

**Emergent farmers, local knowledge and the implication
for land reform:
A profile of commonage users in Philippolis, Free State**

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1. Introduction and background

It is a curious phenomenon that modern municipalities in the southern provinces of South Africa own vast tracts of agricultural land. This was primarily the case in rural towns in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and the Free State.

Many municipalities inherited public land, called “commonage” or “meentgronde”. In some cases, this land used to be church assets, whereas in other cases, it was owned by the municipality.

In South Africa, municipal commonage can very broadly be defined as rather small tracts of land around villages and small cities, where a system of open access applies. In principle, everybody can thus make use of these lands, but it is especially meant for the poorer village residents, in order for them to build or enhance their livelihoods. Although crop-growing on commonage land occurs, it is mostly used for stock keeping and grazing. Until the mid-20th Century, municipalities administered commonage agricultural land for the benefit of white town residents.¹ Subsequently, white residents tended to lose interest in small-scale agriculture, and this land was increasingly let to commercial farmers, at relatively high rentals. This formed a valuable source of municipal revenue.

This paper reflects on the users of commonage – the new “emergent farmers”, or black livestock owners who keep animals on the commonage land. (In by far the largest number of cases, commonage is used for grazing and not for crops). Until now, there has been a lack of understanding of the kind of people who use the commonage, their background, their knowledge base, and their economic goals. Typically, municipalities do a cursory “needs analysis” in order to qualify for public funding; but no in-depth study has been undertaken of what the motivations and sentiments of commonage users actually are.

This paper is a first attempt at such a study. It is based on a survey of commonage users, undertaken in Philippolis in the Southern Free State. There are numerous methodological shortfalls: A very small sample (28 people), and an interview methodology that certainly does not capture the richness and complexity of people’s views and beliefs. An in-depth study will require a much more anthropological approach, but this was impossible within the time and funding constraints of the project.

¹ There is some confusion regarding the exact meaning of the term “commonage”. In this paper, it is used to refer to any municipally-owned agricultural land, simply by virtue of the fact that it is owned by a municipality. However, Anderson and Pienaar (2003: 7) argue that, “Where a municipality merely leases land to a user or group of users in terms of a contract of lease, it is not making the land available for commonage purposes: They reserve the term “commonage” for general use rights by residents of a town.

This study is therefore a “middle-ground” project, linking existing and future research. It provides new insights into commonage users’ views, and provides a basic methodology which can be used in other towns in future; and it also provides a platform from which a proper anthropological study – with much more participatory methods - can be launched.

The paper reflects on five themes:

1. The socio-economic background of commonage users
2. The different types of commonage users (based on the scale of their livestock enterprises)
3. Their economic ambitions
4. Their agricultural and ecological knowledge base, and
5. Their views regarding land ownership.

The paper then turns to policy questions, which need to be taken forward in policy debates.

The final section of the paper turns to four theoretical issues, which impinge on commonage in South Africa. The paper argues that the Philippolis survey findings raise questions that have relevance for the following:

1. The debate on Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)
2. The indigenous and local innovation debate
3. The common property resources debate, and
4. The spatial development and rural-urban linkages debate.

2. Historical precedents

There are two types of historical precedent. The first is the common lands in medieval English, Welsh and Scottish villages, where fields were held in common. In the southern parts of the country, it was primarily crop-farming, whereas the northern areas, commonage was generally grazing for livestock.

There are several important aspects of the English system which are important to note. Firstly, livestock and cropping were often integrated into sustainable systems; for example, stock were depastured on the waste produced by the fields on the whole year through, on the fallow land until ploughed for winter corn, and tethered stock were kept on the unploughed pieces within the arable fields even when crops were growing (Smith 1968: 7). In this process, livestock fertilised the fields *in situ*.

Secondly, these systems were always a combination of communal effort (e.g. for ploughing), but individual returns from specific strips of land within common fields

(Smith 1968: 6). These were complex systems, and tenure systems were carefully managed to remain sustainable.

Thirdly, there were strict controls on the use of common land. The number of animals which each tenant was permitted to graze was often carefully monitored, and the dates on which corn and hay stubble could be opened to stock were strictly regulated.

These factors are of enormous significance to the current commonage debacle in South Africa, where environmental sustainability and tenure systems are extremely poorly designed, and often verge on the chaotic.

In the 18th and 19th Centuries, these common fields were later “enclosed” to make way for commercial sheep-farming, and many peasants lost their foothold in agriculture. They either became wage-earners on capitalist farms, or drifted to the towns to become the modern urban proletariat. At the same time, enclosed land became used for “improved husbandry” and new agricultural methods, associated with the private investment of capital and technology (Smith 1968: 42).

A second precedent was in pre-modern and early modern Europe, where town dwellers went of to grow crops on pieces of land outside the city in times of economic hardship. This was for instance fairly general practice in Holland right after the ‘golden century’ from 1600 to 1700, when the economy was declining and many city families depended on subsistence agriculture on the common lands outside the cities to survive. In some sense, this precedent is a more accurate precedent for the current South African situation.

The South African commonage situation remains *sui generis*. It reflects some of the English and Dutch experiences, but with its own unique characteristics. Firstly, South African municipalities are very modern institutions, having to grapple with infrastructure development, socio-economic planning and economic investment strategies. This is a far cry from the very basic medieval institutions where commonage flourished. At first glance, one may think that that this may improve the prospects for commonage management, but paradoxically, South African municipalities are so overwhelmed by their other obligations that commonage management has been very neglected.

Furthermore, the informal, village-based management systems in pre-modern Europe appear to have been more durable, in terms of rights, obligations and enforcement systems, than the confused commonage systems in South Africa. The pre-modern European systems evolved over centuries, whereas black commonage use emerged within two or three years in the mid-1990s, at a time when the municipal system was also being overhauled. No institutional systems have evolved to sort out the complex issues of who should have the right to use commonage, under what conditions, and how the environment should be managed.

What is particularly perplexing, in the current South African context, is that several underlying philosophies of land reform are competing for pre-eminence. During the 1995-1999 period, land reform was seen by government as primarily for “the poorest of

the poor”; but since 2000, government has focused on creating a commercial black agricultural class. It is totally unclear where commonage should fit into this framework. Furthermore, there have been relatively “communal” approaches jostling with more “individualist” approaches to land reform. The pre-1999 land reform period created numerous collectively owned farms, which have generally been recognised to be extremely problematic; the post-2000 period is more oriented towards individual tenure. The difficulty is that only fairly wealthy black people can afford to farm on an individual basis, and this has the danger of leaving poor black agriculturalists behind. There are no easy solutions to these ideological confusions; but they do explain why South African commonage is so confused, compared to its medieval European precursors.

A third dilemma for South African commonage management is that it is taking place in a globalised context. Agriculture in South Africa has been opened to stiff international competition, due to the dismantling of tariff barriers in the early 1990s. In this context, commonage farmers have to compete in a context of low prices and foreign imports.

A fourth difficulty is that so much agricultural knowledge and experience is lacking amongst commonage users. Medieval farmers had generations of knowledge which they drew on and gradually refined. In South Africa, commonage users are either the urban working class, or recently urbanised farm workers. The latter have the advantage of having been exposed to commercial agriculture, but often in a very menial capacity.

In South Africa, then, we have the opportunity and the obligation to devise a uniquely South African system of peri-urban land access, primarily for the urban poor, but potentially as an important component of a holistic land reform strateg.

3. The significance of municipal commonage in South Africa

The contextual circumstances in which municipal commonage in South Africa operates, sets itself apart from many other commonage systems around the world.

A first important factor is its sheer size. For the Free State, a survey conducted by Buso (2003) yielded the following profile:

Table 1: Size of commonage according to Municipality: Free State

Town/Camps/Fields	Size
Letsemeng	
Luckhof	2921 ha
Jacobsdal	4360 ha
Oppermansgronde	3400 ha
Total	10 681 ha
Metsimaholo	
Oranjeville (comprises of Jacobskraal=177 & Vaaldam Settlement=207)	384 ha
Deneysville	None
Sasolburg	
Total	384 ha
Phumelela	
Warden (Old commonage=773 and the new commonage=900)	773 ha + 900 ha
Total	1673 ha
Tswelopele	
Bultfontein (Old commonage 3206ha + the new commonage 721ha)	3927 ha
Hoopstad (60 ha of grazing in the buffer zone+ 1623 ha of grazing)	1683 ha
Total	5610 ha
Maluti-a-Phofung	
Butchers Camp	15 ha
Kestel	68 ha
Phuthaditjhaba	None
Tshiamo	None
Total	83 ha
Mohokare	
Zastron	2172 ha
Smithfield	2952 ha
Rouxville	3392 ha
Total	8516 ha
Mangaung	
Unknown	
Montsopa	
Ladybrand	728 ha
Hobhouse	1210 ha
Thaba Patchoa	3704 ha
Tweespruit	431 ha
Total	6073 ha
Dihlabeng	
Clarens	500 ha
Paul Roux	253 ha
Bethlehem	500 ha
Fouriesburg	600 ha
Rosendal	550 ha
Total	2403 ha
Moqhaka	
Steynsrus	1068 ha
Kroonstad	6105 ha

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Total	7173 ha
Kopanong	
Philippolis	3491 ha
Springfontein	4194 ha
Bethulie	4798 ha
Reddersburg	2259 ha
Edenburg	3477 ha
Fauresmith	4614 ha
Gariiep Dam	583 ha
Trompsburg	4118 ha
Jagersfontein	2167 ha
Total	29701 ha
Naledi	
Total	1882 ha
Masilonyana	
Verkeerdevlei	520 ha
Theunissen	639 ha
Soutpan	N/A
Brandfort	560 ha
Winburg	1180 ha
Total	2899 ha
Ngwathe	
Total	1446ha
Nala	
Bothaville	1102 ha
Wesselsbron	1175 ha
Total	2277 ha
Mafube	
82 camps	4850 ha
Total	4850 ha
Matjhabeng	
41 camps	8432 ha
Total	8432 ha
Tokologo	
Boshof	6327 ha
Hertzogville	2150 ha
Dealesville	1441 ha
Total	9918 ha
Setsoto	
Ficksburg	2031 ha
Senekal	2143 ha
Clocolan	2010 ha
Marquard	2010 ha
Total	8194 ha
Nketoana	
Total	600 ha
TOTAL	At least 112 795 ha

For the Northern Cape, Buso (2003b) gave the following figures:

Table 2: Size of commonage: Northern Cape

Municipalities	Size (ha)
Dikgatlong (Barkly West, Delportshoop)	10 141
Emthanjeni (De Aar, Hanover, Britstown)	20 420
Gamagara (Deben, Kathu)	1 459
Ga Segonyana	4 998
Hantam (Nieuwoudtville, Loeriesfontein, Brandvlei, Calvinia)	40 554
!Kei !Gariiep (Keismoes, Kenhart)	23 218
Kamiesberg (Kamieskroon, Leliefontein, Garies, Soebatsfontein)	247 744
Kareeberg (Carnarvon, Vanwyksvlei, Vosburg)	21 184
Karoo-Hoogland (Sutherland, Willison, Fraserburg)	85 800
!Kheis (Brandboom, Groblershoop, Topline, Wegdraai)	12 291
Kgatelopele	9874
Khai Ma (Pofadder)	17 888
Khara Hais	12 976
Kimberley	Approx 3340
Mier	75 269
Nama Khoi	432 121
Renosterberg (Petrusville, Phillipstown)	7151
Richtersveld (Port Nolloth)	526 700
Siya Themba (Prieska, Marydale, Niekerkshoop)	19 584
Siyancuma (Douglas, Griquastad, Campbell)	20 300
Thembelihle (Hopetown, Strydenburg)	20 000
Tsantsabane (Postmasburg)	7000
Ubuntu (Victoria West, Loxton, Richmond)	19 950
Umsobomvu (Colesberg, Noupoot)	9689
Warrenton	No answer
TOTAL	At least 1 641 433

An important factor is that commonage is usually found in arid and semi-arid areas in South Africa, including the Karoo, Namaqualand, parts of the Kalahari of the Northern Cape, the grasslands of the Free State and the Eastern Cape, and the scrublands of the southern parts of the Eastern Cape.

In this paper, the focus is placed on commonage in the Karoo, because it is the largest geographic unit of this very large area. Philippolis is located in the very northern part of the Karoo (the “skyn-Karoo”), which is actually a transition zone between the Nama-Karoo and the Free State savannah.

The Karoo is an arid to semi-arid area, reaching from the West Coast of South Africa up to the Stormberg mountains of the Eastern Cape, and from the “ Klein-Karoo” in the south up to the southern parts of the Free State (the Transgariiep). The Karoo consists of two distinct biomes: The succulent Karoo is found in Namaqualand and southern Cape, whereas the largest component of the Karoo is the “Nama-Karoo”. The latter is a

combination of grassland and small Karoo bushes (“bossies”). In good rainfall seasons, the Karoo produces substantial grassland for fodder; in cases of drought, the grass virtually disappears and the Karoo bushes become predominant. The ecology is very fragile, because environmental maintenance rainfall depends on sporadic and irregular rainfall events, which are often heavy thunderstorms and tend to wash away unprotected soil. The Karoo reaches very high and low extremes of temperature, which reduces the number of plant species able to survive in this arid soil.

There are several features of the Karoo land resource which impacts on the current problems experienced with regards to commonage management.

Firstly, the ecology of the Karoo has meant that the current settled farmer existence is at odds with the ecosystem of the Karoo, which lends itself rather to cyclic migratory practices whereby people and their herds constantly move to productive areas of land according to rainfall and season. Only through intensive government technical and financial support has this settled agricultural system survived commercially since the early 1800s. This support was available to white commercial farmers since the 1960s, and has largely led to the restoration of degraded Karoo land. It is now generally realised, amongst commercial farmers, that their Karoo land has to be managed very sensitively and carefully to prevent degradation. But municipal commonage users have not received this training and financial support, which often leads to severely degraded soils because of the intensive usage.

Secondly, the overwhelming majority of the large estates are owned by white farmers, descendants of the white settlers that occupied the land from the original inhabitants, e.g. the Khoi-san, Xhosa, and Sesotho peoples. Prior to the democratisation of South Africa in 1994, no black people possessed agricultural farmland in the Karoo. Many worked for white farmers as farm workers. After 1994, this has changed and government started active land reform policies, whereby land had to be transferred from whites to blacks according to the market principle of supply and demand (willing buyer, willing seller). So far, this has been an extremely slow process, as many blacks do not have the money, skills or experience to purchase land, or to develop it even if it is purchased for them by the state.

A third important contextual issue around commonage in the Karoo is rapid urbanisation in the past 15 years. Thousands of farm workers have lost their jobs, due to a combination of globalisation in agriculture, which forces farmers to cut costs and reduce labour. It was intensified by government legislation (the *Extension of Security of Tenure Act*, 1996), ostensibly to protect the interests of farm workers, but had the unintended consequence of provoking farmers to reduce their labour forces even further.

Table 3: The urban population per settlement category in the Free State, 1991, 1996 and 2001 (Marais 2004)

	Cities	Regional towns	Middle-order towns	Small towns
1991	1 028 841	124 042	257 515	245 168
2001	1 097 182	158 617	355 661	435 607
% change per annum 1991 – 2001	0,9	3,1	3,5	8,9

This has substantially increased the pressure on municipal commonage as the constantly increasing numbers of urban poor want to use the commonage to maintain their livelihoods.

Finally, almost all current commonage users are historically disadvantaged in terms of learning and experience opportunities. They never had the chance to acquire the knowledge needed to run a commercial farm. However, what knowledge commonage users do possess, we do not know at present. Together, this makes it very hard to devise policies and governance systems that directly appeal to the commonage users and tailor to their needs. This was an overriding rationale of the Philippolis study.

Thus, what we have in the Karoo is too small plots of often degraded land, which for many historically disadvantaged black urban poor form an important last resort for making a living. This is indeed a complex and multi-faceted problem.

Land reform efforts have been bedevilled by the fact that commercial agricultural land is now highly sought after, and prices of land are escalating. Even though land demand of black emergent farmers is extensive, it will be difficult to access additional commonage land at substantial scale.

After 1994, there was increasing political pressure on the newly-democratised municipalities to make commonage land available to emergent black livestock owners. Some of these people had lived in the urban townships for a long time, while others were recent “immigrants” from white commercial farms. Increasingly, municipalities terminated the rental arrangements with the white farmers, and began allowing black livestock owners onto the commonage land. The legal arrangements were often unclear or inadequate, and in most cases, the black farmers used the land communally.

Municipal management of commonage land began to deteriorate, because municipalities are not accustomed to manage agriculture, nor to engage with complex groups of natural resource users. The symptoms of the failure of municipalities to deal with the problem are often reflected in the poor maintenance of infrastructure and the deteriorating condition of the veld.

At the same time, the ANC Government identified commonage as a pillar of its land reform programme. Municipalities are being placed under a lot of popular pressure governmental pressure to increasingly make their commonage land available to emergent farmers. Municipalities can obtain financial and other forms of support to convert commonage into a livelihood and developmental resource for their poor residents.

Historically, municipalities administered commonage agricultural land for the benefit of white residents. Now, as part of the Government's land reform programme, municipalities can obtain financial and other forms of support to convert commonage into a livelihood and developmental resource for their poor residents. According to the White Paper on Land Policy (1997):

“In large parts of the country, in small rural towns and settlements, poor people need to gain access to grazing land and small arable / garden areas in order to supplement their income and to enhance household food security. The Department of Land Affairs will encourage local authorities to develop the conditions that will **enable poor residents to access existing commonage**, currently used for other purposes. Further, the Department will provide funds to enable resource-poor municipalities to **acquire additional land for this purpose.**”

Between 1996 and 2002, 98 commonage projects were funded by DLA (DLA, *Annual Reports*, 1996-2002).² This has created another level of official interest in commonage. Not only has DLA made available funding to purchase additional commonage land for municipalities³, but it has raised far-reaching questions about whose problem commonage management actually is. Is it the responsibility of the users? Or the municipalities? Or the provincial Departments of Agriculture? Or DLA? Or some complex combination of all these agencies? These institutional questions remain unresolved.

4. Previous and current commonage research

Research into commonage was initiated by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 2002. Telephonic surveys were conducted with municipalities in the Free State, and in the Northern Cape (Buso 2003; Buso 2003b). Subsequently, other useful studies of commonage management were conducted, including Anja Benseler's study of the Khai Ma municipality (2003); Cartwright, Benseler and Harrison's study of

² In terms of the *Provision of Land and Assistance Act* (Act 126 of 1993).

³ The acquisition and transfer of additional or 'new' portions of commonage land to municipalities picked up momentum from 1998 to 2000. However, municipal commonage appears to have been de-emphasised as a type of land reform after the ministerial review process of land reform which took place in 2000. In 2002 only 2% of land transferred within the redistribution programme was for municipal commonage. The Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) budget guidelines for 2003–2005 show that municipal commonage has been allocated a mere 3% of the total requested for land reform over this period – some R13 million (Anderson and Pienaar 2003: 7).

Emthanjeni Municipality in De Aar (2002 and 2004); and two evaluations of commonage for the Department of Land Affairs (CASE 2004, Karoo Institute 2005).

Much of the focus has been placed on municipalities' management of commonage. However, a lacuna has been our understanding of commonage farmers' beliefs, goals and knowledge base (Atkinson 2005). There has been the temptation, on part of municipalities and DLA policy-makers, to regard commonage users as a single category. This Philippolis study was intended to show some of the important differences amongst them, in terms of their socio-economic status and resources, the scale of their commonage farming enterprises, their knowledge about farming and their future goals.

The overriding argument, in this paper, is that, unless we understand the dynamics of commonage farmers, we will not be able to draft suitable policies and programmes for them. Furthermore, we will not be able to build on their efforts to promote viable land reform strategies. It is hoped that the insights derived from this study will be disseminated and used by future commonage planners and managers, to improve commonage management systems.

5. Philippolis commonage: A land system under strain

Philippolis is located in the southern Free State, 30 km north of the Orange River. It is the oldest settlement in the Free State, dating from the 1830s, when it was a mission station. Subsequently, the town became the capital of the Griqua kingdom (until 1860), and thereafter it was sold to the Free State Republic.

During the 20th Century, Philippolis had its own municipality. Since 2000, it was absorbed into a larger municipal entity, called Kopanong Municipality. Kopanong includes eight other towns, including Trompsburg (the municipal capital), Fauresmith, Jagersfontein, Edenburg, Gariiep Dam, Bethulie and Reddersburg. Each of these towns is now managed by a "Unit Supervisor", and basic clerical and technical staff. Policy-making emanates from the headquarters in Trompsburg.

Philippolis was one of the first municipalities in the Free State to make commonage available for local black stock-holders. It took this decision in 1998, and thereby pre-empted much of the political conflict which characterized towns such as Trompsburg. Gradually, sections (called "camps") of the commonage were handed over to local black users.

In Philippolis, the municipal commonage of 3491 ha is divided into five camps and used for stock farming. The HSRC study, conducted in 2002 (Buso, 2003), gives a picture of the conditions prevailing on the commonage. Users of the commonage are organised into a stock committee, then consisting of 35, with seven members forming an executive

council and each member paying R120 subscription monthly. Users keep a bank account with First National Bank.

The stock committee consists of owners of sheep, goat and cattle. In 2003, there were about 80 heads of cattle. Individual ownership varies from five to ten head of cattle, while some commonage users own up to 100 sheep. This level of stock ownership places a heavy burden on the grazing capacity of the land. Up-to-date figures for 2005 are not available.

The commonage management system in Kopanong Municipality is extremely fragmented and unclear. At this stage, each town in Kopanong is still managing its commonage in terms of the contracts drafted before 2000, or those concluded on an *ad hoc* basis since 2000. There is no commonage management policy. Kopanong Municipality has received funding from the Development Bank of South Africa to draft a commonage policy, but by August 2005, this had not yet commenced.

There are numerous management problems facing the Philippolis commonage, based primarily on the fact that the rights and obligations of the municipality and the commonage users are unclear. This leads to frustration for both parties. The unsatisfactory contractual system results in many dysfunctions, including poor maintenance of infrastructure, overgrazing, and poor payment of rentals. None of these problems are unusual, as the previous studies have already indicated (Benseler 2003; Atkinson *et al*, 2005).

This paper addresses these questions, from the vantage point of the commonage users, and it explores their implications for future policy design and support programmes.

6. Philippolis commonage users: A socio-economic profile

In this study, 28 commonage farmers were interviewed. It is not clear how many commonage farmers there actually are, because their organizational capacity is poor. It seems that their numbers may be in the region of 55 commonage users, which would mean that about 50% of the commonage users participated in the survey.

The majority of interviewees (54%) were in the 41-60 age group. Only three farmers were less than 40 years old. A large number (36%) were over the age of 61. This suggests that commonage farming is attracting middle-aged and elderly people, as a source of livelihood.

The majority (79%) were male.

Another way of assessing their work status is the nature of their employment. The largest number (12 people) are considered retired or unemployed, and another five people do odd jobs or piecework. This leaves 11 people (40%) with full-time employment.

The largest employment category was municipal workers (5 people, or 18% of the survey). Two people were gardeners or labourers. Significantly, two gave their profession as “farmer”, suggesting that they are committed to their commonage farming activities on a full-time basis.

The level of household income was not specifically asked. But in 18 households (63%), there are no other adults working. In eight cases, one other adult had an income.

Generally, then, it gives a profile of predominantly unemployed or partially employed people who use the commonage. While some of these households can draw on another person’s income, the majority do not have a regular source of income. Nevertheless, 25 out of 28 interviewees have a house, indicating the prevalence of the government’s housing programme.

A significant minority (40%) of the respondents own a car or a bakkie. A small but significant category (2 people, or 8%) claim to own some kind of agricultural land, suggesting that they use the commonage land as a supplement to other agricultural activities.

7. Stock ownership and livelihood categories

Twenty people (41% of the survey) own large stock (cattle). A slightly smaller number owns small stock, such as sheep and goats (16 people or 38% of the survey). Ten people (20% of the sample) own pigs. Only one person claims to own chickens, and two people own horses and donkeys (mainly for transport purposes).

This finding is rather unusual. Given the climatic conditions of Philippolis in the southern Free State, a predominance of sheep- and goat-ownership would have been expected.

A very significant issue is that the number of livestock owned by these farmers differs widely. In the Philippolis survey, they were divided into four categories:

- *Group 1:* They own up to 10 head of livestock, and amounted to 57% of the sample (16 people)
- *Group 2:* They own between 11 and 30 head of livestock, and amounted to 21% of the sample (6 people)
- *Group 3:* They own between 31 and 100 head of livestock, and amounted to 14% of the sample (4 people)
- *Group 4:* They own more than 100 head of livestock, and there were two people (7%) in this category.

This raises a very important question of how the interests of these groups diverge. It is tempting to conclude that Group 1 commonage users are the poorest, and Group 4 the wealthiest. However, this is not necessarily the case at all. People may hold different numbers of stock for very different reasons. Intuitively, if people's situation and survival strategies are considered, at least four different categories of farmers emerge:

- *Survivalists*: Households with few alternative sources of income (perhaps other than social grants or pensions)
- *Micro-farmers*: They have other livelihoods, and want to keep only a certain limited number of stock
- *Emergent small-scale farmers*: They show signs of capital accumulation; for example, they may have bank accounts, they would like access to loans, they may like to farm on their own (i.e. not in a group), and they would like to farm on a larger scale, to make some profit. These farmers may be good candidates for ownership of small-holdings, where they could either undertake small-scale agriculture, or combine it with other income-generating activities.
- *Proto-capitalist farmers*: People who may have other livelihoods, but would like to go into farming on a full-time or large-scale basis. For them, livestock and capital accumulation is of paramount importance. Acquiring their own property is also important. These farmers would be ideal candidates for a "step-up" land reform strategy, i.e. opting out of commonage use and finding their own farm.

An important finding, from the Philippolis survey, is that one cannot find neat correlations between these types of farmers and the level of stock ownership. Some people may have only a few head of livestock, but, given the opportunity, may want to become emergent small-scale farmers, or proto-capitalist farmers. Other people may own quite large flocks or herds, but do not have any real ambition to grow their farming enterprises. A Group 1 person may be either a survivalist, or a micro-farmer, or an emergent small-scale farmer, or a proto-capitalist farmer. It depends on much more than their current level of stock ownership. Their subjective characteristics (knowledge, beliefs, goals) are as important as their level of stock ownership. These issues will be described more fully, below.

Furthermore, there is very little correlation between the level of stock ownership and their knowledge of farming or natural resource management.

Consequently, we can conclude that commonage management planning should include a person-by-person analysis of each commonage user, their capital and knowledge resources, and their economic goals. Only then can a proper and effective support strategy be tailored. The rest of this paper provides evidence for this argument.

8. Farming categories in Philippolis

There are several ways in which the commonage farmers in Philippolis can be grouped, each with different social and policy significance.

8.1 Ownership of assets

The interviewees were asked about their ownership of various assets, including houses, cars, bakkies and agricultural land. Ownership of assets was fairly evenly distributed amongst Group 1-4, suggesting that Group 1 stock owners are not necessarily the poorest of the farmers. For example, four of the members of Group 1 own a car, and two own a bakkie; in the case of Group 2, three own a car, and three own a bakkie. Fourteen own a house.

Some of the Group 1 farmers are people who are indeed poor, with few assets, and their few head of livestock enable them to “survive”, or eke out a living. But some may be people who indulge in “recreational agriculture”, and who keep a few head of livestock for cultural, symbolic or hobby purposes.

There are two unusual cases, of commonage users who own other agricultural land. This suggests that commonage land is not always the only land available to urban residents. Of these two farmers, one is a Group 2 farmer (10-30 head of livestock) and one is a Group 4 farmer (more than 100 head of livestock). Once again, the number of livestock owned does not correlate directly with people’s assets or livelihood resources.

8.2 Commonage use and employment status

It is tempting to think that commonage land is being used primarily by those who have no other source of livelihood, i.e. as a subsistence hedge against food insecurity. Four commonage users are indeed labourers or domestic workers, presumably very lowly paid. They own modest numbers of livestock.

But the facts reveal that several of the commonage users have other sources of livelihood.

Of the Group 1 farmers, who own less than 10 animals, the largest number (50%) are unemployed or retired (although it should be remembered that retired people are not necessarily poor, and may have other household resources). Another 19% only do odd-jobs. There is a relatively large number of Group 1 farmers (46%) who have full-time jobs, suggesting that their low level of livestock ownership is not because they are poor, but possibly because they do farming as a hobby.

The two largest farmers are both interesting cases. The one is a municipal employee, which suggests that he farms because he wants to, and not because he desperately needs the money. It is likely that he ploughs some of his wage earnings into his commonage

activities, thus building up his agricultural base. The other person gives his job description as a “farmer”, indicating that he regards his commonage activities as his full-time profession. In fact, there were two interviewees, each with significant numbers of livestock, who are already describing their employment as “farmers”.

Of the Group 3 farmers (30-100 livestock), two are unemployed (suggesting that farming is their main source of livelihood), and two are fully employed (suggesting that they are building up a second livelihood).

Of the total number of 28 interviewees, the largest category of employed people (a total of five) are municipal workers. These are relatively highly paid workers in small towns, and they may well be ploughing some of their wages into their farming enterprises. Two of the middle-range livestock owners are entrepreneurs, again suggesting that they use their commonage activities and their trading resources to bolster each other.

These findings show the large diversity in livelihoods combinations of commonage users. For some, it is a hedge against dire poverty, while others approximate middle-class status. For the latter, farming may either be a lucrative sideline activity, or it may eventually eclipse their current jobs – and they may in future prefer to go into farming full-time. Such people would be ideal land reform candidates.

6.3 Commonage use and household income

It is somewhat misleading to correlate commonage use only with the income of the commonage farmer. Household incomes are complex, and may be derived from other sources (other wages, pensions, and remittances). The survey attempted to correlate commonage use with household income – not by asking about actual income (because the findings are often inaccurate or people are reluctant to disclose it), but by asking about other adults who make an income.

There is no correlation between household employment and commonage use. In the survey, the majority of commonage users (68%) are from households where there are no other adults earning an income. In these households, the commonage users are either the sole source of wage income, or the entire household depends on the commonage revenue. Some of these households own very small numbers of livestock; but others can be classified as emergent farmers and even proto-capitalist farmers. But in 8 of the 28 cases, another household member does have an income.

6.4 Livestock ownership and gender

The majority of commonage users in the survey (22 out of 28) were men. This reflects the finding by Anderson and Pienaar (2003: 16) that, “To date, commonage projects are

predominantly grazing projects from which women are politically and culturally excluded”.

The number of livestock is also fairly evenly spread amongst the women and men. Amongst both men and women, the ownership of large livestock is more prevalent than the ownership of small stock. Of the six women, five own cattle, and three own small stock (sheep and goats). Of the 22 men, 15 own cattle and 13 own small stock.

Pigs, horses, and donkeys are exclusively owned by men.

6.5 Livestock ownership and age categories

The vast majority of commonage users (88%) were over 40 years old. A substantial number (35%) were over 60 years old, giving the impression that commonage ownership is primarily a livelihood resource for the middle-aged and the elderly. The larger livestock owners were also in the middle-aged and elderly categories. The younger farmers (less than 40 years old) were concentrated in the survivalist and micro-enterprise categories.

It is not clear what to deduce from this age profile. It may indicate that younger people do not want to farm. But it may also mean that older people have more resources (wages and pensions, as well as community status) which enables them to get access to the commonage, and to purchase more animals. Younger people do not have such resources, and either find it difficult to purchase livestock, or they are simply kept off the commonage by the older men.

Similar data about the prevalence of older commonage farmers can be provided with reference to Karoo-Hoogland Municipality in the Northern Cape (unpublished workshop notes, 17 September 2003):

Table 4: Commonage users in Karoo-Hoogland Municipality

Town	Users with fewer than 10 small livestock	Users with 10-50 small stock	Users with more than 50 small livestock	Total number of users	Age
Sutherland	2	11	2	15	9 under 40 years 6 over 40 years
Fraserburg	0	9	0	9	2 under 40 years 7 over 40 years
Williston	2	8	2	12	4 under 40 years 8 over 40 years

6.6 Commonage use and residential patterns

Length of residence in a town has important implications. The “old-timers” tend to have houses, jobs, and social networks. The “new immigrants”, particularly people who have moved from the farms, may not have these resources. It is likely, therefore, that the old-timers may have preferential access to the commonage, and have more resources to build up their livestock. In particular, it may be the case that “old-timers” are more established within community organizations, and therefore are more likely to be given permission by the Stock Committee to use the commonage. In many cases, the existing commonage users decide who should access new commonage land (Atkinson *et al* 2005: 31). But these hypotheses need more in-depth qualitative investigation than could be attempted in this study.

In the commonage survey, a large majority (61%) have lived in Philippolis for more than 15 years. Only 4 of the users (14%) have lived in Philippolis for less than five years, and another 7 people (15%) have lived in town for 6-15 years. This suggests that commonage use is indeed predominantly undertaken by “old-timers”.

The prevalence of “old-timers” is also probably due to the fact that it required mobilisation and political pressure to access the land. As Benseler observed, with regards to the Northern Cape, in most cases (Kgatelopele Municipality, Renosterberg, Kai!Garib, Kimberley, Ubuntu, Richtersveld, Nama Khoi, Kamiesberg, Ga-Segonyana, !Kheis), emergent farmers gained access to the land through a period of negotiations with the respective municipalities (2004: 28).

But the picture is not as simple as this profile would suggest. Even though the number of old-timers on the commonage is far greater than the number of people who have recently moved to town, two of the new immigrants already own more than 30 head of livestock. If these two individuals are ex-farm workers, it may be the case that they brought their own animals with them from the farm.

It is also interesting that the largest group of survivalists (63%) are actually old-timers, who have lived in Philippolis for more than 15 years. This may suggest that these people, who are well ensconced in Philippolis, are using agriculture as a marginal side-line livelihood, or a hobby; or it may suggest that they have given up hope of getting an urban job (or have lost a job), and are beginning to turn to agriculture for a living. Once again, qualitative interviews are required to establish the what their rationales are.

7. Commercial motivations for farming

Why do people farm on the commonage? This question lurks throughout any study of commonage usage. Is it out of desperation, or out of a love for agriculture – the veld and the animals - or out of an entrepreneurial spirit? And if it is for any of these motives, are

these motives changing over time? Is there a new entrepreneurial spirit sweeping the small towns? Was it always there, but had no opportunity to develop, caught between the constraints of farm labour and urban wage labour? Is it the harbinger of a new agricultural class, or the signs of desperation and poverty? Is it people’s first choice for a livelihood, or a fall-back option after everything else has failed? Is it a sign of economic progress, or of economic failure? And is it a sign of modernity, or of a re-nascent traditionalism? Does commonage farming recall ancient and anthropological belief systems, or does it reflect a new commercial mind-set? Is stock ownership a type of insurance policy against a “rainy day”?

Most likely, different people have different reasons why they are turning to commonage farming as a livelihood. In fact, each person may have several reasons for doing so. But if we do not understand different people and their complex motivations, we will be unlikely to design policies, support programmes or institutional structures that will be suitable for their needs.

In this section, we attempt to “unpack” people’s complex motivational structures. At best, it is a shallow approximation of the situation, because it is primarily a quantitative study. A great deal more qualitative study, from anthropological and economic points of view, need to be undertaken to do justice to these questions.

7.1 Why do people farm?

For this question, people could give multiple answers, and their responses were subsequently categorized into similar groups.

The survey shows that people use commonage for a wide variety of reasons:

Table 5: Reasons for commonage use in Philippolis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Rationales	Additional income/commercial reasons	13	36.1	36.1
	Personal progress	2	5.6	5.6
	Customary practice	2	5.6	5.6
	Emotional commitment	13	36.1	36.1
	Long term investment	2	5.6	5.6
	Farming knowledge	4	11.1	11.1
	Total	36	100.0	100.0

Commercial issues (additional income, long term investment) predominate. But some also regard farming as important from a subjective point of view, as a form of personal

progress or as an emotional commitment. Some individuals want to improve their farming knowledge.

To explore the issue of people's farming rationales and goals further, a correlation was drawn between people's residence in Philippolis and their reasons for farming. People were allowed to volunteer more than one response.

Of the 20 people who had previously lived on a farm, 40% were doing commonage farming to raise additional income, and 33% had an emotional commitment to it. This suggests a background of exposure to commercial agriculture. In contrast, the majority of urban people were farming out of emotional commitment, or to a lesser extent, customary practices or additional income.

This may have policy implications. If ex-farm workers are more oriented towards commercial agriculture, it may mean that those commonage users who have a farming background may be better candidates for land reform than long-term urban residents, who are not accustomed to thinking commercially about farming.

7.2 The sale of livestock

Most commonage users (18 people, or 64% of the survey) had not sold livestock in the previous year. A relatively small number (6 farmers, or 21%) had sold between 1 and 10 head of livestock, and an even smaller group (4 farmers, or 14% of the survey) had sold more than 10 head of livestock. Clearly, stock sales are not a major feature of commonage use. Commonage farmers are more oriented to the accumulation of livestock than engaging in commercial agricultural activities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there are some correlations between the size of people's herds and their orientation to livestock sales. Only two of the 16 Group 1 farmers had sold livestock. The greatest majority of the Group 1 farmers (14 people, or 78% of these farmers) had not sold any animals in the previous year. Of the four Group 2 farmers, two had not sold livestock at all. The large majority of commonage users prefer not to sell, or to sell only a few head of livestock. They are probably combining accumulation and survival strategies.

The sale of larger numbers of livestock occurred within the two larger classes of commonage farmers. Of the two Group 4 farmers, one had sold fewer than ten animals, and one had sold more than ten.

The sale of animals was also compared with the professions of the commonage users. It might be expected that unemployed commonage users, or those with poorly paid jobs, would sell some of their livestock to generate an income. When comparing livestock sales with the categories of full-time employment, part-time employment, and unemployed, there does not appear to be a trend. The majority of all these categories did

not sell any livestock in the previous year. In the survey, only six of the fifteen unemployed commonage users had sold livestock in the previous year. Remarkably, this left nine unemployed commonage users who had not sold any livestock. So why do they keep their animals? Are they accumulating livestock to build up their herds and flocks?

Another way of understanding people's commercial motivations is to ask what they did with the proceeds of livestock sales. Of the 11 people who had sold livestock, five had used the money for household expenses (indicating a primarily subsistence use of livestock), while six had ploughed the money back into their farming activities (suggesting a more investment-oriented approach to farming). Four had saved the money.

Of the four people who had sold relatively large numbers of livestock (more than 10 animals), two were in the unemployed category, and two in the full-time category. This suggests that large livestock sales are taking place in relatively extreme circumstances – either to survive, or to accumulate profit.

Livestock sales are also hampered by logistical problems. One farmer sells mutton to butcheries in Philippolis and Colesberg. Mutton is in demand and therefore has a good market. However, for emerging farmers who do not have transport, it is difficult to sell to surrounding areas (Buso 2003: 62).

But these conclusions are tentative at this stage. In reality, there is likely to be a continuum of motivations across the commonage users, or even for individual commonage users. An important aspect of a proper commonage strategy would be to understand the variety of motivations of commonage users, so that appropriate livelihood strategies can be designed for them. Such strategies should include a mix of land access options, extension services, and financial services.

7.3 Commonage farmers' future ambitions

A third dimension of understanding commonage farmers' situation is to consider their future goals. Do small-scale farmers want to remain small-scale? Do they want to own their own piece of agricultural land? Do they want to farm on their own, or farm collectively? Are there correlations between these desires and their current level of stock ownership?

Almost all commonage farmers (with the exception of one) want to increase their livestock. The one exception was a survivalist, who wants to remain a small-scale operator. But are they willing to meet the obligations which accompanies increased livestock ownership?

7.4 Payment of rent

One way of testing whether the farmers are fairly realistic about their ambitions, is to ask them whether they are prepared to pay rent if they increase their livestock. Four farmers said that they do not want to pay rent – and this includes two Group 1 farmers, one Group 3 farmer, and even one Group 4 farmer! It is alarming that farmers who have sizeable numbers of livestock, and who want to increase their livestock numbers, are not prepared to pay rent. This suggests a degree of “free riding”.

This is not an unusual finding. At a commonage workshop conducted in Karoo-Hoogland Municipality in September 2003, it was found that all the farmers had more than the official limit of 40 sheep, and one person had more than 200! That farmer had never paid rent, and had no intention of doing so. She wanted to access her own farm from a land reform subsidy (HSRC 2003b).

In the 2003 HSRC study, municipalities levy very different levels of rentals (Buso 2003: 29). Even within Kopanong Municipality, there are different rentals within its nine towns. In Fauresmith, rentals range between R25 and R41 per annum for a small head of livestock. In Trompsburg, the rate is R4/livestock per month.

Rentals levied on black emergent farmers are often much lower than those which commercial farmers are expected to pay. In Reddersburg, for example, the commercial farmers pay R55 per ha per year, whereas the commonage users pay R15/livestock unit per annum. In Tswelopele Municipality (Bultfontein area), a commercial farmer pays R140 per ha per annum, whereas emerging farmers pay R25 per ha per year (Buso 2003: 30). This indicates that the municipalities, which are often desperately cash-strapped, are making huge financial sacrifices by diverting commonage rental from white commercial farmers to black emergent farmers.

Payments rates vary greatly. In some towns, such as Luckhoff, Warden, Bultfontein and Ladybrand, regular payments are made. Buso (2003: 33) found that 22 Free State towns experienced regular payments, whereas 13 towns experienced poor levels of payment. This places the Philippolis responses in perspective. The majority of interviewees would certainly *intend* to pay rental if they secured additional land (although their intentions may not carry over into actions!), and they presumably recognize the right of the municipality to levy rentals. In contrast, four farmers are explicit that they do not want to pay more rentals for additional land, and would probably become chronic defaulters if they were given the chance to do so.

One reason for low payment of rentals is that in many municipalities (such as Philippolis in Kopanong) determine the fees by hectare of land, and not according to head of livestock. Where rent is payable per hectare, there is no limit on livestock numbers, and this encourages free riding. People are not held responsible for their number of livestock, whereas the group as a whole is held responsible for the payment of rental for an entire field. This encourages Hardin’s “tragedy of the commons” and consequent overgrazing,

because everyone is liable for the same amount of money, regardless of the number of stock being grazed.

In Philippolis, the Stock Committee is required to pay an amount of R11 000 to the municipality per annum. Stock owners believe that this is too much (Buso 2002: 61), and the Stock Committee has requested the municipality to revise the current contract because it was concluded when the erstwhile Transitional Local Councils were still operational. Kopanong Municipality still has no policy on commonage management or rentals.

Payment is channelled through the Stock Committee. This has the advantage of relieving the municipality of the burden of having to collect the money from the emergent farmers themselves. The disadvantage, however, is that in most cases the emergent farmers' committees are loosely grouped and thus have no legal standing. This has two implications: (1) many of the organisations struggle to collect the rates from the emergent farmers and (2) the municipality cannot hold them responsible in the case of non-payment. Only contracts that are signed with individuals, therefore, are legally binding.

The Stock Committee also levies a subscription fee when people join the commonage. The Stock Committee uses the subscription fee to pay the municipality and buy medication for their stock. According to stock committee members in Philippolis, people who own pigs refused to join the stock committee because they did not want to pay a subscription fee of R120 (Buso 2003: 61). They argue that their pigs have nothing to feed on in the commonage and that they rather keep them in their backyards in order to feed them. However, such pigs contribute to making the town untidy and environmentally unhygienic.

The Philippolis farms claim that it is difficult to raise the money that they are supposed to pay to the municipality and that consequently they resort to selling their stock in order to raise the funds (Buso 2003: 60). So, the farmers argue, the municipality should lower its rates and establish a uniform level of rentals for all towns. Emerging farmers indicated that they approached the Land Bank to secure funding but were not successful because they were expected to pay during the first month without having generated profit. They believe that the required rentals have exacerbated their poverty. Members of the stock committee indicated that they need advice on how to secure funding, while DoA should make its extension officers available to offer agricultural assistance.

7.5 Desire to own land

The following table shows the overwhelming desire of Philippolis commonage users to own their own land:

Table 6: Preference to own agricultural land

	Frequency	Percent

Valid	Yes	25	89.3
	No	3	10.7
	Total	28	100.0

The current commonage contracts in Philippolis do not spell out at what stage a user should leave the commonage and become self-reliant. There is actually no limit to the number of livestock which can be kept on the commonage. The Committee believes that there is a dire shortage of camps because users own large numbers of sheep and goats. The stock committee has requested more camps from the municipality but nothing has transpired (Buso 2003: 60). The committee is open and accommodating in the sense that people who used to work for commercial farmers but have lost their jobs are welcome to join the committee, provided they produce a formal letter of request. Such people come with their stock and on the basis of their formal letters they are accepted to the committee.

One of the challenges facing emerging farmers is a need for more camps in order to accommodate more stock coming with newcomers as well as the ever-expanding sheep and goat numbers of the old members of the stock committee (Buso 2002: 61) .

In the Philippolis survey, several questions were then asked, to investigate people’s sense of realism about keeping more livestock and owning their own land.

7.6 Location of land

Another way of testing farmers’ seriousness about farming on a larger scale is to ask them whether they would be interested in land situated further away from town (say more than 10 km). The rationale is that only people with some vehicles would be able to live in town and farm further afield; or that people would have to be prepared to go and live on the farm.

Only four respondents were *not* interested in land situated further away. Twenty-four farmers, including 14 Group 1 farmers, would be prepared to travel some distance to access farmland. Whether land is to purchase or to rent, most commonage farmers are eager to get more of it.

Significantly, one Group 2 farmer and one Group 3 farmer, who have significant stock holdings, would prefer to remain close to town. These people are obviously urban-based, and may well not have transport; and yet they want to increase their livestock even further than their current level. It is not clear whether they are using their livestock primarily for “symbolic” or “emotional” reasons, or whether they believe that there is some commercial gain to be had from remaining close to town. In the latter case, these may be suitable farmers to relocate onto peri-urban smallholdings.

7.7 Farming responsibilities

Farmers' seriousness about farming was also tested by asking them about their willingness to maintain infrastructure. Only one person was *not* willing to help with infrastructure repair. This finding should not be taken at face value. Interviewees may have wanted to give the "right" answer to this question, and in practice may have no willingness or skills to repair infrastructure.

The maintenance of infrastructure has bedevilled many commonage projects during the last few years. Typical commonage infrastructure is windmills, fences, reservoirs, and troughs. The DLA study conducted in 2005 (Atkinson *et al.*, 2005: 48) found that infrastructure is in a poor condition 9 municipalities⁴, although in some cases commonage users rate the infrastructure in a worse condition than do the municipalities. The 2003 Free State study found that, in seven municipalities, infrastructure is good condition; in six municipalities, it is in fair condition, and in seven municipalities it is in a very poor condition (Buso 2003: 16). In different localities, either the municipalities may be responsible for repairs, or it may be the responsibility of the users. In practice, a great deal of confusion reigns.

In most of the cases, the contracts between users and municipalities stipulate that the users are responsible for the maintenance of the infrastructure (Buso 2003b; Benseler 2004: 29). Most of the municipalities deny that they are responsible for maintaining the infrastructure, although they are the legal owners and are obliged to do so in their managerial and administrative capacity. The reason for this can be traced back to the era when commercial farmers used to lease the land and it was their responsibility to maintain the infrastructure, except for major infrastructure repairs. Emergent farmers do not have the financial capital nor the expertise to maintain the infrastructure themselves.

In Kopanong Municipality, the situation is varied. In six of the Kopanong towns, the municipality is contractually responsible for paying for repairs, while in the other three municipalities, the users are responsible. In Philippolis, the users are responsible for maintenance. But in practice, fences get stolen while people from the township cut down trees for personal use. This is because community members have a misperception that commonage land belongs to the whole community and hence every community member could do as he or she pleases. This has a negative impact because stock moves around without being protected by fences, and they can get stolen, or run over by cars. Users have reported the matter to the municipality but nothing has as yet been done. Commonage users repaired some 500m to 800m of fence that was stolen. Water pipes are also in poor condition, and the matter reported to the municipality but to no avail. Some of the commonage users repaired the pipes themselves (Buso 2003: 61).

⁴ Koffiefontein, Ventersburg, Reddersburg, Bultfontein, Venterstad, Graaff-Reinet, Port Alfred, Beaufort West, and Stellenbosch.

Farmers’ attitude to farming was tested by asking them whether their livestock were branded. Only two survivalists have not branded their livestock. Since the Free State Department of Agriculture has initiated branding campaigns in the past, this may account for the prevalence of branding.

7.8 Individual and collective farming

A major policy question is whether emergent farmers should farm individually or collectively. Many land reform projects have been designed on the basis of group-based farming, and many of these projects have been shown to fail. Get reference.

Many municipalities have leased commonage land to groups of black farmers. It is not clear why this has been done, because commercial farmers never leased land communally. The reason may be that black farmers had to join together to lobby for land to be made available to them, and therefore they presented themselves as a group to the municipality. It may also be to make rentals more affordable, if land is shared; or because it is easier to lease land to a group, rather than splitting up the land into several individual camps. Consequently, of the nine municipalities included in the DLA policy review (Atkinson, Benseler and Pienaar 2005: 36), eight municipalities used group leases.

This has created many problems of group dynamics, intra-group conflict, “free riding”, and a “tragedy of the commons” (see Hardin 1968; Benseler), where only a few farmers take responsibility for management, while others enjoy the benefits. It has also meant that commonage management is unsustainable for municipality, often with poor levels of payment, deteriorating infrastructure, and overgrazed land. Cartwright, Benseler

Philippolis, like so many other municipalities, has structured its leases on a group basis. It is significant, therefore, that in the Philippolis survey, a large majority of commonage users (19 out of 28) want to farm on their own. Only nine stated specifically that they would prefer to farm communally.

This is an extremely significant finding. It suggests that people are farming “in a group” because they have no other option. They would prefer to access and manage land on their own.

Table 7: Reasons for wanting to farm individually

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	To much conflict in a group / difficult to manage	16	57.1
	Wants to work for his own benefit / keep produce for self	1	3.6

	Can keep more livestock	2	7.1
	Total	19	67.9
Missing		9	32.1
Total		28	100.0

The table suggests widespread frustration with group management. It also shows people’s frustration with the limited availability of land, and the belief that one’s own land will enable more livestock to be kept (this is not entirely true, because it depends on the size of such land).

It is also probably significant that, of the people who wanted to farm communally, the majority were survivalists. This suggests that people who are farming at small scale, or are at the beginning stages of their enterprise, can support one another. But a great deal more qualitative investigation needs to be undertaken. It is possible, on the one hand, that many people are disillusioned with group projects because they have been poorly managed, and if they were properly institutionalized, they would prefer it. On the other hand, some people may never have considered the potential advantages of individual tenure, whether rental or ownership.

A great deal of South African land reform has made unverified assumptions about people’s preferences in this regard. Very often, “needs assessments” are conducted, but in a very shallow way, often based on no more than a group meeting or a simple head-count of stock numbers (see Atkinson *et al*, 2005: 30). Increasingly, it is becoming clear that there is no substitute for *in-depth, individual interviews*, based on an inclusive set of criteria.

7.9 Problems of commonage management

One should be careful not to read too much into people’s expressed desire for more land, particularly land situated further afield. It may be the case that people have these desires because of the current poor management of the commonage, and if it were better managed, people may prefer continuing to farm communally, close to town.

The following table gives an overview of people’s concerns about the current commonage situation (interviewees could mention several commonage problems, in an open-ended question):

Table 8: Commonage problems

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Theft	7	16.3
	Dogs	5	11.6

	Access to water	4	9.3
	Too little land / too many people / too many livestock	12	27.9
	Broken infrastructure	11	25.6
	No problems	4	9.3
	Total	43	100.0

The table shows a large number of management-related issues (such as broken infrastructure). Lawlessness (theft and stray dogs) contributes to their frustration. Many sheep have been killed by stray dogs. Since some fences are stolen, so dogs easily access commonage. Some boys from the township go hunting on commonage with their dogs. Many sheep have been lost. The committee has reported the matter to the municipality, South African Police Services and the magistrate but nothing has happened yet. To resolve the matter, the committee has called the boys and told them that they should not hunt on the commonage as this is against municipal regulation. It should be mentioned that this is not a solution to the problem because vagrant dogs still enter the commonage, so there is a need for a comprehensive approach by all interested parties to combat these losses (Buso 2003: 61).

For some people, the problem is one of overuse of land, which is an extremely interesting finding. It suggests that people are aware of the “tragedy of the commons”, and that a limited resource is being swamped by too many users. In other words, people are aware of overgrazing as a problem. They are also aware that a large number of people, farming collectively, are difficult to manage.

8. Knowledge base of commonage farmers

The previous section considered the economic rationales and strategies of commonage farmers. In this section, some findings are presented about their level of agricultural and ecological knowledge.

It is tempting to hypothesise that the larger farmers will be more knowledgeable, because they are using a greater share of the land resource, and presumably devote more of their attention to their farming activities.

There are several potential methodological shortcomings in this analysis. Not only is the sample of farmers very small, but it is in principle very difficult to reduce people’s complex knowledge bases to a few basic questions. Their understanding (or lack of it) may be more extensive than portrayed here. Also, the interviewees may have felt intimidated in the interview setting, or they may have more hands-on knowledge in a practical setting than they could articulate (in Afrikaans).

8.1 Knowledge of stock diseases, medication and supplements

Knowledge of stock diseases was taken as one indicator of people's knowledge about farming. Interviewees were asked an open-ended question about what diseases can affect cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. Based on their answers, respondents were categorized as having a poor level of knowledge (0-1 correct answers), fair knowledge (2-4 correct answers), and good knowledge (more than four correct answers).

The results show that, of the 28 farmers, 13 had poor knowledge, 13 had fair knowledge, and only 2 had good knowledge. This indicates that the vast majority of farmers have little experience of managing livestock diseases.

There was no close correlation between the size of farmers' enterprises, and their level of knowledge of diseases. Of the two knowledgeable farmers, one was a Group 1 farmer, and one was a Group 4 farmer. Conversely, of the two largest farmers, one had poor knowledge (which is an alarming finding), and one had fair knowledge.

The farmers were also asked what type of medicine can be applied. In this case, only two categories were used: poor knowledge (0-1 correct answers), and fair knowledge (more than 2 correct answers). Twenty-two farmers had poor knowledge, and 6 had fair knowledge. The degree of knowledge (or lack of it) was distributed fairly evenly amongst the four categories of farmers.

It should perhaps be noted that two of the Group 1 farmers had fair knowledge of medicines, and eight of them had fair to good knowledge of diseases. These may be farm workers who have recently moved to town, and are now starting their commonage herds.

Finally, the farmers were asked about the kinds of supplements they could give their animals. Only one farmer had more than four correct responses, placing him in the category of good level of knowledge. Nine farmers had a fair level of knowledge, while the vast majority (18 farmers) had poor knowledge.

These findings indicate that the majority of commonage users know little about stock management, even when they own fairly large numbers of livestock (more than 30 animals). Consequently, it is likely that these animals are in poor condition, which is likely to reduce their market value, and detract from the farmers' potential profitability.

Probably the most significant finding is that all the commonage users who had *never* lived on a farm, had a poor level of knowledge of stock diseases. This is not surprising, since they would not have had an opportunity to learn about it. Of the 23 users who had lived on a farm, 8 had poor knowledge, 13 had fair knowledge, and two had a good knowledge. It is rather sobering that eight people had lived on a farm before, and still had a poor knowledge of stock diseases.

Of the 23 people who had previously lived on a farm, 17 people had a poor knowledge of medicines, and 6 people had a fair knowledge. This is not particularly impressive, since it suggests that farm workers are given little opportunity to learn about livestock medicines. But even their mediocre showing is much better than those people who had never lived on a farm, and who had uniformly poor knowledge of livestock medicines. The same conclusions can be reached with regards to knowledge about nutritional supplements.

The implications of this for extension services are profound. On the one hand, those commonage users who do not have a farm background, have to be learn about livestock diseases *ab initio*. Even some ex-farm workers have very little knowledge. A great deal of training needs to be provided.

8.2 Knowledge of veld ecology

Another way of determining commonage farmers' knowledge base is to ask them about grasses and plants. The interviewees were showed samples of four species of local Karoo grass.

Those farmers who recognized none of the grass species, nor could they state whether the grass was suitable for grazing or not, were classified as having poor knowledge. Those who recognized 2-4 types of grass, were defined as having fair knowledge, and those who gave more than four correct answers, were defined as a good level knowledge.

Significantly, the majority of farmers (20 out of 28) achieved a "good level" grade, while 7 had fair knowledge, and only one person had poor knowledge. The majority of "fair knowledge" interviewees had only a few head of livestock, suggesting that the larger farmers had managed to garner some knowledge of the veld.

The interviewees were shown five types of Karoo shrubs. They had to state whether these bushes were good grazing, or were poisonous. Farmers got bonus points if they knew the common names of the plants. In this case, the farmers were divided into poor knowledge (0-2 correct answers), slight knowledge (3-5 answers), fair knowledge (6-7 correct answers and knowledge of some names), and good knowledge (8-9 correct answers and some plant names).

A significant number of farmers (13 out of 28) had fair or good knowledge about Karoo shrubs. Interestingly, it included four Group 1 farmers, It is somewhat alarming that the two large farmers can be classified as having only slight knowledge and fair knowledge respectively.

Finally, the interviewees were asked an open-ended question about what plants are undesirable in the veld, and should be eradicated. Ten out of 28 gave more than three

correct answers, and were thus classified as having a good level of knowledge. The five people with a poor level of knowledge were concentrated in Group 1 and 2. However, six Group 1 farmers also had a good level of knowledge.

This suggests that some of the small-scale commonage farmers, who may be new arrivals in Philippolis, may have a better knowledge base than some of the larger and more established commonage farmers. This hypothesis was tested by comparing knowledge with previous residence on a farm. On the recognition of grass types and Karoo bushes, ex-farm workers were somewhat better than their urban counterparts; but on the recognition of pest plants, ex-farm workers were conspicuously more knowledgeable.

Table 9: Farm origins and knowledge of pest plants

			Previous residence on farm	
			Yes	No
Recognise pest plants	No correct answer POOR KNOWLEDGE	Count % within Previous residence on farm	2 8.7%	3 60.0%
	1-2 correct answers FAIR KNOWLEDGE	Count % within Previous residence on farm	11 47.8%	2 40.0%
	3+correct answers GOOD KNOWLEDGE	Count % within Previous residence on farm	10 43.5%	0 0.0%
	Total	Count % within Previous residence on farm	23 100.0%	5 100.0%

As stated above, this assessment of people’s knowledge is still very preliminary. But it begins to suggest some of the “ fault-lines” of people’s knowledge base, which will have to be taken into account in designing training and support programmes.

The mixed level of knowledge raises implications for environmental management. It appears that some farmers have some knowledge of the veld (although it is not clear whether they have sufficient knowledge or environmental concern to manage their stock numbers). Buso (2003b) found that 17 of the municipalities in the Northern Cape reported some degree of environmental degradation of the commonage including overgrazing and erosion. This is mostly due to the limited amount of commonage land available to small farmers. However, the lack of land management plans, which sets out the grazing guidelines also contribute to overgrazing. Ideally, a provincial land management plan should be developed as well as individually tailored grazing plans for

each of the municipalities. Furthermore, overgrazing can be ascribed to the fact that emergent farmers are not sufficiently informed about grazing capacities and should receive more training in this respect (Benseler 2004: 46).

The legal prescriptions concerning veld management should also be noted. Carrying capacities of different types of rangeland have been established nationally, and exceeding these limits constitutes an offence (Cartwright *et al*, 2004: 128). The Conservation of Agricultural Resources Protection Act No 43 of 1983 determines veld management and carrying capacity. The Department of Environmental Affairs, which as a Natural Resource Conservation Division, is tasked with policing these regulations. But this department seems to be very absent from the management of municipal commonage.

In the meantime, commonage users are utilising the natural resource with very limited knowledge of veld conditions. This constitutes a major problem for sustainable natural resource use. Clearly, they need more ecological knowledge. This raises the issue of *where* people obtained their knowledge, and it is dealt with in the next section.

8.3 Source of knowledge and support

From the open-ended interviews, we identified two possible ways of learning about agriculture: From a commercial farmer (usually, but not invariably, an employer), and from one's family. The following table shows that knowledge derived from farmers is overwhelmingly more important.

Table 10: Source of agricultural and ecological knowledge

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	On white farm / from white farmer	18	64.3
	Parents / grandparents	6	21.4
	No one	2	7.1
	Other commonage users	2	7.1
	Total	28	100.0

This finding echoes the information derived from Buso (2004: 62). Emerging farmers indicated that they have good working relations with white commercial farmers who advise them on farming related issues. Emerging farmers said that they generate income through selling their stock. Emerging farmers breeding goats co-operate with a commercial farmer who transports their goats to the Kimberley market.

The linkages between the commonage users and the commercial farmers are strong. Twenty of the interviewees (71%) had previously worked on a farm. Only 5 people (20%) were born in Philippolis, and 3 people (11%) had come from another town.

Another way of tracking the relationship between urban residence and commonage ownership, is to compare the fortunes of commonage users who lived on farms previously, and those who did not. Both the Group 4 farmers (who own more than 100 head of livestock) had lived on a farm previously. Those who had lived on a farm previously were spread fairly evenly across all the livestock ownership categories. But those who had *not* lived on a farm previously, were concentrated in the survivalist and micro-farming categories.

The majority of the interviewees (18 people) had acquired their livestock from a white farmer. Only three people had purchased their livestock from other township residents. (Eight people did not answer the question).

The purchase of livestock from white farmers was prevalent amongst people who had worked on a farm previously (89% of those people who had worked on a farm before, purchased their stock from white farmers). Half of those people who had not worked on a white farm still purchased their livestock from white farmers, while the other half (2 people) purchased their livestock from other commonage users.

Even amongst those people who had been born in Philippolis, the majority had bought their stock from white farmers – thus suggesting ongoing commercial relationships between black urban residents and white commercial farmers.

Three commonage farmers had purchased livestock from other farmers on the commonage. This suggests that farmers who are willing to sell surplus stock may find a buyer amongst newcomers on the commonage. However, it is too early to tell whether this may be a trend or not.

We were also interested in the extent to which commonage users taught each other. The table shows that it does indeed take place, but not frequently:

Table 11: Learning from peers

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	12	42.9
	Other commonage farmers / friends / peers	7	25.0
	Other farm workers	9	32.1
	Total	28	100.0

The most remarkable feature of these tables is what was *not* said. At no stage did any commonage user mention that he or she received technical support or knowledge from an agricultural extension officer. This is not surprising. In the nine towns in the DLA review, no training had been provided in five of the town (Atkinson *et al*, 2005: 55).

Members of the stock committee further expressed the need to undergo skills development programmes. According to them, development programmes in southern part of Kopanong Municipality are few and far between (Buso 2003: 62). The uneven nature of extension services was also noted in the DLA report (Atkinson *et al* 2005: 53), where three out of nine towns apparently do not receive any extension services at all. There is an element of arbitrariness in this; for example, a strong Department of Agriculture office is located in Koffiefontein, and there the extension services were significant.

Many municipalities, however, stated that they do not obtain any support from the DoA (Benseler 2004: 43). This could be due to at least two factors. Firstly, there is a real lack of involvement of the extension officers with the municipalities and emergent farmers. Secondly, the municipalities are not *aware* of the existence of an agricultural extension officer, as is the case in Kareeberg Municipality where the municipality was unaware of the help that the emergent farmers were receiving and the interaction between the extension officer and the commercial farmers.

One of the problems that were identified during the interviews is that the geographical boundaries within which the extension officers operate do not coincide with the boundaries of the newly amalgamated municipalities. This means that in some cases, different extension officers are responsible for covering different towns in the same municipalities. Benseler (2004: 43) argued that extension services should be coordinated within municipal boundaries so as to prevent cross-cutting activities. This will enhance cohesion amongst commonages within a municipality and prevent fragmentation.

8.4 Knowledge needs

The Philippolis commonage users were asked an open-ended question about what kind of agricultural knowledge has been most useful to them. The vast majority thought that knowledge of livestock, diseases and feeding was most important. Significantly, only two people mentioned knowledge about the veld.

Table 12: Importance of different types of knowledge

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Livestock/ diseases / feeding	16	48.5	48.5
	Veld and pasture	2	6.1	6.1
	Infrastructure	3	9.1	9.1
	Right attitude	6	18.2	18.2
	None	6	18.2	18.2
	Total	33	100.0	100.0

Another way of getting an understanding of people’s attitude to knowledge is to ask an open-ended question about what kind of additional knowledge they would like, possibly by means of training courses. Again, livestock was the most prevalent subject, followed by general farming methods. Knowledge about the veld got several mentions, suggesting that people are becoming aware of their knowledge gaps. (However, this question was asked at the end of the interview, and the findings may have been prompted by the veld-related questions during the interview).

Table 13 : Knowledge needs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Veld	9	27.3	27.3
	Stock and diseases	12	36.4	36.4
	General farming	11	33.3	33.3
	Financial management	1	3.0	3.0
Total		33	100.0	100.0

9. Conclusions and policy implications

This paper has not considered the huge implications of commonage management for municipalities. At present, municipalities have no experience of managing communal, emergent farmers employing environmentally risky methods. There is an urgent need for municipalities to draft commonage management plans, to bring some order into their often chaotic management systems, and to get some kind of developmental vision for the future. To achieve this, sustained and holistic support will be needed from national departments such as Agriculture, Land Affairs, Provincial and Local Government, and Water Affairs and Forestry. These issues cannot be dealt with in this paper.

This study has addressed the topic from the “worm’s eye view”, i.e. from the perspectives of commonage users. By understanding commonage users’ experience, background, resources, knowledge and developmental goals, much better local policies and institutions can be crafted. Their perspectives have significant implications for the drafting of future policies:

9.1 Selection of beneficiaries

A very important question is the issue of *equity and fairness*: Who should benefit from the commonage? Is it fair that some people benefit (possibly for quite a long term) and other people do not? How should such decisions be made? Should interests of the poor be promoted, or should the municipality invest in those emergent entrepreneurs who may eventually build up businesses and create investments and employment? Should commonage be used to kick-start new types of agricultural products, or should it be used for new farmers to join the tried-and-tested agricultural activities of the area?

Beneficiary selection is an extremely important and delicate policy issue. Many constituents have a legitimate and reasonable claim to get access to the commonage. Municipalities need to carefully investigate the moral and economic claims of different types of constituencies. Subsequently, municipalities need to draft a policy on selection of specific beneficiaries within such categories of claimants. Should the claims of the indigent override those of the poor, and should the claims of the poor override those of emergent farmers? Should longer-term residents have preferential treatment? Should marginalised groups, such as women, youth and disabled, have preferential access?

There are three important considerations:

- A municipality may choose to take proactive measures to ensure that priority land reform groups – the poorest residents and women – benefit from commonage. Measures may include quotas within allocation procedures and means-tested eligibility criteria. Lower levies for women may also be an affirmative support measure to ensure more women benefit from commonage.
- A municipality may choose to prefer beneficiaries that have agricultural experience (e.g. ex-farm workers).
- Municipalities need to determine exit options for lessees, e.g. after a certain number of years, or if the size of their agricultural enterprises reach a certain maximum.

Gender equity require special proactive measures. The struggle for women's access to the key resource of grazing needs to be supported. The experience of an NGO worker in the Karoo who has actively supported the development of women within stock farming projects defies any simple 'cultural' explanation of the absence of women in this farming sector. At the heart of the matter lies women's inability to access credit, and thus stock. In rural areas men tend to have jobs that enable them to gain access to additional cash to acquire stock, or, credit records that enable them to acquire credit from institutions such as the Land Bank. Credit facilities specifically designed to support women need to be developed and/or made readily accessible to rural women (Cartwright *et al.* 2002: 37).

9.2 Promoting appropriate leasing systems

The survey in Philippolis suggests that the current group-based leasing system, and the lack of clarity regarding rights and obligations, are major sources of discontent.

Appropriate contractual arrangements need to clarify the tenure of the users, and the terms and conditions subject to which land is used and held. This requires consideration of several issues:

- the **rules** concerning the application for an opportunity to use the land: What are the entry criteria, and is the project designed to provide an additional livelihood, or is it to boost emergent farmers, or does it try to straddle both?.
- the **extent of use** and the content and nature of the use right – which concerns the extent to which the user may transact his right pursuant to a sale, a donation, a swop, a bequest, a lease sell or as surety (e.g. will users be able to get a bank loan, or bequeath the land to their heirs?)
- **obligations** to maintain infrastructure (see standard clause in contracts of lease concerning the obligations of the owner, and “normal wear and tear” provisions). It is standard commercial practice for lease agreements to place the burden on the user to maintain, but replacement as a result of fair wear and tear is for the account of the landlord.
- **environmental** concerns
- the basis for sharing **in benefits / profits** (what is the production model – partnership, trading trust, company – who does the work and how is the profit distributed?); and
- arrangements concerning **marketing and other cooperative endeavours** (sharing implements, buying fertilizer. etc).

There are at least three legal options. Two of these options involve the *lease of land*:

1. **Option 1:** It can be leased to a legal entity, which represents the users. This entity would be responsible for the payment of the rentals. (According to the argument in Text Box 1 above, this system cannot be regarded as “commonage proper”. However, in certain circumstances, it may be the most desirable legal option.
2. **Option 2:** The land can be leased to the users where *each person is individually and collectively* responsible for the payment of the rental. If one person does not pay, then the other users have to make up the shortfall. This is the most common system at present. It has significant dangers, because if one person does not pay, the whole arrangement may collapse, because users may resist being held responsible for the fees owed by “free riders”.
3. **Option 3:** If the land is made available *per head of livestock*, then there are significant advantages. If there is non-payment by one or a few people, then

steps can be taken against them directly, and it would not endanger the relationship with the other users. However, it would mean a greater administrative burden for the municipality, because payment and credit control would have to be monitored for each person separately. Furthermore, the municipality would have to monitor whether the users keep to their limited number of livestock and to the other regulations.

In such a case the land is managed by means of municipal grazing regulations or by-laws. Such by-laws or regulations can be changed as and when conditions require this, and it is therefore a more flexible legal instrument. The municipality should keep an up-to-date grazing register of the users and their stock. The municipality would be able to make regulations such as:

- Number of livestock per person
- Amount payable per head of livestock
- Setting aside camps to lie fallow
- Animal health regulations (dipping, dosing)
- Environmental regulations (e.g. weed removal)
- Safety and security regulations (measures against theft, e.g. branding)
- Disaster management (measures against fire).

Promote continuous and relevant learning

Training, mentoring and technical advice to commonage users has been sadly lacking in many towns. A much stronger knowledge base is needed, to include both agricultural and environmental issues. The following agencies are of key importance:

- DoA extension officers
- DoA Landcare officials
- Land Bank
- Agricultural colleges
- Department of Labour (for training grants)
- Private training agencies
- Commercial farmers, as part of a proper mentoring programme.

It is important that formal training courses should be offered regularly (i.e. not a “once-off”), so that commonage users (and in particular, new entrants on the commonage) receive regular updates, and positive messages are reinforced.

Furthermore, day-to-day mentoring should supplement formal training. South Africa is fortunate to have a very dynamic and resilient class of commercial farmers, many of

whom have indicated their willingness to support emergent farmers. Such relationships should be proactively established by the municipality.

Municipalities should actively encourage NGOs to work with commonage users, on an ongoing basis.

Commercial farmers and NGOs should be paid for their training and mentoring activities. Such funding can be drawn from the municipality's commonage budget line item. If this is insufficient, provincial DoA offices should be encouraged to budget for such activities. If this is also impossible, then donor funding should be sought.

Promote effective environmental management

On many commonages, the land is overgrazed. This is primarily due to weak institutions, which cannot control "free riders". Consequently, certain beneficiaries exploit the natural resource excessively, without paying heed to regulations (such as limits on stock holding, chopping down trees, breaking fences or gates, failing to fertilize or rest irrigation land). This is the classical "tragedy of the commons" problem.

Benseler's study of Pofadder in Khai Ma Municipality, suggests that there are several reasons for over-grazing:

1. Poor water distribution and infrastructure which entails that the animals concentrate on few water points and overgraze the land in that area, although the land on the rest of the farm is in a good condition.
2. There are insufficient marketing channels and opportunities for the stock and the animals are not in a good condition, which makes it difficult to sell them.
3. The extension officer provides environmental awareness guidance, but the people fail to comply with the grazing regulations.
4. Emergent farmers do not provide the real numbers of their stock on the commonage which makes it difficult to enforce grazing regulations

A large part of this problem will be solved if institutions are designed appropriately, and their enforcement mechanisms are strengthened. In addition, specific environmental measures should also be taken.

- *Careful land use planning:* Kraals, troughs and dips lead to trampling and environmental damage. Camps should be planned with natural features in mind. Inputs by environmental specialists (either a consultant, or from DoA) are critically important at the planning stage. Land use planning should be accompanied by a rotational grazing system, and by resting of cropland.

- *Pounding:* Stray animals should be pounded. This is often difficult, for political reasons (pounding is typically unpopular, and creates difficulties when the animals belong to important or powerful local residents). DoA should assist municipalities to create pounds and write pounding regulations into the by-laws.
- *Environmental training* should be provided to beneficiaries. DoA extension officers should present regular discussion groups on topics of interest, and in particular, production methods which do not damage the environment. Water resource management and veld management should be key topics. Municipalities should be proactive in getting LandCare officials involved, and providing counterfinance for their activities. This should be funded from the dedicated commonage account.
- *Local knowledge:* Local environmental knowledge must not be underestimated. A municipal CBW would be well placed to assess commonage users' knowledge of the veld. This can be done with the support and participation of DoA extension officers. It is always more effective to build on an existing knowledge base, than to assume that people have no knowledge and then to insult them by telling them what they already know.
- *Incentives:* It is possible that the municipality can provide incentives (e.g. discounts in rentals) for effective and sustainable natural resource use. This is already contemplated in the Sustainable Use of Agricultural Resources Bill, published in July 2004. It is important to create a culture of caring for the environment, to counteract the culture of free-riding.
- *Legal steps:* At the same time, gross environmental abuse should cause contracts to be cancelled forthwith, and in really serious cases, legal proceedings against the tenants.
- *Environmental monitoring:* Users need to regularly monitor the condition of the environment. Such monitoring sheets should be handed to the municipality, and verified periodically by DoA officials. Typical aspects for monitoring should be underground water levels, extent of "climax" grasses, and the presence of invader plants.

Commonage as an aspect of land reform

There is a strong "felt need" amongst municipalities (politicians and officials), as well as local residents, for access to land on an affordable basis. This is an extremely powerful form of "land hunger" – in fact, it is so powerful, that municipalities simply cannot resist it, even if they wanted to. In some towns, the demand for agricultural land is reaching

crisis proportions, and some towns (such as Trompsburg) have seen violent demonstrations and land invasions.

There are numerous arguments for commonage being an important aspect of land reform:

Firstly, it suggests that pro-poor commonage development has *prima facie* importance as a municipal developmental strategy, precisely because municipalities already own this land. It does not have to be purchased, at great expense.

Secondly, commonage is readily accessible to the poor, and should therefore be a first-line strategy for household subsistence and survival.

Thirdly, commonage land should be regarded as one land reform instrument within a suite of strategies, including DLA's land redistribution programme. The argument for commonage as a "stepping stone" to privately-owned land is of major importance here. Commonage offers opportunities for first-level accumulation of capital, entrepreneurial experience, and economic networks. As such, it is a key support for other land reform strategies.

Fourthly, commonage development has great potential for spin-off economic development, such as local markets, local capital accumulation, local skills training, and local spatial planning (publicly owned land, small-holdings, small farms, subdivision of agricultural land).

Fifth, commonage land is often the only natural resource available for poor communities, particularly in land-locked areas without access to fisheries.

Sixth, municipalities' institutional instruments for community participation and needs identification can play an important role in promoting access by the poor to natural resources. Institutional mechanisms such as ward committees and ward councillors can be utilised much more effectively than they have been done in the past.

Seventh, it offers a valuable opportunity for experience and learning in collaborative or co-operative social institutions, and as such, is a valuable school for economic citizenship for people who have been marginalised and disempowered for almost all their lives. It can also help in creating a new generation of young farmers, and thereby restore the image of agriculture as an attractive career option.

It can be argued, therefore, that an effective commonage policy is a major foundation plank for effective pro-poor land reform. This does not mean that *all* land reform has to go via the commonage route. LRAD can be accessed directly by more resourced members of previously disadvantaged communities, and tenure reform can proceed without commonage involvement. But to the extent that land reform aims at offering economic opportunities *for the urban poor*, it can be argued that the commonage programme should be a key component of land reform.

But there is some debate about the actual role of commonage within the broader land reform programme. One view is that commonage is a “nursery” of potential commercial farmers, and by means of a “step-up” strategy, commonage users can “graduate” from commonage towards individually utilised parcels of land. Such parcels of land may be smallholdings (rental or ownership), small farms, and eventually, commercially-sized farms. On the smaller land parcels, intensive agriculture or mixed rural-urban livelihoods could be practiced.

This view has not yet taken hold within DLA, and has not been tested in practice. The support systems (extension officers), appropriate land parcels, or credit systems, have simply not yet been made available for this. But another point of view challenges the “step-up strategy” (Anderson and Pienaar 2003: 22). They argue that subsistence agriculture on commonage land is not an incipient, or embryonic, form of commercial agriculture. The production objectives between commercial and subsistence forms of agriculture, and consequently management approaches, differ radically. Few commonage participants can in fact afford to access land through the LRAD programme, since they would not qualify for enough land for a viable commercial farming venture.

This line of argument holds that the importance of commonage for land reform is its use of land for non-commercial purposes. Non-commercial purposes’ does not mean ‘non-economic’ – awareness of the economic value of these activities, and their contribution to the national economy, is increasing. These include the ‘safety net’ purposes of fuel collection, income supplementing through running stock, depasturing stock for sale for weddings and funerals, holding stock for sons’ bridewealth, and vegetable production for food security and additional income.

Deciding on this debate is premature. A coherent step-up strategy has not even been designed, let alone implemented. Such a process of experimentation is urgently needed.

10. Theoretical debates on common land management: Their relevance and usefulness to municipal commonage

Municipal commonage, as we see it in South Africa, presents quite a unique situation that is not easily captured by any major present or past (academic) debate. This does not mean, however, that contemporary municipal commonage as we see it in the Karoo is without earlier historical precedents.

A variety of different debates and topics hold partial but interesting ways of how to possibly look at the Karoo municipal commonage situation. Initially, the following are discussed here: 1) the CBNRM debate, 2) the indigenous knowledge and local innovation debate and 3) the common property resources debate, with associated insights from political science and institutionalism studies and 4) the spatial development and rural-urban linkages debate. Within these discussions we shall firstly touch upon the

commonalities, after which we highlight the differences with the municipal commonage situation.

The CBNRM debate

Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) has been the dominant paradigm in natural resource management for over 20 years now. Its name suggests what it basically stands for: natural resource management by local groups of people that live in and around the natural resources to be managed. This can be anything from vegetation and wildlife to water and fisheries.

In Southern Africa, emphasis in CBNRM has mostly been on the management of wildlife resources, possibly because the associated commercial activities of nature-based tourism and hunting are most lucrative (Adams and Hulme, 2001). This type of CBNRM were most famously operationalised through programmes such as CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe, ADMADE in Zambia, LIFE in Namibia and the CBNRM programme in Botswana.

In institutionalised terms there is a distinction one can make between ‘everyday’ CBNRM and ‘focused’ CBNRM (Fabricius, 2004). The latter captures formalized interventions that actively seek to decentralize authority and decision-making over issues of natural resource management to local communities. “Everyday CBNRM” is the resource management that local people living in and with natural resource do on a daily basis, without any formalized authority to do so having been bestowed upon them.

Thus, municipal commonage systems can be said to be “everyday CBNRM:: “To all intents and purposes, CBNRM is management of the commons – although technically those commons are sometimes the property of the state or of a nature conservation authority” (Turner, 2004: 3). This is exactly the problem with municipal commonage: Technically it belongs to the state, but it is up to the commonage users collectively to manage the land in a sustainable manner. Whether this actually happens is another question to which we will come back in the section on common property resources.

What does need to be mentioned here is the inextricable link between CBNRM and local governance which, naturally, is also very close in municipal commonage. Related to the debate on the question whether there is a crisis going on in CBNRM and communal areas in Southern Africa, Turner (2004: 14) comes to the following conclusion:

“It is hard to see a viable future for the societies and economies of the region without viable institutions and economic activity in the communal areas. A prerequisite for that is effective and equitable local governance, one part of which is effective and equitable CBNRM. That is the crisis of southern African CBNRM, a crisis compounded by being largely ignored”.

This statement, so it seems, could not be more true for municipal commonage as well. The ‘crisis’ in local governance in Southern Africa is indeed quite visible, although it must be noted that South Africa is far ahead in terms of local governance than its neighbours. Turner explicitly puts emphasis on the importance of affirming the commons in the region and to research the link between commons and local governance. The section on urban-rural linkages will return to this issue.

It is clear from the foregoing that CBNRM is a form of commonage management and municipal commonage is a type of CBNRM. However, municipal commonage differs from any type of CBNRM in two crucial aspects: Firstly, its departing objective, and secondly, and the notion of “community”. In the great majority of cases, the ultimate objective of CBNRM is the *conservation* of natural resources. Resources can be used, but this must be done in such a way that it does not irreparably upset the biological balance and health of the ecosystem. Municipal commonage, however, has as its principal objective the *alleviation of poverty* of peri-urban settlers that have no or very limited other means of making a livelihood. To use these commonage lands on an ecologically sustainable basis is important so that the future prospects for using the same land are not irrevocably damaged.

This whole issue of ‘objective’ plays a prominent role in CBNRM scholarship in general (e.g. Barrow and Murphree, 2001). It often happens that formal CBNRM is implemented with such an explicit objective of *conservation* behind it, that the development of local communities is not prioritised.

Another important variable in the CBNRM discourse is *tenure* (Barrow and Murphree: 2001), which concerns the rights that communities or individuals have over land and other resources, thus regulating their access to the land and the benefits they can get from it. Who should get access, who should contribute what to the maintenance of the system, and who should derive what benefits? In many municipal commonages, an open access applies, and hence the issue regulation and benefits takes on great significance, as will be discussed in the section on common property resources.

A third major variable in the CBNRM discourse, is the notion of community. CBNRM tends to assume that communities are “small-scale human groupings socially bound by a common cultural identity, living within defined spatial boundaries, interacting on a personal rather than bureaucratic basis and having an economic interest in the common pool interests of the area” (Murphree, 2000: 4). That this is a myth, is well accepted in the CBNRM literature. However, CBNRM literature and studies frequently still have an – often implicit – assumption of a community as a local group of people that at least share some kind of common background, no matter what this exactly entails. This probably comes forth from the fact that most CBNRM scholarship has always focused on wildlife as the dominant type of natural resource that has to be managed, and thus looks at ‘communities’ in a rural setting.

Municipal commonage does not have this purely rural setting. Its distinctive feature is an interface between a unique combination of urban and rural settings. Municipal

commonage grounds have to deal with a very diverse and constantly changing group of people that often migrated to the city or village from various places of origin. Thus the only thing that they usually have in common is that they depend on the municipal commonage grounds to make a livelihood. They may be divided along lines of language, residential history, occupation, and level of wealth. It is hypothesised that this makes the development of self-governing institutions to avoid the 'tragedy of the commons' much harder.

10.2 The indigenous knowledge and local innovation debate

Relating back to the importance of the (ecological) indigenous knowledge base of commonage users, the associated debate on the use of indigenous knowledge and local innovation can provide interesting insights and comparisons as well. The fact is that knowledge frames from Western science that generate 'scientific' and modern influential facts are often opposed to 'unscientific', practical and indigenous knowledge of rural people from developing countries. The establishment of particular 'scientific' practice as authoritative influences the relationship between discursive power and actors to the advantage of actors that stand closer to or deal professionally with 'accepted' scientific practices.

Municipal commonage from this perspective can almost be viewed as an 'unscientific practice' that many people in organisations based on more modern or western notions of scientific organisation (such as governments and many NGOs) do not fully comprehend. The highly underrated importance of and public awareness about municipal commonage might actually be explained by this tendency. Nevertheless, there is a growing body of literature devoted to the value and use of indigenous knowledge in dealing with agricultural output and natural resource management issues that might be useful in dealing with municipal commonage (See for example: Critchley et al, 1994; Critchley et al, 1999; Critchley, 2000; Reij and Waters-Bayer, 2001).

Interest in the application of indigenous knowledge (IK) and farmer innovation in development began during the 1980s and has led to a multitude of projects aiming to identify, map and understand local knowledge and practices, and to use this to supplement, or even replace, the conventional and limited 'transfer of technology' approach that had been dominant before, and since, the decolonisation of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. A key element of projects trying to tap into IK is their participative nature: no longer do 'experts' teach locals farmers 'how it's done', but stakeholders involved learn from each other, and share experiences and knowledge in an iterative manner through all stages of the project cycle. The current trend is for governments, international organisations, research institutes and extension agents to put a lot of emphasis on participatory methodologies and local knowledge in the implementation of their policies and programmes. This emphasis has gone to such a degree that 'participation' truly has become a fashion- or 'buzzword', that has to be found in tender

documents, or else a tender can not possibly be won.

While in principle a good idea, one has to stay alert to how one actually operationalises “participation”, to make it truly meaningful in a specific local context. That this alertness is not always consciously taken into account has clearly been shown by Büscher and Mutimukuru (2004) in a case-study of the operationalisation of participation and other ‘buzzwords’ in a project in the Mafungautsi forest in Zimbabwe. Several pitfalls need to be taken into account when dealing with buzzwords: 1) The ideological operationalisation of the buzzword; 2) contradicting conceptions within the buzzword; and 3) loss of meaning through the usage of buzzwords for political legitimisation. It remains important to consciously take this into account in order not to lose focus from what participation actually means and entails.

Participatory approaches come in many forms, but arguably one of the first thought out methods is that of ‘Participatory Rural Appraisal’ (PRA) (McCracken et al, 1988) but increasingly participatory methods have expanded in scope and become more inclusive. Arguably one of the latest trends is ‘Participatory Innovation Development’ (PID) (Van Veldhuizen et al, 2003), focussing specifically on local knowledge, experimentation and innovation. Several practical projects that have focussed on this type of participatory approach are ‘Promoting Farmer Innovation’, which ran in East Africa between 1997 to 2001, the Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation I and II programmes, which ran in 7 countries throughout Africa between 1997 and 2002 (CHECK) and the current PROLINNOVA (PRomoting Local INNOVAtion) programme, which started in 2003 and runs in 9 countries in Africa and Asia, amongst which South Africa (see www.prolinnova.net for more information).

The project that probably holds the most lessons for indigenous knowledge and local agricultural innovation in municipal commonage is the Promoting Farmer Innovation (PFI) project. It had quite an elaborate methodology, that proved itself in the field in East Africa (see annex 1). PFI offers at least seven key lessons (Critchley and Mutunga, 2002; Mutunga and Critchley, 2001) which are applicable to municipal commonage.

The first issue deals with ‘who is a true innovator and what is a true innovation?’ Often it is hard to judge an innovation, and this is why subsequent projects and the literature have also focussed on ‘initiatives’ besides only innovations (Critchley, Büscher and Saruchera, 2004). In municipal commonage contexts, you can also see individuals that innovate more or show more initiatives than others. It could be worth focussing on these individuals as ‘focal learning points’ for other commonage users.

The second lesson dealt with monitoring and evaluation/ impact assessment. This has been consistently feeble in participatory programmes, and always needs attention, hence also in municipal commonage.

Thirdly, the role of researchers and ‘hard science’ in local innovation and indigenous knowledge needs clarification. It is often necessary to ‘validate’ and ‘add value’ to indigenous knowledge and innovations. This is likely to apply to municipal commonage contexts. Emergent farmers may develop their innovations, which perhaps should receive some scientific scrutiny for their validity and sustainability.

The fourth issue is to focus on a good gender balance, especially in the African context. For municipal commonage, Anderson and Pienaar (2004) have also pointed at the crucial importance of the access of women to the commonage lands, as this is often not the same as for men.

The fifth lesson from PFI is about cost-effectiveness: whether the individual innovation is a cost-effective measure in itself and the cost of the methodology of identifying and working with innovations. As municipalities and commonage users are often not very well equipped financially, it is also important to consciously take the financial dimension of matters into account when devising ways of improving commonage management and governance.

The sixth issue is scaling-up and institutionalisation: Respect for local peoples knowledge is often not yet imbedded into organisations dealing with them. This remains an important challenge, as this does not only deals with knowing the importance of local knowledge and innovations, but also acting like it: thus it is a mentality question, which equally plays in commonage issues.

Finally, PFI had to be careful of the ‘favoured farmer syndrome’. Too much focus on one individual or case might lead to that one becoming a ‘darling’, which has all kind of negative effects on others in the group.

One important lesson with regard to innovation needs to be added here. This concerns the experience of the Resource centre on Urban Agriculture and Forestry (RUAF) of the Netherlands based NGO called ETC Foundation, mostly in Latin America. They found that in bigger city environments, a higher level ‘innovativeness’ exist than in smaller villages. Henk de Zeeuw, coordinator of RUAF, explains this mostly through the higher dynamics that exists in cities. For emergent or city farmers, this leads to more frequent and easier contact with consumers of their products, and encourages them to be creative and innovative in order to satisfy customer’s needs and so make an income.

10.3 The Common Property Resources debate

Where land use is communally managed, strong community organizations are required to allocate rights, responsibilities, tasks and obligations.

Garret Hardin’s article “The Tragedy of the Commons” sparked the debate on common property management. According to Hardin (1968: 1244):

“Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit - in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.”

Hardin argues that it is in each user’s best interest to maximise his or her own use of the commons. Adding one additional stock unit to a tract of communal land will provide a net individual benefit to the user. The negative impact of additional overgrazing is, however, shared by all herdsmen and the cost is thus carried by the group.

Consequently, Hardin proposes mutual coercion as the means by which to regulate the use of the commons. By this he means that coercion is “mutually agreed upon by the majority of the people affected”. Hardin implies that users are not able to organise themselves in using a common and that rules governing the commons have to be determined externally, through administrative law. He thus states that in order to prevent degradation of a Common Pool Resource, either the state has to govern the commons or the resource has to be transformed into private property (Haller, 2002: 7).

In response to this bleak perspective, are the New Institutionalists who focus on the impact that “individual incentives, strategies and choices” have on the formation and development of institutions and how they are influenced by the political and economic sphere (Haller, 2002:ix). Institutions are seen as central to Common Pool Resource management: As Haller puts it (2002:10):

Institutions are seen...as formal and informal “rules of the game”, such as constraints, norms, values and rules. These give incentive to groups and individuals, and also structure human action and interaction, especially in economic activities, in collective action and in sustainable resource use.

The New Institutionalists’ main argument is that the commons have to be managed through *sets of rules and regulations* that are either externally imposed or, ideally, *internally developed* and consensually maintained by the users themselves.

Where does this leave the debate about commonage management?

As Anderson and Pienaar commented, in most commonage projects, no criteria for allocation of rights to the commonage are in place and agreements for commonage use are either non-existent, or extremely unclear in terms of the allocation of rights and responsibilities. This appears to be the case in the Matzikamma District of the West Coast, in the largest part of the Karoo Hoogland District in the Northern Cape, and in Free State commonage projects (Anderson and Pienaar 2003: 27). This allows for networks of the powerful to monopolise public land and co-opt the institutions that govern the use of commonage (Cartwright et al. 2002:37).

There is virtually no guidance for municipalities to fix the situation. The DLA's commonage manual of 2002 unfortunately pays no attention to the different options that exist for crafting regulations or grazing/ allotment agreements that could work to secure the rights of individual users of commonage (Anderson and Pienaar 2003: 28). The manual contains inappropriate advice on options for regulating access to municipal commonage. It promotes the idea that portions of commonage land should be leased to a user group on similar terms and conditions to which such land is being leased for commercial purposes. The manual does not promote the conclusion of grazing/ allotment agreements or even discuss options for regulating access in terms of municipal regulations. The manual does, however, contain an example of an outdated and early draft set of municipal regulations. The lack of attention to how the rights of users need to be defined, allocated and administered is a major flaw.

With the municipal commonage system, it seems that we actually have a classic 'tragedy of the commons' going on, as described by Garret Hardin (1968). Too many people use the commons for their own purposes, whereby individuals lack the incentives to co-operate for the long-term benefit for all. The generic solution to this problem is to have an external agent (such as a municipality) intervene and to impose regulations and a system of monitoring so that the problems of over-use and free-riding can be overcome. Although this mode of thinking is still very pervasive, since Elinor Ostrom's famous study 'governing the commons' (1990), it is no longer the 'standard' solution to all tragedy of the commons problems.

The question here then becomes: is there space for the development of self-governing institutions to avoid the tragedy of the commons in a municipal commonage setting? Going back to Ostrom's original study, five internal variables (among the commonage users) are likely to affect the possibilities for the development of self-governing institutions (Ostrom, 1990: 188):

- the total number of participants,
- the number of participants minimally necessary to achieve the collective benefit,
- the discount rate in use,
- similarities of interest and
- the presence of participants with substantial leadership or other assets.

Whether and how these variables are present in the Karoo commonage situation could be analysed through the data of our survey. From the CBNRM literature, we had already hypothesised that variable four – similarities of interest – are not very likely to be present among the commonage users, other than the fact that they all want to use the commonage area in order to make or improve their livelihoods. The indigenous knowledge and innovation literature pointed us to the importance of variable five – the presence of participants with substantial leadership or other assets. The evidence in the Philippolis setting shows that relatively few commonage users have "educated" other users, which suggests that leadership is poor.

While pointing towards the importance of the need to reflect on the incremental, self-transforming nature of institutional change and the need to include information and transaction costs, Ostrom also pays attention to these external variables (1990:191). On external variables, Ostrom mentions that “regional and national governments can play a positive role in providing facilities to enhance the ability of local appropriators to engage in effective institutional design” (1990: 212). She does not extensively discuss this positive role, but gives four possible determinants (1990: 212-213):

- professional information services,
- equity court proceedings,
- government legislation that takes local needs and demands into account and
- oversight responsibilities.

Related to municipal commonage, this seems fairly obvious and the importance of these variables are overall reflected in recent reports on municipal commonage by Buso (2003) and Atkinson and Benseler (2004).

Of course, common property resource studies have further progressed from Ostrom’s groundbreaking study (see for instance the many interesting studies collected over the years by the International Association for the Study of Common Property, at www.iascp.org), but it seems hard to decipher exactly which other additional lessons from commons theory might provide vital additional insights for municipal commonage, other than for internal development of self-governing institutional arrangements. The book by Dolšak and Ostrom (2003: 338) comes to some important conclusions on the external political environment of the commons:

- the increased interconnectness of the biophysical world across scales, and institutions across levels, requires that adaptation to challenges occur at multiple levels,
- the interests of resource users at these multiple levels are often in conflict,
- allocation of rights to resources (individual rights for privatization of a resource or community rights in the process of devolution) is a political process,
- access to this political process is limited by the structure of the macro institutions and also by the human, political and social capital available to each groups of actors,
- more open political systems and more interconnected economies provide a larger set of adaptation strategies and
- adopted policy solutions are incremental and not linear.

These conclusions need to be taken into account in developing structures that are conducive to effective and supportive management of municipal commonage among the various levels of government and other actors (NGOs, private organisations, researchers, etc).

Many answers to these questions are still required. In particular, the intergovernmental relations system in South Africa – particularly with regards to land reform – is still very unclear. So is the relationship between government support systems (such as extension officers) and the institutions of civil society which could potentially play such a role (such as commercial farmers' associations and agricultural co-operatives).

Some progress has been made on clarifying the thorny issue of land tenure, rights and obligations on municipal commonage. Some important thinking has been done by researchers at the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) and the Legal Resources Centre (see Anderson and Pienaar 2003: 29). Some of these lessons have been implemented on a piece of commonage in Colesberg in the Northern Cape.

Anderson and Pienaar suggest that, once the capacity of the land and the criteria and process for selection and allocation have been determined, the next step would be to select the users and conclude agreements or, in the case of regulations, confirm and record user rights.

A great deal more research and experimentation needs to be done. It appears that the role of external authorities (e.g. the state) remains quite unclear; that the extent of self-governance by communities may well be over- or under-estimated in different contexts; and that individuals' and communities' systems of meaning intrude on their understanding of rules, compliance and appropriate behaviour. In the context of commonage in South Africa, we simply do not know whether to impose a strong municipal regime, with clear penalties for rule-breaking, or whether to encourage strong community-based organizations to emerge. We also do not know what are the appropriate roles and functions of municipalities, Departments of Land Reform and Agriculture, and commercial farmer organisations. The institutional environment is still totally inchoate.

10.4 The Spatial development and rural-urban linkages debate

Possibly *the* characteristic that sets municipal commonage apart from other forms of commonages, CBNRM and the IK and local innovation debate, is the fact that it takes place in a peri-urban context. This potential *urban-rural linkage* makes the need for innovative spatial planning very pertinent, but also very complex. With their base in the city or village and their source of livelihood outside the city or village, many resource-poor commonage users and their families are literally 'split in two'.

However, we have noted in the section on innovation that there is a clear difference between the bigger cities and the smaller villages. The dynamics are much more intense in a city environment, hence creating more opportunities for 'city farmer' or commonage users to potentially sell some produce. This statement seems to hold when considering the example of Philippolis, where there is not a high level of dynamism amongst the commonage users and the potential opportunities they could derive from being close to a

village environment. Most likely, this is also due to the fact that commonage land around Philippolis is mostly used for the keeping of livestock, instead of, for example, producing crops for village residents.

There are two ways of thinking creatively about this rural-urban interface.

The first way is to promote peri-urban small-holdings. This involves a focus on people's current livelihoods, which stock-keeping, combined with an array of urban micro-enterprises (such as repairs of bicycles, making shoes and panel-beating), and to combine them. This can be done by promoting peri-urban smallholdings, where a diversity of livelihoods can be promoted.

Most South African towns consist of a built-up area (including townships and informal settlements), commonage camps, and surrounding commercial agricultural land. Our towns are not geared for promoting mixed rural-urban livelihoods. Consequently, small-scale farmers are not assisted with land reform options that will enable them to draw on the facilities of urban environments (markets, transport, banks, supplementary livelihoods, etc). Many towns are characterized by a "Berlin wall" between large commercial farms and small urban plots (e.g. RDP houses) which are totally unsuitable for promoting livelihoods (e.g. small-scale farming, backyard agriculture).

This spatial structure offers few opportunities for emergent farmers to experiment with small-scale agriculture, partly due to the excessive pressure on commonage land, and because large-scale agricultural land is difficult to access (due to high land prices). A pro-active strategy on land subdivision is needed. This will require municipalities to identify agricultural land on the perimeter of urban areas, which will need to be purchased (e.g. by DLA subsidies), and then subdivided into smallholdings.

The second way of promoting a functional rural-urban interface is to consider the possibility of *non land-bound agriculture* (Henk de Zeeuw, personal communication). Because municipal commonage in the Karoo is mostly focused on livestock, little besides the potential economic benefits from selling meat or dairy products can contribute to the enhancement of the livelihoods of the commonage users. And *if* the cultural value attached to livestock is similar as in Lesotho (many Karoo residents are from Sotho descent), even the meat-selling option will be low, as livestock are not reared primarily for commercial use, but also for prestige and symbolic value (Ferguson, 1994). The Philippolis survey indeed seems to confirm that many commonage users are reluctant to sell their livestock.

Lessons from other parts of the world suggest that, because the availability of (a sizeable part of) land is often a problem, the focus shifts to non land-bound agriculture. Examples are intensive year-round irrigated vegetables, hydroponics, flowers and pot plants, herbs (including medicinal herbs), intensive livestock keeping (zero-grazing dairy units, vermiculture, rabbits, chickens, etc), and mushrooms. Rather than using land, experience by the Resource centre on Urban Agriculture and Forestry (RUAF) of the Netherlands

suggests that much of these products are grown in pots, pans, and other ‘holders’ in small gardens.

In Philippolis, seven emerging farmers are currently running a dairy with machinery and cows purchased by DoA from a commercial farmer. According to these farmers, the dairy has a good income-yielding potential but the problem is that DoA does not assist with funding, with the result that the little they get from selling milk is spent on feed for the cows. One barrel of feed costs R22 and cows need 10 barrels a day. Financial support was obtained from the EU-funded Community Projects Fund, but it has been so locked in red tape that this funding has sometimes been more of a poisoned chalice than a blessing. According to the stock committee, they would like to start crop farming but the question is how to procure machinery to plough fields. If this could be done they would also grow feed for their dairy cows. They said they brought these issues to the attention of the municipality and DoA, but to no avail (Buso 2003: 62).

Lastly, for people that are not themselves involved in the nurturing and growing of these products, there are possibilities in the processing (cook, bake, dry, etc) or packaging and the marketing of the produce.

Other lessons from the urban-rural linkages and urban agriculture point toward some of the key issues also highly relevant to municipal commonage in the Karoo: the generally insufficient attention for peri-urban activities and urban agriculture, the need for more integrated rural-urban planning, tenure security and the (re)use of wastewater for agricultural purposes (Van Veenhuizen, 2004). However, exactly how these issues should be tackled still needs to be debated, and should be subject of future research. Research on municipal commonage in semi-arid areas can certainly contribute to this aim.

11. Next steps

This study takes previous studies forward by beginning to consider the many, varied and complex beliefs, knowledge resources and economic goals of commonage users.

This study will serve as a precursor of the Kopanong Municipality’s commonage planning process. The process is about to start in September 2005, with funding secured from the Development Bank of Southern Africa. Kopanong Municipality has commissioned the HSRC to undertake this work, and the HSRC has invited Dr Atkinson to direct this study.

In this process, major questions will be whether commonage can serve as part of a “step-up” strategy of land reform; whether suitable forms of land lease can be designed; whether a diversity of commonage users’ development goals can be accommodated; and whether their knowledge base can be strengthened by appropriate mentoring systems. These questions will take commonage management to new frontiers in South Africa.

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