

Spotlight on Agriculture

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Developing a tailor-made Rangeland Management Plan for sustainable livestock production

The management of rangeland has always been acknowledged as a very important precondition for a sustainable livestock production system. It is however, for various reasons, not so easily implemented in the southern communal areas of Namibia. Since 2001, the MAWRD and SARDEP have concentrated their efforts specifically on identifying the specific constraints hampering the implementation of community oriented rangeland management plans in these areas and addressing these constraints in order to find a workable solution. Certain pilot areas were identified in the Karas Region by the FSRE team, specifically those communities who expressed their commitment to participate in such a project.

MAIN CONSTRAINTS IDENTIFIED

- Lack of ownership.*
Farmers do not own the land and therefore do not commit easily to the conditions of a land management plan.
- Lack of a proper land use policy.*
No laws exist (at this moment, although the new Land Bill is on the verge of being implemented) to hold people to a responsible land management plan.
- Lack of resources that are necessary to implement a rangeland management program.*
Many communal farmers have a long history of a lack of financial resources. Especially during the frequent droughts, such rangeland management plans are not a priority for them.
- Lack of appropriate knowledge or skills.*
Communities do not have knowledge on rangeland management and the available knowledge is often based on commercial farming systems and is therefore not suitable for the realities of the communal setup.
- Lack of motivation and commitment.*
Farmers do not foresee the positive results coming from rangeland management for sustainable livestock production and it is therefore difficult to motivate and get them committed to such plans.

PLANNING TOWARDS A WORKABLE SOLUTION

The FSRE approach for planning towards a workable solution includes three important steps:

1. Assessing the current rangeland management situation in specific communities and acknowledge and accept that certain identified constraints (such as frequent droughts and a lack of ownership of land) cannot be changed (or will not be changed soon) in the communal setup.
2. Filling knowledge or skills gaps through proper training and adapting existing rangeland management knowledge or skills to the communal situation.
3. Assisting the community to work out a rangeland management plan that contributes to satisfying their needs and to which they will be committed.



The utilization of shrubs is discussed during a practical veld training session at "Kameelrivier".

Methods used

1. Assessing the current rangeland management situation:
 The community is asked to draw a current resource map with specific references to rangeland condition (described as "good" or "bad"), water points, borders and fences, animal breeds and numbers and any current rangeland management practices. In addition, a practical evaluation of the current rangeland condition is done together by the FSRE team and the farmers, as the farmers still lack the knowledge and skills to do it on their own.
2. Filling knowledge and skills gaps:
 Firstly an assessment is done (through using different PRA methods such as the wheel of capacity) to evaluate the existing rangeland management knowledge or skills within the specific community. Target specific training is then given which includes theoretical as well as practical sessions. The theoretical sessions focus on a wide range of topics including anything from the growing cycle of grasses and how that can be used to manage rangeland effectively, to the role of different veld animals in the ecosystem. However, all information and training concentrate on adapting existing knowledge/skills to the communal situation. In the practical training, farmers are mastering different skills and methods to determine veld condition, for example the Fourie-score sheet. They are also shown practical ways to identify signs of overgrazing, which also includes erosion and how to revert the existing erosion, poisonous plants, etc.
3. Assisting the community in finding a workable, long-term rangeland management plan for sustainable livestock production:
 Different rangeland management options are proposed and discussed. The community evaluates the plans through using aids like the SWOT analyses. Specific attention is given to assure that the plan will be implementable.



The type and value of grass species are discussed.



The farmers and FSRE team are filling in a Fourie score sheet for the evaluation of the rangeland condition.



The grazing capacity is determined by cutting several square meters (1 m²) along a transect.

The way forward

Rangeland management will remain a high priority for the Karas FSRE team. Continued assistance will be given to communities already in the process of implementing a rangeland management program, while more communities will be included in the future.

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