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# Foreign Investments and Livelihoods in Northern Zambia

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## PLAAS Working Paper 55: Foreign Investments and Livelihoods in Northern Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

This study employs a wider livelihoods approach to challenge some insular neo-classical economic narratives on the nature, process and impact of large-scale land acquisitions on smallholder farmers living on Africa's customary land. Large-scale land-based acquisitions are often justified as a vehicle to utilise idle land, improve land productivity, modernise the countryside, commercialise the agrarian sector, create jobs and ensure macro-economic returns, while conversely portraying smallholder land-based livelihoods as pristine, unproductive, unable to support national development and enhance poverty reduction. This approach is problematic, since the diverse land uses by smallholder farmers are narrowly examined, the production and poverty reduction value to rural livelihoods is largely ignored and the social implications, psychological ramifications and economic benefits of the large-scale capitalist ventures are not explored in-depth. Even the process of land acquisition is hardly regulated by an array of international, regional and national guidelines on responsible investments. This is because of the intersection of the state, traditional leaders and private sector interests staked against the smallholder farmers in coercive hierarchical relationships. Of course, investors create some jobs with some differential benefits but these are often seasonal and too precarious to augment sustainable alternative livelihoods. This article therefore provides rich empirical data from Zambia's newly-created Chembe district to demonstrate the limitations of the romanticised neo-classical economic benefits and the need for a wider livelihoods lens. From such a wider perspective, we challenge the notion of an agrarian trajectory based on a capitalist transition to large-scale farms and co-existence premised on voluntary regulation in the context of weak governance and unequal power relations, thus opting for an alternative path hinged on securing livelihoods for the rural smallholder farmers.

**Keywords:** Chembe, investments, land, land rights, large-scale farming, livelihoods, smallholder farmers, Zambia



## ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

AU	African Union
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
FPIC	Free Prior Informed Consent
FRA	Food Reserve Agency
FISP	Farmer Input Support Programme
MFEZ	Multiple Facility Economic Zone
PRAI	Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment
VGGT	Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security
ZESCO	Zambia Electricity Supply Company

## INTRODUCTION

How have foreign-based investments affected land-based livelihoods for smallholder farmers in Africa? This article seeks to shift debate from an insular macro-economic perspective to a more diverse livelihoods approach, one that is informed by the day-to-day quotidian concerns of the rural smallholder farmers. The article is informed by a qualitative case study of Mansa Sugar Limited, an Indian-owned company, which acquired 5 000 hectares of state and customary land in Zambia's newly-created Chembe district. The land was acquired for irrigated sugar-cane production in order to produce sugar, ethanol and electricity. Hall (2011) and Scoones (2016) long observed the sugar rush in Southern Africa. We challenge the assumptions that there are vast tracts of vacant and unproductive land readily available for investors in marginalised rural Africa, that smallholder farmers are mere substantivists, that investor-promised multiple and inclusive macro-economic benefits and modernisation projects for the rural sector are a given. In addition, we assert that regulation of investments is more in theory than practice as power relations are heavily skewed in favour of big capital, some state elites and traditional leaders in the context of weak governance. We acknowledge that some jobs are created with differential benefits and some benefits are derived from social corporate responsibility but they are not meaningful enough to support sustainable livelihoods. Consequently, the investments have negatively affected the diverse and multiple land-based livelihoods for the rural farmers including loss of financial income, food, good health and education. Hence the need for an alternative path to development in contrast to the ahistorical envisioned capitalist transition to large-scale estates. To substantiate our argument, we present this article in seven interrelated parts. First, we give our theoretical approach and justification for the article. Second, we unpack the agrarian investments in Chembe, analysing the pull factors in line with the state's pro-market policies. Third, we detail the qualitative methodology and why it is of use in capturing local livelihoods. Fourth, we explore whether the land was vacant and unproductive, how the land was acquired in the context of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), then broaden to look at wider livelihoods lost beyond land and land rights. Fifth, we analyse whether the forms of compensation covered wider livelihoods in line with regional and international guidelines for responsible investments. The sixth section motivates for an alternative path before concluding in the last section. In the next section we elaborate on our theoretical perspective.

We chose to adopt a wider livelihoods perspective with its genealogy in Cousins and Scoones (2010)'s debate on how the framing of agriculture and land reform influence state policies in Southern Africa. We were convinced that large-scale land deals in Africa must be understood in terms of the livelihoods interest of the smallholder farmers that are complex and anchored on land as the main form of natural capital. The emphasis is on understanding the impact of land deals in the context of diverse and multiple livelihoods with access to land being central to other forms of capital such as human, social, physical, and financial for poverty reduction (Scoones 2009). This is a better illuminating lens that goes beyond analysing land deals through an insular focus on efficiency in economic returns to land, labour and capital premised on scale (Cousins and Scoones 2010). We were aware of the limitations of this approach in its neglect of power and gender relations in Africa's differentiated society (Murray 2002).

We therefore tried to integrate these in our analysis without claiming to be exhaustive. We factor the gendered impact of the investments noting that it is typically unequal between men and women. Informed by such a wider livelihoods perspective we argue that policy formulation in relation to land grabs must focus on poverty reduction for the rural farmers. We find de

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<sup>1</sup>I would like to acknowledge the partnership and co-fieldwork with Zambia Land Alliance. However, the analysis and views expressed in this paper are entirely mine. E-mail feedback to [pzamchiya@plaas.org.za](mailto:pzamchiya@plaas.org.za) and [pres1zamchiya@gmail.com](mailto:pres1zamchiya@gmail.com).

Schutter's (2011) trifocal approach useful in framing such a future. First, is the transition path. This envisions industrial farming as the future and reflects the modernisation narratives of the colonial era. To some, de-peasantisation will happen. Small-scale farming is not considered as an alternative (de Schutter 2011). The second is the co-existence path. This refers to the possibility of achieving both the establishment of large-scale plantations and protecting the smallholder farmers. It is under this model that regulations are considered key. The third is what we coin as the alternative path. It builds from de Schutter's formulation that it is a scenario,

in which governments seek to channel agricultural investment into the support of small-scale farming. This, it should be emphasized, is not equivalent to the status quo, or to preserving subsistence agriculture—with low productivity, and few possibilities for the farmer to climb his or her way out of poverty. Nor is it a way of saying that investments in agriculture, and particularly the arrival of foreign investors, should be shunned: rather, it is a way of ensuring that investment will be directed towards ends that are most poverty-reducing (de Schutter 2011: 261).

The interventions must go beyond a narrow ahistorical conceptualisation of a teleological capitalist transition to large-scale farms in the countryside leading to de-peasantisation. The latter means 'the loss or disappearance of the peasantry' through loss of their access to means of production (van der Ploeg 2013). A proposition for co-existence is based on regulation is possible but difficult given weak governance and the unequal power relations. State elites, chiefs and investors involved in land deals have juridical, economic and social power. A wider livelihoods approach would require a form of de Schutter's alternative path framework hinged on investments that support smallholder production for poverty reduction. Of course, as Cousins and Scoones (2010) have argued, contradictions will always be there between an emphasis on poverty alleviation for the poor and need for economic growth for poverty reduction.

Be that as it may, this article is important in regenerating academic debate on land deals beyond the narrow acceptance of large capitalist estates as the only vehicle for emancipation of rural livelihoods. It adds to a growing body of case studies focusing on the implications of land deals for local livelihoods in Africa. Furthermore, it brings out rich empirics, something that will be hard to unearth by expanding the breadth of the study within the same study timeline. Of course, this makes it difficult to generalise. However, it is through systematic collection of empirically rich case studies that meaningful comparisons can be done to build a national and regional picture on the revolving impact of large-scale land deals on rural livelihoods. In addition, the study is also relevant in feeding into ongoing debates about investment policies and Africa's agrarian future. Solid answers continue to be elusive for activists, scholars and policy makers alike. Our hope too is that it will provide a key foundational resource for students and scholars that want to pursue further studies in understanding the livelihoods realities of smallholder farmers in the context of land deals and perhaps their differentiated nature in the long term. We now turn to the dynamics of agrarian investments in Chembe.

## AGRO-BASED INVESTMENTS IN CHEMBE DISTRICT

While global policies matter, host public policies are also significant in fostering investments (Cotula 2012). Chembe district managed to attract foreign investors due to both external and internal factors. Some scholars usually focus on the external factors that led to a new rush for Africa's land namely the triple financial, food and fuel crises in 2009 and downplay the internal factors such as public policy and the investor's internal logic of capitalist accumulation. For substantiation, the Zambian government set up a Multiple Facility Economic Zone in Chembe district in 2009 (MFEZ). MFEZ is a designated zone meant to attract domestic and foreign direct investments. The intention was to 'create the ideal investment environment for attracting major world class investors' (ZDA 2018). The creation of MFEZ in Zambia was done with the assistance



of the Japanese and Chinese governments. Under this model the Zambian government acquires customary land, converts it into state land and creates infrastructure for industry that attracts investors. The Chembe MFEZ zone was about 3 600 hectares. It is evident that Zambia's market-based land tenure reforms embodied in the 1995 Land Act in the era of neo-liberal policies legalised the conversion of customary land into state land which could be sold, thus theoretically placing the countryside on the market for foreign and domestic investors. Prior to 1995, only six percent of the land could be traded (Nolte 2013). The rest was under customary tenure and could not be converted. With the rise in demand for land from 2008 some studies show that customary land has diminished from 94 % to 54% in 2015 (Sitko *et al* 2015). Once the land is converted to state land it cannot be reversed.

According to Chembe's Council Secretary there were also financial incentives for investors. For Zambia and thus Chembe district, an investment of at least US\$500 000 attracted no tax on profits for five years from the first year of operation of manufacturing projects (ZDA 2018). Second, there was no tax on dividends for five years from the first year of declaration of dividends (ZDA 2018). Third, there was no import duty on capital goods and machinery including specialised motor vehicles for five years (ZDA 2018). Fourth, value added tax incentives include zero rates on mining products for export (ZDA 2018). There were also non-direct fiscal incentives, such as free access to health services by investor's skilled personnel, help in getting immigration permits, protection against nationalism and support in acquiring land. The government was typically subsidising large-scale agriculture. As de Schutter has argued, 'a first obstacle is that poor agriculture-based countries who seek to attract foreign capital in order to develop their infrastructures are competing for the arrival of direct investment. This results in a tendency to lower the level of requirements imposed on investors, whether these relate to the compensations owed, to the creation of employment, or to the payment of taxes' (de Schutter 2011: 264...). The General Manager at Mansa Sugar acknowledged the support in our interview. He said, 'no doubt Zambia is a good place. Government is helping us. The chiefs are very helpful. If any problem comes they help us. Land Alliance also helps us. They are innocent people. Local communities are always innocent people'.<sup>2</sup> The innocence could refer to how they view local people as being naïve about the relentless logic of capital investments or mere appreciation of good hospitality. Mulongwe, the district's crop officer seemed to confirm that government rendered significant support to the investor, perhaps at the expense of the smallholder. He explained,

We are the project manager of Mansa Sugar Limited. As a department we have been involved in site selection. We assigned the investment site, we counted farmers, and evaluated their fields and they were paid. Now Mansa said we must identify people interested in outgrower schemes from the community.<sup>3</sup>

The incentives are in fact so numerous that the benefits to the Zambian government are impervious.

Geographically, Chembe attracted new investors because of rich natural resources. There was plenty of water from the Luapula and Lwela Rivers and various streams in the district. The Luapula River covered 152 kilometres in Chembe district.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the sugar-cane plantation was situated along the river bank. The investors emphasised that water for irrigation was not a problem. Mansa Sugar Limited used water for irrigation from the Luapula River. They operated a complex pivot system and had a water pump in the Luapula River. This confirms the assertion that investors do not only look for land but also water resources (Mehta *et al* 2012). As White *et al* (2012) have argued in the context of land deals, 'despite much rhetoric on targeting marginal lands, investor interest often focuses on the best land in terms of water availability and irrigation potential, soil fertility, proximity to markets or availability of infrastructure (2013:37).' As the senior agricultural officer for Chembe district collaborated, 'for Chembe

<sup>2</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>3</sup> Interview, Mulongwe, Agriculture Department Chembe, March 2018

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Mumba Mushitu, District Commissioner, Chembe, 12 March 2018

district, water is not a problem. The investors are following water resources in Luapula River. There are several districts in the province but investors are following the route of Luapula River.<sup>5</sup> Chembe received an average of 900mm of rainfall a year and average temperatures of 25 degrees celsius.<sup>6</sup> The climate was suitable for sugar-cane production, cassava, soya, rice, citrus fruits and plantations (ZDA 2018). These are some of the crops that investors are interested in. The district was situated right at the border of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which provides diverse export marketing opportunities to Rwanda and Burundi as well. An abundance of sunshine was another key natural factor that attracted investors to the new district (ZDA 2018).

As a result, the following is a profile of investments taking shape in Chembe. These were collated from various interviews with the Council Secretary, the District Commissioner and from primary documents.

Table 1: Profile of investments in Chembe District

Area of Investment	Description	Stage
<b>Agri-based</b>	For sugar-cane plantation and processing factory	Mansa Sugar already established sugar-cane plantations and factory under construction
<b>Mining-based</b>	For manganese and iron	No investor yet
<b>Fish farming</b>	For fish cage farming along Lwela River	Negotiations ongoing with Pendulum investors
<b>Residential plots</b>	1 600 plots for housing	Chembe Town Council investing
<b>Energy-based</b>	For solar power plant	Negotiations ongoing
<b>Agri-based</b>	For small-scale chili production	In the initial construction phase by a Zambian investor
<b>Agri-based</b>	For sugar-cane production	15, 400 hectares of land acquired by Chimsoro Milling company. No activity on the land yet

However, Chembe was not all rosy as an investment destination. The physical capital was poor and infrastructure was not good. The rural farmers lived in a long neglected area in terms of development. As the District Commissioner explained, 'Chembe being a new district, our infrastructure is poor. In the western part of the district the road is in a deplorable state. In the rain season people are cut off. Roads are bad. Housing is a challenge. There are few schools and health posts and people walk long distances to seek medication'.<sup>7</sup> The council secretary also noted that drinking 'water was a severe challenge'.<sup>8</sup> He said the council had a K1 million plan to invest in a mini-water scheme in order to supply the new community of investors with clean drinking water.

Given the above investment initiatives, we focused on Mansa Sugar Limited because it was the biggest investment in the district. The investment was projected to cost US\$50 million upon

<sup>5</sup> Interview, Patrick Bwalya, Senior Agricultural Officer, Chembe District, Chembe, 13 March 2018

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Mumba Mushitu, District Commissioner Chembe, 12 March 2018. Personal observation

<sup>8</sup> Interview, Council Secretary, Chembe, 15 March 2018

completion.<sup>9</sup> As of early 2018, the Managing Director said about US\$25 million had been injected. In addition, Mansa had acquired land and started investment activities with an impact on the livelihoods of small-scale farmers. Further it is owned by Indians signifying a South to South investment, a trend long observed by Hall (2011). What had they invested in? Since August 2015, Mansa Sugar planted a total of 900 hectares of sugar-cane and aimed to reach 1900 hectares of land by the end of 2018.<sup>10</sup> The General Manager said they wanted 'to produce sugar, ethanol and electricity'.<sup>11</sup> This shows the food-fuel-energy nexus. Mr Chisango, the Zambia Development Agency General Director was confident of the macro-economic benefits the project would bring. He said that, 'ethanol fuel will go down by 25%, thousands of jobs would be created, local businesses' value chains would be enhanced, outgrower schemes will empower local communities, bring in foreign currency and lead to export-oriented industrialisation' in Zambia.<sup>12</sup> This was reiterated in our interview with the General Manager of Mansa and most government officials.<sup>13</sup>

Mansa Sugar Limited had also completed a road network in the enclosure covering 25 kilometres.<sup>14</sup> They had drawn electricity from the Zambia Electricity Supply Company (ZESCO) power line. There were also investments in irrigation. A South African irrigation manufacturer, Agrico was awarded the contract to provide irrigation. A water pump was installed at Luapula River and centre pivots installed on planted land.<sup>15</sup> The water pump could provide 2 156 cubic metres of water at full capacity (Smith 2017). Machinery such as tractors, combine harvesters and planters was purchased from South America, India and South Africa. Offices and houses for skilled labour were under construction and some had been completed for senior management.<sup>16</sup> A sugar processing factory was at an advanced construction stage to an extent that the investor expected to start producing sugar by the end of 2018.<sup>17</sup> The sugar processing plant was expected to produce half a million tonnes of sugar-cane a year.<sup>18</sup> From calculations this would produce about 40 000 tonnes of sugar annually. Of interest here is that the infrastructural development is happening inside the enclosure. How benefits will trickle to the periphery remains to be seen. Now we delve into the research methodology that helped us to see whether the investment was helping wider livelihoods.

## METHODOLOGY

Concrete investigations rather than ideological persuasions should inform intellectual debates about the effect of large-scale land-based investments on livelihoods in rural Africa. Consequently, our study is based on field research. We held interviews in 2018 in Zambia's Chembe district. We conducted 11 long in-depth interviews with heads of households (five men and six women) who lost their land. These interviews enabled the farmers to tell their story in a way that captured their wider livelihoods beyond statistics on economic returns to land, labour and capital. In addition, we had an open discussion about the investment and its impact with 33 community members (23 women and 10 men) to verify and triangulate some of the stories. From the 33 community members, we managed to have 21 follow-up short detailed interviews with farmers who lost their land to the investor. In total, we therefore had 32 detailed in-depth interviews with farmers who lost their land out of the affected 310 families. These interviews

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.znbc.co.zm/50m-mansa-sugar-set-to-open/>, 6 February 2018

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>11</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.zda.org.zm/?q=content/zda-reflects-copperbelt-and-luapula-investment-monitoring-tour>

<sup>13</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>15</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>16</sup> Personal observation, 12 March 2018

<sup>17</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018. Personal observation, Mansa Sugar, 12 March 2018

<sup>18</sup> Interview, Mansa Sugar General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

were all recorded on camera. The few media articles on Chembe were also of use as well as personal notes from farmers.

Beyond the farmers who lost their land, we interviewed seven government officials. Five were from the Department of Agriculture which was central in working with smallholder farmers, scoping the land for investment, doing evaluations for compensations, and supporting the investor. The other two were the District Commissioner and the Council Secretary for the District. They were central in helping the investor with land acquisition on both state and customary land. We then had in-depth interviews with two traditional chiefs who 'gave' customary land to the investor. It was also important for us to hear from one civil society representative of the Mansa Land Alliance who promoted pro-poor land rights. This diverse range of actors gave us rich detailed material which enabled us to write this story which challenges some parochial neo-classical framing of big capital investments as a panacea to insecure livelihoods. In the next section we interrogate whether there was available land.

## WAS THE LAND VACANT AND UNPRODUCTIVE?

The headline in the African Farming on 12 June 2017 read, 'From nothing to a great commercial sugar-cane operation in just over two years' in praise of the Mansa Sugar investment (Smith 2017). The assumption was that there was nothing productive on the acquired land. Nan Smith, the author of the article, went on to claim that, 'the bush that covered this land has made way for fields of sugar-cane, a year of harvesting in three years' (Smith 2017). The use of the term 'bush' reinforces stereotypes that Africa's marginalised rural land targeted by foreign investors is uncultivated, undeveloped, uninhabitable and of no economic value (Borras and Franco 2010). Bhupendar Rathore, a senior manager at Mansa, buttressed the imagery of a bush in an interview. He said, 'when we first came, there was nothing here but bush' (Smith 2017). Some local elites such as Chief Rasford Chita also claimed the land was lying dormant for five years which, however, was not the case. Even state elites emphasised that there were vacant tracts of land in Zambia's communal areas. For example, the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources appealed for more investors in Chembe because of its 'vast arable land.'<sup>19</sup> At a global level the World Bank also listed Zambia as one of the countries with vacant and underutilised land.

Contrary to the above ideological persuasions of vacant and unutilised land, our empirics showed that the land was a source of multiple livelihoods. Central was smallholder agriculture on the customary and state land acquired. A total of 168 local farmers used the 'state land' to produce cassava, maize, groundnuts, beans, sweet potatoes and vegetables before and after it was acquired by government for MFEZ in 2009. Even by the conservative Department of Agriculture statistics there were 10,000 registered farmers eking their livelihoods on customary land in Chembe.<sup>20</sup> The main crops grown were cassava, maize and beans. Cassava was a local flex crop. It was used to make thick porridge, alcohol for drinking after a hard day's work in the fields and the leaves were used for relish. It was also a herbal remedy meant to enhance fertility. Other crops were soya beans (a new crop), rice, groundnuts, bambara nuts and fruits such as bananas and oranges for consumption and for sale. Shifting cultivation was a prevalent practice. Given the land uses we documented, it was evident that the land was not vacant and available.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.znbc.co.zm/50m-mansa-sugar-set-to-open/>, 6 February 2018

<sup>20</sup> Interview, Chanda Justin, Agricultural Supervisor, Chembe, 13 March 2018

However, some neo-classical economists frame 'vacant' and 'underutilised' land to reflect a valuation of productivity rather than wider livelihood uses (Cotula *et al* 2009), a perspective that was popular with most state elites and investors. However, we argue that place-based realities become key, for these were long ignored rural farmers. They were resource famished with no meaningful state support for inputs, markets for various commodities, credits and infrastructure but producing sustainably on the land. The contrast with the massive incentives awarded to the new investors in Chembe showed the state's large-scale bias. For, 'not all 10 000 government registered [small-scale] farmers received state support in the 2017-18 season. Only 3 927 received government support. This was in the form of seed, fertilisers and chemicals'.<sup>21</sup> There was general shortage of inputs and the government did not intervene. Chindowe Mulongwe, the Crop Officer for the district said, 'many farmers wanted to grow soya but the seed was not found in the district. There were few agro- dealers dealing with soya beans. Farmers want to secure soya seed through the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) E-voucher system but there was only one agro dealer with 20 bags which catered for a few ... it failed because of seed shortages'.<sup>22</sup> Market support was also absent as farmers complained of lack of reliable markets for their commodities and price fluctuations of crops like cassava in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Nevertheless, smallholder farmers still produced sustainably and the land supported rural livelihoods. As an example, we give three vignettes on production from farmers who lost their land.

#### Farmer A

Bonias Chabala was born in 1955. He used to farm maize, cassava and groundnuts on the 3.2 hectares of land that was taken by the investor. He produced 70 x 50kg bags of maize, 55 bags of cassava and 30-35 bags of groundnuts per season. Out of these his family consumed 10 bags of maize per year, seven bags of cassava per year and one bag of groundnuts per year. For the remainder, he sold 60 bags of maize to the government's Food Reserve Agency (FRA) at K60 per bag [UD\$1 is equivalent to about K12], about 45 bags of cassava at K110 each to traders in Kasumbalesa in the Democratic Republic of Congo and sold groundnuts locally for K15 per five kilograms.<sup>23</sup>

#### Farmer B

Loveness Kalasha was born in 1969. She used to produce cassava, maize and beans on her two hectares of land before it was taken by Mansa Sugar Limited. For maize, she produced 80-120 x 50 kg bags per hectare per season, 15 x 80 kg bags of cassava per lima [1 lima=0.25 hectares]. She and her family of 10, consumed 2 x 50 kg bags of maize per month and 1 x 80 kg bag of cassava per month. She sold about 120 bags of maize for K20 per 5 kgs to the Congolese and people from Ndola and the Copper belt. She used to sell the maize in DRC before the Zambian government banned maize exports. However, the cassava she still sold at Kasumbalesa in the DRC and depending on quality and demand would get between K280-300 a bag of cassava.<sup>24</sup>

#### Farmer C

Vincent Chola was born in 1958. He used to produce cassava, maize, beans and groundnuts on three hectares of cleared land taken by Mansa Sugar Limited. He produced 15 bags of maize per lima, eight bags per quarter lima. His family of eight consumed 2 x 50 kgs of maize per month and 10 baskets of cassava. He sold 25 bags x 50 kgs of maize to the Food Reserve Agency (FRA) and 10-15 bags x 50kgs of cassava at K150 a bag.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Interview, Patrick Bwala, Senior Agricultural Officer, Chembe, 13 March 2018

<sup>22</sup> Interview, Chindowe Mulongwe, Crop Officer, Chembe, 13 March 2018

<sup>23</sup> Interview, Bonias Chabala, Chembe, 16 March 2018

<sup>24</sup> Interview, Loveness, Chembe, March 2018

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Vincent Chola, Chembe, March 2018

The vignettes further demonstrate that Chembe's customary lands were not only occupied but the modes of production were oriented towards local and regional markets through informal and formal channels. It challenges the framing that African rural farmers are substantivists operating outside commodity circuits. They cannot be relegated to the pristine agrarian world. Rather, these can be conceptualised as petty commodity producers, to borrow from Cousins (2010). They are integrated in the market but perhaps use non-commodity relations at times (van der Ploeg 2013). The farmers in Chembe used family labour but also hired labour. Mumba Nobert, a farmer who was displaced explained, 'at the time I was farming on my two hectares of land, before I was displaced I was contributing to local economic development. I was employing labour. People would come to work on my fields in groups of 10 and I would pay them'. So there was economic activity on the land that was acquired by Mansa Sugar Limited supporting wider local livelihoods. Following our evidence, we argue that the customary land acquired was living capital and far from 'vacant' and 'unutilised'. A key question that follows is, how was this productive and inhabited customary land in Chembe acquired?

## CUSTOMARY LAND ACQUISITION

The investor approached the chief in line with Zambia's 1995 Lands Act and privately negotiated for the 2 500 hectares of customary land. Sub-Chief Harrison Mumba recalled, 'in April 2016, Mansa representatives who were Indians came to my palace to ask for 10 000 hectares of land. I gave them 2 500 hectares in Kombo area. The land they wanted was too much. It was going to affect a lot of people'.<sup>26</sup> From the available data, the chief agreed subject to consulting the people. When some of the local farmers were consulted by the traditional leaders and the investor they gave conditional consent. First, they wanted the investor to ensure the boundary of the farm was 800-1 000 metres from the village.<sup>27</sup> This was because they wanted to fetch firewood from the forest to cook and use other natural resources to support wider livelihoods. Second, they wanted the investor to 'improve school and health institutions in terms of building classrooms, accommodation for teachers and medical personnel in the area'.<sup>28</sup> Third, they wanted an improvement of the road network. They wanted it to be tarred. Fourth, they wanted the investor to install electricity for them. Fifth, they required a 'network tower for phone communication'.<sup>29</sup> Sixth, was a demand for employment. They told the investor that, 'when you employ workers we want permanent workers not only casual workers ... with reasonable salaries and conditions' for off-farm income to augment traditional on-farm income.<sup>30</sup> Seventh, they wanted the investor to build houses for the village heads.<sup>31</sup> Eighth, they wanted compensation of K4 500 per quarter lima [1 lima=0.25 hectares] of cassava. They argued that they got 15 bags of cassava from a quarter lima [0.06 hectares] which amounted to the requested figure.<sup>32</sup> According to community members interviewed the investor agreed to meet all these conditions hence 'consent' was given. At the meeting the traditional leaders played a crucial role in convincing the people to give away their land. It seems the five village headmen at the meeting were to gain personal benefits by advancing the interest of the investor. To illustrate this the five headmen namely Mofya White, Bonias Chabala, Chola Belt, Power Iwando

<sup>26</sup> Interview, Harrison Mumba, Chief, Kapwepwe Village, 13 March 2018

<sup>27</sup> Community meeting minutes, held at Fikombe primary school, 22 April 2016. Started at 1430 hrs and ended 1730hrs. Corroborated by various interviews

<sup>28</sup> Community meeting minutes, held at Fikombe primary school, 22 April 2016. Started at 1430 hrs and ended 1730hrs. Corroborated by various interviews

<sup>29</sup> Community meeting minutes, held at Fikombe primary school, 22 April 2016. Started at 1430 hrs and ended 1730hrs. Corroborated by various interviews

<sup>30</sup> Community meeting minutes, held at Fikombe primary school, 22 April 2016. Started at 1430 hrs and ended 1730hrs. Corroborated by various interviews

<sup>31</sup> Community meeting minutes, held at Fikombe primary school, 22 April 2016. Started at 1430 hrs and ended 1730hrs. Corroborated by various interviews

<sup>32</sup> Interview, Harrison Mumba, Chief, Kapwepwe Village, 13 March 2018. Corroborated by Community meeting minutes, held at Fikombe primary school, 22 April 2016. Started at 1430 hrs and ended 1730hrs.

and Mumba Bushira wrote a letter of consent to the Director of Mansa Sugar after the meeting. They raised one demand for personal benefit. As 'the headmen of this area we discussed and accept our investor to start operating in our land as [for] development in the area. What we need [from] our investor is to help the headmen of this area to build their houses. We have done a great job to convince people to release their customary land'.<sup>33</sup> They engaged in rent seeking mechanisms, a phenomenon observed in other land deals in Zambia. Beyond this thinking was a conviction by the community that capitalist ventures could be disciplined.

The district council was supposed to check whether there were any conflicting claims according to the law. We could not get confirmation as to whether this was done. What is a fact, is that the district council proceeded to make a positive recommendation to the Commissioner of Lands who had the ultimate power to convert customary land into state land. Once the Commissioner gave the title, Mansa Sugar Limited got a 99-year leasehold from the Ministry of Lands. As stated in the 1995 Land Act, the customary land is lost forever once converted, for it cannot be converted back into customary land. Fundamental to these transactions is that, 'customary land is seen as a fungible bundle of property rights that can easily be converted, transferred, and transformed from user rights in land into private property' (Amanor 2012:734) in line with neo-classical framing. This 'allows the dominant political coalitions at the local level to redefine customary tenure in line with their narrow group interests and appropriate the land of the poor and marginalised' (Amanor 2012:734).

Nevertheless, the local authorities (chiefs, state elites and the private investor) argued that there was voluntary consent to the acquisition of customary land. This brings into focus the concept of FPIC. This is a principle that underpins the widely accepted Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT) and the African Union (AU)'s Guiding Principles on Large-scale Land-based Investments. However, it was difficult to concur with its applicability and implementability in our case. Once some chiefs openly motivated for the release of the land to the investor at the consultative community meeting the issue of power relations took centre stage. Chiefs in Zambia are powerful because they administer customary land. They have both formal and informal power (Brown 2005). In some cases, the chiefs epitomise 'decentralised despotism' (Mamdani 1996). It was therefore difficult for less powerful community members who disagreed to freely oppose the traditional leaders' position in public.

These realities of the differentiated nature of Chembe society across gender, class, age, ethnicity, wealth, etc., make it difficult to authoritatively assert whose consent was to be prioritised. Was it to be by majority or by consensus? For example, most female-headed households refused to cede their land to the company because it increased the burden of securing livelihoods but the investor went on to dispossess them because of the letter of 'consent' from the traditional leaders. Susan Chenda, born in 1960, lost 11 hectares of her land to Mansa without consent. She said, 'I refused to give away my land. But the company used earth moving equipment to destroy my crops. I feel deprived of my right to land. This defeats the purpose why our ancestors fought for independence and this is perpetuating poverty'.<sup>34</sup> The different actors in Africa's land deals are differently empowered by existing formal and informal institutions (Franco 2014). This makes it difficult to neatly apply the principle of FPIC.

Others gave 'consent' under duress, given relentless directives from an investor who had the power, networks and resources to advance its own interests. Clementina Chipulu who lost two hectares of her land explained,

I was forced to give them the land but had said no. When the investor came I said no. I refused. After one week they came back and I refused. The meeting did not yield any fruits. The third time the investor came and demanded that I give away the land. It was now difficult to resist. The

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Investor, 22 April 2016

<sup>34</sup> Interview, Susan Chanda, Chembe, 16 March 2018

investor pestered me and put me under pressure. I said, “I do not want to give you my land, it is my birth right. I will die.” I did not want to give away my land. I was made to understand that land had already been taken. The Chief told us that it was a government decision so we had to give away our land. They used deception.<sup>35</sup>

We had no doubt from our study that state officials in Chembe had an investor bias. Albert Mwewa, one of the affected farmers, said, ‘Government must be fair and sincere because we elected them into office. They must work for the people who put them into office and not the investor’.<sup>36</sup>

Harrison Mumba, the sub-chief for Kapwepwe further explained,

Government must consult before investors come. It helps to know the community interest. There is no effort from the District Commissioner to explain his role. The DC is a new position because we are a new district. Because there is no dialogue, communities think government is for the investors and not for them. Government must explain to people. Now chiefs face problems to explain to the people. The burden is left on us chiefs.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to government bias, what also comes out clearly from the above is that there was inadequate information provided during the consultation. This was further collaborated by Mr Kalaba, Mansa Land Alliance Coordinator who said, ‘at a follow up meeting held on 11 September 2017 at the Provincial Administration office, no one could provide evidence of consultation that took place. The investor, the chiefs and local government officials had no documentation to prove that the consultation process happened... information was not made available to the community’.<sup>38</sup> Even Mansa Land Alliance, a powerful civil society organisation in the district, had no access to information. The broader community was not even granted access to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Local realities also showed that there was no chance for a legal challenge. Even if it was there, the income-poor farmers could not afford the legal costs against the well-resourced investors. Beyond the loss of land as natural capital, what else was lost?

## BEYOND LOSS OF LAND RIGHTS

A major concern was the reduction in crop production due to the decreased cultivation area for affected households. The land acquisition worsened the situation of food availability for poor rural households in Chembe. To illustrate, Irene Mwape from Chitala village lost her land to Mansa Sugar Limited. She was 43 years old. She had eight children – five boys and three girls. She suffered a loss of income, was now forced to buy food at the market and consequently her family had become food insecure. She reflected,

I used to farm maize, cassava, groundnuts and beans. Out of the crops I harvested, I would get K1 000 for maize, K900 for cassava, beans K800 and groundnuts about K500. Now there is nowhere to grow crops because my piece of land was taken. I have to survive on a paltry wage of K300 including buying food. I have to buy maize and cassava from members of the community who still have their fields. A gallon of maize is K5 and a bag of cassava is K100. A bag of cassava lasts for about a month if mixed with maize and I need five gallons of maize a month. We are now food insecure because we rely on buying. In comparison to when we had our land there is a big difference in terms of what we eat. All food crops came from the field. In the past, with six hectares of land we could eat food anytime and we did not measure portions. Normally, we would eat three times a day. Now it is difficult to eat as we please. We now eat twice a day – in the

<sup>35</sup> Interview, Clementina Chipulu, Chembe, 15 March 2018

<sup>36</sup> Interview, Mwewa Kaluba, Chembe, 17 March 2018

<sup>37</sup> Interview, Harrison Mumba, Kapwepwe village, 13 March 2018

<sup>38</sup> Interview, Harrison Mumba, Kapwepwe village, 13 March 2018



afternoon and in the evening. At lunch we have maize and in the evening shima and vegetables or dried fish when we can afford to buy it.<sup>39</sup>

This phenomenon has been observed in land deals that result in local farmers losing their land in Zambia (Joala *et al* 2016). The outcome is in contradistinction with most international guidelines whose sum total is mainly meant to secure and promote food security. Even the World Bank's much criticised Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment that Respect Rights, Livelihoods and Resources (PRAI) are clear on this goal. The second PRAI principle emphasises that investments should not jeopardise food security but rather strengthen it. It is explicit in that, 'whenever there are potential adverse effects on any aspect of food security (availability, access, utilisation or stability), policy-makers should make provisions for the local or directly affected populations so that they do not become food insecure (FAO *et al* 2009:7). In Chembe, no provisions were made as the poor were left to sink on their own.

Household rural poverty also increased as a result of the financial incomes of certain affected families falling after the loss of their land. This affected households' regular inflow of capital. For example, Edward Chilufya from Saki village lost his land to Mansa Sugar.

There is a big difference in my income. In the past I had 4 hectares of land. I was able to sell 80 bags of cassava to the Congo. One bag was K300. I now have no field to make an income. I would sell maize to the Food Reserve Agency. I harvested 300 bags last season and got paid. This income alleviated family problems but now I have nowhere to grow and have to rely on paltry wages from Mansa Sugar Limited. Mansa Sugar is like a thief that came to steal from us. Does this mean we are going forward as a nation?<sup>40</sup>

The loss of financial capital had an adverse effect on acquiring human capital, especially education. Other local farmers were now struggling to keep their children at school. Beatrice Mwale from Mumbwe village who lost her land explained,

I have children in school. One is in grade seven at Kasama school; another is in grade 11 at Fikombo school. I also have another child at Mpkia Agricultural College. I used to support them from the 11 hectares of land that I had. Now I can no longer afford it. I am no longer able to support my children in terms of school fees.<sup>41</sup>

An increase in education can make one get a good job and more money to invest in the fields. In this case, sending children to school also acted as a social safety net in future.

There is a danger for academics to reduce land to its productive elements and merely view it as a commodity (de Schutter 2011). Investors did not merely acquire land, water and affected the economic status of local people. In our case study, access to land guaranteed healthier livelihoods for the rural farmers. Land with traditional medicines was acquired and people lost access. From our study, they lost access to 21 different kinds of medicinal herbs that were used to treat various diseases that afflicted the local community. These herbs were on the land acquired by the investor and in surrounding areas. A similar trend was observed by Joala *et al* (2016) in Kalumbila and Mumbwa. The herbs in Chembe were used to treat headaches, coughs, dysentery, stomach pains, fits, diarrhoea, prolonged monthly periods in women, eye problems, infertility, sexually transmitted diseases and sores. The investor destroyed a people's well stocked 'pharmacy', thereby compromising their health.

The following table is a collation of the herbs that were lost. It is based on our interviews and conversations with displaced members from Chembe community.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, Irene Mwape, Chembe, 15 March 2018

<sup>40</sup> Interview, Edward Chilufya, Saki village, 17 March 2018

<sup>41</sup> Interview, Beatrice Mwale, Chembe, 17 March 2018

Table 2: Traditional medicinal herbs lost

Number	Name of Herb	Major Use
1	Indale	To treat headaches
2	Ichifumbe	To cure coughs
3	Mabele	To cure dysentery
4	Kalai	For pain relief
5	Umunosokansoka	To treat stomach aches
6	Katenge	To cure fits
7	Umsalya	For diarrhoea
8	Akafifi	For eye treatment
9	Makukwe	To cure prolonged monthly periods in women
10	Umpundu	For serious headaches
11	Kalai	For serious headaches
12	Lunda	To cure stomach upsets
13	Umupoto	To cure toothache
14	Papwe	To treat children with persistent stomach pains
15	Umupyanga Mansa	To cure infertility
16	Umulama	To treat sexually transmitted diseases
17	Mulberry	To treat sexually transmitted diseases
18	Isase	To treat sores, wounds and cuts
19	Imisoko	To treat diarrhoea in children
20	Linda	To treat stomach upsets
21	Umutondo	To treat sores

This is part of the human benefits from the land, not adequately captured by a narrow macro-economic approach. These benefits are ignored in simplifications to fit the mainstream understanding of productive lands (Borras and Franco 2010b). Local people were now much more vulnerable to poor health. Good health as a human capital is a means to earning other livelihood capital. It has intrinsic value.

Another negative impact never adequately captured by macro-economic imperatives is perpetual psychological torture caused by tenure uncertainty. Communities lived in fear. They believed that the investor was going to take their remaining customary land. That was because the investors still wanted to acquire 5 000 more hectares. As stated earlier, in the initial stages Mansa Sugar had asked for 10 000 hectares. The investor said they needed more land because part of the land they acquired was swampy. In addition, community members felt that the investor did not respect the boundary and kept encroaching into their land. Mumba Nobert, a displaced farmer captured the development, said, 'we are living in fear every day. The company will expand into our land. There was a boundary set. However, Mansa Sugar is planting pine trees beyond their boundary. They are encroaching into our customary land. It is like we are surrounded by lions'.<sup>42</sup> A similar trend was observed in Mkushi by Nolte (2013) and in Kalumbila by Joala *et al* (2016). Nolte (2013) observed that investors who were initially allocated state land and farming blocks later migrated from the state land to customary land in Mkushi. Across Zambia there was fear, uncertainty and anxiety that caused deep stress among the communities that co-existed with the

<sup>42</sup> Interview, Mumba Nobert, Chitala village, 14 March 2018

investors. It is difficult to quantify the financial cost of psychological torture as we move to analyse the compensation process.

## NARROW COMPENSATION

I am inclined to agree with Wily (2012) that the focus of investors is to capture the land cheaply and legally. The compensation given by Mansa Sugar Limited did not consider the diverse and multiple livelihoods sourced on the land. As mentioned earlier, the farmers produced a variety of crops in the fields that were taken by Mansa Sugar Limited. However, out of the diverse crops that included cassava, maize, groundnuts, etc., Mansa only agreed to compensate for cassava. Abel Chisanga from Mumbwe village who lost his land and received compensation, elaborated, 'Mansa only compensated for cassava fields. Maize and beans were not factored in. They argued that cassava was a long term crop as it took up to three years to harvest and that maize was a short term crop. Mansa Sugar Limited said no compensation for my maize and beans because they were for only one season'.<sup>43</sup> The investor did not only refuse to compensate short term crops but destroyed the crops. This is despite the fact that the community had 'agreed with the company for a two to three years grace period so that farmers could harvest their crops'<sup>44</sup> which were key to their livelihoods. The investor eventually did not respect the agreement. As a result, local farmers lost their maize, groundnuts and beans. Jennifer Lukole from Chipanda village lamented, 'the company came to destroy my crops with excavators. I wanted to sell the crops. I had cassava fields to be harvested in April 2018. Groundnuts were destroyed and my maize crop was destroyed in January 2017 a few months before harvesting. That was cruel'.<sup>45</sup> The crops destroyed constituted the staple food for the whole year in most households and they ensured that survival was not at stake whilst waiting for the long term crops.

All the farmers we interviewed said the compensation was not enough as depicted in the three cases below.

### Case A.

'The amount of compensation was not enough. They [investors] did not meet the promise. We had agreed quarter lima was K4 500 but the company did not consider it. At first I refused the money because we did not agree. There was a second meeting and we agreed. We were paid in cash in February 2016. The money is finished. We paid school fees and bought fertilisers. For my two hectares of land I wanted K70 000 as compensation. Something must be done.'<sup>46</sup>

### Case B.

Angie Mwewa who was 42 years old and lost 8 hectares of land was not happy with the compensation. She was born in Chembe. Angie said, 'they came with the police to force us to accept the little compensation. They told us that we would walk out with nothing if we resisted... The initial agreement was that quarter lima was supposed to be K4 500. I only got K4 500 despite the initial agreement indicating otherwise. My rights to land have been violated... My plea is that those investors must give us compensation as we initially agreed. I cannot call this development when life is going backwards instead of forward'.<sup>47</sup>

### Case C.

Albert Katele who lost 10 hectares of land to the investor complained, 'the compensation was little. I had 10 hectares of land and I got K7 500. I complained bitterly but I was asked to move out of the room [room 7 at Fikombo primary school] where compensation was being paid in cash] by the police. They did not want me to speak. I went to council and I was promised more but nothing has happened yet'.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Interview, Abel Chisanga, Chembe, 17 March 2018

<sup>44</sup> Interview, Noah Katebe, Chembe, 17 March 2018

<sup>45</sup> Interview, Jennifer Lukole, Chembe, 17 March 2018

<sup>46</sup> Interview, Mumba Nobert, 14 March 2018

<sup>47</sup> Interview, Angie Mwewa, Chembe, 16 March 2018

<sup>48</sup> Interview, Albert Katele, Chembe, 17 March 2018

All the people we interviewed who were compensated had already used up the money they received but still had livelihoods to support. The next table collated from our primary data, shows how compensation was paltry for the hectares that had cassava crops. Zambian law does not consider compensation for customary land in ‘voluntary’ acquisition. If it were state land, the locals could have been compensated for the land.

Table 3: Compensation in Chembe District

Name	Amount of land lost in hectares	Amount of compensation received (for cassava on the land)
Vincent Chola	5	K8 000
Mumba Nobert	2	K16 000
Mofya White	10	K8 000
Dickson Chola	15	K15 000
Bonias Chabala	4	K8 000
Diana Mpupe	1	K3 000
Angie Mwewa	8	K4 500
Clementina Chipula	2	K4 500
Susan Chenda	11	K4 500
Mega Sakeni	2	K6 825
Albert Katele	10	K7 500
Jeniffer Lubole	5	K4 000
Mwea Kaluba	30	K11 000

The money they were given was not enough to sustain their livelihoods and for argument’s sake, buy available alternative state land which, ironically, was converted from customary land. From our survey the cost of state land in the new council plots was as depicted below.

Table 4: Cost of Possible Alternative Land

Type	Size	Cost
High Cost	40m x 60m	K7 500
Medium Cost	30m x 40m	K5 000
Low Cost	18m x 30m	K3 000

This means very few households could afford the land once converted to state land and put on the free market in line with Zambia’s neo-liberal public policy.

The dispossessed local farmers had initially agreed with the company to be paid K4 500 per quarter lima of cassava as monetary compensation at a consultative meeting that included most of the affected villagers. However, after the inclusive community meeting there was another ‘exclusive’ meeting held on 21 January 2017 at Chembe Council Chambers. It was attended by relevant governmental departments, 12 community representatives and the investor. It was at this meeting that the company Director changed his decision and rejected to pay the compensation figure of K4 500 with the support of government officials.<sup>49</sup> Harrison Mumba, the sub-Chief was clear that the compensation figure was set unilaterally. This reflected the skewed power relations. He explained, ‘people continue to complain about compensation because the

<sup>49</sup> Personal notes, committee member, 21 January 2017

decision was determined by the company and the government without them. There was no consultation on compensation. It was unilateral decision making...There was no information on the evaluation criteria. It is unfair...We need input from stakeholders'.<sup>50</sup> From the second meeting it was clear that the compensation was determined by government rates not understood by the community that worked on the land. However, according to a committee member the 'new price was taken to the community by committee members and the community accepted this price per quota lima'.<sup>51</sup> From our study, other community members begrudgingly agreed to receive the new compensation figure set by a few powerful elites. To them it seemed there was no option. Some were lured by the prospect of receiving lump sum payments given the increased monetisation of the local economy. With little financial literacy the value of the money in replacing livelihoods was not factored by this group.

Mr Kalaba, the provincial coordinator of Mansa Land Alliance explained,

Internationally there are guidelines and principles but communities once they see money they get excitable. They forget they need to understand the benefits and engage. They realised after spending that the money was not enough. We need to help people to understand fully before anything is done. ... Luapula province is the most poverty stricken. So money causes anxiety. Poverty and low levels of education affect people's understanding on what the law says.

Others did not receive the new information and still believed in the open old agreement of K4 500 per quarter lima.

Compensation was narrowly conceptualised that local farmers who practiced 'chitemene' (that is shifting cultivation) were not paid anything. The land was misconstrued as the 'bush' where there was 'nothing'. In addition, unplanted fields at the time of land acquisition were not compensated whether they were un-cleared or cleared. Mwewa Kaluba said, 'I had 30 hectares of land. I cleared eight hectares of those. For compensation I got only K11 000 for cleared land. The company did not consider the amount of land I had but only those fields where there was cassava. This means my land was taken for nothing. I am single and not married'.<sup>52</sup> One could argue that customary land did not legally qualify for compensation in the unjust Zambian law but what about the labour used to clear the fields which were not compensated. Even one of the local Chiefs, Harrison Mumba, complained, 'the investor did not consider the amount of investment we had put into clearing the fields. The labour we spent to cultivate was not factored in. Even our time was not compensated'.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the government officials were dismissive of further claims for compensation by community members. According to the Council Secretary there 'was no more compensation to be paid. As government it is unfair on the investors to keep compensating. No more compensation. They already signed. Even people from outside the community are mobilising for compensation'.<sup>54</sup>

It is clear that the compensation process did not meet international best practice as enshrined in the VGGT and AU guidelines that seek to support wider livelihoods. As Dalal-Clayton and Sadler (2014:297) have argued, compensation must be paid for 'loss of assets or access to assets; or loss of income sources or means of livelihood, whether or not the affected persons must move to another location'. This is an approach that is in sync with our wider livelihoods perspective. Yet in this case, not even all crops and trees were compensated. The livelihoods of the farmers were at least supposed to be restored to previous levels as per various progressive international guidelines but not even a valuation of that was done. Perhaps, corporate agribusiness cannot be expected to act on the basis of voluntary guidelines. This presents a challenge to proponents of co-existence regulated by the principles. To borrow from White *et al* (2013), 'capitalist firms are

<sup>50</sup> Interview, Harrison Mumba, Kapwepwe village, 13 March 2018

<sup>51</sup> Personal notes, committee member, 21 January 2017

<sup>52</sup> Interview, Mwewa Kaluba, Chembe, 17 March 2018

<sup>53</sup> Interview, Harrison Mumba, Kapwepwe village, 13 March 2018

<sup>54</sup> Interview, Council Secretary, Interview, Joel Shava, Council Secretary, Chembe District, Chembe, 15 March 2018

not boy scouts and are unlikely to place moral codes and good governance above profit and needs of shareholders'. The community did not only lose land but wider livelihoods that were not compensated. Despite the gloomy picture, the question arises if there were any benefits derived for the local farmers?

## BENEFITING LOCAL LIVELIHOODS?

We acknowledge that the investor created jobs, occupied by some of the displaced farmers. However, these were mainly casual and precarious jobs. To make matters worse, the investor failed to pay the casual workers their salaries from January to March 2018, creating a local crisis of livelihoods. Even when the investor could pay in 2017, the new wages could not sustain livelihoods as salaries were low. Thus not all jobs that come with the new investors are emancipatory. As in many land deal cases across Africa, the promise of decent jobs is proving elusive. We are inclined to agree with Wily (2012:775) that 'one is reminded that even the much more expansive industrialisation of the nineteenth century enclosures could not produce the number of jobs required and more often than not meant the poorhouse for the most disadvantaged and poor'.<sup>55</sup> All the general workers that we interviewed complained about poor working conditions and salaries, as the cases below depict.

### *Mwewa Margret Case*

Mwewa Margret was a casual worker at Mansa Sugar. She lost her land. She complained of the working conditions, 'in a day we must weed or plant 800 metres. This is a task difficult to complete. Each time we want to complain, they say if you are not interested, you can leave. I am now in the third month without pay. I started working there in January 2018. I do weeding, loading of logs in a truck and planting sugar-cane.'<sup>56</sup>

### *Patrick Chibale Case*

Patrick Chibale from Mumbwa village explained, 'I started to work for Mansa Sugar in December 2017. I got paid K200. I was doing general work like weeding. I started from 0600hrs to 1800hrs working without lunch. We had no gloves, no gumboots. But when an Indian supervisor came s/he will be wearing gumboots and gloves. The working environment was not good. We encountered snakes in the fields at times. What kind of investment brings snakes? From January 2018 I was not paid, so I left.'<sup>57</sup>

### *Irene Mwape Case*

'I started working in May 2017 as a general worker. I clear the land, do weeding, remove any other materials before the planting of sugar-cane. The job that I do am not happy with, but there is nothing I can do since all the land is taken from me. I prefer to work on my own piece of land because the working conditions and the money is not good... I still work on my own field but it belongs to Mansa Sugar Limited now. I am not happy.'<sup>58</sup>

Irene still identified with the acquired land and calls it her 'own'. This shows an intrinsic strong claim to land rights.

The General Manager complained, 'getting workforce is now difficult. People have their land and are growing their things. The rain season is therefore difficult to get labourers. More women

<sup>55</sup> Liz Alden Wily. 2013. Looking Back to See Forward: The Legal Niceties of Land Theft in Land Rushes. *Journal of Peasant Studies*. 39(3-4). 751-776

<sup>56</sup> Interview, Mwewa Margret, 17 March 2018

<sup>57</sup> Interview, Patrick Chibale, Chembe, 17 March 2018

<sup>58</sup> Interview, Irene Mwape, Chitala village, 15 March 2018

come to work during winter'<sup>59</sup>. That was because most women worked in their remaining fields during summer. After harvest they then sought wage-labour, signifying the hoe-wage relationship and defying full proletarianisation nor de-peasantisation associated with the transition path. This is a long established historical fact in Southern Africa.

It is important to mention here that there were differential benefits from employment. There are a few who got long-term contracts for clerical jobs. These increased their financial 'capital'. However, those few now stayed in company houses in the enclosure. In addition to some employment, the community benefited from skills development. The General Manager explained, 'we are training them. We give 5-10 days training on irrigation, how to plant and many other things. The good ones become supervisors'.<sup>60</sup> The investor also gave mattresses and pillows to the local clinic and some roofing materials to schools as part of social corporate responsibility. These seemed welfarist and not emancipatory enough for poverty reduction. What then should the future look like?

## CONTESTED AGRARIAN FUTURES

In order to structure our final analysis on the contested futures, we recast de Schutter's (2011) trifocal approach with examples from the field in Chembe. The transitional path was mainly preferred by investors, state elites and some western journalists. They articulated a future of highly capitalised industrial farming in the countryside, a situation whereby investors would acquire more rural land used by smallholder farmers and establish 'more profitable' large-scale capitalist ventures. From their narrow perspective, such an industrialisation process would wipe away smallholder farmers through de-peasantisation with rural proletarianisation taking place. For them, smallholder farmers had no future as Chembe was said to be 'heading towards industrial farming in ten years'.<sup>61</sup> Such insular modernisation narratives were not only ahistorical but ignored the fact that the small-scale farmers were the largest producers of food crops such as maize and cassava, not only in Chembe but in Zambia more broadly. Proponents of the transitional pathways also ignored credible evidence from elsewhere that shows that smallholder production is effective in reducing poverty (Wiggins *et al* 2010).

Most male respondents preferred the investor to remain in Chembe and honour its promises and obligations. For example, Albert Mwewa said, 'let Mansa Sugar Limited continue and stick to the compensation we agreed'.<sup>62</sup> John Kalaba from Chital village also concurred, 'let Mansa Sugar continue for they have put in a lot of money. All we need is fair compensation'.<sup>63</sup> Mulenga Mwape from Chitale village explained, 'I am appealing to Mansa to promote fairness. Compensation and fair labour practices, that is what we want as a people. We want to work properly with them but they must be fair with us'.<sup>64</sup> It seemed men wanted the money because they controlled the distribution of household income.

This was a difficult proposition though. The investor and local state elites unequivocally claimed that enough compensation had been paid. In the absence of a massive social uprising and a strong legal case backed by alternative valuation of wider livelihoods, this was difficult to realise. More broadly and beyond, one wonders whether the investors will be bound by regional and global regulations for responsible investments that produce a win-win situation in the context of weak governance and unequal power relations.

<sup>59</sup> Interview, Mansa General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>60</sup> Interview, Mansa General Manager, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>61</sup> Interview, Tyson Kalaba, Mansa District Land Alliance, Mansa office, 18 March 2018

<sup>62</sup> Interview, Albert Mwewa, Chembe, 15 March 2018

<sup>63</sup> Interview, John Kalaba, Chembe, 12 March 2018

<sup>64</sup> Interview, Mulenga Mwape, Chitala Village, 17 March 2017

The alternative path was reflected more by women and poorer households who wanted the investor to exit Chembe and give them back their land. This is because women work the land more and are major providers of food and income to the family. There is a corpus of literature that shows that women in Africa work the land more than men. Narrow models based on monetary compensation disadvantaged women because in most cases men controlled the money and women lost their fields and wider livelihoods. Therefore, it was not surprising that women valued a piece of land more than men. To illustrate this, Irene Mwape said, 'I prefer the investor to go back and give us back our land because our lifestyle is now different than in the past'.<sup>65</sup> Albina Chilufya said, 'since the investor has violated the agreement, I do not think they can continue, I think they can pack and go'.<sup>66</sup> Beatrice Mwale, another woman who lost her land, was of the same opinion, 'my view is that this company must just give us our land back. They failed to honour the agreement so they must go back. I prefer to work on my land because it has more value'.<sup>67</sup>

The demand for investor exit was understandably meant to reclaim and protect the land, which was the primary livelihood capital for most households in Chembe. However, given the intersection of the state, traditional leaders and investor interests culminating into hierarchical coercive power relations, Mansa Sugar Limited was likely to stay for the foreseeable future. Hence the need to think beyond a 'chase them away' approach. The immediate priority is for the state to give the local farmers who lost their land some alternative land that will ensure they have secure livelihoods. That must be followed by a moratorium to stop further acquisition of customary land in Chembe whilst options for emancipatory investment models are being worked out. The future will mean that foreign investors and the state will support local farmers without taking away their land and land rights. As de Schutter (2011:262) argued, 'small-scale farmers can be helped by investments upstream and downstream in the production process itself, focusing on the provision of public goods that can improve productivity and access to markets, and on institutional innovations that can strengthen the position of small-scale farmers and allow them to obtain a better revenue for their produce'. Perhaps the state should also consider strengthening local production systems through non-exploitative outgrower schemes or contract farming. Of course, outgrower schemes have worked in some cases and failed in others across Africa, as illustrated by Scoones (2016). It will depend on the model, relations of investor, state and the outgrowers as well the political and economic context. This is not to say everyone will win because local processes of social differentiation will lead to winners and losers but this is a model with greater potential to support local livelihoods than the other two pathways above.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evidence generated from this study renews the academic debate, for it challenges critical assumptions about the nature, inclusivity and impact of land-based large-scale investments in rural Africa using a wider livelihoods approach. We argued that the land acquired by Mansa Sugar Limited was neither vacant nor economically unproductive. This land was living capital. What was misconstrued as a 'bush' by investors, was land meant for diverse smallholder production. We also showed that consent to have one's land taken was conditional in a situation where power relations were uneven. It was not a 'yes' or 'no' situation. Local farmers lost land, water resources, financial income, traditional medicinal plants and suffered perpetual psychological torture due to tenure uncertainty. All this disrupted the local farmers' day-to-day livelihoods. On the other hand, Mansa Sugar provided some materials for local schools and clinics. Jobs were created with some differential benefits and offered to the local

<sup>65</sup> Interview, Irene Mwape, Chembe, 15 March 2018

<sup>66</sup> Interview, Albina Chilufya, Saki village, 17 March 2018

<sup>67</sup> Interview, Beatrice Mwale, Chembe, 17 March 2017



community. However, the seasonal jobs were largely precarious and failed to sustain local livelihoods. Foreign investments that involve loss of land by local communities tend to have more disadvantages than benefits. The valuation of what is lost must not be narrow but include wider local livelihoods. Alternative models that support smallholder production for poverty reduction and development must therefore be pursued. These must transcend the narrow transitional path and regulated co-existence which largely undermine livelihoods of African rural farmers in Zambia.

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