



The direct use value of municipal commonage goods and services to urban households in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

To redress past racial discrepancies in ownership and tenure, the ANC government of South Africa initiated programmes to make land accessible to the previously disadvantaged. A key component of the national land reform programme was the provision of commonage lands to urban municipalities for use by the urban poor. However, there has been no assessment of the contribution that urban commonage makes to previously disadvantaged households. This study assessed the economic benefits of the commonage programme to local households, through an in-depth survey of 90 households across three small towns in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. We examined the marketed and non-marketed consumptive direct-use values of land-based livelihoods on commonage, calculated via the 'own reported values' approach. The results indicate that a proportion of South Africa's urban population rely to some degree on municipal commonage for part of their livelihoods. Commonage contributions to total livelihood incomes ranged between 14 and 20%. If the contributions from commonage were excluded, the incomes of over 10% of households in each study town would drop below the poverty line. Overall, the value of harvests from commonage was worth over R1 000 (US\$ 142) per hectare per year and over R4.7 million (US\$ 0.68 million) per commonage per year. However, the extent and nature of use and reliance was not uniform among households, so that we developed a typology of commonage users, with four types being identified. However, rapidly growing urban populations and high levels of poverty potentially threaten the sustainability of commonage resource use. Yet the national land reform programme focuses largely on the transfer of land to municipalities and not on sustainable management. Municipalities, in turn, invest relatively little in commonage management, and the little they do is focussed on livestock production. Non-timber forest products are not considered at all, even though this study shows that they are a vital resource for the urban poor, notably for energy and construction materials.

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Introduction

Natural ecosystems have a number of characteristics which make them appealing as a source of income to the poor. Environmental resources are renewable, widely dispersed, and often found in common property areas where the poor can negotiate access (USAID, 2006). Access to any land, from a small plot to a forest or communal grazing area, offers local households opportunities to uphold a diversified livelihood. Multiple strategies from the land and resources upon it may include production of staple cereals, vegetables and tree crops, a range of livestock, as well as collection and use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) (Shackleton et al., 2001; Campbell et al., 2002). The strategies may be solely for household consumption, or may also incorporate ad hoc local trade through to regular sale of surplus agricultural production,

livestock or processed NTFPs on local, regional or even international markets (Belcher, 2005). This wide array of potential strategies collectively enhances a household's ability to obtain a livelihood under uncertain and perhaps difficult conditions (Lahiff, 2003).

Much understanding of livelihood diversification strategies and the use and value of natural resources, and their role in poverty alleviation has been developed in rural areas of the developing world (e.g. Ellis, 1998; Campbell et al., 2002; Kamanga et al., 2009; Scoones, 2009). In comparison, the use of NTFPs by urban households has received less examination, except for analysis of market chains of individual NTFPs. The random household survey of Cocks (2006) indicated that many urban households in a town and large city in South Africa continued to use a wide range of NTFPs for both direct consumption as well as cultural reasons. Stoian (2005) revealed how access to and marketing of NTFPs collected in rural areas was a vital transitional livelihood strategy for new urban migrants in Bolivia. A recent random survey in Swiss cities revealed high demand for a range of locally collected NTFPs (Kilchling et al., 2009). Davenport et al. (2011) showed that the proportion of urban township households in South Africa using

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