

# What benefit-sharing mechanisms can help forestry-based land restitution beneficiaries in South Africa? The case of Limpopo province forestry projects

Lucky Makhubele <sup>a,b</sup>, Ratsodo Tshidzumba <sup>a</sup>, and Paxie Chirwa <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Forest Science Postgraduate Programme, Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences University of Pretoria, 5-15 Plant Sciences Complex, Corner of Lynwood Rd and Roper St, Hatfield, Pretoria, 0028, South Africa; <sup>b</sup>Department of Forestry and Natural Resource Management, Fort Cox Agriculture and Forestry Training Institute, New College Admin, Middledrift, 5685, South Africa

## ABSTRACT

The capture of the benefits by the elites due to the lack of a benefit-sharing mechanism is a serious threat to the development of forestry land restitution projects in South Africa. This study investigated the benefit-sharing mechanisms desirable to land claimant beneficiaries in forestry-based land restitution projects. A random sampling technique was used to select 351 and 170 households' beneficiaries in Levubu and Tzaneen communities in Limpopo Province, respectively. Data were collected using a household questionnaire and focus group discussions. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse data. Findings revealed that there are still no benefit-sharing mechanisms in Levubu and Tzaneen communities, but the beneficiaries comprehend the significance of developing a benefit-sharing mechanism for fair and equal distribution of benefits. The results revealed that stakeholders' meetings (58.7%) and open beneficiaries' meetings (40.6%) were preferred mechanisms. In addition, beneficiaries in both Levubu (54.4%) and Tzaneen (68.9%) preferred to receive benefits monthly. This paper provides the first overview of a benefit-sharing model in forestry-based land restitution projects in South Africa. It concludes that there is a need to consider the early development of a benefit-sharing mechanism in land restitution projects in order to allow a greater equal share of the benefits.

## KEYWORDS

Benefit-sharing; community forestry; forestry projects; elites; land reform; land restitution

## Introduction

Land reform is a tool and/or policy that are widely used to address the inequality of land ownership and unequal access to land in many countries (Tshidzumba et al. 2018). Worldwide, land ownership and access inequality have been described as social injustices and these frailties have been addressed through implementing land reform (Sharma and Jha 2016). Land reform has been and/or is still being implemented in European countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, and many more (Hartvigsen 2013), and in Asian countries including China, Japan, Vietnam, Nepal, Taiwan, and in African countries like Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malawi, etc. as well as in Latin American countries (e.g. Mexico, Peru, Brazil, etc.) (Sharma and Jha 2016). Most importantly, a wide variation of land reform processes has been implemented in different

ways in different countries (Hartvigsen 2013; Sharma and Jha 2016). For instance, these include amongst others land consolidation, restitution, distribution, redistribution, expropriation, privatisation, and collectivisation (Davies et al. 2020). During apartheid in South Africa, land inequality was manifested through segregation and land occupation restriction policies such as the Group Areas Act 41 of 1950 and Natives Land Act 27 of 1913 (Kloppers and Pienaar 2014). As result, native South Africans occupied approximately 13% of the total land (Kloppers and Pienaar 2014). Moreover, a recent land audit still shows the inequality of agricultural land ownership, the report revealed the current land ownership by race with Whites owning 72% (26.6 million ha), Coloured (15%, 5.3 million ha), Indians (5%, 2 million ha), Blacks (4%, 1.3 million ha), Other (not specified) (3%, 1.2 million ha), and Co-owners (1%, 425 437 ha) (Government of South Africa 2017). Post-apartheid (1994), South Africa's land reform policies were enacted and have been implemented through a diversity of programmes such as land restitution (returning land to rightful owners), land redistribution (redistributing land to landless people), and land tenure (provide rights to those who are already occupying land without rights) (Netshipale et al. 2017;). These programmes are aimed at improving the livelihoods of previously disadvantaged people (Sharma and Jha 2016). According to Netshipale et al. (2017), land restitution and redistribution are the most prioritised since they enable the transfer of large areas of land to the rightful groups. However, land redistribution and restitution programmes are being reported as failed due to poor beneficiary selection resulting from politically connected and business people at the expense of deserving beneficiaries (Hall and Kepe 2017), and poor benefit-sharing within projects (Chirwa et al. 2015; Tshidzumba et al. 2018).

This study focused on the land restitution programme because it is the most implemented programme in the forestry sector in South Africa. Land restitution projects are expected to be commercially viable and deliver maximum benefits to the beneficiaries. At the same time, the improvement of the livelihood of previously disadvantaged people remained the epicentre of the South African Land Restitution Programme (Davis 2019). Also, land restitution is perceived as a vital strategy for rural socio-economic development as it contributes substantially to poverty and unemployment alleviation. However, approximately 73% of the farms restored through land restitution failed to achieve the goal of improving the lives of the beneficiaries (Manenzhe et al. 2016). Criticism of the failure of land restitution projects can be expressed through the following questions: Why land restitution projects have not delivered benefits? How are land restitution projects contributing to the realisation of the objectives set out in the land reform programme? Despite a cost of about 19 billion rand (USD 1.36 billion) spent since the implementation of the land restitution programme (Makhubele et al. 2020), measurable benefits of land restitution projects have been limited (Tjale et al. 2020). Sharing of benefits in land restitution projects seems even less apparent: the livelihood of very few beneficiaries had improved through the land restitution projects due to unequal sharing of benefits (Valente 2009). The question "How can we make land restitution projects work?" is critical as it is almost three decades since land restitution was first implemented, and progress remained more or less the same all the time. For many beneficiaries of land restitution, the frustration of land restitution failure cannot be downplayed (Davis 2019). Land restitution projects beneficiaries are frustrated and struggling to survive because of the project's failure to provide essential benefits (Tjale et al. 2020).

There are many forestry plantation areas subjected to land claims in South Africa, with about 40% of privately-owned plantations and 70% of state-owned plantations under land claim (Chirwa et al. 2015). As a result, the forestry industry has initiated partnership models to expedite settlement. The forestry partnership models initiative was aimed at ensuring sustainable management and production of the forest plantation land to be transferred (Tshidzumba et al. 2018). However, different forestry companies use different approaches to address land restitution claims. These include the following post-settlement models: (i) plantation management plan, a management assistance plan, a timber supply agreement and a lease agreement; (ii) lease-back and joint venture models; (iii) a sale and lease-back model (Chirwa et al. 2015; SAFCOL 2015).

In 2015, the community-based forestry plantation area was approximately 45100 hectares accounting for 3.7% of the 1.27 million hectares of forestry plantation land in South Africa. However, few community forestry projects have been reported to be successful and growing. Mabandla project in KwaZulu Natal is one of the examples of a successful community forestry project in South Africa (Clarke 2018). In terms of management, the Mabandla project Trust deed stipulates that committee elections should be conducted democratically, and Trustees should ensure that there are effective communication, transparency, accountability, and fairness in the benefit distribution (Blore 2015). In addition, Blore (2015) states that the Trust deed has mechanisms to help the project avoid elite benefit capture.

Several studies have found that the lack of a Benefit-Sharing Mechanism (BSM) within land restitution projects is the main challenge, due to the capture of benefits by the elites (Chirwa et al. 2015; Tshidzumba et al. 2018; Tshidzumba and Chirwa 2022). Makhubele et al. (2020) define BSM as a tool developed to identify the benefits (monetary or non-monetary) and a guideline of benefit distribution. The study conducted by Tshidzumba et al. (2018) on forestry community projects in Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal, found that there is a lack of BSMs, and the elites captured the benefits of the projects. Elites are powerful groups, such as politically connected and/or economical powerful people, who benefit at the expense of other beneficiaries (Mtero et al. 2019). Tshidzumba et al. (2018) have emphasised that the capture of the benefits by the elite is more common in forestry community projects where there is no BSM. Other studies have also indicated that forestry land restitution projects are characterized by unequal benefit-sharing, and do not have the capacity to address the challenges such as unequal benefit-sharing (Makhubele et al. 2020). This hampers efforts to share benefits adequately and equally (Gebara 2013). Likewise, the benefit-sharing mechanism is required to distribute and guide sharing of benefits in various projects like mining projects (Garidi and Gaidajis 2019), RED+ (reducing emission from deforestation) projects (Weatherley-Singh and Gupta 2015), hydropower projects and community conservation projects (Gill 2020). The absence or unsuccessful implementation of the benefit-sharing mechanism creates conflicts and unequal sharing of benefits (Weatherley-Singh and Gupta 2015).

It is clear from the literature that there is a need for forestry land restitution projects to develop a BSM. A BSM would potentially increase the chance of an equal share of benefits among the beneficiaries (Chomba and Nkhata 2016). This could reduce the possibility of conflicts among beneficiaries in the project and promote justice by reducing elite capture as the BSM is predetermined. Eventually, it would enhance sustainable management and production in the project (Campese 2012). In this study, the communities are yet to get commercial forestry land. Therefore, it is of great importance for the communities to

identify benefits and develop a BSM before the project commencement. This study investigated the BSMs desirable to land claimant beneficiaries in forestry-based land restitution projects. The leading research questions addressed were: (1) what are the desired benefits? (2) what are the desired external stakeholders? (3) What is the desired role and support from external stakeholders? (4) What are the desired benefit distribution mechanisms?

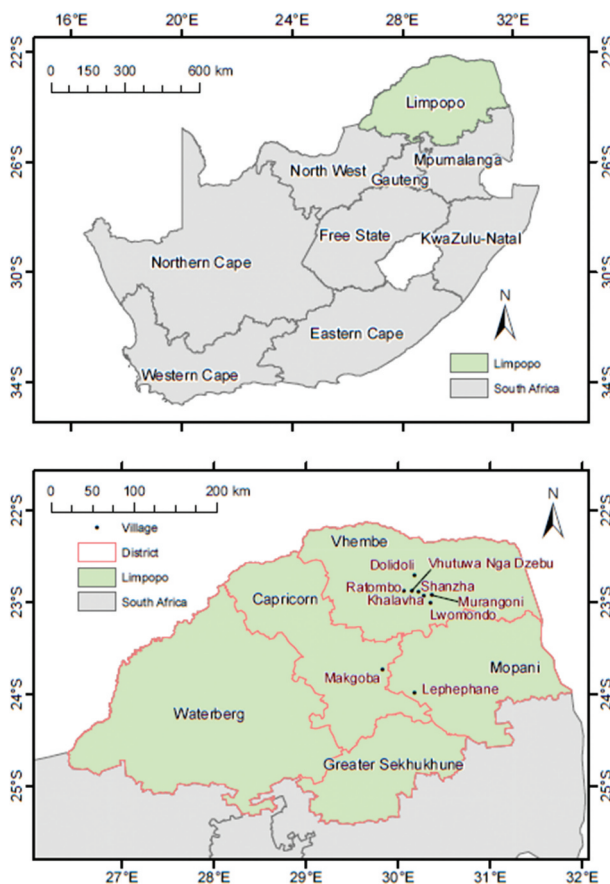
## **Methodology**

### ***Description of the study area***

This study was conducted in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The total land area is approximately 125 755 km<sup>2</sup> and the province has five district municipalities, namely Vhembe, Waterberg, Capricorn, Sekhukhune and Mopani (Statistics South Africa 2016). Limpopo Province is the second poorest province after Eastern Cape Province, with over 80% of the population being rural dwellers (Chikozho et al. 2019). The province is characterised by diverse land use, including commercial forestry and agriculture, homelands, communal farming, natural forests, sacred forests, conservation areas (e.g. parks) and mining. A report by Statistics South Africa (2016) highlighted that Limpopo Province is the second-highest province (24.1%) in terms of households involved in agriculture after Eastern Cape province (27.9%).

However, commercial farms account for 64% of the province's total land area (Chikozho et al. 2019). This is because commercial farmers accumulated more land than the communities during land dispossession implementation in the country. This left many rural communities landless. However, a mission to redress the injustice was initiated after the advent of the democratic government in 1994. The study communities are former victims of land dispossession where their land was dispossessed and converted from subsistence agriculture and residence to commercial forestry. This study was carried out in three district municipalities, namely Vhembe, Capricorn, and Mopani. In total, nine communities were surveyed with seven of these communities situated in the Vhembe district and the other two were each from Capricorn and Mopani districts (Figure 1).

The communities were grouped based on the area under the land claim. Thus, Vhembe communities were grouped under Levubu communities while Mopani and Capricorn were grouped under Tzaneen communities. These communities are former occupants of the land that is being used for commercial forestry by a state-owned forestry company. To get the land rights back, the communities lodged the land claim with Limpopo Land Claim Commission (LLCC) and the communities are still awaiting their title deeds since the land claim was successful. These forestry land claims in Limpopo Province are part of 61% of the state-owned company land which is under land claim in the country (SAFCOL 2015). Seven communities in Levubu and one community in Tzaneen registered Community Property Association (CPA) while only one community in Tzaneen considered Community Trust (CT) to manage the projects on behalf of the beneficiaries. During the survey, it was not known if communities would agree on any of the available settlement models proposed by the state-owned company (Leaseback and Joint venture). The registered beneficiaries were 829 in Levubu communities and 1387 in Tzaneen communities, with those from Levubu having claimed a total of 31,133 ha and those



**Figure 1.** Map of Limpopo Province showing the study sites.

from Tzaneen a total of 8,032 ha, of commercial plantations of *Eucalyptus* and *Pinus* tree species. The rotations of *Eucalyptus* and *Pinus* tree species are 10 years and 35 years, respectively. The plantations produce timber and poles for the local and international markets.

### **Data collection**

Following ethical clearance, data collection in both Levubu and Tzaneen was conducted between November and December 2017. Permission and authorization to conduct this study were granted by the community leaders and the CPAs, and the CT leadership. The mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) helped to understand the desires, attitudes and experiences of the beneficiaries (McCusker and Gunaydin 2015). We applied purposive sampling to select the study communities that lodged a land claim against commercial forestry plantations. We then relied on the list of registered land claim beneficiaries as a key means of data collection and for randomization of the household sample. A computerized random sampling numbers generator was used to select the households (Krosnick 2018). The lists were sourced from the CPAs and CT leadership.

The sample size was determined at a 95% confidence level and 5% confidence interval. The sample units selected from Levubu communities were 351. While in Tzaneen communities, 170 sample units were captured.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and focus group discussions. The questionnaire captured the demographics, the desired benefits, stakeholder engagement and benefits distribution mechanism. Furthermore, focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with a combined group of project committee members, elderly and youth beneficiaries, to get their perception and more details about benefit-sharing in land restitution projects. In total, five FGDs, with a minimum of 11 participants each, were conducted in Levubu communities namely, Khalavha, Songozwi, Lwomondo, Vhutuwa nga dzebu and Murangoni, while only one FGD was conducted in Tzaneen communities, at Makgoba village with 18 participants.

### **Data analysis**

The collected quantitative data were processed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23.0. A series of statistical analyses were performed to answer the research questions. The demographics were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages). A Friedman's test analysis was performed to mean rank the desired benefits and stakeholders' engagement, role and support. This analysis was executed to determine if there was a significant difference among the variables and to determine the most desired and least desired variables. The variables were significantly different at  $p < .001$  and the highest mean was ranked "1" and the lowest was ranked "4". Then, to test the relationship between the desired benefits and socio-economic factors, a binary logistic regression was conducted. Dependent variables were desired benefits and independent variables were socioeconomic factors. Variables were coded as 0 = No, 1 = Yes, 0 = 18–35, 1 = 36–≥60, 0 = Female, 1 = Male, 0 = Formal income, 1 = No formal income, 0 = Education, and 1 = No education. The relationship was significantly different at  $p < .05$ . Cross-tabulation was adopted to analyse the benefit-sharing approach, benefit-sharing meeting, level of benefit-sharing and timeframe of benefit-sharing. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis. The data were processed using the following steps, identification of similarities and differences of respondent's responses, categorisation of similarities and differences among the groups of the respondents on the FGD questions responses, and compilation of the responses for the conclusion. This analysis helped to ensure the truthfulness and reflection of the real perspectives of the participants.

## **Results**

### **Demographics**

Table 1 shows that the population in the study communities was relatively old with a large majority of respondents being 36 year old and above, that households headed by females were more abundant than those headed by males, that most respondents had attended school, and that the main source of income was social grants (old age grant, child support grant, disability grant, foster grant), especially in the Levubu communities. It is also worth noting that a substantial number of households had no formal income at all, especially in the Tzaneen communities.

**Table 1.** The socio-economic profile.

Demographic characteristics		Tzaneen Communities (n = 170)	Livubu Communities (n = 351)
Age group	18–35	27.7	6.5
	36- ≥60	72.3	93.5
Gender	Female	68.8	60.1
	Male	31.2	39.9
Education	Formal education	87.7	69.3
	No formal education	12.3	30.7
Household Income	Formal income	11.8	23.1
	Social grant	29.4	56.4
	No formal income	58.8	20.5

### The desired benefits

Table 2 presents the association of socio-economic factors with the desired benefits. Education had a significant influence ( $p < .05$ ) on community development benefits. Illiterate beneficiaries were significantly more likely ( $p < .05$ , 2.186) to consider community development benefits than literate beneficiaries. Age had a significant influence ( $p < .05$ ) on access to the land benefit. Young beneficiaries (18–35) were significantly less likely ( $p < .05$ , 0.405) to desire access to land for different benefits (e.g. residential, farming, business and cultural practices) than elder beneficiaries.

The level of desire for the benefits is shown in Table 3. There were significant differences among the desired benefits in Levubu ( $x^2 = 274.162$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Tzaneen communities ( $x^2 = 181.144$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The most desired benefit by mean rank was employment, ranking (1) with a mean rank of 3.16 and 3.34 in Levubu and Tzaneen, respectively. During FGDs, the young beneficiaries indicated that they were not employed and were hopeful that forestry land restitution projects would provide employment. This was supported by old beneficiaries who emphasized that the projects would employ their children.

**Table 2.** The association of socio-economic factors and the desired benefits.

Dependent variable	Independent variable	B	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I.for EXP (B)	
					Lower	Upper
Employment	Age (36-Above)	-.278	.326	.757	.434	1.320
	Gender (Male)	.046	.823	1.048	.697	1.575
	HH Income (NHI)	-.294	.383	.745	.385	1.443
	Education (NE)	-.108	.652	.898	.562	1.435
Community development	Age (36-Above)	-.307	.477	.735	.315	1.716
	Gender (Male)	-.456	.086	.634	.377	1.067
	HH Income (NHI)	-.658	.072	.518	.253	1.061
	Education (NE)	.782	.008*	2.186	1.231	3.881
Business opportunities	Age (36-Above)	-.627	.140	.534	.232	1.229
	Gender (Male)	-.405	.100	.667	.412	1.081
	HH Income (NHI)	-.450	.199	.638	.321	1.267
	Education (NE)	.462	.094	1.588	.924	2.726
Access to land	Age (36-Above)	-.904	.004*	.405	.220	.747
	Gender (Male)	-.023	.905	.977	.667	1.431
	HH Income (NHI)	.062	.836	1.064	.593	1.910
	Education (NE)	.362	.097	1.437	.936	2.205

\* denotes significance difference at  $p < 0.05$ , HH = Household, NHI = No Household Income, NE = No Education



**Table 3.** Beneficiaries desired benefits.

Desired Benefits	Livubu Communities (n = 351)		Tzaneen Communities (n = 170)	
	Mean rank	Rank*	Mean rank	Rank*
Employment	3.16	1	3.34	1
Community development	2.09	4	2.09	3
Business opportunities	2.16	3	2.08	4
Access to land	2.62	2	2.49	2
<i>Chi-square</i>	274.162		181.144	
<i>P-value</i>	0.000		0.000	

\*Ranking ranging from highest (1) to lowest (4)

### **External stakeholders' engagement, role and support**

The external stakeholders in this study referred to private companies, non-government organisations (NGOs), local government and community-based organisations (CBOs). Table 4 shows the level of desire of beneficiaries for external stakeholders, roles and support. There was a statistically significant difference among the desired external stakeholders in Levubu ( $x^2 = 195.738$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Tzaneen ( $x^2 = 195.163$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The most preferred external stakeholder by the mean rank was local government, ranking (1) with a mean rank of 2.91 in Levubu and Tzaneen (3.37). During all FGDs, engaging local government was emphasised as one of the most important approaches in community beneficiaries' projects and consistently identified in all areas. During FGDs in Levubu, participants indicated the following: "Involving government is the best option in our projects because we believe the government will help us in terms of finance and management." They further emphasised that local government would play important role in overseeing the project management and the operation.

**Table 4.** External stakeholder's engagement, role, and support.

Beneficiaries desire	Livubu Communities (n = 351)		Tzaneen Communities (n = 170)	
	Mean rank	Rank*	Mean rank	Rank*
<b>External Stakeholders</b>				
NGOs	2.79	2	2.42	2
Local government	2.91	1	3.37	1
Community-based organisation	1.98	4	2.09	4
Private company	2.31	3	2.12	3
<i>Chi-square</i>	195.738		195.163	
<i>P-value</i>	0.000		0.000	
<b>Role of External Stakeholders</b>				
Conducting benefit sharing	1.97	2	2.07	2
Monitoring	1.89	3	1.80	3
Facilitating	2.14	1	2.13	1
<i>Chi-square</i>	32.558		17.397	
<i>P-value</i>	0.000		0.000	
<b>Support from External Stakeholders</b>				
Technical support	2.03	2	1.93	2
Financial support	2.37	1	2.51	1
Developing policies	1.60	3	1.55	3
<i>Chi-square</i>	170.403		113.748	
<i>P-value</i>	0.000		0.000	

\*Ranking ranging from highest (1) to lowest (4)



There was a statistically significant difference among the desired role of stakeholders in Levubu ( $\chi^2 = 32.558$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Tzaneen ( $\chi^2 = 17.397$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The results showed that the communities had a common preference as they both expected external stakeholders to facilitate benefit-sharing ranking (1) with a mean rank of 2.14 in Levubu and Tzaneen (2.13). During FGDs, Levubu youth beneficiaries clearly and consistently articulated the expected roles and responsibilities of external stakeholders as follows: *“We need a third-party preferable government to oversee and also help to facilitate benefit-sharing because benefit-sharing is a complex task considering that the project has a large group of beneficiaries.”*

In addition, there was a statistically significant difference in the desired support from external stakeholders in Levubu ( $\chi^2 = 170.403$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Tzaneen ( $\chi^2 = 133.748$ ,  $p < .001$ ). A common preference was consistent as both communities' most desired support was finance, ranking (1) with a mean rank of 2.37 in Levubu and Tzaneen (2.51). During the FGDs in Tzaneen, participants uniformly emphasised the importance of acquiring financial support as follows: *“Financial support is very crucial at the initial operation of the project because the majority of us are not employed, and it will be very difficult if we do not get support to kick start the project.”*

### **Beneficiaries desired benefits distribution mechanism**

There was a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 59.511$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between Levubu and Tzaneen communities on the perception of the type of meeting that should be considered for benefit-sharing (Table 5). The most desired meeting in the Levubu communities was the stakeholders meeting (58.7%), whereas in Tzaneen it was the open meeting (40.6%). Regarding the level at which benefits should be shared, there was a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 22.303$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between Levubu and Tzaneen communities. In both Levubu and Tzaneen communities, the respondents revealed the desire of sharing benefits at a household level accounting for 59.5% and 53.5%, respectively. Furthermore, there was a significant difference between Tzaneen and Levubu ( $\chi^2 = 10.053$ ,  $p < .001$ ) regarding benefit-sharing timeframes. Most beneficiaries in both Levubu (54.4%) and Tzaneen (68.9%) preferred to receive monetary benefits monthly. During FGDs, Levubu elder beneficiaries indicated

**Table 5.** The desired benefit-sharing mechanism.

The proportion of respondents in communities (%)			
Beneficiaries desire	Livubu (n = 351)	Tzaneen (n = 170)	Inferential statistics
<i>Types of benefit-sharing meetings</i>			$\chi^2 = 53.511$
Open Meeting	31.9	40.6	df = 2
Stakeholder Meeting	58.7	27.6	p = .000
Project Committee Meeting	9.4	31.8	
<i>Level of benefit-sharing</i>			$\chi^2 = 22.303$
Individual	27.4	17.1	df = 2
Household	59.5	53.5	p = .000
Groups	13.1	29.4	
<i>Timeframe of benefit-sharing</i>			$\chi^2 = 10.053$
Monthly	54.4	68.9	df = 3
Two-three months	22.1	19.2	p = .018
Six-twelve months	11.6	5.2	
Yearly	11.9	6.7	

that the household representative should receive the monetary benefits on behalf of other beneficiaries in the household, while the youth beneficiaries consistently articulated the importance of receiving benefits monthly by emphasizing that, *“we want monetary benefits monthly because the majority of us we are not employed.”*

Through both interviews and FGDs, the data were incorporated to develop a benefit-sharing model. The model was developed out of the beneficiaries’ perceptions and ideas of how the benefit-sharing should be structured. FGDs played a significant role as the ideas of the beneficiaries contributed to a designed benefit-sharing model. The model has inter-related four steps (Figure 2). First step, CPA/CT committee and the beneficiaries meet in a general meeting to identify external stakeholders. When stakeholders are identified and assessed, the project appoints external stakeholders and develops a Benefit-Sharing Project Panel (BSPP). Second and third steps, the BSPP embarks on the assigned task of benefits decision-making and implementation. In step four, the BSPP distributes the benefits to the beneficiaries. In the last step, the BSPP assess and evaluates the benefits accrual, to make sure that benefits are distributed equally and fairly. The proper execution of each step would ensure the enforcement of fair benefit-sharing.

## Discussion

### *The desired benefits*

This study found similarities between communities’ desired benefits including both tangible and intangible benefits, employment benefits from the projects and access to land for vast land-use options (e.g. residential, farming, business and cultural practices). These benefits are critical as many beneficiaries, old and young did not have an income and depended on social grants for survival in both communities. In line with this, Chitonge (2013) reported that rural communities are characterised by social grant dependants, inclusive of the land restitution beneficiaries. Beneficiaries’ desires are in line with the objective of land restitution, as highlighted by Tjale et al. (2020) that the implementation of land restitution in developing countries including South Africa is aimed to improve the livelihood of previously disadvantaged people through the provision of social and economic services. This, however, is not the reality to date in South Africa, as research has shown that many land reform beneficiaries’ livelihoods have not improved since the implementation of the land reform legislation (e.g. Manenzhe et al. 2016; Makhubele et al. 2020).

Nevertheless, land restitution beneficiaries still believe that land restitution projects would provide essential benefits to improve their livelihoods, as emphasized by beneficiaries in FGDs; they are looking forward to land restitution to change their lives through access to the land resource. Hence, reports on land restitution projects’ failure are important lessons to active projects and to the land claimants who are still awaiting their title deeds. Many beneficiaries live in deep rural areas where basic services are poor or not available at all. On this note, it was not a surprise that community development was one of the critical desired benefits by uneducated beneficiaries. Given Limpopo Province is the second poorest province in the country (Chikozho et al. 2019; Makhubele et al. 2020), basic services such as schools, electricity, water and infrastructures are not adequately provided to the whole province. This leaves many deep rural communities with serious poverty.

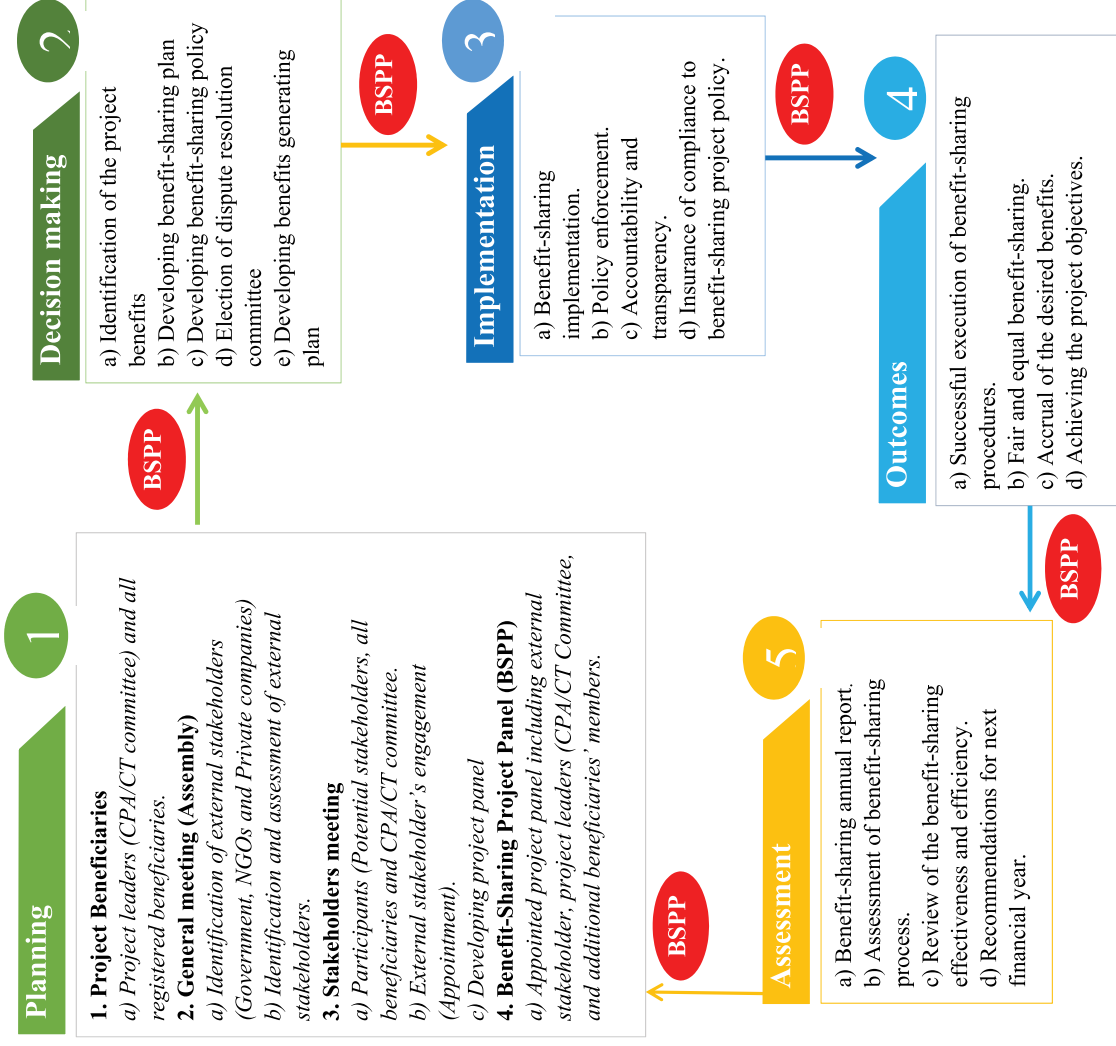


Figure 2. Proposed benefit-sharing model.

The benefits of access to land are unmeasurable and land is becoming even more critical. Given many rural communities rely on the land for survival (Statistics South Africa 2016), the demand for access to land is poised to increase. It is evident from the study that land is a critical natural resource as it was the second most desired benefit in both study communities. It was also evident from the study that older beneficiaries' desire for access to land was beyond the economic benefit; cultural and traditional benefits are amongst the benefits that influenced the older beneficiaries to desire access to land. They consistently reported the loss of culture and traditional practices due to forceful removal and that they remain badly affected by the imposed restrictions after losing the land rights.

## ***External stakeholder's engagement, role and support***

### ***Stakeholders' engagement***

This study revealed similarities between communities' desired external stakeholders to participate in benefit-sharing; both communities' beneficiaries have an interest to engage local government and NGOs in benefit-sharing of their land restitution projects. In the understanding of land reform beneficiaries and communities' dynamics, an external stakeholder is a critical need to move towards proper management of the projects. As noted by FAO (2008) and Tshidzumba et al. (2018), the presence of external stakeholders in establishing policies, committees, and management of the community projects is essential. Bonham et al. (2014) indicated that the engagement of stakeholders in the planning and implementation of community projects plays a vital role in ensuring that the project is effectively implemented and properly managed. The lack of neutral third parties like NGOs in community projects may cause the shifting of benefits to the elite group (FAO 2008). Tshidzumba et al. (2018) suggested that to eliminate the elite capture in CPAs and CT projects, external stakeholders like the government must be unequivocally engaged.

Furthermore, the involvement of the external stakeholders would help in ensuring that beneficiaries' rights are respected and always protected. As noted by Chomba and Nkhata (2016), the issue of who should accrue the benefits from the project involves consideration of the property rights and as such, the beneficiaries' rights should always be respected. The beneficiaries in the study communities raised concerns about exclusion in decision-making by the leadership. In this regard, the beneficiaries strongly believed that even in the benefit-sharing phase they could be excluded. Similarly, Puttergill et al. (2011) reported that powerful authorities limit other beneficiaries from participating in the decision-making process and benefit distribution. According to de Koning and de Beer (2014), transparency by the project leaders regarding benefits distribution and the decision-making process is vital as it could reduce potential conflicts within the projects. In the same vein, in a community project where there is a lack of sharing of information, there are always high chances of conflicts and benefit capture by elite groups (Gebara 2013). Thus, it would be important that project leaders maintain effective communication with all beneficiaries to ensure transparency in the land restitution project (Bonham et al. 2014).

### ***Purpose of engaging external stakeholders***

The purpose of engagement of external stakeholders in land restitution projects must be clear from the onset. However, stakeholder assessment is crucial to understand the goals and roles before engagement (Heslinga et al. 2019). According to Heslinga et al. (2019), the

assessment of stakeholders is significant in determining whether stakeholders' goals are conflicting or complementary. In this regard, it would assist in avoiding and managing potential power misuse, interference in tasks and conflict of interest in implementing the project tasks. Both Levubu and Tzaneen communities have similar interest and views that the external stakeholders can facilitate and conduct benefit-sharing of their land restitution project. Similarly, Terblanché et al. (2014) reported that Mashishimale CPA and Nkumbuleni Community Trust (CT) benefited in Limpopo, in which independent facilitators (external stakeholders) were appointed to assist the project with the following: (i) information dissemination, (ii) conducting audit, (iii) leasing with other stakeholders, (iv) attending project issues, (v) business management, and (vi) financial management. This has been regarded as an ideal approach for both projects as it yielded good results in terms of production and management. Given that beneficiaries have diverse interests, benefit-sharing in community projects is a complex process that deserves monitoring and transparency facilitation (Makhubele et al. 2020).

### ***Desired support from external stakeholders***

This study found that beneficiaries in both study communities need financial and technical support for their project to effectively operate and succeed. Within the communities, beneficiaries are not financially stable as many beneficiaries are poor and unemployed. Therefore, acquiring a start-up funding package to start operating the forestry projects would be crucial in Tzaneen and Levubu. As noted by Kirsten et al. (2016), restoring the land to the rightful owners alone is not enough for beneficiaries to effectively engage in agriculture and forestry production. As a result, there is a need for financial support to cover inputs and production costs. Kirsten et al. (2016) further argued that without such support as managerial and technical skills developments, it is unlikely that community land restitution projects will succeed. In line with this, Tshidzumba et al. (2018) suggested that the government and other stakeholders have to find a way of assisting beneficiaries with these needs after transferring the land. In the same vein, Gumede (2014) emphasized that the government should allocate more resources to land restitution projects to ensure that it meets its objective of improving the livelihoods of beneficiaries. The need for community forestry projects to acquire financial support at the initial stage was noted in a successful community forestry project in KwaZulu Natal. The project received start-up capital from a private company, which helped the project purchase the equipment required to start operating the project like a labour truck, tractor and bakkie (pick-up) (Clarke 2018).

### ***Beneficiaries desired benefits distribution mechanism***

After benefits identification, the next step is how such benefits would be equitably and fairly allocated or distributed to the beneficiaries. Given the diverse needs of beneficiaries, this could be more difficult and even more challenging in projects with a large group of beneficiaries. Nevertheless, fair and equal benefit-sharing should prevail at all times as all beneficiaries have equal project rights. The accrual of the benefits from the projects is the primary desire of the beneficiaries. However, there was no clear procedure or any guide on how they will accrue such benefits. It was within this study that the beneficiaries shared their benefit-sharing preferences. A difference has been identified in the desired platform where sharing of accrued benefits amongst the beneficiaries should occur. Similarly, Campese

(2012) found that different approaches to benefit-sharing are possible in diverse community groups. The Livubu communities preferred stakeholders meeting as the place where benefit-sharing should occur while Tzaneen communities preferred open beneficiaries' meetings.

This difference may imply that the Levubu communities were influenced by the desire to have stakeholders facilitating and conducting benefit-sharing. These findings suggest that beneficiaries would prefer transparency in benefit-sharing in their projects (Tshidzumba et al. 2018). Of note, the household level sharing of benefits was the most preferred approach in both Levubu and Tzaneen. Individualised or household benefit-sharing in communities solves direct family issues. Noteworthy, it was evident that benefits could be shared at an individual, household and/or community level but advantages and disadvantages would always prevail irrespective (Campese 2012). Therefore, the beneficiaries would prefer the approach that is best for their project and fit their context. According to Campese (2012), the advantages of household-level benefit-sharing include targeting main beneficiaries and low transaction costs.

Notwithstanding, the disadvantages of household-level benefit sharing may include the unequal distribution of benefits and post-benefit-sharing conflicts within the household. Hence, it is important for beneficiaries to be very vigilant about their preferences as it could help them to settle the mechanism that may not bring challenges at a later stage (Campese 2012). Within the concept of benefit-sharing, the beneficiaries desire to accrue benefits within a reasonably short timeframe of a month. It is evident that beneficiaries' low socio-economic status has influenced the monthly preference for accruing the benefits.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the desired benefits and how the benefit-sharing mechanism plays a significant role in determining the distribution of benefits. Analysis revealed that forestry land restitution beneficiaries have not developed a benefit-sharing guide or mechanism for distributing the benefits. Neither government has included a benefit-sharing mechanism in the land restitution policy. Nonetheless, the beneficiaries showed a need and desire to develop BSM for fair and mutual distribution of benefits. Hence, they contributed to ideas of the developed benefit-sharing mechanism presented in a recent study. Even at a relatively early stage of the projects, the communities need to develop a benefit-sharing mechanism in an inclusive approach to ensure that each beneficiary participates. The pre-existing BSM is critical, if not, the risk is that once the projects commence, to develop a BSM would be difficult. Consequently, the non-existence of the BSM has the potential to influence the phenomenon of elitism amongst the beneficiaries and thereby compromising the accrual of the benefits. Of note, this has immensely contributed to the failure of land restitution and redistribution in South Africa. Building and adopting a clear benefit-sharing mechanism can contribute to and improve the sustainability of land reform projects.

This study provides the first overview of a benefit-sharing model in forestry-based land restitution projects in South Africa. As highlighted in the model, it is, therefore, important that the BSM approach involves the external stakeholder, identification of projects benefits, the collective decision on benefit-sharing meetings, selecting appropriate benefit-sharing levels for equal accrual of benefits, and developing a benefit-sharing timeframe that would satisfy the needs of the beneficiaries. The presented model is designed to help forestry land restitution projects in terms of developing a BSM for fair and equal benefit-sharing.

However, future research studies are recommended to investigate or test the applicability of the BSM model generated in this study on similar forest-based land reform projects.

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## ORCID

Lucky Makhubele  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1089-0946>  
 Ratsodo Tshidzumba  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5574-3328>  
 Paxie Chirwa  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7544-973X>

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