



case study

Biodiversity and Red Meat Initiative (BRI) Stewardship in the Kamiesberg Uplands

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BRI farmer with his sheep in the Kamiesberg

CSA is a conservation NGO active in the Succulent Karoo.

Conservation Areas are the third category of the South African government's biodiversity stewardship programme which provides a vehicle for informal, quickly established agreements that can be applied in a wide variety of circumstances. Conservation Areas also provide flexible and non-binding recognition to communities or landowners who conserve or manage their properties in biodiversity-compatible ways.

The Biodiversity and Red Meat Initiative (BRI) is an initiative that seeks to secure priority biodiversity areas and expand the protected area network in the Namaqualand Uplands through biodiversity stewardship. This initiative entails voluntary biodiversity stewardship agreements between individual commercial and communal farmers, and Conservation South Africa (CSA).

BRI was catalyzed upon recognition that livestock farming is the largest contributor to the economy of the Kamiesberg Uplands, and can also have significant negative impacts on biodiversity if not well managed. The Kamiesberg is the catchment for two non-perennial rivers in the area, the Groen River and the Buffels River, and is also home to a network of wetlands.

BRI is using the Global Conservation Stewardship Program's stewardship model as a format for achieving better land management practices. The Global Conservation Stewards Program bridges conservation and development through innovative conservation agreements developed in partnership with communities and others who own or rely on natural resources.

The initiative started with a CSA funded one year pilot project in June 2009 and ended in June 2010. During this phase, twenty two farmers joined the BRI, of which two were private farmers and the rest communal farmers. The biodiversity stewardship agreements also function as a pilot to allow farmers and conservation organisations to determine whether farming and conservation can be mutually beneficial. The biodiversity stewardship agreements were signed between individual BRI farmers and CSA wherein both parties have agreed to implement a set of conservation actions designed to address land management issues.

In terms of the biodiversity stewardship agreement, farmers agree to manage all or parts of their land with valuable biodiversity as Conservation Areas by undertaking conservation actions that will contribute towards sustainable farming, while CSA agrees to provide certain incentives to those signing biodiversity stewardship agreements.

The BRI aims to build farmers' and the environment's resilience to the devastating effects of climate change predicted for this area. BRI is guided by the stewardship principle that land owners and land users can make a valuable contribution to conservation.

CSA's Role in the BRI

Farmers who form part of this initiative commit to reducing their stock in an effort to give degraded land a chance to recover and to encourage the growth of new plants. The farmers are supported in this by CSA through a subsidy scheme, through which CSA provides a price premium to farmers selling stock (sheep and goats) in excess of the agreed carrying capacity which CSA has based on the formula used by the Department of Agriculture.

CSA has thus entered into a verbal agreement with a local owned butchery, Nammeat, to purchase livestock from the BRI farmers and provide transport for the



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farmers' stock to the market. Nammeat would provide a fair price for the livestock, and CSA would subsidise the price of the stock to a certain amount to reach the price premium.

The price premium is determined by the proposed number of stock BRI members are willing to reduce. CSA has agreed to pay a premium on the difference in price for each livestock unit to guarantee a price of R600/stock unit. Due to drought conditions in the previous season the market price has decreased significantly. In turn farmers received a low R450/small stock unit. CSA provided security by paying the difference to ensure that farmers receive R600 per head of stock.

Some of the incentives which CSA has provided to BRI farmers who have committed to reduce their stock numbers, who do not graze the wetlands at certain periods of the year, who apply alternative predator management options, and apply the management guidelines for downsizing their herds and improving the management of the land used for grazing are:

- Conducting demonstrations
 - Offering training interventions such as ecology training, wetland training, eco-shepherd training and general field management training
 - Access to expertise, existing programmes and information
 - Monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity stewardship activities
 - Research of marketing opportunities and accessing potential markets
 - Designed guidelines and land use management plans on request to BRI members
- Provision of hand and water pumps to supply water to water troughs outside the wetlands
- A mapping process was done for most of the BRI members' sowing or cultivation plots (*saai persele*). The maps outline the borders of each sowing plot and include a legend to describe the resources and infrastructure available for each sowing plot. As a result of the mapping it was clear that there were 23 BRI members who have access to the sowing plots on the Leliefontein Commonage. None of the 23 BRI farmers are sharing their cultivation plots although it was proposed to do so as a means to allow other BRI farmers to sowing plots. CSA has attempted to enquire if farmers have used their plots informally and if some of the plots are not in use.

CSA is in the process of developing an integrated monitoring system for the BRI which will include socio-economic monitoring, an ecological monitoring system which is being undertaken by Nurture Restore Innovate (NRI) and a compliance monitoring system which is being undertaken by BRI monitors and overseen by CSA.

BRI Achievements

In November 2010 the BRI Association was formed with the aim to drive biodiversity stewardship mentorship and support appropriate projects that align with biodiversity stewardship objectives. The BRI Association now consists of forty four members.

BRI members received marketing and awareness exposure such as appearing in articles of the quarterly *VeePos* local newspaper. BRI members have also indicated that they derived most benefit from their partnership with Nammeat and the financial contribution they received by reducing their stock numbers. The training on predator control management which the BRI farmers received was beneficial, as they reported that incidents of stock loss had been reduced. The BRI farmers have also gained a better understanding of land use management, and want to learn more about practical conservation actions they can undertake.

BRI Challenges

The BRI farmers have expressed a lot of uncertainty, such as the socio-economic implications of reducing their stock, the lack of clear guidelines on reducing stock, and whether there are alternative livelihood strategies for them to adopt that will still ensure conservation actions and the sustainability of their livelihoods. The BRI farmers are making enquiries about whether there are other options to achieve conservation goals without compromising their livelihoods, and what the ultimate conservation goal is.

The farmers also faced practical setbacks such as no access roads and lack of infrastructure which has limited their ability to market their products. Water

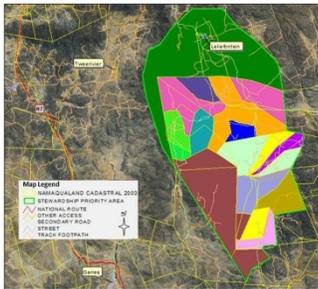
infrastructure on the commonage remains a challenge with poor services from the local municipality. Farmers very often experience problems with wind pumps on the commonage which are not well maintained. There is also a need for all active role players in the Kamiesberg Uplands to reach consensus about stock carrying capacity.

Flaws in the BRI

The 2010 target for small stock reduction was 500 animals. BRI members expressed reluctance to reduce their stock, as during this time only 287 small stock were reduced. The main reason underlying their reluctance was that traditionally farmers usually sell off their stock during November, closer to the end of the year to pay debts accumulated over the year in order to have money for the festive season.

The stock reduction process was intended to be undertaken in order to get excess animals off the land before the end of the flower season, so that seed setting could occur. Yet it is cited that the increase in BRI membership made it difficult to conduct stock counts in order to plan for a stock reduction before the deadline date.

An additional weakness of the initiative was entering into the area and initiating pilot livelihood projects without a thorough understanding the socio-economic variables at play.



Map of the BRI biodiversity stewardship area

The Most Important Lessons

Although BRI membership has increased dramatically, the initiative is still in its infancy stage and is yet to produce information on how stock reduction has improved veld condition for grazing and biodiversity in the Kamiesberg Uplands. At this stage it remains difficult to fully assess the benefits of the initiative to the BRI farmers for their willingness in undertaking specific conservation measures during the first two years of the initiative, and whether indeed their livelihoods have improved.

The BRI farmers' uncertainty regarding the amount of stock to reduce needs to be addressed since communal farming is an important livelihood strategy for them. Whether the farmers actually derive more benefits from reducing their stock and then selling their products at premium prices remains elusive. The uncertainty of stock reduction from CSA and requesting the BRI farmers to voluntarily comply needs to be investigated. It is apparent that reducing stock numbers will have less than ideal effect on livelihoods.

There is also a need for more capacity in the initiative, if an increase in BRI membership results in it being difficult to perform stock reductions. Research information needs to be collected regarding how stock reduction leads to the improvement of veld conditions for grazing and biodiversity. Certain livelihood activities of the BRI farmers, such as the selling of their stock closer to the end of the year to settle accumulated debts during the course of the year need to be considered for future planned phases.

Different means of income need to be explored to reduce the reliance on communal farming as much as the BRI farmers value the income derived from engaging in the initiative and their partnership with Nammeat.

The impact and influence of this initiative on the few private farmers who are engaged in the initiative needs to be explored, if its aim is to achieve the vision of building farmers' and the environments' resilience to climate change.

Communication processes throughout phase one of BRI in the Kamiesberg Uplands was great and should remain as such. The *VeePos* newspaper also plays a major role in creating conservation and biodiversity awareness in the Kamiesberg Uplands. There has been horizontal learning throughout this process, and CSA has also learnt a lot of valuable lessons from the farmers.

The Future of BRI

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The people of the Succulent Karoo are the custodians of biodiversity in the region. Their understanding and involvement in biodiversity matters are essential. The BRI thus offers an innovative approach in addressing biodiversity and livelihood concerns in the Kamiesberg Uplands. These biodiversity stewardship agreements are in effect the first Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) scheme on communal lands in South Africa, in which the BRI farmers are paid to reduce their stock and graze the land in a more sustainable way.

The BRI agreements are designed to last for only one year, after which they will be reviewed, discussed and the next steps to take are agreed to by both CSA and the BRI farmers. The BRI hopes to expand to eventually encompass the complete 21 000 ha of the Three Peaks Priority Area with most farmers as members of the initiative, as presently the initiative is a pilot in the Leliefontein Communal area. BRI will be making use of cyber tracking technology to collect data which will be made available on reports and to relevant stakeholders. The second BRI phase will conclude in June 2011. A third phase will commence in July 2011. The successes and challenges of the project need to be shared in order to broaden support for this work.

The BRI Association has become involved in the maintenance of the Leliefontein Wetland Project. There are plans for the BRI farmers to present their initiative the annual Land Reform Biodiversity Stewardship Initiative. To make biodiversity stewardship agreements a success, every step of the process is to be pursued in consultation with land owners and land users. If sustainable farming practices are applied, then biodiversity gets conserved and farmers will benefit from sustained resources.