Building Sustainable Peace and Prosperity through Women’s Land Tenure Security: A Zambian Case Study

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About the Author

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Executive Summary

Land security continues to be an understudied issue, despite the fact that conflicts over land have been part of human history since ancient times. Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, land redistribution and resettlement legacies continue to thwart efforts to build sustainable peace and security. While land insecurity stirs the potential for violent conflict and political upheaval, it also forces millions of people to live with daily insecurities. To this end, an even more neglected yet crucial issue related to land security is the inability of women to access land titling rights, to own land, and to secure their land interests across the developing world. Lack of understanding in this regard hampers informed decision-making, policy design, and program implementation at local, state and international levels.

While Zambians pride themselves on their country’s peaceful history, land insecurity in Zambia, as in many other societies, spurs the potential for violence. Zambia represents an interesting case study in this regard because unequal land-tenure security along gender lines also intertwines with broader issues of human security, stability, and peace. This report, based largely on field research, offers new and unique insight into the plight of rural Zambian women whose inadequate access to land rights intersects with poverty, environmental degradation, national food security, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, conflict susceptibility and the economic productive potential of the state. Zambia is one of the world’s poorest countries. It ranks #163 out of 186 countries on the Human Development Report, which uses indices ranging from maternal mortality rates to GDP per capita to measure and compare the overall development of states across the globe. Without land-tenure security, people generally, but the poor especially, cannot “recover from harmful, unpredictable events,” making them exceptionally vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. Because women grow about 90 percent of the food in Africa, their land-tenure security is a “key link in the chain from household food production to national food security.” In addition, when land rights are informally documented, the stigma of

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1 Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.
HIV/AIDS places women in a “precarious” situation—they often stand “accused of bringing the malady into the family,” making them vulnerable to losing everything upon their spouse’s death. Failure to understand these connections not only feminizes poverty in Zambia but also erodes Zambia’s potential productive capital. Although current Zambian land practices impact many dimensions of human security and essentially shut out more than 50 percent of the native population’s capacity to produce, there remains little appreciation for how women’s lack of land security contributes to state fragility.

To shed light on this issue, this paper lays out a range of key findings and proposed solutions.

**Key Findings:**

**Political**
- Zambians cannot simultaneously gain title and keep their land under the traditional authority.
- The Zambian state land-tenure system locks out the most marginalized.
- Oral organization of land cannot adequately defend people’s land-rights claims.

**Cultural**
- Male-dominated cultural tradition restricts Zambian women from being primary decision-makers in their own lives.
- Zambian women mainly access land through men.

**Economic**
- Land remains the most fundamental asset with which people can invest in their own economic development, as well as the macro-economic development of the state.
- Women represent the core of Zambia’s untapped potential for wealth generation and poverty reduction.

**Proposed Solutions/Best Practices:**
- Documentation holds the key.
- Buy-in from men is essential to secure women’s property rights. Non-governmental efforts aimed at sensitizing men, and working with men to sensitive other men, to understand how women’s land-tenure security improves the health of the family, community, and state prove successful in changing the cultural attitudes that engender women’s land insecurity.
- Both top-down and bottom-approaches are critical to securing women’s property rights. Some customary authorities safeguard women’s property rights through a customary documentation process akin to titling. Education-based efforts, targeted at vulnerable

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communities and men in particular, teach people about the importance of land-tenure security, specifically as it relates to women and the family unit.

The implications of this case study reach far beyond Zambia; the key findings offer best practices, lessons learned, and a mapping of roadblocks that have local and international relevance. By examining the literature on property, capitalism, and violent conflict, this study suggests that land-tenure security not only empowers women at the most localized level, but it also builds sustainable macro-economic development. Moreover, the study situates the experience of Zambian women’s ability to own land within the broader global human development context, looking towards the post-2015 development agenda. In doing so, this study evidences that omitting women’s land rights from international peace and security frameworks threatens the overall sustainability of these agendas, and argues that when systems empower women to own land, the state, and its people—not just women—win.

Poverty and lack of opportunity create the conditions that allow conflict to erupt and thrive.\(^7\) Thus, the international security and development fields need to examine more comprehensively the dynamic relationship between individual-level insecurities, especially for women, and state-level fragility. By examining the situation in Zambia and connecting those findings to current development and security literature, this study builds a bridge between women’s equitable and secure access to land, and sustainable prosperity and peace in Africa. In doing so, this study opens a new, gendered lens through which practitioners can assess and craft development policy, raises critical questions related to women, peace, and security, and calls for more research and analysis to better inform policymaking and practice.

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Introduction

Although the pursuit of land has generated violent conflict for centuries, there remains insufficient understanding about how to craft and implement policies that engender land security instead of land anxiety. Looking at Africa in particular, land redistribution and resettlement legacies continue to thwart efforts to build sustainable peace and security. Lacking land-tenure security, millions of people, poor women especially, face eviction, displacement, and economic disempowerment, all of which raise tension and spread poverty instead of prosperity. Within these countries, patriarchal tradition mixes with an impenetrable property system, perennially disempowering women. While these practices impact many dimensions of human security and essentially shut out more than 50 percent of the native population’s capacity to produce, there is little appreciation for how women’s lack of land security contributes to state fragility. By examining the situation in Zambia and connecting those findings to current development and security literature, this study builds a bridge between women’s equitable and secure access to land, and sustainable prosperity and peace in Africa, thereby shedding light on new dimensions within the women, peace, and security field, which demand far more research and analysis.

This paper begins by unpacking first-hand accounts collected in Zambia. This research shows how the interaction between Zambia’s state and customary governance structures lock out the most marginalized. In combination, legal blockades and patriarchal customs systematically disempower women, thereby compounding the vulnerabilities of these women and all who depend upon them. This study then details how women’s lack of land-tenure security impacts poverty, health, food security, and economic development, and argues that securing women’s property rights lays at the foundation of Zambia’s sustainable development. Next, this paper offers a series of proposed solutions and best practices for how to advance policies that secure Zambian women’s property rights. Directly following, this paper zooms out to examine the concept of land-tenure security within current academic debates relating to sustainable economic development and violent conflict. Finally, this study situates women’s land-tenure security into existing national and international frameworks for promoting global peace and security. In doing so, this paper elevates women’s land access and ownership as fundamental to human development and survival, and, therefore, essential for sustainable peacebuilding.
Methodology

This paper draws on both primary and secondary research to deliver its findings and proposed solutions. This research draws its key findings from primary research conducted in Zambia over the course of six weeks in the summer of 2013. During this time, the author conducted 20 oral interviews each for the duration of approximately 30-45 minutes. These interviews were conducted in Lusaka and Chongwe, and varied in terms of structure, although all involved conversation as opposed to written questionnaires. The author supplemented these interviews with site visits to the Ministry of Lands and various non-governmental and commercial entities involved in issues relating to land rights, women’s empowerment, child welfare, agricultural production, and financial services. The author used secondary research, itemized in the reference list at the end of this paper, to further understand the scope of academic literature and national and international policy frameworks surrounding issues central to women’s land-tenure security, state development and conflict.

Land Tenure in Africa

Nearly every Sub-Saharan African country must balance the competing governing interests of the colonial-derived “state system” and the indigenous “customary system.” Nowhere is this balancing act more apparent than in the land-tenure system. In many countries, the state land-tenure system recognizes individuals’ rights to land parcels through individual designations of freehold title, akin to Western-style ownership.8 The customary land-tenure system, by comparison, deals with layers of “overlapping” individual and communal interests that do not easily translate to “concepts of absolute individual ownership.”9 While contexts vary, the most secure form of land ownership across cultures is freehold title.10 Universally, title represents the formal documentation of one’s land interests; it protects against land grabs, allows an individual to convert his/her land into collateral for a loan, and gives an individual the security to invest in his/her land. As the policies intended to balance the competing interests of

10 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 1, 2013. The identity of this individual and this individual’s organization is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
the state and customary systems vary from state to state, so, too, do the levels of security that those policies provide.

**Land Insecurity in Zambia**

Zambians cannot simultaneously gain title *and* keep their land under the traditional authority. Within this system, chiefs hold the power to administer land for the benefit of their people, and, thus, have a vested interest in stopping people from titling their land, as titling diminishes the chiefs’ territorial power and control. Furthermore, the customary system does not have a designation or formal documentation process akin to titling that equally protects an individual’s land interests.\(^{11}\) Verbal agreements make it difficult for individuals, especially women, to support, defend, or prove their claims to the land. As foreign investors show increasing interest in grabbing/acquiring land, some chiefs stand accused of selling the people’s land to investors for their own personal benefit.\(^{12}\) This problem is reportedly growing.\(^{13}\) Moreover, land interests morph adjacent, once-friendly chiefdoms into contentious rivals over property.\(^{14}\) Exacerbating the problem, traditional land systems lack maps outlining where borders are and where chiefdoms end.\(^{15}\) The Zambia Land Alliance reports instances where hostilities between chiefdoms transform neighbors into enemies; people from one chiefdom can no longer enter the neighboring chiefdom due to hostilities.\(^{16}\)

As important, the Zambian state land-tenure system locks out the most marginalized. The road to title is cumbersome and expensive. Those who have the time and means to initiate the titling process can expect to wait years and pay thousands of dollars to secure a title deed. Every business day, people wait in line for hours at Zambia’s Ministry of Lands. Even with an appointment, the queue takes hours, days, years even.\(^{17}\) One Zambian indicated he began the titling process five years ago and has already paid $5,000USD, but expects to pay $6,000USD more before he can secure title to a property that he and his family have lived on for twelve


\(^{12}\) Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.

\(^{13}\) Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.

\(^{14}\) Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.

\(^{15}\) Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.

\(^{16}\) Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.

\(^{17}\) Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 9, 2013. The identity of this individual and this individual’s organization is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
These sums represent direct costs paid to the government and surveying offices, and do not reflect the time spent away from work or wealth left unearned over the last five years as a result of not being able to use the land as collateral and/or develop it accordingly. Locked out of the state’s land-tenure system with no customary alternative to secure one’s land interests, daily life in Zambia is riddled with land-related insecurities.

These insecurities engender tension between the state and its people. In June of 2013, for example, the Zambia National Service (ZNS is Zambia’s national army) shot and killed two individuals over a land dispute in Kampasa. The ZNS violently cleared the land because the government deemed these settlers illegal squatters on state land. Although these “squatters” lacked the proper documentation to support their claims, some media outlets reported the two victims and others had lived on this land for more than 25 years prior to the shooting. Another incident occurred at the beginning of August 2013, in Chongwe. Thirty households were instructed to vacate their land within seven days. One resident (age 59) reported he and his siblings were born on the property from which he was now being evicted. While land insecurity stirs the potential for violent conflict and political upheaval, it also forces the majority of Zambians to live with daily insecurities.

Zambia is one of the world’s poorest countries. It ranks #163 out of 186 countries on the Human Development Report, which uses indices ranging from maternal mortality rates to GDP per capita to measure and compare the overall development of states across the globe. Zambia suffers from a high unemployment rate, with 80 percent of Zambians earning “a dollar or less a day.” Because extreme poverty demands people live off the land to survive, the vast majority of Zambians believe “land is life.” This makes secure resource rights, particularly access to and

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18 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 9, 2013. The identity of this individual and this individual’s organization is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
19 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
25 Mildred Mpundu, “We Know No Other Home Than This: Land Disputes in Zambia,” Panos Features, 2006.
ownership of land, even more “vital” to sustain livelihoods. Without land-tenure security, people generally, but the poor especially, cannot “recover from harmful, unpredictable events,” making them exceptionally vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. In Africa, environmental degradation and the effects of climate change make these vulnerabilities even more pronounced. Where land-rights documentation only occurs informally, displacement becomes commonplace, further dismantling any semblance of security. With companies frequently seeking to develop occupied land in rural areas, “roughly a quarter or more” of rural Zambians “face near-landlessness,” and fears of land grabbing pervade society. Blocked from securing title, most Zambians find it virtually impossible to defend their ownership claims against those who are more powerful and wish to displace them.

Despite all these obstacles, land remains the most fundamental asset with which people can invest in their own economic development and build sustainable economic development for the state. Lack of land-tenure security inhibits individual-level growth. Many eager to develop their land cannot obtain the loans necessary to do so, while others hesitate to invest in their land for fear it will be stripped from them once development begins and the land increases in value. Secure property rights, however, would pay dividends. Commercially, land-tenure security mitigates risk for banks, gives people “the confidence to invest in their land and encourages its sound stewardship,” all of which serves to “improve food security and increase incomes.” Moreover, clearly documented land rights also create stability, which builds in-country development capacity. Multi-national corporations, large-scale developers, and agricultural companies need assurance in their chains of production. Especially in agricultural economies, more secure land tenure facilitates commercial relationships between corporate entities and

32 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 3, 2013. The identity of this individual and this individual’s organization is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
34 Interviews by Roslyn Warren in Chongwe, Zambia on July 16, 2013. The identities of these individuals are protected through non-disclosure agreements.
farmers, giving farmers the confidence and ability to invest, streamlining production, and reducing the risks associated with the working environment.\textsuperscript{36} Although land-tenure security is instrumental for building capacity at both the individual- and macro-economic levels, it remains largely unattainable for women.

**Women and Land Security in Zambia**

Tradition restricts Zambian women from being the primary decision-makers in many aspects of their lives, including but not limited to authority over their own bodies, all of which has deep implications for land ownership. Girls learn from a young age that their fathers, their uncles, and their brothers should control their lives, and this norm diminishes women’s capacity toward self-determination.\textsuperscript{37} For example, when girls reach puberty, elders teach them that being a good wife means submitting to their husband’s will.\textsuperscript{38} Some traditional coming-of-age practices teach girls how to please men sexually because sexual prowess is equated with being a good wife. This tutorial actually culminates with the girl performing sexual intercourse with a man as a demonstration of her understanding of what is expected of her as a wife, and a woman, signifying her submission to these cultural edicts.\textsuperscript{39} If this sexual act, performed as part of the tutorial, does not result in immediate pregnancy, the relationship often continues, resulting in pregnancy, early marriage, and partial or complete suspension of formal education.\textsuperscript{40} A recent article in Zambia’s *Saturday Post* entitled “Are Women Today’s Slaves?” encapsulates the problem, defining a woman “as a servant and a worker, for the satisfaction of the husband who behaves like her employer.”\textsuperscript{41} Seeing marriage as “the only option in life for her,” a woman’s “horizon for self-realization” rests with a man,\textsuperscript{42} all that she “owns” is vested in her husband because he is the traditional head of the household.\textsuperscript{43}

As a result, in both state and customary systems, Zambian women mainly access land through men. In the state land arena, despite Zambia’s National Gender Policy, which stipulates

\textsuperscript{36} Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 3, 2013. The identity of this individual and this individual’s organization is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.

\textsuperscript{37} Interview with Zambia National Women’s Lobby by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 4, 2013.

\textsuperscript{38} Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.

\textsuperscript{39} Interview with Zambia National Women’s Lobby by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 4, 2013.

\textsuperscript{40} Interview with Zambia National Women’s Lobby by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 4, 2013.


\textsuperscript{43} Interview with Zambia National Women’s Lobby by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 4, 2013.
that 30 percent of all state land be parceled to women, few women independently own land.\textsuperscript{44} The nature of their work (women predominantly work in the house, in the field, or sell in the market) precludes women from obtaining the same types of information as men.\textsuperscript{45} For example, land advertisements generally appear in newspapers, yet the nature of women’s work coupled with a literacy rate hovering just over 60 percent (and significantly lower in rural areas)\textsuperscript{46} means the common Zambian woman does not buy the newspaper.\textsuperscript{47} Accordingly, only men apply for these ownership opportunities.\textsuperscript{48}

Cultural traditions uphold “male dominated patriarchal structures,”\textsuperscript{49} further dictating women own and access land through their husbands.\textsuperscript{50} More than 90 percent of Zambians live on customary land.\textsuperscript{51} Because the average Zambian lifespan is short (estimates indicate anywhere between 14-20 percent of Zambians have AIDS),\textsuperscript{52} male household heads often die without a will.\textsuperscript{53} Whenever possible, customary authorities transfer land administration rights to a male relative, regardless of the deceased’s spouse’s property claim.\textsuperscript{54} As administrator of the estate, this man often keeps the property for himself.\textsuperscript{55} Also common, the deceased’s relatives “grab” the land from the widow, treating her as a “foreigner” on property she may have lived on for decades.\textsuperscript{56} In one instance, a widow refused to vacate her land after her husband died, and his family turned the property into a graveyard in an effort to chase her away.\textsuperscript{57} Generally speaking, for women to inherit property, men (whether chief, husband, uncle, or son) must bestow it upon

\textsuperscript{44} Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.
\textsuperscript{45} Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.
\textsuperscript{47} Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.
\textsuperscript{48} Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.
\textsuperscript{50} Interview with Zambia Land Alliance by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 5, 2013.
\textsuperscript{51} Interview with Justice for Widows and Orphans Project by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 17, 2013.
\textsuperscript{53} Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
\textsuperscript{54} Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
\textsuperscript{56} Interview with Zambia National Women’s Lobby by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 4, 2013.
\textsuperscript{57} Interview with Zambia National Women’s Lobby by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 4, 2013.
them. Among other things, these practices block a woman from accessing credit without her husband’s approval, and leave her and her children unprotected when her husband dies.

Women’s Land Security and State Development

While land insecurity “enslaves” women individually, it also financially, socially, and politically undermines families and communities. Poor women largely serve as family breadwinners, as they are primarily responsible for food production and management. Because women grow about 90 percent of the food in Africa, their land-tenure security is also a “key link in the chain from household food production to national food security.” Moreover, secure land rights and its corresponding empowerment “enhance” a woman’s “ability to negotiate safe sex” and make her “less vulnerable to engaging in transactional sex as a means of survival.”

Financial services data from Christian Enterprise Trust of Zambia (CETZAM), one of the country’s leading micro-financiers, contends that women’s empowerment “usually benefit[s] their families through improved nutrition, health, education, etc.” Instead, current practices dismantle the family unit. One UN study of Zambia reveals, “One third of widows lost access to family land when their husbands died.” Rather than going to school, children from these families must refocus their lives on survival. Under these conditions, not only do fewer children become productive members of society, but poverty also pushes these children out of the classroom and into the streets, where they engage in myriad vices, from prostitution to theft.

The Justice for Widows and Orphans Project reports girls as young as 13 years old turning to prostitution to sustain their livelihoods. These girls ultimately become street mothers. One

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58 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
59 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
60 Interview with Justice for Widows and Orphans Project by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 17, 2013.
64 Irene KB Mutalima, Microfinance and Gender Equality: Are We Getting There? www.sarpn.org, 2007, p. 4.
rural Zambian sees the crisis clearly: the state complains about street children, but land insecurity ultimately leaves many families with no other option.  

This feminization of poverty not only impacts women and their families, it also erodes Zambia’s potential productive capital. Despite Zambia’s resource wealth, “abundant water” supply, “ideal” agricultural climate, and “ample arable land,” 80 percent of Zambians “live in absolute poverty.” 79 With only 17 percent of its GDP dedicated to agriculture, 72 Zambia’s women make up the core of the state’s untapped potential for wealth generation. 73 According to the Zambia National Women’s Lobby, women comprise 73 percent of Zambia’s small-scale farmers. 74 Across Africa, women produce 90 percent of food 75 and process, store, and transport between 80-90 percent of it. 76 Additional UN data suggests female farmers produce 60-80 percent of food in developing countries globally. 77 Taken in aggregate, “Women worldwide account for two thirds of all working hours and produce half the food,” but they “earn just 10 percent of the world’s income and own less than 1 percent of the world’s property.” 78 Today, 70 percent of the “world’s poor are women.” 79 The result: the UN estimates that about “0.1 and 0.3 percent” of GDP is “lost” annually “from failure to ‘promote gender equality and empower women’.” 80

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69 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Chongwe, Zambia on July 16, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
71 Mildred Mpundu, “We Know No Other Home Than This: Land Disputes in Zambia,” Panos Features, 2006.
Secure land rights for women could feed families and nourish communities. Instead, African women overwhelmingly do not own the land they till. While some development experts view “landlessness” as the “best predictor of poverty and hunger in the world,” Zambia’s Central Statistical Office designates “female-headedness” as the number one factor in the perception among Zambians that land is not accessible to them. How can a nation spur sustainable economic development if those responsible for feeding the population, those poised to advance the state’s productive potential are systematically blocked from obtaining the foundational security they need to produce?

**Best Practices for Promoting Women’s Land Security**

Documentation holds the key. Oral organization of land cannot adequately defend women’s land-rights claims if and when the necessary time comes. Without written documentation, state and traditional authorities easily evade blame for evicting people, poor women in particular, for investment or development’s sake; it is easy to accuse individuals of “occupying” land “illegally” and label them “squatters” (as was the case in the Kampasa and Chongwe). Moreover, non-documented rights create opportunities for authorities (state or customary) to “collude” with foreign investors or multinational corporations to profit off the land to the detriment of the destitute. Because, by and large, women only access land through men, women are doubly vulnerable to this type of exploitation. In the customary system, women and men can lose their rights to land because they cannot prove ownership. Yet, even when a household gains title, only the head of the household gets listed on the deed, leaving a wife unable to claim ownership over the property when the husband dies. Because Zambian land increasingly attracts foreign investment, safeguarding women’s land rights not only protects women but it also ensures one of Zambia’s most prized assets remains accessible to future generations of Zambians.

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On this front, Zambia progresses, albeit slowly, by combining top-down with bottom-up approaches. Some chiefs have been receptive to protecting women’s land rights. In Eastern Province, for example, one chief awarded 400 women land certificates in Nimba as part of a project initiated by the Zambia Land Alliance. These certificates represent an effort to create a customary document, similar to that of a title deed, providing security for women living on traditional lands without confronting the political tension between state and traditional land designations. Victories such as this, however, rest upon the political will of certain leaders who see the benefit of greater land-tenure security for women. Significantly, although corruption and entrenched social norms continue to plague broad-based land reform, individuals interviewed also report a slow reversal of tradition in Zambia. A female banker in Zambia indicated that more and more women today own property in their own right. This, she indicated, contributes directly to elevating women’s decision-making power in other facets of their lives. While roles are changing, changing mentalities and the culture from which those beliefs stem is a slow process. In rural areas, the areas where enhanced female agency is most sorely needed, progress inches along. Largely, tradition still dictates that power rests with men.

It follows that women cannot empower themselves without buy-in from men. The rights-based argument is not as effective a tool to galvanize male support behind women’s land-tenure security as is self-interest, whether for individuals or on a national basis. At the macro-level, scholarship and cross-country analysis illustrate “the importance of property rights

90 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
91 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
92 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
93 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on June 25 – July 18, 2013. The identities of these individuals are protected through non-disclosure agreements.
94 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
95 Interview by Roslyn Warren in Lusaka, Zambia on July 2, 2013. The identity of this individual is protected through a non-disclosure agreement.
for growth, investment, and government effectiveness.”

Education is instrumental to bring this information to the fore. Men (and women) must see that gender equality betters their own lot as well as improves the health of Zambian society more generally. Self-interest powerfully motivates people; even the most entrenched traditionalist can be moved to support his own interests. Especially in traditional arenas, men listen to other men in this regard. Efforts by organizations, such as the Zambia National Women’s Lobby, aimed at sensitizing the male cross-section of society remain central to success. Bolstering the idea that enhanced women’s land ownership improves the family condition, strengthens the community, and builds sustainable national development can roll back the entrenched patriarchy found on customary lands and in rural communities.

The Concepts of Property, Capitalism, and Security

Examining how secure property rights underpin capitalism situates this study’s Zambia field research within the context of economic development theory. In his book, The Mystery of Capital, Hernando de Soto theorizes that capitalism fails in the developing world because millions of people cannot convert billions of dollars worth of assets into capital. As a result, de Soto argues, “80 percent of the world is undercapitalized.” Capital or wealth, he maintains, is not just what a person owns or an individual’s “accumulated stock of assets,” it is also the “potential” those assets “hold to deploy new production.” Because land “is a productive, wealth creating and livelihood sustaining asset,” it is largely the “most valuable form of property” for all people. Yet, holding land cannot, on its own, create wealth. Calculating the potential of land as an asset requires a “conversion process,” a system that makes the intangible tangible. The West’s property system represents that conversion process; it is “the legal expression of an economically meaningful consensus about assets.” This system allows assets

to “lead an invisible, parallel life alongside their material existence.”

In this way, “property” represents the “socially constructed” concept that allows capitalism to thrive. It is the agreed upon structure that gives people confidence to trade on the potential for or prospect of future wealth with individuals they have never met. This system transforms a parcel of land into collateral for a loan, mitigates lending risks for banks, allows utility companies to provide services for a guarantee of payment, and more.

Looking at the existing security literature further demonstrates how land acquisition and lack of adequate land access are principal drivers of violent conflict. At the inter-state level, land lies at the heart of today’s most contentious global politics. For decades, Israelis and Palestinians fought and continue to fight over the same strip of land. At the intra-state level, land use and redistribution policies erupt in violence. In Rwanda, “extreme land scarcity” coupled with the consolidation of land by non-agriculturalists represents a “principal reason” behind the civil war that eventually resulted in the 1994 genocide. Kenya’s colonial rulers derived power from “alienat[ing] people from their customary land,” ultimately “pitt[ing] one ethnic group against another.” This control strategy left a legacy of group-based land disputes in place long after independence, culminating in the “widespread violence” of the 2007 presidential election that killed 1,300 people and displaced 600,000 more. War spurs displacement, which breeds more conflict. Returnee land reclamation efforts and the fear that those efforts “could lead to violent actions” remains a main point of tension in Burundi today. Environmental degradation and economic interests also intertwine with land ownership and use rights—claims over resources fuel violence. In Ethiopia, prolonged drought and the subsequent famine pushed 600,000 people to migrate from the central/northern to the southwest/western regions of the country, “result[ing] in nomad-farmer conflicts over land.”

As a multitude of rebel groups battle against each other

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and the government over the mineral rich eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the people in the Kivus continue to suffer through the “deadliest conflict since World War II.”

Conclusion: Implications for Women, Security, and Sustainable Peace

Though it is clear that land insecurity disempowers women, inhibits sustainable development, and spurs conflict, two of the three most respected international initiatives relating to women’s rights fail to include land security within their frameworks. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325)\textsuperscript{116} and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)\textsuperscript{117} both make no explicit mention of women’s land-tenure security. Even where policy prescribes land-tenure security for women, practical implementation often falters. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) demands equal treatment for women in “land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes,”\textsuperscript{118} and, thus, serves as the “only international instrument” to date that elevates women’s land-tenure security as a means to “comprehensively” promote women’s rights.\textsuperscript{119} Yet, even legal commitments prove inadequate to meet this challenge. Although Zambia (along with nearly every other country in Africa outside of Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia) has ratified CEDAW,\textsuperscript{120} the facts on the ground indicate a dearth of women’s land-tenure security. While this paper focuses on the lack of secure land rights for Zambian women, this problem exists in many states and stymies sustainable development across the globe.

The achievement and sustainment of six of the eight MDGs, for example, funnel directly back to women’s land security. The world cannot “eradicate extreme poverty and hunger” (MDG 1)\textsuperscript{121} if systems bar women (who are charged with managing food production) from investing in their land. To “achieve universal primary education” (MDG 2) and “reduce child mortality”

(MDG 4), states must secure women’s land rights, for if a mother holds land in her name, her “children have higher levels of educational attainment,” and the chances that her children are “severely underweight are reduced by half.” Efforts to “promote gender equality and empower women” (MDG 3), “improve maternal health” (MDG 5), and “combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases” (MDG 6) fundamentally intertwine with elevating women’s decision-making power in their daily lives. Whether enhancing her ability to demand the right to an education, stop domestic abuse, or negotiate safe sex, a woman’s agency starts at home. With increasing clarity, studies show, “Improvements in household welfare are typically more pronounced when women hold the rights.” As a result, it is no coincidence that efforts to “develop a global partnership for development” (MDG 8) increasingly focus on women. Between 2010-2011, roughly 20 percent of MDG-based aid ($20.5 billion out of $91.9 billion) dealt specifically with gender equity and women’s empowerment. In many respects, the most immediate gains for a developing country’s prosperity can be made in providing more equitable land-tenure security for women.

As this study evidences, when systems empower women to own land, the state, and its people—not just women—win. Importantly, gender-equity provisions continue to garner increasing attention and support at both the national and international policy levels. Official US foreign policy toward Africa highlights the integral place gender equality holds in combating indicators of state fragility. The US State Department maintains, “Reductions in the gender gap in education, health, political participation, and economic inclusion will result in an increase in the continent’s economic competitiveness.” International agencies, too, point to women’s empowerment as the surest way to foster sustainable stability. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon contends, “Where women are educated and empowered, economies are more powerful and

strong...societies are more peaceful and stable."\(^{130}\) This Zambian case study indicates that it is land-tenure security that empowers women at the most localized level. What practitioners must test further is how such empowerment, specifically related to land-tenure security, lays the foundation for building sustainably peaceful and prosperous states.

Scholars and practitioners increasingly agree: Poverty and lack of opportunity create the conditions that allow conflict to erupt and thrive.\(^{131}\) In this regard, women’s land-tenure security pays huge dividends. As the world approaches the MDG deadline and begins to frame the post-2015 MDG agenda, future efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, eliminate child and maternal mortality, end the scourge of HIV/AIDS, and empower women and girls must explicitly include benchmarks that measure and secure women’s land access and ownership rights. The hopes for building sustainably peaceful and prosperous states hang in the balance.


References


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