

**Dynamics of conservation and society: the case of
Maputaland, South Africa**

by

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Dynamics of conservation and society: the case of Maputaland, South Africa

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Abstract

Current conservation practices in the developing world are conceptualized as tools to simultaneously protect biodiversity and provide rural economic development. Conservation's responsibility or ability to contribute to poverty alleviation and maintain its primary function of biodiversity protection is widely debated. Regardless if one chooses to prioritize conservation over poverty or *vice versa*, human well being at the global scale and local livelihoods at the micro scale are dependent on natural resources, making it is impossible to separate environment and development issues.

In South Africa, conservation has largely been pursued in protected areas, particularly fenced parks devoid of human settlement. The benefits of parks are well known (*i.e.* biodiversity and ecosystem services), but the impacts on local livelihoods are not well documented. The Maputaland region located in northeast KwaZulu-Natal contains exceptional biodiversity alongside massive poverty and has been the subject of conservation and development projects marketed as win-win solutions. Yet, conservation in Maputaland is driven by global external agendas and epistemologies based on

misconceptions of rural land use patterns and livelihoods, while the costs of implementation are borne locally. Nature-based tourism, participatory community schemes, and pro-poor policies have been designed to facilitate economic development, but the benefits have been minimal and slow to materialize. Uneven levels of power between rural residents and external institutions, as well as within the local tribal government, have resulted in the inequitable distribution of benefits and decision-making power.

Development strategy in Maputaland continues to focus on conservation, including the expansion of protected areas to form transboundary peace parks linking reserves in South Africa, Mozambique, and Swaziland. However, expanded conservation is likely to result in household resettlement, lost access to socio-cultural and natural resources, and an increased risk of conflict over land use between conservation authorities and local residents. Complicating the success of any conservation and/or development scheme in Maputaland is the massive HIV/AIDS prevalence. With more than one third of residents infected, the disease will deepen poverty, decimate local capacity and leadership, and lead to an increased risk of resource degradation and land use conflict that ultimately undermines the long-term security of both biodiversity and local livelihoods.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Environment and Society), is my own and original work except where acknowledged. This work has not been submitted for a degree at any other tertiary institution.

Jennifer Lee Jones

Disclaimer

This thesis consists of a series of chapters that have been prepared for submission to, or publication in, a range of scientific journals. As a result, styles may vary between chapters in the thesis and overlap may occur to secure publishable entities.

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