias Magwere is a 66-year-old father of eight children and has several grandchildren. He has a long history in the area and was part of the first batch of farmers who received agricultural plots under the black tenant scheme in the late 1960s.

Interviews with some of the workers who worked under Tobias reflect a sense of both optimism and resignation. One respondent, Sox, highlighted that by the end of the contract he felt overworked and poorly rewarded.

'We used to start work as early as five in the morning, cutting down trees, digging up tree stumps while women would be cutting and piling tree branches and burning some of the stumps. We were allocated mugwazo [a portion of work which was supposed to be completed each day]. Food was not provided and in most cases I would bring maheu [a traditional energy drink]. Depending on the amount of work that day, I would normally finish work late in the afternoon. Although I received my rewards at the end of the month, it was hard labour and when I look back I feel I would probably have made more money had I moved to search for employment elsewhere.'

Sox, who now works in a local grocery shop, continued:

'What made it worse is I was not so sure if I was doing the right thing, whether I was facilitating the dispossession of my kinsmen from our ancestral land or I was triggering development in the area. This question will continue to haunt me.'

Another respondent, Tamandai, a married father of four children, welcomed the idea.

'Look, there are no viable sources of income in this area. Our parents built their lives either by working in South Africa or other urban areas and remitting money back home, at the same time investing in irrigation plots offered by TILCOR or mixed agriculture in the communal areas. They also used to own large farming areas, part of which we as their children were allocated when we started our families. But with the deteriorating weather patterns in recent years which has negatively affected farming and contraction of labour opportunities in urban centres, we have limited opportunities to rely on. As a result, I was happy to work on US\$2.60 per day and for your information, this commitment saw me being promoted to supervisor and this position came with a corresponding increase in my wages to US\$3 and later to US\$5 per day. I managed to buy 2 goats which have increased to 13 and 4 ducks which are now 19. I also managed to keep my children at school during those days. It is through this work, and my association to my supervisor, Mr Magwere, that I also managed to get a job in Green Fuel where I am currently working right now.'

In order to get a deeper understanding of these first workers, who were later referred to as 'the pioneers' because they helped Green Fuel to 'break ground', I asked Tobias why he accepted this opportunity.

'I was the vice chairperson of the Chisumbanje Settlers Association (CSA) and at the same time a successful farmer in the communal areas. With this position I had influence and respect among people in the area. This level of trust made it easier for me to identify young men and women who were willing to work in the initial phases of this project. Because of my close association with Green Fuel, I assured most of my workers that they will get good jobs in the Green Fuel operation once our work is finished. This was plausible and we discussed some of it on the 20th, the day that we met with Green Fuel each month in order to review progress.'

On further probing about how he handled his apparently conflicting role, Tobias admitted that, *'Yes it had several challenges, some of the members thought I had sold out, actually at some stage they threatened to relieve me of my post as vice chair. Under such pressure, I approached Green Fuel advising them I was going to terminate my contract until some of the demands raised by the membership were addressed. The concerns which were being raised were centred on what farmers who lost their land will get in return and what criteria will be used to determine their compensation. Noticing rising tensions, Green Fuel shut down the water supply that was going to some of the local farmers' plots including drinking water for livestock.'*

'This created an impasse which was later resolved with the intervention of the national political leadership. After this, I retook the contract for clearing the last part of the land. I had to convince membership that whatever we wanted to do was bound to fail because "land in Zimbabwe belonged to the state". Inini chaiye [even me] I was moved by the Smith colonial government in 1965. I drew their attention to the large trees close to the road, and reminded them that even my family was moved to pave way for the construction of power lines. Similarly many more families were moved to pave way for roads and canals in the following years. Although they received some sort of compensation, they moved and some even provided their labour for this. That is just the way it is! This whole area is pegged and it's a matter of time before the whole area is taken up.'

At the end of the interview, Tobias shook my hand, and smiled contentedly as he jumped into his ramshackle Toyota Hilux and roared out of his homestead. He put his foot down as he made his way through the country road, his knowledge of his car's capabilities making him reckless behind

the wheel. This was one of the gifts he managed to salvage from his many dealings with Green Fuel as their local labour broker.

‘The Early birds’: Plant construction workers

The construction of the ethanol plant began in November 2008 on land that was leased from the rural district council.¹¹ As stated earlier, most of the 500 workers who were taken over from ARDA were employed to do the preparatory work for the establishment of the project. They also became part of the ‘early birds’ – the first batch of employees who joined the initial stages of the project.

Work on the initial establishment of the plant required considerable manpower. Green Fuel placed job advertisements all over the local townships of Chisumbanje and Checheche for a variety of jobs – the construction of water reservoirs and canals, the refurbishment of offices and guest house for staff and the construction of the plant itself. This generated interest from as far as Harare and created an unprecedented ‘labour rush’. Jobless youths (some of them graduates), lowly paid farm workers, new (resettled) farmers and civil servants from across the country descended on Green Fuel and crowded their gates every day. The rewards were not disappointing either. Green Fuel recruited this initial batch as general workers entitled to an allowance of US\$2.40 per hour which could increase if extra hours were worked. A total of 2,000 employees were recruited during this time.

Interviews with respondents who were part of this ‘labour rush’ indicated that a level of tension, anxiety, excitement, and uncertainty engulfed Chisumbanje at the time. Below is an excerpt from an interview with one of the employees, Mujaji a middle aged man.

‘I used to work in the tea estates in Chipinge but after the land reform in 2000 and subsequent takeover of the farm, I lost a substantial amount of income. My new employer was less keen on meeting some of the benefits which I used to receive under my old employer, citing depressed production and difficulty finding markets for tea. When I heard about this opportunity for employment at Green Fuel, I was one of the first people to land here looking for a job. It was a bit

¹¹ 69 hectares was leased from Chipinge Rural District Council (Chisumbanje Ethanol Project Document, 2011).

easier; my basic English was good, I was mature and physically fit to engage in demanding tasks. I was trained on the job with a group of Malaysians who were constructing the plant. In a good month, with a boost of extra income from overtime and taking double shifts, I earned more than US\$800. It was a good salary and I used it to substantially boost my cattle herd back home. After the completion of plant construction, I was lucky to be retained by Green Fuel. Now I am a shift supervisor monitoring the amount and quality of cane entering into the crushing machine. The conditions have seriously changed, however, and my salary has reduced by almost half from the one I used to get in the initial phase, but it keeps me going.'

Taribo a 34 year old who left his job in the civil service to join Green Fuel narrated his story as follows: *'I used to work as a clerk in a government ministry and when I heard of this opportunity from an uncle who previously worked for ARDA, I resigned. Due to his influence it did not take time to secure employment as a shop floor clerk at Green Fuel, screening potential employees and recording their personal details. The work was stressful at first and I received a lot of threats from potential job seekers every day, but I was there for the money. However, I quickly noticed that the situation and the system they used here was very different from the one we had when I was civil servant. There were no contracts at all, we were just recorded in a book and rewarded with allowances. In 2012, there was a massive retrenchment. Specialised personnel with international exposure or local experience working in distilleries were head-hunted to fill in positions at the ethanol plant. These adjustments meant that many workers were 'casualised' or retrenched, and others were reassigned to work in the sugarcane plantations. I was laid off during this exercise and I regretted why I had left my position in government in the first place. This was the lowest point in my working life as no retrenchment packages, pension or any benefits were given. It was only a year later that my uncle organised another position for me and now I am back with Green Fuel as a security guard.'*

Mhanduwe, a local resident, narrated the recruitment process in the initial stages of plant.

'By the time I decided to look for a job in Green Fuel, the demand for jobs was already unprecedented. Thousands of people queued at the gates very early in the morning each and every day. No one would notice or bother even if you say you are a local resident. Due to this

pressure, Green Fuel started to use awkward methods of recruiting people. I remember what happened on the day I was selected, we were gathered at the gate, an estimated two thousand or more of us. The team doing the recruitment came in a kombi.

'One of their members dismounted the kombi and announced through a megaphone that they wanted only five people. The kombi sped off and they announced that jobs will be given to the first five people to get onto the speeding kombi. We all ran after the speeding kombi. Most people were left behind and I kept on running until I was the first to get inside. That is how I got the job, but to my surprise, they were four other people already in the kombi who had already been positioned before the race and I was the last one! My job duties entailed drilling, with instruction from some foreign engineers, an underground pipeline which moved water from the Save River to the sugarcane fields. The drilling required a certain precision and the machinery involved produced a sharp light. I worked for three months but I could not bear the lighting that struck my eyes causing severe pain to the eyes which would last for days. Realising the amount of risk posed to my health, I quit the job despite all the rewards we were promised.'

Mhanduwe retreated into the informal economy mending bicycles and periodically working as an assistant builder to his older brothers.

At that time it was not too difficult for Mhanduwe to look elsewhere for a job because the prosperity generated by the inception of the biofuel project had created down-stream opportunities. Furthermore, some farmers had access to land for cotton growing and livestock keeping which gave them a fair chance to survive outside the estate plantation.

'Vashandi': Plantation workers

The largest group of workers were those who worked in the plantations. During my interactions with them, they often referred to themselves as *vashandi*, implying 'real' workers. They worked in the operation's agricultural enterprise. They would boast at times that the whole biofuel project depended on them since they were the source of labour in the plantations where raw materials for the plant came from. In 2013, Green Fuel's primary sugarcane estates had 1,500 long-term (permanent) workers and 1,000 temporary (casual) workers.

Long-term staff were employed in administration, irrigation, machinery maintenance, applying herbicide, and driving. Temporary workers carried out menial tasks such as planting, weeding and fertilising in the plantations. Although they often romanticised their positions, based on my own extensive discussions with the workers, particularly those who were also farmers and had lost their land, there was significant evidence that plantation workers were generally unhappy about being forced to rely on insecure and poorly paid employment on plantations. This is indicated by the emotion that they showed when speaking about various labour problems.

Trying to express his frustration with labour problems without saying anything that could get him in trouble with the authorities, one respondent remarked:

'In order to obtain land for the sugarcane plantations Green Fuel gave us a false impression of future working conditions. Before the land acquisitions and the official commissioning of the project, we held several meetings to hear about our future rights and interests within the project and were told that we would benefit from wage employment making us to question the project's actual benefit. We were verbally promised that, besides the provision of decent jobs for everyone, particularly those who have been dispossessed of their land, the ethanol company will provide other benefits, such as insurance schemes for housing, transport, school fees. These promises were never fulfilled, making us wonder about the biofuel production's actual benefit for the development of our lives. I have my own family and an extended family to look after, and considering that I do not have other sources of income, I have no choice but to work and take extra time to augment the meagre salaries here.'

Working conditions in the sugarcane plantation have been a cause for concern. Wages are very low, even compared to multinational sugar companies operating in the same south-eastern lowveld region. At the end of 2013, most plantation workers were earning US\$2.74 per day. Workers in the plantations were concerned that they received their salaries late, sometimes going for several months with no salary. Even though with no salary, some workers still held on to their jobs. It appears that Green Fuel failed to pay workers in full so as to prevent them from

abruptly resigning, the logic being that if people are owed money, they will not sacrifice it by quitting without being paid. This was difficult to resist due to the absence of a workers' union at the workplace. Essentially, this was self-indulgence on the part of company management meant to transform local people through introducing new forms of labour discipline. Rules designed to control the labour force are particularly despised by villagers, but are especially important for capitalists.

Plantation workers have no job security, no insurance and work in unhealthy conditions with no protective clothing. The villagers work 30 days per month and payment is based on daily output. Casual workers get 'contracts' of between two weeks and three months. They work shifts from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. or 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Their duties include supporting the mechanised harvesting of cane, water control, and weeding, spraying and general work. At times food is provided: *sadza* (thick porridge which is a local staple) with beans, cabbage, dried kapenta fish (*matemba*) or crocodile meat. If work assigned for the day is not completed, deductions are made from the daily rates.

A concern consistently raised by plantation workers was that Green Fuel had never been transparent in its process of signing contracts. In fact, most of villagers I spoke to, said that they had neither seen nor signed any contract. According to a Human Resources officer in Macdom, the agricultural enterprise of the project:

'Most of the work in the sugarcane plantations is semi-skilled, casual and at times seasonal, so we would rather keep registers than making workers sign contracts.'

My interviews with workers yielded that most people were not clear on their roles and duties as well as dispute resolution mechanisms.

In the sugarcane fields where water diluted with stillage containing chemicals is used, no adequate measures are in place for the provision of clean and safe drinking water for the workers.

This affects workers' health. The lack of clean water supplies for the workers led to the death of at least one worker and 70 others were hospitalised with cholera.¹² Cumulatively, over 600 cholera cases were reported in the district in 2011.¹³ Although government officials consistently denied a link between the epidemic and the working conditions in the sugarcane plantations, water that is used for irrigation contains chemicals that are harmful to humans if they are ingested or get in direct contact with skin (Mafongoya and Jiri, 2012).¹⁴

'MaBoss': Administration and management staff

The term *Maboss* referred to middle level managers and senior management, and was applied to shift supervisors at times. A sketch of the labour structure and employee interdependencies shows that senior management is composed of Conrad Rautenbach, who runs the estate. He is a member of the 'inner circle' in a family partnership that was founded by his father, Billy Rautenbach, in 2008. Conrad's fiancée, Nicole, is in charge of the corporate affairs portfolio while Billy's wife works in the finance division of the company's head office in Harare.

Middle level management is composed largely of engineers and administration staff (mostly black) who work at the ethanol plant. They are allocated company vehicles and receive fuel from the company. These senior employees and the managers from the 'inner circle' are housed at the modern guest house that was established by ARDA in the 1960s and was recently refurbished for the purposes of the ethanol project. In contrast to the living arrangements of senior managers, the majority of the workers live in the less prosperous villages scattered around the project. The sharp spatial separation of senior (mostly white) staff and black workers is a stark reminder of class and racial inequality at Green Fuel.

As an extension of the paternalism that existed on the plantations established by the colonial state, black supervisors are appointed to manage workers in the sugarcane plantation irrigation blocks. Workers seek employment through their kinship and rural networks; when senior management is looking for special skills, they rely on these trusted supervisors to recommend

¹²'Cholera kills one in Chisumbanje', *The Herald*, 30 March 2011.

¹³ Red Cross Emergency Appeal Report.

¹⁴ Interview with Macdom worker, Chisumbanje, 14 December 2014.

suitable people. The restructuring of labour that took place after the construction of the ethanol plant was complete resulted in significant retrenchments, suspension of incentives and resignation of workers due to frustrations. This presented a problem of labour shortage in the plantations.

Green Fuel did not have many houses in the compounds on site to house agricultural workers. The bifurcated geography of labour housing complicated the company's attempts to attract and discipline its labour force. The company responded to the problem of labour shortage by adjusting working hours from 5 a.m. to 12 p.m., providing meals at lunch, and dispatching buses as far afield as 100km in search of workers.

Most people who took up this opportunity were young adults from poorer households who had little or no land in the area. They can be classified as 'migrants', with less attachment to the places they are being transformed to, and more of a need for paid employment. Still, a patronage system was used in selecting who got the job. As a result, most supervisory positions were filled in with people who come from areas outside the district. This has resulted in under-representation of locals in terms of employment numbers. Less than a third of the workers come from the local community.

As a response to a labour crisis, Green Fuel also initiated a programme of recruiting more women. The number of women, especially divorced, widowed or those whose husbands are based in South Africa, was on the increase. They were trained in jobs such as operating heavy machinery, security and other ancillary activities such as cleaning¹⁵.

Some locals continue to boycott jobs at Green Fuel while others stay but disdain the working conditions. Even some black middle-level managers joined the shop-floor workers in despising the treatment which came out of the racial division of labour in the company, although they were careful to do so in private.

¹⁵ Interview, with Green fuel Human resources officer, 12 December 2013.

*'We are fed up! The top management is dominated by whites and they get preferential treatment; for us blacks, we cannot be promoted to senior levels yet we have better qualifications and more experience than most of our white bosses.'*¹⁶

Green Fuel's strong internet presence, sophisticated business models, hundreds of hard helmeted workers, thousands of litres of ethanol going out to Harare every day and an aerodrome established for private planes used when flying state officials and business partners, all reflected success. Green Fuel's General manager was keen to frame the estate in the idiom of corporate management, often romanticising how the company supported workers with food, and transport to their villages, and downplaying racial distinctions.¹⁷ Probing below the surface reveals that worker struggles for decent salaries, working conditions, and rights persisted.

'It is better working in my fields': Understanding the new labour regime at Green Fuel

The last section showed that the project greatly transformed the agricultural structure and labour settings in the area, creating an agrarian labour situation that will potentially result in a 'large surplus population' left with neither land nor jobs. (Li, 2009, 2010). This section continues to unpack how the new labour regime has reconfigured people's usual routines or daily practices. In this section, I juxtapose three labour related issues on which the local population is divided: the number of jobs available, the conditions of work and the question of security.

The number of jobs created is far less than claimed in official company documents. For example, in 2012, official figures revealed that the total number of employees was 3,298 against a target of 4,500. Another issue that featured prominently in discussions with local villagers was the under-representation of locals compared with those from outside the Chipinge district. In 2012, out of 975 who were employed at the ethanol plant, only 202 (20.7 %) were from the Chipinge district. Combined with statistics from Rating and Macdom, Green Fuel subsidiaries which operate the agricultural estates, only 34 % were from the Chipinge district.

¹⁶Interview, Green Fuel employee, Chisumbanje, 11 December 2013.

¹⁷ Interview, Green Fuel General Manager, Chisumbanje 12 December 2013.

Working conditions were not favourable, either, and unions were not welcome. Workers who wanted to form a representative body that would meet with management in a joint works council were told to wait, because Green Fuel were still having consultations about which labour bodies to work with since their operations involved both agriculture and energy. Three years later, unions were still not allowed on the company premises and workers were made to believe that senior management had not yet come to a consensus on the matter of labour representation.

The security that people had enjoyed when in possession of land was lost after the introduction of the project. In fact, people's incomes and working conditions were negatively affected. First, the 1,238 who were displaced and not allocated irrigation plots had not received their plots by the fourth year of the project. These people were not prioritised for available jobs. The few who managed to secure employment in the biofuel company also suffered significant reductions in their wages and their family income, because opportunities for paid work decreased drastically after the initial establishment of the project. In 2009, in the initial stages of the project, the average wage of general workers at Green Fuel was three times higher than in 2013.

Because of the delay that workers experienced in the payment of their wages, some of them could not access credit that they used to get from local grocery shops. Before the takeover, when people were still able to plant maize and other associated agricultural activities, they were allowed to borrow from the local grocery shops. The introduction of the biofuel project and wage employment has seen the breakdown of this system since store owners do not have the trust as to when the workers are going to actually pay them.

Moreover, it was easier to estimate incomes based on the area or quantity of maize under cultivation than it is now when they work at Green Fuel. One respondent, who owned a smallholder plot and doubled up as an employee at Green Fuel, reported that,

'Our soils are very good here; we used to intercrop cotton and maize without even applying chemical fertilisers. Last year I received a combined income of US\$1,300 which is far more than the US\$500 I received from these small plots in a period of six months.'

His family therefore received twice as much from working on the plots than at the sugarcane plantations. Again, it was difficult for the villagers to forecast their total income when they were employed as sugarcane plantation workers.

The agrarian setting and people's ways of working in the fields completely changed once they joined the project. According to one villager, for each maize crop his family needed to work mostly during the first three months, starting when the fields were planted. From the fourth to the sixth months, they only needed to work on the crop occasionally. April is the month of harvest. After harvest they spent time with their families, visited friends and relatives, repaired or built houses, collected fuel wood or gathered forest products for sale. This has long been the traditional schedule of dry land farming for the predominantly Ndaou people. However, working for the biofuel company they are no longer able to control their time. Due to the lack of advance planning by the biofuel company, casuals who come searching for work are told to wait and they use a first come first serve basis. This has led many workers to conclude that the situation was better when they were working in their fields than in wage employment at Green Fuel.

On the other hand Green Fuel management seems to think that wage employment is the best despite the poor working conditions lamented by their workers. Yet the lack of decent conditions at work affects relations between labourers and Green Fuel. In addition, workers also said that there is inadequate security against fire accidents, considering that Green Fuel is an organisation which deals with a highly inflammable product, ethanol. These concerns became stronger after an accident in 2013, not far from the project site, when a Green Fuel tanker carrying ethanol destined for Harare collided with a truck, exploding and burning 24 people to death.

The poor working conditions have led some workers to feel that they were not treated any better than in workplaces they experienced in colonial Zimbabwe or apartheid South Africa. In colonial times whites were regarded as bad employers in terms of wages and working conditions. In the 1930s, the British colonial administrations in Africa became increasingly convinced of the necessity for direct intervention in how its African subjects used the land (Mamdani, 1996). Colonial officials and experts viewed the 'natives' as potential sources of pollution and disease, who also abused or under-utilised the land. Consequently, the local indigenous population were deprived of their best land and confined to marginal, unproductive areas that would become labour reservoirs for growing the colonial economy (Mlambo, 2005).

Colonial land segregation policies, and the accompanying narratives that characterised 'natives' as lazy and unproductive, legitimised the practice of alienating state land, the development of white commercial farms and the creation of 'squatters'. Colonial legislation defined squatters as Africans living without formal labour agreements on land designated for Europeans by the 1930 Land Apportionment Act and revised in 1941 (Bratton, 1978). Some whites kept natives on the land because evictions would remove needed labour along with unwanted squatters. Targeting adult men, ranch labour discipline relied on an unstable alliance among white capitalist farming, threats made to traditional authorities and state enforcement of tenancy contracts (ibid.).

Moore (2005, p. 140) gives an example of Charles Hanmer, a former white settler in the eastern highlands who in 1948 wrote to the Native Commissioner complaining about the means of procuring and disciplining labour on his ranch. He proposed and later enforced the following:

'Africans should work under labour contracts. Colonial officials should direct indirect rulers, chiefs and headmen to help discipline productive subjects on white property. Displaced subjects would have to find a new home with no government support because government interference coddled Africans in the name of welfare and paternalistic protection while constraining capitalist production. Owner-orchestrated evictions without this interference would offer hope for an improvement in the efficiency and discipline of Africans. Responsibility to find new homes should

devolve to displaced workers whose discipline on the ranch would render them both jobless and homeless.'

Labour tenancy would thus become self-disciplining in the service of both the state administration and white capital accumulation. Paternalism, disdain of labour unions and patronage involved in employee placement are all colonial practices that are seemingly being reproduced by Green Fuel in order to create a cheap and disciplined workforce. Everything appears to be the same. The only difference is bifurcated geography, whereby Green Fuel cannot house many workers on its premises.

An ethnographic study carried out by Rutherford in 1992 on commercial tobacco farms in north-west Zimbabwe revealed that white farmers who owned the majority of the farms had firm control of the workplace and a racialised disciplinary regime for their workers (mostly blacks). Most decisions made by the white commercial farmers were necessarily not guided by legislation, they were shaped by racialised understandings of the 'rural African cultivator' and the 'European farmer'. (Rutherford, 2001 p. 14).

This form of 'domestic government', in which the rules of the white farmers governed much of the daily life for farm workers and those who lived with them, enabled the farmers and their management to have extensive influence over the conduct of farm workers at and off work (Rutherford, 2001). It was also reinforced by the Zimbabwean government, which viewed health, education and social welfare as largely the responsibility of the white farmers; farm workers essentially 'belonged to them' (Rutherford, 2008).

Getting by: life in the midst of a livelihood crisis

This section moves the discussion further by reflecting on the second question of this chapter: how do different categories of workers survive in a fragmenting post settler economy? In addressing this question, I acknowledge, as noted in earlier sections, that most people who got employment at Green Fuel were experiencing difficulties and insecure livelihoods in an uncertain labour market.

During the many days I spent with the workers, particularly after work at their homes when they assume different roles as fathers, mothers, and breadwinners and as they participate in extended family networks, I was struck by the different experiences and material conditions among them. Some were acquiring new assets through livelihood diversification but others were not. Some were exploiting their closeness to politically connected elites to take up part-time jobs, while others doubled up wage work with other 'informal' economic activities. In the end, I realised I could have underestimated the weight of wage employment and its impact on livelihoods. Even though the wage was often low – which made it difficult or impossible to accumulate – some of the workers at the ethanol project were taking advantage of the stability and the certainty of a wage to engage in wider livelihood activities beyond the estate.

'I bet for both teams'

This is how Douglas Mapuya started the interview with me on a chilly Friday evening in 2014: 'I was born into a farming family. My feet are firmly rooted into the soil.'

Mapuya, a short, muscular man, had worked hard to grow crops on this dry, unforgiving soil which receives limited rainfall. Attributing his ability of being very determined to his late father, a renowned farmer and former freedom fighter who served a long time in the army, Douglas talked about his ability to use good agricultural practices with water, mulching, crop rotation, and the capacity to choose the right crops to take to the market. He showed me how he chose to put profits into buying assets for the farm and more importantly using the excess to improve the lives of his large family.

Mapuya's residence speaks of man who works tirelessly, and with strength of purpose. When I arrived at his home, I was taken into a separate building that appeared to be the main indoor living area with several picture frames hanging on the walls, big brown velvet covered couches, a flat-screen TV and a radio playing music in the corner. Wearing green shorts, a black T-shirt and an old khaki beret, Douglas led the introductions. He was soft spoken and had two wives; the first one we were introduced to was of a bubbly nature while the second was slender and of a quieter disposition. One of the things I learnt was that although they shared the sleeping quarters, he

had to build them each a separate indoor kitchen which was clearly their own domain. He had 13 children; 5 of the younger ones were present, the others were either in school or married or in their own homes.

'Due to the passion I have for farming, I have several pieces of land, one here close to Green Fuel but others in neighbouring areas. Currently I have two plots I was allocated by our local headman and the other two I rent from neighbouring areas. I used to work for ARDA as a tractor driver but I was retrenched in 1999. Although I continued with farming, I could hardly afford to keep all my farms viable, so I reduced to two, sometimes even one.'

'Somehow, the entry of Green Fuel, which afforded me a re-entry into employment, has given me another chance to get back into farming and increase the area under cultivation. The most important thing is that I can use the wages I get to buy chemicals for cotton. We used to do contract farming with cotton companies but they used to rip us off. It is as if they get all the money and give the farmer only change. I weaned myself from them. The salary I get at Green Fuel is small, sometimes irregular, right now we are two months behind, but we are certain it will come. Farming is difficult when you do not have some sort of cash income to purchase inputs and this job has opened a window for me to pursue my passion. My twin brother who works as cab driver in Harare often jokes that I bet for both teams! Combining farming and a job has allowed me to spread risk and provided me with a decent life for me and my family.'

'Isu tinojingirisa, we improvise'

Besides those who possess pieces of land and use the limited income they receive from wage employment at Green Fuel to reinvest into their farming, others are earning their livelihoods by creating new opportunities, combining wage employment and other business activities. Below is a case study.

'We are making a living', announced Lovemore triumphantly. Dressed in a navy blue safari suit and wielding a few dollars, he was preparing to leave the Chisumbanje compound to go to Checheche for his family Christmas shopping. He had worked the entire season in the plantation

irrigating Green Fuel sugarcane fields. The money he was holding was from his clients who had just paid for their grocery items they owed to him.

Lovemore is a middle-aged man, married to Upenyu, and lives with their three children. He is the son of peasant farmers in Chisumbanje who grew up in the area. He did not proceed with formal education after secondary level, instead started as an assistant to his uncle, a builder, and later learnt the trade to build on his own. During the cotton boom period in the early 2000s, struggling to sustain his family with dry land farming, he moved away from a small plot allocated to him when he got married, to stay in an informal settlement which had developed on the outskirts of Checheche growth point. There, he secured contracts to construct market stalls, ablution facilities and houses for farmers, small-scale traders and dealers who descended on the area to cash in on cotton sales.

The cotton boom collapsed with a plunge in international prices in the late 2000s and Lovemore could not make as much business from building as he used to do.

'It was a meaningful coincidence. I was experiencing poor business in Checheche after most cotton merchants closed down due to depressed prices. Incidentally this is the same period Green Fuel moved in to revive plantation agriculture in the area. I secured a job at the plant during the first days with the task for rehabilitating irrigation canals and developing new ones and later as an irrigation assistant, a position I hold up to now.'

Meanwhile, Lovemore's wife Upenyu, who had established herself as a vendor selling food to cotton farmers in Checheche, moved back to Chisumbanje and opened a small fruit and vegetable market. The market was conveniently located along the small road that connects the compound and Green Fuel offices. She would move her market to the nearest Chisumbanje primary school gate during school breaks and at times take it to the church entrance, depending on the activity and numbers of people congregating. Upenyu became popular because of the flexibility in how she charged fellow residents, preferring to offer credit or adjust her prices according to the immediate circumstances of individual buyers. During the school holidays, her older child is also involved in helping out at the market, where he is promised extra pocket money and items for school, if he sells more goods at the market.

The Chisumbanje agricultural estate had a grocery store and bar for workers who stay in the compound. ARDA took over the running of these at independence but could not sustain them after the ESAP of the late 1990s. A local teacher who took over the running of both the bar and grocery shop only lasted until Green Fuel came on board. However, several people I interviewed were not happy with how the businesses were being operated. Some complained that since the shops and the bar are run by the company and its employees, they only work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., thereby disenfranchising customers who wanted to buy late in the evening. Again, credit was not acceptable, prices were non-negotiable, commodities in the grocery shop were sold in large packets and the bar did not have affordable and popular beer brands.

Lovemore saw this as an opportunity and opened a tuck shop in one of his rooms using his small savings. He sold a variety of commodities, some in small packets known as *kanjodzi* ('emergency'), sufficient for one family meal.

Life in the compound is organised around a dense networks of exchange which work according to principles of reciprocity, where there is an expectation of a return for goods and services rendered, and of 'everyday communism', where the guiding idea is that people give according to their capacity to do so and receive according to their needs (Graeber, 2011). Operating the only tuck shop in the compound, Lovemore would normally have insight into his customers' circumstances in order to be able to offer them goods on short-term credit which would be paid back once salaries were received.

Lovemore's brother, Malvern, was retrenched from the tea estates in Chipinge, where he was employed in the pack shed, and loading crates of tea onto pallets. He came to live in with his brother with the hope of finding employment, and got occasional work as a security guard, keeping stray livestock away from the sugarcane. Malvern decided to complement his brother by opening a shebeen selling opaque beer, cheap whisky and loose cigarettes.

From Lovemore's room, the two brothers sell both beer and groceries and attract a large gathering. This gathering point is an ideal place to cook and sell *maputi* (roasted maize mixed with ground nuts), as they get assistance from Upenyu. The shebeen has greatly overshadowed the grocery shops and bar run by Green Fuel.

As a reflection of how lucrative this trade can be, Lovemore bought a second-hand motorbike within a year.

'My goal is to live on the income from the shebeen so that I can remit my estate wages to keep my children in school.'

Although shebeens are not legal, and residents spoke of it often being raided, I never saw this happen; beer was being sold and consumed publicly in the relatively secluded spot in the compound. Even Green Fuel management seemed not to bother much about these businesses and entertainment activities. In summary, the compound can be viewed as a zone of relative autonomy where the managers keep their distance and where workers and residents openly establish businesses. Wage employment at Green Fuel is one of the many strategies of material accumulation and attempts to establish predictable lives on the estate.

While most workers told of how they improvised in the face of changing livelihood scenarios, others were struggling to survive. Land access was the biggest determinant in people's ability to adapt. Those who had access to small plots seemed to be better off than those who relied only on wage work. Similarly, those with skills such as sewing, and those whose spouses were working, had the advantage of double incomes.

Responses to labour exploitation

The history of worker resistance and mobilisation on agricultural farms in Zimbabwe shows that labour unions in the agricultural sector were organisationally weak and had limited presence on the farms (Rutherford, 2008). The majority of farm workers lived on the farm and thus on private property, so NGOs and unions needed management permission to be enter the farm compound (Rutherford, 2001).

The labour situation in Chisumbanje is characterised by poor working conditions, low wages and a lack of labour representation. Some workers have not remained passive victims, but the contestation is still emerging and formative.

Many workers who took part in interviews and focus group discussions at Chisumbanje expressed fear of losing their jobs if they raised questions about union representation, or if they demanded the enforcement of agreed working standards such as leave and pay days. In an attempt to roll back the company's influence and reclaim their rights, workers have been organising secret meetings, sometimes at night, away from the foremen whom they view as 'spies' for management. In May 2013, in the same week that the Zambian Minister of Energy and Water visited the project to explore business opportunities, a group of disgruntled workers and displaced peasant farmers led an incursion into the plantation, burning 500 hectares of sugarcane worth an estimated US\$5 million.¹⁸

Many younger and relatively educated workers, and older adults who had experience working in the sugarcane plantations in Triangle estates, had knowledge of labour regulations in the plantations. In June 2013, a group set up a workers committee and mobilised 100 workers to stage a demonstration over outstanding salaries. This was met with a backlash by senior management who resolved to dismiss nine of the committee members.¹⁹

Since the public stand-off with management, workers have been making attempts to revive a workers committee and join the Zimbabwe Energy Workers Union (ZEWU), but such efforts have continuously been frustrated by company management who prefer that workers join the ZANU-PF aligned Zimbabwe Sugar and Milling Industry Worker's Union (ZISMWU), despite Green Fuel being in the energy sector. A local civil society organisation, Platform for Youth Development has been mobilising the community around land and labour rights but its impact on agrarian labour structures and labour relations are still nascent.

This was the message from one key founding member of the workers committee: *'All we want is to be treated fairly and to be rewarded equitably. Had we been treated fairly, our conditions of service would have been improved and we wouldn't be in such a situation.'*

¹⁸Chisumbanje sugarcane set ablaze, suspected arson attack, Herald, 28 May 2013.

¹⁹Green Fuel dismisses 9 for 'illegal strike', Newsday, 9 July 2014.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the biofuel project has led to the transformation of agrarian and labour settings at Chisumbanje. Local people who lost their farming land were obliged to become workers on the estate who often needed to work extra hours under difficult conditions in order to achieve a living wage. They were also driven away from their familiar daily practices.

At the core of the chapter is the argument that people who were dispossessed did not necessarily get preferential access to employment – the process was more haphazard than that and followed a different logic. Moreover, the nature of the employment on offer was scarcely such as to match what those who were dispossessed had lost, in terms of either the number of jobs on offer or the conditions of work. In addition, by being condemned to being waged labourers, local people have been left without any of the social and legal protection which they had enjoyed when in possession of land, and none of the security – e.g. contracts and trade union membership – normally associated with formal employment.

The poor working conditions experienced by most workers drove them to engage in new and innovative economic activities. Some of them combined these activities with formal work at Green Fuel and were showing signs of accumulation despite notable differences among the different households.

Some villagers pushed off their land and at times denied employment in the plantations were bitter and vowed to fight back to regain their land. When one of the local farmers who was dispossessed off his land with no compensation and arbitrarily dismissed from his job at Green Fuel, he posted on social media: *'There is a small Rhodesian island in Zimbabwe called Chisumbanje Estate ethanol project where some ex-Rhodesians have teamed up to exploit black people in the name of the so called National Project.'*²⁰ It was a concern, a fear of losing both resource entitlement and citizenship rights, even in an independent Zimbabwe under a black government.

²⁰ Willard Chinogwenya, posted on Facebook, 14 November 2012.

For this villager, and many others in much of the global south, it is a difficult situation to understand and yet one that has to be contended with, decades after achieving political independence. The next chapter looks at the different forms of socio- economic arrangements emerging.

Chapter 6

Making a virtue out of necessity? The unintended consequences of Green Fuel's land grab

Introduction

The dominant literature on large-scale land acquisitions generally paints a grim picture. Drawing on the lived realities of local people, the last three chapters have shown that investors in the Chisumbanje biofuel project did not adequately consult with local people; they only consulted with the political elite. Local farmers were dispossessed of their land, sometimes with disproportionate force, and adequate compensation was not provided. Promises of employment benefits were also not fully realized by the displaced as only a few workers employed by the company were from the displaced communities, and labor relations were iniquitous. This is the popular message often captured by the media and NGOs, one that falls into a trap of its own making, and that suggests that local people affected by these investments are passive victims of powerful forces over which they have little or no control. Social contexts and historical processes are often overlooked, if not explicitly discounted. This chapter – through an engagement with the historical specificities of Chisumbanje – attempts to overcome some of these shortcomings by focusing on the unintended consequences of the Green Fuel intervention and the possibilities that arose.

The chapter demonstrates how local people actively seized on the opportunities for making new livelihoods from the haphazard opportunities which opened up in the area after the introduction of the biofuel project. Green Fuel's operation inadvertently resulted in a number of changes: a significant increase in the resident population; a building boom; rapid growth in business activity, especially of small enterprises such as market vending, grocery and hardware stores, butcheries, grinding mills, carpentry, building, welding, tailoring, hair salons, photocopy shops, and mobile money agencies; and more transport connections and operators, including kombis, informal taxis and small trucks. Such activities are fragile, informal and risky, but offered a livelihood, generating considerable economic activity.

The main point I make is that while opportunities generated by the presence of Green Fuel such as downstream jobs are not deliberately planned, and many of them are entirely informal, their existence suggests that local people are not simply 'victims' of corporate and state machinations, which is the common message of the anti-land grabbing literature, but also 'agents' who have the capacity to use the limited opportunities open to them in innovative ways. The chapter goes on to show how some local people have seized these opportunities while others find it difficult; this is not something specific to rural Zimbabweans or Africans, but is increasingly true of the 99 % of the population worldwide.²¹ The jobs of the past in the factories, mines, farms and so on no longer exist or may do so only temporarily and the alternative is a set of activities that don't fit the past expectation of a 'job' or 'employment', and are therefore not counted as such.

The first part of the chapter reflects on the socio-economic changes that Chisumbanje has experienced over the years and how this has continued to evolve as a result of the biofuel project. This is followed by detailed case studies of how local people insert themselves practically into 'new economy' which is emerging as a result of the Green Fuel intervention through innovative strategies most of which fall outside the 'formal economy'. This section aims to give more recognition and legitimacy to what people do for themselves, something often unacknowledged by mainstream institutions (Hart et al., 2010, p.5). The last part looks at reverse migration and how it is beginning to shape the contours of the intervention itself.

Reflections on social and economic changes in Chisumbanje

The month of October in Zimbabwe is full of expectations. Clouds appear heavy with the rains but as each day passes the heat continues as people restlessly gaze into the sky with eyes full of anticipation. Until the rains come, the air remains heavy with the accumulated haze of winter fires, the trees look tired from thirst and the heat becomes oppressive. By evening, the clouds have dissipated, taking hope with them. Maybe tomorrow.

²¹ 'An Economy for the 99%', Oxfam Briefing Paper, January 2017.

Since independence in 1980, life in the peripheral region of Chisumbanje has been built around a similar feeling of anticipation; that maybe one day the area will see economic transformation. Life was sustained mainly by working at the ARDA estate, but with wages low business was limited. During this period Chisumbanje was at the periphery of development and its local economy was driven by the ARDA estate. Its local 'township' remained a sleepy service centre where estate workers would visit to while up time or buy basic groceries. This was influenced in part by policies adopted by the post-colonial government.

At independence in 1980, the new government announced an ambitious plan for setting up 'growth points' – development sites on small settlements based on an existing economic base, usually agriculture or mining. The economic base was expected to stimulate and sustain growth at the same time as establishing strong linkages with the surrounding hinterlands and providing alternative investment opportunities to those offered by the main cities (Wekwete, 1991). It is within this development strategy that Chisumbanje was declared a township, and less than 10km away Checheche business centre was designated a growth point. Checheche became a fully developed growth point in 1983 and most trade done in Chisumbanje revolved around the township and Checheche growth point.

At independence, ARDA took over the Chisumbanje Estate and its local economy was influenced by what was happening on the estate. Out-growers schemes continued on 416 hectares while ARDA invested in more housing for its workers which housed up to 2500 at the height of the cotton boom. The government made investments in infrastructure for basic social services at the nearby Checheche township as part of its rural growth point expansion strategy. Chisumbanje remained at the periphery of development at the time as agricultural performance of the estate begun to decline.

There have been many attempts over the years by rural and urban planners to stimulate local economies at townships like Chisumbanje and 'growth points' such as Checheche. But this did not turn out as expected. The introduction of the Rural District Councils did very little to spur

economic growth in areas such as Chisumbanje. Whether it was because of its location, far away from the seat of government or the under-performance of the agricultural estate and commodity markets which were expected to sustain production, very little development took place in Chisumbanje in the last 20 or so years. Its surrounding areas remained domains of poverty.

On one of my earlier visits to Checheche, in 2008, I was met with ubiquitous litter, untarred roads, an unpaved bus terminus, pole-dagga-and-thatch huts near the bus stop, animal drawn carts, a few shops and innumerable taxis ... the word 'growth point' seemed anomalous in describing Checheche. It was different from other Zimbabwean growth points I knew. Similarly, Chisumbanje was a sleepy service centre, a depressing place with few grocery shops, no prominent entertainment spots or hardware shops or fuel station, and the demand for residential and commercial stands was low since no one was keen to invest in the area.

Over the years, particularly in the 1990s ESAP era, the ARDA estate collapsed and hundreds of workers lost their jobs. Although the 120 out-growers carried on making use of canal irrigation, they got little support from the estate. The decline of ARDA had a negative effect, as revenues from labourers working on the estate vanished. That is why there is something positive to note with a new investment partnership between ARDA and Green Fuel. The new company which took over the estate operations has invested substantially in new irrigation systems, revamped agricultural production on the estate and is employing thousands of workers who spend some portion of their wages locally, thereby stimulating the economy.

During my later visits to Checheche in 2012, I was surprised at the sight of crowdedness that I got. Despite my night arrival, the growth point bustled with human activity with the bus terminus as its epicentre where buses were revving up ready to ferry passengers to major towns and cities. The dirt, dust and litter were still there, but this time mounds of uncollected rubbish could be seen at the gates of houses which had been much improved and modernised since my initial visit. In the ubiquitous litter, broken cell phone chargers, used tinned food cans, and empty bottled water containers were quite prominent. There were more taxis, home-made pushcarts pushed by young man to ferry luggage for those people who could not afford taxis. Self-styled travel consultants and hustlers milled around ready to assist anyone who needed help.

There was a short queue at a small makeshift shop with a large sign on top marked EcoCash, where people lined up to use the facility to deposit or withdraw their money or pay bills using their cell phones. In front of a filling station, I noticed unkempt young men milling around the complex looking busy, running this way and that way with fuel containers, which, as I learnt two days later, was one of the many commodities which come through the unofficial Mozambique borders. At my destination at Chisumbanje, several entertainment spots were packed with people mingling and chatting over drinks and a braai. I could hear one of the revellers shouting, *'kumba kwacho kunotouya kuno!'* (My home will have to join me here!), while others discussed and debated issues ranging from the economy to farming, and from Green Fuel to other social issues.

When I asked a taxi driver about the drastic change from what I had always seen as a sleepy little place since the demise of cotton in the 2000s to one which looked abuzz with human activity around the clock in 2012, he explained that the people who milled around were Green Fuel workers. He explained that some workers had been paid the very same day and most of the people, even those who are not working for Green Fuel, are linked in one way or the other to what is happening at the company; once workers receive their wages, this is the kind of activity to expect. He also explained that loan sharks and petty traders from outside had come to 'grab' opportunities arising from the presence of the ethanol project.

This prompted me first to carry out an enterprise survey at Chisumbanje and Checheche, together with 16 interviews with shop owners, local authorities and other informal entrepreneurs involved in the expansion of infrastructure and services in the area.

New people, new enterprises

Business activity has increased at both Chisumbanje and Checheche growth point. Most local people from the surrounding communal areas now visit the two centres daily. They can access a wide range of services from shopping, insurance and banking to health care, cell phone banking and entertainment. The number of transport operators linking the two centres has also increased substantially, following the introduction of informal taxis. Some local people who have invested

in the transport business have become part of a new elite; others rent shops, or rent out spare rooms in their homes to tenants who include civil servants.

My enterprise survey revealed an increase in the number of service providers since 2008. At Chisumbanje township the number of stores offering services to the locals is increasing.

Table 3: Changes in the number of service providers at Chisumbanje

Type of service provider	2007 - 2008	2011 - 2015
General Dealers	20	35
Bottle stores	5	9
Restaurants/Foot outlets	1	6
Butcheries	2	7
Grinding mills	1	4
Fuel stations	1	1
Motor spare parts	0	2
Hardware shops	0	2
EcoCash outlets	-	5

The number of people investing in property for both residential and commercial purposes is growing. At the time of the study, over 45 new residential stands had been developed and the demand kept on increasing.

At Checheche Rural district council, over 4,500 people were on the housing waiting list at the time of the study. The demand for housing has been triggered by the influx of people who are looking at opportunities at Green Fuel. The number of prospective home owners has increased as more people aspire to own houses for their own accommodation and for renting out to Green Fuel and its employees.

Table 4: Changes in the number of service providers at Checheche

Type of service provider	2007 - 2008	2011 - 2015
General Dealers	33	68
Banks	2	5
Fuel stations	2	5
Pharmacies	0	3
Insurance providers	0	4
EcoCash outlets	-	14

Buoyed by this increase in business and demand for residential and commercial properties, the local authority has, for the first time since 1983, submitted an application to the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing to have Checheche growth point awarded town status.

In 2014, Checheche was awarded town status, and the local authority rolled out an ambitious low- and medium-cost housing scheme targeting over 1,000 beneficiaries, and 50 industrial/commercial stands. The road network was improved and plans to tar the entire network were reportedly in place. The Chipinge Rural District Council is on record as saying that demand for both residential and business stands at Checheche growth point had increased because of business operations and opportunities brought by the ethanol project.

More people have also been involved in the construction industry. During the research, I interviewed a group of entrepreneurs who are conveyers of water and sand from the Save River. They are all from Chisumbanje and the surrounding communal areas which have not yet been affected by the ethanol project. Their parents are subsistence farmers and they, too, own small plots and invest the money they get in farming and buying livestock.

'We have never worked for Green Fuel. This is our area and we will find something to do. We make money every day and we converge at Chideu bottle store where sometimes deals are brokered with potential clients. Our group has ten people doing different but interrelated jobs but the number can increase depending with the kind of jobs we get. We are all in the construction industry. We used to rent carts and wheelbarrows to fetch river sand and water from Save and for transporting materials for people building their homes. But now, we own a scorch cart and donkeys that provide the draught power. We charge between 10 and 20 dollars for a scotch cart of river sand and slightly less for water. With the expanding settlements, the number of people constructing houses is increasing and so are our clients. Within our group we have builders who, when they need water or river sands, they contract us to provide the service. We also have welders who make window frames, door frames and fences. We also have carpenters and plumbers. When we get a contract we normally create these linkages between the suppliers of the building

materials, the builder, and those supplying local materials such as quarry and sand and these are found within our group. We get clients from the townships, church and some are referred by past clients.'

Shop operators at the growth point told how the returns from their business operations had grown since Green Fuel commissioned the plant. The injection of cash, mainly through wages, has resulted in a burgeoning micro-enterprise economy. The proliferation of small enterprises, particularly in the retail sector, is also thriving. The demand for commodities such as clothing and food can be met by the informal sector in terms of affordability, type and quality.

Mr Muyambo, a local businessman commented on the changes in the area.

'I used to own a general dealer supplying basic grocery items to my clients. As a retired teacher, the business was just to keep me busy, as long as I got money to restock. But since the advent of the ethanol project serious competition has emerged. More shops have been built and the business actually increased. To hedge my business, I decided to diversify and I added a hardware store to my business. The demand for housing especially around Checheche is now very high and I supply them with window frames, cement, roofing materials. I am enjoying good returns.'

Of the many shops that have opened, one of them is Mbuya motor spares. Located close to Checheche main terminus, the shop is owned by Jephinot, and is normally stocked with oil, and spares for Japanese cars and tractors.

Jephinot, a former bricklayer, came to Checheche in 2013 from Marondera communal area, some 100km south-east of Harare. Ten years ago, he and Samson, his elder brother, a former farm worker, were allocated an eight-hectare plot as part of the land redistribution program.

But for Jephinot and his brother it did not go so well due to the negative impacts of climate change and lack of subsidised agricultural inputs. In addition, he does not receive agricultural extension advice. As a result he recorded an increase in livestock deaths due to irregular dipping and lack of livestock vaccines. Furthermore, he does not have security of tenure. This means that

he struggles to access loans from banks to drill a borehole that would enable a continuous supply of water throughout the year. The lack of tenure security for small holder farmers is common in many newly resettlement areas.

Although the situation is desperate, the farmers are determined to find solutions, with or without the help of the government. Some decided to become more self-dependent and organised themselves into community groups to discuss the challenges they were facing and how best to deal with the changing seasons. Samson, Jephinot's brother, opted to diversify and headed to Chipinge town where he started to rent a shop. Jephinot followed months later. The two started buying spare parts from Harare and reselling them in town. The business was good. Jephinot gained the skills and experience as he was the one who was usually sent to buy spare parts, sometimes in Beitbridge (a town located at the Zimbabwe - South Africa border) or Messina in South Africa where they were much cheaper.

In 2013, the 41-year-old left with his family and started his own shop at Checheche.

'I came here because I was searching for new markets. I found that there were few shops and the demand was rising due to activities at the ethanol plant. So far I have used part of my profits in buying a residential stand. The business is good here especially at month end, you can even go home with US\$300. The soils here are also better, I am thinking of investing some of my profits in renting some land so that I can grow beans since farming has always been my passion.'

A boom in cotton production in the 1990s created the illusion that Checheche growth point and its arid surrounding areas could turn into a town with booming business overnight before such hopes faded. However, this massive agro-industrial partnership between ARDA and Green Fuel has awakened hopes for Chisumbanje and its local residents. Although some businesses are small-scale, based on local demand, all of this has created a sense of optimism and inspired many people to be innovative.

Working and living in the 'new economy'

In order to get a nuanced understanding of the changes brought about by the advent of the Green Fuel project and how local people perceive and react to these changes, I used an ethnographic approach, which involved sustained observation and participation in observed practices and events. I joined in routine activities done by the local people such as attending meetings of informal savings clubs, buying vegetables, fuel and second-hand clothes from local markets, using informal taxis, eating in local restaurants and blending in with activities of the youth such as informal trading in the street and playing pool.

Participant observation was complemented by in-depth interviews. These were of necessity biased towards those I found at their workplaces and some whom I followed up at their homes. Most of the lives of my respondents, especially traders, are incredibly mobile, with continuous movement between places. I developed case studies from the interviews I had with respondents. The cross-cutting theme from all the case studies presented in this section is the propensity that people have to adapt and find benefits even in the context of land grabbing. Despite the local population being fractured and angered in different ways by the things Green Fuel (and indeed the government and the ruling party) does and does not do, they also see opportunities and new avenues beginning to open up, thereby revolutionising the economic structure from within, and creating a new one.

New agribusiness entrepreneurs

The introduction of the biofuel project is providing the context for a new dynamic of agricultural commercialisation. It is small-scale, but is generating profits, supplying markets and providing employment for people in and around Chisumbanje. Despite limited success in pressuring and persuading Green Fuel to avail more irrigation land, the few that were allocated out-grower plots are using the space they have to produce vegetables and green mealies for sale in the local markets. Even those who lost their land and did not receive anything in return have taken things into their own hands and are making use of low-cost irrigation technology in home gardens and at the Save River banks. Dominated mainly by women and their family members, these

enterprises have resulted in a substantial increase and variety of horticultural products which are finding their way into local markets at Chisumbanje and Checheche.

Mai Two is a local resident married into one of the families of headman Chisumbanje. Despite the fact that their fields have not yet been incorporated into the ethanol project, she is a beneficiary of the out-grower's plots and received a double allocation (two plots of 0.5 hectares) due to her connection with local leadership which was responsible for the allocation.

'My plot has green maize (0.4 hectares), tomatoes (0.2 hectares), vegetables (0.2 hectares), onions (0.1 hectares) and okra (0.1 hectares). The costs I incur include seed, fertiliser (both top and basal), pesticides, trellis and fence wire, and these I can now buy from Checheche farm supplies. I use family labour and one permanent worker who is paid US\$70 per month, but lives as a member of the family and eats with us, and he is provided accommodation too. At peak times I sometimes hire temporary labour and pay US\$3 per day, and when weeding maize I pay them US\$1 per line of about 50m. I have built a market stall at Chisumbanje township where I sell my major produce. I also supply the Checheche green market, most of the traders come here and buy in bulk my agricultural products such as vegetables and tomatoes. It is very difficult for me to calculate the numbers sold per crop but what I know in a good week I can get between US\$70 and US\$100. The advantage I have is that I cultivate all year round making use of the irrigation. I usually produce crops at off-season to take advantage of increased demand and better prices.'

Despite the flourishing markets for green agricultural produce, Chisumbanje experiences periodic droughts which affect the availability of food, especially the staple maize grain. This tends to affect most people in the area but for others the situation can be turned around.

One of the people who is determined to fill in the gap of grain shortages during periods of drought is Bornwell who stays near the Chisumbanje township. Bornwell is employed at the Green Fuel ethanol plant as a general hand but does not get much from his monthly salary. As a result he supplements his income with a mobile bicycle repair shop, but still the money he gets does not sustain his family.

However, he has identified areas in the Highveld where he goes to buy grain at cheaper prices and comes back to resell it at Chisumbanje township. Bornwell narrated his story as follows;

'I came here in 2010 and a year later I married when she [pointing to his wife who was seated nursing an eight-month-old baby] came over to visit an uncle who is my co-worker. We survive only by income I get from working on Green Fuel. We have no fields to cultivate like what others do but this year the situation is very bad. Due to erratic rainfall season with persistent dry spells, even those who planted last season did not harvest anything. Now there are serious food shortages in this area and the whole of the Save Valley in general. There was a time when people used to rely on food handouts when faced with such a situation, but this year the donors have not turned out. This has really affected most people especially those like me who are fully dependant on Green Fuel. At times the grain will be completely absent from the market or going at higher prices. Sometimes you would need to travel to Checheche, so plus transport money you need US\$10 just to buy a 20kg bucket.'

Bornwell added that despite what looks like a dire situation, it has become a business opportunity for him.

'I go to Mutasa and Marondera and there I can buy a 50kg bag with three buckets at US\$10. Here I sell at US\$6 per bucket. I started this about a few weeks ago and it's promising. So far I managed to take my child to hospital, bought extra blankets and we also now have extra buckets to use. My plan is to eventually buy a grinding mill and offer milling services.'

Bornwell is getting inspiration from other local women groups, one of whom now owns a shop at Chisumbanje.

'Mukando' informal saving clubs: coping with uncertainty



Figure 9: Madube, a proud shop owner at Chisumbanje, narrated her story:

'I grew up in Chiredzi. I met my husband in the early 1990s when he had come to cash his bank cheque for cotton sales. When we got married, I moved to stay with him in Chisumbanje and we were successful cotton farmers. Our income significantly dropped with a plunge in international prices of cotton in the late 1990s. The 2002 drought also decimated our livestock herd and this region is semi-arid, other crops generally do not perform well. One day when I had taken my husband who had suffered a stroke, to a local clinic, there was a job advert for village health workers which I decided to respond to. I got selected and we received our training from the Ministry of Health and were given informational materials and bicycles to use. Our task was to carry out home visits and disseminate health and hygiene education at community meetings and the sessions were not supposed to be less than five per month. Some local women from Matikwa village where I worked started to take interest in my sessions but they told me that the main challenges they faced in implementing what I was teaching them was limited utensils to use, competing priorities on household income, limited decision making roles and so on. We decided

to form an informal savings club (*mukando*) in order to help ourselves to meet other long term needs.’²²

The club started as a group of four women with common interests to pull resources together. The women, all from Matikwa village, agreed that they would contribute US\$20 into the scheme and every fourth month, one of them receives the full amount. After three cycles, the women were putting in US\$50 and members were allowed to borrow from the scheme for investment elsewhere as long as they would pay back with an interest. Madube tried to set up a flea market, while one of the members borrowed to collect firewood for resale. Group members were also able to purchase household goods such as blankets, pots and pans. Madube and her friends also started a grocery club where they each put in US\$4 per month and one member travelled to Checheche every four months to buy non-perishable groceries which they shared. This not only saved on transport and the cost of groceries, but also provided an emergency stock which the members could borrow from in times of need. For them, *mukando* became a crucial safety net which cushioned them from unforeseen shocks.

When the Green Fuel ethanol project started in 2009, the fields of two club members were incorporated into the project; the Madubes and the other group members were not affected, but may face a similar fate in future. Meanwhile, the savings club increased to ten members, a constitution was developed and they started pooling monthly income of over US\$800. They created linkages with a local microfinance institution which would enable individuals to access loans at low interest rates. While loans are made to individuals, all group members hold the responsibility for ensuring the loan is paid. Group members can conduct either joint or individual income generating projects. On a regular basis, the group met to discuss and to keep track on loans as well as to encourage accountability for the funds. The savings club was an integral part of the group since most members could not access loans from banks.

²²Mukando is a practice whereby groups of people pool finances and take turns to share the sum by rotating it every month, week or per day. Other versions of the scheme involve members contributing funds from which members then borrow at lower interest rates than those obtaining in banks.

Madube had started petty trading and was able to purchase a stand to build a shop at Chisumbanje; she also applied for a passport using her savings and began cross-border trading, travelling to Messina in South Africa during her spare time, bringing back groceries, blankets and building materials to sell in the township. So successful was this business that Madube began to take orders and bring back other household goods such as fridges, stoves, microwaves and beds. Her business was helped by the number of lodges being established, triggered by an increase in demand for accommodation fuelled by Green Fuel activities, and there were no shops where employees of such establishments could buy these goods on credit.

Madube still belongs to the savings club. She has completed her shop at Chisumbanje and it is one of the biggest shops there. Through this, with her husband now incapacitated due a stroke he suffered years ago, Madube was able to take care of their children including sending them to better schools. Another of the club members financed the completion of her family house in the new stands at Checheche while another bought a second-hand car which is working as a local informal taxi. Crucially, some of the women who belonged to the club were married and would use the opportunity of double income to save up for recurring expenses. One member from the original group had a husband based in South Africa and mainly survives on remittances. Some who joined later had husbands who were workers at Green Fuel; others belonged to the out-grower schemes, or having lost land to the project were working on stream banks and backyard gardens to eke a living.

'Those who started this savings club came up with a brilliant idea,' said Mbuya Tecla Gumborembwa, a participant of the club. *'It has contributed to our financial stability and cushions us during periods of stress.'*

One woman started a poultry project. She purchased 100 broilers and stock feed with her savings and sells the chickens to neighbours and members of the Apostolic Faith Mission church she

attends. Another woman has become an informal trader selling vegetable produce, mobile airtime and green mealies.

Mai Saru, who benefitted from the Green Fuel sewing project established under its corporate social responsibility programme, works from home most of the time because they are only called to Green Fuel when new uniforms or replacements are needed. She has invested her savings in substantially improving her business of making school uniforms for local schools. She now makes a profit of US\$250 per month which she re-invests into the project, while the balance provides for the family since her husband is a migrant seasonal worker.

There were significant challenges, however. For instance, one of the group members had to sell her radio to repay a long-standing loan and eventually pulled out of the scheme. Experiences from Chisumbanje have shown that the informal savings club is providing significant income, is working as a safety net for local people, and has the potential to create new networks for inclusive development.

‘People have money in the area but did not have anywhere to spend it’

During an afternoon visit to Chisumbanje, one will not miss the aroma of fried chicken or goat meat which drifts enticingly from Tendai’s informal restaurant. Located near a popular entertainment spot, paTindo, as it popularly known, enjoys a busy trade. Customers flock to eat goat, sausage, chicken or beef served with rice or sadza, but the most popular dishes are *gango* and *gochi gochi*, braaied goat or chicken. Tendai Chikaka opened the braai spot in 2012; he employs two people and usually hires an additional person during the weekend to keep up with demand.

The buy-meat-and-barbecue concept has long been popular in urban areas where friends come together near a butchery or bottle store to grill meat on an open fire. But with burgeoning growth of a class of people with readily available disposable incomes, and a conviction by people like

Tindo that people have money and do not have anywhere to spend it, the braai craze has taken over most spots in the surrounding service centres in Chisumbanje.

Tendai is 33 years old and single, and grew up in Harare's high density suburb of Highfield. Upon completing his secondary education, he enrolled for a certificate in banking with the Institute of Banking of Zimbabwe at a city college. He worked for a building society in the city before he was retrenched when his employers merged the building society with an established commercial bank.

'I didn't know what to do then, but I had friends who were already accustomed to operating in the informal sector. They were operating informal bars, dance groups and car washes and I would join them to while away the afternoon. These adventures quickly become large networking sessions where business deals were sometimes brokered. One of them told me that plenty of opportunities had arisen in Chisumbanje and I should go and try my luck there. But the situation was not as easy as I had imagined. When I arrived in Checheche, formal jobs were hard to come by. I started the idea of 'gochi gochi' on the veranda of an incomplete shop which looks like an abandoned building, since the owner who is based in South Africa, ran out of funds to complete.'

Tindo later befriended the owner of Mafaro Enterprises, a popular bar and butchery in Chisumbanje. What started off as a way for the owner of Mafaro to increase weekend sales, grew in popularity, becoming a place where people go to drink, braai meat and socialise. Tindo does not sell beer to his customers, he simply cooks sadza and roasts meat, charging US\$1-5 per meal. He has recruited two people from Chisumbanje who assist with the cooking, cleaning and fetching firewood.

'I'm now well established and I have a solid base of customers who eats here regularly,' said Tindo, who ironically wears dreadlocks, often associated with Rastafarianism, a popular culture of vegetarians.

During winter the turnout is low, but Tindo would not go home with less than US\$50 per day. He does not have a licence, as his activities are construed as part of the Mafaro Enterprises, and he does not pay rentals to the owner since his customers buy beer and meat from the premises. Besides running the business as his main source of income, Tindo also refers himself as a 'freelance music promoter'.

Rarely do estate workers have the opportunity to see the country's top musicians performing. Most music lovers have to be content with listening to their favourite musicians on the radio, watching them on television and following them in the newspapers. This is no longer the case for people living around the farms in Chisumbanje – Tindo is credited with bringing rising music stars such as Kapfupi, Peter Moyo, First Farai, Progress Chipfumo and Sugar to Mafaro.

Due to the high demand for these shows and their high attendances, Mafaro Enterprises and its garden get packed and even less comfortable – old chairs, scruffy floor and broken windows – but the *gochi gochi*, the live music and the beer evoke memories of similar places back home for the patrons, most of who are migrants who came for work at Green Fuel.

Lloyd Nyani, a 31-year-old mechanic at Green Fuel, remarked: *'I finish work at around 5 p.m., and there is no one to cook for me, my family is at home in Marondera. Instead I buy takeaway food at paTindo every day on my way home from work. It's convenient and cheaper too. Besides food, we also chill there watching football during the weekends.'*

Mafaro is the place to be in Chisumbanje, where food, entertainment, music and leisure meet, but it is also providing significant employment and business opportunities for many traders who set temporary markets outside the shop every weekend or during music shows.

Street commerce: 'Snooker entrepreneur'

One activity which is also turning out to be good business is snooker and pool. It is now common to see an unfazed, restless crowd – street vendors, smokers, taxi drivers, travellers, unemployed

youths – at Chisumbanje township, Checheche growth point and other townships and hearing them yelling at the snooker players, *‘singa, singabhora, black haatambi! Sink, sink, ball! He won’t play the black ball’*, while milling around the table betting bangles, hats or dollar notes. The snooker and pool tables have been set up in disused buildings, shop verandas, bars and other open areas.

Some local youths have even been consumed by the excitement of betting to sustain their livelihoods. Others, bending under a reality that employment opportunities at Green Fuel are limited, are now hooked on playing or owning a snooker table. The previous year, Green Fuel’s apprenticeship scheme received an overwhelming number of applications but only 36 were selected, leaving thousands of youths, including university graduates, to turn to pool both as a sport to while away their time and as a way to earn some sort of income.

Calling himself a ‘snooker entrepreneur’, Joseph owns three tables, one on a shop veranda at Chisumbanje and another in a bar at Checheche. The third is in front of Poru Cocktail, a bar and restaurant which belongs to the local council but which was closed down long ago for renovation. In front of the premises is a giant deciduous tree which lets in the welcome winter sun and offers a spreading canopy to give respite from the harsh summer heat. This place is popular with the youths and they call it ‘Chill Spot’.

Joseph narrated his story as follows; *‘I started this snooker business in 2012. I used to work for a lodge in the Save Valley Conservancy but lost my job in July 2013 after a Chinese firm took over and slashed staff numbers. Saddled with the task of feeding my twin nine-year-old boys, I had to think fast. I took a gamble and sunk my entire US\$900 severance package to buy a snooker table. It paid off as my business is flourishing. I pocket US\$90 every Sunday from my three snooker tables which I have managed to use to pay for my sons’ schooling, to settle rent and put a deposit on a residential stand. Sometimes I have a petty brush with council by-laws but this does not dampen my appetite for my business.’*

To attract more clients to his pool tables, in particular to the one located at the disused cocktail bar, Joseph offers 'incentives' to punters who play on his tables. Spectators and players are serenaded with the relentless high volume of Zimdancehall music, a local subgenre of reggae and dancehall popular among urban youths. Blaring stereo speakers, tied to tree branches, hover over the snooker tables, amplifying the chaos and noise at the usually serene chill spot.

Youths from all the corners of the area converge at chill spot, some peddling street drugs such as marijuana, others play pool as a source of income despite the high risks that comes with gambling.

Youths in Chisumbanje and the surrounding areas are restless, they are looking beyond the government and Green Fuel. Opportunities for formal employment in Zimbabwe are very low due to an underperforming economy. This means that the demand for jobs at Chisumbanje was going to be high, but enterprising young people are using their ingenuity to create new sources of income.

Their livelihoods are improvised and flexible and involves a wide array of overlapping activities which is evidence of a new economy emerging, one that is characterised by solidarity and innovation.

Selling in the streets dominated the livelihood practice of most young people in Chisumbanje. Few have gone through the formal procedures to register their markets, but it is their only source of financial hope that they have. The goods being sold range from second-hand mobiles, mobile airtime, mobile covers, and fruit and vegetables to second-hand clothes and pirated DVDs.

Twenty-three-year-old Abel Mutodi sells insurance discs, and started his business selling airtime and other mobile accessories at Chisumbanje Township.

'My father is a settler farmer but our sugarcane plot was taken over by Green Fuel in 2011. The issue has not yet been resolved but it really affected us, my father is too old to work and I had to do something to bring food home. After finishing school three years ago and failing to secure a job in Green Fuel I turned to street vending, selling cell phone chargers and discs. It is hard to

hassle in the streets during the day. I do not have any option except to soldier on since the future belongs to the youths.'

Godwin, who dreams of one day becoming a cross-border truck driver, is venturing into the insurance sector.

'I now sell car insurances packages. I sell third party vehicle insurances whose normal prices are US\$20. Motorists are obliged by law to renew their insurance once in a quarter and if they are late they will have to pay an extra fine. I work as an agent for the insurance company which is based in Harare. The vehicle insurance I sell is only one of the three statutory requirements which motorist are obliged to pay. The others are road access insurance and car radio licence. These two are paid at any post office. Insurance payment on the other hand, is done online and the motorist collects the disk at the post office. So I always make sure I have data on my smart phone to facilitate motorists to purchase their insurance. I get a commission for this. I am now popular with motorists because most of them find it easier to come to me than travelling to Chiredzi to use the more formal shops there. Also, before doing the payments, a car registration book is required. It's a requirement and 'formal shops' strictly uphold this. However with my services, I am flexible enough to offer insurances even to clients who do not have registration books, especially those I know or those who have been referred. I operate under the tree close the post office gate. I have placed adverts all over so the people all know whenever they need my services.'

Tamauripo Cash wash

Another enterprising business opportunity which has been attractive to the locals is the car wash. They use the water from the Save River nearby. They swoop down on motorists, first assisting them with finding a parking spot then hustling for a cleaning job.

Alex, a young man at one of the car washes I visited, told me, *'I have to do everything necessary to make sure I put food on the table and take care of family. I have been operating this car wash for two years as a joint venture with my friends.'*

The car wash is named Tamauripo ('be here, even if you have nothing'), Alex is joined by three boys, all wearing sandals. One starts mixing powdered soap with water; while others take out mats from the car while the other is setting up the vacuum cleaner machine. Tamauripo car wash was formed by four unemployed youths who organised themselves and found a place between Richards supermarket and Kujokochera filling station at Checheche.

Alex was born in 1993 in a family of two, and did his primary education at Checheche primary school. Raised by a single parent – his mother is a house-keeper and subsistence farmer – Alex knew that after secondary school he had to look for employment as a child to earn money to look after his only parent.

'After my secondary education, I had the basic five subjects needed to proceed to any tertiary institution. However, with my elder brother now staying in South Africa where he migrated long time back and rarely returns home, my mother could not raise funds for me to pursue further with school. I then left home for Harare to look for a job. Sometimes I got a job just for a short time but most of the time I was not employed. Sometimes I get a job painting, next I can work on offloading trucks and so on. I have no fixed job, and I am always looking. Jobs are so scarce. Life after school is so painful if you are in a big city like Harare where industries are not functioning. I always think of getting back to school, but there is a challenge of school fees. After many months of looking for employment I got so depressed realising that I could not find any employment even low level work.

'When I saved the little money I got, I would visit home to check on my mother. Due to the hardships I experienced in Harare, I always nurtured the idea of coming home to till the land, but again without irrigation, farming is not all that attractive and crops will be vulnerable to mid-season droughts. That is when I came up with an idea to start a project, something that will be self-sustaining. The first thing to come to my mind was to purchase an irrigation pump and a generator so that I can venture into full time farming at home. In between my menial jobs, I started selling fruits and cigarettes in order to buy the necessary equipment. I did this through a

lot of sacrifices. When I came for the 2013 Christmas holiday, my friends encouraged me to stay. They convinced me that there was no need for me to go back to Harare since whatever I was doing there could still be replicated at home. My friends had tried their luck at Green Fuel but they were not successful, in fact they didn't see themselves suitable for menial jobs which were available such as weeding. They told me that they would rather hustle and take advantage of heightened business activity including several cars in the area to set up a car wash. I went back to Harare and I used the little money I had in my phone to purchase the car wash equipment required to start the business.'

Alex teamed up with his two former school friends with ambitions to be one of the most sought after local car wash enterprises. They get water from the Save River, use up to 40 litres for a car, and charge US\$3 for smaller cars and US\$5 for larger cars. Their charges also depend on whether the vehicle owner wants it be cleaned inside, outside or both. They deliver a clean car in 15 to 20 minutes. They have cultivated a special relationship with motorists and their customers are comfortable and they seem to trust the young boys with their cars. Among their important clients are second-hand car dealers. Business has been good, especially on weekends. Alex now makes enough money to look after his mother, his wife and their one-year-old son. All of his team have now acquired driver's licences and one of them has bought a motorcycle.

Tamaripo is not the only car wash; there are others which have been formed by people who had jobs before or had started their own small enterprises. This is the case with one car wash which operates from the Porusingazi complex. It is unstructured, and was started by a group of young men who found the spot convenient to engage in the car washing business. They normally use only soap and water and charge as little as US\$1 for small cars and US\$3 for bigger ones. They also target haulage trucks, for which they charge up to US\$10, and offer their services on a door-to-door basis.

This micro-enterprise has a special arrangement by which the members of the group have their own clients. Each keeps the money from his respective clients, and contributes a small share of

it to the enterprise, building the sense of common ownership. One of the members, Takura, came from the surrounding communal areas to look for a job at Green Fuel but failed to find one and started to sell freezits (frozen plastic drinks) at the bus terminus. He did not hesitate to join the car wash business which promised to have a better return than that which he made from selling freezits.

One of their clients I interviewed on the site said he goes to this car wash because they do a quick service and he wants to help their business. *'We have to wait longer and pay \$5 at other places,'* said this client, *'while here it's faster and cheaper.'*

One thing that sustains the car wash, and indeed that has provided significant employment and improved transport networks, has been the introduction of informal taxis.

'Zvi pii pii': Informal transport operators and the new transport networks

Since the commissioning of the ethanol project, there has been an improvement in the transport network with an increase in the number of kombis going from town to town and the introduction of informal taxis that service shorter routes. Before the project there were only two buses and four kombis linking the area with Chiredzi. For those who stayed in the Chisumbanje estate compound, only ARDA tractors were available, but they were no longer functional which forced people to walk a distance of over 3 km to reach the main road.

Now there are 14 kombis linking Chisumbanje with major towns. There are also 16 informal taxis which are locally referred to as 'zvi pii pii', named after the sound of the hooter which they use to attract passengers. These new taxis are owned by teachers, local policemen, shop owners and other petty traders involved with flea market and, tuckshops, as well as some workers at Green Fuel.

Takunda, a young school leaver waiting for his ordinary level results, operates a *mushikashika*.

'I stay with my sister, a teacher at Takwirira secondary school. She took a loan from the bank in 2010 and bought a car. When I finished my O levels, I started to use the car for business as a public

transport vehicle. My route is Checheche to Chisumbanje and back. It's a distance of less than 10km. There are many people who travel this journey every day; from Green Fuel workers, teachers, traders to people just making a visit to Checheche to visit bigger shops, the church or St Peters hospital. I charge 50c per trip but during busy hours in the morning and evening, sometimes I charge a dollar per trip. We improvise so that the car which should normally carry 6 people including the driver can carry up to 12 people because the demand for transport is high. On a good day, I can make 7 return trips and pocket US\$60 after deducting US\$25 for petrol and other ad hoc expenditures. My sister keeps the money and I get a weekly wage, but the hope is that I will be able to proceed to university next year. We use informal parking points where passengers have ease of access although if you are caught by council, they will fine you or tow your car to their offices to set an example against this practice. We make use of 'va nafieman', touts who shout out for clients and constantly look out for municipal police. In return we give them 50c for every trip. In some cases we get private trips where we are hired to take people or a family to church, school, hospital or elsewhere and these we charge depending on the circumstances of the client.'

One thing that has contributed significantly to the local economy has been the introduction of mobile money transfer platforms. In October 2011, mobile phone operator, Econet (Pvt) Ltd launched a facility called EcoCash, which enables people to deposit, withdraw, transfer, buy airtime, and pay bills and merchants using their cell phones. By April 2013, 18 months after it was launched, 2.3 million Zimbabweans had registered to use the service. One million active users are currently transferring US\$200 million every month, equivalent to 22 per cent of the country's GDP (Levin, 2013).

Many young people, some of them university graduates, have ventured into the business of in Chisumbanje and Checheche. With the advent of EcoCash services, many people who have descended on the area find it easier to make transactions, thus technological advances have bridged the formal and informal economies and brought payment services to the informal economy.

'If there is no way, we create one'

The lowveld has long been characterised as a mysterious place where all sorts of legal and illegal activities thrive (Wolmer, 2007; Scoones et al. 2012) as well as resistance to state control (Scott, 2009).

At Checheche, backyard filling stations are sprouting up as unemployed locals take advantage of the slumping Mozambican Metical against the US dollar to bring fuel into the country through the porous border.

'We are trying to eke out a living because there is no employment in the country. We are taking advantage of our proximity to the border,' said a local fuel dealer, Petros, who jointly operates his enterprise with Chauke.

Petros, 37-years-old and still single, has worked as rank marshal, tout and an informal 'travel consultant' at Checheche growth point since the 1990s. He has been in and out of court for suspected cases of theft and burglary but has never been convicted. Chauke on the other hand comes from Chikombedzi, an area that borders Mozambique and is home to the Shangani tribe. He came to Checheche in 1997 at age 17 to look for a job and save money to go back to school. He has worked as a herd boy, looking after livestock for families in the area before he joined the rank marshals as an informal loader for one of the cars which service the Checheche-Chigove route. The owner of the car used to work in South Africa as a driver and was given a pick-up truck as part of his retirement package. He decided to come home to use it to transport goods and people, mostly traders from Checheche to Chigove, a small township on the border of the two neighbouring countries. Since the country adopted the US dollar in 2009, the two have joined hands and operate an informal service station.

'When the ethanol project was established in 2009, we thought everyone here was going to benefit from cheap fuel manufactured at the plant. But that is not the case, in fact, every day we see trucks taking all the fuel to Harare. Local fuel dealers actually buy from the Mutare depot and

when it gets here, it will be expensive. So we bring in our own fuel from Mozambique which is less than 60km away using unofficial routes. Sometimes we have to pay something to authorities who often patrol the area. We are all trying to survive because life has become difficult for almost everyone in the country. The profits are good, if we buy a 200-litre drum straight from Chimoio, it costs US\$120 and then transport to Chigove is US\$10. If we buy from Chigove it costs between US\$170-180. A drum gives between US\$260-280 gross profits. We are overwhelmed by demand: we actually need tankers.'

Chauke, who is now married, has managed to pay school fees for his children from selling fuel and is investing in cattle back home. Local motorists interviewed opined that fuel from Mozambique was much more efficient than local blended fuel.

'This is a welcome development because our fuel prices in Zimbabwe are too high. We will continue to buy from smugglers because I am saving. Imagine that for US\$5.50 I can buy five litres of unleaded petrol from informal fuel dealers as against US\$7 at local filling stations.'

There has been a perception that unleaded fuel lasts longer than blended fuel. One local government official who apparently uses the fuel said in an unofficial capacity said that, *'That trade route which they use has been there for a long time, our Mozambican brothers and sisters bring chickens, drinks and so on and they trade with grain, vegetables and bicycle spares so it has been helpful beyond this fuel. If anyone says they are ready to stop the trade, then they should provide them with new jobs first, because they have been doing this for years and some have built up their lives around this.'*

He did not mention it, but one of the most prominent things entering the local markets from Mozambique are bales of second hand clothes.

The sight of people carrying huge bales and bags has become a common sight at Checheche. Traders in the merchandise are seen almost everywhere, especially at the bus terminus in the

evening. During the day, some vendors go to offices and other workplaces while others peddle their merchandise at beer halls, outside supermarkets or anywhere people may be gathered to socialise. The majority, however, have found a home at the big market behind the main bus terminus at Checheche where wholesale marketing of second-hand clothes has become brisk business, attracting people from the surrounding communal areas.

Tariro, a 29-year-old single mother, runs a popular market specialised in second-hand clothes for children.

'I stay with my brother who is a policeman at Chisumbanje police station. He started working here a long time ago and he owns a house and a shop which he rents out in the growth point. I came in 2014 to stay with him; this is when I started selling 'mabhero' (second hand bales of clothes). He is the one who told me about mabhero since he knows one of the drivers who transports them. I get my stuff from Mozambique. When going to buy, I take the 12 a.m. bus there which arrives in Mutare around 3 a.m. There are small cars which take us to the Mozambique border at around 4 a.m. We wait until the border opens at 6 a.m and after processing our entrance papers, we take small cars to Chimoio which charge us 100 Metical. By 10 a.m, I would be done selecting what I want. Normally I pay US\$240 for a full closed bale. When we pay it's inclusive of transportation across the border and there is trust you will get the bale on the other side. The next day after arriving home, our stuff is delivered at our market and we pay another additional US\$10. My business is doing quite well because unlike some areas where you need to wait until the end of the farming season to get cash, here there is a lot of cash which circulates mostly from the workers at Green Fuel. I sell my clothes for between US\$2 and US\$6, while others go for US\$1 for four. I have an established customer base and one nurse at St Peters refers new mothers to my stand. One bale gives me profit of US\$200 to US\$250. I have managed to send my child to boarding school. The returns are good. I sometimes exchange clothes with mealie meal and chicken and I also offer credit to my customers.'

'Give me a way one ticket to Zimbabwe, I want to go back home!'

One dynamic which is emerging, rather unintended, as result of the presence of the ethanol project, is the slow process of reverse migration; people coming back home looking for opportunities in and around the ethanol project. During my fieldwork in 2014, in one of my routine drives through Chisumbanje and its sun-bathed environs, I came across a young man, probably in his early thirties, busy working in the fields together with his wife and children.

To the uninformed eye, this could have passed as something normal. But it was not. Seeing a complete family is an increasingly rare phenomenon in a Zimbabwe, where high unemployment levels have driven many across the borders in search of the proverbial greener pastures while tearing families apart. It is even uncharacteristic to see this in Chisumbanje, an area with a pattern of migration history that dates back to the early twentieth century. My own misconception that the biofuel project was responsible for only driving people away, was quickly dispelled as I engaged with the young man in a long conversation.

Jealousy, a 33-year-old married father of three children, grew up in Chisumbanje and when he got married, his parents offered the couple two hectares of land on which to build their own house and grow their own food. Jealousy's first two agricultural seasons of dryland farming did not produce good harvests. Low rainfall, an unprecedented hyperinflationary economic environment, political tension brought about by a controversial election process and a general decline in the prices of cotton left the family with little to show for the first harvests. Jealousy, realising the responsibility he had for his family and wife, now pregnant and unable to provide labour in the fields, decided to join the bandwagon of mostly young men who migrate to search for employment in South Africa.

'Things were increasingly getting bad in Zimbabwe, droughts, decline in cotton prices, political tension and hyperinflation, that's why I had to brave for the journey down South. My initial plan was to work for restaurants in Cape Town. I found it hard though to secure employment in Cape Town and ended up working in the orange plantations. Life was not easy but I could afford to remit some money to my family back home. It was only when I joined a construction company at the Green Point stadium that my income improved, but this only lasted for a year.'

Jealousy, wearing his trademark blue T-shirt with the inscription 'South Africa World Cup 2010', was the embodiment of a man who had tried his luck in South Africa and found the going tough in that fabled land of gold and decided to come back home. When his contract in Cape Town expired, he was invited by a friend who stayed in one of the oldest high density suburbs of Pretoria. Jealousy joined his friend's trade, washing and guarding cars at middle-class shopping malls.

His ordeal started when armed thugs besieged his home demanding money and other valuable items. *'I escaped with only one thing in mind which was to go back home with my loved ones'*

Sporadic violence, xenophobic attacks, the decline in income from his informal job and uncertainty about his safety forced him to make painful choices; between going back to Zimbabwe where the economy was in a sharp decline or stay in South Africa where xenophobic attacks were on a dramatic increase.

Now looking a picture of renewed life and vitality, and having an enduring hope that the future can only get better, Jealousy declared: *'Faced with a choice of starvation in Zimbabwe or being butchered in SA, I would rather die at home, where my ancestors are buried.'*

Home for Jealousy meant looking for opportunities at Green Fuel, reuniting and staying with his family and avoiding the attendant risks that come with working in a foreign country.

Jealousy's story reflects and refracts the wider dynamics of young men and women shuttling between urban and rural, and local and foreign centres of capitalist production. Although regional citizens have long migrated to centres of capitalist production in search of employment, life today is far more complex than it once was, as Jealousy's story reveals. There is a sense of fragmentation in southern Africa's centralised economies which has resulted in a contraction of formal employment opportunities (Bolt, 2011). Gone are the days when regional citizens would retrace livelihood routes to centres such as Gauteng, with long-term plans to be achieved through secure jobs that enable them to save and invest back home (ibid).

There have been concerns about the high numbers of Zimbabweans crossing the border to South Africa to look for jobs; some end up staying under harsh conditions as refugees and if they get sick or die they end up in pauper burials (see Beremauro, 2013). This systematic dislocation of couples has serious implications for families and social relations. In June 2012, while making a submission to a government one woman bemoaned the high rate of migration especially among men who go to South Africa to look for livelihood opportunities and in some cases end up contracting diseases or succumb to the violence that characterize most of South African townships.

Jealousy and his family were working their fields — a reflection that there were opportunities for people to build their livelihoods around the secondary economy that Green Fuel's operations had triggered in Chisumbanje. True, not everyone is coming back, and surely some are sceptical of what they are going to do, but in Chisumbanje there are some who see opportunities and they are reversing a pattern of migration that has been entrenched for close to a century. Besides working on the out-grower plots or looking for employment at Green Fuel, Jealousy was in the process of using his skills to set up a welding business.

Conclusion

This chapter has gone beyond the negative effects often associated with land grabs, to provide a nuanced analysis how local people make use of economic ingenuity in order to actualise opportunities that Green Fuel, not intentionally, has made available merely by virtue of its presence. The local economy has been reconfigured and informalised as new enterprises and economic innovation emerge.

The cases studies presented confirm the assertion of Hart &Sharp (2014) that people adopt different strategies to insert themselves into an unequal economy. Although many operating in the informal sector are reliant on patrons and support from others, very often political patronage plays a part. For instance, from the case studies presented, if a taxi operator or a flea market trader is to secure a place to work from in the growth point, someone inevitably has to be paid

off but this is the nature of the informal economy and at the time of study it had enabled local people to get by.

One might be tempted not to view these new changes as 'real' growth because it is informal. The economic innovation stories that I have presented are evidence that we cannot easily dismiss this narrative, because it is the basis of significant employment and a substantial numbers of livelihoods. Today such complex livelihoods are the norm in town too and make up a new distributive economy, and with it a distributive politics (Ferguson, 2015).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Livelihoods at a Crossroads? Uncertainty, Hope, and Rural Change

Introduction

This thesis has explored the consequences of land acquisition for the purpose of establishing a large-scale sugarcane biofuel project for the lives and livelihoods of a group of individuals who reside on, and in proximity to, it. The thesis provided a discussion and illumination of the ways these individuals in Chisumbanje in south-east Zimbabwe lived through conditions of uncertainty and profound economic insecurities brought about by threats from the encroachment of a biofuel corporation, backed consistently by the state and an increasingly patronising local bureaucratic elite. It is a story of corrupt leaders, a dodgy deal, and a dejected community – but it is also about resistance, innovation, and people’s hopes and aspirations.

The central objective of the thesis was to critique a particular episode of land acquisition and, simultaneously, to contribute to the debate on projects and institutions that create and administer initiatives that purport to improve the economic well-being of the most marginalised segment of the population, and to eliminate poverty. The thesis opens a new debate around land, people, livelihoods and the economy in Zimbabwe, and rural change in general.

Below is a sketch of some of the themes explored in the thesis.

Situating large-scale land acquisitions

The first concern I had when I engaged with this topic was how the recent wave of large-scale land acquisitions can properly be contextualised and framed. This was an important question, because although the phenomenon appears to be international and worldwide in its scope, local contexts matter. In the case of Chisumbanje, where the Green Fuel biofuel plant is located, this thesis has shown that landscapes are products of history, shaped by wider economic forces, government policies, and the management interventions of generations of land users. One of the

arguments I presented is that contemporary resource contests are rooted in, and play out through, much longer-term histories of resource entitlements and the politics that govern them. In this regard, the thesis sought to show that the livelihood trajectories and lived experiences of a group of individuals inhabiting a highly contested space have to be analysed and understood within a historical context, as well as through historically-embedded processes.

In Chapters 2, 3 and 4 I observed that while previous endeavours at centrally controlled 'development' dating back to the 1950s on the part of colonial state functionaries may have laid the foundation for agricultural development in the lowveld, they were simply insufficient in scope to satisfy the needs of local inhabitants in Chisumbanje. The thesis has shown that state interventions regarding land use planning and legal restrictions reduced access to resources and flexible management of land. At the same time, the colonial government manipulated the role of chiefs and rural district administrators by supporting them in obtaining and maintaining undemocratic control over village institutions, thereby excluding local villagers from meaningful participation in 'development'. State projects were implemented without community consultation and any regard for local socio-ecological considerations, and this had adverse consequences for the livelihoods of the local inhabitants. This finding carries important lessons for anyone entrusted with negotiating land concessions in contemporary large-scale agricultural investments.

The historical approach adopted in the thesis provides important insights which are often overlooked into indigenous people's history and their position in both settler and post-colonial society. It also suggests that existing accounts of Rhodesian state policy on land segregation may have overestimated the impact of its segregationist measures while underestimating the extent of the differentiation among the peasantry. Chisumbanje agricultural landscapes and livelihoods have been shaped by continual adaptation and innovation over time. The thesis has sketched how contemporary livelihood practices in Chisumbanje – crop production, livestock keeping, and migrant labour – relate to long-standing resettlement patterns. It also shows how a modest pattern of differentiation emerged when successful farmers and some households that had members working in cities or in South Africa accumulated more assets, income and crops than

those that did not, and that these were often redistributed to an extended network of kin and friends.

In considering the historical antecedents of the agro-investments in Chisumbanje, the thesis highlighted that new forms of understanding the land are required in order to gain control and operate large scale agricultural projects. Investors use these modern techniques for the purposes of making investments that maximises profits. Sadly local people are at the mercy of these new technologies and their views are rarely captured in the development of large scale agro investment deals.

Role of the state and other actors in large-scale land acquisitions

The second concern of this thesis was to understand how land deals are shaping — and being shaped by — the modern nation state. What role do national institutions and elites play in determining the outcome of large-scale land acquisition and its impact on local communities?

In Chapter 3, I observe that the Zimbabwean state was not a passive victim in the biofuel land deal, simply coerced into leasing part of its national territory to powerful economic players in order to access capital. On the contrary, I located the expansion of land-based investments within Zimbabwe's neoliberal import-substitution industrial policy, itself a product of post-colonial national development policy. The thesis argued that the Green Fuel project highlights the trajectory this policy followed when African capitalist interests continued the oppressive measures that had been implemented by the settler government before independence. Contemporary land contestations reflect deep-seated characteristics of the African post-colony in which rulers seek to maintain a firm grip on power. However, instead of totalising the state as if it is made up of a homogeneous group of individuals with similar interests and strategies, Chapter 3 identified the role and power relations of different people involved in the land deal. It showed how the involvement of ruling party elites, rogue capitalists, power games, and patrimonial politics undermined any form of transparency and accountability in the design and signing of the Chisumbanje biofuel deal. In this regard, the thesis opens up a discussion on the

need to shift the debate over land deals from the current polarised narratives in which land deals are seen as either good for rural development or bad due to their tendency to displace local people and disrupt their livelihoods.

By deconstructing the multi-layered interests and strategies of different actors involved in the long-term acquisition of land, the thesis has also challenged the view that handling 'development' in a more 'inclusive' way is a solution to the many shortcomings recorded in these large-scale agricultural schemes. This view is challenged on the grounds that it glosses over the political economy of MNC's investments in developing countries and the political cultures of the host governments which receive the investment.

Chapter 2 reviewed literature on how the global economy has evolved since the 1970s, showing the increasing dominance of MNCs in the global economy and their hold over states, particularly those in the 'developing' world. It also showed a clear trend where private sector companies affected by the 2007-2008 financial crises have turned to land investments to protect themselves against future shocks.

Added to this, as discussed in Chapter 3, is the corrupt tendencies that permeates through most governments targeted by these investments. Neo-patrimonial politics and corruption govern the way in which large-scale deals operate, and the ruling elites are prepared to do the dirty work for the MNCs in return for a small share of the spoils the MNCs generate. All this points to innate weaknesses in the governance systems of most countries targeted for such investments, which makes them inherently unable to contain recent land transactions let alone attempt to persuade capital to work in the interests of the majority population that is affected by them.

If corruption and rent seeking continue to dominate governance systems in many African countries, then the calls for inclusive development face significant obstacles to becoming a possible remedy for the many problems associated with large-scale land deals.

Land rights and livelihoods

The second question I posed in the thesis was, 'Whose land was taken away and what did they gained in return?' My findings showed that most farmers lost their land and their livelihoods were disrupted. From the perspective of local people, the biofuel project failed in alleviating poverty and uplifting livelihoods in that only 516 farmers were allocated land out of the 1,754 who had been displaced from their land. Even then, with an average income of US\$200 per farmer in a season, the 516 farmers clearly lived in poverty. They did not benefit from the project which took away their land.

The company justified the loss of land by insisting that it would introduce subsistence farmers to the market. But only a small proportion of the local people were given the opportunity to participate in this market, the market was not in the main ethanol feedstock, and the market was not guaranteed. The main argument of the chapter is that a lot of local people lost access to land that was held under a form of tenure adapted to their economic position on the periphery of a colonial and then post-colonial state.

In line with the standard literature on LSLA, the chapter also showed that without land, displaced people were obliged to work in the plantations or become out growers for a market which was not guaranteed while others were forced to migrate elsewhere in order to scratch for a living. Women and children were the most affected.

Chapter 4, in particular, shows the view regarding the negative consequences of LSLAs on local agriculturalists to be too limited, because, like the large body of literature on LSLAs, it focuses narrowly on land dispossession. The implication of focusing too much on the land issue is that all grabs are lumped together as bad and all local people as losers. Social contexts and historical processes are often overlooked, if not explicitly discounted.

This thesis has drawn attention to the history of Chisumbanje and its people showing that, despite agricultural activities in communal areas often being described as 'subsistence' farming,

people in Chisumbanje have long been in a position in which they could not subsist on agricultural activities alone – income from labour migration was necessary to keep 'subsistence agriculture' going, and subsistence agriculture was a way of spreading income from labour migration through local communities.

This is what has come under threat after the development of the Green Fuel project in Chisumbanje. The people there now face a situation in which becoming labour migrants is more difficult than it was earlier, they have lost land that was under a system of tenure that was adapted to that earlier reality (and may lose more in future), and they have been exposed to market-based agricultural activities offered to them under extremely unfavourable terms.

In showing this, the thesis also tested the assumption – often made in the mainstream literature on LSLA – that local people occupy suitable land and much of it is being used productively, at least for subsistence agriculture, and LSLAs deprive them of this. The thesis argues that while this narrative may be relevant in other parts of the world, it is not a sufficient account in reference to the historical settler economies of southern Africa. It is this context – which shows local people as recipients of similar projects in the past as 'worker-peasants' – that was duly considered in detail in the assessment of the LSLA undertaken by Green Fuel. Such an approach has the potential to bring out nuanced perspectives on how people's responses on the ground can open potential and opportunities for a more sustainable future.

Labour and livelihoods in LSLA

The third objective of the thesis was to examine the quality of jobs and the overall employment dispensation the company offered local people in the sugarcane fields and the plant itself. What was the nature of employment created by the biofuel project and which kind of people were employed in each job category?

In mainstream literature on LSLAs, developing countries are said to be characterised by depressed rural economies that have been starved of investment for a long time. Large-scale land acquisitions are perceived to be a significant vehicle to stimulate the rural economy. In Chapter

5, these arguments were juxtaposed with the history of Chisumbanje and its people in order to assess if the revival of agriculture would open up opportunities for wage employment.

Chapter 5 examined the quality of jobs generated at the ethanol production plant and the general working conditions experienced by people who work in the sugarcane plantations. The chapter illustrated a glaring failure of the project in that local people who were hired got menial seasonal jobs that could not sustain their families. Typical of settler capitalist operations, the better paying jobs of supervisors were given to Africans coming from outside the area. Next, the local workers worked under poor conditions and were not allowed to join unions, except the one that was linked to the ruling party, a sign that even the government was on the side of capital and not on the side of the workers, as might have been expected given that ZANU-PF projected itself as a partner for the people who had been oppressed in the colonial era.

Some have suggested that because of the exploitative nature of wage employment at Green Fuel, it would perhaps be better if local people had been left alone to practice what they had already been doing. The basis of this argument is quite compelling. If Africans were able to live in the difficult environment before the encounter with foreigners, and considering, as highlighted earlier in the chapter, that the alliance between MNCs and the state elites in land deals is too corrupted to lead to any meaningful outcomes for local people, would it not be better if the MNCs and the states simply left them alone to carry on organising their lives according to their own long-standing understandings of the environment?

Chapter 5 has shown that while this idea may be plausible in other parts of the world, its application in southern Africa ('the Africa of the labour reserves') is problematic. Simply saying 'leave the people on the ground alone' is no solution when the form of agriculture they practised for decades prior to the LSLA was dependent on wages earned by migrant workers.

The system of labour migration that sustained the underwriting of agriculture with wages in Chisumbanje has gone into decline.

Jobs for migrant workers have gone because, as Laterza and Sharp (2017) argued, the century-old migrant labour system that used to create millions of jobs for southern African regional large-scale mining-based economies has had its day. Added to this, is the deindustrialisation following structural adjustment and the political uncertainty after the land invasions in the year 2000, had a negative impact on agricultural livelihoods in Chisumbanje even before the arrival of Green Fuel. So, suggesting that people be left alone is condemning them to the very unfavourable circumstances they wish to escape.

Given these situations, one could further argue that there is limited point in having undisturbed access to land in an area of uncertain climatic conditions which is located on the margins of an under-performing state that has neither the resources nor the intention to invest in small-scale agriculture. What people need in such circumstances is access to money, and the question of who makes that money available and why they do so is not necessarily the most important issue to the people on the ground.

It is not surprising that, as noted in Chapter 5, many people in Chisumbanje were calling not for the outright exit of Green Fuel, but rather for better terms of inclusion and equity in the workplace, while others used the small income that they received in innovative ways.

Agency and rural change

The final objective of thesis was to explore the unintended consequences of the biofuel operation. What opportunities have emerged, inadvertently, as a result of Green Fuel activities, and how did people responded to them?

On reflection, it appears that the potential solution to the many problems associated with LSLAs put forward in much of the literature raises many problems, doubts and concerns. The common argument is that steps should be taken to ensure increased inclusion and participation for local people in large-scale agro-investments schemes. But what conceivable incentive might the MNCs and the post-colonial states have to follow this advice and take the necessary steps? This is why

Chapter 6 explores what people on the ground can do for themselves with the few resources that come their way as the unintended consequence of Green Fuel's presence in the area.

The thesis has challenged the dominant view in the large corpus of literature on responses to land grabbing. This view makes an implicit assumption about the homogeneity of affected local communities. One thing that has been consistently illustrated throughout this thesis, is that local communities are made up of different classes who have different capacities hence LSLA elicit different responses from these diverse groups Chapter 6 explored these issues more deeply, arguing that land deals operate in a complex space characterised by diverse social groups, with varied interests and aspirations, and that understanding the identities of these groups, and the issues that unite and divide them, is key to galvanising political mobilisation among affected communities against, or indeed even for, land deals.

Chapter 6 offered a preliminary foray into some of the initiatives taken by local people to insert themselves into an 'enclave economy' created by Green Fuel. It described the efforts of people to fashion a livelihood in the course of their everyday lives, and in the process, offered an alternative perspective on some of the key underlying issues at stake. Some of these efforts were based on people's participation in market based activities while others were a reflection of the existence of a solidarity economy. The situation on the ground was too new to come to definite conclusions, but there were a few hints of the way things might unfold.

In a way, the Green Fuel operation, as noted in Chapter 6, has stimulated the rural economy as seen by thriving secondary economy and other down-stream industries in Chisumbanje and the surrounding areas. There has been an increase in money circulation mainly from wage employment and other secondary activities tied to the Green Fuel operations, especially the growth of small enterprises.

It is no surprise that, when some of my research respondents with small enterprises were reflecting on their lives, they highlighted that their enterprises were contributing significantly both to their household economy and rural development in general.

What is interesting is that the emerging social relationships were characterised by both self-interest and mutuality, two tendencies that may define the politics of agricultural investment and to the economy more broadly.

Conclusion

This thesis has looked critically at concerns raised over the increasing trend of global land grabbing, and based on the last chapter, observes that it is in people's everyday practices, not from the elites, that we are far more likely to find meaningful solutions to inequality inherent in these large agro-investments and the seeds of a more human economy.

Some local people in Chisumbanje I interviewed during this research, and recorded in several case studies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, accepted that it will probably take a lifetime before Green Fuel takes their hopes and aspirations into consideration, if it ever does so. They have now embarked on fashioning an alternative, based on a spontaneous application of collective common sense. This sense tells them that they must modify the way the market goes to work among them, alter perceived wisdom about the sanctity of personal ownership, and embrace practices embodying mutuality and reciprocity in their daily lives in order to survive the hardships to which they are all exposed.

It is not certain where local people's agency is going because the timeframe for this research was limited, but this is all we have to go on. The question of how people on the ground behave in relation to the scraps that come their way in the globalised economy is one for more research in future. They already show that they are innovative risk-takers, but that doesn't necessarily mean they will come to behave like textbook entrepreneurs whose sole guide is to buy cheap and sell dear, or that they will follow Green Fuel's example and behave like playground bullies.

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