

Social fences, metal fences: contrasting approaches to range management in southern Lesotho and the Eastern Cape

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Abstract

Extensive livestock production remains a significant part of livelihoods in many parts of southern Africa where land is not held in freehold, including Lesotho and the former 'homeland' of Transkei, now part of the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. In such areas, sustainable livestock production requires some form of community based range management. Based on field research and project support work in the Maluti District of the former Transkei and the Mhale's Hoek and Quthing Districts of southern Lesotho, this paper explores the contrasting views of community based range management that prevail in the two countries. It aims to reveal the social and economic tensions that exist between social fencing approaches and metal fencing approaches, and to highlight the different perceptions of governance and institutional roles that result from the two countries' political experiences over the 20th century. This comparative discussion should yield policy lessons for both countries, and the wider region.

The Drakensberg escarpment separates two very different experiences of governance and resource management in these two areas. In southern Lesotho, chiefs continue to play a strong role in local government and natural resource management. Cattle, sheep and goats still play an important role in local livelihoods. Livestock are herded by boys and young men. Grazing areas, demarcated by natural features or beacons, are unfenced. They are opened and closed by the chiefs sitting in council with senior men of the community, who also punish infringements of local range management rules. Like their Xhosa-speaking neighbours in the former Transkei homeland area of the Eastern Cape, Basotho have suffered heavily from stock theft over the past decade. Each side blames the other for most of this crime and violence. In the former Transkei, local governance and land management were perverted and distorted by the 'betterment' resettlement and planning programme of the apartheid era. This programme divided grazing lands into fenced camps that were administered by government in association with officially approved headmen. Herding of livestock has become uncommon in these areas, where most of the 'betterment' grazing fences have now disappeared and where governance has become increasingly uncertain since the advent of democracy in 1994. Many people in these communal areas of the Eastern Cape look back to the comparative order and good management of the 'betterment' era with nostalgia, and are calling for government to restore the fences. There is little prospect in these areas of the social fencing that comparatively vigorous local governance in Lesotho continues to enforce — although the future of these Basotho institutions is uncertain too.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The historical experience of black South Africans is well known. They suffered centuries of oppression and exploitation that culminated in the apartheid system of the 20th century. One pillar of this system was the restriction of African land rights to the so-called 'homelands' or

bantustans. Unsustainably large numbers of black South Africans were required to live in these areas, and millions more were officially deemed to have their legal and family roots there. Most members of both groups were forced to adopt multiple livelihood strategies, combining migrant labour in distant mines and cities with sub-subsistence agriculture and local off-farm activities in the 'homelands'. There was heavy pressure on the natural resource base in these areas, causing widespread and severe land degradation. The white authorities ascribed this degradation to the allegedly incompetent and reckless land management of the Africans, without acknowledging the underlying political causes for which they themselves were responsible. Such arguments are still widespread today, as critics argue that the South African land reform programme will export the poverty and degradation of the 'homelands' to the commercial farming areas.

What happened to the people of Lesotho during the 20th century is less well known. After the Basotho¹ had lost much of what is now the Free State to Boer military conquest, Britain agreed in 1868 to protect the remaining territory of Basutoland. For many decades, Britain intended ultimately to transfer Basutoland to the Union of South Africa. In the end, the excesses of apartheid caused this policy to be abandoned, and Lesotho gained its independence from Britain in 1966. Meanwhile, although their political experience had been very different from that of people in the South African 'homelands', their economic experience had been similar. Metropolitan political and economic interests in Britain and South Africa found Lesotho to be a convenient labour reserve for the South African mines. The dispossession of blacks in the conquered territories of Lesotho and elsewhere caused many to migrate to the territory, where population pressures became as unsustainably high, and land degradation at least as severe, as they were in the 'homelands'. Basotho, too, had to combine migrant labour with efforts to produce at least some of their food and income requirements from the limited field and range land available in their cramped kingdom. The country became famous for the severity of its soil erosion.

Unlike black South Africans, however, Basotho retained most of their indigenous social and political structures, and were able from 1966 to govern their nation themselves - within the strict confines of total enclosure by a hostile and overwhelmingly more powerful neighbour. A modified version of customary land tenure system was maintained. No land rights were ever accorded to settlers. Small though it was, the Basotho owned their land and could govern themselves within it.

Basotho also differed from their neighbours in experiencing the waves of 'development' that have been sweeping across Africa since the 1960s. Especially after the leadership adopted a more hostile stance towards the South African regime, Lesotho became a favourite client for the development agencies. Within its limited confines, agriculture and natural resources (ANR) were the main sector these agencies could identify for the delivery of projects. Over the last three decades, the country has therefore hosted hundreds of projects aimed at tackling soil erosion, increasing crop and livestock production and enhancing natural resource management.

Like most other African countries, Lesotho has rather little to show for the huge sums spent on these ANR projects, many of which were poorly designed and/or delivered. Like these other countries, Lesotho has more recently experienced changing development philosophies that emphasise local participation and responsibility in an effort to achieve more meaningful change. As part of this recent vogue, some projects have introduced community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) concepts in their efforts to enhance the condition of soil, forests and range lands. CBNRM has been an implicit rather than an explicit component of Lesotho's recent 'development' experience, however. It has had very few 'CBNRM' projects

¹ The people of Lesotho are called Basotho (singular Mosotho). Their language, and their way of doing things, are Sesotho.

as such, not least because it totally lacks the sort of wildlife and ecotourism sector that has been the primary platform for CBNRM in countries further north.

Until the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa was shunned by the international 'development' industry. For better or worse, it has little of the 'development' experience that Lesotho and most other African states have built up over recent decades. As we shall explain below, it had some special 'development' experiences of its own, notably the compulsory land use planning and land reallocation enforced in the 'homelands' by the 'betterment' programme. In many 'betterment' areas, the state erected fences to demarcate the required land uses.

Since 1994, there have been many initiatives to enhance the livelihoods of the rural poor in South Africa - most of whom live in the former 'homelands'. CBNRM concepts have been central to some of these efforts, in the wildlife and tourism sectors and in ANR activities.

In this chapter we contrast what we have seen of one kind of CBNRM - community-based range management - in adjacent rural areas of South Africa and Lesotho. Although geographically close, these areas' experiences of range management diverge in many ways, as do their views about how it can best be achieved in the future. In Lesotho, the social fencing approach to range management may still have a future. In the neighbouring area of South Africa, people now put their faith in metal fences.

1.2. Southern Lesotho and the Eastern Cape

Lesotho is a small and socially homogenous country. It comprises largely mountainous terrain, with a strip of lowlands and foothills along its northern and western boundaries with South Africa. Two of its ten districts, *Mohale's Hoek* and *Quthing*, straddle the southern corner of the kingdom and border mainly on the Eastern Cape, one of South Africa's nine provinces. Almost five times the size of Lesotho, the Eastern Cape is anything but homogenous. One of the most blatant aspects of its diversity derives from the recent apartheid past. The province is divided into formerly white and black areas, corresponding to the areas of freehold tenure and the former 'homelands' of *Transkei* and *Ciskei* respectively. In the latter areas, population densities are higher and standards of living much lower than in the formerly white parts of the province. Along part of the border between southern Lesotho and the Eastern Cape, freehold farms (still almost all white owned) face the fields and villages of the *Basotho*. Along the rest, more comparable land use systems face each other as the former *Transkei* 'homeland' meets Lesotho along the *Drakensberg* escarpment. Our focus in this chapter is mainly on the *Transkei* part of the Eastern Cape, and on the nearby *Mohale's Hoek* and *Quthing* districts of Lesotho. In the *Transkei*, we shall refer most specifically to the *Maluti* district, which runs from near the formerly white farming town of *Matatiele* up to the border with *Quthing* district.

In *Maluti* district, poverty is endemic and land degradation a significant problem. Typical former 'homeland' conditions prevail. Infrastructure is poor. People cannot live from the land, and are using their arable resources less and less. They pursue a wide range of local and migrant off-farm livelihood strategies, although many migrant jobs have been lost in recent years. The pensions now provided by the South African state to all elderly citizens have become a major livelihood source since 1994. Meanwhile, low density settlement is spreading across formerly agricultural land. Overall, in what *Manona* (1998) has described as the 'deagrarianisation' of the former 'homelands' of the Eastern Cape, people show decreasing interest in agriculture, presumably concluding that alternative sources of income are preferable and adequate. One reason for this choice is the poor state of the 'betterment' fencing (see below) that kept livestock out of fields for some decades. Stock damage to crops is now a major farming hazard.

For over 20 years, the Environmental and Development Agency Trust (EDA) has been combating poverty and promoting sustainable land use in three districts of the former Transkei, of which Maluti is one. One of South Africa's more prominent rural development NGOs, EDA began in 1996 to focus more explicitly on CBNRM approaches. It built these into what it called a Community-Based Land Management (CBLM) programme, which it operated with donor funding until 2000. The CBLM concept was an attempt to blend the emerging international emphases on participatory approaches and CBNRM with the emerging South African land reform programme, through which stronger ownership rights, new land management institutions and greater land management authority were promised to residents of the former 'homelands'. EDA and the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape agreed that PLAAS would provide applied research services to the CBLM programme. This resulted in what for us was a rewarding three years' interaction with EDA and the programme, during two of which Zolile Ntshona lived in Maluti district and undertook research on the valuation and management of communal range lands.

In southern Lesotho, CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere) is one of the more recent agencies to have undertaken ANR programmes with the Ministry of Agriculture and area residents. Since 1995, successive phases of its Training for Environmental and Agricultural Management (TEAM) project have placed increasing emphasis on participatory approaches to enhancing farm production and natural resource management within a livelihoods framework, and have started to pilot experiential learning extension approaches. From 1997 to 2000, PLAAS worked with CARE to provide applied research services to TEAM. This enabled Stephen Turner to make regular visits to Mohale's Hoek and Quthing districts, and to promote contacts between EDA, CARE and their respective programmes on the two sides of the border.

1.3. What follows

Our years of contact with the EDA and CARE programmes put us in the fortunate position of being able to compare livelihoods, agricultural and natural resource practices and 'development' interventions on the two sides of a southern African border. Out of the many contrasts between these neighbouring areas, those concerning range management seemed particularly striking to us. Range management has not been a prominent issue in either programme, although it clearly falls under the general ANR rubric of both. But the differing ways in which it is practised or neglected, and the views people in the two areas have about its future, offer important insights into the prospects of CBNRM in these two areas and in the region more generally. In this chapter, we therefore offer a discussion of what these differences are.

We feel it is important to present this discussion in the context of rural livelihoods in southern Lesotho and Maluti district. So we begin by outlining the structure and condition of these livelihoods. We then describe the governance and institutional framework within which range management has to take place, which clearly meshes with the overall livelihoods framework of people in these areas. We then summarise the CBNRM and broader rural 'development' initiatives that the two sides of the border have experienced, before focusing in more detail on the land management and land use planning approaches and programmes that have been applied there.

All this contextual discussion then enables us to describe and contrast how range management used to be practised in the two areas, how it happens now, what local people think should be done about it, and how those views compare with current government and project policies. From this presentation of the condition and prospects of range management in the Eastern Cape and southern Lesotho, we aim to identify the implications for local livelihoods and for range management and CBNRM policy in South Africa, Lesotho and the region as a whole.

2. Livelihoods

2.1. The livelihoods framework

Many different livelihoods models have been devised in the last few years, and a number have been applied in Lesotho and South Africa (Carney *et al.*, 1999; Mohasi and Turner, 1999; Ntshona, forthcoming; May, 2000; Sechaba Consultants, 2000; Turner, forthcoming). Rather than compare these models or apply any one of them in detail to southern Lesotho or the Eastern Cape, we are guided here by the inclusiveness of the livelihoods approach. For us, a particularly valuable feature of this inclusive approach is its emphasis on the non material aspects of what makes life better or worse: specifically, the political and social dimensions within which households construct and pursue their economic strategies.

2.2. Politics and governance

In terms of politics and governance, Lesotho and the Eastern Cape are inverse images of each other. At the macro level of the national political framework, Lesotho is unstable. The disastrous riots of September 1998, which devastated the capital and some other towns and caused a significant drop in national economic performance, were symptomatic of years of political uncertainty, during which Basotho have steadily lost faith in the party political process. The restoration of democracy in 1993 (following a period of military rule) did little to restore public confidence. A recent survey showed a lower understanding of and commitment to democracy in Lesotho than in six other southern African states (Turner, forthcoming, 36).

At the micro level of village life, on the other hand, Basotho remain comparatively secure in their understanding of how politics and governance should proceed, and feel that they have the capacity to operate the established system. The situation is far from ideal. Chiefs continue to dominate local governance, and many are inadequate administrators. Party politics has riven Basotho communities for decades, and continues to be a major impediment to progress in some villages. But there is a public understanding of how the system works, and what can be expected from it. This offers a reasonably stable platform for governance processes like range management.

Conversely, in the former Transkei areas of the Eastern Cape, black South Africans can now be reasonably confident about their national political framework. They live in an area where support for the ruling African National Congress is almost total. Although national party politics are not always edifying, they can be seen to be operating within a stable and democratic structure, overseen by the nation's impressive new constitution. Outsiders may express doubts about the longer term future of the South African polity, but blacks in the rural areas can be more confident of their national political framework than ever before in the nation's history.

At the local scale of areas like Maluti district, however, politics and governance are in flux. The structures of chiefly administration set up by the apartheid homeland government continue to function. But they are politically discredited, and their grip on local affairs is loosening. New systems of local government established in South Africa after 1994 were judged by a recent review to have been too ambitious. Many local authorities are now being merged, so that formal local government structures are further away from the people than ever. Administrative power is claimed and exercised informally and often unpredictably by a range of leaders and groupings that include chiefs, local strong men and political committees. This leaves the residents of districts like Maluti uncertain about local structures of authority and jurisdiction under which natural resources like range land can be managed.

2.3. Land rights and access

The contrast between these inverse images is sharpened when we look at land tenure and administration in Lesotho and the former Transkei. In Lesotho, indigenous systems of land tenure and management have been progressively codified and adjusted (notably through the 1979 Land Act), but retain the essentially communal character familiar to Africans on many parts of the continent. Chiefs continue to play a prominent role in local land administration, but do this now within the framework of Village Development Councils. Corruption is a growing problem, especially in peri urban areas where an informal land market operates and many chiefs take a commission to regularise the transactions. But in the rural areas Basotho remain fairly sure of securing residential land rights. There is not enough land for everyone to get fields, but the tenure and administration of arable land are clearly understood and function predictably. Range lands are common property. As we shall explain in more detail below, there is little uncertainty about how they are owned and operated.

In former South African 'homeland' areas like Maluti district, on the other hand, land tenure and administration are increasingly chaotic at the local level. Many legal and administrative vestiges of apartheid land administration systems remain in place, but function less and less efficiently. In some cases, local 'progressive' bodies, such as branches of the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO) have claimed land administration rights and allocate land in competition with the chiefs and magistrates (Turner, 1999). There is no clarity or consensus regarding local land rights or their administration. The latter often involves various chiefs, headmen and government officials, all of whom may charge for their services (Greenberg, 1999). This is partly due to the failure of the national government to make meaningful progress with tenure reform for the former homelands (Turner and Ibsen, 2000, 42-43). Range lands have ceased to be common property. In many cases, open access now prevails. As in many other African countries (Turner and Fuller, 1996), enclosure of the commons is now a real possibility.

2.4. Security

There is less to distinguish the two sides of the border with regard to security issues. Sustainable livelihoods clearly require adequate local security conditions, and in both these areas livelihoods are threatened by the current security situation. There are two main components to the problem.

The first is stock theft, which has degenerated from a time-honoured sport into a serious crisis in southern Lesotho and the adjacent districts of the Eastern Cape. There is ancient animosity between Basotho and the Xhosas of the Eastern Cape, and stock theft has always been one manifestation of ongoing feuds. But the scale and violence of cross border stock theft have escalated. Lives have been lost and many livelihoods destroyed overnight as households find their herds gone (Kynoch and Ulicki, 1999). The crisis has caused many stock owners to avoid remote range lands along the border, with the result that the grazing there is now probably better than it has been for generations. Conversely, there is even heavier pressure than before on more secure grazing areas close to villages.

The second component of the problem, linked to the first, is steadily increasing lawlessness in rural society on both sides of the border. Police and chiefs are increasingly seen as corrupt and ineffective. Declining migrant labour opportunities mean that there are more underemployed men in rural areas. Competition over local economic resources is intensifying. In these circumstances, securing compliance with any sort of common property resource management system is difficult. Effective range management becomes harder to accomplish.

2.5. Social networks

With regard to social networks, too, conditions on the two sides of the Drakensberg escarpment are broadly similar. Although many people in the former Transkei suffered enormous social disruption through the forced removals of the apartheid era and the 'betterment' programme that we discuss below, the disruption was not universal and much of it took place some decades ago. It therefore remains possible for local social networks to play a significant role in livelihood maintenance and development. People can assert a range of social entitlements and claims in assembling the means of agricultural or other production, and in securing the day to day necessities of survival at levels that are commonly below the poverty line. Social networks remain part of the essential fibre of livelihoods in the former Transkei. They are of limited use in achieving effective range management, but they are one of the bonds among those whom we have observed privatising some grazing areas in Maluti district.

In the less disrupted social environment of Lesotho, rural livelihoods continue to be held together by the social networks that pervade village life (Turner, forthcoming, 75-80). These networks are more relevant to achieving basic food security and combining the means of crop production than they are in range management. But, as we shall show, an essential component of Sesotho range management is herding labour. Kinship and other relations are central in herding arrangements, which often mean the deployment of boys and young men from one village to another for the care of herds that may combine several different households' stock.

2.6. Economic activities

Southern Lesotho and the former Transkei present largely similar economic opportunities and constraints to their residents. Both areas were turned into labour reserves for the South African mines and cities by the political and economic forces of the 20th century. As we have shown, they have a tradition of multiple livelihood strategies that combine migrant labour with local crop and livestock production, typically at much lower levels of productivity than those achieved on South African freehold farms. Now, formal sector employment opportunities are dwindling, although that does not deter escalating migration from these rural areas to supposedly better lives in the urban sector. Those who remain in the rural sector must rely more heavily on local non-agricultural strategies than their forebears did. On both sides of the border, marijuana production is the most lucrative activity and has become the backbone of many household livelihoods. These areas have many remote corners where the authorities are unlikely to detect this illegal crop.

There are differences, too. As we have noted, state pensions have rapidly become the mainstay of many livelihoods in districts like Maluti. One pensioner often sustains half a dozen other family members with this monthly payment. There are no state pensions in Lesotho, which is one reason adduced by those who claim that the rural economy remains more vigorous in that country than it does in neighbouring areas like the former Transkei. The 'de-agrarianisation' to which we have referred is undoubtedly much further advanced in this former 'homeland' than it is in Lesotho. In Mohale's Hoek and Quthing districts, although peri-urban sprawl is plainly evident, a comparatively robust rural economy continues to function. Fields are ploughed, large herds of livestock graze; rains permitting, crops are harvested and make a substantial contribution to household subsistence. Increasing areas of farm land are no longer cultivated, but the proportion is far smaller than in former Transkei districts like Maluti. Rural Basotho livelihoods are heavily dependent on the urban economy over the horizon, but they maintain levels of agrarian economic activity and resilience that are much harder to find across the border.

Traditionally, livestock have been an important economic (and cultural) component of livelihoods on both sides of the border. Cattle have provided a multitude of products to the household, as well as essential draft power for crop cultivation. Small stock provide meat,

wool and mohair. Horse riding is prominent in the culture and economy of rural Lesotho, and donkeys are important beasts of burden in both countries. In Lesotho especially, wool and mohair production have been staples of the national economy during the 20th century. In both areas, however, livestock production - and, hence, range management - are now becoming minority concerns. Herding labour is becoming scarcer, the risks of stock theft are significantly higher, wool, mohair and meat prices are falling and - we must assume - alternative livelihood strategies now appear more attractive. CARE surveys in five villages in southern Lesotho in 1999 found that 25% of households had no cattle, sheep or goats (Turner and Mohasi, 1999, 29). 66% of the households in these five villages mentioned livestock as a livelihood strategy, with only 7% ranking it as their most important strategy (*ibid.*, 35). In the Lesotho mountains as a whole, the percentage of households owning cattle dropped from 59 in 1993 to 49 in 1999, while the percentage of households owning small stock fell from 50 to 40 (Sechaba Consultants, 2000, 104). In recent, unpublished research in the Mkemane area of Maluti district, Ntshona found that 43% of households owned cattle, 10% owned sheep and 38% owned goats.

In both countries, livestock ownership is increasingly concentrated among those households that are better off, as they are the ones with the resources to stay in production and access markets in current, more difficult circumstances. At the same time, range land remains important to all livelihood categories - and particularly to the very poor - as the source of other common pool resources, such as medicinal plants, firewood and building materials. The economic value of communal range lands has typically been underestimated - or not recognised at all — by governments. Recent research in South Africa has started trying to value the true worth of these resources and bring it to the attention of policy makers (Shackleton *et al.*, 2000; Ntshona, forthcoming). While the livelihoods of many poor households have been impoverished by the declining feasibility of livestock production, they are further jeopardised in Maluti district by the possibility that the remaining, more affluent livestock producers may start to enclose the commons in their own private interests. In southern Lesotho, this threat remains remote.

3. Governance and institutions

3.1. Southern Lesotho

In the rural areas of southern Lesotho, chiefs continue to play a leading role in local government. Some chiefs are women: either the widows of chiefs, or the wives of chiefs who have been deposed because of incompetence or misdemeanours. Local hierarchies of chiefs and village headmen report upwards to area and ward or principal chiefs, who in turn are answerable to the king. Extensive mountain areas, where summer grazing is a more appropriate land use than cultivation or settlement, were originally used by the Basotho for seasonal stock posts, to which livestock were driven from the lowlands each spring. These mountain grazing areas were administered by the principal chiefs, who were based in the lowlands. Villages and fields have now spread throughout the mountains, but local chiefs and headmen in most areas still report to principal chiefs in the lowlands — although some principal chiefs are now based in the eastern and southern mountains. In Mohale's Hoek and Quthing, local chiefs report to principal chiefs within the same districts.

The modern state is represented through the offices of its various ministries in the district headquarters of Mohale's Hoek and Quthing. Various ministries, including Agriculture, have field offices in the rural areas and operate extension services and other infrastructure.

Back at the village level, one or more Village Development Councils (VDCs) operate in the area of each gazetted chief. One VDC often covers several villages, each of which has a

headman who reports to the gazetted chief. The VDC is meant to be responsible for a wide range of local functions, including land allocation, land management (including range management) and development planning. Some VDCs have sub committees for various portfolios. VDCs' performance over the years has been uneven, depending on local politics and personalities. They have received inadequate support and capacity building from government, and some are moribund. Gazetted chiefs are *ex officio* members of their VDCs, although the chair is meant to be chosen from among the elected members. Some dominate their VDCs; others ignore them and still rule as if they did not exist. In some cases, VDCs have been more assertive and have taken the central local government role, perhaps because the local chief is incompetent or unpopular. VDCs were meant to have been superseded by Community Councils in terms of the 1997 Local Government Act, but this change has been deferred pending local government elections.

Another ambiguous relationship is between the VDC and the chiefs traditional council of senior men, which in many cases also serves as an informal local court. Traditionally it was the chief and this council, and within it specifically nominated members, who took responsibility for range management. In many places this remains the practice.

3.2. The Eastern Cape

Local government and resource management in Lesotho are hardly paragons of harmony or efficiency. But at least Basotho have a reasonably clear idea of how these systems are meant to operate, and what their rights are. In former Transkei districts like Maluti, as we have shown, this sort of clarity no longer exists. As in most former South African 'homelands', the tangle of apartheid legislation, institutions and functions has not yet been completely unravelled. To complicate matters further, post-apartheid local government structures have recently been revised following a less than successful pilot period. People in the former Transkei were beginning to be familiar with the Transitional Representative Councils (TRCs) that were established after the first democratic local government elections in 1995 - although there was little these non-executive and severely under-resourced bodies could do for their constituents. In 2000, apparently recognising that it had bitten off more than it could chew, government abolished the TRCs. They are being merged with each other and/or with small town Transitional Local Councils to form Local Municipalities, several of which fall under each District Council. Residents of Maluti District are several hours' travel from the seat of their District Council.

Formal local government has thus moved further away from rural people, and remains largely inaccessible for many of them. The chiefs are closer to hand. Some continue to be paid by government, and much of the apparatus of chiefly administration during the apartheid era remains in place. Much as in Lesotho, its effectiveness varies from area to area with local politics and personalities. Overall, however, the perceived legitimacy of the chieftainship is lower in the former Transkei than it is in Lesotho, and 'progressive' bodies like SANCO openly challenge all chiefly authority in some places. There is no universally understood, village-level organ of governance comparable to Lesotho's VDCs. Who has authority or influence over processes like development planning, maintenance of infrastructure or the management of natural resources depends on local circumstances. Very often, there are competing claims to this authority. As a result, people are confused and many aspects of governance function poorly.

Other official state agencies are at least as remote from Maluti district villagers as they are for the citizens of Mohale's Hoek and Quthing. Departments like Agriculture and Forestry have been in turmoil since 1994, as the agencies of the various former 'homeland' and white governments were integrated, jobs were lost and functions were restructured. In the process, most of these agencies have become much less visible and effective, partly because they have fewer resources than before, partly because of privatisation initiatives in sectors like forestry,

and partly because there is such confusion about how the remaining staff are meant to operate. The few agricultural extension staff still notionally available in districts like Maluti are widely considered to be ineffective.

4. CBNRM and land management initiatives

4.1. Southern Lesotho

As in the rest of the country, the rural geography of southern Lesotho shows strong signs of indigenous land use planning and resource management. Cultivation is concentrated on appropriate soils at feasible altitudes, although population pressure has pushed fields up onto steeper, higher slopes than is sustainable. Settlements have traditionally been built away from good arable soils. As we shall show, indigenous grazing systems make good use of the range of topography and pastures available. Basotho know what their landscape has to offer, and have generally been efficient in making best use of it - although often at unsustainably high levels of exploitation.

As we have indicated, Lesotho has experienced wave after wave of ANR initiatives over the second half of the 20th century. In general they have tried to engage with the existing structures and systems of local governance and resource management, working with chiefs and VDCs on a range of initiatives to enhance production and protect the environment. Since colonial times, a long succession of projects have executed soil conservation measures. From the 1950s, these programmes have often included land use planning initiatives. The authorities worked with chiefs, and later with VDCs and similar bodies, to identify natural resource capabilities, plan appropriate uses for different parts of the landscape, and manage resource offtake with measures like grazing plans and forest regulations. As elsewhere in Africa, the land use planning initiatives of government and donor agencies were heavily technocratic at first, and added little value to the environmental skills and management systems that Basotho already deployed. Later attempts have used more participatory methods and have made less ambitious assumptions about how much technical planning could change a heavily used landscape for the better. At best, these more modest schemes have achieved only incremental improvements over the quality and impact of resource management that Basotho were already achieving.

Many of these initiatives have thus promoted community-based natural resource management, although specific use of the term has been rare in Lesotho. One USAID-funded range management project in the 1990s was entitled 'Community Natural Resource Management', and not surprisingly had links to the family of CBNRM projects that USAID supported in southern Africa during that decade. The general view among the dwindling band of development agencies still active in the country towards the end of the century has been that interventions should focus as directly as possible on sustainable changes in the livelihoods of the poor. From this perspective, natural resource management efforts are seen as too remote, indirect or unpromising to be worth the limited investments that are now available. Rather than conserve the landscape, for example, projects prefer to achieve increased production in a household garden.

Over the years, southern Lesotho has experienced the full history and variety of development interventions in the country. Colonial soil conservation programmes were succeeded by large, donor-funded integrated rural development projects. The fertile mountain pastures of Quthing district were the target of long running livestock development projects that included village land use planning and efforts to enhance range management. During the 1980s and the 1990s, small scale NGOs and large international agencies both promoted sustainable livelihood development initiatives that included ANR activities. Over the last decade, some agencies

have responded to the deep poverty of the remoter mountain areas with programmes to upgrade basic infrastructure there. CARE, as we have shown, has been executing an ANR programme that promotes sustainable livelihood enhancement through experiential learning and capacity building for community-based organisations. Since the livestock projects ended, however, there has been little focus on range land or other extensive natural resource management.

4.2. The Eastern Cape

The former 'homeland' areas of the Eastern Cape have a much narrower experience of ANR initiatives. But one of them was so sweeping and effective in its ambitions to transform the rural landscape that its impacts are still powerfully felt some 35 years after it lost momentum. Like the long running soil conservation programmes of Lesotho, the South African 'betterment' programme had its roots in the American and southern African droughts and dust bowls of the early 1930s, and in the authorities' myopic belief that Africans' irresponsible grazing and farming practices must be urgently modernised to save the environment. 'Betterment' operated in the South African 'homelands' from the 1930s to the 1960s. It was a drastic replanning of rural landscapes. For the indigenous scattered Nguni settlement patterns of areas like the Transkei, it constituted villagisation (de Wet, 1995). The programme combined the conventional paternalism of white land use planners in Africa with the brutality of an apartheid regime. It was widely opposed, and sometimes strenuously resisted. Some of the resettlement that 'betterment' required was carried out by force. Some of the resisters paid with their lives.

From a land use perspective, the core of the 'betterment' approach was the supposed rationalisation and consolidation of the different uses in the landscape. Settlements were to be clustered into villages. Areas for cultivation and *grazing* were consolidated and demarcated. Quite apart from the immediate trauma and long term stress of being forced to move into new, villagised homes, the people of districts like Maluti often lost their existing fields and had to cultivate new ones. These were sometimes of inferior quality, were often further away, and could be smaller in area than their old ones. Established grazing patterns and management systems were also swept away. Crop rotation and livestock culls were key technical elements in the authorities' efforts to force what they saw as more sustainable farming practices on ignorant Africans. (Stock reduction was rarely successful.) These efforts were driven by technical calculations of the size in hectares and herds of the 'economic units' believed necessary to achieve a basic minimum income without environmental damage. One reason for their ultimate collapse was that funds and land were never made available to absorb the large numbers of 'surplus' people that such calculations generated. Fencing was a key component of the 'betterment' landscape, demarcating the different planned land uses from each other and dividing grazing areas into 'camps' through which the stock might be rotated according to approved plans.

Over the middle decades of the 20th century, 'betterment' thus swept away indigenous land management institutions and practices in the Eastern Cape. It replaced them with an authoritarian, technocratic system of planning and management in which resource users were policed by the authorities and their local agents. The complete inverse of CBNRM, resource management under 'betterment' meant user compliance with regulations imposed from above.

Although formal 'betterment' programmes lapsed in the 1960s, their effects were strongly felt for the next 40 years. The planned, villagised landscape of districts like Maluti today is the landscape that 'betterment' created. 'Homeland' government agricultural extension and resource management programmes have mainly followed the course charted for them by 'betterment'. Paternalistic attitudes are still common among agricultural staff, and rural people still expect top down approaches from government agencies. Some of these people blame 'betterment' for declining interest in agriculture or environmental care among the

population. It is undeniable that the resettlement and disruptions of 'betterment' gradually extinguished much local environmental knowledge and commitment. 'Betterment' distanced people from the land.

The ANR experience of the former Transkei since 'betterment' has been much more limited than that of neighbouring Lesotho. Shunned by the international 'development' agencies, the demoralised landscapes and oppressed population of these areas were only supported by a few NGOs. Among these, EDA was a prominent pioneer. Its initial sustainable agriculture programmes were harassed by the apartheid authorities. Since 1994, it has been able to make more progress. In 1996, as we have noted, it launched its ambitious Community-Based Land Management programme, hoping to integrate CBNRM efforts with the new opportunities for land ownership and local land management authority that land reform was meant to unlock. It has made limited progress with what turned out to be a challenging learning curve for agency staff as well as area residents. Some communities were able to take substantial steps forward in the management of local woodland resources. Very little was attempted in the field of range management. As in southern Lesotho, project planners found the social, economic and technical complexities of range management daunting. They preferred to focus on what seemed more feasible initiatives in household livelihood enhancement and the management of other kinds of natural resource use.

5. Social fences, metal fences

5.1. Social fences in southern Lesotho

If a 19th century Mosotho could travel time to see how the range is managed in the country today, s/he would be shocked at the degraded state of the pastures, and probably bewildered at the diminished authority of the chiefs. But the range management system of 2001 would be broadly recognisable. It has grown organically on its indigenous African foundations. These provided for chiefs, sitting in their councils of senior men, to open and close grazing areas under their jurisdiction. Normally, this rotational system followed a seasonal pattern, with livestock moving to higher altitudes as spring progressed into summer. For lowland stock (and the Basotho were originally a lowland people), this transhumance involved long distance treks into the mountains. Later, as people came to live permanently in many mountain valleys, some transhumance was more localised - but could still span 1,000 metres or more in altitude. Long distance transhumance from the lowlands to distant mountain cattle posts continues today. But, as we have noted, it involves fewer stock than it used to because of economic and security considerations, as well as increased pressure on mountain grazing by mountain residents.

In the villages and pastures of southern Lesotho, systems of rotational grazing thus continue to be managed by chiefs and their advisers, in varying degrees of collaboration with the Village Development Councils that currently have statutory responsibility for natural resource management. Horses, and occasionally milk cows and bulls, are usually tethered in specially allocated grazing areas near villages. The large majority of stock - sheep, goats and cattle - are taken out each day from village kraals or cattle posts to graze under the supervision of herd boys or older shepherds. (As security risks rise and more boys attend school, the average age of herders is rising.) Herders are expected to know where they may graze their stock. Sometimes, stone beacons are used to demarcate the different grazing areas into which the landscape is divided. Often, well known natural features are used for this purpose. Stock can be impounded, and fines are payable, if animals are found grazing in the wrong place. Such stock may belong to local people, or to trespassers from other villagers. Conflict over the boundaries between different grazing jurisdictions are common. Traditionally, a chief would have one or more councillors (*babehi ba makhulo*) responsible for supervising range

management, and men could be assigned to ride the range checking for violations. These arrangements continue in some places. In others, often because of poor local leadership, range management and the punishment of transgressors has become less systematic, and violations are common.

Wire fences thus have no place in the range management of southern Lesotho. Indeed, promotional tourist literature sometimes describes the kingdom as a 'land without fences'. The system clearly depends on those factors that more generally make good governance and effective common property resource management feasible, such as well functioning local institutions, clear distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and respect for local law (Turner and Ivy, 1996). It also depends on the availability of herding labour. This labour is becoming scarcer, partly for the macro economic reasons that are making livestock production a less attractive livelihood strategy and concentrating stock ownership and herding in fewer hands.

Range management programmes in Lesotho have mainly been driven by environmental concern about the perceived overstocking and overgrazing of the nation's pastures. They have sought to enhance the existing Sesotho systems of rotational grazing and stock management, rather than to revolutionise them. These efforts, and the now well institutionalised permit system for stock movements, have been more successful than incentives to reduce stock numbers. Only one administration - a military regime - was prepared to introduce grazing fees. The democratically elected government that replaced it quickly cancelled them.

The core components of current range management policy were introduced almost 20 years ago at Sehlabathebe in the south eastern mountain district of Qacha's Nek (just north east of Maluti and Quthing districts). These are the Range Management Area (RMA) and the Grazing Association (GA) (Turner and Ivy, 1996). In brief, these are intended to tighten up the relationship between local groups of stock owners, clearly demarcated grazing areas, and the profits that enhanced range and livestock quality should generate. Only members of a GA (who should normally be all stock owners, and even non stock owners, in the specified village(s)) are entitled to use the RMA at any time. In consultation with the chief, the VDC and the Ministry of Agriculture, the GA takes responsibility for range management and related livestock improvement measures such as breeding and marketing programmes. A limited number of small fenced camps are typically set up around the RMA headquarters for breeding stock, but the general grazing system of the RMA continues to be regulated by social fencing and to depend on herding labour.

As can be imagined, it is easier to operate an RMA and GA in relatively secluded areas like Sehlabathebe where the number of competing or seasonal claims on the pastures is limited. In many parts of the country, adjudicating the relationship between neighbouring chiefs and their stock owners, and sorting out how an RMA grazing plan would allow for transhumance from the lowlands, make the concept much more complicated to apply. Nevertheless, there are now nine RMAs/GAs operating in Lesotho, and in its 2000/2001 plan the Range Management Division of the Ministry intended to work towards the declaration of four more (Range Management Division, 2000, 2). Across the country, the Division continues also to work on another long established programme, for the adjudication of grazing areas. Again, the intention of this effort is to rationalise the relations between groups of villages and clearly specified areas of pasture, so that range management can become more effective.

The areas of Mohale's Hoek and Quthing districts where we have worked are typical of much of Lesotho in having had little or no special attention from these range management programmes - until 2000, when the pasture adjudication programme was launched in Mohale's Hoek. The 1980s livestock projects in Quthing district to which we referred above did include some efforts to enhance range management, but did not involve such sweeping institutional change as the RMA/GA programme. Even this programme makes only marginal

adjustments to tenure, and does not noticeably change the landscape of the pastures, which continue to be demarcated by social fences.

In these southern districts, people do not want or expect radical change in range management arrangements. Although often contentious in their local detail, the government's RMA/GA initiatives broadly conform with how Basotho think their range management should evolve. What is more important in their livelihoods is that there should be security in the pastures and in their village lives generally. Like people everywhere, they need good leadership and efficient local institutions, and they do not always get them. Where leaders are strong and local structures work well, existing approaches to range management can still work well in the Sesotho view. Other livelihood forces are more likely to cause significant change in livestock production and pasture condition. These include wool and mohair prices; the availability and cost of herding labour; and the comparative potential for income generation from other local and migrant strategies. Basotho's attachment to their heritage of communal tenure is so strong that the notion of fencing the range into camps for ranch-style production remains too alien to contemplate. Although there has been comparatively little explicit reference to CBNRM in Lesotho's 'development' experience, indigenous CBNRM systems have so far continued to serve Basotho in their management of range lands.

5.2. Metal fences in the Eastern Cape

As we have seen, the land use history of neighbouring areas of the Eastern Cape is very different from that of southern Lesotho. The multiple traumas of 'betterment' threw a skein of metal fences across the landscape as the authorities imposed their version of a rotational grazing system on local stock users. These schemes were operated by the Department of Agriculture in collaboration with compliant chiefs and headmen. Rangers were employed by the Department to check on obedience to regulations and to impound trespassing stock.

Before 'betterment', the residents of the former Transkei managed their range much as the Basotho did. Since 'betterment', the old ways have not resurfaced. The former demography, administration systems and social units had been too comprehensively disrupted for that to be possible. Few of the old camp fences remain, although a few communities (for example at Bensonvale in the Herschel district, west of the Quthing border) have kept them in place. Instead, the prevailing situation is approaching open access. Local efforts are still made to protect certain areas from grazing at certain times of year, but respect for these measures is irregular.

Herding labour, which was hardly needed in the 'betterment' camps, is still little used. In arrangements that would perplex Basotho but would be familiar to people in the communal areas of Botswana, many stock owners in Maluti district drive their animals into what they think are suitable grazing areas and leave them there. Every few days, they check on their whereabouts and welfare. Others, though, bring their stock into kraals at night for fear of stock theft.

Meanwhile, it is becoming possible in these conditions of poor governance for stronger stock owners to find ways of securing exclusive access to prime grazing areas. Ntshona (2000) has documented one such case in Maluti district. A Fanners' Association has succeeded in interpreting Department of Agriculture policy that supports 'commercial' livestock production in such a way that it has obtained approval from the chief and the Department for the effective privatisation of an attractive area of grazing land. The Department is helping the Association with the fencing of this area and its division into camps. This development has caused considerable tension in the community. The Farmers' Association introduced its enclosure proposal to the community as a way of benefiting everybody, but in practice the benefits are being restricted to the small group of members. Many non stock-owners continue to depend on such range lands for a variety of other natural products. The Association now intends to sell these products, notably thatch grass.

Overall, as range management and many other aspects of local governance have become more chaotic and lawless, the mood in the former Transkei has become comparable to that in Russia. Despite the many injustices and failings of the former regime, there is a certain nostalgia for the order and predictability that it imposed on local affairs, including range management. In the range management sector, this means that many people have now concluded that the 'betterment' fences should be rebuilt, and their grazing lands once more placed under systematic rotation. Although they would expect much stronger and more genuine community involvement in the management of future fenced grazing camps than there was under 'betterment', this is certainly not a yearning for the conventional CBNRM that is being promoted across most of Africa. People in these Eastern Cape areas have been strongly influenced by their political, land tenure and agricultural experiences. Their model of successful, professional farming remains the commercial, ranch-style operation that they see white farmers running in the freehold districts.

People's views about the future of range management in districts like Maluti brings to mind the long running debate about the realism of calls for CBNRM in Africa, and about appropriate roles for the state. Lawry (1990) argued that it was naïve to call for the state to withdraw and allow indigenous African resource management institutions to take up their previous roles again (IFAD, 1995, 90). Such institutions, where they still exist at all, are now generally too weak to operate effectively in contemporary conditions. The people of the former Transkei are certainly not starry-eyed about the potential for a return to the pre-'betterment' systems of range management, or to the pure sort of CBNRM that many projects in Africa seem to advocate. Instead, they believe that government should take on at least some of its 'betterment' role again: providing the fences and other livestock production infrastructure, and offering professional guidance in the management of fenced grazing camps.

These views correspond with the Eastern Cape perspectives on national and local politics and governance that we outlined earlier. People in the rural areas of the former Transkei know that they have elected a strong national government. That government now has the power and resources that its predecessor used for so long to subjugate them, and to impose expensive, technocratic ANR programmes like 'betterment' on them. Meanwhile, they live in a local governance vacuum, where range management and related processes are in disarray. They want the government to assert its presence and deploy its resources in their areas again, just as it did during 'betterment' but this time with a human face.

Government - in the form of the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture - appears to be responding positively. The Department has launched programmes to rebuild the grazing camp fences in selected former 'homeland' areas. None of the fences have yet been rebuilt in Maluti district, but they are likely to be welcomed if they are. On the other hand, the government has as yet said little about how a newly fenced grazing system would operate. Erecting the fences is a relatively straightforward matter of spending money. The institutional and socio-economic issues of how range management will function after fences have been built are infinitely more complex, and have yet to be tackled. In particular, it is not clear what the costs and benefits would be for different livelihood strata. Current policy on tenure reform in the national Department of Land Affairs, confused as it is, gives signals that the enclosure of land in areas like the former Transkei for private farming purposes would not be opposed. We can join with the residents of Maluti and similar districts in hoping that government will play a stronger role in helping to rebuild local natural resource management. But we must also emphasise the possibility that a new fencing programme might impede access to these resources for the poor, if it promotes the privatisation of the range.

6. Range management and livelihoods

6.1. Broad trends

In both southern Lesotho and the Eastern Cape, rural livelihoods show similar broad trends. The standard 20th century livelihood cycle of migrant labour and rural farming has broken down. The rural natural resource base is increasingly seen as unproductive, and agricultural markets are unattractive. Those who can leave the rural sector, particularly the younger generations, do - either literally, by migrating for good to the big cities, or figuratively, by moving to country towns or peri-urban growth areas where they will strive for a non-agricultural living. In South Africa, many younger people have inverted the traditional structure of inter-generational dependence by subsisting on their grandparents' pensions.

These trends mean that range lands retain their importance for two increasingly disparate groups. The very poor - many of them women or female-headed households - need the range not so much for its grazing but for its supply of other resources that they can collect and sell, or use for domestic subsistence purposes. The well off - almost entirely male-headed households - can still prosper from livestock production, and therefore have a direct interest in the condition and management of pastures. In former 'homeland' districts like Maluti, there is significantly less interest in the range among middle livelihood categories, where most households have given up any serious ambition of keeping herds and may just have one or two animals kept within the homestead. In southern Lesotho, the differentials are not yet so clear cut, and many middle income families still strive, or hope, to keep stock on the range. But for them, too, the trends are not promising. The costs of livestock production are rising (not least because of stock theft), and livestock commodity prices are falling in real terms. Nevertheless, many Basotho households still badly need access to cattle for draft power, since they remain more committed to field crop production than their counterparts across the border.

6.2. Implications

Against the two countries' background of range management experience and attitudes that we have outlined in this chapter, the key implication for livelihoods is therefore one of maintaining equity in access to range land resources. It is unrealistic to try and counter the trend of narrowing livestock ownership among the richer classes - although in Lesotho, where more people still need cattle for farming purposes, there may be ways to facilitate such access through enhanced rental or sharecropping arrangements. The main challenge is to ensure that those who need the non-grazing resources of the range can still use them and can still participate in their management. The second challenge is to prevent those with small numbers of stock from being excluded from the range through processes of privatisation by the rich. The third challenge is to sustain and enhance the involvement of the state in assuring equitable and environmentally appropriate range management arrangements.

There seems to be a fair chance of meeting these challenges successfully in Lesotho. The poor still have access to the resources of the range lands, and there is no sign that that access will be curtailed by anything but the exhaustion of the resource base. The greater concern for Basotho in this regard must be to reduce dependence on over used resources, and to promote their conservation and sustainable use. Meanwhile, although the richer livelihood groups are gradually coming to dominate the use of the range in Lesotho, their dominance of its management is mediated by the traditional and modern institutions that control it - the chief in council, and agencies like VDCs and Grazing Associations. In this regard, the broader challenge for Lesotho is to reinforce responsible civic behaviour and the rule of law in rural society, so that these institutions can enforce their mandates. With regard to state involvement, the Lesotho government remains engaged to the extent that its slender resources

will allow. Government is aware of the continuing dependence of Basotho livelihoods on a degrading range land resource base, and it does what it can to enhance range management through its RMA, GA, range adjudication and related programmes. Despite the grave instability of the national polity, line functions of government like range management remain in place. Despite often exaggerated expectations of what government can or should do for them (Sechaba Consultants, 2000, 178-180), rural people do feel themselves to be part of an established relationship between the functions of the state and the capacities of local society.

The prospect of meeting these challenges in the Eastern Cape is less assured. There are two main reasons for this. The first is the local institutional vacuum that we have described. In a situation that approaches open access, it is easier for the strong to privatise resources. As we have noted, this has happened in many African countries. The second reason is the signals coming from central government about the future of tenure reform in the former 'homelands'. Misguided policy preferences for 'progressive', 'commercial' farming rather than communal land management (Cousins, 2000, 4) help create signals that the Department of Land Affairs would not oppose enclosure of the commons by richer livestock producers. The democratic government of South Africa has shown little commitment to the commons, and little understanding of how the poorest rural people depend on them.

There is therefore a real possibility that the poor will find it harder to access fuel, medicine, building materials and other such resources from the range land of districts like Maluti in future. Nor can we be confident that those with smaller stock holdings will have equitable access to the range. Already, in the Maluti district case studied in detail by Ntshona, local tensions have arisen because an elite Farmers' Association has fenced off some of the best grazing for itself.

Ironically, the sort of re-engagement that people in these Eastern Cape districts want from the government could be counter-productive for all but the richest of them. It is understandable that they are nostalgic for the order of 'betterment' and for the advantages of a fenced system of grazing camps in a society where, unlike in Lesotho, herding labour is scarce. But if the grazing camps are reintroduced - and we have quoted signs of government's intentions in that direction - this could accelerate the capture of range resources by the rich and powerful, and confirm the extinction of communal African values in Eastern Cape society. People want the government to come back into their local lives. But the way the government is coming back may help to dispossess many of them. So far it shows no signs of heeding the increasingly forlorn calls for a state commitment to the commons in South Africa. It is ironic, too, that the tension, injustice and conflict currently arising in the area over natural resource management derive from changes that appear to be directly in line with new land reform policies.

7. Implications for the region

The main lesson we draw from this review across the Lesotho — South Africa border is that the state must engage proactively in natural resource management. As Lawry pointed out a decade ago, it is naive to expect that local society can go it alone. But the state must engage in the interests of equity, and with a special commitment to the livelihoods of the poor. In most of southern Africa — as across the continent — the commons are under threat, or have already been partly privatised. Sometimes the government has been unable to halt the process, or has turned a blind, perhaps conniving eye to it. In other cases, notably Botswana's Tribal Grazing Land Policy, privatisation was the government's explicit intent.

Eastern Cape people's nostalgia for the metal fences and public order of 'betterment' is resonant with a sort of often felt but rarely expressed nostalgia for colonialism in Africa. This is not a nostalgia for the oppression and exploitation that characterised colonialism. It is a yearning for the order and predictability that colonial regimes ultimately achieved. When the

colonial state was so explicitly in charge, most people in communal areas had a clear view of some sort of livelihood. There was a fair prospect that natural resources in these areas would be managed for the common good — however socially and technically conservative the official definitions of that welfare may have been.

Just as it is impossible to recreate pre-colonial resource management institutions, however, so is it unwise to try to reimpose the heavy, paternalist hand of colonial resource administration. What South Africans in the former Transkei really want is a state that is patently trying its best to deliver the technical and institutional services that effective and sustainable resource management requires. Metal fences for the range could be a part of this input, although we have pointed out the risks that accompany them. In any event, black South Africans probably feel that they have a more immediate claim on these services than the citizens elsewhere in the region where democracy is less fresh. The people of Maluti and similar districts know that the new government is there in Pretoria because of their votes. They expect to see the resources of the state once more marshalled in the name of enhanced local resource management. People in other southern African democracies would probably find their expectations naive.

What Lesotho's modest experience shows is that it is feasible for the state to engage proactively in natural resource management and fuse its inputs with indigenous institutions and systems. For as long as herding labour remains widely available, a system that depends on social rather than metal fences can still function, reducing the opportunity for resource capture by the rich and helping to maintain resource access for the poor. Lesotho's experience is deeply flawed, in terms of the unstable national polity, deteriorating performance of many government departments, and decaying civic values in rural society. It is also a small and comparatively coherent country, lacking the vast geographic and social disparities of countries like South Africa and Namibia. But it has shown that it is possible to engage with indigenous systems of social fencing and to lay the foundations for a modern southern African commons.

There is a broader challenge. It would not yet be appropriate to tackle it in Lesotho. South Africa should be tackling it — but, despite new funds to start rebuilding 'betterment' fences in the Eastern Cape, there is no sign that it is doing so. Nor is there much sign of other governments in the region engaging with the problem. Yet it is surely necessary to do so, if we are serious about proactive state involvement in equitable and sustainable management of the southern African commons. The challenge is to build a modern southern African commons with metal fences. If herding labour is scarce, metal fences appear inevitable. But there must then be safeguards for the resource access of the poor within those fences, and guarantees that fencing does not lead to privatisation. Could there be a way of blending the experiences and expectations of southern Lesotho and the Eastern Cape?

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