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Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies



# COLLAPSE, CONFLICT OR SOCIAL COHESION?

## LEARNING FROM LIVESTOCK DIPPING ASSOCIATIONS IN KWAZULU-NATAL

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## PLAAS Working Paper 62

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## ABSTRACT

This working paper is about the revival of communal cattle dipping in post-apartheid KwaZulu-Natal, which has improved animal healthcare and strengthened the livelihoods of the black rural households that keep cattle in the province. Given that the authoritarian system of apartheid era livestock dipping fell apart during South Africa's democratic transition, this is a remarkable achievement. Other provinces have struggled to revive dipping – such that tick borne diseases are endemic along the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, for instance. By contrast, perhaps 90-95% of the 1600-odd dip tanks in KwaZulu-Natal are run relatively well by local Livestock Associations, which organise regular cattle dipping in conjunction with the provincial government's vet services department. There are opportunities to strengthen and expand the remit of the Livestock Associations: these remarkable organs of civil society which might be collectively collecting R450 million in membership fees each year. There is also much to learn from KwaZulu-Natal's example. At a time when much is written about the weakness of government institutions in rural South Africa, here is a quiet, largely unnoticed, 'success story' of an effective relationship between the state and civil society that we would do well to understand.

**Keywords:** vet service; cattle dipping; civil society; rural livelihoods; local government

# 1. Introduction: Why livestock dipping matters – collective action after apartheid

The livestock held by black South Africans—cattle, goats, sheep and fowl—are a crucial part of the national economy, providing assets and security to anything from 1.4 to 2.4 million smallholders living on communal land and land-reform farms across the country (Cousins and Hornby, 2016). Perhaps 40% of the national cattle herd—some 5.5 million of the 13.8 million—grazes on communal land (Kenyon 2014). This percentage of small stock held on communal land (as opposed to commercial farms) is even higher—maybe 76% of goats in KwaZulu-Natal are on chieftaincy land and land reform farms (KwaZulu-Natal 2010:2). There is a relatively small core of more commercially minded, ‘emerging farmers’—for instance syndicates of teachers and taxi owners, who bring together 200-300 head of livestock. Yet the vast majority of smallholders hold small numbers of livestock, making occasional sales of their goats and fowl to pay for school fees (for instance) each year.<sup>1</sup> These transactions are often missed in official reports and statistics; but they form a vital part of the ‘informal’/‘invisible’ economy. One estimate conservatively places the offtake of cattle in the Eastern Cape to be worth R2.1 billion per annum.<sup>2</sup> The cash value of goat sales in KwaZulu-Natal alone might be worth R3 billion per annum.<sup>3</sup> ‘Consequently and perhaps counter-intuitively to a society that has urbanised rapidly over the last century, animal health is of growing importance and interest to a greater number of people’ (Beinart and Brown, 2013:5).

Yet in recent decades, there has been a crisis in animal healthcare. In many parts of South Africa, vet services, in particular the collective livestock dipping practiced on chieftaincy land, collapsed during the tumultuous years of the democratic transition. Many provinces have struggled to revive collective dipping—such that tick borne diseases, which have not been seen for generations, are endemic along the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, for instance.

This paper focuses on the community organised, livestock dipping tanks, which historically have been the cornerstone of the state-organised veterinary services for black farmers. The dip tank plays three important roles here. First, regular dipping helps remove the ticks and parasites, in particular guarding against are heartwater, redwater, gallsickness and sweating sickness. Second, the dip tank is the place where government veterinary officers (animal health technicians) support livestock owners: each year vaccinating livestock against the controlled diseases of anthrax and Blackquarter, and doing checks for foot and mouth and contagious abortion. Thirdly, and more broadly too, dip tanks are places where animals are counted and checked, allowing the government to effectively survey the health of the national herd.

The central matter is the question of collective action: how can the government empower rural communities, working together, to run their dip tanks effectively? For unlike large commercial

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1 Statistics are very uncertain because no systematic data is collected at a national level. A larger estimate based on Labour Force surveys suggested there are 200,000 ‘surplus producing smallholders and 4-4.5 million ‘semi-subsistence’ households – cf. Aliber et al (2009: 141).

2 Kenyon (2014: 10) estimated 14 per cent of 2 million cattle at about R5 000 per head = R1.4 billion. Cattle prices are more like R7500 per head today, leading to the higher figure quoted in the text.

3 See footnote 23 for the details of the calculation.

farmers that have large enough herds to organise dipping on an individual basis, 95% of black cattle owners have less than ten cattle per household, and so must dip collectively as a community. (A dip tank needs to be dipping around 500-600 cattle to be working cost-effectively.) Focusing particularly on KwaZulu-Natal, this paper outlines:

- A. How the authoritarian, albeit a relatively effective, system of livestock dipping run by the apartheid government operated.
- B. Why this system fragmented and collapsed around 1994.
- C. A KwaZulu-Natal success story: how cattle dipping was rebuilt and reorganised in the 2000s, this time along more decentralised, collaborative and voluntaristic principles.
- D. Nonetheless, I conclude by noting there are opportunities to improve the current dipping regime. Briefly these are:
  - i) Increase the number of well-resourced animal health technicians who provide a wider range of free vaccinations and animal healthcare services.
  - ii) Building on KwaZulu-Natal's relatively successful cattle dipping regime, introduce free dipping for goats/small livestock, particularly benefiting poorer, female-headed households.
  - iii) Working with Livestock Associations at a municipality level, pilot livestock auctions/sales to stimulate the entry of emerging farmers into commercial markets.
  - iv) Strengthen the voice of women by encouraging female participation in the livestock associations that run the dip tanks.

## 2. Livestock dipping under apartheid - effective, authoritarian, unsustainable

*Touch a man's livestock and you touch his manhood*

Today, there are many state vets who look back to the old system of livestock dipping with nostalgia. They remember this as an era when the health of the herds in the communal areas was properly maintained because a well-resourced state vet service (which has suffered budget cuts since the end of apartheid) had the power/authority to compel livestock owners to bring their animals to the dip tanks. In the communal areas 'today, dipping is optional! We do not even know the number of livestock!'<sup>4</sup>

These vets have a point; but they miss something more important: that livestock dipping was authoritarian and unsustainable, because the history of cattle dipping in South Africa is linked to the histories of conquest and colonisation. For cattle dipping was first established in South Africa in the 1900s to counter an outbreak of East Coast Fever, just years after the last of the independent, African kingdoms had been annexed and conquered. In the north-eastern districts of Transkei, dissidents armed with old rifles from the anti-colonial wars took the hills when dipping and cattle

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<sup>4</sup> Interview, state vet, September 2019.

taxes were imposed on them. Likewise, the Bambatha Rebellion in the north-eastern districts of KwaZulu-Natal gained momentum in part because of popular protests against stock dipping (Beinart 1994: 94-5; Redding 2006: 135-7).

For the rest of the 20th century, the state-organised system of cattle dipping imposed on communal areas was an object of suspicion and mistrust. Each livestock-owning household carried a stock-book, listing the animals that they held, which would be regularly checked by government officials when the herds were assembled at the dip tank on dipping day. In theory at least, this system of surveillance was strictly enforced: government officials noting the death/slaughter of animals, and issuing permits that allowed livestock movements and sales. All animals had to be accounted for. If an animal dies or was slaughtered, for instance, the owner would have to bring the animal's spleen as proof of death. (The spleens were tested for disease at the vet sciences laboratory at Onderstepoort, Pretoria.) Where there were discrepancies, livestock owners were fined. Moreover, the much-detested livestock taxes levied on rural households were calculated on the basis of the censuses carried out at the dip tanks. In consequence, when rural revolts swept across South Africa in the middle decades of the 20th century, dipping tanks were often destroyed by anti-government militants when they had an axe to grind against the government.

At the same time, it should be noted that the exact mechanisms of government authority and control varied across South Africa over the 20th century, and there were particular regions and certain decades where dipping seems to have worked in a relatively consensual manner. From the 1930s to the late 1950s, the Transkei districts of the rural Eastern Cape saw one important attempt to organise cattle dipping under African control, organised by local district councils that were partly elected by African taxpayers (Mbeki 1992: 55-9). Here, the Bantustan project initiated in the 1950s was disastrous: the dissolution of district councils and the transfer of powers over to unelected (often corrupt) Tribal Authorities led to revolts in the early 1960s. Thereafter, the Tribal Authorities seem to have been too cowed to attempt to organise dipping in any serious manner. One chief complained that 'I am not regarded as a headman but as a dipping foreman', and feared the people 'are conspiring to kill me' (Gibbs 2010: 150). Transkei's Tribal Authorities often decided to reduce the regularity with which cattle were dipped, against the advice of scientific experts, with the result that tick-borne diseases returned to the coastal districts of the Transkei in the late 1970s.

If the Transkei Bantustan government's attempt to run stock dipping through Tribal Authorities ended in abject failure, other Homelands seem to have run more effective dipping regimes, especially as state budgets went up from the mid-1970s onwards, allowing them to provide more in the way of veterinary healthcare. Elders interviewed in the districts of the old Bophuthatswana remember Lucas Mangope's dipping/vet service fondly for having provided free cattle dipping and vaccinations—certainly compared to the chaos that followed as apartheid collapsed in the early 1990s (Beinart and Brown 2013: 45-6). Similarly, the KwaZulu Bantustan Government's system of livestock dipping is widely remembered as having been relatively effective, insofar as local officials organised cattle dipping days on a regular fortnightly/monthly schedule.<sup>5</sup>

Yet even when livestock dipping worked, it seems to have been run on shoe-string budgets. Most importantly, there does not appear to have been an effective schedule of maintenance

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<sup>5</sup> Interviews, Mdukatshani, August 2019.

and repair. One KwaZulu-Natal engineer estimated that there had been no proper maintenance/repairs to the dipping tank structures—(the concrete tanks and the wooden enclosures)—since the 1960s/1970s.<sup>6</sup> This was a fragile system—such that it cracked-up very quickly during the uncertain years of South Africa’s democratic transition.

### 3. ‘Things fall apart’ – Vet services during the democratic transition

In the 1990s, apartheid era systems of cattle dipping and animal health control fell apart in many rural districts of South Africa. In the politically tense parts of the country, such as the districts of Mpondoland, in the Eastern Cape, officials were sometimes chased away by rural communities – for they were seen as symbols of a repressive government authority (Gibbs 2014:160-5). Something similar happened in the regions where black tenants lived on white-owned commercial farms. During apartheid, white farm managers had often provided rudimentary vet services and run regular livestock dipping, as well as strictly (sometimes cruelly) controlling the number of animals held by the tenants. With the advent of democracy, black tenant farmers no longer had their livestock forcibly culled by white farm managers; but the dipping services also stopped, and disease increased in their stock.<sup>7</sup>

More generally, animal healthcare systems unravelled. On the ground, people noted that dipping stopped because the apartheid era dipping tank attendants, who had once organised the dipping days, no longer received their salaries and were redeployed to different posts. More generally, vet services fractured in many parts of South Africa because the merger of fragmented Bantustan bureaucracies into new post-apartheid provincial governments (which were made responsible for providing animal healthcare) proved a nightmarish task. Take the example of the post-apartheid Limpopo provincial government, which was an awkward merger of the Lebowa, Venda and Gazankulu Bantustans, plus part of the old Transvaal provincial government. Creating a streamlined government machine out of these separate, suspicious bureaucracies – already difficult enough – was compounded by the ANC’s historic mistrust of the old apartheid and Bantustan administrations. Even the provincial vet/animal health departments in the more administratively stable parts of post-apartheid South Africa struggled because of severe cutbacks and retrenchments. For officials in the post-apartheid national treasury insisted that limited government budgets were better spent on national priorities such as schooling and social pensions, rather than subsidising ‘unproductive’ and ‘inefficient’ agricultural services, such as cattle dipping. Provincial agricultural department budgets declined in real terms well into the mid-2000s, with the consequence that organisational capacity was lost (Gibbs 2010: 154-60). One historian coined an apt phrase to describe the disillusionment of these years when he wrote: ‘the old [Bantustan] government structures were corrupt and inefficient, but a bribe in the right place could always get your road fixed in time for a wedding or a funeral’ (Peires 2000: 109).

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, engineer, KwaZulu-Natal agricultural department, September 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews, Mdukatshani, August 2019.



At this moment of crisis and retrenchment in the mid/late 1990s, many agricultural schemes, once controlled and run by Bantustan governments, were transferred to local communities. This is what happened to livestock dipping. With dipping assistants cut from the provincial payroll, government now called on local communities to form their own dipping committees (which in KwaZulu-Natal are called Livestock Associations). Local municipalities would provide dipping chemicals for free; but now it was the job of the dipping committee to organise the weekly/fortnightly livestock dipping – work once done by salaried dipping assistants. Thus dipping continued on a make-do basis; but in a haphazard and un-coordinated manner. It was a case of *saave qui peut* (Gibbs 2010: 154-60).

## 4. Rebuilding post-apartheid rural infrastructure – A KwaZulu-Natal example

After a time of crisis, livestock dipping was slowly revived by provincial governments. For one, South Africa was enjoying its highest rates of post-apartheid economic growth in the mid-2000s and government expenditures were rising rapidly. The influential National Treasury was also more inclined to argue that agricultural development should no longer be ignored, if a dent were to be made into the deep rural poverty in the former homelands. Many of the African National Congress provincial governments, for various reasons, were also interested in building support in rural districts—and they saw state services as an effective means of connecting the governing party to the people. In consequence, provincial agricultural/animal health budgets started increasing again (Gibbs 2010:154-60).

Across South Africa, provincial governments started a variety of programmes to rehabilitate and revive many of the agricultural programmes that had foundered during the difficult years of the democratic transition. This paper looks at what was arguably the most successful of the provincial government initiatives to revive dipping operations in KwaZulu-Natal, which comprised of an i. engineering, and ii. community development programmes.

### i. A fragmented bureaucracy rebuilds the dip tanks

The most fundamental task was to locate and mend (and, if necessary, entirely rebuild) the dip tanks – for these had not been maintained for three to four decades were often in a poor state of repair. In 2004, the KwaZulu-Natal provincial agricultural department engineering team organised the first phase of a repair and maintenance programme.<sup>8</sup> A handful of large, established engineering firms won contracts for this work. These large engineering firms employed a second layer of skilled sub-contractors—(often these were emerging black-owned SMEs)—who developed business capacity, as they conducted work across the province. Design standards of the renovated/rebuilt dips were improved. For instance, in an initial phase of the operations, the

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<sup>8</sup> Placing an exact date is difficult. Government documents are difficult to come by and memories fray, but Rauri Alcock has a photo of a plaque put up a Sibumba diptank, 'officially opened by the KwaZulu-Natal minister of agriculture and environmental affairs on 10 February 2004 on the occasion of the Diptank Rehabilitation and Livestock Association Project'.

Livestock Associations (i.e. the dipping committees that each looked after a dipping tank) were given pumps and hoses so that they could fill their dipping tanks from nearby rivers. Later, boreholes and pumps were installed nearby the dips. At the height of this first phase of operations, the provincial department estimated that ten dipping tanks were rebuilt/renovated each month at a cost that came down to R100 000 to R160 000 per tank.<sup>9</sup>

A second phase of engineering operations started in the early 2010s when the provincial agricultural department decentralised operations, transferring its engineering team into the ten district municipalities spread across the province.<sup>10</sup> Inventory/supply systems also fragmented as the effects of the 1999 Public Finance Management Act kicked-in. Instead of holding stockpiles in central stores—as in the apartheid era—suppliers now bought materials from private suppliers, and had to obtain quotations when buying materials worth more than R2 000. Around this time too, the long-established large engineering firms, which had won the first round of contracts, were replaced by smaller, emerging Black Economic Empowerment firms. For procurement decisions valued at over R 30 000 were now subject to the preferential points system established under the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (2000). As Brunette, Chipkin and Meny-Gilbert argue (PARI 2014:7): ‘the system of awarding contracts is today so decentralised and fragmented that it is difficult to coordinate activities between departments and tiers of government and/or to exercise oversight over the system as a whole’.<sup>11</sup>

Inevitably, these transitions—coming at the same time—caused much disruption. The scheduled programme of dip tank repair slowed down, and unit costs increased to as much as R250 000 per dip tank. However, the engineering programme was not entirely derailed—and in 2019 the KwaZulu-Natal government was on course to complete this programme of works very soon.

## ii. Civil society renewed – The local Livestock Associations

At the same time as running a reconstruction programme, the provincial government transferred authority over the dipping tanks to newly formed Livestock Associations (LAs). Each dip tank is now run by a local LA, whose elected chairs and secretaries organise the regular dipping days and collect membership fees that are used for running costs and to carry out small-scale repairs (on pumps, railings etc.). Officials estimate that perhaps 90-95% of the 1600 dip tanks in KwaZulu-Natal have functioning Livestock Associations—an impressive figure given the fraught history of dipping in South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

Two reasons lie behind this success. For one, LAs were often closely involved in the engineering programmes that repaired their dip tanks, in consequence developing basic engineering expertise. Typically, the ten-odd unskilled labourers employed to work on the repair/rehabilitation of each tank would come from the local LA. In the earlier stages, there were even hopes that the LAs develop their own inventories of basic building materials—not just making their own repairs, but selling the materials into wider communities. Whilst this more ambitious plan has born limited

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<sup>9</sup> Interview, engineer, KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Department, September 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> They describe two phases of outsourcing, the latter which occurred in the 2010s.

<sup>12</sup> By comparison, the state vet in the Eastern Cape Lusikisiki district municipality estimated only 50% of livestock associations on his patch were functioning effectively—Gibbs (2010: 158).

fruit, my interviews suggested that many LAs were drawing on their bank balances to make vital, basic repairs, buying the building materials (cement, creosote, railing poles etc.) from the large hardware stores in the district centres. This is encouraging: for an ongoing schedule of maintenance is imperative if dipping operations are to be maintained.<sup>13</sup>

Second, and perhaps most importantly, local LAs have established sustainable symbiotic relationships to officials in the district municipalities. The chairs and secretaries of the local LAs receive free dipping medicine for their dip tank when they attend monthly meetings convened by animal health technicians in the district municipalities. Each LA must show their account books and dipping registers (that list the number of stock being dipped at each tank) in order to receive free dipping medicine. What makes the system work so well is that there is a relatively effective quid-pro-quo: there are powerful incentives that encourage LAs to keep their operations and books in relatively good order.

Given that livestock dipping came close to collapse during the democratic transition—(indeed, it has collapsed in a number of provinces, which are experiencing a resurgence of tick-related diseases)—KwaZulu-Natal has achieved a remarkable success. The LAs activities are underpinning by significant fundraising efforts, collecting annual fees of around R50-150 from each of their members. If (using Mdukatshani figures) we assume that there are on average around 100 members per dip, and that 90% of the 1600 tanks in the province are working, then the LAs across KwaZulu-Natal are collectively raising R450 million in membership fees each year. There are no salaries or stipends officially paid to any of the office bearers. Given the conflicts around money that so often arise in poor communities—(witness the conflicts over school funds in many rural provinces)—there has been remarkably little conflict in the LAs.<sup>14</sup>

These are remarkable organs of civil society organisation. Local LAs conduct many surveillance and registration operations that were once the job of apartheid era government officials. They keep dipping tank livestock registers and issue movement permits.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, many people say that they now that they are responsible for running their own dipping operations, they understand the importance of animal health in ways that were never explained to them under the more top-down vet services model of the apartheid era. In this sense, this model of community-run cattle dipping has worked very well in post-apartheid KwaZulu-Natal.

## 5. Recommendations – Problems and opportunities

At the same time, it is clear that this much decentralised and somewhat ad hoc method of cattle dipping comes with constraints and vulnerabilities. One ambition of this working paper was to suggest that the fraught history of cattle dipping in South Africa means that it is very unlikely that

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, engineer, KwaZulu-Natal agricultural department, September 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Most local LAs hold their bank accounts. Additionally, the 43 local municipalities will hold bank accounts on behalf of the district level LAs. The district level LAs bank accounts were set up with the state/development bank Ithala with the expectation that these organisations would eventually be properly constituted as Section 21 not-for-profit organisations; but this did not happen – interviews, Mdukatshani, August 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Admittedly, there are caveats in such voluntaristic systems: one reason that livestock registers are sometimes inaccurate is that LAs only receive free dipping medicine if they are dipping more than 500 cattle.

a more centralised (apartheid era) model of dipping will be returning anytime soon. Nonetheless, there are opportunities to improve the current dipping regime. Briefly these are:

- Increase the number of well-resourced animal health technicians who provide a wider range of free vaccinations and animal healthcare services.
- Building on KwaZulu-Natal's relatively successful cattle dipping regime, introduce free dipping for goats/small livestock, particularly benefiting poorer, female-headed households.
- Working with LAs at a municipality level, pilot livestock auctions/sales to stimulate the entry of emerging farmers into commercial markets.
- Strengthen the voice of women by encouraging female participation in the Livestock Associations that run the dip tanks.

#### **i. Securing animal health – linking Livestock Associations to government**

The state vets in Pietermaritzburg, in particular, are frustrated by their lack of 'grip'. They feel they cannot mount effective animal health and vaccination campaigns because the bureaucratic machinery beneath them is so thin.

We might see the situation most clearly when we compare the organisation of vet services today with that of the apartheid era. Previously, a locally hired, part-time, unskilled dipping attendant oversaw each dipping tank, running the dipping days and monitoring livestock numbers and health in his particular area. (He would report up to a dipping foreman.) Today, the lowest rung of the government that the local LAs will interact with are a much smaller number of 200-odd university trained animal health technicians, who are each responsible for around half-a-dozen dip tanks. In one sense, the new technicians (unlike the apartheid-era dipping attendants) are theoretically far better trained and more capable professionals. At the same time, many reports have noted that even the most enthusiastic animal health technicians simply do not have the time to monitor their area. In consequence, there are basic gaps of bureaucratic monitoring and surveillance. Unlike the apartheid era, when stock numbers were carefully tabulated into annual reports, today we do even have accurate reporting on animal numbers.

Yet there are opportunities too, for the post-apartheid KwaZulu-Natal vet services has relatively sound foundations compared to other provinces. Despite persistent grumbles about demoralisation and the lethargy of some municipalities, the resources and capacities within KwaZulu-Natal are stronger than some of the other provincial governments. (Animal health technicians in the Eastern Cape are apparently desk-bound because the pool of government vehicles is so poorly maintained.) Likewise, the KwaZulu-Natal government has shown a renewed interest in animal health in recent years—after years of neglect when many vet technicians were moved into vegetable production—for instance bringing temporary technicians onto rabies vaccination campaigns.

Clearly, there are opportunities to focus more resources on animal healthcare, perhaps hiring more animal health technicians and diverting resources from less productive parts of the department. For there remains a simple public health and poverty relief rationale to the work done by animal health technicians. Livestock of various sorts remain widely held by all but the poorest rural households; and the animal healthcare and welfare work (including cattle dipping) overseen by the technicians is a vital in maintaining the health of the herd.

## ii. Dipping goats – to include poorer and female headed households

There is also an important question to be resolved about who does best from this revival of state subsidised livestock dipping. Here, it is important to emphasise that it is only cattle dipping—not goat and sheep dipping—that was revived by the post-apartheid government. Historically, cattle have tended to be held in larger numbers by the more prosperous and male-headed households. (By contrast, poorer, female-headed and child-headed households are more likely to hold small livestock.)

There is a clear opportunity for government to build the dipping tanks for dipping small livestock (which would largely be for goat dipping, given that sheep herds are far sparser in the province) and to distribute free goat dipping medicine to LAs. Intriguingly, a number of LAs in the Msinga district have recently started dipping goats on their own initiative, building new dip tanks with their own funds.<sup>16</sup> Because goat-dipping medicine is not freely given by government, membership fees are significantly higher too—one LA charged R100 pa for its cattle section and R150 pa for its goat section, for instance.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, households are willing to pay because ‘we are selling more than in the days of our fathers’. Indeed, Mdukatshani’s research suggests that informal goat sales may be a hidden part of the informal/invisible economy—‘invisible’ because goat numbers are dramatically undercounted in official government surveys. Successive drought years in the 2010s—in which cattle were hit by much higher rates of mortality than the hardier goats—have also increased the proportion of goats. In consequence, goats are becoming an increasingly important part of household livelihoods.

This recommendation comes with a cost. Building 1600-odd goat dipping tanks (which would need to be built from scratch) using sub-contracted engineering firms might carry cost-tag of R80-160 million over the ten years or so it takes to complete the programme.<sup>18</sup> (Nevertheless, as the cattle dip maintenance/engineering programmes are draw to close, there is a new opportunity here to mobilise capacity/funding within government.) Supplying free goat dipping medicine to the provinces estimated 3.2 million goats might cost R38 million annually too—but again offers

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<sup>16</sup> One LA collected R1000 from each of its 10 members to buy materials (cement and fencing poles). Members supplied free labour and constructed the tank and pens themselves – Interview, Bongobuhle Mveli, 28 August 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Only 10% of the cattle tanks have small stock tanks built next to them; and in any case, these dilapidated structures were designed more for sheep than goats. We used an estimate of R50 000-R100 000 per goat dip. (The cattle dip tanks cost R100 000-R200 000 to rebuild from scratch.)

empowerment opportunities to the subcontracted suppliers.<sup>19</sup> In short, there seems to be a substantial coalition of interests who would gain from these relatively low cost measures.

### iii. Auctions – Encouraging KwaZulu-Natal’s R4.2 billion invisible economy

Another question concerns the function and purpose of local municipality level Livestock Associations, whose chairs and secretaries get elected each year by the chairs and secretaries of the local LAs. The couple that I interviewed were effective insofar as they convened monthly meetings with local government officials, thus ensuring dip medicines and other materials are passed down the chain to local dip tanks. But policymakers have not seen (as they once hoped) the LAs catalysing the business activities of emerging black farmers—perhaps spinning-out their own businesses, such as supplying building materials for repairing dip tanks. The one exception (that proves the rule) is the Siyaphambili Co-operative at Ladysmith, which has been the focus of government pilot projects.<sup>20</sup>

The inability of government catalyse LAs’ involvement in business activities is all the more striking given that many indices suggest there are very thick flows of animal sales/transactions taking place KwaZulu-Natal. The NGO Mdukatshani has estimated that 500,000 to one million goats are trucked into the province from South African/Namibian borderlands each year because there is such a demand for slaughter.<sup>21</sup> Other surveys of individual livestock owners conducted a village level suggest that perhaps 5-15% of cattle are sold informally within localities. Given that a cow might be worth R7500 per head these are substantial sums—one sale is the equivalent to receiving a whole year of child grants. The cash value of informal cattle and goat sales and trade in KwaZulu-Natal alone might be worth, respectively, R3 billion and R1.2 billion per annum.<sup>22</sup>

It is also very noticeable that a growing number of black livestock owners are selling into commercial auctions. The AAM auctioneers, who run most of the livestock sales in KwaZulu-Natal, estimate that around 30% of their sales are in this sector. They now run three small livestock sales (mainly goats) each month. AAM are seeing an increasing number of black speculators (i.e. livestock traders) too. Many trade in small volumes (perhaps three to six animals at a time); one or two of the largest black speculators might be buying 25 cattle (worth around R250 000) at an auction.<sup>23</sup> These flows are sufficiently thick that a number of white commercial speculators are

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19 Free cattle dipping medicine costs R35 million per annum – pers. comm. Dr Themba Sikhakhane.

20 A leaflet publicising the ‘National Red Meat Development Programme Beed Indaba’ (2019: 30) typifies this booster literature.

21 The lower figure is the official number of imports from Namibia; but there are clearly many more goats coming in from across the border – cf. Cousins and Hornby 2016.

22 Fieldworkers who have conducted detailed small surveys and then scaled up the figures to province-wide level come up with very large numbers. These KwaZulu-Natal figures are based on Mdukatshani estimates: that 800,000 goats (worth R1200 each) are slaughtered and another 200 000 are used for fines and swapping each year; and that 200,000 cattle (worth R7500 each) are slaughtered and another 200,000 traded for *lobola* type activities. Kenyon produces similarly high figures for the Eastern Cape – see footnote two. Official government estimates are much lower, reflecting a likely undercounting.

23 By contrast, the largest commercial white speculators are commissioned to buy 100 odd cattle in a fortnight period – Interview, AAM auctioneers, September 2019.

buying livestock in the communal areas. One LA told me that a neighbouring white farmer had trucked their animals to market until he suffered a robbery worth R460 000.<sup>24</sup>

To this end, there have been a number of important initiatives run by NGOs and commercial auctioneers, working in partnership with local government officials and LAs, to bring black smallholders to commercial auctions. LAs have been given free transport to take their livestock to commercial markets in nearby towns. More ambitious projects have set up temporary auctions rural areas—complete with weighing scale, holding pens, water tanks, drinking troughs, loading ramps, a marquee, a mini-kitchen, generators, an auctioneer’s podium, and a weighing scale. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agricultural and Environmental Affairs has built new sales yards at Msinga with an initial investment of R1.9 million. Its first sale in 2016 netted R826 000 (National Meat Indaba 2016).

Yet whilst government trumpets the success of a rising generation of black ‘emerging commercial farmers’, the dynamics behind the rise of livestock sales are not clear. Certainly, the fact that 95% of cattle owners have herds of less than ten beasts suggests that very few smallholders are positioned to think in terms of profit maximisation. More research is necessary to understand the value chains involved in this web of transactions—from farm-gate sales, to the collection pens, the traders/transporters, and the auctioneers (see the diagram in appendix three). The question remains of how to make these livestock markets more inclusive.

#### **iv. Empowerment – Bringing women into the Livestock Associations**

Finally, if LAs are to be the main vehicle through which dipping and wider commercial activities are revived, we must ask whose interests they represent. Given that historically, cattle have tended to be held in larger numbers by the more prosperous and male-headed households, it is likely that the revival of subsidised cattle dipping and the formation of LAs is likely to have benefited these households most. Some of the provincial government’s publicity literature—which celebrates the achievements of commercially minded, ‘emerging’, black smallholder farmers—gives this impression too.

Nonetheless, I was struck by the relatively egalitarian structures of the Local LAs. For one, there is more diversity within many of the local LAs than might be imagined. Certainly, the chairmen are typically men—often comfortably retired migrant labourers, who might be expected to hold a good number of cattle and drive their own vehicle. Often a representative of the chief sits on the committee too. At the same time, it is striking that quite a few of the dipping tank secretaries who keep the accounts are middle-aged women: trusted to handle scrupulously the fees that they collect from members of the LAs. (Much the same was seen in the village water committees, which often elected powerful matriarchal figures as secretaries and account holders.) Secondly, it seems (from admittedly impressionistic interviews rather than surveys) that the larger, more commercially minded, cattle owners, who own herds of perhaps 100-200 livestock or more, have tended to keep clear of the communally organised LAs. They are more likely to spray their own herds with anti-tick medicines, rather than involve themselves in the complex politics of organising cattle dipping collectively. These richer interviewees also said they preferred not to keep their livestock in the communal areas, where they are more vulnerable to disease and cattle theft. In the districts of the

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<sup>24</sup> Interview, Mdukatshani, August 2019.

Natal Midlands many of the larger, more prosperous owners have managed to put their herds onto the land reform farms nearby. Broadly speaking, we can conclude that the LAs are run by pillars of the local community – both women and men.

Even so, the participation of women in the LAs—both at individual dip tanks and in the second tier of local municipality organisation—could be strengthened. Rural South Africans have become accustomed to having a certain proportion of seats on traditional councils allocated to women. In much the same way, gender quotas could be introduced into the LAs—perhaps increasing the executive (currently a chair and a secretary) from two to three, and stipulating that one of these posts must be held by a woman. The question remains of how to make LAs more inclusive.

## 6. Conclusion

This working paper asks how collective action might be rebuilt from the grassroots-up in rural South Africa, in the poorest districts that were devastated by apartheid policy. Cattle dipping was once the centrepiece of animal healthcare and government agricultural policy in these districts of South Africa. It remains a vital necessity today, given that many rural households still hold livestock, and there is a dense web of livestock transactions in these districts. In KwaZulu-Natal alone, goat and cattle sales might be worth R4.2 billion per annum. Yet in many parts of the country, livestock dipping has fallen apart as authoritarian apartheid-era institutions crumbled and collapsed during the democratic transition. Since the mid-2000s, the KwaZulu-Natal provincial government has done something remarkable in rebuilding the dip tanks and getting them running again. This has been done under the aegis of local Livestock Associations, remarkable, voluntarily run, community based organs of civil society, which might be collectively collecting R450 million in membership fees each year. At a time when much is written about the weakness of government institutions in rural South Africa, here is a quiet, largely unnoticed, ‘success story’ of an effective relationship between the state and civil society that we would do well to understand and learn from.

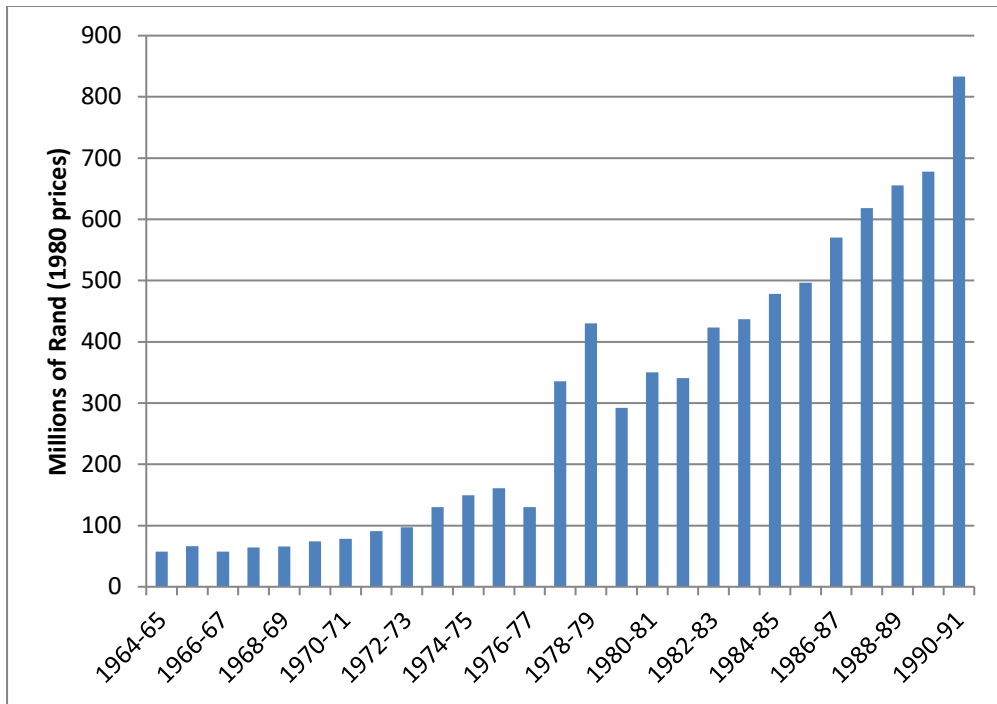


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## 8. APPENDICES

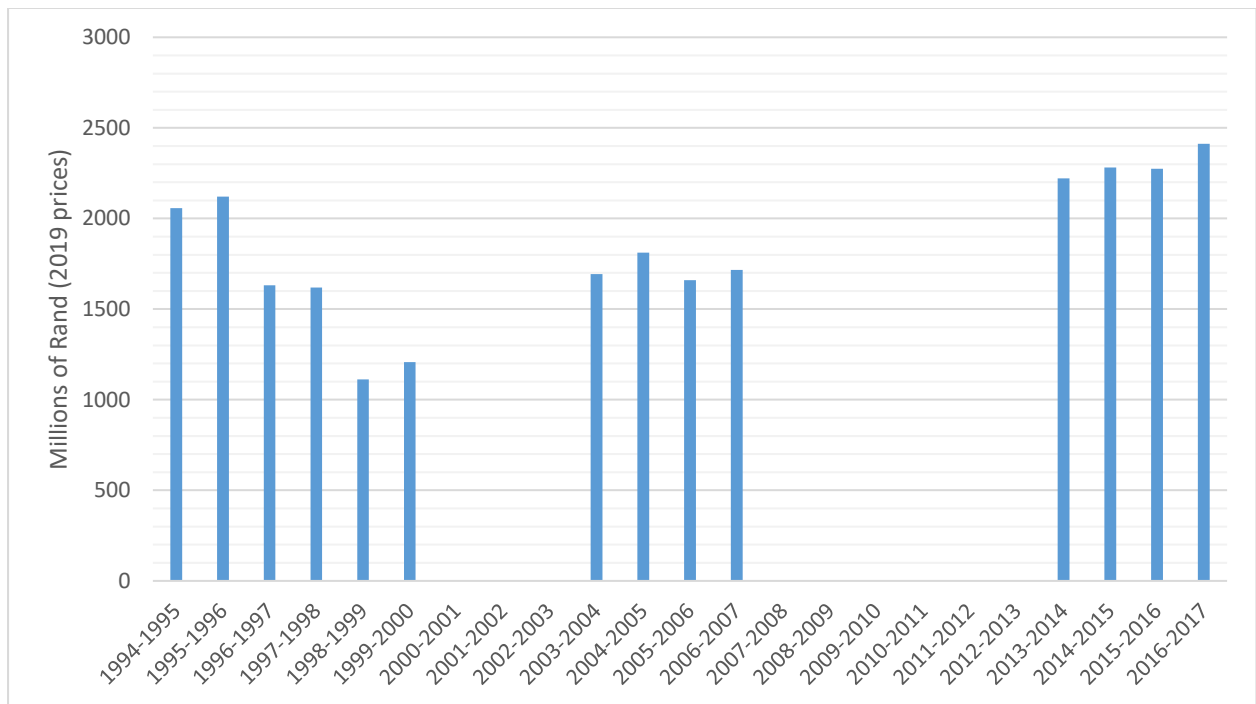
### Appendix One: Bantustan Government expenditures – A Transkei example



Source: Transkei Auditor General, Estimates of Expenditure (Umtata, 1964-91)

Because Transkei was a ‘model apartheid Bantustan’ its annual financial reports, running back to 1963, are found in government libraries, giving us an indication of the rise in Bantustan government expenditures over the apartheid era. Note the steep rises from the late 1970s onwards, as peasant production sagged.

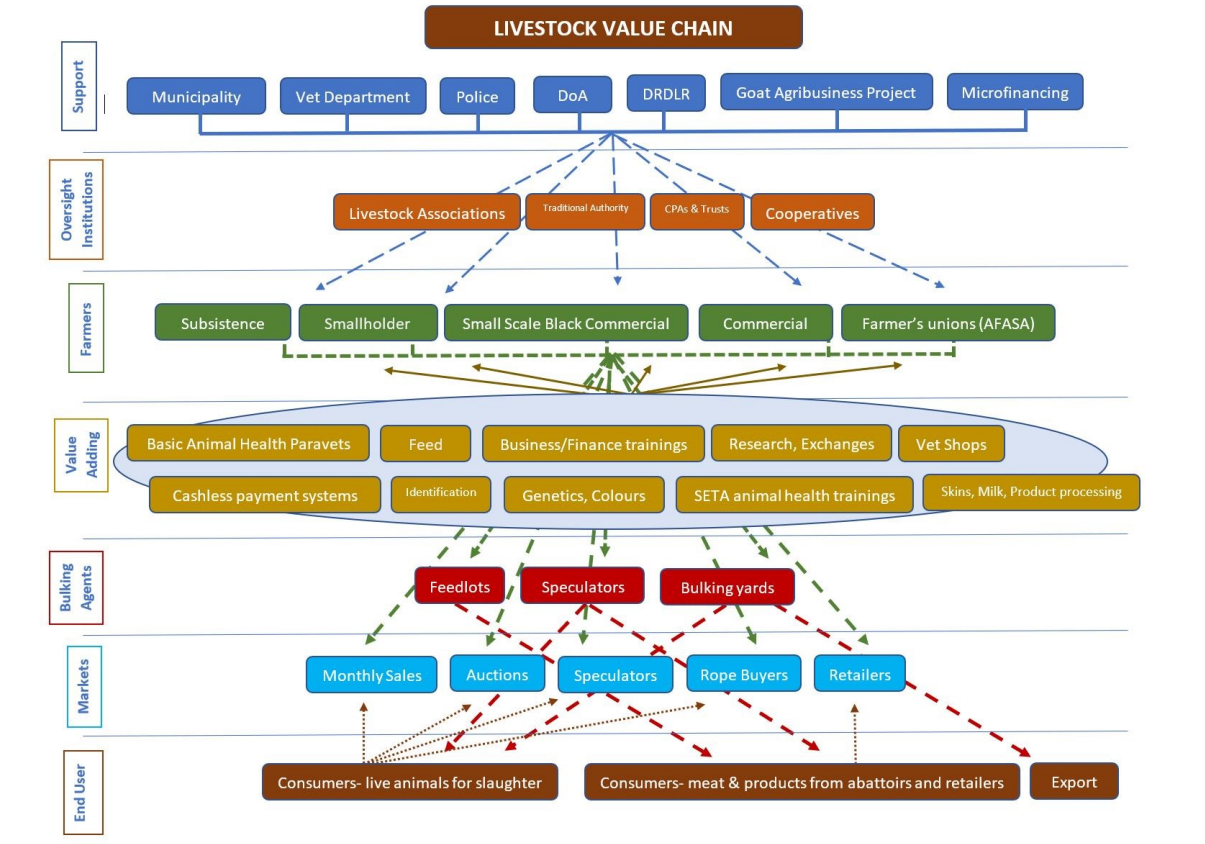
## Appendix Two: Post-apartheid agriculture expenditures – An Eastern Cape example



Source: Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs Annual Reports (Bhisho, 1995-2017)

The Eastern Cape's department of agriculture has the longest running series of annual reports found in South African libraries, giving us a decent indication changing government expenditures. Originally named the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, it is now known as the Department for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform. Note the increased expenditures in the mid-2000s, around the time when rural infrastructure programmes started.

### Appendix Three: Marketing value chains



Source: <http://www.mdukatshani.com/>