

**D R A F T**

**Water and Ecosystem Resources in Regional Development:  
Balancing Societal Needs and Wants and Natural Resources Systems  
Sustainability in International River Basins**

**ACCESS TO RESOURCES:**

**LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS AND STRATEGIES**

**WP 4.1**

Wolfgang Werner

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## 1 Introduction

Kavango is one of thirteen administrative regions in Namibia. At present it comprises an area of 48,500 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to a population of 201,000 people or just over 30,000 households (RoN 2002: 14, 16). The length of the Okavango River in the Namibian section is about 415 kilometres (el Obeid and Mendelsohn: 5). The region is subdivided into five major language or tribal groupings. From east to west these are the Mbukushu; Gciriku or Rumanyo; the Shambyu; the Mbunza and the Kwangali.

The Okavango River has been central to the livelihoods of people in the region. This is reflected in the fact that the vast majority of the population continues to live along the Okavango River. In general, population densities along the river are higher than 40 people per km<sup>2</sup>, exceeding 100 people per km<sup>2</sup> in places (el Obeid and Mendelsohn 2001: 17). In the mid-1990s it was estimated that 90% of the region's population lived within 10 km of the Okavango River, and almost 80% within 5 km of Rundu (Tvedten et al 1994: 68). 78% of the total area in Kavango Region has population densities of less than 1 person per km<sup>2</sup> (el Obeid et al 2001: 17).

In the 1920s the population was described as 'small and scattered along the river frontage of about 200 miles'. Although the population did not have much livestock, there 'has been ample grazing and water for them'. With lots of water for the cultivation of their crops and plenty of fish in the river, the conclusion was 'that they are quite well off' (UG 23-'30: 60) and never 'had to struggle for an existence' as a result of 'having been provided by nature with a plentiful supply of water and wild fruits' (UG 16-'33: 59).

The situation for most people living in the Kavango Region has changed for the worse over the last 70 years. The Region is the third poorest region in Namibia, with an estimated per capita income of N\$ 1,763 in 1994. According to the UNDP's Human Poverty Index, about 27% of people in Kavango are poverty-stricken, and only neighbouring Ohangwena and Caprivi Region are more disadvantaged than the Kavango Region in terms of the UNDP's Human Development Index (UNDP 1998: 13; Behnke 1998: 7).<sup>1</sup> The UNDP commented that 'severely limited household **budget** is a significant aspect of poverty in Okavango...(UNDP 1998: 16, original emphasis).

These statistics are sobering in view of the fact that the Kavango Region receives good rainfall, has patches of good land for cultivation and access to abundant surface water from the Kavango River (Behnke 1998: 7).

Moreover, regional forage production routinely exceeds the feed requirements of the regional herd, and in comparison with other regions, Kavango residents

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<sup>1</sup> The Human Poverty Index is a measure of deprivation consisting of three elements: longevity, knowledge (literacy) and standard of living (access to safe water and health services, malnourishment of children). Apart from longevity and knowledge, the HDI tries to measure access to resources such as land, credit and capital and other productive resources (Ibid.: 10-11).

have the best access to grazing and fishing resources in the country (Behnke 1998: 7).

Significantly, however, Kavango has the most poorly developed water supply systems of all regions after Ohangwena and Omusati Regions, (UNDP 1998: 16).

Though better endowed with natural resources than most other regions in Namibia, Kavango was and continues to be 'erratically productive, in large measure because of irregular rainfall'. Small-scale crop farming therefore is risky. Kavango residents have responded to this by diversifying livelihoods strategies. Migrant labour, fishing and alternative food sources all contributed towards people's livelihoods (Behnke 1998: 8). Historical evidence suggests that agriculture did not necessarily play a prominent role in the livelihoods of all Kavango communities. At least one report in the early 1930s maintained that people grew 'mealies, kaffir-corn<sup>2</sup>, millet, beans, monkey-nuts, ground beans, pumpkins, melons, calabashes, cabbage and water melons *only to supplement* the supply of wild fruits, edible grasses, plants, roots and bulbs provided by nature' (UG 16-'33: 59, original emphasis). More specifically, the Mbukushu were described as

a type of bush people, and would rather live on wild fruits, insects, mice etc., than put themselves out to do an honest days work on the lands. They are poor in stock, being like the Hottentot who slaughters his only beast rather than be bothered with the herding and watering of it.<sup>3</sup>

This paper presents a literature survey on livelihood options and strategies in the Kavango Region of Namibia, with particular emphasis on

- land tenure and management systems;
- institutional arrangements and aspects;
- pressure/interest groups; and
- policy, both as officially stated and in its practical impacts.

It lies in the nature of a literature survey that it provides a general overview of information available on a particular topic. This implies that not all the relevant aspects of an issue are covered satisfactorily. Moreover, a survey of this nature is likely to raise new questions that need to be investigated either by more intensive literature searches and/or research in the field.

An attempt has been made to provide a brief historical overview of developments in Kavango from the 1920s on. This was based on archival sources in Windhoek. Due to time constraints, however, the wealth of information in the National Archives could not be adequately reviewed. Historical investigations are important in particular with regard to the evolution of tenure and land management systems, as they provide

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<sup>2</sup> 'Kaffir corn' was colonial parlance for sorghum.

<sup>3</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Half Yearly Report, 30.6.1932 p.7

insights not only into what has shaped the present situation, but also convey something about the dynamics of customary tenure regimes.

Archival sources have been augmented by published and unpublished sources. These consist mainly of articles and books but also reports and papers written for government ministries.

Without wanting to pre-empt any criticism of this paper, it must be stated at the outset that it was not possible to do justice to all available sources in this paper. Certain sections and in particular those dealing with agriculture would benefit from additional information. The primary focus here has been on land related topics.

The paper consist consists of two main sections. The first section deals with land tenure and land use and begins by situating Kavango Region within the Namibian context. This is followed by a sub-section on tenure and land use in Kavango specifically. Section 3 deals with policies related to land tenure and land use as well as the institutional environment in Kavango.

## **2 Land tenure and land use**

### **2.1 Land tenure**

Patterns of land tenure and land use in Namibia have been shaped by colonial policies. The process of colonial integration was highly uneven and effected different indigenous formations in different ways. The arrival of German colonial forces in 1884 was followed by a process of land dispossession in the central and southern parts of what is today known as Namibia. This process was largely limited to those communities, which practised extensive livestock farming in the arid and semi-arid parts of the country. Their nomadism implied that they did not have strong, centralised political and social structures, which facilitated relatively easy conquest.

This was different in the north-central and north-eastern regions, where local people practised mixed farming. These societies were characterised by relatively strong political structures, which German colonial forces were not eager to engage in wars of subjugation. As a result, Namibia was divided into two broad zones in the early 1900s: the Police Zone on the one hand and those areas that fell outside the Police Zone. Essentially, the Police Zone referred to those parts of the country in which the Germans were able to establish a police presence on account of the dispossession of indigenous communities. All those areas where indigenous communities practised mixed farming did not fall into the Police Zone. Kavango was one of those areas.

The particular form of colonial dispossession produced a dualistic agrarian and land tenure structure. In the Police Zone, settlers were able to obtain land under freehold title. In the remaining areas that were referred to variously as 'native reserves', 'bantustans', 'homelands' and more recently 'communal areas', no freehold title could be obtained. Access to land in these areas continues to be governed by customary tenure regimes, although these are increasingly coming under pressure as the discussion below will show.

#### **2.1.1 Forms of tenure in Namibia**

Four main categories of tenure can be found in Namibia:

- Land owned under freehold title;
- State land;
- Non-freehold land; and
- Municipal land

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, approximately 41% of the total land area of 824,268km<sup>2</sup> constitutes non-freehold land, while 44% are owned under freehold title. Approximately 15% are protected and/or desert areas (RoN 1991: 147).

Land in the freehold category is surveyed and registered in the Deeds Office. Approximately 6,200 farming units make up this category (Ibid.: 148). These are owned primarily by white individuals and/or companies. Just over 7% of this land has been transferred into black ownership since Independence.

The State owns a number of registered farms, which were used for experimental and other agricultural purposes. Through Namibia's redistributive land reform process the State is acquiring ever more freehold farms, which it subdivides and allocates to previously disadvantaged Namibians.

The State is also the legal owner of all communal land. Despite of its formal legal ownership by the State, tenure in non-freehold areas is governed by customary tenure regimes.

Finally, municipalities in the freehold areas own about 350,000ha of land as municipal lands. In most cases, these areas are rented out to the highest bidder for limited periods and are used for small-scale, part-time farming. Municipalities in non-freehold areas have only been proclaimed after Independence. Rundu has thus become a town in the early 1990s.

### **2.1.2 Non-freehold land: land tenure in Kavango**

Four broad categories of tenure can be distinguished in Kavango: land controlled by traditional leaders (approximately 74%), the state (17%), the Namibia Development Corporation (5%) and large-scale private farmers (5%) (el Obeid and Mendelsohn 2001: 26). To this must be added a number of tourist lodges which are run by private individuals/companies on land leased from traditional authorities.

#### **2.1.2.1 Customary tenure**

Historically, the administration of land in Kavango was done in accordance with customary rules. Although six different sub-tribes inhabited the region, the land tenure regime was fairly uniform across these. In recent years, customary tenure has come under pressure, resulting in the gradual enclosure and individualisation of communal pastures.

The first South African Native Commissioners observed in the first half of the previous century that land in Kavango was vested in the Chief, 'who may issue to members of the tribe allotments of land for agricultural and residential purposes'. They noted that there was no security of tenure, 'though the chief rarely exercises the right to dispose the tenant and in any case as long as the tenant is of reasonably good behaviour and complies with the instructions of the chief and is loyal to him, he is not interfered with.' Young men leaving their families and getting married apply for land and are never refused. People from outside were encouraged to settle, and immediately after having been allotted a parcel of land 'become naturalised'. No payment was demanded for allocations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> NAR 4 N1/15/9 System of land tenure on the Okavango, n.d.

Access to virgin land for residential and cultivation purposes could be obtained without reference to the chief, or making him any payment. A person 'may later, should he decide to move away, sell the particular piece of land which he has developed, for his own benefit'. Chiefs may order people to leave the land, 'but as long as the occupant is law-abiding and does not become too rich, an order of this nature is seldom issued' (UG 16-'33: 58; McGurk and Gibson 1981: 48).

The colonial administration acknowledged the rights of chiefs(ennesses) to allocate customary land. In 1932 the Administrator advised the Native Commissioner in Kuring Kuru that Chieftainess Kanuni of the Kwangali had the right to 'grant sites to any Mission without His Honour the Administrators consent'.<sup>5</sup>

The existing literature is not entirely clear on how much power chiefs had in terms of allocating land and how colonial policies impacted on traditional political structures. Chiefs derived their legitimacy from royal birth, and dealt with all matters arising in their territories, subject to tribal law (UG 16-'33: 58). However, they were said to have been weak. In the early 1930s the Officer in Charge of Native Affairs in Kavango expressed the opinion that the five chiefs in Kavango were incompetent to administer their areas.

They are all very poor, weak in tribal authority and influence, and have no idea or understanding of the position they are permitted to hold. They are not above accepting bribes, favouring relatives and particular friends concerned in disputes, and condoning evil customs.

As a result, he considered to withdraw all powers from them and have special courts hear complaints and disputes<sup>6</sup>.

Headmen did not seem to have existed. Tribal areas were reported to have been divided into smaller districts, without headmen or councillors. Instead, kraal heads were responsible for the maintenance of tribal law and order in their own kraals. They reported matters such as murder, stock theft etc. to the chief (UG 16-'33: 58)<sup>7</sup>.

'Kraals' consisted of the owner of the kraal with his family and members of other families. The latter helped him – the owner – with his cattle and lands and were in turn helped with their lands given by the owner. 'In addition, everyone in the kraal received their proportion of the milk meat (if any) veldkos etc.'<sup>8</sup> Often these families amounted to eighty or ninety souls in one kraal (UG 16-'33: 58).

The powers of 'kraal' heads over land seem to have been limited. McGurk (1981: 101) noted that among the Sambiu the control over land by the village chief was rather weak. Although he/she owned all the land, he/she received no payment for its use.

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<sup>5</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Administrator Windhoek to The Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru 28.7.1933

<sup>6</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Inspection Report: Okavango and Western Caprivi Zipfel Areas, 9.7.1932 p.16

<sup>7</sup> It is not entirely clear what the term 'kraal' meant. It must be assumed that this refers to villages in the contemporary sense.

<sup>8</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.1 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for S.W.A.: Report on a Tour of Inspection Kuring Kuru to Diriko 30.7.1927 p.9



Anyone is entitled to take as much land as can be cultivated and whatever unoccupied plot he wishes. In a dispute over land, however, the chief is always called upon to settle the matter (McGurk 1981: 101).

The lack of additional headmen was ascribed to the fact that chiefs were essentially 'weak in authority and influence', thus fearing that men appointed as headmen might become powerful enough by establishing large herds of livestock to usurp the chieftainship. 'It has always been their policy to withhold authority from their subjects and to prevent rich and influential natives from other tribes from settling in their territory.' (UG 16-'33: 58, 60; McGurk and Gibson 1981: 71).

Over the years, the colonial administration has strengthened the powers of hereditary chiefs and formalised the 'middle level administration' of headmen (Gibson 1981b: 196). The process started with the introduction in 1930 of a Native Commissioners' Court in Kavango (GN 177/1930)<sup>9</sup>. Increasingly the colonial administration bolstered the powers of Chiefs by supporting them in imposing fines on their subject who disobeyed tribal courts. When Chiefs complained in the early 1950s that some tribesmen did not attend tribal courts, the Native Commissioner replied that

Once a chief has ascertained that a tribesman has wilfully refused to attend Court the Chief may seize a beast or more than one beast to be held as security for attendance. In extreme cases the defaulter may be arrested and brought to court.<sup>10</sup>

At that time, land was said to have been allocated by the headmen under the control of the chief. At the same time, the Native Commissioner observed that 'lands have been cultivated or abandoned without reference to the local headman'.<sup>11</sup>

At Independence, all five Kavango communities were governed by chiefs or kings called *hompa* (Kwangalai, Mbunza, Sambyu and Gciriku) and *fumu* (Mbukiushu) Hinz 1995: 35). Differences between one tribal area and another occur in the substructure below Chiefs. McGurk (1981b: 142) noted that in the case of the Sambiu, Chiefs no longer exercised the powers they formerly had. This he ascribed in part to the establishment of a white administration and the increasing spread of tribes people into villages. Chiefs were now assisted by elders or *matimbi*, who lived in the vicinity as well as district headmen, who seem to have been created by the colonial administration (McGurk 1981b: 142).

Formerly, when the Sambyu lived in one or two large villages, the chief together with the tribal elders composed the highest court... Today there is a court for each political division; the village, the district, and the tribe, and each is presided over by the principal authority of the area. Since district heads are creations of the white administration, their courts were not a part of the traditional Sambyu organization.' (McGurk 1981b: 143-44).

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<sup>9</sup> SWAA 2394 A519/29 Die Hoofnaturellekommissaris, Winhoek: Kalihonda versus Kaptein Kasiki Katembo van die Bunja Stam, 11.7.1951

<sup>10</sup> SWAA 2394 A519/29 Office of the Native Commissioner Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek: Annual Meeting of Chief (sic) and Headmen held at Rundu on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1954: 2

<sup>11</sup> SWAA 2394 A519/29 4<sup>th</sup> Tribal Meeting held at Rundu, Okavango Native Territory, 5-7 March 1951: 2

Among the Gciriku, the headman (*nturaxumbo*) of a village is responsible for law and order. He is appointed for life by chief. The territory of the Gciriku is divided into 11 headmanships (sg. *mukunda*), each being headed by a foreman, who is appointed by the chief (Gibson 1981b: 196). Gciriku chiefs have certain privileges and responsibilities. They act as judges, settling disputes, determine penalties and see that sentences are carried out. They claim a tribute after settling inheritances (Gibson 1981b: 199). He is assisted by a primary council (*lirenga*), a group of secondary councilors (*sitenya*, pl. *vitenya*) and the village headmen (*nturaxumbo*, pl. *vanturxumbo*). The *lirenga* is the prime minister and war chief. Transmits order to village headmen and leads raiding parties. *Vitenyas* are husbands to women in the chiefs family (sisters and daughters) and work his fields and attend court as councillors. Chiefs also have confidantes called *mutimbi* (pl. *vatimbi*) (Gibson 1981b: 200).

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional authorities, i.e. the *homba* or *fuma*, were regarded as the ‘highest administrators’ of land in Kavango (Hinz 1995: 36). The Mbukushu ‘believe that all natural resources such a land, the river, and their products belong to *nyambi*, God, who created them’. Land belonged to the the people collectively, and could not be sold. Individuals were allocated parcels of land for exclusive use in the form of gardens. These were surrounded by brush fences and rights to such land were respected by the community. All land that is not fenced or not used for cultivation is open to all for grazing, hunting and the collection of natural products. Ownership of game found on fenced land is claimed by the owner of the land (Larson 1981: 231, Hinz 1995: 37).

Headmen were firmly entrenched in the process of making land allocations. A case study conducted at Mupapama in 1990 found permission to settle in the tribal area or use land for cultivation had to be obtained from the *homba* or her headmen. ‘Traditionally a person was not even allowed to enlarge his existing fields without the necessary permission’ (Eirola et al 1990: 29). Newcomers always have to seek permission from the *homba* to settle and offer a present in the form of a heifer, goat or money, indicating a willingness ‘to be subjected to the authority of the *homba*’ (Ibid).

Other sources noted that applications for land had to be addressed to the headman of an area. In the case of an applicant from the area of the headman, the latter would investigate the personal record of the applicant and make an allocation subject to the agreement by the majority of the community. In the event of somebody who had family in the area of jurisdiction but was applying from outside, the headman would call a meeting with the applicant, the relatives and inhabitants of the area to consider the application. The outcome of such a meeting would be communicated to the next level of the traditional authority system to be conveyed to the *homba* / *fumu*. Outsiders with no relatives in the area where they wish to settle have to support their application on their own. Otherwise, the procedure is the same (Hinz 1995: 37-38).

Payments for allocations are not generally made, and rights, once allocated, remain ‘with (a) family as long as it is used by the family. Should a family die out, then the land would revert to the community.’ The renting out of land not utilised by a

member of a family is prohibited and must be handed back to the headman for reallocation to somebody else (Ibid.: 38).

Customary land tenure systems have often been described as open access regimes with little or no control over resources. This was not entirely true in Kavango, although the exact nature of tenure rules still needs to be investigated. While grazing was communal, 'the owner of stock is held responsible for any damage is stock may do to the lands of the community'.<sup>12</sup> At the village and household level, rights were clearly defined.

Every adult male and female cultivates his or her own fields. Within a household there is no communal land. The boundaries between individual fields, as well as between the lands used by two villages, is demarcated with fences or strips of uncultivated land (McGurk 1981: 101).

The riverbank itself 'is a communal grazing, fishing and water resource area'. However, as more and more *mahangu* fields were ploughed on the banks of the river, access to the river for those from further away became impossible without trespassing on such fields. Possibilities to develop gardens on the banks of the river are also said to be disappearing (Eirola et al 1990: 38).

#### **2.1.2.2 Fenced farming**

During the last quarter of the previous century, customary tenure systems came under increasing pressure from wealthy individuals who wanted to enclose communal grazing land for individual use. Developments towards individual tenure on non-freehold land were actively encouraged by the colonial administration. A process of zoning the region to develop commercial farms as well as game reserves was implemented. The former are situated on the southern boundary between Kavango and the freehold farming area, thus acting as a kind of buffer (Hinz, 1995: 38).

Approximately 328,000 ha of communal land had been fenced for commercial use in the Kavango non-freehold area in the early 1990s. In addition, 259,000 ha of communal land was leased by the then First National Development Corporation (now Namibia Development Corporation) for the establishment of a cattle ranch in the south-western corner of the region. In total the land area officially fenced in Kavango amounted to just over 10% of the total land area of the region.

Fencing in Kavango started in the mid-1970s and was supported by the then Kavango Administration in an attempt 'to stimulate cattle production'.<sup>13</sup> By the early 1990s thirty-seven farms had been fenced for private use along the main roads and *omiramba*. In addition, the Kwangali Farms Committee allocated forty-four farms of approximately 5,000 ha 'to landless Namibians' as part of the Mangetti-north Farm Project. This project was started in 1987. At Independence, all the units had been surveyed by the Office of the Surveyor-General. Money was budgeted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development for the development of these farms, which were to consist of one borehole per farm and the erection of a perimeter fence.

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<sup>12</sup> NAR 4 N1/15/9 System of land tenure on the Okavango, n.d.

<sup>13</sup> Chief Agricultural Extension Officer, MAWRD to Regional Commissioner, Rundu, 18 February 1992: 'Communal Land fenced for private Use', p.3

No information could be found on tenure arrangements on these farms.

Apart from land that has been fenced either by private individuals, government or the National Development Corporation, the latter two also administer large scale agricultural farms in the Region. These are used for irrigation, dairy and experimental purposes and are situated along the river at Musese, Shadikongoro, Vungu Vungu and Mashare as well as at Ncamagoro along the main road to Rundu and north of Katjinkatji (el Obeid and Mendelsohn 2001: 26).

### **2.1.2.3 Game reserves**

Fifteen per cent of Kavango Region is used for nature conservation. Four nature conservation areas have been proclaimed: Mangetti, Khaudum Popa Falls and Mahango. These are owned and controlled by the government through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (el Obeid and Mendelsohn 2001: 26).

At present, no conservancies have been registered in Kavango (Conservation and the Environment 2002: 30). However, a number of lodges and campsites are being operated by private individuals or companies. These lease land from traditional authorities.

### **2.1.2.4 Resettlement**

At Independence, a resettlement project was started at Bagani on the eastern side of the Kavango River to accommodate primarily San people who had served as soldiers in the colonial army and were deserted by the South African Defence Force. In 1997 714 family units were settled at Bagani (RoN 1998: 29).

## **2.2 Land use**

The total area of Kavango was given as 463,000 morgen in 1948, or approximately 396,328 ha.<sup>14</sup> Of this area 17,120 ha (20,000 morgen) was cultivated and another 336,836 ha (393,500 morgen) available for grazing. 42,800 ha (50,000 morgen) was unoccupied and cattle free.<sup>15</sup> Figure 1 overleaf provides comparative areas for 1989.

Early reports by South African colonial officials paint a picture of Kavango as being well endowed in resources. The main inhabited area was said to have comprised 216 miles (approximately 350 km) of river front, with an average width of two miles between the river bank and the dunes.

The land beyond the dunes is uninhabited except for twelve to fifteen miles down the Omuramba Omatako in the Diriko (sic) area, and six miles down the Fontein Omuramba in the Sambio (sic) area. The land is very fertile and where the dunes sweep away from the river, often to a distance of four miles, excellent grazing for stock is to be found.

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<sup>14</sup> One morgen corresponds to 0,856 ha.

<sup>15</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Agricultural Survey of Okavango Native Territory, 24.11.1948 p.2

The area was described as well wooded, and ‘wild fruit trees are also plentiful, and provide the natives’ sole supply of food during certain seasons of the year.’ (UG 16-’33: 58).

**Figure 1: Land Use in Kavango, 1989**

	Ha.
1. Nature Conservation	
- Khaudum Game Reserve	320 000
- Mahangu Game Reserve	30 000
- Game camp	45 000
<u>Sub-total</u>	<u>395 000</u>
2. FNDC Projects	
- Vungu Vungu	200
- Shitemo	1 000
- Shadikongoro	1 000
- Musese	1 000
- Mangetti	259 000
<u>Sub-total</u>	<u>262 000</u>
3. Dryland cultivation	80 000
4. Grazing	1 000 000
5. Other (towns, roads etc.)	15 000
6. Undeveloped	2 813 300
<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>	<b><u>4 565 500</u></b>

Source: Adams and Werner 1990: 137

### 2.2.1 Cultivation

South African officials described people in Kavango as indifferent agriculturalists’ (UG 16-’33:59). This lends credence to the assertion that agriculture in general and cultivation in particular were not necessarily the most important components of livelihoods, and suggests that agricultural production happened at a low technological level.

Historically, *mahangu* or pearl millet was the main crop, followed by sorghum and maize. It was estimated in 1949 that the area cropped in the Kwangali, Gxiriku and Mbukushu areas consisted of 5% maize, 15% sorghum and 50-60% millet (25% in the Sambiu and Bunza areas).<sup>16</sup> One estimate put the area under *mahangu* at 75%. Maize required better soils and was thus mainly planted in the *omiramba*, vlei areas ‘and in odd corners where the soil has fertility above the average’. Sorghum was also grown on better soils, and the average area planted was slightly higher than for maize. Peanuts were a prized crop and of excellent quality. Cowpeas were grown mixed

<sup>16</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Extract from the Report for the Months of April and May 1949 on the Okavango Native Territory by the Native Commissioner, Rundu

with other crops such as *mahangu*, sorghum and maize, where these primary crop had germinated poorly.<sup>17</sup>

*Mahangu* was regarded to be the 'surest crop to grow under the conditions'.<sup>18</sup> Soils throughout the region were said to be deficient in humus and sufficient organic material to compensate for deficiency was not available.<sup>19</sup> Land was not fertilised with either manure or ash. The available cattle and goat dung was thrown away or burnt as rubbish (UG 16-'33:59).

The old custom of cultivating the land was described as 'raking the old lands every year and burning the refuse'. People explained the custom in the following way:

By burning they (a) eradicate the thorns which otherwise harass the feet of the agriculturalist.

(b) The refuse is piled against the old stumps which are thereby slowly eliminated by burning.

(c) The plough or hoe works more readily in a land cleared of all undecayed humus.

(d) It is easier to burn the refuse than carry it to the outskirts of the land.

(e) The incidence of broken plough is lowered if there are no hidden stumps to impede the plough.

(f) The forefathers of the tribe tilled the soil in a certain manner and that must therefore be the correct method.<sup>20</sup>

Little attention was paid to seed selection and planting. In 1932 it was observed that

The sowing is very badly done, the grain being planted in a haphazard manner. No transplanting is done and no system of drainage is followed. A heavy shower of rain will cause a large portion of the field to be washed away. Very little is therefore done by the natives to protect their crops, and the question of the yield being left to providence (UG 16-'33: 59).

Twenty years later it was estimated that 50% of an average stand was planted with inferior seeds. All seeds were broadcast and weeds took a heavy toll of the yield. Improved seed selection and 'better cultural practices' were regarded as necessary to increase yields of all crops. In addition, new technology such as planters and cultivars would 'eliminate these poor cultural practices'<sup>21</sup>

Traditionally, women and young girls cultivated fields with man-made hoes. Since the introduction of ploughs, men and boys also became involved in ploughing the land

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<sup>17</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Report on Crops and Stock: Okavango Native Territory, 20.4.1950 p.1-3

<sup>18</sup> SWAA 2394 A519/22 Vol.1 Director of Agriculture Windhoek: Agricultural Survey of Okavango Native Territory, 24.11.1948: 3

<sup>19</sup> Ibid: 4

<sup>20</sup> SWAA 426 A50/44/1 Extract from the report for the months of April and May 1949 on the Okavango Native Territory by the Native Commissioner Rundu

<sup>21</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Report on Crops and Stock: Okavango Native Territory, 20.4.1950 p. 2

with oxen. The new technology allowed farmers to cultivate larger areas of land, in turn increasing the dependency on family labour for assistance (Eirola et al 1990: 31). Ploughs were introduced in the early 1930s and in 1931 thirty-two ploughs were in use in Kavango.<sup>22</sup> This, it was feared, contributed to a further diminution of humus to the soil 'due to the increased oxidation as a result of more thorough aeration'.<sup>23</sup> In the absence of fertilisation, fields soon became exhausted. Once this occurred, they were allowed to return to the bush and land for new fields was cleared (McGurk and Gibson 1981: 44).

The result of these practices was that yields and harvests were generally poor.<sup>24</sup> To some extent, the cultivation of larger pieces of land compensated for low yields. However, more extensive lands made post-planting cultivation difficult due to a lack of labour and in wet seasons caused poor yields due to competition from weeds.<sup>25</sup> This brief discussion suggests that there was no shortage of land for cultivation.

As the population grew, it became increasingly difficult to abandon exhausted fields for new ones. In recent years the river terrace has reached saturation point in available land for cultivation. 'Year after year the soil is exhausted by continuous cultivation without putting anything back, and valuable irrigation land is going down the drain'. The effect of increasing pressures on terrace land is forcing people inland for cultivation. In addition, pastures for livestock coming to drink on the river bank are decreasing (Eirola et al 1990: 37). Keyler (1995: 39) noted that the clearing of land in Kavango was still common in the mid-1990s. It must be assumed that this process took place further away from the river. He found that 48% of Kavango households had cleared new land during the five years that preceded his fieldwork. On average only 29% of respondents cited the lack of land close to homesteads as an obstacle to clearing new land.

Little attention seems to have been given to protect crops and store them. The situation in the 1930s was described as follows:

A protective thorn bush fence is not erected around the field, and a certain amount of damage is done to the growing grain by unherded stock. The kraal itself is usually situated away from the field instead of in the center, and birds, springhares, and other animals, not disturbed by the presence of human beings, also damage the crop (UG 16-'33: 59).

Neither grains nor fruits were stored. Regular shortages of grains were reported from October every year to the following reaping season (UG 27-'34: 45). It is not entirely clear how local people coped with droughts. While access to *veldkos*, game and fish played an important role in surviving droughts, requests for food aid were made

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<sup>22</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Monthly Report, 30.11.1931

<sup>23</sup> SWAA 2394 A519/22 Vol.1 Director of Agriculture Windhoek: Agricultural Survey of Okavango Native Territory, 24.11.1948: 4

<sup>24</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.1 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for S.W.A.: Report on a Tour of Inspection Kuring Kuru to Diriko 30.7.1927 p.4-5

<sup>25</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Report on Crops and Stock: Okavango Native Territory, 20.4.1950 p 2

during the drought in the early 1930s and in later years.<sup>26</sup> Famines did occur such as in 1942, for example, when nine people were reported to have died from starvation in the Mbukushu area.<sup>27</sup>

The colonial administration tried to encourage people in Kavango to improve agricultural production and to store food grains for bad seasons. By the mid-1940s, six grain silos had been built in the Kwangali area and two in the Bunya area.<sup>28</sup> While some people had followed the advice in the early 1940s to store grains, large numbers did not do so as they were 'satisfied to exist on veldkos, fish, game and milk only'.<sup>29</sup> Amongst other things, proposals were made to start growing tobacco and vegetables under irrigation in small gardens. However, the Director of Agriculture identified a major stumbling block in improving agricultural production. In a report in 1948 he expressed the opinion that

The people generally seem to have more than enough food in a good season. Milk supplies are adequate by their standards, in other words they lack for nothing (sic). Therefore the need for more or improved work has just no meaning to them.<sup>30</sup>

It is not clear to what an extent cultivation in Kavango has improved over the last few decades. In the mid-1990s, traditional *mahangu* seeds were used on only 55% of land cultivated, while only 18% of the cultivated land was under improved *mahangu* seeds. With regard to sorghum 87% of the land was under traditional seeds and only 12% under improved seeds. At the same time, 49% of farmers owned at least one plough and 45% owned oxen (RoN 1999: 13). The latter further contributed to depriving the soil of organic matter. In the mid-1990s an astounding 78% of Kavango were still not using any kind of fertilizer. Lack of transport and the cost of chemical fertilizer were identified as the main obstacles to using manure or other fertilisers (Keyler 1995: 40-41).

The average size of fields is also very small. The 1998/99 Agricultural Survey found that the total number of fields amounted to 9,571 with a total area of 13,163 ha. This resulted in average field size of 1.38 ha. (Ibid.). As Table 1 indicates, total area under cultivation fluctuated widely over the last ten years, reflecting to some extent the rainfall pattern. In a good rainy season millet/sorghum yields reach 365 kg/ha, reaching 380 kg/ha in an outstanding year.

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<sup>26</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Monthly Report: August 1933, 31.8.1933, p.3; SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Native Commissioner, Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner, Windhoek: Proposed Famine Relief Measures: Okavango Native Territory: 1941, 5.11.1941, p.2-3

<sup>27</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Native Commissioner, Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner, Windhoek: Famine: Okavango Native Territory, 31.3.1942, p.1

<sup>28</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Native Commissioner, Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner, Windhoek: Construction of grain silos, 14.11.1945

<sup>29</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Native Commissioner, Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner, Windhoek: Proposed Famine Relief Measures: Okavango Native Territory: 1941, 5.11.1941, p.2

<sup>30</sup> SWAA 2394 A519/22 Vol.1 Director of Agriculture Windhoek: Agricultural Survey of Okavango Native Territory, 24.11.1948: 5



**Table 1: Okavango: Rainfed cereal production, 1990-2002**

Year	Maize			Millet/Sorghum						Total Cereals	
	Area	Yield	Production	Area		Yield		Production		Area	Production
				Subsistence	NDC/FSP	Subsistence	NDC/FSP	Subsistence	NDC/FSP		
1990-91	2,500	1,150	2,900	8,000		300		2,400		10,500	5,300
1991/92	2,500	-	-	12,300		100		1,200		14,800	12,000
1992/93	-	-	-	17,000		260		4,400		17,000	4,400
1993/94	-	-	-	51,000		241		12,300		51,000	12,300
1994/95	-	-	-	14,800		330		4,900		14,800	4,900
1995/96	300	1,910	600	25,300		365		9,200		25,600	9,800
1996/97	500	2,300	1,300	22,000	4,200	365	900	8,000	3,800	26,700	13,100
1997/98	100	-	-	10,000	-	120	-	12,000	-	10,100	12,000
1998/99	3,100	50	200	18,200	-	330	-	6,000	-	21,300	6,200
1999/00	7,300	280	2,000	15,000	-	380	-	5,700	-	22,300	7,700
Jan-00	2,600	374	1,000	7,800	-	265	-	2,100	-	10,400	3,100

Notes:

Source: Namibia Early Warning and Food Information System 1993-2002

Not all households owned oxen in Kavango. In the mid-1990s only an estimated 45% owned an ox (RoN 1999:13). However, 93% of farmers are reported to plough with oxen (Behnke 1998: 13). People without oxen hire them. Usually payment would be in cash or a bag of *mahangu* once harvesting has been completed (Eirola et al 1990: 31). However, oxen only become available for hire after homesteads with oxen have ploughed their own fields. This increases the risk of crop failure as *mahangu* can only be planted when the season is well on its way, and crops 'are exposed to too much or too little rain at the wrong time' (Ibid.: 37).

Agrisystems Overseas (1996: 11) observed that 'cattle, draft animal and plough ownership in Kavango appears to be closely correlated with wealth, access to employment and/or remittances and family household size'. It noted that 'those households without cattle and draft animals have smaller fields, use hand hoes for cultivation or hire draft animals and their labour to larger households'. Animal draft power enables farmers to enlarge the areas under cultivation. However, this was likely to put pressure on available labour needed for weeding, harvesting and post-harvesting operations. Poor households in particular lacked own labour and cash to hire in labour to perform these tasks. Richer households on the other hand are not able 'to plough or cultivate an area greater than they are able to weed. As weeding is probably the most labour demanding task this limits the expansion of their crop growing activities'. In the mid-1990s 'farmers in general complain(ed) of a shortage of labour for weeding and clearing new fields' (Agrisystems (Overseas) Ltd. 1996: 11).

These observations suggest a highly differentiated population. In the mid-1990s the Rural Development Support Programme classified farmers in Kavango as follows:

*Advantaged:* about 10% of farmer who cultivated an area over 11 ha. owned draft animal power and had access to a household labour force of 6 or more and usually had surplus crops for sale.

*Transitional farmers,* accounting for an estimated 20% of farming households. These cropped an area of 5-10 ha., owned draft animals or had access to hire or borrow; and a household labour force of 3-5 people. They frequently have surplus for sale.

*Disadvantaged farmers.* Estimated to be 70% of farming households, cultivating less than 5 ha. They did not own any draft animals and had only limited access to hire or borrowing. Household labour was estimated to be less than 3, and they did not usually have surplus crops for sale (Cited in Coulter and Hindmarsh 1997: 10).

In addition to these farmers, about 162 could be classified as large-scale farmers, having planted between 25 and 400 ha. of *mahangu* in 1997. 'They use tractors for land preparation and planting, apply fertilisers and have significant borrowings'. With the exception of 2 farmers who were financed by Agribank, all others received financial support from the Namibia Development Corporation. Most of them farmed approximately 90km south west of Rundu. Approximately 370 non-mechanised farmers in the 'Advantaged' category received production loans from Agribank. On

average, these loans were about half the amount borrowed by mechanised farmers (Cited in Coulter and Hindmarsh 1997: 11).

A limited amount of grain was produced under irrigation along the river. The Namibia Development Corporation, a parastatal company, managed four farms where irrigation is taking place. The main crop produced is maize. Wheat production was terminated in the mid-1990s. As Table 2 below shows, yields for crops produced under irrigation were much higher than for rainfed farming.

**Table 2: Okavango: Irrigated cereal production, 1990-2002**

Year	Maize			Wheat			Total Cereals	
	Area	Yield	Production	Area	Yield	Production	Area	Production
1990-91	400	5,500	2,400	100	4,120	300	500	2,800
1991/92	500	6,500	3,200	100	3,500	200	600	3,500
1992/93	500	5,500	2,900	200	4,000	800	700	3,700
1993/94	600	5,850	3,400	n/a	n/a	n/a	600	3,400
1994/95	400	6,675	2,500	200	4,500	700	500	3,200
1995/96	500	5,450	2,600	400	2,340	800	800	3,400
1996/97	600	3,800	2,400	-	-	-	600	2,400
1997/98	600	4,400	2,700	-	-	-	600	2,700
1998/99	400	5,000	2,000	-	-	-	400	2,000
1999/00	200	3,500	800	-	-	-	200	800
Jan-00	400	7,500	2,600	-	-	-	400	2,600

Notes:

Source: Namibia Early Warning and Food Information System 1993-2002

### 2.2.2 Livestock

Kavango farmers owned comparatively small numbers of livestock during the previous century. First estimates in the early 1930s estimated the total number of livestock to be 7,400 or less than two head per man on average (UG 16-'33: 60). In 1948, 20,000 people owned some 36,000 large stock units, 'which reflects that each family unit of 7 persons owns slightly more than 12 head of stock'.<sup>31</sup> At that time, the region had approximately 336,836 ha (393,500 morgen) of grazing. At 36,000 units in total, the carrying capacity amounted to approximately 9.5 ha (11 morgen) per large stock unit (LSU). This does not take into consideration considerable areas of grazing that were inundated during the summer months.<sup>32</sup>

Livestock numbers have increased dramatically over the last fifty years to over 124,000 cattle and 63,500 head of small stock in 1998. Table 3 provides a summary of livestock numbers for the period 1988-1998.

<sup>31</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Agricultural Survey of Okavango Native Territory, 24.11.1948, p.1

<sup>32</sup> Ibid: 2

**Table 3: Kavango: Livestock numbers 1990-2000**

Year	Cattle	Sheep	Goats
1988	84,567	160	32,373
1989	83,913	315	31,678
1990	87,740	67	32,214
1991	95,505	56	34,389
1992	88,829	101	33,525
1993	94,370	197	33,588
1994	106,520	181	34,962
1995	81,847	172	35,100
1996	98,775	128	40,442
1997	113,142	240	46,320
1998	124,326	261	63,248
1999			
2000			

Note: Figures are for Kavango and West Caprivi and exclude the Kavango Mangetti

Source: Directorate of Veterinary Services: Stock Censuses 1989-2000

Evidence on the marketing of livestock is contradictory (Behnke 1998: 14-15). Off-take for marketing purposes was a mere 3.5%, far below the rates of off-take in commercial enterprises (Ibid.: 12). More specifically, households with smaller herds were found to be more likely to sell livestock than households with larger herds. The latter were found to make more voluntary sales while poorer households with less access to cash were forced to sell in order to generate cash for specific purposes. It is thus not surprising that livestock sales provided a larger share of household income among the poorer households than among wealthier ones. Amongst the poorest 'food insecure' households the sales of livestock accounted for 21% of household income, versus 13% and 10% respectively for 'generally poor and income sufficient households respectively' (Ibid.: 14)

During the early years of South African rule, livestock grazed primarily on the banks of the Okavango River. Large tracts of grazing along the river would be inundated during rainy seasons and thus not accessible to livestock. However, these areas were of crucial importance in tiding people over 'dry early summer months'. Dominant grasses were annual *Eragrostis* species and *Dactilinium Egyptianum* with patches of *Ar. Meridionalis*.<sup>33</sup>

When asked whether they were aware of rotational grazing, Chiefs answered that this was new to them. 'We do not know anything about veldt management or control.'<sup>34</sup> However, in some instances grazing areas away from the river were used. Kwangali

<sup>33</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Report on Crops and Stock: Okavango Native Territory, 20.4.1950 p.4

<sup>34</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Extract from Minutes of Meeting with Chiefs and Headmen, Okavango Native Territory, 30.9.1947

cattle for example frequently grazed in Angola<sup>35</sup>, while the Sambiu grazed their cattle far down the 'Fontein Omuramba where good grazing was available.'<sup>36</sup>

Evidence on herding systems and the use of cattle posts is not clear. Archival sources suggest strongly that livestock was not herded during the dry season and when grass on the riverbank was depleted. Moreover, livestock was not taken to cattle posts in uninhabited areas beyond the dunes where grazing was always abundant (UG 16-'33: 60). Cattle posts away from the river were not common. The Officer in Charge of Native Affairs in Kuring Kuru reported in 1932 that

In no single instance throughout the country have the natives ever established cattle posts away from the river. They are too lazy or afraid of the bush and bushmen to trek the stock across the dunes to known spots where winter grazing is in abundance, with the consequence that it dies of poverty during the winter months.<sup>37</sup>

Chieftainess Kanuni (sic) of Kwangali reportedly had refrained from establishing cattle posts away from the river beyond the dunes 'merely because her ancestors had not permitted this', i.e. the extension of the tribal area to sites beyond the dunes. However in 1933 she began to encourage her subjects to establish cattle posts away from the river.<sup>38</sup>

*Omiramba* were regarded as the best grazing areas. 'Generally they are rich in humus'.<sup>39</sup> They were well grassed with *A. Uniplumis*, although stands of *Dactilinium Egyptianum* covered large areas. Where grazing had been heavy, *Cynodin Dactylon* (kweekgras) was dominant.<sup>40</sup> Their utilisation was limited by the absence of water. On rare occasions, water was opened up in *omiramba*, herders established cattle posts. In 1934 two cattle posts were said to have existed in the Mbungu (sic) and Dikwaya (sic) *omiramba*, between 10 and 20 miles from the inhabited area.<sup>41</sup>

Historically, pressure on grazing was unequal across the region. The Kwangali and Mbunza areas were much more heavily stocked than the Mbukushu and Gxiriku areas. In the former, no grazing was said to be available between July and October, while the latter two areas were comparatively well grassed. The Director of Agriculture observed that there was

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<sup>35</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Monthly Report April 1932, 28.4 1932 p.2

<sup>36</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.3 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Inspection Tour Okavango and Western Caprivi Zipfel Territories: October 1934, 31.10.1934 p.2-3

<sup>37</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Monthly Report July 1932, 31.7.1932 p.3

<sup>38</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Inspection Report: Okavango and Western Caprivi Zipfel Areas, 9.7.1932 p.2

<sup>39</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Agricultural Survey of Okavango Native Territory, 24.11.1948, p.3

<sup>40</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Report on Crops and Stock: Okavango Native Territory, 20.4.1950 p.4

<sup>41</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.3 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Inspection Tour Okavango and Western Caprivi Zipfel Territories: October 1934, 31.10.1934 p.2-3

a substantial difference in size and condition between the Diriko (sic) and Mbukushu cattle as compared with Kuangari (sic) and Bunja (sic) stock indicative of the respective grazing conditions.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.2.3 Environmental impacts

Pressure on the available land increased over the years, as the low level of technology employed in agricultural production was not able to compensate for an ever increasing population in people and livestock.

Exact figures on the human population do not exist on account of the fact that no systematic censuses were carried out until the 1970s. Table 4 provides an overview of population estimates for several years. These suggest that no significant increase in the population occurred from the 1920s to the late 1950s. Gibson (1981: 16) ascribed the dramatic increase from 1960 to 1970 in part to an influx of Angolans into Kavango. During the following twenty years to 1991, the population more than doubled and in the decade before the last census in 2001, soared by an astonishing 72%.

**Table 4: Population figures: 1886-2001**

Area	1886	1921-22	1932	1938	1947	1960	1970	1991	2001
<b>Kwangali</b>	7,000		11,960	5,980		7,729			
<b>Mbunza</b>	3,000		3,160	2,556		5,016			
<b>Sambyu</b>	3,000		1,360	1,936		5,527			
<b>Gciriku</b>			4,040	3,634		4,535			
<b>Mbukushu</b>			2,480	2,816		5,064			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,000</b>	<b>10,500-20,000</b>	<b>23,000</b>	<b>16,922</b>	<b>25,540</b>	<b>27,871</b>	<b>49,577</b>	<b>116,830</b>	<b>201,000</b>

Source: Gibson 1981: 16-17; RoN 2002: 14

Although these figures do not suggest any drastic population increases until the mid-1960s, colonial officials warned of impending disasters along the river as a result of overstocking.<sup>43</sup> In 1948 members of the Agricultural Commission were of the opinion that there was a danger

in concentrating on the banks of the Okavango river, as this will ultimately cause the whole useful portion of the Territory to be outtrodden. Farming should be

<sup>42</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Agricultural Survey of Okavango Native Territory, 24.11.1948, p.2

<sup>43</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Report on Crops and Stock: Okavango Native Territory, 20.4.1950 p.5

spread out to the interior, and here I must suggest boreholes and wells further into the dunes.<sup>44</sup>

The gradually increasing numbers of livestock grazing along the river led to the disappearance of reed beds in the river and denudation of the river of grass. Amongst other things this impacted negatively on the supply of reeds used for weaving mats (McGurk 1981b: 103). The Native Commissioner in Rundu commented that ‘slowly the country is being allowed to deteriorate and in twenty years may have gone back a good deal more.’ He called called for some drastic action to halt the situation.<sup>45</sup>

In 1950 serious land degradation was reported in the Kwangali area. It was noted that soils along the river were depleted over a distance of 70 miles (approximately 120 km) east of Kuring Kuru, and that erosion was taking place as a result of the undulating topography. North of Kuring Kuru at Mpungu Vlei, signs of land degradation were also observed. The fear was expressed that unless something was done soon, there was ‘grave danger of the area between Bunja (sic) and Kuring Kuru not being capable of supporting its population’. New technologies needed to be introduced. At the same time, crops east of Rundu were found to have improved gradually. Better soils were found in the areas of Sambiu, Gciriku and Mbukushu.<sup>46</sup>

The perception that the land was being degraded was discussed with traditional leaders at tribal meetings, and a number of proposals were made to remedy the situation. At a tribal meeting in 1947 Chiefs agreed to the seriousness of the situation and agreed to the following actions:

1. We must stop all new entries into our country until we have formulated a plan under which we can carry receive more people.
2. We must allow our people to settle in the Omurambas.
3. We must ask the government most respectfully to assist us in finding water in the Omuramba areas. We know there is water there but that it is not always clean or easy to dig for.
4. We must improve our cattle and introduce better fowls. We must ask government to adopt...plans for a Tribal Farm where we can improve our cattle and our grain.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from reports that people were now more eager to manure their fields, proposals were made in the late 1940s to develop the *omiramba* for agricultural use by drilling for water. Grazing in the dunes was described as good and the damp soils in the *omiramba* suitable for maize, while the dunes were suitable for millet.<sup>48</sup> The colonial government encouraged stock farmers well into the 1980s to graze their animals

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<sup>44</sup> NAR 4 N1/15/9 Minutes of a Meeting held by members of the Agricultural Commission on 24/6/1948 at Kwata Kwata in the Reserved Area, Okavango Native Territory, p. 2

<sup>45</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Native Commissioner Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek: Native Agriculture, 9.10.1947

<sup>46</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek: Report on Crops and Stock: Okavango Native Territory, 20.4.1950 p.1

<sup>47</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Extract from Minutes of Meeting with Chiefs and Headmen, Okavango Native Territory, 30.9.1947

<sup>48</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/30 Native Commissioner Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek: Development of the Okavango Native Territory and new Locations for Occupation. 3.11.1947: 4

inland along the *omiramba* ‘where there is abundant pasture land’. (McGurk 1981b: 103).

Evidence suggests that people have begun to settle in some of the dry drainage lines or *omiramba* in recent times. Many small and scattered settlements have sprung up to the south of the Okavango River as well as west and, to a lesser extent east, of the Grootfontein-Rundu main road (el Obeid et al 2001: 17). A vast expanse of land east of the Omatako valley continues to be very sparsely populated, and most of the people living there have been relatively recent arrivals. Only 8% have been living there since birth (Lux-Development 1999: 15).

While the development of water in the *omiramba* opened up possibilities for farming, only families with access to transport (animal or motorised) are able to develop new plots at a distance from the river (Agrisystems (Overseas) Ltd. 1996: 10). It is thus reasonable to conclude that the poorer, more marginal farmers in the region will increasingly feel the impact of increasing pressure on land.

Apart from developing the *omiramba* and other areas for grazing, government proposed that agricultural practices be improved. An experimental farm was established in the reserved area between the Gciriku and Sambiu tribal areas in the mid-1950s. It was envisaged that such a farm would ‘contribute to an improvement in the primitive methods practiced in the Okavango Native Territory’.<sup>49</sup>

The idea of livestock improvement was more frequently discussed within government. Selective breeding was proposed, which would entail the ‘castration of all bulls of an undesirable type.’ Only the best bulls in each herd would be retained, and if no suitable bulls could be found in a particular herd, indigenous bulls from other herds could be used. Part of the reason for this proposal was that fact local farmers did not accept Afrikaner bulls and that there also was no immediate prospect that they would be able to dispose of their animals.<sup>50</sup>

## 2.2.4 Other resources

### 2.2.4.1 Veld-food

Important as the river has been as a source of nourishment, livelihoods were crucially dependent on resources that were harvested away from the river. It is clear from reports that access to *veldkos*, plants and bulbs played an important role in tiding people over poor harvests and in preventing famines. In the 1920s and 1930s officials described the area as well endowed with wild fruits such as manketti nuts, four varieties of ground nuts, two varieties of tree nuts, wild oranges and wild lemons, shivi nuts, lily bulbs, wild plums, two varieties of onions, potatoes, *Inyande* tree fruit and various other roots and bulbs. These resources grew mostly ‘beyond the dunes in the uninhabited area’ and were harvested and brought in by ‘bushmen’ (UG 16-’33: 59; UG 27-’34: 45). Large tracts of *mugongo* nut trees were reported to be in the dunes in the late 1940s, but the absence of water made it difficult to harvest these. It

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<sup>49</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22/1 Die Naturellekommissaris, Runtu: Ontwikkeling van Proefplaas in die gereserveerde gebied: Okavango 30.1.1953 p.1

<sup>50</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 The Director of Agriculture, Windhoek to Chief Native Commissioner, Windhoek: Cattle breeding: Okavango Territory, 2.3.1949 p.1



was estimated that in a three day period a man was able to harvest two months' food supply. The nuts were said to be of good nutritional value.<sup>51</sup>

Reliance on vegetable food seems to have declined over the years, although this has not been documented very well. Gibson (1981: 166) states that 'the relative importance of vegetable food in the diet is not reported', and that only few wild fruit are mentioned. More recently, villagers observed a general decline in resources in the central area of Kavango. Reeds, trees and thatching grass was declining because of increasing population pressure (inter alia through influxes from Angola), fires and tree felling. People from as far afield as Rundu came to cut trees for poles. Fruits are declining, because fruit trees are cut to make way for fields (Jones et al 2001: 40).

Natural fruit trees are not cut down during deforestation. 'Everywhere in the forest they are looked after well' (Eirola et al 1990: 86).

In addition to veld-foods, swamp foods are also found in the form of certain underwater bulbs, sprouts of reeds and the buds of certain creepers (Eirola et al 1990: 87-88).

#### **2.2.4.2 Wildlife**

Game is said to have been abundant close to river settlements well into the 1970s. Excessive population growth, deforestation, agricultural activities as well as the uncontrolled killing of game resulted 'drove' game into the interior of Kavango, 'a fifty to two hundred kilometres inland' (Eirola et al 1990: 85). In the central area animals such as spring hare were declining because of fires and over hunting (Jones et al 2001: 40).

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<sup>51</sup> SWAA 2394 A 519/22 Vol.1 Native Commissioner Rundu to Chief Native Commissioner Windhoek: Drought in the Okavango. Food Position. 20.4.1949

### 3 Policy and institutional framework

#### 3.1 The legal and policy framework

##### 3.1.1 Land and Resources policies after Independence

The immediate post-Independence period was characterised by an policy and institutional vacuum. In particular, ethnically defined Representative Authorities that administered tribal homelands and the corresponding legislation were abolished. Regardless of whether the concept of tribal homelands is accepted or not, it can be argued that these provided communal farmers with a certain sense of security, albeit defined along ethnic and tribal criteria. Many traditional authorities were unsure how the changes introduced after Independence would affect their powers generally and more specifically with regard to land allocation and administration.

For all its positive aspects, the *Constitution of the Republic of Namibia* did little to ameliorate this dilemma. While the right to private property is enshrined as a basic human right in the *Constitution*, the latter does not offer similar protection of rights to land and natural resources conferred under customary land tenure systems (Harring 2000: 8). Instead, it vests ownership of communal land in the State. Article 100 stipulates that ‘land, water and natural resources below and above the surface of the land...shall belong to the state if they are not otherwise lawfully owned’. Harring (2000: 11-12) has expressed the opinion that ‘this section is meaningless until all other ownership rights are resolved: the state, by default, takes title to property after all other possible forms of ownership are determined’. He concludes that in view of the vagueness of Article 100 ‘the Government of Namibia has claimed that it “owns” the communal land and that it can displace the occupants of communal lands at will’ (Ibid.: 12).

The *National Land Policy* reiterates the point that government is the owner of communal land. Acknowledging the provisions of Schedule 5 of the *Constitution* that all communal land is vested in the government, the *Policy* commits government

to administer this land for the benefit of traditional communities residing on such land for the purpose of promoting the economic and social development of the Namibia people (RoN 1998: 11).

Apart from divesting residents in non-freehold areas of all ownership of land, some of the provisions of the Constitution may have the unintended effect of undermining whatever tenure security people may enjoy under customary tenure arrangements. An example of this are some of the provisions contained in Article 21(1) and (2), which provide for the free movement of people throughout Namibia and the right to settle in any part of Namibia.

The *National Land Policy* is rather vague on how this ought to be interpreted. While it acknowledges these fundamental rights, it points out that they do not amount to ‘land ownership or property rights’ (RoN 1998:13). This seems to suggest that these

constitutional rights cannot be interpreted to mean a claim to property rights. However, in the absence of any clear statements on how existing rights are or can be protected, the *Policy* is failing to deal with the problem of how rights to grazing land in particular can be protected in view of the constitutional provisions of free movement and settlement. As Harring (2000: 10) pointed out, Article 21(1) and (2) represent a 'clear political statement...against tribalism...but there are implications here that undermine and confuse the legal basis of communal land rights, the only rights that most Blacks have'.

Article 66 which provides that 'both the customary and common law of Namibia...shall remain valid to the extent to which such customary or common law does not conflict with this Constitution or any other statutory law' seemingly recognises customary land law, and thus provides indirect protection (Ibid: 11).

Resolution 13 of the *Land Conference* may have also contributed towards increasing tenure insecurity. The resolution recommended that access to communal land be provided regardless of tribal or ethnic criteria and stated, *inter alia*, that 'all Namibians have the right to live wherever they choose within the national territory' (RoN 1991: 35). Although the resolution also stated that in requesting access to communal land, 'applicants should take account of the rights and customs of the local communities living there' (Ibid.), this was more conveniently ignored when stronger communities elbowed their way into valuable grazing areas of weaker and more marginal communities.

The implication of this brief discussion is that land rights – and by implication rights to other natural resources - of the poorest sector of society do not enjoy constitutional protection. This is particularly worrying, as no appropriate legislative framework has been created as yet to deal with customary tenure issues.

### 3.1.2 Communal Land Bill<sup>52</sup>

A *Communal Land Reform Bill* has been in preparation since the mid-1990s. The *Bill* was passed by the National Assembly in early 2000 and referred to the lower house, the National Council, which in turn objected to some of its provisions and referred it back to the National Assembly for amendment. One of the main objections of Councillors in the National Council was that the *Bill* did not deal adequately with the enclosure of communal pastures. It would appear from a critical reading of the *Bill* that its main objective is to legalise the fencing of communal land instead of addressing the problem.

The overall objective of the *Bill* is to improve the administration of land in the communal areas and to protect the land rights of people. The *Communal Land Reform Bill* does not propose any changes in the vesting of communal land. Section 17 stipulates that

all communal land areas vest in the State in trust for the benefit of the traditional communities residing in those areas and for the purpose of promoting the economic and social development of the people of Namibia, in

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<sup>52</sup> The *Bill* has been signed into law in August 2000.

particular the landless and those with insufficient access to land who are not in formal employment or engaged in non-agricultural business activities.

Although government is the formal owner of all communal land, the allocation of rights to land will continue to be made by traditional authorities as in the past. But the *Bill* promises to improve security of customary tenure by introducing a system of registration of customary land rights. Section 24 stipulates that customary allocations will attain a certain degree of legality once these have been registered with the Regional Land Board. Before registration of customary rights, Regional Land Boards are required to satisfy themselves that customary allocations which have been made in terms of the Act, do not infringe on the rights of others, do not exceed the maximum area of land laid down by the Act and have not been made on land reserved in the public interest.

As legal owner of communal land, the State can add to or subtract land from communal areas. The *Bill* prescribes the procedure that will govern the alienation of communal land by the President as ultimate owner. He may only withdraw from communal land areas any portion of land that may be required for the public good with the approval of the National Assembly. Once such approval has been obtained, the *Bill* stipulates that the land may be withdrawn only once the State has acquired any rights that might exist on such land and after adequate compensation has been paid to those people who have ceded their rights to the State. At face value, this seems to be an important and welcome step in recognising the rights of communal farmers to their land (Republic of Namibia 1999: 10).

However, where the provisions of the *Bill* will bring about more tenure security for communal farmers, this applies only to residential and arable land, and thus only to individual households. It does not make any mention of the possibility of conferring land rights to communities of users such as communal grazers. Instead of presenting innovative community based tenure rules and institutions, it proposes to (re-)invest traditional leaders / authorities with powers of allocating grazing rights. They will be empowered to prescribe conditions of land use relating to

- the kinds and numbers of livestock that may be grazed; and
- the section or sections of the commonage where stock may be grazed and the grazing in rotation on different sections (Section 29 (1)(a))

These rights are subject to the President's right to withdraw and reserve any portion of communal land for any purpose in the public interest.

Chiefs and/or Traditional Authorities may also withdraw the grazing rights of any resident if he/she contravenes the conditions laid down or has access to other land in excess of a maximum prescribed by the Minister of Lands 'and which the Chief or Traditional Authority considers to offer sufficient grazing for the stock of such resident'. Traditional leaders may also withdraw grazing rights at any time

if, due to drought or any other reasonable cause, the Chief or Traditional Authority considers such cancellation in the interests of the residents of the traditional community concerned (Section 29).

Section 29(4) stipulates that it will be illegal, except with the permission of the Chief or Traditional Authority and subsequent to ratification by a Communal Land Board, to infringe on communal grazing areas either by erecting a structure, or ploughing such land or constructing a residence or obstructing access to water.

It has been argued elsewhere (Werner 1997) that many analysts have mistakenly attributed the lack of control over communal land and natural resources to colonial policies that diminished the powers of traditional leaders to make allocations. The suggestion has been put forward that the obverse was the case: traditional leaders received powers of allocation from the colonial state, which traditionally rested with communities of grazers. A critical assessment of the *Communal Land Reform Bill* suggests the same: traditional authorities are likely to be strengthened at the expense of communities.

The *Communal Land Reform Bill* introduces a new institution in the form of *Communal Land Boards*. One or several *Land Boards* may be established in regions within which communal areas are located. The *Boards* will consist of at least eleven members, only three of which will be civil servants appointed by the Ministers of Lands, Agriculture and Environment respectively. Each traditional authority within a *Board's* area of jurisdiction will be represented by one member, and, where conservancies exist, they will be represented too.

The functions of the Boards include the following:

- to exercise control over the allocation and the cancellation of customary land rights by Chiefs and Traditional Authorities under this Act;
- to consider and decide on applications for a right of leasehold;
- to establish and maintain a register and a system for registration for recording the allocation, transfer and cancellation of customary land rights and rights of leasehold;
- to advise the Minister, either of its own motions or at the request of the Minister, in connection with the making of regulations or any other matter pertaining to the objectives of the Act (Section 3).

The Act seeks to uphold and formalise rights to communal land which were held at the time of promulgation of the Act. Such rights include rights to fenced communal land. The *Bill* prescribes a procedure for formalising rights to communal land enclosures, which seems to open up opportunities for communities who lost grazing to enclosures to contest the latter. Applications to formalise enclosures have to be submitted to Regional Land Boards, who have to ascertain, amongst other things, 'whether any other person claims to possess any right in relation to the land in question' (Section 28(4)). In cases where conflicting claims to a fenced piece of land are registered, the Land Board must conduct a hearing to resolve the matter.

It must be concluded from these proposals that Land Boards, as new institutions responsible for land management at the regional level, will be concerned primarily with the registration of land rights generally, but more specifically, with the legalisation and formalisation of enclosed land. This new institutional framework

therefore seems to have been designed for the primary purpose of servicing a new form of land tenure on communal land: long term leasehold and possibly title. While this may not be a bad thing in and of itself, it does very little to strengthen access of small scale and marginal farmers to communal land. If this process goes unchecked, the latter will lose access to land, instead of gaining it.

A complication arises in that the *Bill* only recognises those traditional authorities whose traditional leaders have been recognised by the *Traditional Authorities Act 1995*. As is known, not all traditional leaders have been recognised so that the question arises how the Act will deal with land related functions in wards where the traditional leaders are not recognised.

The provision in the *Bill* that the Minister of Lands will appoint members to the Land Boards raises concerns about how meaningful they will be in representing the aspirations and hopes of ordinary communal farmers. It can only be hoped that Land Boards will not merely be an institutional framework for government to control the management of land more effectively.

### **3.1.3 Legislation regarding other resources**

A disappointing feature of the *Bill* is that it does not address the issue of property rights to grazing areas on communal land. This is particularly surprising in view of the fact that government has passed policies and legislation some years ago that provide for the transfer of property rights to natural resources to communities. This reflects Government's high commitment to natural resources management and is probably in no small degree related to Article 95 of the Constitution, which *inter alia* calls on the state to maintain

ecosystems, essential ecological processes and biological diversity of Namibia and utilisation of living natural resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future.

The absence of legislation with particular reference to CBNRM after Independence opened up sufficient space for governmental and non-governmental institutions to 'experiment' with various models of local natural resource management (Personal communication: Mr. Karl Aribeb).

To many stakeholders government's reticence to extend property rights over land to groups of users seems particularly unintelligible in view of the fact that existing legislation already provides communities of users with property rights over game and water resources, for example. Where communities have chosen to avail themselves of such rights, an institutional framework has been developed to manage natural resources.

The most prominent examples in this regard are conservancies. In 1995 a policy paper on "Wildlife Management, Utilisation and Tourism in Communal Areas" proposed conservancies on non-freehold land, in order to integrate the management and utilisation of wildlife into a broader rural development programme. A number of conditions have to be fulfilled for conservancies to register with the Ministry of

Environment and Tourism. A major precondition is that communities elect a representative committee to negotiate the boundaries of the conservancy with neighbouring communities and draw up a constitution and management plan (Blackie *et al* 1999: 7). The Ministry of Environment and Tourism as well as NGOs are providing technical support to communities wishing to establish conservancies.

It is important to point that the rights conferred on communities are rather limited. Although they have the right to utilise wildlife and tourism resources for their own benefit, conservancy management committees have not rights to grant or deny access to land, not even prohibit self-drive tourists to traverse their land. This point is important to understand why government is willing to grant these rights but not outright property rights.

The development of forestry policy and the new Forest Act that was passed in December 2001 are modelled on the conservancy model. In contrast to previous policies, communities will be given more extensive rights to forest land. Amongst other things, the new Act provides for the establishment of community forests. For this to happen, forest management committees will have to be elected and forest management plans drawn up. The technical support to be provided to communities by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism will be very similar to that of conservancies. In April 2002 the Directorate of Forestry will begin consultations with communities in and around forests to proclaim them in terms of the new Act.

Finally, Government has drawn up a programme to gradually hand over the responsibility and finally ownership of rural water supplies to local communities. Water point committees have been trained and set up in large parts of the country. In the first few years they will be responsible to collect enough money from the provision of water to the community to maintain the communal water installation. In the final phase of this transition, communities through their water point committees will also assume the responsibility for capital costs of their water points. At that point, full ownership of a water point would have been transferred to communities.

### **3.1.4 Impact at local level**

One respondent gave the reason for resources depletion as a lack of commitment by government to enforce rules for resource use. A lack of policy co-ordination between government at the regional level and local communities also leads to overutilisation. An example was cited in the central areas of 'outsiders' obtaining permits for the felling of trees who cut down fruit trees. Villagers cannot intervene because government has given a permit (Jones *et al* 2001: 42).

The Every River has its People Project observed a mismatch between decision-making at the regional and local level on how natural resources are to be managed. One respondent stated the following:

Outsiders will come with their permit from the government and they will cut a big Mangetti tree which we depend on for its fruit. We cannot refuse them to cut the tree because it has been bought from the government.

Control over resources emerged as a major issue during the Every River has its People surveys. Traditional leaders in the Gciriku area felt that they ‘did not currently get sufficient support from central government in terms of enforcing traditional resource management rules’. A traditional councillor expressed the opinion that ‘the government says it works with the traditional authorities, but that is only through their mouths. If the traditional authorities come with certain laws about natural resources, the government does not honour or enforce those laws’ (Jones et al 2001: 22). These observations led one respondent to state although government had put rules in place to manage natural resources, resource depletion was continuing, as there was ‘no commitment from the government’ (Ibid.: 2001: 42).

Concerns were raised that the powers of traditional authorities were competing with those of central government. Traditional authorities failed to enforce laws about natural resources because government did not ‘honour or enforce those laws’. This resulted in the destruction of these resources (Ibid.). Traditional authorities had appointed a committee to investigate the feasibility of levying fees on people harvesting resources such as thatching grass and palm leaves. Traditional leaders argued that this has always been the case. A practical problem would be to implement such a decision and collect fees (Ibid.).

### **3.1.5 Institutional framework**

The general institutional framework across Kavango is fairly homogenous. Apart from traditional authorities, which are represented in one form or another in all villages, new institutions have developed, particularly after Independence.

#### **3.1.5.1 Government structures**

Namibia’s decentralisation policy foresees the established of development committees at various administrative levels. Elected Regional Councillors are expected to establish Constituency Development Committees, while villages and settlements in constituencies will also have their own CDCs. All of these will fall under the Regional Development Co-ordinating Committee (RDCC), which is chaired by the Regional Governor (Jones et al 2001: 24). It is not clear from available literature how well these structures are functioning.

The Directorate of Resource Management in the MET is working with the Gciriku traditional Authority to establish a conservancy in the south-western corner of the Khaudum reserve. Developments have been delayed by a boundary dispute between the Gciriku and neighbouring Shambyu tribe (Jones et al 2001: 31-32.). Similarly, Directorate of Forestry is negotiating with the Gciriku Traditional Authority to establish a community forest, to stretch from the eastern boundary of the Gciriku area about 10km westwards to Shinyungwe and cover an area of about 20km deep inland. In June 2001 it was decided to go ahead with a community forest



Water Point Committees (WPC) have been established in most inland villages in terms of government policy to transfer ownership of water to local communities. In mid-2001 there were 260 WPC in Kavango. Training in managing funds and running committees is provided for these committees to prepare them to manage rural water points (Jones et al 2001: 23).

### 3.1.5.2 Non-governmental structures, CBOs and traditional authorities

Traditional leaders in the central areas maintained that previously 'used to either obey local rules or accept the fines imposed by the traditional authority if the rules were broken. However, now many people (especially outsiders, but also some locals) do not accept the authority of the traditional leaders. They do not obey the rules concerning resource use and do not accept the legitimacy of the traditional authority to levy fines for offences' (Jones et al 2001: 42).

All tribal areas have **Land and Farming Committees**. These were established shortly after Independence by the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation. These committees act on behalf of traditional authorities and are mainly concerned with the allocation of land away from the river and consist of ten to twelve members. Members are elected by communities and include members of traditional authorities as well as white collar workers from urban areas. In the Gciriku area tensions between the Chairman who resided in Rundu and the traditional leaders seem to have existed (Jones et al 2001: 23). LFC has been established in the Mbunza and Sambyu areas to assist traditional authorities in administering land. The Mbunza LFC has the following responsibilities:

- Review applications for land and grant approval for land acquisition
- Settle land disputes among the Mbunza community members
- Update the community concerning any development programmes of the government and NGOs on land issues
- Plan for correct and viable land utilisation and the conservation of natural resources
- Advise the traditional chief on land management and administration (Jones et al 2001: 42).

Much of what the LFC envisages for the future relates to economic development and conservation issues (Ibid.: 43).

Hinz (1995: 39) reports that in the Mbukushu area, the Land and Farming Committee considers all applications for land for commercial purposes, such as lodges for example. The responsible headman would receive an application, discuss it with his community and then refer it to the *fumu*, who in turn will submit it to the LFC for consideration. The latter will discuss the application and possible conditions under which land could be granted to the applicant. The matter is then referred back to the *fumu* who will make the final decision and sign a contract. The Mbukushu also have formalised this process by issuing a 'customary law PTO (Permission to Occupy)' in the form of a standardised Memorandum of Agreement between the traditional

authority and a successful applicant for land for special purposes. Such an agreement is valid for the duration of five years after which it is renewable. The applicant has to pay a certain amount of money for it (Ibid.: 40).

It has to be emphasised that tribal Land and Agriculture Committees are proceeding to allocate communal land for private use. While it is not clear how much land these committees have already allocated and in which areas, it would appear from impressionistic evidence that land along the omiramba is most sought after, because of its higher water potential and better soils. It is also clear that the Land and Agriculture Committees have undertaken their own zoning process, whereby they, in conjunction with the chiefs and headmen, have agreed that certain parts of the Kavango should be set aside for commercial farming.

Some respondents in the Every River has its People project stated that they had lost access to resources on land that was fenced off by individuals.(41) In one instance women were prohibited to gather palm leaves on enclosed communal land and had to give up making baskets (Jones et al 2001: 41-42).

Organisation typically found in villages are church, womens' groups, water point committees, health committees, youth groups, school board committees and political parties (Jones et al 2001: 43).

### **3.1.5.3 Natural resources management: attitudes and rules**

It is not easy to obtain a clear picture from the literature of how natural resources were managed. According to one source, customary law before the whites arrived allowed all trees to be cut, except those bearing fruit. This was changed by the colonial administration, which laid down a list of trees that could not be cut.<sup>53</sup> In the 1930s already colonial officials were concerned about the fact that people were cutting down fruit trees and that chiefs were unable or unwilling to stop the practice<sup>54</sup> (UG 25-'36: 48).

According to Eirola et al (1990:74-75), people in Kavango argued that 'God created nature for the use of man, and what is used will never be depleted because this did not happen in the past. God will see to it that it will be replenished'. A clear distinction seems to have been drawn between natural resources and in particular fish, and domesticated animals such a goats and cattle. On the question as to why people never slaughtered calves or ate eggs, but fished large quantities of small fish the response was:

Goats, cattle and chickens have nothing to do with the subject under discussion. God gave all people these fish to catch and eat and He will see that there will be enough fish in the river for all times. If we do not catch them today, somebody else will anyhow come tomorrow and catch them for himself. Besides, we are hungry and having nothing else to eat.

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<sup>53</sup> SWAA 2934 A 519/29 4<sup>th</sup> Tribal Meeting held at Rundu, Okavango Native Territory, 5-7 March 1951: 2-3

<sup>54</sup> SWAA 2385 A 519/1 Vol.2 Officer in Charge Native Affairs Kuring Kuru to Secretary for SWA Inspection Report: Okavango and Western Caprivi Zipfel Areas, 31.10.1933 p.1; 6

The *Every River has its People Project* noted that there was ‘a high degree of awareness among residents of the need to conserve resources...There is also a high degree of awareness of good management practices’ (Jones et al 2001: 24). A resident in a riparian village is reported to have stated: ‘God gave us our natural resources for free. If we misuse them then we will have nothing at all’ (Ibid.).

Various sources attribute ‘a considerable knowledge about plants, animals, birds and reptiles that can be used for different purposes, including food, medicine, clothing, ceremonies, tributes, decoration, building purposes and tools’ (Ibid.). Many adults are said to have surprising knowledge about the ecology of the river and the characteristics of different fish species (Fisch 1984:111). Regrettably, none of the sources provide any information on exactly what this body of knowledge consists of and how it was used or is still being used.

Contradictory responses were received from respondents of the *Every River has its People* survey regarding customary rules for natural resources utilisation. Some said there were no rules; others said rules had always been there. The consultants speculated that those denying any rules might have referred to the fact that the rules that were in existence were not observed. In an inland village a respondent stated that ‘There are no rules if people go to collect the trees, grass and firewood. There were rules before, but we do not implement them anymore, but our forefathers implemented them and took care of the natural resources’ (Jones et al 2001: 25). Others said there were no rules for the use of wildlife resources, but government regulations on hunting were known. Yet another said rules preventing the cutting or burning of fruit trees were set by traditional authorities (Ibid.).

A riparian villager stated that rules regarding plants, grasses and trees are set by the traditional leaders. ‘If someone is found cutting trees and grasses without the chiefs permission, they will be punished and pay four cattle.’ (Ibid.: 25).

On the specific issue of starting veld fires, the Gciriku Chief said that before Independence, the Traditional Authority fined people who started fires in terms of customary rules on burning. Nowadays, people won’t say who started the fire or would run away before they can be fined (Ibid.: 25).

## 4 Conclusion

This brief literature survey suggests that pressures on the Okavango River have increased steadily over the last few decades. An increase in the number of people in the Region coupled to a lack of technological innovations in the agricultural sector have resulted in the River being congested, leaving little room for the expansion of cultivation or livestock farming. People were forced to open up land further away from the River, in particular along the more fertile *omiramba*. While this may relieve direct pressure on the River, such a course of action is crucially dependent on the provision of water. This can only be obtained from underground sources by drilling. It is likely that this process will accelerate in the future, as more and more people would want to obtain land for farming.

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