

**BELONGING AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS: WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LAND  
AND NON-PERMANENT MOBILITY AT MERRIVALE FARM,  
MWENEZI DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE**

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With 1 figure

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**Summary:** The fast track land reform programme in Zimbabwe has reshaped rural livelihoods as land has become a major asset for rural people. The major question that I sought to answer in this study is how have rural women become important actors in accessing land and shaping non-permanent mobile livelihoods in the context of the fast track land reform programme, riddled with conflicts? The data for the article is based on an ethnographic study that I undertook at Merrivale farm, Tavaka village, from April 2009 until August 2012. Major results that emanated are that women have become major actors in land acquisition and non-permanent mobile livelihoods. Problematising the notion of conflicts from two angles in this paper helps in understanding how mobility, linked to land acquisition and land use, is central in the evolving of conflicts in the new resettlements. Connecting land access, social networks and mobility to South Africa and the conflict paradigm brings out how land-based livelihoods are embedded with social mishaps in the new resettlement. The concept of “home” becomes central in resolving conflicts and affects how conflict mechanisms are reached at Merrivale or in South Africa. I explore the conflict resolution approaches women used to solve at Merrivale and in South Africa.

**Zusammenfassung:** Die Fast Track-Landreform hat das Leben auf dem Land in Simbabwe stark verändert, da sich Landbesitz zu einem zentralen Gut der ländlichen Bevölkerung entwickelt hat. Im Fokus der vorliegenden Studie steht die Rolle der Frauen als Akteure des Landerwerbs und die Frage, wie sich das Leben der Frauen nach der Reform verändert hat und welche Konflikte sich im Zuge des Veränderungsprozesses ergeben haben. Die dem Artikel zugrunde liegenden Daten wurden im Zuge einer ethnographischen Feldstudie auf der Merrivale Farm in dem Dorf Tavaka im südlichen Simbabwe zwischen April 2009 und August 2012 erhoben. Die Ergebnisse der Untersuchung belegen eine starke Partizipation der Frauen an der Landreform und ihre aktive Rolle bei dem Landerwerb. Die traditionell zentrale Funktion der Frauen bei der Bewirtschaftung des Landes hat sich durch den Wandel der Besitzverhältnisse bzw. eigenständigen Landerwerb seitens der Frauen verändert und hat darüber hinaus das Verhältnis der Geschlechter zueinander nachhaltig beeinflusst. Die mit diesen Veränderungen einhergehenden Konflikte beziehen sich sowohl auf die eigentliche (land)wirtschaftliche Arbeitsteilung und veränderte Mobilitätsmuster der unterschiedlichen Akteure, aber auch auf das familiäre Zusammenleben und die Arbeitsteilung im Haushalt. Der Beitrag behandelt neben den Ursachen und Ausprägungen der Konflikte auch unterschiedliche Ansätze der Konfliktbewältigung.

**Keywords:** Fast track, land reform, mobility, women, conflicts, conflict resolution, belonging, home

## 1 Introduction

Land is a critical resource for rural Zimbabweans whose livelihoods depend solely on agricultural activities. The past decade (2000–2010) has seen Zimbabwe's agrarian sector and land ownership rights become heavily restructured due to the fast track land reform programme<sup>1)</sup> (FTLRP), (MOYO and CHAMBATI 2013; MURISA 2009; SCOONES et al.

2010; MUTOPO 2011; MOYO 2011; CHIWESHE 2011; MUNYUKI-HUNGWE 2011; MATONDI 2012). I define land reform as focusing more on changes to existing forms of land tenure, ownership and land transfers, for example from landed elites to landless peasants. The FTLRP has been surrounded by controversy with scholars supporting evolutionary approaches to land reform, arguing that it undermined the rights of citizens, and led to mayhem and chaos (MOORE 2012; ZAMCHIYA 2011; HELLMUM and DERMAN 2004). Revolutionary scholars argue that the process of land redistribution was inevitable and it had to take the peasant as the central starting point. It was the

<sup>1)</sup> It should be noted that the FTLRP is still an ongoing phenomenon in Zimbabwe such that it is difficult to safely conclude that it has ended.

best that could be done in the circumstances and if observed closely it has led to an improvement of rural livelihoods as land has trickled to the peasants (HANLON et al. 2013; MOYO 2011; SCOONES et al. 2010; SADOWBA 2008). However both the revolutionary and evolutionary scholars on land reform agree on the fact that there was need to redraw the geographical, political and economic, equity and social aspects surrounding land access by the black Zimbabweans since large tracts of land had belonged to a white minority. The white commercial farmers controlled more than a million hectares of the arable land in the country (MOYO and CHAMBATI 2013).

The programme has been analysed with different lenses by global, regional and national think tanks, since its implementation. These think tanks include the World Bank, the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, the Food and Agricultural Organisation, the South African Institute of International Affairs, the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape and the Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network, Pretoria. All these institutes have produced varied reports that emphasized the importance of the land reform but critiquing the methodology that was adopted with regards to its implementation, (MATONDI 2012; ZAMCHIYA 2011; SCOONES et al. 2010). The think tanks all acknowledged the critical role that land plays in improving rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe. However an important part of the exercise is that it dwelt on three major policy thrusts thus, reindigenising<sup>2)</sup> and empowering black Zimbabweans, decongesting the communal areas created during the colonial area and resolving tenure issues that surrounded the land question after the Lancaster house conference of 1979. The notions of reindigenising and empowering the black community have been rejected by (MAGURE 2012) who asserts that, when flows of means of production are characterized by inequity and discrimination then the whole notion of empowerment is not achieved.

In as much as these were the policies underlying the FTLRP, women emerged as critical actors during the fast track process. Women's involvement in the FTLRP has led to the emergence of a women's rural land movement. A rural women's movement

has emerged that is characterized by women peasant farmers. The movement gained much currency due to the fast track land reform processes, which was characterized by women war veterans, who encouraged rural women to participate in the process, since they constituted the greater number of farmers. After the fast track, several women's collective organizations have been formed in which women have associations in their villages that deal with purchasing farm implements, acting as commodity associations and accessing markets for their produce. Detailed studies by HANLON et al. (2013), MURISA (2011), and MUNYUKI-HUNGWE (2011) demonstrate that in Zvimba, Goromonzi and Mazowe, these women's farmer groups in fast track areas have influenced the setting up of such women's groups in communal areas such that the role of the Zimbabwe Farmers Union is diminishing. This has led to active rural women's movements in agriculture in Zimbabwe, since donor programmes do not support the land reform farms. Through the use of agency, women have created a civic platform of engagement in their land-based livelihoods. Initially in Zimbabwe it had been the urban women's movement that championed access to land but with the advent of the fast track land reform, rural women emerged as the strategic actors with more agency to participate in the fast track land acquisition process. Land, non-permanent mobility and belonging carried a special connotation that had symbolic representation and reinterpretations of how land based livelihoods are understood and reconfigured in present day Zimbabwe. The processes of social change in post 2000 outcomes of fast track land reform in Zimbabwe present new structures and processes of understanding rural livelihoods from rural women's view point.

Few empirical investigations have been conducted in Zimbabwe in understanding how women acted as an important force in the fast track process (HANLON et al. 2013; MUTOPO 2011; MAZHAWIDZA and MANJENGWA 2011; CHAKONA 2011; SCOONES et al. 2010; GOEBEL 2005). However in as much as these article have dealt with the gender question of the land reform, the debate has been centred on women's access to land and not going further in understanding how post fast track land reform livelihoods are captured from a women centred perspective. The main objective of this study was to examine how women accessed land and carved livelihoods in a post fast track farm in the Mwenezi district, in the southeastern part of Zimbabwe, using ethnographic methodologies.

<sup>2)</sup> This is a term that has been used to the notion of making sure that land and other means of production such as mines are owned by black people as a way of creating an economic force that appreciates the blackness of the majority of the citizens.

## 2 Methodology and theoretical framework

This work was based on iterative ethnographic methodologies from a case study approach (BERNARD 2006). I was a resident of Merrivale farm, Tavaka village from April 2009 until August 2010, with some repeated short visits in January, February 2011 and August 2012. This enabled me to engage with the participants at all stages of their lives and livelihood pathways. I decided to do an in-depth study of twenty households so that I could develop a detailed understanding of women, land access and non-permanent mobility at Tavaka village. FITZGERALD (2006) points out that ethnography involves direct and sustained social contact with the agents. Data collection was mainly multi-sited, where I stayed at Tavaka village, engaging in everyday forms of life such as going to the fields, fetching water and travelled with the women to South Africa for trading purposes.

My data collection techniques were modelled along MARCUS's (1995) understanding of the researcher being a part of interconnected places that offer value to the research thus following the people, the processes and their lives closely. I also buttressed this with in-depth interviews, focus group discussions; transect walks and daily observational guides as I sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of the women under study. In-depth interviews helped me in accessing individual notions of land access and how the women carved other livelihoods out of land access in the village. Focus group discussions were composed of three groups thus a women standalone group, a mixed women and men's group and a group which comprised men, women and the youths. This was done so as to have critical and reflective contributions. In terms of understanding the language, my capacity to speak Shona, the local language, was important in as much as in this part of Zimbabwe they speak Karanga, a Shona dialect.

I was able to engage myself with everyone and also learnt new words. Flexibility in language use was critical in developing a deeper understanding of the land based livelihoods at Tavaka village. Transect walks enabled me to view the fields that one had, the areas of conflicts and also the boundaries of plots of land. I recorded all the interactions of the villagers, involving their time in the fields, at home, days the women went to South Africa in daily observational guides. The daily observational guides were important in understanding the value chain process events from acquisition of the land, production and the marketing of the crops. Trading trips to South Africa with my respondents led to the development

of trans-border research and this opened up more nuances in my field work. I analysed the data based on the principles of eclectic analysis were interpretations are based on the development of recurrent themes that can be coded from the data set available.

The methodology is influenced by the theories of agency and livelihoods. I demonstrate how the women possessed the knowledge to deal with their social and natural environment as reflected by their involvement in accessing land, cropping activities and trading in South Africa even in the difficult circumstances as evidenced by the decade of political, economic and social malaise in Zimbabwe that occurred immediately after the embarkation on the FTLRP (LONG 1992, 22–23) defines agency as the “the individual actor possessing the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion. Within the limits of information, uncertainty and the other constraints (e.g. physical, normative or politico-economic) that exist, social actors are “knowledgeable” and “capable”. They attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in the flow of social events around them and monitor continuously their own actions, observing how others react to their behavior and taking note of the various contingent circumstances”.

Theories of agency are important in understanding how actors make choices and the capabilities that influence the choices with regards to developing actor oriented projects (LONG 1992; VAN DEN BERG 2010). This denotes that the women are active agents in the fast track process and have devised strategies and means of dealing with their livelihoods. Agency becomes useful as it is not only developed by the individual but by the other actors that interact with the individual. This also enabled me to conceptualize and develop an understanding of how land, actor projects and belonging are enshrouded in these paradigms.

An analysis of the livelihoods perspectives (ELLIS 1999; SCOONES 2009) start with how different people in different places live. A variety of definitions are offered in the literature, including, for example, ‘the means of gaining a living ‘or a combination of the resources used and the activities undertaken in order to live. A descriptive analysis of livelihoods portrays a complex web of activities and interactions that emphasises the diversity of ways people make a living (SCOONES 2009). Livelihood theories are about the capacity of individuals to access physical, social, political and economic capital so that they can lead better lives. SCOONES et al. (2010) have argued that live-

lihood constructions by rural people in Zimbabwe after fast track reform demonstrate how land has become the major asset underpinning livelihoods. Reflections of women responding to shocks and multiple stresses in the Zimbabwean political economy sphere lead to the in-depth understanding of how actors use the physical assets and social networks at their disposal in order to cushion themselves against more vulnerability in pursuit of livelihood diversification strategies tied to farming. Women's strategies in order to deal with complex livelihoods in a rural setting demonstrate the changing nature of the term livelihood and how actors define better livelihood outcomes from poor livelihood outcomes. SCOONES et al. (2010) and SCOONES (2009, 172) evidently argue that in reality people combine different activities in a complex bricolage or portfolio of activities. Outcomes of course vary, and how different strategies affect livelihood pathways or trajectories is an important concern for livelihoods analysis.

### 3 Description of study area

Merrivale farm is located along the R1 Beitbridge-Chirundu road that connects Zimbabwe with South Africa. It is situated in Masvingo Province in Mwenzei district in the southeastern part of the country. Merrivale farm was carved into A1 village settlements during the fast track reform. The villagers under this mode of resettlement have 6 hectares of grazing lands and 30 to 50 hectares of common grazing lands<sup>3)</sup>. Tavaka village settlement is found on the 132 km peg along the R1 highway on the way to Beitbridge, the border town that demarcates Zimbabwe and South Africa. Tavaka village is situated in ward 4, under Mwenzei Rural District Council, which covers the communal areas of Neshuro, Maranda, Gudo and Lundi among other areas. The following map in figure 1 illustrates the location of the Merrivale farm.

The area falls under the agro ecological regions four and five, which receives an average annual rainfall of between 450–600 mm. The area is characterized by black alluvial soils (*dhaka rechiname*) and white sandy soils (*majeche*). The major livelihood activities are crop and livestock production, which involves the planting of crops such as maize (*chibage*), cotton,

<sup>3)</sup> It should be noted that land hectareage is not uniform at the farm due to the mayhem that occurred during the farm occupations. The government has not solved this misnomer until today.

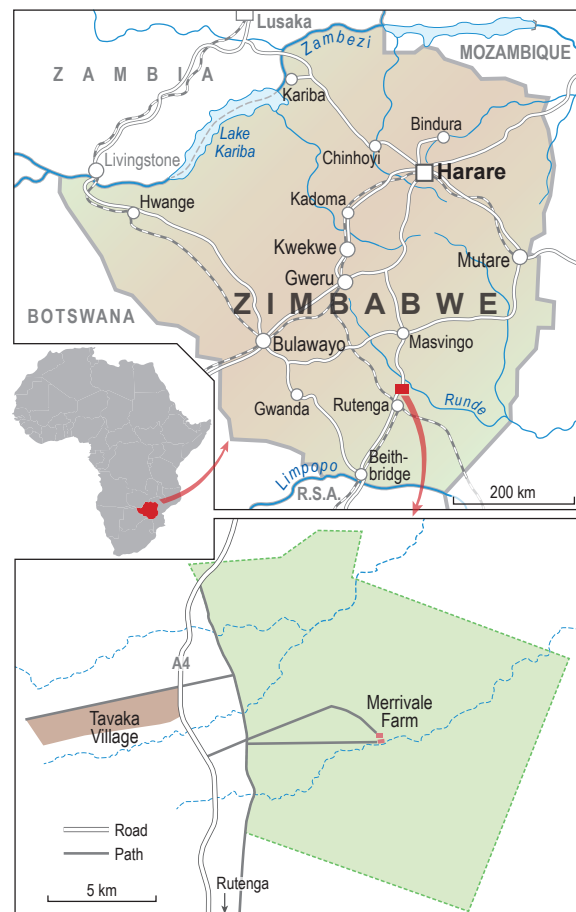


Fig. 1: Location of Merrivale farm

sorghum (*zvijo*), bambara nuts (*nyimo*), ground nuts (*nzungu*), sunflowers, millet (*mapfunde*), and leafy vegetables (*murivo wemashizha*). The major livestock kept are oxen (*madhonzwa*), cattle (*matsiru*), goats (*mbudzwi*), sheep (*hwayi*), and donkeys (*madhongi*).

### 4 Women's land access modes at Tavaka village

The FTLRP opened new opportunities for women to access land in Zimbabwe. This gave women an open window to capitalize on the situation and access land, a resource that had been controlled by men in the communal areas (HANLON et al. 2013; SCOONES et al. 2010; MOYO 2011; MAZHAWIDZA and MANJENGWA 2011). What should be understood is that patriarchal relations had historically governed land relations and women were not able to acquire land as individuals. They had usufruct rights to land and not ownership and entitlement rights to the

land. With the advent of the FTLRP, the women were able to bargain with patriarchy and hence they accessed land as individuals, changing the social relations that had governed land for decades. Some of the traditional authorities tried to resist women's participation in the mayhem phase, but they later realized that since their jurisdictional boundaries would increase since their authority would extend to the fast track areas, they had to accept women who participated in the land reform project. It should also be noted that in some areas, traditional leaders through their village courts had tried to adjudicate the land acquisition modes particularly from women but this proved to ineffectual as the women even asked for the land disputes to be taken to legal courts (MAKURA PARADZA 2010). However, several scholars have argued that some women did not access land due to dominance of the programme by men (HELLUM and DERMAN 2004; GOEBEL 2005). However, the findings from empirical studies by the African Institute of Agrarian Studies, the Institute of Environmental Studies, Centre for Applied Social Science Research Trust and Ruzivo Trust, all research institutes working on land and natural resources management in Zimbabwe, proved that ordinary women obtained access to land, with more than 18% in the A1 settlement and more than 12% in the A2 farms, further revealing how the statistics by the presidential Land Review Report 2003 are invalidated with the report indicating that 18% of women obtained access to land in the A1 farms and 12% in the A2 farms.

The research by the Zimbabwean institutes demonstrates a percentage which is higher than the one presented by the government. The Utete Presidential Land Report's methodology has been critiqued because it lacked gender disaggregated data and as such, some women who accessed land were not included, for instance in Mashonaland East Province, where there were no quantified gender data sets that demonstrated who received which type of fast track farmland (The Utete Presidential Land Report 2003). In as much as this occurred, women were presented as if they lacked agency (MATONDI 2012) and were left out in the process yet they were active participants in the process (MUTOPO 2012; MOYO 2011; SADOWBA 2008). Women have actually become active users and owners of the land and they are not a front for men, thus a change in the household gender relations with regards to land access and land use in Zimbabwe (MAKURA-PARADZA 2010) has occurred. Women have become innovative actors in agriculture without relying on men and 80% of women in

Zimbabwe, both in the fast track and communal areas are the agricultural producers on the farms, with men taking a managerial role only (MATONDI et al. 2013).

In the study site, 50% of the women had accessed land as individuals alongside men, and in terms of social differentiation this included married, widowed, single and divorced women. This is a significant figure since it demonstrates the high levels of participation for the women in the land acquisition process challenging the assumption that mostly in land reform projects, women are discriminated and do not benefit in the process. The participation of women also relates to changes in gender relations where women felt that land was an important resource for every individual, thereby challenging the dominant norm that is the duty of the household head, normally a man to access land for the family.

After the initial invasion stage or during a second wave of invasion after the first occupiers or settlers were well settled, and there was now some semblance of order and 'jambanja' of unoccupied land on the resettlement farm was not allowed, land occupations continued. In Tavaka village several methods of accessing land have been adopted by the women that are not visible at face value. The methods of acquiring land the women adopted require an understanding of what happens in the community where they resided. After the initial invasion stage and the second wave of invasion after the first occupiers or settlers were well settled, and there was now some semblance of order and 'jambanja' of unoccupied land on the resettlement farm was not allowed<sup>4)</sup>, but women at Tavaka village still occupied land in their already established settlement. Based on personal observations, in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, women accessed land using the system of self-allocation of vacant fields in the village or fields that had been deserted by some families that has retreated to the communal areas. 25% of women from the village used this land acquisition mode. This involved the clearing of physical spaces that were either used as paddocks or were idle forests without permission from any formal institutions. The women believed that formal and informal institutions that governed land acquisition processes had no jurisdiction over self-allocation of land, since land

<sup>4)</sup> It should be noted that the land reform process in Zimbabwe is still an ongoing process but rather with the advent of the new constitution in 2013, it will be important to see how land issues are handled since a juridical tool now exists that has been people driven.

was a prime resource that the women felt belonged to an authority higher than any person, thus being the creator of the universe. Some women pointed out to me during my discussions with them that, “what is often not understood by most people is that God is the creator of the earth, so when I clear a field here in the village without informing any authorities, I have not violated any rule because no human being has created land and so that is the reason I have cleared land and everyone in the village knows it belongs to me.”

Being residents of the villages for protracted lengths of times gave the women the opportunity to have the knowledge about which land was vacant in the community. My observations and interactions with the women revealed that this was not a formalized mode of land acquisition on the new farms and hence the traditional authorities were not so much concerned about the land occupancy by the women. In as much as the traditional authorities existed to regulate land use such a practice was not condoned, but it only became an issue if it involved more than two women claiming ownership of the land in question.

Land was also accessed by most of the women using marriage bonds. This involved the fact that after a certain period of time the husband had to give the wife a field (*tsewu*)<sup>5</sup> amongst his own fields as way of respecting the cultural notion that the wife had led to the enlargement of the family through her reproductive capacity and this had to be respected. The (*tsewu*) concept was respected so much in the area where I worked as the Karanga mythology also advocated that women ought to be appreciated as farmers by giving them their own hectareage of land since they are the major providers of labour on the farms. This is a practice that is done in the communal areas and the fast track farmers adopted it to their new farms as an important customary norm that still applied in the new land space. 25% of women had already accessed land in the fast track settlements via this mode and 75% of the women still believed that their husbands and their families would still honour this obligation of allocating them their own land hectareage. In my discussions and daily interactions with the women it emerged that, due to the insecurity of the marriage institution in the present day world, it was proving to be difficult for women to access land via this channel and marriage was now constantly being redefined to suit the current social world. The

women however by all means available made sure that they had to utilize this system of land access as it was uncontested by the husbands and they had the backing of the traditional authorities, which made it easier for them to utilize this process in their homes.

Due to the fact that some women in the village were trans-boundary traders in fresh produce, they accessed land through renting and borrowing plots from other villagers at Tavaka; 10% of women from my sample had accessed land using this mode. This comprised of both married and single women. Rental markets in relation to land had gained momentum from 2007 when the Zimbabweans political economy was deteriorating at a faster pace and hence land markets also acted as a safety net for the farmers in the accumulation of finances to fund their agricultural activities and meeting their day to day livelihood needs. The rental aspects of land acquisition enabled the women to acquire their own fields and as a result gender relations with regards to the married women also changed as the women invested their time independently of their husbands in carrying out their own agricultural activities. This is buttressed by responses from a focus group session with men only, where the men pointed out that, “our wives now have a new form of economic independence where we allow them to rent their and farm their own fields, without asking them to work in our fields simultaneously. This has also led to the production of more agricultural output particularly in cases of bambara nuts, maize and ground nuts. The married women can sell their produce independently and plan the use of their financial proceeds”. This phenomenon has actually led to clear demarcation of division of labour in the households and with the women assuming the capacity of planning their farming activities, deciding independently on the crops to grow, the trading spaces and how the finances can be used independent of their husbands, a new norm that is uncommon in rural areas.

This was a hidden method of accessing land as it was condoned by the district and provincial land committees that were initiated by the government to act as agencies of overseeing land issues at the fast track farms. Land markets were developing in the village depending on whether the land was being shared between the two or more women or it was being done on an individual basis. Renting and borrowing attracted a user fee that in 2009 until 2011 was pegged at between R300 to R700 depending on the hectareage of the field. In as much as a land market was developing in the village it was not discussed openly and most of the contracts were

<sup>5</sup> I have dealt with this aspect in a rigorous form. See Mutopo 2011.

hidden from other villagers as those involved feared being chased away from the fast track villages.

Some women in the village accessed land through inheritance mechanisms in the fast track village of Tavaka. This followed the death of a spouse and they would automatically become the owners of the land. Such measures required the family of the husband to be present so that they would give the wife the go ahead of using the land automatically assuming ownership of the land. This can be evidenced by the following case history:

*"I am aged 45 and I am a widow with 4 children. I came to Merrivale in 2001 when my husband got land after participating in the mayhem process. We have 6 hectares of cropping land and we share 30 hectares of grazing lands with the other villagers. My husband died in 2006 and this brought some insecurity with regards to my settlement in the village. His brothers, members of the immediate and extended family pointed out that I could stay at the farm until the traditional rituals would be officiated after a year, when they would decide on who would take over the farm, issues of levirate marriage (kugara nbaka). In August 2007, we held the traditional ritual (kurova guva) and most of the family members pointed out that if I wanted to stay on the farm I had to get married to one of the brothers. I refused the arrangement and so they wanted to chase me away from the farm. However my eldest son was 25 and he threatened to take the case to Mwenenzi district court. The threats helped as I was allowed to inherit my husband's land but it has created acrimonious relationships with my husband's family and they do not talk to me as they also point out that I did not want to follow tradition and that my son disrespected them by involving courts in a traditional issues. They ended up just distributing, my husband's clothes (kugova nhumbi), to the family members and all the cattle, goats and donkeys were given to my children. Had it not been of my son all the gains of my sweat through the establishment of this farm were just going to some people who never participated in the land access process."* (Field notes, Tavaka village, September 2011)

Inheritance was contested issue as evidenced by the woman's story. Traditional rules guided the people's thinking such that even if the codified laws allowed the wife of the deceased to inherit immovable and movable property, family members still found means and ways of circumventing this. The family members justified customary rules as this was also an opportunity for asset accumulation for them. With the villagers moving from communal homes, they had also mingled with other villagers who also relayed to them information on the legal aspects of inheritance. Fast track settlement also acted as a curtain raiser where the legal laws were

brought to the people through various exchanges of information and interaction that women, men and children were involved in. Women were at liberty to be involved in the inheritance discussions as they knew that people would leave and return to the communal homes and not return so being in the fast track farms acted as a buffer for not being thrown away from the fast track farm.

## 5 Conflicts associated with land access at Tavaka village

When women accessed land, several conflicts emanated from the women's access to land. I define the term conflict as referring to the points of disagreement that erupt between two parties. They have roots in economic, political and the social organization of communities. The conflicts' roots centred on the fact that the movement from communal areas to the fast track farms had led to the importation of laws and customs that prevailed in the former communal areas (MUTOPO 2012; CHIWESHE 2011) such that women were not supposed to own land as individuals. Discussions with the village head pointed to the fact that, several cases had been adjudicated at the village courts where women had carved land for themselves and they were asked to pay fines for self-demarcation of land that did not involve traditional authorities or government agencies of land resettlement, such as the Ministry of Lands and resettlement. The traditional authorities in the fast track farms were mostly composed of people whose families were village heads in their former communal homes before moving to the fast track farms. At Tavaka, the village head was the son of a village head from Neshuro who by the time I embarked on my research had died, and so the son automatically assumed headship. It should be borne in mind that due to the nature of the establishment of the fast track farming units, village headship situations varied with some men self-appointments to the office also evident.

The conflicts centred on the fact that the women were not adhering to their traditional customs and were acting as if moving from communal homes to the fast track farms opened leeway for too much self-emancipation that was directed at disobeying the traditional authorities. This also created sources of conflicts with other villagers who complained that their grazing space was shrinking as most of the land was now composed of fields owned mainly by women. This caused insecurity in terms of belonging, as the other people felt they would not have enough pastures

for their livestock. Women repeatedly pointed out that clearing the unused land was not supposed to be severe cases as they belonged to the land, and were bona fide citizens of the country who had a right to the land within the jurisdiction of their habitation.

Land related conflicts also emanated from the issue of tenure security as both the men and women in the village lacked formal tenure rights to the land as they only had offer letters from the government that were not recognized as formal title deeds for the land by financial institutions and the courts of law. On most of the offer letters it was the man's name that appeared and the woman's name did not appear because the land was deemed to belong to the husband. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the women revealed that after the mayhem phase had been completed and the farmers were settled on the land, the officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, when they visited the farms, only asked for the husband's name through their questions which were not clear that even the women could have registered their names as well (MATONDI 2012). Some of the women wanted this to be resolved by starting the land registration exercise again as it created so much tension in the homes as women were investing on the farms, yet they were not seen legally and culturally as owners of the land. The women understood that by being present on the land they belonged onto the land and their livelihoods were intractably tied to the land as they were daughters of the soil, hence Zimbabweans who had a right to the land, like any other citizens in the country.

With regards to the concept of the (*tsevu*) field being given to the wife, they were some problems with it as some women pointed out that if you were unable to have male children you could not get the field as during the family court (*dare remusha*), it was always agreed that girl children could not perpetuate the family name and so there was no need to provide a field to someone who had just given birth to female children only. The conflicts involved the male elders of the family and elderly female aunts (*madzvitete*), some of whom had been divorced or had never gotten married and were accused by the women of taking their frustrations of failing to solve their personal issues and hence advocating that the women should not be given the fields. Conflicts also centred on boundary demarcation especially with regards to the self-allocation of plots amongst some women. In the process they would at times take land that belonged to other settlers, which would result in disputes as the injured parties argued that their fields were becoming small due to these land parcelling activities amongst some of the women on their own.

All the conflicts presented reflect how the "home" becomes a central place for conflict brewing as well as for conflict solving. As such the concept of home reflects how conflicts are started; the actors involved and the decisions on who adjudicates and solves them are reached. An important point to understand is that in the Shona mythology when a family dispute cannot be resolved amicably within the family court system, and the elders of the family agree, the matter of contestation is forwarded to the village court whose adjudication process cannot be contested and whose authority is of a supreme nature than the family court that the one who is guilty can choose to defy its ruling. In the family court, the aim is normally of creating amicability but in the village court one has to pay a fine and in land matters it is normally livestock such as cattle from the one who is guilty.

Women's access to land in the new fast track farms has led to the redefining of roles for women in the old traditional communal areas as the women who remained these spaces are also now bargaining with patriarchy to access land. Land in the communal areas is vested in the authorities of traditional leaders who now have to bore down to the pressure caused by fast track land reform which has changed the social boundaries of women's access to land in the old communal areas.

## 6 Non-permanent mobility, women and trade of fresh produce

Land acquisition by women during fast track land reform has also led to the trans-boundary trade of women selling agricultural produce to South Africa. This movement to South Africa has been defined in an earlier section as non-permanent mobility. Empirical validations from the field study indicated that the women from my sample had all not been involved in trans-boundary trade before the fast track land reform. Their entry into the trans-boundary initiatives was facilitated by access to land and the ability to produce more food crops (MUTOPO 2011). Thus before the fast track, such initiatives did not exist as in Mwenezi, it was mainly the young men and their fathers who went to South Africa to work in the labour mines. Also women in the communal areas had the responsibility of looking after the homesteads and did not travel to South Africa to trade or look for any jobs. Changes in the social, economic and political sphere in Zimbabwe required the creation of new commodity value chains and entry into new markets for men and women in southeastern Zimbabwe after the fast



track reform (SCOONES et al. 2010). Their agricultural produce was sold locally; some women from the urban areas of Masvingo in Mucheke suburb had been involved in cross border activities but they mainly sold hand crocheted doilies in South Africa and not agricultural produce (MUZVIDZIWA 1998). However with fast track and women producing more agricultural commodities, the South African sphere emerged as an important market niche that helped in cushioning the women from the economic problems in Zimbabwe. Agricultural commodities did not fetch much substantial income on the market due to the hyper inflationary environment in Zimbabwe, so innovative market searches by the women led to the South African markets being explored. The entry of more women in mobility patterns for agricultural trade were also punctuated by the proximity of Mwenezi to South Africa, hence it became a lucrative trading route.

A symbiotic interdependence between women and the trading trips to South Africa emerges, also reflecting changes in the patterns of irregular migration and trans-boundary activities in Zimbabwe (SCOONES et al. 2010). Trips to South Africa were undertaken by the women from Tavaka for trading purposes. The land spaces they acquired were used for planting fresh agricultural produce that had a market in South Africa. This was based on the fact that the bambara nuts, ground nuts, leafy vegetables such as pumpkin leaves, mopane worms and termite mound had to have markets that were much better in terms of income returns than the Zimbabwean markets. The women organized trading trips to South Africa on their own. Men were not even involved in the logistical process as they felt in as much as it was a female venture and contributed income to the households; it was not something under their sphere. This is evidenced by the following extract from an interview with one of the male residents of Tavaka village whose wife travelled regularly to South Africa to sell her fresh produce.

*"In as much as the trips that my wife takes to South Africa are important as she brings more income that we use to pay school fees for our children, but farming implements, clothes and food. As the head of this family I cannot be seen to leave the homestead and go and sell goods in South Africa. I have to continue with the farming activities here and besides I feel it is a woman's job to sell because as a man I lack the patience to travel that long distance and deal with people who can just be asking prices and not buying my items."* (Extract from an in-depth interview, Mr. K.C, Tavaka village, Merrivale farm, June 2010)

Livelihood enhancement of a particular livelihood strategy ought to be understood from the stand point of the person whose livelihood has been informed and how they value the livelihood transfor-

mation. The women in my sample all concurred and understood that, livelihood security from land acquisition and trading trips to South Africa emanated from asset accumulation and the capacity to look after their families, which marked an important conduit in shaping the social and economic satisfaction in their lives. I found out that in as much as the women earned between 500 and 1000 South Africa Rand, after the trading of their produce in South Africa, to them the amount had a value which was beyond the economic value of well-being. In this case, the social value of livelihoods presented demonstrated how women value accumulation strategies from below. This was because the women could sustain themselves without the help of anyone; the income had an intrinsic value which was immeasurable to the women because it brought personal satisfaction. The livelihood security of the women had increased as evidenced with my personal observations during trading trips with the women, in-depth interviews and my stay in the village, were the women had accumulated assets such as solar panels, owned cattle and were able to send their children to school due to the income they earned from agricultural trans-boundary trade.

In as much as trading in South Africa was an important livelihood activity appreciated by the men and women the traditional notion that, women are the ones who should be involved in small scale trade still prevailed. In terms of gender roles, it was important to note that women normally left their homesteads with their husbands or members of the extended family. Trading in South Africa opened new household responsibilities for men that they had never engaged in such as, looking after children. Mobility to South Africa was normally associated with men who went to look for work in the mines (DODSON 2008). This has transformed gender roles and the gender stereotypes that women should stay at home and men should be the ones to be in the public sphere were also eroding. At Tavaka village, women were entering the public sphere due to new livelihood security systems that were developing due to the new socio economic conditions generated by FTLR in Zimbabwe. This synopsis demonstrates how the processes of mobility by the women transcend the discourse of local geographies beyond the national, regional and global spaces (BRICKELL and DATTA 2011). However in some households conflicts emanated with the husbands trying to control the income earned in South Africa but however the conflicts were resolved amicably as they were changes in income earnings with women also contributing towards the family purse creating new income governance parameters in the home that were

driven by women. This is evidenced by the following extract from a discussion with one woman from the village:

*“When I first started trading trips to South Africa my husband was not interested in the whole process. As soon as he realized that I was now making decent income returns, he started arguing that I had to bring the proceeds home. We had disagreements over how I had to use the income and also that I had to bring the money from South Africa and he authoritatively pointed out that he would plan the use of the income, since he was the head of the family. I stood my ground pointing out that the agricultural produce I sold was produced using my own sweat and piece of land so he had to learn to live with the changes in the household. It took a year from him to understand and we have now resolved the conflict amicably”.* (Field Notes, Tavaka village, August 2010)

## 7 Conclusion

I have examined how access to land and livelihoods derived from non-permanent mobility for the women are imbued in the discourses of belonging and identity. Land-based livelihoods in Zimbabwe's fast track farms are modelled on the notion that it is our land and the basis of our existence such that as women they felt that they had a right to be part of the land. This phenomenon of land-based livelihoods is linked to identity debates in the Zimbabwean agro based discourses because the women presented in this case emerge as strategic actors who were able to acquire a resource that positively influenced their identity as Zimbabweans. This identity tied to land access was now exhibited in multiple forms of trans-boundary trade that presented a new dimension of processes of social and agrarian change in enhancing the status of women.

However women's independent access to land in the fast track farms has led to the redefinition of the social landscape in the old communal areas. The women's new role has influenced women in the communal areas who are now also bargaining and negotiating with patriarchy to access land as individuals, a system that did not exist before the fast track land reform.

An analysis through the gendered lens of the fast track land reforms reveals that agency was crucial in the land access mechanisms and in the resolving of conflicts because the major aim of the women was the maintenance of livelihood security. This brings about a new dimension of understanding human agency from the perceptions of the women and how agency played a crucial role in the organising of post

fast track land reform livelihoods using social innovation platforms that did not include the government as critical actors. In all the innuendos that emanated from the land based livelihoods and non-permanent mobility the conflict resolution mechanism adopted demonstrated the importance of the home, as a place of domicile, livelihood mapping and creation as well as forum for resolving conflicts.

The issues of the dynamism of gendered roles at home were examined and the article reveals how men argued that small scale trade was a domain for women that did not have much to do with the men, demonstrating how notions of this trade also influenced men's behaviour towards women, when they agreed to stay home and look after the homestead.

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