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Processes of Change: Climate Variability and Agro-pastoralists’ Livelihood Strategies in Gaza Province, Mozambique

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Abstract

The livelihood of agro-pastoralists in Mozambique’s semi-arid areas is becoming progressively more vulnerable. Increased frequency and duration of droughts turns food insecurity into an almost constant threat. The system’s resilience is further affected by pressures such as population growth, resource degradation and lack of basic services. Promoting social learning is a promising approach to develop and improve coping mechanisms to climate variability. In addition, through building human and social capital, it can lead to empowerment of agro-pastoralists. To achieve such results a first step is the comprehension of the local “socially based spatiality” a concept that characterises “organisation, use[s], and meaning of space as product of social translation, transformation and experience” (Soja, 1980:210). Therefore this first phase of the research grasps two main issues related to household’s livelihood activities: 1. Socio-spatial organisation; and 2. Pluriactivity. The last stands here for the customary diverse livelihood strategy of rural populations. This analysis, which shall be expanded during a second phase of field research, is done by collaboratively assessing and reflecting on life-world through the use of tools of applied anthropology.

Due to frequent crop failures in the past decade, agro-pastoralists reinforce off-farm livelihood practices. Among these are, for example, the increase of charcoal production and the extraction of wood. The first has become an important livelihood strategy, which offers casual employment opportunities for women and young men, in the face of threatened food security. Due to its buffering capacity against extended dry spells, the role of livestock becomes crucial to the household. Yet, with the effects of climate change the livestock vulnerability also increases. With a background on the local life-worlds, our next step will be on Action Research, whereby we will focus on increasing adaptive capacity through collaborative learning strategies.

Keywords: Agro-pastoralists, climate variability, livelihood strategies, pluriactivity