Land reform has encapsulated an important symbolic function in the ‘new’ South Africa as it is seen as a means to address historical injustices and forms a centrepiece for rural restructuring. In 2009 the ANC government embarked on re-energised initiative to uplift rural areas through development, food security, and land reform. An emphasis was placed on macro level invention and a modern technological approach to agriculture was adopted. Within this approach land has been conceptualised as a commodity from which productivist output can be achieved. Such interpretations are grounded in the enlightenment philosophical thinking which perceives a distinction between culture and nature. In recent years this interpretation has been increasingly criticised for hindering and preventing a true understanding of the complexities of human-environmental relatedness. This article therefore attempts to show case the meaning that land and local landscapes has for many rural and peri-urban amaXhosa living in the former Ciskei. Many of these meanings and attachments are linked to local cosmologies and belief practices. The case material will illustrate how one’s ability to access and move through a local landscape contributes to processes of well-being, identity formation and a shared heritage. In response a call is made to adopt a more sustainable landscape development approach to rural development which aims to give a more comprehensive consideration to all ecological, social and economic functions of rural landscapes so as to ensure the conservation of local cultural landscapes and prevent the loss of ecological and heritage values in the area.

Keywords: well-being, human-environmental relatedness, sustainable landscape approach, land reform