

# A mixed-method systematic review to assess household characteristics and livelihoods in rural Zimbabwe.

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## Abstract

Livelihood activities that depend on natural resources form a continuum of people-forest interactions. Hence, households' decisions on land and resource use are influenced by a more complex set of factors which are beyond just a desire for forest products. This study is a meta-synthesis of the socio-economic demographic characteristics of households, and the role of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) production and trade in local livelihoods through building insights from previous studies. The aim was to understand how use of forest resources can effectively contribute to both livelihood enhancement and forest resources conservation.

## Introduction

Rural livelihood systems are dynamic, in space and time. A household is a complex set of relationships involving different economic, social, cultural and political networks and entitlements, accessed by different family or household members. Productive bricolage thus offers an approach to examine the roles of NTFPs in rural livelihoods, everyday decisions on natural resource use and forest resource changes in an integrated manner.

## Method

This study used a mixed-method systematic approach to combine and synthesize previous studies into a single primary synthesis. A total of 21 Journal article, 15 grey literature publications, seven book chapters and four theses that cover Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts in south-east Lowveld of Zimbabwe were reviewed.

## Highlights

- Within the same village, choice of livelihood activity varies with age of household head, education level, household size, ethnicity and gender.
- Livelihood benefits include enhancement of community health, education, income at the household level depending on proximity to National parks and Game ranches.
- Specialisation among livelihood systems reduces pressure on forest resources.
- Crop-cattle based livelihoods depend on forests more than other livelihoods systems.
- Rural households are active forest managers who purposively modify the landscape to safeguard the availability of valuable forest resources.
- The social value of forests range from totemism, sacred sites, sacred hills, ceremonial sites, sacred forests to sacred tree species.
- Rural households follow a seasonal and adaptable survival plan in which various activities are combined to produce integrated and flexible livelihood strategies.

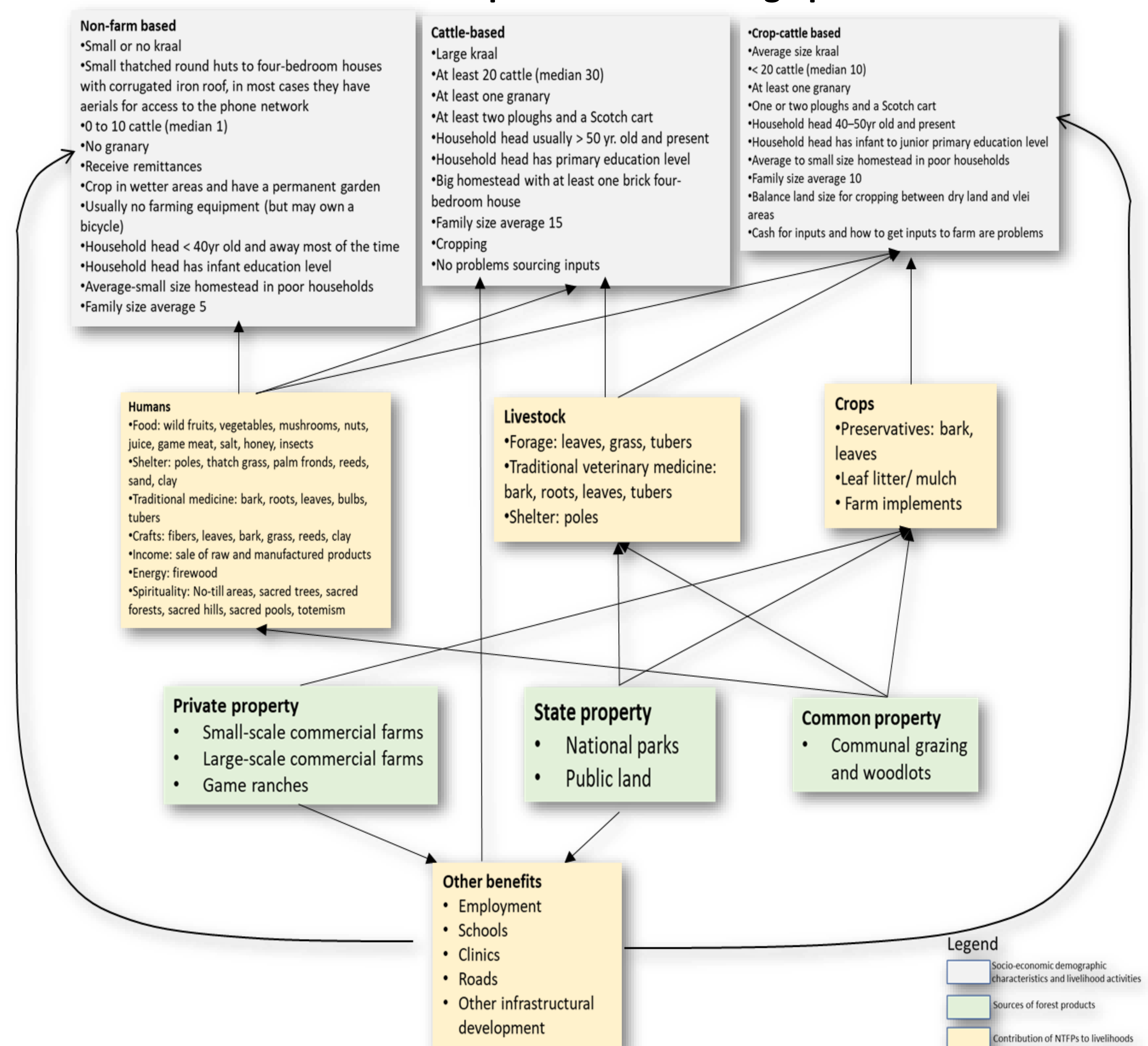
## Acknowledgements:

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## Results: NTFPs as a productive bricolage process



## Peak labor demands for rural households

Activity	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Crop production												
Livestock production												
Gardening/Irrigation												
Formal employment												
Casual work												
Beer brewing												
Brick molding												
Mopane worms												
Marula fruits												
Marula nuts												
Baobab fruits												
Basketry/Weaving												
Palm wine												
Craft production												
Housework												

## Conclusion

Though aggregate contribution of NTFPs to rural households varies amongst different social actors and livelihood systems, NTFPs play a significant role across all livelihood systems. Despite the differences in aggregate contribution across livelihood systems, the contribution incentivizes rural households to actively manage the landscape and to safeguard the availability of valuable forest resources.