



A Demand-driven Model of Decentralised Land-use Planning and Natural Resource Management: Experiences from the Chiredzi District of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Decentralisation should ideally result in the transfer of effective power and control from the state to elected local level authorities – it should take a democratic form. But most decentralisation reforms turn out to be supply-led interventions in which states and other upper level actors, most of whom have a predilection to retain far-reaching control, define the form and extent of powers to be given to local-level authorities, usually resulting in de-concentration. This paper uses empirical evidence from Zimbabwe to argue that decentralisation is likely to result in more thoroughgoing empowerment if it is demand-driven. Even if empowerment is demanded we note that relations in decentralised arenas are not necessarily always egalitarian. We therefore argue that efforts to resolve the dilemma of community marginalisation through decentralisation should not lose sight of local level equity dimensions. We caution that demand-driven decentralisation should not be misconstrued as implying that the state and other external actors should completely retire from the business of the local. Effective empowerment appears to require a preserved role for upper level (non-local) actors, especially in providing political legitimation, technical backstopping, financial support and resolving issues whose solutions transcend the scope and scale of the local.

Résumé

La décentralisation devrait idéalement aboutir à un transfert effectif de pouvoirs de l'État à des autorités locales élues ou décentralisation démocratique. Mais la plupart des décentralisations se présentent comme des démarches initiées, dirigées et contrôlées par l'État et les autorités centrales, qui en définissent la forme et contrôlent les pouvoirs dévolus aux autorités locales. Ceci conduit finalement à une simple déconcentration. L'article ci-dessous s'appuie sur des évidences

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empiriques tirées du Zimbabwe pour montrer que la décentralisation semble ne pouvoir renforcer le pouvoir des acteurs périphériques que si elle se présente comme une demande de la base, et non comme une offre étatique. Même lorsque les pouvoirs sont demandés par la base, et obtenus, les relations entre le niveau central et le niveau local dans les arènes décentralisées ne sont pas toujours égalitaires. Nous montrons en conséquence que les efforts déployés pour résoudre le dilemme de la marginalisation du niveau local à travers les décentralisations ne doivent pas perdre de vue les dimensions de ce niveau local. Nous voulons dire que même les décentralisations demandées et ‘arrachées’ ne doivent pas impliquer le retrait total de l’État central. Un réel renforcement des pouvoirs du niveau local va de pair avec le maintien de certains rôles de l’État central, comme la légitimation politique, l’appui au développement local ou l’expertise technique, et le soutien financier.

Introduction

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

Though stated in the extreme, the above binary outcomes mirror the often under-studied question of whether or not to use decentralisation as a policy intervention. As pointed out by Ruitenbeek and Cartier (2001:4), policy makers are impatient and often seek a quick fix when things are better left to themselves. Their ‘hands-off’ reproach appears to be a crude, but poignant, reminder to environment and development practitioners to be more modest in their quest to effect change, because change cannot be invented: it is a pervasive and eternal feature of all social and ecological systems. And we have absolutely no reason to assume that peasant communities are so fatalistic

and improvident that they are incapable of appropriately adjusting to changes in their everyday social and other environments. More often than not, most such people are adapting to change in ways that are more attuned to the prevailing challenges and opportunities, and what they do, or what they are capable of doing, is often a reflection of options and resources at their disposal. Such systems evolve naturally! It is in the face of such a truism that Ruitenbeek and Cartier (2001:17) strongly argue for non-interventionism, with the related foreclosure hypothesis being that the 'premature introduction of external interventions could lead to system failure. This may occur because the introduction of such a process disrupts existing evolutionary processes within the system'.

Everyday common experiences with decentralisations appear to lend weight to the above conjecture. For instance, in pointing out how most decentralisation interventions in Southern Africa appear to have a predilection for turning into de-concentrations, Murphree (1991) observes that 'there is a tendency in bureaucratic hierarchies to seek power from levels above and a general reluctance to devolve such power to levels below'. Similar sentiments are echoed by Conyers (1990) and Murombedzi (1991), who indicate that higher level actors tend to decentralise service-type activities while retaining control of fiscal and production oriented activities. Bazaara (this issue) identifies the failure to devolve effective control as an impediment to the democratisation of natural resource management in Uganda. In summing up such tendencies, Mandondo (2001) argues that decentralisations often turn into de-concentrations because most such decentralisations are supply-led interventions that predictably result in conditional empowerment. He argues that in supply-led empowerment scenarios, state-level and other external actors hold wide discretionary powers with respect to the form and extent of power to be given to actors on the fringes of formal systems of power, including local-level bodies and communities. Mandondo (2001) articulates a language of alternatives and reversals in which he appears to be arguing that decentralisation is likely to result in more thoroughgoing empowerment if it is demand-driven. Such reversals and alternatives fall under the rubric of emancipatory approaches (Reason 1999), and have also been alternatively popularised as putting the last first (*sensu*, Chambers 1983).

The ideals, in relation to everyday common outcomes of decentralisation, therefore implicitly appear to justify a continuum of policy options that spans from full-scale and wholesome intervention to non-intervention. A mid-point logic-of-balances occupies the centre of the above continuum. Based on pragmatic considerations, it argues that: among local communities, researchers and other stakeholders, no one holds monopoly of insight or is a priori exclusively endowed with superior qualities in terms of knowing, skills etc.;

none of the stakeholders will accept to be simply wished away through approaches that are not sufficiently inclusionary; and, locals do not exist in isolation, but are in fact subsets of over-arching systems with which they are intricately interconnected. The emerging discipline therefore emphasises integration across a variety of axes-including across stakeholders, disciplines, as well as across scales (Sayer and Campbell 2003; Lovell, Mandondo, and Moriarty 2003). The aim of this study was to use empirical evidence from a decentralisation initiative that largely appeared to be demand-driven to test the wider generality of the emancipatory conjecture: that decentralisation is likely to result in more thoroughgoing empowerment if it is demand-driven. The analysis is situated within the broader context of related counterfactuals, i.e., that full-scale or some form of mid-point external intervention is still necessary.

The study was conducted in the Chizvirizvi area, which lies some 40 kilometres east of Zimbabwe's south-eastern lowveld town of Chiredzi. The community in question opted to transform from government-initiated consolidated villages that were heavily congested to a system of more spacious self-contained 'private plots', which they planned for and implemented. This community had staked several other demands, including: that they be conferred with legal titles over their plots; that there be fiscal accountability and parity between taxation and service delivery by the Rural District Council; and that appropriate authority status³ over wildlife resources in their area be bestowed directly upon them, and not on the Rural District Council, as has happened in other CAMPFIRE⁴ districts. For purposes of brevity, the present study mainly restricts itself to issues pertaining to land use planning, land tenure and resource access. The next section gives an overview of land tenure and settlement in communal areas, with special emphasis on the evolution of land tenure and settlement patterns in Chizvirizvi.

A brief history of land tenure and settlement in Chizvirizvi

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

Communal lands are legally state lands in which peasant communities enjoy usufruct rights. In practice, people living in communal areas enjoy de facto traditional freehold entitlement over their residential and arable plots, beyond which there are usually grazing, woodland and other commons, which people use and manage through various forms of collective or non-collective arrangements (Government of Zimbabwe 1994). But during the late 1970s most communal lands, including Sangwe, became fragmented into zones of shifting control between the Rhodesian⁵ military wing and the mass mobilisation committees of the guerilla movement, in response to which the Rhodesian regime introduced protected villages (Lan 1985; Godwin 1996). The protected villages were a Rhodesian military strategy aimed at creating buffers of uninhabited land in order to minimise contact between peasants and the guerrilla arm of the liberation movement, which depended on the peasants for material, moral and other forms of support (Lan 1985).

The abandonment of the protected villages upon the attainment of independence did not significantly alleviate population pressure within the communal lands, which necessitated the need for interventions to de-congest the communal area. Such initiatives had the twin objectives of improving infrastructure and service provision in communal areas in order to address the imbalances of colonial neglect.⁶ Colonial neglect of African reserves was the result of a fiscal apartheid in public sector capital investment policies (Wekwete 1990). The bulk of the social and physical infrastructure investment was located in European areas to support a fledging capitalist economy, which was further supported with a lot of subsidy and preferential marketing policies (Murphree and Cumming 1991; Scoones and Matose 1993; McGregor 1995). Under-investment in the African reserves reinforced the under-development of the peasant sector, which remained a source of cheap labour for the emerging capitalist economy. Over time, the peasant sector was also weakened by the downstream effects of the communal tenure system under conditions of high population growth – including lack of collateral, subdivision into smaller and smaller holdings, low productivity and declining surpluses, and very low propensities to save and invest.

De-congestion and reconstruction and development policies in Chizvirizvi were partly played out through the implementation of a government driven resettlement scheme based on a system of consolidated villages. The scheme was established on land purchased by the government from the adjoining commercial farms for purposes of resettlement. The consolidated villages⁷ were based on a system of land-use planning that divided landscapes into three major categories, including clustered villages that lay in between, and separated distinct grazing and cropping areas. It was also hoped that the centralised settlements would enhance peasant access to a variety of services,

including water, electricity, road networks and other amenities like schools, clinics, beer halls and grinding mills. In total, ten villages, each presided over by a village chairperson, were established, with all the villages falling under the control of a government-paid resettlement officer.

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

From top-down to bottom-up visions of tenure, settlement and resource use

Community concern about congestion within and environmental degradation around government-initiated consolidated villages in Chizvirizvi came to prominence around 1987. The community, through the Chizvirizvi Development Committee, solicited the support of the Department of Natural Resources for a more dispersed resettlement scheme to be based on a system of individual plots, in which the plots-holders would be ultimately responsible for most resources within their plots. Similar support was solicited from the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture in 1989. Although both these government agencies were supportive of the idea, the rampant destruction of the natural

resources in areas close to the clustered settlement continued unabated. The support, nevertheless, gave impetus to scheme residents to put in place temporary mechanisms of apprehending violators and protecting their resources. Such measures included collective monitoring and policing of resource use.

Meanwhile, at a local level the Chizvirizvi Development Committee enlisted the support of the local chief and the chairpersons of the ten villages in question. This led to local level endorsement of the plan, with signatures of endorsement attached to the plans. The plans were subsequently formally submitted to the government through the provincial Lands Office. Although the community received a favourable response from the government in 1995, it was indicated that the government did not have funds to support the implementation of the plan. Through his links with the Zimbabwe Farmers' Union, the chairman of the Chizvirizvi Development Committee was able to meet with the Minister of Agriculture to open up avenues for funding. Although no financial support could be obtained from the ministry, the committee was able to secure ministerial endorsement to enhance access to alternative funding pathways, including donor support. On the advice of the Chiredzi District Administration the community's donor outreach strategy laid emphasis on building lasting partnerships with local potential donors. The strategy was mainly intended to avoid the projectised and the time-bound nature of externally funded projects. Thus, building strategic partnerships appears to have been vital as the community forged ahead with their vision of decentralised land-use planning and conservation of natural resources.

Subsequent to the initial community overture for funding, the Malilangwe Trust organised a multi-stakeholder meeting that included expert attendees as well as other potential learners from as far afield as Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, and even the United States of America. The Trust subsequently donated Z\$100,000⁸ to the community for surveys, mapping, and demarcation of plots. After concerted efforts at securing the support of the district and provincial agricultural extension agencies for technical support, a survey team was eventually assigned to the area in June 1999. The survey and demarcation work started in late 1999, with logistical support being mainly provided by the Malilangwe Trust, while the community provided labour as and when needed. After completing surveys and demarcation, plots were allocated by March 2000, which was witnessed by several external actors, including the district administrator, the MP for the area, as well as representatives from the President's office.

Thus partnerships at a range of levels, including the local, the district, and the national, appear to have been crucial in planning for and implementing the vision. But conceptual and theoretical debates about state-local relations

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

The practical political economy of land allocation in Chizvirizvi

A total of 294 plots, each measuring 85 hectares in size, were to be allocated to each household from the ten consolidated resettlement schemes. However, there were other farmers who were allocated more than 85 hectares to compensate for the poor soils – this being especially so for farmers in villages 6 and 10. Allocation was done through a raffle in which people randomly picked cards whose numbers corresponded to numbers assigned to plots. Villagers took turns picking their cards, but two of the villages declined to partake in the process, preferring to remain in the consolidated village. Not everyone was subjected to the raffle, though there was a system of open and hidden exemptions. The chief was exempted from the raffle process as a sign of respect, and allocated a bigger plot encompassing his original homestead. Two plots were additionally given to the chief to allocate to nominees of his own choice. Local leaders who oversaw the alloca-

tion process had to devise a more clandestine means of exemptions in order to raise funds for the logistical costs associated with the allocation process, including the provision of food. Households that contributed funds for logistic costs associated with the allocation process, including the provision of food, were secretly allocated cards prior to the public raffle exercise, and through this arrangement were thus able to gain privileged access to prime plots. Plot 83 was specifically assigned to the youths of the area for various projects and activities. Patterns of ownership of plots were markedly skewed, with only a very small proportion of women in Chizvirizvi living at plots that are registered in their names (Table 1).

Decentralisation is often portrayed as a one-off allocation process involving transfers from one level (often the state) to another, usually the community. The implicit assumptions appear to be that resource use and other relations in community settings are more egalitarian, and that empowerment is almost guaranteed once powers are retired at that level. But as evident in the above narrative, ownership relations engendered by a community driven initiative encompass elements of both equity and imbalance. For instance, allocating land through a raffle together with assigning a plot to the youth appears to have been premised on equity considerations, while allocating to the chief and his network of colleagues, though representing a gesture of respect, could arguably be seen as entrenching elite domination. Thus, as Mandondo (2001) argues, resolving the dilemma of community marginalisation through decentralisations needs to be addressed together with intra-community inequalities of access to resources.

Table 1: A Breakdown of Ownership of Plots in Chizvirizvi by Gender

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

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

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

The micro-politics of land allocation in Chizvirizvi

First preference to take up the new plots was given to people formerly residing in the government initiated consolidated villages. Some of these people were initially reluctant to move into the new plots mainly because they had made a lot of infrastructural investments at their homesteads. These people were to join the last minute rush for the plots, when ownership of the plots was opened to anyone else willing to own them. The rush grew in volume on the back of good crop harvests secured by the pioneer group of settlers. A diverse array of power plays ensued as various people asserted claims to the land. A group of teachers at one of the local schools was one strong constituency that had been left out of the initial allocation process. They are reported to have clandestinely instigated the local village worker to mobilise people in two of the villages to revolt against the scheme, purportedly because they had been allocated infertile plots. In the hope of limiting the ensuing conflict, the DA unilaterally took over control of the unassigned plots, but such custodianship did not last long, neither did it dampen the conflict. Realising the futility of intervention, the DA later capitulated and re-vested such control in the committee that had hitherto overseen the allocation process. To break the impasse, the Malilangwe Trust organised a multi-stakeholder meeting in which the various adversaries were invited.

In August 2000, the land allocation committee was reportedly approached by a group of sixteen liberation war veterans⁹ who felt that they were also being left out of the entitlement process. The chairperson of the land committee decided to enlist the support of the chief in deciding how best to handle the issue. For fear of squaring up against the veterans, it was quickly decided that they be allocated land as soon as possible. But the problem was how to

allocate the seven then remaining plots among the veterans. With initial concurrence of the veterans, it was decided that the plots be allocated through an elimination raffle in which the veterans would randomly pick cards marked YES or NO, with those picking the latter relinquishing their claims to the plots. Although the raffle was completed with the initial support of all concerned, the losing veterans did not honour the raffle verdict, with the majority of them just opting to grab plots that had been earlier allocated to other people. One of the war veterans annexed the plot that had been assigned to the DA, where he promptly started development. The ensuing conflict assumed legal dimensions in one instance where a certain woman just went ahead and annexed plot number 83, which had earlier been allocated to the youth. She enlisted the support of lawyers to resist her eviction from the plot. The ensuing process saw four members of the land allocation committee being sued despite their resolve to remain steadfast in endorsing the youth's claim to the plot.

Present-day conflicts mainly revolve around boundary disputes and the gender dimensions of entitlement to land by way of inheritance. Although the conflicts mostly pit local peasants against each other, there are instances in which other actors are also involved. For instance an official of the national agricultural extension agency (AREX) is currently embroiled in a boundary dispute with his peasant neighbour, with the resolution of the conflict still pending at the chief's court. In generally unwritten law, the spouse should inherit a plot on the death of a partner, with the children taking over the plot if both the mother and father die. Despite such arrangements, conflict over plots still arises depending on the nuance and entitlement and peculiarities of intra-household relations. One such inheritance conflict pitted the relatives of a deceased woman against the husband as prospective inheritors of the plot. There are diverging stories on how the woman registered the plot in her name in the first instance. One version is that the woman was able to apply for the plot instead of her husband, who was made ineligible because he was in formal employment. The second version is that the woman was able to register the plot in her name on the merit of her status as a member of the Master Farmer Club.¹⁰

There was a misunderstanding between husband and wife when the husband had retired from formal employment. This saw the two arriving at a mutual agreement in which they both occupied and lived at different locations within the plot. Over time, the wife fell ill and died, but she had reportedly made a verbal will bestowing the ownership of the plot to her brothers, and not the husband, and hence the present conflict. Inheritance conflicts come

in many shades and forms, with women being generally disadvantaged in most of the cases, unlike the above case.

Conflicts over land and resources in the plots often cascade to higher levels where customary, elected and other leaders vie for influence and control over the whole resettlement domain. Thus, over the years, the institutional setup of Chizvirizvi appears to have typified what Makamuri (in a personal communication) refers to as the 'waxing and waning' as well as the 'emergence and submergence' of institutions. At the national level, the socialist-inspired institutions of VIDCOs and WADCOs appeared to be on the ascendancy in the immediate post-independence period. The VIDCOs and WADCOs were elevated at the expense of traditional institutions of chiefs, headmen and village heads. Having acted as grassroots arms of colonial administration within the African peasantry, traditional institutions were purportedly neglected in the immediate post-independence period because they were seen as functionaries of colonial oppression (Makumbe 1996). Although the establishment of the Chizvirizvi resettlement scheme coincided with the inception of VIDCOs and WADCOs, such institutions did not necessarily emerge as prominent institutional players within the scheme. The scheme was in fact under the leadership of a government employed resettlement officer,¹¹ who was assisted by a subordinate cadre of village chairpersons, each of whom presided over each of the resettlement scheme's ten villages.

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

appears to have had a bearing on the process of forging new political administrative institutions within the new scheme. Through the scheme, the village heads were able to recoup their lost power, displacing village chairpersons as leaders of the newly reconstituted villages with the blessing and support of both the chief and the resettlement committee.

A very strong alliance between champions of development, as represented by the resettlement committee, and the 'more legitimate' traditional leaders, appeared to have emerged by the turn of the century. The emerging configuration of institutions, however did not translate into an enduring monopoly on power and influence. Events leading to the year 2000 parliamentary elections as well as the 2002 presidential elections saw the emergence of the war-veteran movement as a significant political force. With prospects of looming defeats in these elections, the ruling party rehabilitated¹² this movement of hitherto forgotten liberators, mobilising them into a campaign machine that spearheaded the violent seizure of white-owned commercial farms for black settlement. Significant events through which this movement thrust itself at the centre of local political processes in Chizvirizvi included the seizure of some surrounding commercial concerns; the capturing of the councillorship post for the ward; and the establishment of grassroots election campaign command centres that were mainly manned by war veterans and members of the ruling party's youth militia. The coercive and often violent activities of these groups significantly eroded the power and influence of both the developmental resettlement committee and traditional leadership. To consolidate his stronghold on power, the new war veteran councillor of the ward under which Chizvirizvi falls, dissolved the Chizvirizvi Development Committee, replacing it with a newly constituted Wildlife Development Committee – which he headed, in addition to doubling up as ward councillor for Chizvirizvi.

People in Chizvirizvi now more readily attest to the benefits of their land-use planning initiative, generally including better and greater autonomy, distance from suspected bewitchers, etc. But there is nothing in the above narrative to suggest that all is blissful and harmonious in Chizvirizvi, notwithstanding the bottom-up manner in which the initiative was introduced. Orienting change in the bottom-up direction appears to be essential, but such interventions still require adequate follow up if they are to result in through-going empowerment. Thus, whether it be bottom-up or top-down, decentralisation appears to need robust follow-up efforts aimed at removing the conditions that may, from time to time, detract from the attainment of enduring empowerment. The conflicts outlined above are among such factors, and they need to be resolved. Such follow-up could thus be conceivably

achieved by rural development practitioners with competencies in conflict resolution. Caution however needs to be exercised in resolving conflicts because they are often tools and weapons through which the poor and marginalised often insert themselves into political processes (Scott 1985). There is, however, no reason to assume that the local poor and powerless can effectively stake their claims unaided given the preponderance of elite influence. The next section considers resource use relations within and between plots and the adjoining Sangwe communal area.

Resource access and use relations

The issue of accessing resources from resettlement plots was a highly contentious one: plot owners generally wanted to exercise exclusion management of resources in their plots, while neighbouring communal areas, on the basis of historical claims, wanted a continuation of open-access use regimes that used to prevail before the plots were established. The contested nature of resources within Chizvirizvi is thus a major source of conflict, with plot owners generally under siege from tenurial and use pressure from adjoining communal farmers. The views of those asserting use pressure varied from (i) extremist arguments against the compartmentalisation of land and resources, with proponents insisting on a reversion to the previously existing open access utilization regimes; to (ii) moderate viewpoints, that tended to emphasise the need for some form of dialogue and mutual use regimes, together with related win-win obligations; to (iii) acquiescent viewpoints, which tended to emphasise the need to respect the entitlement and ownership of the plot owners. On the other hand, most plot owners argued for exclusion management, with most of them advocating the fencing off of their properties, together with the need to re-erect the boundary fence between the whole resettlement area and the adjoining communal areas. Most people, however, recognised the limitations of such an option in terms of cost, and also in terms of effectiveness since an earlier existing fence had been vandalised. Most plot owners saw the conferment of formal title over plots as a key facet of the incentive structure for enhancing exclusion management.

Despite the above, seemingly conflicting, resource-use relations, there are also aspects of mutual and reciprocal arrangements relating to the use of resources. In general, the northern part of the scheme is drier and less fertile - with less arable land, but more wooded and endowed with better grazing resources. The reserve generally tends to obtain plots in adjacent communal areas as well as in southern parts of the resettlement scheme. Disparities in the spatial distribution of resources generally necessitate the need for reciprocity. Reciprocal resource use relations are mostly forged at a personal and informal level: people from the drier north negotiate for access to arable

land, thatching grass, and water from those in the southern parts of the scheme, as well as from adjoining communal areas. The latter two groups usually seek access to grazing resources, firewood, mopane worms and poles from the former. In general, people tend to seek access to resources that are closest to them.

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

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

Synthesis

The general thrust of our argument is that demand-driven empowerment stands a better chance of being based on people's felt needs and priorities than top-down and supply-led modes of empowerment. We note, however, that even if empowerment is demanded, relations in decentralised arenas are seldom egalitarian. We therefore argue that, regardless of their orientations, environmental decentralisation reforms are best conceived not as one-off events in which power is abstracted from one level to be devolved to another level, but as continuous processes in which the dilemma of community marginalisation from the centres of power is tackled in tandem with intra-community impediments to such empowerment.

This article explores whether it is best to intervene fully, whether to intervene a little, or not to intervene at all in environment and development processes that include a decentralisation agenda. Subsequent findings and analyses have largely supported a mid-point logic of integration and multi-stakeholder partnership in which community should comprise the fundamental locus of initiative and change. This is best done within a framework in which other stakeholders play a more supportive role of fostering conditions that enhance that attainment of thoroughgoing empowerment, or dismantling those detract from its attainment. Contrary to the anti-state fervour of some sections of the environment and development research movement, the logic of integration and partnership sees a role for state level and other external actors. This is the case particularly with regard to the following points:

- Providing the political legitimization that community-driven initiatives are so utterly in need of;
- Providing a countervailing source of information, skills and ideas through which community-driven ideas can be scrutinized and improved. The logic is that no side has a monopoly on insight;
- Providing funding and other forms of material support to community-driven initiatives;
- Providing coordination where community-level issues and problems appear to cascade beyond scales at which communities can address them on their own;
- Providing neutral arbitration in instances where community-level polarisation limits the scope for progress.

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

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Notes

1. The concept of entrustments was introduced by Ribot (1999), and was adopted by Mandondo (2001) in an article that gives a historical overview of natural resource governance in Zimbabwe.
2. We use a Weberian definition of the state as a clearly defined set of institutions with official powers. Admittedly, based on Gramscian perspectives, it is not easy to draw neat lines between the state, civil society and civil society organisations (see also Holm, Molutsi, and Somolokae 1996). The state is an amorphous entity of elected politicians and non-elected civil servants and other actors with different interests and often conflicting preferences (see also Halser 1993).
3. Appropriate authority is a legal instrument in the Parks and Wildlife Act that confers custodianship of wildlife resources in wildlife-rich communal areas of Zimbabwe on peasant communities residing in such areas, with such authority being vested in Rural District Councils in which such communities reside.
4. CAMPFIRE is an acronym for Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources. It is a programme for decentralised wildlife management in districts that have received appropriate authority status over wildlife resources in their areas (Martin 1986).
5. The former name of Zimbabwe was Rhodesia. Independence in 1980 came on the back of a guerrilla war waged by liberation fighters operating mainly from Mozambique and Zambia.
6. The policy of reconstruction and development ran under a national policy framework that emphasised 'growth with equity'.
7. The system bears parallels to colonial land-use policies that were implemented under the Land Husbandry Act. Such policies were purportedly meant to promote environmental conservation through the rationalisation of land and resource use in order to bring some semblance of order to the then perceived 'disorder' and environmental destruction in the African peasantry.
8. Currently equivalent to US\$1818 at official rate but US\$20 at parallel market rate.
9. The war veteran movement has risen from the obscurity of political neglect to a force to reckon with on the Zimbabwean political scene. War veterans forced the government into awarding them hefty gratuities for their contribution to the liberation of the country in 1998. In 2000 they spearheaded the violent

seizure of white-owned farms with tacit and overt support from the government, culminating in what is popularly referred to as the 'fast track phase' of land reform in Zimbabwe.

10. Master Farmers are farmers of repute, recognised by farmers' associations for their high production records and contribution to agricultural advancements in their areas.
11. The resettlement officer fell under the Department of Rural Development.
12. War veterans were essentially a disgruntled and forgotten lot, with their fortunes only having turned for the better around the year 2000 when they were, through an extended system of accelerated incentives, courted by the government into the political limelight. Belated gratuities for their contribution to the liberation struggle included lump sum payments of Z\$50 000, monthly pension allowances, as well as accelerated promotions for those still active in the national security services.

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