

COMMONAGE USE IN SOUTH AFRICA:

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

KAROO CONFERENCE
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COMMONAGES

- Municipal-owned land on the periphery of towns
- Before 1994 used by white residents and farmers
- Since 1994 largely used by township residents (often farm worker in-migrants)
- At least 70 towns in the Free State and 60 in Northern Cape – other provinces?
- At least 115 000 ha in Free State and 1640 000 ha in Northern Cape. Other provinces?

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MULTI-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What contribution (in cash or kind) does commonage agriculture make towards improving the financial position of local families?
2. Does it help to smooth their consumption patterns?
3. What is the allocation of commonage amongst richer and poorer urban residents? Are there systematic patterns of exclusion?
4. How is the land currently used, and, in particular, what is the extent of livestock holding?
5. What is the social structure of the commonage users (e.g. commonage committees), and what are their leadership capabilities?
6. How effectively are commonages managed by municipalities, and what is the extent of overgrazing?
7. What are the prospects of environmental sustainability and desertification for future commonage use (and therefore livelihoods)?

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COMMONAGE MANAGEMENT

CARNARVON (KAREEBERG LM)

- 9850 ha
- 33 farmers interviewed
- Strict municipal management
- Well organised committee
- R120 000 annual municipal revenue
- DoA as key mentor
- 2 new farms bought by DLA
- Support by 2 local co-ops & abattoir

WILLISTON (KAROO-HOOGLAND LM)

- 23 000 ha
- 15 farmers interviewed
- Ineffective municipal management
- Weak committee; political stalemate - LM
- Poor payment of rentals
- DoA support compromised by local politics
- 2 new farms bought by DLA
- Support by local commercial farmers

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COMMONAGE USER PROFILE



1. Mainly middle-aged people with low level of education
2. Typically unemployed/municipal workers/craftsmen, some white collar – either survivalists or part of upward social mobility
3. Some assets and vehicles – not the poorest of the poor – some employ herdsman
4. Significant livestock holdings: Carnarvon: average 11-50 sheep; Williston 10-30
5. Problems of stray dogs, poor infrastructure, littering around dumping sites – municipal management!
6. Multiplier effects – local purchases of food, clothes, agricultural supplies
7. Fair degree of environmental and farming knowledge
8. Farming knowledge inherited from family & employers – human and social capital.

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GOALS OF COMMONAGE USERS

1. Strong emotional attachment to agriculture
2. Focus on accumulation of livestock, not primarily sale or slaughter (“semi-commercial”)
3. Want to expand agricultural operations
4. Vast majority want to farm on their own, not in a group
5. Desire for training.

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WHY COMMONAGES ARE IMPORTANT

1. Land ACCESS and USE, not OWNERSHIP
2. People use their own agricultural skills – usually livestock
3. Multiple livelihoods – agriculture plus local urban livelihoods – much more resilient than conventional land reform
4. Land is available – does not have to be purchased
5. Near to towns – valuable strategy of peri-urban development – hence lower transport and transaction costs
6. Different versions of collaborative use – informal systems have emerged (common property use). Significant social resilience, but great local variations.
7. Easy to reach by govt depts and agricultural extension officers.

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HISTORY OF THE COMMONAGE APPROACH

1. Initial support by DLA – 1990s
2. Research on commonage from 2003 to 2010 – PLAAS, HSRC, Rhodes University (SANPAD), Dept Land Affairs
3. 2003 – major symposium in Pretoria (DPLG did not pitch up)
4. Innovation in the Free State – “step-off” policy, whereby commonage users could be intensively mentored and then step off onto their own farms
5. Continued assistance by various Departments of Agriculture in specific towns
6. But no political vision to take it forward!

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MAIN POLICY OPPORTUNITY

1. Can reach 15-30 farmers per town, *immediately*
2. Good access by government support agents, e.g. extension workers – Provincial Depts Agric already involved, but underfunded
3. Can work with local users committees – existing forms of community resilience
4. Can be *systemically* rolled out – create *systems* that work, not ad hoc projects
5. Can be integrated into IDPs as an LED opportunity
6. Can lead to improved agro-processing, and therefore urban livelihoods
7. Can harness skills of commercial farmers and producer organisations
8. Major opportunity to assist municipalities to improve their service delivery

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS

URGENT NEEDS:

- A. Need a political vision of commonage-based land reform**
- B. Fix the “organisational architecture”:**
 - 1. Support and training (DoA, Agri-SETA), including SME training
 - 2. Improve municipal management (COGTA)
 - 3. Environmental training and management (DoA, DEA)
 - 4. Link commonage to land reform (DoA, DRDLA)
 - 5. Hence intersectoral approach required, with strong municipal co-ordination
 - 6. Need involvement of appropriate community development workers.
- C. Need to measure land reform differently – not in terms of hectares transferred, but in terms of livelihoods.**

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MAIN MESSAGE

Let us base policies and programmes on things that work!

There are low-hanging fruit that can be harvested –

Just fix the institutions!

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