

This meant that despite rigorously following good governance procedures and standards, the launch and implementation of the REDD+ project was influenced by inadequate information flows, unequal power relations, systemic poverty and social inequalities. While project developers undertook serious efforts to redress these issues, participant observation and interviews revealed the continuous challenges around fostering equal participation and democratic governance in a deprived rural context.

We also analysed the effects of the REDD+ mechanism on local tenure arrangements and livelihoods. REDD+ and other market-based conservation mechanisms rely on clear formal property rights and governance arrangements to enable the selling of ‘ecosystem services’ (e.g. carbon credits) from rural villagers to international buyers. Because land tenure in the rural villages was largely guided by customary arrangements, the REDD+ project considerably changed the access to and control over forest resources.

The project resulted in new demarcations of village and forest lands, as well as new management plans and by-laws, which imposed restrictions on villagers in the name of global climate change mitigation. This affected residents living in the villages, whose rights to cultivate farms in the forest were restricted, as well as farmers of neighbouring villages, whose previously tolerated activities were deemed illegal.

The replacement of customary arrangements with formally enshrined rules and regulations created a new understanding of boundaries, rights, community and property, which changed the relations between people and forests, as well as between people themselves.

While carbon payments were intended to compensate villagers for their incurred losses, they were small in amount and did not take into account different opportunity costs of villagers, leaving some of them with higher

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losses than others. In addition, the carbon payments were distributed only to residents who were formally registered in the villages, which meant that farmers, who previously accessed the forest on customary terms, were not compensated.

Finding more positive and equitable methods of ‘saving nature’

While our study examined the REDD+ mechanism specifically in the context of Tanzania, its findings offer valuable insights to conservation-development initiatives in South Africa and elsewhere. It highlighted the importance of acknowledging the gap between policy and practice of market-based conservation and showed empirically how pro-poor measures and approaches become reshaped by the actual social, economic and political conditions in remote rural contexts.

Findings offer valuable insights to conservation-development initiatives in South Africa and elsewhere. It highlighted the importance of acknowledging the gap between policy and practice of market-based conservation.

We also demonstrated how the reliance of market-based conservation on formal tenure rights and governance institutions conflicted with customary land use arrangements, which affected ownership and access to forest resources, creating new winners and losers within and between communities.

While social safeguard processes have been highly promoted as a way to mitigate any potential negative impacts on local people, our study confirms that their implementation lags behind in practice, which has also been documented in other areas across the South, for instance in the context of Madagascar by Professor Mahesh Poudyal and her colleagues from Bangor University and Université d’Antananarivo.

Based on our findings we call for an explicit social and environmental justice assessment grounded in a thorough analysis of local livelihoods to achieve more positive and equitable outcomes from the commercialisation of nature conservation.

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This article is based on Scheba, A, Rakotonarivo, O.S. (2016). Territorialising REDD+: Conflicts over market-based forest conservation in Lindi, Tanzania. Land Use Policy. Vol. 57. pp 625-637.

Are land reform farms going to waste?

Since its inception in 1995, South Africa’s land reform programme has been severely criticised. But are these criticisms valid and supported by evidence? *Tim Hart, Peter Jacobs, Godfrey Mokwatlo and Precious Chauke* perceive interesting patterns that are emerging in some areas with respect to land usage for agricultural purposes.

Criticisms against the land reform programme include lack of coordinated state support, lack of finances and credit, the increasing shift away from the poor to relatively better-off beneficiaries and the wastage of scarce natural resources. The list seems endless.

One of the common criticisms of South Africa’s land reform programme, particularly when agricultural land has been redistributed to new farmers or returned to land claimants through restitution, is the lack of ‘productive use’ by the recipients. Productive use is often inferred as the use of such land in much the same way as it was used by the previous owner or willing seller.

Such criticisms do not always consider the social and economic differences between the previous owners and the new recipients. In some instances, these differences [between previous owners and new recipients of land] are enormous and related to past and present circumstances. Land reform recipients themselves are far from similar and are diverse in terms of

aspirations, age, gender, social class, education, wealth, skills, family and other social networks, and overall access to livelihood assets and the permanency of livelihood sources. Some applicants desire to own and work small parcels of land but this is mostly discouraged by bureaucrats, agricultural unions and lobby groups.

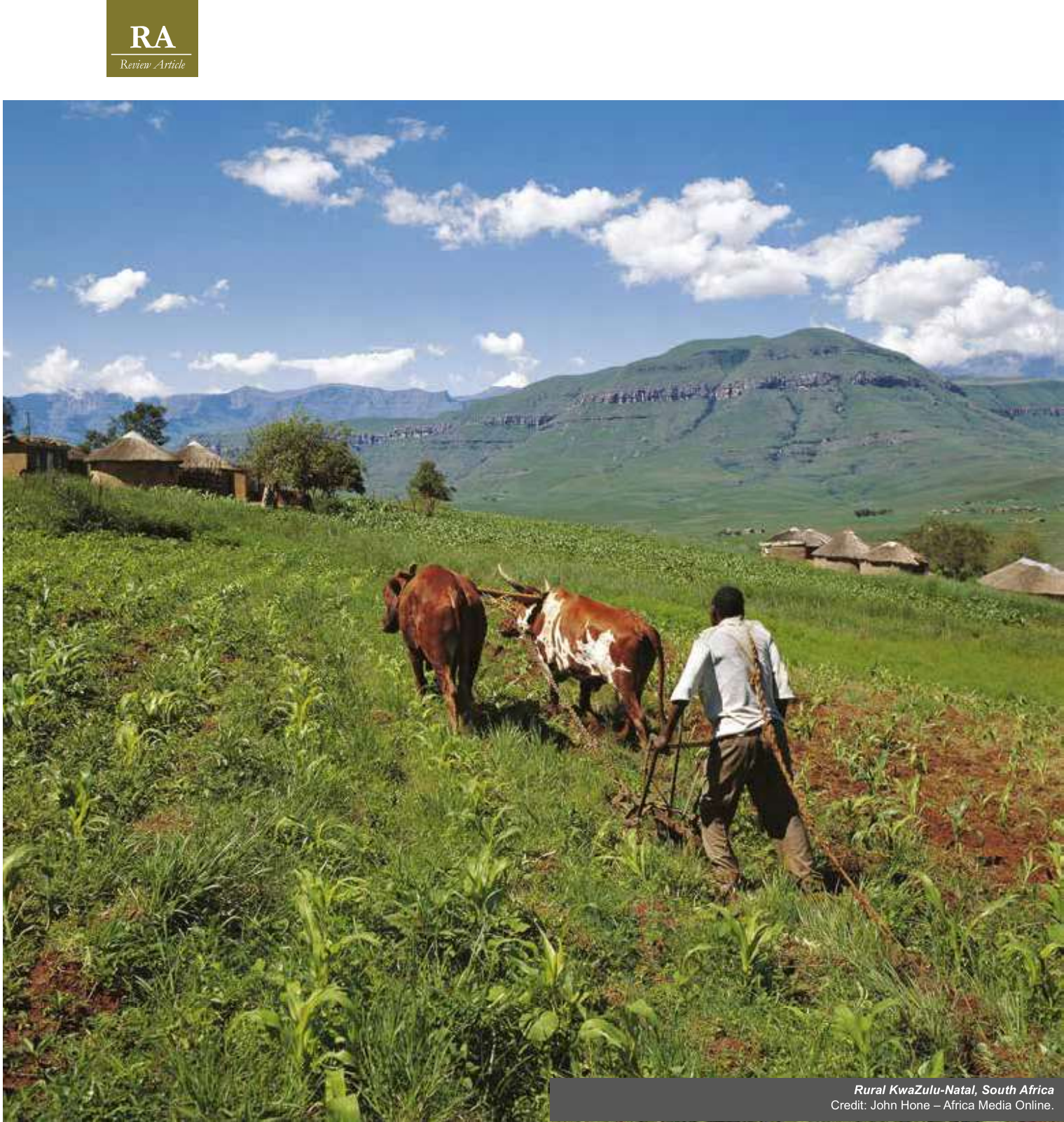
Similarly, such calls for continuing with the agricultural models and practices of previous owners (some who have sold to avoid pending bankruptcy) do not take into account the challenges encountered by new entrants into firmly established global value chains and the global trends of consolidating farmland and the increasing industrialisation of agriculture. These global trends often compound situations and access to markets and value chains in which variable and significant differences prevail between previous and current owners.

Is it sensible and realistic in contemporary South Africa to argue that the land is not used ‘productively’

for agricultural purposes by new owners? We should rather refocus the question on: ‘are the recipients using the land for agricultural purposes that help to sustain or improve their wellbeing?’

In this article we analyse a survey of 286 land reform beneficiary households in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the North West provinces during 2012. Response to a very basic question, ‘Was the household involved in the production of any kind of food or agricultural products during the past twelve months?’, indicates that between July 2011 and July 2012, around two-thirds of the households used land obtained from the land reform programme for agricultural purposes.

The size, practices and purposes of farming operations varied across households and were to some extent related to the provinces and districts in which they were located. Of those households sampled during the survey, 91% received land through the various redistribution components of the land reform programme implemented since 1995. Therefore, the results largely reflect the activities of farmers on farms purchased on the ‘open market’ with a government subsidy.



67% of all the respondents engaged in agriculture at the time of the survey.

Agricultural production on redistributed farmland

In the three provinces, 67% of all the respondents engaged in agriculture at the time of the survey, while slightly less than a third did not use their redistributed land for any agricultural purposes. However, analysis of the responses to the question on a province-by-province basis (Table 1) reveals stark

differences in the use of redistributed farmland. In the Western Cape less than half the surveyed households (43%) used the land for agricultural purposes, while almost 80% in KwaZulu-Natal and almost 97% in the North West did so. The greater share of negative responses of the households in the Western Cape affects the overall share of surveyed households engaged in agriculture during this period.

Table 1: Engagement in agricultural production by province

Engagement in agriculture		Share in Western Cape	Share in KwaZulu-Natal	Share in North West	Share of total respondent households
Not currently engaged in agriculture	N	58	25	1	84
	%	56.86%	20.16%	3.13%	32.56%
Currently engaged in agriculture	N	44	99	31	174
	%	43.14%	79.84%	96.88%	67.44%
Total	N	102	124	32	258
	%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: HSRC 2013
Note: N = 258 number of valid cases

Less than a third of households did not use their redistributed land for agricultural purposes.

Why the Western Cape figures are much lower than those of the surveyed households in the North West and KwaZulu-Natal is unclear. At this stage we can propose two possible reasons. Firstly, in terms of provincial gross domestic product (PGDP) the Western Cape is the second wealthiest province, next to Gauteng. Similarly, off-farm and other alternative livelihood opportunities are different from those available in the other two provinces and job opportunities may be more readily available. This situation may reduce the dependency on household level agriculture. KwaZulu-Natal is considered to be one of South Africa’s poorest provinces and the North West is considered to be a middle income province in terms of its GDP.

Secondly, the two districts sampled in the Western Cape are perhaps less rural and situated along the northern and southern coastal belts of the province where farmland is relatively more expensive.

In contrast, the four districts selected in KwaZulu-Natal and the North West include large areas of former homelands and are in some cases much more remote in contrast to those in the Western Cape. Remoteness and the

presence of former homelands in these districts may impose a greater need for household agricultural production and possibly a long experience of this practice as a means of supplementing household food supplies or production for local and regional markets. Also, farmland is relatively less expensive in these areas, which may enable any excess of the grant being used to purchase the needed agricultural inputs.

Is this farmland really wasted?

The perception that the land reform farmers underuse or waste their farmland is questionable. We see that among the households who received agricultural land through land reform in the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and North West, two thirds told us that they actively farmed some or all of the land between July 2011 and July 2012.

Less than a third of households did not use their redistributed land for agricultural purposes during this period. However, this evidence also shows diversity in engagement in agricultural production by beneficiaries across the three provinces. To some extent, the criticisms suggesting that land is not being used for agricultural purposes, or even being ‘unproductive’, should be

treated cautiously based on the current study data.

By its nature farming involves risk. This risk increases by inclusion into the global economy as farming becomes more expensive; by limited support and access to finance; frequent changes in land reform and agricultural policies; and by the changing motivations and circumstances of individual land reform beneficiary households.

The evidence presented here encourages us to argue, contrary to poorly informed perceptions, that in most cases farmland is not wasted by land reform beneficiaries. The study is limited in the sense that we did not investigate alternative (non-agricultural) uses of land. We propose further that longitudinal surveys should be conducted every 12-36 months, asking the same question from the same sample, including a question about alternative uses of land and usage cycles.

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