Land reform and agrarian change in southern Africa

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Poverty alleviation, stepping stones
and 'economic units'

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Poverty alleviation, stepping stones and 'economic units'

R. F. Rohde[1], T. A. Benjaminsen[2] and M. T. Hoffman[3]

[1]Centre for African Studies, University of Edinburough
[2]Centre for International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric), Agricultural University of Norway
[3]National Botanical Institute (South Africa)

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Abstract

This paper examines the consequences of land reform for communal livestock farmers in Namaqualand. It investigates the likely outcomes of recent commonage acquisitions and tenure reform in the former 'Coloured Reserves' using case study material drawn from the Leliefontein communal area. In particular, we try to answer two questions about land reform in Namaqualand. The first is concerned with models of land management in both new and old common lands: what effect will the imposition of either a commercial or communal land management model have on twin objectives of poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability? We conclude that the commercial farming model is rarely appropriate in Namaqualand's communal areas and suggest that sustainable development is more likely under a flexible system which takes account of both the objectives of communal farmers and the constraints under which they operate. The second question explores the implications of recent policy shifts regarding the use of commonage as a 'stepping stone' for emergent black commercial farmers. We ask if this is feasible in the Namaqualand context and conclude that present rates of grant are inadequate to provide incentives for emergent commercial farmers to move off the commons. The contradictions inherent in using the commons for both poverty alleviation and as a 'stepping stone' are likely to result in a backward step reminiscent of the discredited 'economic units' policy.

Communal livestock farming in Namaqualand – a brief background

Recent local government reforms have amalgamated the previous district of Namaqualand with the Hantam Karoo to form one District Municipality in the Northern Cape Province. Leliefontein is one of six communal areas (former 'Coloured Reserves') in Namaqualand administered under the Rural Areas Act 9 of 1987. Namaqualand covers 48,000 km^2 (4.8 million ha) of which 27% is communal[1] and 53% commercial farmland. Conservation areas (5%), state land (8%) and areas owned by mining companies (7%) cover the rest. The area has about 77,000 inhabitants, the overwhelming majority of whom are 'coloured' people of mixed Nama descent (81%). There are 412 privately owned commercial farms with an average size of 11,650 ha. In contrast, more than four times as many households (1748) own livestock in Namaqualand's communal areas on a total land base of about half the size of that used by the District's commercial farmers (SPP 1997). The fact that privately owned commercial farmland is owned almost exclusively by 'whites' and the overcrowded communal areas are

inhabited by 'coloureds' is an obvious legacy of colonial and apartheid policies.

Much has been written about the history of the communal areas in Namaqualand – the fact that they have served as labour reserves for the white commercial farming and mining sectors since the mid 19th century is well documented. Throughout the 20th century the reserves remained socially, politically and economically marginal, existing primarily as overcrowded refuges for migrant labourers and their families. During this time, peasant agriculture provided a supplement and a safety net for many communal residents, in spite of the fact that traditional transhumant patterns of grazing were curtailed within an overcrowded and inadequate area of land.

Both colonial and apartheid polices deliberately restricted the ability of communal farmers to survive from agricultural activity alone. By confining many farmers to small communal 'reserves' and curtailing opportunities for seasonal transhumance, peasant agriculture became a relatively unimportant activity among a suite of livelihood options involving low-paid wage labour in the District's commercial farming and mining sectors. As a result, many families adapted livelihood strategies which *included*, but did not entirely depend upon a low input, limited capital, labour intensive, risk averse livestock farming system. The result was that a large number of small-scale farmers had to find ways of coexisting within a limited area of communal land. Consequently, stocking rates within the Leliefontein communal area have been persistently above the recommended carrying capacity since the 1950s, if not longer. The impact of over 50 years of continuous heavy grazing has been a loss of palatable perennials and the incursion of poisonous plants such as *Galenia africana (*known locally as *kraalbos*).

Neighbouring large-scale commercial farmers have been generously subsidised throughout much of the 20th century. Low interest loans, grants for fencing and infrastructure, debt-relief, drought assistance and de-stocking incentives have enabled commercial farmers to maintain low stocking rates, especially during the last 50 years. The resulting fence-line contrasts between communal and commercial land are often cited as evidence of the effects of overgrazing as opposed to sustainable use. But the causal links to overgrazing cannot be reduced to a simple equation of stock units per hectare: it is more accurate to link the differences in vegetation to a history of political oppression that created the disparities between commercial and communal landscapes, socio-economic conditions and land management practices in the first place.

Comparing the socio-economic objectives of communal and commercial stock farming

Communal and commercial stock farmers in Namaqualand are operating in the same ecological environment[2], but with contrasting management aims. In the commercial system, livestock (which are almost exclusively sheep) are raised for the production of meat to be sold within national agricultural markets. An optimal stocking rate in this system gives maximum growth per animal during its first year of life, predictable lambing rates, low mortality and off-take of a high quality 'finished' meat demanded by the market.

It is commonly claimed that a commercial economic unit in Namaqualand typically entails one owner keeping a minimum of 700 sheep on a farm of between 8000 and 12,000 ha. Net incomes for such an economic unit range from between R6,000 and R8,000 per month[3] depending on variables such as rainfall, land productivity and market fluctuations. Such farms tend to be highly capitalised due to inflated land prices[4] and the costs associated with the erection and maintenance of fencing[5] and several pumps for dispersed ground water supplies. Furthermore, Namaqualand's commercial farmers often mimic the transhumant patterns of early Nama pastoralists by owning two or more agricultural holdings located in different agro-ecological zones, enabling them to move between farms in response to drought or seasonal climatic variation, thus reducing the risk inherent in this dryland environment.

Namaqualand's communal livestock farming sector on the other hand has multiple production objectives. In the first place, milk and meat are important elements in household food security. Secondly, sheep and goats provide capital storage (e.g. to pay for school fees, medical emergencies etc.), while in many cases donkeys provide draught power for transport and cropping operations. Optimal production strategies seek to maximise herd size at high stocking densities, following a dynamic, opportunistic pattern of herd size fluctuation depending on climatic variation.

Communal farmers keep livestock for a variety of purposes and this is expressed in the large variation in herd size and in multiple ownership. In Paulshoek village, Leliefontein[6], between 2,000 and 4,000 sheep and goats graze an area of 20,000 hectares, the equivalent of two average sized commercial farms. A total of thirty herds vary in size from between 13 and 173 small stock with a mean of 82 goats and sheep.[7] In at least a third of these, more than two people have combined their

animals to form a single herd. In one well-documented case (Marinus 1997), twelve people, most of whom are related in some way or another to the 'owner', lay claim to at least one animal in the herd of 170 animals. Many of these vicarious owners do not live in Paulshoek but retain links with their extended village family through occasional visits during holidays or over weekends. Apart from providing additional food and livelihood opportunities, livestock are a form of social capital which contributes a significant element to the cohesion and vitality of village life.

Not only are production objectives radically different in commercial and communal grazing systems, so too are livelihood strategies. Unlike many commercial farmers, few communal farmers are wholly dependent on livestock for their income. Evidently there is not enough land available for most stock farmers to increase herd size to the point of providing a sufficient family income. A chronic land shortage is one factor among many which motivates individuals (often men) to seek work on commercial farms, in the regional mining sector or in the informal economy of Namaqualand's towns. Most communal area households are characterised by an extended family network often scattered throughout Namaqualand providing multiple sources of household income including remittances from migrant labourers, pensions, casual labour and self-employment. Such diverse livelihood strategies provide the mainstay of many communal farmers' household income. For many families in the Leliefontein communal area, owning livestock acts as a buffer or an insurance against unemployment or failure to receive sufficient income by other means. A recent study in Paulshoek (Global Change 1999a; 2000), shows that income from livestock sales, added to the value of milk and slaughter animals consumed, only amounts to approximately 6% of village income. But in an economy where average per capita monthly income is less than R250 (average monthly household income = R1, 242) the contribution of small herds of livestock becomes significant.

Half of Paulshoek's households own livestock. On average, livestock owners receive higher incomes (+34%) than non-livestock owning households. This is partly explained by the fact that livestock owning households have four times as much income on average from permanent jobs and self-employment and twice the income from remittances as households without livestock. However, at least 30% of this differential can be attributed to the additional income derived from farming activities.

In Leliefontein village[8] the wealthiest livestock owners have a monthly household income of R3, 050 coming from multiple sources. These households, representing 6% of the total, own 300 sheep and goats on average. The poorest group (also representing 6% of households) has an average monthly household income of approximately R300 and possess only 33 sheep and goats. However, the overwhelming majority (87%) of communal stock farmers in Leliefontein own between 66 and 84 small stock and have average monthly household incomes of around R1,400. This group depends mainly on welfare grants (41% of households in the total sample), migrant labour (20%), temporary jobs (10%) and family support (5%). Only 10% of these households depend on livestock as the most important source of household income with herds averaging 84 sheep and goats (Anseuw *et al*, 1999).

Comparing communal and commercial rangeland management systems

Communal farmers continue to use a system of livestock husbandry based on kraaling and (limited) stock post mobility, in contrast to the camp system used by commercial farmers. Kraaling is a traditional and rational way of using unfenced rangeland by multiple herds. Individual farmers move with their grazing animals during the day and return them to a pen at a stock post each night. Stock posts can be moved to take advantage of better grazing conditions elsewhere. Traditionally, rangeland management was dependent on seasonal transhumance and periodic migration in order to maximise the grazing potential of herds which fluctuated in size in response to climatic events. Kraaling can be typified as a labour intensive and risk averse strategy within an open rangeland utilised by many separate herds.

The commercial camp system differs from this in that fenced portions of rangeland are managed by individual farmers whose animals are left unattended in paddocks, both day and night. Here, rangeland management depends on conservative stocking rates and rotational grazing between camps in order to maintain the productive potential of the vegetation and a constant sustainable offtake or 'crop' of livestock. Camping is capital intensive with low labour inputs where the high risks of mortality by predators are offset by high production values.

Not only does communal farming have different production objectives to that of commercial farming, but the factors which

determine environmental sustainability in either the kraaling or camping system are also different. Debates about the environmental effects of kraaling versus camping are highly complex and beyond the scope of this paper to address in any detail. However, we argue that in the communal kraaling system, management decisions relating to stock post mobility and the periodic resting of the veld are more important to maximising livelihood options and environmental sustainability than the maintenance of low intensity fixed stocking rates (set to a nominal 'carrying capacity') as advocated in the commercial ranching or camp system.

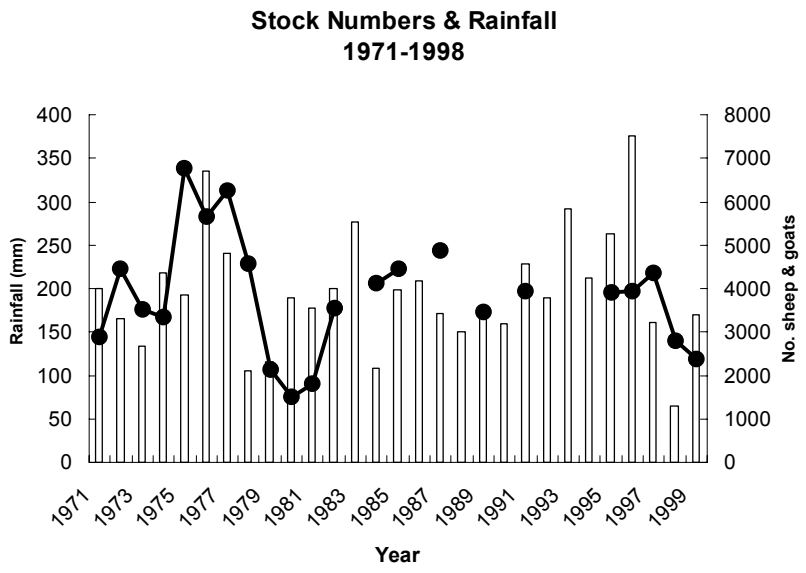
Agricultural policies in Southern Africa have been dominated by the thinking behind the commercial ranching model, even in the context of communal areas (Boonzaier 1987, Abel & Blaikie 1989, Barrett 1992, Scoones 1992). Policy makers perceive the communal farming sector as inefficient, unproductive and overstocked. Hence, policies tend to focus on the control of stock numbers within a defined carrying capacity in order to increase the productivity of each individual animal and to avoid overgrazing. But communal livestock farmers are generally not interested in reducing their livestock numbers because many of them already have too few animals and restrictions on livestock numbers will only lead to further impoverishment. They find themselves 'between a rock and a hard place' - the lack of alternatives to this constitutes the real tragedy of the commons in Namaqualand.

Communal rangeland is often stocked at between 150% and 200% above the recommended carrying capacity. Average herd sizes are typically 80 to 120 goats and sheep - enough to provide only a meagre income. The economic incentives to expand individual herd sizes is constantly thwarted by the limitations inherent in an inadequate natural resource base. During periods of high rainfall, herd sizes expand rapidly and provide a large surplus whereas during droughts, communal herds suffer severe losses because there are few natural fodder reserves to fall back on. From the perspective of this double bind, it is not surprising that communal farmers do not have the same perception of the relationship between overstocking and vegetation degradation as commercial farmers and policy makers. From their point of view, the problem is not overstocking but a shortage of land. Given the colonial and apartheid history of land alienation and inequality that underscores this situation, it is not an unreasonable argument.

Rangeland management is primarily dependent on two variables: (1) the productivity objectives which determine

stocking rates and (2) the long-term impact of stocking rates on the environment's productive potential. Recent studies in the Leliefontein communal area provide some data on these two variables (Global Change 2000). In the village of Paulshoek for example, where approximately 30 farmers graze up to 20,000 ha of communal land, stocking densities have ranged between 3 and 10 ha per Small Stock Unit (SSU) during the last 30 years and show a clear correlation with variation in annual rainfall (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Mean annual rainfall (mm) (histograms) for Springbok (1971-1996) and Paulshoek (1997-1999) and the number of sheep and goats in Paulshoek, Namaqualand from May 1971 to December 1999.



Privately owned commercial farms bordering Paulshoek are typically between 4,000 and 12,000 ha in size. Here the stocking rates are more stable, varying from between 10 and 14 hectares per SSU depending on landscape vegetation characteristics rather than on climatic fluctuations. In terms of maintaining live animals, the communal system is more productive when averaged out over the medium term, but more vulnerable to mortality during drought. Yearly lambing percentages are up to 3 times higher in the commercial system, while off-take (sales and consumption) per hectare is roughly equivalent (even in a year with up to 24% mortality due to drought in communal herds as opposed to 6% mortality due to drought in adjacent commercial farms).[9]

Table 1: Comparison of data from communal and commercial farming systems (Global Change 2000)

	Communal (Paulshoek)	Commercial (Rooivaal)
Hectares	20,000	5,000
No. of livestock owners	61	1
No. of herds	28	1
Ha per SSU	7.5	11.9
Weaning % (during drought)	25%	79%
Inputs	very low	moderate
Off-take: Rands per ha[1]	R9.2	R8.8
Gross income per ewe	R68	R105
Death due to predators (98-99)	9%	16%
Death due to drought (98-99)	24%	6%

[1]The current exchange rate is approximately 1US$ = R7

Such figures show that there is at least some parity in the value of off-take per hectare between communal and commercial production systems, despite the continuous high stocking rates and 'degradation' incurred by communal farmers. The concept of 'land degradation' remains problematic however and depends on individual perceptions and evaluations of landscape condition. Degrees of degradation are typically evaluated according to vegetation composition and cover. Comparisons of vegetation cover, species diversity, palatability and soil fertility between densely stocked communal areas such as Paulshoek and neighbouring commercial farms suggests that land degradation (in their sense) in the short to medium term is a consequence of continuous high stocking densities within a confined area.[10] However, if degradation is defined according to monetary values of secondary productivity (see Table 1 which indicates a slightly higher off-take per ha in the communal than the commercial area), then it is hard to identify degradation in Paulshoek's communal rangeland, since stocking levels have been sustained during the last 50 years at levels equal to if not higher than adjoining commercial farms.

Colonial and apartheid land reform initiatives in Namaqualand

For over a century the socio-economic and environmental circumstances prevalent throughout Namaqualand's communal areas (poverty, unemployment, high population density, intensive grazing) have been interpreted as fulfilling all the criteria for a 'tragedy of the commons' scenario. This is in fact how Namaqualand's communal areas are typically represented. But this image only survives by ignoring the greater tragedy of political oppression and the imposition of a long succession of unsuccessful, inept agricultural and land-use policies.

Agrarian reform of Namaqualand's communal areas has been proposed repeatedly since the mid-19th century, primarily by individuals with a vested interest in privatising the commons in the form of 'economic units' or privately owned and managed farms (Price 1976; Luyt 1981; Leeuwenburg 1972, SPP 1995). Governments toyed with this idea throughout the 20th century. It was embodied in a series of policies, enacted in legislation and finally enforced in the 1980s. The Coloured Rural Areas Act of 1963 made provision for the sub-division of non-residential land which could be hired out to so-called *bona fide* farmers (Kröhne & Steyn 1991). In 1984, it was decided to subdivide the Leliefontein reserve into 47 'economic units', the rationale being that privatisation of land would encourage entrepreneurship and the development of the region, since lessees would run farms profitably (Archer *et al* 1989). Privatisation would lead to more 'developed' farming techniques, to conservation of the area, and subsequently this development would rid the area of the "whimsical and irrational" traditions which were retarding development (Kotze *et al* 1987, Archer *et al* 1989).

The 47 farming units established in 1984 for the Leliefontein Coloured Reserve ranged from 1,500 ha to 6,175 ha, depending on the local ecological conditions, with a mean size of 3,248 ha. Thirty units were rented to individuals or syndicate groups, while the remaining 17 units were reserved for communal use. The majority of people who were granted economic units had other sources of income - they were typically shop owners, teachers and mine workers (Kröhne & Steyn 1991).

Most of the communities in the Namaqualand reserves never accepted the 'economic units' initiative because it further marginalised the majority of communal farmers. In Leliefontein, popular resistance against this scheme was widespread

(Boonzaier 1987) and communal farmers successfully contested the issue in 1988 when they won their case in the Supreme Court on legal technicalities.

Post-apartheid land reform

Today, for the first time since the advent of colonialism, the government is taking a proactive role in promoting the social and economic advancement of the majority of the rural population in Namaqualand (in accordance with its Constitutional obligations). The achievements of land reform are highly symbolic of this effort to reverse the legacies of poverty, oppression and marginalisation. Since 1994, the communal land-base of Namaqualand has been expanded by 19% as the government has purchased privately owned commercial farms as new commonage, now owned and administered by the district's various municipal authorities. Efforts to transform and restructure the formal regulation of communal farming have gone hand-in-hand with this expansion. At the time of writing, this process is underway and in flux - the outcome will have enormous implications for the future of communal livelihoods and sustainable land-use.

Land reform in South Africa consists of three sub-programmes:

Land Redistribution which enables poor and disadvantaged people to gain access to land has until recently been effected primarily through a Settlement/Land Acquisition Grant[11] of up to R17, 000 per household. In Namaqualand however, this grant would purchase enough land for only 15 small stock, hardly enough to form a meaningful supplement to a subsistence income. For the communal residents of Namqualand therefore, the primary means of land redistribution has been the acquisition and expansion of municipal commonage - privately owned commercial farmland purchased by the Department of Land Affairs (DLA) and transferred to the ownership of local authorities such as the Leliefontein Transitional Council.

Land Restitution involves returning land, or compensating persons or communities who were dispossessed of property after 1913 as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices. This provision does not apply in Namaqualand because for most places (with the exception of Richtersveld) land alienation took place prior to that time.

Land Tenure Reform aims to bring all people occupying land under a unitary, legally validated system of land holding. Little progress has been made in this regard at a national level.

However, due to sustained NGO support and focused collaboration, the State managed to promulgate tenure reform legislation that seeks to address the land holding and tenure administration of 23 so-called Coloured Rural Areas in the Western Cape, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and Free State. These areas are home to 70 000 people and is 1.7 million hectares in extent.

To simplify what is in reality a complex legal situation, land reform in Namaqualand has taken place primarily in two ways:

1) Through the *redistribution* of privately owned land to the TLC's of the 'reserve areas', as commonage. The Department of Land Affairs (DLA) has provided a Municipal Commonage Grant to TLCs of the 'reserve areas' to extend or create commonage for the benefit of poor and disadvantaged residents. The TLCs became the owners of such land with the explicit purpose that it should be made available to residents at non-commercial rates equal to the costs incurred in maintenance and administration.

2) Through *tenure reform* of the communal areas previously known as 'Coloured Reserves' or 'Coloured Rural Areas'. These Reserve lands continue to be administered under the Rural Areas Act 9 of 1987 and land in these areas is held in trust by the State on behalf of the inhabitants. This act will be repealed by the Transformation of Certain Rural Areas Act 94 of 1998 after a transition period of 18 months which makes provision for the transfer of the land, either to a local authority or to other legal entities such as Communal Property Associations (CPAs), Trusts, Voluntary Associations or to individuals.

Some uncertainty arises in this context, with the reorganisation of local government throughout South Africa.[12] While the boundaries of the Transitional Local Councils (TLCs) and the communal Act 9 Areas (or Reserves, or Coloured Rural Areas) coincide at present, they have been re-demarcated, reducing the number of TLCs from 11 to 4 new municipalities. They will therefore soon become much larger entities than the old TLCs which governed individual Act 9 Areas such as Leliefontein, amalgamating communal, commercial and urban municipal land within one local government unit. This poses a whole set of new problems as to who will own and control both the new and old commonage – a subject which is beyond the scope of this paper to address.[13]

This outline merely skims the surface of the legal situation, but it is vital for the following discussion to distinguish between these two differently constituted forms of communal land: the old *Act 9 Areas* which formerly constituted the 'Coloured Reserves' and the new *municipal commonage* created under post-apartheid land reform legislation.

Managing the commons

The new commonage lands were intended as enlargements to the chronically overstocked communal village lands resulting from apartheid policies. Two stipulations were attached to this initiative, with important social and environmental implications. In the first place, the beneficiaries of the new commonage were specifically identified as poorer, disadvantaged households. Secondly, beneficiaries (communal farmers) and owners (municipalities) had to agree to a binding, sustainable management plan. Commonage Committees (Meentkomitees) were created in order to achieve these objectives as democratically based advisory panels to the Local Authorities. In the context of Namaqualand, the underlying goal of the Meentkomitees has been to:

> *transform commonage management (for both the old Act 9 Areas and the newly acquired commonage) from a system based on top down remote (currently absent) control and unilateral enforcement, where the costs of commonage maintenance was carried by rate paying residents (whether they used the commonage or not) and ad hoc grants from central government, to a system based on participative rule making, for management to be guided by a five year management plan and for users to be held accountable for the payment of the management and maintenance costs of the commonage* (Pienaar 2000:334).

Thus, the commonage policy in Namaqualand has had three distinct though inter-related strands: social equity, environmental sustainability and the restructuring of commonage management.

Meentkomitees (MK) have been created according to varying circumstances in each Act 9 Area although in general, the process has followed a similar pattern in each. Mass meetings have led to decisions on the composition of the MK and the

election of MK representatives, after which constitutions and codes of conduct have been adapted, leading to the election of office bearers and regular MK meetings. In Leliefontein the MK is composed of nine community members, one from each village[14] plus one member from the Department of Agriculture.

One of the first tasks of the MKs has been to collect information on the veld conditions of the commons, numbers of farmers and livestock, an inventory of existing infrastructure, details of current farmer practice in relation to grazing fees and record keeping, as well as input from farmers on current problems and expectations. Subsequent management plans devised by MKs in each of the Act 9 Areas are in different stages of development. Three pilot areas (Concordia, Pella and Steinkopf) are relatively advanced and management plans have been adopted by their respective TLCs. The organisational and legal difficulties inherent in creating democratically accountable management systems where they have been defunct for several generations should not be underestimated. The input and reports made by facilitating NGOs such as Surplus People Project and the Legal Resources Centre in setting up the Commonage Committees highlight the many difficulties in creating a system based on collective and individual responsibility for infrastructure and environmental sustainability.

One of the most positive outcomes of this approach has been that the management plans of the three pilot areas have incorporated both the old and new commonage under one system of management (Northern Cape DOA & SPP 2000). Because strict management plans have been a prerequisite to accessing the new commonage (including a grazing agreement limiting stock numbers to official carrying capacity), it has acted as an incentive for farmers to agree to registration, user fees and grazing controls across the commons as a whole. Part of the explanation for this resides in the fact that the new commonage land constitutes a significant addition (up to 75%) of the original commons in the three pilot areas. Communal farmers have recognised the advantages in lowering stocking densities by expanding the land base and have consequently agreed to user fees, a quota system which limits total stock numbers (according to carrying capacity)[15] and to forego the automatic rights of grazing which previously accompanied rights of residence. When given the choice between *flexibility* accompanying minimal regulation and the imposition of *controls* aimed at enhancing productivity, communal farmers choose increased regulation of the commons as long as the land base is expanded sufficiently

to accommodate both productive and social objectives. How this will limit the opportunities of prospective farmers or the desire of existing small-scale farmers to expand their herds remains to be seen.

Leliefontein differs from the three pilot areas in several respects. In the first place it straddles several distinct agro-ecological zones with ten discrete villages. This adds a level of logistical complexity to an already complex organisational problem. Secondly, to date the additional commonage amounts to less than six percent of the total area[16] and is concentrated on the northwestern side of the Leliefontein communal area, many kilometres and several hours drive from the villages on the coastal plain. As a result of these difficulties, the Leliefontein MK has been unable to amalgamate the old and new commonage under one management plan. Instead they have devised grazing agreements with distinct rules for the new commonage but have been unable to bring about any change in the system of grazing across the old commons, although this is also an important long-term objective. However, without a substantial expansion of the land base, this goal of a wholesale reform of communal grazing management is unlikely to succeed.

For the new municipal commonage in Leliefontein, it is proposed that stocking rates will be set according to a 'commercial' carrying capacity of 11 ha per SSU, providing extra land for a total of 1,000 sheep and goats. A maximum of 75 small stock per farmer will be allowed within a specified camp for a specified period of time as set out in a grazing agreement. User fees of R1 per month per SSU are meant to cover the costs of a shepherd or farm supervisor and infrastructure repairs but are likely to be inadequate. Communal farmers will not be allowed to build kraals, cooking shelters or huts on the new commonage but must pool their stock within each camp where they will be managed as if it were mini-commercial farm.

It is not surprising that so far only the wealthier communal farmers have applied for access to these new farms. While there may have been a presumption in favour of granting such leases to poorer farmers, the logistics of using distant grazing land and the requirement to entrust livestock to a paid herder within a camp system are major disincentives to the majority of poorer communal farmers. Under these circumstances, how is it possible to reconcile the needs of communal farmers with the constraints inherent in a commercial management system? Farmers in Paulshoek (one of the closest villages to the new commonage farms) generally express dissatisfaction with the

consultation process carried out by the Leliefontein MK. It seems likely that after the local elections (December 5, 2000) a new MK will be formed in order to develop a management plan which takes account of the broader needs of communal farmers.

Social and/or environmental sustainability?

The implementation of commonage projects in Leliefontein has been ham-strung by the ideology of the commercial management model, making the delivery of an expanded land base to the poorest all but impossible. The justification for this has been based solely on normative perceptions of what constitutes sustainable management practice. This policy has prevailed locally in spite of a national programme which favours flexibility in the creation of such management agreements:

> *"[T]he Department [of Land Affairs] is also aware that, for too long in South Africa, inappropriate planning norms have been imposed upon black people [. . .] it is essential to take due account of what the grant applicants themselves believe will improve their lives and not to lose sight of the very limited choices that poor people have"* (White Paper on South African Land Policy – DLA 1997).

While the national programme favours flexibility, should this happen at the expense of sustainability? Herein lies the problem: do we define sustainability using conservative commercial models based on carrying capacity, or are there other more flexible models we can draw on which better accommodate the needs of poorer communal farmers?

The effectiveness of land reform in improving the socio-economic future of communal residents will depend to a large extent on the land management model that is ultimately implemented. The current model for the management of the new Leliefontein farms is not a good one for communal farmers. It is expensive, foreign and in many senses unworkable. It will, however, provide for a sustainable ecosystem. The dilemma is how to marry this with the needs of communal farmers. How can a management system be developed that accommodates the aspirations and knowledge of communal farmers without compromising the integrity of the landscape beyond 'acceptable limits'? This dilemma revolves around the judgement of what

constitutes long term sustainable land use as weighed against the pressing needs of people who have been systematically marginalised, in part by being forced to subsist on a densely populated and intensively grazed land base.

Recent discussions within and between the Farmer's Associations of Leliefontein and the MK continually reiterate an awareness of the need for "a scientific and environmental approach" (Rodkin 1999) to the management of the commons. And yet, with respect to grazing regimes and long-term ecological degradation and recovery, the science is incomplete. Historical evidence from Paulshoek shows that significant environmental change took place within the village rangelands around 50 years ago with decreased vegetation cover remaining more or less constant since then. Vegetation cover on neighbouring commercial farms was in a similarly 'overgrazed' state in 1960 when fencing first divided the commercial from communal lands. Improved vegetation cover and the recruitment of palatable perennials on commercial farmland adjacent to Paulshoek occurred over the next 20 to 30 years due to lower stocking levels and rotational grazing. This implies that there is an environmental cost to high stocking densities within the communal system, but that this loss of natural capital is recoverable over periods of time estimated to be between 30 and 50 years under controlled grazing conditions. In addition, a significant proportion of the lowlands in Paulshoek have been ploughed in the historical past. This has resulted in a complete transformation of the vegetation from a mixed suite of palatable evergreen and leaf succulent shrubs to a monospecific stand of the unpalatable and toxic shrub *Galenia africana*. Rehabilitation of these lands to a condition of high ground cover and palatable perennial plants would take decades under controlled grazing conditions similar to those which commercial farmers adapted during the 1950s when they fenced their lands into camps or paddocks.

It is paddocks such as these which are now being brought back into communal tenure under the commonage principle of the land reform programme. Just how these previously commercial rangelands should be managed sustainably within a communal system over the long-term is a consideration confronting planners at the cutting edge of land reform implementation.

In Paulshoek, one of the Leliefontein villages closest to the new commonage lands, 93% of households subsist on incomes of less than R1500 per month, and over half of all households own livestock within 30 (often multiple ownership) herds. And yet, only two farmers, (from the wealthy, emergent farmer

category) have indicated that they might apply to use the new commonage. Under a more flexible management system, the new commonage could be used as an incentive for a restructuring of the old commons if the additional land was meaningful in terms of size, and if it were accessible to the majority of stock farmers. Seasonal grazing within the new commonage, if made available on this basis, could be used as part of an expanded communal system in order to give old overgrazed areas a chance to recover during flowering and seedling establishment phases of palatable vegetation as well as acting as a flexible grazing reserve during drought. Such a system would be predicated on the willingness of a large proportion of Paulshoek farmers to take part in such a transhumant grazing system. It would depend upon the farmers of Paulshoek applying to the municipality as a group in order to lease a portion of the new commonage (one of the farms) for this purpose. It would require the MK and TLC to allow the building of kraals and temporary housing. It would also require permission for periodic high stocking densities and periods of complete rest. Is this realistic? Can the Leliefontein MK find ways to make the new commonage available to the poor and disadvantaged? Would the 10 discrete villages of Leliefontein be a more appropriate focus for leasehold arrangements with the TLC since they already act as discrete social and political entities?

We feel obliged to ask whether or not the commitment to a 'scientific' commercial rangeland model merely serves as a convenient means to divert attention away from an underlying political agenda. The adherence to commercial management principles and the effective privatisation of Leliefontein's new commonage will only be to the advantage of the richest stock owners among the communal farmers and deny the majority access to the benefits of the land redistribution programme. The parallels with the mind-set of the old Reserve Management Board and the similarities of the new commonage to the 'economic units' of the 1980s cannot simply be dismissed.

Furthermore, we must ask what has become of the government's commitment to land reform as a means of poverty alleviation? This commitment seems to have been displaced by a monetarist macro-economic policy geared towards the creation of a black middle class. Agricultural policy has followed suit. It is not the first time that the dogmatic adherence to commercial land management models has served the interests of an emergent black elite. Kenya and Botswana (among others) provide classic examples of the negative socio-economic and

environmental consequences for poor rural communities which result from the imposition of land policies modelled upon private land ownership and commercial production systems (Behnke 1993; Ellis & Swift 1988; Homewood & Rodgers 1987; Lane & Swift 1989; Sandford 1983; Scoones 1995).

Stepping stones or 'economic units' reborn

The wealth differentials that exist between communal farmers are often cited as a prime reason for the reform of communal tenure. Wealthy farmers are portrayed as 'free riders' who exploit the commons at the expense of the poor. Giving incentives to the largest farmers to leave the commons and become commercial farmers themselves is often seen as the most appropriate means of reducing communal livestock numbers, and at the same time providing better grazing for poorer communal farmers. Because of their capital reserves and the fact that they often own cars or *bakkies* (pick-up trucks) and have the ability to hire labour, these are the most likely candidates to become 'emergent' commercial farmers. We regard such reasoning as flawed on several grounds. In the first place such wealth disparities are insignificant when viewed against the socio-economic inequalities that exist within South Africa as a whole. Secondly, 'wealthy' communal farmers often employ herders from within the community, thereby contributing a small but important element to the local economy, especially to the poorest households. The costs to rural communities of removing entrepreneurial households in this way should not be underestimated: wealthy individuals provide jobs and services that are an important part of the complex process of developing a prosperous rural economy. Finally, given the government's restricted budget for land redistribution, the choice of whether or not to target black emergent commercial farmers or the poor is purely political. We believe that priority should be clearly focussed on poverty alleviation in the Namaqualand communal areas rather than on the creation of a black elite.

During the first half of 2000, there was a major shift in land reform policy away from poverty alleviation and the redistribution of land to the poor, towards the facilitation of land acquisition by emergent black commercial farmers. New criteria for commonage projects state that:

> *"[. . .] commonage should be seen as having a dual purpose, i.e. that of providing access to land for*

> *supplementing [subsistence] income and as a stepping stone for emergent farmers. This means that all commonage projects must accommodate both subsistence and emerging farmers"* (DLA 2000).

Now, not only do communal farmers in the Leliefontein area have to conform to a commercial management system in order to qualify for access to the new commonage land, but the old policy which favoured the most disadvantaged communal farmers has given way to one which now splits this priority with the wealthiest. How are the many contradictions inherent in these criteria to be resolved?

NGOs working in Namaqualand have welcomed this policy to the extent that it proposes to remove the larger farmers from the commons and thus "enhance the prospects for subsistence farmers on commonage and communal land" (SPP 2000:1). But will the new commonage lands actually act as 'stepping stones' for the small number of wealthier communal livestock owners who fit into the category of 'emergent' commercial farmers (DoA & DLA 2000)? Are the grant incentives enough to entice such farmers off the commons? We will try to answer this question by projecting the recommended grant levels as set out in the Integrated Programme of Land Redistribution and Agricultural Development (MoA 2000) in the context of commercial herd sizes, gross profit margins and land prices in Namaqualand.

Two basic 'emergent farmer business plans' will be calculated using prices and productivity values current in the commercial farms surrounding the eastern portion of Leliefontein.[17]

Scenario 1

An emergent farmer needs to obtain a loan on top of the Integrated Programme grant to purchase 1100 ha of land at R135/ha with a stocking rate of 11 ha per SSU. The grant based on total project costs is calculated on the basis of the value of his own-contribution, including his livestock, the value of a bakkie and a year's own labour.

Project Finance:		
1100 ha of land @ R135		R148, 500
Own contribution		
Value of 100 breeding ewes	R 25,000	
Bakkie	R 10,000	
Labour	R 6,000	
Total own contribution		R 41, 000
Total project cost		R189, 500

Financed by:		
Own contribution	R 41,000	
Grant	R 43,317	
Loan	R105,183	
Total finance		R189, 500
Profit/Loss:		
Gross margin per ewe x 100	R 13,400	
Interest payment @ 17%[18]	R 17,881	
Gross profit/(loss)		**(R 4, 481)**

In order to break even, the farmer in Scenario 1 will either have to boost his gross margin by increasing the stocking rate to 8 ha per ewe or provide more than R27, 000 in cash towards the purchase price of land in order to reduce interest payments. In order to make a small profit to provide a safety-net income of R1, 500 per month the farmer will have to provide the full purchase price of the land in cash and reduce the stocking rate to less than 10 ha per ewe.

The problem is magnified when the scale of the commercial operation is expanded. In Scenario 2 an emergent commercial farmer wants enough land for a minimum commercial herd of 300 breeding ewes.

Scenario 2

Project Finance:		
Cost of 3,300 ha of land	R445, 500	
Own contribution		
(300 ewes, bakkie and labour)	R 91,000	
Total project cost		R536, 500
Financed by:		
Own contribution	R 91,000	
Grant	R100,000	
Loan	R345,500	
Total finance		R536, 500
Profit/Loss:		
Gross margin per ewe x 300	R 40,200	
Interest @17%	R 58,735	
Gross profit/(loss)		**(R18, 535)**

Scenario 2 assumes that our emergent farmer *could* obtain a loan of R345, 000. In order to break even he would have to raise the profit margin by increasing the stocking rate to levels of 7 ha per SSU or contribute R110, 000 in cash towards the purchase price of the land. This would reduce his loan requirement to R235, 000 with annual interest payments of R39, 950 (or the equivalent of total gross profit). Even in a best case scenario where our farmer provided all the cash for the purchase of the land (R345,500) and therefore was relieved of interest payments, income would be only about R3, 000 per month.

Neither of these scenarios take account of full variable costs, depreciation on capital investments such as fences and pumps or leeway for drought years when profits are greatly reduced. The gross margins are calculated for conservative stocking rates and it is unlikely that under high livestock densities that gross margins of R134 per ewe could be maintained. It is clear that either grant levels must be raised or interest rates on loans must be reduced substantially before real incentives will exist for black emergent commercial farmers to buy land in Namaqualand. The realities of livestock production in this arid, marginal environment, coupled with the lack of capital among emergent commercial farmers and the current inflated price of land in Namaqualand make it highly unlikely this objective will succeed. It also goes a long way towards explaining why so little land comes on the market in Namaqualand. The high risks and low returns from capital invested are such that the few land deals which do take place are typically by existing farmers 'trading up' to better farms while selling poorer, marginal land to the government for inflated prices.

At best, the new commonage will provide economic opportunities for the wealthier communal farmers, at the cost of alienating these lands from the poorest. Rather than acting as stepping stones, the new commonage farms will become a reborn version of the discredited 'economic units'.[19] The policy of promoting black commercial farming and the concomitant diversion of scarce funding and human resources to this new programme will seriously exacerbate the delays in addressing the land needs of the rural poor who constitute the large majority of Namaqualand's rural population. (Cousins 2000).

Conclusion and Post-script

A policy focus on emergent commercial farmers in Namaqualand will, contrary to the main purpose of land reform, not lead to poverty alleviation within the old Act 9 Areas.

At best it will help preserve the status quo, at worst it will lead to further marginalisation of small-scale communal farmers through the alienation of commonage lands and the imposition of commercial principles (e.g. management plans, restrictions related to carrying capacities) to control the management of the remaining communal areas.

The new Integrated Programme of Land Redistribution and Agricultural Development (MoA 2000) is the latest in a series of land reform policy shifts, brought about during the Mbeki presidency under a new Minister of Agriculture and Land Affairs. Many of the land reform policies discussed in this paper have been superseded by a World Bank style programme which seeks to unify all previous programmes within one system based on a sliding scale of grants for agricultural projects. Municipalities and other government bodies will no longer be eligible purchasers of land under the new Integrated Programme. However, associations such as CPAs or community trusts are now able to apply directly to DLA to purchase communal grazing land under this new policy. While many of the criteria and terms relating to eligibility and procedures need to be clarified, our reading of the policy suggests that a village such as Paulshoek, were it to constitute itself as a CPA or trust, could apply for a commonage grant of R20, 000 per household, providing each household could also contribute R5, 000 either in cash, kind or labour. In principle, Paulshoek's 140 households could raise R2.8 million in grants to buy an extra 20,000 ha of commonage – effectively doubling the land base of the village. As a CPA whose membership would be all residents of the village, it could act as a powerful incentive to reform the management of Paulshoek common grazing land and rehabilitate the old commons.

Unfortunately, the land reform budget only allows approximately R4 million per year for land acquisition in Namaqualand[20], the equivalent of about 1% of the annual national land reform budget. At current prices, a meaningful redistribution of land would require an additional 1.2 million ha of land (25% of Namaqualand) - enough to swallow up several years' worth of the entire national land reform budget.[21] To be realistic, this programme is unlikely to come anywhere near to

achieving its aim of transferring 30% of Namaqualand's agricultural land during the next fifteen years.

The successful implementation of the new Integrated Policy in Namaqualand is ultimately dependent on a reduction of inflated land prices. A tax on commercial farmland would have an immediate impact on the market with beneficial results for group commonage projects and emergent black commercial farmers. Meanwhile the future of the Act 9 Areas and the new municipal commonage remains uncertain. Many questions as to the ultimate ownership, control and management of the communal lands have yet to be decided through ongoing local democratic processes. We hope that this paper will make a small but positive contribute to the resolution of some of these problems.

Notes

1. We maintain the commonly used terms 'communal' and 'commercial' even though we acknowledge that these concepts are problematic since commercial activities are indeed also taking place in the 'communal' areas. Alternative concepts could be 'people-intensive' and 'land-intensive' systems.

2. The Leliefontein area includes different vegetation or veld types: Namaqualand Broken Veld, Succulent Karoo, False Succulent Karoo and Mountain Renosterveld (Acocks 1953). The area receives winter rainfall, usually from May to September, with a precipitation that varies from 100 mm to 350 mm. Traditionally, Nama herders exploited the various agro-ecological zones between the coastal plain, the mountainous escarpment zone and the summer rainfall grassland interior through seasonal transhumance. Commercial farmers mimic this pattern today through the multiple ownership of farms in different agro-ecological zones.

3. A detailed economic analysis of commercial and communal livestock farming is discussed below.

4. Market prices of grazing land in Namaqualand are as much as 10 times higher than the productive value of the land (SPP 2000). Research conducted into incomes from livestock farming in the Paulshoek area (Global Change 2000) show

that net annual income per hectare is less than R10 per ha for communal and commercial farming systems. Currently, land in this area is changing hands for more than R135 per ha or more than 13 times the annual productive value while base lending rates are around 20%.

5. A typical 10,000 ha farm might have a minimum of 40 kilometres of shared boundary fencing and up to 60 kilometres of internal fencing.

6. Paulshoek is one of ten Leliefontein Communal Area villages. It has a population of approximately 800 people living in 140 households. Paulshoek is the study site for an interdisciplinary research project (Global Change 1998, 1999a, 1999b & 2000) since 1997.

7. These data reflect the low stock numbers during 1998-9 after several years of below average rainfall (Global Change 1999a).

8. All the data quoted in this paragraph are derived from a study by Anseuw *et al*, 1999.

9. This information is derived from a study conducted during a drought year. Output from Paulshoek's rangeland during above average rainfall years is likely to be significantly higher.

10. Similarly stark contrasts are evident between commercial farms: 'overgrazing' in Namaqualand is not a phenomena confined to communal grazing systems.

11. Since May 2000 this has been designated as either a housing/settlement grant or as a livelihood/ food safety-net grant and the latest Integrated Programme document states that grants ranging from R20,000 t0 R100,000 will be made available for individuals and groups for grazing and agricultural land acquisition.

12. See Municipal Structures Act 1998 and Municipal Systems Bill 1999

13. From both a practical and political perspective, it seems likely that the newly acquired commonage in Namaqualand will be included in the transformation process.

14. Three are elected Councillors, 3 are members of the land committee, set up in 1995 to identify willing sellers of commercial farm land, and 3 are members of village farmers associations. There are nine representatives for ten villages because Rooifontein and Komassies are represented by one councillor.

15. During droughts when carrying capacities are reduced, the Council will enforce recommendations made by the Department of Agriculture to reduce a percentage of all herds larger than 20 breeding ewes.

16. Total area of the old Leliefontein commons is 192,000 ha. Additional commonage of 11,000 ha has been added under the land reform programme. A further 18,000 ha, also situated in the northwest, is due to be transferred to the TLC in the near future.

17. Assumptions include: 90% weaning rate, 8% ewe mortality, culled ewes are valued the same as ewe lamb replacements, current prices of R235 per lamb (R15 per kg. x 17 kg. carcass minus transport and commission). One hundred ewes produce 90 weaned lambs of which 27 ewe lambs are kept as herd replacements. Sixty-five lambs and 16 culled ewes are sold giving a gross income of R19,035 per annum for 100 breeding ewes or R190 gross income per ewe. Variable costs of R56 per ewe include veterinary medicines, feed, tranport and maintenance but not labour, interest payments or bank charges. Gross margins per ewe under such a scenario are R134. No allowance has been made for capital depreciation.

18. Wellman & Murray 2000

19. There are important differences between the economic units initiative and the black commercial farmers programme that we should not lose sight of: people are not being forced to relocate from existing locations into less productive options; anyone is allowed to apply i.e. there is no lower limit on stock numbers; preference is supposed to be given to poorer herd owners, even though it is in letter only.

20. Harry May, SPP pers. com. March 2000

21. According to the Integrated Programme (MoA 2000: 13) the national budget over 15 years is expected to be in the region of R 5.5 billion or R 360 million per year.

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