Production of crops in arable fields and home gardens

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Introduction

This chapter explores the dynamics of crop production in the two villages. Crops are produced both in residential areas (home garden production) and in the arable allotments (field production) and these will be treated separately. The title deeds that were issued after the landscape was surveyed at the end of the 19th century (chapter 3) distinguished between a commonage (or rangeland), building lots (or residential lots) and garden lots (also referred to as arable land allocations or arable fields). Arable farming was designated to take place in arable allotments, which were referred to as ‘gardens’. The title deeds made no reference to home gardens, per se. Over time, residents have developed home gardens on their residential lots. It is not clear whether these gardens were planned as such by land surveyors and land use planners: the title deeds made no reference to home gardens. The original layout of sites at the time of settlement (chapter 3) has altered over the years with changes in the size and numbers of kraals in each building lot. The layout that was designed for Koloni provided only 1/8 morgen (0.1 ha) for each residential lot, with no mention of gardens (see chapter 7).

* Comments by Jan Douwe van der Ploeg and Nick Parrott on earlier drafts were extremely useful.
We start with an overview of land use, followed by account of land relations, and then consider issues of access and control. We also describe crop production: the kind of crops grown, how, and on which fields.

The second part of the chapter examines the decline of crop production in the arable allotments, and its variability in time and among producers, in more detail. We prefer to speak in this chapter of under-cultivation of arable fields rather than of a general decline of agriculture, which is how Manona (1998) has characterised agricultural development processes in the Eastern Cape. Under-cultivation does not exclude the possibility of arable fields being used for (agricultural) purposes other than growing crops. As noted earlier, the most notable feature of the arable allotments or fields is that most of them lie predominantly or totally fallow in any given year and that there is much annual variability in the degree to which they are cropped. These allotments, which appear to be ‘overgrown’ by weeds and grass, are used for grazing cattle and have become places for gathering fuel wood, herbs and other plants, as described in chapters 9 and 10. This demonstrates that arable fields are used as multi-purpose zones. In this chapter we focus only on the growing part of the equation. A second and related question to address is whether a shift from field cropping to home garden production has taken place in Guquka and Koloni, as has occurred in the former Transkei (Andrew and Fox 2003, 2004). In discussing trends in crop production we also reflect upon the role that betterment planning and other forms of state intervention have played. The chapter mostly focuses on the period after 1960, when under-cultivation began to occur (chapter 3).

In interpreting empirical data from Guquka and Koloni we draw upon the broader literature on agrarian change and livelihood dynamics. Our analysis focuses on the locality and on everyday life: on how local people read the landscape and understand and respond to changes occurring around them.


The current use of arable allotments

Locally villagers speak about cultivation in terms of ‘ploughing’. The ability to plough often but not always translates into planting and caring for crops. The recent history and use of arable farming has been investigated in detail by Bennett (1998, 2002, 2004) who documented the status of the fields: whether they were ploughed or not and whether crops were produced, for the 1997/1998,