

Governance Structures of Rangeland Management: Insights from Namibia's Agro-pastoralist Communities

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Introduction

- Namibia's arid and semi-arid rangelands cover over 78% of the country and are vital to agro-pastoralist livelihoods
- Over 70% of the rural population depends on communal grazing systems
- Conservancies in Kavango East were introduced by the Namibian government 1996
- The conservancies are governed through a hybrid of traditional and governmental institutions



Typical farm in Muduva Nyangana

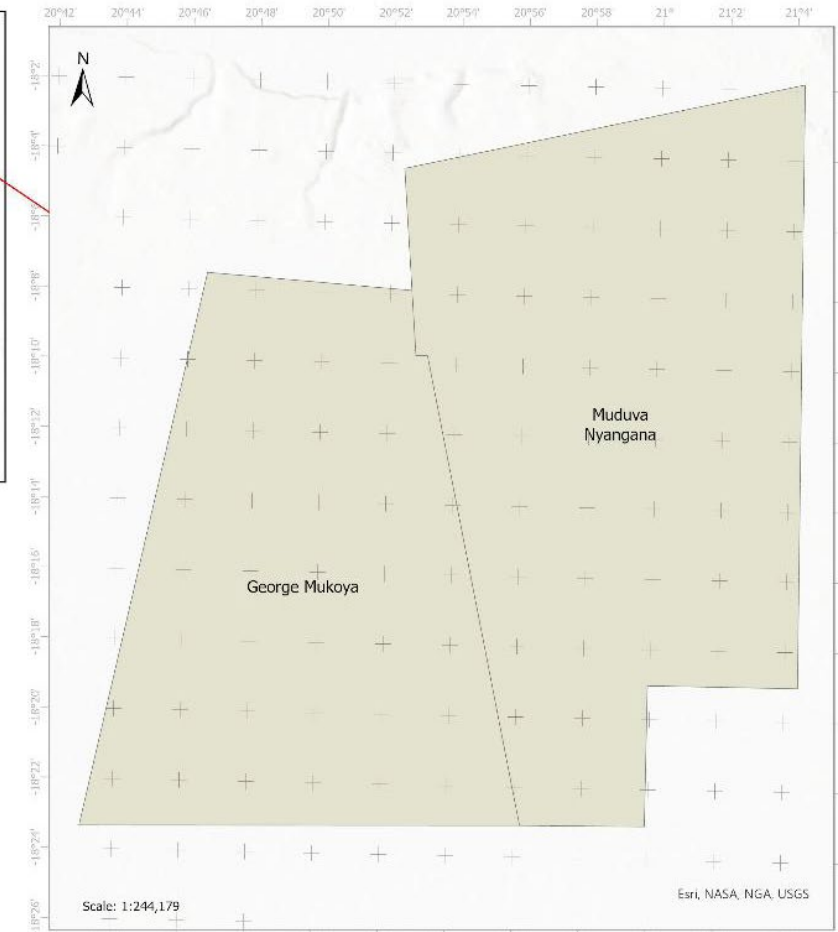
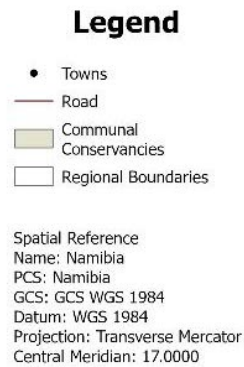
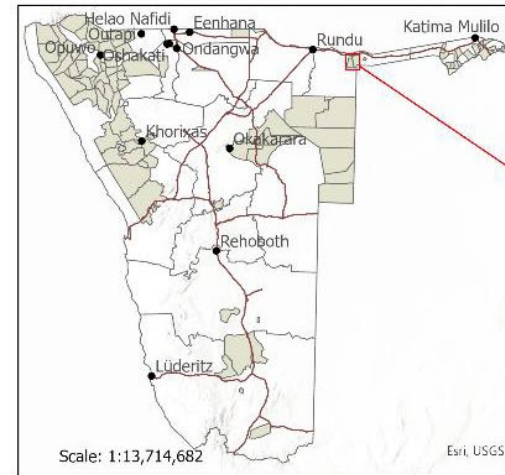
Aim and Study area

Aim

- Identify and describe actors involved in rangeland management
- Explores how actors govern communal rangeland resources

Study Area

- 18 villages
- 2 Conservancies in Kavango East: Muduva Nyangana & George Mukoya



Methodology

Data collection between April 2024 and January 2025

- **18 Net-Maps exercises in 18 villages**
- **11 Focus Group Discussions (FDG)**

Main themes of the FDG:

- Decision-making over grazing area allocation
- Water access planning during dry seasons
- Customary law enforcement and leadership roles
- Conflict resolution and inter-village negotiations



Net-mapping exercise in Cwa village

Key Actors and Their Roles

Net-Maps revealed that **Traditional Authorities (TAs)** and **Conservancy Management Committees (CMCs)** are the two most influential actors in communal resource governance

Actor	Key Roles in Rangeland Governance
Traditional Authorities (TAs) (chiefs, headmen and village elders)	Enforce customary laws, allocate grazing area, resolve conflicts
Conservancy Management Committees (CMCs) (Namibia's 1996 Conservancy Policy)	Coordinate meetings, report, and manage land use
Water Point Committees (WPC)	Manage borehole use, schedule access, mediate water disputes
Village Development Committees	Link local planning with development agendas
Elders	Interpret environmental cues (e.g., grass condition, rainfall signs) and provide oral guidance
Herders	Implement daily grazing decisions based on real-time observation and oral instructions from elders

Actor Interactions and Village Governance Differences

Shamambungu village: Good Governance

- TAs, CMC and WPC hold pre-rainy season meetings to jointly plan borehole maintenance and grazing paths

“When the borehole gets damaged, we sit with the elders and conservancy to decide what to do.”
(Participant FGD, Shamambungu village, 2024)
- Timely decision-making, reduced conflict, effective cooperation

Dumushi village: High Power of TAs

- Decisions deferred to TAs, especially after rule violations (e.g. illegal hunting, protected plant harvesting)

“The conservancy only comes when there is a big problem.”
(Participant FGD, Dumushi village, 2024)
- Authority of the customary institutions is respected and valued

Crop-Livestock Interaction in Agro-Pastoral Systems

Customary rules regulate the interaction and prevent conflict between livestock keepers and crop farming

Observed practices:

- Animals are not allowed to graze on active crop fields
- Crop residues may be shared within village —but not across villages
- No fencing is allowed without TA approval to maintain communal land access

“You can’t let animals go into someone’s field unless it’s harvested and they agree”

(Elder during FGD,

Muduva Nyangana Conservancy, 2024)



Dumushi village agro-pastoral prepare for cropping season

Water Access and Dry Season Challenges

Water scarcity is the main driver of livestock movement during the dry season

Within villages:

- WPCs schedule herder access to boreholes and mediate local disputes
- CMCs support planning and maintenance

Challenges:

- Boreholes and water pans damaged by wildlife (e.g., elephants, especially near wildlife zones)
- Delays in repairs due to conflicting understanding of responsibilities within village actors

Procedure:

- Affected villages negotiate with neighbours
- This often leads to conflict and tension



Water point at Gcima village (MNC 2024)

*“When our borehole is dry, we go where there is water. We ask, but sometimes it causes fights”
(Participant FGD, Dosa, 2024)*

Water Access and Dry Season Challenges

Shamambungu village as a proactive case:

Joint planning occurs before the dry season between TA, CMC, and WPC

Meetings focus on:

- Allocating water between people and wildlife.
- Preparing for borehole strain in dry months.

Unlike in other villages, community members of **Shamambungu anticipates challenges** rather than reacting

This sets Shamambungu apart through **collaboration, foresight, and structured planning**



Fetching water Gcima village (2024)

Conclusion

- Land and resource governance is clearly allocated among actors and differs between villages
- Governance is a continuous negotiation among actors affecting the enforcement of needed actions which might be delayed
- Cropping practices strongly influence rangeland and livestock management
- Access to water has strong influence on rangeland management decisions

This is work in progress, based on selected case studies from Muduva Nyangana and George Mukoya Conservancies

Further work is being conducted in Omaheke region

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