



Land claims and the pursuit of co-management on four protected areas in South Africa



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ABSTRACT

Successful land claims on protected areas by previously disenfranchised communities often result in co-management agreements between claimant communities and state conservation agencies. South Africa, in particular, has pursued co-management as the desired outcome of land claims on its protected areas. We review four cases of co-management on protected areas in South Africa, and reflect on the appropriateness of the pursuit of co-management as the preferred outcome of land claims. Despite promises of pro-poor, democratically informed management, the practical experience of co-management has seen the continuation of the status quo in terms of conservation, with very few material benefits for claimant communities and limited sharing of responsibilities and decision-making functions. The findings underscore two deep challenges facing co-management in cases of land claims worldwide. First, during land claims negotiations in cases involving protected areas, the state cannot be expected to represent the best interests of its citizens (the land claimants), while simultaneously seeking to meet national and international obligations for protected area coverage. Second, the concept of democratic co-management may sit uncomfortably beside the realities of managing loss-making protected areas with ever-shrinking conservation budgets. Where co-management agreements have already been signed, ensuring that new landowners do indeed have a say in management should form the driving focus for co-management practice going forward.

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Introduction

Co-management has occupied centre-stage in natural resource management thinking and practice since the 1990s. Throughout these decades, and across several countries, the approach has often been associated with land claims by previously disenfranchised communities on protected areas (e.g. Berkes, 1994; Hill and Press, 1994; Kepe, 2008; Reid et al., 2004; Tofa, 2007). Caught in the predicament of needing to redress past injustices, while at the same time respond to national and international obligations to maintain, and indeed expand, protected areas, co-management became seen by many countries as the answer to their conservation and development challenges.

The roots of co-management's wide-ranging appeal can be found in parallel global discourses that began to dominate international and national policy in the 1980s and 1990s, and which remain dominant to this day (see Mansuri and Rao, 2004 for a review). During the 1980s, growing democratic and development

discourses argued for greater civic participation in decision making (Chambers, 1994), and for rights-based approaches that empowered the poor and put access to resources at the centre of tackling poverty (Sen, 1981, 1999). Simultaneously, theoretical developments in the field of economics, which had comfortably accepted as incontrovertible truth Hardin's postulation of the Tragedy of the Commons (1968) for two decades, were beginning to shift towards the idea that community-based bodies could effectively manage common pool resources under certain conditions (Ostrom, 1990). These developments occurred against the backdrop of growing dissatisfaction with centralised command and control of natural resource management (Holling and Meffe, 1996), referred to in other circles as fortress conservation (Adams and Hulme, 2001), which was giving way in ecology to approaches that emphasised stakeholder engagement and learning based approaches such as adaptive management (Lee, 1993; Walters and Holling, 1990). Rights-based development discourses became ever more associated with conservation discourses when first the World Conservation Strategy (1980) and then the Brundtland Commission (1987) highlighted the link between poverty and conservation and called for synergy between conservation and development. The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 concretised the notion of community involvement in natural resource management at a global policy

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