

Policy Intervention, Livelihood Sustainability and the Environment

No. 10

PANRUSA Briefing Notes

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Key points

- Policy intervention comes in many different forms and can be implemented at many different scales
- Policies can have positive impacts on some people's lives while at the same time have unintended negative impacts on other people's lives
- On the ground, local interpretations of policy are key to how day to day lives are affected



Research areas:

1 Arid southwest:

- a) Mier, South Africa
- b) SW Kgalagadi, Botswana

2. Semiarid northwest:

- a) Ghanzi Dist, Botswana
- b) Omaheke, Namibia

3. Dry sub-humid southeast:

- a) NW Province South Africa
- b) Barolong, Botswana

This briefing illustrates the ways in which specific policies (or components of policies) can have quite radical and different impacts on poverty, livelihoods and the environment in different contexts. Case studies from South Africa, Namibia and Botswana are used to illustrate the very different ways in which policies are perceived on the ground and thus the flexible adaptations adopted by rural populations in response to policy and environment interactions. Briefings nested within this series (BN10A-D) provide in-depth analyses of country-specific policies.

Policy interventions

To understand policy intervention we need to consider several issues:

- the actual *content* of the policies (i.e. the aims of the policy, intended outcomes, legislation etc)
- the administrative *practices* embraced within the policies (i.e. how it will be put into practice),
- the *capacity* of various different people/groups to put into practice the technical and political factors within the policy (i.e. the *capacity* of different tiers of government, or other institutions, to *implement* the policy), and
- the various negotiations and interactions between these people/groups (i.e. the mechanisms for feedback, discussion, local interpretation of all aspects of the policy)

Policy intervention comes in many different forms and can be implemented at many different scales. Policies may be top-down or bottom-up, or allow a combination of both. They may involve varying degrees of local participation, or may be solely government directed. Policies can have positive impacts on some people's lives while at the same time have unintended negative impacts on other people's lives. Poor people in particular can be marginalised by policy interventions if specific attention is not given to their different needs. The chains of communication between and within policy makers, NGOs, community organisations, households and individuals are critical in affecting place-to-place outcomes of policies and their implementation, as well as resource practices at the local level. These issues are addressed specifically in BN 7.

Top-down approaches to development, and in particular natural resource issues, have assumed that aggregate benefits to a nation or area will trickle down to all sectors of society. For example, within conservation these ideas have promoted 'protected areas

and 'national parks', *excluding* people in order to protect the environment. These approaches assume people have negative effects on the environment, and they have contributed to the alienation of local people from the land and resources. Local people living in Study Area 1, adjacent to the Kgalagadi Trans-Frontier Park, illustrate how people can be dispossessed from land and alienated from conservation and development processes within the park (BN10C).

Bottom-up approaches, sometimes known as community-based, grassroots, participatory and local approaches, promote development from the local level, involving local people themselves in development initiatives, decision-making and sometimes policy formulation. Such approaches can be sensitive to the needs of local people, as well as the variable and unpredictable nature of specific environments. In the Mier (Study Area 1a) the Agricultural Research Council are working with small groups of farmers to improve farming and rangeland management practices in order to prevent/redress degradation. Such initiatives are people-driven and locally specific, moulding to different social and environmental contexts.

Local institutions for livelihoods and the environment

Where natural resources are 'unpredictable' (i.e. highly diverse and variable, as in the Kalahari) and resource users lack group identity and structure (e.g. 'communities' within the Kalahari are highly diverse, diffuse and highly changeable) then it can be difficult for local institutions to control access and regulate resource use. Communal management may therefore be better conducted through a more structured institution such as a committee. Examples of successful committee management structures in the study areas include: Okonyoka's Water Management Committee (which regulated external access to rangeland resources and was used as the structure to manage the locally initiated fencing of the grazing area around the settlement) (Area 2b); Khawa's ward system for utilising the hunting quota as part of the community-based wildlife utilisation project (Area 1b); Logageng's informal but very effective farmer's group (Area 3a).

However, committees may not always represent all aspects of a community and may not be able to address both people's individual and collective needs. Certain sections of communities and society can be continually and increasingly marginalised through these committees, even when the committees are deemed to be highly participatory. Such processes can perpetuate the disparity in wealth and well-being between rich and poor, the secure and vulnerable and often jeopardise the

sustainability of the natural resources that these institutions are trying to promote.

Flexible adaptations

On the ground, local interpretations of policy are key to how day-to-day lives are affected. Even if policies are strong, with poor or unclear implementation, different understandings on the ground can lead to quite different, and often unintended, impacts.

For example, in Okonyoka (Area 2b) those residing in nearby emergency relief boreholes have been excluded from critical grazing resources through the community fencing. The Water Management Committee is also fairly successful in excluding temporary resource users in drought periods, but these households (often young, more vulnerable) are facing severe difficulties in securing access to resources necessary for their livelihoods.

In SW Botswana (Area 1b) the FAP policy has been successful in supporting medium and large scale farmers in the region, but the unintended consequences for the environment could have been overlooked by the policy makers.

In Areas 2a and 1b the changes in resource rights with the implementation of community-based natural resource management projects have different implications for different households. These changes have real, and highly variable, impacts day-to-day lives. Though the approaches are participatory and seemingly in favour of poor people, some households remain marginalised by the projects.

The following briefing notes in this sequence (10A-D) attempt to identify the different approaches and relevant institutions, relating to specific policies, in order to identify which policies and practices are sensitive to the links between poverty and natural resources, and which promote sustainable livelihoods within such varied environments.

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