

# Wildlife management and land reform in southeastern Zimbabwe: a compatible pairing or a contradiction in terms?

William Wolmer<sup>a,\*</sup>, Joseph Chaumba<sup>b</sup>, Ian Scoones<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Environment Group, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK*

<sup>b</sup> *Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X 17, 7535 Bellville, South Africa*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the melding of two discourses in southeastern Zimbabwe: land reform and wildlife management. The former seeks to redistribute large, ‘under-utilized’ landholdings to smallholders whilst the latter needs extensive land holdings to be viable. These two discourses are rooted in very different models of development. The land reform exercise emphasizes direct redistribution, equity and land for crops; whilst the wildlife management discourse tends to stress maximizing foreign exchange earnings, encouraging public–private partnerships and trickle down. Yet there has been a recent flurry of interest in the development of ‘wildlife models’ for land reform which would combine the two. This paper investigates whether the competing discourses about land for smallholders and wildlife-based land reform are compatible or can be successfully reconciled. It traces the ways they have come together in Zimbabwe’s southeast lowveld and examines the ‘science’ and politics underlying their melding. Finally it explores the potential implications for rural people’s livelihoods of this development. It concludes that land reform and wildlife management can be reconciled, but probably not in a particularly equitable way: it is more likely to provide an opening for an equitable land reform agenda to be usurped by local and non-local elites with wildlife interests.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The on-going land reform programme ought to take advantage of the economic and ecological attributes of wildlife production in parts of the country that are prone to drought and have fragile soils which cannot sustain crop production without massive investment in irrigation. Of the country’s natural regions, wildlife based land reforms can be

successfully implemented in Natural Region V whose crop production potential is generally poor (Ministry of Environment and Tourism, 2001, pp. 4–5).

This paper examines the melding of two ostensibly antagonistic discourses in southeastern Zimbabwe: land reform and wildlife management. Since 2000 Zimbabwe’s land reform initiatives have gained a high, and controversial, profile internationally. Land reform, in this context, has meant the compulsory acquisition of relatively large, privately owned ‘commercial farms’ and their redistribution to smallholders primarily for the purpose of dryland cropping. The speed and number of ‘fast track’ resettlement initiatives have been particularly marked on the large ranches of the southeast lowveld. In this part of the country there has also, in recent years, been a movement towards commercial wildlife management in both the commercial and smallholder sectors.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [w.wolmer@ids.ac.uk](mailto:w.wolmer@ids.ac.uk) (W. Wolmer).

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The former seeks to redistribute large, ‘under-utilized’ landholdings whilst the latter needs extensive land holdings (even by the standards of commercial agriculture) to be viable. These two discourses are rooted in very different, even opposing, models of development. The land reform exercise emphasizes direct redistribution, equity and land for crops; whilst the wildlife management discourse in southern Africa tends to stress the neo-liberal goals of maximizing foreign exchange earnings, encouraging public–private partnerships and trickle down.<sup>2</sup> Given this divergence it is at first glance rather surprising that there has been a recent flurry of interest by government ministries, NGOs and the private sector in the development of ‘wildlife models’ for land reform or ‘conservation based land reform’ which would meld the two, as outlined in the quote above. The attempt to incorporate inherently extensive wildlife management into resettlement schemes runs directly counter to the rhetoric and technical biases of land reform programmes in Zimbabwe. It is also a significant departure in various respects from Zimbabwe’s experiences of community-based wildlife management to date.

This paper investigates whether the competing discourses about land for smallholders and wildlife-based land reform are compatible or can be successfully reconciled. It traces the ways they have come together in Zimbabwe’s southeast lowveld and examines the ‘science’ and politics underlying their melding. Finally it explores the potential implications for rural people’s livelihoods of this development.

## 2. Land reform, wildlife and politics

When one examines who stands to gain from advocating the new ‘wildlife-based land reform’ discourse it is not perhaps as surprising a development as it first appears. Its emergence can be clearly linked with the economic and political interests of the white dominated wildlife sector; politically connected new black landowners and entrepreneurs; various NGOs and the environmental lobby (with international funding); certain branches of government/party at national, provincial and district levels; as well as local actors. These positions and agendas will be elaborated in more detail but first it is necessary to flesh out the history of wildlife management in Zimbabwe’s southeast lowveld.

<sup>2</sup> A range of policy approaches have emerged in southern Africa—from community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) to community-private joint ventures—that seek to encourage the management of wildlife to take on more commercial forms—and in particular link private sector tourism and safari operations with community or local involvement, usually with an emphasis on ‘poor’ commercial investment (Ashley and Wolmer, 2003).

## 3. Wildlife management in the lowveld

### 3.1. Commercial wildlife management

On the commercial ranches of Zimbabwe’s southeast lowveld wildlife came to be conceived of as a potentially useful product in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> The presence of wildlife was previously considered detrimental to cattle ranching (as a reservoir for disease and competitor for scarce grazing). However game meat and hide production was pioneered on two of the ranches and briefly boomed before stagnating due to difficulties in marketing, stringent veterinary and food-hygiene controls and pressure from a politically powerful cattle lobby. But the emergence of an international safari hunting industry and legislative change devolving ‘appropriate authority’ over wildlife to land owners in the 1970s and, more recently, the growth in live game sales and tourism; together with a relative decline in beef prices, severe drought in the early 1990s and the collapse of the Zimbabwe dollar and the broader shift to export-oriented agriculture, have massively increased the popularity of game ranching (see Bond and Manyana, 2002; Moyo, 2000).

These shifts have been underpinned, and encouraged by, Zimbabwe-based research (much of which was conducted in the lowveld). In the 1960s some influential studies on game meat production were conducted by Fulbright scholars (Dasmann and Mossman, 1961). This was followed, in the 1980s and 1990s, by a number of upbeat and highly favourable comparisons of the wildlife industry’s prospects with those of beef production (Child, 1988; Jansen et al., 1992; Taylor and Walker, 1978). These researchers were drawn together in a research programme coordinated by Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) on ‘multispecies systems of animal production’. The central hypothesis was that multispecies systems provide greater financial returns per unit area, per unit of ungulate live mass, and per unit of investment than extensive single-species domestic livestock systems. Also that they are more ecologically resilient and stable, permit greater diversity, and are more sustainable; and that this is true under both private and communal ownership of land and wildlife resources (Cumming, 1988).

By 1994 wildlife ranching was one of the fastest growing new uses of commercial farming land in Zimbabwe generally with 20.7% of white commercial farms under some sort of wildlife utilisation (Hill, 1994). A further development since the late 1980s is the emergence of wildlife ‘conservancies’. These are amalgamations of privately owned ranches surrounded by veterinary fencing and with internal fencing removed.

<sup>3</sup> The following section draws on Child (1988) and Wolmer (2001) who provide more detail on the history of game ranching in the lowveld.

The largest and best-known conservancy is located in the southeast lowveld and was initially established as part of a black rhino conservation scheme. This, the Save Valley Conservancy, is comprised of 24 properties and with a total area of 3387 km<sup>2</sup> it has become the largest private wildlife reserve in Africa (du Toit, 1998). Both economic and ecological arguments have been made to justify commercial wildlife utilisation on large properties. These derive, in large part, from the work of the researchers mentioned above. The economic arguments centre on the foreign exchange raising potential of charismatic fauna through hunting and ecotourism opportunities.<sup>4</sup> The main ecological arguments were that the niche separation of browser and grazer wildlife enabled a higher carrying capacity and was hence more productive, and that wildlife species were evolutionarily adapted to dryland environments and thus more resilient in times of drought. The large size of the conservancies is thus justified on the basis of economies of scale and in terms of sustainable carrying capacities—commercially managed wildlife has to be done on a land extensive basis to be viable. As Suzuki (2001, p. 618) points out, in the process of establishing conservancies farmers and ranchers have also reinvented themselves as ‘long-standing and dedicated conservationists, stewarding the country’s faunal resources with beneficent knowledge and expertise’ for the good of the nation. These have been oft-deployed arguments for staving off land reform and resettlement on these properties: extensive commercial wildlife management is the most economically and ecologically sustainable and productive and morally correct landuse (Moyo, 2000).

As this last point indicates, the economic, technical and moral arguments for game ranching shroud a highly politicized arena. Game ranching in general, and the lowveld conservancies in particular, have always been extremely politically controversial. The highly visible disparities between relatively ‘empty’ ranches, stocked at low levels with ‘wild’ animals separated by electric fences from overpopulated, poor communal areas are an obvious source of conflict and have been described as representing Zimbabwe’s ‘land question’ in microcosm (Wolmer, submitted for publication; see also Saruchera, 2001; Wels, 2000). The conservancies were a unilateral undertaking on the part of the member ranchers and have no statutory definition in law. There has been a great deal of suspicion of their motives by many in government and at best this means the conservancies have been regarded as ‘white self-indulgence’ and at

worst as attempts by large-scale farmers to ‘hide and privatize wildlife’,<sup>5</sup> exploiting a national heritage and challenging the state’s control over wildlife. The Minister of Environment and Tourism pledged to curb the ‘unplanned and uncontrolled mushrooming’ of private conservancies in areas suited to subsistence farming and commercial agriculture in order to prevent them ‘threatening food security’<sup>6</sup> and was at pains to emphasize that:

Government will not allow the privatization of wildlife resources through the back door, that is, through unplanned and uncontrolled private conservancies. We are fully aware of such Machiavelian plots to privatize wildlife resources from Kenya to South Africa.<sup>7</sup>

The conservancies and better-endowed game ranches have responded with ‘community trust’ and ‘neighbour outreach schemes’ in an attempt to gain a degree of political and social legitimacy. The most sophisticated example of this was the Save Valley Conservancy’s wildlife endowment scheme;<sup>8</sup> but more common are acts of good-will between game ranches and neighbouring communities such as borehole drilling, school fee handouts and permitting access to sacred areas.

However the Save Valley Conservancy’s high profile attempts at neighbour outreach have been stridently criticized for proffering ‘cosmetic changes that largely maintained the status quo of domination by one racial group’ (Saruchera, 2001); and as strategic tokenism geared more towards attracting donor-funding (Wels, 2000). Indeed many of the outreach schemes could be read as attempts at converting communal areas to adjuncts to the wildlife and tourism cause by, for example, establishing ‘cultural villages’. As a Councillor for one of the wards bordering Save Valley Conservancy put it to us: ‘conservancy outreach was too small, too late, then land reform came’ (see also Wolmer, submitted for publication).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> According to Bond (2001) the value of sport-hunting in Zimbabwe increased from US\$2 million to US\$12 million per annum between 1984 and 1993, and the gross number of visitors to Zimbabwe—largely attracted to ‘nature based’ activities—increased by 325% from 1980 to 1990 (although real visitor expenditure per capita declined over the same period).

<sup>5</sup> Chiredzi Rural District Council—Master Plan 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Minister for Environment and Tourism (Chen Chimutengwende) in *Hansard*, 14/2/1996, 3967–3971.

<sup>7</sup> Address to staff seminar on private conservancies and game ranches and the conditions for their establishment and growth, Mushingi Training Centre, Masvingo 3–6 October 1995; quoted by Cunliffe (1993). This is examined in greater detail in Wolmer (submitted for publication).

<sup>8</sup> This scheme was intended to use donor funding to purchase wildlife which would be released within the conservancy. The conservancy would then be obliged to buy their progeny each year at the prevailing market rate. This money could then be used to finance community projects (du Toit, 1998; Metcalfe, 1996; Wels, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Councillor, Chiredzi District 20/11/2001.

### 3.2. *Campfire: wildlife management as development strategy*

In parallel to the politically controversial development of game ranching on the commercial farms of Zimbabwe's lowveld there have been attempts by the state to disburse wildlife revenue and devolve authority to local communities in the communal areas through the world-renowned Campfire scheme (Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources). The central tenet of this scheme is that in contrast to colonial-style 'fortress conservation' there should be no conflict between the economic survival of agricultural communities and foraging needs of wildlife—rather they should complement each other (Alexander and McGregor, 2000; Hulme and Murphree, 2001; Logan and Mosely, 2001). Communities neighbouring protected areas should receive direct benefits from them and have some say in wildlife management and use if conservation policies are to be effective.

Campfire achieved iconic status in southern Africa and internationally—rapidly becoming the most famous exemplar of CBNRM (Community Based Natural Resource Management) and establishing a powerful constituency of researchers and practitioners. It received generous donor support and generated countless workshops, conferences and publications. By 1990 even President Mugabe was to say 'it is proposed to make wildlife an agricultural option to complement crop production and stock raising. Wildlife management will be rationalized to bring economic benefits to the rural communities that engage in it' (cited in Cumming, 1990). This expansion in the realm of wildlife utilisation from the commercial to the communal realm was justified in similar economic and ecological terms to those used by the advocates for game ranching. Hunting and game viewing with the bonus of cultural tourism were promoted as the most lucrative landuses in Zimbabwe's arid regions where dryland cropping was perceived to be a waste of time.

These promoters of wildlife management have tended to couch their arguments in the language of agricultural economics, emphasizing 'financial and economic profitability' and 'Africa's comparative advantage' with a focus on returns on land area. However this mode of analysis tends to be apolitical and ahistorical and, as we shall see, leaves many questions unanswered. And in developing models from studies on commercial ranches which presume a beef production objective in cattle ownership (as revealed by a stated focus on multispecies systems of *animal production*) and exporting them to the smallholder sector they are comparing unlike with unlike. These studies are often interpreted to mean that not only is wildlife a preferable landuse option in certain regions, but that it is the only possible sensible option. For example:

Its wildlife only in the lowveld... studies have proved it. That land is of no use to anyone except wildlife... Get the cattle out and bring the buffalo in—it's simple.<sup>10</sup>

Yet notwithstanding frequent drought and distance from markets, small-scale agriculture and livestock production cannot be written off so glibly in the communal areas of the lowveld. Livestock, in Zimbabwe's smallholder sector, are valued first and foremost for their supply of inputs to arable production rather than for beef production (Barrett, 1991; Scoones, 1992), in the lowveld it is their role as providers of draught power for ploughing fields that is particularly valued (Wolmer et al., 2002). Alongside labour migration and remittance income cropping and livestock are vitally important to people's diverse, complex livelihoods.

In this context what, then, has been the experience of community wildlife management in recent years in Zimbabwe's lowveld? Does it offer a viable alternative or even add-on to other livelihood activities? Wards 4 and 5 of Sangwe communal area in Chiredzi District bordering Gonarezhou National Park, for example, have Campfire committees and school blocks, clinics, grinding mills, small dams and shops have been built with the proceeds and committee members receive cash dividends. However the scheme's reputation in Chiredzi has been tarnished by corruption scandals (in 1999, for example, the CEO of a bankrupt Chiredzi Rural District Council plundered the banked Campfire receipts to pay the salaries of angry striking council workers); and a lack of real devolvement of power—communities are not involved in the sale of hunting rights and are suspicious of misappropriation by the council.

Many people in the area view Campfire merely as another means of enforcing unpopular natural resource conservation legislation. Resource monitors on each village committee are meant to inform the police about anyone they discover cutting trees, cultivating streambanks, causing veld fires or poisoning watercourses (this is a means of fishing). The fact that the local police station is located in Ward 5, bordering the national park but far from any township, lends resonance to people's suspicion that protection of animals from poaching is held to be a higher priority than protection of people from crime. In particular there are bitter complaints about damage to property, fields and livestock caused by marauding elephants and carnivores. Four people have been killed by elephants in these wards since 1996—including children herding cattle. There have been long time lags in dealing with compensation claims and compensation that has been paid is regarded as

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Commercial Farmers' Union representatives, Masvingo 23/11/2001.

insufficient. In this context it remains more lucrative to poach than wait for meagre cash dividends.<sup>11</sup> In some cases poaching can be read as, in part, a political demonstration. One interviewee—a self-confessed poacher—summed up his frustrations thus:

Campfire money is being looted and little finds its way back to the community. If it does, it will not be adequate to meet my family's daily requirements and other necessities. The whole process reduces me to the status of a beggar. I am a man! Campfire is more about the national park than us. We used to hunt and eat meat often, but now there are too many restrictions yet our crops are being severely damaged by problem animals every year and the compensation is too little and untimely.<sup>12</sup>

Ostensibly the Campfire programme has allowed multiple resource use in the communal areas of the lowveld (wildlife, livestock and crops) and yet its driving philosophy appears to be a conservation one not a development one. Campfire areas are a de facto buffer zone aimed at taking the strain off protected areas. Further, as some commentators have observed Campfire is an explicitly non-redistributive development model which, notwithstanding its participatory rhetoric, legitimizes the status quo with regard to land and resource ownership and diverts legitimate demands for land reform in the direction of secondary rights to natural resources (Hughes, 2001; Katerere, 2002; Murombedzi, 2003). Indeed it could even be argued to make way for the expansion of commercial wildlife interests into communal areas in the guise of public–private partnership (Hughes, 2001). As Katerere (2002, p. 7) puts it:

In essence by focusing on increasing flows of money under the guise of CBNRM partnerships, Campfire has not contributed to transforming the rural economy. Instead, it has successfully given legitimacy to minority interests that have extended their tourist

investments into the very communal areas. In short, those with land have been able to increase their access to land and wildlife resources... [this has] only worsened the ever-widening income disparity between the poorer majority farmers and the rich.

Attempting to square the circle and combine Campfire with redistributive land reform in calls for 'wildlife-based land reform' would appear, in this reading, to be a rather surprising development.

#### 4. Farm invasions and fast-track resettlement post-2000

At Independence in 1980 Zimbabwe inherited a highly skewed land distribution, with the majority black farming population being confined to the former 'reserves' (later Tribal Trust Lands, then communal areas), most of which—like Sangwe—were located in the marginal agroecological zones. The 'willing seller, willing buyer' formula enshrined in the new constitution ensured that land transfer would have to be on the basis of full compensation in foreign exchange and effectively ruled out significant land redistribution (Palmer, 2000). This was only abandoned in 1992 and the government's new powers of compulsory land acquisition at controlled prices were not used until 1997 when a swathe of farms were designated for acquisition in an attempt to answer the clamour for land reform and shore up the waning popularity of ZANU(PF)—the former liberation movement party. This rapidly became a complex and bureaucratic process and most of the designations were successfully challenged in court.

2000 heralded a very dramatic and very public shift in the political register in Zimbabwe. Soon after ZANU(PF) suffered an unprecedented popular defeat in a constitutional referendum a wave of farm occupations spearheaded by members of the War Veterans Association—and tacitly supported by government—occurred across the country. This was accompanied by a general increase in political violence and a much proclaimed 'collapse in the rule of law' as the campaigns for the June 2000 parliamentary and March 2002 presidential elections segued into each other and the farm occupations transmuted into an official 'fast track' land reform programme (see Chaumba et al., forthcoming(a),(b)).

Almost all the game ranches of the lowveld were occupied in varying degrees by war veterans including portions of the conservancies, as was a section of Gonarezhou National Park (see below). As widespread poaching and deforestation was brought to the attention of the world's media it appeared that this was an irrevocable attack on the 'wildlife management' model of development on commercial and communal land. Fences were torn down and the wire converted to snares,

<sup>11</sup> The revenue earned by district councils leasing safari hunting and tourism rights to the private sector is allocated to wildlife management activities (anti-poaching enforcement, problem animal control etc.), to district council levies and with a recommended minimum of 50% going to the 'wildlife producer' wards themselves. This in turn is divided between ward-level management costs, ward projects (such as grinding mills) and sometimes a contribution to traditional leaders, with the remainder divided once more between all the households in the producer wards. Bond (2001) shows that the median benefit per household from wildlife dividends nationwide (in wards where Campfire is operating) declined from US\$19.40 in 1989 to US\$4.49 in 1996. In most wards the financial benefit per household from wildlife constituted less than 10% of that derived from agricultural production. He concludes that in most wards wildlife is not financially viable at the household level.

<sup>12</sup> Interview from an early phase of this work (see Mombeshora et al., 2001).

cattle driven into the game areas leading to fears of veterinary disease outbreak, trees cut down for sale of firewood, fields cleared and huts built.<sup>13</sup>

Very broadly speaking there were three perspectives on the land occupations in the lowveld conservancies and game ranches. The first might be termed the 'official' ZANU(PF) and war veteran party line. Their campaigning slogan for the elections was that 'the economy is land, and land is economy'. A populist moral discourse about the return of 'African soil' has underpinned the designation and seizure of white-owned commercial farms and redistribution to black smallholders primarily for the purpose of dryland cropping. Usually bound up in this discourse is an assumption that land is most productively and equitably used for farming. There is, as we have seen, a suspicion of wildlife ranching which is held to be a ploy by whites to forestall land acquisition and justifying multiple and extensive land holdings. As one councillor put it:

We are aware this [land reform programme] is politically motivated but the political philosophy is trying to end shortage of land and create more space to locals who are overcrowded... White men did not import wild animals from Europe.<sup>14</sup>

This bias against wildlife and towards agriculture and food security is rooted in the historical technical biases of landuse planning in Zimbabwe.<sup>15</sup>

A second broad perspective is that of the commercial farming sector and wildlife industry which has been largely shared by Zimbabwe's erstwhile donors and the opposition party. The farm invasions have been seen as an economic, ecological, moral and aesthetic outrage. The destruction of game has gained even more media attention than the destruction of tobacco by farm invaders. This has been expressed in very extreme terms as the quotes below indicate:

Huts are popping up like fever blisters as pristine areas are invaded.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, 'Poaching reaches critical levels in Save game parks' *Daily News* 27/8/2001; 'Invaders cause havoc in conservancies' *Zimbabwe Independent* 12/10/2001.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Councillor, Chiredzi District 21/3/2002.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the agricultural extension service (AREX, formally Agritex) uses a standard landuse planning approach developed from the 1930s across the country that has no explicit recognition of wildlife as a potential productive landuse. Similarly Zimbabwe's land suitability categorization of 'natural regions' defined primarily by rainfall and soil quality (Vincent and Thomas, 1961) indicates that the appropriate landuse for Region V (dryland zones, including the lowveld) is extensive cattle ranching, with no mention of wildlife.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Environmental consultant, Harare 15/11/2001.

Since February last year [2000], the once lush green Zimbabwean agricultural landscape has been transformed into a motley of mud huts, tree stumps and charred pastures as new settlers torch flora and fauna in a land preparation process resembling Russia's World War II 'scorched earth' military strategy against Hitler's Germany.<sup>17</sup>

Last season... there was a freak storm called Cyclone Eline that swept through the region, destroying everything in its wake. This time, another hurricane is sweeping through Mwenezi as thousands of war veterans and supporters of the governing ZANU(PF) party take over cattle and game ranches, felling trees at random and clearing huge tracts of land to grow maize, the Zimbabwean staple food which, unknown or ignored by the settlers, will never thrive in such a dry area.<sup>18</sup>

For their countless crimes against the environment and Zimbabwe surely the settlers have forfeited the right to ever own a piece of land. Whilst they continue to sell the wood from our precious trees the stretches of empty, desertified land grow like a cancer around their newly settled plots. With their fancy cars and trucks let them go back to their homes and plots in town and stop the rape of our countryside.<sup>19</sup>

The people in Save Valley Conservancy are not there for resettlement, only poaching.<sup>20</sup>

The settlements have been associated with rapid and unsustainable off-takes [of wildlife] threatening the viability and survival of many species including those that are protected. Ultimately this undermines an attractive means of livelihood (Ministry of Environment and Tourism, 2001, p. 2).

The narrative of destruction of a formerly pristine wilderness runs into trouble when one considers that the conservancies and game ranches are all former cattle ranches in which efforts have been made to manufacture wilderness by buying in game and modifying the landscape (Wolmer, submitted for publication; cf. Neumann, 1998).

A third perspective is provided by many of the settlers themselves. This again, masks an array of diverging viewpoints but broadly this encompasses a sense of reparation—of re-asserting territorial identity claims

<sup>17</sup> *Daily News* 14/12/2001.

<sup>18</sup> Invaders wreak havoc in once thriving game parks *Daily News* 16/8/2001.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from 'Patriot', Kadoma, *Zimbabwe Independent* 16/11/2001.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with safari industry representative, Harare 28/11/2001.

by returning to ‘our land’ and ‘our animals’ in either a general or a specific sense; and escaping land shortage:

Whites gave us the name poacher because we used to stay with animals and hunted them at will. Now when they are talking about conservancies—what do they want to conserve when all these are our animals.<sup>21</sup>

We were overcrowded in the communal areas with less fertile soils—our children are finding it hard to get land—yet whites have these huge tracts of land... We fought during the liberation struggle for the sole purpose of land and this has taken so long... We will never forget the land where our forefathers were buried... There are sacred places in these large estates and white farmers do not give us enough time to do our rituals.<sup>22</sup>

Before we were poachers. Now we live here.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. The new dynamics

With Campfire discredited (in the eyes of some) as a win–win solution to rural development and conservation, and fast track resettlement and land claims potentially causing a major contraction in wildlife areas, what now for wildlife management as a landuse strategy in Zimbabwe’s lowveld? Despite these developments the wildlife management lobby is stronger than ever regionally and internationally. This is evident in the sudden enthusiasm in southern Africa for states to enter into Transborder Natural Resource Management (TBNRM) agreements, including the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park which incorporates Gonarezhou National Park. These derive their impetus from a complex mix of economic, political and symbolic criteria (Wolmer, 2003) but essentially provide a potential financial incentive to states and the private sector to bring more land into the conservation estate.

After the March 2002 Presidential elections this was accompanied by a discursive shift on behalf of some politicians, with the Minister of Environment and Tourism talking up the Zimbabwean safari industry at the Safari Club International convention in Las Vegas and an increasingly pro-wildlife/hunting and anti-poaching line being taken in the state-owned media.<sup>24</sup> In parallel, notwithstanding the massive rise in poaching

and conversion of invaded and fast-tracked game ranches to arable, there is—as we described at the beginning of this paper—an emerging discourse on ‘wildlife models’ for land reform. This has included the Ministry of Environment talking of implementing a ‘Campfire approach’ on resettlement areas (as the quote at the beginning of this paper indicates) and the UNDP’s interim report on the fast track land reform process suggesting that:

... any resettlement plan should ensure the preservation of adequate refuge areas for Zimbabwe’s rich natural flora and fauna. It is suggested that improvements of environmental policy should include encouraging new settlers to engage in various natural-resource enterprises, including ecotourism (UNDP, 2001, p. 50).

WWF are even more explicit—arguing for a ‘wildlife-based model for affirmative action and community participation that will enhance Zimbabwe’s international conservation image and attract donor support’ as well as constituting a ‘complementary approach to land reform’ (WWF-SARPO, 2001, p. 1).

However it is very unclear as to what form such models would take in practice and the landuse planners implementing the fast-track resettlement programme have no expertise in this area and very few in the wildlife sector have experience of planning for land reform. As one resettlement planning officer put it:

There is no process for the inclusion of wildlife management in landuse plans. It is not set up to include that.<sup>25</sup>

But in practice, on the ground in the southeast lowveld, there are examples of ongoing *ad hoc* negotiations over land and wildlife management in the lowveld. Game ranchers, conservancies, safari companies, new settlers and state actors (from national parks staff, to agricultural extensionists to the Provincial Governor) have made trade-offs and accommodations and done back-stage deals. In practice these new modes of articulating wildlife management and land redistribution have outstripped the incipient models for wildlife-based land reform and rendered the neat community based natural resource management models of the 1980s inappropriate or irrelevant. There is no formal policy and legal framework for the management of wildlife outside of protected areas in Zimbabwe (Katerere, 2002) and, as we have seen, even the conservancies lack statutory definition. This, instead, is a confused and ambiguous situation where many actors are deploying a complex

<sup>21</sup> Interview with settler, Fair Range Ranch 10/12/2001.

<sup>22</sup> Discussion with settlers, Fair Range Ranch 9/11/2001.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with settler, Gonarezhou National Park 19/11/2001.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, ‘Local conservation programmes lauded’ *The Herald* 15/4/2002; ‘Troops dispatched to curb poaching’ *The Herald* 29/4/2002.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Agritex officer, Harare 14/11/2001.

and sometimes contradictory set of narratives. This ambiguity brings opportunities and constraints to these actors. We will now explore two of these *ad hoc* initiatives in more detail.

## 6. The Save Valley Conservancy land offer

The occupations of properties in the Save Valley Conservancy (Fig. 1) and subsequent poaching gained a great deal of national and international media exposure of the emotive ‘Zimbabwe’s Killing Fields’ variety of moral outrage (and see above). In a number of key hotspots, since February 2000, there have been numerous movements into the conservancy by war veterans, communities with historical land claims and landless peasants. Game scouts were attacked, fields were pegged, fences removed, cattle driven in, and poaching, burning, removals of firewood and thatching grass intensively carried out by local communities and opportunist entrepreneurs. There were increasingly violent stand-offs between game guards and war veterans<sup>26</sup> and escalating poaching and, by mid-June 2000, ‘no-go’ areas had been established (Wolmer, submitted for publication).

This has prompted the conservancy to go beyond the much derided wildlife endowment offer to surrounding communities and to consider the obvious alternative: formally offering communities land inside the conservancy fence on the condition that much of the land remains under wildlife utilisation. This would mean the creation of a ‘Campfire-style’ concession area where safari hunting and tourism revenues accrue to the local community as the concession holder. However this arrangement is unlike Campfire in one crucial respect: it requires redistribution of land—albeit with strings attached to the way that land may be utilized. As such it has more in common with the emerging South African model of ‘contractual national parks’ resulting from land restitution claims on protected areas. The best known example is that of the Makuleke community who have agreed to maintain ancestral land in Kruger National Park that has been returned to them as a wildlife management area (see Reid, 2001; Steenkamp, 2001).

The Save Valley Conservancy has offered up three contiguous properties in the southwest of the conservancy on which a land claim exists for such a negotiated resettlement.<sup>27</sup> It is proposed to divide these properties

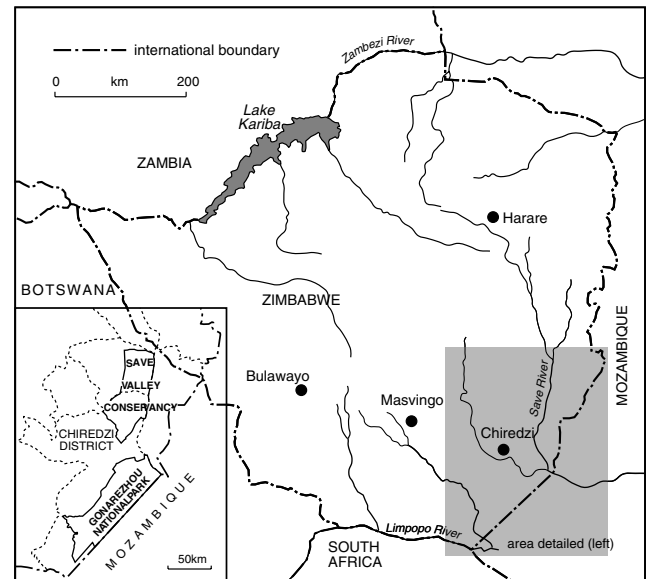


Fig. 1. The Save Valley Conservancy and Gonarezhou National Park, southeastern Zimbabwe.

north-south along the line of an old veterinary fence. On the west of the fence resettlement would be based on the standard smallholder agricultural model whilst the land to the east (approximately three-quarters of the area) would constitute a wildlife concession area for the community for hunting and tourism enterprises. In parallel the conservancy has talked up the opportunities for indigenisation—or buy-in by black entrepreneurs—as safari concessionaires on the community land or private landowners in their own right (WWF-SARPO, 2001); and income generating schemes such as craft production and cultural tourism in the communal and resettlement areas outside the wildlife zone.

Since the farm invasions began, the power dynamics of negotiations between the conservancy landowners and the government and local authorities have shifted considerably. Whereas previously the conservancy’s outreach programmes were pitched as exercises in good neighbourliness and were mainly an attempt to ward off poaching and resource conflicts, the new land offers are a last ditch attempt to bargain for the very survival of the conservancy as an entity and shore up the threatened commercial interests of the landowners. These landowners now recognize the need for change whilst hoping this can remain largely symbolic. As one broker to the potential deal put it: ‘The Campfire-type deal helps dilute the whites-only image of the conservancy.’<sup>28</sup>

Encouraging wildlife utilisation in adjacent (old and new) resettlement areas (as well as in the communal areas) serves another strategic purpose for the Save Valley Conservancy and other game ranches in the vi-

<sup>26</sup> ‘Farm guards shoot group of occupiers’ *The Herald* 15/2/2001.

<sup>27</sup> The land claim derives from former ranch workers’ families who had received land before the establishment of the conservancy and were displaced as ranching operations expanded but have never been fully assimilated into the neighbouring communal area (WWF-SARPO, 2001). In contrast to other land claims in Save Valley Conservancy these are not people who lived in the area before the ranches existed and want access to ancestral rainmaking shrines.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with safari industry representative, Harare 14/2/2001.



cinity of Chiredzi. Now that Gonarezhou National Park is ostensibly part of a tri-national transfrontier protected area there are perceived economic and political benefits to be had from establishing ‘connectivity’ with the park. Symbolic connectivity or ‘ecological integrity’ could be achieved if portions of the resettlement and communal areas splitting the conservancies and game ranches and the park were turned over to wildlife utilisation. This would enable the local wildlife industry to market itself as part of Africa’s biggest protected area and also, crucially, they would have a ‘buy-in’ to an international conservation agreement. This could be a valuable argument against designation for resettlement or for the eviction of farm invaders (Wolmer, 2003).

However, to the frustration of the wildlife industry and confusion of the settlers on the conservancy properties, the government has been very inconsistent in its position on land reform in the conservancy generally and on the proposed land deal specifically. Different politicians, including ministers, Vice Presidents, the Provincial Governor, MPs and councillors have variously advocated everything from further invasions and the complete poaching out of wildlife—to pulling out entirely. With such a range of actors trying to make political capital from the situation, and in some cases an eye to potential enrichment, this confusion is hardly surprising. As well as the politicians, certain opportunists have been able to benefit from the confusion. For example a black safari entrepreneur has been able to use his political influence to become the go-between for the white ranchers and government; and a war veteran has established a security company employing youth brigade militants—paid by the landowners—to guard against poaching.

Whilst, despite blowing hot and cold, the various arms of government appear to be moving towards accepting a wildlife-based land reform model in the Save Valley Conservancy,<sup>29</sup> many in the very communities this is meant to benefit remain unconvinced. The ethnically Ndaud Gudo people in Ward 1 of Sangwe communal area, for example, have ancestral burial sites and ritual pools and conducted an annual fishing festival on what is currently Levanga Ranch. Before 1986 the Levanga area was classified as State Land to which the Gudo people had relatively free access in order to visit their ancestral shrines, hunt, fish or graze their cattle. Since the ranch was bought in 1986 there have been a long run of conflicts over access to ritual sites for traditional ceremonies and to natural resources—particularly fish. The Gudo people’s position hardened from a desire to negotiate access to certain pieces of land to an outright land claim, particularly when a respected headman caught poaching by the ranch owner was publicly beaten about the head with a fish. This anta-

gonism has been made manifest in acts of resistance such as the starting of veld fires, fence-cutting, thefts of sugar cane, the burning of a ‘traditional village’ and now the massive-scale poaching accompanying the farm invasions (Wels, 2000; Wolmer, 2001, submitted for publication).<sup>30</sup> As Chief Gudo put it:

The relationship between us and the owners is bad. We do not even know them, they have their separate lives and we have our own. We used to have our sacred pool... where we used to carry out our rainmaking ceremonies... It is a place where we bury our chiefs. Now this is no more... But when they bury me, they will bury me there because that’s where my father lies. Also when I want meat, I will go there because I cannot always graze!<sup>31</sup>

The point is that it is particular pieces of land on which historical claims exist that are coveted. Although no wildlife-based land reform scenario has yet been offered to the Gudo people it is highly unlikely, given their recent experiences, that such a scheme for land restitution with ‘strings-attached’ would be satisfactory to them. They want direct access to natural resources and sacred areas rather than in absentia management via a joint venture company.

## 7. The Gonarezhou National Park land claim

A similar, but relatively less publicized, land occupation has occurred on another boundary of Sangwe communal area. This one is of the northwestern portion of Gonarezhou National Park and has also been accompanied by talk of wildlife-based land reform (see Fig. 1). This is different from the Save Valley Conservancy land offer in two important respects. The first is that the land being contested is state land rather than being a private landholding in white hands. The second is that the proposals for marrying community wildlife management with resettlement have come from some of the settlers themselves rather than being a reactive offer by the landowner.

The contested portion of land is the ancestral home of the Chitsa people who in common with other Shangaan groups settled in the late 19th century in the region of the Save-Runde confluence. In 1935 this area, the southern portion of the then Ndanga District, was proclaimed a game reserve. However in 1940 it was

<sup>30</sup> The SVC annual report for 1997–1998 reported that the ‘Gudo area has... been identified as an area posing the biggest threat to the SVC in terms of illegal hunting, veld fires, thefts etc.’ (Wels, 2000, p. 294). In fact farm invasions first took place here long before the current occupations in 1998.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Chief Gudo (Mombeshora et al., 2001).

<sup>29</sup> See Ministry of Environment and Tourism (2001).

subsequently deproclaimed as a tsetse fly control hunting programme was initiated along the Save and Runde Rivers. In 1950 it was again designated as a game reserve, only to be deproclaimed once more to accommodate further tsetse hunting operations (Wolmer, 2001). During these tsetse fly control operations large game was shot out and large trees bulldozed and roads built by the tsetse fly control teams. In 1962 the Chitsa people were evicted from the area on the understanding that they would be allowed to return after tsetse control was completed and settled in Sangwe communal area, bordering the park. This portion of 'State Land' was subsequently leased to Lone Star Ranch as cattle grazing land. Boreholes were sunk during this period. During the 1970s the area was in the thick of the liberation war and the local population was moved into 'protected villages' in Sangwe communal area. In 1975 Gonarezhou National Park was formally gazetted and the former tsetse corridor or 'State Land' was controversially incorporated into it.

The Chitsa community deeply resented their eviction and the fact that Independence did not bring restitution of their ancestral land. During the 1980s and 1990s many continued to utilize this portion of the national park illicitly to poach wildlife and to drive their cattle in for valuable 'poach grazing'. In May 2000, after commercial farms in the area had been invaded, a group of settlers largely from the Chitsa community of Sangwe communal area, at the instigation of a local councillor and war veteran commander and with the support of Headman Chitsa, occupied the contested portion of 'State Land'.<sup>32</sup> This constituted a 20 km deep strip running along the north western end of the park. As on the farms in the area in the first instance this was a largely symbolic political demonstration involving relatively few people camped at the edge of the park in tents supplied by the army and an increased amount of 'poach grazing' (see Chaumba et al., forthcoming(a)). In a similar fashion to the Save Valley Conservancy the occupation was accompanied by large-scale poaching or hunting (depending on your perspective) and was explicitly described as the restitution of ancestral land:

We had a rainmaking ceremony to tell the ancestors we are back. The rains came the same day.<sup>33</sup>

The invasion came to be 'formalized' when landuse planners pegged the area in July 2001 as part of the 'fast-track' land reform process after getting the go ahead from the Provincial Governor (Chaumba et al., forth-

coming(a)). 10 new villages were laid out along an old track built by the tsetse fly control teams, each village had arable plots demarcated to the north and communal grazing areas established to the south. Fertile basalt soils and the relative ease of clearing fields due to the fact that elephants had already done a good job in that regard meant growing maize and cotton was an attractive prospect.

However as well as arable and grazing areas the settlers leaders—a ZANU(PF) councillor and war veteran base commanders—proposed the designation of an 8 km deep 'wildlife zone' beyond the grazing area. This could then constitute a new Campfire concession area where safari hunters would disburse hunting revenues to the populations of villages 1 to 10. The settlers' leaders even approached the government to get 'appropriate authority'—the legal right to exploit and sell the wildlife.<sup>34</sup> But the bulk of these settlers were from Wards 4 and 5 in Sangwe communal area who, as we have seen, have had at best ambivalent experiences of Campfire. Why then would they be so keen to sacrifice a large portion of their newly (if illegally) acquired resettlement area to a wildlife zone? The answer was revealed during the 2001–2002 planting season—the first in which crops were planted on the black soils of this portion of Gonarezhou. Herds of elephants not only destroyed the growing crops but also ripped down people's newly built huts. The wildlife zone was thus wanted as a buffer in which, it was hoped by the settlers, 'problem animals' could be destroyed or scared away by paying safari clients.<sup>35</sup> The settlers' primary concern was to continue to farm and graze livestock unhindered by elephants and other dangerous animals. Removal of elephants from this area was their main priority and any financial disbursement accruing from this merely a bonus.

This, however, is not the whole story. As well as the 10 villages and associated arable, livestock and wildlife zones a large adjoining portion of Gonarezhou known as 'Section 27' (also in the former veterinary corridor) has also been claimed for resettlement. 50 ha self-contained plots have been allocated to 56 people. These are all members of a relatively wealthy and politically well-connected local elite including, councillors, war veterans' leaders, army personnel, and senior policemen and National Parks staff. Yet none of these people have physically relocated to Section 27. The proposal, instead, is to operate it as a mini-conservancy: a further safari concession where revenues would be disbursed to the 56 landowners. This portion of land is strategically a very important one. It would form a corridor linking the rump Gonarezhou National Park to game ranches such

<sup>32</sup> The settlers were able to exploit the ambiguous status of this portion of the park. Even the Minister of Environment of Tourism appeared unaware that it was part of the national park. See: 'No people were resettled in game park, says Nhema' *Daily News* 7/13/2001.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with settlers, Gonarezhou National Park 20/11/2001.

<sup>34</sup> 'Gonarezhou settlers want to exploit wildlife' *Zimbabwe Independent* 9/11/2001.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with settler, Gonarezhou National Park, 19/11/2001.

as the Malilangwe Conservation Trust and the conservancies beyond. These 56 plot holders, similarly to the conservancy ranchers, envisage benefiting from buying-in to the transfrontier park scheme.

The state's position on these schemes is riven with ambiguities much as it is in the Save Valley Conservancy. Wildly conflicting messages have come from different politicians. The tenure of those with new plots in the park (and particularly the former—smallholder—group) is perceived as being markedly less secure than on private properties that have been carved up in the fast-track resettlement process with the risk that the government will decide to pull the plug on supporting the process and send in the army. But the uncertainty and confusion has again been a potentially lucrative ground for opportunists willing and able to exploit the situation, particularly the 56 new potential hunting concession owners.<sup>36</sup>

## 8. Conclusion: the livelihood implications of wildlife-based land reform

In essence wildlife is a potentially highly lucrative landuse option for wealthy elites (whether they be white or black) and offers very little financially to poor members of 'communities'. Wildlife management can only ever be extensive to be feasible which means it requires a lot of land. Even in Zimbabwe's lowveld this land is in demand for other uses. Wildlife does not combine well with other landuses—particularly those that involve the presence of people. Wildlife ranching employs less people than cattle ranching and the experience of revenue trickle down in the lowveld has to date been pretty miserable (dismissed by many as 'grinding mills and beer money'). A massive growth in tourism and hunting in the region would be necessary to create a revenue stream that would have a noticeable impact on livelihoods.

This is not to argue that cattle ranching for beef production is the answer in the new resettlement areas. Although this was the landuse which most studies of wildlife management in Zimbabwe have explicitly or implicitly posited as the alternative to game it is not an option in these areas. Commercial beef production also requires extensive landholdings. Cattle, as in the communal areas, are valued principally for their role in the agricultural production system—as providers of draught power for cultivation. Yet agriculture—in the absence of irrigation—is not an easy option either in a drought-prone region. But, particularly in a context of economic

meltdown, agriculture—alongside labour migration, remittance income and other diversified activities—will constitute a vital element of poor people's livelihoods in the new resettlement areas in southeast Zimbabwe and demands for smallholder irrigation schemes and restocking assistance will continue to rank highest in people's development priorities (Mombeshora et al., 2001; Wolmer et al., 2002).

Why, then, is 'wildlife-based land reform' being mooted at all, given the government's supposed commitment to equitable social transformation? As we have demonstrated it is bound up with the economic and political repositioning of the wildlife sector, various branches of government, NGOs, indigenous elites and local communities. To the existing (predominantly white) wildlife industry it is an attempt to safeguard dwindling assets and get state and community 'buy-in' to wildlife or to expand operations into new spaces. To indigenous elites (including local politicians, war veterans and civil servants) it is an opportunity to muscle in on a potentially lucrative industry under the twin flags of land reform and 'indigenisation'. To the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and conservation-oriented NGOs wildlife-based land reform is a potential means of bringing resettlement areas into their realm of expertise; and, should donors re-engage with Zimbabwe, this new development model could be used to attract funding. Finally to members of communities with land claims on private and state land the wildlife-based land reform discourse is a means by which the repossession of ancestral land can be justified in the language of community development (cf. Li, 1996). So can land reform and wildlife management be successfully reconciled? The answer is yes, but probably not in a particularly equitable way. It is more likely to provide business opportunities for local and non-local elites with wildlife interests than an impetus for broad-based rural development.

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<sup>36</sup> For more evidence of opportunistic exploitation of the situation in southeastern Zimbabwe by local political heavyweights and unscrupulous safari hunters see 'SA cashes in on Zim confusion' *Mail and Guardian* 2/5/2003.

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