Lisa Cliggett has carried out ethnographic research in Zambia on household economy, family dynamics, environmental change and migration since the early 1990s. Her research since 2001 takes her to the border zones of the Kafue National Park, Zambia’s largest national park. Since 2004 the National Science Foundation has funded a variety of Cliggett’s projects in the migrant destination next to the park. One project, a collaboration with Jon Unruh (Geography, McGill University) and Roderick Hay (Geography, Cal State U. Dominguez Hills) examines migration, land tenure insecurity and environmental change. The other project, a collaboration with Deborah Crooks (Anthropology, University of Kentucky) looks at food and livelihood security in the migrant context. Also during the 2004-2007 time frame Cliggett and Crooks ran an NSF funded field school in ethnographic research methods for anthropology graduate students.

In addition to the above research grants, in 2008 NSF funded the workshop “Tonga Timeline-Appraising 60 Years of Multidisciplinary Research in Southern Province, Zambia” (June 2008) which brought together a multidisciplinary group of scholars from Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Europe and the US to capture the breadth and depth of knowledge on Tonga Speaking populations, starting with the seminal work of Elizabeth Colson in the 1940s. The proceedings of the seminar will be published with Limbani Press/ABC books (Lusaka/London).

Cliggett has published a number of articles in various anthropology venues, including American Anthropologist, Human Organization and Human Ecology. Her books include:
- Grains From Grass: Aging, Gender and Famine in Rural Africa 2005, Cornell University Press;
- Economies and Cultures: Foundations of Economic Anthropology (Co-authored with Richard Wilk) 2007, Westview Press; and
- Economies and the Transformation of Landscape (co-edited with Christopher Pool) 2008, Alta Mira Press.