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"Towards a Conceptualisation of Power in Fuelwood Access in Zimbabwe"

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Chipango, Ellen Fungisai. "Towards a Conceptualisation of Power in Fuelwood Access in Zimbabwe." *Conservation & Society* 17, no. 2 (2019): 184-94. https://doi.org/10.4103/cs.cs_18_35 .

Fuelwood scarcity in sub-Saharan African countries is a pressing challenge to rural households. However, what is not appreciated is that the scarcity is conceived by the power dynamics constraints, which impede fuelwood access. That being so, the growing body of work on fuelwood does not as yet pay adequate attention to the relationship between power asymmetries and fuelwood access, hence there is a gap in fuelwood policy. In the face of this wider problem, the case of Buhera District demonstrates power dynamics of fuelwood access in Zimbabwe. Based on extensive qualitative fieldwork, the article illuminates the relations between state actors and the local people in accessing fuelwood. This is important because access is determined by the policing action taken by the powerful state actors. The questions at the centre of this article are how rural people's access to fuelwood is influenced by power dynamics and how these dynamics contribute to fuelwood scarcity in their villages. From the study it emerged that there are various techniques of power, which are used by state actors in controlling and regulating fuelwood access, leading me to draw two major conclusions. First, there is no one fuelwood scarcity (shortage in a specific location), but rather even where fuelwood is available, power relations play a role in determining accessibility. Second, hidden power is used to present fuelwood scarcity as apolitical, leading to flawed solutions which intensify rural people's plight. Accordingly, by showing the workings of power relations, I endeavour to provide the foundation for well-informed fuelwood policy. (Text from author's abstract)

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