

FROM MACRO TO MICRO: ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND 'THE POOREST OF THE POOR' IN SEEKOEIVLEI, SOUTH AFRICA

C2 – Executive Summary

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"From Macro to Micro: Environmental Policy and 'the Poorest of the Poor' in Seekoeivlei, South Africa" by the same author.

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Executive Summary

- This dissertation assesses how a multi-partnership policy for poverty alleviation and environmental conservation is achieving its objectives. Working for Wetlands is a programme managed by different national departments in public-private partnership.
- I analyse both the macro and the micro level of this policy at a particular location. For that purpose, I investigate the link between both through an in depth study of the changes in livelihood and in perceptions on the environment and development of the people involved at the ground.
- I use a Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) **theoretical framework** and a triangulation of **methodologies**, including literature survey; 48 questionnaires and structured interviews face to face with current employees of WfWet and with a control group of similar age and gender balance; two focus groups with women and men working in WfWet; face to face interviews with eight experts who were involved in WfWet at different levels; and secondary data such as internal monitoring and auditing documents, procedural documentation, general statistical data, historical documents about Seekoeivlei, aerial photographs and GIS information.
- The SL approach provides an integrative frame of analysis that analyzes the link between policy and livelihoods through a focus on five assets: human, social, natural, physical and financial. In particular, the assets approach provides interesting insights on how the programme has affected some assets more than others, and on how this effect may (or not) be sustained throughout time. This integrative view helps to identify which aspects the policy needs to emphasize if sustainable livelihoods are to be promoted.
- The case study is located around a wetland called Seekoeivlei, situated in the east of Free State, South Africa. This is a very valuable wetland in ecological terms for its water regulation function, bird and other biodiversity habitat and its particular geomorphology. During the last century it suffered from unsustainable agricultural and management practices that eroded its water storing capacity and other values. It was declared a nature reserve in 1979 and a Ramsar site in 1996. In the last decades the wetland has been target of some rehabilitation works and attempts to develop the area and to promote its tourism value, with diverse success.
- The closest human settlement is Memel, with a population of about 5,500 (2001), divided in about 500 people predominantly white, and about 5,000 inhabitants in the township of Zamani, mainly a black community. After a massive migration from agricultural lands to township during the nineties, unemployment is a big socioeconomic issue in this area.
- I conducted the fieldwork over six weeks between June and July 2007, in Memel, Zamani, Pretoria and Bloemfontein. A local research assistant helped with IsiZulu and Sesotho translation in the township. Afterwards, I used digital software to analyse the qualitative data, classifying each paragraph or comment according to topics and speakers' characteristics.

- The results are divided in two big blocks: the macro and the micro. Interaction between both is discussed thereafter.
- At the **macro level**, I explain the institutional and policy context of WfWet and I analyze the policy formulation and implementation processes from the upwards perspective.
- WfWet started from some initial and parallel efforts at governmental and NGO levels. During this sequence, I identify key strategies that have contributed to the achievements of WfWet so far:
 - Focus on water as the main value of wetlands rather than biodiversity.
 - Emphasis in lobbying, awareness raising and Media coverage.
 - Joining the labour intensive objective to present a win-win policy.
 - Institutional moves: full time wetland experts, multiple hosts.
- The programme has a well established process of implementation that includes wide auditing of the process and results, but not medium-long term monitoring of its impact on the environment.
- Main strengths and opportunities identified are:
 - It has multiple recipients with relatively little money and it delivers more than it expends, according to experts.
 - It plays an important role for public awareness; the programme is helping to get academics and professionals interested in contributing to wetlands' rehabilitation and conservation and provincial and local authorities are also getting interested in enhancing water supply, thus the programme has big potential to happen at a regional level.
- WfWet is a complex programme that deals with many different aspects and actants at the same time, including financial management, skills provision and training, environmental compromise, public and private actors at different levels, etc. The main constraints or weaknesses identified are:
 - Implementation level: intermittence of the work.
 - Policy formulation level: little link between skills and future jobs.
 - Policy formulation level: complexity of the learning process with landowners.
 - Implementation level: lack of financial capacity for particular tasks.
- At the **micro level**, I investigate changes and trends in the livelihood of workers and in their perception on environment and on development.
- I present the results of the analysis of changes and trends in livelihood assets and the situation and perception on livelihood strategies among the employees of the programme in the rehabilitation of Seekoeivlei. I do this in comparison to a control group of people living in the same township, which provides a proxy for the changes caused by the programme. There are relevant differences in terms of livelihood assets and strategies (See Figure below for a summary, and the box for a more extended explanation of the results at the micro level).

- In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the impacts of this policy, I analyse the differences in discourses and perception on environment and on development between both groups.

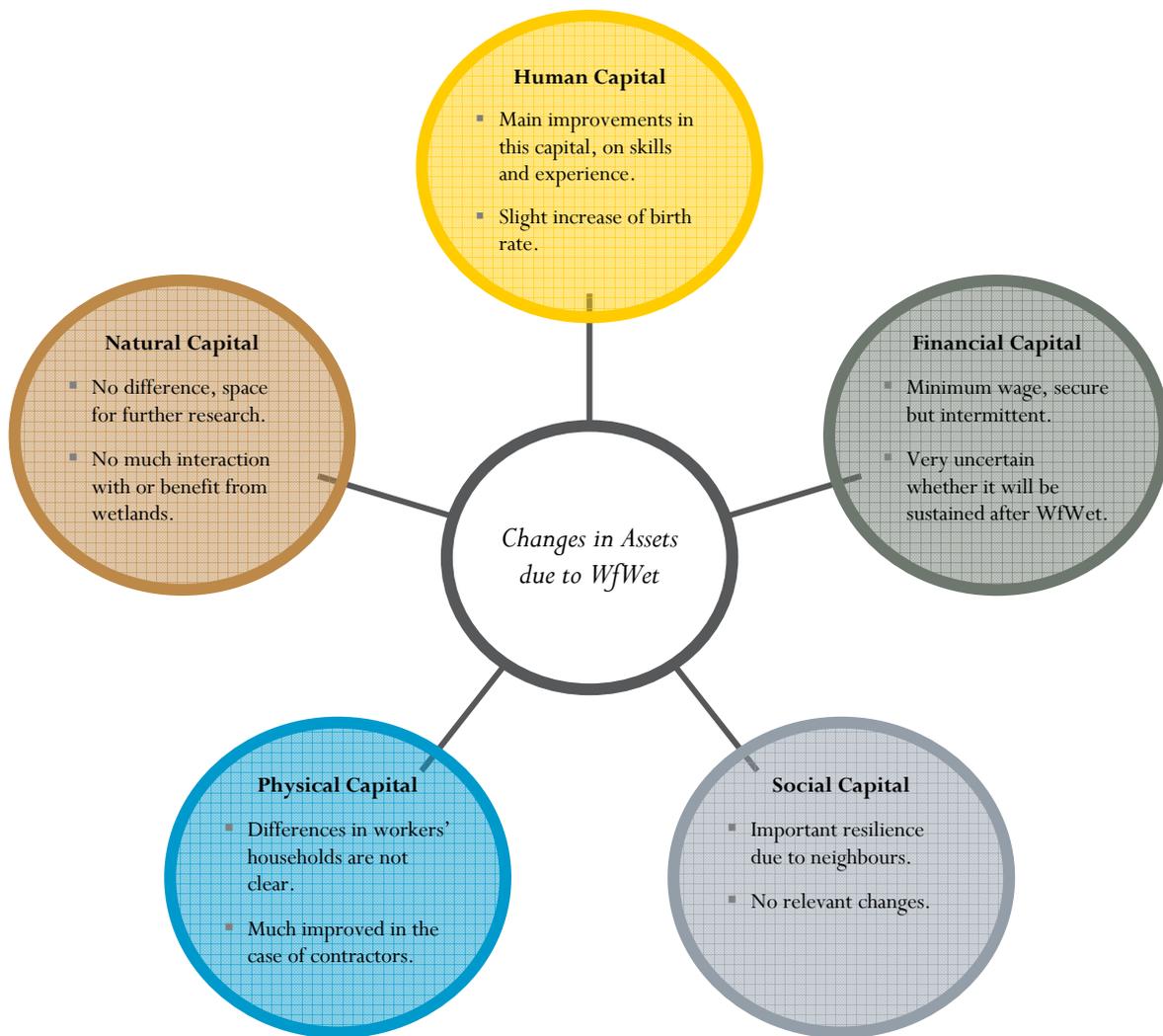


Figure 0: Summary of improvements in capital after working in WfWet.

Box 0: Summary of the results at the micro level**LIVELIHOODS**

In general terms, the programme has attained the livelihood outcomes expected in the SL framework: increased working days have been created, poverty has been reduced and well-being and capabilities improved. However the sustainability aspects related to adaptation and resilience do not seem to have a significant enhancement. WfWet has triggered differences in livelihood assets, more remarkably in the case of human capital. There are also some differences in physical and financial capitals. The natural and social ones have no meaningful difference.

Human Capital

- The average household among workers has 8 people (± 3), two more than the control group, differing in the number of children below 15 years old.
- The main improvement experienced by workers and their families has been on skills and on the working experience. Part of the income may serve to pay education and certificates for other members. Some of them also expressed a change in mind and an increase in self-esteem for they are now contributing to the household.
- However, the capacity and possibility of using this increased capital may be limited by the second constraint explained at the policy formulation level.

Financial Capital

- Even if wages are comparatively low and the work -thus its payments- are intermittent, WfWet ensures a minimum wage during the period in which people are in the programme.
- Workers have preferently used their income for immediate consumption and they have little opportunity to save or invest their wage in promoting their livelihoods. Thus, main financial benefits of this job may not be sustained beyond the period of employment in WfWet.

Social Capital

- The social network itself is very wide and intermingled throughout the community; extended families and helpfulness between neighbours is very common as well as a source of economic resilience for many households. WfWet does not make a difference in this case.
- There are positive attitudes towards public participation in policies although it is not a common practice.

Physical Capital

- There is no clear difference in wealth ranking between workers and non-workers regarding household products neither house materials.
- Workers have done small improvements within the house due to WfWet. There is an outstanding difference of the purchasing capacity of contractors in contrast to general workers.

Natural capital

- The fact of working in WfWet makes no difference, *a priori*, in the access to and use of natural assets. The main difference may be due to the changes in perception of workers, which will have direct link in their interaction with the environment.
- Residents are provided with basic services by the municipality. There is no accountancy of the water used per household yet (July 2007) since water meters were recently installed.
- The interaction of the community with wetlands is very low; the protected area is enclosed and other wetlands around are neither frequented. Therefore the link of people's livelihood with wetlands is higher for wealthy families at the town that benefit from the tourism it attracts.

LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

An improved future strategy for workers in WfWet would be to work in erosion control; the high amount of erosion problems in the region should provide a wide market for these skills. However, the impact of WfWet in workers' livelihood strategies does not seem to go far beyond the period of employment. Two main issues may hinder this to happen:

- At the external level, the lack of market and employment facilitation;
- At an internal dimension, the lack of linkage between the skills acquired and the possibility of further jobs. Although employees feel now confident enough to solve erosion problems, they fail to consider these skills and experience towards an enhancement in their strategies, and they refer to the mainstream ones -this excludes contractors. They do not know how to link these with further employment. Reasons that may cause that bring us back to the external level:
 - Lack of information services on employment;
 - Or lack of a market for these skills, because erosion is not yet seen as a real problem by farmers and by other authorities.

PERCEPTION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The analysis of how workers and the control group define development and nature/environment provides relevant insights about the impact WfWet is having. It reveals meaningful differences between workers and the control group in their discourses referred to wetlands, to the environment and to development.

Development

- Workers highlight more than non-workers the role of employment as a driver of development.
- They insist in the magnitude of the lack of employment (in terms of financial capital) as the main problem to address. The word 'job opportunity' is a keyword mentioned in many of the conversations. Nevertheless there is no much suggestion about how to make it happen and the word is used like a black box.
- Beyond this link with employment there is a high heterogeneity of definitions of development that could engage a rich debate among the community towards a common and collective construction of their development.

Environment

- There is a high variability in the type of answers on environment and wetlands. For instance, women show a bigger frequency of 'do not know' and of references to plants, comparing to men that would refer more to animals, and would mention many action verbs.
- Now, the workers in general consider that they have learnt about environmental issues through WfWet, that wetlands are important and they feel capable of diagnosing what erosion problems exist. They see an improvement in their knowledge and perception comparing now and before and they feel confident to contrast their opinion with that of farmers. They also assert with more emphasis that they are not benefiting from the wetland as a tourism attraction, in comparison to the control group.
- Workers of WfWet demonstrate in general a more elaborated, holistic awareness of environmental issues comparing to what they thought before WfWet. This is corroborated by the results within the control group. WfWet has also had a positive impact on the attitudes of workers towards wetlands; many of them did not know much about wetlands before WfWet and the same level of (un)knowledge was observed among non-workers.
- In this sense, there is an important lack of knowledge about wetlands, about what is in Seekoeivlei and about WfWet among non workers. The need for participation and education to appreciate what is in Seekoeivlei is acknowledged by some, and corroborated by answers that reveal important misunderstandings among participants (including some workers) on what is there, what is the Nature Reserve for and who can access it. Also there is not much knowledge about WfWet among people who are not involved. This means that the community would need further information about the Reserve and about the project, as well as environmental education if the programme is to have extended effects along the community.
- There are remarkable differences between workers in WfWet and non-workers regarding the answers on water management policies and participation, including an outstanding lack of knowledge among non-workers when referring to conservation policies and the environment of Seekoeivlei.
- Also, there is a strong position in favour of the local management of water.

- In the **conclusion** section, I explain that particular features of the institutional context and of the processes of policy formulation and implementation are remarkably reflected on the ground.
- The actual implementation of the project keeps good coherence with the basic principles, as well as with the initial objectives of the initiative. WfWet is solid and maintains its basic principles. Its multiple origins reinforce its foundational solidity and its legitimacy.
- The programme is attaining positive achievements in both the socioeconomic and in the environmental dimensions; it is restoring wetlands and it is providing jobs for poor people, at least temporally. Some significant achievements at the micro level are due to key strategies and strengths at the macro level.
- However its sustainability in the long term is uncertain. Critical issues also originated at the policy formulation and implementation processes, and affected by micro conditions, may hinder its effects from being sustained in the long term. These gaps are mainly the lack of skills-jobs linking awareness of the workers, the current lack of a market niche for the skills acquired, and an insufficient consideration of a development that may be sustainable.
- More information on local socioeconomic context would be needed previous to WfWet implementation. Otherwise, the skills provided to the workers do not seem to be in good consonance with local labour-market demands and there is no much link between the programme and wider socioeconomic conditions.
- In addition, the environment and development objectives are conceptually isolated from each other from the very beginning at the policy formulation (rehabilitations and jobs) which is reflected on the ground as unsustainable employment. As an alternative, it should seek for a better integration of both within inclusive scenarios. For example, looking for a sustainable, local resource based rural development or either including participants' views on development at the planning stage.
- Environmental awareness has increased and enhanced but it is partial, hence a clear link between nature and their daily lives is not fully engaged. Workers talk about the need to conserve water for animals, and about wildlife mainly as an attraction for tourism. This perception about environment is rather alienated from their quotidian life and sustain, and it leaves out other important pieces of the picture of environmental awareness regarding nature as resource and service provider and waste receptor, among others.
- An integrative education should start upwards in a more integrated policy formulation through a comprehensive, long term approach towards sustainability. A Sustainable Livelihoods approach may help to design a more comprehensive environmental education. This should be focused in a way that it encourages a better understanding of sustainability, highlighting the linkages between nature and people's livelihood and the cyclic view of nature in order to reduce the perception of nature as something external to their real needs. In addition, a further integration of environment and development issues towards sustainability requires that all the assets are appreciated, not only the natural or the financial.

- Some other recommendations for further improvement of the programme are:
 - Recommendations for dialogue: an interactive, horizontal dialogue could be engaged in order to inform training design at the policy formulation level with the needs and proposals from employees.
 - Maximization of achievements to extend the benefits of the programme to the community: the programme could consider and maximize its achievements so far; employees have a deeper knowledge on environmental issues and the Reserve than their fellows, thus they could be a transmission vehicle on environmental knowledge within their communities.
- Using the core principles of a SL framework, this research has contributed to a better knowledge of what matters to people and what their priorities are and it has engaged debates about what affects their livelihood through the Focus groups. These contributions, the need for a balance in the key dimensions of sustainability and development of longer-term commitments should be considered for further improvements of the WfWet programme in designing the policy.