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Marginalised herders: Social dynamics and natural resource use in the fragile environment of the Richtersveld National Park, South Africa

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Marginalised herders: Social dynamics and natural resource use in the fragile environment of the Richtersveld National Park, South Africa

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Abstract

In the contractual Richtersveld National Park (RNP), park officials and neighbouring communities jointly manage resources, with the aim to harmonize biodiversity conservation and human land use. Our socio-ecological approach compared herding practices and livelihoods of 36 livestock owners and 35 hired herders inside and outside RNP, and further assessed soil quality and vegetation characteristics under different livestock grazing patterns and access to natural resources. Hired herders were mainly in charge of animal movement patterns but were not included in formal agreements, which negatively impacted on natural resource management, livelihoods, animal well-being and communication amongst stakeholders. Soil properties and vegetation were generally negatively affected through grazing and herding practices in this fragile semi-arid biodiversity hotspot that encompasses many endangered and endemic species. Our research highlights the complex social relationships and dynamics between diverse stakeholders engaged in the contractual park and accentuates the need to improve herders' social and economic status.

Keywords

Pastoralism Livelihoods, Socio-ecological approach, Richtersveld National Park