

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of climate change on the livelihoods of female elderly headed households in Gutsa village, Murape Ward, in Goromonzi District of Mashonaland East province in Zimbabwe. It is based on intensive ethnographic fieldwork that I undertook for close to nineteen months in Gutsa village. The key questions that I sought to answer in this thesis were: How is local knowledge about weather and climate change constructed? What is the nature of contestations surrounding this knowledge, and in particular surrounding the attribution of climate change to particular causes or events? How are livelihoods organized in response to the impact of climate change? I examined elderly women heads of households' perceptions and understandings of weather and climate change, issues of conflict and consensus regarding attribution and causality of weather and climate, the concepts that are used to refer to climate change, elderly women's struggles to make sense of, and respond to climate change and to organize livelihood activities in response to the ongoing impact of climate change. In order to answer my research questions I adopted the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal, participant observation, archival research, life-history interviews, narrative research and in-depth interviews as data gathering approaches. I focused on the situated experiences of ten elderly women heads of households in Gutsa village existing in a wider community. In doing so this thesis explored these women's complex understandings and interpretations of weather and climate dynamics as well as the relationship between climate change and their multiple and competing responsibilities. The thesis also analyses the implications of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme in the district, peri-urban development, resource commoditization and commercialization, rapidly shifting markets, changing property relations, social networks, livelihood opportunities, gender relations, changing household structure, the politics of local authority and governance and the dynamics of ecosystems and interspecies interaction. The thesis argues that there is a central vernacular climatological theory that is widely shared among the elderly as well as among other situated individuals in the village and the wider community.

Key Words

Climate change, weather, elderly women, households, vernacular meteorological theory, livelihoods, commoditization, governance, interspecies interaction