

## Forum for Integrated Resource Management in Namibia

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### Abstract

Forum for Integrated Resource Management (FIRM) is an approach designed to put rural communities in the driver's seat in terms of their own development. It involves a Community Based Organisation (CBO) of rural farmers taking the lead in organising, planning and monitoring their own development while coordinating the interventions of their service providers. These service providers may take the form of traditional authorities, government extension services, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or short or long-term projects. The FIRM approach can take many forms but was first established and piloted in the Grootberg area, Kunene region in Namibia. The Grootberg FIRM was developed to coordinate service provision by a variety of government and non-government bodies, to write its own proposals for funding, establish a Women's Desk, and to undertake integrated land-use planning and implement sustainable resource management plans at local level. Community members undertook and hosted a number of exchanges and participated in various national and international gatherings (including the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Committee on Review of Implementation of the Convention (CRIC), in Rome in 2002) and focused on sustainable resource use. The FIRM approach is adapted by agricultural extension services and continues to be expanded in Namibia and is being evaluated by extension personnel in Botswana and South Africa. Thus the flexibility and applicability of the FIRM approach seems to be catching on and spreading in southern Africa.

**Key words:** *Forum, rural communities, farmers, service providers, integrated land use planning*

### Introduction

The Forum for Integrated Resource Management (FIRM) can best be described as an approach to ensure that rural farmers living on communally managed farmlands are in charge of their own development (Kruger et al., 2003). It involves a Community Based Organisation (CBO) of rural farmers taking the lead in organising, planning and monitoring their own activities and development actions while coordinating the interventions of their service providers. These varied service providers may take the form of traditional authorities, government or private extension services, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), other CBOs and short or long-term projects.

The key element of the FIRM approach is the collaborative planning, implementation and monitoring process led by the CBO representing the community involved (Kambatuku 2003). This usually takes the form of an annual meeting to which all CBO members and associated service providers are invited. During this facilitated meeting, the goals and objectives of the community are reviewed and reaffirmed or revised. Results obtained from formal or informal monitoring of the previous year's plans and activities are then thoroughly discussed and lessons learnt are extracted. This analysis serves as the basis for the next and key step of the annual meeting, operational planning for the coming year. During this process, the various service providers commit themselves to providing specific support to the community based

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on the community's own agreed-upon objectives. This approach ensures that the services provided by mandated service providers and project partners are in line with the needs and wishes of the CBO and the greater community.

The FIRM approach was first established in collaboration with the Grootberg Farmers' Union (GFU) and soon thereafter expanded to overlap with the #Khoadi //Hôas Wildlife Conservancy. This farmers' organisation was recognised to be one of the better organised associations with the infrastructure of an agricultural research station ceded to them from the government. At the time the FIRM approach was initiated, four independently-funded national development projects as well as numerous other service providers were active in the area. The FIRM was established to help the four development projects coordinate their support to the already well-organised and active CBO. This was partly the result of concerns voiced by the GFU that, although projects operated simultaneously in the area, they did so without any clear cooperation. Moreover, the GFU suggested that these specific projects could better interact with the GFU and support needs identified by the community if they were doing so in a collaborative manner. These projects were *Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification* (Napcod), the *Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme* (Sardep), the *Communal Area Water Supply* (Caws) project, all funded by the German Government and implemented through the Gesellschaft für technisches Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). The fourth was the wildlife-oriented, community-based, natural resource management programme, *Living in a Finite Environment* (Life), funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). These four projects, together with the GFU, invited numerous other institutions that were at that time involved in natural resource management and development in the area, including traditional leaders, community-based organisations such as the #Khoadi //Hoas Conservancy, government extension officers from the Directorate of Rural Water Supply and the Directorate of Extension and Engineering Services and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism as well as NGOs, such as the World Wildlife Fund for Africa (WWF) and the Namibian Nature Foundation (NNF). They agreed to "pool projects and programmes that have a common philosophy and approach to focus on developmental issues in the Grootberg area with the GFU as the local structure" (Kruger, 2001). A first meeting was held in March 1996.

### Materials and Methods

FIRMs in six different areas of Namibia are examined to review their progress, implementation and effectiveness. These six areas, the projects with which they are/ were associated and their primary agriculture focus are summarised in Table 1 and (Fig 1.).

Table 1: Areas of selected FIRMs, the projects that support them and the primary focus of their activities.

Area	Projects	Primary focus
Grootberg, Kunene Region	Sardep, Napcod, Caws (GTZ)	Rangeland, large and small stock; wildlife
Onkani, Omusati Region	Sardep, Napcod (GTZ)	Rangeland, large stock and small stock
Gibeon, Hardap Region	Sardep, Napcod (GTZ); Ephemeral River Basins (Norway)	Rangeland, small stock and water management
Kuiseb, Erongo Region	Environmental Learning and Action in the Kuiseb	Small stock and water

	(ELAK) (EU)	
Okakarara, Otjozondjupa and Omaheke Regions	Desert Margins Programme (GEF)	Large and small stock
Oshikoto Region	Oshikoto Livestock Development Project (OLDeP), National Agricultural Support Programme (NASSP) (EU)	Large and small stock; livestock marketing

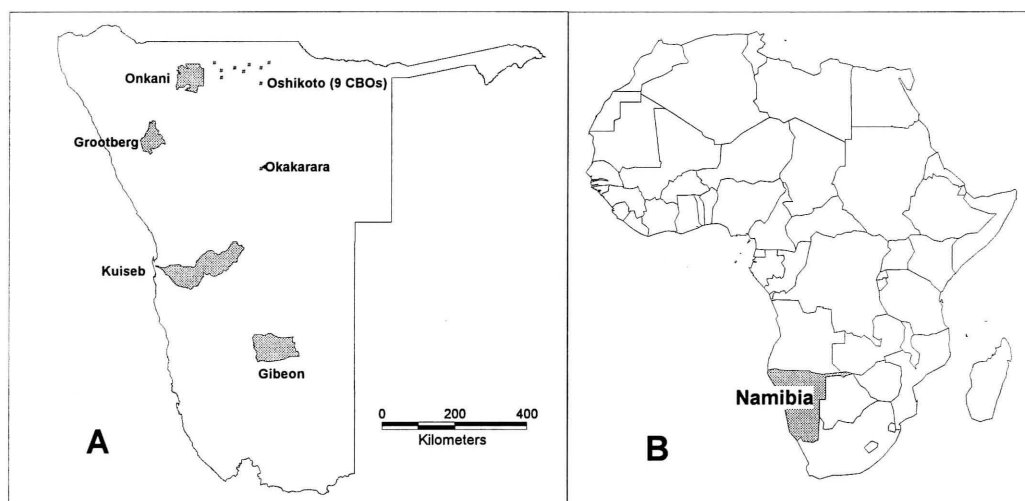


Figure 1. Map A shows the location of the six areas where FIRM is currently actively pursued, referred to in table 1 above. Map B shows the location of Namibia on the African continent.

To assess these six FIRMs, we reviewed documents from the projects supporting establishment and implementation of these FIRMs and we interviewed participants involved in their inception, facilitation and implementation.

## Results

Analysis of the six selected FIRMs revealed very different states of progress in terms of the overall objectives of their establishment. The six FIRMs (Table 2) that are currently actively pursuing activities all undertake some form of annual planning and ongoing monitoring of activities of the CBO and their service providers. As the current partners of the FIRMs come from different origins, their approaches and their activities vary.

Table 2: Six selected FIRMs, their current activities and development partners with comments on their current status.

Area	Current activities	Current partners	Comments
Grootberg, Kunene Region	Tourism and wildlife management, local level monitoring, livestock husbandry	Government extension services including DEES, DVS, DRWS; #Khoadi //Hoas Conservancy; LIFE project; NNF	This is the oldest FIRM and is currently used as demonstration site for most newly established FIRMS.
Onkani, Omusati	Community	DEES; DVS;	Also one of the,

Region	development, livestock health, natural resource management	independent researchers	earlier FIRMS and used as demonstration site for new FIRMS in the northern communal areas.
Gibeon, Hardap Region	Community development, natural resource management, small stock farming	ERB*	The Gruendorner Farmers's Association is a very strong local cooperative that drives this process.
Kuiseb, Erongo Region	Water management, livestock farming	DEES; DRWS	The Kuiseb River Basin Committee adopted the FIRM approach to suit their objectives.
Okakarara, Otjozondjupa and Omaheke Regions	Livestock farming, rangeland management, community development	DMP**	The Local Development Committees (LDCs) that are decentralised structures of the regional government adopted this approach.
Oshikoto Region	Livestock farming, livestock marketing, rangeland management, water management	OLDeP	These are the latest FIRMS and are being coordinated in nine constituencies within the Oshikoto region.

\*Ephemeral River Basin project (Government of Norway); \*\*Desert Margins Project (Global Environmental Facility (GEF) through ICRISAT)

### Discussion

FIRM is an approach that has started in 1996 and is constantly in a process of evolving. The principles of FIRM can be adapted to suit different community based structures ranging from farmers' associations (Grootberg), cooperatives (Gibeon), basin management committees (Kuiseb), local development committees (Okakarara) and livestock committees (Onkani) to organizations within specific constituencies (Oshikoto region). The major prerequisite is that local resource users (e.g. farmers) are in charge of the process and that it is not steered by influential local service providers. The composition of the FIRM is determined by the objectives and priorities of that specific CBO that leads it and can vary considerably from year to year.

Without support of externally driven programs or dedicated extension personnel the FIRM approach will be less effective. In all cases referred to in Table 2, strong externally funded support programs played a major role in getting the FIRM off the ground and supporting its

activities. A major challenge is to ensure institutional sustainability of these organizations after the end of the externally supported initiative.

The FIRM approach has been identified and adopted by the Directorate of Extension and Engineering Services of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) as parallel to and supporting their Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSRE) approach. They (FSRE) have as their overall goal improved service delivery to communal farmers. Two of their five main objectives, support to institutional development of Community Based Organisations and cooperation with other service organisations, are built on elements of the FIRM approach. DEES now focuses on multidisciplinary approaches, broad participation and implementation based on farmers' needs and priorities. Both FIRM and FSRE use interactive participatory planning processes (e.g. logical framework) as tools to support monitoring of short-term progress and long-term impacts. Both focuses on development of what DEES calls Community Action Plans where communities determine the priorities and service providers, together with the communities, cooperate to provide some of the inputs needed to achieve their objectives.

The MAWF is currently enhancing the various forums within which they operate. These range from national forums for policy directives and development to regional planning of extension activities that take farmers' priorities into consideration. Having grown out of projects, some of which were integrated into the MAWF, it is not surprising that the FIRM approach, including the support provided by NGOs and other non-governmental service providers, is being mainstreamed into at least some of the main government extension services.

Although the FIRM is seen as meetings only to some observers, it has proven to be useful where direct interaction between local communities and service providers take place. This enables communities to meet local service providers on their own territory and opens up opportunities for joint solving of problems. Regular meetings to assess progress made and to adjust actions if needed are powerful tools communities have to call service providers to account for their plans and budgets. Peer pressure amongst service providers seems to serve as adequate incentives to service providers to stick to planned activities and commitments.

To keep up momentum and interest, short term demonstrable results are needed. It is therefore important that quick tangible successes are recorded by the local communities and service providers. Sometimes planned activities are too big and long-term oriented that people loose faith in the ability of their leaders to show tangible progress over the short term.

Entire decision making process is supported by FIRM approach. Although it is advisable that the FIRM approach is initially used for specific needs and objectives (e.g. marketing, rangeland management) it can be extended over time to address a wider range of community priorities.

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