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**Common property struggles in the management of communal rangelands in central Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.**

Conference poster (Accepted version)

Bennett, J. (2008) 'Common property struggles in the management of communal rangelands in central Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.' Presented at the combined XXI International Grassland Congress and the VIII International Rangeland Congress (IGC/IRC), Hohhot, China, 29th June - 5th July 2008[Unpublished]

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Available in the CURVE Research Collection: October 2008

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This document is the author's final poster presented at the above conference. An abstract for this poster was published in the [conference proceedings](#).

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# COMMON PROPERTY STRUGGLES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNAL RANGELANDS IN CENTRAL EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

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## BACKGROUND

Common pool grazing resources can be held and managed under a variety of different property systems ranging from genuine common property regimes (CPRs), where forage access and use is controlled on a communal basis, to complete 'open access', where a free-for-all scenario effectively prevails (Ostrom et al. 1999). In South Africa there is currently limited understanding of the way these property rights are expressed in communal areas and the social, political and ecological factors which govern them (Bennett and Barrett 2007). Addressing this knowledge gap will be fundamental in developing effective institutional capacity and policies for the management of the commons at both the local and national level. Using the central Eastern Cape Province as its focus, this study seeks to review the types of property regime in place for the management of common pool grazing resources in the region and the key axes of struggle in their operation.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research was undertaken at three communities (Allanwater, Lushington and Roxeni) in central Eastern Cape Province (Figure 1).

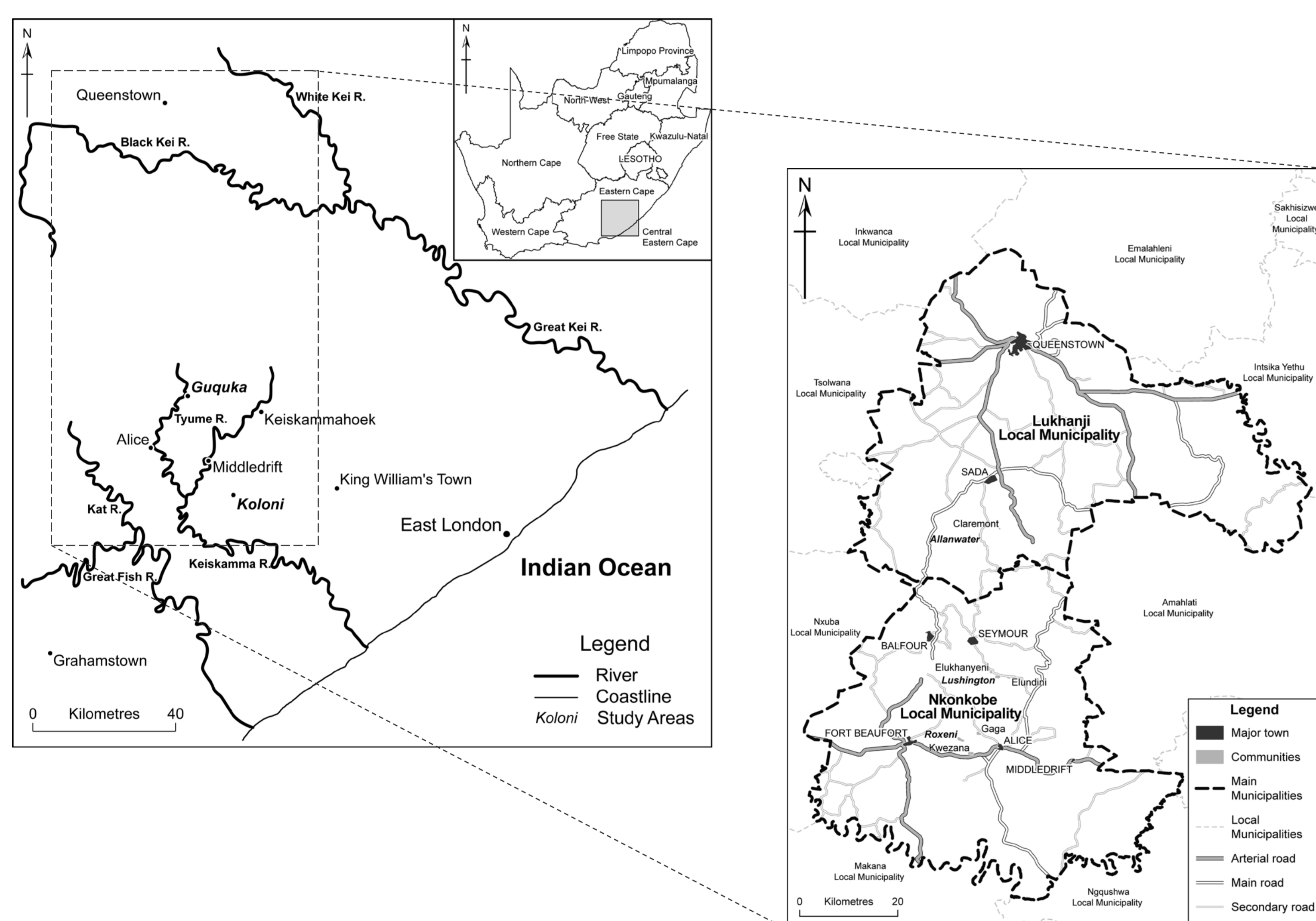


Figure 1: Location of study sites in central Eastern Cape Province

Primary data were collected through group interviews and semi-structured interviews administered to key informants at each settlement. These aimed to characterise the current rangeland access and grazing management practises at each site. This work was supplemented by transect walks, participant observation and available secondary data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The key findings from the three communities studied are summarised in Table 1. The research indicated that regionally, the maintenance of a recognised CPR system is infrequent and seems only to be possible in rare situations where both effective institutions of grazing management are in place and pressure on grazing resources is relatively low. This is corroborated by the findings of other studies in the region (e.g. Cousins 1996, Ainslie 1999 and Bennett and Barrett 2007).

Importantly, several key axis of struggle were also identified within the different grazing systems, which appear to restrict their ability to be managed on a genuinely communal basis. These are outlined below.

Table 1: Key features of each study village.

FEATURE	SETTLEMENT		
	Roxeni	Lushington	Allanwater
Site history	Colonial planning, and betterment	Former commercial farm	Former commercial farm
Village structure	Single settlement	Four separate settlements	Single settlement
Origins of inhabitants	Inhabitants have common origin and are politically unified	Inhabitants have very different origins and are politically divided	Inhabitants mostly of common origin and are politically unified
Socio-economic status	Inhabitants relatively wealthy and educated	Inhabitants quite poor, with limited educational attainment	Inhabitants very poor, with relatively little education.
Livelihood basis	Cash income based	Mixed	Largely agrarian
Institutional control	Farmers' Association – consistently strong.	Residents' Association and sub-committees, fragmented and weak	Residents' and Farmers' Associations, centralised and strong.
Rangeland management system	'Minimum' CPR historically, now open-access	Grazing consistently unregulated and in effect open-access	Basic CPR in operation throughout
Rangeland boundaries	Historically well delineated, now totally unfenced and vague	Defined by fencing in commercial areas but otherwise unclear	Well defined all around by perimeter fencing
Rangeland user group	Undefined due to encroachment on resource by outsiders	Unclear -includes all four sub-settlements but may involve others	Clearly defined as individuals are from Allanwater only
Range size	Fairly limited	Extensive	Extensive
Range condition	Very poor	Poor	Good overall but areas of poor quality

**1. Amount of rangeland available.** This differs considerably between communities largely as a result of the legacy of colonial and apartheid policy. Spatially limited grazing resources are subject to increased pressure resulting in degradation and an inability to enforce grazing boundaries due to inadequate forage production.

**2. Institutions.** Inadequate development of institutions associated with resource management is a widespread constraint in the region. Moreover, even where these do exist their efficacy is often compromised by an inability to enforce grazing management decisions in the face of outsider encroachment (see Roxeni case).

**3. Degree of social cohesion and political unity.** Forced removals under apartheid have resulted in 'communities' being politically and ethnically divided and existing as separate groups within settlements. This makes consensus over grazing management often difficult to achieve (see also Ainslie 1999).

**4. Increasing levels of social stratification.** Many communities are becoming increasingly de-agrarianised as they are drawn into the local economy and their engagement with issues of resource management is diminishing as a consequence.

## CONCLUSION

Current grazing systems in the region are highly varied and reflect the myriad of social and political factors, which have shaped them. Due the constraints outlined above, very few retain defined grazing rights within clear resource boundaries and thus, recognisable CPR management. Policy must reflect this and be sufficiently flexible to support overlapping rights across resource boundaries that are generally 'fuzzy'.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research was entirely supported by an Applied Research Fellowship from Coventry University.