

## Closing the Gap between Farmers and Support Organisations in Namibia

*A.S. Kruger*

### Summary

Namibia is one of the most arid countries in the world with very low and erratic rainfall. Agricultural production is a major production area and contributes with 10% to the Gross Domestic Product. It is mainly based on extensive livestock production. Commercial farmers are mainly livestock producers, supported by efficient support structures (organised farmers unions, extension, research, credit, etc.) while the communal farmers are the majority and also mainly pastoralists. Work done by SARDEP indicated that communal farmers and community based organisations (CBO's) have very limited self-help capacities and are unable to voice their demands for sustainable development. Support organisations (governmental, non-governmental and private) are not meeting the demands and needs of the farmers and CBO's and finally that the frame conditions (e.g. land tenure) are not conducive to sustainable land use. Based on these conclusions, SARDEP embarked upon an approach to support farmers and CBO's in identifying, prioritising and finding solutions to their problems; to encourage support organisations in reorientating their services towards the needs of communal farmers and; to promote the creation of a policy framework conducive to sustainable resource management.

**Keywords :** Pastoralism, participation, self-help, sustainability, land-use

### 1 Introduction

Namibia is one of the most arid countries in the world. It has a low and variable rainfall, ranging from 20 mm in the south to 600 mm in the north-east. The high variability of rainfall (coefficient of variation close to 40 % for Windhoek), which seems to have increased during the last two decades, includes periodically years of well below-average rainfall. This significantly reduces the meaningfulness of average rainfall figures for the country (Kruger & Woehl, 1996).

Although about 34 % of the country receives more than 400 mm of rain per annum, about 95% of the soils in the area have a clay content of less than 5 %, which makes it marginal for crop production. Namibia is therefore mainly a livestock producing country where the major features are scarce productive land and fragile soils, compounded by limited water resources and an erratic rainfall regime (Kruger, 1996).

About 70 % of Namibia's total population of 1.7 million, live in the rural areas with approximately 90 % deriving their livelihood from agriculture, particularly livestock production. In relation to the overall land area (ca. 1,000,000 sq. km), Namibia is also one of the least densely populated countries in the world, although distributed highly unevenly (30% live in just 1% of the land area in the northern communal areas) with population densities of > 100 people per sq. km in relation to an average of 1.7 people per sq. km for the whole country.

## 2 Agriculture in Namibia

The agricultural sector is divided into a commercial farming sector where farmers operate on freehold title deed land and a communal farming sector where farmers operate under a common property regime system. In the second case land is considered state land for which no title deed can be registered. The communal sector comprises 48% of the total agricultural land and about 140,000 farm households which produce mainly livestock and subsistence food crops. The communal areas directly support 95% of the nation's farming population. The main income of farmers derives from livestock production (MAWRD, 1995).

The commercial sector is made up of 6,337 freehold title deed farms belonging to about 4,200 farmers primarily oriented towards livestock production. About 90% of the red meat produced in Namibia is exported to South Africa and Europe. The agricultural sector is third after mining and fisheries as far as export earnings are concerned (MAWRD, 1995). The commercial farmers have highly productive farming practices supported by efficient and professional organisations (Namibia Agricultural Union), good infra-structure, well established information basis and adequate support structures like extension, research, veterinary services, marketing and access to credit.

In pre-colonial times, land in Namibia was considered territory of the different ethnic groups and was communally owned. Control over water points and other strategic places enabled farmers to make use of large areas of rangeland. In the north, subsistence crops were produced under a slash and burn practice since sufficient land was still available. The nomadic movement of animals tracking rainfall and better fodder resources, made it possible for farmers to keep large herds of animals. Farmers were traditionally well-organised and control over the resources was exercised by traditional leaders (Kruger & Woehl, 1996).

Today, conditions for farming in the communal areas are completely different from the past. Communal farmers lost the ability to solve their problems by themselves. They can no longer move with their animals in search of fodder and water. Traditional structures, that controlled the access to and management of natural resources, are still unclear. Support services to communal farmers are virtually non-existent, despite recent attempts by government to improve them. This results in over-utilisation of the rangeland, desertification and a further impoverishment of the rural communities (Kruger & Kressler, 1995).

## 3 The Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme (SARDEP)

It was against this background that the Namibian government initiated the Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme (SARDEP) in the communal areas of Namibia. SARDEP started in 1991 with support from the Federal Republic of Germany through the "Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit" (GTZ). The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development (MAWRD) is the implementing agency (SARDEP, 1995a).

The overall goal of SARDEP is to contribute towards reducing land degradation caused by human interference in the communal grazing areas of Namibia. SARDEP started with an "Orientation Phase" in the Southern and Eastern communal areas in 1991 with the view to identify a strategy for sustainable rangeland management and improved livestock production. The programme extended activities to the North Central communal areas in June 1993 and also recently to the Western communal areas.

The Orientation phase was mainly used to

- establish the implementation structures needed;
- to analyse and document the resources, production systems, conditions and constraints for rangeland utilisation;

- to identify solutions for range management and livestock production based on the needs and demands of the communities;
- to assist the local communities in testing some of the solutions according to the identified problems;
- to monitor and assess the tested solutions for possible replications and
- to identify a strategy for sustainable rangeland management and improved livestock production.

#### 4 Results and discussion

With the support of the CDC Consultants from Switzerland in July 1994, an analysis of the current and future situations of people in the programme areas was carried out. The purpose of this exercise was to support SARDEP in preparing the components of the future strategy in identifying and developing roles and responsibilities of all the actors at all levels of the programme. In the process consultations were held with farmers, government officials and programme staff on all levels.

##### 4.1 The present situation in the communal areas

The current *task* of local households is to sustain a decent living for a growing population in the communal areas and to ensure subsistence for the members of the households.

The *outputs required* in order to achieve this task are however not adequate. The quantitative and qualitative performance of livestock production is not sufficient; the poorer segment of the population is increasingly impoverished and is more and more depending on off-farm income sources and migration. The over-utilisation of the rangeland reduces its production potential resulting in degradation, loss of soil, insufficient forage and low drought tolerance.

The *environment* in which the task should be fulfilled, is also not conducive. The current land tenure system is uncertain and does not encourage initiative and responsibility for sustainable utilisation by the resource users. There is still a lack of awareness amongst politicians and some regulations remain obstacles to sustainable land use (e.g. fodder subsidies during drought periods). The population growth rate exceeds 4% in the communal areas and at the current rate, the population of the country will double every 25 years. The communal farmers also have low access to proper basic infrastructure (roads, communications, etc.) and services (extension, research, marketing, credit, veterinary services, health, education, etc.).

Despite the availability of limited *internal resources* within the communities (e.g. manpower, funds, etc.), they are not always adequately supported by external inputs from both governmental and non-governmental sources. Not all the inputs from outside are relevant to the needs of self-sustainability. An example is that the provision of food relief to sustain people is increasing.

The *internal structure and organisation* of local communities is far from adequate. Because the management capacity for new collective tasks is low, self-help capacity is low and dependency on outside support is high. High management capacities in traditional systems to cope with transhumance, rotational grazing, etc. are disrupted by outside interference. Existing formal structures for the resource management and the collective decision making are not effective. Because of land degradation, an increasing part of the poor can not be sustained by livestock production and have no alternatives for income (KEK/CDC, 1994).

#### 4.2 The strategy components

The goal to use resources in a sustainable manner in order to reduce man-induced land degradation and to improve the welfare of the rural population, makes it necessary to bring about change in the entire system of communal land use, and not only on an individual basis. Eight strategy components have been identified that need to be addressed by the relevant actors in a well-coordinated manner in order to achieve the desired results:

- *Resettlement of large communal farmers to title deed areas:* The population in the communal areas will double within the next 25 years from the current ca. 1,000,000 people (70% of the population) to approximately 2,000,000 people (still 70% of the population). This will place tremendous pressure on the already limited resources (land, grazing, water, etc.). Government will therefore have to promote the resettlement of large communal farmers to title deed areas in such a way that it can relieve the pressure on the communal lands.
- *Improved marketing:* In a variable environment where animal numbers have to be adjusted to the variable fodder base, an efficient marketing system needs to be in place. Apart from the need for adequate marketing infra-structure (e.g. auction pens), sufficient buyers should attend auctions to encourage competition for better prices. Farmers also need timely and regular information regarding market prices for different classes and types of livestock.
- *Alternative Income Generating Activities:* The objective of this component is to reduce the dependency on livestock production. Where diversification is not possible because of a lack of natural resources, alternatives like shifting from raw material production (live animals) to semi-products (slaughtering, meat, leather, shoes, etc.) is essential, thus keeping a part of the processing of livestock in the area and thereby reducing the exclusive dependency on livestock production.
- *Land Tenure System:* The objective of this component is to promote the improvement of the frame conditions necessary for sustainable rangeland management and improved livestock production. Land in the communal areas is state owned and no title deeds are allowed. This creates the problem of open and uncontrolled access to the rangeland resources to everyone. With the uncertainty of control over and access to land and the management of the rangeland, as well as the urgently awaited Communal Land Bill, there are very little incentives for the local community to implement sustainable rangeland management practices.
- *Alternatives for Capital Accumulation:* In line with the true tradition of the African pastoralist, livestock (mainly cattle) is still considered as the major source of security and wealth. Due to the lack of alternatives, farmers will always re-invest money into cattle and put them on the already degraded rangelands.
- *Local Investment Packages:* The objective of this component is to identify, develop, test and implement packages such as saving schemes to promote local funds and schemes that will generate money from outside the community for investment in the rural areas.
- *Institution Building on Communal Land:* There is an obvious gap between the traditional authorities on communal land, that are no longer able to assume the full management responsibility, and the newly-created administrative bodies, that are not yet able to take over.
- *Sustainable Improvement of Livestock Production:* This is a clearly defined agricultural component. Farmers have to be supported to identify, test and implement sustainable rangeland utilisation and improve livestock production practices under their specific situations. Support to farmers is required in the very areas in which they are residing in terms of extension, research, veterinary services, marketing, credit, etc. Emphasis should also be put on enhancing their capacities to better track fodder resources in times of fodder scarcity (KEK/CDC, 1994).

### **4.3 Conclusions from the orientation phase**

During a Strategy workshop in March 1995, farmers participated from the southern, eastern and northern programme areas. Some 35 governmental, non-governmental and private organisations were also invited. The purpose of the workshop was to bring communal farmers and support organisations together on the same forum to meet each other, to know each other better, to find common avenues for future co-operation and to get ideas on the future strategy for sustainable range management and improved livestock production.

Farmers were given a chance to elaborate a joint vision for the future, to identify the constraints and hindrances in getting from the current situation to the vision and to find solutions, first those that they can implement themselves and then those where they will need support from outside. Service organisations were also given a chance to illustrate current services and goods they are providing to the communal farmers, as well as what they intend to deliver in future. From this exercise, the following conclusions were made (SARDEP, 1995b):

- Communal farmers have a very good idea about their vision for the future. They however lack the ability to voice their demand for support in order to implement their solutions.
- Support Organisations (governmental, non-governmental and private) are not presently providing services matching the needs and demands of the communal livestock farmers.
- Frame conditions (e.g. land tenure) are not conducive to sustainable rangeland utilisation and improved livestock production practices.

## **5 The SARDEP strategy**

On the basis of experiences made in the Orientation Phase as well as inputs made during the CDC Consultancy (1994) and the Strategy workshop (1995), the SARDEP Strategy for sustainable rangeland utilisation and improved livestock production practices was identified:

- Farmers and Community Based Organisations (CBO's) are supported to be in a position to identify their problems, prioritise them and find solutions to them. Farmers must be made aware of the potentials and limitations of their natural resource base, their farm economics and the overall economic situation in the country. Farmers must also be in a position to explore what problems they can solve on their own and where they need support. They must have a detailed knowledge about accessible services. They must be in a position to clearly formulate their demands to other organisations. They need to be organised in interest groups for a common task and be willing to share their experiences. Farmers must be in a position to make their own contributions into joint research, extension and other service activities and they should be encouraged to continue with animal production and rangeland utilisation independently and invest even further into their activities in a sustainable manner, should they choose to do so.
- Service Organisations (governmental, non-governmental and private) are supported to re-orientate their services towards the needs and demands of the communal farmers. These organisations must have a clear picture of the demands of the communal farmers in all fields. They must have an internal Human Resource Development System geared towards dealing with communal farmers and they must be in a position to make information on specific activities in certain regions available to other organisations and farmers.
- SARDEP has to promote the creation of a conducive policy framework where sustainable rangeland management and improved livestock production is possible. This is done through studies related to access to and management of natural resources in the communal areas, through giving direct inputs in meetings and workshops where related policy issues are

discussed, and also by exposing politicians and decision-makers to the real situation on the ground to highlight the constraints and hindrances in the current policies (SARDEP, 1995b).

## 6 Conclusion

It is obvious that the development of technical solutions alone might not be sufficient to support local farmers in solving their problems. What is however a prerequisite for success, is the empowerment of the local communities to resume responsibility for the management of their own resources. SARDEP moved away from the general practice of developing and offering technical packages (input approach) to the communities, to a process of enabling local communities to identify solutions to their problems and identifying those institutions which can support them in implementing solutions beyond their own capability (negotiation approach).

The success of SARDEP will at the end be measured in how far they succeeded to "close the gap" between the farmers and the service organisations. SARDEP will only be considered successful if farmers are able to solve their own problems, if they are able to get the necessary support for those problems they cannot solve by themselves, and if the service organisations are directing their services towards the needs of the communal farmers. Proof of whether SARDEP has achieved its goals, will be when farmers and CBO's do not require their services any more. This is the true meaning of sustainability.

## 7 References

- KEK/CDC (1994): Support for the Organisational Development Process of SARDEP, Main Mission Report, Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, Windhoek, Namibia.
- Kruger, A.S. and Kressirer, R.F. (1995): Towards Sustainable Rangeland Management and Livestock Production in Namibia. Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, Windhoek, Namibia.
- Kruger, A.S. (1996): Environmental Threats and Opportunities Assessment for Namibia. A report on Pastoral and Agro-Pastoral Resources. Namibia Resource Consultants, Windhoek, Namibia.
- Kruger, A.S. and Woehl, H. (1996): The Challenge for Namibia's Future: Sustainable Land-Use Under Arid and Semi-Arid Conditions. Agriculture and Rural Development, Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation, DLG-Verlags-GmbH Frankfurt am Main, Germany.
- MAWRD (1995): The National Agricultural Policy, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, Windhoek, Namibia.
- SARDEP (1995a): SARDEP Objectives and Policy. Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, Windhoek, Namibia.
- SARDEP (1995b): Strategy Workshop for the next phase (1996-1999) for the Southern and Eastern Communal Areas, Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme, Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, Windhoek, Namibia.

### Address of author:

**Albertus S. Kruger**

Chief Rangeland Researcher  
and

National Co-ordinator of the Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme (SARDEP)  
Private Bag 13184  
Windhoek, Republic of Namibia