

Barking Dogs: Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in Post-Apartheid

Namibia.

Research for the work presented here was conducted as a socio-economic survey of project sites undertaken with field support from Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod). The goal was to learn about local priorities and establish a baseline of data in order to assist with program design. Efforts to control land degradation in Namibia through Napcod have utilized a high degree of grass-roots participation through the formation of community-based organizations (CBOs). The main findings presented here are that rural farmers expect more from local organizations such as CBOs than from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and that opportunity for investment is a key incentive for participation in such projects, and should form a central component of any community project.

Through applied research, NGOs may work towards implementing a benign form of intervention, not only well-intentioned but also effective, a positive postscript to 400+ years of colonialism. Specifically, NGOs utilizing participatory approaches may reverse some of the structural imbalances created by the recent social and environmental history of southern Africa, a history marred by the predatory antics of apartheid. This paper presents findings from participatory research into local perceptions of subsistence farmers and pastoralists in southern Namibia concerning CBOs and NGOs. Local perceptions of these organizations are presented in two tables used to outline and contrast two distinct sets of expectations.

Anthropology can play an important role in understanding local perspectives. In this case, we are concerned with both an environmental paradigm, desertification, and

No

bureaucratization, a western form of social organization. Household surveys, interviews, and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) group meetings are tools available to practitioners for gathering and understanding local opinions. Looking at local decision-making strategies makes it possible to include numerous perspectives in a process that is participatory because it resembles a feedback loop as opposed to a 'top-down' flow of information. It is also useful for evaluating the impact of development projects, and in particular for understanding technology adoption. This research found that a successful way to approach environmental management is through the formation of local projects and/or committees. These committees play an important role in disseminating information generated by scientists and service organizations, such as methods of recognizing and preventing land degradation.

During fieldwork, feedback sessions were used to apply research findings and disseminate results from interviews and participatory exercises. Participatory exercises were used to draw up a list of criteria for evaluating the success of community-based projects in the area. Surveys were conducted at 50 households spread over three sites, and are representative of a majority of local households. Sites were differentiated by varied levels of formal social organization (i.e. a farmer's league), project initiatives, and contact with NGOs. Three surveys were used; household economics, range management, and CBO/NGO participation. Results presented in this paper are from the CBO/NGO survey. Survey results indicate that community members are twice as likely to identify and discuss the work of local committees, CBOs, as they are the work of externally-based NGOs. As these results indicate, local organizations are more accessible for many people.

Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod)

A central objective of the research reported here is to analyse efforts of the NGO Napcod to design and implement anti-desertification programming through the formation of CBOs, and to examine the effects and functions of these participatory forums. Napcod works to implement projects along guidelines provided by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which mandates universal participation in the form of soliciting input and setting project agendas through a dialogue incorporating a range stakeholders from policymakers to village committees. The UNCCD is one of the first such documents to canonize participatory development. Article 3 of the Convention, *Principles*, calls on all Parties to utilise participatory methodologies wherever possible (UNCCD 1994).

Research Setting: Namibia

Namibia is the driest African country south of the Sahara. There is growing scientific concern in Namibia regarding desertification and the permanence of vegetation change induced by over-grazing. With a 3% annual growth rate, population pressure is a concern. From a policy perspective there is a need to protect subsistence households from the periodic scarcities and animal mortalities caused by drought, while decreasing reliance on drought relief. Napcod is concerned to create the skills necessary to preserve and care for Namibia's natural resources. Fieldwork was conducted on communal lands of the southern semi-arid Hardap region of Namibia, which receives between 50 – 400 mm rainfall p.a., and has a highly variable 40 - 50% departure from average annual rainfall. There are no crops grown in the area, and the climate is suited mainly for the production of small livestock, sheep and goats.

Interviewees listed livestock sales, pensions, and wage labor as their main sources of income. Over 90% of employment opportunities are related to small-scale livestock production. Household financial security is characterised by a high degree of external subsidies: government pensions available to all people above the age of 60 (N\$200 p/month = approx. US\$20), remittances, and off-farm wage labor are the most common subsidies. Many survey respondents reported that without subsidies, it would not be possible for food-secure farming to take place under the increasingly sedentary conditions found on communal lands. Reduced mobility has been associated with range degradation in many parts of Africa. The region is characterised by high degrees of farmer absenteeism and labor outmigration. Population demographics and migratory work patterns are partially a legacy of the 'homeland' or 'native reserve' labor-pool system created by successive German and South African colonial administrations.

Indicators for Project Success

Waterpoint committees, a farmer's league, a wildlife conservancy, and a tourist campsite are the various projects that are located at the study sites. Criteria for evaluating the success of community-based projects and committees were compiled. These criteria were solicited directly from community members during interviews, in an effort to include local priorities and multiple voices. Main identified indicators of success are 1) investment potential for locals, 2) opportunities for employment, training, and skills acquisition, 3) long-term commitment by external organizations, and 4) stable local leadership. The first indicator, investment potential, tells us that development projects should offer opportunities for participants to diversify their incomes through investment into the projects themselves, chiefly in terms of dues, time spent at meetings and work

days, and material resources sacrificed, for example, pasture or forest set aside for conservation. The amount of resources a family is willing to invest determines their commitment to a project. The notion that participation is decided at the household level through perceived investment opportunities requires that a socio-economic component form a central part of any investigation.

Participatory Research

Community meetings were held during the initial stages of research, after which household (HH) follow-up visits were conducted, allowing interviewees a chance to respond in private. Interviews were conducted with HH heads, often in the presence of numerous family members. Additional interviews were conducted with government extension officers, Traditional Authorities, and wage-herders; temporary residents who have moved to the area seeking employment. During survey work regular feedback sessions were conducted in order to avoid a purely extractive data process, and to apply research findings by presenting them in public forums. Feedback sessions provided an opportunity for the research team to recount their findings to community groups of between 10 and 40 people in the local languages of Nama/Damara and Afrikaans. Written summaries of the work were left with community groups. Recommendations based on data findings were made and questions were solicited. For example, one community had a relatively high rate of female-headed households of 57% (N=12). This community also exhibited a highly uneven distribution of wealth. Many households in this area reported unstable livelihood security because they had few savings and no access to cash. We recommended that they consider forming a savings and loan cooperative, as had a neighboring community, and opened the subject for discussion.

Additionally, data collection was combined with community meetings and work days wherever possible. Attempts were made to collect data at these events utilizing PRA methodologies. An example of a PRA exercise utilized is SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) conducted within a framework of livelihood analysis during which community members were led through a resource mapping exercise. The twofold purpose was to collect data regarding local perceptions of resources whilst initiating a discussion that would lead to the planning, formation, and recognition of community goals.

Capacity Building

Projects designed to enhance social organization, known as 'capacity-building', aim to implement a sustainable form of development. Sustainable project development is defined here as meaning that once a project has ended within a specified time frame, the results of the project will continue to benefit the community, in this case with a forum for addressing local issues, and some presence of local leadership. The formation of community members into CBOs is a strategy embraced by many NGOs in an attempt to tackle technical resource management issues through westernized, or bureaucratic, social organization. This idea reflects recent findings from across Africa that in many cases, the best way to tackle technical environmental issues is indirectly, through enhancing formal social organization and ability of local communities to solicit the services they themselves deem necessary. This represents an incoming trend of decentralization, during which time NGOs may find themselves directly in the role of service provision. The organizations which formed the basis of this study are committees comprised of elected officers who take on the responsibility of maintaining contact with external agencies and holding regular meetings to manage local projects.

Why tackle environmental problems through social organization and capacity-building? The last African colony to do so, Namibia received its independence from South Africa in 1990. In pre-independence Namibia, most agricultural extension services were geared towards white commercial farmers on tenured lands. After 1990 efforts were made to increase agricultural services to black farmers on communal lands, a majority of who are subsistence farmers. Within 2 years these efforts shifted away from a focus on technical agricultural advice to focus on capacity-building. It was perceived by research and extension agents that the lack of formal community organizations prevented rural communities who had been marginalised by the pre-independence regime from soliciting services and investing in sustainable development initiatives where the natural resource base was concerned (Kroll and Kruger 1998).

Anthropology Applied

Napcod is also an effort to connect science and community action (see Seely 1998). Participation from numerous sectors is required to create the framework for applying scientific findings on land degradation, and assisting farmers to design solutions that they themselves will implement. Concentrating on the wide range of actors involved in resource management, Scoones (1999) writes about the suitability of anthropology to investigate adaptive management in variable conditions, chiefly in terms of everyday decision-making. An objective of the research presented here was to determine how the recent acceleration of presence by governmental and non-governmental service organizations (SOs) is perceived by rural communities. What role do these external SOs

and the recently formed community-based organizations play in the household decision-making process, in relation to long-term and drought-coping strategies?

Research Question: What are Local Perspectives of Developmental Activity?

How are membership levels of various CBOs constituted, how do participants define success, decide whether or not to participate? Has there been an increase in CBOs, if so, what has been accomplished in terms of community decision-making? How are NGOs and CBOs differently perceived? By studying local perceptions of post-independence activity it is possible to draw important conclusions about the efficacy of the work being done, and gather a sense of what has been accomplished. Surveys were designed to gain an understanding of farmer perspectives. All households surveyed were asked to name the service organizations (SOs) which had been working locally before and after independence in 1990. One objective was to demonstrate an increase in the number of service organizations locally active in the ten-plus years since independence. An increase was reported by 55% (N = 29) of those surveyed, who listed names of various SOs active post-1990, as opposed to 20% (N=10) who listed SO activity prior to 1990.

Survey Results

One result is a set of farmer evaluations which can also be considered as recommendations for future planning, a 'client-driven' approach, as presented in Table 1: 'Local perceptions: why farmers value NGOs'. These results are significant because they represent local aspirations and can help field agents to plan with farmers. Projects which solicit design and goals from farmers themselves have a higher likelihood of setting and achieving realistic goals suited to local settings. Two tables are presented. An important distinction between Table 1 and Table 2 is that Table 1 presents NGOs; external service

organizations, whereas Table 2 presents CBOs, which are internal, local organizations wholly comprised of community members.

The objective was to gauge the level of perception regarding availability and utilization of service resources. Because the actual number of external SOs working in the community may only indicate a high volume of 4x4 traffic, questions were designed to elicit from informants criteria for successful SOs. Fifty HHs were asked to discuss this subject. For Table 1 a total of 21 responses regarding NGOs were recorded at 15 HHs spread over the three sites. As presented in Table 2, 44 responses, twice as many, were recorded at 28 HHs regarding CBOs. These results indicate a higher level of awareness and ability to discuss CBO activities. Differing expectations for CBOs and NGOs emerged, with a broader set of expectations pertaining to CBOs. People expect more from local organizations.

Interviewees were asked to explain why the NGOs they listed were valuable. The reasons given are presented here:

Reason/ Value	# responses	% total (N=21 at 15 HHs)
Water/ 'water is life'	5	24
Trainings/ workshops	4	19
Staying power/ presence	3	14
Social organization/ facilitate meetings	3	14
Holistic/ environmental	2	10
Donated infrastructure	1	5
Animal services	1	5
Drought relief	1	5
Exposure trips	1	5

Table 1 Local perceptions: why farmers value NGOs

The most commonly recorded response 'water is life' refers to the high level of waterpoint maintenance provided by service organizations. This response is also an indicator of a high reliance on government services. Respondents at all three sites mentioned that they planned to attend training workshops in the near future to learn about waterpoint maintenance. This is an important indicator of how individual future plans are tied to newly formed CBOs: emerging waterpoint committees (WPCs), which are discussed below.

Some respondents indicated that despite a lack of tangible evidence of NGO and CBO activities, the most important general accomplishment has been to facilitate public dialogue. Meetings represent an important opportunity for people to voice their opinions in public. One respondent gave the metaphor of a dog who although unable to bite, can now at least bark. Regretfully, the respondent was not asked whom the dog might bite, in the case that it had teeth. This metaphor is telling, in that it alludes to the dramatic changes that have occurred in Namibia in the past ten years. One man told us that in the past it was whites who "said how things would be", a situation that has now changed.

Several respondents mentioned that NGOs were providing a direction to move in.

Participants were also asked to discuss the recently created community-based organizations active in the area. These results are presented in Table 2. The ultimate purpose of CBOs, as envisioned by Napcod, is for a single committee to represent all the public needs of a community, and streamline communication with outside agencies. A comparison of the two tables reveals that CBOs are perceived as providing investment opportunities and financial services, generating development, and creating decision-making skills; all services that were not reported as expected of NGOs. CBOs and locally

based committees are easily accessible to residents, accountable, and will theoretically put the follow-through aspect of management in local hands. The survey demonstrated that there had been a significant increase in the number of active community-based organizations since 1990.

The general CBO survey attempted to measure several variables:

- Change in CBO presence since independence (post-1990)
- Most important contributions and accomplishments CBOs have made
- Effective CBO practices
- Individual levels of involvement
- Individual levels of frustration

Survey results are presented in Table 2.

Reason/ Value	# responses	% total (N=44 at 28 HHs)
Water/ 'water is life'	9	20
Financial opportunities	9	20
Provides training	5	11
CBNRM (community-based natural resource mgmnt)	4	9
Self-govt	4	9
Generates development	3	7
Creates decision-making skills	3	7
Liaison w/ NGOs & SOs	2	4
Financial services	2	4
Livestock breeding program	2	4
Accessible & in-community	1	2

Table 2 Local perceptions: why farmers value CBOs

As with Table 1, water infrastructure services rank high on the list. Under the current government plan, by 2007, newly formed waterpoint committees are expected to take over ownership and management of approx. 5100 waterpoints throughout Namibia which are currently government-owned and maintained. This plan calls for the creation of numerous CBOs.

Also frequently mentioned was 'income generation', an important result indicating that community projects which provide an opportunity for investment are likely to draw widespread participation. This finding is the basis for concluding that investment is a primary incentive for participation. During interviews, it became clear that many subsistence farmers and pastoralists are not interested, for example, in biodiversity, or in erosion control, *per se*. The motivation for technology adoption, and/or participation in development or community projects is based primarily on the opportunity to derive income in the form of cash for goods marketed and tourism services rendered, or gain access to valued agricultural technology such as livestock breed improvement, and the numerous resources and services offered by various agencies. Additionally, it appears that a high level of female-headed HHs correlates with a high level of participation. Of 3 sites surveyed, the site with the highest number of female-headed HHs, 57% (N=12), showed the highest levels of membership in projects.

One idea is that the higher the percentage of community participation in CBOs, the higher the level of 'capacitation'. What is a measurable indicator of success or enablement? What has the increase in CBO and NGO activity since independence resulted in, and how are these changes perceived by local inhabitants? In theory, the success of community organizations should be measured by levels of participation. In reality, it is also necessary to take into account motivations and incentives which individual households might have for showing up at meetings and workdays. From the data presented in Table 2, 20% (N=9) of respondents perceive CBOs and their projects (i.e. tourist camps, waterpoint infrastructure) as a form of investment. The following indicators for project success have been identified:

- Level of local leadership: a high level of trust and 'staying power' is necessary. The higher the commitment on both sides, local and NGO, the higher the likelihood of success. Resentment quickly builds on the part of farmers subjected to lapsed development projects.
- Income generation must play a central role to all endeavours, a possible explanation for the differentiated levels of participation between research sites, with a higher participation noted in projects focused on income generation.
- Universal appeal of projects; to minimise marginalisation, conflict and rivalries, projects should attempt to be non-exclusive, for example including various income level and age groups, and both genders.

Conclusion

In human terms, Napcod is concerned with long-term enhancement of rural communities' ability to identify problems and implement solutions by partnering with, and soliciting services from, governmental and non-governmental organizations. CBOs must increase the ability of pastoral agriculturalists to sustainably manage their rangeland resources, i.e. minimise land degradation while reducing household and community vulnerability to shock through increased livelihood flexibility.

The need for developmental intervention has partial roots in the apartheid-era governance and its legacy. The apartheid apparatus did not promote or facilitate democratic social organization, often actively quashing any attempts with violence. During the period prior to independence, resources and services were separately managed without coordination between government sectors, the communities themselves, or NGOs, thus negating chances of participatory design or community organization. The formal social organization that did occur was almost exclusively political in nature. In this sense, these participatory projects are concerned with a form of democratisation.

The creation and implementation of CBOs has resulted in a higher level of awareness for such local organizations than for than NGOs. This means that locally comprised

organizations play a larger role in the everyday perception of available resources, and as such, represent an opportunity to sustain higher levels of participation.

References

- Kroll, T. and A. S. Kruger (1998). "Closing the gap: bringing communal farmers and service institutions together for livestock and rangeland development." Journal of Arid Environments **39**(2): 315-323.
- Scoones, I. (1999). "New ecology and the social sciences: What prospects for a fruitful engagement?" Annual Review of Anthropology **28**: 479-507.
- Seely, M. K. (1998). "Can science and community action connect to combat desertification?" Journal of Arid Environments **39**(2): 267-277.
- UNCCD (1994). Elaboration Of An International Convention To Combat Desertification In Countries Experiencing Serious Drought And/Or Desertification, Particularly In Africa, United Nations General Assembly: 58 pp. U.N. Doc. A/49/49.