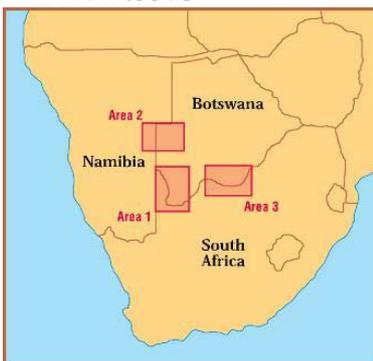


# Land Policies and Livelihoods in Communal Rangelands

*in the arid southwest*

## Key points

- The historical context of policies has a significant impact on present day livelihoods
- Understanding people's responses to changes is essential if the full impact of policies on rural livelihoods and their sustainability is to be achieved
- Dryland people are resourceful and can adapt flexibly to policies to secure livelihoods



## 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,
  - c) Barolong, Botswana

No. 4A

## PANRUSA Briefing Notes

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

This briefing compares the impact of different land policies on communal rangelands in the arid southwest region of Botswana and the adjacent area of South Africa. Major land use changes in the region have led to shifts in farming practices on both sides of the border with long term impacts on natural resource availability and livelihood security and sustainability. This historical context is essential to understanding present day livelihoods.

### History of land use change

**Shared histories:** The major land use change this century came with the formation of the Gemsbok National Park in 1938 in South Africa. Livelihoods at this time on both sides of the border were based on small numbers of livestock, limited crop production and hunting and gathering of animals and wild foods. Households living in the area now designated as a park were told to move south along the Nossob River. Some ended up in Bokspits (now in Botswana) while others moved to settlements such as Welkom (South Africa). Over the following decades families were forced to move on, in search of water and grazing, due to various droughts and increased pressure on natural resources. Settlement patterns and land and water point ownership today reflect closely the negotiations and allocations of rights which took place at this time.

In **SW Kgalagadi**, during the 1960s and 1970s waged work on farms in South Africa and Namibia gained importance, propping up the more subsistence based livelihoods at home. Through their experience gained on karakul sheep farms, farmers in Botswana started to rear karakul sheep. These sheep are adapted to dry condition and by slaughtering day old lambs for pelts, ewes are stronger and more resilient because they do not need to produce milk for their young. The boom in this industry in the late 70s fuelled a government programme to commercialise sheep production in the region through its Tribal Grazing Lands Policy. Ten leasehold farms were established for this purpose. This was followed in the mid 80s by a crash in the karakul pelt market, which coincided with a major drought across the region. This region was severely affected, especially as migrant farm work opportunities had ceased.

Farmers today are still recovering from this difficult period: many keep smaller herds of animals, others have diversified to other breeds of small stock, and cattle. Some are no longer farming.

**The Mier area of South Africa** has a strong agricultural history. Settled in the first part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and shifting between colonial administrations, land rights have been complex. The 1930s saw the establishment of land rights based on race and by the 1960s this was formalised through apartheid and the Act on Rural Coloured Areas. Subsequent land use has included communal lands, individual leasehold farms and community-run game farms. Since the 1990s provision has been made for farmers to convert their leases to freehold but this has been shrouded in controversy and is still unresolved in many cases. Current livelihoods in the area therefore differ between the farms and the communal lands and settlements and overall there has been little livelihood support outside the agricultural sector.

### **How do people respond?**

PANRUSA has identified a diverse range of community and farmer responses to land policies in these communal areas.

#### **Livelihood responses**

In the **SW Kgalagadi** diversification of small stock keeping has followed the problems of the 1980s e.g. preferences for dorper and persian sheep, or goats, which are seen as less risky, and less work, than karakuls. However a major constraint remains the lack of access to markets, a significant problem with the increased numbers of small stock under the Financial Assistance Programme (BN 10B). Some have diversified their livelihoods further, setting up small businesses or small tourism enterprises in the wake of the official opening of the Transfrontier Kalahari Gemsbok Park.

In **Mier** less than half the people own livestock and there is clearly a decline in interest in farming as a livelihood. However there are few alternative opportunities available and so many see livestock ownership as the only safety net in an unpredictable environment and economic climate. Pressures on land therefore remains intense.

#### **Sustainability of Actions**

In **SW Kgalagadi** the FAP has provided a boost to the small stock economy in the region for both large and small farmers. However the full environmental impact of the increased number

of animals in the region is not known and the consequent increase in new boreholes for cattle in the areas around Tsane-Tsane is cause for concern (BN 5B). In Mier possibilities for the expansion of farming activities are severely limited and lack of alternative livelihoods means pressure on both communal land and lease and freehold farms remain a major problem. However a Landcare programme is operating on the community-owned game farm: this aims to restore degraded dune systems (and thus increase grazing capacity for wildlife) and create employment for labourers. Already other farmers are adopting some of the management techniques and this grass-roots programme could prove highly successful.

#### **Consequences for the marginalised**

In both areas unemployment is a major problem. Therefore welfare payments (cash & food) remain central to the livelihood strategies for the poor households. Drought relief labouring, especially in Khawa in **SW Kgalagadi**, is a vitally important livelihood - since its cessation in June 2000 many households have suffered. Additional welfare benefits to Remote Area Dwellers (RADs) (see BN11) act as an incentive for poor people/destitutes to move to RAD settlements (i.e. Khawa). New schemes such as the 'quota' wildlife project also attract people to RAD settlements (BN 10C). Poor people living outside these designated areas feel marginalised. In **Mier** 43% of people rely on government welfare payments as the main income. The 'land hunger' in the region is not necessarily the result of a wish to farm but is perhaps due to a lack of alternative livelihoods. Support through agricultural assistance therefore would only benefit a limited part of the community and would exclude many of the poorest households.

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 4A, March 2001  
Additional material provided by Andre van Rooyan and Heleen Koster