Privatisation of Rangeland Resources in Namibia

For a subject which has a high profile in Namibia and elsewhere, there is surprisingly little information on the details and mechanisms of this emerging trend in land control – rangeland enclosure. The potential for communal range management is examined in an area characterised by high and increasing land pressure, by the apparent breakdown of customary law, and a movement towards range enclosure.

Background

The struggle for independence in Namibia was fought partly over land and since then few issues have been as consistently high on the political agenda. This pressure arose from the perceived inequalities in distribution of land between the freehold farming areas and the communal areas which consist of state land previously set aside as native reserves under colonial law. After independence, initial efforts to address land reform were preoccupied with redistributing commercial land; other elements, including communal land reform, were largely overlooked.

Rangeland enclosure – largely through fencing of previously communal rangeland – is an especially problematic form of spontaneous land tenure change. There have been few reliable indications as to the real

Overseas Development Institute London, UK J. Cox, C. Kerven, R. Behnke

Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit Windhoek, Namibia W. Werner

Project completed in 1997

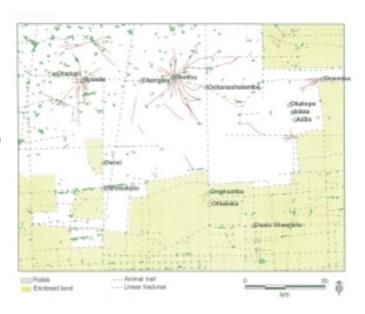
effects of this move towards privatisation on the outputs and productivity of rangelands, and on social parameters such as equity. Perhaps most significantly, the appropriate role of Government and local communities in managing this type of land reform is also unclear. In Namibia, this may be one of

the main reasons why the Government, whilst being publicly opposed to unauthorised fencing, has yet to promote a coherent policy on tenure of its communal lands.

This project focused on privatisation of rangeland resources in the northeastern Oshikoto area where enclosure of communal land has become increasingly common, particularly since independence in 1990. Rangeland enclosure was examined in an effort to identify how governments and local communities can more effectively manage the changing face of local control of landbased resources. Field research combined a physical survey of land use with a socio-economic survey of institutional, economic and legal factors.

Research highlights

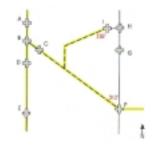
The importance of changing patterns of land tenure – especially where scarce resources such as boreholes are involved – for livestock production is emphasised. Enclosure of communal land in Namibia has been



Distribution of linear features, fields and animal trails from aerial photographic interpretation, north-eastern Oshikoto.

ascribed to a gradual breakdown of customary forms of land tenure. However, the findings of this project suggest a more complex scenario.

Before independence, traditional authorities sanctioned enclosure of tribal land to prevent government alienation of land through fencing programmes. Until the late 1960s, indirect government rule facilitated administration of tribal lands according to customary laws. Establishment of



Survey techniques combined ground survey data, global positioning system (GPS), aerial photos, satellite imagery and other information in a geographic information system (GIS).

ethnically based regional government structures continued to provide reduced statutory power. After independence, traditional leaders, no longer with legal or institutional support, gradually lost control over the process of communal range enclosure. As a result, access to communal land for small-scale herders has in general become more limited and less secure.

Few data existed on the extent of fencing and on its implications in terms of land management, and field survey techniques were developed to address this gap and provide an objective estimate of fencing distribution.

Comparison of survey results with earlier information from 1994 emphasised the rapid changes that were taking place within the study area. Also, enclosure was generally restricted to uninhabited areas, and accessibility was a major determinant of fence distribution.

Farmers fencing large areas of common land were found to be embarking on a different form of livestock management, related to a change in commercial orientation. There is a higher rate of capital investment associated with a transition to privatised ranching. Outputs change from multiple use - milk, meat, draught power – to a single commodity – meat. These and the lower stocking rates and other changes related to the changed management all tend to lower the output per unit area when compared to traditional open-range pastoral systems. Thus, privatised commercial ranching is a profitable but less productive use of the land. The benefits will accrue only to a few,

whilst many former producers will be forced to find alternative livelihoods.

Uptake

The work is expected to contribute towards Namibian land tenure reform, to debates on rangeland privatisation in southern Africa, and to improved theories of community resource management.

Linkages

A follow-up study was recommended in view of the project findings concerning trade-offs between profitability and productivity and the many unanswered questions on longterm effects of rangeland grazing. The aims of this study, to be designed in consultation with all local stakeholders, are to compare the biological and economic returns from the three main forms of livestock rearing practised in northern Namibia - mobile openrange, newly commercialised enclosures, and established commercial land south of the veterinary cordon fence.

Relevance to sustainable livelihoods

A number of constraints affecting both small- and large-scale livestock farmers were identified. These include: a) poor distribution and seasonality of water sources; b) veterinary inputs rarely reach small-scale farmers; c) inadequate local knowledge of animal health problems; d) marketing outlets are not targeted at small-scale farmers; e) an inability to raise capital without secure land tenure; and f) small-scale farmers are presumed by officials to be uninterested in selling higher quality livestock and receive

little or no support from outside agencies which might assist them to commercialise. Action to address these points can be expected to contribute to sustainable livelihoods.

The most effective way of tackling the causes of poverty among the residents of the area may be to support livestock marketing and livestock health, to enable people to raise their own cash. Linked, in a development sense, is the need for improved social services. Communities settled round boreholes or traditional wells lack facilities normally supported by the Government. With limited education, transport and communications, the settlers lack the means to confront authorities about expropriation of their land and water points. Similarly, they do not receive visits from government health, veterinary or education workers.

It was recommended that DFID and other projects in northern Namibia consider what support for basic services could be extended to the people in this and other remote regions.

Selected project publications

• Cox, J., Kerven, C., Werner, W. and Behnke, R. (1998) *Privatisation of Rangeland Resources in Namibia: Enclosure in Eastern Oshikoto.* Overseas Development Institute, London, UK.

For further information on the Programme contact:

The Programme Manager
Livestock Production Programme
NR International
Park House, Bradbourne Lane
Aylesford, Kent ME20 6SN
<w.richards@nrint.co.uk or lpp@nrint.co.uk
www.nrinternational.co.uk



