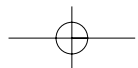
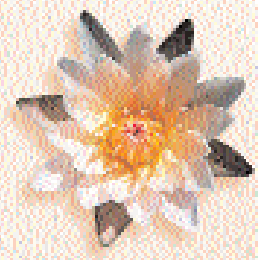


SAND AND WATER  
CHAPTER  
ONE

# INTRODUCTION

Place of sand and water



Imagine a flat expanse of sand stretching several hundred kilometres in all directions. Cover the sand with grass and trees, and add a few gentle ridges and dips formed here and there by old dunes and rivers that are now dry. The mantle of sand quickly soaks up any rain, leaving little or no surface water in this vast landscape. Life would not have been easy for anyone who made their home in this thirsty landscape.

Now slice a valley through the landscape, a valley long and deep enough to bring a flow of clear and clean water, year-in and year-out. What had been a rather featureless and hard landscape becomes a place where sand meets water. All kinds of new opportunities open up for plants, animals and people to live in a place where few of them would normally be found. The valley and its river is, of course, the Okavango. And the region is Kavango, an area covering about 48,500 square kilometres or roughly 5.5% of Namibia. The 201,000 people who live here make up about 11% of Namibia's population.

Where did the original population come from, and who now lives in the Kavango? How do people farm, and why is farming generally unproductive? From where does the Okavango River get its water, and how important is the river to the region? Where is underground water most available, and what effect does the provision of this water have on land uses? Why have fish stocks apparently declined? Of what value is tourism to Kavango? How is the region governed and who controls the use of land? What, why, when, who and how?

*Sand and water: a profile of the Kavango Region* has been compiled to bring together a summary of information on the region and to answer some of those questions. There are obviously many other questions: some answered and others not. In presenting this information, the book also seeks to evaluate and highlight what are probably the most important processes in the region. This is important because bald facts and figures do not always speak for themselves. Rather, the facts and figures are products of processes and practices, and these are the things that require explanation.

From the image of a river cutting through a large expanse of sand, it should be clear that the region broadly consists of the Okavango River valley and the extensive area of sandy woodlands to the south and north. Comparisons are often made between these two zones in the book, and 'the river or Okavango' and 'inland' areas are shorthand terms used for them. The veterinary cordon fence is an important border and feature, and its position in the region is shown in

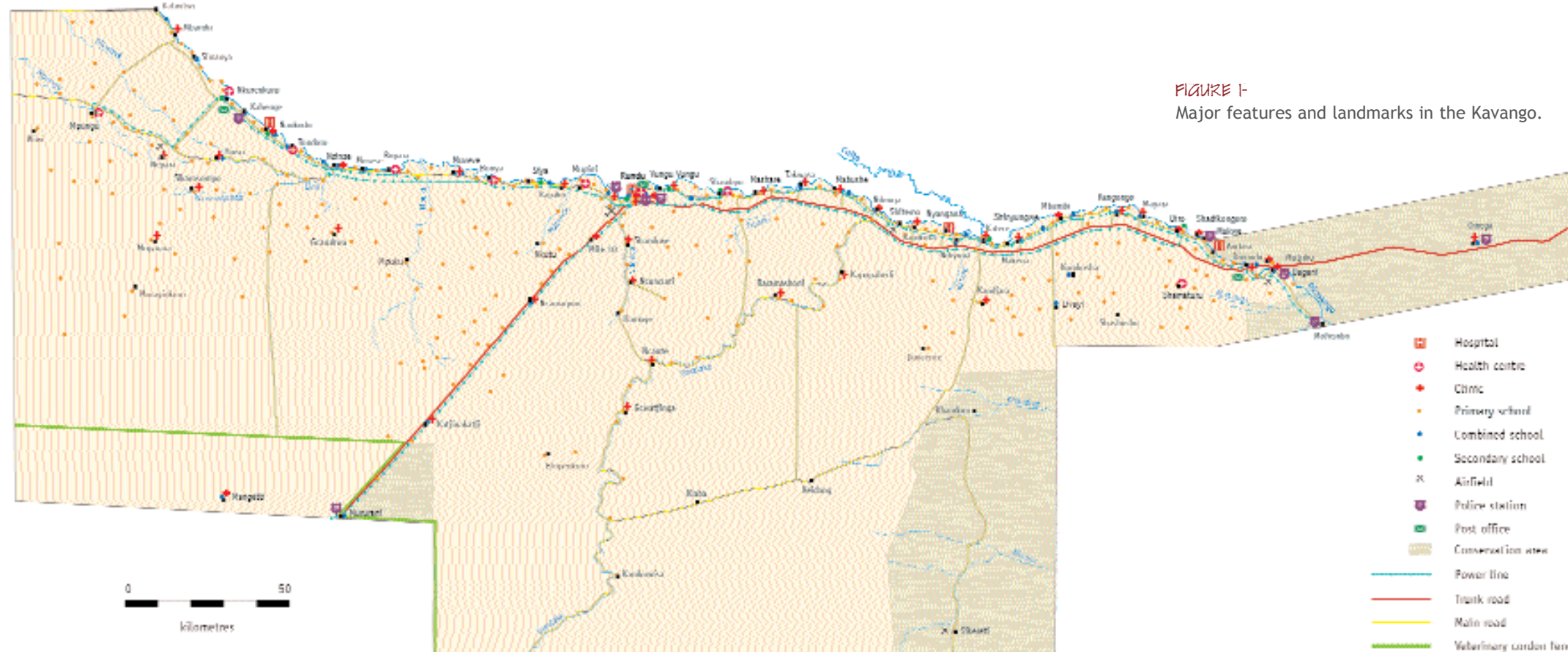


FIGURE 1- Major features and landmarks in the Kavango.

FIGURE 1. Areas south of the fence within the region are controlled by the government and its parastatal, the Namibian Development Corporation (NDC).

Within Namibia the Kavango Region is one of 13 regions designated for purposes of administration and political representation. The borders of the region have changed four times (see page 36), while its name has also changed over time from Okavangoland, Okavango to Kavango. 'Okavango' was the name given to the river by the explorer Charles John Andersson in his book *The Okavango River*, published in 1861, but he probably misunderstood the name and incorrectly added the prefix 'O'.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Okavango River is now widely adopted within Namibia and elsewhere, and this is the name used here.

The Kavango and the section of river that runs through it forms part of the Okavango Basin, and many aspects of the region need to be viewed in the context of this larger Basin (FIGURE 3). Most importantly, the Kavango and its section of river fall neatly in the middle of the Basin. Upstream and to the north is Angola, which is the source of all water flowing through Namibia. The water enters Namibia along two

People in the region are represented by nine regional councillors, one for each of the nine constituencies (FIGURE 2). This table provides estimates of the areas and number of people in each constituency. The Rundu Urban constituency is smaller than the town itself, and many people living in the town fall within the surrounding Rundu Rural East and West constituencies. About 41,400 people lived in Rundu in 2001.

The nine constituencies with an estimate of their populations in 2001<sup>2</sup>

Name	Area(square kilometres)	People
Kahenge	8,786	30,600
Kapako	6,091	26,100
Mashare	9,120	16,200
Mpungu	8,140	18,700
Mukwe	5,513	26,300
Ndiyona	8,066	19,600
Rundu Rural East	596	19,000
Rundu Rural West	155	24,600
Rundu Urban	14	20,100

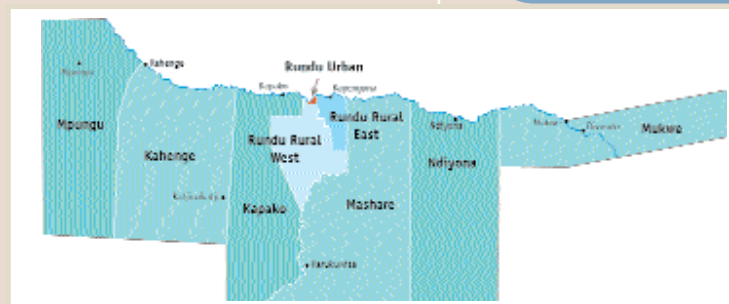
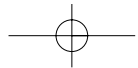


FIGURE 2- Kavango is divided into nine constituencies, each of which is represented by a regional councillor.



*There are few large rivers in the world that deliver such clear, clean water as the Okavango.*

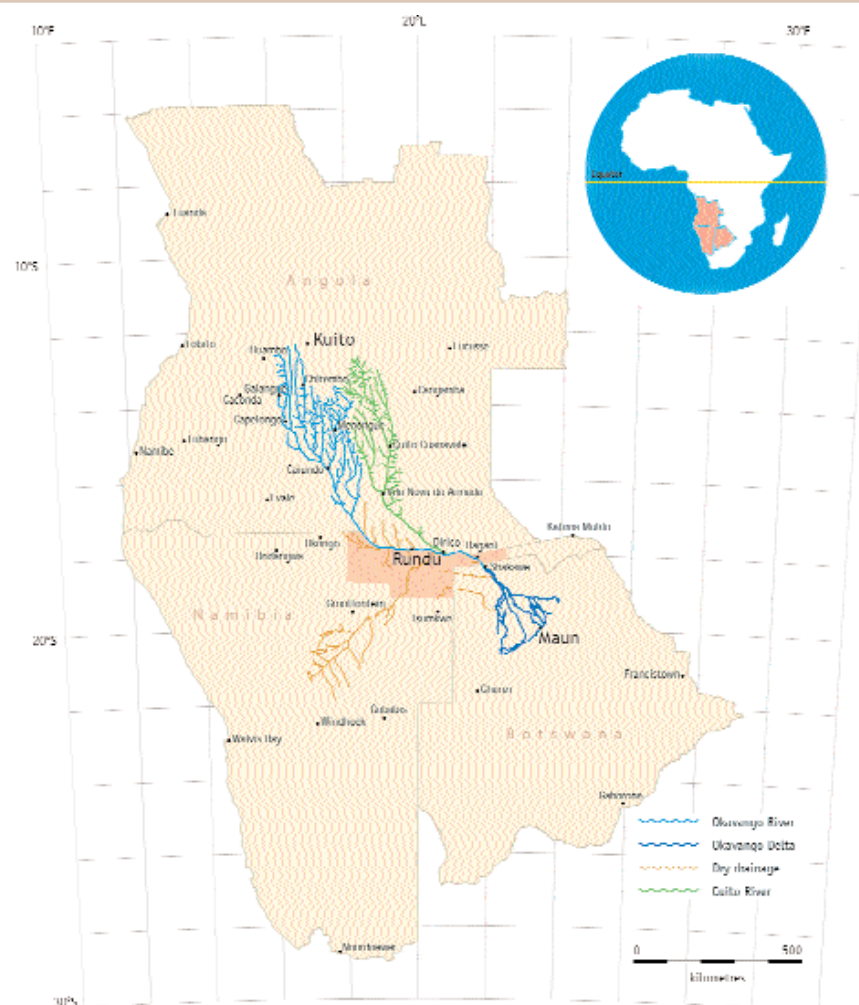
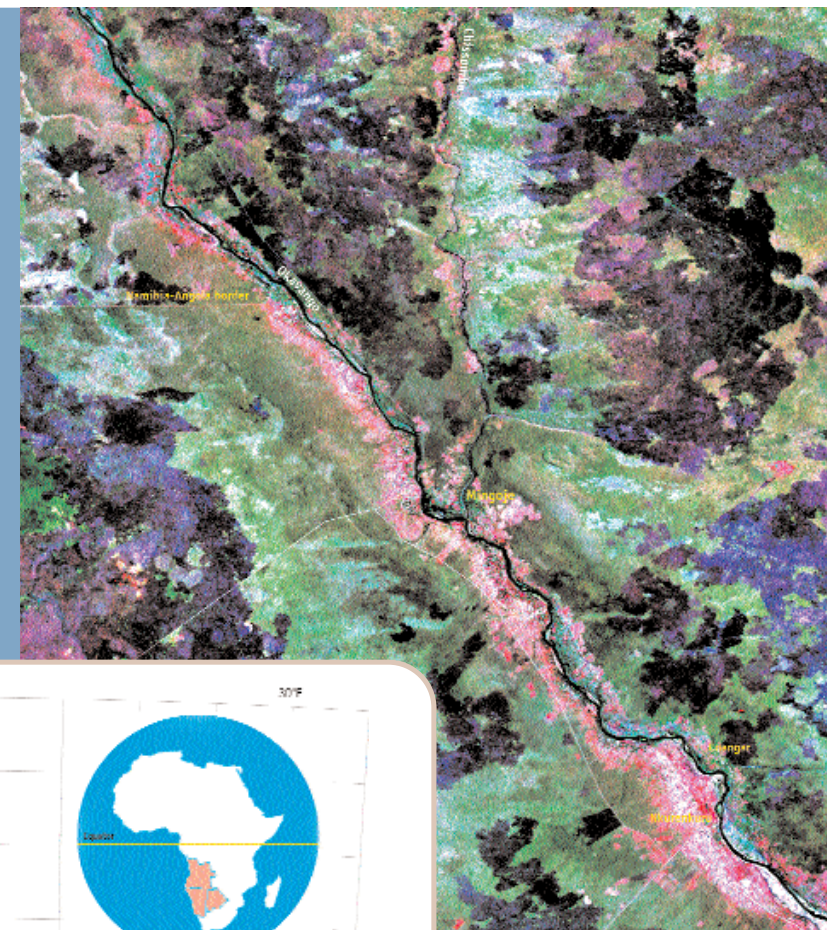
major waterways: the Cubango and the Cuito River both of which have extensive networks of tributaries spread across their catchment areas. Rainfall in these areas is much higher than elsewhere in the Basin, and the relative abundance of surface water means that the Okavango's water has much less importance for Angola than elsewhere.

To the south and east of Kavango and downstream are Botswana and the famous Okavango Delta into which the river feeds. The countryside around the Delta is arid because it receives little rain, and the river system really becomes more and more of an oasis the further downstream it flows. Large numbers of tourists, paying handsome fees to stay in lodges and other resorts, are attracted to the Delta, and the area has also been the subject of many films and books portraying its spectacular wildlife and scenery. All of this has given the Delta considerable international fame and enormous value for Botswana. The importance of Okavango water to Botswana is now so great that almost any plan that Namibia or Angola might have to use and diminish the supply of water is contested and controversial. Not surprisingly,

Botswana has much greater concerns about the strategic planning and management of the Okavango Basin than Angola or Namibia.

The region of Kavango therefore sits firmly between the major supplier (Angola) and major user (Botswana) of Okavango water. Water is certainly used in Angola and Namibia for subsistence farming and domestic uses, and to supply the needs of a few small towns and irrigation projects, but the political and economic influence of all these local users is very much weaker than that of various external groups. These include the Botswana government (for its interest in tax revenues earned for the country as a whole), the Namibian government (because of the potential to use Okavango water for irrigation projects, hydroelectric power and to supplement Windhoek's water supply), and external shareholders (for the profits they earn). As demands for water increase in southern Africa and more people begin to recognize the economic value of tourism to beautiful places, making the best use of water in the Okavango Basin is obviously a difficult, but extremely important challenge.

Perhaps the most striking aspect to the Okavango River valley is the massive difference in numbers of people living on the northern Angolan bank compared to the southern Namibian side. The band of cleared fields (coloured pink in this satellite image) is broad on the Namibian side because so many people live there, whereas the small number of people in Angola have cleared only scattered fields. The number of people living across the river in Angola is not known, but judging from the areas cleared for farming it might amount to 10% of the population along the bank in Namibia. Since about 155,000 people live within 10 kilometres of the river in Namibia, perhaps 15,000 people live on the Angolan side.



**FIGURE 3-** The origins of the Okavango River drainage in Angola, its passage through Namibia and its ending in the Okavango Swamps or Delta in Botswana. The river forms the border between Namibia and Angola along a river frontage about 415 kilometres in length.

