RANGELAND MANAGEMENT IN COMMUNAL AREAS OF CENTRAL EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA: A STUDY OF TWO CONTRASTING CASES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Cape Province of South Africa includes many areas where livestock production is undertaken on a communal basis using rangeland shared between one or more communities. In the central Eastern Cape region, these 'communal areas' are centred on the former homeland of Ciskei. The legacy of inappropriate social planning schemes under apartheid has resulted in considerable variation in population density and availability of grazing resources over relatively short distances in the former Ciskei region. This variation is further increased by the natural heterogeneity in the productivity of the rangeland in terms of its classification as sweetveld, sourveld or a mixture of the two. Together these social and ecological factors interact to produce a diverse range of scenarios at the communal level. The management strategies designed to cope with this heterogeneity are accordingly diverse.

This paper will consider the variation in methods of range management in communal areas of the former Ciskei based on a detailed study of two contrasting cases (Bennett, 2002). In particular, the focus will be on the utilisation and management of the arable land allocations as a forage reserve. These areas are opened up to livestock once harvesting of crops is complete, and effectively function as additional rangeland for the duration of the winter.

Keywords: Rangeland, management, communal.

2. OVERVIEW OF STUDY SITES

The research was undertaken at two villages, Guquka and Koloni, in the former Ciskei.

Guquka, is located in Victoria East District and is part of the former AmaKhuze Tribal Authority. The range area amounts to some 400 ha and is shared with the neighbouring village of Gilton and the adjacent township of Kayalethu. Rangeland is separated from arable and residential land by fencing and many of the arable fields at Guquka are also individually fenced to protect crops from damage by livestock. Grazing resources are managed through a somewhat *ad hoc* grazing committee, constituted by key livestock owners. The local rangeland type is sourveld, which becomes nutritionally poor as the grass sward matures and is consequently unproductive during the dormant (winter) season.

Koloni, is one of several villages that compose the AmaGqunukwebe Tribal Authority located in Middledrift District. Rangeland amounts to 650 ha (1050 ha including the arable lands) and belongs exclusively to the people of Koloni. It is separated from arable and residential land by fencing and is also divided into four separate grazing camps. Control of grazing management lies with the Resident's Association (RA), which is effectively constituted by all the resident adults within the village and headed by a democratically elected chairman. The local rangeland type is sweetveld, which remains nutritious as the grass sward matures, maintaining livestock productivity throughout the winter.

3. METHOD

Information regarding grazing management was collected through a series of interviews (Bennett, 2002). These interviews were conducted at both research villages and followed three basic stages. Firstly, there was a series of fairly informal interviews with key informants, which sought to identify the how the grazing management systems functioned in principal at each village. Subsequently, a series of largely qualitative semi-structured interviews was conducted with individual livestock owners to generate data on exactly how people at each village managed their livestock on a day-to-day basis, particularly during the winter when the arable land allocations became available for grazing. On the basis of these interviews some follow-up case study interviews were undertaken with individuals whose grazing management practices differed significantly from the norm.

4. RESULTS

Responses form the initial round of interviews with key informants were remarkably similar at both Guquka and Koloni and were used to construct a generalised, theoretical grazing management framework for the arable land allocations at the two villages. This is summarised below in Figure 1.

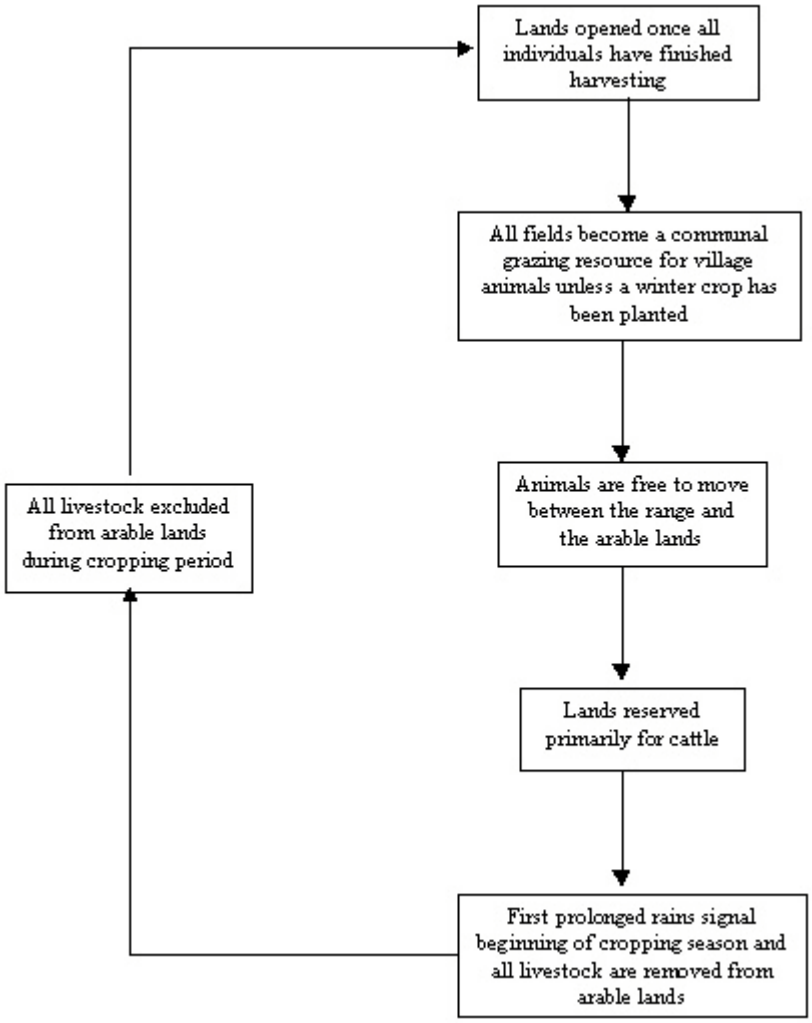

Figure 1. General management framework governing the use of the arable land allocations as a forage reserve for livestock.

However, the results of the semi-structured interviews and case study work with individual livestock owners showed that whilst the theoretical system was largely adhered to on an everyday level at Koloni, at Guquka there were in practice several marked deviations.

4.1 Maintenance of individual rights over fields during the winter period

The grazing management rules at both villages officially maintain that all fields become accessible by all livestock at this time, unless a winter crop is grown. At Koloni this is the only exception tolerated. At Guquka, however, several residents maintain individual rights over fields throughout the winter without growing crops. This may be for grazing their own livestock or simply for resting a field that was grazed during the summer months. In all cases these exceptions are possible because the field is fenced.

4.2 Livestock involved in arable grazing

Differences between the two villages also extend to the type of livestock allowed on the arable lands. This is essentially an issue of differing levels of resource control. Koloni has separate range camps with reasonably maintained fencing, which give it greater flexibility in controlling livestock movement. Small-stock can therefore be maintained on the camps during the winter and arable land allocations reserved for cattle. This control is not possible at Guquka. Here, several communities share the range but there is no collective responsibility for its upkeep. In this sense the range can

be considered as more typical of an open access than a common property resource, in that there is no control over user rights (Cousins, 1995). In such an environment control over livestock access to the grazing resource is almost impossible. Thus, at Guquka, the lower arable land allocation inevitably becomes accessible to all livestock (including some from outside the village) once the gates separating it from the range area are opened.

4.3 Grazing of arable lands during the summer

The arable fields at Guquka are grazed by livestock throughout the cropping (summer) period, a practice strictly prohibited at Koloni. Lack of available grazing at Kayalethu encourages livestock owners to maintain their animals on Guquka's arable lands. Furthermore, livestock from Guquka also make significant use of the fields for grazing at this time. This mostly takes the form of cattle grazing individually fenced fields because owners are absent from the village or because animals are sick or unruly. However, towards the end of the summer, increasing numbers of cattle from Guquka can be found free-ranging on unfenced areas of the arable lands. Owners generally justify this behaviour to the grazing committee with an official excuse, but the underlying reason for their presence is invariably shortage of forage on the range area at this time. Moreover, the owners who are able to practice this tend to be those who are well connected with the grazing committee on the basis of social standing within the village.

5. DISCUSSION

The key discrepancies outlined above between the grazing management systems at Guquka and Koloni are essentially a result of differing levels of resource demand, availability and control at each village.

At Koloni local grazing pressure is relatively low and grazing resources are considerable, of good quality and belong exclusively to the village. Moreover, the separation of arable land from grazing land and the division of the range into camps allows flexibility in control over grazing decisions at the communal level. In this environment, the RA at Koloni is able to both make and enforce all grazing management decisions at the village level, and the system, with very few exceptions, follows the general paradigm outlined in Figure 1. Thus, control and enforcement of communal grazing decisions remains very much with the whole community at Koloni and in this sense the ethos of communal grazing is still strong within the village.

At Guquka the situation is very different. The range is shared with several other communities and is essentially inadequate for the number of livestock it serves. Furthermore, the arable land allocations are the exclusive property of the village, but inadequate communal fencing in the face of this high resource pressure makes it difficult to retain grazing rights exclusively for the village. This has led to some key deviations from the official grazing management system, at an everyday level. The maintenance of fencing around individual fields is an important feature, which facilitates many of these deviations. It enables livestock owners who have access to fenced fields to bypass many grazing management decisions to a greater or lesser extent, without overtly contravening the grazing management regulations. In this sense, decision-making power has devolved from the central to the individual level for members of this land-owning elite.

6. CONCLUSIONS

These contrasting examples of the way in which communal grazing resources are managed at the local level have important implications for policy makers. Within the South African context it is inadequate simply to distinguish between communal grazing systems and freehold, commercial grazing systems. Communal grazing systems in areas such as the former Ciskei have been shaped by a complicated legacy of social intervention through activities such as betterment and forced resettlement of people as well as natural ecological factors such as the variation in the productivity of the range. Policy prescriptions for these areas cannot therefore afford to be generalised. Rather, they must be flexible and seek to acknowledge the enormous social and ecological diversity that characterises these systems.

7. REFERENCES

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