

Land Without Order: Customary Authority, Conservation, And the Crisis of Rural Governance in Post-FTLRP Debshan Ranches, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT: This article critically examines the institutional disorder unfolding in Debshan Ranches, Insiza North, following Zimbabwe's Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). It highlights how traditional leaders, private conservancies, and newly resettled farmers each lay claim to authority over land, leading to overlapping jurisdictions, enforcement dilemmas, and resource access conflicts. Drawing on interviews, participatory mapping, and policy analysis, the study illustrates how the erosion of customary legitimacy—coupled with unaccountable conservation partnerships—has deepened rural land-use instability. The article advocates for the formal recognition of traditional leadership structures in land governance frameworks and stresses the need for equitable co-management models to reconcile livelihood strategies and ecological objectives through orderly land management.

KEYWORDS: Traditional Authority, Land Tenure, Conservation Conflict, Resettlement, Rural Governance, Customary Law

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Makahamadze, Grand, and Tavuyanago (2012) highlight the deeply rooted democratic principles of traditional leadership in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, where chiefs ruled consultatively and were custodians of peace, culture, and human rights. These leaders derived legitimacy from cultural traditions and historical continuity, as described by Adewumi and Engwurube (1985), and were instrumental in land allocation, tax collection, and the regulation of natural resources, playing central roles in both governance and cultural preservation. The colonial era disrupted these structures, marginalizing traditional leaders through dual governance systems that diluted their powers, with statutes such as the Chiefs and Headmen Act [Chapter 29:01] of 1982 restricting them to limited customary roles (Chakaipa, 2010). Post-independence reforms, including the 1984 Prime Minister's Directive, further decentralized power to elected officials, excluding traditional leaders from development planning, despite their continued cultural authority.

The late 1990s marked a shift with the introduction of the Traditional Leaders Act [Chapter 29:17] of 1998, which expanded the functions of chiefs, headmen, and village heads significantly, recognizing their role in land governance, natural resource management, and dispute resolution. These reforms attempted to harmonize the dual leadership structure, but practical tensions remained, especially after the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), which disrupted long-standing land jurisdictions and introduced overlaps in authority between state institutions (such as the Environmental Management Agency and Rural District Councils) and traditional leaders (Mabhena, 2010). Despite efforts to empower them legally, traditional leaders often found themselves sidelined in critical development areas due to legal inconsistencies and competing institutional mandates, leading to confusion and conflict over land use and governance.

Today, traditional leaders remain vital actors in Zimbabwe's rural governance, straddling the spheres of cultural guardianship and development facilitation. They are responsible for enforcing communal land laws, preserving public infrastructure, and supporting health and education services, all while operating under the oversight of government structures like District Development Coordinators and RDCs. However, Makahamadze et al. (2012) caution that their developmental relevance is contested due to institutional contradictions and the lack of a harmonized legal framework post-FTLRP. The central question now is how Zimbabwe

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can reconcile traditional leadership's historic and cultural authority with modern state governance to ensure coherent and effective rural development, especially as traditional leaders continue to command legitimacy and community trust in areas often neglected by formal government structures. Would you like a diagram summarizing the dual governance structure and its evolution?

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Land related conflicts have existed since the colonial era, with the black majority being forcibly moved from their traditional communal lands. In Matabeleland South province, Government officials agree that Chief Solomon Jahana made his request to be relocated from Gokwe in the early 2000 era known to the late Governor for Matabeleland South, Stephen Jeqe Nkomo who promised to look into the matter until 2006 (Interview with Official 1, 08.6.2015). Chief Jahana had initially proposed to relocate with sixteen thousand (16 000) people but due to land pressures had to trim the number to eight thousand (8 000) people after the Insiza District Land Committee who highlighted the paucity of land within Insiza north to accommodate such a huge number of people, (Interview with Official 1 09.6.2015).

Meanwhile another Chief Mazetese, a corrupted version of Mazethesa, meaning self-imposed chief (Mwenezi-Masvingo) made similar land restitution claims, intending to bring eight thousand people (8000) exacerbated the conflict in the Debshan Ranches area. Whilst awaiting his response from Government structures, people, largely from Midlands kept on making incursions and settling themselves in the claimed area as the reputation of its good soils for cropping purposes had spread throughout the provinces. The land conflict in Debshan Ranches, Insiza North, is rooted in overlapping and competing claims to land rights. On one hand, Chief Jahana and his subjects assert customary ownership based on ancestral tenure and traditional authority; on the other, newly resettled farmers claim legitimate occupation under state-sanctioned allocations during Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). These competing frameworks—customary versus statutory—have created recurrent tensions and open conflict, particularly in Wards 13, 20, and 21 of Insiza North, Matabeleland South. In this context, the study seeks first to identify the range of FTLRRP-related conflicts and the key actors involved in the Debshan Ranches area. Secondly, it examines the role of traditional leaders in managing or mediating these disputes, assessing both their authority and the effectiveness of the measures they have taken. Finally, the research investigates how these unresolved land conflicts affect food security and livelihoods, revealing broader implications for social cohesion and rural sustainability in post-reform Zimbabwe.

This study critically examines the governance challenges posed by overlapping traditional leadership claims and contested land-use in the Debshan Ranches area, particularly following the disruptions introduced by Zimbabwe's Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). It seeks to ensure traditional leaders retain not only their constitutional recognition but also their functional legitimacy and relevance in the eyes of their communities. Without clarity and consistency in traditional authority, there is a growing risk of undermined, ineffective leadership structures. Particularly, through neglect or the imposition of development programmes that corrode existing socio-political order and customary land administration.

Although the current Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013 affirms the role of traditional leaders, this affirmation must go beyond rhetorical commitment and be reflected meaningfully in practice. As Kirmani (2008:801) notes, "governance affects us all," pointing to the complex social, cultural, and political dynamics that structure daily life. The unresolved conflict in Insiza North, particularly involving the Debshan Ranches highlights systemic governance failures—marked by duplications, jurisdictional ambiguities, and policy inconsistencies. If left unaddressed, it sets a dangerous precedent for future conflicts, exploiting the cracks in rural governance frameworks. This study, therefore, aims to amplify these structural challenges and provoke a policy response from higher authorities to ensure clarity, coherence, and sustainable development in rural Zimbabwe.

1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is geographically limited to specific wards within Insiza North, particularly those surrounding the Debshan Ranches area, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other regions affected by land reform. Methodologically, the use of focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), semi-structured questionnaires, and observations presents certain limitations. FGDs may be influenced by dominant voices, suppressing minority perspectives, while key informant interviews are subject to personal bias and selective memory. Semi-structured questionnaires limited depth in responses, which was augmented by the use of FGDs, KIIs and observations can be shaped by the researcher's presence, potentially affecting participant behaviour. Additionally, accessing sensitive information may prove difficult due to political tensions or mistrust among participants, especially where leadership disputes and land conflicts are ongoing. These limitations were neutralised through triangulation during data collection to preserve the integrity of the research.

1.4 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was limited to the confines of Wards 13, 20, and 21 of Insiza North that consist of Debshan Ranches, formerly commercial farms. It will also focus on and pay attention to the farmers who resettled during the FTLRP and those who have since returned from Gokwe under Chief Jahana. The study will also draw hugely from the wealth of knowledge held by local elders who witnessed

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all related events (colonial era evictions; FTLRP and its attendant invasions by the neighbouring Mberengwa-Zvishavane and Shurugwi communities; and eventually the return of Chief Jahana.

1.5 THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Sustainable Development approach and the Participatory Rural Approaches to development guided the research. The Sustainable development framework finds its roots in the Brundtland Commission of 1987 by Harlem Gro, who defined it as development that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the future generation's own needs (using the same resources). This thrust lies within the contemporary approach to development whose demands call for systems that feed into seven dimensions of sustainability are all compromised by imposed current development structures and activities. The expanded analysis of the seven dimensions of sustainability—environmental, economic, social, cultural, institutional, political, and spatial and how each is affected by conflicting land-use policies, livelihood struggles, traditional leadership disputes, and food security challenges, especially contextualized for post-land reform scenarios like in Zimbabwe's Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) is presented below:

The seven dimensions of sustainability—environmental, economic, social, cultural, institutional, political, and spatial—are deeply impacted by land-use conflicts, livelihood struggles, traditional leadership disputes, and food security challenges, particularly in Zimbabwe's post-Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) context (Scoones et al., 2010). Environmental sustainability, which involves preserving ecosystems and managing natural resources wisely, has been severely undermined by unregulated grazing, deforestation, and soil erosion, especially in regions like Insiza North, where competing jurisdictional claims prevent coherent land management (Mabhena, 2010). The absence of coordinated planning and customary oversight has left fragile ecosystems exposed. Economic sustainability, reliant on secure livelihoods and productive investment, is similarly compromised. Uncertain land tenure, frequent cattle intrusion, and limited institutional support discourage farmers from investing in agriculture, reducing household resilience and threatening food security (Chimhowu & Woodhouse, 2006).

Social sustainability, rooted in equity and community cohesion, suffers from tensions between new settlers and long-established communities, eroding trust and sparking conflict—often at the expense of vulnerable groups such as women and the elderly (Hellum & Derman, 2004). Traditional mediation mechanisms, previously central to conflict resolution, have weakened in the wake of FTLRP, amplifying disputes and undermining social bonds (Makahamadze, Grand & Tavuyanago, 2012). Cultural sustainability is also jeopardized; traditional leaders, who once safeguarded rituals, heritage, and indigenous knowledge systems, have been delegitimized or excluded, and sacred cultural sites are sometimes destroyed during resettlement (Matyszak, 2010). The resulting loss of agricultural knowledge and disrupted spiritual practices threaten cultural continuity. Institutional sustainability, which depends on clear and legitimate governance structures, has faltered as overlapping authority between chiefs, state institutions, and resettlement committees has fostered confusion, weakened policy enforcement, and hindered dispute resolution (Chakaipa, 2010). Political sustainability, defined by inclusive governance and stable institutions, is compromised when land and leadership disputes become politicized, excluding traditional leaders from policy processes and eroding public trust in reform initiatives (Ranger, 2003). Without participatory dialogue, reforms risk alienating the very communities they are meant to empower. Spatial sustainability is also deteriorating due to poorly planned resettlements that generate overlapping land claims, inefficient land use, and heightened exposure to environmental hazards (Moyo, 2011). Marginalized communal farmers are often displaced to ecologically fragile zones, while prime land is misallocated or poorly regulated, undermining spatial equity and functionality. Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that sustainability in Zimbabwe is not solely an ecological or economic matter but a holistic system grounded in authority, equity, and planning. In FTLRP-affected regions, sustainability cannot be achieved without clarifying the mandates of statutory and customary institutions and integrating them into inclusive and transparent land-use governance frameworks (Makahamadze et al., 2012).

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW: TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN ZIMBABWE

The debate surrounding the relevance of traditional leadership in contemporary governance and development in Zimbabwe remains a contentious yet pivotal discourse. This literature review explores the interface between traditional leadership and sustainable development in rural communities, particularly through the lens of land-related conflict, food security, and evolving governance structures in Insiza North. Traditional leadership derives its authority from tradition, a concept often associated with the preservation of inherited customs, social norms, and cultural mores (Keulder, 1998).

However, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1994) challenge the purity of such traditions, suggesting that many are invented in response to rapid societal transformations, and are retroactively legitimised by a constructed historical narrative. They define invented traditions as symbolic practices governed by accepted rules aimed at instilling continuity with a selected past. Traditional leaders, often hereditary, describes communal figures sanctioned by cultural values and endorsed by community legitimacy to lead and govern (Adewumi and Egwurube, 1985). While their legitimacy is rooted in tradition, their role has evolved in tandem with the historical

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and political dynamics of post-colonial states (Keulder, 1998). This dual authority—traditional and modern—presents both challenges and opportunities for harmonising Indigenous governance with state structures.

1.6.1 Traditional Leaders and Local Governance under Zimbabwe's Constitution

Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution, particularly Chapter 15, affirms the role of traditional leaders in cultural preservation, communal land administration, environmental stewardship, and conflict resolution through customary law—all anchored within a developmental mandate. However, recent scholarship cautions that this facilitation role remains largely supportive rather than directive (Muchadenyika, 2014; Makahamadze et al., 2009). The Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17) institutionalises their jurisdiction over communal lands, reinforcing their integration into rural governance systems. While initially weakened in the early post-independence period, traditional leadership has resurged as a strategic governance partner, especially where state capacity is limited (Chigwata, 2016; Kurebwa, 2020). This resurgence is not only a reflection of precolonial governance continuity but also a response to the governance vacuum left by ineffective local government structures (Musarandega, Chingombe & Pillay, 2018).

1.6.2 Post-Colonial Traditional Governance and Shifting Authority

The local governance system in Zimbabwe reflects a complex negotiation between colonial legacies and post-colonial reforms. Decentralisation, while formally enshrined in policy, remains uneven in practice, often constrained by centralised political control (Mkodzongi & Lawrence, 2019). The Fast Track Land Reform allowed local communal farmers prejudiced under the colonial Land Apportionment Act of 1931 and the related Land Husbandry Act of 1952 to repossess their land. This often came as a social cost with many conflicts between the newly resettled and claimants of ancestral lands (Mkodzongi & Lawrence, 2019; Mkodzongi, 2013). Colonial-era governance excluded African agency, and while post-independence reforms aimed to democratise rural administration, they often sidelined traditional authorities. Yet, contemporary studies suggest that traditional leaders have regained influence not simply through cultural legitimacy, but through their instrumental utility to national governance strategies and international development frameworks (Manyeruke & Ncube, 2021). The challenge lies in balancing their inherited authority with modern democratic expectations, particularly around issues of legitimacy and accountability in rural governance.

In "Contested Terrain: Local Governance and Development in Post-Land Reform Zimbabwe," Mudimu et al. (2019) examine how the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) reshaped local governance structures by reconfiguring authority among state actors, traditional leaders, and emergent local elites. Contested authority has characterized post-colonial governance in Zimbabwe, where traditional leadership resurged as a key player in land-use administration and local development, often in tension with formal state institutions and democratic decentralization frameworks (Chadambuka, 2024). This shifting terrain has led to fragmented governance landscapes where legitimacy, accountability, and power are unevenly distributed, challenging efforts to build inclusive and democratic local institutions in the post-land reform context. This has had unintended effects on land-use governance and conflicts that affect livelihood activities and potentially food security.

Evidence from the Nkoranza South Municipality, Ghana explores how land tenure reforms—particularly land registration and privatization—can negatively affect rural livelihoods by reinforcing elite capture and marginalizing vulnerable land users (Anafo & Guba, 2017; Yeboah & Shaw, 2013). It reveals that while formalization aims to improve tenure security and agricultural productivity, it often sidelines customary access systems and weakens communal governance structures, thereby intensifying socio-economic disparities (Anafo & Guba, 2017). This dynamic resonates with Zimbabwe's post-land reform context, where similar processes of localized power consolidation by traditional authorities and political elites have reshaped rural governance and access to land (Scoones et al., 2010).

In both cases, land reform has had unintended governance implications, including the erosion of customary norms, the politicization of land access, and increased vulnerability of the poor. These findings highlight the need for participatory land governance frameworks that prioritize equity, transparency, and institutional pluralism in the management of rural livelihoods. Land-use policy remains a critical fault line in Zimbabwe's local governance. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), while aimed at addressing colonial injustices, entrenched new governance dilemmas, particularly in areas like Matabeleland where resettlement was contested (Mkodzongi & Lawrence, 2019). Traditional leaders have often become key actors in mediating these disputes, though their authority is complicated by lack of tenure security and overlapping jurisdiction with state agencies (Chipenda, 2021). While some scholars (Nori & Scoones, I. (2023). frame the FTLRP as partially successful in redistributing land to the rural poor, the policy's uneven implementation and politicisation continue to undermine its developmental goals (Chadambuka, 2024). Going forward, effective land governance will depend on clarifying the roles of traditional authorities within a transparent, legally coherent, and community-responsive framework.

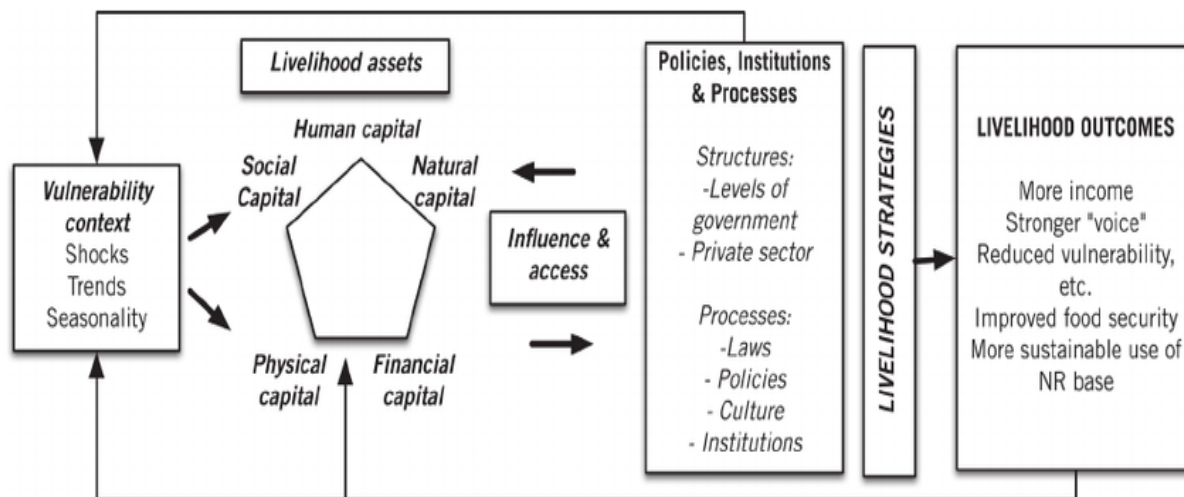


Fig 1: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, Source: Scoones, I. (1998): Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: A framework for analysis. Working Paper 72, IDS, Brighton, UK, IDS.

1.6.3 Land-Use, Traditional Leadership and Food Security

Sustainable development, as a concept, has often been challenging to define due to its complex nature and varying interpretations. According to the National Framework for Development Planning (NFDP, 2007), sustainability involves a process or state that can maintain itself indefinitely, with a focus on preserving and enhancing the quality of life for future generations (Adams & Younos, 2008). This entails the efficient use of resources, reliance on renewable resources, and the conservation of the natural environment. The Brundtland Commission (1997) succinctly defines sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In the context of rural development, leadership plays a crucial role, particularly in rural communities. Hersey, Blanchard, and Johnson (1996) highlight that leadership strategies must be adapted to the experience levels and motivations of the community members. For instance, experienced workers may benefit from delegative leadership, while unmotivated or inexperienced villagers may require a more directive approach. Traditional leaders, who have long been responsible for service delivery in rural areas, continue to play vital roles in modern communities, ensuring that services meet the needs of their people. The Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) further supports this approach by addressing the challenges faced by rural communities, particularly through small-scale mining and the risks it brings.

As Scoones (1998) observes, rural populations often rely on remittances from urban areas, particularly from South Africa, to sustain their livelihoods. The SLF emphasizes poverty reduction, sustainability, and empowerment through a participatory and consultative process. Carney (2005) argues that while macro-level policies may appear balanced, they may not align with grassroots realities. The framework integrates formal and informal trade, recognizing that livelihoods are dynamic and shaped by the available assets, opportunities, and external factors like ecological, social, and political influences. Cohen (1980) underscores that the SLF focuses on people's ability to survive and thrive despite shocks and stresses, ensuring that their current efforts do not diminish future opportunities. Livelihoods are sustainable only if they can adapt to these challenges, recover from disruptions, and enhance the capabilities and assets needed for future generations to thrive.

1.6.4 Post-Fast Track Land Reform Programme Conflict and Sustainability

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), launched in Zimbabwe in 2000 to redress historical land imbalances, has yielded mixed and often contentious outcomes, particularly in Southern Matabeleland. While intended to dismantle the racially skewed land ownership structure inherited at independence, scholars such as Zikhali (2008) and Mabhena (2010) argue that its implementation deepened ethnic and regional inequalities. Mabhena critiques the marginalization of Matabeleland residents, asserting that the reform privileged beneficiaries from Mashonaland and amounted to 'internal colonization.' The unresolved historical land claims and the failure to tailor the program to regional needs have, according to Marongwe (2003), led to persistent land conflicts. In contrast, Moyo and Yeros (2005) and Scoones et al. (2010) present a more optimistic interpretation, portraying the FTLRP as a grassroots-driven agrarian revolution that empowered ordinary Zimbabweans, including some in Southern Matabeleland who experienced agricultural gains under favorable conditions.

Despite these successes, the FTLRP has often been seen as a politically motivated initiative aimed at consolidating ZANU PF's control, with critics like Alexander and McGregor (2001) and Derman (2006) describing it as clientelistic and exclusionary. The program's uniform approach overlooked the unique socio-economic and environmental conditions of regions like Matabeleland South, resulting in inadequate support for resettled farmers and a surge in food insecurity (Nyawo-Viriri-Shava, 2012). Ongoing tensions between resettled farmers and indigenous communities, like the Jahana, reflect the persistence of unresolved grievances.

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Mabhena (2010) further links the decline in agrarian livelihoods to increased reliance on off-farm income, such as migration and informal mining. Capaldo et al. (2010) introduce a more dynamic view of food security, shaped by complex temporal and structural factors. Meanwhile, environmental degradation and the cessation of farming on productive lands, highlighted by Manzungu (2004), Rukuni (2007), and Jansen (2003), signal deeper structural issues undermining the reform's sustainability.

At the heart of these challenges lies the marginalization of traditional governance structures that once managed land use and conflict resolution in rural Zimbabwe. By sidelining these systems, the FTLRP weakened local cohesion and exacerbated land disputes, leading to fragmented communities and diminished agricultural output. The absence of clear land tenure policies and the exclusion of traditional leaders from decision-making have left many farmers uncertain about their rights and reluctant to invest in their land. Nevertheless, cases of resilience exist, such as in Insiza, where some resettled farmers, aided by communal labor traditions like Nhimbe or Amalima, have achieved notable productivity (Bamu, 2010). These examples underscore the importance of localized, inclusive approaches. Ultimately, while the FTLRP sought to correct historical injustices, its flawed, top-down execution has perpetuated conflict, undermined rural governance, and compromised food security—especially in Matabeleland South—highlighting the need for reform models that engage communities and respect traditional structures.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

A mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research, was adopted. The qualitative approach focused on gathering in-depth data regarding the opinions, ideas, and perceptions of respondents, particularly concerning the role of traditional leadership in community development. Qualitative research, as described by Mouton (2001), enables a detailed understanding of social interactions and is well-suited for exploring the challenges rural communities face in participating in development activities. Despite its time-consuming nature and potential for researcher bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 2003), the qualitative approach provided insights into participants' experiences within their contexts. In contrast, the quantitative component allowed for the collection of data from a larger number of respondents, offering more reliable and objective conclusions (Shields & Twycross, 2003).

1.7.1 Study Population and Sampling

The study focused on the communities in Debshan Ranches (Wards 13, 20, and 21) within Insiza North, which include both pre-colonial settlers and FTLRRP settlers. A non-probabilistic random sampling method was used to select participants, ensuring the inclusion of key informants with knowledge of traditional leadership and land management. The sample consisted of villagers, traditional leaders, councillors, extension workers, and local elders, who were purposively chosen for their relevance to the research questions.

1.7.2 Targeted Population and Randomly Selected Sample

The target population for the distribution of the questionnaires included local government officials such as District Development Coordinators formerly known as District Administrators, traditional leaders (Village Heads, Headmen, and Chief), the lead farmers in feuding communities, the councillor, and Extension staff.

1.7.3 Ethical Issues in the Study

The research was conducted per the research ethics. These emphasise the need to recognise human rights and require the researcher to undertake to give the respondents adequate information regarding their participation in the study as well as what that entails. In the research, respondents were made to be aware of the principle of confidentiality as well as their right to willingly and freely participate.

Table 3.2: Purposively Selected Sample of Key Informants

Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Research Instrument
Villagers	210	21	Interview
Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Research Instrument
Traditional Leaders	4	4	Interview
Councillor	4	4	Questionnaires / Interview
Extension Workers	5	5	Questionnaires / Interview

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1.7.4 Data Collection Instruments

In this study, data was collected using two primary instruments: questionnaires and structured interviews. According to Leedy (2001), research instruments measure knowledge, attitude, and skills. Structured interviews were employed to clarify responses and provide deeper insights, as no single source of data could offer a comprehensive view. The study, focusing on villagers' perceptions of traditional leaders' roles in community development, relied on case study methodology for in-depth analysis (Smith in Merriam, 1998).

Section and Subject/Objective Issues Covered

Section A: Demographic Details of Respondents	This section gathered demographic information to verify the relevance of participants for the study.
Section B: Customary Development Activities of Traditional Leaders	This section aimed to establish the customary conflict resolution roles of traditional leaders concerning land.
Section C: Effectiveness of Traditional Leadership	Questions assessed the effectiveness of traditional leadership and whether villagers perceived leadership as relevant in rural development.
Section D: Challenges Faced by Traditional Leaders	This section explored the challenges traditional leaders face in fulfilling their duties.

Questionnaires, as defined by Wegner (2005), consist of written questions, either open or closed-ended, to gather specific responses. In this study, they were used to collect large amounts of comparable data efficiently and cost-effectively. Respondents could complete the questionnaires privately, ensuring more honest and thoughtful answers, especially to personal questions. The questionnaires were structured into four sections aligned with the study's objectives, providing a reliable means of data collection for the researcher.

1.7.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis involves organizing and interpreting collected materials to uncover insights. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), it is a process of arranging and understanding data to present findings. Mouton (2001) views it as identifying themes, patterns, and relationships, while Glesne (1999) emphasizes organizing data to make sense of it. The researchers organised data into tables and tallied, then thoroughly analysed to identify patterns, trends, and key themes. Divergent responses were examined, and comparisons were made across categories to discover connections. Data presentation used tools like bar graphs, histograms, and pie charts, with analysis guided by strategies for rigor, including investigator responsiveness and methodological coherence (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morse et al., 2009). The analysis process included data reduction, visual display, through Microsoft Excel-generated charts and graphs, and qualitative narratives. Data were collected using a combination of questionnaires and structured interviews. The questionnaire was employed for a broad survey of villagers, while interviews were used for in-depth discussions with key informants such as traditional leaders and extension workers. The use of multiple data sources helped to cross-verify the findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of traditional leadership in community development.

The data collection procedure involved a combination of semi-structured in-depth interviews and questionnaires. Interviews were conducted with purposively selected key informants—Extension Staff, Councillors, and Traditional Leaders—complementing the data gathered from 123 randomly selected villagers. The aim was to triangulate data to enhance reliability. Pre-testing of the data collection instruments was done to ensure validity, using villagers and key informants not part of the final sample. Researchers personally interviewed the key informants, with both open-ended and closed-ended questions used to encourage ease and full participation. Scheduled interviews were conducted to ensure convenience and that no one suffered prejudice and losses among participants while semi-structured questionnaires were administered directly to villagers and extension workers resident within the wards. The collected data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Researchers coded qualitative data and categorized them according to similar codes, which are key words arising from participants' responses to identify themes related to traditional leadership and rural development, while quantitative data were analysed for patterns and statistical trends. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a robust analysis of the research questions.

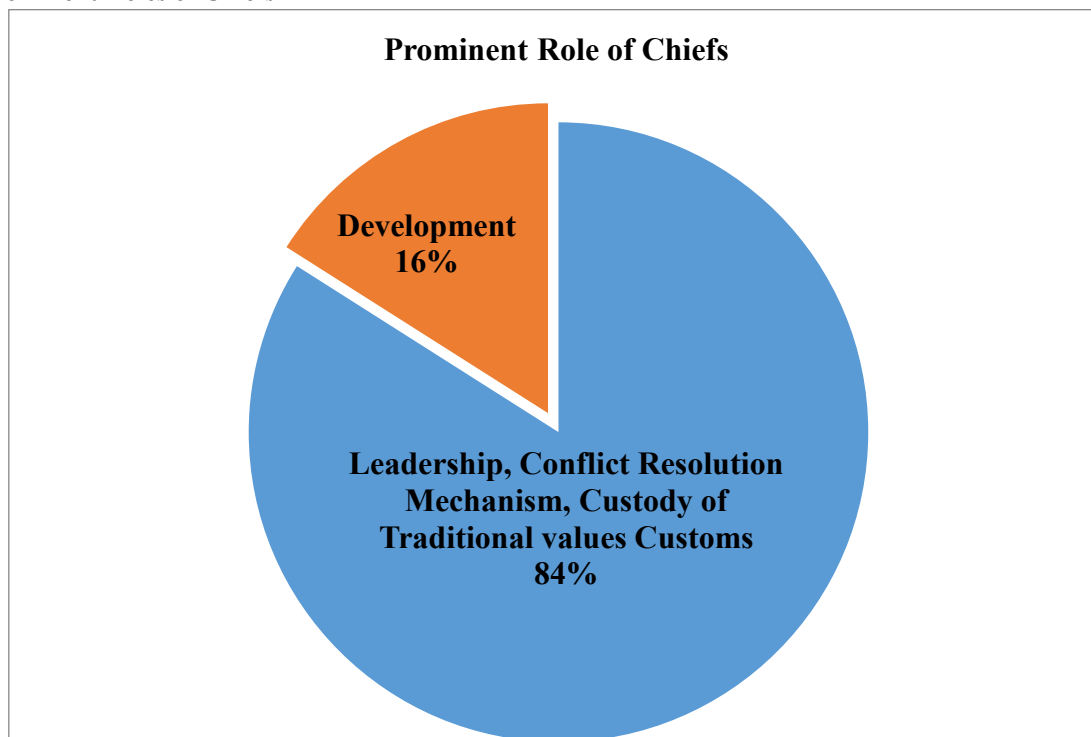
Ethical Considerations: Ethical Aspect	Description
Permission	The researcher sought permission to conduct the study well in advance. A letter was presented to the Chief Executive Officer and the local councillor for approval to carry out the study.
The Right for Self-Determination	Participants were asked to voluntarily consent to participate and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time during the study.
Anonymity	Respondents were advised to remain anonymous, with a name coding system used during the sampling process to protect personal identifying data.
Confidentiality	The researcher ensured that all information provided by participants was kept confidential. The promise of confidentiality was strictly adhered to throughout the study.
Harm to Respondents	Participants were assured they would not face physical harm or victimization. The researcher emphasized that no adverse comments or inferences would be made if participants withdrew.

The researcher adhered to ethical guidelines by seeking permission to conduct the study, respecting participants' autonomy, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining confidentiality. Emphasizing these principles was essential for securing participant cooperation and ensuring the success of the research. Informed consent and confidentiality were upheld throughout the study. Overall, a mixed-methods approach, combining case study and survey techniques, was employed to explore the role of traditional leadership in rural community development under the FTLRRP in Matabeleland South.

1.7.6 Results and Discussion

The study achieved a high response rate of 81%, providing confidence in the data for analysis. Gender distribution among respondents showed a 40% male and 60% female split. Regarding the period of stay, the majority had lived in the area for over 16 years, with 30% residing for over 35 years, indicating strong local knowledge relevant to the study on conflict resolution and land allocation.

Figure 1: Prominent Roles of Chiefs



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All respondents acknowledged the presence of traditional leaders in their community, confirming their influence in both customary and development activities. Respondents identified key roles of traditional leaders, including supervising the community, leading development projects, preserving cultural values, and coordinating social initiatives. A notable 28% of respondents highlighted their leadership role in development efforts, with other roles, such as enforcing by-laws and presiding over customary courts, receiving less attention. In terms of historical governance, 84% of respondents indicated that traditional leaders were primarily responsible for conflict resolution and maintaining customs, with a smaller percentage (16%) viewing development as a key responsibility. This reflects the dominant role of traditional leaders in leadership and governance at the district or chieftaincy level.

The study highlights the central role of traditional leaders in conflict resolution in Debshan, a contested area with complex land disputes. Respondents identified several key roles for traditional leaders, including resolving local conflicts, guiding subjects on cultural matters, promoting local development through indigenous knowledge, safeguarding land for future generations, presiding over customary courts, and leading community-based projects. The conflict in Debshan is exacerbated by competing allegiances to different chiefs, particularly Chief Jahana and Chief Mazetese, which has created deep divisions among residents. This fragmentation undermines traditional leadership and local conflict resolution mechanisms, escalating tensions and threatening food security. Additionally, the colonial legacy of displacement and competing claims to land further intensifies these conflicts.

Various formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms have been employed, including institutional measures like District Land Committees. These committees, composed of government stakeholders, are tasked with addressing land disputes. However, their effectiveness is hindered by challenges such as land scarcity, population pressure, double allocations, and delays in addressing disputes, particularly in remote areas like Gwamayanga. Legal issues also arise, such as cases where settlers are removed from land without alternative options, leading to legal challenges and slow progress in conflict resolution. In conclusion, while traditional leaders play a crucial role in conflict resolution, the ongoing fragmentation of leadership and the inefficiencies in institutional mechanisms have hindered efforts to resolve land-related conflicts effectively.

1.8 LOCAL STRUCTURES-TRADITIONAL LEADERS

There are local structures that deal with conflict situations in the area, which follow the Local Government Structures. However, the people in Debshan Ranches at times render these structures useless. Since 2001 to date, ZANU-PF Councillors won elections uncontested. As such, power lies with people who elect the Councilor now and again, and the Councilor now and again tries to super-impose unfavourable decisions to the electorate, Interview, 07.6.2015).

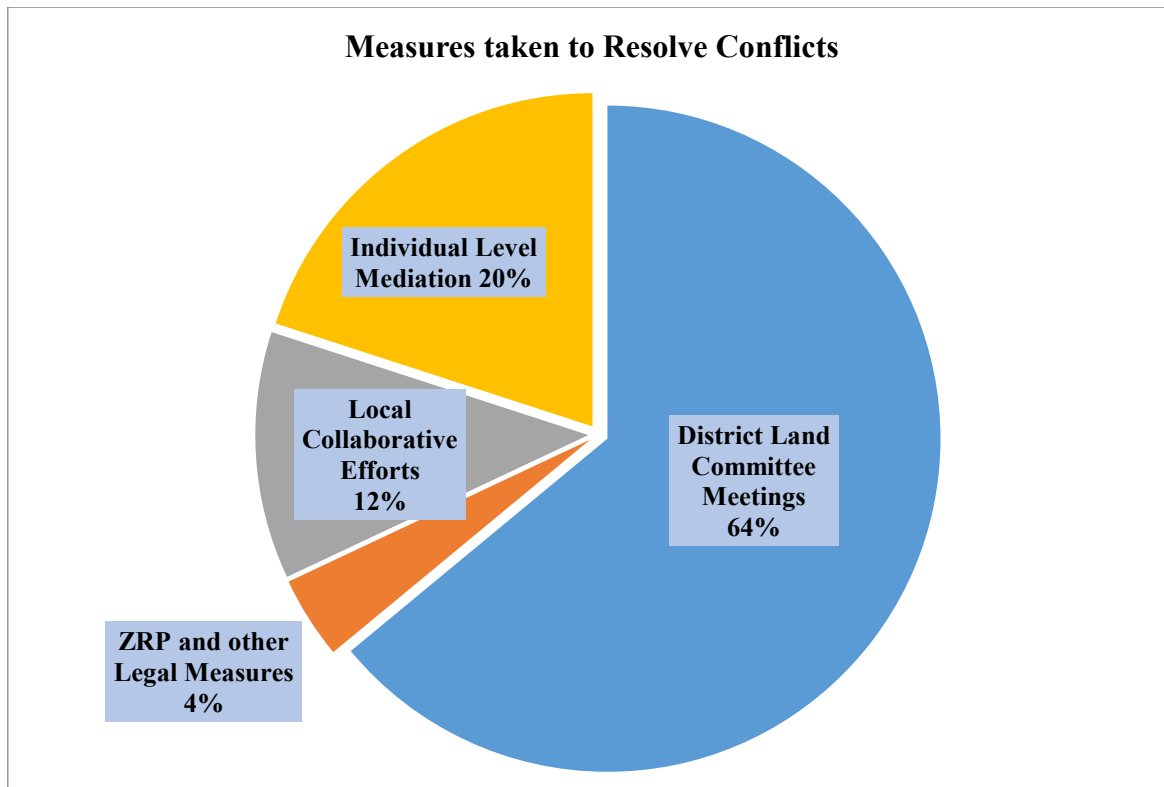
However, there are times when such structures came up with mechanisms to deal with stock thefts and cases of vandalism of property belonging to Debshan Ranches. Strengthening these structures would be one way of ensuring there is stability and peace in the community that would ensure that attainment of uninterrupted food security. There are mechanisms in place that adequately address the challenges faced by Chief Jahana's subjects. When Chief Solomon Jahana passed on in 2012, he had not yet appointed Village and Kraal Heads to enforce the available traditional conflict resolution mechanism.

The heir apparent to the Jahana Chieftainship has since been installed and is on the throne. This has been attributable to divisions and conflicts emanating from two '*centres of power*', where a significant portion of the area is controlled and has its allegiance to Chief Jahana (Gokwe returnees and original Insiza dwellers) while a not-so-small proportion is of the view that Chief Jahana is the bastard Chief instead, (Traditional Leader, Interview, 15.6.2015). Appointing people into these otherwise noble structures has been thus stalled, leaving a void manipulated by all and sundry, from where conflict stems.

1.8.1 Individual Level Conflict

Conflict managers the world over have acknowledged that silence makes people compliant bystanders to the perpetrators of violence or crimes. Inaction by those in Authority, victims, and or perpetrators ferments sentiments of revenge on unaddressed grievances. The most common conflict resolution mechanism employed in the district has been the engagement of warring parties at the individual level where at times they agreed on modalities of resolving their differences through restorative justice, including '*compensation for destroyed crops*' (Interview, 20.6.2015) Usually, compensation worked best when one's cattle grazed in another person's field. Debshan Ranches management resorted to shifting their cattle from paddocks nearer to the fields of the resettled during cropping season to minimize conflicts surrounding cattle grazing settlers' fields. There are few occasions where cases were reported to the Police after violent confrontations though.

Figure 2: Most Used Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Debshan Ranches area



Data shows that the District Land Committee handled the most conflicts and thus enjoyed more legitimacy than any other conflict resolution structures. The source of mandate or responsibility that an authority has can be an identifier of the acceptability and role of that authority. The researcher asked participants the source of authority for conflict resolution structures in their village. Participants indicated their allegiance to the District Lands Committee (64%); and mediation at the individual level using lower tiers of local governance (20%); including social capital (Collaborative Efforts, 12%) albeit with resistance from aggrieved groups. Participants acknowledge that they barely report each other to ZRP and conventional legal Court to resolve land disputes, with only a percentage of the sample resorting to these structures for assistance. These include pseudo ViDCOs and WADCOS; Village assembly and ward assembly since there are clear structures regarding Headmen, Chief, Kraal Head; and Councilor; and Rural District Council.

Figure 3. Source of Conflicts in Debshan Ranches

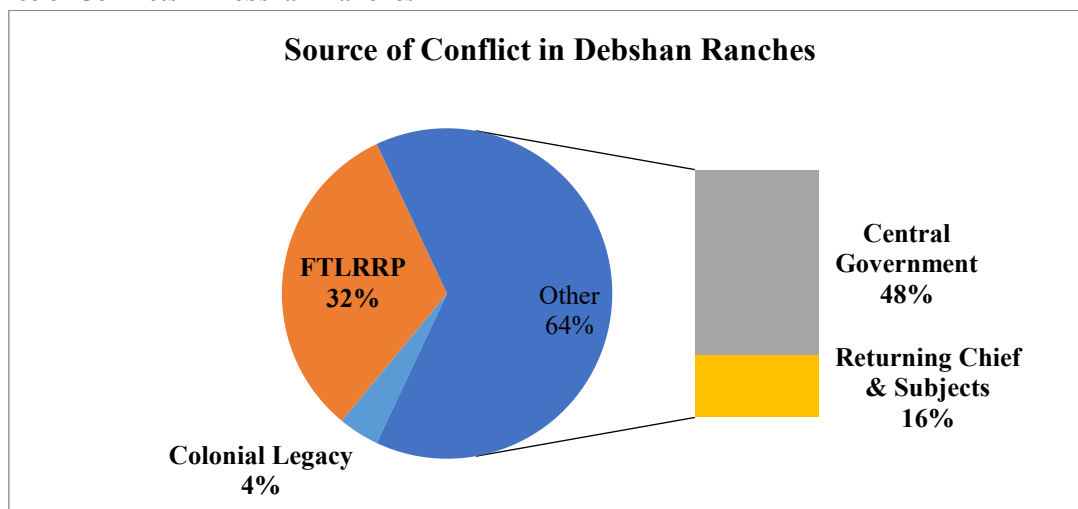
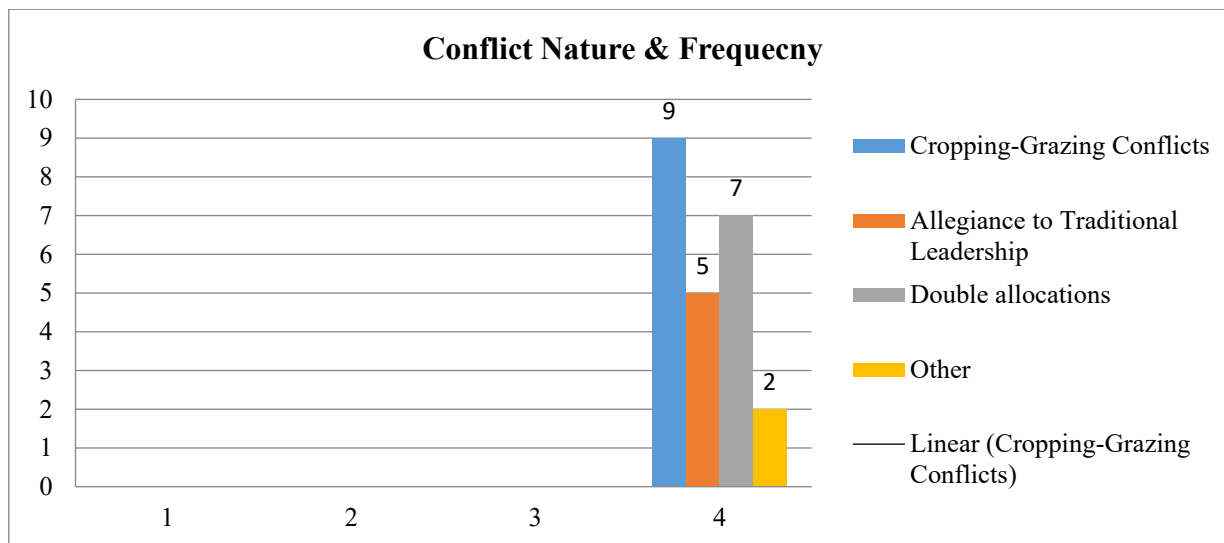


Figure 3 above highlights that the major sources of conflict include the role of central Government and colonial legacies that resulted in the FTLRRP, which eventually undermined local structures and institutions. This effectively laid a firm foundation for land-use conflicts currently manifesting, and those still simmering and lying dormant as latent conflicts awaiting trigger events. Figure 4.6

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above shows that the central Government, through its inadequate planning and implementation of the noble but poorly implemented FTLRR programme. Thus, Central Government and FTLRRP are jointly attributed to have caused up to a staggering 80%, (being 48%+32%).

Figure 4: Nature of Conflicts in Debshan Ranches



Debshan Ranches villagers have long been in protracted conflicts pitting old Insiza dwellers, encroachers from Zvishavane, and Mberengwa villagers who moved in under the FTLRRP and the returning Chief Jahana and his subjects. The nature of these conflicts ranged from crop-grazing land conflicts; allegiance to traditional leaders; double allocations and other related to land. From a sample of 30, including 4 Traditional Leaders (Chiefs), 5 Extension Workers; and 4 Councillors, and 21 Villagers drawn from all three groups (Chief Jahana, Chief Mazetese, and original Insiza dwellers), the study found that the most prevalent conflicts bordered around land-use such as cropping versus grazing interests. Villagers from either group had their crops destroyed by livestock from the other, i.e. Chief Mazetese and Chief Jahana's subjects. Such conflicts resulted from a double allocation of land and contested land-use, resulting in land previously used as grazing for livestock allocated for cropping by newly resettled farmers. Other conflicts in Debshan Ranches stemmed from allegiance and loyalty problems, over which of the Chiefs to temporarily suspend and which to pay homage to.

1.8.2 Thematic Perspectives from Communal Farmers:

Environmental Sustainability

Towards the maintenance of ecological processes, biodiversity, and natural resources for current and future generations, traditional leaders on both camps now face the gloomy impact of conflicting land use and leadership disputes. Participants of FGD 1, 2022 had this to say;

Conflicting land use and leadership disputes here has seen a rise in unregulated grazing, leading to overgrazing, deforestation, and soil erosion. This is particularly rife here because we no longer have effective customary controls over land and hence we no enforcement. This lack of coordinated land use planning because of disputed jurisdictions allows unsustainable practices to go unchecked (Village Head, Under Chief Jahana, 2022).

Resource competition increases pressure on fragile ecosystems like wetlands, which provide grazing sustenance during drier seasons, particularly in semi-arid zones like Insiza North. Our traditional land governance once regulated grazing seasons, but without recognized authority, environmental degradation is intensifying.

Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability involves the capacity of communities to generate livelihoods, incomes, and economic value over time without external dependence or collapse. It is affected as livelihood insecurity rises when smallholder farmers lose access to secure land or experience crop loss due to cattle intrusion or tenure disputes.

This areas is facing very difficult leadership challenges leading to disrupted agricultural activity that undermines food production. We now face prospects of reduced household incomes and local food security (Lead Farmer, Chief Jahana, 2022).

Conflicts has affected people's determination to invest in their land through fencing, boreholes for irrigation due to uncertainty, compounding economic situation unsure whether they will harvest from their fields due to grazing conflicts and are unwilling to invest in productivity.

Social Sustainability

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This is the ability of a society to maintain social cohesion, equity, and access to essential services and resources. Its absence can raise tensions between new and older settlers that leads to community divisions, mistrust, and in some cases results in outright violence and weakened traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. A gendered perspective captures women’s plight in water security amidst conflicts, particularly from rivers and wells.

“We used to share grazing space as one village; now people put poison in water points because they are angry” (Elderly Woman, Jahana, 2022).

The situation has reduced social harmony and collective land stewardship. Furthermore, food insecurity threatens to exacerbate social inequalities, particularly affecting women, the elderly, and orphans. Participants noted cultural sustainability concerns regarding the preservation and respect for local traditions, identities, and knowledge systems. Focus group discussion participants argued:

“Without traditional leadership structures as custodians of the land, culture will be delegitimised or overridden, eroding our customary norms and values. Cultural landscapes in this area such as sacred groves, burial sites, ritual fields are getting disrespected or destroyed due to resettlement without community consultation” Headman, Chief Jahana Area, 2022).

There is a loss of cultural heritage and traditional agricultural knowledge weakens intergenerational transfer of sustainable land use practices. The disempowerment of chiefs risks not just governance gaps, but cultural dislocation as an outcome of policy confusion. Institutional Sustainability relates to the capacity of governance structures and institutions to support fair, adaptive, and enduring systems. The absence of this capacity often leads to ambiguity in the recognition of chiefs vs. resettlement committees or state land officers creates administrative confusion as noted in the response by one of the key informants below.

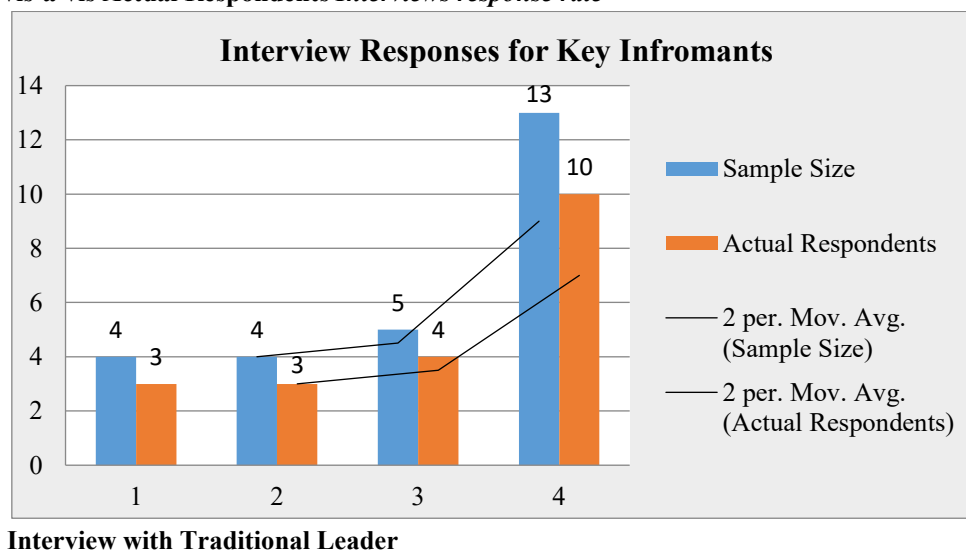
“Land allocation processes that do not integrate customary tenure systems undermine institutional legitimacy, which yields conflict and disrupts livelihoods and food security. Unclear mandates lead to inconsistent conflict resolution and weak enforcement of land-use rules. For example, if one chief allocates land and another tries to enforce boundaries, who has the real power?” (Local Government Officer, 2022).

The post FTLRP conflicts are also criticised from a political sustainability perspective, where significant importance is the stability of political arrangements that foster fair representation, and responsiveness of governance to local citizens’ needs. Without such, conflicts over land-use and leadership legitimacy fuel local-level political factionalism, sometimes tied to broader party politics. Marginalization of traditional authorities may lead to loss of local voice in national policy debates on land. A staff member in the District Development Coordinator’s Office at Insiza suggested;

“The absence of inclusive dialogue between settlers, traditional leaders, and the state weakens participatory governance. Politicized land allocations erode trust in land reform as a legitimate process, affecting rural communities’ livelihoods and food security thereby” (District Development Coordinators’ Office, Insiza District, 2022).

Sustainability is deeply rooted in how land is organized and governed, not just in ecological or economic terms, but as a systemic issue involving justice, identity, and space. In Zimbabwe’s FTLRP areas, poor spatial planning and uncoordinated resettlement have led to fragmented landscapes, overlapping claims, and vulnerable communities lacking services. The absence of functional traditional leadership and clear land-use policies has pushed communal farmers to marginal lands while prime areas are occupied without oversight. For sustainable land use and long-term resilience, integrated planning that respects both statutory and customary governance is essential.

Figure 5: Sample vis-à-vis Actual Respondents Interviews response rate



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Regarding traditional leaders' customary roles in development, a key informant stated:

Traditional leaders are responsible for maintaining societal harmony by mediating disputes, particularly those involving land, livestock, and family matters. Government also entrusts them with the administration of customary punishments and presiding over customary courts (Headman, Chief Jahana Area, 2022).

Traditionally, leaders hold the responsibility of resolving disputes, enforcing cultural norms, and overseeing community matters, especially those related to land and family. Their roles also extend to presiding over customary courts and upholding judgments as per local customs and practices. The recent constitutional framework legally acknowledges these responsibilities despite the contrary existing arrangement on the ground further supports this.

Historically, traditional leadership in Zimbabwe has been seen as a pillar for maintaining social cohesion. Traditional leaders are expected to be custodians of culture, serving as mediators and adjudicators in community matters, particularly land disputes and family issues. Their role, enshrined in customary law and increasingly formalized through legal systems, has long been foundational to rural governance (Chirau, 2018). The introduction of formal governance systems through the FTLRRP, however, has created tension by eroding some of these traditional roles.

Land governance in the Debshan Ranches area has become highly contested, with overlapping claims of authority from Chiefs Maduna, Jahana, and Mazetese. The Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) disrupted historically recognised boundaries and traditional systems of land allocation, resulting in leadership ambiguity and weakened customary oversight. This lack of clarity has fostered tension among communities and emboldened villagers to disregard customary rules and institutions.

As one respondent under Chief Mazetese explained: *“There are too many chiefs claiming this place now. People no longer know who to follow, so they just do what they want, especially those who came here recently.”* This confusion has undermined traditional leadership legitimacy and contributed to ongoing land-use conflicts.

The FTLRRP has had a significant impact on the territorial boundaries traditionally managed by local chiefs, leading to confusion and conflict over leadership. The introduction of resettled populations from outside the area has increasingly seen the contestation of the delineation of authority, undermining traditional leadership structures. This has resulted in disputes over land and jurisdiction that were previously clear-cut (Nyakudya & Gukurume, 2022).

In post-reform Zimbabwe, traditional leaders frequently handle land-related conflicts, primarily involving disputes over grazing and cropping areas, double land allocations, and competition for infrastructure development like dams and bridges. These tensions have intensified under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), as new settlers challenge existing claims. Although local governance structures—especially traditional leaders and the District Land Committee (DLC)—play a central role in mediating such conflicts although their effectiveness is often limited by fragmented and overlapping leadership structures.

The FTLRP has significantly disrupted local land governance structures in Zimbabwe, particularly by displacing traditional leadership from their historical role in land allocation and use. As newly resettled farmers encroach on communal grazing lands that were once uncontested, tensions have escalated, resulting in land disputes and the erosion of customary authority. Traditional leaders report feeling marginalized and disempowered, primarily due to their exclusion from the resettlement process and the disregard for established territorial boundaries (Key Finding, 2025).

While intended to redistribute land to marginalized groups, the FTLRRP has inadvertently led to significant land-use disputes and disempowerment among traditional leaders. By allowing for the resettlement of people without proper consultation with local leaders, it has eroded traditional land-use practices and created new fault lines within communities. The chiefs' diminished role in land governance has led to a sense of humiliation and loss of legitimacy, further complicating their ability to manage conflicts and sustain community order (Moyo & Hove, 2019).

This section presents several narratives structured to highlight sentiments such as frustration, exclusion, resistance and disempowerment verbatim quotes from local voices, and a clear storyline that connects encroachment, leadership legitimacy, land use, and conflict within the framework of Zimbabwe's Fast-Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) and how these collectively affect livelihoods and food security.

1. Narrating Encroachment and Power Contestation

During the early years of the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme, a group of newly resettled farmers with allegiance to Chief Mazetese of the Midlands Province moved into areas historically under the jurisdiction of Chief Jahana Khumalo in Insiza North. This movement, perceived by local leadership as unauthorized encroachment, triggered tensions over both land and authority.

“These people from Chief Mazetese's side just came and started grazing their cattle in our fields—without even greeting us or informing the headman. They say we are not their leaders.” (Village Head, Jahana Area, 2022)

The act of driving cattle into cultivated fields belonging to long-settled communal farmers was widely viewed not just as a practical disruption, but a symbolic challenge to customary authority and local tenure norms.

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2. Resistance to Customary Authority and Breakdown of Traditional Mediation

The traditional leaders under Chief Jahana—village heads and headmen—repeatedly tried to engage the new settlers to resolve disputes through customary mediation. However, these efforts were often rebuffed.

“Each time we summon them to the village court to talk things out, they don’t come. They tell us, ‘We do not answer to you. We belong to Chief Mazetese.’” – Local Headman, Jahana

This refusal to recognize traditional structures underscores deep legitimacy disputes, rooted in both historical displacement and the administrative ambiguities of the FTLRP.

3. Historical Displacement and Reclaiming Authority

Chief Jahana’s community traces their ancestral claims to this land prior to colonial displacements that relocated them to Gokwe. During the FTLRP, after sustained lobbying and petitions to the government, portions of this land were officially restored to Chief Jahana’s jurisdiction.

“We went to the government. We told them this was our land before we were moved. They listened—and we were given back this place. But now, the same people who were settled here by force are saying we have no right.” – Chief Jahana

Despite this recognition, the practical enforcement of leadership legitimacy and land boundaries remains fraught.

4. Livelihood Conflicts and Spark of Violence

Tensions often escalate when older communal farmers retaliate against the incursion of cattle from newly resettled areas, which are sometimes deliberately sent to graze on fields that are not yet harvested.

“They send cattle to graze in our fields just before harvest. When we try to drive them away or impound them, they say we have no power to touch their cattle. This has brought fights between families.” – Elderly Communal Farmer, Jahana Area

Such provocations are perceived as deliberate attempts to assert dominance over land-use patterns, with severe consequences for food security and social cohesion.

5. Underlying Structural Issues

At the heart of these recurring conflicts are unresolved questions of land tenure legitimacy and a lack of coordinated land use planning. The state’s ambivalence in clearly delineating leadership authority has left a vacuum in local governance.

“There’s competition over land use and no clear legitimacy about who owns or leads here. That’s what is causing all these fights.” – NGO Land Mediator, Matabeleland South

These narratives illustrate how ambiguity in land ownership, divided allegiance to traditional leaders, and unstructured land use post-reform converge to generate persistent and often volatile conflict in areas like Debshan Ranches. The refusal of new settlers to submit to the traditional leadership of Chief Jahana is more than a local quarrel—it is emblematic of wider fractures in Zimbabwe’s post-FTLRP governance landscape, where legitimacy and spatial planning remain contested.

1.9 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The interviews reveal a complex intersection between traditional leadership, land reforms, and community conflicts in the Debshan Ranches area. Traditional leaders, once the custodians of land and culture, are now grappling with the consequences of the FTLRRP, which has blurred jurisdictional boundaries and introduced new challenges related to land allocation and governance. Conflicts over grazing land, land allocations, and the encroachment of new settlers are major concerns, compounded by the loss of clear authority. Traditional leaders’ inability to mediate these issues due to their diminished roles has further exacerbated tensions and hindered development. These findings align with broader debates about the impact of land reforms on traditional governance structures and the complexities of implementing policy reforms in rural Zimbabwe (Sibanda, 2021).

1.10 CONCLUSION

The study reveals the complex dynamics of land reform in Zimbabwe’s Insiza District, where traditional leadership, governance policies and land use conflicts converge. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) has triggered persistent disputes over land tenure, worsened by poor coordination among traditional leaders, local government, and national authorities. Influxes of migrants and the rise of informal livelihoods like gold panning reflect the economic hardships facing resettled communities. While some farmers have shown resilience through communal labour systems such as Nhimbe/Amalima, broader development is undermined by land conflicts, weak infrastructure, and limited access to farming inputs. The study also highlights structural governance inefficiencies caused by overlapping mandates and legitimacy struggles between traditional and elected leaders. Addressing these challenges requires cohesive, inclusive, and coordinated leadership for integrated governance approaches that harmonize traditional and modern leadership systems to support resilient, inclusive, and sustainable rural livelihoods.

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1.11 RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance sustainable livelihoods, the study proposes the following recommendations, structured around the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework components:

Policy Level Recommendations

Human Capital – Strengthening Traditional Leadership and Governance

A pressing need has emerged to build the governance capacity of traditional leadership structures in rural communities. Structured training programs are essential to equip traditional leaders with skills in governance, development planning, and conflict resolution. This would enable them to lead more effectively while maintaining legitimacy and cultural relevance. Moreover, strengthening collaboration between traditional authorities, local councils, and state agencies is pivotal in ensuring equitable and transparent land allocations. A harmonized governance approach that merges traditional and modern leadership models can foster inclusive and community-driven decision-making processes. Such integration can transform traditional institutions into dynamic agents of development while preserving their custodial roles.

Social Capital – Strengthening Community Engagement and Institutional Collaboration

Social cohesion and participatory governance were highlighted as critical factors in rural development and land management. Establishing formal dialogue platforms between traditional leaders, elected councillors, and local government institutions was proposed as a means to improve coordination and trust among stakeholders. The formation of community land committees was recommended to manage and resolve land disputes fairly while improving the efficiency of allocation processes. Inclusive governance that empowers marginalized voices—such as women, youth, and minority groups—was emphasized as central to sustainable community engagement. When communities participate meaningfully in governance, a sense of ownership and accountability is fostered, contributing to long-term stability.

Natural Capital – Sustainable Land Use and Agricultural Practices

Environmental sustainability emerged as a critical concern, particularly in the context of land use and agricultural activities. The findings emphasized the urgent implementation of land-use policies that prioritize environmental stewardship and prevent degradation. To bolster agricultural productivity and ecosystem health, the adoption of agroecological farming techniques was recommended, including organic soil enrichment and diversified cropping systems. Rotational grazing and controlled settlement expansion were also identified as necessary measures to mitigate the overuse of natural resources. These strategies collectively aim to preserve biodiversity, protect soil health, and ensure that land remains productive for future generations.

Financial Capital – Enhancing Livelihood Opportunities

Economic sustainability in resettled rural areas hinges significantly on improving access to financial resources. The findings suggest that targeted credit schemes are needed to enable smallholder farmers to invest in inputs, tools, and infrastructure. Market linkages should be expanded to allow farmers to sell produce beyond the confines of the state-controlled Grain Marketing Board (GMB), enhancing income opportunities. Additionally, incentivizing cooperative farming models that adopt sustainable agricultural practices can support resilience and self-sufficiency. Such financial empowerment strategies are essential for transforming subsistence farming into viable, growth-oriented livelihoods.

Physical Capital – Infrastructure and Resource Development

The physical infrastructure necessary to support rural agriculture and livelihoods remains underdeveloped. Stakeholders underscored the need to improve roads, water sources, and storage facilities to boost productivity and reduce post-harvest losses. Expanding irrigation schemes was identified as a key intervention to buffer communities against climate variability and improve crop yields. Capacity-building initiatives were also proposed to expose farmers to modern agricultural technologies and methods. These infrastructure investments and knowledge transfers are fundamental to enhancing efficiency and ensuring that rural economies can withstand climatic and economic shocks.

Political and Institutional Reforms – Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

Governance in rural areas is often marred by unclear jurisdictional boundaries between traditional authorities and elected officials. The findings recommend that responsibilities be clearly delineated to minimize conflict and duplication of roles. Legislative reforms should affirm the complementary roles of traditional leaders within modern governance frameworks, rather than positioning them in adversarial roles. Furthermore, improved policy coordination is necessary to align development initiatives, reduce bureaucratic fragmentation, and optimize resource use. These reforms are foundational to ensuring that governance structures are transparent, efficient, and conducive to inclusive rural development.

The success of sustainable rural development in Insiza North hinges on inclusive governance, capacity building, and infrastructural investments that empower communities. Strengthening synergies between traditional leaders, local authorities, and development stakeholders will bridge governance gaps, mitigate conflicts, and enhance the livelihoods of resettled farmers. By addressing

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structural inefficiencies and fostering cooperation, stakeholders can ensure a resilient and food-secure rural economy in Zimbabwe. Thus, through implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work toward a more structured, equitable, and sustainable approach to land use and governance in Zimbabwe's rural communities. Strengthening traditional leadership structures, improving policy coordination, and enhancing access to resources will ultimately support food security and rural development in areas affected by FTLRP.

Actionable Recommendations based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

1. Human Capital – Capacity Building for Traditional Leaders

Traditional leaders require structured training programs to enhance their understanding of governance, development planning, and conflict resolution. Workshops, seminars, and knowledge exchange platforms should be established to equip them with the necessary skills to effectively participate in community development.

2. Social Capital – Strengthening Collaborative Governance

To reduce governance conflicts, local authorities should actively integrate traditional leaders into decision-making structures. Establishing formalized dialogue forums between traditional leaders, councillors, and local government agencies will improve cohesion and foster joint development initiatives.

3. Natural Capital – Sustainable Land Use and Conflict Resolution

Land disputes among resettled communities can be mitigated through clear land use planning and tenure security measures. Traditional leaders, in partnership with government agencies, should oversee participatory land-use mapping to ensure equitable resource distribution and sustainable agricultural practices.

4. Financial Capital – Market Access and Economic Empowerment

Farmers in Insiza North frequently struggle to sell surplus produce due to logistical barriers. Investment in rural transport infrastructure, cooperative storage facilities, and direct market linkages can improve financial capital and enable reinvestment into farming inputs, enhancing food security and economic stability.

5. Physical Capital – Infrastructure Development for Food Security

Improving storage, transportation, and access to processing facilities will reduce post-harvest losses and enhance food security. Local governance structures should prioritize rural infrastructure projects that align with community needs and development aspirations.

6. Political and Institutional Reforms – Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities

A clear delineation of responsibilities between traditional leaders and elected officials is critical for governance efficiency. Legislative reforms should ensure that traditional leadership structures complement rather than compete with local authorities, fostering mutual respect and cooperation in delivering rural development initiatives. The success of sustainable rural development in Insiza North hinges on inclusive governance, capacity building, and infrastructural investments that empower communities. Strengthening synergies between traditional leaders, local authorities, and development stakeholders will bridge governance gaps, mitigate conflicts, and enhance the livelihoods of resettled farmers, ultimately ensuring a resilient and food-secure rural economy.

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