Between a rock and a hard place: contested livelihoods in Qwaqwa National Park, South Africa

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This paper was accepted for publication in February 2002

This paper examines rural livelihoods and the prospects for participatory conservation through a case study of Qwaqwa National Park (QNP) in South Africa. The park was established in 1992 in the context of South Africa’s transition to democracy, growing ecotourism in the country and global movements towards conservation involving and benefiting local people. The paper argues that the protracted conflict between park residents and management led to new patterns of livelihood activities and household formation, and resulted in material and social differentiation amongst park households. The goals of park management, with a commitment to nature conservation and ecotourism, were at odds with the livelihood practices of park residents. Conflicts arose over stocking levels, overgrazing, wood-cutting and deforestation and over the use of other natural resources, including water and medicinal plants. The park was the site of a Rand Water project that employed many residents. Residents found themselves between a rock and a hard place as they resisted attempts by the management to reduce stocking levels and yet relied on management to gain access to sources of paid employment.

KEY WORDS: South Africa, Qwaqwa National Park, participatory conservation, rural livelihoods, households

Introduction

In 1987, Anderson and Grove recognized a significant shift in conservation ideology in Africa.

In the African context, the view that has commonly identified conservation with the protection of species and habitats, with broader movements to preserve wildlife and wilderness, is giving way to the process of rural development and the survival of agrarian societies in Africa.

Anderson and Grove (1977, 1–2)

Since then, it has been argued that ‘the merging of conservation and development goals ... have become so widely accepted in African conservation that they constitute a new orthodoxy’ (Hulme and Murphree 1999, 280). However, Hulme and Murphree also suggest that, whilst there is a growing body of literature contemplating the principles underpinning the new conservation, less is known about the ways that these ideas are converted into practice in specific political and environmental contexts.

This is especially the case in South Africa, where the response to shifting conservation ideology has been geographically patchy and uneven. In 1983, residents were abruptly removed from land that was proclaimed the Tembe Elephant Park in the east of the country (AFRA 1991). In the west, residents of Richtersveld successfully resisted removal in 1990 from land designated to become a National Park. Following a long period of bargaining and negotiation, local people became involved in the planning, management and day-to-day running...
of the new park (Boonzaier 1991; Glazewski et al. 1991). In the far north-east of the country, the experiences of the Makuleke community, whose land shares a boundary with Kruger National Park, resonate strongly with the debate over preservation or participation in conservation (Tapela and Omara-Ojengu 1999; Ramutsindela 2002). Furthermore, in 1998, the tourism industry accounted for 737,000 jobs and 8.2% of the country’s domestic product (SAIRR 2000, 516). The increasing importance of tourism, particularly ecotourism, to the South African economy has further implications for the involvement of the rural poor in conservation.

It was in the context of the ideological shift towards participatory conservation, the rapid transition to democracy in South Africa and growing potential for tourism that the Qwaqwa National Park (QNP) was established in 1992. The park occupies former farmland on which agricultural labourers remained when the park was proclaimed. It provides an interesting and important case study of the struggles over land between residents and management and suggests what the implications of this struggle might be for participatory conservation. The idea of being ‘between a rock and a hard place’ refers both to the location of the park (nestled between sandstone outcrops of Golden Gate National Park and the dramatic cliffs of the Drakensberg escarpment), but is also a metaphor indicating contradictions in the relationship between park management and residents. Residents resisted attempts by park management to reduce domestic stocking levels, but were also highly dependent on park management for securing various sources of wage labour. Similarly, the park management found themselves between a rock and a hard place as they attempted to negotiate the seemingly irreconcilable requirements of responsible nature conservation and the human development of park residents.

Qwaqwa and its National Park: history and context

Establishment of Qwaqwa and QNP

The research on which this paper is based took place in Qwaqwa National Park between August 1998 and August 1999 as part of a larger project, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The project investigated changing multiple livelihoods in former ‘homelands’ in South Africa and related shifts in household livelihood strategies to macro-level change. ‘Homelands’ (in quotation marks because they were unrecognized outside South Africa and were not ‘home’ to the majority of Africans) were established under apartheid to control the movement of blacks and reinforce white ownership of land and access to resources. Black people were forced into ‘homelands’ established along tribal grounds. People of the Xhosa tribe became residents of Transkei and Ciskei, whilst Zulus became citizens of KwaZulu. Qwaqwa was the ‘homeland’ established in 1974 for people of the southern Sotho tribe (Figure 1). It became exceptionally overcrowded as Sothos were forcibly removed from ‘white’ towns and farms where they had previously worked (Table 1).

For the purposes of the research, Qwaqwa included not only the erstwhile ‘homeland’, but the additional farmland to the north and north-west that was purchased in 1984 by the South African Development Trust (SADT) ostensibly to reduce overcrowding (Figure 2). Some of the additional land, the Qwaqwa Farms (QQF), was leased to black farmers or taken over by Qwaqwa’s agricultural development corporation and later redistributed to black farmers under the South African Government’s Land Reform Programme. The Land Reform Programme was developed after the democratic elections in 1994 to redress massive inequalities in land ownership through redistribution, to offer restitution to those who lost land through racially discriminatory laws and to improve tenure security (Department of Land Affairs 1997; Turner and Ibsen 2000).

The remaining SADT land was proclaimed the Qwaqwa National Park in January 1992 according to Section 18(1) of the Qwaqwa Nature Conservation Act (No. 5) of 1976. Fencing was erected around the perimeter of the 22,000 ha park and fences within the park removed to allow the free movement of 3,000 game animals that were introduced in 1993 (Murray 1998). Fences that separated QNP from its immediate neighbour, Golden Gate National Park, were removed, prompting claims that QNP was a buffer zone to prevent poaching and land invasion in Golden Gate (Figure 2). After its establishment, QNP was managed by the Highlands Development Corporation (HDC), a parastatal formed to manage economic development in Qwaqwa and the eastern Free State. However, when elections took place in South Africa in 1994, Qwaqwa was incorporated into Free State Province (Figure 1). Qwaqwa lost its legislative function as a self-governing territory and in 1995 QNP was placed under the responsibility of Agri-Eco, a new, wholly government-owned parastatal that emerged from the reorganization and reconstitution of former Qwaqwa government agencies. When Agri-Eco took over management of QNP in 1995, the relationship between park
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management and residents had deteriorated significantly.

Conflict in QNP
The conflict in the park had its origins in the proclamation of QNP when no formal recognition was made of the park’s longstanding inhabitants. In 1992, most adults in the park were from families that had been employed for many generations as farm labourers on white-owned farms until the land was purchased by SADT. Piet, Moemoledi, Sepolo and Kehla were all residents that had relatives from earlier generations buried in the park. After the park’s establishment, residents remained on the land, grazed their cattle and sometimes laboured for farmers who had rented land from the SADT. Some of these residents claimed that they were never consulted about the establishment of the park in the early 1990s. Others suggested that the Qwaqwa government guaranteed them secure tenure and grazing rights. Institutional transformations in South Africa, particularly those that led to shifting management regimes, left park residents alienated from decision-making processes and subjected to the parks rules and regulations.

(B)efore the land was proclaimed a national park, residents utilised the land for grazing and arable purposes without restriction. However, in 1992 rules and regulations emerged to control the residents, concerning their livestock, usage of land, resources and tenure. This legislation stated that the inhabitants of the Park had no right to claim ownership or grazing rights in the Park; hence

Figure 1 Location of Qwaqwa in South Africa
they were regarded as squatters on the land on which most of them were born and bred.

O’Malley (1997, 15)

When game animals such as antelope and zebra were introduced into the park, conflict over stocking levels arose. The reduction of stocking levels, officially to 15 large stock units per household, though park residents sometimes quoted higher numbers, was justified based on concern about soil erosion and associated environmental problems. Residents continued to be excluded from management or planning decisions made in the park and the relationship between park management and residents declined steadily. Residents were forced to curtail forestry and their use of other natural resources, including water and medicinal plants.

When the change took place from farms to park, the people were told that it would be a park and we would live harmoniously. We were told this by the people from Qwaqwa. Before we were cultivating fields but now this is prohibited. Now the park warden said that we must wait for the negotiation. We were also told that we must not keep more than 30 cattle per household and we were not given the reason for this.

Kehla

Responses to the imposition of livestock restrictions were varied. Some park residents relocated their cattle and paid for grazing on farms owned by black commercial farmers who were beneficiaries of land reform. Most residents resisted the reduction of their herds and continued to graze their cattle in the park. Some residents even adopted an enduring debate from academic research about the definition of households and argued that there was no clear way for the park management to delineate one household from another.

At the establishment of the park, the Highlands Development Corporation might have hoped to remove all residents from the park in a similar fashion to the KwaZulu government’s removal of local people from the Tembe Elephant Park in 1983 (AFRA 1991). However, in the late 1980s, a shift in the ideology of conservation in South Africa followed the Parks Board’s attempts to remove residents from Richtersveld. Richtersveld was originally one of 23 rural reserves for ‘Coloureds’ (people of mixed racial origins) and lies on the border with Namibia in Northern Cape Province. The land was earmarked for the establishment of a National Park, but residents, supported by a non-government organization, the Surplus Peoples Project, resisted removals. After protracted negotiations, a substantially revised contract was signed that protected Richtersveld residents’ tenure security, access to local employment and use of natural resource (Fig 1991). Thus, even before the transition to democracy in South Africa, there had been a shift in the ideology of nature conservation such that, in spite of the lack of consultation at the proclamation of QNP, it was unacceptable to simply remove people from the park.

Post-apartheid, new legislation offered some additional security to park residents and prevented park management from ejecting residents from the park. The Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA) 1997 (Act No. 62 of 1997) was a response to the government acknowledgement that many South Africans were without secure tenure rights (Department of Land Affairs 1997). The aim of the Act was to provide increased tenure security by strengthening land rights and protecting occupants from unfair eviction. Whilst the Act was widely criticized from different sides (National Land Committee 1997), in QNP, many elderly residents and their families benefited from increased tenure security. The strict regulations governing the lawful

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Table 1 Population growth in Qwaqwa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Population density per km²*</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Murray (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>SAIRR (1977)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>Surplus Peoples Project (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>933</td>
<td>Sharp (1994)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on area of 48,234 ha between 1974 and 1982 (Sharp 1982). Further land was formally incorporated into Qwaqwa thereafter, including that which now comprises QNP, but was never released for settlement purposes and made no contribution to reducing population pressure in erstwhile Qwaqwa
eviction of occupants meant that Agri-Eco could not forcibly remove residents from the park without going through formal legal processes. Furthermore, because not all SADT land had been formally transferred to Qwaqwa by its incorporation into Free State Province, there was a complex pattern of land ownership in the park. In 1998, parcels of land in the park were owned variously by the Republic of South Africa (RSA), the Minister of Land Affairs and Free State Development Corporation (FDC) (Marinacci 1998). The implication for residents in the park was that any eviction attempt would involve a very complex legal process involving all three owners of the land.

In 1999 the future of QNP seemed uncertain. Since its establishment in 1995, Agri-Eco had been subject to the same damning criticisms levelled at its predecessor, the Highlands Development Corporation (Murray 1998). In April 1999, park employees found themselves working on daily contracts whilst rumours about insolvency at Agri-Eco spread around the park. The Department of Land Affairs (DLA) had begun working with residents and management to resolve the land issue in the park, but faced a number of significant difficulties both carrying out research to understand the conflict and encouraging fair participation in negotiations. These problems were also pertinent to my own research and it is to these issues that I now turn.

**Research in QNP**

In QNP, interviews were carried out with 12 individuals in ten park households. Homesteads in the park were clustered in three main areas (the sites of the former Oldenburg, Annashoop and Eerstegeluk...
farms) and each area was represented in the sample. In 1999 there were 35 households in the park. Thus the sample represented almost one-third of the total number of households. These interviews contributed to a larger baseline survey of 117 households throughout Qwaqwa. The survey provided information about household size and composition, migration histories and main income sources. Following the survey, ethnographic and life history interviews were carried out with four respondents from three park households. These qualitative interviews took place over a number of weeks, involved much longer discussions with each individual and yielded up to five hours of recorded discussion for each respondent. They provided very detailed information, only some of which is discussed in this paper. The focus of the discussion here is residents' testimonies about changing household livelihood strategies, power relations within and between households and the social relations that enabled people to make a living in the park.

A methodological approach drawing on quantitative and qualitative methods was necessary because of a number of significant issues that arose while carrying out research in the park. First, given the involvement of various organizations in the conflict over land, there was an acute feeling of research fatigue amongst park residents. They had been interviewed by the local tribal council, the DLA, the local civic organization (SANCO) and Free State Rural Committee. At other times, political organizations saw opportunities to garner support and involved themselves in the conflict over land in QNP.

In addition to research fatigue, people within the park were also suspicious of researchers. Some residents sought to co-opt researchers into an alliance with particular stakeholders in the conflict, whilst others refused to speak to them at all. Some believed researchers could voice their problems and fears to the government, whilst others spread malicious rumours and misrepresented research objectives. These problems were similar to difficulties encountered in Qwaqwa by University of Cape Town researchers in 1984 (Sharp 1990). The key methodological issues that arose in Sharp's work, of language, permission, access, participant observation and privacy, were all highly pertinent in QNP. Sharp argued that, given social and political conditions in Qwaqwa, there was little chance of implementing research methods in 'textbook fashion' but, most importantly, the methodological difficulties encountered in the field were themselves important sources of information.

The difficulties encountered in QNP necessitated flexibility and pragmatism throughout the research. Ardington and Lund's (1996) critique of surveys carried out in South Africa suggested that surveys alone were unable to accurately represent rural livelihoods. Qualitative research, they argued, could show the significance of male out-migration, highlight the importance of state transfers (such as welfare payments) and agriculture as sources of rural livelihoods and deal with the importance of access to land in sustaining rural livelihoods.

Therefore, the methodological approach used in QNP included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The survey contained questions related to baseline information that could be used to provide a general view of household composition, livelihoods and income in the park. In the later ethnographic and life history interviews, respondents described their lives at various life-stages. The positions that people occupied in the park and their relative levels of wealth were dependent on a wide range of factors. Access to employment in the park and state transfers were the most important differentiating factor. However, social and material differentiation were linked to particular circumstances and relationships that existed before the park itself. Some households had stronger identification with the land on which they lived: their ancestors were buried on the farms and they had worked and lived there for decades. Thus, their commitment to the conflict was partly rooted in their historical background. Only through life histories could this history be revealed. Others had very strong kin networks in various locations within the park that provided safety nets in times of stress. Such networks led to preferential access to employment. Thus, in order to understand contemporary social processes in the park, it was necessary to track changing household livelihoods over the life-cycles of respondents.

**Household livelihoods in Qwaqwa National Park**

The households about which data were collected in QNP had a mean size of six people. Household livelihoods were obtained from a diverse range of sources, including agricultural and non-agricultural activities, and were pursued both inside and outside the park with repercussions for the form of households and intra-household relationships.

**Wage labour**

Wage labour was the most important measurable source of income amongst park households. In only two households, income came from employment outside the park. Whilst labour out-migration had been important, after the park conflict arose migrant workers returned to the park to protect their claim on the land.
I was working away in Tuffscott Hospital in the town of Stillfontein but then in 1995 I had to return to the park because the park management were chasing my family out of the park.

Moemoledi

The most important source of wage income was a local ‘Working for Water’ project. The project was funded by Rand Water (a water utilities company/parastatal) and operated in QNP and Golden Gate National Park. Park residents and others were employed to cut down ‘foreign’ and ‘thirsty’ tree species, such as black wattle, which contribute to soil erosion. Local community projects were not new in QNP. In the early stages of the park’s development, projects created employment opportunities in the park. In 1995 about 20 people had been involved in the control of black wattle. In 1998 the ‘Work for Water Community Job Creation Project’ employed 320 people for ten weeks (Agri-Eco 1998). Residents were critical of the project, since park management (appointed as implementation agents by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry) employed people from outside the park instead of employing park residents on longer contracts.

In 1999, 80% of households were dependent on salaries of R650 per month from Rand Water. (In 1999, £1 equalled approximately R10) In half the households this was the only source of direct cash income. Some households had as many as three people employed on the project. The Rand Water project had lowered the unemployment rate of the economically active population (EAP) within sample households from 84% to 45%. Similarly, Marinacci’s (1999) investigation on behalf of the Provincial Department of Land Affairs found that about 70% of formally employed (wage earning) residents worked on a contractual basis for Rand Water. Given the fixed-term nature of the project, she argued that it was imperative for residents to get access to other sources of income generation.

EDA Matatiele, reporting on the impact on livelihoods of a Working for Water programme in the Maluti District of the Eastern Cape, came up with similar conclusions. They found some successful investment in alternative sources of livelihoods drawing on wages from the programme.

A number of respondents … attempted to invest their money by purchasing livestock and poultry, while others were able to hire tractors as well as buy fertiliser and seed for farming.

EDA Matatiele (1999, 24)

In QNP, residents involved in the project had largely failed to invest their earnings in order to establish future livelihood activities. One household invested in solar-panel electricity to decrease household expenditure on paraffin, candles and batteries and used an old car to buy beer for resale.

We do sell beer sometimes because our daughter is working for Rand Water. One bottle of beer is R4 and a case of beer is R42. We have a car. We buy beer at Kestell. Qwaqwa is cheaper but the petrol that we use also contributes because of the distance.

Piet

I sell beer if we have the money, I have a car to go and fetch it.

Toba

Apart from this, there were no other sustainable income-earning benefits from the Rand Water project. In order for people not to lose their jobs and income at the end of the Rand Water project, investment was needed, perhaps in value-adding activities connected to forestry and agriculture, such as charcoal production, basket-weaving and rope-making. In 1999, the wood cut in QNP was sold by Rand Water in Qwaqwa’s main town, Phuthaditjhaba.

Residents also complained that certain people received preferential access to employment opportunities in the park. One young man suggested park management were only interested in employing people who would not cause trouble and had reduced the size of their cattle herds. Toba, who had many cattle and strong kin relations in the park, argued that the park was not interested in employing any park residents, irrespective of whether they had reduced their herd sizes.

I have plenty of cows – about 63 plus calves. We also have 3 sheep, 21 goats and a few chickens. So now the park prefers to employ people from outside the park. It is too bad and creates anger inside the park.

Toba

From a broader perspective the relationships between management and residents were more complex. M. Skosana, one of the most vocal actors in resisting the reduction of stocking levels and prohibition of wood-cutting, was also employed on the Rand Water project. His homestead was used as a meeting place for Rand Water labourers and tools and machinery were stored there. Some families, such as the Skosas, had particularly strong kin networks in the park. These social networks were the most important way of finding employment in the park. Households who had a family
member employed by Agri-Eco or Rand Water heard first about job opportunities. People in the park without other kin nearby, or those living in smaller family groups, were less likely to be employed by Rand Water or other local community projects. Small, female-headed households were vulnerable unless they could get access to wage labour. Some women managed to get employment as domestic workers in the houses of park management. They occupied a precarious position, as their income depended on the good relations with park management, but this interest conflicted with their agriculture-based livelihoods. Evelina was caught between her low-paid domestic work at the park house of a senior Agri-Eco manager and the need to pursue other livelihood strategies.

I work at the house of . . . and it is good to just cross the road to work and then come back again. I had cattle but at the moment they are only seven. I get about 12 litres of milk each day and I sell the milk to people who are working in the park. Every year we sell one cow but last year we sold it in winter (June) because it was a difficult time. My problem was that I didn’t have enough money to buy groceries – like maize-meal for my children and corn for the chickens. I am paid R300 per month. If I could get a pay rise then things could be much better.

Evelina

State pension payments

Pensions were the second most important source of income and partly or wholly supported half of the households where people were interviewed. Only one household was solely dependent on pension income. All recipients of pensions experienced difficulties collecting monthly payments because of isolation and poor transport infrastructure in the park. There was one tarred road through the south of the park along which taxis ran irregularly to Phuthaditjhaba. However, most pensions were collected in Kestell to the north of the park (Figure 2). Respondents in the north of the park walked to the nearby tar road and caught lifts with local farmers. People living more centrally in the park had to either wait for the irregular arrival of taxis and buses on the untarred roads or procure some alternative mode of transport.

Whilst pensions were a significant source of livelihood for many people in the park, they could not be seen as stable and sustainable sources of household income. The most obvious reason for this was mortality. Households throughout Qwaqwa depending on an elderly relative’s pension became extremely vulnerable following the death of that relative. However, the sustainability of household livelihoods constructed around pensions was also dependent on the (limited) financial and administrative capacity of Free State Provincial Government. In June 1999, pensioners from QNP and local farms travelled to Kestell only to find that pension money had not arrived. They were sent away and told to return two weeks later. With no money to return home, some pensioners spent an anxious night in the Kestell township, whilst hungry children in the park eagerly anticipated the arrival of grandparents with a sack of maize-meal.

In spite of these problems, pensions did provide a crucial safety net for people who would otherwise have lived in chronic poverty. Pensions allowed households to stay in the park when they might otherwise have been forced to leave the park to seek alternative sources of livelihood, thus relinquishing their claim for secure tenure in the park. As will be shown later, reliance on pensions also had implications for household formation.

Livelihoods and livestock

Total household income was very difficult to calculate for a number of reasons, most of which derived from attempts to estimate income from livestock. Due to the conflict over livestock, some respondents were unwilling to speak about their cattle. Other respondents stressed the importance of cattle to their household livelihoods.

I am not working but I sell calves for meat and I am milking cows and using milk for domestic purposes. I have 41 cows and calves. I used to have 50 but nine of them died.

Rabotai

We are relying on our stock because the park is doing nothing to assist us. So if you have no stock then you can’t do anything and some people had to abandon the land and move away. The park makes it difficult for us to keep stock. But they haven’t been able to do anything because even if they try and chase us away we will continue to occupy and to stay with our cattle.

Moemoledi

Even when the size of their livestock herds was known, it was difficult to estimate income because of the broad range of social and economic values that Cousins (1996) argues are attached to livestock in South Africa. He suggests that the roots of contemporary conflicts over livestock and rangeland resources lie not only in the inequitable distribution of land due to past policies of apartheid, but also in the multiple functions of livestock within livelihoods. His conceptual model of livestock production captures the multiple functions of
livestock (sales, investment, saving, consumption, slaughter, bridewealth, milk, draught, loaning and mortality) and illustrates how the complexity of livestock livelihood systems contributes to social differentiation.

This complexity has significant methodological and analytical implications. In QNP, households could not accurately calculate the annual or monthly income from their cattle. Many households had dairy stock whose milk was both consumed within the household and sold to Rand Water workers. The proportion of milk sold and consumed varied daily. In terms of cattle sales, respondents reported that they often sold a cow before Christmas to get money for the festive season and the new uniforms that would be required for school children in January. At other times, cattle were sold for ritual slaughter at weddings or funerals. Where data were available, this income ranged from R700 to R3000 annually.

Similarly, other sources of income available within the park were difficult to quantify. Many of these relied heavily on natural resources. One pensioner cut grass to weave ropes that he then sold locally.

When I stopped cutting wood, I was highly affected because my life depended on wood cutting. But I know so many different kinds of jobs. I can make grass mats, brooms, African hats, cut wood and pottery. I make ashtrays.

Anonymous

Another respondent was a ngaka (traditional healer) and used his knowledge of plants in the park to produce muti (treatments) for his patients. Both the collecting of grasses and medicinal plants were against park regulations.

I am ngaka but I don’t want to talk about that part of my work.

Anonymous

We used to pick herbs freely but it is not possible now. Park management were at loggerheads with the Oldenburg people for picking up herbs. We are allowed to pick up herbs but only to a limited extent.

Piet

In order not to arouse suspicion amongst respondents or risk breaching people’s privacy later, respondents were not pressed for further details of activities that violated park regulations by management.

It was possible to estimate monthly household incomes exclusive of income from livestock. Non-livestock based household income ranged from R300 to R2000 per month, with a median value of R1500 and a mean of R1180. No household was without some source of monetary income (usually either a pension or Rand Water wages). Significantly, monthly household income in QNP was higher than the average for Greater Qwaqwa and, in terms of geographical location, the only place where incomes were higher was Qwaqwa Farms, where black farmers had purchased their own farms. Some of the households in QNP had substantial capital assets, such as livestock numbering over 100, and secure incomes. Whilst the DLA aimed to resolve the park conflict to give poorer people access to secure livelihoods, how this might be achieved without also benefiting those with considerable assets remained a moot point.

Thus far, evidence of household livelihoods has been drawn from a broad consideration of all respondents to the survey and qualitative interviews. The following analysis attempts to link findings in QNP to broader understandings of rural livelihoods and of participatory conservation.

Understanding rural livelihoods and participatory conservation

Two main concerns arise from a consideration of household livelihoods in QNP. The first is the importance of diversification of activities to alleviate risk and secure sustainable rural livelihoods. This diversification has implications for household formation and location. The second concern is the implications of struggles for livelihoods and the conflict in the park for participatory conservation in QNP in the future.

Rural livelihoods and households

The broad range of activities in QNP demonstrates the importance of diversity in rural livelihoods. Whilst households were partly dependent on some form of agriculture, usually pastoralism, it would be highly misleading to equate rural livelihoods with agrarian livelihoods. Households were heavily dependent on other sources of livelihoods, notably wage labour income and pensions. In fact, many depended more heavily on wage labour income and pensions than on agriculture. Wage labour income and pensions were not supplementary forms of income and were used to buy basic foodstuffs rather than invest in future livelihoods. Thus the findings in QNP resonate strongly with a growing literature that seeks to represent rural livelihoods as diverse and complex systems (Bryceson 1999; Ellis 2000; Francis 2000). The lesson here is that integrated rural development planning must move away from its preoccupation
with agrarian livelihoods to recognize the complexity and diversity of rural livelihoods.

Changing and diversifying livelihoods in the park gave rise to new patterns of household formation and fragmentation in QNP. First, households were increasingly ‘spatially extended’ (Ellis 2000) in that their resources and activities were ‘geographically stretched over considerable physical distances’ (Murray 2001, 12). In the park, Sepolo’s pension could not support his entire family and so his wife and children moved to the village of Bolata in the original Qwaqwa ‘homeland’.

There were conflicts. We refused to leave and they said that we must reduce the livestock. They said that we must move to Qwaqwa. We told them that we were not prepared to move. Then I became anxious and I moved my family to Bolata. Before, my children were far from school and I was also far from the shops. In Qwaqwa my children were near the school and the shops.

Sepolo’s two dwellings were not separate households, one in the park and one in Bolata, but a single household that straddled spatial boundaries across Qwaqwa. The new forms of household relationships that extend across the different parts of Greater Qwaqwa are described in detail in Slater (2000) and constitute a different process to that by which migrant labourers from homelands and from Lesotho have worked in urban areas in South Africa for long periods and returned only infrequently to their rural homesteads (for example, see Murray 1981). In Qwaqwa, household members move weekly or daily between different dwellings, where diverse livelihood activities take place. Any notion of households must be equally as fluid and flexible as the movements of people themselves.

Whilst in Sepolo’s case, the restriction of agricultural or natural resource-based livelihoods in the park led to the extension of a household across geographical space, dependence on pensions discouraged the formation of new households. The significance of pensions to household livelihoods was conspicuous in the park. Young unemployed people who married were without the material basis to establish a new household. Younger people stayed with parents or grandparents whose pension or Rand Water wages guaranteed that they would be fed. Under park regulations, no new dwellings could be erected in the park. As households became increasingly large and overcrowded, divisions and conflicts within them were amplified.

We are about 15 people in the household. Even if I got married and wanted to build a new house here, the park management do not allow it.

Sepolo’s experiences, compared with his richer neighbours, Piet and Toba, also reflected a continuing process of differentiation amongst people in the park. Those who removed their livestock from the park saw their livelihoods gradually eroded. Those who refused to move their cattle experienced a significant increase in livestock numbers (and therefore in assets and capital).

I would not agree to sell my livestock. I had plenty of cattle and some of my cattle got stolen and others died. I had 20 cows, 30 goats, and 20 sheep. When all my cattle disappeared they were at the farm of Mr Pienaar. The person who looked after my cattle stayed at Pienaar’s farm and I paid him R150 to look after my cattle. My neighbour did not move his cattle away from the park. I got scared and afraid, that is why I took mine away. Now he has more cattle than me.

Sepolo

The differentiation process also fed into different levels of social capital within the park. Here, social capital is referred to as the ‘social resources (networks, social claims, social relations, affiliations, associations) upon which people draw when pursuing different livelihood strategies requiring coordinated actions’ (Scoones 1998, 8). Larger households, with additional family members living nearby, had greater social capital and more success resisting stocking restrictions. Those same households also had more members employed on the Rand Water project. The differentiation process looked set to continue as, whilst there were very few households that were able to use income from Rand Water to invest or save to develop alternative livelihood opportunities, the few that could invest were from larger households with greater numbers of cattle and more Rand Water workers.

Conservation and conflict in QNP

The other concern arising from the research is the implications of conflict over livelihoods for participatory conservation in QNP. Whilst the literature suggests a growing global consensus that ‘(c)onservation programmes are only valid and sustainable when they have the dual objective of protecting and improving local livelihoods and ecological conditions’ (Ghimire and Pimbert 1997, 3), in QNP, three main issues were identified that raised serious doubts over the potential for sustained participatory conservation.

The first issue was the justification for the existence of the park. Officially, the park was originally proclaimed to establish ecotourism in Qwaqwa, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of the ‘homeland’ (O’Malley 1997). However, once the conflict over livestock arose,
questions were raised about the real reason for the establishment of the park.

The people who are living in the park were not allowed to let their cattle graze in the park. We don’t know who the park is really for and this is a really difficult question.

Piet

Staff at DLA argued that the shape of the park made it a perfect buffer zone separating Golden Gate National Park from neighbouring Qwaqwa. Elsewhere, research has highlighted the potential benefits and pitfalls of community-based natural resource management on the boundaries of National Parks (Wells and Brandon 1993; Neumann 1997). Drawing on this research, it becomes clear that, if QNP was established purely as a buffer zone, it was done not under the influence of a philosophy that sees buffer zones ‘as a means to strengthen local land and resource claims’ (Neumann 1997, 562). Rather, the buffer zone was established within the old preservation orthodoxy ‘where human activities are restricted to those which will maintain the ecological security of the protected area’ (Neumann 1997, 562).

Residents of the park were sceptical of the need for the preservation of species and habitat in the park. Just as the existence of pristine, natural environments that are untouched by human activity has been questioned globally (Ghimire and Pimbert 1997; Neumann 1998), QNP occupies land that had previously been farmed by whites for over a century. Farmhouses in the park, such as the National Monument, Klerksvlei, dated back to the Anglo-Boer War from 1899 to 1902. In springtime, maize and sorghum seeds that had lain dormant in the soil for years germinated and grew ‘wild’ in the park. Residents of the park were unconvincing of the pressing need to conserve formerly white-owned farmland that could potentially be transferred into the hands of black farmers. Similarly, when park management justified reduced stocking levels drawing on arguments about soil erosion and associated environmental problems, residents were once again sceptical of the management’s arguments.

They make so many rules. For example the maximum number of cattle per household is 15. We were just told ‘15’ and there was no explanation of how they came to this figure. They need to see which ways people can have more or less cattle in different parts of the park.

Moemoledi

The park management viewed this scepticism as evidence of park residents’ limited capacity to manage natural resources in a sustainable way. However, this scepticism is not surprising, not least because soil erosion and environmental problems have frequently been used to veil attempts to control black people and secure segregation in South Africa (Yawitch 1981; de Wet 1988; Mather 1995). Koch argues that, in the nineteenth century, ‘Wildlife protection was thus one of many mechanisms used to create a black proletariat during [South Africa’s] industrial revolution’ (1997, 216). Similarly, in Qwaqwa, Moroney (1976) argued that enforced culling in the 1940s under the auspices of environmental protection was actually a means of reducing people’s capacity to secure local livelihoods and forcing black people into labour on nearby white-owned farms. Whilst the mechanisms enforcing apartheid were swept away after 1994, the legacies of inequality endured and residents felt that animals and nature were valued more highly than black people.

The park seems to be doing nothing about the grass surrounding people’s houses. It causes the problem of snakes but we are not allowed to kill them.

July

The main issue is that we have lots of cattle and they will eat all the grass and they may make erosion so the park management prioritises nature on top of the people. The wild animals are very dangerous. My wife is a victim of an ostrich attack and it can be dangerous for the children who are coming home from school. It seems that we are getting trapped on all sides by animals.

Moemoledi

The second issue that arose from the research was the meaning of the term ‘community’ in community conservation projects. Successful participatory conservation is dependent on the involvement of the ‘community’ in planning, management and decision-making processes (Kothari et al. 1996). Agrawal and Clarke (1999) argued that in the context of community-based conservation, ‘communities’ have been represented as homogeneous social structures with common interests and shared norms. However, they then suggested that ‘such representations of community ignore the critical interests and processes within communities and between communities and other actors’ (1999, 633). Hulme and Murphree (1999) expressed similar doubts about what constituted ‘communities’ in conservation and maintained that the term was used more to generate positive images of conservation than to represent an accurate description of participatory processes. In QNP, households were highly differentiated in terms of their monetary incomes, livestock holdings and levels of social capital. Thus, when the DLA attempted to work...
with management and residents in the park to solve the conflict over land and livelihoods, they faced the problem of unequal participation in negotiations. Park residents made their livings in numerous different ways and had varying ideas about the future of the park. Some older residents, particularly those who remember the cruel treatment they received at the hands of white farmers and whose income came from state pensions, felt that life was better under the park.

Life in the park is much better than life on the farms.  

Floria

The farmers did things like ill-treating the workers. Girls who looked after chickens were beaten if the chickens ate the eggs.  

Piet

Other respondents wanted land on which to grow crops and argued that the park should be subdivided and become farmland once more.

The problem here is that we need land to work on. If we had sown maize, then we could take it to feed the chickens but because we are not allowed to cultivate we have to go and spend money to get food for the chickens.  

Boraki

We are ill-treated by the park because the best thing is to make [the land] back into farms so we can go back to the old plots that people had before.  

Moemoledi

Whilst proposals for the park varied, some residents were able to make their voices heard at meetings regarding the park's future, but other voices were subsumed beneath the interests of a small number of individuals. This participation hierarchy arose out a complex web of kin, gender and generational relationships. The hierarchy was highly pertinent to the livelihoods of park residents, but also called into question the possibility of finding a solution that would be beneficial to those less able to participate in negotiations.

Finally, there has been a growing focus on the role of institutional sustainability in grassroots conservation initiatives (Ghimire and Pimbert 1997; Agrawal and Clarke 1999; Infield and Adams 1999). In the case of QNP, issues arise concerning both the attitude of institutions towards participatory conservation and the fragile nature of institutions that have been re-organized or restructured since the end of apartheid. The African (community) conservation orthodoxy identified by Hulme and Murphree (1999) has penetrated national conservation agencies in South Africa more quickly than provincial ones. At the provincial level, QNP was located in the conservative and Afrikaner-dominated farming land of the eastern Free State where the preoccupation of conservation measures remained the protection of animal and plant species. There were occasional piecemeal attempts to improve the relationship between people living next to the park, for example through the sale of culled game at low prices in nearby villages and towns, but Agri-Eco's management of the park remained top-down and coercive. Whilst at the provincial level, Agri-Eco's future existence was threatened by insolvency in 1999, local level institutions such as SANCO and the ANC had been unable to gain widespread support amongst residents. Furthermore, Turner (2000) suggested that South African local government structures would face a further period of uncertainty as the transition arrangements for local government that were made soon after elections in 1994 were reviewed. Given the likelihood of institutional failure, Agri-Eco's threatening insolvency and differentiation within the park resident 'community', it is difficult to see where stable, democratic and participatory institutions are likely to emerge from.

Conclusion

This paper identified patterns of changing livelihoods and household formation in Qwaqwa National Park and considered the impacts of a protracted conflict between park management and residents. Since the establishment of the park and the ensuing conflict therein have closely paralleled the transition to democracy in South Africa, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of each process on changing livelihoods. However, the research demonstrates the importance of diversity in rural livelihoods and shows how the main sources of livelihoods (wage income, pensions and livestock) have been affected by institutional and economic change in South Africa. The conflict in the park stemmed from two tensions. The first was the difficulty faced by park management in their attempts to integrate environmental conservation and human development. The second was the relationship between stock grazing in the park and people's access to wage labour. Herein lay the main contradictory element in household livelihood strategies in QNP: residents resisted attempts by park management to reduce stocking levels and yet they also relied on links to park management and employees to gain access to sources of paid employment. The impact of conservation and top-down land use planning on the livelihoods of park residents is an important case study that raises
serious questions about the prospects for participatory land use in South Africa as a whole. Whilst the contribution of tourism to the country’s economic growth is championed by the South African government, the conflict in QNP represents an apt and timely reminder that the land and resources on which ecotourism depend are not uncontested.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people and organizations. First, the residents of QNP who agreed to be interviewed despite conflict and mistrust within the park. Second, the Department for International Development, who funded the research. Finally, Colin Murray, Chasca Twyman and the anonymous referees who commented on earlier versions of this paper.

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