

Evolutionary process of mainstreaming desertification policy
A Namibian case study

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Abstract

The policy landscape in Namibia represents a relatively progressive framework for combating desertification. The Namibian Constitution, the various draft and approved policies, legislation drafted, in progress or promulgated, Namibia's Vision 2030 and the several National Development Plans as well as the signed, acceded to and ratified international environmental agreements all provide the background against which the Namibian Government, NGOs and civil society could address the challenges of desertification. On the other hand, understanding of the interrelationships among desertification, poverty alleviation, land reform and sustainable development is limited as is the political will and commitment to address these issues related to desertification. Although elements of the policy landscape are not being activated, a number of supportive initiatives are being undertaken within the broad interpretation of this landscape although not directly within its ambit.

Namibia initiated its focus on combating desertification before the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and prides itself on being driven by the needs of the country, documented in its Green Plan, and not by the requirements of international agreements. During the course of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Desertification, (INCD), development partner support contributed to initiating Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod) which, from the beginning, agreed not to develop a static National Action Plan (NAP) but to, instead, elaborate and use a 'rolling planning' approach. This supported Namibia, the driest country south of the Sahel, in addressing key challenges encapsulated by the statement 'Proud of our deserts while combating desertification'. Other key steps in the initiation of the programme were an analysis of the existing policy framework and an analysis, using resource economics, of the losses to desertification, the results of which continue to be quoted a decade later.

The Napcod programme, under the guidance of a broadly-based steering committee, implemented a number of projects ranging from investigating bush encroachment in communal and commercial farmlands, to introducing Forums for Integrated Resource Management (FIRMs) as a coordination mechanism for community based organizations (CBOs) supported by their service providers, to Local Level Monitoring as an approach to support decision making at the grass roots. Although Napcod was formally concluded after ten years of implementation, the approaches established have been integrated into and taken up by a variety of ongoing programmes, services and organizations. The newly

established Country Pilot Partnership (CPP) Programme for sustainable land management will now serve as a vehicle of continuing the momentum gained under Napcod. Based on broad participation and extensive communication, these approaches are now integrated into various government services, adopted by communities and continue to evolve through ongoing testing and application.

Nevertheless, several bottle-necks have been identified in terms of implementation of policy directives and the policies themselves. Conflicts and lack of integration amongst the multiplicity of new policies and legislation following independence in 1990 have been identified. Lack of understanding of the implications of new policies and legislation has led to their misinterpretation and misapplication. The requirement for continuity in the implementing framework, communication amongst different components of the implementing framework and greater buy-in from implementing agencies and communities has not been fully addressed. Nevertheless, it was partially met by limited institutional memory within the primary organizations that were involved. The final conclusion, however, suggests that the evolving process of mainstreaming desertification policy has contributed to overall sustainable development in Namibia.

Introduction

Namibia is the driest country in sub-Saharan Africa with 22% of the land surface arid, 70% semi-arid and 8% dry sub-humid. Consequently rainfall is highly variable and unpredictable and much of the landscape, particularly in the semi-arid areas with high population density, is susceptible to degradation. A national land degradation risk assessment indicated that 4% of the land is at high risk, 67% at medium risk and the remainder of the land is classified as low or very low risk of land degradation (Klintonberg and Seely 2004). Nevertheless, many policy makers have high expectations of the potential of Namibia's environment to provide food security and improved livelihoods for its growing population. This contradiction between the arid environment and the expectations of the majority of the population and their decision makers is at the base of efforts to combat desertification in Namibia. There has been a strong push from some quarters towards alternative land use options that do not rely on conventional agricultural practices and that are more suited for the characteristics of the land such as game ranching, community based tourism and wildlife conservancies.

Policy overview

The policy landscape in Namibia, despite the contradiction between expectations and aridity, represents a relatively progressive framework for combating desertification (Dewdney 1996, DRFN 2006). The Namibian Constitution of 1990, with visionary Article 95 (1), affirms that 'the State shall actively promote and maintain the welfare of the people by adopting ... policies aimed at maintenance of ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia and utilization of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future.' Vision 2030 confirms that Namibia's goals for 2030 include, *inter alia*, .. 'a healthy productive land' .. 'rivers run permanently and clear' and 'farms and

natural ecosystems are productive, efficient, diverse, stable and sustainable – socially, economically and ecologically’, all essential for combating desertification.

As one of several relevant policy elements at the sectoral level, the National Agriculture Policy (RoN 1995a) has as an overall goal ‘to increase and sustain levels of agricultural productivity, real farm incomes and national and household food security within the context of Namibia’s fragile ecosystem’. Specific objectives include several challenging statements, e.g.: ‘achieve growth rates and stability in farm incomes, agricultural productivity and production levels higher than the population growth rate’ and ‘promote sustainable utilisation of the nation’s land and other natural resources’. Government’s main role will be to create a favourable macro-economic policy environment and to provide agricultural support services and facilities conducive to increasing and sustaining agricultural productivity, real farm income and food security. Moreover, these services will be designed to redress the structural imbalances and dualism inherent in the sector ‘by redirecting and strengthening essential services and facilities to the communal areas, where their socio-economic impact is likely to be greatest’.

Effective drought preparedness planning and responsive drought management are considered to be key factors in reducing the risk of production failure in Namibia’s highly variable climatic conditions. Agricultural extension will play a co-ordinating role in ensuring that farmers have access to support services and programmes for improved farming and marketing. The main focus of extension services will be on small- and medium-scale farmers, with emphasis on supporting female headed households, retrenched farm labourers and youth engaged in agricultural production as a means of livelihood and gainful employment.

Government will also consider practical ways to integrate and co-ordinate rural and regional development programmes aimed at addressing such problems as rural poverty, food insecurity and unequal distribution of incomes. Close co-operation with NGOs and the private sector will be pursued.

The Namibian Drought Policy and Strategy (RoN, 1997) recognises that droughts give rise to regular and significant shocks for rural livelihoods and increase vulnerability. Prior to this policy, government had borne full responsibility of risk management and financed and delivered substantial drought relief programmes. A number of these relief measures, e.g. fodder subsidies, were found to encourage unsustainable farming practices such as overstocking and farming on marginal land which, in turn, led to land degradation. In general, government fostered an expectation that in cases of drought, the state would come to the rescue. The new approach to droughts, based on the policy and strategy, focuses on developing an efficient, equitable and sustainable approach to drought management. This implies shifting the responsibility for drought management from government to farmers. Farmers will assume greater responsibility for drought management by developing ways of reducing vulnerability to drought in the longer term. This involves managing their agricultural operations in an economically and environmentally responsible manner and taking low rainfall and resultant income

variation into account. Moreover, the policy recommends that farmers be encouraged to reduce their livestock by marketing it, rather than receiving fodder subsidies.

The objectives of the Drought Policy include, *inter alia*, to: a) encourage and support farmers to adopt self-reliant approaches to drought risk; b) minimise the degradation of the natural resource base during droughts; and c) enable rural inhabitants and the agriculture sector to recover quickly following drought.

Emergency relief water supply programmes should be based on identification of needs by community-based Water Point Committees and Regional Water Committees. Emergency schemes should be planned and designed pro-actively to facilitate immediate implementation as needed while complementing long-term development goals.

Sustainable rangeland management practices need to be developed, which requires that land tenure policies give users more secure and exclusive rights to land and resources. Diversification of income sources will be an important means to mitigate the negative impact of drought. However, 'in the long run, the alleviation of poverty is the most effective way of ensuring that food insecurity does not result from drought'.

The National Land Policy (RoN, 1998) is focused on the poor. More specifically, the policy will ensure equity in access to land and secure land tenure, and will consider special programmes to help the poor acquire and develop land. Several issues have a bearing on desertification, e.g. the directives for a) clear policy and administrative structures for land allocation and management in rural areas and b) removal of uncertainties about legitimate access and rights to land in communal areas.

The National Resettlement Policy (RoN, 2001) defines its programme within the wider undertaking of government to uplift living standards of all Namibians. The primary objective of the National Resettlement Policy is to resettle eligible people in an institutionally, sociologically, economically and environmentally sustainable manner and in such a way that they become self-supporting. More specific aims of resettlement include: a) to redress past imbalances in the distribution of natural resources, particularly land and b) to alleviate human and livestock pressures in communal areas.

The National Water Policy (NWP) (RoN, 2000) was formulated and approved to address inequalities in access to water. In line with other government policies, the NWP puts emphasis on a reduction of government involvement in the actual operation and delivery of services, placing more responsibilities on community management of water supplies. The policy is built on the assumption that privatisation of water service 'can introduce efficiency and effectiveness, reduce wastage and extend use of valuable public funds', reflecting the Dublin Principles of sustainability, social equity and environmental integrity (GWP, 2003). Cost recovery and economic efficiency are accorded high importance.

Decentralised water management structures have been established in all regions. At the apex of this framework are Basin Management Committees which will be responsible to manage a water basin within an integrated management plan. At the local level, Water

Associations and Water Point Committees will be responsible for the day to day management of water points. WPCs are recognised in law and have the authority to control access to water points and organise payment for water. Payment for water services will be gradually introduced up to a point where local water users will be completely responsible for the operation and maintenance of water points.

The NWP tries to balance the imperatives of improved equity with sustainable water management, economically and environmentally. It states that 'all Namibians have the right of access to sufficient safe water for a healthy and productive life', while, at the same time, recognising the scarcity and economic value of the resource. Decentralisation of water management and development as well as integrated planning which needs to harmonise human and environmental requirements are some of the fundamental principles of the NWP.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy for Namibia (PRS) (RoN, 1998b) was approved in 1998. The PRS identified six structural problems that make poverty reduction difficult including: a) a highly skewed distribution of income, b) a weak agricultural resource base, characterised by limited and highly variable annual rainfall as well as sandy soils with low fertility and c) a high population growth rate and the resulting pressure this puts on scarce resources such as water. Despite obvious limitations, the PRS recommends that the livestock sector be further developed and crop productivity and value be increased. New ways of using water more efficiently are considered important. The complementary National Poverty Reduction Action Programme 2001-2005 (2002) builds on international best practices and includes ensuring policy harmonization.

The Wildlife Management, Utilisation and Tourism in Communal Areas Policy (RoN, 1995b) provides for user rights over wildlife and other natural resources on communal lands to a legally-constituted body known as a conservancy. A conservancy consists of a group of commercial farms or areas of communal land on which neighbouring land owners or members have pooled resources to conserve and use wildlife sustainably. Members practice normal farming activities and operations in combination with wildlife use on a sustainable basis. The main objective is to promote greater sustainable use through co-operation and improved management. Conservancies are operated and managed by members through a Conservancy Committee.

Conservancies seek to increase local responsibility and ownership over wildlife. Rural residents benefit financially from wildlife and tourism through a range of activities including harvesting quotas, trophy hunting, selling live game and tourism concessions. Conservancies provide new economic opportunities which can help in times of drought.

At the initiation of Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod), (Napcod, 1997; Napcod, 1999), Namibia's Policy to Combat Desertification (RoN, 1994) was prepared but never approved. Napcod accepted the UNCCD definition of desertification as 'land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities'. Its guiding principles included, *inter alia*, recognition that combating desertification involves long-term,

integrated strategies and that it must address poverty alleviation, contribute to informed decision making and involve broad-based participation.

As part of the Napcod programme, an analysis of policy factors and desertification was compiled (Dewdney 1996). This focused on immediate policy factors, e.g. land and natural resource management, water, agriculture and forestry. It also analysed what were termed 'underlying policy factors' of poverty, population and economic policies. The analysis concluded by pointing out that in some key natural resource sectors sustainable use is being targeted, e.g. water and wildlife, although in other sectors, e.g. land and agriculture, environmental considerations are subordinated to social, political and economic considerations.

A recent policy contributing indirectly to combating desertification is entitled 'Government of the Republic of Namibia, Civic Organisations, Partnership Policy (RoN, 2005). Its objectives include, *inter alia*, 'to bring the Government closer to the people and create partnership opportunities that benefit the Government, COs and civil society. The policy is also expected to establish a greater sense of local identity, community and ownership leading to more inclusive, equitable and socially sustainable development, all necessary elements in combating desertification.

Combating desertification within the evolving policy milieu

Two streams of policy issues, covered in the introductory overview, have direct relevance for combating desertification. One stream addresses enhanced use of the environment and natural resources through a variety of stated intentions and recommendations. The other, less obviously directed at combating desertification but equally if not more important, is that which addresses broad participation, devolution of responsibilities and community empowerment. Taking advantage of the second set of elements embedded in a number of policies, several programmes have been developed that contribute, directly or indirectly, to addressing desertification. These included: Community Based Natural Resource Management, based on establishment of representative conservancies, focused on wildlife and tourism and spear-headed by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, and the Community Based Management of rural water supply, the broader Basin Management approach nationally and internationally, the Farming Systems Research and Extension programme and Community Forestry under the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry. In many instances, the focus on participation and community involvement has resulted in far greater involvement by NGOs in policy implementation while government institutions remain focused on the sectoral content of the policy framework. The Napcod programme, with government and NGO representation, took advantage of the enabling environment provided by the latter policies and two tools evolved. The Forums for Integrated Resource Management (FIRMs), supported by Local Level Monitoring, use the focus on community participation and empowerment to address improved management of natural resources and hence adaptations to withstand climate change including natural climate variability and anticipated droughts.

Basin Management

In Namibia, river basin management was recently identified as a valuable approach to enhance management and functioning of a water basin (RoN, 2000). The basin management approach within Namibia is: an iterative process; transparent to all; open to voluntary participation; information rich; based on shared vision and understanding; enhances capacity of all stakeholders; focuses on sustainable development; encompasses integrated water resource management (IWRM); encompasses integrated, multi-sectoral approaches; and reflects the Constitution, Vision 2030 and all relevant Namibian policy and legislative instruments. One of the main purposes of basin management is to bring a wide range of interested communities together to improve understanding, management and decision making with respect to shared water resources.

In Namibia, the establishment of a Basin Management Committee (BMC) has so far involved three phases: a 'start-up phase' in which basin area, stakeholders and issues are identified and preliminary meetings and information dissemination take place. During the 'forum phase' a Forum of Stakeholders is established, a shared information base is initiated and stakeholder capacity needs are identified and plans made to address these needs. During the 'basin management committee phase' the idea of a basin management committee is introduced and discussed, and a committee is established that begins activities, elaborates a constitution and vision and obtains the Minister's confirmation. After establishment, the BMC and the Forum identify and facilitate or implement activities that support integrated land and water management in the basin. In this way, basin communities are better prepared to address ongoing climate variability and environmental change. Overall, basin management has been recognised in Namibia as a useful approach although challenges to its implementation range from appropriate representation to sustainability and are receiving ongoing attention. Moreover, international donors have also recognized the importance of participatory water management and have contributed to many of the initiatives since independence.

On the local level, Water Point Committees under the Community Based Management programme which grew out of the Water and Sanitation Sector Policy (RoN 1993), have been established throughout Namibia. They are supported by a new directorate of Rural Water Supply which focuses on facilitating community based management. At least 4000 Water Point Committees oversee use, management and maintenance of community boreholes and contribute to cost recovery. They have the largely unrealized potential of undertaking local level monitoring and contributing to basin management on a larger scale. In terms of numbers of people involved, this has been one of the most successful community participation programmes to evolve.

Currently within Namibia, and as a direct result of the National Water Policy White Paper (2000), two river basin management committees are in place and starting to contribute to basin management while in another three basins the potential is being analysed or the first steps of establishment are being taken. Two active groundwater aquifer management committees predate the policy and helped to steer its formulation. They both support the Department of Water Affairs in management and water allocation from these aquifers. A Basin Management Support Unit has been mooted but not yet established to enhance basin management.

Namibia is a member of several transboundary river basin organizations (RBOs) under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocol on shared basins. Until recently, these RBOs have received greater attention, nationally and from international donors, than basins lying entirely within the country. Namibia participates in Orasecom (the Orange-Senqu River basin committee that is augmented by two, two-country water commissions – Lesotho and South Africa, Namibia and South Africa), Okacom (encompassing the Okavango River in Angola, Namibia and Botswana), Zamcom (the Zambezi river organization that is not yet ratified but is operational through Zacpro) and the Permanent Joint Technical Commission on the Kunene River (Angola and Namibia). These and other evolving or non-functional RBOs, most of which predate the current policy, were a factor ensuring that transboundary RBOs were included in the policy formulation.

Forum for Integrated Resource Management (FIRM) The FIRM is an approach giving rural farmers living on communally managed farmlands a tool allowing them to be in charge of their own development (Kruger et al., 2003). In the centre is a Community Based Organisation (CBO) of rural farmers or a water point committee taking the lead in organising, planning and monitoring their own activities and development actions while coordinating the interventions of their service providers. Service providers include traditional authorities, government or private extension services, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other CBOs and short or long-term projects or programmes. Several hundred firms, most supported directly by an Agricultural Development Centre (ADC) and its extension personnel, have been or are being established and are operating at different levels of effectiveness. The ADCs themselves are a new institution established since independence to support more effective and efficient communal farming.

The key element of the FIRM approach is the collaborative planning, implementation and monitoring process led by the CBO representing the community involved (Kambatuku 2003a). This usually takes the form of an annual or twice annual meeting to which all CBO members and associated service providers are invited. During this facilitated meeting, the vision, goals and objectives of the community are reviewed and either reaffirmed or revised. Results obtained from formal or informal monitoring of the previous year's plans and activities are thoroughly discussed and lessons learnt are extracted. This analysis serves as the basis for the next step of the annual meeting, operational planning for the coming year. During this process, the various service providers commit themselves, within their mandate, to providing specific support to the community based on the community's own agreed-upon objectives. This approach ensures that services provided by mandated service providers and project partners contribute to agreed-upon needs and wishes of the CBO and the greater community. It also minimizes the amount of time needed by communities to meet with their service providers and it further ensures ownership by communities of the interventions that take place in their areas.

Local level monitoring (LLM)

Agriculture is still the most important source of support and income for most Namibians living in communal areas in the form of livestock farming and dryland crop production. However, Namibia is an extremely dry country experiencing highly variable and irregular rainfall. Most of the country is arid to semi-arid and not suitable for large-scale agricultural activities. Many farming communities in Namibia survive in ecologically marginal areas that are highly susceptible to drought and degradation. This high variability and generic dryness of the climate in Namibia puts pressure on the local farmers, forcing them to make management decisions that can be the difference between life and death, many times based on limited information and knowledge about the present state of the environment. By continuously monitoring and observing the condition of the rangeland, farmers would be better equipped to detect any patterns or trends in the state of the environment and in agricultural activities (Reed and Dougill, 2002). There are several techniques developed to monitor the state of rangelands, however, these techniques are normally developed by scientists or other specialists and local farmers often find these methods both complex and time consuming. Furthermore, these techniques often require special skills and experience to provide useable information, skills that few of the local farmers in Namibia possess.

Local level monitoring involving local community members was first developed for monitoring of wildlife in the Grootberg conservancy in north-western Namibia (Stuart-Hill et al., 2004). This approach was adopted and further developed by Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod) into a tool that can provide local farmers with relevant information to support their decision making (Kambatuku, 2003b).

At the centre of the local level monitoring system developed by Napcod is a set of environmental indicators identified by the local farmers based on their information needs. Most frequently, livestock condition is selected as an indicator that integrates rangeland condition. Rainfall and fodder availability are other preferred indicators. Each farmer is then equipped with a field guide, in which he enters his observations for each of the indicators used. With livestock, for example, the observations are based on comparison of a number of animals with photographs illustrating a range of poor to excellent conditions. The frequency of observation differs between different indicators, ranging from observations made on a daily basis to once a year. The recording of observations in the field guide is an important part of the system. Most farmers make decisions based on one or several environmental (or social) indicators. However, observations are seldom recorded and only kept in the head of the individual farmer. Information like this is usually lost, as the memories fade and get mixed up between years. This is a common phenomena often resulting in statements such as 'the grasses were much higher in the past' or 'it used to rain much more when I was young.' By recording these observations the farmer gets a better understanding of how variable environmental conditions, e.g. amount and seasonality of rainfall, influence the state of the environment and agricultural production. Secondly, by recording each observation in the field guide, a historical record is created, which allows the farmer to compare conditions over the years and also to compare with fellow farmers who are also recording their observations.

The FIRM and LLM approaches, working together, have led to a number of local improvements ranging from better organized and used quarantine and auction processes to community developed plans and implementation of improved range management. No figures, beyond specific events or localities, are available overall.

Discussion

This brief overview illustrates the comprehensive policy framework available to support combating desertification in Namibia. However, by definition most policies have a sectoral bias, with little overall integration of policies and programmes. In some instances there is actual conflict between policies and legislation of different sectors. What is lacking is an overall policy framework integrating sectoral policies with respect to combating desertification and addressing environmental variability and change. It is noteworthy in this regard that to date no rural development policy exists, although attempts have been made, and a desertification policy was formulated but never approved. Similarly, and in another vein, no overall policy has been formulated on participation, devolution of responsibilities or community empowerment although this is included in most sectoral policies and has been addressed in the recent partnership policy (RoN 2005).

On the other hand, the various policies are not always fully understood or interpreted taking into account Namibia's variable climate and the potential productivity from its arid environment. Conflicting statements promoting issues such as sustainable development (today a catch all phrase), while at the same time achieving increased productivity or 'achieve growth rates and stability in farm incomes, agricultural productivity and production levels higher than the population growth rate' are of concern. Interpretation often focuses on increased productivity using traditional farming methods, to support the growing population and contribute to poverty alleviation, while ignoring climate variability and prevailing aridity. Evolving expectations and changing life styles of the population are also largely ignored.

The Basin Management and FIRM approaches and LLM are firmly based on the evolving policy framework elements promoting broad participation, devolution of responsibility and community empowerment. While these policy directives in themselves are not fully understood or implemented at any of the relevant levels, ranging from high level policy makers through traditional authorities to farmers on the ground, they do provide the platform for introduction and gradual development of necessary interactions, communication and cooperation required to combat desertification. Moreover, the FIRM and LLM also address the policy directives focusing on improved natural resource management which by themselves, however, would not have the impact on desertification if they were not embedded in participation and community empowerment.

It is noticeable that in many sectoral policies the role of the state has changed in the past fifteen years in Namibia. Instead of implementing development programmes and providing subsidies, the State intends to play more of a facilitating role, with regional and local authorities, communities, NGOs and the private sector assuming increasing

responsibility for service provision. It is in this gap that Napcod, and programmes using the FIRM and LLM tools refined in Napcod, have addressed the issues contributing to desertification frequently in parallel with initiatives focusing on wildlife and tourism.

Several other implications of this shift in policy related to service provision through community empowerment, devolution of responsibility and participation are implicit. One of these implications is that communities will have to pay for some basic services such as the provision of water and veterinary medicines. How this will impact on the poor and marginal sectors of society, or on the environment in which they live, needs to be carefully monitored, in order to prevent or mitigate potential negative effects. Nevertheless, the overall recent policy focus on community empowerment, devolution of responsibility and participation provide the framework for and make a major contribution toward a people-centred approach to combating desertification.

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