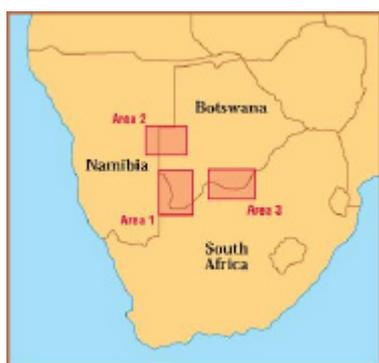


Managing the Risk of Drought in Southern African Drylands

Key points

- Drought is endemic and should be considered a norm rather than an unexpected event
- Understanding people's responses to risk 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 policy and environmental changes 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
 - b) Barolongs, Botswana

No. 8B

PANRUSA Briefing Notes

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Managing risk, in whatever form (social, environmental, economic, political) requires flexibility and the capability to cope with variability and uncertainty. This briefing explores the key facilitating and inhibiting factors governing livelihoods across the semiarid northwest and the flexible adaptations people make to cope with environmental and policy change.

Environmental change - coping with drought

In the semiarid northwest drought plays an important role in determining both livelihood and rangeland management strategies. Drought events are key junctures when livelihood patterns often changed and drought-coping strategies are tested to their full. Over the last hundred years drought mitigation activities have been changing.

- **Pre 1960s:** generally movements to new locations and the opening up of new grazing areas at times of drought.
- **1960-80s:** More localised and temporary movements of people and livestock, often linked to social networks and specific ecological conditions. Movements linked to less 'severe' droughts and to prolonged dry seasons. In severe droughts, movements co-ordinated by government.
- **1990s:** Increasing community restrictions on movements, though these are difficult to enforce. Reliance in drought years on government subsidies, in place up to 1996. Increasing trend to secure exclusive access to resources for drought and dry seasons either privately or communally. Movements are still regulated by social networks and ecological conditions but mediated by different structures and institutions.

Therefore, today, in the communal areas of Omaheke, movement of livestock as the principal management practice in times of drought, or when grazing resources are poor, is still the main coping strategy used by pastoralists.

In Ghanzi District (2a) the borehole expansion in the communal areas has been driven both by increases in the livestock and human population, and by incidences of drought. During drought, pressure on water and grazing resources acts as the catalyst for some households to move to new areas. For example, one family at the Dryhuk borehole has applied for a new borehole in another location. Though the family was part

of the original Dryhuk syndicate, the number of households at the borehole has increased steadily to the point where they feel their farming livelihoods would be better at a less crowded borehole. They are in the process of applying for a new location, with a smaller syndicate, where they will be able to secure access to more resources for their livestock. Households can apply for Drought Recovery Assistance from the government which provides financial assistance for the drilling of a new borehole.

Policy change - coping with intervention

The increasing community restrictions on movements in Omaheke (2b) mean that alternative coping strategies in times of drought have to be secured by households. Prior to the Communal Land Bill, some individuals and communities took the opportunity to fence areas within the communal lands to offset such risks. Local interpretations of land policies identified a 'policy gap' whereby it was not illegal to fence, but neither were the mechanisms /structures in place to apply formally to fence an area. Fences were erected to secure exclusive access to water and grazing resources, in particular to offset risks associated with drought and the increasing pressure from rising human and livestock populations. By enclosing areas for exclusive access individuals and communities can regulate resource use and actively manage the range in a way they perceived to be impossible in open areas. However the negative consequences for those excluded from these areas were ignored. Thus a coping strategy for one group may shift the risks to another group making them more vulnerable. Under the new Communal Land Bill all fences from this period will be reviewed by the newly created Land Boards and all new fences will need prior approval.

Households in the Ncojane TGLP farms in Botswana have developed different strategies for coping with the risk associated with drought. Though they have exclusive access to the resources in their leasehold ranches, in times of stress (e.g. drought, fires across farms etc) they utilise dual grazing rights by dropping fences and allowing their cattle to graze in the communal land. The ranches are then run as cattleposts, though other land users are not permitted access to their leasehold land and water. This manipulation of policy is likely to be addressed with the new proposals for fencing in the communal areas, whereby farmers will be asked to relinquish their dual grazing rights upon fencing their boreholes. However, with extended families and complex social networks, this is likely to be very difficult to enforce.

In some settlements in areas 2a (and 1b) (such as New Xanagas, Kule and Ncojane), drought relief

labouring and piece work are important employment opportunities. Reliance of drought relief labouring, like in many areas of the country, is significant for the poorer households.



Dual grazing rights - fences down in TGLP ranches, Botswana

Outcomes

- **Movement of livestock is still the major strategy for coping with drought.**
However, compared to the past, it is now mediated by different structures and institutions.
- **Government assistance through drought policies can help support vulnerable livelihoods during droughts.**
However, short term assistance can create dependency/complacency and detract from long terms strategies to off-set such risks.
- **A coping strategy for one group may shift the risks to another group making their lives more vulnerable**

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