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Land degradation in South Africa

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Background South Africa is an African country that has a famous colonial past called the Apartheid era (1948-1994) under British rule. From the colonial reign to current capitalistic agendas, soil erosion and land degradation is a current problem for South African farmers and communities. The ecological crisis of goes beyond property; land reform and restorative justice must also be addressed when combating land degradation in South Africa.

Definition of land degradation: "Land degradation is caused by multiple forces, including extreme weather conditions...it is also caused by human activities that pollute or degrade the quality of soils and land utility" (World Health Organization, 2020)

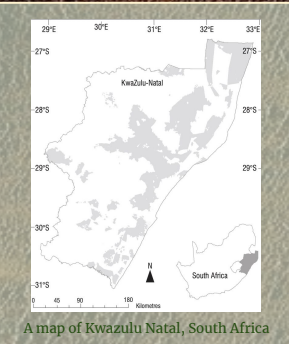
The pro-growth norms of global society foster timidity among conservation professionals, steering them toward conformity with the global economic agenda and away from acknowledging what is ultimately needed to sustain life on Earth.

An inspirational quote (Noss, et al., 2012)

Discriminatory Policies

Land act of 1913: The government passed this act that would only allow South Africans to own about 7% of arable land while giving 80% to the white minority that made up less than 20% of the entire South Africa population. The law originally aimed to "limit friction" between the two racial groups and forbid Blacks to live beyond these reserves. As a result, loss in land ownership and high density populations on limited land impacted the Blacks economically, socially, and physically. Land erosion occurred due to mass amounts of Africans living in tight spaces (*The Native Land Act is passed, 2013*).

Black Homeland Citizenship Act of 1970: During the Apartheid era, the government portioned off 13% of the country into nation states or "homelands" of indigenous groups causing mass forced resettlement of Black Africans everywhere. The act erases South African citizenship for the Blacks and allow the White minority fill up the rest of the lands freely. The Homelands forced the South Africans to resettle and live in cramped spaces once again (*The Black Homeland Citizenship Act of 1970, 2014*).



A map of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa



Picture of land degradation by Ebbouma et al., 2022



Larry Miller's farm from WUSA9

Land Degradation in South Africa

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References



Causes from economic markets In the post Apartheid era, the main drivers of degradation comes from profit driven opportunities. The soil erosion comes from the agricultural industry that has been pushed to generate mass amounts of profit and deemed necessary for South Africa. In hopes of moving on from the difficult history of the apartheid era, the land that was redistributed back to Black farmers have been part of inclusive business models as a "preferred means to implement land reforms" (Bourblanc and Anseuw, 2019). The plan did not go as expected because African farmers feel the immense pressure to succeed only for profit driven intentions. Due to the lack of Black ownership of land in the past, there is an absence of institutional support to enhance farming for South Africans and deficit of cultural knowledge of the land compared to White farmers who had the capabilities to farm successfully.

Effects

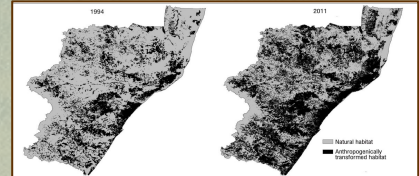
- Poverty still persisted post Apartheid
- Every year, 1.2% of the natural landscape has been transformed for agricultural use since 1994 (Jewitt, et al., 2015).
- After the government pulled away their support for farming post apartheid, the croplands become prone to crop failure due to the already "altered soil structure, organic matter content and differing soil nutrient levels", (Jewitt, et al., 2015).
- Woody encroachments (Mani, et al., 2021)
- Loss in biodiversity (Jewitt, et al., 2015).
- Tragedy of the Commons also occurred due to the lack of land regulations and knowledge to better take care of the land..
- Increased land use of agriculture causes a decrease in average cultivated area per person as well as a negative impact on biodiversity
- Only nine percent of taken land has been redistributed back (Mograbli, et al., 2020).
- "Land expropriation without compensation" (Miller, 2022) is a controversial solution because it would cause the white minorities to give up their land, which people are against.

Cultural significance

- Land is more than property to South Africans, they view land as a "home"
- South Africans see a lot of potential in the use of land as religious or spiritual safe space, eco-tourism, agriculture, and area for cultural events (Miller, 2022)
- There is memory in the soils as the first speaker of the series mentioned, and South Africans have also not forgotten the detrimental impacts in its land.
- A farmer (interviewee) mentioned the remaining post-Apartheid tension between the White and Black groups. White farmers refuse to give up their land for redistribution and behave immaturely in response (Mani, et al., 2021)

Solutions

- Scholars suggest redistribution of land back to the original owners and restorative justice could be a solid action plan unlike previous attempts.
- Since Black farmers have only recently received their land back, they advocate for more institutional support, accessible resources, and ample subsidies to further prove that the government is indeed authentic in their restorative plan (Ebbouma, et al., 2022).
- Due to the lack of agricultural knowledge of the land, Black farmers wish for sustainable training to be offered to help farmers succeed while combating against land degradation (Ebbouma, et al., 2022).
- Agroforestry is a method to combat land degradation, which includes the use of trees within crops (Bhalla and Harrisberg, 2022).



A comparison of KZN from 1994, to 2011 that shows how much of the land has changed because of human intentions (Jewitt et al., 2015)