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Agro-Ecology and Power Relations in the Use of *Ziziphus mauritiana* in Muzarabani: Insights from Political Ecology and Actor-Network Theory

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Abstract

The linkages between eco-resources and conflict are as old as humanity itself. The aggressive nature of climate change coupled with the need to attain food security in semi-arid Zimbabwe has caused conflicts over the use of *Ziziphus mauritiana* (*Zm*) in Muzarabani district. History is abounding with friendships, conflicts and associations forged by societies to preserve access to, and governance of natural resources. Efforts to settle actors who might block access to *Zm* value chain have been crucial in Muzarabani. The significance of *Zm* has been evident in politics, struggles, mediation, and actor network relations. The influx of environmental migrants in sparsely populated semi- arid Muzarabani has presented more complex dimensions into the *Zm* politics, with concerns such as differences over freshly drawn physical boundaries, complaints over the powerful integration of previously autonomous actors into new societal structures and the creation of new actors identities, among others. The creation of new actors has altered the nature of the *Zm* related conflicts. In this paper we use theoretical insights from the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and Political Ecology (PE), to discover the link between power relations and the reconfiguration of *Zm* use and practices toward sustainability. Through the observation of the productive and exploitive characteristics of power, the paper explores power in practice and how it creates and imposes mores, norms and rules. Power generates and employs regulations thus motivating and embracing specific ecological management, in addition to shaping out how *Zm* are used. In specific terms, the theoretical outlines of ANT and PE help to ascertain how power is altered through socio-material situations, oral and transcribed discourses, actor networked frames and cultural institutions. The paper highlights how agency is dispersed, through power in *Zm* use, among diverse actors (human/social and material/nonhuman) entities. The thought highlights the importance of aligning, enlarging and cultivating spaces in which small scale farmers in arid areas are endowed with the ability to modify and regulate, or fight and reject, new ideas, in order to practice the kinds of *Zm* production they consider to be sustainable, applicable and valuable.

Keywords: Actor-network theory, mediation, political ecology, *Ziziphus mauritiana*