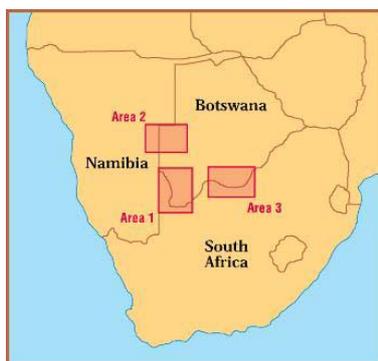


# Poverty, Policy and NR based Livelihoods

## Key points

- Livelihood changes expose key points when individuals or communities experience vulnerability to poverty regardless of their wealth or status.
- While cross-border regions share similar, often historically rooted, livelihood regimes, livelihood trajectories and poverty outcomes have been differently affected by policy.
- Policies aimed at livelihood enhancement may increase long term vulnerability to poverty.



## 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) Barolongs, Botswana

No. 2

## PANRUSA Briefing Notes

*PANRUSA, Poverty Policy and Natural Resource Use in Southern Africa. A DFID funded research project at the University of Sheffield UK.*

Identifying who is poor and what constitutes poverty in different regions is a key challenge for researchers and policymakers alike. This briefing draws on data from three cross-border study areas and explores the differentiated nature of livelihoods and poverty. The significance of policy to livelihood changes and poverty is considered.

### Understanding poverty

Poverty is a complicated and ever changing phenomenon that affects people at different times and places in different ways. As such there has been a move towards understanding poverty in the context of livelihoods, based on the assets (e.g. access to land, water) that people have and the capabilities and activities that enable individuals and communities to use these assets. Vulnerability and adaptability to livelihood shocks, such as drought, provide key starting points for understanding poverty within and between regions and across different policy environments. Livelihoods can be analysed to reveal the ways in which assets are used by different people and understanding changes over time can help identify key points when people experience vulnerability to livelihood risk and poverty.

### Poverty and livelihood changes

#### Arid southwest

Livelihoods once dominated by karakul sheep farming across the region were severely affected during the 1980s by the combined effect of the collapse in the market for karakul pelts, prolonged drought and the imposition of border controls. In SW Botswana today, poverty is endemic and for many, livelihoods have suffered to the extent that some are supported only by state destitute payments. Cross-border waged labour, which was once a valuable source of cash income, is now restricted as is access to markets. Only a small minority of elite landowners have been able to diversify their livelihoods e.g. through cattle ranching and small commercial ventures. In the Mier region of South Africa the impacts have been less severe as livelihood diversification was organised at the community level e.g. through game farming and other commercial ventures. Unlike SW Botswana, access to urban centres provides markets for small stock and opportunities for waged labour.

### **Semiarid northwest**

In both cross-border areas 2a and 2b, livelihoods have been affected by the ongoing privatisation of communal rangelands (see BN4B). In the overcrowded communal areas of Namibia, communities are pre-empting policy by fencing and securing access to land, grazing, and water. For some, e.g. new farming households and Damara ethnic groups, their exclusion is pressurising the remaining communal lands and the sustainability of livelihoods. In Botswana, privatisation has been accompanied by the displacement of the landless to planned Service Centres which are often under-resourced, overpopulated and environmentally depleted, creating an underclass of rural poor dependent on the state.

### **Dry Sub-humid southeast**

In both Botswana (3a) and South Africa (3b) livelihoods are organised around small-scale arable production. As with the arid southwest, the imposition of border controls has divided communities and social support networks. In Botswana, government subsidies to the arable sector have benefited larger rather than smaller farmers. For the small farmer, diversification (building, waged labour) has been the key to maintaining livelihood stability and mitigating poverty in the current policy environment favouring food security (imports) rather than self-sufficiency. In South Africa, land reform has increased the small farming community yet lack of government support (eg. credit services) threaten the long-term viability of the sector and rural livelihoods.

### **The role of policy**

While cross-border regions share similar, often historically rooted, livelihood regimes, livelihood changes and poverty outcomes have been differently affected by policy. In each of the areas, but especially in the SW (areas 2a&b), the imposition of border controls has isolated communities depriving them of access to employment and markets. In Botswana and Namibia policies favouring commercial production are creating a growing underclass pressurising scarce resource-poor communal lands. Government intervention in Botswana has been through safety nets and subsidy rather than livelihood enhancement – propping up the poor who have become dependent on the State thus threatening longer term social and environmental problems. In Namibia, policy in communal areas has been uncoordinated such that communities have organised to secure land for themselves threatening the livelihoods of those excluded. Despite the empowering nature of land reform in South Africa, policies to support livelihoods have been delayed threatening the viability of land reform and livelihoods in some areas.



**Lining up to receive welfare payments in Botswana**

### **Outcomes**

- **Borders constrain livelihoods and increase vulnerability to poverty**
- **Poverty can be mitigated through livelihood diversification. The poor are those who are unable to diversify and alter the decline in their livelihoods**
- **Social exclusion both through policy and community action creates poverty**
- **Exclusion may have historical roots (eg based on ethnicity), socially sanctioned (e.g. based on gender/age), or politically motivated (based on economic returns)**
- **Short-term 'safety-net' policies can create longer-term social and environmental problems**

PANRUSA was funded by the UK Government Department for International Development, and conducted by researchers at the University of Sheffield, UK, in conjunction with researchers from Africa.

The PANRUSA website is <http://www.shef.ac.uk/panrusa>  
Staff can be contacted by email at [d.s.thomas@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:d.s.thomas@sheffield.ac.uk)  
[d.sporton@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:d.sporton@sheffield.ac.uk)  
[c.twyman@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.twyman@sheffield.ac.uk)  
Fax: +44 114 279 7912



Views expressed in this briefing note are those of PANRUSA and not necessarily of DFID  
PANRUSA Briefing Note 2, March 2001