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VS

LOCAL REALITIES

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HOW TO EFFECTIVELY PROTECT FARMERS' DATA IN AFRICA

Digital solutions are increasingly linking agricultural producers to information, markets or financial services across Africa. By using advanced digital devices, these services can collect vast amounts of data that can help improve service delivery. However, without effective data-protection frameworks, farm-related data may be used without the consent and even to the disadvantage of producers. Therefore, safeguarding and effectively using agricultural data need to be balanced.

Why is protecting farm data important?

Farm data includes data about the farmer, the farming site and operations, and commercial transactions. The protection of farm data is a complex issue that stands at the intersection of different regulatory frameworks, such as personal data-protection laws, contract and competition laws and intellectual property rights. None of these regulatory frameworks currently provides sufficient protection for farm data and many aspects and effects of their application to farm data remain unclear.

Africa's data protection regulations are 'in the making'

African regulators have not yet responded to the specific challenges associated with farm (or more generally agricultural) data protection. The only transparent regulatory framework covering data-protection requirements for farm data in Africa, even if not specifically so, are personal data-protection regulations. At the continental level, African states adopted the 'The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection' in 2014, which has not yet entered into force. By the end of 2023, 34 African countries had enacted such regulations at the national level.

An analysis of existing laws shows that they generally reflect the basic elements of the AU Convention mentioned above. However, these laws often fall short with regard to specific legal aspects of digital-service provision, such as international data transfer and automated decision-making. Enforcement capacities also remain a concern, and several countries have not appointed a data-protection authority yet. In other countries, these authorities are not independent.

Weak spots: Compliance and enforcement

Where personal data-protection laws exist, compliance among digital agricultural service providers is limited. A review of 106 providers shows that almost two thirds did not have a privacy policy readily available on their website. Among the available policies, the majority does not protect all users' rights over their personal data as set out

in national laws. Generally, awareness of data-protection issues is low among Africa's agricultural producers, as is the ability to control access to their data. Survey results from Ethiopia, Ghana and Benin show that only about a third of the producers surveyed actively seek information by reading the privacy policy. A slightly larger share, but still the minority, is taking steps to protect their personal data. Awareness is somewhat higher among younger and more educated respondents.

Thus, while African countries have been making good progress in the adoption of personal data protection laws, revisions of many laws are needed to bring them in line with the AU Convention. Importantly, capacities of enforcement institutions need to be strengthened. At the same time, it is necessary to raise awareness among agricultural producers and thus make sure that they know about, act on and demand compliance with the rights to their data.



Link to article: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17579961.2023.2245673> (open access)

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IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE: A PEEK INTO THE GOND COMMUNITY'S LIFEWORLD IN CENTRAL INDIA

In India, contradictions galore! A rich tapestry of people, problems and policies, reflected in the microcosms of India's myriads of villages, is where this story unfolds. The Gond people, who refer to themselves as *Koitur*, are nested at the fringes of Central India's forests. They form an ethnolinguistic indigenous group inhabiting the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and parts of east India. As traditional forest-dwelling communities, Gond people are often marginalized in today's Indian society. Many Gond people live in remote villages from smallholder farming and (agro-)forestry and have a rich repertoire of knowledge about life in and from the forests. For generations, they have collected wood for fuel, leaves for fodder, fruits and flowers for food and herbs for medicine.

Women's pivotal role

Life has been particularly difficult for Gond women who endure the burden of fetching water, as well as collecting and burning fuelwood – making them exposed to smoke, which is detrimental to their health. However, livelihoods and culture are undergoing changes. For example many of the Gond households use Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) today, which is provided under government policies. Consequently, and as intended, cooking has become cleaner, healthier, easier and less time-consuming, while fuelwood logging in the forests has declined.

The story about (not) using Liquefied Petroleum Gas

First research findings about the Gond's lifeworld show, for example, that some Gond women despise cooking with LPG gas: They are either too scared or do not like the taste of meals prepared with them. *"The gas stove looks daunting"*, exclaimed one Gond woman in an interview, while another one quipped that *"the flame is too high and food cooks fast"*, thus not retaining flavours and taste. Many Gond women showed that they keep an LPG gas stove for everyday cooking while they continue to cook with fuelwood for special occasions like festivals, marriages etc. The next generation is forgetting the trade of collecting firewood but the older generation still collects it from the forests nearby. While some have an LPG connection but do not use it every time, others have an LPG cylinder but relinquished it for other family members after the extended family split and now use fuelwood again.

Changing food habits

Older women attribute the next generation's changing food habits to these 'modern' cooking techniques. An older Gond woman stated that *"our generation was poor and could not afford rice and wheat every time. For a few weeks every year, we survived on wild flowers (mahua), berries and leaves. But the tastes and preferences of our*



children have changed". Another older woman jauntily declared that she was able to recuperate from illness in a matter of hours - and even danced at her nephew's wedding – all because she ate *mahua* all her life. "*Your generation would probably take four days to even get up from bed if you fall this sick because you are on a less-nutritious diet of rice and wheat*", she chided me.

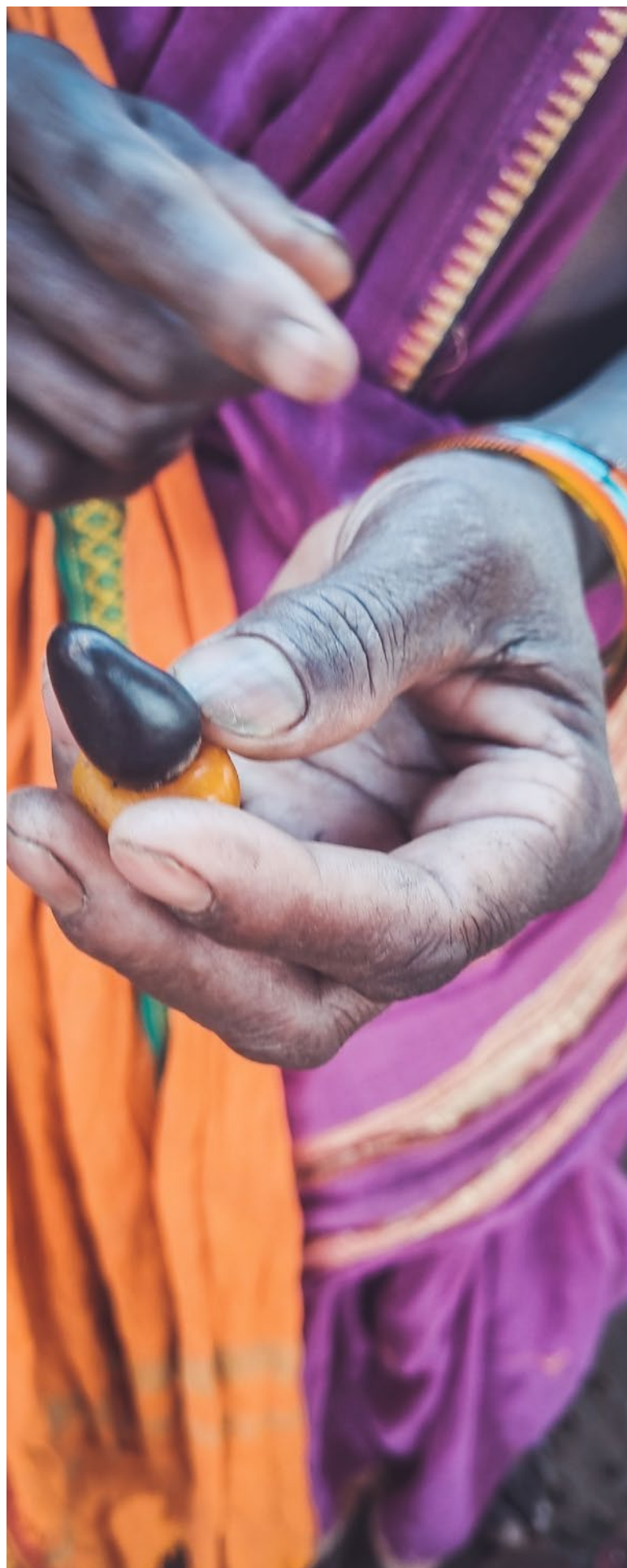
Gond at a crossroad?

Though they are one of the oldest ethnic groups in Central India, the Gond people find themselves today in the whirlwind of modernization, between not anymore and not yet. On the way, they seem to be losing a big part of their heritage and culture. Many policies designed to 'help them' are costing them their traditional beliefs and practices. But, the question is, what could be the real alternative to this march of modernization?

ZEF and **Right Livelihood College (RLC)** Campus Bonn junior researcher Sakshi Abrol is currently conducting empirical field-work in the Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh forest belt of India. She is working with local forest-dependent communities called Gond and tries to find out how their livelihood opportunities could be enhanced. In her research she applies a mixed-method approach, including focus group discussions and interviews with Gond people, in particular women and elderly. In this way she wants to understand how the relationship of these people with forests and their related life-patterns have changed over time and what challenges they have been facing in earning a decent living out of procuring and selling forest goods.

This research is funded by the DAAD.

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CLIMATE CHANGE AND MINING A DOUBLE BURDEN FOR RURAL LIVELIHOODS IN GHANA

The West African region, including Ghana, has become a vulnerable hotspot to climate change effects - as predicted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). West Africa's rural areas are affected most, which is partly related to their over-reliance on subsistence farming and other ecosystem services. However, there may be additional factors that impede rural communities from adapting to the local effects of changing climate. Among them are socio-economic and infrastructural deficits, added by the harsh consequences of national development policies and global trade relations - including natural resource extraction and conservation strategies.

Rural Africa's livelihood crisis not only due to the changing climate

Following the recommendations of the UNFCCC for countries to develop and implement their nationally determined contributions to the international climate-change agenda, Ghana has taken several adaptation measures to combat the effects of climate change. It has, for example, set up a National Adaptation Plan Framework in 2018. Moreover, it has initiated several adaptation strategies for the country's northern region, where rural livelihoods are considered the most vulnerable, with only a single rainfall season. However, rural regions in Ghana's south, such as the forest zones, are equally vulnerable, due to socioeconomic factors besides the local impact of climate change.

Southern Ghana is a natural-resource enclave both from below the Earth's surface (minerals and petroleum) and above (forest and agriculture). These natural resources drive the nation's economy and sustain rural livelihoods. But, they also have generated mining activities, dating back to several centuries ago. Hence, we see a growing number of extractive activities such as mining within or near forest reserves, often closely surrounded by forest-dependent communities.

Effects and trade-offs of corporate mining activities on local communities

Traditionally, rural communities in southern Ghana live from rain-fed agriculture and non-timber forest products. However, mining has become a dominant economic factor. This development has had an enormous impact on local communities' livelihoods. Community leaders, for example, increasingly lease out their arable lands for extractive activities such as rubber or teak plantation and minerals mining. Such trades are perceived to enhance rapid development but often ignore the trade-offs: the rural communities living around the mining operations are often directly exposed to their effects.

Most multinational mining firms attempt to compensate for the socio-environmental harm they cause by initiating

benevolent activities. This way, they secure their "social license" (communal acceptance) to operate. However, not all households benefit from such corporate social responsibility initiatives. The sheer presence of a mining operation can thus be both a source of livelihood empowerment but also disempowerment for different households within the same mining-affected communities.

Study angle: role of corporate responsibility

This study demonstrates the crucial role of corporate responsibility in adapting to climate change impacts in rural mining landscapes within the forest zones of southern Ghana. It examined the capacity of households to fend for themselves amidst the simultaneous impact of increasing extreme climate events and mining activities. The research showed that the local effects of changing climate across the forest zones can worsen the plight of vulnerable households and even impede the capacity of the mining operations to provide their corporate responsibility initiatives.

Focus: southern Ghana's forest zones

The transboundary Volta Basin occupies about 70% of the land area of Ghana. The remaining 30% of the country's land area covers the southwestern part and coastal systems. The country's forest zones are mainly located in southwestern Ghana, consisting of rainforest and deciduous agro-ecological zones. Here, conservation parks, timber extraction, plantation farming, mining, and petroleum activities are abundant. For our study, two communities surrounding two mining operations, one located within the rainforest and one in the deciduous zone, were selected. We surveyed household heads and mineworkers for their perceptions of the impacts of climate change and mining operations. In addition, we conducted





a historic analysis of extreme rainfall and temperature events across southern Ghana.

Effects on local livelihoods of changing climate and mining

The household respondents affirmed that changes induced by extractive activities and a changing climate do affect their livelihood resources. Particularly households with a large family size, with the head being unemployed, divorced, or widow(ed) were more likely to perceive that their livelihoods are affected by mining and climate-change impacts.

Similarly, mineworkers attested that their companies were unable to provide alternative livelihoods for their affected communities, with their operational activities also threatened by climate-change impact. Mineworkers demanded that the regulatory bodies governing Ghana's mining industry should integrate a climate-impact and adaptation assessment into their regulatory requirements for the sector.

The fieldwork also revealed that corporate responsibility plays a key role in rural development. We can see a direct dichotomy between communities classified as mine-affected compared to non-mine-affected, even if these communities are all located along the same mine-bound road. Moreover, state-appointed regulators acknowledged the philanthropic nature of corporate social responsibilities. They thus affirmed the notion that by engaging in benevolent activities, mining companies seek to buy social acceptance from affected communities - rather than providing alternative livelihoods as outlined in national environmental regulations.

So many households face a double burden caused by both climate extremes and the effects of mining. Excessive rainfall, for instance, can be cause of contaminants flowing from mining sites into farmlands. This can e.g. lead to mines losing their social license. Hence, to be able to coexist and address the double burden, it is imperative that collaborative approaches are being developed. These should involve both the mining operators as well as the affected communities.

Such initiatives can include the existing corporate responsibility activities, which mostly address the infrastructural and socio-economic empowerment of the affected communities. However, the study's author emphasized that implementing such a plan has to cautiously target the most vulnerable households identified in her study.

Further reading: DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48565/bonndoc-229>

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BRIDGING SCIENCE AND POLICY AT ZEF: SHAPING GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY AGENDAS

Usually, the general public only hears about science-policy interfaces (SPIs) when media outlets communicate the main messages from a new global assessment. A recent example was the alarming message that [1 million species are threatened with extinction](#). Assessment reports are released every couple of years by global advisory bodies, the most renowned being the [IPCC \(the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change\)](#) and [IPBES \(the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services\)](#). IPCC and IPBES inform the international community on the detrimental impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, respectively.

Research on SPIs at ZEF

Researchers from ZEF are actively contributing to these assessments by providing decision-relevant knowledge, which is not policy prescriptive. [Junior-professor Lisa Bibler-Freudenberger](#), for example, is a lead author of the so-called [Nexus Assessment](#) of [IPBES](#). This unique thematic assessment has been featuring the interlinkages between biodiversity, food, health, water, and climate.

However, there is still little public knowledge and awareness on how these SPIs function: What are their overall policy impacts? Who is involved? What motivates scientists to invest time and effort into the work of these platforms? These knowledge gaps make SPIs an appealing subject for

research on questions such as: How do these platforms deal with complex interactions between different conflicting policy goals? Are experts from the Global South equally represented? Are these interfaces truly providing accurate, up-to-date scientific knowledge to policy-makers or are they biased to specific worldviews, disciplines, or political interests?

Several projects at ZEF are exploring SPIs as a field of research. In addition, these projects contribute to developing capacity among young scholars to support the important work of SPIs. One example is the [CABES project](#), funded by the [International Climate Initiative](#). CABES aims to boost the capabilities of biodiversity-professionals in West, Central, and East Africa and thus strengthen their engagement with IPBES. Additionally, ZEF researchers in the [LANUSYNCON](#) project are researching whether and to what extent science-policy-interfaces consider complex interactions between the sustainable development goals e.g., food production and biodiversity conservation.

Debating the role of science in United Nations' processes

In this context, ZEF organized a public [panel discussion](#) in October 2023 on the role of SPIs in United Nations' processes. Experts from different disciplines discussed opportunities and challenges in the practical work of scientists with young researchers and an interested audience.





The event took place just before the [UN Climate Summit \(COP28\)](#), which was hosted by the United Arab Emirates and chaired by [the head of the country's national oil company](#). This setting was highly controversial among the panelists, of whom many believed that fossil-fuel interests should not have a seat at the table. Nevertheless, most participants agreed that there is currently no real alternative to international climate and biodiversity negotiations. They also thought that despite the limitations of UN policy processes scientists have a moral obligation to stay involved and thus ensure that research has an impact.

This insight was endorsed by two recently published studies by [Niklas Wagner](#) and [Sara Velander](#) from the ZEF-based [LANUSYNCON](#) project team: Global SPIs are necessary to [enhance connectivity between experts and policymakers](#), synthesize complex scientific information for society, and identify [‘windows of opportunity’](#) to support the development and implementation of evidence-based policies.

However, challenges remain: The silo-design of global SPIs is an obstacle for considering tradeoffs and synergies between different policy goals, such as climate action and biodiversity conservation. Another issue is regional bias: [Voices from the Global South are often underrepresented](#) in global SPIs, as consistent engagement requires consistent funding. So assessments are likely to be biased towards knowledge from the Global North. This entails the risk of ‘quick fixes’ and ineffective solutions that do not meet the needs of the world’s most vulnerable populations.

Outlook

So the question is whether SPIs will become part of the system advocating ‘business as usual’ or if they turn into change-makers. The outcome depends on whether the challenges will be overcome in the future. The panelists at the ZEF event in October 2023 came up with a few suggestions: Investing more in translating scientific findings into ‘normal language’; creating regional SPI platforms; strengthening collaboration of SPIs, e.g. by publishing joint reports, and increasing funding for larger delegations from the Global South. All these measures could contribute to bridging silos, enhancing equity, and fostering widespread action on sustainable development.

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FROM A 'ONE HEALTH' PERSPECTIVE OUR FOOD SYSTEMS ARE NOT HEALTHY

Food systems play a vital role in providing people with healthy and nourishing food. But, they are also relevant in safeguarding the environment and animal welfare. Currently, however, global food systems are unsustainable and pose a significant threat to the planet: they contribute to environmental degradation, increase the global human health burden, and are detrimental to animal welfare.

According to estimates, food production and consumption account for almost 30% of the world's total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, alongside the depreciation of livestock conditions and animal welfare. Additionally, unhealthy eating habits related to so-called Western diets (mainly consisting of industrialized and processed foods) are causing a rise in non-communicable diseases. Therefore, our food systems urgently need a transformation. This requires a multidisciplinary approach, such as applied by 'One Health', which integrates different aspects of the food system, including human health, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability.

Sustainable food systems involve more than one dimension

To promote healthier, more ethical, and more sustainable eating habits of humans we have to look into the impact of their dietary patterns. By taking a life-cycle approach (from production to consumption) we can evaluate the sustainability of diets. This approach enables us to measure specific emissions and resources from food production to food-consumption. By incorporating other dimensions into this assessment, we can gain a better understanding of various components and goals of food systems. Examining animal welfare loss, for example, can deepen our un-

derstanding of how the foods we consume are having an impact on the lives of different animals. Moreover, consuming certain types of food can be associated with the onset of several chronic illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer.

What food choices make a difference?

To achieve our common societal goals of mitigating climate change, reducing human health burdens, and improving livestock production conditions, we must make mindful food choices. Our research indicates that by following a flexitarian or vegetarian diet and reducing meat-based products by 40%, we can significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions, promote better overall human health with improved nutrition, and reduce the negative impact on animal welfare. A crucial factor in this effort is the type of protein we consume. We should prioritize plant-based and vegetarian protein sources, such as eggs and dairy while increasing the consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds. By doing so, we can develop a balanced and sustainable approach to the health of people, animals, and ecosystems.

Juliana Minetto defended her doctoral thesis in April 2024 and received her doctoral degree from Bonn University's Faculty of Agriculture. This article is based on her doctoral research which was funded by the One Health project.

The research is funded by Ministry of Culture and Science of North Rhine-Westphalia.

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IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: APPLYING DECOLONIAL RESEARCH METHODS IN PRACTICE

This research takes you to the Dominican Republic, a well-known tourist destination in the Caribbean Sea. According to the Dominican Republic's Ministry of Tourism more than ten million tourists visited the country in 2023. Nevertheless, there is a flip side to this sunny image, especially when we look into the living conditions of the Bateyes communities on the island.

In the focus: The people in the Batayes

Bateyes are rural settlements, built in the 20th century in the vicinity of sugar mills to provide housing for seasonal sugarcane laborers coming from neighboring country Haiti. Over the decades, Bateyes have turned into permanent residencies for Haitian immigrants and their descendants. Today, the Bateyes have the lowest well-being indicators in the country, with very high rates of hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, statelessness, and sexually-transmitted diseases. Most Bateyes residents face precarious working conditions and racial discrimination. This PhD research on "The Impact of Anti-Haitianism on Bateyes in the Dominican Republic," analyzes the effects of certain government policies on Bateyes, in particular on the rights to work, housing, education, health, and nationality.

Decolonial research approach

As a PhD researcher, one of my main goals is to apply decolonial methods throughout my fieldwork. Ensuring counter-hegemonic research techniques to prevent the use of oppressive Western approaches in knowledge construction is pivotal for my work. These methods try to dismantle, question, and critique supremacist procedures that ignore participants' knowledge and reinforce patriarchy. Therefore, they deploy a continuous reflective process that prevents the misinterpretation and suppression of

participants' voices. Decolonial methods demand creative approaches going beyond conventional research methods. So, to gather data in my fieldwork in the Bateyes, in addition to 'traditional' ethnographic methods, I have used group debates, cooperative games, and popular theatre. I investigated the perception of gender violence through the theater with the monologue "Junior el mío," which tells the story of a woman who idealizes her partner despite suffering domestic violence. After the performance, the participating women shared their perceptions and experiences about gender violence in a relaxed and trusting space. This encounter revealed their challenges, strengths, defense mechanisms, and visions on the subject.

Reflection with participants

I also regularly shared my fieldwork reports with research participants, who provided feedback and corrected me when I misinterpreted any aspect of their reality. These feedbacks counteract the academic tendency to presume that study participants will never read your results, and they ensure their dignity, knowledge, and experiences are respected. Moreover, this approach increases data quality. Decolonial methods facilitate the inclusion of the voices and perspectives of illiterate people, whose contributions are highly significant, despite their lack of academic training. Furthermore, by applying these methods sensitive information is protected, especially when informants' integrity is in jeopardy. These techniques are not necessarily new but a conscious effort to stop reinforcing oppressive processes while doing empirical development research.

This research is funded by the DAAD.

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CULTURAL LANDSCAPE HERITAGES IN EASTERN AFRICA AT RISK

Many indigenous communities across the world use and conserve their landscapes as part of their culture and history. Millions of them live in cultural landscapes designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as World Heritage Sites. Often, they directly depend on these heritage sites' resources for their livelihoods. However, cultural landscapes under the UNESCO World Heritage Site label are changing rapidly and profoundly. Population growth, economic growth, changing cultures, environmental degradation and climate change are among the major drivers that link the local with the global level, and cultural heritage sites to questions of sustainable development.

Trends in sub-Saharan Africa's Cultural Landscape Heritages

Sub-Saharan Africa is affected most from these challenges. The ZEF research project "Local Dynamics and Integration of UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Outstanding Universal Value: Evidence from Cultural Landscapes in Ethiopia and Kenya" investigates changing needs, perceptions, and interests of people living in - and depending on resources from - UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Ethiopia and Kenya. It does so by framing these sites as dynamic systems and 'living landscapes'. The researchers focus on bottom-up perspectives across age, gender, and education status to understand changes, future prospects and challenges of the sites. The project's two case studies are the Konso Cultural Landscape UNESCO World Heritage Site in southern Ethiopia and the Sacred Mijikenda Kaya Forest UNESCO World Heritage Site in Kenya.

Konso Cultural Landscape in Ethiopia

The Konso Cultural Landscape is an area in the highlands of southern Ethiopia, characterized by dry-stone terraces and fortified settlements built since the 16th century. Traditionally, the terraces are used for smallholder agriculture, as well as to store water and protect the soil from erosion. Many Konso settlements are surrounded by massive stone walls and protected sacred forests used for medicinal purposes and as burial sites.

The Konso Cultural Landscape has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2011. It still largely retains its historic characteristics and structures. However, southern Ethiopia, including the Konso Cultural Landscape is undergoing rapid and profound changes. Research revealed an increasing rate of landscape fragmentation and a decline in diversity and cultural and environmental uniqueness. Based on satellite images taken between 1976 and 2023, forests and shrub land shrank by minus 1.13% and minus



1.34% per year, respectively; while settlements and agricultural land expanded. Interviews revealed that younger people are less interested in maintaining the dry-stone terraces and stone-walls around the settlements. Assessing the value of land is gradually changing from historical and cultural to financial. And though the terraces have been developed and managed traditionally over the last centuries, culturally protected areas are more and more incorporated into urban settlements as a result of urbanization.

Mijikenda Kaya Forests, Kenya

The Mijikenda Kaya Forests consist of ten larger forest sites spreading along the coast of Kenya. They host the remains of numerous fortified villages, known as kayas, created since the 16th century by the Mijikenda people. The villages were abandoned during the British colonial times but are now regarded as the abodes of ancestors. Their surrounding forests are used and conserved as sacred places. Today, they are the only remaining fragments of the once extensive coastal lowland forests in Kenya. The Mijikenda Kaya Forests were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage in 2008 for their unique cultural and environmental values. However, similar to the Konso Cultural Landscape in Ethiopia, the Mijikenda Kaya Forests experience significant land-use and land-cover changes. The main drivers include population growth, mining, agricultural expansion, and illegal logging for fuelwood and charcoal.

The current situation is deeply rooted in history. The colonial dispossession of Mijikenda people forced many people to settle in the fringes of the Kaya forests, including today's forest buffer zones. Land dispossession ushered in new forms of exploitative forest use, including commercial charcoal production, and an increasingly vibrant land market along the Kaya forests. These dynamics have had re-



percussions on traditional culture, exemplified by, among other things, a gradual disregard of indigenous norms and values of forest conservation, especially among the youth. The emergence of religious communities, materialized by mosques and churches being built along the fringes of the sacred forests, further weakens the respect for the councils of elders as custodians of the Kaya forests.

A new priority theme in research

The topic of cultural landscapes as well as questions of changes in UNESCO World Heritage sites and their adaptation to external and internal dynamics is of increasing importance in development studies and African studies. The

extent to which findings will be considered in policies and landscape management-practices from the local to the global levels remains to be seen. We will present some of our findings at the conference of the Association for African Studies (VAD) in September/October 2024 in Bayreuth. Also, a stakeholder workshop with politicians and other decision makers is planned in the course of 2024.

The project "Local Dynamics and Integration of UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Outstanding Universal Value: Evidence from Cultural Landscapes in Ethiopia and Kenya" is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation (2022- 2026).

Link to website: <https://bit.ly/ZEF-Heritage>

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Wooden statues in Waka, Konso Cultural Landscape in Ethiopia



VIEWPOINT: “I FEEL HONORED TO BE AMONG THE FEW WOMEN WORKING IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS”

Interview with Rosemary Isoto, Professor at the Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics of Makerere University in Uganda on women in African agriculture.

What experiences have you made as a female agricultural economist from and working in Africa?

Agricultural economics is a field still dominated by men. Hence, I feel honored to be among the few women working in this area. I also feel a continuous need and challenge to ensure I represent other women well, including being a role model for other young women. Worldwide, women face the task of motherhood yet they also have to excel professionally. I have had to juggle among these many roles that society expects of me as a woman but also compete on the same scale with men.

What role can female agricultural economists play and what specific contribution can they make?

Female agricultural economists are underrepresented in leadership and policy-making positions. So they are even under more pressure and required to work harder than their male colleagues. Yet it's important for agricultural economists and more so for women to be at the table where discussions on the country's national development priorities are held and decisions taken. There are research and development questions especially in the agricultural sector that are dominated by or particularly affect women. Those questions are better framed through women's lenses. No one will consider women's positions and perceptions if they are not actually present in such discussions and in policy-making positions.

Which challenges and opportunities do you see for women in Africa's agri-food sector?

Women in Africa's agri-food sector face several challenges and opportunities. Some of these challenges include limited access to productive resources such as land, agricultural inputs and technologies, but also to agricultural and market information. These challenges can hinder their productivity and profitability and make them less competitive in comparison to their male counterparts. Overall, women in rural areas often have lower levels of education or none at all. They also face many limitations in accessing training opportunities due to the nature of their domestic roles. This can affect their ability to adopt new agricultural technologies and practices.

In addition, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affect women, leading to food and nutrition insecurity. Women are often more vulnerable than men who use to have better access to climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Another issue is unpaid care and domestic work that societal norms and stereotypes impose on women. This not only constricts their time and energy for engaging in agricultural activities, but also limits their decision-making power, mobility and participation in agricultural activities and markets.

So what about the opportunities?

Yes, there are also opportunities arising for rural women. For example: the increasing demand for food, as a result of Africa's growing population and urbanization. This growth creates an opportunity for ready markets where women can trade their agricultural output. Governments and organizations are increasingly recognizing the important role women play in agriculture and have started implementing policies and programs to support their participation and empowerment. Overall, empowering women through education, training, and access to resources can help overcome many of the challenges they face in the agri-food sector and thus unlock their full potential.

You have contributed to research on agroecology at PARI/ZEF. Could you tell us how women's labor demand is affected by agroecology practices?

The impact of agroecology practices on women's labor demand can vary. It depends on several factors such as the specific practices women adopt, the local context, and the existing labor needs within households. Agroecology often involves diversified cropping systems, which can require more labor compared to monoculture systems. Women, who are often responsible for tasks



such as weeding, planting, and harvesting, may face increased workloads. Furthermore, agroecology practices aim to reduce the reliance on external inputs such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. While this can reduce costs, it may also increase the need for labor-intensive practices such as composting, natural pest control, and manual weed management.

How is time allocated differently between genders for agricultural work and household activities?

Generally, in Africa and specifically in Uganda, women tend to participate more in time-consuming agricultural activities such as planting, weeding, and harvesting. Men, in contrast, are usually involved in more physically demanding agricultural work such as plowing. Culturally, women are considered primary caretakers and givers, so they are expected to do most of the household chores and provide baby and children care. All these tasks put an immense burden on women's time allocation and leave them with limited time for leisure and personal self-care compared to men. So there is a need to consider the societal norms and expectations of women and release them from the many often unpaid household activities. Thus, they could invest more in paid activities and can take better care of themselves and their families.



You have been cooperating with ZEF researchers within the PARI project. What is, from your perspective, the benefit of such international cooperation?

I count myself as one of the few lucky researchers, as I have been given an opportunity to work very closely with several researchers within the PARI project. I worked on different areas, including studies on the women's time use and on agroecology, respectively.

First and foremost, collaborating with ZEF researchers meant we had sessions to share and discuss our views and perspectives on the different issues we were working on. Each of us brought on board diverse experiences and expertise that led to often good outcomes and research outputs.

In addition, I was able to expand my professional networks and create new ones within Africa and with Germany. This gave me access to new research communities as evidenced by the workshops I have attended. I also had a chance to meet great leaders and professionals in the field.

Bringing together many researchers from within Africa, PARI provides a platform to share openly and work on similar topics. Thus, we were able to see differences

and similarities and to learn from each other's countries within Africa. Another direct benefit of working with ZEF researchers is that it gives you access to excellent and vigilant mentors in ZEF-PARI. For example, I was able to get another career-enhancing opportunity specifically from AWARD [African Women in Agricultural Research and Development] after ZEF-researchers brought the call to my attention.

There are also several indirect benefits from my cooperation with ZEF and PARI. For example, my students were either also working directly as enumerators or indirectly with the ZEF researchers. This is an experience they otherwise would not have had and it is an important factor for future continuity. My hope is that such collaborations can continue to ensure that the benefits are long-term and long-lasting.

What is your personal outlook on the role of women in agricultural research?

I think ZEF-PARI needs to be commended for their particular interest in including women in their research agenda. Most of the researchers I worked with were women so it gives a lot of faith working with an organization that is also gender-responsive. I would like to commend ZEF-PARI for the unintended impacts of their collaborations/cooperation on other young scholars.

The ZEF-PARI project was one of my first solo projects as a researcher and I felt really grateful for this opportunity. I have since been able to utilize the knowledge and experiences to propel not only my career but also that of others. For example, one of my students was interested in doing a study on gender and time use. Due to my own research in this area I was able to cruise him through his thesis because he was dealing with a wiser and more knowledgeable person in this field. This credit goes directly to PARI. Furthermore, a student who participated in a survey for the agroecology study was motivated to undertake his master's degree in agroecology - which he is pursuing now at the University of Malawi.

Ms. Isoto, we thank you for this interview.

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