

## ASPIRATIONS AND NEEDS OF FARMERS ON COMMUNAL GRAZING AREAS IN THE FREE STATE

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### ABSTRACT

*The study evaluated the needs and aspirations of farmers in communal or commonage grazing systems in the Free State. The study focused on communal grazing systems in Qwaqwa, Thaba-Nchu, Botshabelo as well as parts of areas in the Free State where commonage grazing systems are practiced by small-scale farmers. In this study the needs and aspirations of the farmers are related to the integration of environmental planning into communal grazing systems in the Free State, as well as security of tenure, working capital, knowledge, adequate extension services, training and water supply, timely veld fires, and co-operation amongst farmers. The needs and aspirations of livestock owners in the communal rangelands of the Free State are constrained by small farm size, population pressure, land tenure problems, distance from markets, poor transport and infrastructure. The study also reveals that integration of environmental planning into communal grazing systems in the Free State is essential for the best cattle performance and land use.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION PERSPECTIVE

#### 1.1 Historical background

The needs and aspirations of people in the Free State could be met through the development of sustainable livelihoods, taking into account the natural, physical, social, financial and human resources (Masiteng & Van der Westhuizen, 2001). Most of the rural farmers in communal areas in African countries wish to improve their standard of living (Mukhala, 1999). Farmers in communal areas would also like to make a profit, generate income, increase well-being, and improve food security and sustainability of environmental resources. The Department of Agriculture Free State has 300 000 clientele of which 162 000 are farming in urban and peri-urban land. This means 54% of its clientele, farms near cities and towns. This includes clients on communal and commonage land. In total 69,7% of the Free State population is urbanized. It is thus accepted as a very important group of clients that needs support according

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to their needs (Olivier, 2001).

In South Africa, there is an increasing need for the creation of "commonage land", which is largely due to the farm workers who arrive at the nearest town with their livestock and the voluntary migration of people from rural areas. These people are in search of work, better standards of living, accommodation, schools, infrastructure and essential services. Many of them need additional land for production purposes or subsistence farming practices, where land is not available at the places where they reside. Through the Department of Land Affairs' (DLA's) Commonage programme, formal commonage areas can be established to assist such people and the others (DLA Policy Committee Submission, 2001).

By means of this study, rural villagers practising communal grazing in the Free State province seek to build their capacity in the management of their local resource base. It is important to note that this research project aims to improve and strengthen the condition, productivity and profitability of the communal areas in the Free State province. The research is responsive to the farmers' own interpretation of and priorities for their farming activities. The holistic approach adopted in this research endeavoured to identify the main constraints faced by farmers, as well as the promising opportunities open to farmers in commonage grazing areas. The research will build upon farmers' own definitions of these constraints and opportunities. The research endeavoured to generate a realistic understanding of what shaped the farmers in commonage grazing areas and how environmental planning can be adjusted so that, taken together, they produce more beneficial outcomes. It also attempted to reflect the activities, needs and constraints of communal grazing areas, and to provide planners, implementers and policy makers with up-to-date information on commonage farming.

## **1.2 Perspective on small-scale farmers**

Although there are several definitions of small-scale farmers a more recent definition where farmers are categorised, taking income as the main determinant, South African producers fall into the following categories:

- a. Established commercial farmers, mainly white, with farming as the sole or substantial means of livelihood. Mainly full-time under leasehold or freehold tenure with good resources.
- b. Resource-poor producers falling into the following subcategories:
  - Pre-commercial (step-up-progressive) with a reasonable income from farming. Mainly black and resource-limited under communal, leasehold or freehold tenure. Willing to learn improved farming

techniques.

- Semi-commercial (step-up) and not earning enough from farming to give up other employment. Severely resource-limited on communal or other tenure arrangements, including sharecropping.
- Subcommercial (subsistence) with a negligible surplus for sale or storage. Extremely small parcels of land under communal tenure, including sharecropping. Land often lies fallow through lack of resources (finance, power, equipment, inputs and information). Upward mobility is restricted (Dillon, 1998; Kirsten & Van Zyl, 1998 and Kotsokoane, 1999).

Small-scale farmers constitute the bulk of the world's farmers. Small-scale farmers operate in a context of increasing local population pressure, with a very small resource base and a chronically low standard of living (Sirur & Van den Brink, 1995). Small-scale farmers live in the margin rather than in the mainstream of society in terms of political influence and the provision of health, education and other services and usually live in absolute poverty (Dillon & Hardaker, 1993).

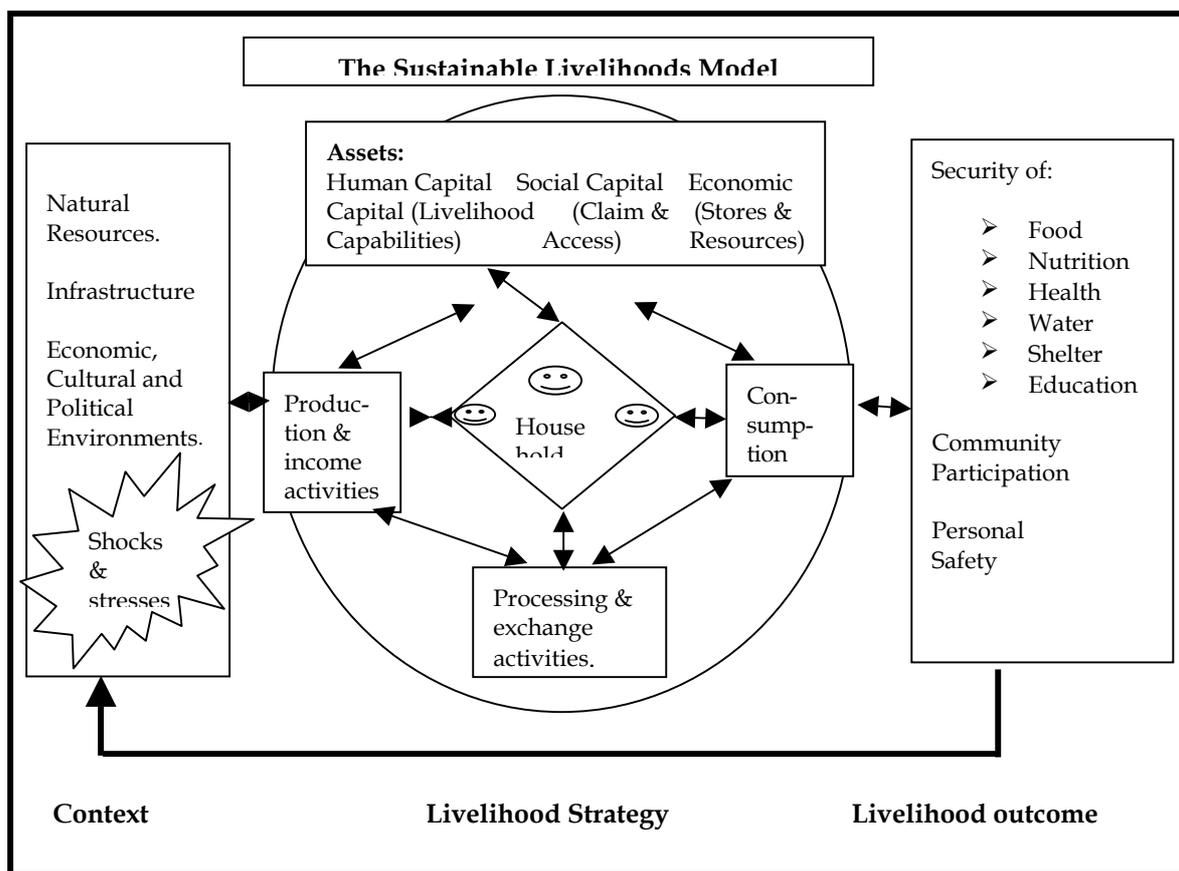
From the available definitions it seems that most black farmers, whether small-scale or not, have limited access to land and capital, and have received inadequate or inappropriate research and extension support in the past. For small-scale farmers to be successful, they should be equipped with good management practices, technical skills and comprehensive financial, management and extension support. Supporting the needs of these new entrants is important and in accordance with the policy of the Provincial and National Department of Agriculture.

### **1.3 Human needs and aspirations**

Brundtland *et al.* (1986) report that the satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of developing countries. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.

The figure itself shows the main features of livelihoods analysis, and emphasises the interaction that characterise this view life. The basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and jobs are not being met, but beyond their basic needs, these people have legitimate aspirations for an improved quality of life. Carney (1998) explains that a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and

shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. Sustainable agricultural production and conservation of natural resources should be emphasised in the agricultural policies of South Africa.



Source: Carney (1998); Drinkwater and Frankenberger (1999)

Figure 1: A model for sustainable livelihoods

## 2. PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNAL AND COMMONAGE GRAZING SYSTEMS

### 2.1 Concept of commonage and communal grazing areas

The term commonage is traditionally applied to land surrounding a town, owned by the municipality or occupied and administered by tribal authority. Scogings *et al.* (1999) report that an important part of this dependence lies in sustaining livestock, and half the livestock population of South Africa is found in the communal areas. Scogings *et al.* (1999) further argue that in order to achieve sustainable agriculture in the communal rangelands, land-use must

be ecologically sound, economically viable, socially acceptable and politically supported. In this country, agricultural production takes place in two types of land tenure systems: commercial and communal. Cousins (1998) defined communal rangelands as follows:

Communal rangelands are those areas used for livestock and other purposes, and a full economic evaluation calls for combining the values of the full range of resources and uses - and for examining the trade-offs as well as the complementarities between them.

The other definition of communal rangeland is:

Areas of veld that are not privately owned, but belong to entire communities whose members have equal access to free resources. This system is particularly important for poorer people (Scogings *et al.*, 1999).

Communal rangelands can also be defined as those areas where agriculture is largely subsistence based and where rangelands are generally communally owned and managed. De Bruyn (1998) and Scogings *et al.* (1999) concluded that in spite the perception that these areas are badly degraded, they are reported to support a quarter of South African's human population on 13 per cent of the land and half of the livestock population. Most of the people who live in these areas depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. In South Africa, these areas occur mainly in the former homelands such as Qwaqwa, Kwandebele, Kangwane, KwaZulu, Lebowa and the former TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei).

The specific objectives of the study are the following:

- a. To evaluate and understand the needs and the aspirations of these farmers.
- b. To examine the key constraints and opportunities posed to commonage grazing systems.
- c. Evaluate grazing-land management experience at various communal grazing areas and commonage projects in the Free State.

### **3. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY**

The study involves a research area comprising the 14 villages and 21 small towns in the entire province of Free State. In total, research was conducted in the 35 areas where commonage has a central role to play within small town and village local economic development. A questionnaire was developed for

specific use among farmers farming on communal and commonage grazing systems. In this questionnaire provision was made for comments by farmers by means of open-ended questions. Stratified random sampling was used to select respondents, and individuals were therefore representative of farmers farming in different communal systems. In total 70 farmers on commonage and communal grazing systems completed questionnaires. Data collection took place between January and May 2002. The interviews were conducted in the Sesotho language at the farmer's localities and it took between 60 and 120 minutes to complete each questionnaire.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Types of land ownership**

The results in this study indicate that the majority of the respondents (72,6%) on communal systems are farming as individuals and 27,4% of the respondents are farming in group. This finding corresponds with a recent survey conducted for the Department of Land Affairs by Van Zyl (1998) who reveals that there is a huge power struggle in the Qwaqwa area and that the community would like to obtain full ownership of their sites in future. Although most of the respondents in this study (72,6%) farm as individuals, group formation has been encouraged among farmers with the hope that farmers can gain through the sharing of facilities and consequently can achieve what individuals cannot do on their own (Sebina & Düvel, 1999). Farmers farming in group schemes have a constitution that guides them to execute the activities taking place at project level. Each farmer is allocated with responsibilities to perform on a daily basis.

### **4.2 Major problems identified by the farmers on commonage land**

Based on the background, respondents were asked to name, in order of preference, the most important management problems they faced. There are many constraints in the communal farming system including, among others, small farm size, population pressure, land tenure problems, distance from markets, poor transport and infrastructure. Due to the fact that small-scale farmers' operations are inside the rural areas and not near any large town or city, those farmers have certain constraints that need to be addressed. The study reveals the following facts:

- **Reliable water supply** is a limiting factor, as farmers are concerned about the lack of reliable water sources in their working areas. Existing dams and water points for livestock should be upgraded.
- **Electrification** is needed, as farmers interviewed on the commonage land

have shown that the unavailability of electricity in their farming areas has prevented them from implementing technological innovations that need electricity.

- **Fencing** of the grazing areas on communally grazed lands is poorly developed. From the extension point of view extensively grazed lands need to be rested and used in rotation, and thus fencing is needed to ensure that rotational grazing is employed. The farmers felt that communally grazed lands must be properly developed, managed and fenced, and that camps must be developed.

In attempt to address the infrastructure problems like reliable water supply, electricity, fencing and roads among farmers, the Department of Agriculture has made R25 000,00 (through the Community Project Fund Support Programme (CPF-SP)) available to each household. In the Free State area water is the most limiting factor, as there are no overall plans to utilise water on communal land, despite the high rainfall in the area. The water taps for household consumption in the area are correctly placed for home consumption but not for cattle. Cattle have to travel  $\pm$  3km to the streams and rivers for water. Boreholes need to be repaired and properly placed.

### 4.3 Farmers' future needs and aspirations

Too often poverty is such that people cannot satisfy their needs for survival and well-being even if goods and services are available. At the same time, the demands of those not in poverty may have major environmental consequences (Masiteng & Van der Westhuizen, 2001). The needs/aspirations regarding commonage projects vary significantly between the different farming categories. With their background in mind, farmers were asked their major immediate needs and major long-term needs. Farmers stated the following as their major immediate needs/aspirations and major long-term needs/aspirations (n=70):

#### 4.3.1 Major immediate needs/aspirations:

- Government financial assistance: to buy a farm (23,0%).
- Fencing, access roads and water points to enable expansion and save money (13,8%).
- Infrastructure development (8,3%).
- Support services, training and farming knowledge and skills (5,8%).
- Generate income (16,9%).

- Herd health programme and training on disease control and management (11,4%).
- Veld management skills and knowledge (4,2%).
- Have enough livestock (4,2%).
- Prevention of veld fires (12,4%).

#### 4.3.2 Major long-term needs/aspirations:

**Table 3.1: Commonage farmers' future major long-term needs/aspirations**

FARMERS' NEEDS/ASPIRATIONS	TOTAL (n=70)
Security of tenure.	8 (11,4%)
To be developed, known, successful, recognised and organised.	17 (24,3%)
Improved linkages with other service providers and farmers.	8 (11,4%)
Own a farm and farming commercially.	3 (4,3%)
Co-operation among farmers grazing on communal land.	7 (10,0%)
Improved support services from DoA.	24 (34,3%)
Farm with quality livestock breeds.	3 (4,3%)

The answers to the question reflect perceptions from the respondents and therefore results may be biased.

#### 4.4 Agricultural training needs and extension service

Government and donor efforts to promote small business have so far focused mainly on credit schemes and training. Training also brings about a marked change in african people's differentiation of thought and leads to increased productivity. A lack of skill is often due to a lack of training (Van Reenen & Davel, 1991). It should be noted that the list of training needs identified is comprehensive and extremely diverse. Respondents on commonage land require access to a wide range of support services and professional advice. It would seem that the most frequently mentioned type of training or assistance and/or support required by respondents relates to cattle management and crop production. The implication is that farmers perceive training on livestock management and feeding to be very important.

Some of the Department of Agriculture's support programmes that enhance

the farming abilities of these clientele groups are (Olivier, 2001):

- Access to finance;
- Access to Markets;
- Infrastructure Development and value adding;
- Support with appropriate information;
- Support development of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME's);
- Improve the involvement of women, youth and people with disabilities;
- Utilize research to develop markets;
- Support public and animal health; and
- Conservation of natural resources.

Agricultural Extension Officers are providing extension services and technical input to farmers on commonage areas and at project level. From the respondents' point of view, integration of service providers is essential to enable service providers to provide extension services to farmers on commonage land. Farmers saw the key role of the local Extension Officers (EO's) as to ensure that the farmers on commonage land know what to do during each part of the season. Extension Officers on the other hand, provide valuable hands-on experience and assistance and assist in evaluating alternative farming practices and potential improvements to farming systems. The majority of the farmers on commonage land felt that the government should play a leading role in kickstarting the process of streamlining the marketing process, development of infrastructures, financial assistance, training and extension services to developing farmers. The government is seen as playing an important role in providing financial assistance (through CPF-SP) to expand current activities.

#### **4.5 Farmers' opinions regarding the management of commonage land**

Due to population pressure and overgrazing in the Qwaqwa area environmental degradation is taking place on a large scale. Even households with land and livestock struggle in the face of land shortages and the high costs of ploughing, planting and harvesting. Households typically make ends meet by engaging in multiple livelihoods, and these livelihood strategies will need to be supported by sensitive and clearly defined and targeted programmes. In an attempt to implement measures to prevent risks associated with small-scale farming, especially in the first few years, the involvement of farmers is of paramount importance. Farmers are of the opinion that services provided by the Department of Agriculture are worthwhile and in line with their opinion regarding the management of beef/dairy projects, but need to be improved. Suggestions from the farmers regarding the improvement include dairy courses and retraining of farmers and labourers. From the results above, farmers view dairying as the future investment for their

children. Farmers have a clear understanding of the fact that good management is the key to success and to profit making. Farmers acknowledge the fact that farming with pure cattle breeds and good feeding will pay in the long run. In general farmers felt that their self-image had been boosted since their involvement in cattle farming on commonage land.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Addressing the problems and the needs of commonage grazing farmers in the Free State area requires detailed and lengthy community facilitation and negotiation. Problems of limited natural resources and unresolved land tenure systems require widespread investment in local capacity building.

Farmers on commonage land need an extremely diverse range of training to facilitate the development of managerial and technical skills. Training directed at small-scale farmers should basically focus on helping them towards self-reliance and economically and environmentally sound practices.

A detailed survey and evaluation of the extension services available to farmers grazing on commonage land need be done. Available extension services from the Department of Agriculture are insufficient and ineffective due to lack of capacity. Extension Officers focus on small-scale projects but do not have the capacity to attend to the needs of farmers in these projects. Veld management research and extension education, training and practice in general have to take cognisance of and reflect the leaning towards more participatory approaches to extension.

The knowledge of farmers should be utilised properly and they should be encouraged to be responsible for their own destinies. The concept that "the government will do" among small-scale farmers on commonage land must be dealt with systematically. The service delivery system should grow to be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of small-scale farmers. Development activities directed towards small-scale farming operations should therefore be based upon sound technical, financial and administrative procedures.

Uncontrolled, untimely or indiscriminate veld fires pose a threat to healthy grasslands and good grazing in the Free State province. Large areas of the protected areas have been burnt as a result of runaway veld fires sweeping into parks from sources in adjacent land, while large tracts of valuable grazing have been destroyed on neighbouring farms. Indiscriminate or untimely burning can have a seriously negative effect on the palatability and nutrition levels of veld grasses. This in turn means that greater grazing pressure is brought to bear on areas where grasslands are still healthy. The National Veld and Forest Fire Act provides for the control, management and prevention of

mountain, forest and veld fires, while allowing Fire Control Committees to be more effective and providing training and support to rural communities in the management and control of veld fires. Within any grazing system, water must be provided to livestock in adequate quantity and quality. Clean water and ample high quality forage are essential for improved livestock production. Inadequate livestock water developments in pasture areas can contribute to serious livestock losses, prevent efficient use of forages, encourage overgrazing near existing water supplies and under-grazing away from the water sources.

A key requirement for sustainable commonage development is the integration of commonage planning with the municipal planning process, such as the Integrated Development Plans (IDP's) and Land Development Objectives (LDO's). Firstly, the spatial or land-use planning process of a municipality, including a district municipality, will determine where infrastructure investments are to be made and where opportunities for livelihood generation will be greatest. These will be key indicators as to where commonage projects should be implemented. Secondly, the planning process will provide an important way to monitor and evaluate the effects of commonage implementation over time, as planning process will include *status quo* assessment of environmental and settlement issues within the municipal area. In order to achieve sustainable agriculture in the commonage areas, land-use must be ecologically sound, economically viable, socially acceptable and politically supported.

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