

# THE SARDEP APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

The basic thrust of the SARDEP approach aims at closing the gap between farmers and support organisations by promoting the creation of a policy framework conducive to sustainable development, supporting community based organisations in finding solutions to their problems and encouraging support organisations in orienting their services towards the needs of communal farmers.

## INTRODUCTION

Namibia faces the challenge of untangling the interwoven legal past of its colonial and apartheid systems. Sixty years of often conflicting and poorly designed legislation has left the current legal framework governing natural resource use and access in Namibia confused. However, natural resource management is an explicitly recognised policy issue although policies are not always guided by considerations of sustainable resource management alone. There are political forces, conflicting interests and ethnic conflicts at work which may lead to unsustainable compromises. Article 95 of the Namibian Constitution provides for securing the welfare of the people with the adoption of policies which will conserve and maintain eco-systems and essential ecological processes and ensure the utilisation of the natural resources on a sustainable basis.

Livestock keeping is the principal activity and source of livelihood for the majority of the people in SARDEP's southern, eastern and western programme areas.

It is obvious that conventional range and livestock managers are currently ill-equipped to face the new challenges resulting from the rapid change in the pastoral economies of Namibia which manifest themselves in increased pressure on the natural resources caused by high population growth, over-utilisation of the natural resources, drought, ecological degradation, growing socio-economic disparities and increased disintegration of existing traditional structures and cultural values.<sup>5</sup>

Achieving sustainable natural resource management is no longer simply a technical matter.<sup>9</sup>

## POLICY INITIATIVES AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AT NATIONAL LEVEL

SARDEP endeavours to create conducive conditions in which such a process can flourish. On the national level SARDEP supports structural and policy changes that allow more broadly based participation by the rural populations. This includes government recognition of community based organisations and their empowerment and a realistic assessment of the

varieties of government reforms necessary for such a role change. Consequently, SARDEP has not only concentrated on communal development efforts but was instrumental in the formulation of policy guidelines for sustainable natural resource management.<sup>10</sup> Through membership on various ministerial task forces and steering committees, SARDEP was able to influence policy initiatives on related policy issues such as the National Agricultural Policy, the Drought Policy of Namibia, the Communal Land Policy, the National Policy on Combating Desertification and the National Policy on Rural Development.<sup>11</sup> SARDEP participated in the elaboration of the national research and extension strategies and in the agricultural sector reform programme.

On institutional change, SARDEP supports the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in attempts to shift from top-down coercion to third-party facilitation.<sup>1</sup>

## EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Communal development cannot grow in the absence of genuine local community structures recognised and empowered by the Government. On communal level, SARDEP relies on matching the needs of the communal livestock holders with the organisational competence for decision-making and implementation at the community level and the building of local capacity to diagnose and solve problems through community based organisations that are able to sustain activities.

Participating communities in the pilot areas of Gibeon, Blouwes and Gainachas in the south, of Okakarara, Okamatapati and Epukiro in the east, of Okongo, Tsandi and Uuvuudhiya in the north and of Grootberg, Omajette and Okombahe in the west of the country have established various types of community committees in the pilot and test areas. The committees which include men and women, owners of large and small number of livestock, and people without livestock, are well recognised in the community and are led by a chair person, a secretary and a treasurer. As most members within the pilot areas were unfamiliar with the concept of joint communal action, SARDEP spent considerable time and resources during the initial three years on awareness creation for sustainable natural resource management, on role clarification, on human capacity building through the provision of training on issues of community development, leadership skills, organisational management and self-help promotion. In addition, SARDEP supports exchange visits between distant pilot areas to expose committee members to experiences made in other pilot areas and to foster mutual learning and group cohesiveness.<sup>18</sup>

These efforts culminated in two major key events. In March 1995 SARDEP organised a national strategy workshop which

elaborated the implementation strategy for the eastern and southern programme areas. Prior to the workshop SARDEP contacted 45 agricultural service organisations ranging from government organisations, parastatals, private sector institutions and NGOs with a request to provide information on their services to the communal areas. The information gathering process was followed-up by individual visits to the organisations in which representatives were briefed on the objectives of SARDEP and the purpose of the strategy workshop. The workshop brought for the first time community representatives from SARDEP's southern and eastern pilot areas and a wide range of service organisations together. The first part of the workshop concentrated mainly on a presentation of the services provided by different organisations and an intensive discussion between farmers and the service organisations on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the services provided. The second part of the workshop related to the elaboration of the SARDEP strategy which was based upon supporting community based organisations in identifying, prioritising and finding solutions to their problems, encouraging support organisations in reorienting their services to the needs of the communal farmers, strengthening the management capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development for development work in the communal areas, and promoting the creation of a policy framework conducive to sustainable development.<sup>19</sup>

In October 1996 SARDEP organised the second major event in form of a national farmers conference where community representatives from all pilot areas of SARDEP had the opportunity for the first time to meet each other - some had never met their fellow farmers from different ethnic groups before - to discuss their experiences with SARDEP and to develop a joint vision for future action based on self initiative and self-help. They also had again the opportunity to present their vision to representatives of the Government, the private sector and the NGOs, and to advise them on how to work more effectively by adopting services provided to local demands.<sup>20</sup>

At several occasions SARDEP has been asked whether the programme aims at helping the communal farmer to become a commercial livestock producer. The answer to this question is that SARDEP facilitates a process during which the farming community will gain the experience to realise their own objectives and development aspirations. These objectives and aspirations have been elaborated at several target group workshops using the technique of participatory rural appraisal. The aspirations as formulated by the farming communities 'simply' states that the communal farmer wants for tomorrow's survival good grazing, good animals and secure land tenure to feed his family.

Sustained development cannot be engineered without the involvement of the resource users, but requires participatory strategies, a change from an "input-driven" approach to process orientation and negotiation where the farming communities themselves take ownership over the evolved project proposals.

SARDEP does not intend to operate a rural credit programme but tries to qualify the farming communities for access to the formal agricultural credit institutions by providing opportunities to gain first hand experience in developing project proposal, in managing project implementation and in handling credit. Initially, SARDEP was confronted by the community committees with project proposals far beyond

the financial resources available within the communities. After lengthy negotiations, participating communities within all pilot areas have developed small projects which benefit the larger part of the community, fit the managerial capabilities and are in line with local financial resources. They cover the rehabilitation and expansion of small water installation, the construction of small earth dams and the fencing of water installations, the growing of fodder, the construction of small cooling facilities for vaccine storage, the supply of veterinary drugs to farmers, the establishment of livestock handling and marketing facilities, the purchase of improved breeding stock, the establishment of simple structures for community meetings, the development of waste dumping sites and the development of alternative income generating activities such as gardening, brick making, and sewing.

## **CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN FARMERS AND SERVICE ORGANISATIONS**

SARDEP facilitates the closing of the gap between communal farmers and service delivery institutions.

To facilitate this approach, SARDEP acts mainly as an 'in-house consultant' promoting a change process and an adaptive management style based on participation and flexible, open-ended planning procedures. To prepare the SARDEP implementation team which consists of the national co-ordinator, four regional co-ordinators and 12 local facilitators placed in the pilot areas, considerable efforts were again directed on capacity building and institutional strengthening of the SARDEP structure. The selection criteria used for the recruitment of the local facilitators were based on the potential and experience for work with communities rather than on technical expertise in livestock production and range management. This has proven beneficial to the programme as the creation of a conducive environment on community level is an essential pre-requisite for the introduction of technical solutions.

## **CAPACITY BUILDING WITHIN THE SARDEP STRUCTURE**

SARDEP staff have resisted calls for 'blueprint' development planning and the delivery of technical packages. Instead they act as an 'institutional organiser, development catalyst, information broker, facilitator, negotiator and mediator'.

## **CONCLUSION**

Most implementation tasks are not being carried out by SARDEP but by governmental and/or private institutions and the communal farmers themselves. Since there are no quick technical solution available for sustainable natural resource management, SARDEP aims at long-term returns from human capacity building. Instead of solely focusing on livestock development and range improvement, SARDEP concentrates its limited resources at national level on policy reform and institutional change and on local level at strengthening rural communities as the prime movers for development by promoting an evolutionary process of communal empowerment and the mobilisation of self-initiative and self-help. This is again in sharp contrast to the all familiar conventional range and livestock development projects.

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