

An argument for place-based policies: The importance of local environmental and socio-economic conditions for agricultural policies exemplified by the Zambezi region, Namibia

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Funded by



Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation

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INTRODUCTION Across rural Africa, agricultural production serves as an important livelihood source for many people, with maize being a key staple crop. National governments promote agriculture for food security and rural development using generalized, top-down policy measures. However, not least as socio-ecological conditions vary across African regions, the general imposition of generalized strategies is questionable.

GOAL To illustrate deficits and challenges of such insufficiently place-based policies, we examine current maize policies in the Zambezi region. By discussing these maize policies in the context of the specific environmental and socio-economic realities of the region, we outline policy deficits which often stem from a lack of knowledge of the particular place and context they try to impact.

CONCEPT Sonnino et al. propose a "multidimensional 'place-based' approach to food security," which "engages with the complex multi-actor, multilevel and reflexive political and social structures" (2016: 486).

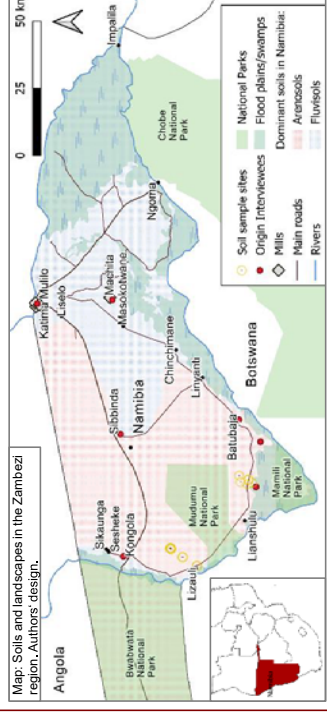
Place based policies therefore...

- Attend to specific local characteristics,
- Consider multidimensional perspectives
- Follow multi-actor and decentralized governance

CASE STUDY AND METHODS We selected the Zambezi region as the Namibian maize policy in Zambezi is a typical example for a conventional production-oriented policy strategy.

We employed a mixed-method approach:

- qualitative interviews, focus-group discussions, policy documents and reports, sector statistics, newspaper articles
- quantitative soil (properties, yields) and climate data



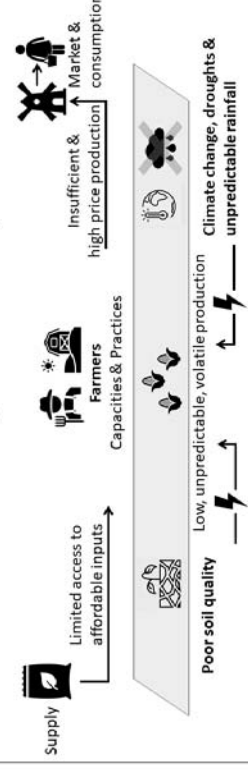
Sonnino, R., Marsden, T., Moragues-Faus, A., 2016. Relationalities and convergences in food security narratives: towards a place-based approach. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, 477-489.

Top down maize policies

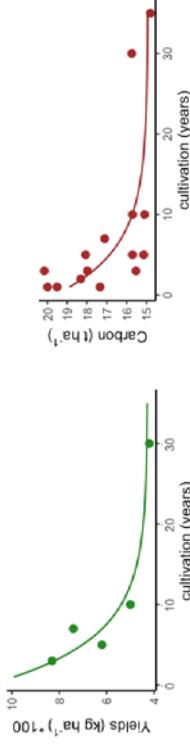
Promotion of commercial production Value chain integration Protection of the maize sector



Socio-ecological context of the place



Identified constraints of insufficiently place-based maize policies in Zambezi. Source: Own compilation.



Changes in maize yields (kg ha⁻¹) and topsoil carbon stocks (t ha⁻¹) resulting from long-term cultivation. Source: Own data.

RESULTS Socio-economic-ecological policy constraints related to:

- Soil,
- Climate,
- Conservation policy, and
- Market

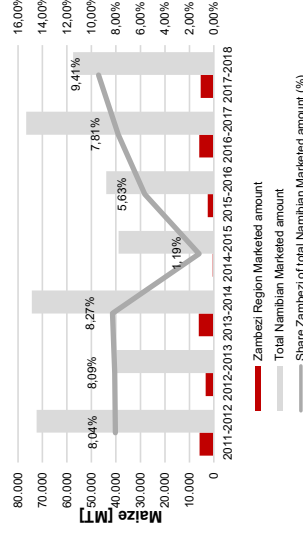


Figure: Zambezi maize production compared to overall Namibian production (2012-2018). Source: Statistical data from NAB and AMITA.

CONCLUSION We emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach combining social and natural science to analyse and evaluate agricultural policies. For the Zambezi region, we recommend participatory development in adapting regional agricultural management and support for collective action to avoid state-dependent developments as well as a general rethinking of visions for the region as a bread basket.