

**Anseeuw, W. & Alden, C. (Ed). (2010). *The Struggles Over Land in Africa: Conflicts, Politics and Change*. Human Sciences Research Council: Cape Town. pp. 289. ISBN: 9 780 796 923226**

Reviewed by

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Land issue is not only a burning issue in agro-based economies, but a common problem across all regions in Africa. The centrality of land generated a lot of debate as far as it is one of the basic tools for development in these areas. Aspects of displacement that came with pre-colonial societal encounters, colonial processes, and post-colonial activities have changed land ownership patterns and have intensified land struggles in Africa. The book, therefore, has a useful purpose to bring to fore these dynamics, mostly relying on case studies from countries in various regions of Africa.

This book is divided into six themes with various contributors dwelling on aspects relating to the politics of land in Africa. The first theme has two contributions based on a case study of Kenya and the Great Lakes Region, largely focusing on ethnic and indigenous land conflicts. For Kenya, the author focused on land claims by differing ethnic groups in the Chebyuk area of Mount Elgon District, espousing the role of the government in land transfers. For the Great Lakes Region, the author illuminated on the origins and nature of land conflict, with specific reference to Rwanda, the author exposed key issues, dominating land conflict and actors involved.

The second theme grappled with issues of traditionalism and modernity in dealing with land ownership. The first contribution on this theme addressed the communal tenure reform in South Africa, noting of historical issues and legacies of land tenure policies in the colonial and apartheid era. The author also explored the legacies in the framework of what has changed and continuities that have been maintained in the communal land tenure system. The second contribution focused on Cameroon's Diamare Plain, which examined the contending issues of land tenure, bringing to fore the traditional systems that have guided the tenure system as well as the emergence of modern systems of tenure. In the conclusion, the author noted, "Although the republic's land laws are increasingly present in rural areas, they must accommodate the widespread customary practice, as villagers are now receptive to the establishment of land title" (p. 81).

Issues of land use, land right, and ensuing conflicts become the primary focus of the three contributions under the third theme. Using Namibia as a case study, the first contribution explored how the tourism revenue, together with local natural assets, have become a contentious issue in communal areas and how the authorities have tried to resolve the ensuing conflicts. Of importance the author noted, "Land reform is incomplete as legislation and policies do not secure the bundles of the rights of respective actors, leading to confusion and inefficiencies, which threaten natural asset sustainability" (p. 99-100). The second contribution, focusing on Mozambique, examined the land law in relation to land rights and enclosure. It dealt with the implementation of the law noting of the processes, the actors and the challenges

that emerged including their resolution. The policy on enclosures, in essence, is supposed to bring benefit to majority, but for the author “there are clear signs that this potential for good is being wasted and the Mozambican enclosures could produce the same result as their predecessors in Europe- a dispossessed rural majority, and migration into towns” (p. 125). The last contribution on this theme focused on the debate between bio-diversity conservation and small-scale farming. The contribution raised the contentious issues in the debate and, in the conclusion, the author noted “...in many cases the use of scientific data to justify biodiversity conservation measures seems to strengthen the existing balance of power, rather than making a real attempt to reshape society environmental relations by making the best possible use of the available knowledge” (p. 141).

Theme four focused on the state politics and land. In relation to Angola, the first contribution analyzed the role of land in conflict and post conflict recovery. The contribution exposed the historical issues in land conflicts and legislation in Angola as well as analyzing the current land conflicts and legislative and institutional framework to try and deal with the challenges. The second contribution, using South Africa as case study, reviewed the two land policies (1990-97 and 1998-2004) exposing the key issues and actors. For the two policies, the contribution concluded that “there remains disagreement about whether the vision changed, or whether the policy change was merely a shift in the methods through which the vision could be pursued” (p. 189). The last contribution on this theme focused on Namibian commercial agricultural land reform process and the legal issues surrounding the process, in the conclusion noting that “...successful resettlement involves complex human process requiring careful social and economic planning supported by unambiguous land reform legislative and policy frameworks” (p. 205).

Land policy development and planning is theme five's primary focus. The contributors focused on two case studies, DRC and Tanzania. On the issue of DRC's Ituri region, the contribution raised the land conflict issues in a war torn societies and how armed groups have dealt with access to land. The contributions mourn the lack of mandate by the peacekeepers in order to resolve the land problem. In the conclusion it was noted that, the local politics of land should be investigated so that, at the very least, peace and humanitarian interventions do not further foster conflict, and the right way can be found to support local peace efforts dealing with land issues. The Tanzanian case study focused on urban planning through land regularization of a once unplanned settlement of Ubungo Darajani in Dar es Salaam. The contribution is about how the authorities managed to bring an approach that brought community involvement from its inception to its implementation. In conclusion, the contribution gave recommendations for enhancement of local community involvement in land management at the backdrop of increasing urban market forces and investment aspirations.

The last thematic area dealt with regionalization of land conflicts with a special focus on Zimbabwe. The first contribution analyzed the critical issues in what came to be termed the Zimbabwean crisis, noting of the origins of the crisis, key actors involved, and how land became a central issue. The author attempted to make an expose of what should be done to normalize the situation in Zimbabwe, largely focusing on three issues: land reform policy, economic policy, and governance reforms. The author did conclude that “the challenges of normalization, of both domestic and external relations and practices, require a vision that promotes the longer term benefits of political stability, security, and development, rather than the persistent tendency to emphasise the electoral confrontations and the pursuit of selective punitive justice” (p. 261). The other contribution focused on the struggles for liberation and neo-liberalism, in the context of the African state and using Zimbabwe as a case study, analyzed how these issues have had a bearing on the

Zimbabwean crisis. How the region responded to the Zimbabwean crisis was exposed. In the conclusion, the contributors noted, “While the trigger of the crisis in Zimbabwe may have been challenges posed by the neo-liberalism to the post colonial state, the conflict, as played out in the region itself, came to be centred on the issue of land.”

The book is a must read copy for academics and practitioners dealing with land issues, not only in Africa but worldwide. For those with interest in African politics and conflicts, they will find the book quite informative on contemporary African conflicts and politics, in general.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER:**

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