

## **From Herding Sheep to Becoming a ‘Hospitality Service Employee’? Eco-tourism on Private Game Farms in the Eastern Cape (South Africa) and its Impact on Farm Dwellers and Labour Relations**

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This paper focuses on the growing number of game farms in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa catering to well heeled game viewing tourists. Over the past few decades, many livestock – mainly sheep and angora goat – farms in the province have been converted to some form of wildlife production, including also hunting and venison production farms. The increased deregulation of the South African farming sector has been one of the driving forces of these conversions. Game farming is a growing, and many argue booming industry in South Africa. There is some debate about what these conversions entail for farm dwellers – i.e. farm labourers and labour/rent paying tenants. While other researchers participating in a joint research project on game farming in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape have found that hunting and venison production farms are shedding labour, proponents of eco-tourism on private game farms argue that in this specific sector, the demand for labour increases significantly compared to conventional farming, and that wages paid are higher. This paper presents preliminary findings of a study conducted in relation to this sub-sector of the game farming industry in the Eastern Cape. It takes into account the fact that game farming often requires the amalgamation of several farms in order to create a habitat large enough to introduce the big game that is so popular with tourists. Furthermore, it discusses which positions farm dwellers occupy who do manage to secure jobs, and whether the wages earned compensate for the loss of access to land to graze livestock and cultivate crops – access that many had on conventional farms, but that land owners no longer deem appropriate in an area that is converted to ‘pristine nature’. Finally, the paper also analyses the possible impacts of South Africa’s land reform programme on farm dwellers’ land rights and game farmers’ strategies in dealing with farm dwellers on converted farms.