FARMING IN THE LANGKLOOF: COPING WITH AND ADAPTING TO ENVIRONMENTAL SHOCK AND SOCIAL STRESS

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During the period 2006-2012, the Langkloof area, situated in the Eden District Municipality, suffered severely from environmental shocks and social stress including drought, flooding, hail, wildfire, heatwaves and reduced labour demand. These events negatively impacted many farmers and their livelihoods. In response to these external shocks and stressors, large-, medium- and small-scale farmers adopted numerous coping and adaptive strategies.

This study performed a comprehensive livelihoods analysis of large-, medium- and small-scale farmers in the Langkloof area, using the widely recognized sustainable livelihoods framework developed by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development, with a particular focus on coping and adaptive strategies against severe environmental shock and social stress. Variables used in the analysis were the vulnerability context in which farmers pursue a livelihood; livelihood assets (social, human, financial, natural and physical); the policies, institutions and processes in the external environment that influence the degree of ownership and access to assets; livelihood strategies pursued; and the various livelihood outcomes ultimately produced. The analysis of coping and adaptive strategies employed by farmers during these periods formed an integral part of this study.

Sixteen livelihood asset indicators were identified to determine the total assets (human, social, physical, financial and natural) of the farmers. After scaling the indicators, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to assign weights to each indicator and to subsequently calculate the total assets of each household. Regarding the coping and adaptive strategies employed by farmers against environmental shock and social stress, the average number of strategies was calculated for each household. Spearman’s rank correlations were calculated for total assets achieved (capacity) and the number of strategies employed against environmental shock and social stress.