

# Challenges and contestations in communal grazing

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A recent seminar was held at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in Pietermaritzburg on 8 May 2008 focusing on challenges faced by scientists and practitioners in livestock grazing in communal areas. The seminar was part of an annual meeting of a research project “Keeping cattle in a changing rural landscape” funded by the South African-Netherlands Programme for Alternatives in Development (SANPAD). The research project involves three post-graduate students from UKZN, their supervisors and collaborators from South Africa and the Netherlands, South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON), Khanya African Institute for Community Driven Development, Wageningen University and Research (WUR), and the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation (ITC).

Over twenty staff from the University, Provincial Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Council and local NGOs attended the seminar and engaged with the many issues raised by the presenters. In his opening address, Prof. Deogratius Jaganyi, Deputy Dean



Photo: Monique Salomon

of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at UKZN, highlighted the importance of academic excellence and scholarship that contribute to challenges in Africa.

Dr Nicky Allsopp from SAEON challenged the audience by arguing that livestock management interventions will continue to fail if they remain underpinned by ‘modernization’ and ‘degradation’ narratives. Dr Claudius van de Vijver from WUR in the Netherlands, suggested that increased frequency and intensity of burning regimes in Africa have exacerbated bush encroachment. Adjusting fire management practices and using grazers such as goats in the agroecosystem, can improve the situation.

The potential of farming systems methodology and participatory Geographical Information Systems (PGIS) were highlighted by two speakers. According to Prof. Akke van der Zijpp from WUR, placing livestock management practices within a broader farming systems framework will facilitate better understanding of why people keep livestock, how it contributes to their livelihood and what strategies to improve are likely to succeed. Dr Michael McCall from ITC in the Netherlands illustrated how high-tech applications using Global Positioning Systems (GPS), remote sensing and modelling are increasingly being used in urban and rural development contexts to engage project beneficiaries as equal partners in development interventions. Spatial mapping of natural re-

sources, spiritual sites, cultural heritage and land use change can assist in community-based natural and cultural resources management, and defend indigenous peoples' property rights. Using GPS to track livestock movement, water points and forage distribution across rangelands are helpful in understanding livestock management practices and develop recommendations to improve.

Monique Salomon, Mphumzeni Chonco and Victor Bangamwabo presented the framework and interim results of a participatory research initiative in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg focusing on how livestock management practices, and particularly cattle keeping, has changed since 1850, how the landscape has changed, and whether there is a causal link between livestock keeping practices and land degradation.

Participants agreed that sharing experiences and reflecting on successes and failures will strengthen research and development efforts in communal grazing.



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