

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 GENERAL

Soil conservation is an expensive and time-consuming exercise, hence soil losses must be avoided through prevention of soil erosion. That is, farmers must be committed to good farming practices and amongst other things exercise caution in handling the rather fragile resource, the soil.

There is no way that one can avoid the use of land, as the ever-increasing population requires sustainable food and fibre production. Hence it is a prerequisite to preserve and conserve the limited soil. Soil erosion is possible whenever raindrops strike an unprotected or bare soil and it is even worse when the soil is unstable (Agassi, 1996).

5.2 LESSONS LEARNT

5.2.1 Immediate economic/financial benefits should not be the only criteria for evaluating the value and/or success of soil conservation

It is often stated that rural communities will only participate in and/or be satisfied with soil conservation programmes if they can reap immediate economic benefits from them. The Madliki experience has shown that this is a gross over-simplification. In the community-based programme the members of the community did not reap any immediate economic benefits and yet they enthusiastically participated. They did not receive any remuneration for their work, neither in cash nor in kind. In contrast they were unhappy with the DALA's programme, from which they reaped immediate financial benefits in the form of being paid for their work.

The difference is that the community-based programme addressed the priority set by the community themselves, and the not a priority determined by outsiders. The community-based programme was not aimed at economic benefits, but at bringing about cultural/psychological/sociological benefits in the form of peace of mind and satisfaction that they succeeded in preventing the bones of their ancestors from being

washed away and in preserving the sacred graveyard area. It must be kept in mind that especially for traditional rural people land does not only have economic value, but also religious, cultural, psychological and sociological values.

Most rural communities are very poor and although no immediate benefits can often be reaped from soil conservation projects, they are long-term solutions to the poverty stricken nation. It is therefore imperative for service providers to intervene in terms of funding such projects in an effort to help people to help themselves. It is important to note that the funding must not be seen as job creation or handout or compensation for work done. It should be only seen as an initial injection to pay for the basic material that is required to start the project.

Extreme caution must be taken when funding projects in order to entrench ownership of the project by the actual owners. In terms of long term commitment or sustainability, the community that owns the project end up being the beneficiaries. At Madliki, for example, the reclaimed graveyard left the community satisfied and grass and other fodder is ready for cutting to feed their livestock, hence I discourage compensation for work done. Problems created by compensation for work done, were described for the case of Sterkspruit/Herschel in Section 3.3. In the IFAD video “Building on Traditions-Conserving Land and alleviating Poverty” the use of “food for work” is, based upon experience, in the West African Sahel, strongly discouraged. Instead providing “tools for work” is encouraged. Thus, incentives/compensation should be very carefully considered, because well-meant actions may have opposite effects to what was intended.

5.2.2 “Ownership” breeds sustainability of soil conservation programmes

Only when a community accept a programme as their own and assumes “ownership” of it, will the outcome of it be long-term sustainable. This was clearly observed at Madliki, when the community took the lead in implementation of projects because it addressed their priority. One of the interesting statements they made was that *“We, the people of Madliki are the owners of this project and in order for it to work we must protect our resources. So we must be the watchdogs.”*

The forestry committee and SANCO must draw up a strategy for looking after the fenced area. This proposed strategy must be presented to the community, modified where necessary and endorsed and implemented by all. Everybody is urged to look after their livestock, otherwise everything caught inside the fenced area will be impounded". The importance of social stability was also seen in Sterkspruit and Herschel where people were taking turns in looking after their cultivated pastures for soil reclamation.

5.2.3 Success and satisfaction breeds expansion of soil conservation

At Madliki the success achieved by the community with soil conservation in the graveyard area and their satisfaction with it, stimulated them to want to *"replicate this throughout our area"*. They believed that only by doing this they would achieve sustainability. Most interestingly the first area, which they targeted for conservation after the graveyard, was the area with which they were so dissatisfied when DALA imposed it on them as highest priority. The community also now had the knowledge and the skills to replicate the project in other areas virtually on their own through the experience gained from the graveyard project.

The Madliki community quite correctly also stated that *"Outsiders, including our neighbours will only benefit through learning from us"*. In the previously mentioned IFAD video emphasis is also placed on the importance of "farmer to farmer extension", with the emphasis on exchange visits by communities to others who have achieved success, so as to learn from them. They mention even cross-border visits. In the case of Sterkspruit/ Herschel one could think of visits to successful projects in the neighbouring Lesotho.

Other communities in the vicinity of Madliki wanted to do the same as was done in Madliki – based on the success that they saw there – and that they wanted me specifically to guide them, on the basis of the way I handled Madliki. However, due to my work commitments, I had to decline and so far nothing has been done to address their need.

5.2.4 Social stability and sustainability is key to success of any community project

One needs to seek social sustainability in order to achieve positive and desired results. Social acceptance is crucial for conservation to be sustainable as people play a very important role in resource management (Borini-Feyerand, 1997). The values of local people and indigenous practices are also significant in conservation. In the Madliki project the community was not quite convinced that exotic trees can assist in reclaiming the land and were not pleased with the idea of using them. They insisted that only indigenous tree species must be planted but because it was a pilot study they agreed to have a few planted as outlined in the previous chapter. Only few beef wood trees survived amongst the exotics. The *Diosporos dichrophylla*, which is an indigenous bush, flourished and it reclaimed the area well. This bush is well established along the contours (Plate 5.1) and it is also used as live fencing. It is therefore time for professionals to realize that community projects will not succeed without the active participation of the resource users as they possess valuable and detailed indigenous knowledge of local bio-diversity and can be effective in suggesting suitable preservation methods.



Plate 5.1 *Diosporos dichophilla* well established along the contours

5.2.5 The importance of recognising and dealing with user groups

Rural communities are fragmented in terms of their interests and priorities. Even though at Madliki everybody showed interest and commitment to the project, there were those individuals who had other priorities. They managed to sieve themselves

out. That is, people who are interested in other activities focussed in their areas of interest. For example, the community members that are committed to agricultural production were quite active in the project, whilst those who have other survival means didn't show much interest in terms of active participation. As community developers we had to be careful when dealing with this situation in order to avoid creating conflict within the community. We remained impartial and encouraged debate around the issue until consensus was reached. The community at large agreed on who the user group is, and how abuse or exploitation by other groups could be avoided. The user group did the work and the following agreement was reached:

- a. The project is owned by the whole community and therefore the user group is accountable to the community.
- b. Direct benefits, e.g. income that might be generated from the project (for example through sale of fodder trees and grass which may be cut) will go to the user group, but indirect benefits, e.g. access to the graveyard, will be enjoyed by everybody.

This proved to be a very successful approach by the community. Hence the project is still working very well, as some community members are busy with other projects, e.g. poultry, water, etc.

Dealing with a user group encouraged active participation of women. Women identified themselves as the active users of land since many households are headed by women. They therefore have to shoulder the responsibility of feeding the rest of their families and the only option that is available to them is agriculture. However, the depletion of the soil resources was making things difficult for them. Hence their participation was crucial.

5.2.6 Lack of active participation by youths

Lack of active participation by youths has been observed as a threat to sustainability of any development or conservation project. The culture of the rural people in the Eastern Cape does not encourage youths to sit in meetings with elderly people. Meetings are perceived as a way of sharing ideas between old people. A boy in particular cannot stand up and talk to people. In Xhosa tradition a boy is a dog

(*inkwenkwe yinja*) so no one can listen to a boy. A girl must have respect and one of the ways of showing respect and dignity is to stay and work at home. Unfortunately the same applied at Madliki, despite efforts to bring everybody on board. This is a threat to the sustainability of soil reclamation or conservation since there might be not transfer of skills to the young ones. This was raised as a concern to the community, but they assured us that transfer of skills has been part of their culture, so they will definitely bring them in when it is the right time to do so.

5.2.7 Lack of incentives for culling livestock

From Chapters 2, 3 and 4, overgrazing is raised as one of the important contributing factors to soil degradation and soil erosion. However, the farmers are not prepared to cull or reduce their stock numbers, as there are no incentives for that. This is one of the areas that need immediate attention if rural development and food security is the priority of government and it can be addressed through ensuring a balance between the cultural needs and development. In my opinion improving the veld management in communal areas through rotational grazing should be the first step. Ensuring that there is a good and stable market for livestock might encourage the community to sell some of their stock. In order to achieve this the existing extension officers should be refocused and motivated.

5.2.8 A need for proper land use planning

From Chapter 2, it became clear that not much has been done in the Eastern Cape with regard to land use planning as numerous and serious mistakes were made by the planners. This is due to the fact that a lot of information on the soils of the Eastern Cape is still missing. An in-depth study of the soils of the province needs to be carried out as soon as possible in order to assist Local Authorities with their huge challenge of developing Integrated Development Plans for their areas.

5.2.9 Parent material and climate are keys to stable soils and erosion-free land

In Chapter 3, the contrasts between Mdantsane and Middledrift explain the importance of climate and parent material in the formation of soil and the stability thereof. This information is crucial in the planning process as it assists the planners to make informed decisions.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 ‘Do with them not for them’

For the success of any development, the developer needs to ensure technology transfer to the local people through hands-on training or practical application. Through this approach sustainability can be achieved. Handouts are a short-term solution, therefore teaching a person to fish rather than providing it free will keep the whole generation healthy.

5.3.2 Understanding the natural resource base

It is recommended that the developer carefully study the resource base of the area prior to the implementation of the project (during the planning stage) in order to have a clear understanding of the potential and constraints of the area. This knowledge can assist the developer in making informed decisions and avoid errors such as those discussed in Section 3.2.3.

5.3.3 Understanding of and respect for cultural values

It is recommended that the developer should have a good understanding of the culture of the target community, as most African communities tend to be very sensitive about their culture. One should listen well to inputs that relate to the cultural values. An understanding of the people one is working with can be achieved by spending some time in the community. A basket of options must therefore be presented in order for them to be accommodated or strike a balance between cultural values and development objectives.

5.3.4 Winning and maintaining a community's trust is extremely important for the success of any development initiative

Any developer is viewed as an outsider by the communities irrespective of colour or ethnic group. It is therefore the developer's responsibility to ensure that he/ she is accepted and trusted by the community. This can be achieved through participatory tools. It is difficult to build trust. However, it is very easy to destroy it, hence, the recommendation that one should be cautious and open-minded at all times. 'Please do not make promises that you cannot fulfill'.