

C

RESOURCE FLOWS, ENTITLEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT: ROLES AND INTER-RELATIONSHIPS

Fuzzy Entitlements and Natural Resources: The Case of Namibia

Mary Seely¹ and Stephen Devereux²

¹Desert Research Foundation of Namibia
P O Box 20232, Windhoek, Namibia

²Institute of Development Studies
University of Sussex
Brighton, BN19RE, UK

Abstract¹: Keynote Address

Sen's entitlement approach to poverty analysis is predicated on individual ownership of assets and resources. Sen himself concedes that the entitlement approach cannot deal with contexts where ownership relations are ambiguously specified, or 'fuzzy' (Sen 1981:49)²

One critical area of ambiguous specification of ownership relations is natural resources in communal areas. Land can be owned by the state (as in Tanzania), or by individuals (as in Kenya), or land can belong to communities, its use being allocated to community members by local leaders. In the latter case, entitlement to land consists only of usufruct rights over that land, but the entitlement to own what is produced from the land is usually secure. Water which could be available on communal lands, on the other hand, may be controlled in non-communal areas within the same state or neighbouring states and entitlement to supply or use may not be secure.

In Namibia, as throughout Africa, natural resources are owned by individuals, households, communities and the state and some, such as surface water, are shared among states. Conflicts occur at all these levels. Within rural communities, a debate is raging at present over the issue of illegal fencing of communal rangelands, a phenomenon which can be explained as an attempt to clarify ambiguous ownership relations over diminishing grazing land. Within households, a woman can own cattle in her own right, but if she is married she must seek her husband's permission before disposing of any cattle.

It follows from these two examples - there are numerous others - that the criterion of 'ownership' is too narrow a specification of entitlement. Entitlement over natural resources operates at three distinct levels: access, ownership and control. Illegal fencing, for instance, can be seen as an attempt by livestock farmers to 'privatise' access to and control over grazing lands which remain communally owned.

A number of policies have been developed or are under preparation in Namibia to resolve ambiguities of entitlement to natural resources. These include the Commercial and Communal Land Bills, the Water Bill, the Land Policy and the Conservancy Policy. A number of Ministries (e.g. Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation), institutions (Legal Assistance Centre) and projects (e.g. LIFE - Living in a Finite Environment - with community game guards who mediate conflicts between people and

¹ Abstract of Paper under preparation for the Joint Congress of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) and the International Geographical Union (IGU): *Livelihoods from resource flows: Environmental awareness and contextual analysis of environmental conflict*, Linköping, Sweden, 19-22 August 1996.

² Sen, A. 1981. *Poverty and Famines*. Clarendon Press. Oxford.

wildlife) are currently involved in mediating conflicts caused by these ambiguities as well as addressing mechanisms for empowerment of these common property users.

This paper will examine entitlement relations over several categories of natural resources in Namibia: land, water, grazing, trees, wildlife and wild foods. The analysis will focus on relations between individuals and the state, between individuals within communities, and between individuals within households (specifically, gender differences in access, ownership and control over resources). It will be argued that entitlement relations over natural resources are inevitably 'fuzzy', instead being multi-layered - ownership, access and control by various actors overlap and interrelate in complex ways - and that this reality has profound implications for, inter alia, food security, poverty and the environment, in Namibia and elsewhere.