



## Research article

## Forest protected areas governance in Zimbabwe: Shift needed away from a long history of local community exclusion



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## ABSTRACT

In this literature review based paper we explored the concept of exclusion of local communities from accessing resources in forest protected areas (FPAs) in Zimbabwe. We discussed the colonial and post-colonial forms, causes and mechanisms of exclusion and their social, economic and ecological outcomes. We examined the range of powers embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms, processes and social relations and their impact on local communities' access to FPA resources and associated benefits along the historical trajectory of forest governance in Zimbabwe. Results showed that the forms and extent of exclusion changed over time in tandem with the shifting political and economic landscape. During the colonial period, it was total exclusion whereby people were evicted from forest land as well as being denied access to basic resources for their livelihoods. Local communities' access to low value FPA resources improved during the post-colonial period but access to high value resources like commercial timber as well as sharing income benefits derived from FPA commercial activities remained a pipe dream. Regulation, legitimation, force and markets constituted the mixture of the power elements that FPA governing authorities used to exclude local communities. These powers remained intact despite attempts at collaborative governance in the 1990s. However, from the year 2000, local communities expressed their dissatisfaction with the centralised exclusionary governance system by invading the FPAs rendering them ungovernable. There is therefore a need for policy reform within the FPA sector to improve the current dire situation.

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## 1. Introduction

Forests provide ecosystem services that are important for human well-being (MA, 2005) particularly in developing countries' rural areas. To sustain these ecosystem services and conserve biodiversity, forest protected areas (FPAs) have been established in many tropical countries dating back to the early years of colonialism (Hall et al., 2011a,b; Hansen and Lund, 2017). This governance instrument favoured commercial timber production and forest protection whilst closing up forests from local inhabitants (Rantala, 2013; Brockington and Wilkie, 2015). Exclusion, which is the different ways in which people are prevented from benefiting from such things as land and its resources (Hall et al., 2011a,b) has been a common feature of Zimbabwe's FPA governance during the colonial and post-colonial periods. It has, however, vacillated over time. During the colonial period, it was mainly physical exclusion

through evictions, denial of economic benefits through illegitimizing commercialization of forest products by local communities and denial of access to even basic livelihood requirements such as harvesting of construction timber. During the post-colonial period particularly from the 1990s onwards, evictions were scaled down and access to basic livelihood requirements such as thatching grass, livestock grazing and fuel wood improved. However, commercialization of forest products by local communities and sharing of benefits such as income generated from forestry enterprises through cash dividends or investment in social services and infrastructure remained a pipe dream to local communities.

The exclusion of local communities from accessing resources from FPAs stemmed from the now disputed idea of pristine ecosystems that could be preserved only if segregated from human presence and use (Adams and Hutton, 2007). Social inequality and exclusion of local communities from accessing and controlling forest resources and benefits are common problems in FPAs (Upreti et al., 2012). People have been displaced and/or denied access to resources by the establishment of FPAs causing poverty amongst

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local communities (Holling and Meffe, 1996; Brockington and Igoe, 2006; Kwashirai, 2008; Brockington and Wilkie, 2015). In Zimbabwe, the centralised government-led FPA governance system is still seen as essential in sustaining FPAs and making them contribute towards the provision of socio-economic and environmental goods and services. Whilst the effectiveness of FPAs in achieving conservation goals is debatable (Campbell et al., 2008; Laurance et al., 2012), it is their impacts on local communities' livelihoods that most criticism of these exclusionary governance systems has been directed at in recent decades.

The heightened debate on the relationship between conservation and development drew attention to the negative human impacts of protected area conservation systems that marginalise and impoverish local communities through human displacement and restrictions on access to resources imposed through regulatory frameworks (Holling and Meffe, 1996; Coad et al., 2008; Agrawal and Redford, 2009; Uprety et al., 2012). Besides impoverishing local communities and creating conflicts, the governance system that determines who enjoys which use and access rights to particular forest resources also constitutes a major underlying cause of forest depletion, degradation and loss (Stellmacher, 2007). Research is therefore required on the exclusion of local communities from accessing resources from FPAs since the early colonial period to better understand local communities' exclusion from FPAs.

## 2. Conceptual aspects of exclusion

Exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process involving denial of access to resources, rights, goods and services and the inability to participate in the activities available to other stakeholders in a society (De Haan, 1998; Khadka, 2009). According to Ribot and Peluso (2003), exclusion is intimately associated with 'access', which 'is about all possible means by which a person is able to benefit from things' and therefore is more akin to a 'bundle of powers' than to a 'bundle of rights, as espoused by Schlager and Ostrom (1992) in the notion of property. Ribot and Peluso's (2003) concept of access focuses on issues to do with who gets to enjoy some kind of benefit or benefit stream from 'things', in what ways and under what circumstances. Within the context of diverse FPA resources as the 'things' in question, there is a range of powers embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms, processes and social relations that affect people's ability to benefit from them. The nature of power and forms of access to resources shift over time because people and institutions are positioned differently in relation to resources at various historical periods and geographical scales. This means that people have more power in some relationships than in others or at some historical moments and not others. Also different political-economic circumstances change the terms of access and may therefore change the specific individuals or groups most able to benefit from a set of resources. The analysis of access therefore requires the identification and mapping of the flow of benefits of interest, mechanisms by which different actors involved gain, control and maintain the benefit flow and its distribution, an analysis of power relations underlying the mechanisms of access involved in instances where benefits are derived (Ribot and Peluso, 2003). In analysing access to FPA resources, we identified the particular benefits that can be derived from them, the policy environment that enabled and disabled different actors to access resources and the mechanisms by which community members and institutions gained, controlled and maintained access at different historical times.

The power relations that structure and shape the operation of exclusion from FPAs are found in four interwoven and mutually reinforcing domains: regulation, force, markets and legitimation

(Hall et al., 2011a,b; Akram-Lodhi, 2012, Fig. 1). Regulation refers to the rules that determine FPAs' ownership, their boundaries, acceptable land uses within their boundaries and conditions under which the FPAs and their resources can be accessed (Hall et al., 2011a,b). In Zimbabwe's FPAs, regulation is mainly carried out by the state and implemented by the Forestry Commission (FC). Our study analysed the regulatory framework, its implementation mechanisms and varying levels of its effectiveness. Force excludes local communities through various forms of sanctions which can involve violence or threats of violence. Force is usually applied by FC officials, forest protection guards, state security members who are occasionally requested to assist with squatter eviction and management of poachers in FPAs. Force is also used by the local communities through starting of forest fires (arson) and encroachment into FPAs for settlement and agriculture. Real confrontation and violence may not be common in FPAs, but force can be quite effective even if it is implied without being used. Markets exclude through pricing or the cost of acquiring permits to access FPA resources or leases to utilise forest land for example for grazing purposes. These determine who has access to FPAs and their resources and who cannot. The value of some key forest resources such as hardwood timber is critical in understanding exclusion dynamics (Hall et al., 2011a,b). Lastly, legitimation relates to the moral basis for justifying exclusion, entrenching regulation, markets and force as acceptable bases for exclusion. Legitimation is vital for supporting different forms of exclusion in FPAs.

Regulation, legitimation, force and markets constitute the mixture of the power elements that are usually deployed by the FPA actors in seeking to exclude and to which the excluded must respond to (Hall et al., 2011a,b). Whilst these powers do not provide the whole picture about how FPA land and its resources are accessed, they provide a sound basis for understanding local communities' access and exclusion from FPAs. Additionally, the actors' interests or goals are critical in determining the type and severity of exclusion in FPAs. Interests are difficult to observe but they can be inferred by observing the behaviour of the stakeholders (Schusser et al., 2015). They can be ecological, social, economic or a combination of different types of interests. Interests influence the actions of individuals and groups of actors. We examined in our paper the interests and power that actors seeking to exclude others deploy and mechanisms that prevent local communities from deriving meaningful benefits from FPAs and the intricate problems that follow from these.

The powers and mechanisms that determine access to FPA resources or lack of it result in different forms of local community exclusion. Exclusion can be in the form of physical or economic displacement. Physical displacement or eviction is the involuntary removal of people from their homes and homelands to give way to conservation whilst economic displacement entails restrictions that make it hard to pursue a livelihood (Cernea and Schmidt, 2003; Brockington and Wilkie, 2015). Cernea (2005) collectively defined physical and economic displacement as restrictions on the use of resources imposed on people living outside a protected area, or on those who continue living inside a protected area, during and after implementation leading to loss of assets and income sources or means of livelihood whether or not the affected person has been relocated to another area. The loss of access to important natural resources is associated with landlessness, loss of identity, increased morbidity, mortality and marginalisation (Cernea and Schmidt, 2003). This is associated with people that lack political power to fight or defend their entitlement.

Local people are excluded from accessing or benefiting from resources in FPAs through fencing, posting guards or through signs and associated sanctions (Hall et al., 2011a,b). The state through the FPA management agency may deprive local community members

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