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The XXI International Grassland Congress / VIII International Rangeland Congress took place in Hohhot, China from June 29 through July 5, 2008.

Proceedings edited by Organizing Committee of 2008 IGC/IRC Conference

Published by Guangdong People's Publishing House

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Presenter Information

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Does LandCare result in changes in perceptions of livestock keepers on sustainable use of natural resources ? An example from Sterkspruit in South Africa

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Introduction A LandCare project implemented by the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture in Sterkspruit, in South Africa was evaluated in terms of its impact in changing the perceptions of livestock keepers on sustainable natural resource management. This project is intended to promote sustainable use of agricultural resources as well as promoting community participation and was implemented in 2004. The study area is considered to be one of the most severely degraded areas in South Africa in terms of vegetation changes, reduced plant cover, invasion by unpalatable shrubs and extensive soil erosion (Hoffman *et al*, 1999, Hill, Kaplan & Scott, 1985).

Methodology By comparing a village with the LandCare project (Blikana) with an adjacent village without the project (Hohobeng) this study, through participatory approaches, aimed at evaluating the impact of the project on the perceptions of livestock keepers with regards to sustainable use of natural resources. Focus was on three target groups, namely, those with 0-8 cattle, farmers with 9 to 16 cattle and farmers with 17 cattle and more. Household interviews were conducted with 131 farmers. Seventy three of these 131 farmers were in Blikana while the remaining 58 were interviewed in Hohobeng. Data were analysed with SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Version 15.0 (SPSS Inc., 1999).

Results and discussion There were striking similarities in the order of what was perceived to be causing land degradation between the two villages and slight differences were that the respondents in Blikana were more likely to attribute the causes to human factors more than was observed in Hohobeng. The number of respondents who associated livestock with land degradation was higher in Blikana than in Hohobeng although these differences were not significantly different ($P \leq 0.05$). On the issue of land cultivation and its effect on land degradation in both villages the majority of respondents could not associate land cultivation with land degradation although it was noticeable that the number of the respondents was higher in Hohobeng.

Conclusions The general contention is that poor management of livestock and cultivation can result in land degradation. Although these differences were not significant between the two villages and focus groups there seemed to be more of that understanding among the livestock keepers in Blikana than in Hohobeng. While there may not be adequate evidence to attribute that line of thought entirely on the implementation and the activities of the LandCare project in Blikana it did seem LandCare may have had an effect on the perceptions of livestock keepers in Blikana. While these perceptions were not translated into action it was decided that the LandCare project was still at its infancy (<3 years) to have an impact on the perceptions of the livestock owners.

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