



m&e case study

Coleske farm:

Mitigating the impacts of protected area expansion on local communities

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C.A.P.E. aims to benefit local communities directly through sustainable use of biodiversity. The challenge has been to make this ideal a reality for the people living on Coleske farm.

The innovative solutions required to mitigate the impacts of park expansion took intensive negotiation over several years.

The overarching goal of C.A.P.E. is that conservation of biodiversity should also deliver sustainable benefits to local people.

In line with this objective, the vision for the Baviaanskloof Mega-reserve in the Eastern Cape is to *“expand and consolidate the existing protected area and create a mega-reserve in which the conservation of the region's biodiversity and natural resources is aligned with rural and agricultural development needs”*.

One of the key principles underlying the Baviaanskloof vision is to keep people in living landscapes, by integrating private landowners, state protected areas and local communities into a broad multi-use landscape surrounding a core area formed by a formally protected provincial park.

IDENTIFYING A CHALLENGE

When the farm Coleske was purchased for inclusion in the formal protected area as part of the park expansion, the implementation of these principles became a serious challenge. The eight people who previously had permanent jobs on this farm had over 100 dependents, forming a small community. Additional people from this community were also employed on the farm on a seasonal basis. On purchase of the land, temporary employment was arranged for 40 people from Coleske.

The then provincial Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism (DEAET) purchased the land for its ecological and management significance. The option of resettlement was explored, as the department was legally bound only to provide alternative, equivalent, housing for this community in the nearest town, which was Willowmere or Steytleville.

However, this farm community understandably did not want to move over 100km to these towns. Willowmere and Steytleville have extremely high unemployment levels and the newcomers would be highly unlikely to find alternative employment there. In addition, while living on Coleske, they benefited from a variety of goods and services derived from the environment. These benefits included: grazing for the donkeys which they used for transport; indigenous acacia wood used for cooking and heating; natural medicine obtained from local plants, and honey produced from hives sustained by the natural vegetation.

Initially, the proper relocation procedures were not followed, and as a result the Wilderness Foundation which was contracted to facilitate the reserve expansion informed the DEAET that a rights and entitlements study needed to be conducted to provide the facts on which to base negotiations.

ESTABLISHING GOOD PROCESS

The Wilderness Foundation also insisted on establishing a sound process which would facilitate a mutually beneficial solution or recommend a way forward, should the challenge not be resolved. As part of the resettlement negotiation it was imperative to get all the authorities with legal responsibilities in this situation to work together. The Wilderness Foundation therefore facilitated the establishment of a task team which included representatives from the community, the Department of Land Affairs, the Local and District Municipalities and the newly formed Eastern Cape Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs (DEDEA).

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The newly established Eastern Cape Parks confirmed that the land on which Coleske stood was essential for inclusion into the formal protected area as it was valley bottom vegetation which was grossly underrepresented in the park. The community restated their desire to remain on Coleske and their need for employment. The local municipality indicated that even if the environmental authorities were willing to allow them to remain on Coleske, the municipality would be unable to provide services for them in such a remote location.

The negotiations around this seemingly intractable problem have taken several years. Delays were caused by changes in the structure of government departments and in legal representation for the community. Political forces also created additional tensions. The main lesson learnt was the importance of following the proper procedures and ensuring that everyone impacted upon by the situation, or its resolution, participated in generating the solution. It was essential that any additional role-players, joining the negotiations at a later stage, be taken through the approved process for the Resettlement Action Plan to ensure that they did not derail what had already been achieved. An important component of this process was helping both the community and the environment authorities understand the extent of their respective rights.

In the interim, a socio-economic assessment of the benefits the community derived from living on Coleske was undertaken.

NEGOTIATING A WORKABLE ALTERNATIVE

After intense deliberation, as they were reluctant to set a precedent, Eastern Cape Parks indicated that it could make available other land in the Baviaanskloof Valley. This land was already transformed and so would not impact the establishment of the reserve. This would meet national legal requirements regarding resettlement.

In addition, to compensate for the loss of benefits derived from the natural environment at Coleske, a lucerne field could be provided as fodder for the donkeys, which would need to be restrained to prevent interbreeding with the park's zebras. Wood cleared in the park, as part of an invasive alien control programme, would be provided as an alternative to the local acacias. A medicinal garden would also be developed for the elders who preferred using natural medicines. This garden could also serve as a teaching aid.

Furthermore, Eastern Cape Parks has already provided 10 permanent jobs (exceeding the original 8 permanent jobs provided by the farm). The rest of the community would receive preference in selection procedures for additional jobs, with the objective of providing each of the remaining 12 households with at least one permanent job. To facilitate this process, a limited amount of training would be provided to improve capacity to undertake more complex tasks. Other initiatives would include helping to promote the production of honey as an additional source of income, and the development of capacity to provide goods for the tourism industry.

In response, the municipality indicated that they would be able to provide basic services to this alternative location, as there was already a small node of development there. In addition, concentrating housing in this area could potentially facilitate the development of a school and clinic. These developments would therefore also benefit the broader community in the Baviaanskloof.

A Resettlement Action Plan has been completed and has currently been put forward to the community for approval. This solution will then need to go to the courts for formal approval or rejection. Finally, after 8 years of negotiation, there appears to be a workable solution on the table which will allow this community to derive real and sustainable benefits from the development of the Baviaanskloof Mega-reserve.

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Park expansion, Eastern Cape, Resettlement Action Plan, communities, livelihoods

