



FIRM

The Forum for Integrated
Resource Management



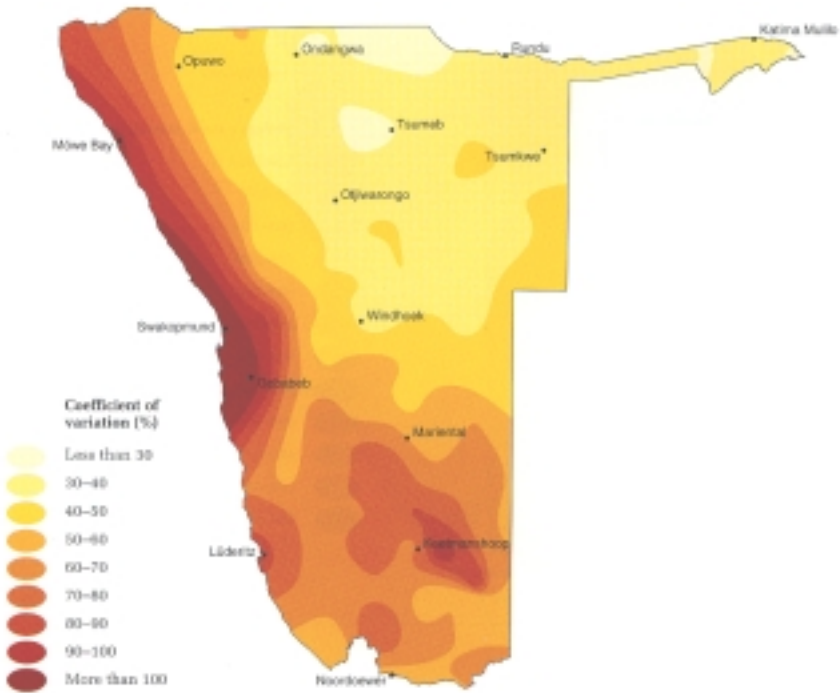
PUTTING COMMUNITIES
AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR
OWN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS



Putting communities at the centre of their own development process is a cliché commonly used amongst the development fraternity. Multi-sectoral and/or inter-sectoral support to community-based organisations (CBOs) is another customary dictum of service delivery organisations. Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod) has gained considerable experience in developing and testing a model for integrated resource management at local level. This model, the Forum for Integrated Resource Management (FIRM), has been developed and being implemented since 1996 in the #Khoadi //Hoas Conservancy in north-western Namibia (Kruger, Gaseb, Klintenber, Seely & Werner, 2003).

This booklet shares experiences gained by Napcod in the establishment and operation of FIRM in the Grootberg area. It comprises six (6) main sections starting with a general background overview on Namibia and its variable environment, followed by a description of Napcod. *Section 3* focuses on establishment of FIRM in the Grootberg area, followed by section 4 on achievements and challenges of FIRM, as perceived by the community and major service providers. The fifth section of the booklet describes the process of how the FIRM approach can be introduced in a new community. The final section of this booklet emphasises major challenges this approach is likely to face in future. This booklet does not try to prescribe to the reader how to establish a FIRM, but rather tries to share the Napcod experience at Grootberg and how interested parties spearheading similar initiatives somewhere else, might use this experience.

2 Background

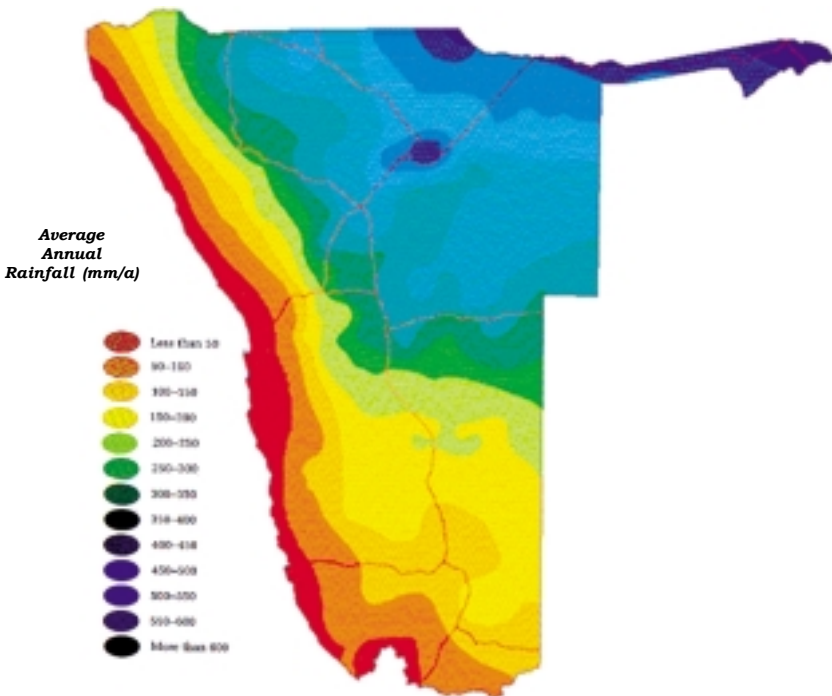


Namibia is an arid country with low and variable rainfall combined with a high percentage of sandy soils, resulting in naturally low agricultural productivity. This situation creates the impression that drought is a permanent phenomenon in the country leading to a general confusion amongst farmers and natural resource users about the difference between aridity and drought. Coping with aridity is a way of life for almost 80% of the population largely dependent on this very vulnerable natural resource base (Schachtschneider, Bethune, Jensen & Seely, 2002). Even though Namibia is amongst the least populated countries in the world, with a density of 1.7 people per km², its population is growing rapidly. The total population in Namibia was less than 800 000 in 1970 and has increased to more than 1,8 million in 2001 (NPC, 2002). At the current growth rate of 3.1% a year, the population is expected to double in the next twenty years. In more densely populated areas and in marginal drylands adjacent to the Namib and Kalahari deserts, natural resources on which so many depend for their livelihoods are already under pressure. Prior to independence natural resources were managed by separate government entities, without appropriate coordination between them and no clear cooperation with non-government organizations (NGO's) and local communities.

Cooperation between government agencies, local communities and NGOs improved as many sectors adopted the more participatory approach of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) focused on wildlife and tourism. The farming community at Grootberg has taken this a step further, where the Forum for Integrated Resource Management, FIRM, aims at Community Driven Natural Resource Management. FIRM also strives to better coordinate the services and assistance required by the community, be they from government extension officers, the private sector or NGOs (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).

2.1 Environmental and socio-economic overview

Namibia is one of the most arid countries south of the Sahel, covering an area slightly larger than 800,000km².



Rainfall increases from the coast, where less than 20 mm of rain falls a year, to the north-east, which can receive over 500 mm of rain a year.

This spatial variation in climate means that the ways people can make a living also vary greatly throughout Namibia's landscape. These basic characteristics of the Namibian climate have wide ranging implications for natural resource availability and resulting land use and management (*Ibid*).

Seventy per cent of Namibia's population is involved in subsistence agriculture. Livestock husbandry by means of free range grazing is the major productive agricultural land use. Rainfall variation, in both time and space, forces farmers to be flexible in their land management systems. Flexible practices include movement of livestock to alternative or emergency grazing areas, de-stocking in drought years and re-stocking after good rainy seasons. For many Namibians, opportunities to successfully practice flexible land management are limited by financial and social constraints. Given the vulnerability of a livelihood so dependent on such a variable natural resource base, many farmers resort to income diversification through measures such as migrant labour, where family members move to towns to earn wages to send home, and more recently through tourism, craft sales and leasing of hunting rights especially in the more scenic, arid parts of Namibia. In some households, old age pensions are often the only cash income on which entire families depend (*Ibid*).

Manifestations of land degradation include deforestation (northern areas), deterioration of rangelands (throughout), widespread soil erosion, bush encroachment (central areas) and localised soil salinisation (Quan *et al.*, 1994; Wolters 1994).

2.2 Post independence legislative framework.

Since Independence, several natural resource -related policies have been revised and as a result now either directly or indirectly provide support for more integrated land and water management for sustainable development. These include, *inter alia*, Article 95 of the Constitution, the Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act (1995), the National Agricultural Policy (1995), the Community Based Natural Resource Management Policy and Regulations (1997), The National Drought Policy and Strategy (1997), National Land Policy (1998), the Swapo Manifesto (2000), the Communal Land Reform Act (2002), the Water Policy (2000) and the draft Water Resources Management Act (2001).

The Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act (1995) takes into consideration varying rainfall and quality of farmlands throughout Namibia. Indeed, the pattern of commercial farmland acquisition by the government tends to confirm this. The act takes neither the next step of addressing farm management to cope with aridity and climatic variability nor the growing phenomenon of absentee farm management, a common response as farmers are unable to make a living solely from farming. Often, the male head of household takes on a salaried job in a distant urban area, yet maintains decision-making powers over the distant farm, leading to poor overall management and land degradation (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).

The National Agricultural Policy (1995) goes a long way toward supporting sustainable development in Namibia, and should the various components of this policy be implemented, agricultural development would be enhanced. Similarly, the National Drought Policy & Strategy (1997) specifically addresses the arid and variable climate of Namibia. The policy points out that “disaster droughts” requiring external intervention are infrequent in Namibia, yet dry periods are common occurrences that make sound planning and preparation essential to ensure the flexible, adaptable, integrated and rapid response vital to good land management (*Ibid*).

Environmentally sustainable land use is incorporated in the National Land Policy (1998) in both urban and rural contexts, yet, some sections, such as the one on land enclosure, ignore environmental considerations and focus on spatial planning and consultation with users. Although this policy document confirms the trend of paying attention to sustainable development in policy development, this has yet to be backed by appropriate legislation, regulations, strategies, training, and capacity building (*Ibid*) necessary for realizing sustainable development objectives.

Similarly, the draft National Resettlement Policy (2000) addresses resettlement that is ‘institutionally, socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and which will enable settlers to become self-supporting’, yet there are cases where resettlement has instead promoted inappropriate land use. For resettlement and redistribution to be successful, political and social goals must be amalgamated with the harsh environmental realities of an arid and variable climate. This amalgamation is difficult when decision-makers do not have sufficient information on the realities of farming in Namibia, nor give adequate recognition to the variability and vulnerability of the environment (*Ibid*).

The draft Water Resources Management Bill (2001) supports sustainable water resource development in Namibia and is based on the constitutional principle that all water belongs to the state. Riparian rights, i.e. exclusive rights for people living along a watercourse and the allocation of water rights with land rights are deliberately omitted from the policy document. However, the draft Act does promote community involvement and decentralization through the appointment and training of community-based Water Point Committees, responsible for local-level water resource management, and the establishment of Basin Management Committees to facilitate a more integrated approach to planning and natural resource management of each surface or groundwater basin. No resource protection is afforded as policy does not recognise an environmental water reserve for providing basic allocation to ecosystems (*Ibid*).

In summary, concepts of environmentally sustainable development, explicitly or implicitly including integrated land and water management, are found in many recent Namibian policies. However, as long as long-term sustainable development is seen in opposition to the immediate needs and development of the formerly disadvantaged population, the current legislative framework will unfortunately not ensure sustainable use of natural resources in practice. As yet, these approaches are not developed strongly enough to overcome constraints such as the capacity, interest and willingness to change by farmers and land use planners (*Ibid*).

2.3 *Integrated land and water resources management.*

The dawning of Independence provided an enabling environment for the revision of policies and adoption of concepts such as community based natural resource management. This further ushered in a generally more integrated approach to land and water resource management. It also coincided with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio Janeiro in 1992 and the development of Namibia's Green Plan (Brown, 1992), based on national needs, for presentation at Rio. This gave impetus to important national environmental programmes, such as Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod), a programme that strives to integrate activities of environmental, agricultural and water sectors, as well as those of communities and NGO's to better understand, monitor, control and prevent further degradation of vulnerable natural resources (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).

Many different natural resource management projects grew out of this enabling environment. The more successful ones follow a similar adaptive, flexible and participatory, community-centred philosophy like Napcod. This approach is well suited to the Namibian setting because realistic development goals are determined by the people directly dependent on these natural resources for their livelihoods. If people, who are familiar with the limitations of their environment, are supported and guided by the government and other relevant service organizations, they can, within the confines of long-term environmental sustainability, develop capacity to plan for and manage their land and water resources themselves. Active participation of all stakeholders, be they individual farmers, community organizations, government extension services or NGO's is a central feature of the more successful projects promoting sustainable land and water resource use. In the past, due consideration was often not given to the needs, experience and aspirations of rural communities (*Ibid*).

3 About Napcod

Namibia's Programme to Combat Desertification (Napcod), initiated in 1994, strives to incorporate a more adaptive, participatory, community centred approach whilst remaining scientifically reliable and without losing sight of the environmental and social vulnerability of farming in a country as arid as Namibia. The Forum for Integrated Resource Management (FIRM) was initiated to coordinate support from four independently-funded national projects in the Grootberg communal area. (Seely 1998).

The overall goal of Napcod is '*to combat the processes of desertification by promoting the sustainable and equitable use of natural resources suited to Namibia's variable environment for the benefit of all Namibians both present and future.*'

Napcod is a partnership between several government sectors, service organisations, non-governmental organisations, as well as community-based organisations and individuals. The implementing government ministries are the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development (MAWRD). External support for Napcod has been provided primarily as bilateral funding from the German Government. To date, Napcod has been implemented in three distinct phases.

Napcod Phase I, (1994), started with community mobilisation and culminated in a workshop, attended by 225 national and international stakeholders, ranging from government, NGO, private organizations, farmers unions and community representatives. The workshop designed an appropriate, dynamic, flexible, national programme, that would promote ongoing participation at all levels throughout the process. This national workshop was imbedded in a one-year planning and awareness-raising phase, during which relevant stakeholders were widely consulted on desertification in Namibia and the needs to be addressed in the programme were identified (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).

Phase II, extending from 1995 – 1999, focused on eight objectives identified at the national workshop in Phase I. This included a study entitled '*policy factors and desertification – analysis and proposals*' (Dewdney 1996), aimed at informing decision makers, such as politicians, senior and mid-level public servants, of the impact of policy instruments on desertification and made recommendations for reform. Several of these recommendations were taken into account in recent policy revisions. Napcod served as a secretariat for development of Namibia's *Drought Policy and Strategy*.

Aspects from the policy analysis and experience gained during implementation of Napcod were incorporated into the drought policy. As part of the capacity building efforts and the strengthening of existing structures and institutions, Napcod, together with other related projects, was involved in publication of resource materials and handbooks addressing Integrated Land and Water Resources Management in Namibia. These resource materials targeted decision makers and technicians in service organisations, teachers, students and scholars, contributing to general awareness and assisting service providers to better understand and explain to the communities they serve, the links among natural resources, climatic variability, relevant policies and sustainable use of these vulnerable resources, be they water or pastures (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).



Phase III, currently in progress (2003 -), is addressing national and local level monitoring and aims to strengthen capacities of service and community-based organisations to combat land degradation and desertification. On a local scale, Napcod is now mainly operating at pilot sites that were involved in the Sustainable Animal Range Development Programme (Sardep) of the MAWRD since the early 1990's. Sardep sought to bridge the gap between community-based organisations and service organisations in support of sustainable agriculture. Napcod continues to support this objective and build on successes of Sardep, to ensure continuity and ultimately, long-term sustainability (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).

4 FIRM in Grootberg

An already well-organised and active CBO, the Grootberg Farmers Association (GFA), represents the community and surrounding farmers on many environmental and developmental activities related to farming. The GFA voiced concern that although projects operated simultaneously in the area, they did so without any clear



cooperation and that by working together they could better interact with the GFA and support needs identified by the community. These projects were Napcod, Sustainable Animal and Range Development Programme (Sardep), the *Communal Area Water Supply* (Caws) project and the wildlife-oriented, community-based, natural resource management programme, *Living in a Finite Environment* (Life). These, together

with the GFA, 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 Rural Water Supply and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism as well as NGOs, such as WWF and the Namibian Nature Foundation (NNF). It was agreed to "pool projects and programmes that have a common philosophy and approach to focus on developmental issues in the Grootberg area with the GFA as the local structure" (Kruger, 2001) and at the first meeting in March 1996 FIRM came into being.

This founding meeting agreed that the overall goal of FIRM is to improve the welfare of rural Namibians by promoting sustainable management of renewable natural resources. Its purpose is to develop a replicable model of inter-sectoral co-operation by implementing integrated management practices in a manner that ensures that renewable natural resources produce sustainable and equitable flows of benefits to communal area resource user groups. All meetings are chaired by an elected community and GFA representative and the GFA decides when and where meetings are held (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).



In 1998, the Grootberg communal area, served by the GFA, became one of the first four communal areas to be declared a conservancy. The name chosen was the #Khoadi || Hôas, or “Elephants’ Corner”, conservancy (Jones 1999). #Khoadi || Hôas is a purely community based organisation, whose interests and boundaries closely overlap with the GFA operating area. Conservancies are formed under an amendment to the Nature Conservation Ordinance, that allows a geographically defined community to establish a governing body for management, conservation and utilisation of its wildlife and other natural resources on previously open-access, state-owned lands. It grants people rights to manage their own resources in keeping with the Constitution (Turner 1996). The rights and responsibilities of these conservancies are modelled on similar legislation for conservation of commercial (freehold tenure) farms. Conservancy management complements traditional farming, allowing income diversification, and provides a strategy for coping in dry periods (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002).

4.1 The area and its people.

The #Khoadi || Hôas Conservancy consists of some 362 000 hectares of semi-arid rangeland. Key biophysical characteristics of the area are its extreme aridity and high temporal and spatial variation in rainfall. Average annual rainfall varies between 240 and 300 mm and drought is a common occurrence. Water resources are mainly subsurface, although two ephemeral rivers, the Hoanib and the Huab, pass through the area. Aridity makes the area totally unsuitable for crop farming and even large-scale livestock farming is difficult. The area is home to a noteworthy wildlife population, including an estimated 200 elephants. Available natural resources, including water points are shared among people, livestock and wildlife populations (Jones, 1999).



The conservancy area previously consisted of farms held by European farmers under freehold tenure; these were bought by the South African government and redistributed as part of the Damaraland Native Reserve under recommendation of the 1963-4 Odendaal Commission (Kamwi 1997). Since then it has been state-owned land used primarily by Damara and Herero farmers for subsistence pastoralism. The conservancy is home to some 3 000 - 3 500 people many of whom were settled in this area under South Africa's apartheid administration. This population is scattered in small settlements of approximately 2-5 families clustered around water points of the previous freehold farms. Some fencing and many buildings, boreholes, windmills and farm dams from the freehold farms are still standing.

The two largest population centres are the semi-urban settlements of Anker and Erwee, each with several hundred semi-permanent residents. Each settlement has a clinic, a primary school with hostel and several small shops. One major gravel road circles the area, linking a few of the settlements with the larger towns of Kamanjab and Khorixas, while most farms are linked by irregularly maintained tracks. Water is supplied through numerous boreholes and should the water quality decline to an unacceptable level or the source dry out, a new borehole is drilled by government (Schachtschneider *et al.*, 2002). The main economic activity in the area is subsistence livestock farming, supplemented with a variety of alternative income sources, including small businesses, old-age pensions, selling of garden or wild food products, and part-time or casual labour in such tasks as building houses or repairing cars. Remittances from wage-earning family members in larger towns are also a source of income. Very few people keep savings accounts, and only minimal amounts of cash are kept at hand for basic purchases.

Livestock are sold only when cash is needed, usually for weddings, funerals, school and hostel fees and medical care. Nonetheless, if livestock are accepted as a financial resource, many conservancy residents could be considered quite wealthy. Wealth is mainly stored in goats around Grootberg (with relatively few cattle and sheep), and a given household may own

several hundred goats. This kind of wealth is nonetheless extremely unevenly distributed (Ibid).



Interviews and community meetings indicate that human capital is a relatively small but growing resource in the area. Young people especially have the initiative and could provide the labour to address issues of environmental management and economic development. However, access to information, through both formal education and other methods, is currently a constraint. Although a strong oral tradition exists through which most young people learn livestock and farm management, access to other locally relevant information is generally limited.

Many farmers complained of having no access to information on rights, laws and policies, particularly on the national level. Policies which have the potential to significantly affect farmers' lives directly, such as the National Drought Policy, National Land Policy, and Traditional Authorities Act, are generally unheard of. In many cases, even traditional authorities, Conservancy and GFA committee members are unaware of frameworks within which they operate. More importantly, they have no ready means of accessing information to further their understanding. Disputes over user rights and access often occur that are beyond these leaders' legal knowledge, and disputes can remain unsettled indefinitely. This need for information access by the community is one of the main issues to be jointly addressed through FIRM (Ibid).

Natural capital, while scarce by most standards, is the most basic and necessary set of resources for these communal farmers. Most of their activities are directly dependent on the natural resource base, making them

particularly susceptible to natural shocks, such as drought. Key resources include westward flowing ephemeral rivers, underground aquifers, areas of higher quality soils and better grazing, uncultivated foods and medicines, and a relatively plentiful wood supply. It is important to remember that these are among the most arid and marginal farms in an already arid country, subject to variable rainfall. The area is extremely susceptible to drought and has an inherently low biological productivity (*Ibid*).

The predominant issue related to natural resources use, however, does not seem to be availability but rather access. Especially for poorer community members, rules and laws concerning resource access and use are unclear. In many of the smaller and more physically marginal communities (those separated from larger towns by greater distances, poorer roads, and a lack of transportation), wealthier families have taken over a "patron" role, controlling land and water resource access on some farms. In these cases, confusion over tenure status and related resource rights has allowed one or a few people to take *de facto* control over large tracts of productive land, including exclusive rights to water points and grazing (*Ibid*).

Any large shocks, including drought, outbreak of diseases among livestock, large-scale cattle theft or the death of a pension- or wage-earning adult, can be extremely damaging to families who keep only a minimal financial safety margin. Strong informal social networks serve a number of purposes, and both kin- and non-kin-based relationships of reciprocity serve as safety nets for subsistence farmers in face of these threats.

Farmers overcome natural disasters and socio-economic threats through networks of strong social contracts that exist for:

- ⇒ provision of funds for funerals,
- ⇒ grazing of livestock,
- ⇒ lending of stock (for breeding) and money
- ⇒ holding and informing neighbours of lost cattle
- ⇒ urban and rural remittances of money and food,
- ⇒ transportation, securing salaried jobs
- ⇒ child care and adoption.

Indeed, informal social networks seem to be one of the main assets these communal farmers have at their disposal and can be used not only as a last resort in emergency situations but also to build up other kinds of assets (*Ibid*).

4.2 FIRM initiatives.

In order to operate efficiently, the GFA, now called the Grootberg Farmers' Union, and the conservancy committee serve as the community mouthpiece to address identified needs at FIRM meetings, where the stakeholders are approached to help with tasks relevant to the nature and function of their project or service organization. Where finance is needed, those involved in projects serving as executing donors to the community, critically assess the actual need of investment and provide joint financing. The community contributes to each investment in kind, for example through free labour and fundraising. This cooperation has made it possible to organise visits to other communities to share experiences in natural resource management (Schachtschneider *et al.*,2002).

Training programmes within FIRM address livestock issues, such as improved goat production (Sardep), integrating wildlife and tourism into community livelihoods (Conservancy, NNF, WWF), improved water supply management and more efficient information exchange as well as networking. Sardep and other partners have assisted with training courses in livestock and range management and facilitated sharing of experiences among farmers through farmer exchange visits. Attention has been given to increasing available fodder through supplements or enhancing local fodder production, reducing fodder in-take during droughts through improved animal health and introduction of breeds well-adapted to local conditions.

Furthermore the development of livestock movement strategies such as rotational grazing, adaptive marketing of animals and improved marketing opportunities and incentives, diversified and improved on-farm production and the development of supplementary and alternative off-farm enterprises is addressed (*Ibid*).

All conservancies require an adaptive management plan, to ensure long-term sustainable and integrated resource use within the area. Before a management plan is accepted by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, base maps showing boundaries, roads, infrastructure, rivers, boreholes, vegetation, geology, habitats and land use zones and resource inventories of the area are needed together with Strategic Management and Land Use Plans, procedures, regulations and details of institutional structures to implement the overall plan. To meet this demand, baseline surveys of wildlife, vegetation, livestock, rangeland condition and livelihoods have been undertaken by community members together with partners such as WWF, MET, Napcod, Sardep, veterinary and agricultural extension services, whilst

All stakeholders and partners in development, sit on one platform on request of one focal community, addressing the variety of issues raised by that one focal community.

FIRM puts communities in the lead of their own development.



more technical tasks such as mapping were done by relevant projects. To ensure flexibility and adaptability of the management plan, monitoring systems for all pertinent information need to be established. Appropriate training is provided for environmental shepherds to monitor wildlife, livestock and rangeland conditions as well as other environmental parameters considered relevant for effective management of natural resources within the area. While environmental shepherds are required to record data in a simple, yet scientific format, their knowledge of the area, social structures and typical environmental conditions are valuable contributions to monitoring of events within the conservancy. These daily monitoring results are compiled monthly by a supervisor within the conservancy committee and used by the chairman in the annual report. Results will thus feed directly into future revisions of the conservancy management plans (*Ibid*).

Through FIRM, the community is able to request and receive support to develop their conservancy management plan, and community members are trained to ultimately take over and manage the plan on their own. FIRM can also assist extension staff from service organizations active in the area, by making available resource materials developed by Napcod and other projects to provide information on natural resources and their sustainable use, relevant to farming communities (*Ibid*).



Transition to complete self-reliance is slow and mainly determined by the rate of change with which the community is comfortable. This requires considerable patience and flexibility from all other stakeholders, particularly

projects bound by a certain timeframe and rigid spending patterns. These stakeholders have come to realise and accept that the pace of progress does not reflect on donor or government performance, but is determined by the community. There are time limits that the community is aware of, since Napcod, Sardep and LIFE do not have indefinite lifespans. However, the community and service organizations responsible to them should, in the time remaining, acquire skills to manage their resources sustainably and through networking attract new partners, where needed (*Ibid*).

The enthusiasm of the community, the wealth of organisations and projects involved in the area and their commitment to the philosophy of FIRM has made the Grootberg area an ideal testing ground for integrated resource management and what may be called the FIRM approach. Although it has taken time, and there is some way to go yet, FIRM has proved successful at Grootberg bringing together the farmers, the conservancy, the donors, government service providers, NGOs and a variety of projects working in the area to combine forces in implementing the development vision of the community. The ultimate goal is to successfully apply the FIRM approach in other areas, within and outside conservancies (*Ibid*).

4.3 Achievements and Challenges.

The major achievements of the FIRM approach to date include:

4.3.1 Greater sense of ownership over development agendas.

This is perhaps the most important achievement of the FIRM approach. Communities are very often seen as the object of development and intervention by outside service providers, instead of the mechanism through which development is initiated and supported. Although the term "community-based" development is frequently used by most outside intervention agents, the true essence of it is largely misconstrued. Even when development is *based* in the

community and communities very often participate in development and implementation of interventions (the so-called "bottom-up" approach), the success of such interventions is normally not shared by communities. As soon as successes are diminished and



failures start to surface, very often these community-based interventions become failures of the intervention agents that initially introduced them. If the community forms the basis of the development process and agrees to "drive" the process based on their own goals and objectives, the process becomes *community-driven* and has a higher chance of succeeding. Service providers then become catalysts and the community takes the lead in their own development process. Successes and failures are owned by the community and the desire to convert failures into successes is that of the community and not of the development agent.

4.3.2 *Clearer vision of future plans and their implementation*

It is very difficult to implement someone else's plans. Very often communities are expected to implement visions and plans conceived and devised externally by development agents and service providers. The FIRM approach focuses on strategic planning and goal development by the community and how service providers can contribute towards achieving it.

There is a general saying that goes: "*if you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there*". This is equally true for rural communities. Poor communities will always tend to be excited about any outside intervention, because they expect to benefit directly from it. This outside intervention, however, might not even feature in the top ten priorities of the community, but when asked whether it will address their real needs, they will always tend to agree. The FIRM approach makes provision for a strategic planning session where communities are guided through a process of determining their own vision and goals for the future. Based on these goals and objectives, the community is then guided through a process of developing plans that will enable them to achieve those goals and objectives. Through this process, communities take the lead in indicating how they want to implement their

plans and where they might need help from outside agents in pursuit of their goals and objectives. This places the community at the centre of their own development process and makes it very clear to them where they are heading and how they plan to achieve their goals.

Integrated Workplan: Grootberg Farmers Union (GFU)						
For the Year 2003						
<i>Objective 1 : Improved Livestock Production</i>						
Number	Activity	Responsible Partner	Supported by:	Resources		Total
				Own	Other	
1.1	Increase available fodder through supplements or local production	GFU	SARDEP MAWRD	N\$ 250000.00	N\$ 450000.00	N\$ 700000.00
1.2	Reduction of fodder intake during drought through improved breeds	GFU	SARDEP MAWRD	N\$ 50000.00	N\$ 40000.00	N\$ 900000.00
1.3	Rotational grazing, adaptive and improved marketing of livestock	GFU	SARDEP MAWRD	N\$ 250000.00	N\$ 450000.00	N\$ 700000.00
				N\$100000.00	N\$130000.00	N\$230000.00
<i>Objective 2 : Integration of Wildlife and Tourism into Community Livelihoods</i>						
2.1	Development of an adaptive management plan for conservant	GFU	WWF, MET, NAPCOD,	N\$10000.00	N\$50000.00	N\$60000.00
2.2	Baseline surveys of wildlife, livestock, vegetation & rangeland	NACOBTA, GFU	MET, WWF	N\$12000.00	N\$8000.00	N\$20000.00
2.3	Training of environmental shepherds for data collection & monitoring	GFU	LIFE, NAPCOD	N\$35000.00	N\$15000.00	N\$50000.00
				N\$57000.00	N\$73000.00	N\$13000.00
<i>Objective 3 : Complete Self-Reliance of Community Plus Networking With other Communities</i>						
3.1	Transfer of skills and knowledge to community to manage resources	NAPCOD, GFU	Veterinary Services, MET, RWS	N\$ 3450.00	N\$2000.00	N\$5450.00
3.2	Train community members to device, implement & oversee development plans and solicit help	NACOBTA, GFU, NAPCOD	MET, NNFU	N\$6150.00	N\$2150.00	N\$8300.00
3.3	Training of community members in financial and budgetary matters	SARDEP, GFU	NNFU, NACOBTA	N\$1550.00	N\$2500.00	N\$4050.00
3.4	Exchange visits to other FIRM communities, networking and information exchange	GFU, SARDEB	NAPCOD	N\$6150.00	N\$2150.00	N\$8300.00
				N\$17300.00	N\$8800.00	N\$26100.00
<i>Objective 4 : Improved Water Supply Management</i>						
4.1	Establish and train water point committees for each water point	GFU, DRWS	NAWRD, DRWS	N\$1550.00	N\$2500.00	N\$4050.00
4.2	Train community members in water resources evaluations & management	GFU, DRWS	NAWRD, DRWS	N\$1550.00	N\$2500.00	N\$4050.00
				N\$3100.00	N\$5000.00	N\$8100.00
GRANT TOTAL BUDGET FOR 2003						N\$277200.00

Example of an Integrated workplan as developed by Grootberg Farmers Union in 2003 within their FIRM.

4.3.3 Improved capacity to identify development priorities and solicit support.

Most communities have a clear vision of the developmental route they want to take and the means to realise their vision. The most serious obstacle they usually face is getting the necessary support to help them achieve their vision. Through FIRM, communities are supported to identify development constraints, to find possible solutions and to put plans in place that will enable them to address the constraints. One of the best indicators of capacity in any community is their ability to develop projects and then write and successfully negotiate project proposals aimed at assisting them to implement their development plans. Napcod spends a lot of time in training and backstopping communities to achieve this.



4.3.4 Mechanisms to monitor and assess the process and impact of development.

Often the planning process is blamed if very little progress in development is achieved. Since a plan entails the careful development of ideas and implementation strategies, there can be no such things as bad plans. It is usually poor implementation of a plan that results in limited or lack of success. The FIRM approach not only makes provision for development of integrated workplans, but also makes provision for regular integrated monitoring, evaluation and adjustment (M&E&A) of workplans. Communities hold regular quarterly M&E&A meetings and all relevant service providers are invited to participate. During these meetings progress with implementation of activities is assessed and adjustments to plans are made, if needed. This provides a very good opportunity for the community (and service providers) to track progress in implementation and it also exerts some pressure on all partners to deliver what

was promised in the planning process. It is important that FIRM makes provision for participatory planning, sectoral service provision based on an integrated workplan, and again participatory M&E&A.

4.3.5 Less duplication of service provision.

Resources (both human and financial) become scarcer by the day and everything possible should be done to avoid duplication of services and infrastructure. Many examples exist where services and products are provided without proper consultation with communities and other stakeholders. The FIRM approach makes provision for involvement of all relevant service providers to sit in one forum with community representatives and develop one integrated workplan based on identified needs and priorities of communities. Service providers can consult each other on the nature and extent of services and products to be provided, thus reducing chances of duplication.



4.3.6 Less conflicting services are provided according to agreed policies and procedures

Often service providers and donors approach communities and negotiate support based on their specific policies and procedures. Since policies and procedures of all donors and service providers are not the same, it can create a lot of confusion amongst community members. A good example is where some donors expect a certain percentage of cash or other types of contribution (labour, livestock or in kind) from the community for the delivering of certain infrastructure (e.g. pipelines) or services (e.g. water), whereas government institutions consider such basic services as part of their mandate and provide them free of charge.

This creates confusion, unhappiness and at times resentment in the community, even leading to the community playing service providers off against each other. The FIRM approach establishes common policies and procedures, based on common principles, for delivery of services and products by service providers.

Achievements

1. Involves various stakeholders with common interests.
2. Serves as a platform for sharing of information and knowledge.
3. Provides a platform for integrated planning, involving a variety of stakeholders.
4. Focuses on support where it is really needed.
5. Puts the community in the “drivers’ seat”.
6. Is conducive towards improving understanding and development of long-term visions.
7. Minimises duplication of activities.
8. Provides a holistic picture of challenges and opportunities within a community.
9. Allows opportunities for participatory monitoring, evaluation and adjustment of planned activities.
10. Improves transparency with respect to roles and responsibilities of different partners.
11. Ensures more efficient use of human and financial resources.

Challenges

1. Mainly driven by external service providers.
2. A lack of buy-in from a number of important partners in the field of natural resource management.
3. A gap between the GFA and its membership.
4. Still some one-sided competition among certain service providers.
5. Institutional and financial sustainability not clarified for when donors withdraw.
6. Irregular attendance of some partners.
7. A lack of continuity amongst representatives from different partners.

Box 1.
A summary of achievements and challenges based on perceptions of a variety of people directly or indirectly involved in Firm and interviewed during October 2002.

5 How to establish FIRM

In order to embark upon a process of establishing FIRM, the following few steps could be considered:

Step 1: Introduce the concept of FIRM to the community.

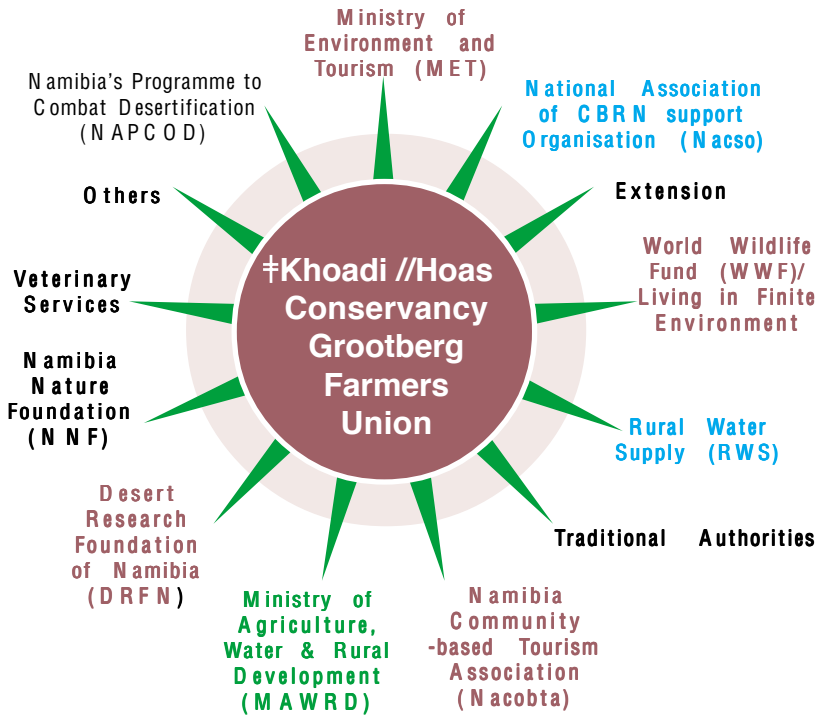
When interacting with a community based structure (e.g. Farmers Association Committee, Waterpoint Committee and/or Conservancy Committee) it is important to explain the need for integrated planning and the simultaneous involvement of several service providers in the process. Apart from explaining the advantages of an integrated forum at local level, it is very useful to invite a representative from an area where FIRM is operational and has achieved successes, as a resource person, to address the committee. Napcod made use of a representative from Grootberg (Gabriel Goagoseb) when the FIRM approach was introduced in the Oskop Conservancy. During this presentation the resource person should focus on the situation before FIRM and the changed situation after FIRM was introduced. Visualisation techniques to illustrate achievements and benefits should be used.

Step 2: Organise an exposure trip to an area where FIRM is already operational.

Farmer to farmer interaction is certainly one of the best ways of introducing new approaches and effect change in any community. Napcod was extremely successful in spreading the FIRM approach by exposing potential FIRM communities to the Grootberg FIRM. These exposure trips can easily develop into uncoordinated leisure tours with very little benefit to participants, if not well facilitated. Upon return from such a trip, it is extremely important to facilitate a feedback and "lessons learnt" session in order to identify best practice and to plan ahead.

Step 3: Establish FIRM.

A meeting between all stakeholders and the community committee should be called to establish FIRM. Such a founding meeting is extremely important in order to establish FIRM. During this meeting an analysis of the present organisational landscape is needed to identify current and potential service providers to the community. Other important issues like terms of reference of FIRM, membership and by-laws also need to be addressed during this meeting.



Step 4: Interactive planning.

An interactive planning workshop should be held over several days to produce a strategic plan for the community as well as an initial integrated workplan and budget. Major stakeholders and service providers identified during step 3 are invited to participate in such a workshop. Care should be taken to avoid outsiders from dominating the planning (strategic and operational) process and thus imposing their ideas and needs on the community.

Step 5: Regular M&E&A meetings

A plan is only as good as the implementation thereof. Regular M&E&A meetings where all partners are actively participating, is the single most important milestone for a successful FIRM. Too often very good plans and initiatives are ruined through a lack of commitment by those partners that committed themselves to the planning process. Participatory M&E&A meetings will “expose” those partners that are not able “to put their money where their mouths are”. This will lead to either “forcing” them to cooperate, or eliminate them from the process to make way for other more committed partners to step in.

6 Future challenges

An increasing number of communities is interested in applying the FIRM approach to organise their development agendas. This will undoubtedly increase the demand for service provision, and will challenge service providers to meet the needs of local communities. As the FIRM concept grows, other community-based organisations will need to adapt it to meet their own unique needs. FIRM improves interaction between community based organisations and service providers. However, the real challenge is to find mechanisms to improve interaction and communication between community-based organisations and their members.

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FIRM

THE FORUM FOR INTEGRATED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

*Putting communities at the centre of their own
development process*



May 2003

*A Case Study in the establishment of FIRM,
based on the Napcod experience*

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