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FROM DEFENCE TO DEVELOPMENT

Redirecting Military Resources in South Africa

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The apartheid military was a repository of many resources, including vast tracts of valuable land. In 1993, Nelson Mandela, president of the African National Congress (ANC), stated that a new government would redress land inequality by using, among other mechanisms, the redistribution of land controlled by the South African Defence Force (Farmer's Weekly, 1993:10). The election in 1994 of a democratic government committed to land reform has placed the conversion of military land, from defence to development purposes, firmly on the agenda.1 The military's historical use of land has been controversial for three reasons. First, some of the land was acquired through the systematic dispossession and exclusion of people who owned it or enjoyed access to it; second, some of the land is located in ecologically sensitive areas with high conservation value; and, third, military activities have had negative environmental impacts.

Dramatic political change in the international and domestic arenas has promoted the reformulation of the military's approach towards land use. There is a potential convergence of interests between downsizing within the arms industry and the South African National Defence Force, and demilitarisation, including the conversion of military land to developmental needs. However, since the election of the democratic government, there have been intense struggles around the restitution of military land to communities who were forcibly removed. These have demonstrated the need for military land conversion to be dealt with in a systematic and planned manner, according to clear principles. Development is a component of conversion and particular attention needs to be paid to the challenge of building community capacity to guide development.

This chapter examines the Riemvasmaak community as a case study.2 It looks back at how the military gained access to the land and the impact of its activities, and looks forward to the conversion of military land for development.

Riemvasmaak has a special place in South African history as it was

1. There are three key components to the government's land reform programme: land restitution, redistribution and tenure reform. The Restitution of Land Rights Act (1994) established two bodies to deal with restitution claims: a Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights and a Land Claims Court. The Land Claims Court will ratify claims which the Commission settles and deal with cases the Commission is unable to resolve. In terms of redistribution, the government aims to facilitate access to land for poor, landless and disadvantaged people. Tenure reform aims to extend secure tenure rights to all rural and urban South Africans (Department of Land Affairs, 1995:4-10).

2. Three data-gathering techniques were used in this research: in-depth interviews
conducted between July and December 1995; site visit; and primary sources. Since the development of Riemvasmaak is ongoing, some details may have changed since writing this chapter.

the first land restitution case after the election of a democratic government. In 1994, some Riemvasmakers returned to the land from which they had been forcibly removed 21 years earlier. Riemvasmaak offers rich and valuable lessons for the land reform process broadly and the conversion of military land more specifically. As a case study, it supports the central arguments of this chapter. First, it is a graphic example of how the military gained land at the expense of its rightful owners. Second, it highlights the negative impact of military activity on the land. Although ecological damage has been minimal, some people even arguing that the land has benefited from the military presence, military debris is a legacy with which the community will have to live for many years. Third, Riemvasmaak demonstrates the intransigence of the military through the drawn-out struggle that communities undertook to regain the land. Finally, Riemvasmaak encapsulates the difficulties communities face as land use shifts from defence to development. The Riemvasmakers’ struggle was far from over when they regained land from the SANDF, and has taken different forms as the people attempt to develop the land and rebuild a sense of community. Development has been a complex, protracted, and, at times, conflictual process. This is the result of a range of factors, including inadequate assistance from an ill-equipped Department of Land Affairs; social divisions in the community along gender, ethnic, class and political lines; and a lack of community capacity to engage with development processes.

This case study sketches life before the community’s removal from Riemvasmaak, the circumstances of the removal, and the hardships endured by the community at the places they were removed to. The period of SADF occupation is then examined, focusing on the impact of the military’s activities on the land. This is followed by an account of the struggle to regain the land and the community’s return. Some of the difficulties faced by the community after their return are also considered. Finally, lessons are outlined for the SANDF’s transformation and land reform processes.

**Life before removal**

The founders of the Riemvasmaak community chose an isolated and arid place to settle, but one rich in minerals and with unusual natural features such as a thermal spring. Riemvasmaak is a relatively isolated area about 56 kilometres from Kakamas in the Gordonia district of the Northern Cape. It comprises 74,563 hectares and borders the Orange River to the south and Namibia to the west. The Augrabies Falls National Park is on its south-eastern border. It is an arid area. The mean annual rainfall is 124.4 mm. The mean annual temperature is 21.6°C with a high of 37.4°C in January. When considered on a monthly basis, at no time during the year does water
availability exceed evaporative demand and a state of permanent drought therefore exists  (Hoffman et al., 1995:1/18). There are four river systems in Riemvasmaak, but only three of the twenty water points sampled in 1994 contained potable water (Toens, in Hoffman et al., 1995:1/23). The area includes a number of mineral deposits and also has a rich archaeological heritage.

The Riemvasmaak community settled in the area at the turn of the twentieth century. In the 1870s, families of Damara, Nama and Herero origin trekked to the Cape Colony to escape conflict in Namibia, and it is believed that some of the founders of Riemvasmaak originated from these groupings. The founder of Riemvasmaak was Dawid Dawids. Also known as Koning Dawid, he had fled Namibia, and it is believed he settled at Riemvasmaak because the white farmers would not allow him grazing land for his large flock of sheep. Dawid’s grandson was born at Riemvasmaak in 1903 (Zaby, in SPP, 1993:4). These early settlers were joined by coloured pastoralists and Xhosa people from south of the Orange River. In 1923, a Catholic priest, Father Fages, asked the Upington magistrate for a place where the community could settle permanently, and obtained permission for them to settle at Riemvasmaak. In 1933, the Minister of Land Affairs made the area available to the Department of Native Affairs for the use of the natives (SPP fact sheet, undated).

Most household heads worked and many farmed on a small scale. In the 1960 census, only 8 of the 318 household heads surveyed said that they were cattle farmers; most worked as farm labourers outside Riemvasmaak. Almost all household heads possessed at least one animal, indicating the importance of keeping stock (Hoffman et al., 1995:2/8-14); some had vegetable gardens and grew cotton and wheat. Social services such as schools and clinics existed. There were four schools at Riemvasmaak: three run by the Roman Catholic Church and the fourth by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. All received funding from the Department of Coloured Affairs.

The high level of social organisation within the community is evident from the manner in which livestock was managed. There were regional committees in each village and the people on these structures were known as the voormanne (headmen). They regularly discussed livestock matters. There were also open community meetings at which land tenure and veld management issues were discussed (Hoffman et al., 1995:2/15).

Despite different ethnic origins, there was a close sense of community, with much intermarriage and a high degree of integration. The common language was Afrikaans and remains so despite the removal. Even allowing for romanticising the past, many of the older community members have very positive memories of the old Riemvasmaak. People knew each other, we were like one big family (Informant 4: 3.


4. Almost 95 per cent of the community were Catholic. The main settlement developed around the mission station.

5. See Hoffman et al. (1995) for a more comprehensive overview of how livestock was managed, and how grazing land and watering points were allocated.
Riemvasmaak community member). The forced removal ended this way of life and caused untold suffering.

**The removal**

From 1948, the apartheid state embarked on a programme of mass removal as it sought to consolidate the Bantustans and remove black spots. The ethnically mixed nature of the community did not fit into neat apartheid plans, nor did the presence of a black community within white South Africa. The state offered alternative land to Riemvasmakers from as early as 1942, and increased the pressure to move in the late 1960s. In 1967, the Department of Coloured Affairs threatened to withdraw support for the schools, as they claimed that Riemvasmaak was a Bantu reserve. The church and the teaching staff rejected these intimidatory moves (SPP, 1993:10). In 1971, the Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Kakamas, G.J.J. Jordaan ordered the Riemvasmakers removal. The rail warrants which they were given stated that tickets would be issued in terms of *swartkoloruiming* (black spot removal) (SPP, 1993:12).

The forced removal of the community was particularly brutal. Approximately 1 500 people were divided into three groupings. Those who were classified under apartheid laws as Xhosa were moved to Welcomewood in the Ciskei in 1973. Those who were classified of Nama or Damara heritage were forcibly relocated 1 300 kilometres away to Khorixas in northern Namibia in 1973 and 1974. Finally, those who were classified as coloured remained in the areas surrounding Riemvasmaak, such as Marchand, Augrabies and Keimoes.

Different racial classifications resulted in some families being split by the removals. In part, this arose because, in 1957, some people acquired Bantu reference books. They felt they had no choice, as they were told they would be fined and would have to leave Riemvasmaak if they did not take them. Others refused and, when the time came for removal, families were split according to the artificial classifications imposed upon them (*Cape Times*, 12 October 1973).

The removal to Namibia was postponed several times due to heavy rains and many families spent nearly a month in tents as they waited for the flood-damaged railway lines to be repaired. A series of articles in the *Cape Times* outlined the nature of the removal. Heartbreaking scenes of uprootment . . . have fallen officially on deaf ears, blind eyes. The juggernaut of Nationalist Party ideology is impervious to tears. Human emotions and feelings don’t count. Only the plan, conceived in some soulless Pretoria office is deemed important . . . It is authoritarian. It is heartless. It is typical of so many Government actions against people who cannot vote back (*Cape Times*, 13 October 1973).
Community members recalled: They chopped those houses with axes, the houses built with timber they burnt and put people in tents. It was raining, raining, raining. They said, Even if God himself comes from this mountain, you will move tomorrow. People were crying and God sent the rain to say I am coming from the mountain and they will move when I want them to move. . . . The people living in the tents were watching the smoke and the flames and crying and praying (Informant 3: Riemvasmaak community member). All our possessions were taken out of our houses and loaded onto lorries. A few rand were shoved into the hands of the homeowner, Then the officials turned around, lit a match and set the house on fire in front of the head of the house. Cruel, barbarous and unapproachable (Badela & Vick, 1993:9).

The community did not feel in a position to resist the removal. Ons het die wit man bevrees wat die wit man se was die wet (We were terrified of the white man what the white man said was the law) (SPP, 1993:11).

The SADF gained control of the land in 1974, soon after the removal. This led some people to believe that the reason for the removal was to make way for the SADF. They used to say our people who fought for liberation were terrorists. They wanted to block these terrorists and Namibia is our neighbour, so they moved us, it was a political thing to block Swapo here (Informant 3: Riemvasmaak community member). Another informant argued that the Northern Cape was used strategically by the apartheid state, which established a number of military bases in the region. There was the suggestion that the apartheid government wanted the Northern Cape to remain underpopulated and had deliberately and strategically underdeveloped the province (Informant 13: ANC official). This claim is denied by the military, who argued that the community was moved in terms of apartheid policy and that the land was only subsequently offered to the SADF. The then Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs and Defence, Wynand Breytenbach, said at the time of the land claim, I don’t want the perception it was the SADF who moved the people (Argus, 1 December 1993). Clearly, however, the SADF benefited from the removal.

Scattered like a handful of desert sand

Those removed to Welcomewood in the Ciskei found themselves in a Xhosa community, whose culture they did not understand and whose language they did not speak. They had to pay R10 for small wooden huts and were promised a tractor but never received one, which made farming difficult (SPP, 1993:18). They were 30 kilometres from the nearest shops, and only one of the 50 houses had a telephone. As they refused to take Ciskei citizenship, they did not receive pensions. They

6. The government paid R68 000 compensation, of which R60 000 went to the Catholic Church for improvements to the land and R8 000 to the victims of the removal (SPP files).

7. This phrase is from Badela & Vick’s article in Work in Progress, June 1993.
were also harassed by headmen sympathetic to Brigadier Oupa Gqozo, military ruler of the Ciskei. According to a community member’s statement in the SPP submission to the Commission on Land Allocation (CLA), Since my livestock died my life became a struggle because I depended to a large extent on those animals. I can’t plant anything here because of the drought of this land. For over a year now we are without clean water which we used to get from a borehole and now we have to depend on water which we get from dams, which is not healthy for human consumption.

Most families in Namibia had to endure hardships. Some were placed at Otjiwarongo without shelter or means of protection, although there were lions in the area. They suffered stock losses and the government eventually moved them to De Riet. Life at De Riet was not much better. They are completely cut off from the rest of the world, having no telephones, transport, schools or clinics. They state that they are living at the mercy of a group of elephants who, on average, visit the settlement once a week looking for food and water. If there is no water in the dam, the elephants break the wind pump. They regularly rip up and devour the vegetable gardens whose produce is essential to supplement the diet of this very impoverished group (SPP, 1993:16-17). People found it difficult to get employment in Khorixas without Namibian citizenship, although some did manage to build up their farms and find employment (SPP, 1993:16).

The coloured Riemvasmakers who remained in the Northern Cape lost access to their grazing land and had to find new jobs, but suffered less than the other groups (SPP, 1993:17).

Among these tales of hardship, survival and courage shines the experience of one individual’s tenacious resistance. Mr. Andreas, member of the group moved to Welcomewood, was very unhappy and, in 1975, moved back to Riemvasmaak. The SADF searched his house without a warrant, stole some of his livestock and disturbed his animals by flying helicopters over his home. Despite this harassment he continued living at Riemvasmaak (SPP files). His story perhaps symbolises the Riemvasmakers’ indestructible link to their land.

The defence force occupation of Riemvasmaak

The SADF gained occupation of the land in 1974 and established a base at the Riemvasmaak mission station. The area was used for training by 8 South African Infantry Training Unit (8 SAI) and the South African Air Force (SAAF). Armscor also used the area for weapons testing. These activities had minimal impact on the vegetation but have left a legacy of spent shells and unexploded ordnance from aircraft, artillery and infantry support munitions.

8 SAI used three areas for training, which comprised about 6 per cent of Riemvasmaak: the valley north of the Riemvasmaak mission

8. The SADF retained the use of the classrooms at the mission station, but the rest of the school buildings were destroyed in military exercises.
station; the region north-east of the mission station; and the sandy pediment in the Gyam-Vaalputs region. In addition they used the area south of Riemvasmaakkop as a mortar range and an area south-west of Riemvasmaak as a driver training area. From 1988, 8 SAI became mechanised, which meant that heavy vehicles such as Ratels were included in manoeuvres, as well as 12.7 mm and 20 mm ammunition.

The SAAF also used Riemvasmaak for weapons testing: an area of 30 000 hectares was set aside for this purpose. Fibreglass models and scrap vehicles were placed in the Loeriesfontein and Kourop valleys, and in the plateau areas east and west of the Kourop River Valley, for target practice.

Armscor used the Gyam-Vaalputs area for testing vehicles, armaments and ammunition. Long-range artillery equipment was fired to targets 35 kilometres to the west at Donkiemond, a few kilometres east of the Namibian border. Armscor also used the driver training area to test vehicles and vehicular equipment.

In 1982, 4 500 hectares of Riemvasmaak was incorporated into the Augrabies Falls National Park. In 1988, the SADF and the National Parks Board entered into an agreement which established the land as a contractual national park. Some 60 000 hectares of Riemvasmaak were to be jointly managed by the two, and the remaining 15 000 hectares were to be used for training and weapons testing. One of the key features of the park was the presence of black rhino (SPP, 1993:20). In 1993 there were press reports of the Ministers of Defence and the Environment viewing the land which the black rhino occupied. This provided the opportunity for the community to voice their outrage. They say our land is going to be used as a reserve for the rhino. Well if I see a rhino there, I m going to shoot him. I really love that animal but if its happiness means more to the white man than my people s happiness, then I ll shoot him . . . (Badela & Vick, 1993:8).

The impact of military activities on the land

There have been positive and negative environmental consequences of the military s presence. Hoffman et al. (1995) concluded that less than 15 per cent of the land was impacted on by the military. They argued that the land benefited from the lack of agricultural activity and that the vegetation of Riemvasmaak is in an excellent condition. It has benefited greatly from the 20 years without domestic livestock and this view is corroborated by the testimony of Riemvasmakers who have returned to the region (Hoffman et al., 1995:ix). The view that the military had minimal impact on the vegetation was supported by most informants, including the three National Parks Board officials interviewed.

However, negative impacts of military activities were obvious in the areas north and north-east of the Riemvasmaak mission station. The SADF stated that there was moderate disturbance of the sandy pedi-
ment in the Gyam-Vaalputs region, but in places the disturbance was more than moderate (Hoffman et al., 1995:2/24). Some areas appeared to be heavily disturbed as there was a low level of plant cover and dominance by classic disturbance species such as *Rhigozum trichotum* and annuals. No thorough account of the condition of the land existed before SADF occupation, so it cannot be stated that the SADF was solely responsible for the state of the land in this area; several decades of livestock farming may have been responsible (Hoffman et al., 1995:1/60).

**Struggle**

Following the political changes of 1990, a group of Riemvasmakers began organising to get their land back. It was decided not to take the case to the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA) but to approach President De Klerk directly. President De Klerk, however, subsequently referred the case to ACLA. In August 1992, the community informed the commission of their intention to apply for land restoration. With the assistance of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), the Land Development Unit (LDU) and the Surplus People Project (SPP), the community prepared a submission to the CLA.  

Riemvasmakers elected sub-committees in Marchand and Welcomewood, to keep the community informed about the land claim and to elect representatives to a national meeting of the Riemvasmaak community. In May 1993, Riemvasmakers from all over the country met to decide on a course of action. Due to logistic and financial difficulties, the community in Namibia were unable to attend this conference. Nonetheless, a programme was decided upon and the Riemvasmaak Co-ordinating Committee was elected to take it forward (SPP, 1993:2).

The programme combined negotiations with mass action. For example, they protested at the World Trade Centre where political parties negotiated the transition to democratic rule in South Africa. They also held a march in Kakamas. The Riemvasmakers case drew support from organisations such as the ANC, who stated at the time, We deplore F.W. de Klerk’s failure to respond seriously to the approaches made to him and demand he take immediate steps . . . to return the people of Riemvasmaak to their land (Cape Times, 24 August 1993).

The CLA hearings took place in Upington on 1 December 1993. Riemvasmakers from all areas attended the hearings. The SADF, three local farmers organisations and the Department of Agricultural Development opposed the application. The SADF did so on the grounds that they required all of the land for army training, air force target practice and weapons testing. They also cited their role in conservation as a justification for their continued use of the land.

The community had met with members of the National Parks Board

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9. The Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA) changed its name to the Commission on Land Allocation (CLA).
on a number of occasions before the hearing and were successful in persuading them about the merits of their case. The National Parks Board subsequently played an important role at the hearing. Dr Hall-Martin announced on behalf of the National Parks Board that it recognised that people had been dispossessed of their land and indicated support for their return. This move, while welcomed by the community, earned the ire of many neighbouring farmers (Informant 5: National Parks Board official). The decision by the National Parks Board was an important one in that all the groups opposing the claim had supported the Board’s retention of control of the land. It was, however, also in the interest of the National Parks Board, which was attempting to transform its image and to be seen as supporting neighbouring communities. The bottom line is that the National Parks Board has to be seen as having a national identity, and that means that the majority of people must have an affinity and care for national parks. We are responsible to parliament. That’s another way of saying that we are responsible to the people of South Africa. The way in which the Riemvasmakers were expelled was immoral and we couldn’t be associated with that (Informant 11: National Parks Board official).

In February 1994, the Department of Land and Regional Affairs announced that the Riemvasmakers had won back their land based on the commission’s recommendations. The CLA concluded that the racially based policies of the state led to the removal of the Riemvasmaak community from the land and that the persons removed were factually prejudiced in view of the distance which they were removed and the environment in which they were resettled (CLA, 1993:3). The commission recommended that:

- Riemvasmaak be returned to its rightful owners;
- 20 000 hectares of land on the eastern side of Riemvasmaak should remain for the use of the defence force;
- a trust be established, as proposed by the Riemvasmaak community, to consider, in consultation with Riemvasmakers, land use options and to prepare and implement development plans;
- the Catholic Church repay the amount of compensation paid to them if they decide to reoccupy their former buildings; and
- the SADF should, as far as practically possible, clear the land of military pollution (CLA, 1993).

The recommendation that the military retain some of the land was rejected by the community. This led to a process of negotiation with the military about their presence. Some informants voiced criticisms about the manner in which these negotiations were handled, suggesting that the community alienated the military unnecessarily and that the military were consequently uncooperative on their departure. One
informant saw the confrontational approach of the community as the result of NGO interventions. The army was not asked to leave the area. The army was chased from the negotiating table. The people who chased the army away are the people who did not live at Riemvasmaak. It was the outsiders. With proper negotiation we could have saved money and it could have happened in a much better manner (Informant 10, translated: local government official).

Others, however, argue that the community’s hostility towards the military seemed to have had very little to do with outsider intervention, and was based rather on the experience of the community. We refused, we didn’t want the SADF, we believed they were part of the apartheid government and responsible for our problems (Informant 4: Riemvasmaak community member). The hostility was exacerbated by the manner in which the SADF handled negotiations. Some informants argued that, during visits by stakeholders to Riemvasmaak, before the community returned, the military displayed a lack of sensitivity. For example, the defence force welcomed them to Riemvasmaak in a manner which some felt was offensive as they did not need to be welcomed to their own land.

When the SANDF finally left Riemvasmaak completely, there was controversy about the manner in which they did so. They took with them water pipes, a generator, road repair equipment, electrical wires and a communication system, which further soured relations with the community. When the military were told that they had to leave, they took engines, pumps and pipes. Some of the engines turned up on surrounding farms. At that stage they should have left with dignity. When it was obvious that they had to relinquish the land they should have made things better for themselves, for the image of the army, and they didn’t even try (Informant 7: development worker). The community tried to intervene. For example, when the SANDF plans to take water pipes were discovered, they approached the Ministry of Water Affairs and Forestry, who supported their request that the pipes remain (SPP files).

**Return of the Riemvasmakers**

The tensions surrounding the SANDF’s departure did little to dampen the joy of the Riemvasmakers’ return. It was a special occasion for the community and an important symbol of the government’s intentions to address the historical injustices of land dispossession. *New Ground* magazine evocatively described the homecoming. The rickety old bus comes to a standstill at Riemvasmaak. People step out. A woman kneels on the ground, scoops soil into her hands and rubs it onto her face, wetting it with her tears. *Dis soos n duisternis wat skielik lig kry. n Swarigheid am die bars wat verdwyn,* says Sophie Basson. (It’s like a darkness that suddenly gives way to light. A weight
on the chest that vanishes.) Tears, laughter, silence. It is the 21st of May 1994. The people have returned to their land (Winberg, 1994:22).

While the return was an important victory for the community, they have had to deal with a number of problems. These include lack of infrastructure, social problems, accidents arising from military waste, and intra-community conflict.

**Infrastructure and social services**

By June 1995, 96 families had returned to Riemvasmaak and a further 168 people were expected. Eighteen families came from the Eastern Cape and the rest from Namibia. There was very little infrastructure when the people arrived and development plans had to be formulated. Conditions were very difficult for the first few months. There was no housing apart from a few structures and houses remaining from the days of the mission. The people lived in rows of tents which were hot in warm weather and cold in cool weather. The community shared taps and toilets and two public telephones. There was no electricity. When I got there, it was quite an experience because people complained of gastro, there was clearly no medication and it looked like the water was a problem. People had no income, there was no shop, no transport, people were cut off because the army had removed the communication infrastructure. I think there was a crisis  (Informant 6: development worker).

The area was served by a primary school offering classes from Sub A to Standard 5. In 1995, there were three teachers teaching classes of approximately 40 children. By June 1995, the principal had not been paid although she began teaching at the beginning of February 1995. About 40 students attended the high school in Kakamas, where they boarded and returned home once a month. A mobile clinic visited the area and visiting priests conducted weekly services.

**Social problems**

The community faced a number of social problems. Unemployment was very high; many Riemvasmakers who had jobs elsewhere sent unemployed relatives to Riemvasmaak to secure their rights, but did not move themselves, perhaps waiting to see how the development process would unfold. Lack of income was exacerbated by the fact that many pensioners did not receive immediate pension payments. One of the causes was that people had to relinquish their Namibian citizenship to return, but did not immediately receive South African documentation enabling them to receive a pension.

Many initially survived on food sent by relatives living in Upington and Kakamas. The government distributed food parcels, as did the Regional Services Council and the Roman Catholic Church; these were often shared with neighbours.
Health was also a problem. A community member said that two children had died since the return. Some people thought this might have been related to unhygienic conditions, while others felt it was because the children were already malnourished. The same informant also suggested that there was alcohol and dagga abuse in the community, and perhaps mandrax abuse (Informant 3: Riemvasmaak community member).

Conflict within the community

Infighting and conflict impeded the development process. Despite years of separation, people were initially able to unite successfully in the struggle to get their land back. This took resources, energy and commitment from the activists in the community and the NGOs, particularly the SPP, the LRC and FARM-Africa.

It appears, however, that once the goal of land restoration was achieved, the glue that had held the community together began to dissolve and divisions emerged. Development was bound to be conflictual and contested. While development is ideally meant to raise standards of living and empower the poorest sections of society, in reality in the context of scarce resources it often ends up benefiting those who are most vocal, most visible and most organised. This is generally not the poorest section of a community. Hence development processes have the potential to exacerbate social cleavages and cause conflict, particularly if they only benefit some sections of a community at the expense of other groupings. The conflict with the National Parks Board demonstrated this point.

The National Parks Board leased 4 270 hectares of land, known as Melkbosrand, which was used to accommodate six black rhinos from the Riemvasmaak Community Development Trust, a community structure of nine people elected to oversee the development process. The National Parks Board was eager to enter into agreements with the Riemvasmakers to develop eco-tourism ventures, utilising natural features such as the thermal spring, the history and archaeology of the area, and the arts and crafts of the Riemvasmakers. 10

The relationship with the National Parks Board has, however, caused deep divisions within the community. Approximately 40 families who historically lived at Melkbosrand wanted to return to the area. There was distrust among this grouping related to their experience of conservation in Namibia.11 These suspicions were explained by a National Parks Board official who commented, The people in Namibia lived with lions and elephants which walked through their kraals and broke their kraals. The Namibian conservationists didn t do much . . . Now the people come back with the impression of only one model of conservation, which is the Namibian one, and they think we are all one conservation group (Informant 5: National Parks Board official).

10. The National Parks Board is training some Riemvasmakers as rangers.

11. The tension with the National Parks Board was evident when it attempted to remove buck from Riemvasmaak. The warder was locked in and sections of the community refused to let the buck be taken.
ARMY RIDES ROUGHSHOD OVER KOSI BAY

Kosi Bay is a precious nature reserve, but to members of the SANDF it is a seaside haven designed for wildlife pursuits of a different kind. They have transformed it into a Mala Mala-style multi-million-rand holiday camp. Yet despite widespread outrage from the government, conservationists and local communities, the army is refusing to budge from what it describes as a small operations base.

The camp is located at the Kosi Bay estuary mouth, within the Kosi Bay coastal forest reserve managed by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Nature Conservation. Kosi Bay mouth is regarded as one of the most environmentally sensitive regions in the province; it belongs to one of the last unspoilt estuaries in the country and is a wetland of international importance. When the army erected the camp as a small listening post it did not conduct an environmental impact assessment. Since its completion, the dunes on which the camp is built are showing signs of erosion.

A recent report on KwaZulu-Natal’s coastal dunes, commissioned by the Town and Regional Planning Commission in Pietermaritzburg, clearly underscores the causes and dangers of dune erosion. It warns that unrestrained trampling and vehicular traffic, and the construction of permanent structures on foredunes . . . destroy their stability and threaten their value as sand reservoirs and coastal buffers. Pleas by environmentalists, politicians and the local community for the camp to be demolished or moved have gone unheeded by the military.

The site is totally unsuitable for development, said Pete Conant, chief researcher for the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Nature Conservation.

Local communities, who have been prevented by the army from harvesting in the area, also believe the SANDF ran roughshod over the KwaZulu-Natal authorities. There was no need for the army to build a base inside proclaimed land without consulting the original owners, said Vusi Mhlongo, a representative of the community at Kosi mouth, the KwamVutsgane. We have asked for an urgent meeting with Isivuno [the Department of Nature Conservation] to explain how the army got there.

In mid-1994, the SANDF approached the KwaZulu-Natal authorities for permission to build a three-bed listening post the fourth such military camp-site along the Maputaland coast in the wilderness area of the nature reserve, about one kilometre from the Mozambique border.

After long discussions, it was agreed that, given the arms smuggling and illegal-immigrant situation, a discreet military facility wouldn’t be inappropriate, said Nick Steele, chief director of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Conservation. It was not intended to be a holiday resort.

Soon after, the site of the military post was inexplicably shifted closer to the sea and onto the most sensitive, prime area of the entire Kosi system. Building began in November 1996 and the camp was paid for with taxpayers’ money, built by army personnel using local labour at an estimated cost of more than R3 million.

The fully electrified, luxury chalets with braai areas and a built-in bar were officially opened in July 1997. Since then, locals and conservationists have reported drunken orgies and flagrant disregard for conservation rules by army personnel who drive their 4x4 vehicles along the beach. This is
a turtle-breeding area and vehicles are strictly forbidden.

Nature conservation officials say that they have never seen the army units at the camp carrying out duties that resemble anything remotely official.

According to Dan Archer, regional head of the Department of Nature Conservation for Maputaland, “When we became aware of the new site, we asked the army to make a presentation to our regional planning group. This was never done and is a deviation from the normal procedure.

What we are questioning is how it happened so quickly, why there was no environmental impact assessment, and why the camp is situated in one of the most sensitive areas of the system,” said Edward Russell of the Community Resource Optimisation Programme (CROP). “We are at pains to get the local community to do things as environmentally soundly as possible. How is it possible that other people simply do as they please?”

The SANDF denies its military camp merely serves to camouflage a hedonistic haven. An army representative insisted that its purpose was purely crime prevention and that the site posed no threat to the area’s ecosystem. However, when journalists visited the camp there were no signs of life. The only indications of recent human presence were track marks on the otherwise pristine stretch of beach in front of the camp, and the visibly eroding dunes.

(Edited version of the article by Hazel Friedman and Jill Gowans in Open Africa supplement to the Mail & Guardian, No. 24, November 1996)

The people from Melkbosrand were concerned that their land would be taken from them again and that they would be forced to enter into an agreement with the National Parks Board to retain government support for development. They asked: “As ons n park toelaat sal ons die grond verloor?” (If we allow a park to be created, will we lose our land?) and “As die gemeenskap n ooreenkoms met die park aangaan, watter voordeel hou die park vir die gemeenskap in?” (If the community makes an agreement with the park, what benefits will the park provide for the community?) (GEM, 1995) The conflict was publicly evident at the celebration to mark the return of the Riemvasmakers when some people held placards protesting against the development worker, the chair of the Trust and the National Parks Board.

There was an ethnic dimension to this conflict in that the people who wanted to return to Melkbosrand were almost exclusively from Namibia, while those who supported retaining the links were primarily from the Eastern Cape. At a GEM workshop it was noticed that people did not refer to themselves as Riemvasmakers, but from the Eastern Cape and from Namibia. Symbolically, people from these two areas sat on opposite sides of the meeting area.

Political fractures resulted from the very different experiences the people had had while apart. The power dynamics within the community had shifted. The people classified Xhosa and removed to the Eastern Cape were, and currently are, in the minority, yet they were

12. There were members of the Namibian group who supported links with the National Parks Board.
a powerful and vocal block, mainly because of their experience in the Eastern Cape, one of the most organised and politicised regions in South Africa. In contrast, those removed to Namibia had been isolated from political and social events. People from the Eastern Cape seemed less cautious of the National Parks Board and prepared to engage with them, whereas some of the people from Namibia accused those from the Eastern Cape of being *skoothondjies vir die blankes* (lapdogs of the whites) (GEM, 1995).

Age also seemed to shape conflict, in that older people generally appeared more conciliatory and perturbed by the degree to which the community was divided. Some spoke of how they had struggled to get the land, how unnecessary the strife was and how important it was that people unite. *Ons het gedink dat ons sal saambly. Ons het hard gewerk, ons het nie gesit, ons het baklei vir Riemvasmaak. Ons het gese dankie dat ons Riemvasmaak gekry het . . . nou moet ons leer om saam te bly.* (We thought we would live together. We worked hard, we were not passive, we fought for Riemvasmaak. We were grateful that we got Riemvasmaak back . . . now we must learn to live together.) It was argued that the reason they had survived the removal and were able to fight for the return of the land was because God was with them, and that people needed to remember this in the conflict. *Ons was 22 jaar van ons geboorteplek weggejaag, laat ons saam werk.* (We were chased away from our birthplace for 22 years, let us work together.) (GEM, 1995) Older people appeared to be more attached to the land than the younger people, as was evident in their romanticised view of Melkbosrand. The families returning to Melkbosrand wanted to farm goats, but the 4 720 hectares did not have the carrying capacity. The conception exists that Melkbosrand is a land of milk and honey. The river has changed its flow and some of the channels which were active then are dry today. In that area there is bad grazing and little potential for crop production (Informant 9: National Parks Board official).

People’s varied connections and experience of the land determined what they perceived to be the best development option for Riemvasmaak. Some people want to go back to what it was and others look forward. It is an emotional issue, the old people cry, it means so much, and others wouldn’t care if it turned into Sun City if it made money (Informant 1: development worker).

Material interests may have exacerbated the conflict. As the Trust derived income from Melkbosrand, it clearly had a vested interest in the continuity of this source of income. Furthermore, some of the trustees involved in negotiations with the National Parks Board accrued benefits, such as flights to Riemvasmaak and accommodation in the park.

Also evident in this conflict was the lack of institutional capacity within the community. Although the Trust held a series of meetings

13 A new board of trustees was elected in January 1996. This chapter discusses the first board of trustees unless otherwise indicated.
with the National Parks Board, it did not report back adequately to the community. Initially, the National Parks Board relied almost entirely on meetings with the trustees and did not engage with the community directly. While it may have been a reasonable assumption that the trustees would report back, this did not happen, resulting in suspicion. For example, people who wanted to move to Melkbosrand did not know that it was leased and that the Trust received R20 000 for the land. They received this information from a National Parks Board official. The lack of trust between the community and the Trust was evident when some people spoke of being sold out by the Trust.

**Understanding the difficulties**

The problems at Riemvasmaak are complex. They are the result of an interplay of factors, including the nature of the development process, the role that the government has played in this process, the composition of the Riemvasmaak community and its lack of institutional capacity. The combination of factors has slowed the pace of development and promoted frustration and conflict. Nonetheless, valuable lessons can be learnt from the experience to inform other rural development and land reform processes. The Riemvasmaak experience is particularly useful for those communities reclaiming land from defence use.

**Development at Riemvasmaak**

At the ceremony celebrating the Riemvasmakers return, the Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom, correctly stated that restitution is more than getting land back. It also involves resettling people, providing infrastructure, sustainable development, economic development and community institution building (Hanekom, 1994). This begs the question why the government allowed restitution to take place before infrastructure or development plans were in place. The answer may lie in the twin pressures of the community’s demands and the democratic government’s desire to be seen to be addressing the land question, one of the most emotive and critical political issues.

People were very eager and adamant and determined to come back. It was spelt out that there was no housing and that accommodation would be in tents and that water needed attention. It was pointed out to them. They were aware. It was a very emotional thing; people were determined to come back. They knew the conditions, but it couldn’t have been slowed down, we would have been very unpopular. It was a politically delicate issue to deal with and to slow it down at that stage would have done more damage (Informant 12: Department of Land Affairs official). Some informants thought that it was politically expedient of the government to allow the return, given the conditions. The process was driven by the need for political impact.
People were coming back, were getting their land back, and there was a political and emotional element about it. Emotions are all well and good, but you can t eat them (Informant 11: National Parks Board official).

For Riemvasmakers the connection with the land is very deep, particularly for those who experienced the forced removal personally or via their parents. After 21 years, the critical issue for many people was to get back the land, no matter what the state of development was. I was born here, I like this place, I feel at home. I came to the place I was born . . . The people love the land very much. We said even if we stay under trees we ll come back (Informant 3: Riemvasmaak community member).

Despite the difficult conditions at Riemvasmaak, there may have been material factors which prompted people to move. Life was very difficult for people in Namibia and many thought that conditions in South Africa would be better. For example, some of the younger people thought that unemployment insurance was available in South Africa, and the South African pension of approximately R355 per month was more than the Namibian pension of R135.

The combination of government and community concerns resulted in resettlement without the other components of restitution being in place. It is this lack of development which has caused difficulties and challenges for all involved.

A key issue which hindered the development process was the unclear relationship between the various tiers of government. The return occurred soon after the first democratic elections, which meant that both national and provincial governments were in the process of establishing structures, defining programmes and recruiting staff. The Northern Cape provincial government had to be created almost from scratch. There was lack of clarity as to what level of government would be responsible for particular aspects of development. The resettlement process is driven by central government, but the responsibility for ensuring development lies at a provincial and local level. This led to a clash between provincial and central government over the provision of housing, schools and clinics (Informant 11: National Parks Board official). There was also evidence of a lack of co-ordination among the three levels of government. For example, the Department of Land Affairs delegated tasks to local government officials who did not have the authority to do work without the permission of their superiors.

The Riemvasmaak case study highlighted the lack of capacity of the Department of Land Affairs to drive the development process. The department was understaffed. Many staff were involved in other projects and, as a result, too busy to follow up and ensure that programmes were implemented (Informant 1: development worker). An example of the degree to which staff were stretched or, alternatively,
the degree to which the department allocated staff inappropriately, was that the Regional Director of Land Affairs in
the Northern Cape was personally involved in moving the Riemvasmakers (Venter, 1995:6). An additional constraint
was that many of the people in the department were appointees of the former government. They tended to have limited
experience of community work compared to the depth of experience among NGOs. Some informants argued that
officials lacked commitment to participatory democracy, which means grassroots access to decision making. The
Department of Land Affairs just don’t know what the hell they are doing. Some are incompetent, some are very old
fashioned and some deliberately block the process (Informant 7: development worker).

The exclusion of NGOs such as SPP, LRC and LDU and local farmers from the development process was a
serious mistake. The NGOs had worked closely with the community and had a sense of its dynamics. Their exclusion
had the effect of diminishing the contributions such NGOs could have made to ensuring that capacity was built within
the community and in ensuring the accountability of the Trust to the community.

The nature of the community

Two aspects of the Riemvasmaak community had profound implications for the development process. First, it is
probably a misnomer to speak of one community. A new community had to be built from the disparate communities
separated by time and geographical distance. Second, it is important to examine the nature of the community that
returned and settled at Riemvasmaak.

The notion of the Riemvasmaak community as a homogeneous entity is an erroneous one. The concept of community
was especially fragile at Riemvasmaak because a new community had to be built. After 21 years of separation and
various political and social experiences, people had developed different expectations and aspirations. They did not
know each other and were uncertain about each other. Die gemeenskap was lank uitmekaar en mense moet met
mekaar gesels en moet hoar wat mense voel. Mense moet tyd gegee word am mekaar weer te leer ken. (The
community was apart for a long time and people need to talk to each other and hear about people’s feelings. People
must take time to get to know each other again.) (GEM, 1995) This made the process of rebuilding the community
difficult and unique. One informant captured this process most articulately: In a microcosm we are trying to reverse
apartheid, we are trying to reverse the worst kind of social engineering with reference and sensitivity to the past and to
the new constitution which enshrines social justice and equality. We are trying to reconstruct an old community in a
new order, which is unheard of (Informant 2: lawyer).

It seems that many employed people chose to see what happened
before returning to Riemvasmaak. Anyone with an income and a job, who has the vaguest idea what Riemvasmaak is like, needs their head read to sit there (Informant 11: National Parks Board official). Those who settled at Riemvasmaak represented the more marginalised and less powerful sections of the original community—namely the elderly, children and the unemployed. An informant argued that the resettled people did not make individual decisions to return. Other people made the decision: Let them go and risk it and it is these people who cannot take development forward... Women and children have been sent there by their men and then other men start exploiting these women and children who have been left there helpless. For example, shopkeepers start exploiting people and people develop political allegiances to their creditors (Informant 2: lawyer).

The composition of the returnee community had enormous implications for the development process. Initially, the Department of Land Affairs was reluctant to engage in development planning before the return of the Riemvasmakers. Yet the people who came back were largely unable to take the planning forward. These factors created conditions for a vicious circle whereby planning with the group could not happen effectively, yet if development was delayed, people would become increasingly desperate and, having very little to lose, were open to patronage, exploitation and political manipulation. During the GEM People and Parks workshop it was clear that there were dominant personalities leading the factions, at least one of whom was a trader. Land Affairs said that they could not plan until the people are back, but you can’t plan with children and old people. They thought they had brought planning material back. Instead they have created the opportunities for super-exploitation, which undermines the planning process (Informant 2: lawyer).

**Institutional weaknesses in the community**

A contributing factor to the problems in Riemvasmaak was the lack of capacity within the community to engage with the development process. For instance, criticisms were raised about the undemocratic manner in which the Trust operated. While subjective factors, such as dominant personalities and bad decisions, may have contributed to this, there are objective factors that will face most resettled communities. The development process requires strong institutions within the community and people with a broad range of skills. Institutions are needed to manage the development process in a democratic manner, make difficult decisions, resolve conflict and deal with large sums of money. The Riemvasmaak case study points to the importance of building institutions within communities to deal with these issues. The lack of skills within the Trust had negative implications for the development process. FARM-Africa argued that the main factors constraining the development of Riemvasmaak are a lack of appro-
appropriate managerial skills in the Riemvasmaak Community Development Trust and its committees, information concerning the development options available at Riemvasmaak, and a lack of certain technical skills at farmer level (FARM-Africa, 1995:9).

While the Trust deed provides for democratic decision-making structures and rules that development plans must be approved by all beneficiaries, it proved difficult to ensure democratic practice. SPP, for example, raised concerns with the Trust about the lack of consultation with the broader community (Informant 1: development worker). Criticisms were made about Trust decisions which exacerbated tensions in the community. Part of the problem of friction in the community is friction with the leadership (Informant 11: National Parks Board official). For example, houses remaining from the time of the mission were allocated to some of the older members of the community and to one of the teachers. There was some tension about the allocation and the people from Khorixas issued ultimatums for the occupants to vacate the houses (Informant 3: Riemvasmaak community member). Concern was raised by some informants about the granting of trading licences as no one from Namibia had received a licence (Informant 11: National Parks Board official).

To be fair, there were objective hurdles which made it difficult for the Trust to operate in a democratic manner. For example, two trustees lived in Cape Town and the rest in different towns in the Northern Cape, the Ciskei and Namibia. This made it very costly to organise meetings, and time-consuming for the trustees who had to travel long distances. It was difficult to organise meetings because of poor communications, particularly with Namibia, and the expense of telephone calls. For these reasons, the Cape Town-based chairperson was not always able to consult with the other trustees and took many decisions alone. Consequently, some of the trustees felt excluded from decision making. They felt ill equipped for the task and overwhelmed by the workload (Informant 1: development worker). Even after the return of the community, only a minority of trustees actually lived at Riemvasmaak, highlighting another contribution to the communication breakdown between the Trust and the community.

While it may have been difficult for people to participate in decision making, given the scattered nature of the original inhabitants, this was not the case after their return. Once the people resettled they wanted to be actively involved in decision making. As most were unemployed, they certainly had the time to be involved in community decisions.

To a large extent, development rests on the ability of communities to participate democratically and shape the process. This is particularly true in situations where land is held communally, and where decisions need to reflect the position and interests of the majority. A community faces many choices and decisions in developing, using and
managing land. At Riemvasmaak, these include tourism, poultry farming, crop production, table-grape farming, mining and the establishment of businesses such as transport and bakeries (FARM-Africa, 1995:22). These decisions are time-consuming and often require access to specialist knowledge and skills.

Because development has differential impacts, there is potential for conflict within communities which needs to be mediated and resolved. For example, many members of the Riemvasmaak community are interested in owning livestock, yet it has been estimated that the carrying capacity of the area is 935 head of cattle or 6047 goats (Hoffman et al., 1995:ix). Not all of those interested can have livestock and difficult decisions need to be made about who may own livestock. This requires a degree of skill within institutions responsible for overseeing development.

An additional burden facing communities is the management of large sums of money. Many funders now choose to fund community-based organisations directly. For instance, Riemvasmaak received a grant directly from the Independent Development Trust. Poor communities may have access to funds but often lack the necessary skills to manage them.

It is necessary for government to take capacity building seriously and to consider the constraints under which communities operate. The need for participatory and democratic processes, access to specialist knowledge, and skills to manage funds indicates that the government needs to pay close attention to the process of capacity building. NGOs are often well placed to assist in capacity building, particularly where they have a history of involvement. As the first restitution case since the election of a democratic government, the Riemvasmaak community has had a plethora of organisations and experts made available to it. This is unlikely to be the case in all restitution cases. Government needs to develop strategies to ensure that capacity is built in communities as part of the restitution process.

**Conclusion**

Riemvasmaak is an example of how the military benefited from apartheid forced removals. It also highlights the need for clear policy and mechanisms to guide the process of restitution of military land.

The case of Riemvasmaak indicates that there are many lessons to be learnt about the development process:

- resettlement should not be allowed without the provision of basic infrastructure;
- development capacity needs to be built in communities and government, and is a process in which NGOs could be more involved; and
- in the case of large-scale returns, the appointment of a development
planner could ensure co-ordination among all the role-players.

A number of recommendations can also be made about military land.

- Policy needs to be developed about the principles, process and mechanisms of restitution and redistribution of military land.
- This policy needs to be co-ordinated between the Ministries of Land Affairs, Defence and Public Works.
- The defence force should indicate its commitment to social justice by returning land from which people were forcibly removed to its rightful owners, through a process of negotiation.
- The defence force should commit itself to clearing land of military debris when land is returned.
- Educational programmes and material should be developed to empower civilians who return to former military land.
- Sound environmental management of military properties is essential particularly to ensure the continuous clean-up of military debris to prevent restitution and redistribution being hindered at a later stage.
- Environmental education should be incorporated into the basic training of all soldiers and in the core management functions of all officers.
- Ongoing research and monitoring of the impact of military activities on the environment must be undertaken.
- The capacity of communities needs to be built to manage the conversion of bases to civilian purposes.
THE SANDF: CONSERVATION OR CONTAMINATION

Penny Mckenzie

South Africa has experienced little local debate about the relationship between defence and the environment. This is partly the result of the narrow way in which both defence and environmental issues have been understood in South Africa. The military emerges from a repressive and secret past, while environmental issues have historically been viewed as white, middle-class concerns. The relationship between the SANDF and the environment has been ambiguous and contradictory. While it has prided itself on being environmentally conscious, it has also been implicated in such environmental scandals as ivory and rhinohorn smuggling. Furthermore, it both benefited from and was directly involved in dispossession to acquire some of its land.

The SANDF does not own land but is allocated land by the Department of Public Works. In theory, the SANDF recognises the responsibility of this relationship, arguing that defence force land should be considered a national asset given in trust to the NDF to utilise for national purposes. Therefore, this land should be utilised and managed in such a way as to ensure its long term potential for non-military use after the NDF does not require it anymore for military use (SANDF, n.d.). However, communities involved with the SANDF have alleged that the military often conducts negotiations as if they own, rather than control, the land (Mckenzie, 1996).

In 1991, the SANDF was the fourth-largest single land-controlling authority in South Africa (Godschalk, 1991:10). Until 1993, the SANDF controlled 600 000 hectares or approximately 0.5 per cent of the land in South Africa. In 1993, the SADF stated: Of this, 500 000 ha is undeveloped and is used for training areas, bombing ranges, shooting ranges and buffer zones around airstrips and ammunition depots (Farmer s Weekly, 1993:10).

Subsequent rationalisation of military land has indicated the SANDF’s recognition of the increasing pressures to use the land for other purposes. General Meiring, Chief of the SANDF, said at the 1995 awards for nature conservation, Land and the utilisation of land has become a very prominent issue in the Republic of South Africa. Demands and pressures to utilise land under control of the defence force for other purposes are increasing daily (SANDF, 1995). Since 1986, the defence force has returned 227 680 hectares of land to the Department of Public Works (Defence Secretariat, 1997:2). The Riemvasmaak Training Area (70 000 hectares) has been returned to the community and there is agreement to hand over the Schmidtsdrift training area. The defence force currently controls 492 140 hectares of land (Defence Secretariat, 1997:2).

Some of the larger defence force areas are:

- Lohatla 135 854 ha
- Touwsrivier Training Area (Cape) 14 857 ha
- Oudtshoorn Training Area 13 393 ha
- Vastrap Weapons Range (Upington) 49 994 ha
- Schmidtsdrift Training Area (Kimberley) 34 986 ha
- General de Wet Training Area / De Brug (Bloemfontein) 16 974 ha
- General de la Rey Training Area (Potchefstroom) 23 599 ha
- General Piet Joubert Training Area (Wallmansthal) 13 706 ha

-
Madimbo Training Area 27 899 ha
- Hell’s Gate Training Area (St Lucia) 3 800 ha
- Boschhoek Training Area (Dundee) 3 381 ha
- Grahamstown Training Area 5 970 ha AFB Hoedspruit 5 375 ha
- 97 Ammunition Depot (De Aar) 6 284 ha
- Pomfret Training Area 5 192 ha
- Mosita Training Area 4 043 ha
- 91 Ammunition Depot (Roedtan) 3 895 ha
- Sterkrivier Training Area (Gravelotte) 5 648 ha
- AFB Louis Trichardt 4 032 ha
- Artonvilla Training Area (Messina) 3 135 ha
- Roodewal Weapons Range (Pietersburg) 3 240 ha

There are a number of indicators that the SANDF is concerned about environmental issues. These include the existence of an environmental unit, the management of some facilities as conservation areas, and the running of an annual competition for units that show the best progress in certain aspects of environmental services.

The defence force established a Nature and Environmental Conservation Unit in the early 1980s. Initially, the environment was conceived of mainly as an area for nature conservation and the preservation of flora and fauna. The scope was later extended and functions such as environmental planning were incorporated. The name of the unit was changed to the Environmental Services Unit (interview with SANDF officer 1995).

The unit has six areas of activity:

- integration of environmental planning into military activities;
- research into the environmental impacts of military activity;
- ecological management of military properties;
- environmental management of the built-up military environment (base areas);
- cultural resource management at defence force facilities; and
- environmental education (SANDF, n.d.).

There are gaps in the unit’s work which might be the result of low staffing (there were between 20 and 25 people in the unit in 1996) and resource constraints. The lack of sufficient funds for environmental services has to a large extent prevented the development of effective environmental service support for the military utilisation of NDF facilities (SANDF, n.d.). The unit has done little research into the impact of military activities on the environment.

We know very little of the impact of the military . . . There is a need to give more attention to military impacts on properties and involve external people in this (interview with SANDF officer, 1995).

Another positive aspect of the SANDF’s approach to the environment is that all military facilities are managed as conservation areas. Five areas have been proclaimed nature reserves and seven have been registered as Natural Heritage Sites because they contain rare fauna and flora. The Heidelberg Training Area is one of only two places where the Heidelberg copper butterfly is found. The heath *Erica heleogena* is only found in its natural state at the Klawer Valley military area near Simon’s Town. Middelburg has cycads and Boschhoek has an indigenous forest (Godschalk, 1991: 10; Deacon, 1994:28).

Ecological management includes soil erosion control, veld management, invasive plant and bush encroachment control, controlled burning programmes, wildlife management and special conservation measures for numerous rare or endangered species on military property (Godschalk, 1991: 11).

There is a range of game on SANDF land including kudu, springbok, gemsbok,
giraffe, elephant, cheetah, rhino and sable. The SANDF regards its record for managing game populations on training areas as one of the most outstanding success stories. For example, at the General de Wet Training Area near Bloemfontein there were only 32 springbok when the land was acquired for military purposes in 1955. The number of springbok increased to the point where 14 000 had to be removed between 1976 and 1991 (Godschalk, 1991: 12). The SANDF’s pride is perhaps reflected in the naming of military equipment after animals such as the Buffel, Ratel and Cheetah.

Among some conservationists, the SANDF is regarded as having a good conservation record. For example, a review of SANDF bases concluded that even if the impossible happened and the SADF disbanded entirely, its priceless natural assets would be handed back to the nation with a clear conscience (Deacon, 1994:30). As demonstrated in the case studies, the positive impact of military activities on the environment lies in the fact that it protected areas from human impact. The flip side of protection is that people were disadvantaged by being denied access to the land.

Two issues highlight the negative side of the SANDF’s environmental record: the militarisation of conservation areas through the activities of the SADF and its role in rhino and ivory poaching.

The activities of the SADF have resulted in the militarisation of conservation areas. Close links existed historically between the military and some national parks. Game reserves situated near borders such as the Kruger National Park and the Ndumu Game Reserve were regarded by the SADF as buffer zones preventing the entry of illegal immigrants and guerrilla soldiers. The SADF had two units in the Kruger National Park one to protect wildlife against poachers and the other to arrest Mozambican refugees. Some of the park staff were former members of the SADF, and some Kruger National Park rangers were former reconnaissance unit members (interview with National Parks Board official, 1995). The militarisation of some parks is visually demonstrated by the military-style uniforms worn by staff, saluting and the military approach to wildlife protection. Militarisation of nature reserves led to a perception among neighbouring rural people that the parks were linked to the apartheid security apparatus (interview with development worker, 1995). Direct evidence of this link is that reserves under the control of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Nature Conservation were used to train the Inkatha Freedom Party’s Self-Protection Units (Mail & Guardian, 22-28 September 1995).