

Land redistribution politics in the Eastern Cape midlands: The case of the Lukhanji municipality, 1995–2006

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Since its initiation, South Africa's post-apartheid land reform programme has generated extensive analysis and critique that in turn has yielded a body of scholarship. Discussion revolves around the official policy of the programme, the challenges associated with its implementation and its reception at local levels. It cannot be overstated that much of the discourse on the formulation of the programme itself commenced in the dying years of apartheid, through a series of workshops, policy conferences, research projects and publications. Prompted by glaring disparities in the country's social and living conditions and primarily by entrenched imbalanced landownership, contemporary land reform dialogue has a well-built backdrop. What, however, is our understanding of local community politics that played perceptible roles in triggering land redistribution and facilitating patterns of settlement? This article gives some insight into a veiled history of interplay between community mobilisation politics, governance and official land reform policy in the Lukhanji municipality of the Eastern Cape during South Africa's transitional years of 1995 to 2006. After outlining how land redistribution was initially driven by forces operating outside government action, the article proceeds to illustrate the frailty of the government land redistribution accomplishment. Moreover, it demonstrates the complex nature of a rural setting that has arisen from community-facilitated and incipient government land redistribution achievements in the area.