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Biodiversity conservation and land rights in South Africa: Whither the farm dwellers?

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Abstract

South Africa is unique in that its globally significant biodiversity, which is under significant threat, coexists with an apartheid history of dispossession that produced a starkly unequal land ownership pattern and widespread rural poverty. It is in this context that the post-apartheid government must fulfil constitutional and international obligations to safeguard environmental assets as well as undertake land reform benefiting the previously dispossessed. Consequently, there is a continuous challenge of reconciling complex and often conflicting relationships between poverty, inequitable access to resources, and the protection of biodiversity. Current efforts to conserve the Cape Floral Kingdom emphasize partnerships between private landowners and existing nature reserves to promote sustainable utilisation of biodiversity. This paper presents a case study exploring how this approach might be reconciled with land rights and opportunities for land-based livelihoods among farm dwellers in the Baviaanskloof area of the Eastern Cape. The paper identifies systemic and structural tensions in current attempts to reconcile biodiversity conservation and farm dwellers' interests, and documents issues of process and principle that could become important in the future. In doing so, it highlights the influence of on-farm power relations and overly complex institutional arrangements in determining the real extent of participation by affected farm dwellers and the efficacy of social safeguard policies. Findings also caution against an over-reliance on ecotourism as the major occupation and the paper argues instead for support for multiple livelihood strategies.
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Keywords: Conservation; Biodiversity economy; Land rights; Farm dwellers; South Africa; Baviaanskloof

1. Introduction

South Africa is unique in two quite distinct ways. First, it is a country with massive biodiversity. The third most biologically diverse country in the world, it comprises an astonishing variety of biomes including Mediterranean-type, arid, alpine and tropical environments. Within these biomes there is enormous species diversity and endemism (Sandwith, 2002). The country contains between 250,000 and 1,000,000 species, many of which occur nowhere else. In the plant kingdom alone, at least 80% of the 18–20,000 species are endemic. It also has the highest known concentration of threatened plants, and the highest extinction estimates anywhere in the world (Wynberg, 2002). It is home to the Cape Floral Kingdom,[1] one of the world's top 25 'biodiversity hotspots' (Myers et al., 2000). Second, South Africa has an extreme history of land dispossession based on racial discrimination, which has produced a highly unequal pattern of land ownership and widespread rural poverty. In 1994, the new post-apartheid government introduced a programme of redistributive land reform to transform the racial pattern of land ownership and to protect and upgrade the tenure rights of people with insecure rights to land (DLA, 1997). Farm dwellers, who live and work in

[1] The Cape Floral Kingdom is the smallest of the world's six floral kingdoms, and the only one entirely confined to one country. It is recognised as a global biodiversity asset.

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severe poverty and under insecure land tenure arrangements on South Africa's white-owned farms, are a key target group of tenure reform. But recent research indicates that despite government policy and intentions (Hall, 2004a; Wegerif and Russell, 2005) land reform to date has yielded little benefit to this marginalised group. The post-apartheid government faces a major challenge in setting up policy and legislative frameworks that both advance freedom and equality and protect the country's natural resource base.

To fulfil its constitutional obligations to safeguard biodiversity, as well as commitments under regional and international environmental agreements, the state gives due importance to the expansion of conservation estate – both in terms of protected area coverage and outside formal protected areas. Recent years have seen the creation of biodiversity 'mega-reserves'[2] – large areas under some form of protection, based on the voluntary and cooperative participation of private landowners. Three mega-reserves have been established in the Cape Floral Kingdom – Baviaanskloof, Cederberg, Garden Route – as part of the Cape Action for People and Environment programme (C.A.P.E.),[3] with substantial funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF, 2004). They are conceptualised as partnerships between private land owners and existing nature reserves towards sustainable utilisation of the unique biodiversity in these areas. The focus is on exposing people to more sustainable ways of using the land and natural resources, promoting the adoption of conservation-conscious farming methods or other land use practices, and where possible setting aside land for formal protection. This approach differs markedly from the 'fences and fines' approach – drawing boundaries, regulating entry, and penalising unauthorised use – typical of many conservation efforts throughout the world in the past.

The research described in this article explores possible implications of this new approach for farm dwellers. Through a case study of the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve in Eastern Cape Province, it seeks to build an understanding of how changing land use in response to conservation concerns may affect land tenure rights and livelihoods of farm dwellers living and working on land targeted for inclusion in the mega-reserves. Recent evidence of farm dwellers' continuing vulnerability to evictions and loss of livelihood (Wegerif and Russell, 2005) gives this question added urgency.

Field research was undertaken in the Baviaanskloof area, and included semi-structured interviews with 13 landowners and 61 farm dwellers and workers across 15 farms.[4] The farms were selected based on a preliminary identification of landholdings where land use changes had already occurred or were being considered by owners. This information was obtained from the landowner database of the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve Project. Farm dwellers were randomly approached, and interviews conducted mostly in small groups. Given the highly unequal power relations on farms, farm dwellers were given assurances of strict confidentiality. Another major source of information was a series of in-depth interviews with key staff in the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve Project Management Unit. Information thus obtained was combined with direct observations, review of many secondary sources including project documents, government policy documents and legislation, and a questionnaire survey of the mega-reserve steering committee. The research was conducted over a period of about six weeks during August and September 2005.

The next section provides a contextual overview of the broader issues around sustainable development, biodiversity conservation and land rights, as well as how these are linked, from global level to the national experience in South Africa. This is followed by an empirical case study analysis of the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve and the specific situation of farm dwellers there. A brief conclusion along with lessons for policy and practice completes the article.

2. Background

2.1. Sustainable development

The problematique of the people–ecology interface is framed against the overall backdrop of sustainable development. This concept is not new but has grown significantly in importance on the international agenda in recent years. Global policy debates increasingly focus on the challenges posed by natural resource limits to the ways in which production and consumption are structured in a world sharply divided between rich and poor (see Daly and Goodland, 1996; Dresner, 2002; Mebratu, 1998; Pezzoli, 1997; Sachs, 2002).

The meaning of 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' is hotly contested. Apart from a general recognition that the world is faced with an environmental crisis and that fundamental change is required to overcome it (Mebratu, 1998), the sustainability discourse is characterised by varying definitions and interpretations. While consensus on a vague concept – rather than disagreement over a sharply defined one – can be a good political strategy (Daly, 1996), the fact that such an elusive concept drives many policy processes at global, regional and national levels is problematic, especially in a world of major power imbalances.

Since the 1970s the debate has shifted from conservation of nature for its own sake, to protection of the productivity of natural resources for economic use – put differently, to the "conservation of growth" (Sachs, 1999, p. 81). When the sustainable development concept first appeared in the 1980 World Conservation Strategy, it subtly shifted the locus of sustainability from nature to development. But since development is itself such a loose concept, just what it is that

[2] The term 'mega' is used because the area must be large enough to accommodate animal movements and gene flow over large distances, as well as encompass a gradient of habitat types.

[3] C.A.P.E. is a multi-stakeholder initiative between government, civil society and the private sector to coordinate and maximize efforts to conserve the Cape Floral Kingdom.

[4] There are a total of 23 farms in the Baviaanskloof, with some farmers owning multiple properties.

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should be sustained is perpetually contested. The formula proposed by the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987) was essentially unable to resolve this dilemma, although it did bring into sharper focus the tension between the crisis of justice and the crisis of nature, both in the present and in the future.

In South Africa, given the apartheid legacy of a deeply divided economic structure, policy making for sustainable development must focus on reducing inequality and poverty. The past decade has thus seen environmental issues move squarely into a socio-political arena concerned with human rights, access to natural resources, social justice, equity and sustainability (Wynberg, 2002). The new Constitution guarantees the right to environmental protection so as to "secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development" (RSA, 1996). However, this commitment generates inherent tensions. Policymakers face the continuous challenge of reconciling complex and often conflicting relationships between poverty, inequitable access to resources, economic growth, and protection of environmental assets.

2.2. Biodiversity conservation

An important proposition in conservation circles is that the world is undergoing unprecedented loss in biological diversity due to increased human activity. Despite significant effort to improve our knowledge base with regard to the magnitude and speed of loss (Myers et al., 2000), current estimates of global extinction rates remain diverse and imprecise (Murray, 1995). It is therefore no surprise that there is continuing public scepticism about the degree of environmental crisis and the extent to which it is brought on by human behaviour (Daily, 1999). Tackling the science and information gap is seen as a major priority. An important initiative in this regard is the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA, 2005).

Habitat destruction is a leading cause of species extinction (Murray, 1995). Protection of habitat is therefore seen as a key factor in slowing down extinction rates. Myers et al. (2000) identified 25 global 'biodiversity hotspots', which collectively occupy only 1.4% of global land area, yet contain the sole remaining habitats of nearly half the Earth's plant species and over one third of its vertebrate species. These habitats all face high risk of elimination. Agriculture is a key factor in habitat destruction, and hence in loss of biodiversity. In his seminal work on the fates of human societies, Diamond (1997) traces the profound effects of the agricultural revolution, which began about 10,000 years ago. Its impact on biodiversity over the millennia is eclipsed, however, by the rise of large-scale modern agriculture during the 20th century (Pretty, 1995). In South Africa, it is estimated that 31% of the Cape Floral Kingdom has been transformed by agriculture and commercial forestry (C.A.P.E., 2000).

Over the past decade the role of multilateral environmental agreements has grown in importance in biodiversity conservation (Steiner et al., 2003). National policy is increasingly formulated on the basis of global concerns. The convention on biological diversity (CBD) requires signatory states to integrate conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into relevant sectoral plans, programmes and policies. South Africa has made significant strides towards such 'mainstreaming' (Pierce et al., 2002). Environmental protection is a constitutional right; important policy frameworks have been developed, including the National Environmental Management Act (RSA, 1998) and the Biodiversity Act (RSA, 2004). The amount of land under formal conservation increased by over 457,000 ha between 1994 and 2003 – the greatest expansion in any comparable period in the country's conservation history (DEAT, 2003).

But although sustainable development is entrenched in South Africa's legislative and policy framework, socio-economic issues tend to override calls for biodiversity conservation. These include a lack of awareness of the importance of biodiversity to the economy and to sustainability, and agricultural and tax incentives that encourage unsustainable land use practices (C.A.P.E., 2000). Moreover, the historical legacy of a grossly skewed distribution of population and wealth underlies the government's intent to increase conservation's contribution to poverty alleviation and economic development.

2.3. The land issue in South Africa

South Africa's land issue is rooted in four centuries of systematic, racially-based land dispossession, spanning the colonial era (see Delius, 1983; Elphick and Malherbe, 1989) and subsequent decades of apartheid rule (see Beinart and Dubow, 1995; Platzky and Walker, 1985). When the first democratically elected government came to power in 1994, about 60,000 white farmers owned 86% of the country's agricultural land, while over 13 million African people survived precariously on the remaining 14% (Bernstein, 1996). Land reform is seen by many as imperative for the legitimacy of the new non-racial order (Hall, 2004b).

The land reform programme is driven by the twin goals of restoring and upgrading land rights, and reducing poverty by promoting rural development. Rural people represent a disproportionate majority of those living below the poverty line: 71% of South Africa's poor reside in rural areas (SSA and UNDP, 2003). The new Constitution provides the framework for land reform and forms the basis of a three-pronged approach: restitution, redistribution, and tenure reform.[5] In much of Africa, land is relatively evenly distributed under customary tenure systems. Southern

[5] The aim of *restitution* is to restore land or provide other redress to those dispossessed of their land after the introduction of the Natives Land Act of 1913. The *redistribution* programme assists landless people to acquire land through the market in order to transform the racially skewed pattern of land ownership. Land *tenure* reform is intended to secure and upgrade the tenure rights of people whose rights to land are insecure as a result of past discriminatory practices (DLA, 1997).

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Africa differs in that colonial settlers concentrated productive land into large private estates, creating a class of landless people and leading to widespread land-related poverty (Quan, 2000). South Africa represents the most extreme case in this respect (Lahiff, 2003). Nearly one million black farm dwellers are employed and about three million reside on commercial farms, in insecure circumstances on land belonging to other people (Hall, 2004a). They are among the most marginalised people in South Africa – a rural proletariat in a political economy featuring large concentrations of commercial farmland where racial domination and poverty are still a fundamental part of life (Du Toit, 1996). Poorly paid, geographically isolated and politically marginalised, their plight has been further exacerbated by deregulation in the agricultural sector post-1994, which has led to job losses, casualisation and evictions (CRLS, 2003).

The Extension of Security of Tenure Act of 1997 (ESTA) was enacted to secure farm dwellers' tenure rights and to prevent arbitrary evictions. It does not stop evictions but regulates when and how they can happen. But ESTA has been notoriously difficult to enforce (Hall, 2004a). A recent survey suggests that close to one million farm dwellers have been evicted since 1994 – more than in the preceding decade – and that just 1% involved a legal process (Wegerif and Russell, 2005). In recognition of ESTA's shortcomings a new farm tenure law is under preparation, but the state faces a fundamental dilemma in the extent to which farm dwellers' tenure can be secured without dispossessing land owners of their property rights (Hall, 2004a).

2.4. The nexus of biodiversity conservation, land rights and poverty

The relationship between biodiversity conservation and poverty eradication is heavily contested. Some lament that the fight against poverty has put conservation on the defensive, arguing that protected areas are being treated as "scapegoats for failed models of economic development" (Sanderson and Redford, 2004, p. 146). Others point at evidence that protected area policies bring significant costs for the poor (Brockington and Schmidt-Soltau, 2004), and suggest that conservation agencies are partly to blame for not bringing biodiversity into mainstream poverty reduction efforts (Roe and Elliott, 2004). Around the world, the creation of protected areas has often resulted in the alienation of indigenous populations from their land and resources (Oviedo, 2005; Schmidt-Soltau, 2005). Europe offers an interesting alternative experience with its 'agri-environment schemes' which promote conservation at the landscape level on private agricultural land (Kleijn and Sutherland, 2003). Such schemes compensate farmers financially for any loss of income associated with measures that aim to benefit the environment or biodiversity.

In South Africa, much has been written about biodiversity conservation, especially in light of post-apartheid policy changes (Pierce et al., 2002; Wynberg, 2002), and the same holds for land reform (Cousins, 2002; Hall, 2004b). But there has been little analysis of the two sectors combined or the dynamics between them – reflecting a general dearth of research in the wider region, with the exception of Zimbabwe (Wolmer, 2006). Where studies have explored both issues, the focus has tended to be on well-publicised land restitution claims in famous national parks such as the Makuleke community in the Kruger National Park (De Villiers, 1999), and the Khomani San in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park. Other, less well-known protected areas have received relatively little attention – the case of Mkambati Nature Reserve in the Eastern Cape is an exception to the rule (Kepe, 2004). Moreover, these studies have invariably focused on formal protected areas, rather than on how conservation efforts on private land holdings outside protected areas affect tenure rights of poor people residing there. The present study is an attempt to address this imbalance.

3. Biodiversity conservation and farm dwellers in the Baviaanskloof: a case study

3.1. Description of the area

The Baviaanskloof, or "Valley of Baboons", is situated in the western part of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province (see Fig. 1). It is a 75 km long valley of varying width and depth, and lies between two parallel east–west running mountain ranges: the Baviaanskloof Mountains in the north and the Kouga Mountains in the south. The easternmost point of the valley is about 95 km north-west of the coastal city of Port Elizabeth, and its most southerly point is 50 km from the Indian Ocean.

The wider Baviaanskloof area is one of outstanding natural beauty and biodiversity, and an important water catchment. No fewer than seven of South Africa's eight biomes are represented there – the Fynbos, Subtropical Thicket, Nama-karroo, Succulent Karoo, Grassland, Savanna and Forest biomes (Boshoff, 2005). It supports a high diversity of species, several of which are Red Data listed – including leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Cape mountain zebra (*Equus zebra zebra*), and grey rhebok (*Pelea capreolus*) (Clark, 1998). It is at the convergence of two of the world's top 25 biodiversity hotspots: the Cape Floristic Region and the Succulent Karoo (Myers et al., 2000). This natural treasure has led to part of the area being declared a World Heritage Site, along with seven other reserves in the Cape Floristic Region.

The surrounding area is facing growing socio-economic pressures. The local economy is based almost entirely on agriculture, involving a mix of pastoralism and irrigated crops (mainly citrus and deciduous fruit, but also some cash and seed production crops). Commercial agriculture is operating at or near to capacity and there is limited space for growth. An overall decline in the regional economy has been accompanied by a general depopulation. Agriculture is unlikely to provide the economic boost required to address growing unemployment, at least not in the current

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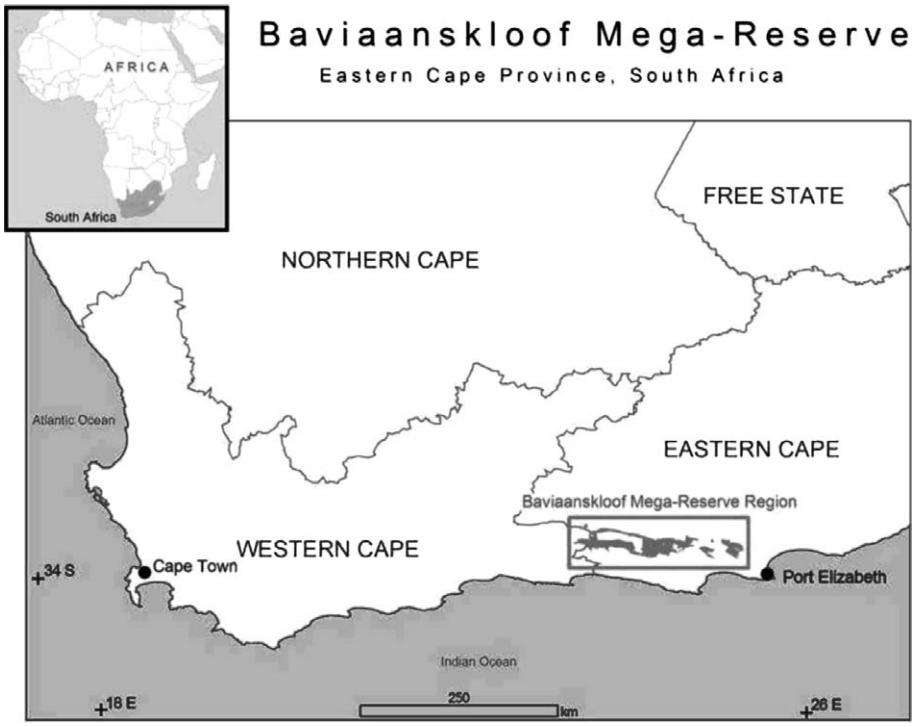

Fig. 1. Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve.

paradigm that favours large-scale commercial agriculture. Conservation-based tourism has been advocated as an alternative and sustainable form of land use with the potential to contribute to the local and regional economy (Boshoff et al., 2000).

While much of the Baviaanskloof is state-owned, in the western part of the valley some 50,000 ha remains under private – largely white – ownership. About 20 family-owned commercial farms here are entirely surrounded by protected area. Less than 800 ha is under cultivation, with the rest used for extensive grazing and browsing. Vegetable seed production, once a thriving industry with significant labour demand, has declined substantially following the cessation of farming subsidies and introduction of agricultural labour legislation. This has led to the loss of many permanent and casual jobs since 1994. Most farmers now practice mixed small stock farming, which is much less labour-intensive. Pensioners, farm workers and their extended families make up over 70% of the valley's community (Boshoff et al., 2000), with many entirely dependent on government pensions and disability grants. The remainder are a mix of white farmers and their families, other landowners, civil servants, and even includes a small hippy community. The overall population currently stands at around 1000 and has been on the decline as people migrate to towns in search of work and subsidised housing.

3.2. A conservation history

Conservation in the Baviaanskloof goes back to 1923 when state-owned land in the area was proclaimed as a forest reserve and water catchment zone. Purchase by expropriation of key properties in the 1970s led to the consolidation of a provincial nature reserve system, a cluster of protected areas of which the Baviaanskloof Nature Reserve is the focal point. During the 1980s the particular importance of the Baviaanskloof Nature Reserve for biodiversity conservation and for the provision of essential ecosystem services (especially water) became more widely recognised. Additional land purchases increased the size of the reserve to about 175,000 ha by the turn of the century (Boshoff et al., 2000). Further expansion of the protected area is continuing up to the present.

The long and convoluted boundary makes management of the conservation estate expensive. Due to its shape, the present protected area is exceptionally vulnerable to the 'edge effect' and the potential for conflicts with neighbouring landowners is high in terms of fire risk, predator poaching, alien vegetation, soil erosion, water wastage etc. This situation led to a proposal in 1997 to consolidate the western sector of the reserve through compulsory acquisition of all private land inside the Baviaanskloof (Clark, 1998). While this could yield many benefits, the proposal failed to appreciate socio-political realities of the new South Africa and that the future of the reserve as a viable conservation area must take into account human communities and land use on properties adjacent to the reserve. The proposition that inhabitants simply be relocated to the nearby town of Willowmore met with fierce resistance from all sides of the Baviaanskloof community (Roodt, 2003) and was clearly no longer viable under the new democratic order. The essence of the proposal, however, was later taken up by C.A.P.E. when it identified the Baviaanskloof Nature Reserve and adjacent areas as a potential

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mega-conservation area – culminating in the present Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve Project. Its underlying philosophy of "*keeping people on the land in living landscapes*" (BMRP, 2004a) differs radically from the previous concept. Nevertheless, a legacy of expropriation in earlier decades and resettlement issues arising from more recent land acquisitions, coupled with anxieties and mistrust generated by the 1997 proposal, pose major challenges to the new strategy.

3.3. The Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve Project (BMRP)

The BMRP is conceived as a 20-year process to conserve the area's biodiversity, protect its critical role as a regional water provider, and deliver economic benefits to surrounding communities. According to project documents (BMRP, 2004a; GEF, 2004) it will stimulate a 'biodiversity economy'[6] by promoting alternative productive land uses – notably, though not exclusively, ecotourism. Under the auspices of the Provincial Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism (DEAET), a Project Management Unit (PMU) was created in 2003 to manage the initial phase of this process. The PMU operates under a sub-contract to the Wilderness Foundation, an Eastern Cape-based NGO, in a transitional arrangement aimed at building the provincial government's capacity to manage the mega-reserve project after 2008. A Baviaanskloof Steering Committee (BSC) has been formed to oversee the implementation of the BMRP.

Expansion of the reserve can involve land purchase by government, but is primarily directed towards voluntary inclusion of private land through the use of formal agreements with landowners (BMRP, 2004b). This expansion does not necessarily exclude the people residing there. It is the express intent of the BMRP that no people should be involuntarily displaced, and that where relocation is proposed it will only be done in a consensual manner. In such an event, the BMRP is bound by a Resettlement Policy Framework and Process Framework (RPF/PF) designed to comply with World Bank social safeguard policies – a conditionality of GEF funding (C.A.P.E., 2003). The RPF/PF sets out quite stringent process and compensation standards in the event that the BMRP displaces people from land or productive resources. It explicitly covers farm workers and dwellers and offers far greater protection than ESTA (the national law that protects them from arbitrary evictions).

The planning domain of the BMRP covers a vast territory around the existing reserve cluster, but certain areas are prioritised. The western part of the Baviaanskloof is a major priority as it represents a 'hole' in the core of the reserve. The following discussion is focussed on this area.

3.4. Farm dwellers: tenure rights and livelihoods in the Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve

The BMRP is at a very early stage and any discussion of impact on farm dwellers is necessarily speculative. Concerted effort by the PMU since 2003 to build a dialogue with the community has gone some way to allaying mistrust and suspicions. Through a 'stakeholder engagement programme' project staff have held numerous meetings with private landowners, farm labourers, local communities, organised agriculture and others (Boshoff, 2005). A full-time community liaison manager and a landowner liaison manager conduct frequent interactions with different segments of the community. Throughout this process, it has been made abundantly clear that there will be no expropriation and that people will not be forced off the land.

But there is scepticism about the 'biodiversity economy'. To appreciate the different perspectives, it is useful to disaggregate the community based on varying patterns of land ownership. Farm dwellers on private land face a different situation than those occupying land recently purchased by the state. A group of ex-farm dwellers now own a farm as a collective, under a land redistribution project. Other, mainly white, landowners can be divided between those who depend on farming for their livelihood, and those who have recently purchased land for its nature-based tourism potential.

3.4.1. Farm dwellers on state land

Coleske farm was bought by DEAET from a commercial farmer in 2001 and now serves as a western gateway into the reserve. The farmer moved off the land, leaving behind a community of around 125 farm dwellers. He had employed eight permanent workers and many others on seasonal basis. Many were born on the farm, have lived there their entire lives and numerous relatives are buried there. Initially, DEAET employed 45 people on a temporary basis under a state-funded Poverty Relief project, raising the community's expectations of job-creation in the reserve. But there were problems in managing the workers. There were insufficient resources for supervision, and on occasion people were found playing dominoes at home during working hours. Relations soured between the reserve manager and the community. In 2004 the newly formed Eastern Cape Parks Board (ECPB) took over as statutory authority of the reserve. Poverty Relief funding ran dry and work stopped, virtually without notice. As the farm is now a protected area, access to resources such as firewood, clay, honey, natural medicines and grazing has become severely restricted. "Die kampe is so klein, ons donkies is te swak om by die winkel uit te kom" (the designated grazing area is too small, our donkeys are underfed and too weak to reach the nearest shop).[7] The farm store was closed down and people now walk over 30 km for basic supplies. Unemploy-

[6] The concept of a biodiversity economy is one where local economic development does not harm biodiversity, and where biodiversity resources are developed into economic opportunities.

[7] Interview with farm dwellers, August 2005.

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ment has made younger people dependent on the pensions of their elders. "Al die jong mense met vrouens en kinders het by ons ouens ingetrek" (the younger families have had to move in with us old folks).[8] The community's continued existence has become increasingly precarious.

The PMU recognise that the Coleske case should trigger the Resettlement Policy Framework and Process Framework. People have lost jobs and access to natural resources. But moving the process forward is complicated by several factors. First, the ECPB – as management authority – has jurisdiction over resource access and utilisation in the reserve, so any agreements with the community require its consent. But the ECPB is very new and short on capacity. Second, there seems to be no consensus on whether the RPF/PF applies to Coleske.[9] DEAET purchased the farm two years before the BMRP officially started, and some feel that DEAET should have handled any resettlement issues then under ESTA legislation. Instead the matter was left to linger and ECPB is reluctant to touch it. Meanwhile, there may well have been an influx of 'relatives' seeking employment or other benefits under a possible resettlement deal. To prove or disprove anyone's legitimate 'occupier' status today will require a very tricky process of forensic sociology.[10] Third, the RPF/PF was drawn up by C.A.P.E. without the involvement of the Eastern Cape government, raising questions about 'buy-in' from those now responsible for the BMRP. Fourth, delivering on the promises of the RPF/PF is hugely complex. As GEF funds cannot be used for implementing action plans arising from the policy, it requires budgetary commitments and synchronised planning from a multiplicity of government institutions at local and provincial level. For example, in addition to alternative land and accommodation, the RPF/PF provides for alternative employment, training and "measures to guarantee that livelihoods do not decline" – all equivalent to and preferably better than before (C.A.P.E., 2003, pp. 38–39). The RPF/PF process may be too institutionally complex to be viable, especially in the Eastern Cape where local government has been widely criticised for insufficient capacity and poor delivery.

While the PMU struggles to initiate the RPF/PF process and line up the various institutional actors, anger and frustration in the community is beginning to boil over. "Hulle het ons gesê da gaan altyd werk wees, maar die beloftes het verbreek" (they told us there would always be work, but the promises have been broken).[11] Much is at stake – not just the fate of dozens of poor and vulnerable people, but the credibility of the BMRP itself and its approach to conservation. Across the Baviaanskloof coloured community, Coleske farm is now a constant reference point as to why conservation is bad for farm dwellers. As long as the Coleske case is not resolved in a way that is perceived as fair and just, the BMRP's stated philosophy of 'keeping people on the land in living landscapes' is seriously undermined.

3.4.2. Farm dwellers on private land

Farm dwellers on private land have not yet felt the impact of the BMRP – it is too early to observe concrete changes in land use as a direct result of the project. Change for them will depend on whether or not landowners agree to alter the way they use their land to accommodate conservation concerns. This is driven strictly by economic considerations.

Among other things, the PMU would like to see farmers withdraw livestock from degraded mountain sides and concentrate farming in the valley bottom.[12] Restoration of wilderness would attract greater numbers of tourists, creating new income streams. For farmers, such a shift involves two types of risk. One is reduced income from reduced stock levels in the short term, against uncertain growth of a biodiversity economy in a more distant timeframe. Second, the current practice of extensive mixed stock farming enables them to spread their risk, while shifting to intensive single stock farming increases risk. Landowners whose livelihoods depend solely on farm income are unlikely to volunteer for such a scheme without income-replacement guarantees: "Daar moet 'n waarborg wees" (there has to be some guarantee).[13] If such guarantees were forthcoming (which seems unlikely) farmers could focus on a single stock type such as ostrich and cultivate land for animal fodder in the valley near the river, thereby enabling the surrender of significant land areas to biodiversity conservation and expanded tourist facilities. Another view is that such a scenario is inevitable. "We have to change our mindset, and fence ourselves in."[14] As new landowners with an eye on ecotourism withdraw grazing areas from agriculture, nature is encroaching on farms and winning the battle slowly but surely: wild animals are increasing and predators moving in. Farmers may be forced to concentrate their crops and stock in central, fenced-in areas in order to protect them.

Whichever the case, most farmers interviewed expect neither positive nor negative impacts on labour and tenure rights of farm dwellers. Jobs lost from herd reductions would be few and could probably be replaced by alternative work, such as servicing camp sites, trail guides, horse treks, etc. Nor do they see much room for job growth. Farm workers themselves see it differently. Those interviewed consistently expressed concern that a reduction in farm activity will place their jobs at risk, pointing at Sandvlakte farm as an example. The owner of Sandvlakte stopped

[8] Interview with farm dwellers, August 2005.
[9] Interviews with Matthew Norval, Project Manager, and Eleanor McGregor, Community Liaison Manager (PMU), August 2005.
[10] Interview with Trevor Beeton, Department of Land Affairs, August 2005.
[11] Interview with farm dwellers, August 2005.
[12] Interviews with Matthew Norval, Project Manager, and Andrew Skowno, Conservation Planner (PMU), August 2005.
[13] Interview with Chris Lamprecht, Chairman Baviaanskloof Farmers Association, August 2005.
[14] Interview with Thys Cilliers, landowner and CEO of Baviaanskloof Mountain Passes Tours, August 2005.

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farming some years ago to focus on ecotourism, leaving many farm dwellers, especially women, without work. Those living on farms cannot see how they could possibly benefit from tourism enterprise on land belonging to someone else. "Ons bly op wit-man se grond" (we live on white man's land).[15] Anything they do is by the grace of "die baas" (the master) – investment is a risk as permission can always be withdrawn. Who is going to put up infrastructure for a kiosk? Selling vegetables to tourists may be an opportunity, but a farm worker who fails to make him/herself available "om in te val" (to substitute) on Saturdays or Sundays risks termination because s/he is too inflexible.[16] Everywhere, farm dwellers worry about their fate should the landowner decide to sell the farm to nature conservation – Coleske farm serves as a constant reminder.

3.4.3. Ex-farm dwellers at Sewefontein farm

Sewefontein is a land redistribution project. In 2001, a group of 75 landless people from the Baviaanskloof pooled their government housing grants to purchase the farm. Given the limited number of houses, the majority of shareholders do not reside there. Some live at Coleske while others live and work on other farms in the valley. Most intend to settle at Sewefontein at some point, when they get ill, old or for one reason or another can no longer remain where they presently are. Sewefontein is their 'insurance policy' against the ever-present threat of eviction. (Interestingly, other landowners in the Baviaanskloof view the Sewefontein trust as their own insurance against land expropriation for conservation purposes.)[17] First and foremost, it offers them a secure place to live when they run out of options elsewhere; second is the possibility of generating some income. The latter is invariably associated with keeping livestock. For poor people livestock is crucial: "die hoofdoel op 'n plaas" (the main aim on a farm).[18] If people have a quick debt to settle they can immediately sell off an animal – the easiest and quickest way to convert a farm product into cash. Equally, they find it inconceivable to confine their livestock to the current camps – grazing and browsing in the hills is necessary from time to time when the camps do not provide enough forage. It is particularly in this regard that the Sewefontein community feels threatened by the BMRP's conservation agenda. They worry about losing their hard-earned right to decide how to use their land: "Ons vrye reg gaan bekrimp raak" (our freedom of choice will be restricted), and about being squeezed out by nature conservation as the wilderness encroaches on them and their animals. "Hulle vernou ons; ons bergwêreld word verkoop of uitgehuur; ons veeplekke raak beknoppig" (our mountains are being sold or rented; our grazing becomes limited).[19]

The BMRP sees Sewefontein as an important opportunity to demonstrate how poor people can turn the biodiversity economy to their advantage. The farm itself holds considerable potential for ecotourism: stunning springs, space for a wilderness campsite, buildings suitable for conversion to guest houses. There is ample water to support intensive irrigated agriculture on smaller land areas. But before any of this can happen, the Sewefontein people have more basic problems to resolve. Like many land redistribution projects (Hall, 2004b), the large number of shareholders is the source of problematic group dynamics and continuous conflict over issues such as farm management, payment of wages to members working the farm, and who is entitled to live in the existing houses. There is general agreement that the group's size must reduce before any progress can be made in making Sewefontein a viable enterprise, and the PMU has agreed to take a back seat while a process of restructuring gets underway.[20]

4. Discussion and conclusions

The early stage of implementation of the BMRP makes this concluding discussion more speculative than evaluative. The project is only two years into a 20-year process. In addition, the plight of farm dwellers is set against a backdrop where many agricultural jobs have been and continue to be lost as a result of wider forces in the agricultural economy unrelated to the conservation agenda now being pursued. Nevertheless, the findings presented here point to some systemic and structural issues that reflect tensions in the BMRP's attempts to reconcile biodiversity conservation with land tenure rights and livelihoods of poor people, especially farm workers and dwellers.

First is the issue of land acquisition by the state as one element in the mega-reserve's expansion strategy. Where this directly results in cessation of agricultural activity as on Coleske farm, and also Nuwekloof farm where five workers lost their jobs in 2003, it introduces the possibility of loss of livelihoods and increased impoverishment of farm dwellers occupying that land. Although purchase of this kind is intended to form only a small part of the overall land consolidation and expansion strategy, it is presently the most visible and with visibly negative consequences. This creates a major image problem for the BMRP and its underlying philosophy that conservation be achieved in a manner that is embraced by local communities. Public perceptions are vital to this new approach to conservation. Cases like Coleske and Nuwekloof threaten to undermine

[15] Interview with farm dwellers, August 2005.
[16] Interview with farm dwellers, August 2005.
[17] Interviews with: Skillie Rautenbach, Department of Agriculture, July 2005; and Chris Lamprecht, Chairman Baviaanskloof Farmers Association, August 2005.
[18] Interview with members of the Sewefontein Trust Committee, August 2005.
[19] Interview with members of the Sewefontein Trust Committee, August 2005.
[20] To this end, a Steering Committee has been formed involving *inter alia* Trust officials, Department of Agriculture, Department of Land Affairs, Southern Cape Land Committee.

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its essence by fuelling suspicions that biodiversity conservation leaves poor and landless people worse off.

Second and closely linked to the above, social safeguard policies especially designed to protect poor people against these risks are proving very difficult to implement, for reasons mainly to do with institutional complexity and capacity. Moreover, the fact that neither the community nor the majority of the Baviaanskloof Steering Committee appear to know about the existence of these policies raises questions about openness and transparency. The RPF/PF is arguably the most important policy instrument spelling out the rights of people affected by expansion of the mega-reserve. As long as people at both ends of the power spectrum – the poor whose rights the RPF/PF is designed to protect, and the steering committee responsible for overseeing the project – remain unaware, their ability to realise these rights is seriously undermined. Without adequate measures to ensure that decision-makers recognise and protect existing rights, they are potentially in jeopardy.

Third, while early speculations suggest that farm dwellers on privately owned farms may not suffer the negative consequences experienced by their compatriots mentioned above, it is equally hard to see how they might actually benefit from a new biodiversity economy given the unequal power relations on farms. To overcome this, deeply entrenched attitudes and prejudices on both sides must be addressed. As pointed out by Du Toit (1996), social relationships on many of South Africa's farms are highly exploitative and unequal, but their persistence cannot be explained simply in terms of farmers' control. They rest also in some measure on farm dwellers' consent – consent which arises from structural conditions such as a deep-rooted culture of paternalism,[21] and the lack of alternatives available to them. Questions that should be asked are: Who stands to benefit most? How can a social environment be created where farm dwellers can negotiate economic opportunities with their landowners on a more even-handed basis? What is required to create some visible success stories to demonstrate that the possibility of change for them exists? This will not happen by itself, and the PMU's community liaison manager is too thinly spread to effectively drive this agenda. There is need for dedicated capacity to forge a new social accord in the community, giving farm dwellers and other poor and landless people access to entrepreneurial opportunities – for example a micro-enterprise development professional with a social/community development perspective, based in the area and tasked with identifying and developing a number of projects that respond to this urgent need.

Fourth, there are two aspects of employment impact that need careful monitoring over the coming years. One is the levels of labour absorption in current farming practice versus a biodiversity economy; the other is the different skill profiles the latter requires, and therefore the implications for a potentially changing profile of employees, along lines of class and gender and also, perhaps, race. Better-paid and more highly skilled jobs may privilege people who do not bear the brunt of job-shedding in farming. The present study came across a few cases where white middle-class individuals from outside the area were employed in tourism-related functions. While too anecdotal to be conclusive, such cases suggest a need for further scrutiny.

Fifth, the study reveals that biodiversity conservation may be risky for the rich as well as the poor. Expectations that farmers will be prepared to reduce the scale of their farm enterprise in favour of uncertain growth in ecotourism are tempered by the question 'who carries the risk?' In the context of the Baviaanskloof, just what it will take to persuade farmers to change their land use still seems poorly understood.[22] An approach to conservation that relies on the voluntary participation of private landowners requires greater insight into this question.

Sixth, the claim that agriculture is unlikely to provide the economic boost needed to address unemployment cannot go unchallenged – for it begs the question: what kind of agriculture? Critics of South Africa's land reform programme argue that land reform should include a process of agrarian restructuring that favours smallholder agriculture over the prevailing commercial farming model, if it is to tackle rampant rural poverty (Hall, 2004b; Kepe and Cousins, 2002). International evidence as well as local research indicates that small-scale family type farm models are generally more efficient, create more on-farm employment (Van Zyl, 1996), and are more supportive of biodiversity (Pretty, 1995) than large-scale mechanised farms. As this study shows, poor rural households seek, first, a secure place to live and land for small-scale production of food and market crops; beyond this, they value land for non-commoditised resources such as grazing, firewood, building and craft materials. In contrast, the state's preference for capital-intensive commercial agriculture – informed by its largely neo-liberal macroeconomic paradigm – tends to undervalue the land uses of the poor. Challenging this paradigm may be beyond the scope of the BMRP, but is central to the issue at hand.

Two observations can be made about the inter-institutional relations that shape the BMRP. One concerns the Baviaanskloof Steering Committee (BSC). Its official mandate is to oversee, advise and facilitate the project (BMRP, 2003), but in practice it functions more as a public relations forum bringing together a wide range of stakeholders[23] on a quarterly basis. In itself this is a useful function, but it does tend to obscure where real power and oversight reside

[21] For a discussion of this culture of paternalism, in which the farm is seen as a family-like community and which emphasizes the master's power over the 'child' (his servant), see Du Toit (1996).

[22] Interview with Mandy Barnett, Programme Developer, C.A.P.E., September 2005.

[23] Members include local and provincial government agencies, NGOs, organised agriculture, academic institutions. BSC meetings are sometimes attended by landowners and other members of the Baviaanskloof communities.

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and this may compromise accountability, especially in relation to protecting poor people's rights. More broadly, the highly complex institutional arrangements on which this project is built can generate inertia and paralysis, and raise doubts about the viability of conserving biodiversity while at the same time delivering economic benefits to the poor. The present impasse in implementing social safeguard policies at Coleske farm is an example.

Finally, questions must be raised about the increasingly popular and perhaps overstated belief that ecotourism can meet the challenge of reconciling biodiversity conservation, rural livelihoods and land rights. Although ecotourism is not the only element of the biodiversity economy being promoted by the BMRP, it appears to take centre stage. But stories of successful ecotourism ventures that involve poor rural people are scarce in southern Africa (Kepe et al., 2005). And as Magome and Murombedzi (2003) have pointed out, ecotourism has not yet been proven to yield significant benefits for poor people in land reform projects. For the Sewefontein community, ecotourism should be seen as only one livelihood possibility among many available to them. It may contribute to farm income without being the major focus of income-generating activities. Government and conservation agencies should aim to provide support that can enhance multiple livelihood strategies.

The BMRP has a difficult route ahead but it is one deserving of support. The broader bioregional strategy for conservation that looks beyond formal protected areas in terms of planning, conservation and economic development is a positive response to much of the criticism that has been levelled against conservation in the past (Kepe et al., 2005). Addressing the immediate and long-term needs of the poor, while simultaneously conserving South Africa's unique biodiversity is a huge challenge, and the BMRP has embraced it. The Baviaanskloof Mega-Reserve will be an interesting space to watch in the coming years.

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