

SUMMARY

RURAL POVERTY AND LAND DEGRADATION: A Determinant Study for Natural Resource Management in Marginal Lands of South Africa

The study is driven by the objectives of reducing poverty, enhancing food security, and promoting sustainability in the management of natural resources. Its terms of reference calls for suggested priorities for research in these areas and an assessment of the appropriate balance of effort between marginal and favoured lands. It focuses on the three poorest provinces: Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Northern Province. Interviews, analysis of relevant documentation and participation in the form of 12 workshops with agricultural personnel served as inputs.

The review of poverty took cognisance of the multi-faceted nature of poverty, the socio-economic conditions that support it and the processes that perpetuate poverty. The income, basic needs, food security, livelihood strategies, human development, and approaches are discussed, and the districts identified as poorest were all part of the former homelands. More than half of the labour force is unemployed, and nearly half of the households depend on transfers as their primary sources of income. The poorest 20% of households are mainly rural. Lack of disaggregated data for comparison across districts, provinces and time periods are problematic. Nevertheless, they provide sufficient guidelines for identifying the most deprived communities where intervention aimed at poverty eradication, are most needed.

A broad definition of land degradation is provided; the focus is on the physical or biological effects, with land-use methods seen as the ultimate causes of degradation. Looking at causes of land degradation, many factors are involved. For example, the influence of climate, especially long-term changes in rainfall patterns for South Africa, has still not been conclusively

demonstrated. Thus, the role of people as a driver remains difficult to unravel. This context provides a diverse, complex and interdependent range of determining influences that translate to human impacts on land resources. The bulk of the study's assessment of the role of people in land degradation refers to South African theory and experience, and the nature of this experience dictates that the analysis distinguish between 'favoured' and 'marginal' areas.

Poverty and land degradation: It failed to provide support for a view implying that the poor are the prime cause of resource degradation on ML. In reviewing the data presented on the location of poverty, poverty incidence and the allocation of government resources to ML and FL, the study concludes that the inconsistencies and lack of data about the underlying site-specific forces driving the poverty process, this invalidates the use of general conclusions for guiding strategy towards poverty eradication on marginal lands.

Finally, the study comes to grips with site specificity and the biophysical and non-biophysical elements, which explain poverty in order to design research in the expectation that poverty impacts can be evaluated. It closes by raising four key issues and recommendations, which will guide future research and resource allocation decisions for reducing poverty directly or indirectly in marginal lands; these revolve around the potential of biotechnology and agroforestry, for marginal lands, determinants of poverty, locus and mapping of the poor, and marginal lands and water.