

Towards integrated farming and biodiversity protection landscapes for improved livelihoods in a Southern African TFCA: a policy study

Chitakira, Munyaradzi

ABSTRACT

The world is facing the challenge to balance food production and biodiversity protection. The Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) initiative presents opportunities for addressing this challenge. The goal of TFCAs is to foster conservation and sustainable use of biological and cultural resources whilst promoting regional peace, co-operation and socio-economic development. The present study sought to assess governance of natural resources in a peasant community in northern KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa which lies within an internationally recognised biodiversity hotspot. The study evaluated the role of existing public policies and customary rules in the development of landscapes that integrate production and protection while simultaneously supporting better local livelihoods. Local farmers' perceptions, preferences and utilisation of indigenous tree resources were assessed. Primary data were collected through questionnaire surveys, key informant interviews and direct observation. Secondary sources of information consulted included public policy documents relating to natural resources governance and satellite imagery. The study revealed that existing preferences and harvesting methods posed a threat to the sustainability of particular tree species and the entire ecosystems. The enforcement of environmental policies was slack due to various challenges, including conflict between local traditional structures and district municipal authorities. Legislation which encourage the integration of agricultural production and environmental conservation for livelihood improvement; ensure that efforts of smallholder farmers are rewarded and which encourage stakeholder collaborative action towards the achievement of production, conservation and livelihood goals in TFCAs need to be developed. Such policy needs to incorporate customary rules, and traditional leadership structures must be the vehicle for its implementation.