

Rangeland as a common property resource: contrasting insights from communal areas of central Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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Introduction In communal areas of South Africa, grazing systems are held under a variety of different common property regimes. However, the social and ecological realities of these communal grazing systems remain poorly understood, particularly with regard to the use of land allocated for crop production. Little is known about how these arable areas are utilised as a common grazing resource but the wide array of tenure arrangements under which they are held suggests that they facilitate some interesting departures from recognised common property systems. A clearer understanding of how common property regimes function at an integrated level in South Africa will be fundamental in developing an empirical foundation for effective institutional capacity building at both the local and national level as well as other policy recommendations. This research outlines the diversity of grazing management regimes operating in communal areas, relating it to key social and ecological factors and emphasising the critical role played by the arable land allocations.

Method Research was undertaken at two socially- and ecologically-contrasting villages, Guquka and Koloni, in central Eastern Cape Province. Guquka lies in an area of relatively poor grazing, better suited to rain-fed crop production, and with a turbulent history of forced resettlement under apartheid. Koloni lies in an area of higher quality grazing, with a history of relative social stability. Information was collected through a semi-structured interview schedule administered to key informants at both villages and supplemented by participant observation.

Results The research indicated that three different types of grazing management regime are in operation at the two villages (Figure 1). Type 1, identified at Koloni, is the egalitarian governance of grazing resources as part of a true communal property regime, made possible primarily through the relatively low pressure on resources at the village. The remaining two were identified in the environment of high environmental pressure experienced at Guquka. Type 2 is the generally recognised scenario of 'open-access' grazing involving little or no community control over the grazing system. The other, unexpected, typology (Type 3) is devolution of control over grazing management to the individual level through the use of fenced arable fields.

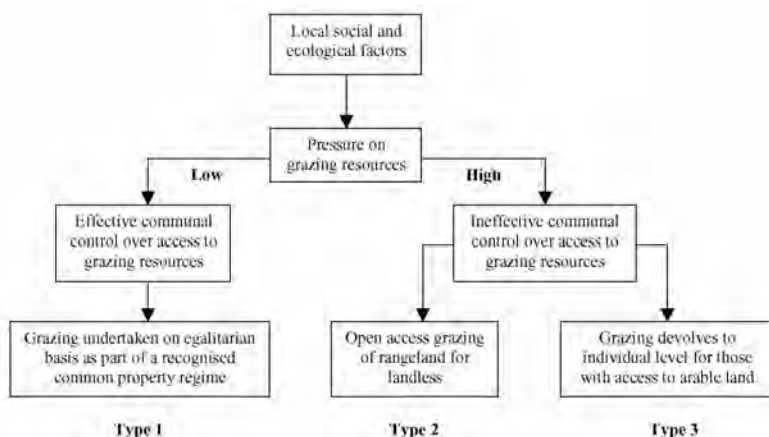


Figure 1 Typology of grazing regimes identified in central Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

Conclusions Although open-access grazing is believed to be representative of the general scenario in central Eastern Cape, the identification of two additional property regimes operating in the region has ramifications for policy-makers. The use of the arable land allocations for private grazing is of particular note as it exemplifies the enclosure of common land in the face of resource pressure as has happened elsewhere in Africa. If land reform policies in the communal areas are to be effective and inclusive, they must give adequate recognition to the existence of these different management regimes and the enormous social and ecological heterogeneity at the local level that has created them.